THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF IMMIGRANT MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADA: THE CASE OF BANGLADESHI WOMEN IN ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

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The Religious Lives of Immigrant Muslim Women in Canada: The Case of Bangladeshi Women in St. John's, Newfoundland

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study reveals how Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women adjust their religious practices in order to integrate themselves in their new context in St. John's, Newfoundland, and analyzes the meanings they attribute to these adjustments. There are five principle findings based on research with six female participants. Firstly, this study corroborates the widely-recognized idea that immigration often results in women's greater empowerment, independence, and egalitarianism in relation to the gendered division of labour and decision-making power (male/female, couple/parents). Secondly, this study also explores why female immigrants tend to experience an increase in religious capital and a sense of ecumenism. I explore other impacts of the transnational socialization that Bangladeshi immigrant women experience in St. John's, such as an increased awareness and knowledge about Islam, and the restoration of religious practices in an effort to form a universal Islamic community. Thirdly, this thesis examines various elements affecting women's religiosity, such as how their religiosity tends to increase alongside their status as mothers and their exposure to religious plurality, as well as the urge to impart faith to children. Fourthly, I argue that media attention following 9/11 positively influenced local people's perception of Muslims, resulting in an increased tolerance toward, and acceptance of, Muslims and their public religious practice. Lastly, I consider how these women assign religious meaning to unpleasant experiences and how this helps them adjust to their new environment.

KEY WORDS:

Tolerance; acceptance; perception; Muslims, Islam; empowerment; independence; gender; egalitarianism; decision-making power; couples; parents; gendered division of labour; religiousness; religiosity; universality; imparting faith to children; motherhood; status as mothers; religious plurality; religious capital; religious practice; assimilation; ecumenism; religious identity; public religious practice; awareness; ostracization; social integration; social pressure; transnational socialization.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Alhaj Abdul Hamid Talukder and Alhajja Monoara Hamid. Their support, love, good spirit and compassion have given me the passion to complete this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research on immigrants' experiences in Canada has greatly gained importance since the late 1960s. Since then, various aspects of immigration, such as Canada's Immigration Policy (Borjas, 1991; Green & Green, 1995; Li, 2003), the official recognition of immigrants' contribution to economic growth (Borjas, 1994; Grant, 1999; Kazemipur & Halli, 2001; Reitz, 2001), and studies on demographic changes and immigration (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Lee, 2003) have been explored. In addition to these, a number of studies have been conducted on the education of immigrants (Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001), their mental health (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Noh & Avision, 1996; Ataca, 2002), issues of racism they may face (Richmond, 2001), on immigrants and crime (Henry et al., 1996; Roberts & Doob, 1997), immigrant women's utilization of the health care system (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2008), immigrants' religiosity (Warner and Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2005; Chen, 2008), and immigration and housing accessibility (Propa, 2007).

My interest in the religious experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants in St. John's is motivated by several factors. First, Newfoundland and Labrador, along with its capital city of St. John's, were foremost of then history homogeneously Christian. A total of 475 Muslim immigrants currently reside in St. John's (Statistics Canada, 2001)[1]. Consequently, because of the recent arrival and small numbers of Muslims, there is a dearth of literature on this subject, which at present inadequately investigates the religious experiences of immigrant Muslim women to this relatively small and isolated city.

[1] A question on religion is normally asked once every 10 years, and the religion question was asked in the 2001 census. Therefore, this question was not included in the 2006 census.

Gaining knowledge about Bangladeshi Muslim women is also essential, as this community is rapidly expanding in St. John's and across Canada. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2007), the country has received over 27,000 Bangladeshi immigrants from 1997 to 2006. Most of the available literature focuses on the experiences of Muslim immigrants of other national backgrounds in larger urban centres in mainland Canada. The lack of availability of literature on Bangladeshi immigrants' religious experiences worldwide also inspired me to study this population's experiences. Despite the fact that Muslims share certain aspects of their religious traditions, there exist internal differences ((Nassar-McMillan, 2003, Vontress, 2002) which are often directly related to Muslims' variations in practice occasioned by localisms. Internal differences due to the adaption of local culture may have dissimilar effect upon immigrants' lived religious experiences. In addition, religiously- understood dress codes are another important social element affecting Muslim women's adjustment to Canadian life. I was also eager to understand local responses towards this Muslim group post-September 11.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis addresses two primary questions: How do Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women adjust or solidify their religious practices upon migration to St. John's? What do these adjustments mean for them? These questions extend into several more detailed questions: What social and structural factors lead immigrant Muslim women to make changes to their religious practices (if they do at all)? Does the culture of St. John's

influence immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women to practice what Olivier Roy (2004) calls a "global" Islam?

In order to examine these questions, this thesis is divided into several sections. The second chapter provides a review of existing literature on immigrant Muslims in Canada and around the world. This review draws upon knowledge from a variety of disciplines and details the context that serves as a foundation of this study. I discuss the theoretical framework upon which the analysis of the findings is based. Chapter Three presents the methodology used in conducting this qualitative research. The sections of this chapter are relevant to understand of how qualitative methodological elements are used. For instance, I detail how I selected my participants and collected data, and the ethical considerations involved in completing this research. Chapter Four and Five discuss participants' profiles, their religiousness, and the shifting gender dynamics in these Bangladeshi immigrant families. In Chapter Six, participants' attachment to what they call a "universally-practiced" Islam is described in detail. Post-September 11 experiences are discussed in Chapter Seven. The impact of assigning meaning to experiences is explored in Chapter Eight. Together, these findings suggest that immigration to Canada empowered these women in various aspects of their lives, and occasioned challenges in others. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes by summarising the findings as well as implications and future prospects for study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews existing literature on immigrant and transnational Muslims both in Canada and abroad. This review draws upon a variety of disciplines and contexts that serve as a foundation of this current study. To facilitate writing, I have organized these literature reviews into the following sections: immigration and gender roles, immigration and religious life, emphasis on globally practiced Islam, post 9/11 experiences, and assigning religious meaning to experiences.

LITERATURE ON THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON GENDER ROLES

Chapter Four of this thesis examines the impact of immigration on gender roles amongst Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women in St. John's. Although this specific group of women has never been studied before, academic research on immigration and gender roles began with the abolition of Canada's quota system in 1962 (Boyd, 1986; Brettell & Simon, 1986). Since then, a number of studies have investigated the challenges immigrant women may undergo in their host countries with respect to gender roles (Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Dion & Dion, 2001; Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). Min's (2001) study on "changes in Korean immigrants' gender role and social status, and their marital conflicts" points out some possible reasons associated with inegalitarian gender role behaviour, which theorists claim often contributes to increased marital conflicts in receiving countries (Naidoo & Davis, 1988; Krulfeld, 1994; Kulig, 1994; Shin, 1995; Rhee, 1997; Morrison, Guruge, & Snarr, 1999; Johnson, 2003). Several studies, conversely, have examined what immigration offers to women (Inclan, 2003; Felicov, 1998, 2007; West & Pilgrim, 1995; Summerfield, 1993; Hyman *et al.*, 2008). These

benefits may include such things as legal protection (Knudson-Martin *et al.*, 2009) and the advantages reaped from living at a distance from extended family members, therein encouraging egalitarian relationships (Williams, 1989; Ware, 1981).

Some scholars studying shifts in women's behaviour (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1999; Min, 2001; Knudson-Martin *et al.*, 2009) theorize the effect of cultural, social and economic developments upon male-female relationships (Worden & Worden, 1998; Cheung, 1999), as well as the effects of higher education and women's paid work on egalitarian gender roles and an increase in women's decision-making power (Pesser, 1984; Bossen, 1984; Boyd, 1998; Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Becker *et al.*, 2006; Cha, 2009). There are, however, other social scientists who do not find connections between higher education, income level, and egalitarian gender roles (Noh *et al.,* 1992; Yu, 2006). Some scholars such as Baluja (2000) and DeBiaggi (1999) have also emphasized the impact of maintaining contact with the mainstream host culture. From the above discussion it is obvious that various social factors are associated with egalitarian gender role behaviour. As Chapter Four of this thesis explores, the gender role shifts experienced by Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women are significant and extensive.

LITERATURE ON POST-MIGRATION RELIGIOUS LIFE

Chapter Four of this thesis examines the post-migration religious lives of Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women in St. John's. Although this specific group of women has not been studied, a number of studies have dealt with the significance of religion to migrants of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (cf. Berger, 1999; Nirbak, 2004; Guest,

2004; Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Merz *et al.*, 2009). Immigrant religiosity has indeed become an important issue to both religion and migration scholars (Warner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Hirschman, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Edgell & Docka, 2007; Massey & Higgins, 2007). This interest has resulted in numerous comparative and qualitative studies (e.g., Warner & Wittner, 1998; Min & Kim, 2002; Cadge, 2005; Chen, 2008). A number of researchers have linked immigration with an increase in religious attachment (Warner & Wittner 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000). Some scholars have advanced theories relating increases in religious attachment to the impact that former immigrants have on the group being studied (Park 2004), while other scholars, noting differences in the socio-cultural environment of receiving countries (which often result in loneliness, sadness, depression and stress [McMichael, 2002; Leonard, 2005; Merz *et al.*, 2009]), have associated this marked increase in religiosity with the notion of increased religious practice and belief as coping mechanisms (Maraj, 1996; Khan & Watson, 2005; Samuel, 2008; Guest, 2004; Leonard *et al.*, 2005; Merz *et al.,* 2009). Other scholars connect this increase in religious participation with increases in religious capital –i.e. religious knowledge (Gardner, 1995; Predelli 2008) and participation in mosque-related activities (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Roald, 2001) in post-migration life. Given the above background information, the religious lives of Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women are important, as there is no research on this community in St. John's or in this province or research on Muslim women in this type of small city in Canada.

THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL ISLAM

Several scholars have conducted research on major religious revivals and reforms (Voll, 1999; Kuchumkulova, 2007) and these movements' ideological nature (Roy, 2004; Kuchumkulova, 2007; Kibria, 2007; Ahsan, 1990; Frankel, 2008). A number of scholars studying immigrants' religious practices have noted immigrants' efforts to establish universal sets of beliefs and rituals (cf. Antoun 2001; Roy 2004; Turner 2004; Kibria, 2007), which often result in a shift in culturally influenced religious practices (Gibb & Rothenberg, 2000; Roy, 2004; Kibria, 2007). Awn writes that focusing on principal practices of Islam often leads Muslims to unite in their host countries (1984). In this way, they often form a "deterritorialized nation" (Saunders, 2008). Common sentiment rather than geographical origin seems to be the focus of these attempts at unity (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992; Hroch, 1996). Johnson (2006) describes this phenomenon as religious awakening among non-Arab Muslims. Kuchumkulova (2007) also notes these non-Arab Muslims' increasing tendency to follow so-called Arab practices as the Prophet Mohammad was born and lived in Saudi Arab which, according to Halliday (1999), results in a sort of globally-practiced Islam. This shift occurs because transnational socialization due to migration encourages many immigrants to rethink their religious practices. Thus, the shift towards a globally-practiced Islam experienced by Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women in St. John's is significant.

LITERATURE ON THE POST 9/11 EXPERIENCES

A number of studies have documented the negative impacts of September 11 2001 upon Muslims and non-Muslim men and women in North America (cf. Bayoumi, 2002; Peek,

2002; Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003; Badr, 2004; Abdelkarim, 2005) and the nature of these destructive influences (cf. Badr, 2004; Chowdhury, 2006; Read, 2007; Downey, 2009; Brown, 2009; Mandaville, 2009; Muedini, 2009). For example, in his unpublished doctoral dissertation "Transnational Media Reception, Islamophobia, and the Identity Constructions of a non-Arab Muslim Diasporic Community: The Experiences of Bangladeshis in the United States since 9/11", Rahman (2007) expresses that post-9/11 Islamophobia negatively impacted the lives and identity constructions of Bangladeshi people living in the USA. Participants of his study considered Islamophobia as a problem embedded in their lives and felt that it functioned as a barrier to their quest for full participation in U.S. life. In contrast, several studies have linked the result of negative attitudes to an increase in group unity (cf. Goffman, 1986; Bonacich & Modell, 1980; Montero; 1981; Fujita & O'Brien, 1985; Ignatiev, 1995). Similarly, the impact of 11 September has been related to Muslims' and non-Muslims' increased interest in learning about Islam (Turkel, 2002; Skerry, 2003; Peek, 2002; 2005). The above mentioned literatures demonstrate how negative events including September 11 impacted immigrants' social integration in the host countries. Given this literature, it is imperative to examine immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women's post 9/11 experiences in St. John's.

LITERATURE ON ASSIGNING RELIGIOUS MEANING TO EXPERIENCES

Chapter Six of this thesis examines the religious meanings Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women assign to their experiences and how these affect participants' lives in St. John's. A number of qualitative and quantitative studies (cf. Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Dweck, 1999; Silberman, 2003, 2004, 2005; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Fox,

2002; Ozorak, 2005) suggest that assigning meaning to experiences help people in general overcome the negative effects of stress. Several studies have also focused on how assigning meaning to experiences can help people better understand their situation (cf. Silver *et al.,* 1983; Pearlin, 1991; Mclntosh *et al.,* 1993; Mickley *et al.*, 1998; Kotarba, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Baumeister, 1991; McIntosh, 1995; Pargament, 1997; Spilka *et al.,* 2003; Lethborg *at al.,* 2006) and experience closeness to the divine (Pargament, 1997; Emmons *et al.*, 1998; Myers, 2000; Pargament *et al.,* 2005; Silberman, 2005b). For example, Myers (2000) in his study "The funds, friends, and faith of happy people" explains that by offering answers to life's deepest questions, religious faith allows believers to feel strength in the face of challenging events. Several studies have also linked emotional and behavioural changes to the assigning of meaning to experiences (cf. Baumeister, 1991; Batson *et al.,* 1993; Pargament, 1997; George *et al.,* 2002; Silberman 2003, 2004; Cohen & Rankin, 2004). Other studies have also examined the role of religion with respect to tolerance (Boulman & Wortman, 1977; Wuthnow *et al.,* 1980; Janoff-Bulman, 1991, 1992; Furnham & Brown, 1992; Koening, 1994). Furthermore, a number of researchers have reported a stabilizing of religious beliefs (Jannoff-Bulman *et al.,* 1983; Jannoff-Bulman, 1992; Park & Folkman, 1997; Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005; Silberman, 2005), which involves the modification of one's own perceptions of incidents rather than religious beliefs (Epstein, 1980; Nisbert & Ross, 1980; Janoff-Bulman & Timko, 1987; Mclntosh, 1991; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Pargament, 1997; Mickley *et al.*, 1998) and can result in more life satisfaction (Dahl, 1998; Pargament *et al.,* 2001; Faccini, 2005; Hansson *et al.,* 1988). It has been obvious from the above discussion that

assigning religious meaning allows people to see their ongoing negative experiences in a better light. Therefore, it is important to see how attributing religious meaning helps Bangladeshi Muslim women in their social integration in St. John's. Finally, immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women were chosen for this study for several reasons, but mainly to shed light on an understudied group. In an effort to gain deeper understanding, the study presents collaboration between the researcher and six immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women living in St. John's, NL. In the next section, feminist standpoint theory, which is used to analyse data for this project, is described in detail.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT PERSPECTIVE

In order to develop an understanding of the lived religious experiences of Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women in St. John's, I chose to employ feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory was developed during the second wave of the women's movement in North America. Standpoint theory was predominantly influenced by Marxist and socialist feminist theories, but further promoted by social scientists, especially sociologists and political theorists such as Nancy Hartsock (1983), Sandra Harding (1986; 1991), Dorothy Smith (1987), Hill Collins (1991), and Susan Hekman, (1997).

I have chosen standpoint theory because it is fundamentally concerned with the production of knowledge. According to Wood (2005), "subordinate social locations are more likely than privileged social locations to generate knowledge that is 'more accurate' or 'less false'" (62). Sandra Harding (2004) and Wood (2005) note that members of privileged groups are often unable to see oppression or inequality perpetuated to

marginalized groups while members of marginalized groups are aware of their social positions as they live within the social structure of domination and of their own group. Unequal experiences can permit marginalized groups to develop a thorough understanding of how social hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and religion influence their lives (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Allison M. Jaggar, in her 1983 article "Feminist Politics and Epistemology" notes:

> The standpoint of the oppressed is not just different from that of the ruling class; it is also epistemologically advantageous. It provides the basis for a view of reality that is more impartial than that of the ruling class and also more comprehensive. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole. (57)

In short, rather than looking for a "universal truth," standpoint theory emphasizes "the situated, local, and communal constitution of knowledge" (Hekman, 2004:234).

Within this framework, standpoint theory emphasizes women's lived experiences (Harding, 1991). According to Sandra Harding (2004:45), "starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order." Women's distinct social positions, which are due not only to their gender, but also to their ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and religion, allow them to acquire diverse perspectives (Hallstein, 2000).

Hill Collins (2000) argues that members of a particular group may share certain common experiences. Despite these commonalities, women often experience differences within the groups due to their multiple and interconnecting social identities. Therefore, standpoint theorists point out that women are not a homogeneous group (Hartsock, 1983;

Hawkesworth, 1989). Standpoint theorists argue that we need to understand different women's experiences from their perspectives. Hill Collins, a Black feminist standpoint theorist asserts that Black women's lived experiences can shed light on how marginalized social groups such as black men, working-class individuals, white women, other people of color, religious and sexual minorities, and all individuals endure subordination (1991:59).

Hill Collins further emphasizes the perspective of "outsider within" (Collins, 1990, 1998). In her unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The other side of othering: How Muslims construct American Christians through dialogue," Lori Jean DeWitt describes the "outsider within" perspective as that of those "who interact with members of the dominant group but are excluded from the group because of their race, class, gender, or religion" (2007:28). The "outsiders within" live in unique positions, from which "they are not only able to see their own positions, but also the dominant system as a whole" (Parker, 2001:47). Therefore, outsiders within the dominant society are believed to be able to offer a more complete and less distorting social perspective (Harding, 1987) than the standpoint of the insiders or more privileged groups members (Parker, 2001: 47). Standpoint theories argue that this "outsider within" perspective is unattainable by people living as members of dominant groups (Hartsock, 2004; Collins, 1990). Using this perspective, Collins (1990) described the experience of female African-American domestic workers as follows:

> Domestic work allowed African-American women to see white elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men and from these groups themselves. In their white "families," Black women

> not only performed domestic duties but frequently formed strong ties with the children they nurtured, and with the employers themselves. On one level this insider relationship was satisfying to all concerned. Accounts of Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation the women experienced at seeing white power demystified. But on another level these Black women knew that they would never belong to their white "families," that they were economically exploited workers and thus would remain outsiders. The result was a curious outsider-within stance, a peculiar marginality that stimulated a special Black women's perspective (11).

Research into the lives of marginalized black women, for instance, allowed study participants to "demystify white [dominant] power" through revealing dominant attitudes towards margins (Swigonski, 1994:391). Harding (1991) states:

> The stranger brings to her research the combination of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference that are central to maximizing objectivity. Moreover, the 'natives' tend to tell a stranger some kinds of things they would never tell each other; further, the stranger can see patterns of belief or behaviour that are hard for those immersed in the culture to detect (124).

Standpoint theory uses individuals' experiences to reveal the underside of power relations between dominant and marginalized groups (Sosulski, 2009); however, it "place[s] less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that construct such groups" (Collins, 2004:247). Feminist standpoint theory argues that individual experiences are emphasized to uncover group experiences (Sosulski, 2009).

Despite these merits for understanding women's unique position to appreciate oppression, standpoint theory is criticised because of its "essentialism" (Hundleby, 1997: 28). Hundleby (1997) notes that feminist standpoint theorists have "grossly neglected the variety of women's experiences by treating the observations and problems of Western,

white, middle-class, married, heterosexual women as paradigmatic concerns for women" (1997:28). In doing so, feminist standpoint theorists have attempted to separate the world into two groups, namely the oppressed/marginal and the dominant/powerful (Hundleby, 1997). Hundleby argues that standpoint theory does not recognize that marginal groups can also be oppressed or marginalized within their marginal structures. It ignores the power differences which exist within marginal groups, and fails to address diverse forms of oppression perpetuated within the groups (Hundleby, 1997:28-30). In addition to this point, Dorothy Smith notes that feminist standpoint theory treats the subject as knower and actor, and, in doing so, there is a risk of "transforming [the] subject into the object of study or [making] use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects" (Smith, 1987:405).

Regardless of these criticisms, feminist standpoint theory can help us understand differences in women's experiences. While it does have important shortcomings, it is important to recognize its key strength – its ability to reveal marginal voices. The strength to reveal marginal voices makes it an appropriate framework for my research into the lives of Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women in St. John's. Standpoint theory has been used in various studies which seek to uncover minorities' experiences. For example, Parker (2001) uses feminist standpoint theory to analyze the communication styles of African-American women executives in male-dominated organizations in the United States. Parker's study included minority members who are inside the organization, and did so in order to better understand African-American women's experiences. Parker (2001) concludes that African-American women's opinions are relatively devalued and

muted by the dominant white male executives. Allison and Hibbler (2004) similarly investigated the barriers perceived by minority employees that limited their participation in organized recreation facilities and programs. These authors found that minority populations do not have equal access to recreational programs, in spite of the fact that these are normally designed for all members. Standpoint theory allows these researchers to shed light on marginalized voices.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion demonstrates that feminist standpoint theory can offer uniquely valuable insights into social systems, practices, and relationships. However, using this lens to analyse Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women's live experiences through such a relatively small and short period of time provides only a partial picture of this society. Including more participants and extending the length of research time would help to further reveal the effect of Newfoundland society on Muslim immigrants. In the next chapter, research design and site are described in detail.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter charts the research design, study site, sampling procedure, and the process I utilized for conducting in-depth interviews for this research. I also describe the processes for transcribing the interviews, coding, and analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This St. John's-focused research project aims to understand the lived religious experiences of the city's small community of immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women. To understand these women's religious experiences, a qualitative research methodology is chosen. According to Delyser (2008), this methodology helps to

> explore issues, ideas and questions on the ground, in the settings in which they arise, striving to understand and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings of the groups and individuals we study … (234).

People experience their lives differently so to uncover the causes that determine informants' interpretation of certain experiences, a qualitative research methodology using in-depth interviews is most suitable. This approach allows me the opportunity to study the Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women's religious experiences in their natural environment. Best and Kahn (1998) state "studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally" (241) allows the researcher to understand the subject(s) without controlling the outcome of the study.

STUDY SITE AND RESEARCH PERIOD

The research took place over six months, from July to December 2008. Informal meetings and interviews took place during the months of October and November 2008. As already described, this study conducted with immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women in St.

John's, Newfoundland. St. John's is the provincial capital of the Canadian Atlantic province of Newfoundland and Labrador. St. John's is the seventh most rapidly-growing metropolitan area in Canada (Tal, 2009). Just over 180,000 people are currently living in the city (Economic Review, 2009). The city has a high rate of turn-over among immigrants. Immigrants often leave St. John's in order to pursue higher education and for more economic opportunities in mainland Canada. To try to curtail this out-migration, the Provincial Nominee Program was introduced in 2008 to increase the number of immigrants to the province. Under this program, international students who have graduated from a reputed provincial post-secondary educational institution can apply for permanent residency in Canada and must then stay in the province for certain period of time. Also, under the "family connections" category, permanent residents or Canadian citizens who live in the province are able to sponsor family members who live outside Canada. Three participants in this study came to Canada under the Family Class Program first introduced by the 1976 Immigration Act. The other three participants immigrated after the 2002 Immigration Act.

The religious and denominational background of the people living in St. John's is mainly Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Pentecostal, and Salvation Army (Statistics Canada, 2001). The Muslim presence in St. John's, however, is not an entirely new phenomenon. The first documented Muslim arrived in the city in 1964. However, the Muslim population of Newfoundland and Labrador has increased dramatically from 1991, 305 to 2001, 630 (Statistics Canada, 2001). According to the 2001 census, there were 475 Muslims living in the city of St. John's (Statistics Canada, 2001). Besides Muslims, there

are a number of other religious minorities, such as Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Greek Orthodox. These minorities together, however, constitute only 3.3% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2001). It is important to note that while Muslims constitute less than 2% of Canada's national population, they are nonetheless the fastest growing religious population, with a 128.9% increase from 1991 to 2001. Estimates suggest that by 2017, the population will increase by approximately another 160%; however, most of this population is located in the greater Toronto area and in Montreal (Jedwab, 2005).

Despite this relative religious homogeneity, St. John's is a multicultural city. In addition to the people of English, Irish, Scottish, French, and aboriginal-origins which constitute the great majority of individuals living in St. John's, relatively large numbers of individuals have roots in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Germany, China, Holland, and Italy (Statistics Canada 2001). The Muslim population of St. John's represents a wide array of ethnicities and hails from a diverse numbers of countries including Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh Saudi Arabia, and many African countries. These immigrants have different languages, values and traditions. Despite these differences, Muslims live together in St. John's and pray in the same mosque called the *Masjid–Al-Noor* [Mosque of light]. Following an active fund-raising period, the mosque was built in 1990. In St. John's, Muslims tend to identify themselves first as Muslims – not according to their national identities.

The mosque is a very important element in the religious lives of Muslims living in the city. Besides organizing congregational prayers, the mosque provides religious education to children, youth and adults. The mosque also provides *halal* meat to the

Muslim community; the orders for *halal* meat must be made in advance. Indeed, the mosque meets Muslims' religious needs in St. John's by giving them a place to pray, providing them with *halal* meat, and furnishing them with a place to meet in a traditional environment. Although Muslims arrived here from different countries with different backgrounds, religious faith motivates these immigrants to come together as a community and the mosque helps by offering a gathering space (see, Hirschman, 2004).

As I describe above, the Muslim population is increasing in St. John's, so the current mosque is unable to meet the community's demands like *Jummah* and *Eid* prayers, social gatherings, and Sunday school for the children, etc. Thus, the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MANAL) has sought to enlarge the mosque vicinity to meet the future needs of the Muslim community in St. John's.

DETAILS ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

There are approximately 60 Bangladeshi women including students currently living in St. John's. For this study, I recruited six female first-generation immigrant participants who were originally from Bangladesh. All were born into Muslim families and identified themselves as Muslims, as currently married, and as being between the ages of 27 and 45. All participants came from well-educated urban families. All are university-educated themselves and are moderate Muslims. Their moderate religiosity and higher education may result in participants' understanding, interpretation, and practice of Islam in ways that are different from individuals with more conservative backgrounds or without higher levels of education. The views of those women who have immigrated to Canada from other countries than Bangladesh are likely to differ from the views of these Bangladeshi

Muslim women. Moreover, although it may go without saying, the views of Bangladeshi immigrant women living in St. John's may also differ from their compatriots living in other parts of Canada.[2]

Two of the six participants in this study were, when I interviewed them, engaged in full-time work, two were graduate students, and the remaining two were working in the home (one was expecting to start graduate studies in the near future [she is currently a graduate student]). They all speak both Bangla and English, and have all lived in St. John's for over three years.

Most Bangladeshi women in St. John's came to St. John's to join their husbands. Although some women came to St. John's alone from Bangladesh, they are few in numbers, perhaps four or five. These women are not included in my sample. On the one hand, this migration pattern means that the sample should primarily reflect married women's experiences. On the other hand, their marital status highlights the context of Bangladesh where social relationships tend to be patriarchal and to value men over women in every avenue of life (Baluja, 2002). Patriarchy is deeply embedded in the social system of Bangladesh and a man is considered to be the head of "his" household, the breadwinner, and the head of his wife and children (Chowdhury, 2009). In a word, a patriarchal society enhances the economic and social value of men.

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[2] In other Canadian cities, Bangladeshi populations tend to be made up of a much larger proportion of individuals seeking political asylum, refugees, skilled workers, and people who have immigrated because of the country's family reunification program. In St. John's, the majority of Bangladeshi immigrants is made up of government employees and graduate students (this means that their level of education tends to be the same).

Women are more generally guided by these perspectives within Bangladeshi society. Family, as part of the social organization of Bangladesh, imposes judgment upon women and limits their movements from place to place. Women's free movement may bring shame for the family; for this reason, families try to control their movement (Rozario, 1992). Consequently, patriarchal family members discourage women to move abroad without their family members. In this regard, Naficha says:

> I wanted to go to Japan to study but my mum[3] did not allow me to go with friends. But after my marriage, I went to China to accompany my husband and then to Canada. She did not have any say because in both places I joined my husband (October, 2008).

In Bangladeshi culture, not listening to one's parents is seen as devaluing their opinions, which brings shame to the family, since family members themselves can be made subject to questioning if they fail to "control" the women of their households (Nasreen, 1998). Therefore, women tend not to go against familial decisions. Furthermore, families often deem that putting limitations on women's movements will help to demonstrate their power over their women as well as demonstrate their regard for existing social norms and values (Killoran, 1998).

Generally, women attain social status through their husbands while men cannot attain their social rank through their wives. Hence, joining one's husband is deemed to be more respectable than attaining higher education abroad alone. In this regard, Natasha expressed:

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[3] Naficha was a teenager when her father passed away. Therefore, her mother was the prime decision maker in her family.

> I received a scholarship from Singapore to do [a] Masters Degree. My husband did not join me there because he had job in Bangladesh. I went there but my family discouraged me from staying in Singapore alone. So I returned to Bangladesh and returned to work. In the meantime, my husband came to St. John's for a PhD program. My family encouraged me to quit my job and join him here. When I came to John's in April 2007 my admission was not confirmed. I joined him in St. John's as [a] housewife (November, 2008).

The perception of these women's experiences might differ from that of single women since these participants came with their husbands and had the support of their husbands to deal with difficult transition experiences. Carol Delaney states that in Muslim rural Turkey cultures, "honour is [...] an attribute of men and shame of women, [however] male honour is [...] inextricably tied to women" (1987:36). This same perspective has been attributed to these Bangladeshi women. Since the honor of men and women is intertwined, participants might have refrained from divulging information that may threaten their husbands' social capital in the community or among other Bangladeshis in St. John's. Furthermore, the social pressure to be an adjusted and/or open-minded Muslim woman may lead some Bangladeshi Muslim women to conceal their challenging experiences and lead a secret life in order to avoid negative social intercourse (Delaney, 1987:43). Although the Canadian Immigration Act 2002 reduces the dependency of spouses upon their sponsor kin, social intercourse and isolation from the immigrant community can lead immigrant women to tolerate domestic violence in silence (Shirwadkar, 2004). Swati Shirwadkar (2004) describes how a woman who brings a domestic issue to the public is condemned by the community which then withdraws its support from her. This diasporic context may have an influence on women's perception of experiences.

SELECTION PROCEDURE

There are approximately 190 Bangladeshis living in St. John's; however, I did not get an opportunity to meet any until the celebration of the 2008 International Mother Language Day[4] celebrated on February 21st every year. Since my own arrival in St. John's in 2007, I had known of the existence of some Bangladeshis in the area, but I did not have their contact information, and was therefore isolated from them until June/July 2008. Hence, at first I was concerned about how to start my research, and who I should approach as participants. There were a number of Bangladeshi Muslim women living in St. John's, but for this project, I was purposefully looking for Bangladeshi Muslim women who had themselves immigrated to Canada. International Muslim students' religious experiences are also important because a large number of students come to attain higher education at Memorial University every year and they also live here often for a longer period in order to complete their education. However, my interest involved immigrants who are permanent residents. Given their intention to settle in Canada they might further emphasize the demonstration of their religious faith in daily life (i.e. such as where to eat, how to dress, when to pray, how to greet others [i.e. shake hands or not, and the words used]). Regarding purposive sampling, Earlandson *et al.* (1993) state that:

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[4] International Mother Language Day hailed from the international recognition of Language Movement Day that has been commemorated in Bangladesh, former East Pakistan, since 1952. On that day, a number of Dhaka University students were killed by the Pakistani police and army in Dhaka during the Language procession (Anwary, 1997). UNESCO declared 21 February as the International Mother Language Day on 17 November 1999. Its observance was also recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in 2008 (see also UNESCO: http://www.unesco.org/en/languages-and-multilingualism/dynamic-content-single view/news/international_mother_language_day_21_february_2010-1/back/16528/cHash/61bacd2f8a/ and Language movement, *Banglapedia - The National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/L_0063.HTM. Retrieved 25-8-2009).

> Central to naturalistic research is purposive sampling. Random or representative sampling is not preferred because the researcher's major concern is not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population but to maximize discovery of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that occur in the particular context under study (82).

Fortunately, I was in the listserv for the local Al-Noor mosque. I received an invitation from the mosque to attend a family party in the summer of 2008. Bangladeshi women are discouraged to go to the mosque to say their prayers because the mosque is considered to be a men's place, but I noticed some Bangladeshi women's names on the listserv. Therefore, I was pleased for the opportunity to meet with them. At the same time, I was quite nervous because there were few Bangladeshi immigrant families in St. John's and I feared that they might refuse to participate in my research. Because of the fact that I was a student, I thought that this might discourage them from sharing their experiences. Unfortunately, on the day I went to the party, I did not meet with any Bangladeshis. I was upset but had not lost hope, because the Muslim community in St. John's gathers at the mosque frequently to celebrate religious and personal occasions. The mosque provides Muslims with a space where they can gather in a traditional Islamic way to celebrate their special occasions. For this reason, I waited until the next gathering.

A few weeks later, I received another email invitation from the mosque to join in a dinner party organized by members of the community. As no Bangladeshis had attended the previous party, I was anxious to know whether I would meet anyone this second time. To my delight, I met a Bangladeshi woman ("Nayla") sitting across the room. I recognized her immediately, as I had met her once before, on International Mother Language Day. I spoke with Nayla and we had dinner together. Our conversation was

informal and we talked about ourselves. I then described my research, and she showed interest in participating in the study. When I told her that I was looking for more immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women, she told me that she knew some more women and that she would talk with them. Nayla and some other Bangladeshi immigrants and students' families arranged a religious discussion at their house on alternate weekends. The goal of these gatherings was to socialize with each other and their children in a traditional Bangladeshi environment, to read the Quran and *hadith*[5], and to teach the children the values of Islam. These immigrant parents believe that learning Islamic teachings would encourage immigrant children to maintain Islamic values. They also felt that familiarity with Bangladeshi culture would encourage them to practice their family's native culture on Canadian soil. Nayla invited me to the discussion when it was her turn to host it. At this gathering, she introduced to me to a number of other women, and recommended three potential participants. I explained to them that the purpose of my study was to understand their religious experiences. These three women were very interested in this study and asked many questions about the procedures. They gave me their email addresses and telephone numbers so that I could contact them. However, some of the other women present at the same *halaka* (religious gathering) did not take part in our general conversation, and did not consent to give me their contact information. I later sent my potential participants an email, where I introduced myself as a Bangladeshi student and informed them that this study was a partial requirement of a Master's degree program. This email formally explained the purpose of my study and the procedures I will

[5] The *hadith* is the record of the sayings or conducts of Prophet Mohammad

follow. A consent form explaining that the project had been approved by MUN's Ethics Board was also attached.

One of the three participants recommended by Nayla moved to mainland Canada during the early stage of my research, and for this reason, withdrew her consent to take part in the study. Another potential participant was uncertain about whether she should take part in this study. When I met her at next *hakala* she said that she was not interested in taking part. Therefore, only one of these first group of participants remained. One of my supervisors suggested that I should distribute pamphlets among immigrant Bangladeshis. I waited for the *Eid* festival in order to distribute the pamphlets. Before going to the festival, I met with the president of the Bangladeshi Student Association (BSA[6]) and discussed my project. When the expected day came, I went to the festival and distributed the pamphlets that my supervisor helped me create. On the spot, eight women expressed interest in participating, though four of these withdrew their consent afterwards. I met an undergraduate student when I first arrived in St. John's, who knew a few families very closely. From him, I found another participant. Thus, in the end six participants were enlisted for in-depth interview.

The women who withdrew their consent did so because they thought they were not the "right people" for this study. I told them that the only requirements involved them being women, immigrants, and Muslim, and that they fell under each of these categories.

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[6] BSA (Bangladesh Student Association) is a non-profit organization formed in November 2005 with the mission to maintain Bangladeshi culture on this Canadian island and to educate second generation children about it. BSA observes Bangladeshi national and cultural days as well as religious festivals. The functions and picnics of BSA facilitate Bangladeshis to meet in a traditional ways.

However, they felt uncomfortable about sharing their experiences. I assured them that giving information would not harm them; still, they expressed their reluctance. One possible reason for this withdrawal is they were concerned about anonymity and confidentiality issues. There are approximately 60 Bangladeshi women living in the city and around 20/25 of them are immigrants. These immigrant women know each other very closely. Perhaps, for this reason, they refrained from participating.

In this study, I did not include Muslim women from other countries. I intentionally selected culturally homogeneous participants rather than religious homogeneity, basing this decision on the fact that previous studies found that despite religious sameness, cultural differences impacted experiences (En-Nabut, 2007). For instance, Bangladeshi Muslim women often do not cover their heads or wear a hijab. As a result, their experiences may be very different from those of visibly Muslim women (women who wear a scarf or hijab) in St. John's. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic identities play a vital role in the lives of Bangladeshi people.[7]

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

I conducted participant observation and individual in-depth interviews. I chose weekly *halaka,* Bangladeshi family programs, and Bangladeshi cultural and religious parties these women regularly attend for participant observation. I conducted an individual in-depth interview with each participant. Each participant was interviewed

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[7] For example, Bangladeshis went through a nine-month war with Pakistan in 1971 to gain independence (declared on December 16, 1971). This independence resulted in Bangladeshis' success in ensuring the survival of their language and culture from the Pakistani regime. It is important to note here that Bangladeshi people identify themselves with their national language, Bangla (Nicholas and Oldenberg, 1972).

twice. The interviews included open-ended questions regarding general topics, such as when they immigrated, why they immigrated, types of challenges they faced when they first came to St. John's, and the challenges they now face, and post 9/11 experiences. There were questions on how deeply each participant was committed to "traditional" Islam, which rituals were still practiced, and how they taught their children about Bangladeshi culture and language. I also asked them about how they understood their adjustment. The interview questions were largely based on the participant's responses. "In this way," Quantz writes, the interview is guided by the interviewee, and the content of the interview "is clarified by the follow-up questioning of the interviewer" (Quantz, 1992:189). Quantz adds,

> Instead of a formal interview schedule which has all the questions planned ahead of time, the interpretive interview must be a process which is flexible enough to follow the lead of the interviewee while not losing sight of the object (189).

Two interviews were held in my own home, one in a participant's office, and three interviews are at participants' homes. Two interviews took place with the participants' husbands present because their husbands expressed their willingness to listen our conversation. During these interviews, the participant's husbands mainly kept silent, but Nabida's husband jokingly warned her to be careful about her answers. Participants were not interrupted or hesitated to respond any questions in the presence of their husbands. Natasha's husband reemphasized an issue his wife had already mentioned. During our discussion, he added, for instance, that people often focus on certain verses rather than the entire Quran, which, according to him, can lead to the emergence of diverse opinions.

All interviews were conducted in Bangla. I have translated the data into English. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The second meetings did not tend to last as long as the first meetings. These follow-up meetings allowed me to clarify issues that arose when I translated the first interview. The second meeting also allowed participants to share extra information that they wanted to add but had not mentioned during our first meeting.

Although the consent form contains information regarding the research, its purpose, potential risks and benefits, participants' rights, and my efforts to maintain confidentiality, I discussed each of these issues before beginning the first interview and asked participants to sign the consent form (see Appendix B). Participants talked about their experiences as Muslims in Bangladesh and in St. John's, and about their experiences being Muslim immigrants in Newfoundland. All interviews were audio-taped. In order to ensure that the context would be respected and that I remembered exactly what had happened, I translated each interview on the same day of its occurrence. Before I analyzed the translated materials, I offered participants translated copy to check for accuracy by email throughout the six month data collection period. I also met with these women in the context of their religious discussions and in their celebration of Bangladeshi events at home and in the city.

In addition to these Bangladeshi women, I spoke informally at the mosque with three non-Bangladeshi women on a number of occasions. We discussed the idea of a universally-observed Islam and rituals. Granted, these findings are somewhat subjective insofar as they are personal friends. While not central to this study, their suggestions that

globalized Islamic practices take place at the Al-Noor mosque are worth noting and confirm a broader trend I am suggesting in this thesis. With their consent, I included their opinions in order to better contextualize my findings.

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSING

Miles & Huberman state that undertaking data collection and data analysis together "helps the field-worker cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better data" (1994:50). For this reason, data collection and data analysis were carried out simultaneously in my study. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English and organized into computer files. To reveal the main themes discussed, I read all the interviews repeatedly. At first, I planned to use a qualitative data analysis software program to code the data. However, seeing that I had few participants, I elected to code the data manually, as there was less possibility to blend data with one another (Clark, 2007). Clark states that "coding involves not just grouping and separating pieces of data, but generating concepts from and with the data itself" (Clark, 2007:86). Therefore, to produce concepts, I coded the data collected line by line. I found that reading from, and working with this data helped me more deeply engage "in words, impressions, and the flow of events" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998:176). The physical reading and rereading of the data on paper made me familiar with it (Cole & Knowles, 2001) and thereby made it easy for me to identify themes.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that prolonged engagement with a population increases the likelihood of producing reliable results. Focusing on the above, credibility was achieved through long, considerable engagement with participants. I met several times with each participant and discussed many issues related to their religious experiences. These meetings gradually increased my credibility among my research participants, as they became more comfortable sharing their experiences. I maintained communication with all participants before and after the formal interviews to facilitate a "deeper understanding of the participants' concerns" (Raouda, 2006:57). I also repeatedly conducted member checks (Linclon & Guba, 1985) with participants to enhance the validity of my data. The participants provided feedback and clarified some details in my transcriptions in person and by phone. Later conversations also allowed me to clarify the conclusions that I made.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Since there are few Bangladeshis living in the city, I could not guarantee anonymity. However, I have made every attempt to ensure that the participants' privacy is respected and that their participation remains confidential. I used pseudonyms for each participant, and omitted any information that I felt might identify individual participants in both my presentation of this study and my publication of its result.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Being a Bangladeshi Muslim woman myself, I had privileged access to the group I planned to study; however, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the perception of a

problem of confidentiality and anonymity discouraged a number of Bangladeshi women from participating in the study. For this reason, this study is limited to only six participants. As I am a member of the same Bangladeshi community, there is also a possibility of bias in the information provided by participants. The findings of this study describe the post-migration religious and gender experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants in St. John's, which might be different from other immigrant groups, as each group is unique, and has different types of experiences. The findings, moreover, cannot be held to represent all Muslim immigrants living in St. John's.

Another limitation of this research might be translation of the interviews. Geertz states that translation is the way of casting others' opinions in "our" own words which "is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them (that is the kind in which things get lost), but displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours" (1983:10). However, being a native speaker of Bangla, I believe I understood what the participants wanted to convey by their words and facial expressions. Accordingly, as detailed earlier in this chapter, I tried my best to translate their opinions into English. I also gave the participants translated versions of our interviews for them to check for accuracy. In this case, they were in agreement with my English translation of Bangla interviews. In the next chapter, the participants' profiles are elaborated.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

The six short biographies are elaborated here in order to provide the reader with an idea of the identity of the participants in this study. To protect each participants' confidentiality, I gave each of them a pseudonym. Some identifying information has been omitted.

GROUP BIOGRAPHIES

Six participants enrolled in the study. The participants in this study are all immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women between the ages of 27 to 45. Five participants do not wear religiously-understood conservative dress like the *hijab* or other head covering scarves, they keep religious practices such as prayers, fasting, and giving alms to the poor. All participants were born, raised, and attended university in Bangladesh. Some of them are also taking further post-graduate education in St. John's. All six participants spent long periods of their lives in Bangladesh and were married there. Most of them came to St. John's shortly thereafter. Participants came to Canada with their husbands who were seeking career opportunities and higher education; some came to avail of better opportunities for themselves and their children. Among the six participants, five had children and one was expecting. All of the participants have lived in Canada for a minimum of two years. Please see the individual profiles below for more in-depth information about each participant.

Participants name	Undergraduate studies	Graduate studies	age	Marital status	Children	Working status
Mahfuza	BA (Bangladesh)	No	45	Married	2sons2 daughters	Health service
Marjia	BA (Bangladesh)	No	33	Married	3sons	House wife
Nayla	BA (Bangladesh)	MA (Bangladesh)	31	Married	2 sons	Financial sector
Natasha	BA (Bangladesh)	MA (Canada)	27	Married	1 son	Student
Naficha	BA (Bangladesh)	MA (Bangladesh)	34	Married	2sons	House wife and part-time student
Nabida	BA(Bangladesh)	MA (Bangladesh and Canada)	33	Married	1son and 1 daughter	student

"MAHFUZA"

Mahfuza is a 45 year-old woman with two sons and two daughters. She is well traveled and has been visited many countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, North America, and Europe due to her husband's studies and job. She first came to Canada with her husband in 1984. During the first few years she lived in Toronto and Ottawa. In 1988, she went back to Bangladesh with her husband where they lived for five years. During this time, she completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree. She returned to Canada in 1993, and she arrived in St. John's for the first time in 1994 after her husband was hired as a faculty member at Memorial University. I first met her in one of the celebrations of Bangladeshi festivals in 2008. She was very vocal. When approached to participate, she was enthusiastic about my research. Her living experiences in a multicultural society and her job, in which she dealt with diverse people, made her a participative and outspoken subject.

This interview took place at my home. Mahfuza expressed that the social environment in St. John's was not congenial to wearing the hijab before September 11 2001. Prior to 9/11, she felt uncomfortable wearing a scarf, as her colleagues often made jokes about it. Mahfuza works in health services. She mentioned that her clients also often seemed to feel embarrassed discussing their problems with her. As a result, she discontinued wearing the scarf at her office. However, she feels that 9/11 and its focus on Islam and its traditions gave her colleagues a better understanding of Islam. For example, after 9/11, her colleagues started celebrating *Eid* festivals with her. They now recognize her religious role in Eid during Ramadan.

"MARJIA"

Marjia is a 33-year old Bangladeshi Muslim who has been living in St. John's for about three years. I met her at weekly religious discussion that is held in her house, and we saw each other from time to time after our first meeting. Marjia was somewhat hesitant when I asked her to participate in this study. However, since this study is to understand religious experiences, she quickly rose above her initial hesitation. Our interviews took place at her house with no one else present. Marjia's husband read the transcript of the interview when I gave it to her to check it for accuracy.

Marjia has six brothers and two sisters. Her father was a medical doctor and her mother was a housewife. Among six brothers, two of them are engineers, one is a doctor, one does business and the other two are working abroad. Among the three sisters, Marjia lives in St. John's, one lives in the United States and another one lives in Bangladesh. Marjia completed a BA and the first year of an MA. However, because of her pregnancy and accompanying her husband to Japan for his higher studies, she could not sit for an MA final exam. Marjia has three sons, aged nine, seven, and three.

Marjia appeared to be popular among all Bangladeshis in St. John's. Although her devout attachment to Islam isolated her from much of the community, she remained admired by all Bangladeshis. She is the only participant who wore the hijab and the veil. She has been wearing hijab (which is called a "*borka*" by Bangladeshis) since 1995/1996 and since then she has covered her face. Marjia inspired her family members such as her sisters and sisters-in-law to wear hijab though she was the youngest one in her parental family. Marjia believes that "Whatever Prophet's wives and daughters did as a Muslim

woman I should do those because I believe that the Prophet, his wives, and daughters are our examples to follow" (November, 2008). Marjia is determined to avoid doing those things that may require compromise with the practices of Islam. Marjia adds that she does not feel threatened or embarrassed when wearing a hijab and veil in St. John's.

Marjia would prefer to live in a Muslim country because her children would get a chance to grow up with Muslim friends. She believes that instilling religious beliefs and practices would be easy in a Muslim country. She asserts that the education system is undoubtedly good in Canada; nevertheless, she deems that while in Muslim countries it might not be the same, it would not be bad. She comments that

> Here [in St. John's] most of the students did their graduation in Bangladesh and are receiving higher educations including my husband. This means to me that I do not need to stay here for availing children's education. They can do it while in Muslim countries (October, 2008).

However, Marjia's husband has planned to stay in Canada for few more years because of his study. Marjia would prefer to live larger cities like Toronto because her children could attend a Muslim school.

"NAYLA"

Nayla is a 31 year-old Bangladeshi Muslim. I met her at dinner at the mosque when I was looking for participants for this study. She was the first enrolled participant and we saw each other at *halaka* on a number of occasions after our formal introduction. Naficha and Natasha also came to this gathering. Nayla was interested in participating in this study first because there is less research on this population and because she wanted to help me out by providing her experiences. Nayla came to St. John's in 2001 to join her

husband. Nayla is the second of three sisters. Her first sister lives in Singapore with her husband and the youngest one lives in Vancouver where she is doing her post-secondary education. Nayla's mother is a retired professor at the government college in Bangladesh. Nayla is flexible to choose her place of living. She states:

> We [husband and wife] are not determined yet to stay here or to go back to Bangladesh. It depends on if we feel that we have to go back to Bangladesh; in this case we will go. My husband has a job here and I have one too (November, 2008).

Like Marjia, Nayla's husband also came to St. John's to pursue his post-secondary education higher degrees. Having finished his studies he got a job in St. John's. Nayla completed her Bachelor and Master of Arts Degree in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She does not intend to move to bigger cities. Nayla has two sons who are about six and two years old. She might move to a larger city in the distant future for her sons' education. In terms of her first-born son's preference to live in Canada or Bangladesh Nayla says:

> He was born here and he went to Bangladesh twice with us. He does not yet express an interest in living here or in Bangladesh. I think my son is still too young to make this choice or even to have an opinion. He misses his grandfathers, grandmothers, and other close relatives who live in Bangladesh. He also wants to visit some places in Bangladesh that he has seen in our pictures (November, 2008).

"NAFICHA"

Naficha is 34 years old. I met her for the first time at Nayla's house, and I interviewed her in her own house. Naficha began the interview by telling me that she has one brother, who lives in Toronto. Her father died when she was a teenager. After her father's death, her mother raised them. Besides her mother, she has paternal and maternal relatives who live in Bangladesh. Naficha completed her Bachelor of Arts and Master's Degree from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Naficha married in 1997. She has two sons aged twelve and eight. Naficha's family has been in St. John's since 2001. Before moving to St. John's, they lived in Korea for three years. Naficha convinced her husband to settle down in Canada, when he was thinking of migrating to a Western country. She did this because Canada accepts dual citizenships. Shinohara (2003) points out that in spite of their movement, immigrants have spent such a long time in their home country that they cannot deny their attachment to their country of origin. Therefore, immigrants often want to keep their national identity. In order to be a Canadian citizen, immigrants do not need to give up their citizenship of origin. This opportunity attracted Naficha. Naficha did not want to settle down in Bangladesh because she feels that the social environment of Bangladesh is not safe. In addition, she now believes that living in Bangladesh may be difficult for her sons as they are getting acclimatized to a Canadian lifestyle. Naficha's elder son, who is twelve years old, was born in Bangladesh, and her second son, who is eight, was born in St. John's. Naficha likes St. John's because it is a quiet place and because she feels that Newfoundlanders are open.

"NATASHA"

Natasha is 27 years old. She is the third among five sisters. Her father is a retired government worker and her mother is a retired school teacher in Bangladesh. Four of five sisters are married. Her eldest sister is a government school teacher in Dhaka, her second sister is a teacher at the English medium school in Chittagong. Her other sister also lives in Chittagong and she is a housewife and her husband is a marine engineer. Finally, the youngest studied for a bachelor of law in Dhaka. Natasha has completed a Bachelor of

Science from Bangladesh, and is undertaking a Masters of Science in St. John's. She was married in 2004.

Natasha arrived in St. John's in 2007 to join her husband (a PhD student in Science) as a housewife. Natasha was bit upset as her admission in a Master's Degree programme in Science was confirmed after she arrived in St. John's. Natasha now likes St. John's because Bangladeshi immigrants to St. John's are, so far, homogeneous in terms of status and education, whereas in other cities, Bangladeshi immigrants are of many different backgrounds, for example, students, workers, businessmen, and asylum seekers. In St. John's, Bangladeshis are mostly students and student immigrants. However, Natasha stated that eventually they may move to Toronto or Vancouver, depending on their job placement.

"NABIDA"

Nabida is a 33 year-old Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim woman with one daughter and one son. Like the other participants, Nabida also followed her husband, who came to St. John's in 2005, three months after their marriage, to pursue his second Master's Degree and PhD in Science. Nabida did her Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Arts in Science in Bangladesh. Before joining her husand in 2007, Nabida worked as a banker in Bangladesh. Nabida says that she was not upset when she quit her job to join her husband in St. John's as her admission to the Master's Degree programme in Science was confirmed before coming to St. John's. Nabida's father is a retired medical doctor in the military and her mother is a housewife. She has one sister and one brother, and she is the youngest. Her brother and sister in law have lived in United States. Nabida's brother is an

engineer and his wife is a medical doctor. Her elder sister, who lives in Bangladesh, is a medical doctor as is her brother-in-law.

This interview took place at her house in the presence of her husband. Nabida's husband mildly and jokingly warned her about being careful with her answers because this thesis may be read by other students. During the interview session, Nabida's husband did not interfere or add any comments. Nabida and her husband have not decided whether they will live in St. John's permanently, or go back to Bangladesh, or to move to another Canadian province. Staying or leaving Canada will depend on her husband's job placement. In the next chapter, egalitarian gender role behaviour and religious lives of these women are described in detail.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two sections. In section one, I explore the transnational gendered shifting experiences of Bangladeshi Muslim women in St. John's, Newfoundland. I argue that the contemporary Canadian context to which these married women arrive allows them to negotiate their pre-migration gender roles and the division of power and labour within their marriages. In the first place, their place in these new found contexts means that these women generally feel empowered in domestic and family-related decisions in comparison to their pre-migratory lives. This shift is enabled largely through their distance from the cultural and familial traditions of their country of origin. In section two, I argue that this relative empowerment in their private and public lives as women also enables significant shifts in their religious lives. With reference to the qualitative interviews I conducted with local women of Bangladeshi origin in St. John's, NL, I point to how Bangladeshi Muslim women immigrants in Newfoundland attend religious symposiums and mosque-related events with far more rigor and regularity in St. John's than in their pre-migratory lives. This increased level of mosque participation has enabled female support for Muslim piety, which again, was largely absent in their daily lives prior to migration.

POST-MIGRATION ROLES OF WOMEN IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES

The purpose of this section is to examine Bangladeshi immigrant women's gender attitudes within and outside the domestic sphere. Becker *et al.*, (2006) describe that women often have more decision-making power in domestic matters while men enjoy

privileges both within and outside domestic matters. The experiences of these six women suggest that immigration has enabled them to experience a greater sense of gender equality[8] in marital relationships in St. John's. My findings suggest that once in Canada, these participants attain a sense of empowerment in their marriages.

Obviously, the migration of women is not a new phenomenon. However, research on the experience of female immigrants in their receiving country is relatively recent (Boyd, 1986; Brettell & Simon, 1986). Several studies suggest that regardless of socioeconomic conditions, female migrants typically undergo challenges with respect to gender attitudes in their host country (Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Dion & Dion, 2001; Tastsoglou & Dobrowolsky, 2006). Roles of husbands and wives also shift notably in the post-migration context (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1999; Min, 2001; Knudson-Martin *et al.,* 2009). In this section, I investigate shifts in Bangladeshi immigrant women's post-migration gender roles in St. John's.

Existing scholarship suggests that socioeconomic class influences gender attitudes in couples' relationships. For example, immigrants from a higher social class encounter patriarchal gender ideologies in Western host countries to a lesser extent than their poorer counterparts because of their socialization in the mainstream culture of the host countries (Inclan, 2003). Higher socio-economic class levels also relate to education and language acquisition. Even poor migrants are able to renegotiate traditional gender roles in new

[8] Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, (2009) define gender equality in marital relationship is as partners' equal status in the relationship in which a husband and a wife both accommodate and attends each other equally.

context because of the increased employment opportunities available to them (Felicov, 1998, 2007).

The linkage between exposure to Western culture and more equitable gender behaviour has been made in various studies (West & Pilgrim, 1995; Summerfield, 1993). With reference to Somali and Bangladeshi women in Britain, Summerfield (1993) suggests that the more people are exposed to Western culture, the more adaptable they become with respect to "Westernized" gender roles wherein women enjoy relatively more rights and opportunities. Baluja (2002) claims that immigration to America offers Bangladeshi couples opportunities to modify some of their former gender systems (Baluja, 2000). Debiaggi (1999) conducted research on Brazilian immigrant families in the U.S. She comments that those Brazilian immigrants who maintain closer contact with Americans develop more egalitarian gender role behaviour. Similarly, Cheung (1999) notes that most of her Chinese participants experienced more egalitarian gender relationships once they migrated to Canada. She opines that the effect of the host culture often overshadows the effect of the country of origin. Worden and Worden (1998) argue that more egalitarian male-female relationships depend on a culture's social and economic development. When compared to many other countries, these features are well-developed in Canada, and this result in more egalitarian male-female relationships. Cheung (1999) suggests that Canadian society:

> inherited the modern Western ideology that advocates an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife and values such relationships. The actual behaviour may be far from its cultural ideal, but such ideology is familiar to the younger generations (327).

Thus, immigration to this culture often encourages immigrants to adopt more egalitarian gender role behaviours in their marital relationships.

A number of studies report relationships between couples' higher education, women's paid work, and egalitarian gender roles (Boyd, 1986; Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2001; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). Immigrants in Canada are often exposed to a common dual-income or dual-study relationship models. Higher education and jobs expose immigrants to mainstream Canadian cultural values on gender equity. These couples are thus socialized about this form of gender equity in the education systems and workplace, and, in turn, shift their own gender attitudes (DeBiaggi, 1999; Baluja, 2000).

Pesser (1984) notes in her research that immigrant women's work outside of the home allows for a renegotiation of gender relations toward more egalitarian norms in the home. In her research "Korean Immigrant Women's Lived Experiences in Halifax: Challenging Gender Relations in the Family, Workplace, and Community", Cha (2009) suggests that as immigrant women start working outside the home, their bargaining power within the family regarding housework and making family decisions increases. Related to this shift, Bossen (1984) and Becker *et al.* (2006) conclude that women's higher education and full-time career secure their participation in the decision-making processes within and outside the household.

However, several studies suggest that due to husbands' "traditional" stance -- i.e. women are inferior and men are superior in the family -- women often experience prejudice in their post-migration lives (Noh *et al.,* 1992; Yu, 2006). Favourable

conditions for a balanced relationship, such as having a higher education and income level do not necessarily ensure equal gender roles. For example, Yu (2006) finds that women who immigrated to the United States from Maoist China had the opposite experience. They became more "traditional" in relation to gender roles in the United States than in China. Yu explains that immigrant Maoist Chinese women likely hold former gender roles in their post-migratory lives in order to sustain indigenous traditions, as well as for the sake of their family's stability and solidarity. Min (2001) and Yu (2006) opine that immigrant women's paid work does not always alter traditional gender experiences and that they often have to bear all household responsibilities in addition to a career.

Migration often involves a social distancing between couples, their parents, siblings and their extended families. Because of immigration, women, like those in my study, live great distances from their extended families. They often form a nuclear family in their receiving country in which there is usually no elder present. In Bangladesh, it is common that women need to take into consideration their husbands' family's opinions, since familial arrangements where elders live with the couple are common. If they fail to do so, young women may be considered impolite and "unfamilial." In relation to my six participants in St. John's, I have noticed that instead of challenging opinions, the participants' parents-in-law encourage the young women to exercise their own judgement to make decisions (see details in the section titled "Gender Behaviour among Bangladeshi Couples in St. John's"). In the study "Postnuptial Migration and the Status of Women in Indonesia," Williams suggests that in patrilineal and patrilocal societies, a move away

from the husband's family offers couples "the opportunity to develop more intimate and perhaps more egalitarian relationships than would otherwise be possible" (Williams, 1989:896). Similarly, Ware expresses that young women who, with their husbands, remain in his parents' home locate themselves "in a singularly powerless position because they are strangers in their husbands' families" (Ware, 1981:163). This idea is also emphasized by Hyman *et al.* (2008) who report that some immigrant participants experience an increase in decision-making power in various domains of domestic life, and more intimacy between spouses post-migration.

Immigrants tend to concentrate on their settlement. Settling in a new place often requires considerable sacrifice from both husband and wife. Therefore, in the settlement process, a shift often occurs in the balance of power in a marriage. Instead of the husband holding a clearly superior position, immigrants tend to respond to each other more complementarily. Participants' husbands adapt to their new surroundings, and tend to attend to each other on a more egalitarian basis because they develop the perception that a division of labour and power which favours the male can hinder the couple's establishment in the new society, while merging this division allows both of them (wife and husband) to take part in the establishment process, including family and career (Becker *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, a migrant couple to North America typically tends to develop a more interdependent relationship. Thus, immigration tends to strengthen a couple's ability to make decisions within and outside the domestic world as a unit.

In addition, most immigrant families are nuclear and consist of two adult members (wife and husband) and their children. In this family system, men's privileges over

women's may reduce emotional attachment and, in turn, their conjugal relationship may become a burden for women (Krulfeld, 1994; Kulig, 1994; Johnson, 2003). Having less decision-making power may not be a significant problem in immigrants' countries of origin because of women's socialization and presence in the same culture. But, the low self-esteem that can be brought about by a limited influence in decision-making power and traditional gender role behaviour in marital relationships may contribute to post-migration marital conflict. For example, Shin's (1995) and Rhee's (1997) studies on Korean migrants in the United States show that most Korean working wives are overburdened because of their full-time paid work and the unequal distribution of housework. This phenomenon has led to an increase in marital conflict within Korean immigrant communities. Similar findings were also reported in a Canadian study within South Asian and Sri Lankan Tamil communities (Naidoo & Davis, 1988; Morrison *et al.*, 1999). In "Gendered Power in Cultural Contexts: Part 1: Immigrant Couples," Knudson-Martin *et al.* state that the balance in power and equality between a husband and a wife is evident "when the social structure offers women more access to resources, opportunity, and legal protection" (2009:19). In many contexts, immigrants may have access to resources, but compared to their country of origin, their receiving geography tends to have many more opportunities to offer to immigrant women and, simultaneously, legal protection. These options may facilitate the experience of egalitarian gender behaviour in marital relationships.

It is evident from the above discussion that gender attitudes rest on a variety of factors. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney state that "gendered behaviour in families is still

so ingrained that a couple's move toward equal partnership does not 'just happen'" (2005: 242). Various social and economic aspects added to the post-migration lives of immigrant women result in sharing power and equality in women's marital relationships. In the next section, immigrant Bangladeshi women's post-migration gender roles in the St. John's context are described.

GENDER BEHAVIOR AMONG BANGLADESHI COUPLES IN ST. JOHN'S

All six participants in my study expressed that in their post-migratory lives they experienced changes in the way that they understand gender and gender relations. The participants left for Canada or other countries soon after marriage. Regardless of the length of time these women lived with their husbands as married couples in Bangladesh, all of them felt that their husbands' expectation was "traditional" in the sense that they expected their wives would equally emphasize domestic chores, childcare and paid work or study. The participants felt burdened because the balance between accomplishing domestic duties and work/study was difficult to maintain. However, when these women moved to join their husbands in Canada, they appreciated a change in their husbands' attitudes in relation to the gendered division of labour. Nayla, a 31-year old mother who came to St. John's in 2001, explains this receptive attitude as follows:

> My husband is friendly and cooperative. He always drops off and picks up our child from school, goes shopping, and helps me in cooking - especially when guests come. He is very active and does not divide work according to [a gendered division of labour]. Whenever he sees anything that needs to be done and he has time to do it, whatever it is, he does not wait for me to do it. Also, he is very responsive in the sense that he never asks me reasons why I do not do certain chores. However, I feel that he is careful of whether I am taking advantage of his helping attitudes or not (October, 2008)

According to Nayla, the division of labour between herself and her husband is balanced. Similarly, the following statement indicates a relatively equalized relationship rather than a privileged based one. Nabida[9], a 33-year-old mother who came to St. John's in 2007, says: "We both do our study and other chores, as well as spend time with our child by turn." Further, Natasha, who came to St. John's in 2007, states:

> Although I have a loving marriage I find him more cooperative in Canada than in Bangladesh. My husband almost equally shares household chores with me. He is aware that our program of study requires staying at the school a long time. As we are in two different programs (my husband is in a Ph.D. program and I am in a Masters program; whenever one of us gets free time do something at home or other necessary things such as shopping or banking, we do it (November, 2008).

These narratives suggest that immigrants generally embrace aspects of normative Canadian notions of gender relations in which a more equitable relationship between a husband and a wife is idealized. Presumably, socialization through school and work enables immigrants to pick up certain aspects of Western gender behaviour to the extent they deem is necessary to lead a comfortable and peaceful marital relationship[10].

Although participants express that their responsibilities increased in St. John's, the power relations between the individuals in a couple also shift, and women's ability to influence their husbands' opinions grows. The participants claim that they gain this power without pushing their husbands.

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[9] Nabida and Natasha worked outside the home in Bangladesh.

[10] Several studies document gender inequality in Canada, for example, Brayfield (1992); McMahon (1999); Phipps *et al.* (2001); MacDonald *et al.* (2005); Statistics Canada (2006); Girard (2008).

> We [husband and wife] make our decisions together in St. John's. My husband always discusses with me and his parents whenever he makes any decision but they encourage him to discuss [it] with me. They always say that "you have some experience living in St. John's, which we lack. We cannot give you effective advice from outside the country. It would be better if you, husband and wife, discuss and make the decision yourselves" (October, 2008).

This participant felt individual empowerment to a greater extent in her post-migration life due to the need for family solidarity. Traditionally, older family members enjoy more privileges than the younger generation in Bangladesh. Parents or elderly family members have more life experience because they are considered to have arrived at a stage in which they have attained maturity and wisdom (Farver *et al.*, 2002; Kumar, 2003). Because of their experience and wisdom, elders often undermine young people's opinions. However, the above narrative demonstrates that instead of giving their opinions, older family members, due to their lack of familiarity with the post-migration lives, encouraged their son and daughter in-law to exercise their own judgment to make decisions. The following examples explain this shift more clearly.

> When we were in Bangladesh we depended on his (husband's) parents' opinion because they might think that we were ignoring their life experience. But since we have been abroad, they have encouraged us to make decisions by ourselves. His parents also encourage him to consult with me. They also discuss with me when they do anything ("Marjia" October, 2008).

> I was a teenager when I got married. A year later, I came to Canada with my husband. Since then, my parents-in-law have allowed me to make decisions. Instead of interfering in our decision-making, they suggested that we consult each other, no matter what is discussed, because they think a discussion together would result in a better decision. My husband also always considers my opinion. If I ever said "no," he tries to convince me rather than ignoring me. However, when I moved back to Bangladesh temporarily [after four years of living in Canada], I felt that I had relatively less power over anything. The elder of the family used to say that "you do

> not know anything about Bangladesh, let us do things in our way." Also, I felt that my husband paid less attention to my opinion. I regained power when I moved away from Bangladesh again ("Mahfuza" October, 2008).

Mahfuza felt this shift whenever she went Bangladesh on vacation when she was relatively young. The other participants also expressed that their opinions were less valued when they were living in Bangladesh. They were knowledgeable about current events but their opinions were not taken into consideration. Nevertheless, when they moved abroad due to either their husbands' jobs or studies, they not only knew what was going on, but also recognized the fact that both their husbands and in-laws valued their opinions. Presumably, this is an effort to reduce the social distance created by immigration between an immigrant woman and her family members. On the one hand, parents may think that having a responsive relationship between a husband and a wife will help them to lead a happier life in a foreign country. On the other hand, immigrant men and women might feel lonely, since they left the support of their extended kin behind. Nevertheless, in the absence of extended family members, husbands and wives develop a more mutual sharing-focused attitude. Husband and wife seek suggestions from each other when choices need to be made, not because they are asked to do so, but because both of them feel loyal to one another. For example, Nabida states:

> Before buying anything, I discuss it with my husband. I do so because he also asks me whenever he does something (November, 2008).
>
> Without letting him [husband] know I usually do not do anything. He also does the same thing ("Marjia" October, 2008).

Presumably, this reflection reveals an effort to make the relationship transparent in order to facilitate harmony in their family lives as they transition between cultures. Furthermore, in this new environment, both men and women are motivated to ask advice

from their partners, though women tend to implicitly ask for permission. However, this does not overshadow women's decision-making power and gender role behaviour. Rather, these attitudes increase women's decision-making powers in their marital relationship in post-migration life as they become more responsible to each other.

In short, the women who participated in this study gained a greater sense of equality and power in their post-migration marital relationships. The findings presented here clarify some of the reasons why this occurs in the context of Bangladeshi immigrant women's new lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. It is evident that a transfer of power and a move towards equality occurred once these women arrived in Canada. Participants did not need to push their husbands for them to value their opinions. The husbands participated to a greater extent in children-related and household tasks. Rather, their voices were heard to a greater extent in their post-migration lives because of their distance from the influence of powerful social forces back home, their socialization in the gender culture of a Canadian city, and also their need for solidarity as a couple within their marriage.

POST-MIGRATION RELIGIOUS LIVES OF WOMEN

The purpose of this section is to investigate Bangladeshi immigrant women's post-migration religious lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. The experiences of these women suggest that participants become more religiously observant in St. John's, but not necessarily in a manner that would be recognized as traditionally Bangladeshi (i.e. not necessarily through the celebration of religious rituals that are typically held in Bangladesh). I argue that immigration allows participants to attain 'religious capital' through gaining access to religious symposiums and mosque-related events with far more rigor and regularity than in their pre-migratory lives. This increased level of mosque participation has enabled female support for increased Muslim piety, largely absent in their lives prior to migration.

Immigrant religiosity has recently become a pertinent issue for both religion and migration scholars (Warner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Hirschman, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Edgell & Docka, 2007; Massey & Higgins, 2007), resulting in numerous comparative and qualitative studies (e.g., Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Min & Kim, 2002; Cadge, 2005; Chen, 2008;). Studies that have focused on immigrant Muslim women and their religious practices report that immigration involves both a loss and a gain of religious "capital" or resources (Predelli, 2008). For example, Wikan (1995) suggests that due to the lack of fluency in the host country's language, immigrant women often experience marginalization in some ways while gaining religious capital –i.e. religious knowledge (cited in Predelli, 2008). Predelli adds that most receiving countries offer immigrants and their offspring the opportunity to develop and

choose alternative forms of congregation life, although immigrants normally carry religion with them from their countries of origin and often choose to preserve their religious traditions and create new religious practices (2008:256). For instance, in Bangladesh, women have fewer prospects to attain "religious capital" through formal means (Gardner, 1995:259). They mainly obtain their religious education from the traditional religious *waaz/mahfil* (sermon) rather than in the *madrasa* or traditional religious school (Huq, 2008). Predelli continues that in the diasporic context, women sustain their religious traditions while modifying their former practices (if necessary). They also assume new religious roles (Predelli, 2008).

A number of studies further suggest that religion often gains greater significance for immigrants in their host countries than in their country of origin (cf. Berger, 1999; Nimbark, 2004; Guest, 2004; Cadge & Ecklund, 2007; Merz *et al.,* 2009). This shift occurs because generally people do not fear losing their religious beliefs and practices in their home countries due to its unquestioned presence (Nimbark, 2004). However, as minorities in a Western country, immigrants oftentimes fear their religious identities may be threatened. This feeling results in a firmer attachment to both beliefs and practices (Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). Yang expresses that willingness to "sustain their ancestral religious identity and, particularly, that of their children" not only makes immigrants aware of their religion but also turns them into regular religious practitioners despite the hardships they may face (2004:7).

A number of studies also claim that immigrants embrace religion in the new society as a coping mechanism (Guest, 2004; Khan & Watson, 2005; Leonard, 2005;

Merz *et al.*, 2009). Immigration often involves adjustment challenges as the receiving countries' socio-cultural environment might differ from that of the countries of origin (Maraj, 1996; Khan & Watson, 2005; Samuel, 2008). As a result, they often experience stress in the establishment process in their new environment. Studies suggest that when stress is intense, many migrants turn to religious practice and communities in order to lighten their difficulties (Guest, 2005; Khan & Watson, 2005).

Furthermore, new immigrants often become more religiously practicing upon arrival in the receiving country because the majority of the fellow immigrants are already religious (Park, 2004). This change does not mean that they feel pressure to be religious, rather it is often according to them, "individual choice, group encouragement, and divine intervention" (Park, 2004:187) that encourages them to uphold religion. When people move to another country they leave behind memories and relationships (McMichael, 2002; Merz *et al.*, 2009). Thus, immigrants often experience loneliness, sadness, and depression due to this separation from social and family networks (McMichael, 2002; Merz *et al.*, 2009). Religion provides consolation and emotional strength to confront the negative feelings that can arise from the displacement (McMichael, 2002) because it allows immigrants to develop "social capital" and "transnational networks" among their faith cohorts (Leonard, 2005:1; Merz *et al.*, 2009). Although moving from one country to another uproots women from their habitual social environment and supports, their religious faith and practices allow them to "recreate lives, homes, and community" quickly in the new society (McMichael, 2002:178). It also allows them to confront threats

arising from the process of resettlement. These responses thus result in increased religiosity post-migration.

Immigration affords women greater opportunities to participate in mosque-related activities and religious symposiums in their host countries than their countries of origin (Haddad & Lummis, 1987) because women have diminished or no access to mosques in many Muslim countries (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Roald, 2001). Roald (2001) describes that very few mosques accept women's presence in India and Pakistan. Participation in various religious activities at the mosque may be associated with increased Muslim piety and the gaining of "religious capital". In Bangladesh, women are not allowed to attend to congregational prayers, i.e. the Friday prayer, the *Eid* prayers. They occasionally attend public religious gatherings, such as *waaz/orosh* or *milad mahfil* or *doa mahfil* [11] (Nasreen, 1998). In Bangladesh, the formal site of gaining religious knowledge, the *madrasa* or traditional religious school, where Qur'an, *hadith,* and *jurisprudence (fiqh)* are the core of the curriculum (Huq, 2008), is mainly open to men, although a handful number of girls' *madrasa* have been established in the recent decades. Therefore, women in Bangladesh mainly attain religious knowledge from secondary sources such as weekly religious programs on radio and television (Huq, 2008). In the past decade, public schools include Islam as a compulsory subject with many other subjects from grades one to ten (Huq, 2008).

[11] The *waaz mahfil* is understood as religious meeting. It is a mass assembly (usually open-air) of religious followers who gather to hear a preacher speak on various Islamic and contemporary social issues.

It is evident from the above discussion that various issues influence immigrant women to hold their religion firmly in the international migration context. Indeed, Arif Dirlik, in "Modernity in Question? Culture and Religion in an Age of Global Modernity," states that religion "acquires new significance under new circumstances" (2003:160). The stress along with new opportunities for practices afforded to migrants causes an open and higher level of practice than in their home countries. In the next section, immigrant women's post-migration religious lives are described.

BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S POST-MIGRATORY RELGIOUS LIVES IN ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

The participants expressed that they were attached to certain attributes of Islam, such as praying, fasting, and reciting the Quran when they were in Bangladesh, and now practice these more rigorously in St. John's because these practices provide them with peace of mind and discipline in their lives. With regards to this increased practice, Marjia, who is 33 years old, has two children, and came to St. John's in 2006, states:

> I have not put religion aside since I embraced it in Bangladesh before my marriage. It guides my pre-and post-marital life; it shows me how to behave with elders and my responsibilities to younger people. It also teaches me how to raise children, what to eat, where to go and what to do there, and other aspects of life (October, 2008).

Despite the sense of continuation, Marjia feels that religion exists to guide her life choices and decisions, particularly post-migration. Similarly, Nayla does not want to keep religious beliefs and practices far from her because she believes that if she fails to follow religion, she will fail to live positively. In her words:

> I was not very firm in my religious practice before migration. When I first came here in 2001 I felt loneliness, as I did not have work or a child at that time. At one time I felt bored and started reading the Quran in English and Bangla in order to understand its messages. I have recited the Quran in Arabic since my childhood but reading it in Bangla and English helps me to understand the teachings of the Quran. Since then, I have kept religion and its teachings with me, though sometimes I have felt this was difficult to do in St. John's. However, reading the Quran myself and reviewing *hadith* and Quran at the *majlish\halaka*[12] inspired me to be committed to religion. Also, I feel that if my son does not see me practicing Islam he may not realize its importance (October, 2008).

The urge to impart religious practices to her child makes Nayla feel committed to her faith. Conveying her faith to her children also makes her hardship feel insignificant because this action satisfies her need to contribute to her faith. In Bangladesh, children learn certain attributes of Islam from the social environment as it is a Muslim-majority country. In St. John's, children do not have such an environment; consequently, participants feel the importance to create such an environment at home through practicing Islam habitually. Similarly, Nabida states:

> In Bangladesh, I was not regular in prayers, though I was a firm believer. I was very upset because of my child's health. You may understand how stressful it was for a mother. I trusted Allah and prayed to him, and He responds to my prayers. My daughter was getting better gradually. This made me more faithful in Islam, and I become more regular in prayers than I was in Bangladesh (November, 2008).

In Nabida's case, faith is intensified alongside her status as a mother. Fearing for her children's well-being also turned Nabida increasingly towards religion. Receiving *rahmat* (Allah's blessing) in time of need increased her religious piety. Natasha, another

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[12] *Majlish/halaka* is an informal gathering to attain and review religious knowledge. In this gathering, members of this *majlish* discuss from the Quran and *hadith*. They also recite the Quran.

participant, also believes that religion offers her peace of mind and shows her how to guide her life. She states:

> Islam shows me the way I must walk in my life. When I follow it I feel blessed, and when I do not follow religious prescriptions I lost myself in confusion. These are the same feelings I had when I was in Bangladesh; however; it did not bother me much, perhaps because I was surrounded by parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. They always tried to show me reasons for things to occur whenever I was worried. In St. John's, I feel it severely and as a way out of it I embrace Islam strongly. It offers me peace of mind, broader explanations, and eliminates my confusions (November, 2008).

Searching for peace of mind motivates Natasha to embrace Islamic practices more firmly in her post-migration life in St. John's. She expresses that she was committed to saying prayers and fasting in Bangladesh because her social environment was committed to religion. The difference between the past and the present time, she articulates, is that she feels uneasy if she misses her prayers and she cannot concentrate on her other priorities. Therefore, although there is no social pressure to observe religious practices in St. John's, Natasha does not wish to put religion aside. She develops a sense that practicing religion will bring her closer to Allah and His blessings wherever she goes. Therefore, she embraces Islamically-understood practices more firmly. Natasha is expecting her first baby, and like the other five participants she will share the religious tradition with her offspring because she believes that the Quran is the right guide for her child.

This sense of intergenerational exchange is reminiscent of Haleh Afshar's (1994) statement that "[Women] are the custodians of the religious beliefs" (129). The women in my study embrace religion as a guide in their lives, and seek to transfer it to their children. Naficha expresses that she practices her religion steadfastly while her children

are starting to go to secular public school in St. John's. She is concerned that her children are exposed to diverse religions through their peers. Therefore, again in response, Naficha turns to Islam with greater rigor. She believes that if her children see her being loyal to Islam it will lead them to love it. This is similar to what Mernissi states in that religion becomes "the comforting cradle" for immigrant women (Mernissi, 1987:13).

Five participants further reported that they had more sources to attain religious capital in St. John's, such as the mosque and a variety of religious symposiums. While the local Bangladeshi community usually does not arrange large events at the mosque, they typically participate in mosque-related events. Predelli (2008) expresses that typically, in the diaspora, the mosque is more than a place of organizing sermons and prayers. In the St. John's single-mosque context, the mosque is a transnational socialization center. Participants articulated that going to the mosque is a new experience for them. Participants also stated versions of Nabida's idea that: "praying with many women in the mosque make[s] me feel good". The participants of this study are aware that according to some prevalent understandings of religious practice and obligation, unlike men, they do not have a religious duty to go to the mosque; however, they all claim to feel empowered because of their access to the mosque. Having access allows them to go to the mosque whenever they want to listen to the imam's explanations of the Quran and various religious lectures that take place in the mosque and expand their knowledge of Islam. Naficha, a 34 year-old Bangladeshi immigrant with two children who has been in St. John's since 2001, states that:

> Mosque participation and lectures increase my religious understanding. At the mosque, I can socialize myself with transnational Muslim women and learn how they practice Islam. At the mosque, I notice that women from other geographical backgrounds offer their prayer[s] in a different way, I mean, their body movements are different than mine. Seeing them, I get opportunities to correct my prayer movements (Naficha, October 2008).

Similarly, Natasha, a 27-year-old who has been in St. John's since 2007, expresses:

> In Bangladesh, we women learned to pray in a different way than men. However, in the MSA *iftar* parties [which are held in the evening, at the time when the Ramadan fast is to be broken] and at the mosque in St. John's, I noticed that women offer their prayer the same way men do. Seeing them helps me to say prayer the way they do (Natasha, October 2008).

Mosque participation enhances the participant's religious knowledge. The social environment of the mosque also educates her to offer prayers in the same way as most other Muslims living in St. John's. Furthermore, in St. John's, MANAL (the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador) together with MSA-MUN (Muslim Student Association of Memorial University of Newfoundland) hold public lectures on Islam, sometimes inviting guest speakers. These events take place either at the mosque or at the local Memorial University campus, and are organized in order to educate Muslims as well as curious non-Muslims about the teachings and values of Islam. These talks are open to all and typically allow for open-ended questions. Those people who attended the talks become more knowledgeable about Islam. With regards to attending lectures, Natasha explains:

> In Bangladesh, I never went to Islamic lectures. But in St. John's, I regularly go to lectures on Islam in the local university campus and at the mosque because many Muslim women come up to these lectures. I have learned more about Islam from these lectures (Interviewed October 2008).

Socialization with Muslim women at the mosque motivated participants to concentrate on religious symposiums. Mahfuza and Naficha expressed that they tried not to miss lectures at the mosque. Nayla also went to the mosque for the talks on Islam whenever possible. Although women have some access to the public lectures in Bangladesh (Nasreen, 1998), participants felt more comfortable and encouraged to go to the Islamic talks in St. John's. Furthermore, having access to the mosque allows those participants who want to offer their prayer in a *jamat* or *jumu'ah* (congregation) to do so. Mahfuza, who is the eldest of the six participants and who has been in St. John's since 1994, expresses:

> I go to the mosque to say *tarabih* with my husband since the mosque has arranged it. I can say *tarabih* at home with small surahs but in the *tarabih jamat* (prayer) imam recites the entire Quran. Hence, attending *tarabih jamat* is a way to gain an "extra" reward (October 2008).

The Quran is divided into thirty *para* or chapters and is usually recited in the *tarabih* prayer. *Tarabih* is performed throughout Ramadan after the *Isha* prayer. Muslims attempt to *Khatm* (complete recitation of the Quran) during the month of Ramadan, because the revelation of the first *ayaats* (verses) of the Holy Quran occurred in the month of Ramadan (Khan, 1985). They do so by reciting at least one *para* or chapter per night in *tarabih* prayer. Reciting a chapter in a prayer by memory is difficult for ordinary people unless they are *hafez* (person who memorize the Quran). Doing so allows for the accumulation of religiously-understood rewards. Praying in a *jamat* is not compulsory for women, but it is not forbidden either[13] (Predelli, 2008). However, women are discouraged

[13] There are hadith that are on women's congregational prayer. For example, Ibn 'Umar reported on the authority of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, (who) said "When your women ask your permission to go to the mosque at night, give them permission." (B. 10:162.). Available at

to attend mosque in most Muslim countries as mosque is considered as a public place (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Roald, 2001). It appears that immigration allowed Mahfuza to attend *Khatm tarabih* and thus, from her perspective, gain spiritual rewards. Beyond mosque participation, information technology helps participants to reshape their religious understanding and practices. Female participants expressed that once they were in St. John's they started listening to religious lectures in English on the internet to improve their knowledge.

Besides a transnational congregation, most female participants also gained access to a religious congregation in its various locations. That is, on occasion, a *madrasha* (a place in which South Asian Muslims receive religious education) formally put together in private homes in St. John's. The purpose of these gatherings in private homes is to discuss *hadith*, recite from the Quran and have discussions on various topics. They typically do so in their native Bangla language, socialize and discuss social news together, and eat Bangladeshi food. In other words, even in private homes, they practice Islam and its rituals as they know them, without separating the "culture from the religion" (Smith & Bender, 2004:93). This cultural adherence does not mean that they are practicing "cultural Islam"; rather, they practice what they perceive as being a more "standard" Islam – (i.e. a universally-practiced Islam in a social setting that meets their

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www.religionfacts.com/islam/library/hadith-7.htm . The same hadith differently narrated by Abu Dawood (567) that Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Do not prevent your women from going to the mosques, although their houses are better for them." Analyses of these hadith suggest that *jammah/jamat* prayer is not compulsory for women; however, they should not be prevented from going to the mosque if they want to pray in *jammah/jamat* at mosque. See http://www.islam-qa.com/en/ref/127476

religious and cultural needs). Furthermore, limiting this gathering to Bangladeshis may be considered by some as the result of reluctance to gather with other Muslims, which is perceived by my informants as nonsensical, since they enjoy diversity in the mosque, and discuss and share their knowledge of Islam in their own ways. Natasha, Nayla, and Naficha attend the same *halaka* with their husbands. This group of people has met regularly for about three years. Natasha describes,

> In this gathering, senior brothers discuss *hadiths* and the context of the revelation of passage of the Quran. One of the senior brothers normally recites one fourth of a chapter of the Quran in each session. Then they discuss *hadiths*, specific verses and *hadiths* on different topics, such as *wudu*[14], *dua*[15], *salat, roja* [fasting], *hajj, zakat*[16]. Although none of the brothers is a professional imam in the *majlish/ halaka*, they collect sources from the Quran, *hadith*, and websites and read it in the *halaka*. The senior brother also gives us references so that we can look them up and read them at home. Without going to the *halaka* I can read it at home but I think *halaka* is more effective than reading the book or Internet alone because it functions as an inspiration (November 2008).

Similarly, Nayla adds:

> Halaka helps me to review, modify, and share my knowledge and practices of Islam. We also do Quran *Khatm* in the *halaka*. We all have individual work and other things. Therefore, finding time for different purposes is often difficult. To overcome these difficulties, we gather in a *halaka*. It meets our social, cultural, and religious needs (November 2009).

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[14] *Wadu* is the Islamic act of washing certain part of the body for ritual prayers.

[15] *Dua* is a sincere appeal to Allah.

[16] Islam is based on many moral injunctions. Among them five pillars are the essential religious duties required of every adult Muslim who is mentally able. The five pillars are described in some part of the Qur'an and were practiced during Muhammad's lifetime. The first pillar of Islam is *Shahada* (profession of faith), *Salat* [prayer] is the second pillar of Islam, *zakat* [almsgiving] is third, *roja/sawm* [fasting] is forth, and *hajj* [pilgrimage] is the fifth pillar of Islam. See www.mb-soft.com/believe/txh/pillars.htm

Attending *halaka* helps the participants review their existing knowledge of Islam, attain the *Quran Khatm*, as well as correct their practice. Participants expressed that attending *halaka* with their husbands allowed them to learn "correct" practices because their husbands have had greater access to formal religious institutions from an early age. Also, attending this *halaka* allows women to stay informed with the happenings in the world. Compared to their husbands, participants have a limited social network and fewer opportunities to explore world events due to responsibilities regarding their career, education, and domestic life. Because of their husbands' worldwide social network their husbands come to know about various international lectures on Islam and related current affairs and have discussions about them at the *halaka*. This knowledge-base helps these participants to learn the worldwide current Islamic affairs and their husband's opinions; as well, it gives them a chance to express their own opinions. Nabida and Mahfuza did not attend any *halaka,* while Marjia arranged a women-centered *halaka* at her house once in a week typically on Friday evenings. This gathering is important to her because she believes that she is not supposed to see men other than those who are prescribed by the Islamic faith.[17] At this *majlish/halaka*, the women read the Quran and *hadiths*. Both married and unmarried women with young children join this *majlish/halaka.*

From the above discussion it is evident that participants are concerned about sustaining their religious practices in post-migration life. All participants except Marjia expressed that they were flexible with respect to prayer while they lived in Bangladesh,

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[17] According to the Quran Muslim women can show their faces to father, husband, father in law, brother, son, stepson, nephews, grandfather, and grandsons, other women, maid servant, and old men and children (who have no sexual desire) (Quran, 24:31)

but in St. John's, the participants made sure that they prayed five daily prayers. Marjia differs in the sense that she was a conservative practitioner of Islam when she was in Bangladesh. Participants also regularly read the Quran and apply the Quranic knowledge to guide their lives and behaviour. My findings are reminiscent of William's conclusion that "Immigrants are religious—by all counts more religious than they were before they left home" (1988:29). In sum, Bangladeshi female migrants in St. John's uphold their religious practices and due to a number of new found stresses and their minority status, those who were more flexible in their country of origin generally become more regular practitioners.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study has investigated immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women's lived religious experiences in Canada. My analysis suggests that participants experience profound changes and challenges in many aspects of their lives. More specifically, the data suggests that in the context of their new lives in St. John's, Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women experience profound changes in gender role attitudes. These women claim to feel empowered in domestic and family-related decision-making in comparison to their pre-migratory lives. The participants did not need to push their husbands as much for them to take their opinions into account. Rather, their voices are heard to a greater extent in their post-migration lives perhaps because of the geographic distance from the influence of powerful social forces in Bangladesh and their socialization in the more equalitarian gender culture of a Canadian city. Furthermore, women's higher education, paid jobs, and urge to preserve family solidarity encouraged these immigrants to pick up

certain aspects of Western gender behaviour, to the extent they deem is necessary to enjoy a comfortable and peaceful marital relationship. This relative empowerment in their private and public lives as women also enables significant shifts in their religious lives. Their participation in religious symposiums and mosque-related events mark these shifts. In the next section, related to this notion of transnational shifts, immigrant Bangladeshi women's observance of "universal Islam" is described.

CHAPTER SIX: THE EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL ISLAM

In this chapter, I explore how, once in Newfoundland, all six participants have become more aware of a notion sometimes called "Global Islam." This sense of a more transnational Islam is due to their experiences in an increasingly ethnically and culturally heterogeneous yet single-mosque city like St. John's (see Chapter Three for more details about ethnic diversity and the mosque in St. John's). The common understandings of the participants reveal that immigration to Canada has encouraged these participants to strive for "standard" religious practices of Islam (Gibb & Rothenberg, 2000). Such "standard" practices are those practices which are shared among most Muslims, for example, saying prayers, fasting in Ramadan and in *Ashura*. My findings suggest that the participants have become more aware of adherence of cultural attributes of Islam due to transnational socialization in St. John's. Several examples will make these religious changes toward "universal" Islam in their Canadian experience evident.

INTRODUCTION

Muslims all over the world have been experiencing major religious revivals and reforms since the eighteenth century (Voll, 1999; Kuchumkulova, 2007). With respect to these shifts, Voll states that Islamic renewal has taken place in "response to the declining effectiveness of existing institutions" as well as "in response to the early European imperial expansion" (1999:517-526). However, this revival or reform has not resulted in a "new Islam"; rather, it refers to a separation of Islam from a given culture (Roy, 2004; Kuchumkulova, 2007; Kibria, 2007). More or less, practices of Islam have adapted to local culture in most contexts (Ahsan, 1990; Frankel, 2008). Olivier Roy states that "by

definition Islam is universal, but after the time of the Prophet and his companions it has always been embedded in a given culture" (2004:25). Consequently, there is an increasing concern for "Quran'ic Islam" – religious duties suggested by the Quran and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad to establish universal sets of religious beliefs and rituals (cf. Antoun 2001; Roy 2004; Turner 2004; Kibria, 2007). Also, immigrants typically prefer to recognize themselves as Muslims rather than according to their cultural backgrounds (Gibb & Rothenberg, 2000; Roy, 2004). This identification often results in the detachment of Islam from local cultural practices (Roy, 2004). This trend is even more evident among young Muslim migrants, who, as is shown later in this chapter, often feel isolated from the larger immigrant community (Kibria, 2007). Halliday (1999) suggests that Muslims in the West emerge as a singular and monolithic group because of their tendency toward a globally-practiced Islam in their host countries instead of the form of Islam practiced in their countries of origin. In this section, I therefore examine shifts in Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women's post-migration attachment to "globally-practiced" Islam in St. John's.

BACKGROUND

Previous studies (Johnson, 2006; Kuchumkulova, 2007) suggest that Arabs are often considered more knowledgeable in Islamic practices. As a result, Muslims of countries considered peripheral because of their geographical distance from the land where the Prophet Mohammad lived tend to follow Arabs' religious practices and rituals. Historical evidence in regions as disparate as China, West Africa, and Central Asian countries suggest that religious awakening often grows from an increased interaction

between Arab and the peripheral part of the Muslim world (Johnson, 2006). In her article "The Proof is on My Palm: Debating Ethnicity, Islam and Ritual," Johnson (2006) suggests that Islam has incorporated local customs since its introduction in the Senegambian region and Guinea-Bissau centuries ago. Since then, Mandinga (inhabitants of Guinea-Bissau, who typically practiced Islam) have not distinguished between ethnic and Islamic beliefs and practices. However, as Mandinga move away from their homeland in order to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, to attain Islamic education or to seek opportunities in Europe and other Western countries many of them become aware of the contrast of practices of Islam in Mandinga and outside of Africa. Johnson states that this increased awareness of the differences has encouraged them "to revise their Islamic beliefs and practices, and to separate 'African' practices from 'Muslim' ones" (2006:51).

Self-identification as "Muslim first" often turns immigrants towards a wider Muslim community in their host country. This prioritization and preference for a broader Islam over local religious practices can be partly explained by the fact that attachment to local religious practices can result in their minoritizing by other Muslims and can further serve to mark immigrants as "ethnic" in the context of Western countries (Kibria, 2007). Therefore, immigrants tend to embrace what they perceive as "universal" Islam (Roy, 2004; Kibria, 2007). For example, in "Believing Women: Harari and Palestinian Women at Home and in the Canadian Diaspora" Gibb and Rothenberg (2000) state that Harari immigrants in the greater Toronto area tend to identify themselves as Muslims first. This identification is because Harari immigrants constitute a small ethnic community in Canada; therefore, they claim to feel insecure because of their immigrant status in their

receiving country. Consequently, in searching for community and sameness in the Greater Toronto Area they emphasise their Muslim identities rather than their identities as Harari. Similarly, in her study "The New Islam' and Bangladeshi Youth in Britain and the US", Nazli Kibria (2007) argues that when Muslims move to Western countries they become part of a religious minority (Kibria, 2007). Kibria states that Bangladeshi immigrants in England experienced ethnicization due to their different rituals, both by non-Muslims and by other Muslims living in the UK. This situation has led young Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants to seek for what they see as "universal" Islamic beliefs and practices. In his work on Muslim migrants in Europe, Roy (2004) also argues that new immigrants often undergo ethnicization in Western society; therefore, immigrants are driven to search for a 'pure' Islam that is upheld by every Muslim, regardless of the geographical location in which they live.

Finally, an increased concern to form a global Muslim community has led immigrants from diverse geocultural background to embrace a commonly-observed Islam in their host countries. Although Islam more or less incorporates local contexts wherever it is established (Frankel, 2008), this integration does not mean that Muslims alter their fundamental Islamic practices such as *salah* (ritual prayers), fasting, *zakat* (almsgiving), and pilgrimage to Makkah [Mecca]. Based on these common religious practices, immigrants from different countries form a Muslim community. As Awn observes, "the unity of the Islamic *umma* is based primarily on the ideals embedded in the abstract vision, not on . . . cultural uniformity" (Awn, 1984:14). Given that all societies or cultures have additional religious mores in addition to the Islam practiced by the Prophet,

immigrants often attempt to form a united community, a community of believers that is governed by universal tenets. Muslims, regardless of the sect such as Sunni, Shi'ia, Sufism or regions of origin such as Africa, Asia, and Middle East, pray together in the same mosque without any ethnic segregation in St. John's. This gathering does not mean that Muslims in St. John's abandon their national identities or divisions (Saunders, 2008). Rather, the desire to form a Muslim community directs immigrants to go beyond their ethnicities. Saunders (2008) argues that religious faith allows Muslim *ummah* to form a deterritorialized nation.

> However, its membership does not need to fully reject competing national identities (e.g. Persian, Arab, or British) nor does this membership necessarily avert internal divisions (Sunni versus Shi'a, moderate versus fundamentalist, etc.). This tendency to treat membership in the ummah as analogous to membership in some other 'nation' is strongest among de-ethnicised Muslims living outside the Muslim world (Saunders, 2008:306).

The vital component of a nation, as identified by many scholars, is a common "sentiment" (see Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992; Hroch, 1996). This sense of community is certainly the case for Muslim living in St. John's. Following Benedict Anderson's notion of an "imagined community" (1991), commonalities in history, customs, and/or values can allow Muslims in St. John's to cultivate a common sentiment which, in turn, can help overshadow ethnic identities based on geographical origin.

It is evident that immigration offers interaction opportunities to non-Arab Muslims. This communication has often encouraged non-Arabs to, in their eyes, "correct" their religious practices. Furthermore, there is growing interest in forming a global Muslim community to encourage immigrant Muslims to observe common practices and

rituals. In the next section, Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women's post-migration religious affiliation related to this notion of "Global Islam" is described.

EMPHASIS ON GLOBALLY-PRACTICED ISLAM

All participants expressed that they modified practices they brought with them and assimilated new aspects of Islam once they moved out of Bangladesh. This shift occurred because, in the first place, participants found that transnational Muslims in St. John's emphasized certain attributes of Islam, for example recitation of the Quran, prayers, and *Ashura* fasting. In the second place, these six women noticed that some of their rituals were not universally practiced. This led some participants to modify their religious rituals in the transnational context. An example of this is Natasha's changing perception of the ritual of *shab-e-barat*. Kibria (2008), in the article "The 'New Islam' and Bangladeshi Youth," defines *shab-e-barat* as the night in which one's fate is written for the approaching year. This occurrence happens on the fourteenth night of the Arabic *Shaban* month. HHHhhIn order to be rewarded, observers usually fast during the daytime, make *ruti* and *halua* (pita bread and sweet foods made with semolina), and other kinds of food, to distribute these among poor people and neighbours, and pray throughout the night. This event is not observed in many places; nevertheless, it is an important Muslim religious ritual in Bangladesh. Natasha expresses the following:

> In Bangladesh, I heard that *shab-e-barat* was not a religious event. However, I used to observe *shab-e-barat* because my family members and neighbours all were observing this event with religious piety. I fast during the day and say prayers the entire night and fast again the next day. Each year national newspapers published articles on the significance of this night and other media also transmitted Islamic programs. On the other hand, when I came to St. John's, I learned that apart from a few Bangladeshis, other background Muslims did not observe this event; they

> were not even aware of this. Thus, I stopped observing it (November 2008).

Moving away from her home country has led Natasha to know and practice an Islam that is practiced by most Muslims in an international context. In Bangladesh, Natasha was unable to stop observing *shab-e-barat* because it carries considerable social weight and is deeply institutionalized in Bangladesh. Fearing that failure to observe the ritual might have brought criticism from the local social environment led her to observe the event in Bangladesh. However, in St. John's this participant did not feel threatened by the possibility of criticism as most Muslims do not observe it. Rather, abandoning culturally-observed Islamic practices makes Natasha feel more integrated, as she becomes a more typical member of her *ummah* by doing so. Furthermore, she receives support for her opinions in St. John's from her husband as well because they have become cognizant of global notions of Islam by living in a heterogeneous society in which immigrants from all cultural and national background tend to emphasize "universal practices" of Islam. Natasha added that she shared the debate surrounding *shab-e-barat* with her kith and kin back home and her siblings stopped observing this ritual in Bangladesh. Similarly, Naficha also pointed out that relatives of her generation knew about the Muslims' disagreement about *shab-e-barat* and *eid-e-miladunnabi.* However, because of social pressure they continued observing those rituals like Naficha. When she informed them that many Muslims in St. John's in particular and in Western countries in general, as well as Arab countries did not observe these rituals though they were the same sect, some relatives of her generation stopped observing those rituals. Natasha adds,

> Although in Bangladesh national newspapers, radio, and television transmitted various Islamic programs on *Ashura*, I have not taken it seriously. Once I was in St. John's I began to observe it, because I noticed that Muslims from diverse geocultural backgrounds emphasize *Ashura* fasting following the Ramadan (November 2008).

Similarly, Nayla expresses:

> When I was in Bangladesh I was not regular in observing some rituals such as *shab-e-barat, eid-e-miladunnabi*, and *ashura*. My focus was on daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and reciting the Quran. In St. John's I noticed that Muslims from different national backgrounds emphasized *Ashura* fasting. Therefore, I have fasted on this occasion for the last couple of years (November 2008).

These narratives suggest that immigration displaces these women and helps them begin practicing "globally-practiced" Islam. In addition, women become knowledgeable of the universalized practices of Islam. However, encountering globally-practiced Islam was not necessarily found to cause avoidance of cultural religious practices in this study. For example, Mahfuza states:

> I know that *shab-e-barat* is not a Muslim custom; still, I do observe it because it is an opportunity to offer *ibadat* (prayer) the entire night. The thing is that without any stimulation it is often difficult to spend a longer time saying prayers and reciting the Quran. Therefore, I consider it as an opportunity to do more *ibadat* (October 2008).

It is evident that immigration offers Mahfuza the freedom to uphold her personal beliefs and practices by letting her know about the debate surrounding *shab-e-barat.* She is also feels more free from social restrictions in relation to what to practice or not. Furthermore, rituals become a means through which Mahfuza reproduces religiosity. Mahfuza adds that she started fasting on *Ashura* in St. John's when she found that all sects of Muslims were fasting on this occasion. Similarly, Naficha states:

> I was not a regular practitioner of Islam when I was Bangladesh, though I regularly observed *shab-e-barat*. This is so because people around me such as my family, relatives, friends and neighbours all observed this event. It is said that on this night our fortune is written for the forthcoming year. If we stay awake the entire night by saying prayer and reciting the holy Quran, Allah will bless us. However, when I came to St. John's I noticed that Muslims from other countries do not even know about *shab-e-barat*. This helps me perceive that *shab-e-barat* is not an important religious event because the entire Muslim community does not observe it. Therefore, in St. John's, I hold those religious rituals that are upheld by all Muslims (November, 2008).

Transnational socialization further makes participants aware of the importance of upholding certain practices and abandoning others. This is perhaps because in their host country, Muslims from different countries live together and tend to emphasize what is common to all in order to form a united community (Metcalf, 1996). The opinions of my participants reveal that some of their pre-migration religious behaviour has changed because of their openness to change beliefs and practices post-migration. Roy (2004) contends that immigration not only offers a "quest for a better life; it is also presented as a positive opportunity to recast a religious identity in unequivocal terms" (157). Because of immigration, transnational communication increases and simultaneously increases Islamic knowledge. This contact often results in modification in old practices and assimilation of new practices. Further, it enables immigrants to make decisions about whether to uphold traditional Islamic customs or to embrace globally-practiced Islam (Johnson, 2006:66). From the above discussion, it is clear that because of their immigration experience participants become more knowledgeable about "universal Islam". This engagement causes some participants to turn to "global Islam" while others remain attached to their previous practice, as well as assume a new one. This dual understanding of embracing global and local components is often done consciously.

To comprehend religious understanding of Muslims from other cultural backgrounds, I spoke with a few women from different countries. I noticed that they also brought some changes and assimilated new Islamic customs in their post-migration daily lives, making clear that these shifts in religious practices and beliefs are not solely Bangladeshi phenomena. Presumably, socialization with transnational Muslims helps them to realize the differences between them and other Muslims and, in turn, helps them to reemphasize what most other Muslims do.

Examples from informal conversations with other non-Bangladeshi Muslim women in St. John's confirm this notion of global Islamic practice. A Muslim female immigrant from an Arab country outside Bangladesh, "Tabassum"[18] stated that back home she only celebrated *Eid el fitr* and *Eid el Azha*. She also observed *Ashura* and *Arafa* day back home. Tabassum did so because her parents did not observe any other days as "religious" events. However, Tabassum reported some changes she and her family underwent in St. John's and in Toronto. For example, Tabassum reported that back home in the Middle East she and her parents used to say thanks to people for their help. When they moved to Canada they found that immigrant Muslims express their thanks to Allah and make *dua* to Allah for those people who helped them. Tabassum assumes that this tradition is more "Islamic" than expressing informal thanks to people; consequently, she has changed her practice.

[18] Tabassum is 19-years old, unmarried, and a university student. She has been in Canada since her early teenage years and she has been living in St. John's for two years.

Similarly, a Muslim woman from Southern Europe, "Noushin"[19] stated that her country of origin was peripheral in the sense that she was socialized to perform some religious practices that were not often observed in mainstream Muslim cultures. Noushin explained that she was not aware of the existence among Muslims of culture-driven differences in religious rituals prior to her arrival to St. John's about six years ago. She noted that her encounters and socialization with Muslims living in this city led her to question the religiousness of some of her previous practices in the light of the Quran and the *Sunnah*. As a result, she has decided to continue some, but abandon others. For instance, Noushin specified that she used to perform extra religious rituals such as fasting, praying and Quran recitation to observe some important dates including, but not limited to, the Prophet Muhammad's Night of Ascension to the Higher World occurring on the 27th of the Arabic month of *Rajab*. This is the night when the Prophet Mohammed was invited by Allah to meet Him and see visions of heaven and hell). As a result of her social encounters with mainstream Muslims in St. John's, however, she noticed that such a practice was not widespread other than in her home country. Yet, using her own reasoning, Noushin concluded that there is nothing wrong or non-Islamic in performing extra prayers, fasting or reciting the Quran, and she therefore decided to continue such practices. Her conclusion for some of her other previous practices, however, turned out to be different. She specified that back home they had great respect for *Bliya* (Muslim Saints), to the extent that they would seek help, not directly from Allah, but from the souls of such good dead Muslims. Nevertheless, when she left her culture and socialized

[19] Noushin is a 32-year-old Ph.D. student who is married with a child. She has been in St. John's since 2003.

with various mainstream Muslims, she realized that this was actually against the main principles of Islamic faith and she therefore decided to correct herself accordingly. However, Noushin does not do it out of any social pressure. It appears that transnational socialization in St. John's motivates this respondent to undertake a process of questioning and adjustment with regard to her Islamic practices.

Another Muslim woman from an Asian country "Tarana"[20] reported that although she was socialized in a non-Arab Muslim country, she used to observe rituals that are observed in most Muslim countries. Tarana specified that she used to perform extra prayers, fasting, and reciting the Quran but they were not limited to any specific days or occasions. Tarana further clarified that she never observed rituals such as *Eid-Miladun-Nabi, sheb-e-barat* because at home her parents never observed them, rather she emphasized *Ashura* and *Arafat* days when she was in her country of origin. These rituals were also observed by the great majority of Muslims in St. John's and in other places.

I have presented some views of women from different countries besides my Bangladeshi participants in the hope of revealing a broader trend in the context in which my participants are located. In general, I found that transnational socialization encourages respondents to have another look at their religious rituals and beliefs.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have discussed immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women's increased attachment toward "universally practiced" Islam. Transnational socialization helps

[20] Tarana is a 37-year-old married woman. She has two children, and is a Ph.D. Student.

participants to become familiar with "universally" observed Islamic practices and rituals and thereby make their decisions either to embrace or to abandon certain practices and rituals in St. John's, Canada. These findings are significant because they shed light on the issue that there is no perceived social or internal pressure either to embrace or to abandon certain religious rituals in St. John's, Canada. Rather, transnational socialization allows participants to become familiar with universally observed Islamic practices and rituals and, thereby make their own decisions. "Global Islam" is not unique to St. John's and reflects a broader globalized phenomenon, but that the Muslim community all access one mosque creates a unique environment. In the next chapter, post 9/11 experiences of the participants are described.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POST 9/11 EXPERIENCES OF BANGLADESHI MUSLIM WOMEN IN ST. JOHN'S, NL

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine the impact of the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on immigrant Muslim women living in St. John's, Newfoundland, in contrast to the experiences of Muslim women in other North American cities. I argue that this post-9/11 Canadian context relatively lessened the integrative challenges that these women faced as new Muslim immigrants. As Islam became more visible in the media, even if pejoratively, the non-Muslim Anglo-Christian majority's familiarity with the faith grew. This heightened awareness had two effects on Muslim immigrants: first, Muslim women themselves became more knowledgeable about Islam. Second, unlike in other North American contexts, the general increase of awareness about Islam encouraged many non-Muslims in St. John's to foster more open attitudes toward them. In this chapter, I hypothesize as to why this differing response took place in St. John's by turning first to the more common negative post-9/11 experiences of North American Muslims.

THE POST 9/11 EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

The purpose of this section is to examine Bangladeshi immigrant women's post-September 11 experiences in St. John's. The experiences of my participants suggest that the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath led the participants to become more knowledgeable about Islam. The media attention fostered by 9/11 resulted in an unprecedented familiarity with the faith by the non-Muslim Anglo-Christian majority. This contrasts

sharply with what happened in many other places. In this section, I investigate Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women's post 9/11 experiences in St. John's.

BACKGROUND

A number of studies suggest that the events on 11 September 2001 generally have had a negative impact upon Muslims in North America. This negative impact was felt most by those Muslim women whose faith is made publicly visible by their religious dress (i.e. those who wear a headscarf, a *hijab*, a *burka*, or *niqab*). Non-Muslim women and men who were mistaken as Muslims also began reporting experiencing prejudice against them (cf. Anderson 2002; Bayoumi, 2002; Peek, 2002; Hussain, 2002; Wannas-Jones & Khalema, 2003; Badr, 2004; Abdelkarim, 2005). Hussain (2002) argues that Muslims' religious and social freedom was tremendously affected by the 9/11 attacks. September 11th is remembered in the West as the tragic event in which the destruction of an American symbolic landmark was accompanied with the loss of thousands of civilian lives. A certain group of Muslim people were held as being responsible for the attacks. Because they shared a common religious background with the terrorist perpetrators, Muslims in general began to be seen as "enemies" of Western society (cf. Badr, 2004; Read, 2007). Downey (2009) also specifies that Muslims in general underwent severe criticism after the tragedy of 9/11. In short, Muslims were exposed to global scrutiny following 9/11 (cf. Chowdhury, 2006; Brown, 2009; Mandaville, 2009; Muedini, 2009).

Scholars suggest that on the one hand, the 9/11 attacks led various ethnic Muslims to feel isolated from mainstream American society (cf. Peek, 2002; 2005) and on the other hand, the events increased sentiments of unity and solidarity among them (cf.

Turkel, 2002; Peek, 2002; 2005). Isolation and the adverse situation made many Muslims feel nervous in the larger society (cf. Turkel 2002; Peek, 2005). This sense of caution resulted in increased group unity. This finding is reminiscent of Goffman's comment in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1986) that "members of a particular stigma category will have a tendency to come together into small social groups whose members all derive from the category" (23). This is because members of marginalized groups feel "excluded" from rest of the society (Peek, 2002:344). For example, researchers found that during and following the Second World War, Americans of Japanese descent experienced social, economic, and legal prejudices (Dower, 1985; LeMay, 2005; Thiesmeyer, 1995). To avoid these heightened prejudices, Japanese Americans rapidly assimilated mainstream American values while highly emphasizing their ethnic identity and group membership (Bonacich & Modell, 1980; Fujita & O'Brien, 1985; Montero; 1981). Similarly, Ignatiev (1995) alleges that the potato famine brought Irish immigrants together in the United States.

Furthermore, a number of studies report a relationship between struggle, patience, and the ability to promptly understand challenging social situations. Prowse (1972) opines that the Newfoundlanders' lives have historically being challenged by several struggles. Eighteenth-century settlers in Newfoundland fought against the aggression of the ship-fishermen, Western adventurers and the difficult climate (Prowse, 1972). Newfoundlanders also underwent colonial oppression, especially during the British occupation of Newfoundland (Holland, 1998). Indeed, joining Canada in 1949 has not completely freed them from Canadian hostile attitudes (FitzGerald, 2001). Rompkey

(1998) contends that psychologically, the constant struggle for a livelihood had the effect of heightening Newfoundlanders' patience. Anthony P. Cohen (1980) suggests that geographical insularity and historical isolation helped Newfoundlanders to develop "communality over and above the enormous internal variety and diversity" (221).

In Newfoundland, unlike many Anglo-Saxon geographies, weeks and months immediately following the attacks it was generally understood that it was not the entire Muslim population that should be held responsible for 9/11. While ethnocentric attitudes towards Muslims were felt in many parts of Europe, North America, and Oceania in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 (Peek, 2002; Downey, 2009; Muedini, 2009), the participants in this study, in the context of St. John's, Newfoundland, did not feel discriminated against because of their faith.

This sense of ecumenism can be explained based on several factors. First, students' ability to bring about positive social change in certain circumstances has been noted in a number of cases (Chowdhury, 2006). The role of MSA-MUN (Muslim Student Association of Memorial University of Newfoundland) in educating local people about the teaching and values of Islam is unquestionable. MSA-MUN undertakes a multitude of activities to educate the local community about Islam, such as "Islam Awareness Week" and public lectures on Islam. Lori Peek (2002) opines that Muslims' effort to awaken public awareness in relation to Islam and Muslims improved general understanding of Islam. Peek conducted a qualitative study in which she examined Muslims' experiences in America following September 11. She conducted personal interviews and focus group interviews with 99 college and university students in New York state cities. Participants

in Peek's study reported that they felt that non-Muslims were "genuinely interested in learning about Islam, and understanding them, and their faith" (2002: 345). Peek explains that her participants believe that "the anger and blame they initially received from others [because of the deadly attacks of 9/11] was beginning to be replaced by interest and engagement" (2002: 345). Second, Peter Skerry (2003) contends that non-Muslims' increased interest in Islam and in Muslim people post-9/11 is due to a growing interest in understanding Muslims' beliefs. Peek (2005) further reports Muslims' shift towards religious knowledge and attachment to Islam post 9/11. Peek (2005) and Muedini (2009) both suggest that 9/11 had the effect of uniting Muslims from different national backgrounds. They also note that educational institutions became a place for both Muslim and non-Muslims to learn about Islam in detail in the wake of September 11. Peter Van Der Veer (2002) explains that,

> Since [migrants] are often challenged in a multicultural environment to explain their beliefs and practices, they tend to become more aware of them. Such awareness can lead to receptivity towards ideological reifications.... in a plural society (101-102).

For the small community of Muslims living in St. John's,[21] MUN-MSA's role in social integration is therefore significant.

The socio-economic status of the Muslims living in St. John's also has an important impact on this population's ability to integrate themselves into Canadian and Newfoundland society. Typically from upper-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds,

[21] The first Muslims in St. John's established themselves as early as 1964. The population is currently growing at a rapid rate. For instance, the number of Muslim immigrants living in Newfoundland increased by 110% between 1991 and 2001, with a total population in 2001 of 445 (Statistics Canada, 2006).

the Muslims living in this city have access to many services and facilities of which many other immigrants might not be able to avail themselves, resulting in relatively easier social integration in the wake of September 11. They typically migrate to Newfoundland because of gainful employment or education opportunities.

From the above discussion, it is clear that 9/11 increased universal scrutiny and social criticism. It also brought considerable positive attention towards Islam and Muslim people. September 11th also had the effect of making individuals of a Muslim, or even nominally Muslim background more knowledgeable with regards to their religion.

THE POST 9/11 EXPERIENCES OF BANGLADESHI MUSLIM WOMEN IN ST. JOHN'S, NL: INTEGRATION MADE EASIER

My six participants reported that the local people they encountered in St. John's seemed to be tolerant vis-à-vis religious diversity and did not discriminate based on one's religious identity. Rather, in the view of the participants, local people tend to understand immigrants as people much like themselves. Therefore, the women participants who were residing in St. John's during the 9/11 tragedy, did not experience negative incidents, even if many incidents happened in other places in Canada. Mahfuza, a married Muslim woman, expressed how she believes local people view her:

> I have been here for many years. After 9/11, I confirmed that people of St. John's accepted me as one of them and a friend. They first knew me as a person and later as a Muslim. Immediately after September 11, I was afraid of how local people might react towards me. You know, I did not notice any changes in their behaviour. I feel that they do not think about which religion I follow, and instead they are concerned about how I behave with other people (October, 2008).

It appears that instead of focusing on others' religious identity, local people concentrated on this participant's behaviour. Presumably, familiarity overshadowed this participant's religious identities. St. John's is a small city and approximately 445 Muslims live in the city, according to the 2001 census (Statistic Canada, 2006). Due to living in close proximity with one another, the hostile North Atlantic climate, and being in a marginalized position within Canada may help Newfoundlanders grow social and emotional attachments with others living in the same circumstances, whatever their background. Thus, communal attachment may prevent many Newfoundlanders from fostering animosity towards the female Muslim participants. Nayla explains further:

> Because of media coverage after 9/11, I was exposed as a Muslim and nothing else, but no one was mean to me, although we were worried. In September 2001, I did not work; I stayed alone at home but never felt scared due to 9/11. My husband was working, he also never felt coercion or intimidated in his work or anywhere else. We were the only Muslim family in the area; however, my neighbours did not look at us with contempt (October, 2008).

The 9/11 tragedy did not affect this participant's life despite her exposure as a member of a religion that is often portrayed in the media as violent. Nayla, a married Muslim woman who has been living in St. John's since 2001, was frightened because of reported harmful incidents against Muslims across the nation. Naficha, who has also been living in St. John's since 2001, was also afraid of the consequences of September 11:

> I was very scared because I came to St. John's right before September 11. I have relatives in mainland Canada; they warned us to be careful because Muslims were assaulted and despised in different places. Because of this I tended to stay home, but surprisingly, I noticed that when I went out, no one really stared at me weirdly. I used to live in a rented home and my neighbours knew my religious affiliation; despite their awareness of this, I did not notice any changes in their attitudes (October, 2008).

Like Nayla and Mahfuza, Naficha also does not emphasize on the physical aspects of *purdah* (wearing scarf or *hijab*) (Kabeer 2000:90-91). Presumably, not wearing religiously-understood dress makes her an "invisible Muslim," and allows her to blend in easily with immigrants of other religious backgrounds. However, those people who knew her to be Muslim were not hostile or unfriendly towards her either. The general consensus amongst local people [whom the participants met and saw] seemed to be that religion does not teach violence, but that some people use religion in reference to their activities to justify their violent acts. Naficha believes that 9/11 made the existence of Islam more public in St. John's and made local people more familiar with it. Mahfuza also holds this opinion. Mahfuza says:

> Prior to 9/11, local people were less aware of Islam. 9/11 introduced us to the local people, you could say. Prior to 9/11, I rarely discussed my religion with colleagues because if you say something to someone and in turn he/she asks you a lot of questions, you might feel uncomfortable. But after September 11, we (me and my colleagues) sometimes had discussions on some issues relating to Islam and about Muslim women, and they understand me quickly (October, 2008).

Furthermore, Mahfuza adds that she usually does not take the day off on *Eid* day[22] because she accumulated her days off to visit Bangladesh or California. As a result, Mahfuza used to pass an ordinary work day on the day of *Eid* before September 11. Muslims in St. John's typically celebrate *Eid* festivals during the weekend if *Eid* occurs during the weekdays. However, September 11th allows her to celebrate *Eid* with her colleagues because of increased curiosity and interest in the tradition. Mahfuza says:

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[22] *Eid* is a Muslim religious festival. It is celebrated after a month long fasting period following Ramadan, and fasting is one of the five compulsory practices of Islam. Fasting is compulsory for every man and woman who is able to fast.

> They [Newfoundlanders] know that our Ramadan is a full month of fasting. They count how many days are left to *Eid*. Two/three days before Eid they start saying to me '*Eid* is coming,' similar to Christmas greetings they say to each other. This makes me so happy I cannot express it. This reminds me of my young age when I did the same thing with my siblings and neighbours [Pause]. You know, on *Eid* day I cook food for my colleagues and they have breakfast with me (October 2008).

This response towards September 11th has led this participant to openly acknowledge her religious rituals in a public workplace setting. Furthermore, it provided her with an opportunity to communicate her faith and, in turn, eliminate her non-Muslim friends' confusion in relation to Islam and religious festivals.

Nayla has been working full-time in St. John's for about four years. She describes her post-9/11 experiences as follows:

> Since I have been working, I have never felt like an outsider because of my different religion, culture, and colour. Coworkers support me a lot. If they feel that I could be in trouble, they come ahead and handle things. They know that I am Muslim, so in meetings where they order food, they order vegetarian for me. I do not even need to remind them. They are very sensitive. They do not invite me to places where I could feel uncomfortable. They never create pressure for me. Above all, during Ramadan, they let me come home early so that I can prepare foods for the breaking of the fast (October, 2008).

Nayla's description reemphasizes local people's [her co-workers] collaboration with, and awareness of, Islam. Awareness of Islam allows them to distinguish between Muslims and these violent people held responsible for the terrorism on 11 September.

OVERAL EFFECTS OF SEPTEMBER 11 UPON PARTICIPANTS

In short, the context of 9/11 made local people more knowledgeable about Islamic practices. This interest further encouraged participants to become more educated about their own religion. With respect to this engagement, Nabida relates,

> I was born a Muslim. You can say that my knowledge about Islam is not like that of converted Muslims who made the choice to become Muslim. But, after 9/11, I feel that I should know Islam comprehensively because if anyone asks me about certain issues of Islam and I cannot answer, it would be shameful for me as a Muslim. Thus I start reading Bangla interpretation of the Quran, Islam related lectures arranged by the MSA-MUN and lectures posted on the website (November, 2008).

Similarly Natasha says:

> In Bangladesh I learned Islam in its practice only, but in St. John's, I feel that I must have detailed knowledge about it. Here, Muslims have in-depth knowledge of Islam. Thus I read Bangla and English version of the Quran, listen to lectures on Islam in the mosque and MUN campus and website, as well as attend halaka almost regularly. I also sometimes read scholarly written text books available at the MUN library (November, 2008).

Naficha also expresses:

> I started exploring Islam in detail because when people talk about Islam, I feel that compared to them, I know nothing. I feel the urge to make myself more knowledgeable about Islam. Hence, I tried to go to the mosque whenever it arranges an Islamic lecture, listen to lectures posted on websites and on the TV (October, 2008).

Mahfuza notes:

> I regularly attend mosque whenever members of the mosque arranged conversation on Islam (November, 2008).

It appears that these three participants made greater attempts to educate themselves about their religious background when living in St. John's. In their home country, people know the basics of Islam and, as a result, they very rarely question one another on their knowledge of Islam. Therefore, women tend not to focus on deciphering and analyzing issues of Islam. However, in the context of St. John's, these women are surrounded by non-Muslims who often have limited knowledge about non-Christian religions. This homogeneity may lead them to pose questions to Muslims, as they are portrayed negatively by the media. For example, Yvonne Yazbeck expresses that "both before and

after 9/11, consumers of Western-based media outlets were supplied with various analyses of Islam, many of which featured the powerlessness of Muslim women. Many accounts have portrayed women as passive victims of oppressive and harsh laws" (2006:31-32). Afshar (2008), in her "Can I see your hair? Choice, agency and attitudes: the dilemma of faith and feminism for Muslim women who cover" also cites journalist Melanie Philips:

> in our midst [... are t]housands of alienated young Muslims, most of them born and bred here but who regard themselves as any army within, are waiting for an opportunity to help to destroy the society that sustains them (*The Sunday Times* 4 November 2001).

Consequently, participants felt that they had to know about certain issues, particularly about the sections that refer to women, because many are curious to learn the Muslim perspective. For example, Nayla says that even though there are many issues in the Quran, some non-Muslims were interested in understanding messages regarding polygamy from Muslim women themselves. Nayla states:

> Many non-Muslim women asked to me about polygamy and I explained the past social situation to them, they appreciated our religious arrangement. I mention to them that in one place in the Quran you read about the acceptance of polygamy but in two places its practice is discouraged (October, 2008).

Perhaps a lack of understanding of the original context of the Quran is the root cause of the negative connotations surrounding Islamic polygamy. The Quran specifies about the conditions in which polygamy can be practiced and the requirements placed upon a husband taking more than one wife: every wife must be treated equally, none preferred. If these requirements cannot be respected, Islamic law stipulates that a man cannot have more than one wife. As a result of common misunderstandings relating to polygamous

marriage in Islam, many curious non-Muslim women ask about this practice. Marjia, who wears the hijab and the veil and has been living in St. John's for about four years, also says that when she goes outside either to pick up her son from the school or go to a shopping center, non-Muslim women often look at her with curiosity. They also occasionally ask her politely what causes her to wear a veil while other Muslim women do not wear them. This question suggests that curiosity prompts local people to learn more about Islam which, in turn, has the consequent effect of enhancing participants' knowledge of Islam.

This study demonstrates how in St. John's, participants generally do not feel socially ostracized because of their religious choices and that a sense of ecumenism and a greater understanding of Islam were fostered following 9/11 amongst local people and the participants in this study. This study also reveals that local people perceive participants as neighbours, classmates, co-workers, and friends.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study investigates immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women's post-9/11 experiences in St. John's Canada. In this chapter, I examine the impact of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on immigrant Muslim women living in St. John's, Newfoundland in contrast to the experiences of Muslim women in other North American cities. The data of this study suggests that in the context of St. John's, 9/11 has had little impact upon the integration of these women as Muslim immigrants. In addition, because of the media, Islam became more visible and the non-Muslim Anglo-Christian majority's familiarity with the faith grew. This heightened awareness made Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants

more knowledgeable about Islam themselves; as well, the general increase of awareness about Islam encouraged many non-Muslims in St. John's to foster more open attitudes toward them. I provided several plausible reasons that may have caused these open attitudes.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ASSIGNING RELIGIOUS MEANING TO EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe the religious meanings Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women assign to their experiences with integration in Canadian society and how these affect their lives in St. John's. My findings suggest that positive religious interpretations (i.e. accepting challenging events in a favourable way is more common than assigning negative religious interpretations to them). I suggest that assigning religious meaning to experiences related to their integration in the context of St. John's assists with the difficulties of integration. Participants are physically far away from their native country of Bangladesh and in the midst of new and multiple cultures and religions in Canada. Many of the advantages they enjoyed as Muslims in their native country (such as holidays during religious festivals, readymade *halal* food, and sharing the same culture as the majority of those surrounding them) are not readily available in St. John's. Despite these challenges, my six participants did not feel that their religiously-understood way of life was threatened. In this chapter, I argue that the religious meanings assigned to experiences - such as a belief in "God's plan" or that God's will has purpose, or that "Allah has given me the opportunity to adjust to a new environment," - provide immigrant participants with comfort, hope, and the ability to deal with a sometimes difficult adaptation processes.

BACKGROUND

The assigning of religious meanings to integration experiences has received a great deal of attention from social scientists (Park, 2005; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Baumeister, 2002). Scholars have shown that religious meanings often influence emotions and behaviour (cf. Baumeister, 1991; Batson *et al.,* 1993; George *et al.,* 2002; Silberman 2003, 2004; Cohen & Rankin, 2004). This altered state is attributed to religious beliefs which are understood to encourage believers to foster certain emotions and behaviours and discourage others (Silberman, 2003). The assignment of religious meaning to experiences also offers believers the opportunity to experience a sense of closeness to the divine (Pargament, 1997) by answering life's deepest questions (Myers, 2000; Pargament *et al.,* 2005) and by providing hope and significance to life (Silberman, 2005b). Research suggests that people often report feeling closer to God and an increasing religiosity after facing difficulties (Pargament, 1997; Emmons *et al.*, 1998; Silberman; 2005b). This sense may be because when religious meanings are assigned to experiences, people are better able to find acceptable reasons for daily and specific circumstances (cf. Kotarba, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Baumeister, 1991; McIntosh, 1995; Spilka *et al.,* 2003; Lethborg *at al.* 2006). Religious beliefs and practice, in this way, are closely associated with physical and psychological consolation (Oman & Thoresen, 2005). Indeed, interpreting experiences from a religious perspective arguably not only helps people overcome the negative effects of stressful life upon their activities but also to see these experiences in a better light (Silberman, 2005b). Thus, religious interpretation results in a relatively easier adjustment to challenging events.

Research further suggests that religious understandings often allow people to see painful and challenging events in a positive light and, in turn, these reduce the burden of difficult events (Pargament, 1997). For Pargament, religion is simply "a way to reduce tension by repudiating reality" (Pargament, 1997:171). My six informants, however, clearly do not see their religious beliefs and practices as a repudiation of reality, but rather as a way of getting in touch with what they feel is real. Research reveals that religion often enhances people's tolerance of challenges (Janoff-Bulman, 1991; 1992) because religious faiths allow them to understand and bear their reality (e.g., Wuthnow *et al.*, 1980). Related studies, such as Koening (1994) and Boulman and Wortman (1977) suggest that religion often provides a framework for understanding the reasons behind events. Thus, religious faith may attenuate stress. In addition, religions tend to offer the hope of a positive existence in the afterlife. Consequently, religiously-inclined people tend to adjust to present difficulties in the hope of better eternal lives (Koening, 1994). However, the extent to which religion contributes to this depends on the degree of one's attachment to religion (Furnham & Brown, 1992; Pargament, 1997).

In addition, a number of studies suggest that religious beliefs are relatively stable (see Jannoff-Bulman *et al.*, 1983; Jannoff-Bulman, 1992; Park & Folkman, 1997; Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005; Silberman, 2005). When people encounter challenges they tend to modify their own perceptions of incidents instead of their religious beliefs (Epstein, 1980; Nisbert & Ross, 1980; Janoff-Bulman & Timko, 1987; McIntosh, 1991; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Therefore, challenges do not necessarily influence religious beliefs negatively (cf. Jannoff-Bulman, 1992; Jannoff-Bulman et al., 1983, Park 2005;

Pargament, 1997; Pargament *et al.*, 2005). In the study "God and the search for meaning among hospice caregivers", Mickley *et al.* (1998) find that some of their hospice caregiver participants consider their positions as a means of gaining strength or understanding from God, which reduces their risk in relation to their health care problems. Dahl (1998) and Pargament *et al.,* (2001) suggest that religious belief tends to allow people to experience more satisfaction in the face of adversity, because religious beliefs assure believers that God controls everything and that their fate is in God's hand (Faccini, 2005). This belief often allows believers to accept difficult situations and to make sense of challenging experiences. Related studies, such as , Hansson *et al.* state that faith-based meaning-making involves cultivating a satisfactory explanation of the event which is often considered as "comforting or equitable" (1988:211).

It is clear that religious meaning often allows people to experience challenges positively. However, positive experiences depend on the degrees of one's attachment to religion. The following sections describe the religiously-understood meaning immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women ascribed to their experiences and how this understanding affected their lives in St. John's.

THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF EXPERIENCES IN ST. JOHN'S

In creating meaning in their daily lives, all six participants in this study rely upon religion. Their religious beliefs are used to reorient their experiences in St. John's positively. "In this process of reframing, [lived experiences] become something explainable, bearable, and valuable. Reframing is designed to conserve significance: …to reaffirm that life has meaning in spite of its pain" (Pargament, 1997:222). Women in this

study assess religion in a distinctive way. There is no evidence of making negative meaning in this study. One of the reasons for assigning positive meaning maybe is that Bangladeshi women in St. John's experience what one researcher refers to as "gendered forced migration" (Satiani, 2007:130) – all participants in this study came to St. John's, Canada in order to join their husbands, most of whom, having already experienced life in St. John's, actively made the choice of settling permanently in Newfoundland. This feeling of choice may lead participants to see their experiences positively as people often do not see the negative aspects of their choices. Furthermore, there are no certain rules and regulations that people have to abide by where they immigrate. Up to a certain point, immigrants are free to move wherever they want inside the country. Therefore, on the one hand, participants whose husbands are receiving education in St. John's may think that once their husbands complete their studies in St. John's they will move to another place in Canada. On the other hand, those participants whose husbands are working may think that the challenges they encounter will gradually disappear as Muslims' presence in St. John's is increasing. As a result, participants may not concern themselves much about their challenges. Furthermore, all six participants are formally educated. Education may help participants to understand people and situations better because it helps them develop a perspective of looking at life from diverse angles. For example, Nayla states:

> Some people are different in St. John's but I do not mind if anyone does not treat me friendly. We should not forget that people are not perfect. As we think of others that they are rude or mean to us; similarly, others may have the same feelings that we are not generous towards them (October, 2008).

This reflection suggests my research participants' ability to adjust to cultures other than their own. In the study "Faith and Poverty: Personal Religiosity and Organised Religion in the Lives of Low-Income Urban Mothers" Sullivan (2005) explains that the tendency to make negative meaning of experiences is relatively common among socially-disadvantaged women. Some participants in Sullivan's study in Boston have had basic needs left unmet, such as the need for housing and employment. These crises may lead them to see their experiences negatively or as a punishment from God. In stark contrast to this situation, the participants in this study lead, at least on a material basis, better lives than many immigrants, since they have jobs or scholarships to meet their needs and demands. This context, in turn, may be a motivating factor in participants' assignment of a positive meaning to their experiences.

Furthermore, all six participants share that believers must not lose hope when they undergo struggles. Naficha mentions that according to most interpretations of the Quran, Allah sometimes tests people by offering them good and comfortable times and also bad and difficult times (Quran, 38:41). She gives as an example Prophet Job's difficult test. He was tested, she explains, through the loss of all of his money and people, and was afflicted with suffering and disease, yet he did not lose faith and hope in Allah. He accepted all his pains without making any complaint to Allah. In the end, Allah rewarded the Prophet Job. Allah says in the Quran that "We[23] gave him (back) His people and

[23] In the Quran, Allah sometimes addresses Himself as We. The personal pronoun "We" does not indicate plurality of numbers. The pronoun "We" in the Quran is the royal "We," and it means respect and glorification. Allah clearly says in the Quran "And your god is One God, there is none who has the right to be worshipped but He, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful" [2:163] and "Say: He is Allah, the One" [112:1]. (See www.islam101.com/tauheed/AllahWE.htm; http://www.godallah.com/we_and_he.php).

doubled Their number -- as a Grace From Ourselves, and a thing For commemoration, for all Who have Understanding" (Quran, 38:43). Mahfuza expresses that she must not think or interpret any situation negatively because "nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed for us: He is our protector: and on God let the Believers put their trust" (Quran, 9:51). Similarly, Natasha refers to what Allah says in the Quran that "So Verily, with hardship, there is relief" (Quran, 94:5). The religious understanding that today or tomorrow Allah will resolve challenges help participants accept their difficult experiences positively. Mahfuza, for example, remembered that her children used to ask her why they did not celebrate *Eid* on the feast day like other festivals in Canada, instead of complaining that this was the case, she explained to them that there were few Muslims here, but that this could change in the future. Mahfuza notices many changes in the wake of September 11th. For instance, she is now able to celebrate *Eid* publicly, non-Muslim friends wish her and the family happy *Eid*, and Muslims now organize *Eid* parties. Mahfuza believes that Muslims will gradually enjoy more and more religious freedom. Similarly, Naficha shares her understanding:

> Whenever any negative thing happened to me I said myself that this is not the end. Things will be normal and better soon by the grace of Allah. It lightens my tension and gives me strength to encounter a negative thing (November, 2008).

The belief that Allah is controlling everything allows participants to accept their difficulties optimistically. Ways that the immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women in this study make sense of their difficulties or negative events include the idea that God's will has purpose, considering struggles as opportunities to adjust to new environments.

ALLAH'S WILL HAS PURPOSE: TESTIFYING IMAAN

The six female participants in this study are physically removed from their country of origin (Bangladesh) and their former culture, and they miss these elements; however, they all believe that coming to St. John's is Allah's will and it has purpose. They explain that it is not for them to question it. Therefore, the participants try to keep active with studying, working, and socializing. They also interpret their experiences in a way that helps them not to think much about their physical distance from Bangladesh. In this regard, Marjia states:

> In Bangladesh there were many good things, and religion was one of them. Almost everyone had the same practices, and we all shared the same culture. The food was great because we became accustomed to it. You can say, there was [were] not much [many] differences among Muslims in relation to religious festivals, holidays, and practices. Here in St. John's we are more or less different from others. However, whatever happens is decided by Allah. I believe that Allah sends us here to fulfill our wishes and at the same time to testify our imaan (devotion to Allah) (November, 2008).

Living in a country in which the majority are not Muslim does not threaten Marjia's personal beliefs and values. Rather, Marjia accepts her lived religiously-understood experiences optimistically. Marjia articulates that practicing Islam is relatively easier when one is in a country where most people are Muslim because all the facilities are available: in countries where Muslims form the majority, one hears *azan* (call to prayer announced from a mosque minaret five times a day) that reminds them to say prayers. One sees others going for prayer or praying around him/her. These practices most likely motivate people to practice their religion. However, practicing Islam in countries like Canada where most people follow other religions (or no religion) is sometimes challenging in the sense that Muslims are exposed to various temptations due

to social openness, which often is thought to cause confusion and distraction from the faith. Therefore, participants believe that they are testifying *imaan* (perfection). Simultaneously, participants get an opportunity to feel close to Allah and meet their wishes in terms of their worldly lives.

Mahfuza believes that she has the opportunity to help others and put her experiences in perspective. In this regard, Mahfuza expresses:

> Look, many Muslims even in their country live in tension but here in St. John's we live in the midst of diverse faiths and we are a small number, I do not feel worry for anything. Further, in my area in Bangladesh [North Bangladesh] villagers are very needy. They face floods and loss of land including homes due to the erosion of land into the river every year. We (family members) help them but if we lived in Bangladesh we might not help them like we do from here [in St. John's] (November, 2008).

Comparing her experiences with socio-economically disadvantaged people in her country of origin helps Mahfuza to accept her own changing circumstances. Mahfuza believes that she must be thankful to Allah for those blessings she has been offered. She refers to a verse from the Quran, explaining that "This is a blessing from my Lord, whereby He tests me, to show whether I am appreciative or unappreciative. Whoever is appreciative is appreciative for his own good, and if one becomes unappreciative, then my Lord is in no need of him" (Quran, 27:40). Mahfuza believes that she must not turn her face during challenges, as the Quran suggests that "it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you."(Quran 6: 165).

Three of my six participants (Mahfuza, Nayla, and Naficha) express that because of their physical absence from their homeland, parents, and so on, many people (such as

relatives and neighbours in Bangladesh) are able to lead a more comfortable life, since these participants help them financially. It appears that coming to St. John's allows participants to stay with their husbands and also makes them able to help their poorer counterparts in Bangladesh by sending remittances to them. One can surmise that participants live in St. John's and think about and send aid to the poor in Bangladesh. Having been born and brought up in these conditions, these women have an appreciation of the poverty which exists in Bangladesh.[24]

Also related to their positive religiously-understood reading of their lives, while living in St. John's for these six Muslim women seems inconvenient to them at times - because of the challenge of locating of readymade *halal* food, prayer places outside the mosque and the university campus, and an Islamic school for children - they understand that this inconvenience has a religiously-related purpose. Natasha, for instance, believes that Allah brings Muslim in St. John's to make visible and communicate the message of Islam in St. John's. Living in a city like St. John's where there are a small number of Muslims provides participants (Muslims) with an opportunity to deliver and spread the message of Islam, and results in an increase in new Muslims. Furthermore, Natasha says:

> You know that before us [addressing her and I], many Muslims came to St. John's and they faced a lot more problems than us, but I believe that because of their hardship the mosque is built here. We started getting *halal* meat from the mosque and university gave us place to pray. Recent development is Muslim convenience store "Taste East" in St. John's from which you can buy *halal* food and meat any time. Also, we are getting

[24] According to a 2008 report produced jointly by the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the World Food Programme, Bangladesh's food-insecure population is estimated to be at over 40% of the total population (65.3 million out of 159 million) (cited in Amin Aasha Mehreen , 2009).

> Bangladeshi fish and other food at this store. I heard that *halal* readymade food will be available at the campus soon (November, 2008).

The participant understands her hardships as the basis of future conveniences because it is assumed that the future is based on the present. All the participants believe that the facilities they are enjoying as Muslims in St. John's have become available because of Muslims' presence prior to them. Participants accept that they should not expect readymade facilities for them as this is not a Muslim majority city or country. Those who are living in the place have to work for the betterment for that of others who will come here in future.

Similarly, Nabida believes that Allah offered her husband and herself an opportunity "to develop spirituality; to complete higher studies that pay honour, money, and success; the ability to live in a different cultural people." Nabida's husband came to St. John's to earn a Masters and Ph.D. degree immediately after their marriage in 2004. Nabida had a job in Bangladesh but everyone in her family suggested she join her husband in St. John's, as he required a longer time to finish. Joining her husband in St. John's offered Nabida the opportunity to work towards a Master's degree. She also got the opportunity to become a part of relatively small Muslim community in a foreign land. Nabida states:

> Allah's teaching is ubiquitous. It touches all aspects that are related to lives, for example, math, science, business, finance and so on. One can stand in any field, and find His creativeness and kindness, rationality behind His deeds, express gratitude and praise to God, and deliver the message of His teaching. Also, all these aspects are necessary to live a life (November, 2008).

Nabida believes that the teaching of Allah can be experienced in any field. She refers to a Quranic word, "*iqra,*" which means read. The first word revealed to the Prophet Mohammed was *iqra* (Quran: 96). Moreover, Nabida mentions an incident in the battle of Badr. The Muslims won the battle of Badr and caught seventy prisoners of war. The Prophet Mohammad declared that those who were literate among the prisoners could go free if they taught ten Muslim children how to read and write (see Wani Ghulam[25]). This example is often given to emphasize the importance of education. Nabida believes that Islam is not only a relationship between humans and God, but also between all human beings and their societies. To fulfill these relationships, therefore, one also needs other kinds of education, along with the Quran. She cites this Quranic verse:

> In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water [rain] which Allah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving [living] creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed *Ayat* [proofs, evidence, signs, etc.] for people of understanding (2:164).

Nabida believes that education can bring people closer to Allah and offer a better understanding about His creations around us.

ALLAH HAS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADJUST TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

The six women in this study believe that Allah is omnipresent and controls their lives. They believe that Allah puts them in new situations so that they learn new things. Regarding this religious understanding, Naficha articulates:

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[25] Wani Ghulam Mohyuddin, http://www.articlesbase.com/culture-articles/education-and-islam-2835442.html

> Allah loves His Creation the most and He is the best knower of how much His living being can challenge, invent, and endure. He will not put His *sristy* [creatures] in a position so that they become bewildered (November, 2008).

Believing that Allah will not put her in any situation that she cannot handle makes Naficha stronger with respect to adjustment. This understanding further suggests Naficha's strong religious beliefs. All participants similarly speak of delving deeper into their religious practice and of finding peace. Naficha further expresses that through her experiences in St. John's Allah is directing her towards religion. The way in which this change takes place is with a greater attachment to religious activities, as I described in chapter four.

Marjia considers her experiences in St. John's as a source of higher devotion to Islam. She believes that Allah offers her family all those facilities they may desire and in turn, she becomes more devoted to Allah. However, she is worried for her young children, as they are exposed to various faiths through their peers; but religion gives her the answer. In this regard, Marjia suggests:

> Exposure to diverse faiths is making me devoted to my faith, although this is a little awkward for our young children. But, I believe that sooner or later they will be exposed to diverse religions; therefore, I think it's good because if they fall we parents can catch them (October, 2008).

Religion helps Marjia dominate her fear of exposure to various faiths and she assumes it as a positive challenge because Marjia believes that she will get an opportunity to correct

her children's religious behaviour, if they get confused as a result of diversity. Nayla articulates:

> I do not know any places in which one will not face challenges. More or less, life experiences challenges all over the places and there are many people who are not as good as I am. That is why, every morning when I wake up I thank Allah because He gives me another pleasant day to live and ask Him to bless those things He offers me (November, 2008).

Nayla similarly does not express her experiences in St. John's negatively. Rather, she feels blessed when she looks around as there are people whose lives are socio-economically and physically worse off, particularly in Bangladesh.

None of the participants complain that Allah has abandoned them. They express that whenever they need Allah's help they receive it. Without His *rahmot* [help] participants believe that they cannot survive. However, all participants, as echoed by Nayla, feel that: "Allah sometimes helps instantly, sometimes slowly. This is His way to do *rahmot* [bless] to His Creation" (October, 2008). As a result, instead of anger in the face of the challenges they meet, participants of this study always express their gratefulness. Participants also make *dua* (pray) so that they can stay away from misdeeds and God does not put them in adverse situation they cannot bear. Participants express that in their personal lives they face difficulties, but draw on their religious beliefs to reframe their personal difficulties and minimize their impact. Natasha described this situation as "life is not a smooth road in which one can drive easily; one has to deal with trials and tribulations". Participants believe that Allah creates them and send them in the midst of thousands of things in the earth to testify whether or how much they worship Him along with daily activities. Naficha sums this up as:

> Allah gives us trouble, and He also helps us to overcome it and provides comfort to us whenever He thinks we need it. Therefore, if His rahmot comes late I should not make negative comments or think that Allah leaves me alone. Allah is everywhere and today or tomorrow He will help me (November, 2008).

This religious belief focuses on God's kindness. Life experiences transition. This transition may have occurred for different reasons. Regardless of their perspectives, difficulties help participants to bear frustrating times, as well as providing hope for a better future. Marjia explains this as:

> Allah loves us the most. He put us in frustrating times when He Himself thinks we need to go through difficulties to be conscious for our misdeeds, when He cannot tolerate our wrong deeds or when He wants to give us something precious. Allah does not cause difficulties to His creations for nothing (October, 2008).

Marjia reframes her difficult times positively. She attempts to justify her difficulties with a religious perspective. This is because this view leads her to endure the negative things with a higher and more transcendent meaning.

Participants of this study depend on their faith in Allah in times of despair and share their joys with Him in better times. They believe that their experiences (whatever they are) are decided by Allah and they cannot turn back from His decisions. Asking questions to Allah is also thought to be a deviant practice. Therefore, instead of asking questions or considering negative immigrating experiences they accept whatever Allah decides for them and share their despair and joy with Allah by thanking Him. In this regard, Marjia states:

> When something happens I say Alhamdulillah [thanks] to Allah regardless of the incidents. I do so because saying Alhamdulillah will minimize negative effect from a incident and, in turn, will increase our courage to encounter it (October, 2008).

The expression of thankfulness is connected with the possibility of receiving strength and blessing, even from the negative incidents. This idea is further discussed by Nayla as:

> I am not worried about minute difficulties. I am thankful to Allah the creator that He gives me a chance to see, to look, and to feel this world (October, 2008).

Having a perfectly functioning body outweighs Nayla's worldly difficulties and makes her thankful to Allah almighty. Similarly, Natasha expresses:

> I always express my gratefulness to Allah. Sometimes, bad thoughts come to mind but instantly I mind it that it is Allah who gives me a good life, family, and so on. Comparing to these kindness, problem is nothing; Allah gives problem and He will solve these in his time no matter what they are (November, 2008).

These findings provide evidence that religion is important to these women's post-migratory lives. A positive religious reframing of immigration circumstances can provide women with a sense of hope and purpose in life. Most religious explanations by the female participants in this study are found in Islamic teaching and scriptures.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have described the religious meanings Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women assign to their experiences. The women interviewed referred to their religious beliefs and practices to makes sense of their experience as immigrants, particularly emphasizing certain readings of the Qur'an and various *hadiths*. Their religious meaning system helps them to view their post-migratory experiences in a better light, which lessens the integrative challenges that are involved in adjustment. This

understanding does not necessarily mean that participants use religion as "a way to reduce tension by repudiating reality" (Pargament, 1997:171). Rather, religion is how these women get in touch with what they understand as "real." The belief that "God's will has purpose" or that "Allah has been given the opportunity to adjust to a new environment" provides participants with comfort, hope, and the ability to deal with the challenges of migration. Their strong personal religious beliefs impart to them a sense of responsibility with regards to their situation. They also view their lives in St. John's as an opportunity to help poor relatives and neighbours at home.

In summary, the qualitative data of this study demonstrates women's inclination to use religion to make sense their experiences. A religious meaning system helps participants to view their post-migratory experiences in a better light, which, in turn, lessens their integrative challenges involved in adjustment.

CHAPTER NINE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

This research attempts to reveal the religious lives of immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women in St. John's, Newfoundland. Specifically, this research focuses on gender relations, religiousness, attachment to a "universally-practiced" Islam, the assignment of meaning to experiences, and tolerance toward, and acceptance of, Muslims. Using a feminist standpoint theory, this research suggests that immigration to Canada can result in the empowerment of women. The Bangladeshi Muslim women in my research who initially came to St. John's as dependent family members are not, as we learn from their narratives, dependent or inactive individuals.

Compared with their gender status in Bangladesh, many Bangladeshi women experience more egalitarian gender attitudes after immigration to Canada. After their arrival in St. John's, five out of six participants describe situations in which their decision-making power within and outside of the family increased. Participants acknowledge that although their responsibilities are increased in St. John's, their ability to influence their husbands' opinions also increases. Participants claim that they gain this power without pushing their husbands. Older family members also encourage participants to exercise their own judgment to make decisions and to seek suggestions from each other (between husband and wife) when choices need to be made.

Bangladeshi participants' experiences also suggest that while they were attached to certain attributes of Islam, such as praying, fasting, and reciting the Quran when they

were in Bangladesh, they have the tendency to practice these more carefully in St. John's. These practices, they explain, provide them with peace of mind and discipline their lives. Although there is not as much social pressure to observe religious practices in St. John's than in Bangladesh, Bangladeshi female migrants in St. John's tend to uphold their religious practices. Those who were flexible in their practice in their country of origin also generally become more regular practitioners. This response is reminiscent of William's conclusion that "immigrants are religious—by all counts more religious than they were before they left home" (1988:29). This shift occurs for various reasons, however, including the search for peace of mind and the urge to impart religion to children. In Bangladesh, children learn certain attributes of Islam from the social environment, as it is a country where Muslims account for the majority of people. In St. John's, children do not have such an environment; consequently, participants feel the urge to create such an environment at home through practicing Islam consistently. Fearing for children's well-being and their exposure to diverse religions tends to turn them towards Islam.

These women's experiences furthermore provide evidence that immigration offers these participants more sources for obtaining religious capital in St. John's, such as the mosque and a variety of religious symposiums. Participants are aware that according to prevalent understandings of religious practice and obligation, unlike men, they do not have a religious duty to go to the mosque. However, they feel empowered because of their access to the mosque.

In addition, participants' experiences suggest that they modified some practices they brought with them and assimilated new aspects of Islam once they migrated to Canada. This shift occurred for a number of reasons. First, participants find that transnational Muslims in St. John's emphasize certain attributes of Islam (for example, the recitation of the Quran, prayers, and *Ashura* fasting). Second, they discover that some of their rituals (such as *shab-e-barat*, which carries considerable social weight in Bangladesh) are not universally practiced. As a result, four out of six participants abandoned this ritual in St. John's. This does not necessarily mean that participants feel social pressure to observe universally-practiced rituals; rather, participants' experiences suggest that immigration offers them the independence to uphold or not to uphold their personal beliefs and practices by letting them know about debates surrounding certain rituals. The shifts in religious practices and beliefs are not solely a Bangladeshi phenomenon. Muslims from other cultural backgrounds also brought some changes with them and assimilated new Islamic customs in their post-migration daily lives.

Participants' narratives offer evidence that in St. John's, participants generally do not feel socially ostracized because of their religious choices and that a sense of ecumenism and a greater understanding of Islam were fostered by the fallout of 9/11 amongst local people and the participants in this study. Participants claim that local people count on their behavioural aspects rather than their religious identities. The general consensus amongst local people seems to be that religion does not teach violence, but that some people use religion to justify their violent acts. The aftermath of September 11th led some participants to celebrate their religious rituals in public workplace settings

and provided an opportunity to communicate their faith and, in turn, eliminate some of the confusion relation to Islam and religious festivals.

In short, 9/11 resulted in local people's becoming more knowledgeable about Islamic practices. This response encouraged participants to become more educated about their religious background. In Bangladesh, people know the base of Islam and, as a result, they very rarely question one another on their knowledge of Islam. Therefore, women tend not to engage in deciphering and analyzing issues of Islam. However, in the context of St. John's, they are surrounded by non-Muslims who often have limited knowledge about non-Christian religions. Non-familiarity often leads non-Muslim women to pose questions to Muslims, especially because some of Islam's practices were overstated and exaggerated by the media post-9/11. Their experiences also suggest that local people perceive participants as neighbours, classmates, co-workers, and friends.

IMPLICATIONS

Although the focus of this thesis is on the experience of immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim women in the small Atlantic Canadian city of St. John's, its findings have more far-reaching implications. By way of conclusion I turn to several repercussions which can be drawn from my findings. First, at the local level, the increase in religious capital enjoyed by female immigrants has a very important impact on many aspects of their lives and the lives of those around them. Female Muslim Bangladeshi immigrants have a much larger impact on the societies in which they re-establish themselves than is typically suggested in academic literature. Following 9/11, for instance, these women functioned as representatives of Islam in the area, and their presence resulted in a very tangible

transformation in local understandings of the faith – a transformation which, it is important to note, was different from many other places in North America. A sense of ecumenism and a greater understanding of Islam were thus fostered following 9/11 amongst local Newfoundlanders. The general consensus amongst local people whom participants regularly encounter is that religion does not teach violence, but that some people use religion with reference to their activities to justify their violent acts. Unlike in other North American cities, these women were not ostracized because of their Muslim faith post-9/11.

Additionally, female immigrants in Canada have an important impact on the cultural landscape of Bangladesh. Post-migration, young women often exercise their own judgment in decision-making. Their success in guiding their own lives in their new context often contributes to minimizing parents' objections about their children's decision-making in their country of origin. As I have explored in this thesis, a sense of greater equality with respect to gender division of labour is also fostered among husbands and wives. Couples' more egalitarian gender role behaviour may contribute to reduction of the gender gap among young couples in Bangladesh through association.

Lastly, through their contact with other Muslims, these women are restoring their kins' religious practices back home. Transnational socialization and mosque accessibility in St. John's offers immigrants the freedom to uphold personal beliefs and practices, and modify and assimilate universal aspects of Islam in their new context by allowing them to become informed about the debate surrounding certain culturally-observed rituals. Making such issues known to their kin, these women have an important impact on the

religious landscape of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the inclination to refer to religious beliefs and practices to make sense of experiences is notable among immigrants. Religious meaning systems help immigrants see their experiences in a better light and lessen the challenges which are often involved in integration.

While the impact of these women on the local environment is apparent, the impact of the local environment on these women is all the more so. In the wake of 11 September 2001, my informants explain that many non-Muslim became interested in Islam, especially surrounding issues related to women. Locals' enthusiasm about women in Islam compelled participants to learn more about their own religious background, and take advantage of opportunities to communicate their faith in order to eliminate their non-Muslim neighbours' confusion in relation to Islam. Another example relates to the consumption of *halal* foods, which is emphasized in the Quran. The availability of *halal* readymade food in St. John's is scarce, and this scarcity indisputably affects many Muslim women's personal and religious lives, as well as the local economy, since Muslims often abstain from buying other readymade foods.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

This qualitative study included the views of six participants. Including more participants and using a mixed-method design, such as a combination of interviews and quantitative surveys, would help to gain more in-depth information and a deeper understanding about this group. Furthermore, none of the Bangladeshi participants in this study has experienced discrimination directly related to September 11th because of her race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. This contrasts with many findings of studies on immigrants

and immigrant communities. There is a need to examine whether this is the experience of Bangladeshi immigrants in other places as well, as to other (non-Bangladeshi) Muslim immigrants. It would also be informative to have data from other groups and geographies sharing some of the characteristics of the group in this study (i.e. the higher than average education level of the local community, the high level of education of the informants, a wealthier than average immigrant population, and "invisible" religiosity) to compare findings and draw conclusions about the process of racism and discrimination. If these women had experienced discrimination and racism as a result of 9/11, their experiences relating to gender, marital, and religious issues would perhaps not have been as positive as they report them to be. Perhaps a comparison study in larger Canadian cities (such as Halifax, Toronto, and Vancouver) might produce different results, especially in terms of religious practice. While it is a fact that Muslim women, like many other minorities (Goffman 1963), tend to "go invisible or underground" if stigmatized in an immigration country, further study on populations such as the female Bangladeshi migrants in St. John's could offer insights into how and why this can be prevented from happening in other geographies.

APPENDIX A

TO CONTACT ME

If you have any other questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at:

(709) 579-4130

or by email:

nakter@mun.ca

Broader Significance

This project contributes to the understanding of the experiences and cultures of immigrant Muslim women who live in St. John's.

Most importantly, my findings would help policy makers and local government to take initiatives to provide safe and sociable environments to immigrant Muslims based on the local knowledge.

This project has been reviewed and has received approval by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University

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)737-8368.

If you have any further questions about Nasrin Akter's research, please contact:

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"The Religious Lives of Immigrants in Canada:

The Case of Bangladeshi Immigrant Muslim Women in St. John's"

INVESTIGATOR:
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MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This research focuses on how Bangladeshi immigrant Muslim women adjust their religious practices and what these adjustments might mean to them. Immigrant Muslims in St. John's, Newfoundland come from varying socio-cultural, educational and religious backgrounds, bringing sometimes differing interpretations of religion in the public sphere, the role of women, and religious practices and rituals.

There has yet to be an academic study that documents Muslim immigrant women's religious experiences in Atlantic Canada. Immigrants in this small, isolated city remain largely unresearched. The impact of 9/11 for these immigrant Muslim women's' social and religious lives is also uncharted. My research thus emphasizes the voices of Muslim women in St. John's which have been absent from recent academic literature.

Participants in my project will have the opportunity to discuss their religious experiences and struggles in Canada.

YOUR ROLE

You can contribute to this study by giving approximately an hour of your time to answer some questions about general topics, such as when and why you immigrated, your level of adjustment in terms of religious practices, especially those practices you do not do in St. John's but you did in your country of origin, the reasons you do or don't observe those practices, how you feel about not observing those practices, and your personal views about headscarves and gender politics.

The interviews I will conduct will be open-ended in that I will not have a specific questionnaire to be completed. The time and location of this conversation can be scheduled for your convenience. Interviews will be conducted in Bangla

CONFIDENTIALITY

This project will observe strict rules of confidentiality. Records of conversations will be kept private and used for research purposes only. All information will be kept by me, the principal investigator.

Should you feel any discomfort in answering questions, you may refuse to answer any particular question or withdraw from the study altogether. Participants will not be paid to participate in the study.

ABOUT ME

I was born and raised in Khulna, Bangladesh.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Title of Research: The Religious Lives of Immigrants in Canada - The Case of Bangladeshi Immigrant Muslim Women in St. John's

2. Name of Investigator: Nasrin Akter

3. Purpose
You are invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the degree to which immigrant Muslim women are adjusting their religious practices into the religious practices of the new country and the meaning of these adjustments to them. You are invited to take part in this study because you are above 18 and an immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim woman.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will interview you twice, individually, about general topics, such as, when and why you immigrated, how the culture in Bangladesh compares to the culture in St. John's, your level of adjustment in terms of religious practices, especially those practices you do not do in St. John's but they did back home, the reasons you don't observe those practices, how you feel about not observing those practices, and your personal view in terms of veil. I will interview you twice because some issues may emerge through the first interview and I may need further information. In addition, this will give me an opportunity to clarify or explain anything that is unclear. You are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time. You also are welcome to pass on any question(s) you wish. During the interview, I will take notes for analysis and the interview will be audio-taped to avoid error in analysis. At the end of the study the tape will be destroyed. The interview is expected to last 1-2 hours. Your participation is voluntary.

4. Risks:
There is a risk that participation in this study may cause you some emotional discomfort as you will talk about your experiences in Bangladesh and in St John's. I will continually ask throughout the interview if you are comfortable with the questions and whether you wish to stop or continue the interview. If you experience discomfort, I will discontinue the interview immediately. With your permission, I will keep the record of the interview and the written notes; otherwise I will destroy them.

5. Harms and Benefits
There are no foreseen harms. However, participation in this study may give you an opportunity for self-reflection in a safe and confidential meeting. The goal of this research is to develop positive social change. Whatever initiatives local and provincial policy makers have taken to provide safe and sociable environments to immigrant Muslims are mostly based on the knowledge of bigger cities. I believe this research will help policy makers become familiar with the experiences and cultures of immigrant Muslim women

who live in St. John's. Knowledge of Muslims' experiences and their culture will help policy makers to take appropriate initiatives to minimize socio-cultural and economic hegemony.

6. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time during the interviews and even after the interviews by telephoning, writing, or emailing me or my supervisors at the given addresses and numbers below. You also have the right to make corrections, delete, or add any information you wish until the final report is complete. In addition to this, you have the right to skip any questions.

7. Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be ensured for all of the participants. Your pseudonym and the country name will appear in the study. Only I will have access to the information you provide according to your name. Audio-taped and paper notes of the interview will be stored in a locker at my home. Other information will be kept in a password protected personal computer, also at home, where only I will have access. Your name and any other information that might point to you will not appear when I will present this study or publish its results. The raw data would be stored for five years and then be destroyed after this certain period.

8. Contact Persons

For further information, please contact my supervisors:

Co-supervisor: Dr Jennifer Selby
Department of Religious Studies
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(709)737 4046
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Supervisor: Dr. Elizabeth Yeoman
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Memorial University
A1B 3X8
(709) 737 3411
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The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. 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.can or by telephone at 737-8368.

Please print/sign your name below (print your name on the first line and sign your name on the second line) if you wish to participate in the research.

I, _____wish to participate in the following research study: The Religious Lives of Immigrant Muslim Women in Canada - The Case of Bangladeshi Muslim Women in St. John's. I have read this consent form and agree to be audio-taped.

_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date
_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date

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