Immigrant Muslim Women and the Hijab: Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Identities in Canada

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By
Tabassum F Ruby

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Head of the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5
Abstract

This study illustrates the ways in which immigrant Muslim women construct distinct Muslim identities with particular reference to the hijab. A short history of the veil and the hijab indicates that the covering of women’s heads is an old tradition and it has different meanings in different societies and that these meanings change over time. In contemporary non-Muslim Canadian society, however, the hijab is often recognized as a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression. In contrast, using focus groups, the results of my research show those women who wore the hijab professed it to be a positive experience in their lives because it confirms their Muslim identities, provides them a chance to take control of their lives, and offers them the status of respectable person. The meaning of the hijab, nonetheless, is not limited to attire in this study. Conducting life modestly was seen by most participants as a part of the hijab and the idea of modesty led many of the informants (whether they wear a headscarf or not) to carry on the values of their “back home” cultures. Muslim traditions, nonetheless, are not woven into larger Canadian society and the participants often confronted difficulties in crafting distinct female Muslim identities. Wearers of the headscarves faced the negative stereotypes of Muslim women and non-wearers of the headscarves encountered the Muslim community’s criticism because many Muslims recognized the hijab as a mandatory dress code. Therefore, maintaining distinct Muslim identities for my participants was not without a struggle either inside the Muslim community or in non-Muslim Canadian society.
Acknowledgements

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Dedication

To my participants,

for sharing their stories
O children of Adam! Indeed, We have sent down for you raement

which covers your private parts and provides protection and adornment;

but the attire of piety is the best; this is one of the signs of Allah

so that they may take heed. (7: 26)
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Chapter 1

Immigrant Muslim Women and the Hijab: Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Identities in Canada

1.1 Introduction

"I was born a Muslim, I was raised as a Muslim, and when I moved to Canada, I became a Muslim." This is a claim I often hear from many of my Muslim friends, particularly, my female Muslim friends. The question is, what makes them or perhaps what urges or motivates them to become a Muslim? The more I think about it, the more it becomes clear that it is an identity issue. People who were born, raised, and live in a Muslim environment often never face the dilemma to situate themselves as Muslims at a very conscious level. For them, it is an established, confirmed, and taken-for-granted “truth” that they are Muslims. Their assurance as Muslims is maybe due to the fact that in a Muslim culture, Islam is established symbolically at many different levels; hence, the question of becoming a Muslim usually never emerges. For instance, hearing the call to prayer five times a day from a nearby mosque, greeting people in an Islamic way, buying groceries without reading the ingredients to ascertain that everything, from meat to baked items is hala\textsuperscript{1}, and wearing a scarf or covering the body in a certain way, are all daily patterns that contribute to Muslim identities. In contrast, Muslims who live in non-Muslim societies, such as in North America, often perceive being Muslim differently from those who live in a Muslim country. Muslim cultures are not woven into the fabric of Western

\textsuperscript{1} Hala\textsuperscript{1} is a legal Fiqh term (Islamic jurisprudence) that defines permissible things, such as which food is edible according to Islamic teachings.
societies; as a result, Muslims have to decide consciously what to eat and what not to eat, as well as what to wear and what not to wear, particularly if they are women.

To position oneself as a Muslim in a Western society raises critical concerns for many immigrant Muslim women as they negotiate their place in the dominant Western culture and in their own communities. Most often, immigrant Muslim women need to contend with the negative stereotypes of “the Muslim woman” as a passive, backward, non-professional hijab wearer. Within the Western media, the hijab has become the symbol of Muslim women’s gendered oppression. The illustration of the hijab is represented usually without reference to historical and cultural understandings of the hijab in the West. In some situations, the hijab may indeed be imposed on Muslim women, but in other contexts Muslim women are choosing to wear it.

Researchers, for instance Shakeri (1998), Moghadam (1994), and Daly (1999) suggest that many Muslim women, families, and communities associate wearing the hijab with their Muslim identities. In many instances, women are seen as the protectors of their culture, and wearing the hijab is a visible symbol of that role and all it represents. Some Muslim communities also think that women are vulnerable to Western influences, which may in some way degrade Muslim traditions. For example, Maghadam (1994) states that it

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2 The term is defined here as any Muslim woman who is born outside Canada, but currently is residing in Canada, having any kind of official documents, such as a Canadian passport or student visa. My intention to define the term in such a broad way is partly because I do not want to exclude anyone on the basis of a certain immigration status. And partly, any Muslim woman who is currently living in the West is not only directly exposed to Western standards, but also faces the negative stereotypes of “the Muslim woman,” as she shares a common identity; therefore, potentially, all Muslim women regardless of their immigrant status could share these concerns.

3 Currently, it is a popular term that refers to certain standard or modest dress for women. This idea includes head-covering, though the connotation of the word hijab is much broader as I will illustrate throughout my thesis.

4 By using the term “the West” I do not have any intention to homogenize it. “The West is as diverse as any other part of the World” (Mojab 1998: 25); consequently, Western people are heterogeneous. However, the purpose here is to indicate the assumed superiority of the West. Western discourses often profoundly mould the majority of people’s lives, because they have managed to impress an ideology of white supremacy over the last few centuries (Jhappan 1996). Western views that often underscore their superiority in reference to the hijab are discussed in the next chapter.
is often thought in many Muslim societies that imperialism can penetrate Muslim society and wreak havoc on the culture through women “by depriving women of chastity, modesty, and honor through notions of autonomy, sex appeal, and so on” (13). Ideas of chastity, modesty, and honor are often stereotypically linked to Muslim cultural values while notions of autonomy and sexual appeal are associated with Western standards. Thus women may accept Muslim cultures’ values willingly, or they may feel pressure from their communities/families, or they may have internalized this perception that they are the keepers of Muslim customs, and should avoid Western lifestyles. In this context, wearing the hijab in a Western society may be read as a form of cultural defense, which women either take on or feel obliged to take on as cultural custodians to defend the “purity” of Muslim culture. In addition, the practice of hijab links Muslim women with the broader Muslim Ummah (community) and provides them with a chance to take control of their bodies as it protects them from the male gaze. In Muslim societies, it is usually thought that women should not dress in a way which presents them as sexual objects. These varied meanings of the hijab indicate that there is no singular or homogenized view of the hijab among Muslims.

Because the hijab represents different Muslim cultures, there are many different kinds of hijab. Numerous styles and fabrics indicate that while it is true that the hijab is a religious icon to certain degree, it is also a cultural mark. The hijab, however, in a global context most often embodies the connotation of collective Muslim Ummah’s (community) identities, where Muslim societies share this symbol. By using the term “immigrant Muslim women” and “Muslim culture,” I do not intend to homogenize Muslim women and cultures around the globe. Hall (1997) argues that we can think about “cultural identity” at least in two different ways. First:
Our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (51)

Hall identifies cultural identities where people share some kind of commonality. My use of “Muslim identities” and “Muslim culture” is similar to Hall’s definition where immigrant Muslim women share a common religious thread.

Second, according to Hall (1997), cultural identities are the identification points which are made within the discourse of history and culture. Although Muslim cultures share a religious bond, they are heterogeneous societies and there is no “Islamic culture” anywhere on this earth, but there are many Muslim societies. Aimee & Lucas (1994) describe the distinction between “Islamic” and “Muslim” cultures:

The adjective Muslim should be used to describe the social reality of the Muslim world as it is-- people, countries, states, laws and customs-- without assuming that what Muslims do is Islamic, ... Islamic states [do not] exist, but there are Muslim states. (393)

Distinguishing between Islam and Muslims allows us to see that immigrant Muslim women practice the hijab in many ways, as well as help to recognize Muslim cultures, their traditions, and customs that impact and shape immigrant Muslim women’s identities. More precisely, because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, they are produced in specific discursive formations, practices, and strategies (Hall 1996).

1.2 Objectives of Study

The primary goal of my research is to examine the ways in which immigrant Muslim women construct their distinct Muslim identities both within the Muslim community, and in the dominant Western society with specific reference to the hijab. The concept of the hijab varies from culture to culture and person to person. In my reading of the literature
review, it appears that many immigrant Muslim women identify the *hijab* as a positive affirmation of their identities and as a tool to negotiate power and status inside Muslim communities, as well as in Western societies. Researchers, such as Dwyer (1999) and Read & Bartkowski (2000), have explored the meanings of the *hijab* in reference to those women who do not wear a headscarf. I, however, find their research limited since the concept of the *hijab* was restricted to garments. These writers rarely examined the notion of the *hijab* in terms of moral conduct, which is the essence of the *hijab*. Thus the goal of this research is to explore the meanings of the *hijab* and to go beyond the physical dimension of the *hijab*, such as a headscarf, and examine its ethical dimensions perceived both by those women who wear it and by those who do not.

In addition to exploring the meanings of the *hijab*, there are studies, such as those by Kutty (1997), Bullock & Jafri (2000), and Jafri (1998), that have indicated that in the West, Muslim women are often seen as “foreigners” and victims of their societies and religion. The practice of the *hijab* is often presented as a sign of their oppression, and in the Western context, the *hijab* embodies almost universally negative connotations particularly within the media. In Canada, these negative stereotypes have a strong impact on immigrant Muslim women in crafting Muslim identities, Muslim values, as well as notions of traditions. Thus, one objective of the research is to comprehend the ways in which immigrant Muslim women construct Muslim identities and negotiate them in the Muslim community, as well as in the larger society.

The findings of my study show that women often struggled between being Canadian and being outsiders. The participants felt that if they simply accept the Western lifestyle their own distinct Muslim cultural identities will disappear. The *hijab* appeared to be a powerful signifier in maintaining the Muslim culture’s traditions, and it is a sign of the
informants' identities. Moreover, the *bijab* is not limited to headscarves and the participants felt that modest behavior is also significant. In addition, modest clothing (which would exclude, for example, the miniskirt) also emerged as the *bijab* for those participants who did not wear a headscarf.

1.3 Summary of Chapters

In the second chapter, I discuss briefly the history of the veil and review the literature on the *bijab*. This quick sketch of the history of the veil in Mesopotamian, Judeo-Christian, and Muslim settings reveals that veiling practices have different meanings within different cultural contexts, historical periods, and geographical locations. Often the veil and the *bijab* are used interchangeably, but a study of the etymology of the veil and the *bijab* reveals significant differences between these practices, and helps us to understand the tradition of the *bijab* within the Muslim context. The literature review focuses on the contemporary studies which have explored the meanings of the *bijab* to Muslim women. In particular, the *bijab* as an identity symbol and the ways in which it empowers or disempowers immigrant Muslim women is outlined. I also examine some of the negative stereotypes of the Western media's images of Muslim women, which are so narrow in their depiction and almost universally negative, especially in reference to the *bijab*.

The third chapter demonstrates my methodology and the difficulties and challenges that I encountered while carrying out the research and writing my thesis. I articulate some of the issues of setting up the focus groups, such as bringing the participants together at a specific time, and the dilemmas of the "insider" researcher. I argue that although I had an easy access to my participants as a member of the community, my relationship with my informants as an "indigenous" fieldworker is problematic. My participants and I identify myself as an "insider" investigator because I have known the community for four years and
we share a religious bond. I, however, often have a different understanding of Islam than my interviewees which raises the critical issues in positioning myself as an “indigenous” researcher. Finally, I explore the feminist ideal of reciprocity between researcher and subjects. I argue that while in theory the reciprocal relationship is appealing, in practice a power structure exists which became evident in the process of writing my thesis, and much power rested in the interpretation of my interviewees’ words. In addition, I illustrate that as a graduate student, the notion of reciprocity is not limited to my participants and I, but mediated by my supervisor’s guidance and I acknowledge her influence on this study.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I focus on the voices of my participants and their experiences living in Canada. I argue that as non-Euro-Canadian immigrants, the participants encounter many difficulties, which are often manifested as overt and current forms of ethnic racism. At the same time, the chapter demonstrates that the informants are exposed to their own religion and culture, as well as to the values of society in which they reside. Thus, Muslim women are in the continual process of negotiating and crafting their identities and seeking ways to maintain them. Since the participants frequently alter their identities in order to adjust in a non-Muslim society, their sense of belonging is not limited to “back home,” but also to “here.” The notion of “home” and “back home” illustrates that the women are often caught up in two different worlds where the memories of their country of origin lead them to live their lives according to their place of birth’s traditions. At the same time, they have also adopted Western values, sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes out of compulsion. However, the participants’ adjustment is not restricted to acculturating to Western standards: they have diverse perspectives on Islamic values and also negotiate their distinct identities in the Muslim community. Thus their identities appear very fluid.
The fifth chapter explores the concept of the *bijab* and its meanings to my participants. I find the idea of the *bijab* to range from head-covering to modest behavior and my interviewees assigned diverse meanings to it. The *bijab*, as a symbol of Muslim women’s identities, a tool to oppose Western standards, and a device to resist the process of assimilation are the prominent themes in this chapter. I found that those participants who wear the *bijab* often encounter racism in Canada since many North Americans perceive it as a sign of Muslim women’s oppression and backwardness. Non-wearers of the headscarves not only have different understandings of the *bijab* than those participants who wear it, but they also often face the Muslim community’s pressure to wear the *bijab* as many Muslims do not perceive them as “good” Muslimah. Thus wearing or not wearing the *bijab* involves complex social and cultural practices as both its wearers and non-wearers negotiate their dress code within and outside the Muslim community.

The last chapter weaves together the experiences and voices of my participants and illustrates the ways in which the women craft Muslim identities with specific reference to the *bijab*. I argue that in crafting female Muslim identities, my participants often confront negative stereotypes in Canada and they face the dilemmas of two different worlds as Muslim values conflict with prevailing Western standards. I also show that most often, the clash of Muslim and dominant culture is due to the views of the *bijab*. In addition, the meanings of the *bijab* to both participants who wear it and those who do not wear it are illustrated. I also indicate the limitations of my research and suggest that in order to explore gender differences, a further study to examine the ways in which Muslim men understand the idea of the *bijab* could be useful since Islam requires lowering the gaze and guarding modesty for both men and women. The *bijab* and views about female sexuality appear

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5 Feminine of Muslim.
closely related in my research. Although it is difficult to conduct research on female sexuality, in particular on Muslim women, since according to my experience it is often perceived as a taboo. I, however, think that further research could explore relationships between the hijab and Muslim women's sexuality. Finally, since the idea of the hijab is very closely related to female sexuality and the perception of the self in this study, further research regarding women's role and place in society could provide a broader understanding of female Muslim identities living in a non-Muslim culture.
Chapter 2

From Veiling to Hijab: Meanings of Female Covering

"Dress provides a window through which we might look into a culture, because it visually attests to the salient ideas, concepts and categories fundamental to that culture." (Arthur 1999: 1)

2.1 Introduction

Documented history indicates that the covering of women's heads, or veiling, is an old tradition and members of different cultures have practiced it for different reasons, but people often perceive or interpret the practice of veiling as a religious obligation. Usually, images of the veil are taken as a sign of women's oppression, submission, and/or seduction. Currently, however, many Muslim women in general and especially those who live in North America claim that for them the hijab is a mark of identity and resistance to Western imperialism, as well as to sexism. This chapter provides an overview of the etymology of the words veil and the hijab. Weaving through the Assyrian law to the Corinthians, and examining the Qur'an's position and Muslim scholars' views, I discuss the contemporary literature on the subject of the hijab and its meanings, particularly within the Western context.

2.2 Etymology of Veiling

Guindi (1999) explains that the dictionary meaning assigned to the word “veil” is “a covering,” in the sense of “to cover with” or “to conceal or disguise.” As a noun, it has four usages: 1) a length of cloth worn by women over the head, shoulders, and often the face; 2) a length of netting attached to a woman’s head or headdress, worn for decoration or

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6 I will demonstrate later in this chapter that there is a difference between the “veil” and the “hijab.”
to protect the head and face; 3 a.) The part of a nun's headdress that frames the face and falls over the shoulders; 3 b.) The life or vows of a nun; and 4) A piece of fabric hung to separate or conceal or screen what is behind it, a curtain.

Summarizing the meanings of the veil, Guindi observes that the veil appears in four dimensions: the material, the spatial, the communicative, and the religious. The material dimension consists of clothing and ornamentation. As a cloth, it is an article that covers the head, shoulders, and face, as well as an ornament over a hat drawn over the eyes. The spatial dimension specifies that the veil is seen as a screen dividing physical space, while the communicative sense emphasizes the notion of concealing and invisibility. The veil in religious settings means seclusion from worldly life as in the case of the life and vows of nuns.

2.3 The Veil in Mesopotamia

In ancient Mesopotamian society, strict distinctions were made among different classes of women, and wearing the veil was a tool that signified their class (Lerner 1986). The class division was primarily based on women's sexual activity and those women who were allowed to observe the veil were recognized as honorable women. Writers such as Driver & Miller (1975), Ahmed (1992), and Lerner (1986) have pointed out that those women who were protected by their men were considered “respectable women” and those who were out in the street unprotected by men and free to sell their sexual services were known as “unrespectable women.” Only “respectable women” were allowed to wear the veil as it was a signifier of their social status. To maintain class divisions among women through veiling was so important in ancient society that they prescribed a law, MAL 40 (Middle Assyrian Law), for the practice that explained which women wore the veil and
which did not. In the history of the veil, the MAL 40 law is important, as it is the earliest known example of such a regulation (Lerner 1986). The law states:

Women, whether married or [widows] or [Assyrians] who go out into the (public) [must not have] their heads [uncovered]...whether (it is) a veil (?8) or robe or [mantle?], must be veiled...When they go in the (public) street [alone], they shall [surely] be veiled. A concubine (?), who goes with [her] mistress in the (public) streets, must be veiled. A hierodule, whom a husband has married, must be veiled in the (public) streets but one, whom a husband has not married, must have her head uncovered... A harlot shall not be veiled; her head must be uncovered... Slave-girls shall not be veiled. (Driver & Miles 1975: 407)

What becomes clear from the law is that those women who are associated with a man must cover their head; whether they are wives or concubines or sacred prostitutes (hierodules) to whom a man is married. The law also indicates that a woman who is sexually serving one man and is allowed to wear the veil becomes a respectable woman even though she is a concubine. On the one hand, the veil in this context emerges as a strict form of labeling women and controlling their sexual activities, since living under one man’s protection was perhaps the only institution that could raise women’s social status and recognize them as “respectable women.” On the other hand, the veil was a symbol of nobility that gave some form of agency and prestige to married women.

MAL 40 also describes the punishment in the case of violation of the law, underscoring the significance of the veil. Those women who were not allowed to wear a veil (such as slaves or “harlots”) were to be given 50 blows with rods and pitch was to be

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7 Driver & Miles (1975) state that the law was most likely compiled between 1450 B. C. and 1250 B. C.

8 Pritchard (1950) and Driver & Miles (1975) explain that the Middle Assyrian laws are unfortunately badly broken and mutilated. Therefore, when the scholars were not sure about the word, whether it was missing or unreadable or presented language difficulties, they put a question mark in front of the word. However, it raises the question that if the very word “veil” is not clear in the law, then how can we be sure about veiling practices among ancient Greeks? Driver & Miles (1975) state that what form of veiling is intended is not clear, but the law demands that the head is to be covered. The other question marks indicate that for some reason, the scholars are not clear about the translated words. It is also noteworthy that Driver & Miles (1975) write the question marks in the text but Pritchard (1950) and Lerner (1986) do not.
poured on their heads if they appeared veiled in a public space (Driver & Miles 1975). The law also specified the punishment for the man who did not report a veiled harlot or a slave woman in strict accordance with the law. He too would be given 50 blows with rods. His clothing was to be taken and his ears were to be pierced. A cord was also to be passed through his ears and tied behind him. In addition, the man would do labor for the king for one full month (Driver & Miles 1975). Penalties such as 50 blows with rods, piercing of the ears, and passing a cord through them are very heavy and point to the seriousness of the crime. These sentences indicate that the veil was a strict signifier of the class divisions that could bring honor to some women but also confer disadvantages to many, particularly those who were not married.

2.4 The Veil in Judeo-Christian Traditions

Bronner (1993) argues that in the Old Testament, women’s hair is presented as an ornament that enhances the appearance of a woman: for example, “your hair is like a flock of goats from Gilead” (66). However, the Midrash and the Talmud9 prescribed rules for Jewish women to cover their hair as part of religious observation. In the Jewish tradition, most often the word “parah” justifies women’s head-covering. Bronner, however, points out that there are considerable differences of opinion concerning the translation of the word “parah.” Sometimes the word translates as “uncover” the head and another time it means to “loosen” the braids. Moreover, whether hair covering is a “Jewish law” or simply a “custom” is also a debated question among Jewish scholars (Bronner 1993; Kraemer 1999). In spite of disagreement regarding women’s head-covering, veiling has been the

9 Early classical rabbinic literature. “Many Jewish scholars treat these sources as reliable portraits of ancient Jewish life and law” (Kraemer 1999: 35-6). The Talmud was compiled, edited, and completed around the fifth C. E. (Brooten 1985).
tradition among Jewish women for a long time, and many scholars perceived it as a command from the Bible (Bronner 1993).

Scholars such as Boyarin (1993), Bronner (1993), and Macdonald (1988) have argued that historically women's hair has been associated with their lower status in patriarchal societies. Bronner (1993) argues that Deuteronomy's many laws indicate that to cut a woman's hair was a punishment and a sign of humiliation. A captive woman, for instance, was obliged to shave her hair if her master wanted to marry her (Deut 21:12). This requirement represented a sign of subjugation and acceptance of her master's authority. Inheriting the veil tradition from early civilizations, the covering of women's hair became an integral part of Jewish religious observance in the Middle Ages, and they often covered their face, as well as head when out of doors and sometimes at home (Macdonald 1988; Bronner 1993).

In the New Testament, Saint Paul's views regarding women's head covering are widely accepted in many Christian traditions. In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 he describes the veil as a marker of women's subordination to men. Saint Paul writes,

3- But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the man head of woman, and God the head of Christ.
4- Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered shames his head,
5- But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered shames her head; for it is one and the same thing with shaven woman.
6- For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shave, let her be covered.
7- For a man ought not to cover his head, being the image and glory of God, but the woman is a man's glory.
8- For man is not from woman, but woman from man,
9- And man was not created on account of the woman, but woman on account of the man.
10- Therefore, the woman ought to have exousia upon her head on account of the angels.
11- But neither woman without man nor man without woman in the Lord,
12- For as the woman from the man, so also the man though the woman, but all things are from God.
13- Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
14- Does not nature itself teach you if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?
15- But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair is given to her in place of a garment.

From Paul’s arguments, it is clear that he believes that women should cover their head because their status is lower than men’s. A “man is not from woman, but woman from man;” thus, her relation to God is secondary, through men, and men have authority over her head. Drawing attention to lines 14-15, Macdonald (1988), citing Meier (1978), argues that Paul’s reference to hair length is an analogy. A woman’s long hair read as “a natural ‘garment’ and what nature began, let women complete by retaining fabric garments on their heads” (280). Paul considered women’s long hair not only as part of their “femininity,” but also as a justification of veiling, i.e., “nature itself teaches” us that a woman should wear a veil. In this context, uncovering of a woman’s head could be read as an attempt to become like a man, because men, whose status is higher than women’s, keep their heads uncovered (Brooten 1985).

D’ Angelo (1995) argues that a closer analysis of Paul’s demand for veiling reveals that he sees a link between women’s head and genitals. Woman’s head, on which hair grows profusely, and the genitals of both men and women, where hair also grows more abundantly, must be covered in public (D’ Angelo 1995). Thus, D’ Angelo argues that when Paul states that if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn (line 6), it as if she is showing her genitals. It follows that if female sexual parts need to be covered then so does her head and hair. Therefore, women’s heads and hair highlight sexual shame and, for that reason, must be hidden under the veil.

Women’s hair, both in the Jewish and Christian traditions, appears as erotic and enticing in addition to being a sign of women’s subordination and sexual shame. Bronner
(1993) and D' Angelo (1995) write that uncovered Jewish and Christian women were seen to arouse men's sexual desire, and to announce “her own sexual availability” (D' Angelo 1995:142). Often divorce was the penalty for being found guilty of “inviting” a male gaze other than a husband's. Moreover, Bronner (1993) writes that a veiled woman was also signified as a wife of a particular man and that no man could dare approach without risking grave penalties. While veiling practices in ancient Mesopotamian and Judeo-Christian traditions indicate men's possession of women, the veil as a temptation to men also emerges in the later traditions.

The veiling command in Judeo-Christian traditions cannot be separated from Eve's story which provides the rationale that women are “natural” sinners and consequently ashamed of their mistake. For instance, Macdonald (1988), citing Rabbi Nathan, writes that “to a woman who disgraced herself, she is ashamed in presence of people. In the same way Eve disgraced herself and caused her daughters to cover their heads” (287). Here, the veil is a constant symbolic reminder of the original sin and implies that women are guilty, as well as embarrassed about their mistake.

The veil appears as a symbol of dignity and nobility in Judeo-Christian traditions in addition to being a sign of women's subjugation, sexual shame, and a reminder of the original sin. Bronner (1993) argues that the practice of veiling in Judaism was often associated with women's modesty and that the veil signified that the wearer was a respectable woman. The veil particularly becomes an image of pride when it is related to the lives of virgins, who are highly praised as they are married to Christ. Tertullian (197 CE), who had a great influence on Christian traditions, believes that a virgin who wears a veil shows herself to be a bride of Christ (D' Angelo 1995). Tertullian's audience, however, is not primarily the veiled virgins; in fact, he addresses “all women alike” (D' Angelo 1995:}

16
Thus linking the veiled virgins with Christ surely raises women's status. D'Angelo also states that

By the fourth century, the veil seems to have become the sign of a virgin;...But in this context the veil becomes a mark of distinction and an honor, assumed in splendid communal ceremonies that reflected both marriage rituals and baptism. (151)

The parallel between baptism and the veil is also noteworthy, because being ceremonially reclothed awarded people new status. Just as those who are baptized are seen to be spiritually cleansed and purified so too are women who wore the veil; women’s bodies are naked without the veil and the veil is a symbol of dignity (D'Angelo 1995).

This account is a very selective and simple sketch of the Judeo-Christian traditions of veiling. The picture is more complex than the scope of this research permits; furthermore, each religion deserves separate discussion. The main goal of this section, however, is to draw attention to some of the meanings of the veil in both traditions and to indicate that there are diverse meanings of the practice in different cultures: it is not only a Muslim custom. Moreover, the compulsory veiling tradition has almost died in Judeo-Christian cultures (even though some Jewish and Christian women still practise it); only one form of the veil in the West where Christian and Jewish traditions have dominated is still being practised, i.e., the bridal veil. According to one estimate, the average expenditure for the bridal veil is $199 (Ingraham 1999); this veil could be interpreted as a sign of women’s beauty, sexuality, their submission to their husbands, and perhaps their modesty too.

2.5 Etymology of the Hijab

Before outlining the veiling traditions in Muslim cultures, it is important to examine the meanings of the hijab, because this is a term that often refers to Muslim women’s head

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10 American dollars.
covering or modest clothing. The term *hijab* has variant meanings in the dictionary\(^\text{11}\) and in the Qur'an. According to Lane (1984), the meanings of the word *hijab* are: a thing that prevents, hinders, debars, or precludes; a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or protects, because it prevents seeing, or beholding. The *hijab* also means a partition, a bar, a barrier, or an obstacle. In the Qur'an, the word *hijab* appears seven times, five of them as *hijab* (noun) and two times as *hijaban* (noun). Neither *hijab* nor *hijaban* is used in the Qur'an in reference to what Muslims (and non-Muslims) today call the *hijab*, meaning a Muslim women's dress code. In most cases, the Qur'an uses the word *hijab* in a metaphysical sense, meaning illusion or referring to the illusory aspect of creation (Ibrahim 1999). For instance, the Qur'an states that “...Until (the sun) was hidden in the *hijab* (of Night)” (38:32).\(^\text{12}\) In this context, the word *hijab* is used symbolically, i.e., the sun is concealed due to the darkness.

The *hijab*, in the Qur'an, is a concept that has double meanings: something that protects, but also something that could hinder. For example, the Qur'an states that “and when ye ask (the Prophet's wives) for anything ye want, ask them from before a *hijab*: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs” (33:53). In this context, the *hijab* appears not only as a material object, a curtain, but also as a positive idea that purifies the believers' hearts. In another verse, the Qur'an states that “they say: Our hearts are under veils, (concealed) from that to which thou dost invite us, and in our ears is a deafness, and between us and thee is a *hijab*” (41:5). In this verse, the *hijab*, which is not a physical object, is an obstacle or a hindrance, keeping non-believers from understanding the message of

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\(^{11}\) *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Lane (1984), is a classical dictionary, which originally appeared in 1863. The meanings of all the Arabic words discussed here are taken from this source.

\(^{12}\) The meanings of all the Qur'anic verses are taken from Ali Yusuf. (trans.). (1946).
God. The Qur'anic examples show that the *hijab* has positive, as well as negative connotations, depending on the situation in which the term is used.

### 2.6 Does the Veil Equal the Hijab?

One complexity regarding the subject of the *hijab* is that the term *veil* is often used synonymously/interchangeably with the word the *hijab*. However, Guindi (1999) points out that in Arabic which is the language of the Qur'an, the spoken and written language of 250 million people and the religious language of more than one billion people around the globe, the word *hijab* has no single equivalent. Therefore, the distinction between the words *veil* and the *hijab* is important, as the latter has Islamic associations that differentiate it from the former term.

In addition, researchers such as Fernea and Fernea (1979) and Roald (2001) have indicated that regional and global terms differ in classifying the diverse articles of women's clothing, and the word the *hijab* varies from culture to culture. Guindi (1999) states that *The Encyclopedia of Islam* identifies over one hundred terms as pieces of clothing, many of which are used for the covering of a female body, such as *burqu', ‘ahayab, jilbab, jellahab, niqab, and izar*. Thus while a Saudi woman may wear a *niqab* and call it the *hijab*, a Canadian Muslim woman could use a headscarf and also identify it as the *hijab*. It is clear that the concept of the *hijab* emerges in multiple ways. The veil, which is often interpreted in Western traditions as a covering of the head, does not illuminate the complexity of the practice in the Muslim context. For this reason, I will use the word the *hijab* whenever I refer to the Muslim traditions, but for the sake of better flow, I will not change the word *veil* if the writers or my participants use this word.
2.7 The *Hijab* in the Muslim Context

The Qur’anic verses that are traditionally cited to describe women’s dress code are as follows:

1- And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty ....And that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. (24: 31)

2- O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): this is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is oft forgiving, most merciful. (33: 59)

In the first verse, the Qur’an uses the word *Khomoorehenna* (from *Khimar*), which means veiled, covered, or canceled. Moreover, *Khimar* is an article that is used by Arabian women for head-covering before and after the advent of Islam. In the second verse, the Qur’an uses the word *Jalabib* (from *Jilbab*), which means an outer garment, a long gown covering the whole body, or a cloak covering the neck and bosom. *Khimar* and *Jilbab*, then, are the basic words which often lead scholars to conclude that the Qur'an requires that Muslim women should wear specific types of clothing, which nowadays is called the *hijab*.

Asad (1900-1992) states that the noun *Khimar* denotes the head-covering customarily used by Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. He writes that *Khimar* was worn in pre-Islamic times more or less as an ornament and was let down loosely over the wearer’s back. In accordance with the fashion prevalent at the time, the upper part of a woman’s tunic had a wide opening in the front, and her breasts were left bare. Thus, the *Khimar* as an ornament was very familiar to the contemporaries of the prophet. Asad states that the Qur’an uses the word *Khimar* to make it clear that a woman’s breasts are not
included in the concept of "what (must ordinarily) appear" of her body and should not therefore be displayed.\textsuperscript{13}

Different scholars, however, have interpreted the word \textit{Khimar} and \textit{Jilbab} in numerous ways. Ibn Kathir (1300-1372), for example, argues that \textit{Khimar} and \textit{Jilbab} signify that women should cover their whole bodies, except one eye. al-Tabari (839-923), on the contrary, cites several scholars who see the first verse as inferring that women's faces and hands can be exposed. Commenting on the second verse, nonetheless, he cites a number of scholars who interpret the verse as requiring covering the whole female body except one eye. Most often, scholars' commentaries on the Qur'an link similar contexts and interpret them in the light of each other. al-Tabari, however, illuminates that not only do many commentators understand the first verse differently from the second verse, but also that scholars have diverse opinions. This clearly shows that among classical scholars who are often quoted, there is no consensus regarding the extent to which women need to be covered.

The justification that women should cover their bodies is based not only on the interpretation of the cited verses, but also on \textit{Hadith}\textsuperscript{14} literature. Ibn Kathir argues that the word \textit{Khimar} makes it clear that women need to draw the veils over themselves, which means that the face should be concealed. In supporting his arguments, he cites many \textit{Hadiths}, indicating that the Prophet told Muslim women to cover themselves in front of non-Mehram.\textsuperscript{15} In reference to the word \textit{Jilbab}, the author states that it was to protect Muslim women from harassment. The main purpose, however, of the \textit{hijab} according to

\textsuperscript{13}Many classical and contemporary commentators, for instance al-Tabari (839-923), Ibn Kathir (1300-1372), and Ali (1946), agree that at the Prophet's time, Arabian women used to wear clothes that left the breasts uncovered and the Qur'an required covering of the bosom.

\textsuperscript{14}Collection of the Prophet's sayings and actions.

\textsuperscript{15}Mehram means a woman's husband or an unmarriageable relative.
Ibn Kathir is that it is a requirement of Islam that leads to righteousness; therefore, it should be observed.

To what extent Muslim women should cover their bodies is a controversial issue, and is extensively discussed among scholars in the literature. Not only the words Khimar and Jilbab have been interpreted in many ways as mentioned earlier, but the Hadith that are often cited as justification for women’s covering are also challenged, since researchers have argued that they are not authentic\textsuperscript{16} Hadiths. Ibe-al-Jawzi (d. 1201), as cited in Roald (2001) argues that women should stay at home, and if they need to go out, they should wear the hijab because they can cause fitnah (temptation).\textsuperscript{17} Ibe-al-Jawzi bases his argument on a Hadith that reads: the Prophet says that “the best mosque for woman is her home.” al-Ghazzali (1054-1111), however, contrary to Ibe-al-Jawzi’s view, argues that there are many Hadiths that establish that women used to pray at the mosque during the Prophet’s time and those Hadiths are stronger than the one cited (Roald 2001).

Khaled (2001) argues that the debate on the hijab among classical and contemporary scholars is fundamentally rooted in the idea of fitnah\textsuperscript{18} (temptation). He states that the Qur’an uses the word fitnah for non-sexual temptations, such as “money and severe trials and tribulations” (233). Nonetheless, scholars often associate the notion of fitnah with women’s sexuality which is signaled, in part, by their uncovered appearance in public. Khaled writes that women are prohibited from attending mosques or driving cars and “every item and color of clothing is analyzed under the doctrine of fitnah” (235). Khaled, 

\textsuperscript{16} There is a science of knowledge that studies which Hadiths are authentic.

\textsuperscript{17} I will discuss this issue below. Also note that the idea of fitnah reminds of the Judeo-Christian veiling tradition where it was thought that an uncovered female head arouses sexual desire in men.

\textsuperscript{18} Please note that he discusses the Hadith literature in reference to the fitnah and argues that they are not authentic Hadiths.
however, argues that these restrictions are misplaced and that *fitnab* reflects men’s fantasies of uncontrollable lust which they have associated with women’s sexuality.

It does not seem to occur to the jurists who make these determinations that this presumed *fitnab* that accompanies women in whatever they do or wherever they go is not an inherent quality of womanhood, but is a projection of male promiscuities... Instead of turning the gaze away from the physical attributes of women, they obsessively turn the gaze of attention to women as a mere physicality. In essence, these jurists objectify women into items for male consumption, and in that, is the height of immodesty. (235-6)

Khaled argues that the injunction that women need to cover their bodies because they can cause *fitnab* is not in harmony with Islam’s message: the Qur’an does not use the word to imply women’s temptation, and does not view women’s bodies as *fitnab*. Moreover, Islam requires lowering of the gaze and guarding modesty for both men and women; thus, a covered female body will not lead to a modest society (the essence of the *hijab*) until men behave in a similar manner.

The second verse cited above contradicts the argument that women’s bodies are seen as *fitnab* in Islam. The context of the verse indicates that at the time this verse was revealed, men treated the slave women very disrespectfully and there were incidents in Medina when the men assaulted the Muslim women. The offenders’ excuse was that they did not know that these were Muslim women. In order to protect Muslim women, it was stated that they should dress modestly so that they could be recognized. Implied in the Qur’an is the idea that men are the aggressors and women the victims, whereas according to those scholars who view females as *fitnab*, women are the actors and men the victims (Roald 2001).

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19 A reference to the Qur’anic verse 24:30, where it states that men should lower their gaze and guard their modesty.
20 Geographical location where the Prophet was residing.
21 Like Ibn Kathir (1300-1372), Ali (1946), and Asad (1900-1992).
In addition to the idea of the *fitnah*, the concept of *‘awrah* also often leads commentators to interpret the cited verses as a requirement for the hijab. Khaled (2001) states that scholars have different opinions about the issue of *‘awrah*, and while some scholars argue that women’s whole bodies, including their voices, are part of *‘awrah*, others state that women’s face and hands are excluded, and yet some write that what is between the knees and naval is *‘awrah*. Since *‘awrah* has to be covered, those scholars who see women’s whole bodies or most of them as *‘awrah* view women primarily as sexual beings, and regard the hijab as a device to desexualize the female body. Contrarily, women’s sexuality in Islam is not diminished, but Islamic morality forbids the public flaunting of sexuality (Guindi 1999), and seduction is not possible if men, rather than viewing women’s bodies as *‘awrah*, turn their gaze away.

Some scholars, however, have not viewed all Muslim women’s bodies (fully or partially) as *‘awrah* and they consistently make the distinction between a free and slave Muslim woman’s *‘awrah*. Khaled (2001) states that a slave woman “does not require the covering of the hair, the arms, or part of the legs” (240), in part because she lives an active life that demands mobility. However, the Qur’an does not perceive free women’s bodies differently from slave bodies, and the cited verses address all Muslim women regardless of their social status. Also, if women need to cover their bodies because doing so grants modesty to a society as scholars like Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari have argued, then a slave woman’s uncovered body could lead to an immodest society, which could undermine the purpose of the hijab. These conflicting interpretations of *‘awrah* not only reveal the complexity of the subject of the hijab, but also show that there is no consensus among scholars regarding to which extent women should cover their bodies.

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22 Men’s and women’s parts of the body that ought to be covered by clothing during prayer time.
Although the concept of the *hijab* in the Muslim context is situated in protecting the modesty of a society, Guindi (1999) indicates that the *hijab* was also a sign of agency. Guindi, citing Abbott (1942), states that ‘Aisha (one of the Prophet’s wives) became very active in public and political affairs after his death. At the occasion of Uthman’s (the third caliph’s) murder, she went to the mosque and asked for the revenge of Uthman’s murder. There she was ceremoniously veiled. Guindi recognizes Aisha’s public veiling as a sign of her political power.

Guindi (1999) also observes that the veiling tradition is not limited to women and has numerous purposes and meanings. Citing Jubour (1989), Guindi states that “a number of pre-Islamic Arab men were known by the title *thu Khimar* (the veiled ones)” (121), which indicates that wearing a veil by both men and women has been a tradition in Arabia. She argues that in many parts of the world the veil is not a sign of “subordinated gender status or shame of sexuality, but the group status of the individual, the identity of the group and the sacredness of privacy” (126). For instance, she writes that on many occasions, the Prophet was also seen wearing a veil, such as when he entered Mecca after defeating his opponents; veiling therefore, became “a means to ceremonialize one’s status and one’s group identity (126).

### 2.8 The *Hijab* as an Identity Icon and its Meanings to Immigrant Muslim Women

In many contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in North America, the *hijab* is recognized as a mark of Muslim women’s identities and their resistance to Western values. Many immigrant Muslim women living in North America have chosen to wear the *hijab* and they claim that people immediately recognize them as Muslim women. Ibrahim (1999) states that it is a growing feeling on the part of Muslim women that they no longer wish to identify with the West, and that reaffirmation of their identities as Muslims requires the
kind of visible sign that the adoption of traditional clothing implies. For these women, the issue is not that they have to dress traditionally, but that they choose to embrace the hijab as a marker of their Muslim identities. Immigrant Muslim women's desire to identify with the hijab as Muslims indicates that they are using the hijab as a technology or a tool to oppose Western standards and values. Wearing the hijab, therefore, attests to Muslim women's desire to assert agency. The important point is that immigrant Muslim women create space for themselves by using a distinct dress code in a Western society.

For those women who willingly choose to wear the hijab in North America, it is not only a symbol of Muslim identities, but also an issue of individual rights. Many observers acknowledge that although the hijab may oppress women when it is imposed on them, the situation is different in the West, and immigrant Muslim women believe that it is their right to decide how to appear in public. Acting upon the West's claim of freedom of choice, immigrant Muslim women are testing that very claim. Moreover, the hijab allows Muslim women physical mobility because they feel free from the male gaze. Consequently, they move in the public sphere more comfortably (Odeh 1993; Hoodfar 1993; Khan 1995).

The notion that the hijab liberates women from the male gaze and helps them to be in charge of their own bodies is a very prominent claim by those Muslim women who wear it. They argue that the hijab is not a mark of oppression; rather, it is a sign of liberation that protects them from a sexist society. Yusufali (1998), for example, states that when she covers herself, she makes it virtually impossible for people to judge her according to the way she looks. She cannot be categorized because of her attractiveness or lack thereof. She thinks people are constantly sizing one another up on the basis of their clothing, jewelry, hair, and makeup. Yusufali (1998) further argues that "one of the saddest truths of our time is the question of the beauty myth. After all, there is no way that you can be overweight.
and still be beautiful” (C3). Advertisements and popular magazines recommend the ideal standard for a female body; she should be forever young, skinny, attractive, and dressed skimpily. Yusufali writes that it is a myth that women in today’s Western society are liberated; on the contrary, they are exploited to sell everything from beer to cars. She asks, what kind of freedom exists when a woman cannot walk down the street without checking every aspect of her physical being? Yusufali claims that the hijab provides her the chance to take control of the way other people perceive her, and she has released herself from the bondage of the swinging pendulum of the fashion industry and other institutions that exploit females.

The hijab, in addition to releasing immigrant Muslim women from the beauty myth and from being objects of the male gaze, also gives them a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim world, as well as the appreciation of family members and friends. Read & Bartkowski (2000) found that several women began to wear the hijab because they had friends who did so or because they felt more closely connected to significant others through this practice. Embracing the community’s practice not only gives the women a sense of belonging and prestige, but it also increases their confidence and self-esteem, which in turn helps them to form positive identities as immigrant Muslim women. Moreover, some researchers have suggested that wearing the hijab offers immigrant Muslim women more power and status within their own communities as they embrace religious and cultural practices (Moghadam 1994).

Papanek (1994) argues that an individual’s identities include a sense of belonging to some group, along many differences, such as having an ethnic, religious, national, and racial distinctiveness. Similarly, even though religion is a common link among immigrant Muslim women, they have diverse views about the hijab. While there are many immigrant Muslim
women who use the hijab to construct their Muslim identities in the West, there are also immigrant Muslim women who do not think that the hijab is a necessary marker for identifying themselves as Muslim. One of Read & Bartkowski's (2000) research participants, for instance, states that "Muslim society doesn't exist on the veil. Without the veil, you would still be Muslim" (409). Another woman argues that "some Muslim women need the veil to identify themselves with the Muslim culture. I don't feel that way" (410).

Immigrant Muslim women's refusal to wear the hijab could be because of their family/cultural background, where the hijab is not perceived as a necessary part of women's clothing. Some women could negotiate their dress code for some reasons, including a response to Western stereotypes. One of Haddad & Smith's research (1994) participants, for instance, states that:

I do not want to go to college with my head covered, and wearing a short skirt does not make me a bad Muslim. I am a Muslim and I am proud to say it, but I want to say it in ways other than dressing in obnoxious clothing. I want to blend in as far as my clothes go. I want to look normal. (36)

This quotation indicates that the participant thinks that Islam does not explicitly require the hijab for women and she can be a good Muslim without wearing it. The passage also shows that she negotiates her outfit in order to be part of her dominant culture that does not see her as "normal" if she covers her head. The response also highlights awareness of Western stereotypes that go along with the hijab.

The decision not to wear the hijab may help women to assimilate more easily into a Western society, but immigrant Muslim women might lose the general support of their community. For instance, if a Muslim community believes that wearing the hijab displays "a disdain for the profane, immodest, and consumerist cultural customs of the West" (Read & Bartkowski 2000: 399), then women who do not wear the hijab could be labeled as "painted
Westernized dolls” and intellectually deficient and immoral (Shirazi 2000). Thus Muslims and Western societies often associate Muslim women with the symbol of the hijab and those who do not identify with this sign may suffer double identity crises (Dwyer 1999). Both the Muslim communities and the dominant Western culture in which immigrant Muslim women reside do not see them as Muslim; yet, they wish to be classified as Muslim without the visible mark of the hijab.

2.9 Media Representation of Muslim Women in the West

The formation of identities is not only restricted to the ways in which we relate and present ourselves to others; it also depends on how others perceive us. One avenue for understanding the ways in which a society views different people or cultures is to study its media because the media often play a powerful role in suggesting and shaping national and personal identities. Studies such as Kutty (1997), Bullock & Jafri (2000), and Jafri (1998) show that mainstream North American media have consistently portrayed an image of “the Muslim woman” as an oppressed and passive hijab wearer. Bullock & Jafri (2000) argue that Muslim women are presented by the media as “others,” members of a religion that does not promote “Canadian” values, but anti-Canadian values, such as indiscriminate violence and gender oppression. Within the media, wearing the hijab is seen as a powerful signifier of Muslim women’s oppression and the majority of articles about the hijab in the print media suggests that this practice is a sign of Muslim women’s subjugation, and therefore should be condemned. The print media’s negative stereotypes of the hijab are demonstrated in the following headlines: “Wearing a uniform of oppression” (The Globe and Mail 1993), “Women’s legacy of pain” (Toronto Star 1995), “The new law: Wear the veil and stay alive” (The Globe and Mail 1993), “Lifting the veil of ignorance” (Toronto Star 1996) (Bullock & Jafri 2000). These headlines illustrate that the popular media not only see the hijab as a mark of
Muslim women’s subjugation, but that the media perpetuate this image. The media do not, however, draw attention to the banning of the practice. Bullock & Jafri (2000) argue that when Tunisian and Turkish governments banned the *hijab* and many women refused to go to work and attend the universities, the media did not report these events. Thus the media perpetuate and contribute to the negative stereotypes of Muslim women.

In addition to these biases, the media often homogenize the whole Muslim world around the globe, generalize Muslim women’s situations, and ignore cultural factors. Jafri (1998) argues that the media often do not make any distinction between religion and culture: “it maybe cultural, but they say Muslims are doing it, so it must be Islam” (35). The media’s homogenizing of Muslim cultures does not reflect the diversity of Muslim societies (both past and present) nor does it provide an image to which individual Muslim women can relate. One of Jafri’s (1998) participants states that “as a Palestinian Muslim student, or woman I haven’t seen anything on T.V. that I can relate to” (30). The persistence of these most negative stereotypes suggests that the *hijab* functions as a metaphor that wipes out most women’s lived experiences. Jafri (1998) argues that

> The veil becomes a metaphor that is used to stand in for the women’s identity, because it embodies all sorts of negative meanings, that they are oppressed, backward, living in a misogynist society. So you, therefore, erase the reality of these women, and replace it with this metaphor. (26)

Through the media stereotypes, the Muslim woman who feels and thinks disappears: one of Jafri’s research participants calls this stereotyping “literary violence.” Muslim women are often not viewed as individuals but as members of communities, which means “they are seen in simplistic and limiting ways as part of the undifferentiated group” (Khan 2000: xii).

Another example of looking at a Muslim culture from the outside and presenting it as an absolute reality is an article about Libya in *National Geographic* published in May 2000.
The article starts with a veiled woman’s picture; her whole body is covered, allowing only one eye to look out. We are told that the picture was taken at the Tripoli airport. One can see the lounge’s view from front to back and right to left, but no one is there except this covered woman. My traveling experiences reveal (and probably people will agree with me) that it is highly unlikely that one sits in a vacant lounge at an international airport. The whole setting of the photograph looks contrived; for instance, the white rays of light came from the back and spread out. The white rays could be symbolized of enlightening the ignorant woman.

The article’s photograph caption reads: “Concealed-Islamic tradition permits one eye to show from a robe worn by a woman” (2). As I have indicated above, the extent to which Islam requires covering of the female body is a controversial issue; there is no consensus among scholars. Although to conceal the whole body except one eye is one opinion, it is not a widely accepted view. Nonetheless, the statement is written very confidently, and underscores the idea that all Muslim women are allowed to see their world through only one eye. Ironically, other pictures in the article do not show other women looking out through one eye. Hence Cockburn’s own article is enough to negate the front cover, but the first impression one gets from the dustcover is that in all Muslim countries, women keep just one eye open.

In addition to homogenizing Muslim societies, the media often suggest that Muslim women are victims of their culture and religion. In response to seeing a Yemeni women’s delegation who attended the Beijing conference on women, Katherine Govier (1995) wrote an article in which she discusses her shock on seeing the veiled women. The language of the article not only humiliates the delegation in particular and Yemeni women in general, but also articulates the view that the women were forced to wear cloak. Govier states that
The press photograph leaps off the page. Two black figures...Their faces completely concealed...What are these figures? Bank robbers? Egyptian mummies in full drag? Escapees from the executioner's chamber? To present this walking black pyramid, a negation of human figure, as a delegate, is gallows humor...When I first saw the photo [Yemeni women’s identity card photo] I was choked with anger. Who enforces this walking jail on women? Or how do they get away with it?...What a tragedy that they are forced to represent their fellow Yemeni women in this dehumanizing way...It is a social dictate, enforced by men who regard women as chattels; it is for nothing but the protection of property, and prevent women’s participation in all but the most private spheres of life...Where are those among us who will stand up and cry enough to the practice of extinguishing women with black cloth. (A 19)

Govier has written the article on the assumption that the women were obliged to wear the black cloak, and that it is the collective responsibility of humanity to save those who are victims of their male relatives. Bullock (2000), however, argues that Govier did not know for sure if they were forced to wear the *hijab*. In contrast, Bullock cites Makhlof’s study of Sana’ women (the capital of Yemen) which shows that issues such as early marriage, high fertility, and illiteracy were imperative to most Yemeni women, whereas covering of the body was not. Bullock (2000) states that “here, we have the western woman questioning the ability of the native to understand her own practices” (46). The article also reinforces the assumption of Western superiority and highlights the harsh environment in which Muslim women live in their countries. It does not, however, provide any understanding of the context or Muslim women’s own perspectives on their situations. Articles like this one appearing in *The Toronto Star* reveal the role of the media in producing and perpetuating this kind of racist discourse against the Muslim community.

2.10 Conclusion

I have explored the meanings of the covering of the female body from Mesopotamian times to the present day and it appears that the veil and the *hijab* are situated
at the intersection of dress, body, religion, and culture (Guindi 1999). The veil, as well as the *hijab*, turns out to be a rich and complex practice that has the ability to change from a sign of oppression to a symbol of liberty. The etymology of veiling and the *hijab* demonstrates that both terms have multiple dimensions and covering of the head or the body with a material object is the most recognized, but is only one, aspect of this practice. Furthermore, there is a difference between the word *veil* and the *hijab*, with the latter having particular Islamic associations.

In Mesopotamian society, the veil was a sign of social status and the veil was the mark of nobility for those who were entitled to wear it, but disadvantaged women such as slaves and harlots who were not allowed to wear it. Apart from the fact that the Bible does not command women to observe the veil, many Jewish and Christian traditions required a veil because women were viewed as being inferior to men. The veil was also a reminder of original sin and a symbol of sexual shame. Every so often, the veil also appears as a sign of modesty and it can give women some agency when it is recognized as a mark of honor.

The Qur'an also does not demand explicit head-covering or face-covering, but it has been a tradition in many Muslim cultures. Different scholars have different views about the extent to which Muslim women are required to cover their bodies, ranging from concealing the whole body except one eye to modest behavior. Moreover, this review indicates the need to situate the *hijab* in its own historical and social context, since covering the body with an ornament is not only a religious practice, but also a social phenomenon, such as using the *Khimar* before and after the advent of Islam. In addition, in Arabia not only women but men used to cover themselves and it was a sign of power, as well as identity.

Currently, many immigrant Muslim women living in North America wear the *hijab*, because it identifies them as Muslim, links them with the broader Muslim *Ummah*, and
confers status in their communities. Immigrant Muslim women also use the *hijab* as a device that asserts agency and they argue that it has given them control over their bodies as they literally deny others a view of their bodies as a commodity. However, there is diversity among immigrant Muslim women, and some may not wear the *hijab* or may not accept traditional values assigned by Muslim community; yet, they wish to be recognized as Muslim women.

Despite many Muslim women's claim that the *hijab* is a mark of their identities and provides them agency, the Western media often portray the *hijab* as a sign of their oppression. As a result, the media homogenize Muslim countries and assume that all Muslim women are forced to wear the *hijab*. The persistence of these views reveals the media's role in asserting Western superiority through its condemnation of this practice and by inviting all humanity to rescue the *hijab* wearers from oppression, ignorance, or both. Thus the negative stereotypes of the media raise the critical question of whether the *hijab* contributes to or inhibits the crafting of positive identities of immigrant Muslim women in a Western society (Bremen 2000).
Chapter 3

Whose Research? Whose Voices?

In our rush to be more inclusive and conceptualize difference and diversity, might we be guilty of appropriating the voices of “others”? How do we deal with this when planning and conducting our research? And can we incorporate the voices of “others” without colonizing them in a manner that reinforces patterns of domination? Can these types of dilemmas be resolved, and if so, how? (England 1994: 80)

3.1 Introduction

As researchers engage in designing, documenting, and writing their research, they are involved in a complex process and often face intricate situations, such as dilemmas of “insiders/outsiders,” power relations between researchers and researched, and gender issues. This chapter illustrates, as well as reflects upon, the process of my study from designing to writing using the focus group technique within a feminist methodological framework. I articulate the issues that I confronted as a member of the group I was studying—namely, immigrant Muslim women—in particular, sharing a religious bond, yet having a different understanding of the religion than my participants. I also raise the question of voices and argue that as a graduate student, my research is deeply rooted in academic settings where it is consistently monitored by my supervisor; thus, the thesis bears the imprints of all of us, the participants, researcher, and supervisor.

3.2 Methodological Framework

Kahf (1999) states that at the beginning of eleventh century Islam began to be depicted negatively in European discourses, and a Muslim woman was signified as “the other,” an image that still prevails in a variety of settings. Currently living in Canada, I personally have encountered many stereotypes of Muslim women. Several non-Muslim
Euro-Canadians, for instance, have indicated that I am “different” from their expectations; that is, I do not conform to the constructed image of “the Muslim woman” who is passive, submissive, uneducated, and wears the *hijab*. People perhaps find me “different” because I do not wear the *hijab*, the visible marker of a Muslim woman, or it may be because of my intellectual abilities. People might have different reasons for not identifying me as a Muslim woman, but my experience demonstrates the deeply embedded image of “the Muslim woman” in the imaginations of many Westerners.

Part of the problem regarding stereotypical views of Muslim women is that their voices are often presented through Western lenses. Said (1978) has analyzed the power relation between the “Occident” and the “Orient.” He states that one example of the Occident’s supremacy is Panikkar’s classic *Asia and Western Dominance* where “Flaubert’s (Orient) encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He spoke for and represented her*” (6). Contrary to speaking for immigrant Muslim women, this study is an attempt to hear their stories through their own voices.

The power relations between the investigator and the investigated, or between the interviewer and the interviewee, have received special attention in feminist discourse. Who speaks for whom, why, when, and how are some of the critical questions that feminists explore. For feminists, an intersubjective or “reciprocal” relationship with the interviewee is very important because power relations may violate the research participants’ rights. Moreover, feminist researchers argue that women’s lives should be addressed on their own terms and feminist research should not just be *on* women but *for* women (Edwards 1990; Song & Parker 1995). This study is situated within a feminist methodological framework, and in keeping the idea of reciprocity, this research presents the stories of immigrant
Muslim women about their experiences of living in Canada, and about the ways they construct their identities in a Western society with specific reference to the *hijab*. I, however, encountered some of the limitations of the notion of reciprocity, which are discussed later in this chapter.

### 3.3 Recruiting participants

There is a small population of immigrant Muslim women in Saskatoon, and most of the people know each other. I have personal contact with many of the Muslim women and by using the snowball technique, I was able to identify my participants. The snowball or chain method occurs when “sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know other people with relevant cases” (Bradshaw & Stratford 2000: 44). In recruiting the sample, the mosque played a particularly important role. Not only Friday prayers but also weekly gatherings in the mosque facilitated meeting diverse groups of women and provided opportunities to talk with them about my research project.23

The *hijab* represents different Muslim cultures, and there are many different kinds of *hijab*. Pakistani Muslim women, for example, wear the *hijab* very differently from Saudi Muslim women. Moreover, even within a culture, the concept of *hijab* varies, and people have diverse opinions about it. Thus as Daly (1999) states, it is important to analyze what it means to be a woman, to be an Afghan, and to be a Muslim by virtue of wearing this distinctive item, the *hijab*.

In recruiting my participants, I invited immigrant Muslim women from wide-ranging cultural backgrounds. In order to explore comprehensive meanings of the *hijab*, the sample of my study included participants who wear the *hijab*, as well as those who do not wear it. Most of the group members, however, were not complete strangers to each other

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23 Please note that men’s and women’s gatherings are held separately in the mosque.
since, as mentioned earlier, the Muslim community in Saskatoon is small. Previous acquaintance of group members enabled me to create a friendly atmosphere during the interview sessions, and the informants were comfortable; consequently, I was able to collect rich data.

In addition to taking cultural diversity into account, language was also a big consideration in selecting my informants. Even though immigrant Muslim women speak various languages, I conducted the focus groups in English so that the group (including myself) had a common language. Choosing the English language, nonetheless, also means that my research is only limited to those participants who speak and understand English. Moreover, conducting interviews in the second language might also have affected the data. The women might have expressed themselves through metaphors used in their mother tongue for the practice of the hijab, but that might have different meanings in English.

3.4 Sampling

Immigrant Muslim women come to Canada from different parts of the world, and there are more than thirty ethnic groups currently residing in Saskatoon. In three focus group sessions, I interviewed fourteen women who come from twelve different countries. In order to protect the anonymity of my participants, details such as their place of birth, age, and occupations cannot be fully described here, but general characteristics are as follows.

The informants’ countries of origin include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Burma, Egypt, Guyana, India, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Pakistan, and Turkey. The women’s ages range from under twenty to between fifty-one and sixty. The participants’ occupations vary from physician, accountant, writer, insurance officer, to students. The immigrant experiences of my participants range from those who arrived in Canada a few years ago to
those who immigrated more than two decades ago. Some informants have lived in other
cities, such as Toronto and Edmonton; others have resided in Saskatoon since they
emigrated. Six participants did not wear a hijab and eight informants were Mujhijib.

3.5 Methodological Tools

3.5.1 The Focus Group

The focus group, one of the qualitative research tools that have been widely utilized
in the social sciences, could be defined as an interactional interview involving at least three
but ideally no more than ten participants.\(^\text{24}\) Utilizing this technique, researchers who act as
moderators strive to learn through discussion about psychological and sociocultural
characteristics and process among various groups (Berg 1998, citing Basch 1987, and
Lengua et al 1992). Using the focus group technique, I conducted three interview sessions
and divided my participants on the basis of their use of the hijab. Having five members in
each focus group, I conducted one interview session with those participants who did not
wear a headscarf and one with those who did. Each interview session was one and half
hours long. My third group consisted of mixed informants, some women who wore the
hijab and some who did not. The mixed group had four participants and the session lasted
for one hour and fifty minutes. A convenient location for the gatherings was needed. After
discussing the matter with the participants, it appeared that everyone would be comfortable
with the interview being held at my apartment; thus, all of the focus groups were carried out
there.

The intent of the focus groups was to create an opportunity for participants to
speak freely about the concept of the hijab and their experiences of living in Canada. I saw

\(^{24}\) Though different researchers have different opinions about the size of groups, for instance Morgan (1988)
states that “use ‘moderate sized’ groups, which is somewhere between 6 and 10” (43). However, he also
indicates that the currently favored range in marketing is 6 to 8, and several years ago it was 8-10.
my role as a moderator concerned with maintaining focus on the topic. In order to facilitate the group discussion and to stay on the topic, I developed an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix A) that served as a vehicle to facilitate communications between the moderator and the participants and directed the flow of the conversation during the interview (Greenbaum 2000).

Ethical considerations must be taken into account whenever researchers attempt to make lived experiences public (Bevan & Bevan 1999, citing Ribbens 1996). Kirsch (1999), citing Newkirk (1996), points out the vulnerabilities of participants and argues that researchers can easily “seduce” and later “betray” informants despite their best intentions. To eliminate some of the vulnerability of the participants, I invited them to review the transcripts and to revise their words if they wanted to. Moreover, I informed the participants that one transcript would be released for the entire group and the participants would be reading what the other have said (Appendix D).

The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) provides guidelines to address possible ethical issues that could occur in research. Following these guidelines, my participants were guaranteed that the researcher would maintain their individual and group rights. The purpose of the research, as well as the fact that they would be participating in a group interview, was fully explained to them during initial contact. They were asked to sign two consent forms (Appendix B) and (Appendix C) before the interview session began indicating they were aware of their rights, and that they would not talk about the group discussion outside the group.

In addition, the participants were informed that their involvement in the research was completely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time without providing any explanation. They were also assured that there would not be any
penalty or loss under any circumstances for choosing to withdraw and that all data collected from them would be immediately destroyed. The participants were made aware that no one except my supervisor, Dr. Biggs, and myself would have access to the transcriptions of the interview, and that all the information would be kept completely confidential. Moreover, the participants were also guaranteed that their names would remain confidential and each informant would have a pseudonym that would be used throughout the thesis. The interviews were audio-taped after seeking participants’ permission, and were conducted over a two month period from January 2002 to February 2002.

3.5.1.1 Advantages of Focus Group

The focus group was particularly useful method to conduct the research on the *bijab* in the Muslim community. This technique brought together many cultural groups among immigrant Muslim women and enabled me to explore the range of cultural differences and similarities of my participants. Berg (1998) states that the focus group is one of the methods that allows for observation of group dynamics, which were very perceptible in my study. I was able to collect rich data through the women’s conversation which was not necessarily directed to me as a researcher, but to the participants who often talked among and between themselves. Thus the group energy and interaction stimulated much discussion and the women interpreted, commented, and disagreed with each other, which provided me a chance to explore diverse meanings of the *bijab*, as well as the ways in which they construct identities in a Western society.

3.5.2 Demographic Survey

The demographic survey (Appendix F) was designed to understand and contextualize some of the responses of my participants on the basis of their sociocultural background. The survey consisted of questions concerning age, income level, immigrant
status, and cultural affiliation. I asked the participants to fill out the demographic survey before conducting the interview. While many of the informants identified their cultural connection with their place of birth, some women found it difficult to associate with a specific culture and they left the column blank. Moreover, some participants stated “Islam” as their cultural identity. Different responses demonstrate that for some women a sense of belonging is not linked with their country of origin, and that the role of Islam is an important factor in some participants’ lives.

3.6 Challenges and Difficulties in Carrying Out the Research

Even though many immigrant Muslim women knew about my study and showed an interest in the research, I found setting up the focus groups a difficult and time-consuming task. In my reading of the literature on focus groups, most of the authors, such as Berg (1998), have stated that focus group interviews “require far less time than individual interviews do to involve the same number of participants” (105). I, however, observed that bringing participants together at a specific place and time is not only hard, but also demands a great deal of time. For example, in order to set up the focus groups, I called each participant more than three times, which meant I made almost sixty phone calls. This was mostly due to accommodating everyone’s schedule at their convenience, and arranging an appropriate meeting time. Moreover, three informants of one group canceled their appointment two days before the interview, and I had to reschedule the meeting. Thus while Berg (1998) is right that in conducting focus groups a moderator can collect data from greater number of participants, setting up the focus groups requires a lot of time, so group work may not be necessarily a less time consuming method than individual interviews.

25 I invited six participants for each interview session, and before finalizing the sample, I made many preliminary phone calls.
Time became a vital issue in the study for both my participants and me. Although I stated very clearly that punctuality is important in order to start the session on time, some of the participants were late. In particular, one interview session was delayed almost forty-five minutes because one informant did not arrive on time. Eventually, I began the interview without her, because I felt guilty that I was wasting the prompt informants' time. Those were low moments during this study and as England (1994), citing Stanely and Wise (1993), argues that "researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods. And all of those things influence how we feel and understand what is going on" (84). I therefore admit that I was not very enthusiastic during the interview. The expected participant arrived ten minutes after the interview session was started, and in order to fill out the consent form, I turned off the tape recorder, which interrupted the flow of the conversation. Thus, as a moderator, I realized that the time aspect became critical as it was connected with the group's collaboration.

Part of the difficulty regarding women's availability and arriving on time was related to their gender. Many of the interviewees felt great responsibility towards their families and most of them refused to meet on weekends as they considered it family time. Furthermore, some women had difficulties finding babysitters and even though I offered to arrange a babysitting service, the participants refused to accept that. The informants denied my offer because they considered their participation in the research to be part of our friendship and they did not want to burden me. In fact, some of the participants indicated that it was their responsibility to help me out in my study because we are members of the same community.

26 Most of the participants in this study either work fulltime or are students; thus, it was difficult to meet during the weekdays.
One of the biggest shortcomings of group interviews technique is that “group influences can distort individual opinion” (Berg 1998: 112). For instance, one person’s opinion might affect other participants’ response particularly if the person is well informed about the topic. Furthermore, people behave differently in groups than when they are alone (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990: 36, citing Shaw 1981). Morgan (1988), nonetheless, argues that it is true that there is an irreducible uncertainty in what the participants might say in private, but if we begin with individual interviews (as an alternative), there is no way to know what individuals might say if others were present.

During two interview sessions, I encountered the above-mentioned limitations of focus group method. In one interview, I noticed that one of the informants was relatively quiet as she felt that she was not as informed as other members of the group about the hijab, and despite my inquiring about her views, gave very short answers. In private, however, the participant reported that although she has little knowledge about the topic, she disagreed with the group members but did not want to expose herself. Thus the informant felt the group’s pressure, and decided to remain quiet. Silence, however, was not only due to disagreement. Another participant in a different group interview had some language problems since she thought that her colleagues’ English was better than her own, and she did not converse much in spite of my motivating questions.

I mentioned earlier that the idea of reciprocity was a key element throughout this research and for the most part of my study, reciprocal relationships between the researcher and researched did provide women an opportunity to voice their opinions. Several times, however, I felt the limitations of the concept of reciprocity. I was put in an awkward situation when two of the participants during the interview asked about my opinion regarding the hijab. Ribbens (1989) argues that one level of reciprocity is that the
interviewer should “take the same risks of self-exposure as we are asking the interviewee to do” (584). Although this position appeals in theory, in practice it may not be possible. I was not only unprepared for the enquiry into my views, but I was concerned that I might impose my views on my informants, which could have caused ethical dilemmas or distorted their responses. Moreover, I wanted to use the interview time for hearing my participants’ narratives, and I thought that my opinion was not important for this interview. Clearly, nonetheless, my participants were interested in knowing about my views, and closing myself up meant engaging in a one-way conversation, preventing them from knowing me (Ribbens).

In my enthusiasm for hearing my participants’ narratives, I also had some difficulties in remaining on topic during the focus group. According to feminist methodological framework, I was supposed to hear the participants’ stories in their own way and at their own pace. In so doing, however, conducting one interview session, the informants went off the topic; cutting off the participants’ irrelevant discussion was a challenge for me. As a result, the interview session lasted a little longer than anticipated.

3.7 Data Analysis

Qualitative data can provide rich insight into human behavior; however, human behavior, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities (Guba & Lincoln 1998). Thus, in order to understand the complexity of our views and actions, we need to explore the way meanings are produced within various social institutions. To grasp the comprehensive meanings of the interview data, the tapes were transcribed and coded according to the themes that emerged from the data. It took me twenty to twenty-four
hours to transcribe each interview; the transcriptions ranged from twenty-five to twenty-seven single-spaced pages.

In order to identify the patterns and themes, I reviewed the transcripts a number of times. On the basis of my reading of the literature, as well as conversations with immigrant Muslim women, I expected that the *hijab* as a sign of Muslim and cultural identity, as well as as a moral concept would be dominant themes. Furthermore, in all of the focus groups, many of the patterns and themes were consistent and helped me in coding the transcripts. For instance, negative stereotypes of Muslim women that the West often has, and the *hijab* as a symbol of Muslim women's identity figured quite prominently in our discussions. From the data, however, some new themes also emerged, such as the concept of “home,” and the sense of belonging.

Verbal communication is a powerful tool through which we present ourselves to others. Incoherent language can not only cause confusion, but may also not leave a good impression of the speaker. Because, as mentioned earlier, English was the second language for all of my participants, I noticed some of the grammatical errors that would sound unintelligent if left them uncorrected. Therefore, in order to present the voices of my informants coherently, I altered the grammar in some of the transcriptions. Moreover, oral conversation is different from written expression and verbal discussion often involves pauses, clarifications, run-on-sentences, and sounds, such as uh and um. Although the structure of a sentence with all of its pauses and sounds is a rich source of understanding in its own right, some of my participants who chose to review their transcripts deleted all of the signs of their incomplete thought; as result, their transcripts seem like written material rather than an interview. The informants’ concerns regarding coherency also indicates that
they wanted to present themselves intelligently and that there would be an audience to read their stories.

Two of my participants, in addition to deleting incomplete thoughts, also removed some of the information before releasing the transcripts. The material that was taken out could have been useful for this study but now it is off limits. One participant took out some of the information because she was not comfortable that the whole group would have access to her views regarding the way in which the hijab could be seductive. This informant particularly expressed concern regarding confidentiality; she also felt that the other participants’ family members could have access to the transcript. My assurance that the group has signed the consent (Appendix C) that they would not disclose the information could not convince the informant that confidentiality would be honored. She insisted that I separate each participant’s information, and that the group members have access to only individual data for the revision of the transcript. I reminded the participant that she could withdraw from the study if she liked, but it was not possible to pull out each informant’s separate discussion. Rather than dropping from the study, the participant reviewed the transcript before it was delivered to the rest of the group members, and she omitted the opinions she did not wish to share.

These concerns raise some critical points. While in theory a consent form assures that the information would be confidential, in practice the informant was not convinced. She was particularly distressed because most of the group members knew each other very well and she did not want to disclose herself to the people of her community. Although for most of my study, the previous familiarity was a positive aspect and the participant talked comfortably among friends, at the same time it appeared that some informants were reluctant to unveil their views in front of their social networks. Moreover, even though the
participant did not withdraw from the study, I realized the difficulties of destroying the data if she had decided to leave the research project. It would have been a tricky task to edit only one participant’s voice from the audio tape of the group discussion.

3.8 My Research Participants and Me: “Indigenous” Dilemmas

Despite feminists’ desire to reduce the power relationship between researcher and participants, hierarchy exists through other competing subject positions, such as class, race, age, and ability. In particular, and most relevant for this research, is the relationship of the researcher with the community as either an “insider” (one who belongs to the “community”) or an “outsider” (one who does not belong to the “community”). Anthropologists have written a body of literature that explores “indigenous,” “insider,” and “outsider” positions in research at many different levels. For instance, those who emphasize “insider” fieldwork have argued that insiders could “write about their cultures from a position of intimate affinity” (Narayan 1993: 671). Moreover,

Insiders are more likely to be cognizant and accepting of complexity and internal variation, are better able to understand the nuances of language use, will avoid being duped by informants who create cultural performances for their own purposes, and less apt to be distrusted by those they study. (Zavella 1996:139)

On the other hand, researchers such as Fine (1998) and Aguilar (1981) have pointed out that an insider’s research is often viewed as “biased” and usually seen as advocacy rather than scientific investigation. As a result, indigenous researchers “are more likely to be seen as biased, self-interested, or without distanced perspective” (Fine 1998: 150). No doubt an insider investigator faces the task of how to distance her/himself when conducting the research. Furthermore, while anthropologists have indicated the limitations of a study conducted by either an “insider” or an “outsider” researcher, scholars such as Aguilar (1981) and Narayan (1993) have also questioned whether anyone is a true “authentic”
insider. For example, Narayan (1993) argues that those who write about their own communities from a position of intimate affinity need to acknowledge that “a culture is not homogenous, a society is differentiated, and a professional identity that involves problematizing lived reality inevitably creates a distance” (671) between a researcher and her/his culture. Thus neither the insider’s nor the outsider’s study is an ideal research model, and the important task is “to examine the ways in which each one of us is situated in relation to the people we study” (Narayan 1993: 678).

In conducting research on the notion of the hijab and the way Muslim women construct identities in Canada, I have situated myself as a member of the community. I have known the community for four years, and I share a common religious belief with my participants. Nevertheless, the question is: Is a common religious thread enough to describe myself as a member of the community? Have my four years of socialization with the community at many different levels provided me enough bases to identify myself as a community member? Moreover, what concerns could I have brought to the research by not wearing the hijab while conducting research on the hijab? I discuss these issues in the next three sub-sections.

3.8.1 Common Religious Bond

In identifying myself with relation to my participants as an “insider,” religion was the strongest bond and I had an easy access to my informants. Butler (1999), citing Saifullah-Khan (1982) states that culture27 is “a system of shared meanings” (139) and because of an Islamic link, my participants also viewed me as an “insider.” One of the women I interviewed stated that as a Muslim woman, I had an advantage in conducting this research. She commented that if a non-Muslim had asked her to participate in the study,

27 I am using the term “culture” here as equal to Muslim Ummah where Islam links Muslims around the globe.
she would have refused as she would not be comfortable talking about sensitive issues like the *hijab* with a “stranger.” However, Islam, or for that matter any religion, is not a homogeneous entity that people learn in a vacuum; rather, most often people have different understandings of the religion depending on their social and cultural environment. Despite the diversity of views, nonetheless, followers of a religion share some basic principles that bring them under one umbrella, and offer them a basis to embrace a specific set of beliefs. Similarly, although my participants and I identify ourselves as Muslim, we often had different perspectives on the issues that were discussed in this study. Thus while the diverse responses of my informants gave richness to the research, I often struggled distancing myself from my own particular point of view, and not offer a judgmental opinion. There are, therefore, limitations to “insider” research.

Berg and Mansvelt (2000), citing Donna Haraway (1991), argue that all knowledge is situated knowledge and in acknowledging that idea, I accept that I have a particular position that comes out of a particular context. I recognize my acknowledgement as a first step towards reflexivity. England (1994) defines reflexivity as “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self conscious analytical scrutiny of self as researcher” (82). Thus reflexivity means awareness of the partiality of our perspectives as researchers.

“The biography of the researcher directly affects fieldwork, [because] we do not parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or a tape-recorder in our pockets ready to record the ‘facts’” (England 1994: 84-85). As an “insider” investigator, the history of my life has a particular influence on my study because I knew the topic of my research long before the “actual” research. Thus if Donna Haraway (1991) is right that all knowledge is situated knowledge, then I have formed the knowledge about my study from
somewhere, and by someone, and my standpoint should be accessible to my potential readers in order for them to understand the research, as well as the researcher's limitations.

Just like immigrant Muslim women (my subjects), I grew up in a Muslim household with a specific idea of the hijab. At my home, the concept of the hijab was symbolic, as well as physical. There was an unspoken emphasis on moral values for both male and female offspring and on conducting life according to modest behavior, such as not inviting the male gaze and staying away from premarital relationships was advocated. I call this the symbolic and unspoken hijab, because neither my parents nor my older siblings ever articulated these ideas, but I knew them. The dimensions of physical hijab in terms of garments were limited to traditional dress codes, such as Shalvar' Qamiz.28 Customarily, Shalvar' Qamiz for females includes some kind of dupata,29 which could be long, short, thick, or transparent depending on fashion; I always had dupata around my neck just like a scarf but never covered my head.

For most of my life, I accepted my home's idea of the hijab without questioning it. I still follow the same values; nonetheless, they now have different meanings. In the last few years, my relationship with my faith has been, and is now, a more conscious one. I pursue Islam with awareness, which is a result of inner changes that I experienced. My inner transformation has motivated me to study the Qur'an and Islamic literature. At this point in my life, I believe that the Islamic concept of the hijab includes covering the body modestly, that is not exposing the body or wearing tight and transparent clothes, but I am not convinced that women need to cover their heads and/or faces. The hijab as moral conduct has for me very profound meaning because the moral principles of Islam eventually lead to righteousness, which is the essence of Islam. I think that Islam advocates

28 A closer translation could be baggy pants and a long shirt.
29 A kind of long and big scarf.
the hijab for both men and women and the hijab in its Islamic sense would not serve the purpose until Muslim men behave according to a similar moral code. Thus the hijab for me is a cloak of piety and righteousness that my home atmosphere advocated, and later in my life I have embraced it deliberately.

The current trend to wear the hijab is not quite in harmony with my views of the hijab. There is a very strong emphasis on covering the head and contrary to my opinion that the hijab is a symbol of righteousness, the hijab has become a sign of Muslim women’s identities. While I respect those women who have chosen to wear it and perceive it as an identity symbol, I identify the hijab as a cultural marker rather than religious requirement. Thus, my standpoint not only clarifies my position in conducting this research, but also shows the problematic “insider” relation with my subjects. When the religious connection is the base of my “indigenousness,” dissociating the self means dismantling the very foundation of that relationship.

3.8.2 A Member of the Community

Positioning myself as an “insider,” a member of the Muslim community, was another aspect in helping me to recruit the participants which was problematic. Researchers such as French (1969), Hillery (1968), and Chekki (1989) have pointed out that “community” is a complex term that contains both sociological and geographical dimensions. French (1969) states that the community appears to be different things depending upon one’s perspective. The term “community” can be defined as “a way of life” (French 1969: 3), “fellowships, community of relations or feelings” (Hillery 1968: 3), and “the feelings of being together with others” (Berlin 1997: 1). In the context of these definitions, religion led me to define a “community.” We, both the participants and I, saw Islam as our way of life, the fact of which made us feel close to each other. Nonetheless, as
I have argued throughout the thesis, there are different Muslim cultures, but there is no “Islamic” culture that can represent the diversity of Muslim societies. I certainly, therefore, did not have enough grasp of the practice of the hijab in diverse cultures, since my interviewees came from different parts of the world. My four years of socialization provided me some understanding of the hijab in different cultures, but since it was a complex phenomenon, to situate me as an “insider” researcher was problematic. Moreover, as Redfield (1969) argues, there are communities within communities. I interviewed two Pakistani women with whom I shared a national identity in addition to a religion. Could my relationship with those two participants be perceived as more “authentic?” Or could I have understood their stories better? While these inquiries remain problematic, I believe that I was an “indigenous” researcher; at the same time, I recognized my limitations.

3.8. 3 The Hijab and Non-Wearer Researcher

In the beginning of my research, I was concerned that those women who wear the hijab might see me as an “outsider,” because I did not wear a headscarf as they do. I also felt that Muhajibh might try to educate me, and potential readers as well, about the “correct” version of Islam. To my pleasant surprise, none of this happened. In fact one of the Muhajibh (Di’ba) commented that many Muslims have the misconception that “if a person is not wearing the hijab that person is not a good person, and I hate that you know, because it is just not fair.” The participant’s remark indicates that although there is a tendency among Muslims generally to look negatively on those women who do not wear the hijab, she did not view it that way. Moreover, one of my participants stated that I had an advantage in doing the research on the hijab. Due to my religious conviction, the wearers of the hijab would be comfortable and non-wearers would not feel any pressure because the researcher

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30 Since I interviewed those women too who do not wear the hijab, the same question could have arisen in their case.
also did not wear the *hijab*. In addition, the general atmosphere was very friendly during the interviews. Thus I believe that the *Mujahibah* were comfortable with the researcher who did not wear the *hijab*.

### 3.9 Writing of the Thesis

My participants identified me as an “insider” researcher and they shared their stories on the assumption that I know the background of their anecdotes. For instance, in Chapter Four I discuss constructing identities in a non-Muslim society, which involves a sense of being caught up in two different worlds where Muslim values often conflict with Western standards. The examples that one participant reported were not having hotdogs at school and not participating in mixed parties. The participant, for example, did not explain, nor did I ask, why she could not eat hotdogs or why her parents did not allow her to go to mixed parties. Due to our commonality as Muslims, my participants and I know that consumption of pork is *Haram* for Muslims and in a typical Muslim home, parents usually like to have limited interaction between boys and girls. This provides some assurance that young people will not engage in illicit sexual activities. Thus, as Bevan and Bevan (1999) argue that “theories and facts are quite interdependent; that is that facts are only facts within some theoretical framework” (16), my informants stated “facts” and assumed that I knew the theoretical foundation of the narrated information.

While I did not have any difficulty in understanding the theory behind the data, in the writing of my thesis, as mentioned earlier, I encountered trouble in distancing myself from my own views of Islam. Feminists are aware of the fact that “we cannot free ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us into the research” (Schepers-Hughes 1992, cited in Bevan & Bevan 1999: 24). Thus my supervisor and I often had discussions about my perception of Islam and its influence on presenting the voices of my participants. The
complexity was that in my analysis, I often recognized that the idea of the hijab—from wearing headscarf to controlling female sexual activities—was strongly rooted in cultural traditions; yet the participants associated it with Islam. I viewed the notion of the hijab as cultural because I identified the contradictions between the participants’ opinions and the Qur’anic teaching. For instance, in the next chapter we will see that one of the interviewees, Raheelah, stated that if she had daughters, she would not have allowed them to go to bars because she wanted to prevent them from having premarital relationships; her sons, however, did not face this restriction. If Raheelah had restrained her daughters’ activities due to Islamic teachings, then she should have placed the same limitations on her sons, as I believe that adultery in Islam is Haram for both men and women. Raheelah’s attitude, according to my understanding of Islam, indicates that she has double standards for male and female sexuality, and her standards are different from the religious ruling.

While theorizing a story, it is quite legitimate for writers to raise hidden assumptions underlying a specific anecdote. In so doing, however, I was caught up in tensions between her beliefs and my views on the Qur’an.31 In demonstrating that Raheelah had double standards for male and female children, I initially directed my potential readers to the fact that she was not following Islam and/or she had a “wrong” understanding of the religion, which assumes that my perspective is “right,” as my supervisor pointed out. Therefore, in her reading of the drafts of two substantial chapters of this thesis, one of Dr. Biggs’ questions was: why is my interpretation more valid than that of my participants? I did not have an answer to her question, except that as a researcher, I did not parachute into the study with an empty head (England 1994). My knowledge about Islam, which differs from many of my interviewees, has an influence on this research and reflexivity, as well my

31 Please note that I had the same problem with some of my other participants, and this issue was not limited to Raheelah.
supervisor's questions, has made me aware of bringing my perspective on Islam into the analysis during the process of writing this thesis.

In a study, two parties are usually involved- the researcher and researched- and reciprocity is advocated between them. As a graduate student, however, my research is situated in academic settings where a third person, my supervisor, also has played a role in the writing of this thesis. Dr. Biggs is a non-Muslim Euro-Canadian woman. Her unfamiliarity with Islam brought an advantage to this research. I consider my major audience for my thesis to be non-Muslim; therefore, as a first reader, she has helped me to contextualize some of the theoretical issues, and to perceive the way a non-Muslim could read my thesis. Thus, every time I handed in a draft of my chapters, Dr. Biggs posted several questions and in my response to those inquires, I integrated her comments and suggestions. I sometimes did not agree with my supervisor's views; nonetheless, again I illustrated the rationale of my disagreement. Therefore, there was a very constructive dialogue between Dr. Biggs and me. The idea of reflexivity demands acknowledgement that this thesis is not limited to the voices of the researcher and researched, but that Dr. Biggs also influenced the study through her guidance.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the process of my research from designing to writing of the thesis. Using a focus group technique, I conducted three interview sessions that provided me an opportunity to listen to the voices of immigrant Muslim women discussing the ways in which they construct identities in a non-Muslim society with specific reference to the *hijab*. It was a challenging learning experience. For the most part, the idea of research reciprocity was maintained. But my attempts at reciprocity raise some critical issues regarding reciprocal relationships between the researcher and participants, illustrating
that the “ideal” model of reciprocity desired by feminists needs to be more practically re-thorized.

As a member of the Muslim community of Saskatoon, I had easy access to my participants, and my Muslim background assisted me in understanding the narratives of my informants. My “indigenous” relationship with my participants, however, was problematic. In addition, since I conducted this research to fulfill the requirements of my Master’s program, Dr. Biggs’ supervision had a role in this study. Thus, the personal and ethical dilemmas inevitably pose problems. Nonetheless, “there also can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware” (Stacy 1988: 26) and I take a standpoint in this research. I acknowledge that while my participants’ stories are the main component of this research, in presenting those narratives, I acknowledge the position of my own viewpoint. This study has the imprints of all of us: informants, researcher, and supervisor.
Chapter 4

Who am I and where do I Belong?

Even though I have been here since I was four years old, the first thing people ask wherever I go is, where are you from? You know. You have to look a certain way I think in order to be accepted as Canadian. (Bilqis')

4.1 Introduction

Most immigrants living in Canada, particularly whose skin is not “white,” often face the question of their origin as my research participant Bilqis’ points out. The inquiry “where are you from?” directly poses the question of identity. Harris (1995) writes that identity is a very abstract word, which refers simply to “an individual’s sense of uniqueness, of knowing who one is, and who one is not” (1). Knowing about oneself very much depends on the culture in which one lives. The language, the food, the dress codes, the values, as well as the beliefs and the social institutions, all are part of a culture and contribute significantly to one’s understanding of his/her identity. A person’s identity, however, is multi-faceted. A Muslim woman, for instance, living in Saskatoon, is not only viewed as a woman, but also as a woman of color, an immigrant, and a member of an ethnic, as well as a religious group. Thus the use of the word “identities” as a plural is more appropriate.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which immigrant Muslim women negotiate the categories of woman, immigrant, as well as Muslim, and also how they situate themselves as to who they are and where they belong. These multiple identities of my participants are not necessarily compatible and often generate tensions because they position themselves as “insider,” as well as “outsider” in their resident country. The participants frequently refer
to “back home,” a place where they think they belong, while realizing that they have been uprooted from their country of origin. Memories of the country of origin led many participants to conduct their lives according to their “back home” traditions, indicating a strong commitment to their culture and religion. Simultaneously, they also adapt to the lifestyle of the mainstream society, sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes out of compulsion. Thus their identities appear very fluid, altering in order to adjust to a non-Muslim environment.

4.2 Immigrant Muslim Women in Canada

Most immigrant Muslim women whom I interviewed came to Canada to gain an education, or they married a person who was already living in Canada, or some participants came as minors because their parents migrated (perhaps in search of a better quality of life). The participants not only, therefore, came to Canada for diverse reasons, but their age at their time of arrival varies. Diversity brought richness and complexity to my study. The experiences of my participants as immigrants, then, ranged from one woman who arrived in Canada as a four-year-old Muslim girl to a mature professional Muslim woman who immigrated more than two decades ago.

4.2.1 As Immigrant

Non-Caucasian immigrants often face racial discrimination in Western societies; part of the discrimination manifests itself under the category of “immigrant.” Ng (1981, 1987, 1993) states that women of color are frequently seen to be “immigrant” by other members of society regardless of their place of birth. Technically, the term refers to those women who have a certain legal status in Canada, such as landed immigrants. However, as Ng points out, in everyday life the word “immigrant” encompasses negative stereotypes of non-English speaking women who have lower paid jobs and belong to certain ethnic
groups. The term is often less associated with “white” English speaking immigrants, but is more applicable to “visible minorities.” Since my informants do not fit the image of “white” European immigrants, they indicated that they often encounter racism in Canada.

Sharing experiences as new immigrants to Canada, the participants (without exception) stated that adjustment in a new country was difficult because of cultural differences such as language, social environment, and weather. The women indicated that after their arrival in Canada, they became more aware that they dressed a certain way, ate a certain way, believed in certain values, had a different accent, and looked different. This highlighted awareness of difference, however, was a reciprocated process between immigrant Muslim women and the society in which they were residing. Nagel (1994) writes that ethnic identity is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinion, i.e., “what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is” (154). Associating with a certain ethnic group and viewing themselves as different, then, affirmed immigrant Muslim women’s distinct identities, but at the same time the larger society perceived them as “foreigners” because they were not “white” middle class women who speak English with a Canadian accent.

Many participants observed that although they have been in Canada for several years, people often view them as outsiders. Their legal immigrant status in the government documents showed that they were citizens of the country, but in their everyday social life, they are often considered as “alien.” In response to my question about what it is like to be a Canadian, Haleemah commented that having a Canadian nationality did not confirm her as Canadian in the society, and people often inquired about her place of birth.

And you look different, you know. When people say where are you from, if I say I am Canadian, yeah I mean where did

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32 I am using “ethnic identity” as cultural identity here.
Even though Haleemah has been here for twenty years and identifies herself as Canadian, she is not accepted as one because her dark skin marks her, in her own words, as different. She is often asked about her country of origin, a constant reminder that she is an outsider and does not belong here. Her status is associated with her racial background rather than with her legal status, suggesting that only Caucasian immigrants embody the image of Canadian citizens.

For those who came here as children or adolescents, the perception of “outsider” usually played out in their school experiences. As young newcomers, they experienced racial discrimination because children in their schools have inherited this idea that only “white” students were Canadian. When Di’ba came here and went to high school in Saskatoon, it was difficult for her schoolmates to accept her as one of them.

People in high school are not very mature. And they are not understanding, you know. So it is hard for them to accept new people who come here so... But I mean you get used to it, you just got to prove yourself, you know.

Although Di’ba faced racism because of her non-European look, she felt that it was limited to young people’s behavior which is not “mature” and “not understanding.” Through childhood socialization, children learn what distinguishes them from others, and who belongs to their group and who is a “stranger” (Papanek 1994). Di’ba, however, did not situate racist attitudes within the broader social context. She viewed racism as individual rather than systematic. In turn, she adopted an individualist approach to the racism that she experienced and she argued that one needed to prove him/herself and get used to the behavior.
The need to “prove” oneself was not restricted to the education system, but was also extended to the work environment. Many participants indicated that they needed to work harder than their colleagues because of the negative stereotypes that are associated with the word “immigrant.” Raheelah, for example, remarked that she had a good reputation at work although she had purchased it at a high price. She commented that “though I have to prove myself a little harder to my colleagues than the others, you know, I have to be better in order to succeed within the department, but I did you know.” Raheelah worked in the same department for several years, but she still felt insecure as a non-Caucasian immigrant. Racial prejudices led her to believe that she needed to compete with her co-workers all the time in order to maintain her job.

2.2. 2 As Muslim Immigrants

Racial discrimination in the case of my participants occurred partly because they belonged to a religious and ethnic group that embodies negative images in Canada, such as “terrorist” and “extremist.” Sollors (1995) states that etymologically the word “ethnic” derives from Greek and means “gentile,” “heathen,” and the word refers not just to people in general but also to “others;” thus, the word has been used to define people “contrastively, and often negatively” (220). Presenting Muslims as “others” and associating them with clichéd views is a common practice in Canadian society and the women were deeply affected by the negative stereotypes. Di’ba, in particular, believed that Muslim identities were connected to “terrorists,” and argued that people have many false impressions about Muslims, and that stereotypical images needed to be terminated. She stated that if she had a chance to make some changes in Canada, she would clear up some of the misconceptions about Muslims.

I like to clear some of the misconceptions about us like in general as being terrorists and all that like we are not and
people should know that. And I mean people need to understand also that we are not here to change them, because you know being different is one thing, but people think that if you are different then maybe you are going to try to you know change things around here and people do not usually like change so. We are not here to change anybody, we are just here to live and you know we are just like anybody else and... You know they... Just need to understand that.

The constant association of the term “terrorists” with Muslims disturbed Di’ba, and she believed that it was a wrong perception that people have. She recognized that as a Muslim, she followed a belief system that made her different and confirmed her distinct identities. However, demanding her human rights, she argued that she is “like anybody else,” and should not be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity and/or religion. In the later sections of this chapter, I discuss that immigrant Muslim women’s identities living in Canada often appear vulnerable, because as members of a minority group the participants felt the larger society’s pressure. Di’ba, however, pointed out that since Muslims have their distinct values, the mainstream society was threatened by them because people think that Muslims might disrupt Western standards or bring some change to the society and “people usually do not like change.” Di’ba, therefore, realized that incorrect information has created fear (misconceptions) about Muslims in Canada, and the communication gap between Muslims and non-Muslims needs to be bridged.

4.2. 3 September 11th in the Lives of the Participants

Hall (1991) argues that “history changes your conception of yourself” (6), and the history of being an immigrant Muslim woman in the West changed after the destruction of the Pentagon and the World Trade Center towers in the United States. Some of the participants’ concerns were not limited to the impact of September 11th on Muslims in

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33 I conducted my focus groups a few months after the destruction of the Pentagon and the World Trade Center Towers in the United States.
Canada, but included Muslims worldwide. In particular, the informants referred to the bombing of Afghanistan where they felt that massive damage has been inflicted on Afghan people without justification. Di‘ba remarked that “you\textsuperscript{34} can’t tell the difference between the terrorists, the Taliban and the normal people. So you kill a lot of innocents and you said, you are going after terrorists, like you are being the terrorist by doing that.” Even though Di‘ba identified the Taliban as “terrorists,” she recognized that the American response was not legitimate because it led to many casualties. She also argued that if the killing of civilians could lead to Taliban being labeled as “terrorists,” then the United States has done the same act by killing “innocent” Afghans and America has defeated the purpose of attacking the country. Di‘ba also noted that Muslims across the globe are at risk. Since they are not secure in their own countries, they are not safe in Western society either. Anti-Muslim attitudes are not limited to the United States, and she was aware of incidents in Canada in which Muslims were harassed.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, as a Muslim, Di‘ba feels insecure in Canada and she views Western attitudes towards Muslims as a collective aggression regardless of their residency.

In addition to commenting on the issue of casualties, some participants also stated that the attack has brought many difficulties to the people of Afghanistan that were not there before the war. Noreen, for example, remarked on the issue of drugs, as well as political violence in Afghanistan. Before the attack, “the women were covered, and now see the drugs start again in Afghanistan. People kill each other, like they just make the Muslim people attack on each other, like you can see the difference they have made in Afghanistan.” Although the covering of the Afghan women was a big issue in Canada,

\textsuperscript{34}The word “you” refers to the American government here.
particularly in the media\textsuperscript{36} before and after September 11\textsuperscript{th}, Noreen (who wears the hijab) did not consider women’s covering as one of the most pressing social issues in Afghanistan. Rather, for her the use of drugs and “Muslim killing Muslim” were greater problems. From the conversation in the other parts of the interview with Noreen and many other participants it becomes clear that the informants believe that the United States government’s attack on Afghanistan reveals the worldwide hostility toward Muslims. On the basis of a shared bond- Islam, they feel connected with fellow believers and this has promoted a sense of collective victimization among the participants. Thus, Noreen and many other interviewees were concerned about Afghans and the collective wellbeing of Muslims who were at risk because of the United States’ aggression.

The events of September 11\textsuperscript{th} and its aftermath have had a direct impact on some participants. In particular, they informed me that traveling has become difficult for Muslims. They argued that Muslim passengers often face longer inquiries about their identification, as well as about their luggage at airports, and airport security’s vigilant approach show biases against Muslims. Di’ba stated that she went to Florida after September 11\textsuperscript{th} to attend a conference with her two Euro-Canadian friends, and at the Toronto airport she was the only one asked for luggage checking.

They just told them oh yeah go ahead you know whatever. For me they actually checked for everything you know...I mean, I can understand, but do it to everybody not just to me, you know. It is not nice to be distinguished, to be picked out like that for things like this, you know.

Di’ba, who wears a headscarf, a distinct symbol of her Muslim identities, believed that she went through a lengthy immigration process because she was identified as a member of a group which was deemed “undesirable,” whereas her friends had an easy time because they

\footnote{\textsuperscript{36} Media is defined here as any form of written text, i.e. books, magazines, journal articles, reports or articles in newspapers, and audio or visual productions, i.e. radio, television shows, and documentary films.}
belonged to the dominant society. Dī'ba recognized the issue of security, but she also indicated that only specific people are being targeted; as a result, she faced racism. Dī'ba's experience shows that she was viewed as “other” despite her Canadian citizenship. Constructing Muslim identities is not easy for her because she was discriminated against because of her religion.

4.2. The Media and September 11th

The biases against Muslims were not limited to discriminatory traveling polices, but some participants argued that the media also promoted negative images of Islam and Muslims. Several days after the destruction of the Pentagon and the World Trade Center towers in the United States, a video was aired in which Palestinian people were shown celebrating the events of September 11th. Noreen, however, argued that it was a fake video.

The media here are not honest. Like when the September 11th attack happened, they showed um, forged, Palestinian people dancing in the street and we saw that on a satellite before actually a few months before the attack. And they say how the Palestinian people are happy, because September 11th attack happened. But actually it was faked and we called to the radio, like my husband phoned and...we told them that we have the tape and the tape has the date, like the pictures has the date, it's an old footage and they just hanged up the phone. It is just, yeah, it shows you just against Islam, like it is not against any country but just against the religion, because we tried to explain and they just won't let us. They just hanged up the phone...They just brought it to show that we are terrorist and I do not know to show how bad we are, but it was not true and we tried to explain it, but...

Symbols have profound effects, and Noreen argued that the fake video was shown as a way to generate hatred against Islam and Muslims. Noreen and her husband tried to correct the information by contacting the media, but they did not get a positive response since the media contact hungup the phone. Noreen strongly believes that the large majority of North
Americans who watched the video or even heard about this received a wrong message about Muslims; therefore, the media perpetuated stereotypical images about Muslims.

The media not only shape personal and national identity, but are the lens through which reality is perceived (Henry 1997). The North American media’s consistent portrayal of Muslims as “terrorist” has shaped many Western people’s views about Muslims, evidenced in Di‘ba’s experience discussed earlier and also in the findings of the next chapter. In crafting female Muslim identities, the media’s negative stereotypes affected my participants’ self-esteem and their identities appear vulnerable in a non-Muslim country.

4.2. 5 Advantages of Living in Canada

Most immigrants come to Canada in search of a better quality of life. The participants in this study indicated that even though their distinct identities are often at risk and they encounter racism, their quality of life has improved. Having exposure to negative, as well as positive experiences, the participants frequently assessed their lives for what they lacked and what they attained by living in Canada. Many women mentioned that they view their residency in Canada as an opportunity to enrich their lives by combining the values of “back home” and the resources of the Western society. By so doing, they felt that they “are the most fortunate people on this earth,” as they could have access to Canadian resources such as higher education and economic facilities of which they were deprived in their place of birth. Nabilah described the benefits of living in Canada and remarked that “if you step into my house, you will feel that you are living in a Canadian/Pakistan” home. By creating a home atmosphere that is a combination of her “home country” and Western amenities, she has optimistically integrated both cultures. Rather than perceiving the West as a threat to her female Muslim identities, she altered her identities to include the best of both worlds—“Canadian/Pakistani.”
In the first chapter, I indicated that most Muslims who live in a Muslim society take their religion as a given while those who live in a Western society are often more conscious about their Muslim identities because they are exposed to different values. Many participants in this study viewed the exposure to Western standards as an advantage. They pointed out that as Muslims, the concept of quality of life included the self-conscious integration of religion into their lives in new ways, and that living in a Western society has provided them a chance to know about their religion in greater depth. Conducting their lives according to Islamic teachings was part of crafting Muslim identities in a non-Muslim culture, but it was also a reaction to the questions that the participants often faced about their faith by non-Muslim people. Farza’nah’, for instance, remarked that as a Muslim woman she maintained certain values that are different from those of the larger Canadian culture and in order to present herself as reasonable, she felt that she should study Islam.

The people that are living back home, you know, my cousins and everyone, they are less aware of Islam than us that we are actually living in a non-Muslim community. It is just because I find it that we are forced kind of thing that find out the reason, because you know, it is so different here that you know if someone ask you why are you doing this, you have to have an answer to them, so you go and seek, seek an answer for that question that someone poses for you. Whereas for them, back home, they have it sort of inherited kind of thing and since everyone is doing, it has become part of them.

Harris (1995) argues that “maintaining the integrity of one’s identity is an ongoing struggle throughout adulthood” (1). Living in a multicultural society and being aware of different value systems, Farza’nah’ experiences an ongoing struggle in her life. She seemed obliged to learn about her faith, so if someone puts a question about it to her, she should be able to explain it rationally. She felt pressure from the outside world to research about Islam, which in turn gives her more insight into her religion than her “back home” relatives.

37 I am using this world simply as a society where people come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
Farza’nah’ realized that “back home” people have taken their religion for granted and “it has become a part of” their lives. At the same time, Farza’nah’ associated religious security with ignorance, stating that her “cousins are less aware of Islam.” Farza’nah’s religious insecurity in a non-Muslim culture, then, appeared as a threat to one’s faith, which required taking a defensive position. Farza’nah’s commitment to her religion was a way of protecting her religion, but it was also an opportunity for her to seek knowledge about Islam. Living in Canada, therefore, facilitated Farza’nah’s search for her religion. Moreover, this knowledge, as well as her relationship with her religion became a mark of her identities in a non-Muslim environment.

Besides acquiring greater in-depth knowledge about their religion while living in a Western society, many participants indicated that life in Canada has provided them with a chance to grow individually, as women. The women felt a sense of autonomy, and they stated that they enjoyed freedom in Canada, which they may not have had if they were residing in a Muslim society. In many Muslim countries, female mobility is controlled in different ways; for example, in Saudi Arabia women cannot drive. Comparing her life in Canada with that of Saudi women, Mali’hah stated that she “would never be able to live there,” because Mali’hah has the pleasure of living a relatively unrestrained life. She loves to live here because “I can just jump into my car and go wherever I want to and nobody is going to stop me; unlike, if I were in Jeddah, I would not be allowed to drive.” Mali’hah perceived driving as a symbol of her freedom and recognizes that she has much more independence than her many fellow Muslim women living in Muslim countries. In part Mali’hah’s identities in Canada as a female Muslim were consistent and in harmony with the Western standards. Moreover, in addition to having physical mobility, Mali’hah liked the wide-open spaces in Saskatoon that give her a sense of liberty. Many Muslim countries are
overpopulated and open spaces are limited. The concept of large and ample spaces is closely connected to freedom. Thus, the choice of mobility and the notion of a spacious country gave her the perception of autonomy and independence.

The women’s control over their lives is directly related to their relationships with their families, and some women stated that being away from the extended family has afforded them more independence. Many Muslim cultures have the tradition of living in a joint family system where couples often live with their parents, siblings, and sometimes aunts and uncles. Therefore, because they lived in a big household, women adjusted their lives to be compatible with their in-laws’ lifestyle in order to maintain harmony within the family. Considering life in Canada as an advantage, Raheelah commented that if she had married and stayed in Pakistan, she would not have had the independence that she has here. She liked the fact that she got “the chance of being... my own person.” Leaving the country of origin, then, freed her from the restrictions of an extended family, and as a woman she enjoyed freedoms that she lacked in her place of birth.

In situating themselves as women and crafting female identities in a Western culture, some participants also stated that their relationships with their husbands in terms of gendered equality was more balanced in Canada than “back home.” In many Muslim countries, men are expected to dominate women, and in maintaining the cultural traditions most often men behave accordingly. However, human relations frequently modify as people’s circumstances change and Raheelah mentioned the change of gender roles within her family. She remarked that her husband is open-minded, but “he is open-minded here, okay, living in Canada. I don’t think he would be as open-minded if we were just settled in Pakistan. It would be a lot different.” Raheelah’s relationship with her husband shows that gender relations are constructed and vary from culture to culture. Her husband’s open
mindedness in Canada not only indicates that Canadian society is less male dominated than Pakistani society, but also shows that Raheelah’s spouse adjusted his behavior according to the social environment in which he resides.

In addition, having been exposed to greater gender equality, Raheelah demands the same relationship with her husband when she goes back to Pakistan. She states that “now when we go back as a couple to visit...he has to reign himself in and not tell the same things to me, because I do not take that from him any more. And I give as good as I get kind of thing you know.” The life in Canada offers Raheelah more autonomy and growth as a woman. Moreover, she understands the husband/wife relationship as an equal partnership, rather than a dominant/subordinate one. Raheelah’s identities as a female Muslim, therefore, are enhanced in a non-Muslim culture and offer her a better quality of life.

4.3 Where Is Home?

Where [ever] you make it (Bilqis').

Illustrating the advantages and disadvantages of living in Canada, the participants frequently referred to their country of origin, a place that was perceived as “home” by the participants. James (1998) writes that “home” is “both a conceptual and a physical space. It is an idea that guides our actions and, at the same time, a spatial context where identities are worked on” (144). The participants in my study also identify “home” as an imaginary place, as well as a psychological concept that often shapes their identities. The participants’ physical dislocation from their place of birth to their current land of residence liberated them from a fixed spatial “home,” and they perceive the concept as fluid. Mali’hah, for instance, stated that “home is wherever I am.” Mali’hah has lived in a number of places

38 Note that the conversation on “home” was followed right after the discussion on the participants’ experiences as immigrant.
inside and outside Canada, which displaced her from a “typical home.” She associated the idea of “home” not with her country of origin, but with her situated presence at a particular moment. “Home,” thus, for her is not a fixed entity where she can make an absolute return because she views “home” psychologically.

Rapport and Dawson (1998) state that “home” is “where one best knows oneself” (9), and most often the starting point of knowing about oneself is one’s place of birth. Therefore, although some participants did not relate the concept of “home” with their country of origin, they desired to maintain ties with “back home.” The reality of “back home,” however, made some participants aware that they did not belong there either. In response, one participant, Bilqis’, adopted an internal sense of home. She remarked that “I carry home inside me, wherever I go it’s home, yeah.” Bilqis’s concept of “home” was due to her visit to Guyana (her country of birth), where she thought her roots were, but her visit made her aware that she did not belong there.

When, ah, when you leave the place where you were born at a young age. It’s funny; I went back expecting to find some kind of homing feeling, because I never felt like Canada was totally home. But, I realized when I went back to visit Guyana that that was not home either. In fact, when I met Guinese people on the street they would say to me you are from outside. And it really hurt me at that time because I was wanting this homing feeling, but yes I guess you created inside.

Bilqis’ was very young when she came to Canada, and her distinct identities as a Guinese Muslim stimulated her to find the place where she could really belong, because she “never felt that Canada was totally home.” However, her visit to Guyana showed her that her upbringing in Canada has affected her, she was not like an indigenous woman of Guyana, and Guinese people viewed her as an “outsider.” Thus failing to connect herself with her “homeland,” Bilqis’ transformed the idea of “home” conceptually. The search for identity
involves movement “in mind and body, within and between spaces of varying scales that are identified as home” (Olwig 1998: 225). Bilqis’ was a “foreigner” to her place of birth and she was a “misfit” in Canada. Thus, in her search for her identity, as Olwig says, she traveled within and between spaces not only emotionally and psychologically, but also physically. Though she was hurt that she could not find “home,” at the same time her journey enabled her to construct the feelings of belonging wherever she resided, and “create home inside” rather than with reference to a particular place.

The concept of “home” and a sense of belonging is closely related to people’s emotional attachment to their family houses. Rapport and Dawson (1998) write that “home” easily becomes a synonym for “house,” within which space and time are structured functionally, economically, aesthetically, and morally. A number of participants in this study also mentioned that “back home” they had lived in their parents’ or even grandparents’ houses and they had developed relationships with the “house” that gave meanings to their lives. Many Canadians seem to change houses more frequently than many participants’ country of origin; consequently, a mobile-Canadian may more easily lose the emotional connection with their “home.” Ati’yah, for example, remarked that because of constant moving from one house to another, she did not feel any association with her house. She stated that “I am living in a house, but I do not feel it is my house, you know, because I know that maybe in a year or two I will move into another house. So we do not really have the connection.” Ati’yah’s concept of “home” emerges emotionally, as well as spatially. She felt closely connected to her “family home,” because it offered her a sense of identity. At the same time, she viewed “home” as a spatial idea that was constructed within space and time boundaries, because her “family home” was also a “house,” located at a particular place and fixed in her memories.
Not only does the “home” easily become a synonym for “house,” most often “the “home” and “family” are also virtually interchangeable terms (Allan and Crow 1989, cited in James 1998). My participants perceived the “home” with reference to the “family,” and many of them felt that Canada was a second “home” because they have left their families\(^\text{39}\) behind. Simultaneously, they also see Canada as a “home,” because their children were born here. In both situations, the notion of “home” was strongly associated with the family. Ati’yah, for instance, remarked that if she had her family\(^\text{40}\) in Canada, it would feel more like “home.” However, she also stated that “Saskatoon is home, because my kids are born here and raised here.” Thus for Ati’yah, the presence of the “family” determines the feelings of “home,” and her sense of belonging is linked with the notion of “family.”

The experience of migration for most immigrants, however, is not limited to leaving their family behind; they also depart from their country of origin often perceived as “home.” Hobsbawm (1991) states that when people are asked where they come from, they name “a city, a country, a province, not a house or a neighborhood” (67). Thus very often, a country becomes a “home” for a migrant and many of my participants also stated their country of origin as “home.” Moreover, since most participants realized that their “back home” culture was different from their society of residence, they did not feel Canada as a complete “home.” Many women commented that the kind of life that they lived “back home” would never be the same in Canada because they have lots of memories of their country that they cannot reproduce in Canada, such as celebrating holidays according to Islamic days.

\(^{39}\) For most of the participants, it was extended family that they referred to, i.e., parents, grandparents, and siblings.

\(^{40}\) By “family,” she meant extended family.
Although there are many cultural differences between the participants’ country of origin and Canada, the informants also felt that they should try to make Canada a “home.” Sima, for example, stated that she would be living in Canada for the rest of her life; thus, even though “there are lots of differences, and it can’t be like home, I should find a way of living in it.” Sima realized that adjustment is necessary to carry out her life in Canada and by so doing, she not only negotiated her idea of “home,” but also “home” appeared fluid, altering according to situational needs.

4. 4 Being Here, Being There: Constructed Identities through Space

You do not belong here and you do not belong there. The first generation of immigrants who know the culture there and the culture here, they belong nowhere (Dilshad’).

Hall (1997) states that “histories have their real, material and symbolic effects… [and] it is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (53). The section on “home” illustrated that the participants carried their past with reference to the concept of “home” very vigilantly. For the participants, the “home” was a physical, imaginary, and emotional space, and the memories of “back home” were often related to their sense of belonging and identities. However, as Sima mentioned, the participants adjusted and negotiated their lives in their residing country, and many informants realized that they have been uprooted from their “back home” culture. Therefore, although the participants had a strong association with their place of birth, they felt simultaneously the same connection with Canada and displacement from their country of origin. Nabilah, for example, commented that “when I go back home, I find things are harder to deal with. If the telephone system is not working well, you feel frustrated, while here the power never goes off.” During the interview, Nabilah spoke about “back home” very enthusiastically;

41 The word “space” refers here to physical, as well as imaginary places, such as home, “back home,” school, and Canada.

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admires her culture very much. However, living in Canada for number of years, she has become accustomed to facilities like well functioning telephone and power systems, which she views as a convenient way of living; thus, she found it difficult to adjust to life in her country of origin without these facilities.

In addition to being uprooted from their country of origin, some of the memories of the participants were fixed in time and place and their imagined “back home” cultures appeared static. The women’s occasional visits to their country of origin shocked them because both the indigenous people, as well as the country, had changed in their absence. Noreen, for example, stated that when she went to Jordan six months ago, “things were not the same as they were before. They wear tight clothes and when I went shopping for some clothes for me, I couldn’t see anything that wide. I was really surprised.” Noreen anticipated visiting the same Jordan that she left several years ago. Nevertheless, the effects of globalization on Muslim societies were evident. Wearing tight clothes was a sign of becoming “westernized” as Di’ba called it, and Noreen was stunned that “back home” people were loosing their Muslim values, including the traditional Muslim idea of modesty. The way in which the participants viewed the changes in their “back home” cultures in regard to the style of clothing will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

4.4. 1 The Dilemmas of Two Different Worlds

The memories of “back home” and their commitment to religious values led many participants to create a home atmosphere in Canada that is similar to that of their country of origin. As a result, their home environments are different from the “outside world,” and lead them to feeling that they are living simultaneously in two different worlds. Negotiating these two worlds generated tensions for the women as they tried to maintain their distinct

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42 Because I conducted focus groups, the participants often interpreted each other. Thus when Noreen shared her visit experience, Di’ba interpreted it in her own way.
identities in a non-Muslim country. For instance, as a Muslim child, Bilqis' had faced more challenges at school than her non-Muslim peeress because her home standards were different from those of the mainstream culture.

Growing up in Toronto, our home culture was different from the culture at school, what I want to call quote outside culture end quote, you know...for example, if they had hotdog day at school, you know I could not participate in that. I would not be having hotdogs... you know. You are different from the mainstream culture.

Having a hotdog at school for Bilqis' was unacceptable because the consumption of pork for Muslims is not permitted. Sharing food, as well as the communal and the religious traditions associated with food is an important activity in the process of socialization which often bonds individuals into communities. Avoiding Haram food, then, confirmed Bilqis's distinct Muslim identities, but it also brought difficulties for her because she could not fit into the mainstream culture. Staying away from particular food in a social environment such as a school then meant alienating oneself and having a limited social circle.

A number of participants, however, indicated that the conflict was not only between the “home” and “outside” world, but within the Muslim community in which people promote different values that cause tensions among Muslims. The participants particularly mentioned the role of the mosque in creating community, and that they were fortunate to have it. Living in Saskatoon, the mosque became a good resource to maintain Muslim values, and it was a central place for the children to learn about their religion and culture. Therefore, most participants appreciated that having a mosque in Saskatoon provided them with a sense of identity, and that their children got a chance to experience their religion, as well as make connections with the Muslim community. There were, however, some

43 Islam provides specific rules about eating meat, and there are certain animals that are not Hallal; moreover, an animal needs to be slaughtered according to Islamic regulations.
44 Haram is the opposite of Hallal, i.e., what is not permissible.
teachings in the mosque that the women did not like; moreover, some women pointed out that their home environment was different from the mosque atmosphere, which created problems for both children and parents. Raheelah narrated that:

I think being in Saskatoon and having a mosque in Saskatoon, a sense of identity, I think it helped when the children were growing up. Umm, but as they grew up, it was harder and harder to keep taking them to the mosque. When they were little it was fine, because...they went, they meet [with their] friends, they had fun, they enjoyed it. But as they were growing up and they were getting into their teen years and they started questioning some of the teachings, because it conflicted with what the home liberal you know thinking was or whatever you want to call. Umm, they would always question that and they [would] come back and they say, ahhh, you know this is what the teacher said to me. Something you know...about women. Or the boys have to sit here and the girls have to sit here. Why?

The presence of the mosque in Saskatoon conferred Raheelah with Muslim identities and assisted her in raising her children in a Muslim environment. Nevertheless, her “liberal” home atmosphere clashed with the mosque’s teaching. In particular, the mosque approach towards women (as revealed in its requirement of the physical separation of boys and girls) was at odds with the more “liberal” views in Raheelah’s home and the larger society. The gendered separation of the teenagers indicates that the Muslim community in the mosque tried to carry on their traditions in the Western society. However, not all Muslims accepted these restrictions and Raheelah, as well as many group members, stated that because of such conflicting opinions, they withdrew from the mosque.

Although a number of participants such as Raheelah advocated gender equity, they also realized that their religious and cultural standards, particularly for women, were not in harmony with those of the “outside” world. The problems of crafting female Muslim identities in a culture where Muslim traditions clash with mainstream society can be
exemplified by Bilqis’ limited participation in social activities. Drawing attention to the cultural differences that caused difficulties for her, Bilqis’ commented that:

Umm, ah, as ah, as a child, yes, certain things were difficult... When I was younger there was a mixed party or something, then ah, I wouldn’t be allowed to attend those things you know. There would be the fight at home like could I go. Ah, things like that so yeah. But there ah, ah, in another aspect I suppose there are things that, all teenagers and children struggle with to some extent...Maybe just a little more tend to some extent.

Usually, in a typical Muslim society, it is not acceptable for boys and girls to participate in mixed parties, whereas in Canada, these are common ways of socialization. In most Muslim cultures, emphasis is placed on maintaining a young girl’s chastity. Virginity, in many Muslim societies, is a prerequisite for marriage and female sexuality is understood as a matter of family honor. Having sexual relationships outside of marriage, then, brings shame to a woman’s family; consequently, unsupervised interaction between boys and girls is frowned upon. In Canadian society, although some restrictions apply, interaction between boys and girls is considered part of the process of growing up. At an early age, it was difficult for Bilqis’ to accept these kinds of restrictions especially when the majority of people did not share the same moral standard: she was caught between two different worlds. While her parents tried to keep their customs, it appeared that Bilqis’ struggled to maintain Muslim culture’s values and at the same time be part of the mainstream.

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45 By using the phrase “Muslim cultures,” I do not intend to homogenize the Muslim societies around the globe, but I find it convenient for my analysis.
46 Islam also does not permit premarital relationships and it could therefore be argued that maintaining chastity is part of religious obligations. I, however, recognize that Bilqis’s struggle here is due to culturally constructed views of female sexuality rather than religious restrictions. Islamic principles regarding having sexual relations outside of marriage are the same for men and women. However, following the discussion in the interview, it was clear that Bilqis’s parents, as well as many participants, view female sexuality differently from male and were not concerned about their male children having premarital relationships. I, therefore, think that Bilqis’ was not allowed to participate in the mixed parties for cultural reasons.
community. She recognized that youths often encounter difficulties, but as a young Muslim female, she faced more obstacles.

While exposure to Western standards and Muslim cultural values put many immigrant Muslim women in contradictory situations, that exposure also provides a chance to enrich their identities. Hall (1992, 1997) writes about the development of identities and argues that since history intervenes, we cannot speak for very long, or with any exactness, about our experiences and identities. Identities rupture and discontinue; as a result, cultural identity is not just about who we are but also about what we have become. According to Hall, identities grow and change as people make alliances due to situationally shared interests; thus, identities are not static. The participants in this study altered their identities in response to the changing environment, as school and home and social circumstances led them to adopt certain Western lifestyles while maintaining traditional cultural standards. The combination of two different cultures offered them an opportunity to enrich their identities. At the same time, however, they felt that they did not fully immerse themselves in either world and their identities appeared very fluid. Bilqis', for example, stated that she incorporated Muslim culture, as well as Western society's values, and as a result she could not perfectly fit into either culture:

From my personal perspective, ...Putting it in an Islamic context, you are different in ah, ah, the Islamic culture and you are different in the Western culture. Because you have, for me I have some of both. So, it's ah, you are kind of like matter out of place in both environments. Yeah... in school you know you maybe sitting beside a boy or in a mix class. But in a mosque you are in the lady section with your hair covered, and that sort of, just a different, ah, different environment.

Stone (1962) argues that "to have an identity is to join with some and depart from others, to enter and leave social relations at once" (94). Living in two different worlds, it was
important for Bilqis' that she should adjust her identities so she could fit into both conflicting places, i.e., the mosque and school. Sitting beside a boy in a mixed classroom without covering her head was common in her school, but in the mosque, it was not customary. In her school, she proceeded according to Western standards, and in the mosque she behaved in the traditional way. Therefore, as Bilqis' confirmed, this conflicting state of affairs left her neither Muslim nor Western but "a bit of both." External forces shaped her identities; building new alliances was a sign that identities were in a process of growth.

4.4 2 Raising Children

Advocating the values of "back home" and living in Canada constituted a dilemma for the children, as well as for the parents. Those women who were mothers pointed out that raising children in a non-Muslim environment was an intricate issue. These women were aware of the mainstream society's influence on their children, and they felt insecure because they did not have control over these external factors. In particular, the portrayal of explicit sexual images in Canada was a cause of anxiety for many participants and they recognized it as a big cultural difference. The women thought that it would have been easier for them to raise children in their country of origin. Comparing Canadian parents' situation with "back home" parents, Nabilah remarked that:

Back home, parents usually don't need to worry. The kids are not exposed to things that we don't want them to be exposed to on a daily basis. We just free from that worry back home, but here when the kids go out on the streets and they see pornography or you know... ah, too much what they call freedom, liberalism and all that and when our kids try to hold themselves back from that I think they are you know they are great kids, because there is nobody to stop them.

Nabilah has lived in Canada for more than twenty years, but she uses us-and-them binaries to identify herself with her "back home" people. Nabilah believes that "back home" raising
children is much easier because exposure to pornography is limited, whereas in Canadian society sexual images are very visible. In Pakistan (Nabilah’s country of origin), it is highly unlikely for a person to go shopping and see pictures of nude women on the front covers of magazines; it is similarly difficult to encounter television movies with sexually explicit content on a local channel. Nabilah, therefore, realizes that in Canada, access to sexually explicit images is easier, through, for example, television shows. Even though pornography is more accessible in Canada, because of the use of the Internet the images of pornographic material are also obtainable in Pakistan. Nabilah, however, did not notice that in Pakistan parents may have the same concerns that worried her. I speculate that Nabilah’s note of the lack of pornography in Pakistan is because she left the country a long time ago and she is not aware of the technical changes there. Thus, she anticipated that “back home” the issue of pornography did not exist, while it disquiets her in Canada. Nabilah’s example also shows that those parents who want to raise their children according to “back home” cultural standards face a tough task eliminating pornography. To diminish the mainstream culture’s influences is a difficult task for parents and children as they try to stay away from the practices that their home environment does not promote.

While the participants were generally concerned about raising children in a non-Muslim environment, my study revealed that they often had different standards for their sons than they did for their daughters, and that parents placed more restrictions on their female children than on their male children. Male children often enjoyed more freedom as they were allowed to go out, but young girls’ socialization appeared to be restrained due to cultural views of female sexuality. Raheelah mentioned the double standard of raising boys

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47 I recognize that Pakistan is a poorer country than Canada; consequently, only a few people can have access to the Internet. Nonetheless, the use of the Internet is growing in Pakistan. Therefore, children could be exposed to pornography.
and girls in Canada and commented that her boys were permitted to make friends and go to
the bars, but she would not have allowed to her daughters to participate in these activities.

Raheelah stated that:

> Bringing up boys, maybe it is a double standard. It is. It's true. I may have brought up my girls in very different manners than I would have brought up my boys. Even though I may think to myself that I am very ah...fair minded. That ah, being of the Muslim background, it is so true. I, ah, there was a lot more freedom given to my boys. And I think I would have allowed to my girls but I am not sure of it. If I would have. (Bilqis': Because you do not have). You know. Yes they grew up with curfews. They have to be home at a certain time. Ah, Alhamdullila [praise be to God], I am very glad to say that neither of the boys drinks. They do not smoke. And yes they do go with their friends to the bars and I would not lie about that. But I trust them enough. Because I have never ever smelled any alcohol on them. Never ever. Umm, I do not know if I would have allowed my girls to do that if I had girls. Frankly. You know. So I can understand what you were saying that having that struggle where are you going, whom are you going with, who is going to be there, and all of these questions, I did not raise to my boys, but I would have I think if I had a girl.

Although Raheelah had no daughters, she was quite confident that her daughters' socialization would have been restricted and she thought that it was because of "being of the Muslim background." As mentioned earlier, interaction between men and women is limited in Islam, as both men and women are not allowed to have sexual relations outside of marriage. The restrictions, thus, are identical for men and women. In practice, however, Raheelah's attitude to confine only female children highlights that despite the fact that she considers herself a "fair minded" person, she could not resist adhering to her cultural views of female sexuality. Avoiding going to the bars and having limited male relationships, in turn, provide some assurance that a girl will stay away from premarital relations. Hence

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48 Referring to Bilqis' and her limited participation in the society, when she could not attend mixed parties.
while she was concerned about her daughters' sexual activities, she was not worried about her sons' interaction with their female friends. The male Muslim identities are limited to only non-smoking and non-alcoholic behavior. This example illuminates that Raheelah tries to hold on to her cultural values for her children. For her, gender differences are justified through religious boundaries, despite the fact that Islam does not have double standard for male and female sexual activities.

Some of the participants developed conscious strategies to eliminate Western society's influences on their children. Nabilah, for instance, states that one way to minimize the impact of the outside world on her children is to be close to them and discuss their daily experiences with them. She particularly mentioned the issue of dating and pornography and stated that from early childhood she explained to her children “that look, what you saw today on the street is wrong because you are a Muslim and you shouldn’t be doing that. That is all. And as a parent you have to keep your eyes open day and night.” For both mothers and children, it is a constant struggle to keep the values of a Muslim society alive in a non-Muslim culture; nevertheless, the immigrant Muslim women appear committed to pass on Muslim traditions to their children.

4.4. 3 Choosing a Marriage Partner

Although Islam has the same rules for men and women regarding premarital relations and non-alcoholic behavior, there are gender differences in terms of choosing marriage partners. Islam does not permit a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man; whereas a Muslim male can marry a Christian or Jewish female.49 This ruling restrains many

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49 Islam allows a man to marry People of the Book, i.e., a Christen or Jewish woman, while a woman is not permitted to do so. Scholars have provided many reasons for the principle. Some of the aspects that are particularly relevant to women’s issues are that the ruling protects a married woman’s rights that Islam grants her. In Islam, a husband is responsible for providing financial means to his family, even though his wife may be self-sufficient in economic matters. Her income is solely for her and she is not required to spend it in the household; however, if she so desires, she can. This rule is due to biological differences that "at any time in
young girls’ choice of marriage partners because Muslims are a small population in Saskatoon. Some participants felt that the Islamic principle of marriage shows gender biases and they dislike the ruling. Sara, for example, stated that finding a partner for her daughter was tough, and Sara “did not like this part” of the ruling since it constrains her daughter’s choice.

The concept of a Muslim identity often denotes a homogenous and internally consistent set of beliefs. However, the focus groups and the dynamic interaction among the participants revealed significant differences among the informants. Kramer (2000) indicates religious differences among Muslims and argues that “dealing with Islam cannot but involve dealing with culture or civilization” (2). Thus according to Kramer, as mentioned in the second chapter, “Islam” is not equivalent to “Muslims,” and understandings of the religion usually vary among Muslims. The participants’ disagreements were visible on the subject of marriage, and they presented different viewpoints. One participant (Dilshad) argued against Sara’s opinion that Islam has specific rules for males and females, and that a woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man while a man could do so. Dilshad advocated gender equality, arguing that both men and women should follow identical rules and should marry whom they like.

her life, a woman may find herself pregnant and caring for another life whose needs must be provided. She should never in this condition shoulder alone that responsibility” (Al-Faruqi 2000 80). Al-Faruqi further argues that the mother contributes a substantial share at the physiological level and the father must share an equal responsibility and provides financial means for both the mother and the child. Moreover, according to Islamic teachings, the father is responsible for the child’s entire financial needs even if the couple decides to separate or seek divorce. A woman cannot be forced to nurse her child and in the case of divorce or separation, if she nurses the baby, she can ask for the allowance. In addition, a woman’s sexual rights are assured in Islam. She is not obliged to perform household chores, and she can even demand wage for her household duties. On top of economic and sexual rights, there are psychological aspects that could empower a woman, such as the respect that she would presumably have and authority in certain matters. Therefore, if a Muslim woman does not stay in a Muslim conjugal relationship, she may suffer heavy economical and psychological loss; on the contrary, if a non-Muslim woman marries a Muslim man, she will be entitled to all of the rights mentioned above.
Dilshad': I do not feel that way you know. Man and woman both should marry the person they want to marry, [the person] they like, so it is same for both men and women and boys and girls.

Sara: But religion is different.

Dilshad': Yeah, and so both men and women should follow the religion, same for both men and women.

Sara: How can they follow their religion if girls are not allowed to marry with other than their own religion?

Dilshad': And boys are not allowed to marry some other...

Sara: But the Book says I don’t know. That’s what the Book says.

Dilshad': I have not seen anything in the Book.

Even though during the interview Dilshad’ mentioned that she has read the Qur’an in translation (she does not understand Qur’anic Arabic), Dilshad’ was not aware of the religious ruling about the marriage issue. Many Muslims usually incorporate religion in their lives along with several other beliefs and principles, and Islam is generally one building block in their lives. Thus while Dilshad’ identifies herself as a Muslim, she advocates gender equality without reference to Islamic principles. Dilshad’s example shows that Islamic laws are not understood universally and that individual interpretations often lead to disagreement among Muslims. These debates indicate that immigrant Muslim women, while members of a religious group, are also actively engaged with Muslim teachings and practices rather than simply constrained by their religion.

The notion of disagreement regarding the marriage issue was not limited to Sara and Dilshad’ but Farza’nah’ offered a different opinion. She argued that a man could only marry a non-Muslim woman if there were indications that at some point she would convert. Men were permitted to marry non-Muslim women because they exerted more power in the relationship; therefore, the children are more likely to follow their father’s religion.
Most of the time the guy has more power over the wife, most of the time; it just turns out even in Western society. It is always like that; men are a lot more dominant in the family than women are. So they will have a lot more influence over the kids. That's why the ruling is there because it just says that if a lady marries a non-Muslim than the kids are most likely to go towards the father.

Farza’nah’s explanation for the gender differences in the choice of marriage partner centers on patriarchal dominance in the family. She argues that men often have more authority in families “even in Western society,” where presumably women have power. In her view, male domination justified the religious ruling.

In contrast, Dilshad’ argues that mothers have more control over their children and “father’s influence is so much that if my son marries a non-Muslim, then their children will be non-Muslim persons, and I do not accept this.” In most Muslim societies, raising children is primarily women’s responsibility and particularly young children spend most of their time with their mothers. As a result, chances are high that mothers would have more influence over their children than their fathers. Dilshad’ and Farza’nah’ presented two competing views which, I speculate, were based in cultural and age differences at the time of their arrival in Canada, and perhaps also because of their level of integration into Western society. Dilshad’ and Farza’nah’ came to Canada in the same year, but the former was a mature woman, advancing towards her PhD degree, while the latter was a minor. Thus, Farza’nah’ was raised in Canada and was exposed to Western lifestyle at a young age. In particular, I suspect that the age difference contributes to their opposing views. Dilshad’ has a daughter who is planning to go to the university this year and Farza’nah’ is a third year university student, who is only a few years older than Dilshad’s daughter. Therefore, Dilshad’ has raised children and she spoke from a mother’s position; whereas, as a young
woman, Farza’nah’ focused on the patriarchal family system where women have less authority.

Although the participants had different interpretations of the issue of marriage, they concurred that they would not allow their children to marry non-Muslims because their religious identities would be put at risk. Thus although Dilshad’ and Sara questioned the Qur’anic ruling, and advocated for the identical regulations for men and women, they still adhered to Islamic principles. Living in a non-Muslim environment and marrying outside of Islam could lead to the loss of their distinct Muslim identity, as well as cultural identities. As a result, marriage became an important issue for many participants. Dilshad’ remarked that “if it’s under my restriction, I would not allow anyone, not my son and not my daughter” to marry outside of Islam. Her desire to pursue Islam is a sign of her strong commitment to her religion, but it is also a response to Western society’s influence: she felt that her faith and culture would disappear if her children married non-Muslim partners. In both cases, her religious and cultural identities were threatened by a larger society and because of external pressures maintaining the distinct identities through marriage became a critical issue.

4.4. 4 Crafting Female Muslim Identities in School

Said (1981) writes about the clichéd images of Islam and states that the West and Europe have portrayed Islam, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it and consequently have made it “known.” The Western “known” version of Islam quite often, if not always, presents Islam as an extremist, brutal, and backward religion. One of the main institutions for the transmission of these negative stereotypes is the education system. Some informants mentioned that some university professors portray Islam according to the “known” description, and that often discussions on Islam revealed the teachers’ biases. The
women felt that their teachers presented a distorted picture of Islam, because these instructors discussed the religion only from a negative point of view and did not draw attention to the positive aspects of Islam. Sima, for example, argued that “there might be some good stuff about this religion too. If you are talking about the bad things, then why don’t you talk about the good things to the students.” Sima indicated that selected images of Islam do not represent the true picture of the religion, and teachers should be giving accurate information to the students. Sima also remarked that a vicious depiction of Islam made “the students scared” of the religion and consequently, they developed stereotypical ideas about Islam and Muslims.

Islam and Muslim women’s issues are very closely related, and when sharing their classroom experiences, the students specifically indicated that their teachers often homogenized Muslim countries, as well as Muslim women’s situation. In particular, the informants referred to the women of Afghanistan. Sima, for example, remarked that her teachers often talked about the restrictions that Muslim women face in Muslim countries and they usually gave the example of Afghan women, but the instructors “look[ed] at the severe cases.” Sima recognized that the situation of Afghan women does not represent an average Muslim woman’s life and it is, therefore, not fair to generalize about Muslim women’s conditions. By presenting a homogeneous view of Muslim women, Sima’s professors ignored that more than half a billion Muslim women’s lives were diverse and did not conform to the image of Afghan women.

The teachers’ homogeneous views were not limited to Afghan women’s situation; they also were associated with the practice of female circumcision. Some participants stated that in many classes, their teachers talked about female circumcision and gave the

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50 There are more than one billion Muslims around the globe, and roughly, the male and female population is equal.
impression that it was an Islamic tradition, and that Muslim countries practice it. Di'ba and Sima argued that “it is not an Islamic custom and it was even done before Islam” and Islam did not initiate it. Moreover, Di'ba and Sima remarked that since the instructors did not specify which countries practiced it, their professors homogenize the Muslim societies around the world. They argued that “they [instructors] just brought it on as you know this is what is happening in Muslim countries and they do not say well this is happening in Egypt, or happened in Iraq, they say a Muslim state you know.” Di'ba and Sima pointed out that their teachers discussed the practice of female circumcision as if it were a universal Muslim custom and did not indicate that “many countries do not do it.” As educators, professors play an important role in shaping students’ views. Providing inaccurate and/or partial information causes damage to the students. Thus because of the education that was delivered, the non-Muslim students, on the one hand, learned stereotypical ideas about Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, Muslim students experienced racism in the classrooms, and Di’ba and Sima’s Muslim identities were jeopardized in a Canadian educational institution.

4.5 Conclusion

The stories told by my participants revealed that as non-European Canadian immigrants they often encountered racism in Canada and their identities were vulnerable in a non-Muslim culture. They were often viewed as “outsiders” or “foreigners” by the larger society, and ethnic and racial discrimination marked them as “other.” The participants highlighted the negative stereotypes of Muslims and argued that the perception that Muslims are “terrorists” was perpetuated systematically. As a result of these biased images, my informants struggled with their Muslim identities while trying to craft distinct identities. The informants, however, also indicated that they have had positive experiences as well, and
that their quality of life has improved both as individuals and as females. Their residency in Canada has enabled them to integrate the different cultures, seek knowledge about their religion, and live more autonomous life as females because they thought that Muslim women often have less control over their lives in a Muslim state. But the aftermath of September 11th have jeopardized these hard-earned struggles and have profoundly affected the lives of my informants, at the personal, as well as at the broader Muslim community level as they felt closely connected to the *Ummah*.

Despite the gains made by living in Canada, the participants experienced a sense of loss as was revealed in their comparison between “back home” and Canada and the memories of “back home” led them to position themselves as “outsiders,” as well as “insiders.” The feelings of “home” directed the participants to re-create “home” emotionally, spatially, and psychologically, and as a result, their sense of belonging was not restricted to their country of origin, but they often perceived themselves as Canadian. Belonging to two different worlds, however, often put the participants into difficult situations. In particular, most often Muslim values conflicted with those of the larger society and many informants felt the dilemmas of living in two different worlds. These tensions become most evident in the case of female sexual behavior. Despite the fact that Islam does not have double standards for male and female sexuality, a number of informants placed more restrictions on their female than male children in their efforts to abide by their cultural as opposed to their religious traditions.

In sum, since the participants were exposed to different cultures, i.e., their “back home” and currently resident country, they continually negotiated their identities in a non-Muslim country. Their experiences reveal the fluidity of their sense of self as they adapted to the changing social and cultural context. All of the participants held on to Muslim
identities as a way of positively affirming who they were and as a defense against the racist attitudes that perpetuate non-Muslim Canadian culture. At the same time, my participants adopted elements of Canadian culture which enhanced their lives. In crafting their identities, all of the informants demonstrated forms of agency in spite of tremendous constraints.
Chapter 5

Listening to the Voices of the Hijab

The question is not simply what do clothes mean or not mean. Rather, how do we use them to negotiate border space -spaces we need to conceptualize as tenuous, fragile, barbed, or elastic, rather than as fixed and dichotomous? (Freitas et al, 1997: 334)

5.1 Introduction

With the increasing number of Muhajibahs around the globe, the issue of the hijab has become a topic of debate among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Researchers like Nasser (1999) have pointed out that the new hijab phenomenon initially began two decades ago in countries like Egypt and the practice has since been embraced by Muslim women around the globe. In Canada, the hijab as a symbol of Muslim women’s identity most often connotes negative images, particularly in the media as mentioned in the second chapter, and signifies Muslim women’s gendered oppression and a restriction of their mobility. Many Muslim women, however, claim that the hijab empowers them in numerous ways: making their identities distinct, confirming status, taking control of their bodies, and giving them a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim world. Thus the discussion on the hijab is contentious, revealing the complexity of the issue.

The intricacy of the issue of hijab, nonetheless, is not limited to whether the hijab oppresses a Muslim woman or liberates her. Most often the Muslim community and the dominant culture recognize the hijab as clothing that is used to cover the female body, i.e., a headscarf and/or long coat. My research, however, indicates that immigrant Muslim women perceive the hijab in a variety of ways and associate diverse meanings to it that range from

51 A woman who wears the hijab such as a headscarf is called Muhajibah

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covering of the head to modest behavior. As a result, the participants often negotiate their places in the larger community, as well as in the Muslim community, because they feel pressure about wearing or not wearing the hijab.

5.2 What Is the Hijab?

That is a question that I ask myself. (Almas)

Roald (2001) indicates that it is difficult to follow the debate of the hijab "largely due to the lack of any clear definition of whether a veil is understood [by the researchers] as a head-cover or face-veil" (255), or whether it refers to women's seclusion. As mentioned in Chapter Two, according to the dictionary and Qur'anic meanings, the dimensions of the meanings of hijab are multifaceted and the word the hijab in my study appears in a variety of ways. The hijab in the form of physical garments signifies headscarves (as some women that I interviewed wore them), but also modest clothing that does not include the covering of the head. Equally important, the hijab in this research also refers to modest behavior.

The second chapter of this thesis also illustrated that the extent to which Muslim women should cover their bodies is a controversial issue that is extensively discussed among scholars in the literature. Similarly, in this study a number of participants indicated that although the Qur'an requires head covering, the instructions are not clear. Dilshad', for instance, remarked that "you have to cover your hair that's the instruction, but it is not very clear how, which way... in my country people say you have to cover everything, you can keep only one eye open or they have different opinions." Even though Dilshad' thinks that head covering is mandatory, she also mentions that there is no consensus about to what degree women should cover their bodies. Moreover, she notes that people have diverse views about the hijab.
Scholars like Asad (1900-1992) have indicated that there are sound reasons for not stating the precise rules regarding the covering of women’s bodies. He argues that human circumstances vary over time, and that the verses are moral guidelines that could be observed against the ever-changing background of time and social environment. Similarly, Dilshad’, one of the participants, recognizes the purpose of the vague regulations of Islam and she states that the religion accommodates people’s cultural differences. She remarked:

Islam defines certain things very strictly, because you have to follow them throughout your life. Even till the end of the world, like these rules will remain the same. But some things are little flexible, because you have to adjust with time, culture, and country.

Dilshad’ is aware that human beings cannot free themselves from the bondage of time and space, and so must adjust their lives frequently. People’s dress codes differ not only from culture to culture, but within a culture, patterns and styles change over time. Drawing on the concept of “flexibility” and “adjustment,” Dilshad’ argues that Islamic rules about women’s clothing can be modified according to their needs.

The idea of the hijab with reference to headscarves or covering of the bodies, however, is only one element of the hijab. Most participants reported that physical articles such as clothing would not serve the purpose of the hijab unless women believe in it. Islam requires lowering the gaze, avoiding seeing what is forbidden, and not inviting the male gaze. For these reasons many participants mentioned that whether a woman wears a headscarf or not, modest behavior is a fundamental aspect of the hijab. Raheelah, for example, remarked that the hijab is not limited to head covering; conducting life unpretentiously is also significant in fulfilling the requirements of the hijab. She stated that “to me the hijab is not just covering of your head...it is your life, your portrayal of yourself as a, as a person. As long as you dress decently, and you do not draw attention to yourself...
that to me is the *hijab.*" Raheelah does not wear a headscarf, but her concept of the *hijab* signifies modest clothing, such as not wearing miniskirts or tight dresses that could be seen as bringing attention to oneself. She also believes that moral behavior is part of the *hijab,* which shows that she sees the *hijab* not as a material garment but as an ethical belief. Raheelah then, while not wearing the headscarf, feels that she is maintaining the boundaries of the *hijab.*

### 5.3 Why or Why Not Wear the *Hijab?*

It keeps the society pure in many, many ways. (Dilshad’)

Following the discussion of the concept of the *hijab,* some participants mentioned the rationale of the Qur’an requiring the *hijab.* For example, Farza’nah’ argues that the *hijab* sets a boundary between men and women that helps them to stay away from premarital relationships, not permissible in Islam. She commented that women have beauty that needs to be concealed, because beauty brings a “lot of other things…the freedom, the kind that we see here.” Farza’nah’ identifies the *hijab* as a means of minimizing easy interaction between men and women, which in turn promotes chastity. However, according to Farza’nah’s views, chastity is not restricted to women’s behavior, but extends to the chastity of a society -- for which women are also responsible. So, women suffer because of the immoral conduct of men, it is the women’s fault because they did not observe modest behavior.

Contrary to Farza’nah’s opinion, Dilshad’ did not think that women’s bodies should be covered because they are attractive. She believes that the *hijab* is a tool that diminishes sexual appeal and as a result promotes a virtuous public domain. She stated that women need to wear the *hijab,* because “it keeps the society pure in many, many ways.”

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52 The *hijab* here signifies as a headscarf.
seemng differences about the attractiveness of women’s bodies, both Farza’nah’ and Dilshad’ clearly linked the hijab with women’s sexuality. Underlying their views is a concept of women’s bodies as either tempting (their beauty will seduce men) or polluting (their immodest behavior can corrupt the society). The status of women’s bodies in turn is seen as a sign of the moral status of nation, because women are perceived as the cultural carriers of their society (Yuval-Davis 1994). Thus a chaste, moral, or pure society is dependent upon the condition of women’s bodies.

Farza’nah’ and Dilshad’s reasoning also indicates that because they see women’s bodies as fitna, their views contradict the Qur’an as discussed in the second chapter. In verse 33: 59, already mentioned, the Qur’an states that women should cover themselves so as not to be “molested.” Implied in the Qur’an is the idea that men are the aggressors and women the victims, whereas according to my participants, women are the actors and men the victims (Roald 2001). Thus as Roald (2001) points out, many Muslims have turned the Qur’anic view around to suggest that women are responsible for a corrupted and un-chaste society.

While some women wear the hijab because they feel responsible for a moral society, others wear it because the hijab offers them respect, dignity, and protection. Almas, for example, is under twenty and is away from her country of origin, as well as from her family for the first time. She reported that because she is living by herself, the hijab has become a security measure, as men are respectful towards Muhajibb and do not treat them like sexual objects. She remarked that “to me now it’s like protection...I wear the hijab and people do not treat you like the way they treat other girls here. It’s like umm, yeah, they are more respectful.” The hijab, for Almas, is a device to earn respect and safety from her potential male viewers since it desexualizes her body. Almas, however, had difficulty explaining why
men respect Muhajibh, and stated that “I do not know how to say it. Sorry.” Many studies, such as Read & Bartkowski (2000) have found that many women wear the hijab because they think that men would respect them. These researchers did not discuss why men respect Muhajibh, and it was difficult for me to speculate about the reason(s). Nonetheless, clearly Almas felt that the hijab provides her the status of a respectable person, which shows that the hijab has significant impact on its wearer regarding her social relationships and her perception of her “self.”

Moghadam (1994) states that women “find value, purpose, and identity in religious practice” (21) and in my study, the practice of the hijab emerges as a significant religious symbol. Many of the wearers of the headscarves felt that wearing the hijab indicates commitment to the religion and self discipline, because it covers women’s hair—a sign of beauty and women’s sexuality. Sima, for example, remarked that when women want to look beautiful, they show off their hair, but those women who cover their hair “do not do it just for the sake of Allah [God]...it is a sacrifice that you do not do it [expose hair]...you just submit yourself.” Sima considers wearing of the hijab as part of her religious obligation, which is expressed by denying her (sexual) desires and pleasures as symbolized by her hair.

Since people often recognize the hijab as a religious sign that offers its wearers respect and dignity, many Muslims look negatively upon those women who do not wear it, and non-wearers often feel community pressure to conform. Despite the dominant view that the hijab is a symbol of commitment to the religion, non-wearers of headscarves argue

53 Here the hijab is identified by the form of headscarf and/or long coat.
54 I used the word headscarf here to make a distinction between those whose concept of the hijab includes the physical article, such as a headscarf, and those who view the hijab as modest clothing (without the head covering) and modest behavior.
that a woman not wearing a headscarf still could be a dedicated Muslimah.\textsuperscript{55} Bilqis’, for instance, remarked that:

\begin{quote}
Within the Muslim community, if you are not wearing the hijab then you know you are not Muslim or you are not Muslim enough, when it’s... it’s a totally personal choice you know. Umm, ah, my relationship as a Muslim and my spiritual development is between me and God and that’s it.
\end{quote}

Arthur (1999) states that “while a person’s level of religiosity can not be objectively perceived, symbols such as clothing are used as evidence that s/he is on the ‘right and true path’” (1). Similarly, Bilqis’ points out that her devotion to the religion is judged by her dress codes, and since she does not wear the hijab, the Muslim community in Saskatoon does not recognize her as a committed Muslimah. For Bilqis’, her relationship with her God is a personal matter that is not connected with the visible marker of a headscarf. According to the community’s attitude, however, the hijab signifies a pervasive identity symbol of a devoted Muslimah.

The participants who did not wear the headscarves perceived the hijab as a cultural dress code rather than as a religious symbol. The women indicated that wearing the hijab is a new cultural phenomenon locally and globally; it does not have a religious connotation. Ati’yah, for example, remarked that “I think it’s more like a culture that is the way they are raised there [“back home”]. And it is not really, I do not think it is taken as a religion when they started.” According to Ati’yah, traditionally women are taught to cover their bodies with the hijab but they do not wear it because of religious requirement.

The non-wearers of the headscarves, in addition to perceiving the hijab as a cultural marker, also reported the irregularity of many of the Muhajib’s clothing. These participants mentioned that many of the women who wear the hijab often dress in tight and transparent

\textsuperscript{55} Feminine for a Muslim woman.
garments at home and/or in women's gatherings, whereas the participants felt that they could not “imagine” putting on a tight and translucent outfit. The women, thus, thought that because of “immodest” clothing, Muhajibb usually need to cover their bodies with the hijab when they go out. Moreover, non-wearers adopted a consistent wardrobe whether they were at home or outside.

Although non-wearers of the headscarves provided different reasons for wearing the hijab from those who wear it, both group categories felt that the hijab is a way of demonstrating the difference between Muslim and Western values. Mali'hah, for instance, commented that morality is declining in Canadian society and wearing the hijab shows people that its wearers do not subscribe to immoral values; also, Muhajibb are afraid, because they do not have control over these undesired values. Mali'hah reported that:

The sense of morals has gone way over the other end. You know, permissiveness has gone to its utter extreme. Like even if you go to the library now which was a safe place for kids to go to, they have access to the most, um, horrific pornographic literature. Okay. It is really scary. There is complete lack of morals and I think it's a swing in the opposite direction, because people are afraid and so they are sort of running to you know cover themselves literally speaking and metaphorically.

Most people will concur with Mali'hah that access to pornographic material has become easy for young people. The fact that Mali'hah singled out the library as a site of access for pornography is particularly symbolic since, as a writer, she holds the library in some esteem—denoted by the term “even”—as if one could expect to find pornography at “other” places but never at the library—“a safe place for children.” The availability of pornographic material at the library— an important cultural source for seeking knowledge—represents the defilement of something previously regarded by Mali'hah as “pure.”
In the previous chapter, I indicated that for some informants, one of the biggest anxiety regarding raising children in Canada is exposure to pornography. They felt vulnerable as they realized that they could not eliminate explicit sexual images from the culture in which they are living. Similarly, Mali’ahah agrees with those participants and even though she does not wear the hijab, she sees a link between the hijab and pornographic literature, and the former stands as a reaction to the latter where Muhajibb use the hijab to oppose immoral values. In addition, I demonstrated in the preceding section that some of the participants perceived the hijab as a protector of their cultures, as they think that women are responsible for a chaste society. Likewise, Mali’ahah believes covering women’s bodies, and hence Muslim society, shields Muslims from immorality.

5.4 The Hijab as an Identity Symbol

The hijab especially in the global context, if...I see a woman in the hijab I know, oh, she is a Muslim and it creates sense of community in that respect which is a nice feeling I think. (Bilqis')

The reasons for wearing the hijab can be diverse, but the hijab has become a very powerful pervasive symbol of Muslim women’s identity, particularly in the West. Many participants who wear the hijab56 claimed that it is a mark of their distinct identities ensuring that people immediately recognize them as Muslim women. Sima, for example, who wears a headscarf, commented that her distinct clothing symbolizes Muslim identities, and the hijab makes her visible in a non-Muslim society. Being visible, however, as a Muslim also means that she encounters the negative stereotypes that are linked with Muslims, and Sima is aware of that. She remarked that:

Nothing else tells them that I am a Muslim, but just my hijab. And...if they have the idea oh, Muslims are terrorist they might look at me like this and if they have the idea that oh, Muslims are good people they might look at me by the respect. But still it gives me...identity.

56 The hijab here particularly refers to the material article; nonetheless, modest behavior is not excluded.
Nasser (1999) writes that adoption of the hijab “conveys a public message/statement, both about the wearer and about the relationship between the wearer and potential viewers” (409). Accordingly, Sima’s response shows that she recognizes her hijab as a public statement. However, whether she would be identified as a “terrorist” or a “good” person in Canada was a secondary consideration for her. The significant element to her is that she will be known as a Muslim in a non-Muslim country. Sima, thus, uses her hijab as a tool to declare her Muslim identities.

The concept of the hijab is not limited to personal identity; it has also become Muslim Ummah’s (community’s) symbol. An immigrant Muslim woman’s attempt to identify herself as a Muslim with the headscarf is an acknowledgement of the general support for the attitudes, values, and beliefs of Islam and her culture that links her to the broader community of believers (Read & Bartkowski 2000; Daly 1999). Some participants in this study also saw the hijab as representative of the Muslim community, and they argued that the hijab helped them to stay away from un-Islamic practices. Farza’nah’ stated that the practice of the hijab defined boundaries for her and that she would not do anything that could portray the religion negatively.

The hijab limits me from doing certain things. When I have the hijab on, me as a Muslim woman, I, you know, I consider myself basically representative of the whole Muslim community. So, I do not go to bars with my hijab on. I do not go to strips clubs with my hijab on, because I know by wearing the hijab I am not representing only myself, it’s the whole Muslim community basically.

Farza’nah’ believes that the hijab symbolizes both individual and collective Muslim identities. For her, the hijab, as a visible sign of Muslim identities, is a public statement for potential viewers. It is also a reminder for the wearer to conduct her life in accordance with
the Muslim belief system by not going to bars and/or strips clubs—places where sexuality is on display, as doing so contradicts the Qur’an’s demand for modesty.

The hijab in my study is a cultural practice that not only links the wearers with a larger community, but is also a symbol of a rite of passage. In Iran, for example, Pervin reported that when a young woman begins to wear the hijab, the family celebrates it. It is a “memorable” event and “part of the life of a girl as a graduation party.” According to Sima, it signifies that a young woman is now a responsible person and the family and friends rejoice in her honor. In this cultural context, the hijab appears as a sign of adulthood and offers the wearer prestige and appreciation from friends and family members.

The participants who have maintained the practice of wearing headscarves in Canada indicated that they are stricter in the use of their hijab in Canada than “back home.” Shaffir (1978) states that usually people become more loyal to their traditions and customs if their identities are threatened by the larger society. He writes that:

A feature common to groups that perceive the outside world as a threat is the belief that they must resist the assimilative influence of the larger society...[This helps the] group members to feel more committed and increases their awareness of their separate identity. (41)

As Shaffir points out, a number of informants in my study reported that they have embraced the hijab in Canada more enthusiastically than have people in their country of origin. Pervin’ for instance, stated that “I find that our hijab here is better than people are wearing in Iran... and I think the reason that it kind of, we need more, I do not know, for some how we need more to do this here than there.” Pervin’ sees that the hijab helps her in keeping her distinct identities in a non-Muslim country and the hijab appears as a sign of resistance to the assimilative influence of the larger society.
In comparing the practice of wearing the *hijab* in Canada to “back home,” the wearers of the headscarves are crafting their Muslim identities not only in relation to the dominant values of their residing country but also to the values of their country of origin. In the previous chapter, I discussed that many informants held a static view of their places of birth and on their occasional visits they were surprised that the societies had changed. In reference to the *hijab*, many participants argued that there is a tendency “back home” for women to dress in tight clothes and not to wear “proper” *hijab*. The contrast of two different places allows my informants to notice the differences of the *hijab*, and “improper” *hijab* emerges as a symbol of losing Islamic values. Thus the *hijab* for these participants stands as a “guardian” of Muslim standards, and they thought that “back home” people were careless in not maintaining it.

5.5 The *Hijab*, Body, and Gaze

The study of dress as situated practice requires moving between, on the one hand, the discursive and representational aspects of dress, and the way the body/dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as a means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world. (Entwistle 2000: 39)

Many prominent scholars, such as Mernissi (1987, 1991) and El Saadawi (1980) have situated the practice of *veiling* as an act of controlling women both physically and psychologically. The writers argue are that *veiling* represents and is a result of the oppressive social hierarchies and male domination (Read and Bartkowski 2000; Roald 2001); therefore, it should be condemned. Mernissi (1991), for instance, states that “all debates on democracy get tied up in the woman question and that piece of cloth [the *hijab*] that opponents of human rights today claim to be the very essence of Muslim identity” (188). Mernissi views the *hijab* as a hindrance to accessing human rights and consequently, inherently oppressive. Equally important is the fact that she denies the lived experiences of
many of those women who recognize the hijab as a positive experience that empowers them and grants them Muslim identities.

For the wearers of the headscarves in this study, the hijab is a tool that confers power and, contrary to the above writers’ opinions, the hijab helps many participants to take control of their bodies. Many of the participants seem to be utilizing the hijab to set boundaries between themselves and the outside world. Di’ba, for example, commented that she likes keeping her curtains closed when she has the lights on, because otherwise people walking down the street can see her. One of Di’ba’s friends, however, finds it odd and argues that Islam is not that strict and that she can relax without the hijab while she is in her home. For Di’ba, putting a barrier between her and potential viewers is not due to Islamic restrictions: rather, she wanted to create a space where she could feel free from the male gaze. Di’ba reported that her friend said that:

What’s the big deal, like you are in your house and like Allah is not going to punish you for what you are doing in your own house you know, and I am like but it is not about being punished, like I do not know how Allah is going to view this, but I do not want people, like this guy, who is he you know that’s the thing.

Secore (2002) writes that veiling as a form of dress is a spatial practice embedded in relations of power and resistance. Accordingly, extending the idea of the hijab from headscarf to creating “safe” space, Di’ba uses her curtains to assert power and resistance, her freedom from the undesired gaze.

The desire to be free from the male gaze was one of the prominent themes in my research and many participants argued that the hijab liberated them from it. Noreen’s story of being released from the look by wearing the hijab is particularly significant, because she suffered heavily from the “inspecting gaze.” Noreen was eighteen years old when she got married and came to Canada. Her husband did not let her wear the hijab, but “it got [her]
into real trouble.” She and her husband ran a store and she often worked there by herself. She was harassed in her work place by some non-Muslim men and because of that, her husband allowed her to wear the *hijab*. Noreen’s distress due to the harassment can be seen in the following passage:

> The first thing that made my husband to let me wear it was because I have four guys behind me and I was married. Imagine what was that would put you. Like especially if your husband... Like think, like, if you, like, how she would react to all those people who are asking for her and I just (missing word) it was terrible four months, the first four months because I had to work... It was very hard, but now I like the work and I am way free than before... So yeah it’s the protection, the main thing.

From the conversation in other parts of my interview with Noreen about her experience of harassment and as the emotional tone of her narrative indicates, she was not only the victim of harassment, but her husband also inspected her response toward the harassers. The behavior of Noreen’s spouse indicates that he blamed the victim, as if Noreen were responsible for the harassment. The *hijab*, however, elevated her position from the “observed” to the “observer” as she felt free from the male gaze and granted Noreen the protection that otherwise might not have been possible for her.

Contrary to those women who perceive the *hijab* as protection, the non-wearers of the headscarves argued that the *hijab* is not an appropriate dress in Canada. These participants stated that the basic purpose of the *hijab* is not to draw attention to oneself. In Canada, however, where it is not a customary dress, people often look at women who wear the *hijab*. Citing the example of her daughters, Ati’yah reported that whenever she goes out with her daughters, she notices that people look at them, which “is the opposite of what the *hijab* is supposed to be.” Ati’yah’s observation indicates that the *hijab* is a marker of difference, drawing attention to the wearer which is contrary to the teachings of Qur’an.
While some women in this study retain their distinct Muslim identities by wearing the "hijab," Ati'yah did not wear the "hijab" in order to be more anonymous in the mainstream society. Both wearers and non-wearers are crafting their identities and negotiating a place as Muslim women immigrants in a Western society. The results of this study indicate that the reasons for wearing or not wearing the "hijab" are varied and complex, and cannot be reduced simply to religious or cultural reasons.

5.6 Western Perception of the Hijab

Veiling--to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies--became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies. (Ahmed 1992: 152)

I discussed in Chapter Two that the Canadian media have portrayed the "hijab" as a symbol of Muslim women's gender oppression that not only represents Muslim women as "other" in a Western society but also underscores Western superiority. While there is a general intolerance about the "hijab" in the media, there are some specific incidents in Canada which further support the idea that mainstream society does not perceive the "hijab" as acceptable clothing. In Montreal, 1994, students were sent home by school officials for wearing the "hijab," and the young women were told that unless they "removed their "hijab" they could not attend school" (Shakeri 2000: 130). Similarly, in May, 1995, in Quebec, "the largest teacher's union in the province, the central de l' Enseignement du Quebec (CEQ) voted to ban the "hijab" in school" (Shakeri 2000: 130).

Discrimination against "Muslim students were not limited to Montreal and Quebec schools. Those participants who attended schools in Saskatoon also reported that they experienced racism in the classrooms. Di'ba', for instance, commented that when she began to wear the "hijab" in high school, her teacher started to ignore her as if she was not
part of the class, which deeply disturbed Di'ba'. She stated that "it was art class and we were sitting all around the classroom and ah he just like totally skipped me, you know, he would be handing out something or whatever you know and I guess at that time it was bad, and I took it hard." The teacher's approach shows the negative attitude toward the hijab by some Canadians. More importantly, perhaps, is the impact of such discrimination on Di'ba's self-esteem.

In mainstream society, the negative stereotypes of Muslim women have become more visible after September 11th, and the hijab has become a sign of a "terrorist" woman. There are a number of incidents in Canada where Muslim were harassed after September 11th,"57 and some participants mentioned that they also had encountered racist harassment. Pervin', for instance, who experienced racism in Canada, reported that someone called her a "terrorist," and she thought that it was because she wore the hijab. Pervin' remarked that "some guy came and he said "terrorist" because I wear the hijab, I think so, that's what I did not like. Some people stare at me. I think that if you have the hijab, you are "terrorist," and really some of them think so." Pervin's experience reveals the powerful and negative stereotypes that have linked the hijab -the sign of Muslim identity -with "terrorism" resulting in verbal, racial, and ethnic assaults like the one cited above. These racist incidents demonstrate that Muslim women (and men) are often seen as "other" in Canadian society, and despite the claim that Canada is a multicultural country, many Muslim face difficulties living in Canada.

Price and Shildrick (1999) point out that the negative portrayal of the hijab in the West stretches back to the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century. "Removing the veil, both real and metaphorical was the prime concern of the missionaries" and "the prevailing

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discourses was that women needed to be rescued" (392). The most recent example of the West as rescuer of Muslim women is the “liberation” of Afghan women from the burqas. While I do not support the Taliban’s compulsory enforcement of burqas, I recognize that wearing burqas, as well as some kinds of hijab such as chadar, is a centuries-old tradition in Afghanistan, and the Taliban did not invent the practice. Moreover, Afghan women are still wearing burqas even though the Taliban regime is no longer in power, illustrating the fact that the custom has not died. Interpreting the meaning of wearing the burqas in Afghanistan from the vantage point of living in Canada, however, is very difficult. For some women, it may represent the contamination of patriarchal control. For others, it may be seen as a marker of Muslim identities.

The “liberation” of Afghan women from the burqas, nonetheless, is portrayed in the mainstream society as if the covering of women is inherently oppressive and the participants in my study mentioned that people often have the view that Muslim women are forced to wear the hijab. I interviewed two Afghan women who wore the hijab and one of them said that people often told her that she could remove her scarf in Canada as her family would not know that she was not wearing it. The participant argues that “It’s not for them, but they thought okay, I am scared of my parents and if they will see me as if I do something bad and I am doing this just for them. I said no, it’s different.” During the interview, one of the informants had very strong feelings about wearing the hijab, and she spoke very enthusiastically about it; however, she often encountered negative views of the hijab as it was assumed that she was forced to wear it.

The participants not only mentioned the negative stereotype of the hijab, but they also recognized that there are many Western style clothes that could be constructed as oppressive. Bilqis’, for example, remarked that many women wear short dresses and expose
their bodies, but this is not perceived as an act of oppression in Canada; whereas covering the body is interpreted as a sign of subjugation. She commented that:

Western women, when they see a Muslim woman in the *hijab* they think ahh, oppression. But yet, you know ten inch heel and a miniskirt is not seen as oppressive. To me it is more oppressive than a putting a scarf on your head.

Even though Bilqis’ does not wear the *hijab*, she feels that the exposure of the female body is also a form of exploitation. Naomi Wolf (1991) has demonstrated that the “beauty myth” has often resulted in the objectification of women, and expenditures of large amount of money to achieve the ideal body. Wolf (1991) writes that there is no justification for the beauty myth: “what it is doing to women today is a result of nothing more exalted than the need of today’s power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women” (13). Thus Bilqis’ argues that the Western style of wearing scanty outfits is a form of women’s oppression.

The representation of the *hijab* is intimately related to issues of voice in the West, which has been expressed through the colonial relationship between the “Occident” and the “Orient” explored by Said (1978). He argues that the link between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, and of varying degrees of complex hegemony, where the Occident spoke for and represented the Orient. As a result, there are many myths about Muslim women created by the “Occident.” One of the fairytales is that Muslim women are passive victims of their societies and their religion, and the example of *hijab* is often cited as a sign of their submissiveness. In this study, however, some of the participants did not see the *hijab* as a mark of subordination. Moreover, they consciously chose to wear the *hijab*, undercutting the myth of the submissive Muslim woman. For example, Di’ba’ reported that she always wanted to wear the *hijab*, but she thought that it
would hinder her participations in sports activities; thus, she did not wear it. She, however, decided to put it on when she realized that it would not hamper sports activities:

It was a weekend and I saw one girl who was a year younger than me at the mosque the night before and ah, she was wearing the hijab and she was playing basketball and I mean that’s the whole thing you know. So um, I was like well you know it is not preventing her from doing all those things. She is still having fun, she is still enjoying herself so why not, so that night actually it was snowing and I made dua [supplication] um I do not know, the next morning Alhumdulliah [praise be to God] I woke up and I was like I am ready. I am just going to do it and Alhumdulliah I put it on since then.

This decision was a significant act in Di’ba’s life since several years later, she vividly remembers the details of the event, such as “it was a weekend” and “it was snowing.” Thus the hijab stands for her asserting her own agency and demonstrates that she is not a passive victim of a Muslim society whose life is ruled by male relatives.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept of the hijab and its meanings to immigrant Muslim women. Wearing the hijab in the last two decades has become a popular phenomenon locally and globally; however, what is the hijab is a debatable question among scholars, as well as among my participants. The idea of the hijab ranges from wearing headscarves to modest behavior, depending on one’s understanding of religious precepts. The participants described the hijab in a variety of ways: some participants linked it with the moral Muslim society and others thought that it was a sign of opposing immoral values. For those informants who wear the hijab, it is a religious obligation. The non-wearers of the headscarves view it as a cultural symbol. The hijab as a mark of identity is a persistent theme and the Muhajibh use the hijab to assert agency, which in turn confers status and
dignity to its wearers. At the same time, however, the *hijab* disempowers non-wearers because the Muslim community does not perceive them as “good” *Muslimah*.

While the *hijab* holds multiple meanings for Muslim women, the mainstream society’s perception of the *hijab* is usually negative, and the *hijab* often is presented in the Canadian media without proper cultural and historical reference. Contrary to the participants’ views, the depiction of the *hijab* in Canada suggests that there is only one form of the *hijab*, i.e., that it represents the oppression of Muslim women. Canadian attitudes towards the *hijab* suggest that Westerners “know the Orient better than the Orient can know itself” (Khan 1995: 149).

In some situations the *hijab* may indeed be imposed on Muslim women, but in my study many of the participants chose to wear it. Living in Canada where the connotation of the *hijab* is often negative, it has a strong impact on those immigrant Muslim women who wear it, as they consequently face negative stereotypes of Muslim women, such as being labeled “terrorists.” In spite of these racist acts, the *Muhajibah* wear the *hijab* as a sign of their Muslim identities and in opposition to “immodest” Western values. Those who do not identify with the visible marker recognize that the *hijab* is not an acceptable dress code in Canada. In fact, their refusal to wear the *hijab* could be read as a symbol of assimilation but, in not drawing attention to themselves, these women, nonetheless, maintain the practice of the *hijab*. Thus the non-wearers of the headscarves may not confront the racism that wearing the *hijab* can prompt; they usually encounter the Muslim community’s criticism.

The *hijab*, therefore, in the form of Muslim woman’s clothing emerges as a device to negotiate spaces within the Muslim community, as well as in the dominant Western culture.
Chapter 6

The Hijab at the Intersection of Identities’ Negotiation

Although clothing fulfils a basic need of human beings in most climates, it is also a significant social institution through which important ideological and non-verbal communication takes place. (Hoodfar 1993: 7)

6.1 Introduction

The brief history of the veil and the hijab highlighted in this study illustrates that covering of a female body has different meanings in different cultures and that meanings change over time. In ancient Mesopotamia, the veil conveyed to potential viewers that its wearer “served” one man; consequently, she was recognized as a “respectable” woman. In Judeo-Christian traditions, the veil was a symbol of women’s subordination, a reminder of their sexual shame, as well as original sin, and variously a sign of their modesty and honor. Wearing the hijab in the Muslim context is often justified as a command from the Qur’an by many scholars, an idea subscribed to by a number of my participants. The hijab appeared as a mark of Muslim women’s identities, a tool that freed them from the male gaze and also earned them respect in their Muslim communities. At the same time, my informants emphasized that the idea of the hijab could include conducting life modestly and maintaining female chastity. Thus the hijab was not restricted solely to an article of clothing but contained moral connotations, and whether or not the women wore a headscarf the concept of the hijab set boundaries between Muslim cultures and Western societies.

6.2 Negotiating Female Immigrant Muslim Identities

Papanek (1994) argues that the question “who I am—is defined by a lifetime of experience, imposed by many outside influences, and composed by the person through a
unique process of growth that may not be without internal struggle” (44). Similarly, data from my study show that the women often struggled with being Canadian and outsiders. Some participants expressed concerns that if they simply accepted the Western lifestyle, their own distinct Muslim culture’s identities would disappear. In order to keep their Muslim identities, they often wished to maintain their cultures’ values, while renegotiating Muslim traditions in Canada. Therefore, by positioning themselves both as insiders and outsiders, most of the participants faced many contradictory situations. The complexity of their lives, however, also enriched their identities; consequently, their identities were continually in a process of growth. For instance, those informants who wore the *hijab* faced negative stereotypes of Muslim women that affected their self-esteem in crafting female Muslim identities; at the same time, nonetheless, racist attitudes strengthened their faith. The wearers of the headscarves often perceived their residency in Canada as an opportunity to seek knowledge about their religion and they viewed themselves as cultural carriers of social values. The insider and outsider dilemma, however, was not only an internal conflict but also a result of external factors such as racial discrimination and ethnic biases.

Nagel (1994) states that “ethnic identity is a composite of the view one has of oneself, as well as the views held by others about one’s ethnic identity” (154). Ethnicity, thus, appears to be a two-way process where an individual positions herself/himself within a specific group on the basis of certain similarities and also by others, who link someone with a particular group due to some shared bonds. Thus in crafting distinct Muslim identities, ethnicity provided a niche for the participants in this study, allowing them to relate to one other and to situate themselves as members of one *Ummah*. Religion, therefore, was the strongest bond that brought my informants together regardless of their cultural differences. Chong (1998), citing Williams (1988) states that “religion can interact
with ethnicity in one of two ways: either as identical to or precedent to ethnic identity, or as ancillary to ethnic identity” (264). The role of religion in reference to my research appears to be identical or precedent to ethnicity. Most often in crafting Muslim identities, Islam provided a thread for my informants to weave the different patterns of Muslim cultures into one multifaceted blanket living in a non-Muslim country.

Although the women positioned themselves as Muslims, their understanding of the *hijab* often differed and the *hijab* emerges as full of contradictions and multiple meanings in this research. Comments such as it is a device that prevents “easy interaction between men and women,” and “it keeps the society pure” closely relate the *hijab* with women’s sexuality. In this context, the *hijab* is associated with chastity and women’s sexuality with the moral health of the society. Thus these participants either agree or have internalized the dominant views that women should wear the *hijab* because an uncovered female body may cause *fitna*, which could corrupt a Muslim way of life. However, while the *hijab* clearly appears to be a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a means of regulating and controlling women’s lives, the women in this study have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of male domination (Hoodfar 1993). Many wearers of the headscarves argued that the *hijab* freed them from undesired gaze, provided them with a chance to take charge of their lives, and helped them to keep Muslim traditions in a non-Muslim country, which in turn, assisted them in maintaining their distinct Muslim identities.

In addition to asserting their agency through the use of the *hijab*, many women view the *hijab* as a symbol of their Muslim identities and a way of opposing Western imperialism. Ahmed (1992) argues that in reaction to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ colonial attack, the veil has become a sign of the dignity and validity of all native customs; thus, “ironically, it is Western discourse that in the first place determined the new meanings of
the veil and gave rise to its emergence as a symbol of resistance” (164). Similarly, those
colors who wore the hijab most often perceived it as a sign of resistance to Western
lifestyles giving, in turn, a positive affirmation of their distinct identities.

Despite the fact that many women view the hijab as a positive experience in their
lives within the non-Muslim Canadian society, the hijab embodies a negative image,
particularly in the media. Some participants highlighted media biases and argued that many
of the Western people's responses to the hijab have been shaped by media images. As a
result, the women were often discriminated against for wearing the hijab on the streets, at
airports, and in schools. The assumption that the hijab is synonymous with “ignorance,”
“oppression,” and/or “terrorist” “has meant that...Muslim women have to invest a
considerable amount of energy in establishing themselves as thinking, rational, literate
student/person, both in their classrooms and outside” (Hoodfar 1993: 5). Living in a non-
Muslim society, and subjected to negative stereotypes made many of my participants’
identities vulnerable, but the women seemed committed to maintaining their distinct
Muslim identities in Canada.

The dilemma of living in two different worlds is most apparent when Muslim values
associated with the hijab conflict with Western standards. Many non-wearers of the
headscarves reported that the purpose of the hijab is not to draw attention to oneself.
Wearing the hijab in a non-Muslim culture, however, contradict this idea. Since the hijab is
usually seen as a symbol of “otherness” in Canada, people often stare at those women who
wear it and therefore, the hijab draws attention to its wearers in a Western society and does
not fulfill its goal. Thus, partly the decision not to wear the hijab in a non-Muslim culture is
the result of some informants not wanting to identify themselves as “other” through their
clothing.
The new practice of the hijab, however, has created pressure for non-wearers since most often, the Muslim community does not view the hijab as a personal choice, rather as an obligatory dress code which all Muslim women should embrace. The Muslim community's pressure indicates that regardless of the fact that there are different opinions about the hijab, many Muslims believe that covering of the head is mandatory in Islam. Therefore, reaffirmation of female Muslim identities through the hijab raises critical dilemmas for non-wearers of the headscarves. They not only face the larger society's negative stereotypes as non-European immigrants, but also within the Muslim community they were "alienated." Thus, crafting female Muslim identities is not without a struggle either within or outside of the Muslim community.

The idea of the hijab in my study cannot be separated from the "back home" memories, which serve as a reference point for defining "home" Muslim traditions. Here the differences between religious and cultural practices blur. What is believed to be an authentic Muslim practice is usually a cultural tradition which is located within a specific time and place. As a result, the participants adopted a static view of their "back home" cultures, and were often shocked to find changes in what were considered traditional and eternal religious practices. For instance, some informants were surprised to see that "back home" women did not wear the "proper" hijab and they thought that indigenous people were losing their Islamic values by not practicing the hijab.

While most studies have explored the meanings of the hijab with reference to Muslim women's dress code, I recognize that the subtle and salient meanings of the hijab rest upon its moral connotations - which the women carry with them. The hijab is often associated specifically with women's sexuality as is made evident in the topics on which the participants framed their discourse. In discussing the hijab, my informants focused on
access to pornography, participation in mixed parties, potential marriage partners, and loss of chastity. These practices are often frowned upon in many Muslim cultures and the participants' concerns show that they perceive women's bodies and sexuality according to "back home" traditions.

Not only does this study contribute to understanding the ways in which Muslim women construct identities with particular reference to the hijab, but the research process itself raises critical issues about the "authenticity" of my "indigenousness." The shared bond-- Islam-- provided me with many avenues to conduct this research, including easy access to my participants and a theoretical understanding of their anecdotes. My position regarding the subject of the hijab, nonetheless, made it clear that I was not an "insider" all the time. I did not always agree with my participants' views, and at times had trouble distancing myself from the research. However, in order to represent the diverse voices in this study, I was forced to distance myself from both my own views and those of my participants. My "indigenousness" gave me entry into the group but ironically the process of doing the research meant that I had to dissociate myself from my "indigenousness."

My research also draws attention to the power relations that inevitably existed between me and my informants. The selection and interpretations of the data was done by me. When there were differences and similarities among the participants, I decided in what kind of similarities or differences I was interested, and which ways they might be similar or different (Spelman 1997). In other words, the research ultimately tells the story which confers more power on the researcher. Moreover, the guidance of my supervisor shaped my thesis, which meant the power relations were not limited to my informants and me, but included Dr. Biggs. The limitations on reciprocity, then, highlight the dilemma of power that persists between the researcher and subjects. Thus the research process involved a
three-way interaction between informants, between me and my participants, and between me and my supervisor. Therefore, as England (1994) observes, reflexivity "can make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them" (86).

6.3 Further Research

There is a need for further research on the *hijab* in order to explore gender differences in response to it. In Islam, the concept of the *hijab* is not limited to women's covering and the Qur'an requires modesty for both men and women. Further research could investigate the ways in which Muslim men understand the *hijab* as a sign of the moral health of a society (the essence of the *hijab*) and what roles men play in maintaining Muslim values. Most often the idea of the *hijab* in my study was connected with memories of "back home," which led my participants to conduct their lives according to the perceived values of their countries of origin. Thus, a study of the experiences of migrants in reference to the concept of "home" could offer a better understanding of the ways in which immigrant Muslim women (and men) construct their identities in a Western society. As the *hijab* and female sexuality appear closely related to each other, a further study could explore the relationship between Muslim women's sexuality and the concept of the *hijab* since my research scratched only the surface of this topic. However, conducting research on Muslim female sexuality would be difficult as it is often viewed as a taboo topic in many Muslim cultures. Therefore, the research would have to find innovative strategies to explore the contours of women's sexuality. Finally, the *hijab* is often perceived as a tool for constraining Muslim women's mobility by many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. The current practice of the *hijab*, however, is often understood by its wearers as a device that allows them to move more comfortably in the public sphere. Therefore, further research
may want to explore Muslim and non-Muslim women’s concept of mobility and its relationship to space.

6.4 Conclusion

In my reading of the literature on the hijab, as well as listening to the stories of my participants, it becomes clear that the hijab stands at the intersection of resisting/protecting Muslim values and opposing the dominance of Western values. In so doing, the physical and moral dimensions of the hijab mediate the process of assimilation into the mainstream society, while protecting female Muslim identities from undesired Western practices. The concept of the hijab conflicts with Western lifestyles, and as a result, my participants often struggled in maintaining their distinct identities. In negotiating the two worlds, my participants were often placed on the margins of the wider Canadian society. In part this marginalization was self-imposed as a way of protecting their Muslim identities. More often it was imposed by many non-Muslim Canadians to whom the hijab symbolized the “other” “the peculiar and dangerous foreigner” (Rozario 1998: 649). Although the idea of the hijab grants some security to Muslim values, it is not woven into Canadian society.
Works Cited


Appendix A---Guideline for Interview Session

1- Why did you move to Canada?
2- What was it like to be a newcomer in Canada?
3- What is like living in Saskatoon now?
4- Would you please explain whether Saskatoon feels like as a home or not?
5- What are the differences and similarities between living in Saskatoon and back home?
6- Would you please throw some light upon whether you feel different being here or not, in Saskatoon?
7- If you have lived in other parts of the West, would you please tell us how different and/or similar it is living in Saskatoon as being a Muslim woman?
8- Do you wear the hijab? Yes____ No____?
9- What is the hijab?
10- What does it mean to you?
11- How is the hijab perceived back home?
12- Why do you wear the hijab or do not wear it?
13- Did you wear the hijab prior migrating to Canada?
14- What are two good experiences you could recall living in Saskatoon?
15- What are two bad experiences you could recall living in Saskatoon?
16- What are the three things that you would like to change in Saskatoon if you had a chance?
17- Any other thoughts that may have occurred to you or any other information you would like to add?
Appendix B---Consent Form

Dear ____

I am studying for my Master’s degree at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies. My research interest is on “Immigrant Muslim Women and the Hijab: Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Identities in Canada.” I am interested in your experience of immigration to Canada and its impact on you as a Muslim woman. For this, I am planning to conduct group interviews, with each group having 5-6 group members. The interview session will be one hour to one and half hours long. I will ask questions regarding your migration experiences, such as what is like to be living in Saskatoon and similarities and/or differences between living in Saskatoon and back home. I will particularly ask some questions about the hijab and its meaning to you. There are no known risks for participating in this research; rather, it will be your chance to tell your stories. All the information that I will gather from you will remain strictly confidential and it is your right as a participant to refuse to answer any questions.

Please also note that the Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Sciences Research in the University of Saskatchewan has approved my research on January 11, 2002. If you want to contact the office for any reasons, you can reach at 966-4053.

I seek and appreciate your willingness to participate in the research. If you have any concerns, you can contact me, Tabassum F. Ruby, at any time at 955-6469. You may also contact to my supervisor Dr. Lesley Biggs at 966-6931 or the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies’ office at 966-4327.

Before we start the focus group, I would like to reassure you of your rights as a participant in this research.

- Your participation in the research is completely voluntary.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without providing any explanation.
- There will not be any penalty or loss under any circumstances for choosing to withdraw and all data that has been collected from you will be immediately destroyed.
- No one except my supervisor and I will have access to the interview and all the information will be kept completely confidential.
- The interview will be audio taped with your permission and the session will be one hour to one and half hours long.
- The tapes will be transcribed. One transcript will be released for the entire group and the participants will be reading what the others have said.
- You have right to see and review the interview transcripts and make changes to your words if you so desire.
- The tapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be stored by my supervisor Dr. Lesley Biggs at the University of Saskatchewan for five years and then destroyed if you give permission.
Please also note that this research has been funded by CUISR (Community-University-Institute for Social Research), which is an institution that promotes building capacity within Community-Based-Organizations (CBOs). On the basis of the information generated by the interviews, I will write a thesis to complete the requirement of my program and a report, as well as recommendations for CUISR regarding the concern(s) you might have particularly with regards to living in Saskatoon or in Canada generally.

I have read this consent form and understand my rights as a participant. I agree to participate in this focus group.

________________________________________  _______________________________
Participant  Date

________________________________________  _______________________________
Tabassum Ruby, Researcher  Date

I have received a copy of the consent form for my own records.

________________________________________  _______________________________
Participant  Date

________________________________________  _______________________________
Tabassum Ruby, Researcher  Date
Appendix C—Consent Form for the Group Agreement

Dear ________

This form is to affirm the group’s agreement for maintaining confidentiality that all the group members will not communicate or in any manner disclose publicly information discussed during the course of this focus group interview. Hence, by signing the form I am in agreement that I will not talk about what the other participants have said outside the group and the information will remain confidential.

I have read this consent form and I agree that I will maintain the group confidentiality.

_____________________________  ______________________________
Participant                        Date

_____________________________  ______________________________
Tabassum Ruby, Researcher  Date

I have received a copy of the consent form for my own records.

_____________________________  ______________________________
Participant                        Date

_____________________________  ______________________________
Tabassum Ruby, Researcher  Date
Appendix D---Transcript Release Form

Dear __________

Once again thank you very much for your participation in my research. As indicated before that you have a right to see the transcripts and if you wish to change or delete any information you are free to do so. I hereby am releasing the transcripts of the group interview.

I, ____________, have reviewed the complete transcripts of my group interview for Tabassum F. Ruby’s project, “Immigrant Muslim Women and the Hijab: Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Identities in Canada.” I acknowledge that the transcripts accurately reflect the discussion we had during our group interview. I release the transcripts to be used by Tabassum F. Ruby in the manner described in the consent form. I have also received the copy of the transcripts for my personal record.

__________________________
Participant

__________________________
Date

__________________________
Tabassum Ruby, Researcher

__________________________
Date
Appendix E---Consent Form for Demographic Survey

Dear ____

I am studying for my Master’s degree at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies. The area of my research is “Immigrant Muslim Women and the Hijab: Sites of Struggle in Crafting and Negotiating Identities in Canada.” I am interested in your experience of immigration to Canada and its impact on you as a Muslim woman.

In order to understand some of my participants’ responses in a comprehensive way, I have designed a demographic survey. The survey contains some individual information, such as age, income level, and legal status. I am asking about this particular information so I can contextualize some of the answers that the participants may give because of their diverse social status. This survey is strictly confidential and any information used from it will only be attributed to a pseudonym. Thus, no one except my supervisor Dr. Biggs and I will have access to this information. Moreover, it is your right as a participant to refuse to answer certain questions or ask for clarification before responding to specific questions. If you have any concerns, please contact me, Tabassum F. Ruby, at any time at 955-6469.

I appreciate your willingness and thank you for participating in my research.

I have read this consent form and understand the purpose of the survey and my rights as a participant. I agree to participate in this research.

________________________________________________________________________

Participant Date

________________________________________________________________________

Tabassum Ruby, Researcher Date
Appendix F ---Demographic Survey

Instructions

Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible. If you are uncertain of how to answer any of the questions please feel free to ask before responding.

1- Date: __________________

2- Name: __________________

3- Age: (check the one most applies to you)
   A) Under 20 ______
   B) Between 20 to 30 ______
   C) Between 31 to 40 ______
   D) Between 41 to 50 ______
   E) Between 51 to 60 ______
   F) Above 60 ______

4- Are you:
   A) Single ______
   B) Married ______
   C) Divorced ______
   D) Separated ______
   E) Widowed ______

5- Please state your education qualifications. If currently you are student, state the degree/diploma/certificate/program that you are working for.

_____________________________________________________

6- From where did you obtain your education? __________________

7- Do you work outside of the home? Yes____ No____ if no, skip to question 10.

8- If yes, what is your occupation or nature of your work?

_____________________________________________________

9- Are you: (check the one that most applies to you)
   A) Full-time ______
   B) Part-time ______
   C) Self employed ______
   D) Other (please specify) __________________

10- Place of birth: Country __________________

11- To which cultural group do you belong? __________________
12- When did you come to Canada? ________________

13- What is your legal immigrant status:
   A) Landed immigrant___________
   B) Refuge___________
   C) Student Visa___________
   D) Other (please specify)_________

14- When did you move to Saskatoon? ________________

15- What is your gross income for your household (before taxes)?
   A) Less than $10,000_______
   B) $10,001 to $20,000_______
   C) $20,001 to $30,000_______
   D) $30,001 to $40,000_______
   E) $40,001 to $50,000_______
   F) $50,001 to $75,000_______
   G) $75,001 to $100,000_______
   H) $100,001 to $125,000_______
   I) $125,001 to $150,000_______
   J) $150,001 to $175,000_______
   K) $175,001 to $200,000_______
   L) More than $200,001_______
Appendix G---Categories

Purpose of migration
Disadvantages/difficulties/Western attitude
Advantages/quality of life
Concept of home
About Saskatoon
The *hijab*: New trend globally & locally
Concept of the *hijab*
The *hijab* and discussion from Islamic perspective
Meanings of the *hijab*
The *hijab* as an identity symbol
The Western perception of the *hijab*/identity
The *hijab* within the Muslim community/identity
Critique to the *hijab*
Islam, social reality & gender differences
Coping strategies