Qissati
Counterstories of Muslim Women School Administrators in Ontario

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ABSTRACT

This composite counter-stories study seeks to understand and illuminate the embodied experiences of Muslim women school leaders in Ontario public schools. Critical analysis of individual and group interviews with seven Muslim women public school administrators (principals and vice principals), autobiographical writing/reflection, and scholarship on racialized women's school leadership shed light on: a) the systemic erasure of Muslim women leadership through 'Invisibilizing' and 'Hypervisibilizing' experiences, b) the experiences of Muslim women's presence and actions as threatening to the cultural and institution reality of public schools and, c) the institutional attempts at containment of these leaders through controlling expectations and tools for reprisal should expectations be transgressed. Theories of Islamophobia and Critical Race/Feminism Theory are shown to arise out of the experiences of women as examined in the data. These theories inform the development of the composite counter-stories depicting the school lives of Muslim woman leaders. The composite characters allow for an embodied expression of the complexities of 'being' Muslim and woman in public institutions to resist further re-inscription into dominant narratives of their lives. These stories also disrupt majoritarian narratives about inclusive schools and Muslim women. The composite counter-stories provide a robust portrait of the impact of leading public-school spaces as a Muslim woman. Compiling the data through a composite depiction of individual experience, I provide new counterstories of gendered Islamophobia in school leadership and Islamophobia in schools more widely.

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Finally, there are no words for the three people that are the reason I keep healing, growing, and learning. Shareef, Rami, and Rick- you are my everything and my always.

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Prologue: My Last Day

"Sorry to interrupt, but Nick has called multiple times and needs you to call him back before the end of the day."
I rubbed my hands over my eyes and took a deep breath. It had been a long day. All I wanted to do was pack up my office and see this place in my rear-view mirror. It had been a long year.

After spending the day revisiting timetables, distributing the 'thank you' potted succulents, and consoling the handful of teachers genuinely saddened by my departure, my office remained untouched and the joy of riding off into the sunset seemed unreachable.

Sherry walked across the office, handing the number to Kyle who was still sitting next to me following the parent meeting that had just ended. It was 4:45. The parking lot, visible through the window to my right, was largely empty.

"You ready for whatever this is?" asked Kyle. We had worked well together, complementing each other's capacities. A White straight male principal, Kyle was always open to hearing my perspective and, more often than not, was supportive in making changes for a more just and inclusive school. He also had a keen sense for the impending nonsense. He expressed suspicion over the past week that the union steward, who had been stirring the pot of discontent amongst staff all year, was up to something.

The toxicity in the building had reached a boiling point this last month of the school year. Staff refused or were afraid to support the end of year community celebration, many chose not to acknowledge Kyle or I in the hallways, and only a handful had said goodbye. No one, not the permanent school staff, not the union, not the senior leadership of the board, was willing to name what had been happening in this school as White supremacy and White fragility masquerading as victimhood.

Kyle grabbed the phone on his desk and brought it over to the table where we were both seated. He dialled the number, putting the call on speaker.

"Hi Nick, It's Nada and Kyle calling from Whitehaven. We understand you needed to speak to us urgently."

"Hi guys! Thanks so much for calling me back. I just need to buckle up something before we all head home for the summer!" hollered Nick in his usual talk-show host tone. Nick was short-listed to be superintendent and had been in his current role in Human Resources for nearly 4 years. He is what one would describe as a member of the old boys' club. Racially ambiguous, charismatic, and deeply embedded in the application of 'rules' to uphold Whiteness, Nick had a way of always absolving himself of complicity in the oppressive reality of the rules.

"So, guys, we got a call today through the local union offices concerning one of your hires." Kyle looked over at me as I shook my head. I have spent much of my professional life managing 'my face' to not convey emotion. It was an exhausting, and lately, a doomed endeavour. Thankful for the shield of a phone conversation, I knew my face said it all.

"Listen guys, you know I am just the messenger here. It is part of the job to follow up on complaints such as these. According to the complaint, this new hire... I believe for French, has a previous relationship with one of the administrators...I don't have any more details, but I believe it is claimed that she is related to one of you," added Nick, sounding intentionally aloof.

The 'hire' referenced was an amazing young teacher who we initially recruited in September after a lengthy search for a long-term occasional (LTO) teacher. She had taught grade 4 and 8 French and art for the duration of the year and had volunteered for an LTO evaluation in the winter. She was skilled, enthusiastic, open to learning, and kind to students and peers. She was visibly Muslim and outspoken about social justice pedagogy. We were overjoyed to be able to offer her a permanent position in June following the transfer of a member of the French team to another school.

"Nick, are you referring to Sanaa?" I played dumb.

"Yes, the last name is Malik or Yousef, hmmm … not sure about the last name." The man works in HR and has access to all employee details by pressing a few keys.

"Nick, seeing that Sanaa is not White and not Christian- who are you suggesting she is related to?" I pushed on. I know I should have walked out. My heart was pounding, and I could hear the rush of blood in my ears. What is wrong with this school? What is wrong with this person -- my peer --asking if I hired a family member?

"Well, I don't have all the details at this point, but it seems she is somebody's niece?"

Wednesday July 5, 2019

Dear Nick,

I understand you have now spoken to Kyle and Carrie [the superintendent] as follow-up and clarified some specifics which were not shared on Friday.

Although the "investigation" seems to be completed for now (or so I was told), it is important to understand that the change of origin of the so-called relationship/connection to the new teacher does NOT in any way eliminate or reduce the discriminatory -- Islamophobic-- nature of the initial "complaint" which instigated your investigation.

The new teacher is the only and first (visibly) Muslim staff to be hired to a permanent position at this school. She is outspoken in her teaching (which is not an easy feat in French) about social justice and being culturally responsive. In addition to the visibility of her identity, she is also one who continuously has an audience to her teaching - as homeroom teachers have often been present in the classroom during her French instruction. In other words, staff are fully aware of what kind of pedagogue she is. Somehow this consistent presence of the homeroom teacher in the classroom while she is teaching rarely seems to be the case for most other French/ prep coverage teachers in the school.

You asked me the question "how do you know the motivation?" behind the complaint and "how can you possibly know that someone is racist?" It is important to consider a few things:

According to the Human Rights Code, motivation and intention are irrelevant -- it's the impact. When casting suspicion on the hiring of a member of an equity seeking group based on nothing but assumption, there is clearly an impact. For context, this is the third permanent person hired to the school by Kyle and me -- but as you may have guessed, the others are not Muslim and have not triggered this kind of response.

Second, when a racialized person, a Muslim person, a woman (who is your peer), says this is about race and gender, believe them. It is critical for those who do not live the identity to listen and learn from those who do, about what is (isn't) racist/Islamophobic/sexist. Anybody immersed in this area of scholarship will tell you the same.

Which brings me to the next point. Being learned in the area of equity is a competence that should be valued to assist those that are not, to better understand the dynamics at play. This is an area of study -- not a personal agenda, a sensitivity, a tone, or an emotion. Having the legitimacy of this knowledge and expertise constantly questioned as legitimate is problematic -- can you imagine any other area of expertise (say hiring and employment policy) being constantly questioned by those who have not dedicated their life's work to its study.

Finally, I come back to where I started -- the impact. At this point, the impact is to delegitimize the skill and merit of this (Muslim)teacher, to question my (a racialized and Muslim female leader) integrity, and to risk the livelihood of this young and up and coming educator. So surely, it must be clear that the "complaint" is neither neutral nor innocent.

While the instigators are not physically trying to rip her hijab off, they are rejecting the legitimate place of this educator and my leadership in the school. I hope this will be something that is considered in the next steps forward -- which need to go beyond "case closed -- all boxes checked". There is a problem here and it needs to be addressed (that is our commitment as a board).

I am hurt and sad to know this is my last exchange with the board prior to my leave and hope the outcome will be one that upholds our strategic priority of ethical leadership as not only an area of aspiration but one of possibility, and most importantly, responsibility.

kind regards, Nada

There was no response to my email, no attempt to clarify, to apologize, or even to acknowledge receipt. Nick was promoted shortly afterwards to superintendent and I extended my leave to continue my PhD studies. When I think back to that Friday afternoon phone conversation, I am still astonished at the level of privilege it must take to not only file a complaint against a Muslim administrator hiring a Muslim teacher but to have a system leader take this complaint seriously, and use "the rules" to legitimate this gendered Islamophobia. Few Muslim women are ever hired

into positions of responsibility in this board. Those who are, have our integrity questioned in the smallest steps and our effectiveness undermined by those who are supposed to have our backs.

Last Day-First Day

As I read over the story, I wonder if my younger self would be surprised by its content. Would the newly arrived immigrant high schooler be disappointed to learn of the realities of being a Muslim woman school administrator? Would the Islamophobia unsettle her? Would she know how to make sense of it? Then I remember the questions and comments of teachers and students in those early days, questions about how a family from Saudi Arabia had arrived in Canada, the declarations about Arabs and Muslims during the Gulf war in a senior English course, the snickers from other girls in the change room, audible whispers about 'what they do to their women' where I 'come from.' I realize that my younger self already knew these realities.

She also knew of the impact of these experiences and the ways they carve a place in you, on you. She understood that it would be a lifetime of such stories that has delivered me to the threshold of this research. In the weaving of these narratives, I come to make sense of my own past experiences while researching the present experiences of the leaders in this study. My last day is in some sense a first day — one to reflect in new ways to understand, counter, and interrupt the Islamophobic narrative constructed for Muslim female leaders in Canadian schools and society. Such a project asks us to begin by locating these narratives in the context of the national (and global) mythologies about this multicultural settler nation.

SECTION 1: FRAMING THE STUDY
Chapter 1: Context and Objectives

1.1 HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Canada is globally viewed as a benevolent and tolerant nation that invites all immigrants to bring their histories and traditions into a multicultural liberal state. Hidden from this myth of Canada are the silenced histories: the attempted eradication of Indigenous people, the enslavement of Black bodies, and the exploitation of Asian migrant labour. Paradoxically, Canada's pursuit of multiculturalism can be shown to exalt Whiteness (Thobani, 2009). Recovering Whiteness from its oppressive legacies, and from the history of fascism that culminated in the Second World War, Canada committed itself to the multicultural project in the post-war years (Thobani, 2007). The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–1970), formed in no small part to address Quebec's growing dissatisfaction with Anglo dominance proposed new parameters of national belonging. Haque's (2005) analysis of the Commission's inquiry and the resulting policy changes reveal a denial of racial hierarchy, and an intentional erasure of Indigenous peoples' status and their right to self-determination. The emerging Official Languages Act (1969) and Multiculturalism Policy (1971) cemented a national identity of 'two founding races' (English and French) with a peripheral location for the tolerated cultural Others who were neither French nor English (Haque, 2010).

Aligned with the national myth of 'multiculturalism' is a liberal secularism that claims a distancing from religious and spiritual cultures (Day, 2000 cited in Haque, 2010). And yet, far from distancing from religion, Canada has engaged in a normalizing of the Christian faith's dominance in public life such that it may be claimed as 'secular.' This 'secularism' continues to inform intolerance of non-Christian religion and religious practices of the cultural Other, while

paying lip service to faith-based accommodations. The 'war on terror,' emerging in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, makes evident the ways in which secularism and the neoliberal multiculturalism policy have reinforced conceptions of citizens as Christian, European, and White. During this time, Islam and Muslims have been 'cast out' of multicultural Canada and made to be other than Canadian (Razack, 2011).

Otherness attributed to Muslims is clearly not a new discourse in 'Western' nations. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), investigates the way imperial projects subjugate the Orient against Europe's modern and enlightened civilization justifying the colonial enterprise. Expanding on Said in *The West and the Rest,* Stuart Hall (1992) explains how the eminence of Islam and the Islamic empires, despite regional differences, was in fact essential to the unification of Western Europe as a single entity in the late eighth century. According to Hall, references to 'Europeans' were coined to unify Christendom and Whiteness while asserting superiority over Islamic cultures. While the shaping of the 'The West' is not a one-dimensional history, it is significant to note that this unified entity has never shed its Christian origins – nor its opposition to the Muslim Other (Said, 1978; Hall, 1992; Loomba, 2015).

For the million or so Muslims who call Canada home, navigating Muslim Canadianness is far from simple. While 'Muslim' is a banner for a wide-ranging diversity of sectarian, racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities as well as a range of political views, religiosity, economic and citizenship status, the public discourse has given little attention to these differences within the Muslim community. Instead, there is talk of unified 'Canadian values' and the need to excise those (Muslims) perceived as not adhering to these values, questioning if they are worthy of

citizenship (Haque, 2012). The prevalent Islamophobia manifests itself in both systemic and individual experiences of discrimination and intolerance. According to Statistics Canada hate crimes targeting Muslims more than tripled between 2012 and 2015 (Stats Canada, 2016). A survey of Muslims in Canada by Environics (2016) found a third of respondents experienced discrimination in spaces ranging from bus stops and stores to workplaces and schools. The state-sanctioned racism of Bill 21 in Quebec continues to be fought in the nation's courts and attacks on Black Muslim women in hijab are growing in Alberta (2021). Physical attacks on mosques and individual Muslims continue, finding new fervour in the populist and alt-right movements globally. Equally distressing is the upholding of Islamophobia in liberal rhetoric, rationale, and beliefs (Mondon & Winter, 2017; Razack, 2022). One 'Islamophobia in Canada' report finds 46% of Canadians have unfavourable views of Islam, 42% believe that the discrimination experienced by Muslim is "mainly their fault," and 51% support government surveillance of Muslim places of worship (Noor Cultural Centre, 2017, p.3). The murders of worshippers at a Quebec Mosque in 2017 and that of a Muslim family in London (Ontario) out for an evening walk in 2021 further signal the increasing normalisation of an anti-Muslim racism in Canada.

1.2 MUSLIMS IN CANADA

Muslim Canadians are a highly diverse group across every indicator including sect, religiosity, employment, education, socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, ethnic origin, citizenship status, home language, political affiliations...and so on. In one respect, this plurality of identities further amplifies the constructedness of 'Muslim' as a social category in a context determined to cast 'Muslim' as singular. The latest Survey of Muslims in Canada completed by Environics Institute in partnership with the Tessellate Institute (2016), indicates

that Muslims number just over 1.1 million or 3.2% of the national population. While the first Muslims arrived in Canada from Scotland in 1851, two thirds of Muslims living here today are born outside of Canada. The Canadian Labour Congress, meanwhile, indicates that Muslim newcomers are at greater risk of living on low income (less than $20K) (46%), as compared to other faith groups (29%). Muslim women were disproportionately represented in this group (CLC, 2019). Ethnically, 41% of Muslims in Canada identify as South Asian, 29% as Arab, 15% as West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghani), and 10% as Black. Other ethnicities include Chinese, Filipino, and Southeast Asian (e.g., Indonesia). Most Muslims are also visibly racialized as not White (88%). The highest share of Muslims in Canada lives in Ontario followed by Quebec, with 62% of Muslims living in Toronto and Montreal alone. The Muslim population is young with three fifths under 35 years of age (CLC, 2019).

1.3 MUSLIMS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Children and young people from Muslim communities experience discrimination and intolerance at school (Paradkhar, 2020; Tessellate Institute, 2016). Still, to date, no school board in Ontario collects quantitative data on incidents of systemic Islamophobia. Further, scholarship in this regard (as evident in the literature review below) remains limited (e.g. Sensoy and Stonebanks, 2010; Zine, 2001, 2008). A report of student town halls conducted by the National Council for Canadian Muslims (NCCM, 2018) reveals that students regularly experience Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric from classmates and teachers. Students express feeling pressure to represent their faith and interrupt intolerance. Some find it difficult to be Muslim in school, where there is little consideration for faith-based accommodations and a continual

onslaught of stereotyping and hatred. The words of a grade 9 student from the Peel District School Board best captures the sentiment of the report:

> With so many negative things being said about Muslims I feel a lot of pressure to prove people wrong. I wear a hijab, so I already feel different. I get treated differently, so I have to try really hard at being the best student, the most approachable, the funniest. I feel a lot of pressure to be exceptional. I can't make mistakes. (p.9)

This student's experience is set against an institutional reality that incorporates little to no Islamic or Muslim representation on staff, in curriculum, in teaching material, or in school culture. When Islam is represented, images and ideas drawn from the media are mostly negative, essentialist, or homogenizing of Muslims (Tessellate Institute, 2016).

While hiring for diversity alone is not a solution to systemic racism, representation of marginalized lived experiences and worldviews through critically conscious educators and staff can play a significant role in identifying and interrupting barriers to equitable and inclusive learning. Students do need to see and experience their own complex identities through the educators with whom they work. Educators and leaders who have lived on the margins can bring other ways of being and knowing into their understandings, their practices and into the ways they lead (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In the Toronto area, largely in response to public outcry and human rights complaints, there have been some efforts to intentionally hire educators and school leaders from non-White/ non-Christian racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. This is now identified as an action item in the province's Education Equity Action Plan (2017). Despite these efforts, newly developed workforce censuses from two GTA school boards (York Region District School Board, 2017; Peel District School Board, 2016) indicate that we are still woefully a long way from employment equity. In the York Region District School Board, for example, Muslim staff represent less than 3% of the total workforce while Muslim students represent over

12% of the student body; four percent of Peel District public school board staff identify as Muslim, while Muslim students represent the largest single faith group (24%) (Peel Census, 2016). Given the small number of Muslim staff, particularly those in leadership roles, little is known about their experiences in relation to the institution, to peers, students or the community. Like the students in the town halls, these leaders are likely placed under extreme pressure to "be exceptional." Along with holding positions of educational responsibility, they are expected to represent, to disrupt, to support and to navigate standards of acceptability set out by the liberal White secular institution.

1.4 STUDY OBJECTIVES

The embodied experience and professional practice of Muslim teachers and school leaders is daily affected by Islamophobia. My dissertation investigates these experiences. To this end, this study has three objectives. First, it offers an opportunity to understand how Islamophobia operates within the structures and discourses of public schools from an insider-outsider perspective. Second, it will explore the ways gendered Islamophobia plays out on the bodies of Muslim women through their stories of leadership and continuance. And third, it will lift up the stories of women in leadership roles to inform policy, institutional, and pedagogical practice in Ontario public schools.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I bring the lens of Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism to these objectives. Specifically, this study asks: *How do Muslim women principals and vice-principals*

in public K-12 schools in Ontario author their experiences of leadership in schools? What are the stories they tell?

The research focus will be guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How do race-gender-faith intersect and shape the participants' stories of leadership?
2. How do existing structures and discourses impact the leadership of Muslim women?
3. In what ways do participants describe how they respond to these experiences as leaders and as Muslim women?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

For Muslim educators and leaders, this is an act of claiming space in the Canadian public education conversation. This study will be the first to examine the structures and discourses in schools which impact the leadership of Muslim women administrators. It will generate new knowledge about leadership from a critical anti-racist feminist perspective. Through the counter-stories of participants, this study surfaces the ways gendered Islamophobia operates in schools as workplaces as well as part of the ideological state apparatus. In doing so, this study expands the current critical race scholarship on Canadian public education. The study investigates Muslim women leaders' resistance to attacks on their humanity and professionalism in schools. Their resistance and continuance are a site of learning for all leaders and a necessary contribution to the literature. Finally, this study's use of counter-story as methodology, composite stories in particular, makes accessible silenced and invisibilized stories of Muslim education leaders beyond the academy. It is essential that these stories be heard and considered. All too often, educators' and leaders' experiences of gendered racism are discounted or invisibilized in the very structures that perpetuate these oppressions. The composite counter-stories of this study

assert the voices of Muslim women in public education in Ontario and connect the dots of embodied experience to national and global contexts of Islamophobia in so-called Western democracies and their institutions. My study contributes to scholarship on educational leadership, critical race feminist studies in education and critical race methods, as well as serving as a springboard for an anti-racist/ anti-Islamophobic review of policy and procedures within public school boards. Study findings will be useful to a growing number of school boards as well as to the Ontario Principals' Council, the National Council for Canadian Muslims, and the Canadian Council for Muslim Women.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews two bodies of literature that have yet to be explicitly connected: racialized women's school leadership and Islamophobia. The stories of Muslim women school leaders serve as the bridge between these two fields of equity and social justice research. The following sections underscore key ideas put forth in each field which are critical to the framing and methods of this study.

Part One: Racialized Women School Leadership

Research on women in educational leadership (Schmuck, 1980; Shakeshaft, 1989; Hall, 1996; Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2003) historically centres the experiences and perspectives of White middle-class women. This was, in part, the result of equity seeking measures having limited impact in the administrative/leadership sphere of education. It continues to be difficult for racialized women to access and occupy positions of leadership across most sectors of society, including education. When racialized women do assume positions of power, they experience significant challenges. The experiences of racialized leaders in higher education is a growing and important area of scholarship (e.g. y Muhs et al, 2012; Henry et al, 2017; Khadka, Davis-McElligatt, Dorwick, 2018; Perlow, 2018; Daniel, 2019; Kim, 2020; Hartley & Ball, 2020) as is the K-12 focused scholarship, my focus in this study.

For the most part, the current literature on racialized women's leadership in K-12 schools in the US, UK and Canada, elucidates the experiences and perspectives of Black women (e.g., Dillard, 1995; Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Alston, 2005; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010; Bailey-Morrissey, 2015; Bloom & Erlandson 2003; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Moorsi, Fuller,

& Reilly, 2018; Horsford, 2020), Latina women (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez &Hernandez, 2015; Rodela, 2020) and Asian women (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Isabela, 2018) . Murtadha and Watts (2005) highlight the importance of these studies as a conduit to understanding the effectiveness of schools in being inclusive spaces for marginalized persons and communities. Racialized women's narratives illuminate how racism and sexism interact to produce patterns exclusively to racialized women school leaders and "reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.9). Racialized women face a variety of hurdles that limit or hinder advancement (Coleman & Campbell-Stevens, 2010). They are often expected to serve in under-resourced schools with large racialized and immigrant communities (Fuller, 2018; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). As well, racialized women leaders are sought after in schools to leverage their 'cultural resources' to care for underserved and marginalized students (Fuller, 2018; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). Studies also show how racialized women leaders engage in 'shifting identities' to "neutralizing negative stereotypes" and serve as a positive relatable role model, while maintaining their own professional commitment to serve and advocate for marginalized students and families (Mullen & Robertson, 2014; Moorsi, Fuller, &Reilly, 2018; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p.831). Faced with pressing demands to both institution and families, racialized women school leaders often experience personal, professional, and emotional costs when navigating the complex terrain of school environments (e.g., Fuller, 2018; Byrd, 2009).

My study situates the stories of Muslim school leaders in this emergent research and scholarship to contribute more complex understandings of racialized women's leadership in

public education. To better grapple with these conversations, I look to these existing studies and what they offer to our understanding of racialized women's leadership roles in public education. I have located the detailed review of the scholarship on racialized women's school leadership in proximity to the analysis of the narratives in this study (Section 2). Adopting a composite counterstory method, I identify patterns in existing research on racialized women's school leadership to further inform the emerging experience's Muslim women within the thematic analysis chapters below. A review of the literature is an important component in the development of the composite counterstories.

Part 2: Islamophobia in (Anglo-dominant) Western Society and its Public Schools

Islamophobia and its manifestations in institutions, particularly in schools, impacts greatly on the lives of Muslim women school leaders. The public and violent hate crimes against Muslims in Canada (i.e., the Quebec Mosque Shooting, London Vehicular Murders) have not led to increased intervention on Islamophobia in Canadian institutions. There remains little public attention to its origins and pervasiveness in Canadian society. This section engages with literature that provides a context for Islamophobia in Canada and its impact on educators, students and schools, the context from which my study participants speak of their experience.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Binary thinking regarding Islam and Muslims did not begin with 9-11. It has, however, gained momentum since these events in the United States. Bolstered by a colonial legacy of representing the non-European other as antiquated and primitive, demeaning understandings of Islam and Muslims are deeply rooted in Western ideologies evident in scholarship and systems

of thought (Said, 1978). Contemporary treatment of Muslims in North America and Europe by the state reinforces and carries on the colonial relationship between Islam and the 'West' through the prism of local racialized histories (Goldberg, 2006). To locate the experience of Muslim bodies in Canada, it is critical to review the historical and present context of relations structuring multiculturalism, unequal power dynamics and racial, ethnic, and religious markers organizing native and settler inhabitants in a hierarchy of being. This section surveys the construction of Islamophobia as it affects the lives and experiences of Muslim people as a global and local circulation of social hatred, racism and discrimination. What follows is a discussion of these manifestations, specifically locating schools as one public institution that generates and circulates Islamophobia in a way that needs to be further examined and better addressed.

2.2 ISLAMOPHOBIA: A RACIALIZATION OF MUSLIMS

The origins of the term Islamophobia trace back to the 1910 writings of two French Orientalists (Diner and Baamer) and their 'discussion' of the experience of African Muslims living under colonial rule (Lean, 2017). While not explicated, the term '*Islamophobie'* is used along with 'dislike' and 'fear' to reflect French society's response to and treatment of West African Muslims (ibid). The term resurfaces in social policy almost a century later with the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. Leveraging a xenophobia framework, the 1997 report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All (*Meer & Modood, 2017) defines Islamophobia as an 'unfounded hostility toward Islam' with 'practical consequences' for Muslims in both 'political and social affairs.' (Runnymede, 2017).

Since the commission, a wide spectrum of scholars debate the accuracy and usefulness of the term 'Islamophobia' (E.g. Halliday, 2010; Allen, 2010; Lopez, 2011). Nathan Lean (2017) cautions against the tug-of-war surrounding the term. He suggests that its acceptance in public discourse is already an indication that any hope of a generally agreed-upon meaning has evaporated. Meer and Modood (2017) extend this position. Instead of deciphering the parameters of the word, they posit that we should work with the word Islamophobia as a form of racialization that generates discrimination and scapegoating. Drawing on the work of Goldberg (2006), Meer and Modood (2019) later explain that the perception and treatment of Muslims in Europe as non-Christians is rooted in cultural and racial otherness. It is this cultural and religious construction of race that shows it to be what Stuart Hall calls a floating signifier (2002). As Hall suggests racialization is a symbolic designation that attaches to bodies as a mechanism of power. What (Muslim) individuals believe or practice is experienced differently from their racial identification as 'Muslim.'

Finding 12,227 articles with the search parameters 'Islamophobia' 'anywhere in the article' between 1980 and 2012, Garner and Selod (2015) observed a general "reluctance to use the concept racialization" (1260 of the total) by the authors (p.10). Yet, the word 'racism' "appears in more than half of these same articles" (p.10), attesting to the links between racism and Islamophobia. Racialization, as Garner and Selod (2015) suggest, is not the only framework for understanding Muslim experience in 'Western' nations, but it is an important one. The dismissal of racialization as pertaining to Muslims, they explain, emerges from phenological understandings of race. Racism, goes the argument, is about a definable visibly 'racialized' group. Islamophobia cannot, therefore, be a form of racism. Garner and Selod (2015) counter

this argument by insisting that race has historically taken its basis in physical appearance AND culture (language as well). Religion, they argue, historically drives racism. Physiological racism (phenotype) is, in fact, an anomaly emerging in the 19th century. Characteristics viewed as natural and inherent are derived from both culture (beliefs, relationships, traditions, religious practices) and physical appearance (dress, language) and are not limited to pigmentation and hair (Goldberg, 1993). As an onto-epistemological rather than a biological phenomenon, race is produced through a process of racialization that involves the confluence of aesthetics, discourse, culture and representation.

Muslims experienced racism historically because of markers of social difference: faith-based cultural practices, beliefs, language, and dress. These markers become fixed, natural, and deemed instantiating 'race as culture'. The racialization of the Muslim Other in the post 9/11 crisis also involves a "dual process of cultural racism and the racialization of national origin" (Naber, 2006, p.236). The racialization analysis pertaining to Muslims echoes Balibar's (1991) 'neo-racism', or 'racism without races.' According to Semati (2010) this neo-racist logic is not explicitly framed within an inferior/superior paradigm but rather one of 'difference.' This difference originating in the culture of the Other (i.e., Muslims) is viewed as insurmountable. This renders "a racism which at first does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but only the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions."(Balibar cited in Semati, 2010, p.266) The emerging negative diatribes about the Muslim other along with the 'multicultural sensibilities' of the state then serve to anchor what is visible (both in 'spectacle' and everyday treatment) as a difference of culture (a "clash of civilization") while sapping the reality of all political and social histories.

Socio-cultural and religious differences as key to racialization support Selod and Garner's argument that Muslims can be/are racialized. It is this process of racialization along religious and socio-cultural registers fabricated in the West that constitutes what we refer to as Islamophobia. Such a conceptual framing helps to understand how Islamophobia functions and situates experiences previously not understood as 'racial' within race scholarship (Garner & Selod, 2015). As explained by Deepa Kumar (2017),

> While modern racism is of a completely different character than the xenophobic and prejudicial attitudes held in medieval Europe, not least because the modern nation state has been able to institutionalize racist practices in ways that far exceed those of earlier societies, there are precursors to the current ideological construction of the Muslim as enemy that demonstrate contemporary Islamophobia is part of a much longer, albeit contradictory, historical lineage. (p.54)

Kumar and others (Kapoor, Kalra & Rhodes, 2013; Kundnani, 2017; Abbas, 2019; Ameli & Merali, 2019; Cainkar, 2019) emphasize that racism ascribing Western constructions of Muslims and Islam is historical. Yet, most contemporary commonplace understandings of Islamophobia make little reference to Orientalism as a mechanism of Judeo-Christianity, colonialism, and empire (Kumar, 2017).

Beyond its historical origins in Orientalism, Islamophobia draws from the local racial hierarchy, assuming new and more complex forms. Unravelling the operation of Islamophobia in Canada thus requires understanding of the workings of the settler colonial state in a transnational context- the context of a global 'war on terror.' Framing Islamophobia as a form of state-sanctioned racialization situated in time and place moves us beyond Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' and Lewis' 'Muslim rage' narratives positioning Muslim people as enemies of the State (Kundnani, 2017, Kumar, 2012). Such an understanding of racism as a political weapon of States moves thinking from 'how' Islamophobia operates into 'why' it exists. While it is not the

intention of my study to explore the political projects upholding and shaping Islamophobia, it is necessary to situate the gendered racialization of Muslim women in public schools in such a global context while attending to the specificity of national/local community.

2.3 ISLAMOPHOBIA: DEFINITIONS

As referenced earlier, the coining of the term 'Islamophobia' by the Runnymede Trust Commission (1997) served the Commission's purpose of promoting awareness and generating a vocabulary to address racism and discrimination against Muslims in the UK. Disentangling this reality outside of the generalized term 'racism' afforded the Commission the opportunity to make specific the experiences of racism and discrimination of Muslim people. The term Islamophobia attempted to make visible the racialization process of Islamophobia discussed above and the complicity of its political projects (historical and contemporary). While no single definition of Islamophobia is perfect, it is useful to pause here and make explicit my own meaning when using the term in this dissertation.

Islamophobia is increasingly located in frameworks of racialization and antiracism where it is understood to be ideological and embodied. Since the original report of the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia original report (1997) there have been revisions to the term in the UK. These consider the United Nations' (2008) definition of racism as social hatred manifesting in forms of discrimination. The UN's renewed definition emphasizes structural inequalities in reception, opportunity and outcome experienced by the Muslim community, calling attention to the institutional barriers and structures facilitating these

inequities. The Runnymede Commission's subsequent report on Islamophobia in 2017 adopted this renewed framework to the redefining of the term in the UK:

> Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (p. 7)

In America, the University of California, Berkeley Center for Race and Gender is home to the Islamophobia research and documentation project. The project gathers researchers, thinkers and practitioners engaging "systematic and empirical approaches to the study of Islamophobia and its impact on the American Muslim community" (IRDP website, 2021). On the project's website we are offered a more complex working definition of Islamophobia:

> Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve "civilizational rehab" of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended. (np)

My dissertation draws from both these definitions, recognizing Islamophobia as a form of racialization, structural and individual, that is rooted in long histories of Empire and colonization. The analysis of the ideology of Islamophobia and its manifestations in public and academic discourses must be balanced by the study of institutional and personal realities, not only in the daily hate crime occurrences but also in the daily indignities, silencing, and injuries to sense of self and wellbeing— what Patricia Williams (1991) termed 'Spirit Murder.' That is the rationale for this study.

Beyond explicating a definition, I also want to briefly situate manifestations of Islamophobia experienced in schools within the political movements that build and shape individual and communal realities of Muslim people through policy, social and economic structures, and public representations. Sayyid (2014) and Kundnani (2017) are both cautious in their discussions of Islamophobia as merely a localised racism, urging attention to political forces within and across national boundaries. This becomes particularly relevant as Islamophobia works to strip "mediated crisis events" of political and racial histories and meaning and instead locates the problem as a function of the cultural deficiency of 'the Muslim' (Kundnani, 2016, p.7). Massoumi, Mills, Miller (2017) challenge discussions of Islamophobia as simply ideological or discursive processes and advance the argument of structural racism not as a by-product of imperialism, colonialism, or neoliberal racial orders but as intentional political actions and structures. These authors view Islamophobia as fostering and maintaining a particular social/world order where Whiteness and Westerness maintain supremacy over all others. Islamophobia is more than a legitimizing shell, argues Kundnani (2016); it is mobilized by "state practices... such that state surveillance agencies conjure into existence the very spectre they believe are haunting them." (p.3) The following sections introduce the wider historical and global context shaping the emerging experience of the Muslim women leaders in public schools with whom I speak.

2.4 ISLAMOPHOBIA: TRENDS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the 'Muslim world' came to serve as the ideological enemy in public imagination of Western nations (Kundnani, 2015). The narrative of a 'Muslim enemy' erases the ongoing exploitation and extraction of natural resources

and labour in the Muslim majority countries by Western nations who provide protection to puppet regimes and demonize those who step out of line. The demonizing of Muslim peoples further justifies the West's unchecked economic, military, and political support of the state of Israel (Kumar, 2012; Massoumi, Mills, & Miller, 2017; Razack, 2022). These political forces mobilize through the constructions of public 'alarm' over (Western) national identity and the 'imaginary' of who belongs to the nation. The ways of belonging are cultural and cemented in thought, speech, and conduct (Abbas, 2020). Echoing Hage (2000) and Thobani (2007), Abbas (2019) finds that the great divide in socioeconomic wealth between Western nations and others is exploited by political elites. Globally, these elites take the opportunity to simultaneously evade culpability while scapegoating marginalized and minoritized populations as the origin of social ills (Thobani, 2007). Instead of focusing on austerity measures behind inequality, members of the dominant social group are set against the minority through the mobilization of national identity and nation against immigrants and Others. For Muslims, the construction of 'Us and Them' fabricated by the imaginary of nationalism in Western states, positions them, often over generations, as unassimilable perpetual strangers to the nation.

Scholars (e.g., Abbas, 2020; Ameli and Merali, 2019; Kundnani, 2017; Kumar, 2012) make clear that Islamophobia is ideological, structural, cultural, and discursive, as well as a targeted and individual experience of racism and discrimination. Islamophobia as mobilized by the state seeks to reduce Muslim political power and the political engagement of Muslims living in the West (Sayyid, 2014; Kundnani, 2017; Kumar, 2017). The fragmentation of the Muslim community through delineations of good, moderate, or secular Muslims and bad faith-practicing Muslims supports the expansion of the mechanism developed to govern Muslim people in public

space and institutions. The securitization apparatus includes internal surveillance of Muslim communities in public institutions like schools and universities (e.g. Afshar, 2013; Miah, 2013; Kundnani, 2015; Saeed, 2019). These mechanisms restrict Muslim peoples' right to movement and opportunity. Mechanisms created in the name of anti-terror also invade the private spaces of Muslims, including mosques and family networks. The anti-terror frameworks leverage the law (the preferential tool of the Western nation) to create 'states of exceptions' that allow the stripping of citizens (and immigrants) of their human rights (e.g., Razack, 2011; Patel, 2017; Kapoor, 2018). These macro forces are directly implicated in and collectively impact the discourses of Muslims and their embodied experience of being Muslim in Canada. If this discrimination is experienced differently in Canada, it is important to note that Islamophobia is still a global phenomenon. I keep these two frameworks in tension as I engage Islamophobia as it operates in Canada and in its public schools.

2.5 ISLAMOPHOBIA FROM "EXTREME TO THE MAINSTREAM"

Before discussing the specific manifestations of Islamophobia in the education sector, I want to attend to the cohesive nature of the Islamophobia project across the political spectrum. This is relevant to schools as state institutions and as spaces claimed to promote the liberal multicultural character of the Canadian nation. A range of scholars in the UK and the US (e.g., Kumar, 2012; Kundnani, 2014; Massoumi, Mills & Miller, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2019; Razack, 2022) make evident the mutually reinforcing interaction of right and left versions of Islamophobia. The normalizing of anti-Muslimness[1] has legitimized a range of legislative and

[1] When I use the suffix -ness in relation to Muslim, I am conceptualizing this to mean the expression of being Muslim, the values and beliefs and the ways they are lived out

programmatic realities including surveillance and securitization. The normalizing is built on the foundational view of Islam as inherently contradictory to the national 'imaginary' of European and North American states and the self-image of their citizens. Mondon and Winter (2017 & 2019) demonstrate the "porosity" of what they identify as 'liberal' and 'illiberal' articulations of Islamophobia in constructing this exclusion (p.4). As in other forms of oppression, those who defend themselves against accusations of Islamophobia often do so by claiming a liberal position. In professing liberalism, many Canadians position themselves apart from the 'real' racists. The construction of this binary enables liberal Islamophobia to become 'mainstream', exempt from scrutiny, and to enter legitimately into everyday discourse in cultural and public institutions (e.g. schools).

For Mondon and Winter (2017), the illiberal articulation/movements are those that have been traditionally anchored in racism (old/biological and new/cultural) and exclusivist ideology, viewing Muslims as a violent and inferior monolith. In these articulations and projects, Muslimness is an "immutable characteristic akin to biology." (Mondon and Winter, 2019, p.60) This form of Islamophobia promotes explicit discrimination but goes beyond physical attacks on Muslims. The enactment manifests itself in public policies that include: the 'Muslim' travel ban, the hijab and niqab ban in public institutions, blocking the building or removal of mosques, the surveillance of young men on university campuses, and the banning of halal products. Liberal (or reformist) approaches, meanwhile, promote an allegiance to universal 'values': democracy, human rights, and gender equality — which are often presented as the natural legacy of the enlightened Christian West (Kundnani, 2014). Liberals may not wage violent attacks on Muslim communities within Western nations but mobilize polite and civil means to engage their

Islamophobia. Much of these polite methods involve separating "moderate and model Muslims" from their "radical and practicing" counterpoints (Kundnani, 2014, p.66). This form of Islamophobia locates the 'problem' with Muslims as one held by an imaginary extremist and fringe minority group. This liberal articulation of Islamophobia asserts its legitimacy by invoking 'progressive values' while condemning (within limits) the racist and the fundamentalist conservatives. Cloaking themselves in narratives of security and freedom, liberal Islamophobes endorse surveillance and targeting of Muslim communities in the name of homeland security, which is a deeply nationalist project. Simultaneously, the liberal commitment to gender rights and free speech fosters Islamophobia through its policing of women for example. Calls to ban the hijab, for instance, are presented as attempts to emancipate Muslim women and to promote the Western notion of civil society as secular when in fact it is founded in Christian values hidden by liberal discourse.

What both liberal and illiberal articulations of Islamophobia have in common is the dismissal of histories of Enlightenment, Orientalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and present-day imperialism (Mondon & Winter, 2017). In this historical erasure, liberal articulations may claim to reject the 'clash of civilization' but continue to uphold the assumed superiority of the West and its accompanying values. Canada is no exception to the interplay between liberal and illiberal Islamophobia. The blurring of liberal and illiberal forms of Islamophobia circulates in public service institutions (e.g., schools) serving Muslim communities. In such spaces, liberal values are invoked to shield the institution and its agents (teachers, administrators, staff, etc.) from accusations of racism. Liberal policy frameworks such as multiculturalism and religious accommodations (Ontario) claim to foster inclusion and belonging for racialized Muslim students

and staff. Ironically, conservative critics point to such frameworks as evidence of the liberals having 'lost their way' and descended into moral relativism, becoming apologists for the unenlightened ways of particular ethnic groups (read: Muslims), and the rejection of 'state values' (Kapoor & Kalra, 2013). In practice, the presence of policies and procedures like faith-based accommodations serve to uphold the liberal veneer of public institutions, infusing a righteousness about public services (like schools) while erasing the cultures of intolerance and daily indignities experienced by Muslim students and staff.

2.6 ISLAMOPHOBIA AT SCHOOL

Schools are participants in cultural politics and culture wars that position Muslims in public spaces in alignment with the racialization discussed above. This charged cultural environment leaves Muslim youth, children, and staff without recourse to recognize, name, and interrupt the rampant, albeit sometimes insidious, Islamophobia. Until very recently, even the language of Islamophobia was viewed as outside anti-oppressive/ anti-racism work in schools (Ontario 3Yr Anti-racism Strategic Plan, 2017). Educational discourses play a pivotal role in positioning Muslimness and Muslim communities as invisible or outside Canadian national identity and belonging. A diligent cadre of researchers, advocates, and educators have steadily documented and analyzed the experiences of Muslims in the education sector of 'Western' nations like Canada (e.g., Zine, 2000, 2008, 2022; Shah, 2009; Schlein & Chan, 2010; Jandali, 2012; Miah, 2013; Kayaalp, 2014; Isik- Ercan, 2015; Bakali, 2016; Ahmed, 2016; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Shah, 2017; Welpy, 2017; Amjad, 2018, ElKassem et al., 2018). In the review to follow, I provide an overview of key findings of this scholarship with particular attention to the

experiences of Muslims students and staff in English dominant public schools. I am especially interested in those studies set in Canada for their contextual relevance to my study.

2.6.1 Muslim Students

Studies examining Islamophobia in the K-12 education sector in Western nations indicate Muslim students and staff are subject to Islamophobia and discrimination at school. A 2015 study conducted with over six hundred Muslim students in California found that students regularly face verbal harassment, name-calling, and references to bombs and terrorists by peers. 55% of these respondents characterized this experience as bullying. The study also finds that 29% of hijab-wearing students reported unwanted touching/pulling of their hijab. Nineteen percent of students in the same study were targeted with online hate and cyberbullying (CAIR-CA, 2015).

To date, "little is known in Canada of the lived experience of Muslim children and the impact of Islamophobia has had on them" (ElKassem et al., 2018, p.7). Most public schools do not collect data on experiences of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate. In one small-scale study (n=144) completed during my tenure as equity coordinator at the York Region School Board, sixty percent of participating elementary and secondary Muslim students reported "experiencing Islamophobia in their school setting." 75% of respondents indicate that they experience Islamophobic microaggressions at least once and up to ten times a week. Ten percent state such experiences happen more than ten times in each week (2018). When asked about the impact of these experiences, students reported significant impacts (Table 1). This small study signals a

need for greater attention to the impacts of Islamophobia in the education sector and its impact on Muslim identifying members of schools.

Lowered self-esteem & confidence	47%
Decrease in friends & poor relationships	36%
Confusion about my identity	20%
Desire to hide my Muslim identity	24%
Hatred towards my religion	10%
Hatred towards my family	10%
Isolation and loneliness	3%
Desire to speak out and act out	5%

Table 1: Impact of Islamophobia Microaggressions on Elementary and Secondary Student (n=144)

In Zine's (2008) study, conducted prior to 9/11 in a public high school, Muslim students described teacher assumptions about Islam and Muslims and a patronizing attitude, especially toward Muslim girls, as a prevalent reality. Assumed foreignness and incompatibility with 'being Canadian' (Zine 2000, 2008; Kayaalp, 2014; Ahmed, 2017; Amjad, 2018), Quebecois (Bakali, 2016), American (Reagan, 2020), British (Miah, 2013; Shah, 2017), or Danish (Jaffe-Walter, 2016) were dominant in the experience of Muslim children and youth in public schools.

The National Council of Canadian Muslims conducted a study in 2017 to capture the experience of being Muslim in public school. The town halls, conducted in the Greater Toronto area, included children as young as ten and as old as nineteen. Participants shared stories of experiencing regular Islamophobic speech and commentary and verbal targeting in the form of jokes and name-calling. As with most other studies (Zine, 2008; Jandali, 2012; Kayaalp, 2014; Bakali, 2016; Ahmed, 2016; Shah, 2017; Amjad, 2018), it is reported that teachers dismiss Islamophobic incidents as being jokes, free speech, or justified. Some Muslim students are even chided for being 'overly sensitive' (Jandali, 2012; Amjad, 2018). This is not surprising in light of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding finding that teachers and school officials participate in one in four incidents of bullying experienced by Muslim children in the US public schools (2017).

In a UK-based study, Welpy (2017) identified the daily implicit microaggression communicating otherness and inferiority experienced by Muslim youth as "read" by the school staff "exclusively through the lens of culture and religion" (p.386). The framework of multiculturalism as tolerance in these public-school settings prevented deep engagement with any issues of racialization and difference. Notions of tolerance communicated to youngsters a requisite acceptance of microaggressions in the name of harmony. Educators' inability, unwillingness, or lack of motivation to foster dialogue around identity and the ongoing denial of 'intent' in incidents of discrimination repeatedly silenced Muslim children's contestation. According to Welpy (2017), the additional worry of being viewed as threatening results in the use of tacit strategies of discursive resistance by Muslim students and their engaging of alternative images of Muslimness. In contrast, a study by Schlein and Chan (2010) describes a

young Muslim girl's experience of navigating the dissonance of being Muslim in an Ontario public school by suppressing her Muslimness at school to fit in with peers. The principal in this case speaks of the hiring of a Muslim teacher as a significant step on the way to addressing the gap between school and community, indicating that the new hire would be the source of learning about Islam for the rest of the staff.

The expectation to inform non-Muslims 'about Islam' is not limited to Muslim staff, as Muslim students report feeling extreme pressure to represent and explain their faith and their community and disrupt stereotypes (Isik- Ercan, 2015; Bakali, 2016; Ahmed, 2016). Students are often 'spotlighted' by educators in classrooms and expected to explain Islam, geopolitical events, and justify Muslim practices (Bakali, 2016). Teacher's language and attitude are reflective of normative thinking regarding the inferiority of Muslims, their incompatibility with 'Western' values, and the encroaching threat of Islamization (Kayaalp, 2014). Teachings and explanations by students do not necessarily result in any shift, as educators will often insist on their previously held perspective (Bakali, 2016; Ahmed, 2016). Engaging the Muslim student as a representative, particularly amongst high school students, simply becomes an opportunity to 'debate Islam' and assign blame to a Muslim body, even if that body is that of a child. When questioned about their Islamophobic beliefs, teachers in Ahmed's study (2016) claim an exceptionalism for Muslims in Canada (Good Muslims) while asserting these beliefs as applicable to the Muslims 'over there,' (Bad Muslims) (Mamdani, 2004).

Amjad's (2018) work with Muslim elementary students in Canada (Alberta) finds teachers actions and language amplify misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslim students.

Bakali's (2016) analysis of Muslim youth's experience in Quebec's public (English) high schools similarly reveals the pervasiveness of Mamdani's "culture talk"— the assumption that Muslims are predisposed to particular viewpoints and behaviours — such as teachers making reference to the 'Muslim mind' during instruction. Such essentialist perspectives on Muslims are coupled with teacher deficit thinking regarding Muslim students' abilities, a lowering of expectations, and streaming toward English acquisition programming (ESL), Special Education, and lower academic programs (Zine, 2000; Shah, 2009; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Amjad, 2018).

Representations of Muslims as a threat to others is perpetuated by state anti-terrorism measures that find their way into public educational contexts. In the UK, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs, such as PREVENT, have infiltrated the education sector with the goal of managing and disciplining the Muslim community. Although these CVE initiatives are informed by pseudoscience (Kundanani, 2014; Jamil, 2016) they require the engagement of social workers and teachers as part of the surveillance and securitization of Muslim communities. Miah (2013) asserts that "there are clear links to be made between the national and international positioning of Muslims and Islam in the ongoing war on terror, articulated through media and political discourses on Muslim communities, and the experiences of anti-Muslim racism within the school environment." In three years (2012-15), 918 children (84 of them under the age of 12, one as young as 3) were referred to PREVENT for 'deradicalization.' In focus groups with over forty Muslim youth ages 15 and 16 from public schools, Miah learned of regular racist incidents with teachers and peers, even on the way to and from school. Students expressed anxiousness about speaking with teachers for fear that they would be 'spying' and 'reporting' on students and their families to PREVENT. Racist experiences were thus normalized and viewed as a 'rite of

passage' of being Muslim at school. Incidents went unaddressed, as students described feeling that reporting was futile. Miah concludes that "anti-Muslim racism is not a series of isolated incidents but rather reflect how the logic of the pathological other permeated the institutional fabric of the school." (p.156). Equally troubling is the anxiety felt by Muslim students around appearing as a threat, which causes some to withhold their knowledge or experience of racist attacks or attempts to defend themselves from them (Bakali, 2016).

Canada does not have a national CVE program parallel to PREVENT. Still, some provinces like Quebec implement programs resembling the one operating in Britain (Jamil, 2016). The Quebec plan, proposed in 2015, required public sector professionals including doctors, teachers, and social workers to be "trained to identify individuals at risk for violent radicalization, thus making national security the primary lens for providing public health, education, and social services." (Jamil, p.108) Instead of committing to addressing-racism and intolerance against Muslims, the plan suggested that youth who experience this form of marginalization are more susceptible to radicalization. Lapsed in 2018, the plan has not been replaced or renewed despite the alarm of members of Quebec's legislature. Further shaping the structural realities for students and educators is Quebec's infamous Bill 21, which bans the display of 'religious' symbols in public spaces, including the wearing of head coverings like the hijab, by public servants. Recent changes to the law, as stipulated by Quebec's superior court (2021), have suspended the Bill in public English school boards yet upholds its legitimacy in French schools. As disciplinary manifestations of Islamophobia, both the Anti-Radicalization Plan and Bill 21, have explicit and direct impacts on the realities of education in Quebec and the

perpetuation of Islamophobia as a structural reality faced by Muslim students and staff across the Canadian landscape (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2017).

The web of racialized policies, discourse, and behaviours toward Muslims in schools is bolstered by the absence of 'positive' or nuanced representation or content regarding Muslims/Islam in the curriculum (Zine, 2002; Bakali, 2016; Shah, 2017; NCCM, 2017; Amjad,2018). This erasure of Muslim identity in Canadian history and curriculum leaves Muslim students feeling invisible, alienated, and having "no voice" at school (NCCM, 2017). Students in Bakali (2016) and Zine's (2008) studies describe the expectation to perform Whiteness, reproduce nationalist cultural viewpoints, and provide normative responses to achieve academic success.

The Institute of Muslim Mental Health (US) reports increasing numbers of cases of depression, anxiety, paranoia, image issues, and substance abuse among Muslim American youth (Mir & Saroub, 2019). Across the many studies reviewed here, students expressed feeling othered, silenced, excluded from 'belonging', and some even spoke of experiencing an identity crisis (Zine, 2000; Shah, 2009; Bakali, 2016, NCCM, 2017, Ahmed, 2017, Amjad, 2018). In addition to the general toll of Islamophobia on emotional wellbeing, some students feel driven to leave school rather than face daily discrimination (Zine, 2000; Jaffe-Walter, 2016). In the UK, where identity-based achievement data is collected, Muslim students are overrepresented in the lowest achievement levels and in school attrition rates (Shah, 2009).

The growing trend of Islamic schools in North America and the UK can be understood, in part, as a response to the need for a safe alternative to public school and a responsive learning environment for Muslim youth (Bakali, 2016; Shah, 2009; Tiflati, 2021). For those students remaining within public schools, the rare Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) becomes a similar type of safe space and a "formalized resistance" to "assert a collective identity," countering normative school culture which seeks to diminish and marginalize Muslimness in so-called secular public schools (Zine, 2000, p.294). The MSA in Zine's study served as an advocacy bridge to secure faith- based 'accommodations' like a prayer space and considerations during Ramadan. MSA members express feeling empowered academically, socially, and spiritually through their membership in the MSA.

2.6.2 Muslim Staff

A smaller body of work examines the experiences of Muslim staff (educators and leaders) in the public (English dominant) schools of Western nations. For example, in a four-year study with seventeen new teachers in English state school who identify as Muslim, Benn (2003) found feelings of isolation and disillusionment, experiences of discriminations and a perception of undervaluing of their skills and knowledge. Women who wear the hijab (or other Islamic attire) report significantly more negative experiences. Hiding Muslimness is a coping strategy cited by several teachers in this study. Making their Muslim identity invisible is intended, according to Benn, to avoid confrontation in Islamophobic spaces. This invisibility contrasts with the pressure to stand out and prove themselves to be taken seriously by supervisors and peers. The scrutiny they describe is attributed to being viewed as a threat, as they are assumed to be 'indoctrinating' students. Some of the study participants describe

experiences of Islamophobia with non-Muslim families who did not favour having a Muslim teacher for their child.

Many of these same experiences appear in Shaikh's (2010) study with Muslim male teachers in English state schools. Like their Muslim sisters, participants speak of being treated as suspect by leaders and supervisors, being subject to ongoing surveillance, and being viewed as unsuitable for leadership roles. Muslim male teachers were also hesitant to engage in expressions of Muslimness (e.g., affinity spaces, publicly supporting Muslim students) fearing that they would be labelled as extremist. These teachers express feeling extreme pressure to demonstrate being exceptional to receive fair treatment. Isolation and tokenism emerged as themes across interviews.

Mogra (2013) finds continued underrepresentation of Muslim teachers in British schools. Examining recruitment, retention, and career advancement, he identifies securing positions to be a critical barrier for Muslim educators. Echoing Muslim male teachers in Shaikh's study, respondents in this study note a lack of support and encouragement for leadership opportunities. Along with stereotyping and surveillance, these factors impact potential recruitment and retention of Muslim teachers in public schools. More recently, Vince (2021) spoke to 21 Muslim educators who face regular questions regarding their professional capacity and identity. Visibility of Muslimness in appearance or practice is reported to increase scrutiny and discrimination.

To date, I was able to locate few studies that examined the experience of Muslim educators in Canadian or American public (English dominant) schools. Bakali's critical ethnographic study Islamophobia in Quebec schools includes the perceptions and experiences of three Muslim teachers. All the teachers describe widespread Islamophobia in their schools expressed through the conduct and words of students and staff. Two of the teachers even spoke of being targeted for being Muslim.

Debbie Almontasser, author of *Leading While Muslim* (2018), faces similar racism and hostility as founder and principal of the first dual language Arabic-English public school in the United States. In her book, she documents her experience and that of other Muslim school leaders from around the US through the lens of political spectacle. Almontasser's research is the first academic study focused on the leadership experiences of Muslim public-school leaders. Other studies focused on Muslim leaders include: Halvorsen's (2003) exploration of how school leaders engaged with the anniversary of 9/11, an autoethnographic study by a Muslim South Asian female principal of a high-poverty urban school documenting her leadership practices (Keval, 2012) and Davidson's (2011) interview study with Almontasser herself relating to her founding of the Khalil Gibran International Academy in New York (as cited in Almontasser, 2018). All fourteen participants in the *Leading While Muslim* study discuss the impact of political climate and the role of the media on their sense of fear and self-consciousness while serving as school leaders. They were fearful of losing their job, of being viewed as promoting radical agendas, and of being targeted by staff, community, or media. Muslim school leaders were cautious in speaking about anything related to Islam or Muslims even when the topic was raised by others. Some of the interviews revealed undermining and gaslighting by supervisors

and staff. Muslim school leaders reported feeling-extreme pressure to represent Islam and to disrupt stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Finally, respondents expressed a social responsibility which drives them, promoting programs and initiatives which foster social change and community service.

The studies discussed in the preceding section elucidate the realities of being Muslim in Western (English language) public schools. They reveal the ways that the racialization of Muslims operates and the entrenched and nuanced Islamophobia that shapes the daily lives of students and staff. My own work hopes to contribute the voices and stories of Muslim women to this growing scholarship on Islamophobia in schools with a critical analysis of experiences of leaders. Through the women's narratives and resulting composite counter-stories I seek to unsettle the dominant discourses of diversity/multiculturalism of public education and EDI (equity/diversity/inclusion) approaches to addressing historical and contemporary colonial/orientalist and anti-Muslim mindsets and practices.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I provide an overview of Islamophobia as a form of racialization and its architecture in shaping Muslim life in Canada. I find myself aligned with writers and scholars who contest the reductionist approach to Islamophobia as simply a matter of representation. The repertoire of Islamophobia along with the complicity of liberal and conservative (and alt-right) 'movements' make clear that understanding and resisting Islamophobia is complex and multi-faceted, or in Sayyid (2014) words, a multiplicity of "specific assemblages" (p.22). Identifying and analyzing these "assemblages" further demonstrates that Islamophobia is not an "elite conjuring trick, deployed consciously and strategically by well-funded propaganda organizations" but rather a historic and contemporary political and social project intended to circumvent "the emergence of a politically engaged Muslim population that is opposed to [Western] hegemony and the emergence of a public space in which racialized population are able to articulate [and actively oppose] knowledge of empire." (Kundnani, 2017, p.42) In my examination of Muslim women's experiences of leadership I hope to show that our experiences are connected to the global and nationalist currents of Islamophobia across various registers of policy and practice informing our work.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My framework draws upon Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). This study follows in the footsteps of Dei and Ashgharzadeh (2001) exhibiting caution towards grand theories. I instead choose to "work within a guiding framework that takes into full account the fact that academic and political questions are continually changing" (p.299). I take up Dei and Ashgharzadeh's invitation to not be limited by theories and instead to wrestle with empirical research through them. As an act of emancipation, and a work to assert voices that have been ignored, this study discursively engages with CRT and CRF as theories from 'the margins' to think through Muslim women's narratives and interrogate institutionalized power and privilege. CRT and CRF bring to light the ways racism is encrypted in rituals, habits, and structures of schools. They interrogate how Whiteness is constructed as 'under threat' and lend insight to understanding the confrontations of Muslim woman leaders with Whiteness. The theories help us to hear the stories shared in this study by illuminating the cultural, discursive, and affective mechanisms of the othering of Muslims. These theories give further insight into the gendered dimensions of this othering. They also help me understand the Christianness[2] that continues to operate through Whiteness that founds and upholds Western public schools. Engaging the stories of women participants through CRT and CRF advances new forms and practices of educational leadership, the institution of school and social justice education. In the following section, I specifically draw on iteration of these theories, particularly CRF, that have taken up Muslim/ Muslim women's experiences in a Western society context.

[2] Where I use the suffix -ness in relation to Christian, I am conceptualizing this to mean the expression of being Christian, the values and beliefs and the ways they are lived out

3.2 CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)

3.2.1 Critical Race Theory Overview

CRT is a relevant theoretical approach to support the goals of this study because it contributes to an analysis of dominant structures and interpersonal realities surfaced in the narratives of Muslim women. Critical Race theory was first adapted into education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) from legal scholarship. It was intended as a tool of analysis for understanding the operation of race and racism in schools. As with its legal studies origins, CRT in education challenges the conceptualization of the state's institution (i.e., schools) as neutral and objective and instead centres race as an organizing force (historic and current) of inequality and oppression in the education sector (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT makes evident race's social constructedness as well as its real and lived realities resulting from systems and structures of Whiteness that maintain patterns of marginalization and inequality (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT has also been instrumental in shaping thinking and practice of anti-racist and culturally responsive leadership in education (e.g., Khalifa, M., Gooden, M., & Davis, J. E., 2016; Santamaría, L., 2014).

A review of K-12 educational leadership literature guided by CRT, identifies six common tenets (Capper, 2015): permanence of race; counternarratives; interest convergence; critique of liberalism; intersectionality; Whiteness as property. This study will engage most of these tenets. In the following I describe those of greatest relevance and how they will contribute to this study.

3.2.2 CRT Key Tenets Relevant to this Study:

Permanence of Racism attests to the ever-presence of racism as part of experience whether we are conscious of it or not and its continued manifestation in individual and systemic ways. For those of us studying educational settings, race and racism need to be part of the calculus to understand what is operating and how power is being mobilized. The permanence of race is an assumption on which my own research is founded. I maintain that public school upholds and reproduces ideologies and practices which have specific lived consequences for Muslim women staff, for Muslim women leaders particularly. Scholarship in educational leadership has begun to explore how race/racism shapes the narratives of racialized women school leaders (e.g., Hodsford, 2012; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). Little research has been done to understand race/racism as it pertains to Muslim staff in public schools thus far. This study seeks to address this absence. By centring race/racism, this study will surface forms of exclusion and discrimination faced by Muslim women school leaders and reveal the wider historical discourses and forms of oppression inscribed in these experiences (Rodela, 2020). Centring race and racism has impacted the design of the interview protocol as well as the autobiographical narrative as I sought to animate experiences as a Muslim woman school leader.

Counter-storytelling creates space for experiences that counter the dominant narrative and holds up stories that are often missing from public discourse (Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, 2009). CRT in education affirms the experiences of racialized people in the sector as a legitimate source of knowledge and analysis (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Not only do counter-stories inject new narratives into the collective consciousness, but they also empower those who

have been made invisible and silenced to speak their truth and to share a worldview from the periphery. Delgado (1989) explains the importance of counter-storytelling as a "psychic self-preservation" (p.2436) for those who tell their stories as well as those who find affirmation in hearing their own experiences reflected and come to understand them to be a function of racism and not individual failings. Counter-stories simultaneously "challenge [the] façade of truth by revealing the perspective of racialized power and privilege behind it" (Capper, 2015, p.808). The counter narratives of Muslim women leaders in this study question the 'truth' of diversity and tolerance and the commitment of the public institution to inclusion. These counter-stories act against the control asserted by institutions toward Muslim women, who in their very presence challenge "the rules and procedures that govern institutional life [which] become truths that are lived as givens." (Ahmed, 2003, p.378)

CRT's tenet of counter narratives emphasizes the importance of racialized leaders across the educational system, not simply for a representative purpose, but rather for the worldviews these leaders may offer should they be provided with supportive conditions. Capper (2015) does caution, however, against racial essentialism when inviting or integrating counter-narrative. The CRT leadership literature reminds us that we are all socialized into 'majoritarian narratives' (narratives of the dominant class) (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As Linda Alcoff (2000) has argued, "the internal is conditioned by, even constituted within, the external, which is itself mediated by subjective negotiation" (p.337). Understanding stories requires us not only to read for what they tell us about the external world but also to seek the unspoken ways the internal has been "constituted within" this social context. My own study will engage the counter-stories of Muslim women leaders, attending to the ways women make sense of their own experiences.

These stories highlight the workings of structures and systems in schools and the specificity of these to Muslim women's bodies. The counter-stories are a missing voice from the collection of perspectives on public education in Canada. Counter-story as methodology is discussed further in the next chapter.

Critique of Liberalism is closely connected to CRT's challenge of the ahistoricism of much the existing analysis within education (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001). CRT theorists would argue that without knowing the histories of systems like liberalism, we risk taking these as natural and a given, instead of constructions of the dominant class. This tenet historicizes and explores liberal ideals which hold racism in place and maintain White supremacy in schools. Liberalism is discussed in much of the existing CRT literature in education and education leadership as colour-blindness, meritocracy, neutrality and incrementalism. These concepts permeate the Canadian ideology of multiculturalism, which plays a central role in Canadian civil society and its institutions. While Canadian multicultural ideology is defined by state policy, it is its infusion into common sense -- a common sense which holds sediments of the colonial origins of the nation and the racial exclusion of non-White bodies alongside a national mythology of a cultural mosaic -- that most profoundly shapes the daily reality of schools. Both the ideology of multiculturalism (as defined by the state) and its common sense (as carried by its citizens) are integral to the Canadian flavour of liberalism dominant within Ontario public schools. Reading the narratives from this study for liberalism generally, and multiculturalism/diversity specifically, elucidates some of the structural barriers encountered by Muslim women in schools. When we recognize the barriers, making explicit how what is constructed as 'good' by the dominant class is harmful and violent to the "rest", we open the

opportunity for dialogue for change (Hall, 1992). We also identify possibilities for resistance and solidarity.

Intersectionality is an analytical frame and epistemology. Intersectionality acts as a prism to illuminate complex dynamics of discrimination that continue to be unrecognized and unexamined in specific experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is intended to show how systems of oppression compound in experience. Thinking through and with intersectionality in my work is intended to disrupt erasure of the complexity of identity and oppression in personal and institutional contexts. The 'single-axis' approach of universalizing the experience of a particular class of White women as the experience of all women was critiqued by Crenshaw in her foundational text on Intersectionality (1989). Intersectionality grapples with the way that patriarchy and White supremacy work themselves out simultaneously upon racialized women's lives. Understanding the lived experience of racialized women as school administrators, including that of Muslim women, is a gateway to understanding the discourse of leadership, Whiteness, and the structures that uphold them. Intersectionality is key to such an understanding.

Whiteness as property analyzes the reality of a dominant class determining what is valued and, in turn, who is valued. As explained in Harris' (1993) foundational writing on this subject, where she posits Whiteness as the "ultimate property," "Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property- was defined to include only the cultural practices of Whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that Whiteness- that which Whites alone possess- is valuable and is property." (Cited in Ladson & Billings, 1995, p.59-60). Billings and Tate locate

Harris' multiple dimensions of 'Whiteness as property' in the context of education, drawing connection to the structures, practices, and cultures of schools. Their discussion of these dimensions illuminates the ways that Whiteness is pervasive and entrenched in every aspect of education. Manifestations that are relevant to my study include the rewarding of conformity to "White norms" of belief, appearance, and conduct (rights of disposition), and the maintenance and protection of programs/roles as exclusively White (the absolute right to exclude). In the following section, I further wrestle with CRT's confrontation with Whiteness and its relevance to thinking about Canadian schools, the context of my study.

3.2.3 Understanding Whiteness through CRT

Critical race scholars assert the permanence of race and racial ideology in public school context (e.g., Allen & Loui, 2019; Castagno, 2014; Picower, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In Western (Canadian) schools, Whiteness as racial ideology is circulated in teacher practice, curriculum, and activities of belonging. This is not unexpected given that the foundations of Canadian education originate in Western Europe and are based on/in White supremacy (Berry, 2007). Defining White supremacy and Whiteness and the ways Whiteness comes to life in public schools will make transparent my scholarly understanding of Whiteness. My discussion also stages an entanglement of Whiteness with Christianity which often converge in the practices, cultures, and activities of school. This is particular to a study of Muslim leader experience in schools.

3.2.3.1 Making Sense of White Supremacy and Whiteness:

White supremacy and Whiteness are sometimes used interchangeably, a practice I adopt in this study. Still, it is useful to make explicit what is meant by each. D'Angelo (2016) offers

the definition of White supremacy as a "political-economic social system of domination. This system is based on historical and current accumulation of structural power that privileges, centralizes, and elevates White people as a group." (p.145) White supremacy operates across institutions and spaces to ensure the racial dominance of Whites historically and in the present day. In speaking of White supremacy, D'Angelo makes clear it is not an exclusive reference to extremist hate groups. In fact, it is not in reference to specific individuals or their intentions at all, but rather a legacy and contemporary reality that asserts the assumed superiority of Whites across systems, sectors, and society.

Cheryl Harris (1993) suggests that Whiteness sutures individual and systemic formations. The nuance across race scholarship regarding 'Whiteness' may be captured by recognizing Whiteness as identity, ideology, and institution (Castagno, 2014; Dyson, 1996; Frankenberg, 1993). Frankenberg (1997) describes Whiteness as a "location of structural advantage, of race privilege". She finds that "being White" affords persons and communities advantage within systems and institutions (p.1). Who is included in and benefits from Whiteness changes as Whiteness' shifts across place and time and stretches to maintain its dominance (Dyer, 1997, Roediger 2007, Yoon, 2012). Invisibility is intrinsic to the ideology of Whiteness and essential to its maintenance. Invisibility is made possible by normalizing and prioritizing all things White in society (e.g., politics, economics, media) and in institutions (e.g. schools) (Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012). Whiteness can be "so persuasive and so normalized that it can escape scrutiny by those of us enmeshed in its production." (Spriprakash, 2022, p.24). As an institution, Whiteness sets the norms, the expectations, the priorities, and the practices that inform and shape institutional culture resulting in the advantage and dominance of White people.

Since this culture is normalized or "unmarked," it is viewed as the right way, the neutral way, of being and interacting (Frankenberg, 1997; D'Angelo, 2016). As places of normativity and measurement, Whiteness pervades the assumptions, values, and actions of educators in their daily work and interactions with students (Castagno, 2014).

3.2.3.2 Entanglements: Christianness in Whiteness:

The way Christianness is embedded in Whiteness and circulates in schooling environments is understudied by educational scholars and researchers. In her autoethnographic journey *Exploring the Authority of Whiteness in [Canadian] Education*, Berry (2007) writes "my Christian history was compatible with the Christian foundations of Western education." (p.18) She reminds us of the constitutive influence of Christianity not only in Western (White) 'culture' but also its educational institutions (Dyer, 1997). In this section, I begin to outline how some of this is evident in Canadian schools, albeit with limited research.

When referring to the 'entanglement' of Christianness in the origins, character, and expression of Whiteness and White Supremacy, I am not seeking to erase the diversity within Christian understandings and traditions across communities and context. This project does not mute the history of Christianness within some antiracist movements (e.g., Southern Christian Leadership Conference, United Farm Workers) or evaluate Christian theology or scripture. That is not the work of this study.

My theorizing of the 'entanglement' of Christianness with Whiteness is informed by Said (1978) and Hall's (1992) analysis of the emergence of a unified West/Europe as a Christian

collective, gathered in opposition to a perceived encroaching Islam. The Muslim has been, and continues to be, positioned as the Other to the Christian in the White/Western worldview. In tracing the figure of the Muslim in the history of race/racial thinking, Rana (2007) posits that scientific racism of the seventeenth century attempted to 'evacuate' religious meaning from its framing, moving "toward a racism based in imputed cultural difference" (p.157). Nonetheless, religion continues to be integral to the concept of race and 'practice of racism' (Rana, 2007; Goldberg, 2006). Rana's analysis intimates an understanding of contemporary Whiteness and White supremacy that is enmeshed in Christianity: what began as the Christian-Other binary becomes the White-Other. Ignoring these origins serves to perpetuate the myths of rationality, a cornerstone of Whiteness ideology.

Razack (2021, 2022) notes the continued absence of attention to the "Christian cast" of White supremacy in critical race scholarship (2022, p.19). Turning to Du Bois, Razack argues that it was "as Christians" that Whites asserted their superiority during the colonial and enslavement projects. The racism and violence experienced at the hands of White colonizers (past and present) is not unique to Muslims of course, but "they feature in specific ways when the Christian core of Whiteness is touched." (p.4) Razack's analysis centres the racial and imperial fantasies of haunting Muslim figures (i.e., terrorist, barbarian, dubious citizen) continuing to shape political and media discourses. This haunting "invit[es] us to feel rather than think about the place of Muslims in White Christian life" and the need to re/assert a Whiteness that is Christian at its 'core' (p.46).

This 'racial fantasy' invoked by the presence of Muslim figures in public life and traced to Christianity and imperialism-liberalism also reveals a "global scale" to White supremacy and "imperial Whiteness," where not all the players are in fact White (Razack, 2022, p.31). Razack does not dedicate analysis (in her latest text) to the non-White anti-Muslim subject; still, she reminds us of the various agendas that may be active for such subjects. Borrowing from Judy Han's (2018) work, Razack asserts that "indulging in anti-Muslim racism can provide access to imperial power." (p.31) The anti-Muslim racism of those claiming Christian identities may therefore be a path to the benefits of Whiteness, if not wholesale admission into the club. While we may recognize dominant (White) Christianness (leaders and institutions) to be upholding power relations and defining policy and cultural norms in society and in education, when it comes to maintaining Christian morality, and the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in these spaces, there are "cracks in the colour line." (p.31) Razack continues, that

> To understand how anti-Muslim racism produces Whiteness and makes contribution to global White supremacy requires the conversion of three tenets. First it is necessary to see racism as a register that spans far-right and liberal positions and that the register is animated by emotions that coalesce to form an affect. Second, that origins of White supremacy and White subjectivity can be traced to Christianity and imperialism and that its contemporary expression is inextricably linked with liberalism…and third, that the law is where White supremacy and racial violence get legitimized. (Razack 2022, p.6-7)

Extending Mondon and Winter's (2017) work on articulations of Islamophobia, she posits liberal and extreme forms of Whiteness work together such that Christian values and beliefs (innocence, purity, godliness etc.) exalting White supremacy continue to circulate in contemporary liberal discourses. Razack's last 'tenet,' legitimizing racial hierarchy through the law, is significant and can be extended into the policy arena of the different sectors (including education) as additional sites of authorizing White supremacy. Her framing, with its three tenets, is intended to support

understanding of Islamophobia/ anti-Muslim racism in White supremacy and supports my understanding of how Whiteness operates through and in schools.

Finally, it is significant to reify when considering the Christianness within the Whiteness of schools, it is the Christianness that is dominant to our context (Ontario, Canada), one that is entrenched in Eurocentricity and implicated in the capitalist- liberal project. It is this Christianness which serves to protect White racial innocence through claims of purity and goodness (Jones, 2020). Jones' study of White supremacy and Christianity suggests that Whiteness goes further to "returns the favor, by deflecting any attempt to trace the ideology [of White Supremacy] to its religious source" (Jones, 2020, p.21). Invoking (false) secularism in public education can be viewed as serving this goal, as it denies the presence or the influence of a White Christian worldviews in shaping the culture, policies, and practices of schools. Further theorizing and research is needed to understand the 'Christian cast' of Whiteness in Canadian society and schools. This study, centring the voices of Muslim women, contributes to this thinking.

3.2.3.3 Whiteness in Public Schools

The social identities of educators are central to their professional identities and the perceptions, expectations and social norms they bring into schools (Yoon, 2012). Recent workplace census surveys across Ontario school boards indicate that 70-90% of school board staff identify as White, around three quarters are women, and more than half say they are Christian. Similarly, 87% of principals identify as White (People for Education, 2022). While White supremacy and Whiteness are structural realities and can be reproduced by those who do

not identify as White (or Christian), the current demographic profile of the educators in Ontario suggests we are some distance from dismantling Whiteness from schools.

Yoon (2012) urges greater attention to the White centered professional culture in schools and the ways it prevents the possibility for greater equity and justice. As with Whiteness more generally, she explains, Whiteness in schools is largely invisible to those it benefits (White staff) and is difficult for most educators to identify. In her study of "Whiteness at work," Yoon examines the paradoxes of Whiteness in teacher dialogue with one another and with students, making visible the contradictions between claimed intentions and demonstrated actions. Educator actions with students and with peers, observe Yoon (2012), Castagno (2014), and Kenyon (2018), contribute to the disparities in student outcomes and the maintenance of inequitable realities. Within teacher discourse, Whiteness is protected by validating educator conduct as legitimate, fair, and well-intentioned. Racialized and Indigenous students and their families are blamed for their own overrepresentation in special education programs, in applied and remedial streams, and in suspension and expulsion data. Meanwhile, educators are depicted as serving students 'at-risk' and protecting their 'safety' and 'wellbeing'. These logics of Whiteness render a false reality in the perception of White educators.

In a study with pre-service teachers, Picower (2009) describes 'tools of Whiteness' employed by participants to maintain their dominant perspectives on race, racism, and racial disparities in schools. These 'tools,' she explains, are not "simply passive resistance" but an "active protection of hegemonic stories and White supremacy." (p.197) The tools are categorized as 'emotional,' 'ideological,' and 'performative.' On a systemic level, the ideological and

performative tools of Whiteness are investments in colour/power blindness, meritocracy, individualism, and niceness. As of late, parameters of Whiteness have even been stretched to include multicultural (Culturally Responsive) education and professional learning regarding diversity and equity as a way to rehabilitate Whiteness and maintain its legitimacy in educational spaces. Collectively, these tools maintain the assumed White racial superiority and continue to shape every aspect of school (McLaren, 1998; Yoon, 2012; Castagno, 2014).

The expression of Whiteness in school culture and content and its impact on student outcomes is well documented (Kenyon, 2018; Gillborn, 2005; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Collin & Blot, 2003; Giroux, 1997). Studies also investigate the operation of Whiteness in forming teacher perceptions and perspectives (Kenyon, 2018; Castagno, 2014; Yoon, 2012; Picower, 2009; Chubbuck, 2004). Still, the entanglement of religion with these expressions of Whiteness is a missing analysis in education literature. Despite Christianity as the driver of colonial residential schools designed to assimilate Indigenous children out of their onto-epistemological birthright and traditions, Whiteness in Canadian schools often presents as secular (Johnstone & Lee, 2022). Until recently Christianity remained a dominant aspect of public school through the recitation of Christian prayer and references to doctrine in classrooms. Despite 'secular' changes, the spectre of Christianity continues to be present in the worldview, values/ethics, and even rituals/celebrations circulating in schools.

These are widespread, normalized, and unquestioned. They also constitute Whiteness as delivered to students through the aesthetic, culture and values/beliefs of teachers. This is undergirded in an Education Act (1990) which explicitly states (under section 264) duties of

teachers "to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality." Christian ethics/values are elevated in schools through the teaching of acceptable social values and behavior. Character education is the primary means by which Christian values and behavior are imparted to students. As a form of moral education, Wilhelm & Firmin (2008) find: "the philosophy of character education [as conceived in American/Canadian schools] traditionally has been dependent upon the Biblical standard on which the Judeo-Christian ethical system is founded" (p.188). The myth of schools as secular spaces distracts from this foundation, and the insidiousness of Christianity in shaping school culture and instructional content.

Much of the special days and curriculum celebrated by elementary school teacher are also typically connected to Christian holidays e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter etc. Christian holidays inform school/classroom decorations, displays, and events (e.g., concerts, parent engagement opportunities, and staff parties). Teachers and administrators justify these practices as 'universal' and 'traditional,' or just a crucial part of 'Canadian society.' In exalting the festivals of one group, they dismiss the presence of those who do not religiously and culturally participate in those traditions (Markowitz & Puchner, 2018). Significantly, the conception of these 'holidays' affirms a White standpoint. Educators aware of the optics of privileging one set of traditions in a 'secular' or 'multicultural' school 'add' non-Christian 'traditions' in proximity to the dominant ones, (e.g., Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Chinese New Year (Markowitz & Puchner, 2018). But these inclusions are always in relation to privileging of the dominant Christian ones.

Another site of explicating entanglement of Christianity with Whiteness in schools is in encounters with children, community and staff of the Muslim faith. I have, in the literature review chapter, surveyed the literature pertaining to Muslim student and staff experiences in public schools. I return to it here only to lift the few studies that have attended in their analysis to the ways Whiteness and the defense of Christianity are enacted in these encounters. An ethnographic study of a Danish high school with a growing Muslim student body, for example, uncovers the ways "coercive assimilation" is enacted under a cloak of "concern"(Jaffe-Walter, 2016). The narratives of Muslim students in this school, meanwhile, reveal the psychic and material cost as they navigate the scrutiny of educators who equate student success to the enactment of a Whiteness infused with Christian values. Markowitz and Puchner's (2018) exploration of structural privileging of Christianity in one American school district further shows a deeply rooted "normative cognitive schema." (p.878) The presence of Muslim (and other non-Christian) students in these schools only serves to further assert the legitimacy of expressions of Christianness in public elementary schools. Finally, Razack's (2022) recent analysis of several school board and court decisions in the United States addressing the presence of Muslimness in public school spaces demonstrates the perceived challenge to the dominance of the Christianness of public-school spaces and the imagined threat to White Christian children by Islam and Muslims. The anti-Muslim tenor of these crusades to protect public education and White students sit alongside multicultural curricula that maintain 'Muslim' and 'Islam' in neat exoticized boxes. Collectively, the three studies speak to the efforts (both within and outside the school) to reassert Whiteness and Christian values masked as 'concern' and commitment to 'liberal' and 'national' values (Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Markowitz & Puchner, 2018; Razack, 2022).

In this section, I expand on my use of the terms White, Whiteness, and White supremacy. I discuss the "Christian core of Whiteness" in schools. In this study, I will, at times, use Whiteness and White supremacy interchangeably. This reminds us to show that Whiteness is an identity, an ideology, and an institution: its expression in schools is intended to maintain a racial hierarchy that has a legacy and seeks to maintain the "accumulation of structural power" for those identified as White (D'Angelo, 2016, p.145).

3.3 CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM (CRF)

3.3.1 Critical Race Feminism Overview

Critical Race Feminism provides an additional lens of analysis for my study. My interest in the Muslim woman school administrator follows in the tradition of critical race feminism to consider the relationship between individual agency and the formal-informal structures in the context of the interlocking oppressions. 'Critical race feminism', first used by Delgado in 1995 to describe an arena of scholarship, both historicizes and analyzes the theoretical and political issues related to the racialized gendering of power structures in White settler society. It explores how "race and gender are constitutive of structures and subjectivities" that shape the relationship of the settler White nation to its racialized, and in this study, Muslim communities (Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010). Racialized women's ways of knowing and being in the world have been absent from and silenced in Western discourse. Critical race feminism responds to the legacy of exclusion of racialized women from theorizing, recognizing that "we need theories that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries -- new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods" (Anzaldua, 1990, p.xxv as cited in Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRF scholarship takes up Anzaldua's challenge and seeks to illustrate that oppression cannot be understood as discrete and separate systems (e.g., race, class, gender). What is needed is an analysis that presumes oppressions to be interlocking and mutually constitutive. This is disruptive to mainstream feminism which, in its "White incantation," is replete with examples of complicity with colonial and imperial projects locally and globally -- the war on terror being one of those examples (Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010, p.8). CRF calls out White feminism for abdication of responsibility for the role of White supremacy in the perpetuation of racism (Wing, 2000). While located on the periphery of nation and academy, CRF asserts the epistemic privilege of racialized women's stories as sites of knowledge-building and theorizing (Wing, 2000). The stories (or counter-stories) authorize an understanding of women's experience as told from their own subjectivity. What comes to life in these stories is the "multiple consciousness" embodied by racialized women and the invitation for intersectional analysis which offers specificity and fosters "the condition of being heard." (Hill-Collins, 2000, p.270). Positioning the stories of Muslim women school leaders in conversation with CRF theorizing on Muslim women is an original contribution by this dissertation to both CRF scholarship and empirical studies in education.

3.3.2 Critical Race Feminism and Muslim Women

As the frontier on which battles of national identity are often fought, it was women, and Muslim women specifically, finding themselves being both symbol and substance of Islamophobia in post-9/11 discourses (Yuval-Davis &Anthias, 1989). Muslim women's bodies became the site of discursive conflict and the target of the everyday racism of institutions and individuals. Public 'debates' about the veil and niqab and condemnations of so-called 'honour

crimes' were commonplace (Haque, 2010; Jiwani, 2010). The paradox of the emerging depictions of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of rescue and yet being a threat to national identity, security, and liberal society was a mainstay of the mainstream and scholarly writing (Zine, 2009; Jiwani, 2010; Thobani, 2011). Mirza (2013) suggests that the paradox emerges in Western nations' struggle with the veil (hijab or niqab). While marginalization and the assumption of national threat is most palpable in relation to veiled Muslim women, the double construction of "meek" and "monster" is ascribed generally to women who adhere to Muslim identity (Kapoor, 2019).

The 'imperilled' Muslim woman figures prominently in the post 9/11 social landscape of the Western state (Razack, 2011). With the advent of the 'imperilled' Muslim woman came the anxiety of an imperilled nation (Zine, 2009; Jiwani, 2010). Hence, the Muslim woman is viewed as destabilizing the (mythology of a) national identity of secular, liberal, and tolerant subjects. Her embodied presence, especially in her hijab/niqab, is an affront to Canadianness. It became increasingly clear that being a 'good Muslim' woman in Canada meant mimicking Whiteness for social relations and interactions and an adherence to 'Western' appearance and behaviour. This 'goodness' is a prerequisite to be worthy of rescue by the 'civilized European.' 'Good Muslim' women want to break free of their culture as they seek "to become more like 'us'." (Jiwani, 2010, p.78) Those rejecting Whiteness, asserting their Muslimness instead (through the veil or through their actions), are viewed as rejecting belonging. Fidelity to religion and community, unwillingness to be rescued and assimilated by the White nation is constructed as a lack of gratitude. Extending Uma Narayan's concept of death by culture, Zine (2009, 2012) helps us to see the conjurings of Muslim women in contemporary public

imagination. Zine characterizes the gendered subject formation of the Muslim woman in Canada as falling into one of three categories: discipling culture, death by culture, death of culture. Zine suggests through this threefold framework, Muslims are constructed as external to Canada with specific implications for the public and private life of Muslim women. The defiant assertion of Muslimness, epitomized in the unapologetic presence of the Muslim woman, is seen as challenging every aspect of the liberal nation project and risks revealing the supremacy and intolerance behind the curtain. Strategies for the surveillance and containment of Muslim bodies become justified. Rules are suspended to create spaces of exception where expulsion from the state and its institutions is seen as necessary and moral (Razack, 2011).

Critical race feminists in Canada have also been vocal in their critique of the liberal project of multiculturalism, discussing the implications for Muslim women post 9-11. In her essential work, *The Dark Side of the Nation* (2000), Himani Bannerji demonstrates the ways that multiculturalism has served to empty our understanding of social relations of their power dynamic and to reduce 'race' to a collective of concrete and natural 'cultural' behaviours and practices. In this process, class and patriarchy are also erased, because 'difference' is viewed as being determined exclusively by the culture of a group. Multiculturalism becomes a way to manage the heterogeneity of the population by restricting it to the level of culture. Eclipsing 'relations of ruling' and power differentials, multiculturalism silences the demands for justice by engaging in a spiral of cultural relativism. Canadianness thus remains suffused with Whiteness, Eurocentricity, and Christianity and sits apart from the 'immigrant' Other.

Critical race feminists who centre Muslim women in a post-9/11 era ask questions of multiculturalism's role in shaping the contours of knowledges and embodied realities of Muslim women in Canada on several fronts. There are key areas of analysis in this work that are relevant to the thinking of Muslim women leaders in public education. Echoing the work of Hage (2002), Haque (2005), and Thobani (2007), Zine (2012) traces the origins of multiculturalism and surfaces the impetus and contours of the federal policy of the Multicultural Act. She extends the discussion by questioning the construction of 'reasonable accommodation' for religious diversity, arguing that it maintains an innocent distance from racist ideologies while feeding paranoid (White) nationalism. Haque's (2010) and Razack's (2011) discussions of multiculturalism, meanwhile, integrate analysis of secularism as dominant ideology producing tolerance as a "practice of demarcation" of who and what is to be tolerable by the Canadian subject citizen (Haque, p.84). Following the specific 'panics' (moments of public crisis), they demonstrate how the Muslim woman comes to be defined as the "limit test of tolerance" (Haque, 2010, p.84). Finally, Arat-Koc (2017), Zine (2009), and Thobani (2007) examine the ways multiculturalism helps define ethno-national identity as White and European and the way this is disguised in declarations of war, racist violence against Muslims in nations, and the growing White paranoia. Collectively, this CRF scholarship speaks to the ways multiculturalism operates in the formation of realities for Muslim women to maintain gendered racialized inequities and uphold an imperial/colonial social ordering of society and its public institutions.

3.4 CONCLUSION

In schools, educators are often set in the mold and vocation of White women. Critical race theory and feminist theory and theories of Whiteness support me to lift up moments in participants' experiences where the demands of institutions of Whiteness, as are schools, collide with the Otherness of Muslim women in a post 9-11 political context. These theories provide insight into the political, social and discursive contexts in which Muslim women's experiences are constructed and received. Such a framework informs the design of interview questions to elicit nuanced stories and reflections. It also shapes the contours of my autobiographical counter-story examined in this study. This scholarship offers effective analytical tools for exploring the ideologies, commonsense racism, and systemic structures impacting Muslim woman's leadership in public education. The ways agency is exercised, and subversion enacted in the face of these ideological forces and hegemonic structures is also a priority of this study. This scholarship offers a grammar and vocabulary through which to make meaning of the stories of participants and through which to contemplate the realities of being a Muslim woman in public education leadership. Placing the theories discussed in this chapter alongside the voices/stories of Muslim women demands that we understand what Muslim women have to say not only about themselves but about the system in which they are embedded.

Chapter 4: Methodology

> You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well you probably can't but also knowing that … the world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way … people look at reality, then you can change it.
>
> *James Baldwin Writing and Talking, 1979*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This is a project from the margins: a project with and by Muslim women. "Research from the margins," write Brown & Strega (2005) "is not research on the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us. It is research that takes seriously and seeks to trouble the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced, and who is entitled to engage in these processes." (p.7) On the margins, this research maintains the assumptions of agency of Muslim women – an assumption that stands in opposition to much of the academic writing on the topic of 'Muslim Woman'. This project joins the work of others who assert a different knowledge system, one in which epistemic privilege lies with those who are held in this place of marginality. Who better to understand living as a Muslim woman than those who do (Jiwani, 2010; Thobani, 2010; Narayan, 1988)? I am not suggesting that there is one way of knowing and being a Muslim woman – I do not wish to replace one essentialist paradigm with another. Being a Muslim woman is as nuanced and messy as being human. For now, my goal in designing the methodology of this project is to begin in the 'standpoint' of the women themselves (ourselves) as they (we) offer thinking, work, feelings, and meanings of daily experience that are missing from the school leadership conversation (Smith, 1990).

This is anti-oppressive research because it surfaces the discourses that operate in institutions (schools) to dehumanize and maintain the inferior status of members of the targeted

group (Muslims, Muslim women). It makes visible the institutional structures (policies, practices, relationships) that inform and are informed by these discourses. Kovack (2005) outlines the purpose of theory in relation to (qualitative) research as including: 1) what you choose to study, 2) who are the participants with whom you work, 3) what is the nature of the relations to participants and research focus, 4) the methods used, and 5) how the research is shared and presented. The preceding chapter has elaborated on the theoretical frame, this chapter explores the who, the what, and the how of my study. This research is qualitative as it intends to understand, describe, depict and 'make messy' the experiences of Muslim women leaders that are missing in dominant narratives of leadership. This research will not submit to "standards of legitimacy that are ultimately not in our own interest." (Brown & Strega, 2005, p.12). As such, this work wrestles with reflexivity, positionality, and learns from decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2005, 2009) about relationality and relational accountability. My study's method intentionally employs critical and decolonizing constructs as described in the following sections.

4.2 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is discussed in much of the qualitative research literature (e.g., Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2017) as a practice that promotes metacognition on the part of the researcher: asking questions about what is known and how it is known. Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017) extend this description, inviting "attention to the social context in which the researcher is embedded … being aware of the habits of thought that are a product of one's place in the social structure" (p.95). Swaminathan and Mulvihill highlight identifying the researcher's own positionality in socio-historical hierarchies as essential to the reflexive process, referring to

this as Critical Reflexivity. Understanding my location at the intersection of marginalities and privileges and connecting this location to my ways of being and knowing the world (and my research) enables me to recognize how I have been socialized toward what I see, notice, relate to (and what I don't see, notice, relate to). It asks me to consider how to safeguard the authenticity and integrity of the work and to ensure that emerging meanings are not simply 'assigned' by me as the researcher. When I try to 'make meaning' from the stories of others, traces of my own existence leave their marks on this understanding. Reflexivity enables me to make those markings visible and reminds me to work closely with participants for them to make and share their own meaning. Throughout the research process I maintain a metacognitive/reflective journal where I hold myself accountable to the question of why I think what I think.

Reflexivity also asks me to consider what it means to research that which is familiar and embodied. In their writing about personal experience as a starting point for research, Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017) discuss the level of commitment elicited by personal connection to the research while cautioning against the personal bias one may carry into such a venture (p.25). The concern they highlight, one that I share, is how to attend to the stories of participants with authenticity and full-bodied presence when I am entangled in the phenomena embedded in these stories. One of the greatest challenges for insider researchers, according to Tuhiwai Smith (1999), is "test[ing] their own taken for granted views about their community" (p.137). Having to take apart what we think we know and what we assume based on our own experiences in our communities is neither simple nor easy. As researchers we need to find ways to disentangle ourselves from the 'familiar,' and make room to become acquainted with stories that resonate with our embodied memories but, at the end, are not our story and are to have a

stage of their own. Through journaling and conversations with a trusted partner, I made assumptions and meaning visible, wrestled with my understandings of the 'data' and how I represent these understandings in the project.

Kovach (2009) describes 'researcher preparation' as an essential part of experience of research within an Indigenous worldview. She uses the Cree word *miskasowin*, "to go to the centre of yourself to find your own belonging" (p.49), to describe what she considers fundamental to this process. In academia we are urged in our preparation as aspiring researchers to know our ontological and epistemological frames of thinking. As a settler on this land, I listen to Kovach and other Indigenous researchers and scholars (Wilson, Smith, Thomas) to find what resonates in my way of knowing and being in this world as a Muslim, Palestinian, immigrant woman. Researcher preparation in Indigenous Methodologies is intimately connected to tribal epistemic positioning (Kovach, 2009). While I am unable to engage in such a process, I have committed myself to decolonizing my research process and to considering more than the cognitive aspects of doing research. I attend to my own histories and emotions, so they do not encircle the stories which are shared by participants. I reflect on my own spirituality and relationship to faith in my preparation as a researcher and listen to what this means for the participants in the study.

The conversations with participants took place during a particularly emotional time personally. The murder of a Muslim family in London, ON had also occurred only a few months earlier. The news cycle had once again abandoned the repression and violence of Israeli state and settlers against Palestinians across historical Palestine. In the days and months that

followed, and as I write these words, I search for grounding in my spirituality. Through meditative practices, I continue to expand my awareness of my purpose and the work I am intended to do in this lifetime. This project, bringing stories of Muslim women into public discourse, is part of this work. Facilitating connection between the women aligns with my purpose. Understanding this elevates the importance of this project beyond its educational and scholarly outcome and drives me further to attend to the stories and to an ethic of care for the participants.

4.3 POSITIONALITY

"Sweaty concept" is the term Sara Ahmed (2017) uses to capture "the description of the world from the point of view of not being home in it" (p.13). I have spent much of my life grappling with sweaty concepts, trying to understand what it means to be female in public and private spaces, how to be racialized and Muslim in White and Christian spaces, and how to be Arab in orientalist spaces. I have had to be aware all the while of my heterosexual, able-bodied, English-speaking, educated, economically secure cocoon that envelops and shelters me in particular ways. The centrality of race to my understanding of myself is born out of my emigration to Canada and is entangled in layers of ethnicity and religion. The specificity of my construction as a racialized person is linked to my Muslimness, my Arabness, my Palestinianness – much of which sits outside of common discourse even in anti-oppressive spaces. Sharing this patchwork of self is neither a testimony nor an explanation. It is an articulation, a selection, words to express pieces with the intention of building connection. It may help the reader know something refracted through the meanings you attach to my words. At the very least, it makes evident that I am an insider-outsider to the participants with whom I work. As I spend more time

outside of a K-12 setting, I may be less of an insider with regard to my profession but will continue to be connected as a Muslim woman.

4.4 DECOLONIZING STANCE

Insider methodology has gained greater acceptance in some qualitative circles. While reflexivity may assist in mitigating some of the concerns of insider researchers, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) urges us to consider "research-based support systems and relationships with communities" (p.137) as a means of balancing the needs of the research and accountability to community. Relationality and relational accountability have been articulated in Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2011) as essential elements of an Indigenous research paradigm. This paradigm is anchored in an Indigenous frame of being and is not to be deconstructed, pieces extracted to service a Western academic purpose. As we seek to decolonize spaces, external and internal, learning from relationality and relational accountability is necessary in a project such as this, which claims emancipatory and anti-oppressive origins and goals. Wilson's research speaks of relationality as an interconnectedness between all things living and non-living: to land/place, to cosmos, to ideas, and to people, each informed through an Indigenous worldview and the specificity of tribal ontology/epistemology. Relationship accountability, what Wilson refers to as the axiology and methodology of Indigenous methods, are the ways in which we are accountable to "all of our relations" (p.100). Wilson and his research participants provide the key elements of that accountability. These are synthesized into four levels: "how we go about choosing the topic we will research … the methods that we use … the ways we analyse what we learn … in the ways we present the outcomes of the research" (p.107). Much like Creswell's (2003) and Kovach's (2005) framing of qualitative research (above), Wilson reminds us that

whereas the domains of the research are not so divergent but rather it is the ways in which we engage with them, one through the lens of the academy, or else from a specific Indigenous worldview.

What I have learned from Wilson (2008) about relationship with participants, specifically, how trust is developed and maintained, how respect and authenticity are fostered, how accountability is demonstrated, was taken into consideration in the design, implementation and sharing of this research. In addition, understanding knowledge as relational required me to think beyond the witnessing and receiving of stories to how analysis would engage, but not burden, the participants. Finally, ways of making space for spirit and spirituality, language and histories, and relationship to place (current and historical) are significant teachings from Indigenous scholarship to which I attend in both process and analysis. With these goals in view, I engaged participants in personal family history stories, made space to discuss spiritual healing, held relation in the presence of hurt and upset emotions, and signaled implicit understanding of power dynamics. In the process of data analysis and representation, I located the transcripts in the context of the above (histories, spirit, emotion, power) and attempted to attend to these in the thematic coding and the subsequent composite writing.

4.5 RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST

Developing trust with storytellers is foundational to relationality and accountability. Participants need to believe in my commitment to respecting them as individuals and as storytellers. The ethics protocols concerning informed consent, commitment to justice, privacy, etc. are building blocks in developing trust. Through adherence to these standards, participants

are reassured that this research does not intentionally or neglectfully cause them harm. Trust, however, requires much more than ethical behaviour – particularly when it comes to storytelling. Our interactions, from the onset, signaled to research participants that they are seen, that their stories are heard, and that I will witness and receive their stories in a manner that mirrors the same care with which it is shared. Attending to the storytelling with full body listening, engaging in a manner that reflects investment, communicates listening that is much more than a list of 'techniques.' I anticipated some challenges to achieving this in a time of COVID when conversations moved online (ZOOM). At the time of the interviews, public educators had pivoted to the digital arenas for well over a year. All participants expressed familiarity with the ZOOM platform. To address the de-personalizing space, I ensured the first interview was conversational and that the participant directed the focus with occasional interventions from me. Knowing the focus of the study from our introductory conversations, participants were very forthcoming about their experiences as school leaders in relation to students, staff, peers, and supervisors. They shared their emotions, and many spoke of feeling a sense of relief in being able to discuss these realities.

4.6 ETHICS/AXIOLOGY

Ethics as defined in the context of research seeks to protect participants from harm and injury. It aspires to ensure participation is voluntary and informed without influence. To this extent, a researcher like myself needs to be forthcoming about the motivation for and objectives of the study. It was also important to share the ways I intended to engage with their stories, the forms in which they will be made public, and how privacy and confidentiality are maintained. Reading through informed consent to clarify meaning was a helpful way to ground the ethical

considerations of conversation with prospective participants. In conventional qualitative research texts, scholars like Guba and Lincoln (1989) remind researchers of the importance of the relationship with participants and its precedence over the goals of the study.

Scholars from communities that have been pathologized, exploited and harmed by research have also written extensively about the 'ethics' or axiology of doing research with and for "Indigenous, ghettoized and Orientalized communities" (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p.811) (e.g.Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Through their writing and guidance, I learned to think about ethics as much more than what has been outlined by the academy: to consider how my research may be damage-centred or complicit in promoting such a paradigm, to think about the extractive nature of research and how this has targeted particular communities and identities, to consider what are the ways my work is accountable to participants and the wider community. Using reflective questions from Wilson (2008) about relationships in research supported my thinking and my ability to foster respect and accountability.

Video/Audio-recording and note taking during interviews ensured greater accuracy of stories received, with the caveat that there is always a level of interpretation. Robina Thomas (2005) agonized about maintaining the stories as those of the storyteller and guarding against narratives becoming her constructions, "over my life, I have been taught that when you ask people to share their wisdom, you must respect and honour their teachings. This was the most important ethical responsibility I had" (p.249). In journeying toward authenticity, I shared transcripts with participants, and asked them to review transcripts for accuracy, encouraging the

storyteller to make whatever changes she deemed appropriate. I also shared and explained the composite counter-story approach of this study and how it honours the voices of the participants and protects their privacy. This is particularly relevant given the small number of Muslim women administrators in the catchment area (Greater Toronto Area). Participants were reminded of confidentiality at the time of the focus group. All data generated from this study remain confidential to the fullest extent possible. Audio recordings of the interview(s), following completion of the study, will be destroyed. All study materials are stored on a secured laptop that is only accessed by me, and any hard copies of materials are stored in a locked drawer for up to two years at which time they will be shredded.

No value judgments were placed on participant interview responses, and participants were free to withdraw at any time from the interview without penalty or to withhold consent for the collection, use and/or disclosure of any information that involves them, without penalty. Their decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to respond to any questions did not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship with the researcher or other participants in the study either now or in the future. Once interviews began, no participants asked to withdraw from the study. Interviewed participants were assigned pseudonyms throughout the data collection and analysis process.

4.7 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: (COMPOSITE) COUNTER-STORYTELLING

4.7.1 Introduction to Composite Counter-Storytelling

In their literature review of counter-narratives in educational pedagogy and research, Miller, Liu, and Ball (2020) found that counter-narratives can be both a methodological frame

(anchored in CRT) as well as a research method (i.e., a data-collection approach). In this study, counter-narrative is used to frame thinking about the goals of the study but also as a tool to engage with and process data and create the product of counter-story. The systemic review by Miller et al. reveals several related approaches with a similar goal: counter-narratives, critical storytelling, and counter-stories. The terms may vary based on the field of study and the researchers' preference. The reviewers suggest that all three are grounded in CRT, critical feminism, and narrative inquiry (p.270). In this study I will be using the terms 'counterstory' and 'counter-storytelling' as discussed by Solorzano and Yosso (2002). In the following section I detail the concept of counterstory, its origins and relation to CRT, discuss its purpose and how I use it in this study, and describe my approach to composite counterstories as a method to consolidate and share the emerging findings of this study.

4.7.1.1 What is counterstory?

Counterstory has emerged in CRT as the avenue to hearing the voices of the marginalized in educational equity research. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) define counter-narrative as "naming one's own reality" through "parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much current rights doctrine." (as quoted in Miller, Liu, & Hall, 2020, p.272) For Solorzano and Yosso (2002), counter-story resists the dominant (or majoritarian) and deficit narratives about racialized peoples. It is an approach of "telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told … a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege." (p.32) From their recent review of the relevant literature, Miller, Liu, and Hall (2020) propose their own definition of counter-story/ counter-narrative:

> A methodology for critically analyzing social reality in the education system and society by narrating the authentic lived experiences of people of colour, searching and acting upon emancipatory solutions, and transforming the educational system in order to provide equitable education for people of colour. (p.275)

Through these definitions it is evident that counterstory is a way to speak back to power while authoring silenced or disappeared experiences. It provides missing truths about the ways structures, practices, and *common-sense* thinking privilege Whiteness while diminishing and harming racialized peoples. In addition to interrupting the normalized stories of racialized peoples, counterstory strengthens the collective consciousness and resistance of marginalized communities as they articulate and listen to counterstories of the embodied lives of those with whom they share social location.

My study uses counterstory to learn from the narratives of Muslim women who are school leaders (principals or vice-principals). The project examines how this group of women "understands their own story through retelling and interpreting of their experiences" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.93). Beyond countering dominant hegemonic narratives (of patriarchy, Whiteness, Christianity, as examples), these stories put forward collective memory from the margins and excavate a "sacred landscape" of survivance, where it becomes possible to move "beyond our basic survival...to create sacred landscapes … of synthesis and renewal." (Vizenor, 1994, p.53) Using counter-storytelling supports the achievement of the goal of this study, which is to understand systems of gendered Islamophobia within public schools while lifting the stories of Muslim women in leadership.

4.7.1.2 Counterstory origins and purpose

As with CRT more generally, counterstory finds its origins in legal scholarship and critical legal studies and with scholars of colour such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Mari

Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Milner, Liu, & Hall, 2020). Driven by the need to understand the lived and embodied experience of racialized peoples, these CRT scholars injected the use of counterstory into their legal scholarship, documenting previously invisibilized narratives and compelling advocacy and action in courtrooms and at policy tables. This approach originates in the understanding that a particular set of narratives, emerging from the dominant class, have informed and shaped public institutions (Cook, 2013). These dominant stories/narratives, sometimes known as "majoritarian" stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), have resulted in a legacy of racial privilege for those who are identified as White (Christian, male, etc..). These majoritarian stories carry within them racial assumptions, often about the non-White Other, rendering the White subject by default as better- developed, rational, capable, and determined. The deficit stories of racialized people also come to be embedded in structures, practices, and the thinking of institutional actors; hence what exists comes to reflect the lived realities of the privileged and their worldviews. Further, the pervasiveness of majoritarian stories ensures that we all, regardless of identity, breathe them in. Unless intentionally interrupted, they can shape how we view ourselves, other people, and the social, institutional, and historical context in which we exist.

Counterstory speaks back to the socially constructed reality while providing marginalized identities with a "vehicle of psychic self-preservation" and collective resistance (Delgado, 1989, p.2436). Counterstories begin from a place where the world is not racially neutral. While they do not purport to be THE truth, counterstories interrupt and make messy much of what is taken for granted – moving us closer to "a more honest account of the world." (Atwood & Lopez, 2014, p.1145) As such, counterstory is a necessary tool toward achieving educational equity, a

"praxis …[which] promises to bridge reflection and social action" (Milner, Liu, & Hall, 2020 p. 275). This study intends to interrupt majoritarian narratives of Muslim women (discussed at length in the theoretical framework chapter) while facilitating a collective counterstory to be leveraged for action not only by Muslim leaders but also by advocacy groups like National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. Through the process of telling the counterstory, it is my hope that we will also begin to build a community amongst Muslim women who are leaders in public schools in the GTA as a site of strength and a springboard for solidarity and action.

4.7.1.3 Types of Counterstories

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) outline three forms of counter-storytelling within the CRT scholarship: personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. Miller, Liu, and Hall (2020) indicate two approaches which they call whole narrative and narrative factors approaches. In these classifications, the counterstory may include the researcher's own narrative or that of study participants. The difference is as follows: in a whole narrative, the goal is to tell an authentic fulsome story (whether the narrative belongs to the researcher or to the study participants). In the narrative factors approach, "participant narratives" are only "one data source", so the goal of the study is not simply to transmit the study participants' stories (p.279). In such studies, the research may leverage the participants' counterstory as testimony of institutional racism.

Like Solorzano and Yosso, Miller et al. address composite counter-storytelling as its own approach. As with the *narratives factors* approach, composite stories draw on a myriad of 'data'

sources including study participants' narratives and researchers' autobiographical stories to create composite "characters" who are located within a social, political and historical context to engage with the ways power and privilege operates. The emerging composites are intended to speak to a collective experience of a silenced community/group. The product, assert Miller et. al (2020) and Solorzano and Yosso (2002), is a result of a literary process and is not "intended to be taken as 'fiction'" (p.280). The goal of the composites is to highlight the key emerging themes as articulated by the study participants when placed in dialogue with the researcher's knowledge and experience as well as the relevant literature. "We are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios…characters are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life." (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.36)

When critical race scholars assert composite counterstory is anchored in real life and therefore 'not fiction,' they are not seeking to diminish the value or credibility of fiction in social research or the possibilities it offers in meeting scholarly pursuits. After all, as Leavy (2012) suggests, there is undoubtedly a "frailty in the fact-fiction (non-fiction/fiction) dualism." (p.251) In autoethnography, for example, Bochner (2000) describes the ways constructed narratives allow researchers to "extract meaning from experience rather than depict experience exactly as it was lived" (p.270) while locating the "autobiographical and personal" in relationship with the "cultural and social" (Ellis, 2004, p.xix). All of which is integral to composite counterstories. Leavy (2012) herself offers several objectives from social research that are effectively reached using fiction. These include developing critical consciousness, extending accessibility of research to a wider audience, and uplifting the often unseen and unnoticed aspects of social

reality- all of which are aligned with my use of composite counterstories. Finally, fictional devices are useful in exposing the emotional dimension of human experience and getting "deeper into the minds of readers." (Leavy, 2012, p.254) This too was integral to the writing of the composites and discussed in further detail later in this chapter. It is significant to note, however, that in a context where the experiential knowledge of racialized people (racialized women) is dismissed, claiming composite counterstories in critical race research as 'not fiction' is a claim of legitimacy and credibility of these voices to "understanding, analyzing and teaching" about oppression and resistance (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p.26). It is a claim against the widespread beliefs and discourses about racialized students and communities- majoritarian narratives which are unfounded and untrue. A creative and exciting method which interrupts dominant parameters of legitimate and valid methods, composite counterstory protects the anonymity (and safety) of participants – a significant consideration for this study where the number of Muslim women in school leadership in the GTA continues to be small (Cook &Dixson, 2013). Composite counterstory is the approach of this study.

4.7.2 Data Gathering

This study adopts Solorzano and Yosso's (2002) ideas around composite counterstory as contributing to critical race methodology. Composites strive to engage theory as it is lived and expressed by participants. It also supports researchers to move beyond entrenched discourses of lived experience trapped by dominant society constructions and understandings. In their conception of composites, Solorzano and Yosso draw on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notion of theoretical sensitivity and Delgado Bernal's (1998) notion of "cultural intuition." To create composites is to attend to both aspects in reconstructing data from its raw forms. Theoretical

sensitivity refers to the researcher's "attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data," (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 42) "it means being able to see beneath the obvious to discover the new" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.46). Cultural intuition, on the other hand, "is achieved and can be nurtured through our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory…) the literature...and the analytics process" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p.567).

Solorzano and Yosso outline four data sources in the construction of composites:

"a) the data gathered from the research process itself [e.g. conversations, interviews, observations],

b) the existing literature on the topic(s),

c) our own professional experience,

d) our own personal experiences." (p.34)

In what follows I explain how I engaged with these data sources in my study.

4.7.2.1 Data Gathering from (a) research process:

Purposeful Sampling

Intensity sampling was used to invite six self-identifying Muslim women who are school administrators working for English public-school boards in the Greater Toronto Area. As mentioned earlier, Muslim identity is diverse and nuanced – race/ethnicity/ immigration status/length of time in Canada/languages are all elements of how Muslims (like any faith group) make meaning of their Muslimness. The significance of extending the invitation broadly to self-identifying Muslims was twofold: 1) to include those who consider their Muslimness significant

to their self-identity, and 2) to not restrict or limit 'which Muslims' are included because the number of Muslim women administrators in public boards is actually quite small. Reasons to focus only on public boards include: 1) the absence of an overt religious doctrine explicit in school board structures, policies, practices, and culture (therefore excluding Catholic school boards), 2) adherence to provincial expectation in alignment with Acts, policies, and strategies allowing for a uniform standard regarding dominant structures and practices (therefore excluding private schools). Limiting the study to English public boards stems from a recognition that Islamophobia in Francophone settings has a distinctive legacy (Cesari, 2002, Easat-Daas, 2019) and manifests in specific ways that require situating and analysis beyond the scope of this project. Finally, the original geographical scope was a logistical decision to enable access to participants with whom I expected to meet at least four or five times (interviews, focus group, analysis follow-up, sharing of final report). Although the entire process was moved online due to the pandemic, I maintained the limitation to the GTA. It was not my intention to focus on boards that serve the communities outside of the 'inner core' of the city of Toronto, but as potential participants made contact and referred others to the study, the school boards in which they worked were all set in suburban settings. The three boards to which participants belong are similar in the diversity of the populations they serve and range in size from 74k- 153k students. Muslim students comprise 11- 24% in each of the settings.

Participant recruitment

An invitation to participants was sent through some email distribution lists of GTA educators (in both the Muslim and non-Muslim educator community). Emails were sent by key contacts in the public education community in the GTA. Personal invitations were made through

referrals and some of these resulted in identifying other potential participants. The invitation included several methods to contact me. Those who expressed interest were contacted by phone/email to share the scope of the project and to share some of the details regarding time commitment, process, and my accountabilities as a researcher. There was a small stipend gift card for participating. Those interested in moving forward were invited to a brief informal conversation by phone at a time of their choosing for introduction and sharing of the informed consent process. An overview of the study was explained, and consent forms (Appendix 1) were shared, read together and discussed. Informed consent forms for every step of the data gathering were sent to participants ahead of the meeting time. Throughout participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the project or about me as the researcher.

Six Muslim women school administrators consented textually to participate in the study. The group was equally comprised of Sunni and Shia Muslims. All six women identified as members of the South Asian diaspora. Their family migration histories varied. Their ages ranged from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Several spoke of being married. Five of the six were mothers. One of the participants discussed the challenges of being queer and Muslim in spaces that assume these to be incongruent realities. All the participants had been in their leadership roles less than ten years, two were relatively new to the role (under 2 years). Two of the participants had served in regional (system level) capacities prior to entering the administrator position. All the participants shared that they were amongst the first (if not the first) Muslim woman to be appointed as school administrator in their respective regions.

Individual Interviews/Conversations

Each participant was involved in two individual interviews and one focus group in this study. The Zoom interviews took place prior to the focus group. During the first interview, we revisited the overarching research question which guides this project and narrators were provided with a few broad topics (Appendix 2) to assist them in beginning their storytelling. Rather than being informed by the literature, which maintains control of the storytelling by the researcher, these topics were simply prompts to elicit the stories which the narrator determines to be important (e.g. tell me about being a Muslim woman in school, in Canada; tell me about your first year as an administrator; tell me about the process of becoming an administrator). I also had a few more structured questions prepared for cases where the participant was reluctant to share (also in Appendix 2). The interview was video/audio- recorded (permission secured for this ahead of time). I also took notes during the meeting and composed a reflective journal after each encounter. The second interview was based on a preliminary review of the first to identify possible areas for further exploration or clarification. Particular attention was given to emerging counter-stories and majoritarian narratives. The interviews were transcribed and offered to the participant to elaborate on topics not highlighted in my own review. Interviews took place over an eight-week period, and each ranged from a little over an hour to two hours. The participants were provided with my contact information and invited to contact me should they want to talk further about anything related to the interview (clarify, add to, share emotions etc. …) in between interview dates.

Considerations for meaningful and productive interviews

Managing 'researcher expectation' and making space for the narrators to lead the storytelling was coupled with the kind of listening explored in both feminist and Indigenous writing on stories. In 'Learning to Listen,' Anderson and Jack (1991) share their lessons for conducting meaningful interviews with women. Attentiveness to words spoken and to the unspoken sharing (pauses, laughter, body language, etc…) enabled me to draw out deeper disclosure and enable the narrator to express her own meaning of embodied and lived realities. Anderson's reflections speak to the need to interrupt the interview convention of travelling from one question to another, paying little attention to the narrator's feelings, beliefs, and worldview. Instead, she invites a revisiting of methods to pay attention to the feelings that are entangled in participants' words. Instead of assuming knowledge of what is meant, journeying away from the researcher 'agenda' at the crossroads of story, or pausing to ask questions about meaning a narrator attaches to an experience, can bring a story to life with all its messiness and complexity. This is a lesson I followed closely in my interviewing. This approach, I believe, fostered authentic and emotive conversations despite the digital medium. Further, Anderson asks us to listen critically not only to the questions and answers but also to our own responses as interviewers. Responses can open a gateway to what is internalized but not immediately spoken. Awareness (on the part of the interviewer) of the social structures that influence a narrator's reality and listening and probing for the narrator's own awareness can help make the invisible visible. This opens the door for the narrator to shape her own story and thereby claim power in the research relationship. Collectively, these considerations enriched the conversations and informed the development of composite counter-stories that honour the voices and experiences as shared by participants.

Focus Groups

The second mode of data collection used in this study is the focus group. Focus groups combine elements of the individual interview and participant observation, providing an opportunity to learn from the "multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences and beliefs." (Madriz, 2000, p.836) This "multivocality" comes from the interaction of thought, memory and emotion among small group of participants. Unlike the individual interview, where the researcher is continuously at risk of influencing responses, the focus group allows the researcher to step back and observe the interaction between participants and listen to the emerging narrative, tipping the power and control toward the group. In their collaborative dialogue, women participating in a focus group build on each other's thinking and opinions (Oakley, 1981). For feminist researchers who centre social justice in the objectives of their work, focus groups are an important research method and a "context of collective testimonies and group resistance narratives" (Madriz, 2000, p.836).

The focus group can also be more than a data-gathering space, it can provide participants with an opportunity to feel connected and affirmed as well as deepening their consciousness. Madriz (2000) suggests that focus groups are of particular value with racialized women as they are consistent with the ways racialized women connect with one another to process and deal with everyday oppressions. Whether we agree with this assertion or not, focus groups do provide those of marginalized identities the opportunity to hear and learn that their experiences of oppression are not individual but a function of larger systems and discourses. This may contribute to a reclaiming of our humanity as we make sense of experiences of subjugation.

Concern regarding honesty of participation in the presence of strangers (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) is diminished in the face of the many possibilities focus groups provide.

The focus group in this study brought together the same group of participants from the individual interviews. Some of the emerging themes (e.g., claims of secularism) from across individual interviews were shared with participants and input was invited regarding the relevance of the concept to their experiences (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2013). The focus group was arranged at a time accessible to participants and took place over Zoom. The conversation was video/audio-recorded with the permission of participants. Before beginning we reviewed the protocol of confidentiality. Details of the protocol and focus group process can be found in the Appendix. The sense of a collective experience, the small number of participants, and the vulnerability demonstrated by a few of the participants fostered open and nuanced conversation in the focus group. I also wondered if being situated in their homes (as the conversation took place on a Saturday morning) during the ZOOM session facilitated greater comfort for participants in the context of the focus group. Their comfort was evident in the willingness to share details of experiences and express emotions.

4.7.2.2 Data Gathering: (c) & (d) Researcher's Personal and Professional Autobiographical Reflections

Committing to writing my own story was also part of 'preparing myself as a researcher' (Kovach, 2009): engaging in a vulnerability I asked of others. My own story enabled me to access the scenes within this narrative from an emotional and spiritual path – something I am not privy to with the stories of others. My hope was that the vulnerability of authoring my own

story in this way would teach me something more about being in this body and in the role of school leader, and that this will guide me further in the individual interviews, allowing me to hear some of the unspoken nuances of those stories. Writing my story also afforded me the ability to engage participants in more a conversational tone should that be the way they want to conduct the interview.

I began writing a draft of my stories prior to meeting participants. Journal entries, emails, and my own professional notes served as field notes of sorts to assist in the recalling of experiences and the counterstory present but hidden. I was guided by the question of what stories capture my experience of being a Muslim woman leader in school, thinking not only about staff but also students, community, peers beyond the school, and dealing with the structures and practices of the system around me. While it is not the intention of this study to produce a critical/decolonizing autoethnography, this body of scholarship informs my own autobiographical counterstory writing in several ways:

- Centring ways of knowing that emerge from embodied histories (Cann & DeMeulenaue, 2012)
- Recognizing identities as not singular or static (Adams & Holman-Jones, 2008
- Rethinking and resisting colonial ideologies and practices embedded in institutions (Chawla & Atay, 2018)
- Surfacing borderline and in-between existence that comes from navigating subjugation and the daily attempts of erasure and silence (Bhattacharya, 2018)

My own stories were then woven with the other data sources to develop the composite characters and stories, "[that] are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life." (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002, p.36).

4.7.2.3 Data Gathering from (b) Reviewing Existing Literature

Prior to constructing the composites, and alongside the process of gathering data from autobiographical writing, interviews, and the focus group I conducted a review of literature on Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia in society and in schools AND on the experiences of racialized women school leaders (K-12). In addition, I engaged with the critical race feminist theorizing about Muslim women in a post-9/11 world. These literatures further informed an analysis of narratives from individual and group conversation and personal/professional autobiographical writing. I looked to make connections between the literature and the data and to identify the areas where the data, buttressed by the literature, may take us in new directions. The review of these bodies of literature involved identifying relevant work, determining key concepts, placing the literature in dialogue with transcripts and personal writing in order to establish themes that would support the development of the composite counter-stories. The review of literature regarding Islamophobia and theoretical writings on Muslim women is captured in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters respectively. The literature pertaining to racialized women school (K-12) leaders is embedded into the thematic chapters. The intertwining of this body of scholarship into the analytical chapters further supported the development of the composite counterstories by allowing me to make explicit the connections to the experiences of Muslim women school leaders.

4.7.3 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through an iterative process that allowed for both reflection and inductive analysis. I did not engage the data with predetermined categories/themes in mind, yet my theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition were informed by the totality of my experiences including my learning, training, and social location. Once the individual and group conversations were transcribed and the autobiographical accounts written, an initial review determined the first round of codes. The first engagements with stories drew on Saldana's (2016) in vivo method because it is attentive to the participants' own language and voice and promotes an immersion in the stories as told by the narrator. Additional first cycle coding methods included emotion coding and values coding – which surface the participant's sense-making of structures, processes and the impact of these and interactions on Muslim women in schools. For all *emic* coding, I paid attention to embedded counterstories and majoritarian narratives in the transcripts and accounts (Cook, 2013). This consequently surfaced codes related to the nature of interactions the participants had with others in the school community and conditions they encountered. As suggested by Saldana (2016), initial coding, particularly concept coding, was accompanied by analytic memos to explore the "abstractions and generalities" that emerge from the use of the codes. The analytic memos were a space to think through the process, the meaning I am attaching to codes, and the assumptions and thoughts that shape the decisions made through the analytic process.

Concept coding used in the following (focused) cycles was guided by the research question: *How do Muslim women principals and vice-principals in public K-12 schools in Ontario author their experiences of leadership in schools? What are the stories they tell?* With

this question in mind, I was able to arrange the coded excerpts into four categories: participant stories of their agency as school leaders, stories of the ways they were constructed by others (typically supervisors, peers, staff), stories about navigating as Muslim school leaders, and stories about the impact of the being a Muslim woman school leader on their well-being, sense of self, and family. These emerging categories, and the granular codes they held, were overlaid with the relevant concepts and salient themes from CRT and CRF (focused on Muslim women) scholarship and the literature on Islamophobia (widely in society and more specifically in schools) to help answer the research sub questions:

- How do race-gender-faith intersect and shape the participants' stories of leadership?
- How do existing structures and discourses impact the leadership of Muslim women?
- In what ways do participants describe how they navigate their role as leaders and as Muslim women?

As I began the Axial coding process, I held on to Cook's (2013) caution against biasing results when using *etic* codes (from theory) and to mitigate for this by staying close to participants' words. Once I named the themes (theoretical codes) that I believed best capture the stories of being a Muslim woman in school leadership before me [experiences of systemic erasure, constructed as threat, facing containment, living the myth of secularism, and finding spaces for healing], I went back to the transcripts and asked: how does this [theme] show up in this sister's narrative? Re-engaging every transcript, I (re)identified relevant excerpts for each theme and noted how the excerpt relates to the theme. In this process, additional sub-themes

became apparent, e.g., under 'constructed as threat' emerged 'thresholds of tolerance', and under 'facing containment' emerged 'absence of protections.' Through the discussion of the embedded themes/sub-themes in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature of racialized women's school leadership and the subsequent construction of the counter-stories, I was able to make explicit what is revealed about public education as a system and a context.

The work of constructing composites required that I come to know each of the participants deeply through their own story telling. In Cook's (2013) work she produces narratives for each of her participants prior to the development of the composite counterstory. The production of these individual narratives provides Cook with an opportunity to deeply know the narrators in nuanced ways— for example, through their body language, tone of voice, and expressions of personality including humour and idiosyncrasies. These could then be leveraged in the development of the composite characters for the final counter-stories. I attempt to 'know' each of the participants by writing memos which centre each participant and her stories. These individual memos encompassed a reflection on the temperament and affect of each person in the two individual and group conversations (about 5-6 hours of video recording). I made note of stories, expressions, or phrases that were repeated in the individual and group conversation and registered any shifts or changes between individual and collective conversations. These memos informed subsequent development of composite characters and the emerging counterstories, discussed in further detail in the next section.

4.7.4 Creating the Counterstory: Composite Characters and Story

The composite stories in this study are created from data with seven (participants and myself) Muslim women school leaders. The storytelling by all participants produced in-depth examples of Muslim women's experiences in leadership. Following analysis, composite characters were created to engage in dialogue which reveals the findings from the different data sources. The dialogue "critically illuminate(s) concepts, ideas, and experiences while it tries to use elements of critical race theory" and critical race feminist theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p.36). Cook (2013) describes using composite characters as an opportunity to "move away from *telling* to *showing* in counter-stories (emphasis in original)" (p.189). In her detailed explanation of composite character building, Cook suggests thinking of composite counterstory in modular format and to not get bogged down by the linear structure of storytelling.

> In an effort to weave a coherent narrative, I created a storyline of the composite counterstory that would embed themes gleaned from the transcripts, fieldnotes, and other data. Blending aspects of various participants into composite characters included taking aspects of body language, phrasing, and personal backgrounds. Each composite character simultaneously represented and introduced one of the themes...with their inner thoughts giving insight into [their sense making] ...A key question guiding this process was whether each character had a well-developed, distinct voice that was multi-dimensional and therefore captured the most complete representation of the data.
>
> pp. 189-90

As Solorzano and Yosso (2002) emphasized in their earlier work on counter-storytelling, the resulting characters and interactions are not imagined but "grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data." (p.36) The work of composing characters and stories helped me to bring participants' language and phrases together into a vivid and lived depiction of experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and harm.

The stories used the scenes and settings of the actual educational leaders depicted in each story. Characters appear in the institutional context as described by participants. Part of the plot

of the stories was constructed out of ordinary events and scenes of school. It was critical for me to locate each of these main composite characters in a context reflective of the school settings discussed in the interviews (and prevalent in the suburban GTA public boards). Each context was initially detailed to make visible what is common but often unseen and then pared down to what was essential for the reader to understand the counterstory. The initial level of detail enabled me to bring to life the nuance and richness of composite character experiences. The composite stories sought to give an embodied and complex view of Muslim women's lives to counter the White mainstream, one-dimensional and stereotypical understanding and representations of their lives. Thus, the characters are depicted beyond their roles as Muslim women in a school leadership role. They embody facets from each of the participants including their professional and educational histories, ambitions, personas, temperament, and family life. The composite characters are an expression of the complexities of 'being' Muslim and woman in public institutions and disrupt majoritarian narratives.

Drawing on the data sources and the emerging themes, I outlined the counter-stories to enable each composite character to engage with the themes. The stories came together by the interweaving of external actions, interactions, and speech with the internal thoughts, reflections, and emotions of the composite character. The repressive nature of the school context evident in the interviews necessitated the writing of fictional opportunities for the composite characters to also be outside of this space to be able to speak to their own analysis of their experiences as leaders as did the study participants. To achieve this, I followed Cook's (2003) suggestion of designing the composite counterstory in a modular format instead of the linear logic of

storytelling. Orchestrating the modules enhanced the character's multidimensional humanity and helped me avoid the pitfalls of "melodrama and sentimentality" (p.191).

Given that centring the voices of Muslim women school leaders and understanding institutional gendered Islamophobia through these voices was the central aim of this project, I repeatedly asked myself throughout writing: does the narrative capture a representation of the data? Will the participants see the complexity of their experiences in these narratives? The writing of these counterstories communicates emerging themes and pushes for new understandings. The composites, characters and stories, are intended to speak to the collective experience of these Muslim women school leaders in the racist structures and cultures of public education and to provide a robust portrait of the impact of leading in these spaces. It aims to illuminate the "felt-sense" of experience, making accessible an embodied reality invisible in dominant discourse (Wertz et al., 2011, p.8). The composites represent a synthesis of data analysis. In bringing together the narratives of the individual participants as composite counterstories, I hope to mobilize discussion about experiences of gendered Islamophobia in school leadership and Islamophobia in schools more widely. The composites are also a reenactment of theory in a manner that is accessible to multiple audiences.

On the 'writing' of the composites

My writing of the composites was both methodical and organic. Even as I explain the analysis process and the steps to developing the counterstories, I struggle to capture the methods for inscribing affective elements in the restorying of experiences. These elements are more pronounced during the interview than they might appear in the stories. Every interview was

emotional for the participants. They spoke of exhaustion, of feeling abused, of feeling isolated. They shouted and they cried. They expressed frustration at individuals and at systems. This is evident in the themes and is explored in the analysis. For the counterstories I wanted the reader to travel alongside the composite character, to not only view their experience but to also hold space for the unspoken. Literary language provides space for affect in the way that conventional social sciences methods cannot.

The affective force created in the witnessing through counterstory is part of the researcher and participant dynamic and rarely is represented in research findings (Simon, 2011). This force provokes pathways of thought: are these simply interpersonal interactions? How do we locate the stories in the manifestations of Islamophobia? How do we reconcile the advancement the Muslim women and the claims of institutional equity and inclusion with what is witnessed? The writing of these counter-stories is intended to unsettle what is held to be true about ourselves, our schools, and about Muslim women in public spaces. The composites stay attentive to the participants' own descriptions and reflection and bring the reader in proximity to the regular episodes of racialization and Othering. Through reading and engaging the reader comes to understand the cumulative effect of living these daily realities and recognizes the discursive and systemic facets creating them.

4.8 LIMITS OF METHODOLOGY

All studies have limitations. This study explores the lived experiences of seven Muslim women who are school administrators in public (English) schools in Ontario. The study reflects these participants' experiences, their understandings, and their thoughts regarding these

experiences. My further interpretation of these experiences and understandings is intended to illuminate and speak to some of the key realities and challenges which these women navigate. The interpretations, while informed by existing scholarship and theoretical framework of the study, are nonetheless my own. As discussed earlier, objectivity and neutrality are not possible and instead I strive for reflexivity about my positionality as a Muslim woman administrator. This positionality affords me the possibility of building trust with participants and hearing about experiences that may be shared in other spaces. My own embodied experiences, which are a component of the counterstory methods used here, enable me to ask questions and prompt into aspects of the narratives that may have gone unnoticed otherwise.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and specific steps taken to gather, analyze, and present the data in this study. The development of the composite counterstories emerges from data collected through interviews, focus group, and autobiographical reflection that was gathered and interrogated in light of the existing scholarship on racialized women's school leadership and a theoretical framework involving critical race theory, critical race feminist theory on Muslim women post- 9/11. The analysis of shared narratives became the basis from which to develop composite characters and counter-stories. These composite counter-stories represent the synthesis of findings of this study and are accessible to audiences beyond the academy. As such, this project makes a significant contribution to empirical work regarding gendered Islamophobia in educational institutions, to the use of the composite counter-stories as an 'unsettling' methodology, and to the existing discourse of equity and antiracism in the Ontario education system.

SECTION 2: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the chapters to follow, I discuss key findings of this study. These chapters provide the analytical basis for the construction of the composite counter-stories. Following multiple cycles of coding, data was organized under three main themes: Muslim women school leaders' systemic erasure, construction as threat, and containment in school spaces. I present each of these analytic themes in the next three chapters. To do this analytic work, I lift up aspects of the women's stories and read it with the theoretical literature. This theoretical engagement opens the possibility for a complex rendering of the women's words and a critical vocabulary with which to understand and speak about Muslim women's school leadership.

My analysis focuses on understanding the ways these women's stories of gendered racialization shape and are shaped in public school spaces. Stories allow silenced groups to speak their truths according to their own terms of reference. Stories and storytelling are central to social change pedagogy (Razack, 2002). Through story, received and created, we can find distance from dominant knowledges and structures that dismiss our embodied experience as a legitimate place of learning. In story we see that we do not live our lives wholly in darkness. There is always light, joy, and kindness. In hardship we find connection, companionship, and affirmation of what we know to be real and worthy of attention. This is reflected in these stories. The sisters in this study offer grounded social knowledge afforded through their epistemic privilege of living and working as Muslim women school leaders. Through stories we reflect on notions of belonging, examine repressive ideologies, and interrogate the institutional culture that locate Muslim women discursively and structurally in schools.

I have organized my analysis according to common themes that arose in the stories of Muslim leaders. The themes explored in these chapters portray the surveillance, policing, and indignities Muslim women endure in their everyday work due to racism, sexism and other forms of wilful intolerance. My analysis centres the women's own words, locating them in the social relations and power hierarchies within Ontario (English) public schools. The study is unique because it focuses on the professional lives of Muslim women in a public institution and begins from these women's location of assumed authority in formal leadership.

> It is precisely because intersectionality is able to knit together the macro-economic political social discourses which structure inequities with a complex array of individuated subjectivities which by imposition, choice or desire are written on and lived within the body that makes its ontological instability a powerful tool for analysis
>
> Mirza, 2013, p.7

The embodied evidence as shared by my participants permits us to "knit together" that which is external and yet "written on" to daily life. Following in the footsteps of Mirza (2013) and her study with expat professional Muslim women in Europe, this intersectional analysis interrogates how institutionalized discrimination comes to be situated and embodied in Muslim women. My study examines the theorization of Muslim women's experiences as gendered and raced beings as it is "constituted, reconfigured, and lived" in the everyday life of professional Muslim women. In doing so I attend to the "discursive effect of hegemonic power and privilege" and the women's "embodied agency" (p.13).

In earlier chapters, I discussed the racialization of Muslims and the constituting of select traditions and practices as innate and unchanging traits. My theoretical framework engages the pivotal role of gender in demarcating Islam and Muslims to an inferior status globally and in Canada. Stories in this project also express intersections of gender and racialization, what Zine (2002) terms gendered Islamophobia. Accordingly, some of the participants speak explicitly

about gender and Muslimness and others make clear they are inseparable. In chapter five I have highlighted key themes and draw on my conversations with Muslim women leaders to show how their practices and presences are subject to erasure is school environments. The excerpts and analysis underscore how leading a school as a Muslim woman is lived through external constructions as well as pockets of self-authored resistance and possibilities for change.

Chapter 5: Theme I- Systemic Erasure

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO THEME I: SYSTEMIC ERASURE

The everyday stories of Muslim women leaders in schools testify to continuance of discursive conflict and gendered racism, interpersonally and institutionally. The body of the Muslim woman leader— particularly when dressed modestly, donning a hijab, or displaying faith practices such as prayer or fasting- is marked as a site of difference and a frontier for erasure. The presence of a Muslim woman in the capacity of leader unsettles racist knowledges and disrupts relational dynamics rooted in the White supremacy of public schools. Expressions of White women's entitled superiority as caregivers, educators, and leaders consequently appear across stories. The paradox of the oppressed and threatening Muslim woman (re)surfaces to reclaim *commonsense* beliefs. The interpersonal dynamics arise in the context of institutional assertions of secularism and multicultural diversity, which serve as 'non-performatives' to maintain and justify the existing order (Ahmed, 2009).

Systemic erasure is the outcome of an interplay of a hypervisbilizing of the Muslim woman administrator along with sustained and intentional invisibilizing of her existence. The process of invizibilizing, I argue in this chapter, enables the systemic erasure of Muslim school leaders in educational spaces. Invisibilizing what is embodied and articulated leaves an emptied cut-out of where the Muslim woman exists, a hollow space to be filled with the distortions of hypervisibilizing constructs. These constructs are indelibly marked by public discourse of gendered Islamophobia evident in the media, political rhetoric, and commonsense understandings. Systemic erasure prevents Muslim women from living in the full complexity of their humanity while leading their schools (Young Jin Kim, 2019; Dicken, 2019; McCluney &

Rabelo, 2018). In the following section I explore the ways Muslim women leaders describe invisibilizing and hypervisibilizing as "written on" to their embodied realities. The meaning ascribed to the sub-themes of this form of discrimination is made evident through participants stories. Throughout I draw connections between the emerging theme/sub-themes and existing empirical scholarship on racialized women school leaders. I position the theme/sub-themes on to a tapestry of theoretical literature to uncover the significance of the stories so as to understand the ways gendered racialization of Muslim women operate within and through public schools. The stories and the analysis offer a glimpse into a lived reality that is largely absent from public education leadership discourses, particularly in Canada.

5.2 SYSTEMIC ERASURE OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN SCHOOL LEADER: IN HER WORDS

5.2.1 Invisibilizing

'Invisibilizing' is a term I coined to conceptualize the intentional removal of a human presence, creating an absence, a demand to not exist, to not take up space, to wilfully ignore pieces, to demand a parcelling of self, to relegate parts of her to the unseen, to be unknown. 'Invisibilizing' leaves a silhouette or caricature of a person in place of embodied complexity. The women in this study describe being 'invisibilized' through daily experiences which obscure and erase their skills, expertise and leadership, ethical commitments and service and personhood. They speak to the local and global geopolitical realities of world events impacting them as Muslim women, and the harm they experience because of gendered Islamophobia in schools. Our conversations were replete with examples of 'invisibilizing.'

The educational and professional achievements of the Muslim women in this study exemplify profiles of excellence. This is not surprising, as Muslim educators speak of needing to be 'exceptional' to be considered for any opportunities for advancement (Shah, 2010; Morga, 2013). Study participants still encounter an invisibilizing of their abilities and expertise upon becoming school administrators. As with the Latina leaders interviewed by Martines, Riviera, and Marquez (2020), Muslim women's competence is minimized and the breadth of their skills unacknowledged. Asian-American women administrators also have their abilities questioned and feel that they need to work harder to prove themselves (Liang & Peter-Hawkins, 2017). Similarly, Bailey-Morrissey (2015), finds Black women in secondary school leadership struggle to be valued and respected by their peers and staff. Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) suggest that racialized women school leaders, Black women in particular, face challenges in negotiating their professional identities. As a result of barriers, Black women school leaders expressed the need to work harder and to develop a 'racial sixth sense that allowed them to read, anticipate and resist their individual and collective challenges' (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p.837).

5.2.1.1 Invisibilizing of skills, expertise, leadership

A 'sixth sense' is needed when successful Black women working in White (male-dominated) organizations continue to work longer hours and are only valued for particular niches e.g. 'diversity work' (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). The literature in this area indicates that racialized women school leaders experience regular dismissal of their skills and expertise and a selective invisibilizing of their gendered racialized identities. While some studies discuss the impact of these realities on racialized women administrators (Mendez-Morrse, Murakemi, Jimenez & Hernandez, 2015; Bailey-Morrissey, 2015; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Young-Jin

Kim & Nguyen, 2019), there is little discussion of the ways this harm is responded to and dealt with by their institutions. The stories in my study offer specificity regarding invisibilizing realities for Muslim women leaders, how they are lived, taken in, and resisted.

Conversations with participants reveal that their pedagogical and leadership skills are often ignored or minimized by administrator partners and even by staff members. Working long hours and demonstrating competence enables some Muslim women leaders to assert authority in particular areas. Still, their expertise is viewed as "fluffy," "flaky," or "biased." Aiyah shares, "It's very hard to never be perceived as an authority on something." Layla, an accomplished administrator, who has served in many capacities prior to becoming a school leader, also describes the routine dismissal of her skills:

> I did feel like I'm a highly paid EA [Educational Assistant] and my role is just to take care of behaviour. I would be, for a lack of a better word, told, basically, just shut up, in the middle of the meeting. "Now, this is how we're going to do it" if I would offer something. I did it, probably, a couple of times. And I think that was enough for me to get an idea that my job is to just sit and listen quietly and I do as I'm told. But then there was micromanagement in many other areas...another VP friend of mine who was White and worked with the same principal and things were different. So that's something that made me reflect. OK, what was it? And it's interesting because this other VP also came from a Curriculum [instructional system leader] background. She was also a resource teacher and so was I. (Layla2, p.1)

As she recounts, Layla feels diminished by her administrator partner who assigns her the more challenging and difficult responsibility of dealing with student behaviour (in an elementary school) while dismissing her contributions to school planning or instructional leadership. Layla feels that barring her of opportunities to instructionally lead speaks to her partner administrator's perception of her as having limited capacity. The perception, Layla feels, erases her past accomplishments and future chances for promotion. Assigning Layla to "take care of behaviours," keeps her busy and unable to reveal the breadth of her expertise.

White leaders deferring to White peers over the Muslim woman leader is another form of invisibilizing the skills and abilities of Muslim women school leaders. Salma recalls an incident in a planning meeting where she attempts to put forth ideas only to have her White colleague appropriate the idea to gain approval from her principal:

> So, I'm sitting there today. And my [White] colleague says…exactly what I said, and [the principal] then approves it. At this point, I'm like, OK, and keep going. So, this is how I look at it: I could be bitter about it or I could just use her to get whatever the hell I need. And I'm going to do the latter, because I know I have the ideas and he listens to her more than he listens to me, right?! I could pick a side, but I'm not going to, I'm just going to use it to my benefit. … But I know I'm working harder. When I look at my portfolio and my peers' portfolios, I have twenty-one things and they might have eight or nine. (Salma1, p.5)

As Salma is made invisible by both her colleague and principal, she feels her ideas and contributions disappear. Salma is accustomed to having her ideas taken up by White counterparts so they can be validated and accepted. Salma knows that her contributions to important conversations are being summarily erased and chooses to focus on the other ways she is supported by her principal. This support is tethered to a significantly larger workload, which Salma accepts in an effort to maintain her strong presence in the school and community.

The erasure of Salma's expertise invisiblizes her workload "[where] I have twenty-one things they might have eight or nine". She understands that because she is unseen by her administrators, so are all the things she does. Salma keeps quiet about her workload. Through her spirituality she finds a way to gratitude but struggles with the knowledge of differential expectations placed on her. Being made invisible, you are made silent.

5.2.1.2 Invisibilizing of Muslim Identity

In addition to the erasure of expertise and leadership experienced by many of the participants, an invisibilizing of their Muslimness is shared by many. While her Muslimness is elevated to serve the needs of the school with regard to 'managing' Muslim families and answering queries and misconceptions, Rania expresses feeling this is eclipsed the rest of time. "I think my Muslimness is invisible," she states and then provides a vivid example to make this point:

> I remember this year (2021) on January 28, we were told as a board that for the first time in Ontario, or Canada, [schools] will be commemorating the National Day of Mourning for the Quebec massacre, a National Day of Awareness against Islamophobia. Our superintendent of equity had asked all principals to send these resources to staff on January 29. So, I reminded my principal in the morning that by 12:00 p.m., she usually sends her memos. I said, oh, make sure you send this memo about January 29. She didn't, and she didn't end up sending it at all. And I remember coming home and telling my daughter: Do these people forget that the VP is a Muslim woman…? Nothing was addressed. Nothing was taught about it. And so, I think sometimes it's invisibility" (Rania1, p.6)

As Rania finds, the Muslimness of the leader is only visible, and significant, when it is useful "to navigate through people's ignorance," and to facilitate "religious accommodations." Otherwise, Muslimness is "invisible," unimportant, insignificant to public school life. A reminder to send a notice of commemoration is a reminder of the presence of Muslimness in the school, in one of its leaders, in the nation. It is deemed unimportant and dismissed. It is unworthy of acknowledgement. Rania's Muslimness is to serve the institution, not the reverse. If Muslims are not part of the 'national imaginary', then the commemoration is not essential to Canada's public schools. If Muslims are not part of the Canadian body, then matters that impact their bodies are outside of the realm of appropriate talk for schools. "Nothing was addressed. Nothing was taught about it." A reminder of commemoration is a reminder of "invisibility" and erasure.

Similarly, as a school leader, Aiyah finds it impossible to address topics that are relevant to Muslim communities. There is a "line." Conversations about Islam and Muslims in public schools are not normalized, as this would mean normalizing Muslimness in public schools. To be a Muslim woman school leader is to be 'representation' without representing. The Muslim woman leader is expected to lay her Muslimness aside. It hangs on the back of her chair, waiting for the next Muslim parent to enter the office or the random curiosity of staff or peers. Aiyah notes the lack of compassion to Muslim pain or harm in Canada or abroad, "They're spoken about as if there is no impact, so very nonchalantly." Muslims are apart from the civilised subject, apart from exalted Whiteness (Thobani, 2007). Our pain is incomprehensible, akin to spectacle. Aiyah's colleagues and peers cannot commiserate. The injustice toward Uighurs, the Rohingya, Palestinians, or the Afazaal family of London (ON) is not a collective pain. Invisibilizing Aiyah's Muslimness further asserts distance. If you are not seen, then your pain is not seen.

Both Aiyah and Salma are cognizant of the expectation that violence towards Muslims, local and global, is not to be spoken of by Muslim women school leaders. Aiyah adds,

> we're not going to arrive at talking about Islamophobia. And since we aren't, there is no recognition of its existence. It doesn't exist as a force. The MSA in my school, the Muslim Students Association, is, I guess, decimated. I'm going to use that word because after the London attacks, I made it a point with my principal that we needed to connect with the MSA. We needed to see how the students were being impacted…And so when we connected with the president of the MSA, he said … There really hasn't been an opportunity for them to gather in affinity and sort of feel safe, feel supported in those spaces. He suggested there were many incidents that happened in the past in the school that caused students to believe that their voices did not matter, Muslim students, that their voices did not matter. What they had taken to the administration was not taken up and not taken seriously and not addressed. And so the group really had fallen to pieces. (Aiyah1, p.12)

The invisibilizing of Aiyah's own Muslimness is mirrored in the school's relationship with the Muslim Student Association. Student concerns are "not taken up and not taken seriously and not addressed," leading Muslim students to believe that their "voices do not matter." Aiyah recognizes that when you are not visible, your concerns cannot be heard they become inaudible, whispers of no consequence. Not being heard can mean "falling to pieces," your voice bounces off and is "not taken seriously." Not being heard signals a precarity of belonging: you are visible for the appearance of inclusivity, but your concerns are not addressed. The Muslim woman leader recognizes that "we are not going to arrive at talking about Islamophobia," the concerns of Muslim students are not heard, Muslimness is not visible, and so Islamophobia "doesn't exist as a force."

5.2.1.3 Invisibilizing of daily harm and its impact

The invisibilizing of Muslimness is paralleled in the similar disappearing of the harm experienced by Muslim woman leaders in schools. Layla's narrative reveals a level of terror and brutality committed by her staff, peers, and superiors unparalleled amongst study participants. After almost two years of incidents, she files a human rights case which compels the attention of senior leaders. She had hoped they would finally take the necessary steps to address the collusion and rampant racism in her school. Instead,

> I was told: since you as a Muslim person are the problem, you need to be moved. It's the problem that needs to be moved. And I'm doing that for your safety, and she [her superintendent] said that "for my safety … We're going to take you to another school" which to me, I took as a negative. And I was really upset about it because I felt that I needed support to continue the work that I'm doing because the battle was for the students, in particular the black students because they were targeted, those kids were targeted. Then I was told that I would be moved and …I was upset because, I think it was my ego, that I was doing so much, and I was making a difference and a change. And I was this close to achieving what we wanted to achieve. And you moved me. (Layla1, p.14-15)

In a follow-up conversation with Layla, she recalls the superintendent's phrasing regarding her move: "When you have cancer, you remove the tumour." Understandably, Layla is emotional in sharing this detail. After two years of orchestrated incidents rooted in gendered racism and involving the collusion of peers, staff, teacher union, and community members, Layla is constructed as the source of the problem. Her gendered and raced identity is the "tumour" that must be removed. (Dis)ease originates with the presence of the Muslim woman leader.

Although she did not instigate the attention to what was unfolding in her school, she is still moved. Her efforts in service of the most marginalized students and families are disregarded. The physical, emotional, and personal costs and the professional impact on Layla are diminished, as the board claims concern for her "safety." It is not without irony that much of the surveillance of Muslim communities in the wake of 9/11 has been under the guise of 'safety.' The safety of the institution's image is at risk when the (dis)ease with Muslim women leaders becomes apparent. The (dis)ease must be contained in her body and psyche. As sexism and racism spread and become visible in an institution, the target is viewed as the origin, "the tumour." Muslimness is outside of the collective body of public education. Muslimness is a foreign presence. The "safety" of the body requires the extraction of this pressence.

Even after Layla's move, it is clear that little will change at her former school. The burden of the ongoing investigation, prompted by her human rights case, continues to be mostly shouldered by Layla (and her family). Layla decides to withdraw her complaint,

> Once [the board] realised I've taken my human rights campaign back and I'm not following up, following through with the lawyer…once they realised I'm not going forward with that, I was told that, you know, they've never seen a more graceful person than me. (Layla1, p.15)

This notion of 'grace' when Muslim School Leaders face violence, abuse and aggression in school environments reappears in Rania's story:

> I then spoke to my superintendent and the reaction I got was: You handled it with such grace. And this is what we hear. You handled it with such grace, as if that's a compliment. And so it feels that constant being quiet, embracing almost all the abuse we get in this school on a daily basis from staff, this [teacher] spoke to me and yelled at me and abused me. And the only response I got was, you handled it with such grace because I kept tight lipped. (RaniaFG, p.11)

Both Layla and Rania are described as "graceful" for taking in abusive conduct and not seeking redress. Not only does this make their experiences of harm invisible, but it also absolves their supervisors, who are senior leaders, from addressing the harm and thus acknowledging their role in making clear that such conduct is unacceptable in the school and workplace. Rather than addressing serious incidents of racism, discrimination and abuse, they praise these women for accepting the harm as their burden alone, absorbing it into their bodies, with no witness to their pain and suffering. The expectation to hide their injury, to accept the blows as incidental bad acts sequesters the experience, detaching it from the realm of gendered Islamophobia. Erasing harm protects the institution and the "safety" of its image. Invisibilizing enables continued singular focus on 'diversity' in hiring without honest assessment of worldviews, beliefs, and resulting school cultures.

5.2.2 Hypervisibilizing

In contrast to invisibilizing, I use the term 'hypervisiblizing' to signal an amplification of otherness. This process can be visualized as backlighting: accentuating presence without attention to detail, making Muslim women singular, interchangeable, recognized but not seen. 'Hypervisibilizing' distorts the meaning of being a 'Muslim woman' to align with normative thinking of gendered Muslimness. 'Hypervisibilizing' (re)constructs 'Muslim woman school

leader' to serve Whiteness and its public education institution. The participants in this study experience hypervisibilizing in service of upholding existing systemic and discursive realities. As the women in this study discuss, hypervisibilizing occurs in a number of different ways including tokenism, the expectation that they will answer and clarify questions about Muslims and Islam, facing stereotypes and misconceptions, microaggressions, and overt disrespect and attacks by staff and parents.

5.2.2.1Tokenism

The underrepresentation of racialized women in school leadership is evident across studies (e.g. Mendez-Morse, Murakemi, Jimenez & Hernandez, 2015; Fuller, 2018; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Liang & Peter-Hawkins, 2017). School districts have, in some contexts, attempted to address this through what is often termed 'targeted hiring,' hiring to increase 'diversity' amongst leaders. In most settings, limited changes occur regarding the hiring process or the development of a sustained pipeline of racialized aspiring leaders. Tokenism is often the outcome.

Tokenism is "the practice or policy of admitting an extremely small number of members of racial (e.g. African-American), ethnic (e.g. Latino) or gender (i.e. women) groups... to give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality, these groups are not welcomed" (Ricucci, 2008, p. 132). Ruby (2021) explains that tokenism is intended to showcase racial diversity within the organisation while maintaining the culture of White supremacy (p.675). Dickens, Womack, and Dimes (2019) explain that tokens are often mistreated in the workplace, feel pressure to represent their racial/gender group, and will often be reminded of their token status. These authors also

suggest that tokens are perceived as one-dimensional: their presence intended to serve the institutional agenda. In some spaces, even the perception of tokenism can become a vehicle to dismiss the racialized women's competency as a leader (Liang & Peter-Hawkins, 2017). Muslim women administrators in this study discuss tokenism in the ways they experience it.

Most of the women in this study acknowledged that Muslim identity was a key factor in their recruitment to leadership positions. As Rania recalls:

> [I was] actually encouraged that I write something about being Muslim in my package…So it was very interesting that many and it was mostly White people who encouraged me to somehow put it in the package what identifies [me as] Muslim…–It's just, it's very interesting to see those very same people who encouraged me to use it…yet don't want to talk about Islamophobia at schools…[but they] felt that it would be good to have a Muslim woman, an administrator. But then that's the tokenism to say we're solving the bigger problem. We're just saying, hey, look, we have some Muslim groups here. So we're doing good and offering support. (Rania1, p.3)

Rania feels that schools are hungering for Muslim leadership to attend to the challenges that Muslim students and families and staff face in their interactions and pedagogical relations with non-Muslim students and families and staff. She notices that rather than educate all staff on these challenges, there is a turn to the "token," and superficial solution of hiring a Muslim person to solve the bigger problem of Islamophobia that is never named as such. Still, Rania is glad for the chance to lead and works closely with Muslim families in her school, helping them navigate advocacy for their children and understanding the curriculum. She is confident her promotion is warranted; she has demonstrated her skills and showcased her achievements in her application, however frustrated she may be by the idea that she is a token hire.

Tokenism is not limited to the hiring and promotion process. After several years as a secondary vice-principal, Salma shares,

> They still physically see me as this person [Muslim Pakistani Woman], they will use me when it will benefit them and I know this sounds terrible. But I'd rather they use me for that portion because it's going to still bring some or highlight diversity. (Salma1, p.6)

Salma notices that Muslim identity "benefits" the institution to "bring…or highlight diversity." When you are showcased as evidence of diversity, you find ways to come to terms with being put on display. For Salma, displaying the Muslim woman leader, she suggests, may disrupt notions of who can be a leader. Displaying the Muslim woman leader may motivate relationship between schools and Muslim communities. We sometimes come to terms with being tokenized by comforting ourselves with non-performative claims (Ahmed, 2012).

In another conversation, Salma spoke of being invited on to committees to "check a box," "I just feel like sometimes they're going to ask you to do something because it's going to make them look good. And you're like, normally you would have a problem with it. But you also learn how to play the game… [I have] been put in a position where I feel like I'm just being used like a poster child." Salma is aware that she is positioned to "benefit them" and "make them look good." She participates. Her wide range of experience (in both education and law enforcement) is still being reduced and invisibilized because they "still physically see me as this person." The Muslim woman leader becomes a flattened existence. Her Muslimness is everything and it is nothing. These moments of hypervisibilization serve to simultaneously erase her complex personhood.

In her understanding of tokenism, Salma describes experiences of being a 'poster child' for diversity and acceptance in her school. Salma accepts this hypervisibled role despite its harm to self as means of "playing the game." For Salma playing the game requires going along with

the tokenization in effort to gain credibility within the system, so that she can advance the agenda of equity for students and lead in the school community.

> So, I always keep telling myself, don't complain, don't complain. Look at the big picture. You're influencing Muslim students or influencing others about Islam. Like it's not easy. But I don't know. I feel like I constantly have to drill out of my mind because I don't want to go into that negative state, right? I don't want to be that one Muslim administrator who is putting up a big kerfuffle over certain things, right? So, I don't know if that makes me weak, but I just look at the big picture and I think I just need to shut up and play the game for now, because if I play the game for the next two periods, maybe by the third period, I'll have a little bit more position on the field where I can move, where I need to move. (Salma2, p.3)

Playing the game permits the organization to use her visible presence as a racialized woman (Muslim woman) to fulfil ever increasing demands to meet the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) mandates of the system.

"Playing the game" appears in conversation with Rania, who takes more of a resistance stance to it. "I used to play the game and a lot of us do, and it's sad, right? That model, minority myth, right? We align with people because it's the only way to survive. But three years ago, I thought: Enough, I'm a proud Muslim. When people ask me if I pray, I say, yeah, I pray. I don't drink. I don't do this. I don't do that." Rania does not wish to "play the game" of fitting the 'form of the norm' and chooses to no longer shrink her sense of being a Muslim woman (Ahmed, 2003, p. 385). In Rania's narration, "playing the game" is discursive. She works to wrestle herself away from the "Good (non-practicing) Muslim" (Mamdani, 2004). Being public in her Muslimness Rania rejects tying the legitimacy of her leadership to performing the modern, secular, and embracing of the West's image of Good Muslims. The Muslim woman leader can also choose to not play the game.

5.2.2.2 Spotlighting

In addition to tokenism, Muslim women are hypervisiblized through 'spotlighting'. Bakali (2017) explains that 'spotlighting' is the expectation that someone of a marginalized identity explain or justify what members of "their group" think, say, or do as indicative of a collective (and agreed-upon) set of beliefs and behaviours. Spotlighting reproduces monolithic and static perceptions of an identity. The assumption is that a simple one-dimensional explanation is readily available and easily comprehended. Spotlighting is unlikely to result in reflection on normative worldviews. Instead, it is a chance to debate, discuss, or even vent misconceptions and ill-informed frustrations onto a marginalized body as a representative of the collective. Bakali (2017) and Abo Zena et. al (2009) found spotlighting to be a common experience for Muslim students in schools.

In my study, Rania becomes a target for spotlighting when she abandons 'playing the game': "[P]eople see me as, well, let's go to her for all our Muslim & Islam questions." Becoming visible is an invitation to be 'spotlighted.' The 'Muslim' is in: to answer questions, explain, justify, and justify, and justify. At first, you feel compelled. You fill "the gap," provide missing knowledge, and clarify misconceptions. There are so many misconceptions. Layla explains,

> In my role, where I started educating people, you know, explaining this is what it means. And that's how this is and this is the reason for that and all that. And I started to speak. But then, too, I felt I'm justifying [their thinking]. Why am I explaining myself to someone? Do I have to, should I be doing that? (Layla1,p.5)

For Layla, answering the questions validates the asking. Her investment of thought and care in her answers makes the questions seem justified. To answer feels like giving permission to keep

asking. But "why am I explaining?" asks Layla. Why does being a leader mean that the Muslim woman must 'teach' Islam and Muslims to staff and peers?

Unlike Layla, Rania wavers between answering and ignoring the questions:

> I find it unfortunate when I have conversations with so many educators, our office staff, my school principal, the ignorance, ignorance, really there is about Islam, and I've had many conversations ranging from girls are forced to wear the hijab to female circumcision…I call them patient conversations with staff to really unpack their ignorance…so it's just it takes a lot of patience. But I feel Google it! Google it! Don't come and ask me. I'm not being paid to teach you about your ignorance. So, I struggle with that a lot…How is it that as an educator, you don't know even the basics about the kids you're serving?! (Rania1, p.5)

Rania resists taking on the role the school assigns to her. Although she does engage in "patient conversations," carefully guiding her staff and peers in learning about Islam and Muslim, she expresses resentment for having to bear the burden and cost of this emotional labour. These conversations, she notes "take a lot," they are mental and emotional labour. Rania invests in these conversations while knowing that with each response she legitimizes the asking. Answering questions keeps her busy. Spotlighting is a way to be kept busy.

Not only are the questions time-consuming but they can also be intrusive and personal. As Aiyah notes, "My admin team in particular asks a lot of questions about the history of my family…Like, I don't know what they're checking… I think they're checking nationalities along the way, which I believe feeds into their own biases about certain countries and certain Muslim narratives. People are very intrigued about my history, my family's history." Aiyah's administrator partners are "intrigued" and confused by her presence. There are many questions. She is unsure "what they are checking."

Muslim women administrators struggle with answering the questions of staff and peers regarding their identities, their faith, and their spirituality. They feel a sense of responsibility, recognize a possibility to educate, and they resent being positioned to represent a complex and nuanced history, community, and identity. They know their words will be taken out of context, overly simplified and viewed as absolute. The spotlighting of Muslim women leaders serves to mask the gendered and racialized discourses that abound in public schools. It also vindicates White colleagues' and students' right to ignorance and claim to innocence when asking the questions. Spotlighting also reinforce the dominant representation of Muslim women as unknowable, a curiosity, or a caricature.

5.2.2.3 Managing 'the Muslims'

Another form of hypervisibilizing is the expectation that these leaders 'manage' the Muslim community. Racialized women leaders are regularly placed in highly racialized schools (e.g. Horsford, 2020; Fuller, 2018; Ponto-Moorsi et al, 2018; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Some refer to this practice as pigeon-holing: limiting racialized persons' opportunities and experience to specific areas. The expectation in the case of schools is that the racialized woman leader possesses a cultural knowledge and worldview that will enable her to bring about transformation in such settings, which are also often under-resourced. Of course, this relegates the work of addressing the needs and opportunities of highly racialized schools as the domain of the racialized leader, thereby absolving the system and its predominantly White leaders of understanding systemic barriers and structural discrimination. Muslim women in this study did not discuss 'pigeon-holing' regarding the schools in which they

were placed. They did, however, speak of being expected to manage the Muslim community in specific ways.

When Muslim families challenge school/teacher practices and advocate for their children, the Muslim woman administrator is called in to be the liaison. Senior administrators look to Muslim women school leaders to be the face of the institution when communicating with advocates (read: complainants). The Muslim woman administrator is deployed, absolving the non-Muslim (often White) peer from needing to engage with building collective and responsive solutions. Instead, the Muslim woman administrator becomes the agent of the board/school expected to resolve the 'problem.'

Becoming the face of the institution also makes Muslim women leaders hypervisible and subject to unwanted attention and scrutiny. In facing the problem one can become a problem to the institution. As Noura shares,

> When Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate is on point and present, we'd rather quietly find a way to move past it. So, I went to [my principal] and I said, this is a problem. And he goes, yeah, that's just so inappropriate. And I said, well, what are we going to do about it? And he says, what do you mean? What are you going to do about it? I said, well, she's [A Muslim substitute teacher] sent us this email. And it's clear that the behaviour that went on in that classroom was really inappropriate. I think we need to find out what happened. And so, he's says, if you want to find out what happened, you can go ahead (Noura2, p.4)

In this incident Noura is recounting, a Muslim teacher experiences Islamophobia by students and sends an email complaint to the administrators. The complaint is dismissed by the principal as simply "inappropriate" behaviour on the part of students. Only when she insists that it be taken seriously, is it suggested that Noura investigate, which implies that a complaint by a Muslim teacher is a complaint to be investigated by the Muslim vice-principal.

Similarly, Rania finds herself called upon to address and "deal" with the concerns of Muslim families. Rania is viewed as having cultural knowledge that is beneficial to placate and resolve challenges brought forward by Muslim families.

> If you have an angry Muslim parent in the school, then its "[Rania] can you deal with it? You have a way with these parents to understand, you understand them", then my Muslimness is no longer invisible. So it's, you know, it's like catering to pieces of identity when they benefit you and when they don't, you just discard it. (Rania1, p.7)

'Being Muslim' is useful to the institution in these moments. 'Being Muslim' becomes visible and amplified; calling up a so-called 'cultural knowledge' held by the Muslim woman leader is a shortcut to a quiet resolution. 'Being Muslim' becomes a technical skill, like a language; it is added to the collection of identities the institution possesses to maintain the image of an equitable and inclusive space. 'Being Muslim' becomes 'useful' in unexpected ways.

5.2.2.4 Bridging as Managing

Several Muslim women leaders in this study spoke of subverting the expectation to 'manage' Muslim families by engaging in 'bridge leadership'. According to Horsford (2020) 'bridge' leadership is a connecting and bringing together of people and movements in service of antiracist and anti-oppressive change. She suggests that the experience of intersectional forms of oppression affords racialized women leaders the capacity to "transverse and negotiate" across communities and context in service of social change (p.62). For Ponsto-Moorsi et al (2018), bridging leadership was evident amongst Black women administrators of under-resourced and predominantly racialized schools in the US, the UK, and South Africa. The school leaders in that study sought to 'bring everybody on board' and employ a collective approach to bring about change that centres students and defines success broadly (p.155). In this project, Rania, Noura,

Aiyah and Salma discuss their bridging work with community and going beyond the parameters of the 'usefulness' of their Muslimness as set by their employer (the school board).

Building a bridge to community is commitment and effort. It is also communication. A new vice-principal in a secondary school setting, Salma is committed to building communication with her community, sharing regular information about what is happening in the school and drawing attention to special events like the Iftar/break- fast dinner. "Eight hundred and sixty people showed up." Salma's goal of connecting to the community, her approach of working with students to determine platform and strategy, allows her to bridge school and community and to demonstrate to her administrator peers and superiors the power of attending to the community whom they serve.

The power of bridging surfaces in Rania's story in discussing the aftermath of the murder of a Muslim family in London, ON in the summer of 2021.

> I'm thinking about the London, Ontario incident … My co administrator didn't mention anything about it, … here I am serving a community, at least 30 percent of the kids are Muslim. How are we not addressing this? I stayed quiet … I let the principal do everything. But after two days, I was like, can we have a virtual space for our Muslim kids where they can talk about what they're feeling because they're feeling it. They're coming to me. They're emailing me. They're asking me. They're asking their teachers [for me] to join their class. They want to talk about this. They need to talk about it. Had I not been in the school. Had the VP been non-Muslim or White, that whole incident would have happened, and it would not have been addressed and it would not have been talked about. Because I pushed it, we talked about it. And I know people thought I was pushing it because I'm Muslim. Well, I am a Muslim woman…we have so many Muslim kids in our school. How are we not addressing this? (Rania1, p.3)

Rania stays quiet and waits. When the students and family keep coming, keep asking, she knows she must push. When we push, we are seen as pushing a personal agenda. "I know people thought I was pushing it because I'm Muslim. Well, I am a Muslim woman." Sometimes we need

to push even when we are seen as pushy. Rania knows the harm experienced by Muslim students and families in the wake of a violent Islamophobic attack. It is her pain too. "How are we not addressing this?" An incident such as this is not a Muslim issue, but it does impact Muslim students and families in ways that are acute and embodied. "How are we not addressing this?"

The very Muslim identity of these leaders that the institution exploits for its own ends can become a way to build bridges and relationships and offer protection to the Muslim community. Despite the expectation that Muslim women leaders 'use' their identity to 'manage the Muslims', several women find ways to support Muslim communities by managing the institution of public education.

5.2.2.5 Stereotypes, Misconceptions, and Tropes

Hypervisibilizing can take other forms, forms that are more blatantly harmful. A recurring theme in conversations with study participants is their encounters with stereotypes, misconceptions, and tropes. Studies examining the experiences of racialized women in positions of school leadership reveal that coping with stereotypes is a daily task. Managing this reality may involve 'shifting' behaviour, speech patterns, or dress to counter stereotypes (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Bailey-Morrissey, 2016; Mullen & Robertson, 2014), self-silencing (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016), and mimicking Whiteness (Mullen & Robertson, 2014). This takes a heavy toll on their emotional and physical wellbeing (Isabela, 2018; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Bailey-Morrissey, 2016; Mullen & Robertson, 2014; Byrd, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2006).

The women I spoke with share being regularly defined through dominant discourses of gendered Islamophobia. Stereotypes of oppressed and weak Muslim women, who are incompetent and unable to speak English, who seek to indoctrinate others, and who are inherently homophobic are woven across their stories. Such normative thinking was discussed by Amina, who was unsupported by her principal in her journey toward becoming an administrator. When she approached her principal to 'sponsor' her vice-principal application (this was a requirement in Amina's board) she was surprised to learn that she was viewed as lacking the capacity to become a leader despite her demonstrated skills and achievements. She describes this conversation with her principal. As Amina remembers,

> I went to her [my principal] and I, I thought she had my back.... And she said, and I'll never forget it. She said, "They're going to eat you alive". That was her comment to me … and the superintendent would say, well, you're coming across as a great teacher, but we can't see you as an administrator. So, they would not give me their support. representative like I am, as a Muslim woman. They just could not perceive that this person, who (they would say) is quiet. (Amina1, p.2)

As a hijab-wearing Muslim educator, Amina feels she is not viewed as capable of leadership. Her involvement in diverse initiatives at her school and her educational achievements (AQs, leadership programs, Master's degree) do not result in opportunities for formal leadership. Her hijab marks her as incapable, it marks her as a target- "They're going to eat you alive." Districts are concerned for your "safety." A Muslim woman with a hijab can "come across as a great teacher." With her hijab she is allowed to cross into the role of teacher, but she cannot "come across" as a leader. A hijabi is not a public-school leader. The hijab covers her hair, supposedly revealing who she is: she is "quiet," and "too soft." Trying to cross into leadership reveals what prevents you from crossing. It reveals what we "can't see you as." The constant undermining of her abilities makes Amina leave the school: "I knew I had to leave the school even though it would be out of my comfort zone. I didn't look back, I moved to a new school. I really worked

hard with the administrator there who was very supportive. That has been my journey, I would say probably about an 8-to-10-year journey. To get to VP, and even then, I would say it wasn't easy." The hijabi Muslim woman leader refuses their expectation and finds her way. When you are prevented from crossing over into formal leadership, you find other paths, longer paths. Being "visibly" Muslim, you must climb over expectations and tropes to show your expertise and demonstrate your skills.

Layla, who encountered the most blatant forms of racism and microaggressions, amongst study participants, shares the statements made by staff in her school: "What?? I'm going to report to a Muslim woman ?!" "so this P@#* principal was placed in a French immersion school, she doesn't even know English, let alone French. Why was she here?" The assumption of superiority by White staff are evident in their refusal of the leadership of a Pakistani Muslim woman. Their exalted status makes it impossible to imagine a reality in which they report to and are evaluated by a Muslim woman. Even when you come across, you are refused entry.

In conversation with Rania, it was clear that she regularly encounters the assumption of the "oppressed" Muslim woman. She explains,

> I think often non-Muslims will pit Muslims like me who don't wear the hijab or are not visibly Muslim, [with those who do] like my younger sister. My younger sister is an educator too, she teaches primary. She wears the hijab very proudly. When people meet the two of us together, they assume that I'm the more liberal one. And so, there's that assumption that women who wear the hijab are oppressed. And I'm not an oppressed woman. (Rania2, p.1)

A hierarchy of oppression is constructed, and Muslim women are positioned according to those who do and do not wear the hijab. Muslim woman leaders are hyper-aware of how they are

positioned against other women in the power relations designed through normative discourses of Islam and gender.

Muslim women leaders negotiate walking in two worlds, the public-school institutional space and the Muslim community space, trying to meet the expectations of both. For Noura's Muslim colleagues, bringing attention to Muslim community concerns and Islamophobia makes her "too Muslim," "a cyclone" who needs to "simmer down." Advocating for justice while inhabiting her identities renders her 'too much,' overflowing, unmanageable. She must turn down the heat, bringing things to a quiet simmer. Being a Muslim woman leader is representation without representing. Somehow, her too-muchness can be useful. "When they're too afraid to say it themselves," Noura is "called to the table." All body, all emotion, she will say what they are unwilling and unable to bring forward.

5.2.2.6 Interrupting Dominant Discourses— Stereotypes, Misconceptions and Tropes

Faced daily with stereotypes, misconceptions and tropes, the Muslim women leaders describe feeling pressure to clarify misconceptions, stereotypes and Islamophobic tropes while simultaneously showing compassion and understanding to the staff and peers doing the asking. Noura speaks at length in our conversations about showing care and kindness to non-Muslim staff who have challenged her decisions through what she sees a gendered and racialized perspective, or else have caused harm to Muslim students and families through their pedagogical moves. She explains that maintaining relationships and ensuring the staff do not feel judged or diminished in their interaction with her as the school leader is critical to her ability to be effective as a leader. Responding to stereotypes and misconceptions becomes an exercise of

(re)assuring Whiteness of its goodness. "You did a great job. You tried your best. You just know better for next time."

Rania speaks of her struggle to show compassion for staff who take actions that harm students, particularly racialized students. "I find it kind of challenging because I'm a protector. I always want to take care of people. And so, it's difficult to navigate." She is aware that naming and addressing the problematic conduct is interpreted first through her embodied identities. At the same time, she emphasizes that we are here to "serve kids and I want to be more towards serving kids." Rania searches for "balance." She wrestles to cope with staff /peers' hurt feelings caused by perceptions of her lack of care or inability to (re)assure the staff member of their goodness. 'Not caring' can become further evidence of her threatening nature and her lack of humanity.

5.2.2.7 Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour" (Wing Sue et. al, 2007, p.271). Husain and Howard (2017) specifically examine what they refer to as 'Religious Microaggressions,' suggesting key themes for such experiences amongst Muslims. These include Muslims as a threat, pathologizing of the Muslim religion, assumptions of homogeneity, exoticizing Islam or Muslims, and alienation. It is significant to note, Husain and Howard's attention to the racialization of religion, and understand microaggressions towards Muslim as a form of racial microaggression. Racial microaggressions are widely experienced by racialized

women school leaders (e.g. Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Ponsto-Moorsi et al, 2018, Young-Jin Kim et al, 2019). They also appear in my conversations with Muslim woman leaders as another way of being hypervisibilized.

The subtlety of microaggression is mirrored in their muted prevalence across stories. Layla pronunciation of English words is 'corrected,' Salma's ideas are only heard and taken up when repeated by White peers, Noura and Muna receive compliments for being articulate, most of the women encounter racist jokes and comments from peers and staff, and many are questioned about their commitment and engagement to their faith. The 'slightness' of microaggressions leaves you wondering if anyone else noticed. Microaggressions are moments that we replay and replay and replay. We question our perception, our emotionality, we want to believe there is no intention to cause harm. We feel powerless to address these 'slights,' worrying we will bring even further attention to ourselves. When you are a 'sore point' you can no longer point out soreness (Ahmed, 2012).

We face being told we are too much: "too soft," "too authentic," "too emotionally invested," "too familiar," and "too knowledgeable." Our too muchness seems to be noticed in moments of disrupting the 'way things have been done,' in disrupting Whiteness. This includes when we are serving racialized students and families. Not punishing vulnerable and marginalized students, having positive relationships with (racialized) community members, advocating against racism experienced by students or staff, and leading changes for antiracist pedagogy (discussed in the next chapter) are incentives for microaggressions.

Microaggressions are expressed with regularity, underscoring a deep awareness of the leader's identity as a Muslim woman and the stickiness of discursively prescribed perceptions of this identity (Ahmed, 2017).

5.2.2.8 Overt Targeting and Disrespect

The subtlety of microaggressions experienced by most participants is in contrast to the different forms of direct confrontation, including sabotage, discussed by a few participants. In the wider literature, Fuller's (2018) investigation of a case of a South Asian woman school leader reveals confrontation in the form of active resistance on the part of White teachers refusing to acknowledge how entrenched pedagogical practises contributed to the marginalisation of learners of English as an additional language. Another UK study found that some Black women in secondary schools were challenged and questioned by White staff who struggled to accept having a Black female leader (Bailey Morrissey, 2016). A cross-sector study which included education, meanwhile, describes White staff leveraging their White privilege to "circumvent, diminish, overrule and control" the leadership of Black women in their respective workplaces (Byrd, 2009, p.587).

Aggressive targeting was evident in some of the Muslim women leader narratives. Amina explains that as a visibly Muslim woman she has had several encounters in which "White staff would speak to me in a way that they would never speak to another administrator." This includes raising their voice at her in the presence of others and publicly challenging her decisions. After several of these experiences, Amina now spends time practicing how to

respond: “What is my next thing that I'm going to say if he comes at me again or anybody else in that tone? How am I going to respond back? I had my line and I practised my line.”

Confrontations I experienced as vice-principal looked slightly different. They were expressed as a refusal to engage, even to speak with me when I was addressing a teacher directly. This happened both in classrooms in front of students and in hallways in the presence of other staff. Like Layla’s experiences as a first-time principal, my story involves collusion between staff, community members, the teacher’s union, and senior staff in the board to undermine leadership and credibility. In both Layla’s and my story, students, particularly racialized boys, were targeted by teachers to trigger behaviour that would be reported to parents of other students to bring on parental complaints. In all the experiences discussed by participants, (White) teachers, staff, and peers present themselves as guardians of the existing order and challenge the Muslim woman leaders for unsettling the entrenched worldviews and practices. To respond to these repeated encounters, the Muslim woman practices “How am I going to respond back?” Practising is essential when you (un)expectedly face hostility.

5.3 CLOSING THOUGHTS TO THEME I: SYSTEMIC ERASURE

The stories of Muslim women make evident the invisibilizing they experience as school leaders. Whether it targets their skills and expertise, their Muslim identity, or the gendered racialized harm they experience, the disappearing of their presence and complexity of existence in White spaces contributes to a systemic erasure. This erasure is intended to (re)confirm the outsider status of Muslim women not only to school leadership but to public spaces in Canada. Hypervisibilizing approaches further the erasure. In the tokenism, spotlighting, and designation as cultural liaison, Muslim women leaders are reduced to a 'normative' cookie cutter Muslimness in service of the institution. They also contend with the violence of stereotypes and tropes, microaggressions, as well as overt targeting and disrespect. These aggressions deplete Muslim women leaders' emotional and physical wellbeing while intending to diminish their targets. The resulting systemic erasure described by participants can be understood more deeply by locating it in the critical scholarship examining gendered racialization and power relations in public schools in Canada.

As Muslim women educators strive for advancement and to expand our "sphere of influence and to have influence on school-wide on issues of justice and equity" (Rania) through formal leadership, we come to realize that our success is seen as a "hospitality" afforded to us so long we uphold dominant institutional culture. "Being the one who receives hospitality keeps us in certain places, even when you move up." (Ahmed, 2009, p.42) Becoming "their diversity" cements our racialization through mainstream discourses and institutional structures. On arriving, we are to support 'Muslim' celebrations, significant Islamic days, and the provision of Muslim- centred resources. On arriving, we become the display.

The obsessive counting of racialized hires in the multicultural school does little to increase representation or justice in schools. The arrival of a small number of racialized women—Muslim women in this study—creates dissonance within the institution and disrupts what is held to be true about what is a leader, who leader roles and spaces are intended or reserved for, and the gendered racist ideas and perceptions regarding Muslim women.

In this chapter I engage the theme of systemic erasure. In my analysis of participants stories, I find this erasure to be achieved through the simultaneous efforts to invisibilize and hypervisibilize Muslim women leaders. This is rooted in the imaging of Muslim women as invading the boundaries of leadership: of 'who' can be leader, of 'how' one enacts school leadership, and of 'what' values and worldviews are to be protected and preserved by leaders. The processes of systemic erasure discussed in participants' stories work to ensure the designation of Muslim women as outside of acceptable public school leadership. Locating Muslim women leaders as outsiders furthers the logics that cast the Muslim woman as threatening and in need of containment, themes discussed in upcoming chapters.

Chapter 6: Theme II- Constructed as Threat

In the previous chapter I examine how systemic erasure manifests in the professional lives of Muslim women school leaders. I place the excerpts of women's narratives in conversation with critical feminist race literature to elucidate the relational and structural factors pervading in this erasure. This process provides a broader vocabulary with which to think and speak about these experiences and to inform the development of the composite characters and counter-stories of this project.

Engaged through a similar critical lens, this chapter addresses the theme of Muslim women leaders 'being constructed as threat.' I locate this theme in orientalist histories and discourses finding contemporary valence in Islamophobia that became a feature of mainstream social and media discourse and politics post 9-11. The amplification of the 'clash of civilizations' discourse post 9/11 reifies the longstanding dichotomy of a Christian West and an Islamic world (Said, 1978). Orientalism heightens the myth of the threat of an ever-encroaching Islam seeking to undo 'liberal' 'progressive' advancements in the West. In this chapter, I show how this distorted and threatening view of Islam and Muslims is embodied in the experiences of the Muslim woman school administrator whose presence in a leadership role unsettles normative expectations of her. I also show how her presence is considered a threat to the cultural politics of schools and the pedagogical legacies of public education espousing White supremacy through its practices of knowledge and socialization.

6.1 INTRODUCTION TO THEME II: CONSTRUCTED AS THREAT

The "ghost of the Muslim Other" haunts the imaginary (Semati, 2010). In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, the "ambient fear" of this ghostly presence has consolidated alarmist views of Islam and Muslims materialized in a global transnational security apparatus anchored in a range of policies as well as an increased and visible mobilization of military and police forces. The narratives of 'clashing civilizations' (Huntington, 1996) and 'Muslim rage' (Lewis, 1990) have become commonplace in Canada, as they have in other multicultural nations. The simplistic appeal of these narratives, argues Semati (2010), reinforces the superiority of the White subject and social order while eclipsing any nuanced discussion of geopolitics, racial politics, and economic imperialism. The discourse of blame embedded in 'because of their culture' lays the groundwork for an unyielding demonization of Islam and Muslims the world over.

The global embrace of the 'war on terror' furthers the idea that Muslims are an imminent and long-term threat to the nation and its citizens. Scholars across a range of fields have discussed the ways this discourse is effective in the 'removal' of belonging, entitlements and citizenship of Muslims in the 'west' (e.g., Razack, 2011; Kundanani, 2014; Kapoor & Narkowicz, 2019). The impossibility of being Muslim and citizen of any non-Muslim nation is underscored in the constant surveillance and everyday criminalization of their existence. In 2014, for example, Canada passed laws that make it possible for Canadian citizenship to be removed from those convicted of terrorist activities. This process of "unmaking citizens" also incorporates a broadening of the terms of citizenship denial and introducing measures that place Muslim citizens of the nation in states of exception, stripping them of protections (Kapoor &

Narkowicz, 2019). While citizenship is not the focus of this study, these punitive measures intended to assist with 'counter-terrorism' inform understandings of the present-day Canadian context and the dominant discourses surrounding the participants of this study. It is in such a context that 52% of Canadians distrust Muslims and 42% believe they are to blame for the discrimination they experience (2012 survey cited by Zine, 2022).

Muslim women navigate these hard political realities when taking on leadership positions in Canadian public-school spaces. Claiming these leadership positions can be seen as a political act in a nation that deems the Muslim female body to be threatening. In the act of asserting herself as leader, the Muslim woman school administrator becomes increasingly visible, and her claim to belong to Canadian public education and to lead in this domain counters dominant cultural expectations of Muslim women. The construction of 'Muslim woman as threat' is part of the 'paradox' introduced in the theoretical framework chapter, which examines the doubling discourse of Muslim woman simultaneously viewed as oppressed, denied agency by 'her culture,' AND a threat to the values and ways of being in 'our' 'culture.' (Jiwani, 2010; Zine, 2009). The experiences of Muslim women in this study offer us insight into the specific ways 'Muslim woman as threat' manifest in the daily life of a school leader. The experiences of women uncovered in these stories exemplify the wider discourses of Muslim women symbolizing a 'threat of terror' and 'encroaching difference,' though manifested within the specific [and unique] circumstances of their lives as school leaders.

In the stories of the women featured in this study, their 'construction as threat' appears in several ways. The construction begins with their mere physical presence as a foreign and

problematic agent of leadership and extends into their interactions with students, community, and staff. In the context of 'clashing' discourses, the myth of secularism of public schools is maintained—and used—to further position the Muslim woman leader as threatening. In individual and collective conversations, Muslim women share their reflections and interpretations of the secularism myth and how it shapes their navigation of school spaces.

The view of, and reaction to, the racialized woman leader as threatening is not unique to Muslim women. Black, Indigenous and other racialized women address this directly and indirectly across sectors including education (Byrd, 2009). What my study elevates is how religious and cultural difference is racialized and weaponized using the specific logics and rationale to justify the mistreatment of Muslim women in leadership spaces. Each of these subthemes is prefaced with relevant connections to existing empirical studies on racialized women's school leadership. As the chapter unfolds, connections to existing empirical research pertaining to racialized women's school leadership may be more evident in particular sub-theme as compared to others. In the following section, I outline the ways Muslim women school leaders are constructed as threatening following participants' own words and understandings.

6.2 THE MUSLIM WOMAN LEADER CONSTRUCTED AS 'THREAT': IN HER WORDS

6.2.1 Physical Presence as Threat

The simplest reason for the Muslim woman leader to be constructed as threatening is her presence. Interpreting presence as a threat is a common theme in much of the existing literature on the experience of visibly and/or openly Muslim educators, who describe higher levels of scrutiny and surveillance which they attribute to being viewed as a threat (Benn, 2003; Shah & Shaikh, 2010). Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) found Black women administrators' experiences to be similarly marked by a surveillance of speech and behaviour. In light of such realities, 'shifting' is used as a strategy by Black administrators to reduce visibility and protect against racial targeting from staff, peers, and community. Shifting in appearance to conform with the dominant image of professional attire and appearance is repeatedly discussed by Mullen and Robertson (2014). These researchers find Black women leaders adopting normative and/or White formal dress standards (e.g., trousers, suit jackets, and jewellery) and beauty measures (e.g. hair styles, accessories) as a strategy to 'fit in'. Racialized women school leaders' management of their physical presence in their effort to navigate power relations and school cultures, attests to the interpretation of their presence as a problem. Physical appearance/presence is one of the planes in which the Muslim women school leaders discuss being 'constructed as threat'.

Muslim women leaders in Ontario public schools are marked as raced and gendered subjects through their daily interactions with peers, staff, and community. As Noura states: from the beginning, "I got the message, you don't really look like a principal." The simple statement "You don't really look like a principal" indicates to Muslim women that their presence is

unwelcome in school leadership. Muslim women's simple act of assuming the role of public education leader challenges the preservation of this position for White bodies. Amina recounts an incident that illustrates this understanding:

> A police officer had to come in and he could not believe, like I could see the look of shock in his eyes - that I was the principal. And so I sat with him and the family, and the family also happened to be a Muslim family…he just could not believe that I was there because he asked twice, "This is a public school?" "Yes, It's a public school." And he said, "And you're the principal?" And I said, "Yes, yes I am the principal." He just could not believe it. And then it's like, you know, it's almost like you have to…sit up and put your arm on the desk…just be very assertive. (Amina1, p.4)

The police officer expresses his disbelief with a hijab-wearing woman holding the position of the leader of a public school. Amina notes: "He asked twice." On encountering a Muslim woman as a principal, he feels entitled to ask if this can be a *public* school, and if she can be its leader. The Muslim hijab-wearing woman evokes an underlying sense of terror and disbelief instead of being seen as common and acceptable in a multicultural country. The hijab, as many scholars note (e.g., Zine, 2009; Mirza, 2013), is viewed as a visible threat in and to claimed secular democracies. As a result, the hijabi principal is also viewed as an outsider and threat to the public, despite being a well-respected leader in a public school.

Muslim women in positions of power also unsettle parents' perceptions of who can be a school leader. Salma recalls how on becoming a secondary administrator, she receives many parents' expressions of disbelief:

> I've had parents who didn't know me in my first year that come in to drop something off. They're like, oh, do you work here? Or are you like a teacher? I'm the vice principal. But you're wearing chappals? You're wearing a Salwar Kameez? I think being true to who you are is the very the first thing that I do. (Salma1, p.12)

In this participant's articulation we can see how reception of the Muslim woman administrator is heightened. When parents point out her non-Western dress as the reason for their disbelief, Salma replies affirmingly "Yes, yes, I am the vice principal." She uses their questioning as an occasion to dispute their perceptions of who is a leader by "being true to who you are." The anxious parental responses elicited by Salma's physical presence are met with the school leader's confidence in her identity as a Muslim woman.

The threat of the Muslim woman's presence is visibly amplified through dress: her hijab, her salwar kameez, her chappals are foreign in the school space. Although multiculturalism is touted as Canada's greatest strength, it is so only within tightly guarded institutional parameters. When engaged through the lens of gendered Islamophobia, Salma's dress conjures what Zine (2009) theorizes as a menacing Islamization ever threatening to 'infiltrate' public life. Salma's refusal to renounce her faith as conveyed by her dress counters dominant cultural and societal expectations of a school leader. The presence of the Muslim woman in the role of leader is perceived as threatening the existing social order in schools because she does not possess the right "look" and performance for a leader. The unsettling of gendered and racist knowledges of Muslimness and Whiteness result in a surveillance of Muslim women leaders' words and actions. These views of her as threat also interfere with the work of Muslim school leaders in their everyday interactions with parents and students.

6.2.2 Supporting/ Protecting Marginalized and Vulnerable Students as Threat

The narratives of racialized women school leaders speak of their commitment to serving and protecting marginalized communities. Many racialized school leaders see it as their calling

or duty to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized students and communities have access to and are supported in often inequitable sites of education (e.g., Moorsi, et al, 2018; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). They see their role of being a support as critical to their leadership and their goal of changing and challenging educational inequality in multicultural and pluralistic societies (e.g., Horsford, 2020; Martinez, Rivera & Marquez, 2020). Leaders in Pontso-Moorosi's (2018) study with Black women across three national contexts (UK, South Africa, US), discuss having a "pupil centred approach" and the importance of a "holistic child" development perspective. These leaders value justice and fairness and express dedication to improving the lives of their students. Racialized women leaders are also strong proponents of culturally responsive teaching that is cognizant of the multilingual learning realities of students (Fuller, 2018; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Hernandez et al (2016) found Latina principals understood their racialized students' lived experiences, held them to high expectations, and advocated for them with White educators in the school. Similarly, Alston (2005) and Isabela (2018) suggest that Black women and Asian American women leaders, respectively, find themselves in predominantly racialized school districts where they employ a servant leadership approach, dedicating themselves to the care of children in their schools.

As a caring profession, it is not surprising to hear that these leaders commit themselves to the service of their students. However, what is surprising is that other teachers and school leaders view the caring actions of Muslim school leaders as a threat to their own understandings of education and what is best for children. The stories of Muslim women leaders of this study afford a glimpse of what caring for marginalized and vulnerable students by a racialized leader may entail and how it shapes the experience of the leader's relationship to peers and staff. In the

stories of Muslim women, we come to understand that taking care of students is viewed as threatening by dominant culture teachers.

Layla finds caring for a student who struggles to find belonging in their classroom elicits unwanted doubt and question of her leadership skills. When caring for her students, Layla is seen as "rewarding the behaviour," the supposedly 'bad' behaviour that warranted the teacher's ejecting the student from the classroom. "Rewarding the behaviour" earns her the label of being "too soft, too kind" and causes her judgement to be questioned by teachers she is leading.

> I truly cannot remember a single day where the day went from 8:00 to six o'clock and nobody approached me and talked about my approach of being non-punitive and understanding. And they didn't, they didn't phrase it like that. They phrased it as rewarding the behaviour. That kids are acting a certain way because you're too soft, you're too kind. (Layla2, p.6)

Promoting a non-punitive approach to children's actions in schools, counter to those of the teachers she leads, causes teachers to question Layla's ability and capability as a principal. Her approach, although "they didn't phrase it like that," undermines the institutionalized understandings of discipline in school. Being "too soft" and "too kind" on "behaviour" is viewed as questioning the teacher's response, signalling that the child's behaviour is not bad, that it is permissible, or worse, that it is justified. She is told that it is her approach that is causing the child's behaviour. Layla finds that according to the teacher's response to her progressive approach to discipline, *she* is the problem.

> I came across to them as being too soft, too soft, not hard enough, giving permission to too many behaviours… Like, they basically want to see corporal punishment happening. They don't feel like they've been supported unless that child who flips that desk over is sitting in the corner, face turned in and crying. … At the end of the day, I don't care what I do, I've got to keep that child whole. I'll be damned if anything I do in terms of touching that child's life is going to take away from them. So, yes, sometimes it's been at the cost of the educator. Sometimes it's been at the cost of a parent. Sometimes it's been at the cost of either my administrative partner, but, hopefully, it's never been at the cost of the child. (Noura2, p.13)

Taking a non-punitive approach to classroom management is viewed as undesirable, soft, even dangerous. Non-punitive practices of listening to already marginalized students are viewed as compromising institutional norms/standards of discipline rather than as a modelling of an empathetic and caring approach. Noura accepts her commitment to educational advocacy for marginalized children may contribute to the view that her style of leadership is "too soft" and a threat to other educators, peers, or even parents, Noura accepts the price of her leading for change, knowing that it is key to how she views her role as a leader.

As with Noura, in a different school environment, Rania expresses a great sense of responsibility to protect and advocate for racialized and marginalized children.

> I feel like sometimes I'm having to shield children. I don't know if that makes any sense, you know, the troublemakers and teachers perceive them a certain way. And I almost feel that I have to shield these kids and I'll go outside and I'll say, hey, you know you did this this morning. Teacher has told me, come and talk with me, but I'll do everything before they're confronted with that violent situation and protecting them…literally hiding them in your office. And then the teacher is calling up and you're like, don't worry, he's in my office. I've got this. I'll take care of it. Because I know how that teacher will talk to this kid will be very different than how I'll talk to him, you know, and they're children. You know they're children. (Rania2, p.8)

Rania's duty to shield students emerges from her own lived experiences as a targeted body in society. She, like the other leaders I spoke to, know all too well how unfairly marginalized and vulnerable students are regarded and profiled. These students are often characterized as troublemakers. They share stories of students who are pushed to the edge, defined through what the educator sees as lacking in the child. Rania speaks of "literally hiding" children in her office, shielding them from the violence they will confront in their classroom. Hiding them, explains Rania, means dealing with the teacher who views Rania's decisions as taking the sides of racialized children over them.

> I've had to speak to teachers and say I respect your pedagogy. I respect your years of experience. But I'm not OK with you yelling at kids… I've even had a White teacher ask me, "Are you upset that I yelled at a brown kid?" and I said, "No, I'm upset because you yelled at a child." … And I realised that these same teachers would never ask a White administrator that. They would just take it and say, you're right, I'm sorry. To be asked that, are you upset that I yelled at this child because he's South Asian is a very strong indicator that I'm someone who gets upset and irrational because I'm protecting my own. (Rania2, p.8)

When Muslim women leaders like Rania support racialized children, the default position for the White teacher is to politicize rather than learn from the moment, undermining Rania's judgement as a leader. Rather than accept the principal's judgment as one might do with White counterparts, Rania is having to explain to the teacher her mistreatment of children is "not OK." Still, the White teacher lashes out at Rania and accuses her of being, "upset that I yelled at a brown kid." When serving in a predominantly racialized student population, the Muslim woman administrator is wrongly viewed as getting "upset and irrational because I'm protecting my own." Rania recognizes that her protection of marginalized and vulnerable children from normatively punitive approaches to discipline taken with racialized students threaten the White teacher's view of herself as a good teacher. When the Muslim woman leader exposes the harm caused to marginalized and vulnerable students in their classrooms, by their teachers, she exposes power relations and the falsity of the image of (White) educators as caring and good. Similarly, challenging racism/Islamophobia is another action contributing to the construction of the Muslim woman leader as a threat to the institution and to those whose identity is entangled in that of the institution.

6.2.3 Confronting Oppression/Racism/Islamophobia as Threat

Many studies exploring the experiences of racialized women administrators in Canada, the US, the UK, and Australia make reference to the institutionalized racism and sexism they face in public education (e.g., Fitzgerald, 2006; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Ponsto Moorosi et al, 2018; Martinez et al, 2020). While there is a growing body of work that specifically examines antiracist school leadership including antiracist leadership preparation (e.g., Gooden & Dantley, 2012), characteristics of antiracist leaders (e.g. Horsford, 2014; Santamaria, 2014), and leader activism (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, Amiot, Mayer-Glenn & Parker, 2020), little is written about the experience of racialized women leaders when confronting racism in school spaces. The scholarship that exists reveals that racialized women administrators avoid leading antiracist work to protect themselves from racial targeting by staff (Armstrong & Mitchell, 207). Latina administrators shared (Hernandez and Murakami, 2016) that they do not engage in conversations about race because it leads to perceptions of them being less intelligent and professional. The racialized women leaders who do confront racist practises in schools face an onslaught of resistance and White emotionality by staff and risk being scapegoated by their superiors (Fuller, 2018). An administrator interviewed by Fuller (2018), for example, experienced hostility from senior leaders and peers for naming institutional racism and making explicit its connections to the poor outcomes for racialized students.

Muslim women leaders understand that their presence is often seen as equity work rather than leadership when in fact a good leader is also an equitable one. To change how both leadership and equity are viewed by her staff, Noura strategically empowers others to do the work,

> When we start doing some of the equity work, and again, I am also really careful that when that work happens, I'm not exclusively leading it—I am always making sure that whoever my administrative partner is, and that we are always careful to make sure that we strategically set the stage so that it is never defined that equity work is happening because our principal is from an equity seeking group. (Noura1, p.12)

Noura recognizes that when leading 'equity work' as a Muslim woman, having a buffer can be strategic. "Administrative partners" can act as a buffer, so can 'equity focused' teachers. Noura enables them to become the face of the work: facilitating learning, serving as a resource to staff, and keeping a finger on the pulse of staff perceptions and responses. Buffering is a way to be "really careful," a way to "set the stage." Noura allows herself to fade from the frontline of the 'work,' "I'm not exclusively leading it." When 'equity work' happens, she wants it to be clear the origin of the work lies outside of her identity as a Muslim woman. Noura makes sure that policies and reports are shared. Resources and release time are made available. She does this work from the shadows. Leading for equity as a Muslim woman is shadow work.

To address racism as a racialized leader, as a Muslim woman leader, also turns one into a 'threatening figure.' When Salma hears from students that a teacher behaves "in racist ways" and "treats the Black kids differently," she knows that the discussion will be all the more challenging for him to hear and take from a Muslim woman.

> Sitting in the role that I'm sitting in and being of colour I cannot be seen as a threatening figure … I've had multiple situations where there is this one guy who everyone's like, 'oh, he's so racist, he treats the Black kids differently.' And I heard him multiple times, I have talked to him and I followed up with situations… but I don't want this White teacher to feel like I think he's racist… it's hard as an administrator, I'm not going to lie. (Salma2, p.7)

Despite having confirmation of the teacher's discrimination against Black students from multiple sources, Salma does not address his conduct directly. Instead, Salma tries to address the racist

conduct without directly addressing the person conducting the racism, something that would not happen if she were not a racialized leader and he a White male.

Along with protecting their racialized students from racism, Muslim school leaders constantly find themselves needing to protect themselves. In the shifting context of Ontario public schools, pockets of dialogue and action have emerged to address colonialism, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia. Countering Islamophobia is still out of the realm of much of anti-racism initiatives. None of the Muslim woman leaders in this study found a commitment in their school to even speak of Islamophobia. As Rania confirms, nobody "wants to hear about" Islamophobia.

> The moment I start talking about Islamophobia. I feel people think I get too aggressive … I feel sometimes I have to be a little quiet when it comes to Islamophobia because everyone wants to hear about the other stuff, but they don't want to hear about the reality of Islamophobia. (Rania1, p.4)

Rania remains silent about her experiences of racism and religious targeting because she feels like she would be forcing others to hear of a racism they don't want to know about. So, she has to "be a little quiet when it comes to Islamophobia." When she does raise Islamophobia in schools, Rania feels like others "think I get too aggressive." Similarly, Salma discusses "tackling anti-Muslim hate" as "touchy," so she navigates carefully,

> I don't know how you define Islamophobia, my first thing about it is being treated differently and in a negative way because of being Muslim. I feel like coming in my goal was to win these people over before I can start explaining certain things…like tackling anti-Muslim hate, it's such a touchy subject, I'm going to be really honest with you because Black Lives Matter is about race. Islamophobia is seen as being about a religion. We are in a public board, so, trying to navigate this makes everyone else uncomfortable (Salma2, p.10)

Salma explains her dilemma: Islamophobia is about a religion; religion does not belong in the secular public-school space. Given the entrenched belief that Islamophobia is a form of

discrimination based on religion instead of a form of racialization, it continues to be located outside the realm of antiracism work of public education (Garner & Selod, 2015). Islamophobia is "touchy" because it extends racism into the unspoken discrimination against religious difference in a Christian society which claims secularism as a reality. It forces us to confront how schools reproduce Whiteness which is inherently Christian as central to educational projects in multicultural and multireligious societies (Razack, 2022; Stonebank, 2019).

Even when incidents of Islamophobia are blatant, Rania is questioned about her desire to "bring conflict" in by bringing in talk of Islamophobia,

> In Ramadan, a teacher in kindergarten tweeted something so stupid and ignorant about Ramadan…and the principal had retweeted it from the PDSB twitterhandle, my principal. And I said, can you please text this teacher to remove the tweet? I'm not going to do it because it's going to come across as the Muslim VP telling me to remove this Ramadan tweet. My principal wanted to know what's so offensive? That's how I got into a little texting about this. This, this. But she didn't tell the teacher to remove it. She's like, well, the tweet didn't get that much coverage. Let's leave it, why do we want to bring animosity? Why do we want to bring conflict? She's just going to feel horrible. (Rania1, p.15)

Bringing the misinformed tweet to the principal's attention is viewed as causing unnecessary conflict. Wondering why the ignorance is offensive, the principal expresses more concern for the White teacher's feelings than for parents and children in the Muslim communities she serves. Rather than confront the teacher, the principal normalizes the violence and harm of Islamophobia to protect the innocence of the teacher from the 'aggressive' Muslim woman administrator

This is not the only incident in which confronting Islamophobia becomes construed as the Muslim school leader causing conflict that threatens the status quo and/or dominant society teachers. Rania recalls an incident where,

> A girl was made fun of because she wore the hijab, there were two White girls in our school who made fun of this Pakistani girl who wore the hijab. And my principal said, maybe this is

> something you shouldn't tackle, I shouldn't because I might "be too emotionally invested" in it. (Rania1, p.7)

Here, Rania's White principal deflects from the experienced racism to focus on the Rania's response. The racist targeting of a hijab-wearing student is not viewed as an opportunity to learn from the Muslim woman leader, to follow her leadership, or to seek her guidance. Instead, the principal views her identity as threat to addressing the issue without "investment". She says this without reflecting on her own investments in protecting the White students from Rania who feels a duty as an educator and school leader to address the issue. To diminish her leadership in an area of knowledge (one she, the principal, does not possess), Rania is dismissed as incapable of responding to the incident on the basis of identity. This move places her embodied wisdom into the realm of the personal and outside effective leadership. Despite the harm caused by Islamophobia to this young student and her family, the principal's discourse excludes Rania from being able to "tackle" the incident (Mirza, 2013). Positioning the Muslim woman administrator as unbalanced, irrational in her actions, the principal lessens the threat Rania's expertise in antiracism poses to her and the White students and predominantly White staff of the school. Ironically, when working with the very community she is intended to represent and be responsive to, the Muslim community, the female Muslim school leader is viewed as threatening the status quo — her skills and expertise are consequently sidelined, and Islamophobia goes unaddressed and further normalized in the school culture.

6.2.4 Being Connected to Community as Threat

Working with, and through, community appears in much of the literature about racialized women's school leadership. Leaders' own school experiences provide insights into the barriers facing racialized and immigrant families in navigating public schools (Hernandez & Murakami,

2016). In one study, Latina principals speak of the many bridges that must be built to support families in overcoming barriers and to facilitate family engagement (Martinez & Riviera, 2020). This bridging is intended to address factors such as language, family dynamics, and financial realities. Bridging appears again in Horsford's (2020) discussion of Black women's educational leadership, with particular attention to building relationships between school and community. Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Jimenez, & Hernandez, (2015) meanwhile identify the significance placed on community cultural wealth by Latina leaders working in racialized communities. This approach values the linguistic, familial, and social capital of Latino families as a cornerstone of building school-community partnerships. Thinking about Indigenous women's school leadership and community, Fitzgerald (2006) invites considerations beyond race and ethnicity to explore the histories of colonialism and the legacies of colonial schooling of and in indigenous communities. While she cautions against a universalising of Indigenous or decolonial, she surfaces that working with Indigenous communities is deeply personal for the Indigenous women leaders she speaks with, and often includes transgressing normative definitions of occupational parameters of the school day or school building. Collectively, the studies highlight the centrality of serving racialized communities to the professional identity of racialized school leaders and the value of their lived own experiences in informing this work.

The Muslim women in this study expressed feeling efficacious and agentic when working with community, particularly the Muslim community. However, their efforts to engage with Muslim communities are received by staff and peers as suspect and threatening to the power relations of schools and school culture. In the stories of the women, we hear how the institution,

and its actors reveal the discomfort with Muslim women leaders' relationship to community. Noura encounters this contradiction in her pursuit of promotion,

> In the promotion mechanisms, you know, not being promoted from, from vice principal to principal and being given the explanation that although I have a strong package that I forwarded of my experiences and my evidence, what I really need to do is focus a little less on the needs of my community. (Noura2, p.2)

Focusing on the needs of 'her' community devalues Noura's professional achievements and educational values that puts community at the forefront. Positioning the community as "hers" also forces her into an alignment based on identity rather than on educational access and advancement for students. Noura feels like her work with community is viewed as having an "agenda" outside her duty as educator to educate. In her interview for promotion, she is told her community work does not demonstrate evidence of skill or competence. By focusing on the needs of *her* community she becomes less qualified for promotion. The 'needs' she is intended to serve are that of the institution: making the institution look inclusive and responsive, and helping it to 'manage' the expectations of Muslim families (Patel, 2015; Stonebank, 2019). Noura expresses frustration at the expectation of being Muslim enough for the institution but not so Muslim that she disrupts the existing relationship with community. When the Muslim woman leader bridges the Muslim community to the institution, she blocks her own path to promotion. Being a bridge can mean being prevented from advancing in the institution.

Noura tries to shield herself from backlash for serving 'the needs' of Muslim student, staff, and families,

> You know, we have a Muslim student association in our school. It's the first one that we have and that's an elementary designation. And in all of our schools and oftentimes the staff, I feel, that it is seen as me giving precedence to the priorities of the Muslim community, so I try to be really careful and balance that any opportunities that I'm going to afford are the result of not activating those initiatives, but being responsive to those asks of

> our students and sharing them with the staff so that they understand that we recognize that if we have a Muslim student association and if we have a black student association and if we have a GSA, they are all the result of asks from our students. They're not the result of me being a Muslim administrator and giving preference over here versus over here. (Noura2, p.8)

In a predominantly Muslim community, students advocate for a place of belonging and connection and move to create an MSA. As their principal, Noura supports them. Still, she explains, she must be "really careful" to not be seen as "giving precedence to the priorities of the Muslim community." She must also demonstrate visible support to other student initiatives, making clear these "are all the result of asks from our students." She feels the unspoken cultural discourse of the 'Muslim agenda' overshadows over her work: the belief in a threat of Muslims 'infiltrating' and undermining public spaces is always present (e.g., Kundanani, 2014; Kumar, 2012). As a result, Noura feels she must work to nullify this suspicion by constantly demonstrating her commitment to the 'needs' of all students and all communities. She does double work in leading and clearing away doubts.

The distrust of the Muslim woman leader overwhelms her efforts to educate through community engagement. Aiyah feels like she is "being watched," unable to engage with the community, staff, or students in the way she needs to, in the way that aligns with her sense of herself as leader. Aiyah shares:

> There is for me a dissonance and how I engage as a leader who is from a minority faith community. So as a Muslim leader with other Muslim staff. I feel that even engaging in a conversation and checking in on them and how they are doing is like I feel like uneasy. I feel like I might, like I'm being watched. Maybe I don't know if I'm being watched, but I feel nervous about it. I feel nervous because I don't know how do I engage? (Aiyah1, p.9)

Aiyah expresses self-doubt and uneasiness when she speaks to other Muslim staff. The naturalness she might have had in these interactions is marred by the constant feeling of surveillance. Interactions of the Muslim woman leader with the community are examined for

evidence of her concealment, of a hidden intention, of a hidden self. Rania's relationship with lunch supervisors who are parents in the community is considered suspect, as is apparent from her interaction with her principal:

> When I am around the Lunchroom Supervisors, my principal will always say and laugh about it: 'There goes Rania talking like a brown woman when she's with her people' and she notices that my accent changes a little. And, you know, she one time asked me: "Do you fake the accent just so they're comfortable with you?" And I said, 'No, maybe I fake this accent, so you're comfortable with me" (Rania1, p.8)

Again, the principal feels the need to personalize Rania's professional relation with parents volunteering in the lunchroom based on their shared identity. Although the remarks she makes are offensive and intrusive, the principal feels entitled to make jokes about Rania's interactions with them because she is threatened by the relationship with members of the Muslim community. So uncomfortable is she with Rania's immersion in her community and status as a respected school leader, that she accuses Rania of faking an accent, so as to make the parents comfortable. It does not occur to the administrative partner that the parents might like her for the respect and inclusive environment she creates for them. Rania names aloud the discomfort she senses from her administrator partner and challenges the negative connotation ascribed to having a positive relationship with racialized communities.

The Muslim woman leader is expected to reassure her White peer of her loyalty, to distance herself from "her people." Repeatedly across interviews, the women in this study speak of the discomfort of their White peers/administrative partners with their relationship to the Muslim community. The (dis)ease betrays Whiteness's insecurity, often expressed here as a suspicion (Jamil, 2015). The relationship with community exposes the insider knowledge and the implicit trust the Muslim women leader possess, leaving the White peers wanting. Grasping at commonsense to reconcile their discomfort, these peers turn to tropes of suspicious and

monstrous Muslims invading public spaces (Ali-Mahomed Wilson, 2020; Miah, 2015). The Muslim woman leader becomes the 'trojan horse,' undoing existing boundaries and disrupting hierarchies and the order of school- community relations.

6.2.5 Threatening the Myth of Secularism

Faith appears in some of the scholarship on racialized women's school leadership as a source of healing, strength, and inspiration (Dantley, 2003; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). Explicit discussion of 'secularism' of public schools is absent. In this section I discuss how constructions of 'the secular' are made evident in the stories shared by my participants. My analysis pays close attention to the ways these constructions are productive in the policing of Muslim women school leaders and the imaging of their leadership as threatening.

The assumption of public schools as secular spaces appears in most interviews and is explored in further depth in our group conversation. In her initial interview, Aiyah shares the challenge of being a Muslim leader in spaces believed to be, and promoted as, 'secular',

> Being a Muslim leader is very, very challenging in an institution that is very Christian. It is very stressful. And I say that because of the number of different ways where this belief around being a secular system is communicated, and that it is OK somehow. The number of times that language actually comes up is a bit ridiculous. It's frustrating at every juncture, I find it very challenging… there is a silence around spirituality and faith and it's seen as something, or perceived as something, that is your business, that is done privately. It is challenging because for me, it's so central to who I am and how it is that I engage as a leader in my building. (Aiyah1, p.6)

Faith may be a wellspring for many school leaders, but this aspect of Muslim leader's identity is often viewed as personal, and again, threatening. Aiyah experiences her faith as "stressful;" because it is seen as not belonging in the supposedly 'secular' environment. As a result, to be a person of faith is to be an outsider. Aiyah, who regards her faith as "central to who I am and

how it is that I engage as a leader," wrestles with being herself in a space that demands fracturing and exclusion of religious life, which is key to her educational philosophy and enactments. To be a Muslim public-school leader is to commit to a silencing of the spiritual. This Muslim woman leader whose faith informs her sense of self, and herself as an educational leader, receives the message to keep faith hidden, something you 'do' in private. In this mythical imaginary of the 'secular', the 'religious' is limited to ritual, it is practice, and it can be left outside of the public institution. Despite the appearance of being a "secular system," Aiyah experiences the space of public educational institutions as "very Christian." Similarly, Layla recalls such an experience of entering a Christian public school system as a newcomer Muslim woman,

> If nobody would have ever told me that the Canadian education system is a secular system, I would've thought it's totally Christian based system. I felt like the curriculum was really, and the practises, the procedures, the routines, the rituals, everything was deeply immersed in Christian values and the Christian religious perspectives. As much as we want to claim that it's secular, I felt that it was very Christianity based … so are we expected to adopt the Christianity when we are in the system, in the schools? And not just as an educator, but also as a parent of students or kids who are going into that system. (LaylaFG, p.1-2)

Public schools may be portrayed as religiously neutral, but study participants make clear that those that are religious minorities do not experience the public schools this way. Had the message of a "secular system" not been frequently communicated, Layla would have assumed these were Christian spaces: the "curriculum, the practice, the procedures, the routines, the ritual" all convey being "deeply immersed in Christian values." Without the privileges afforded to those participating in a normalized Christianity masquerading as secularism, Layla questions the expectation to uphold the existing system and replicate it through non-Christian bodies. The invisibility of Christianness in 'the secular' is critical to the existing order (Selby, Barres & Beaman, 2018). The invisibility of Christianness makes the secular "stressful" for the Muslim woman leader, who can see what is hiding in plain sight.

Aiyah recognizes the wilful ignorance that surrounds her regarding the reality of secular schools:

> I'm not sure that anybody understands spirituality, faith, like forget Muslimness, forget Islam. I'm not sure that they know how this works in a space that they believe is secular and therefore, you know, devoid of all religion, when it is [actually] highly Christian. We still do ridiculous things like before an Easter weekend, give out cookies with sprinkles on it that are shaped like little chickies, you know, like Easter. And I was like, why are we doing this? That was my question. And she -my principal- said, 'Well, aren't chicks secular?' And I think "What are you saying? Chicks are secular?!"(Aiyah1,p.8)

Aiyah finds herself working alongside educators and peers who replicate the Christian in the secular without thought or consideration to what they are maintaining, who they are uplifting, and who and what continues to be regulated and excluded. Easter cookies are distributed, decorated with chicks instead of Christian crosses, the cookies are considered by the White principal as innocent, a religiously neutral gesture, "aren't chicks secular?!". Although Aiyah questions why they, the leaders of a school that claims to be secular, are engaging a Christian ritual (while it does not participate in any other faith-based celebration), for no reasonable explanation, the meaning of this gesture is lost on her White principal. The Muslim woman leader, from her position as outsiders sees the ways the secular is used to invoke neutrality and privilege Christianity.

In Rania's 'secular' school, "Christmas, it's like a two-month celebration". With "less than 10 percent of the kids in [the] building are Christian" celebrating Christmas begins in November. Elf on the shelf, Candy Cane-grams, Gingerbread house building, Sing Alongs, the Christmas concert, even the canned food drives and mittens on the tree, each signalling the importance of Christmas and its 'values' to the culture and identity of the public school. Non-Christian bodies negotiate how to be present in school during this period. Rania navigates carefully: How to lead

in such a space? “Society has indoctrinated us that Christmas is the holiday, so I find myself navigating when do I fight? When do I stay quiet? When do I step back? When do I tell teachers, OK, it's October 20 and not one class has done anything for Islamic Heritage Month.” (Rania1, p.4)

When Noura does question the permissibility of particular practices during the winter concert, she finds herself at the brunt of the anger of teachers who feel her questions as a threat to their identities.

> So maybe we should reconsider the whole school singing of the Little Drummer Boy because it has an undertone context of Christianity. It then gets turned around into staff members coming to me with like 10-page reports that they've written up about all the ways in which they feel like they are being disenfranchised by my interception and asking whether or not some of our practises are really minimising or limiting to all members of our community. And I've had people come to me angry and frustrated and annoyed and really upset by me posing these types of questions. And they come to me to vent and expose their anger and their frustration, which I receive as Islamophobia. They'll never go to my partner who is Christian or who is White. In that case, it always comes to me as though I am the Muslim who's trying to take Christmas and Christianity away from their experience.(Noura2, p.2)

The Muslim woman leader is figured as the “Muslim who’s trying to take Christmas and Christianity away.” Noura experiences what her White administrator peers will not. She is viewed as representing the invasion of the Muslim agenda: the desire to erase Christian core of Whiteness. The mere suggestion that a practice be reconsidered for its Christian tone is a threat.

The voicing of concern about the ways ‘the secular’ is expressed in public schools is threatening to those staff and families from the dominant Christian culture. So is the “speak[ing] about accommodations and prayer spaces and reflection about Ramadan,” when it emerges from a Muslim woman leader. The Muslim woman leader’s motivation is assumed to be personal and

her aspiration, disruptive. Noura experiences this in her attempts to discuss faith accommodations in her school board. Noura explains,

> As soon as you open up and you start to speak about accommodations and prayer space and reflections about Ramadan, even though you're doing that in parallel with those similar conversations for other communities which we serve, it does not matter because our community in and paradox to Christianity is probably one of the most vocal communities…you become the face of that of that contention between what's defined as the public secular system…when you stand as a representation you take all the hits that come alongside with it and you are seen as a perpetrator a disturber and and an oppositional force against the machine. (NouraFG, p.3)

Noura makes evident that the secular framework adopted in schools seeks to manage the religious other, who in the post 9/11 world, is often Muslim. In such a framework, religion is declared as individual and privatised, the secular school becomes a site to resist Muslimness. Reminding staff and peers of their legal obligation to accommodate, Noura describes becoming the face of the disruptive "force" to the Christian normativity of schools. She is the "representation" of a threatening "perpetrator." Her presence in a position of authority triggers narratives of 'clashing civilizations' and the impending trespass of Islam into the west (Huntington, 1993).

In their panic, those invested in the existing order, typically White, work to reassert control of this public-school space. Advancing the language of 'the secular' is a tool in this work. Aiyah explains,

> Being in a space, the language of 'secular' is abused. It's used in order to justify the ways in which we regulate what's allowed and what isn't allowed. And that tone is really set by an, in my opinion, a very Christian dominant perspective, the language that stands for secularism stops decision making or thinking or ideas that really push an inclusion of faith like plurality or spirituality in our spaces, I feel like that language is abused. "But this is a secular space" stands in as the No. (AiyahFG, p.2-3)

In our group conversation, the participants expressed frustration at assertion of 'the secular' to signal the pretence of a liberal, free-speech, and gender equality supportive space. This is not

how it is lived and embodied in their daily experience. Asserting 'the secular' becomes non-performative (Ahmed, 2012). Aiyah recognizes the ways reference to the secularism in schools is instrumentalized to prevent new and transformative ways to think about belonging and wellbeing in schools that include the spiritual. Asserting "the secular," she explains, prevents disruptions to a privileged Christianity and the normalized scrutiny and suspicion of Islam and Muslims. In both her body and her actions, the Muslim woman leader is constructed as threatening to the public-school space. She is viewed as undermining the role of leader, the entitlements of educators, and the culture of schools socially and pedagogically.

6.3 CLOSING THOUGHTS TO THEME II: CONSTRUCTED AS THREAT

In their stories, Muslim Women Leaders tell us that it is in 'the leading' of their schools that they are treated as a menace to the accepted social order. Occupying the leader role, disrupting harmful practices toward marginalized students, valuing community connections, calling out racism, and upsetting the myth of secular public schools signal an undoing of power hierarchies and school cultures that have long comforted and protected most education staff. Jasmin Zine's (2009) suggestion that "as subaltern groups gain political voice and leverage; Whiteness becomes less settled and more vulnerable" finds resonance here where the Muslim woman in a position of authority is equated to a decline in the existing order and the established superiority of Whiteness (p.151).

The Muslim woman administrator challenging the racism, exclusion, and harm caused to students and community unsettles the White supremacy of schools as well as the 'truth' of Muslim women's inferiority and weakness. She fails to take the "form" corporeally, and in her words and actions, fails to protect the "truth" of schools. "To defend certain truths is often to defend particular social forms, whose intelligibility and value become given or worldly," explains Ahmed (2003, p.378). It is unnerving to the "social form" when the body that occupies the role of principal or vice principal is not the body envisioned as the guardian of rules and procedures. When this precarious guardian then questions the very intelligibility and value of what is given, her loyalty is suspect, and the social order is put at risk. Those who have historically benefitted will "invoke a defence of [this] world against injury and loss," protecting this world they have seen made from being "unmade." (Ahmed, 2003, p.379) The fearful defenders of the "truths" of public education, these good White diversity subjects, declare a crisis

in ‘security’ of institutional truths and work to resecure boundaries: asserting the goodness of White teachers and schools, the secularism of established practices, and the need to contain the leadership of the Muslim woman, the focus of the upcoming chapter.

In this chapter I engaged the theme of constructing the Muslim Woman Leader as Threat. The participants discuss and reflect on the many ways they are cast as threatening the existing order and the accepted ‘truths’ of the public education discourses, cultures and structures. The Muslim Woman is construed as threatening this order in her physical presence, her relationship with community, her disruption of the harm caused to vulnerable and marginalized students, her naming of racism, and challenging of the myth of secularism of public spaces. In the following chapter, I focus on the final theme of containment, examining the ways participants identify and discuss the expectations and tools used to contain their expression of themselves and their leadership in public schools.

Chapter 7: Theme III: Containment

In this chapter I discuss normative and professional discourses of school leadership that seek to contain Muslim women's approach to and enactment of leadership in schools. Professional discourses in public education espoused by policy (e.g. Ontario College of Teacher Standards of Practice and Ontario Leadership Framework), professional learning qualifications (e.g. Additional Qualifications, Principal Qualification Program) and institutional policies and procedures engender Whiteness in the expectations of educational leadership. These discourses, professional expectations, and cultural norms impact the professional lives of racialized (Muslim) women who become school administrators. These discourses determine what practices are permitted within these structures, and what are not. They make clear who and what school leadership is imagined to be. The discourses and narratives surrounding Muslims, particularly Muslim women, further inform the ways Muslim women are recognized in public school spaces.

In previous chapters I surfaced the ways that Muslim women's presence and actions challenge the entitlements of the predominantly White education staff (educators and leaders) and unsettle the deep emotional investment in existing social, cultural, and pedagogical processes of schools. I have discussed the ensuing anxieties and expressed panic that the leadership of Muslim women brings up. I show how White staff seek to (re)secure what they perceive as transgressed boundaries to reclaim power and (re)establish the public schools as neutral, diversity-loving, and secular spaces.

Aligned with the others, in this chapter I describe the tools, strategies and practices White staff, peers, and leaders deploy to contain and control Muslim women leaders' forms and

enactment of leadership in public school environments. I refer to these as "normalizing technologies" following Jaffe Walter (2016) who employs the phrase in an ethnography with Muslim students in a Danish school. Walter's research finds that these technologies attempt to remake Muslim students in the mould of White students. Citing Dreyfus and Rainbow (1982) by way of explanation, these technologies "operate by establishing a common definition of goals and procedures which take the form of manifestos, and even more forceful agreed upon examples, of how a well-ordered society should be organised." (p.6)

Normalizing technologies are used to garner Muslim women's compliance with White school cultures, values and expectations. The stories of women in this study demonstrate that these technologies and tools of containment are intended to produce particular types of school leaders. The tools of containment surfacing in the stories of participants are two types: those that define permissible professional and personal acts and decisions and those that implement the consequences of transgressing (re)secured boundaries.

As with the other chapters, I begin the analysis and discussion with the voices of the women. Unlike previous chapters, relevant existing empirical research is compiled ahead of all the subthemes. This is done intentionally, as the findings in existing studies are more impactful when discussed collectively as an experience of 'containment' of racialized women leaders instead of delineating them into categories on the type of containment (a delineation specific to the stories of Muslim women here). Connections from this existing scholarship to the ways containment operates for Muslim women leaders becomes evident as I engage with my participants' own words across the subthemes/categories.

7.1 INTRODUCTION TO THEME III: CONTAINMENT

Muslim women school administrators confront a range of responses to their presence as leaders in public school environments. While the studies of racialized women in school leadership are limited, many show women in a persistent struggle with normative views of leadership as White and male. In these studies, Black, Indigenous, and racialized women leaders describe the increased scrutiny of their words, actions, and decisions by other leaders and the teachers they are to lead (Fuller, 2018; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Byrd, 2009). Across studies, racialized women leaders speak of a downplaying of aspects of their self-expression specified as appearance, speech, mannerism, worldviews, and interpersonal skills (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Mullen & Robertson, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2009). They also discuss their constant efforts at 'shifting' or 'playing the game,' of Whiteness, as a way to fit in and maintain their effectiveness as a leader.

In Byrd's study of ten Black women leaders across different sectors including education, participants express high levels of scrutiny and surveillance of their leadership decisions and actions. The participants repeatedly describe attempts to thwart their leadership by subordinates, peers, and superiors. These findings resonate with those of Armstrong and Mitchell (2017), who suggest that being a racialized woman leader in a Canadian (Ontario) school is twofold: one must follow explicit and expressed expectations for leaders laid out in policies and processes, as well as embrace a 'shadow identity' that is racialized and gendered. Their participants describe experiencing pressure to conform to this 'shadow identity,' enact Whiteness, and censor aspects of their own identities. This demand to self-censor and self-regulate one's identity, referred to by Mullen and Robertson (2013) as 'shifting,' takes a great emotional toll on women leaders.

The pervasiveness of Whiteness also features in British educational spaces. Research findings of Bailey- Morrisey (2016) point to an expectation that Black women leaders comply with this social and political reality. Those unwilling to 'pass' or 'play the game' face negative responses from teachers and peers. They also encounter more struggles in pursuing promotion and advancement. Fuller's (2018) study with a British Muslim school leader found emotional 'backlash' expressed by teachers, leaders, and community members particularly when the leader brought forward the discriminatory practices and mindsets taken by school authorities against the largely racialized and immigrant community in which she serves. This study discusses repeated targeting and scapegoating of the Muslim women leader for raising issues of race and discrimination, despite keeping her own Muslim identity hidden. The expectation that one conceals one's Muslimness in British public-school spaces is prevalent in studies with Muslim educators (Mogra, 2013; Shah & Shaikh, 2010; Benn, 2003). These teachers emphasize the expectation to 'play the good Muslim,' by publicly aligning themselves with so-called liberal values, particularly in regard to gender and sexual identities. Muslim teachers are also pressured to adopt cultural practices that signal their 'safety' to or alignment with peers. They are expected to participate in social gatherings that involve alcohol and engage in physical contact with colleagues through hugs or handshakes. Along with conforming to dominant British or American cultural expectations, Muslim teachers report minimizing aspects of their identity both in conversations and action. Even those aspects that are not part of professional practice (such as lesson content, or clubs they lead) but simply living their life as a Muslim in a public space (engaging in prayers, fasting, wearing a hijab) are subject to scrutiny in professional environments. As with the leader in Fuller's (2018) study, many of the Muslim educators spoke

of reprisal simply for 'being' Muslim as they were blocked from professional opportunities or held back from advancement.

The scrutiny experienced by Muslim teachers and discussed in the wider literature of racialized women's school leadership also appears in Debbie Almontasser's study (2019) *Leading While Muslim*. She finds that Muslim administrators are hypervigilant towards being targeted by community members or the media. They describe themselves as needing to be extra aware of, and careful with, their words and actions so as not to be misconstrued as 'extremists.' One states: "I'm under a microscope…Molehills will become mountains. A harmless comment CAN lead to something seen as suspicious or radical" (p.59). Another discloses: "I don't feel comfortable talking about my personal faith, while performing my work role…I refuse to be scapegoated into a corner," (p.69) "I am really mindful of the words that come out of my mouth." (p.71) Across interviews conducted by Almontasser (2019), Muslim administrators speak of the surveillance they experience in their conduct as school leaders.

Some of these experiences are shared by the Muslim women leaders I spoke with. My research expands on previous findings by delineating the dominant societal strategies and disciplinary tactics used on Muslim women leaders, as well as the unspoken demand to contain their Muslim identities and cultures in public education workplace settings. My findings also demonstrate how Muslim women leaders locate these strategies and tools in the wider discourses shaping schools. In the following section I discuss the strategies and tools of containment used to garner Muslim women leader's compliance and silence in public school settings. I gather and characterize their experiences thematically through their own words. First, I will discuss the

ways containment is asserted through the expectations of being 'a good Muslim,' supporting notions of 'happy diversity', and displaying flawless leadership. Failure to meet these expectations can trigger several tools discussed further below.

7.2 CONTAINMENT OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN LEADER: IN HER WORDS

7.2.1 Containment by Expectations

7.2.1.1 To be a 'Good Muslim'

Containment begins by drawing lines to delineate school leader identity, making clear what is allowable, making clear who is allowable in these roles. In Canada, as with much of the world today, the demand to contain one's Muslimness coincides with assimilation policies that dictate the 'right' way to be present in Canada. These policies are intensified for Muslim women as visible or religious markers of difference resist the kind of assimilation practices projected on racialized and newcomer bodies. To characterize the demand to assimilate and uphold dominant ways of being in school and public spaces, I return to Mamdani's notion of '*Good Muslims'*. This notion grows out of the unequal power relationship between colonizer and colonized discussed by Said (1978), who describes this imbalance as enabling the casting of the colonized body as Other. The objectification of the racialized/colonized Other is achieved in no small part through knowledge production: writing, theorizing, and 'scientific inquiry' by White Europeans. The resulting construction is of a singular, inferior, unchanging colonised/racialized object/other and a superior, rational, moral, and learned White subject. It is such a binary that scaffolds the work of Orientalists like Bernard Lewis (1990), who suggests that there are both 'bad' and 'good' Muslims. The bad Muslims are those who resist becoming "modern, secular, and

Westernised." (Mamdani, 2004, p.24). The good Muslims adopt or perform liberal values- as other 'model minorities' do. In this 'good-bad' binary, the referent for goodness is always White, Christian, and European who is afforded the complexities and nuances of personhood. To be Muslim, in converse, is to be viewed through "petrified," "lifeless" frames (p.18).

Muslim women leaders in this study experience demands to contain or downplay their Muslimness (Muslim Femaleness) in public school leadership. One participant in the study, Rania, remarks: "There's this presumption that I'm a liberal Muslim simply because I don't cover my hair. There's an assumption that I'm a liberal Muslim simply because I listen to music, you know, stupid things like that, that you're pretty moderate, we can handle your kind of Islam." (Rania1, p.17) Rania understands her White peers' approval as "We can handle your kind of Islam." When Muslim women leaders align with White normative culture, they signal safety to the school community and compliance with institutional norms. To become acceptable is to downplay markers of the 'religious' (the hijab) and adopt mainstream habits (listening to music).

In the environment of public schooling, Aiyah finds she must avoid the markers of the 'religious' so that her colleagues are not made "uncomfortable." She finds she cannot speak of spirituality in an educative space that claims to serve the 'whole child' and seeks this child's wellbeing. Rather than speak of religion, integral to who she is a person, she flattens this important part identity by using palatable words like 'mindful' and 'holistic'. The institutional space of public-school casts acceptable Muslimness within limited and rigid parameters to ensure the comfort of the (non-Muslims) peers and staff with her being a Muslim woman. Being a certain kind of Muslim can make you more acceptable.

Still, being a 'good Muslim' may not be enough. For Rania to become acceptable she must fully embrace all that is seen as mainstream 'culture,' Rania is aware of the pressure to move away from being Muslim, "the women I work with will say, 'One of these days we're going to make sure you drink with us.' Umm…no actually you're not." (Rania2, p.3) Rania notices that to belong to the community of colleagues in school, she is expected to engage in cultural practices outside her own. Performing 'good Muslim' is aligning words and actions with that which is held as the 'Western/Modern ways', distancing oneself from all that is perceived to be Muslim, real and imagined.

The expectation of dispelling misconceptions and countering stereotypes appears across the narratives of Muslim women leaders as it does in the stories of other racialized women school leaders (Almontasser, 2019; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Mullen & Robertson, 2014; Mogra, 2013). Challenging normative construction of Muslimness, of the Muslim woman, through one's own conduct and expressions of self is essential to performing acceptable subjecthood. It is evident in Noura's assertion that she must make explicit her support for the LGBTQ affinity group in the school, "to contradict the default stereotype". Anticipating the ways that she may be construed as 'Muslim' through dominant discourses that cast her as homophobic and intolerant by default, Noura strives to be the 'good Muslim' to her school community, or as she states: "I make very intentional efforts to be seen as open and as public and as visible with that support [for establishing a GSA] as possible to contradict the default stereotype as a Muslim woman." (Noura2, p.8) As Noura indicates, there is pressure that Muslim female leaders visibly and publicly perform 'liberal values', distancing themselves from distorted mainstream discourses of Muslims and Islam.

Being a 'good Muslim' requires a constant undoing of normative constructions of Muslim women to be seen as acceptable. The cognitive and emotional labour required to navigate this 'good Muslim' containment is consuming and depleting. Muslim women leaders attempting to comply with the expectations find the pressure consistent and sustained. The leaders also never seem to achieve a state where they ever become 'good' enough. "Good Muslim" expectations are not the only parameters ascribed to Muslim women leaders. Attaining good subject status also involves expressions of gratitude to the institution for tolerating our presence. This gratitude can be displayed by participating in what Sara Ahmed (2009, 2012) refers to as "happy diversity".

7.2.1.2 Serving 'Happy Diversity'

Ontario's Education Equity Action plan (2017) provides a "blueprint" to public school boards to guide their efforts to "identify and eliminate persistent inequities" across the system. The plan discusses four areas, one of which addresses "Leadership, Governance and Human Resources Practices". This area lists a series of action items including enhanced diversity and hiring and promotion for school and system leaders. The Equity Action Plan also includes "organizational culture change" as an area for attention. Little direction and few explicit actions are provided, however, to guide school boards toward the necessary transformations of organizational culture to accompany their efforts for greater diversity in leadership.

Consequently, school boards engage with diversity as a stand-in for inclusion, making limited changes to organisational structures or culture beyond the requisite equity trainings. Recruiting racialized women leaders has become a key technology of diversity designed to

address perceptions of the institution's dominant Whiteness (Ahmed, 2009). Recruitment through this 'enhanced diversity leadership' process is commonly seen as entering the role through the "diversity door" (Ahmed, 2021, p.244). Those recruited are welcome "on the condition that you give something back in return, integrating into common organizational culture or by being diverse and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity." (Ahmed, 2012, p.40).

Muslim women are typically overqualified, as were my participants, before their promotion into a leadership context of changing demographics and growing pressure to "increase diversity among school and system leaders" (Ontario EEAP, 2017). Participants had 'put in' the time and repeatedly demonstrated competence as teachers and educational leads. Some of us have even been singled out for our advocacy for 'equity' and 'inclusion'. Our arrival into leadership thus comes to signal the institution's pursuit of 'equity' and 'inclusion' rather than the result of our own merit acquired through our labour. Our arrival, as Ahmed (2009, 2012) explains, is seen as marking the departure of inequality on the basis of social difference (i.e., misogyny, racism, colonialism, etc.…). Our visibility as racialized gendered bodies marked by faith difference is to serve as a constant reminder of the institution's 'arrived' state. We are to celebrate our own presence and praise the institution for its commitments.

The happy diversity that we are expected to promote and perform is "a condition of commitment, a demand to use happy words and a prohibition on unhappy words." (Ahmed, 2012, p.154) The "demand" of 'happy diversity' is to ensure happiness by avoiding upsets or discomforts. This "demand" for a 'happy diversity' is not innocent and reifies the power of those with authority in educational spaces. School boards, like other public institutions, are

deeply invested in the belief that "everybody is happy," to promote the idea of fair education and to deflect attention from addressing systematic inequalities designed to retain dominant society power. The hiring of Muslim women leaders (and racialized leaders in general) is intended to promote the image of diversity as a "viewing point, a way of picturing the organization" (p.146), Whitewashing inequities that keep the existing order intact.

The women in this study express their struggles in negotiating being part of this 'happy diversity.' In an earlier chapter, Salma discusses always being seen "physically…as this person" (Salma1, p.6) and the expectation that she [in her gendered and racialized body] accept being the diversity of her institution. In her attempt to subvert this reality, Salma explains that going along with the expectation is a way to 'play the game'. Investing in 'being happy diversity' is hoping for mutual benefits, not knowing if they will materialize. Serving 'happy diversity' also involves submitting to the unspoken "prohibition on the use of the word racism" in sites of schooling (Ahmed, 2009, p.46). Salma feels the pressure to not raise issues of racism "because [conversations about Islamophobia] are hard conversations, so I want to get my way in without trying to make people uncomfortable." Knowing the discomfort that ensues amongst the predominantly non-Muslim and White staff when talking about race, Salma prioritizes 'celebrating' identities. Celebration of diversity takes priority over addressing inequities and is posted everywhere: on the bulletin boards, in the morning announcements, in the newsletters, in the front foyer, and in the cultural bazaars and buskerfests. These 'celebrations' serve as a public reminder of happy diversity that all in the schools must claim to feel whether they are recipients of inclusion or not.

The additive nature of happy diversity allows dominant culture to remain centred in schools. 'Christmas' appears regularly in the stories of participants as a site of struggle in negotiating 'happy diversity', "I can't be seen as the Muslim VP who 'cancelled Christmas'," Muna remarks (p.5). Her comment highlights that happy diversity protects Christian normativity and exalts its celebrations (e.g. Christmas displays, activities, concerts). Muna notes how such legacy practices become a point of 'clash' with staff who perceive her very presence as threatening their 'tradition'. To accept 'happy diversity' is to then celebrate Christmas in schools without question and with enthusiasm. When you embody happy diversity, you are expected to always celebrate and practice institutional values as Rania finds:

> We do eight weeks' worth of Christmas games and Christmas playing and Christmas celebrations and Christmas carols, we had three assemblies during the last week of school, three assemblies where we had to sing Christmas carols. And at the last assembly, I just stopped singing and she [my principal] said, "Well, you weren't very enthusiastic". And I thought, OK, after two assemblies, I'm kind of jingle belled out. I'm not a Christian woman, I don't celebrate Christmas, I love the festivities but I'm participating because it makes everybody else happy. (Rania2, p.4)

Rania participates in the celebration and displays the 'expected' joy for the Christmas season, yet she senses her participation is suspect, her movements watched. After the third assembly, her enthusiasm wanes and this is taken to be a signal of resistance to the values of the school. She is expected to maintain the illusion of happiness and the organisation's image as a 'happy' equitable space. Rania's internal conflict with these expectations also reveals how "going along with the happy image of an organisation…can offer a way of protecting oneself from the consequences of being the sore point." (Ahmed, 2012, p.156).

With time, however, depletion leads you to question what it means to survive as a racialized and gendered being in this institution, in this role. In this everyday soul-taxing

conflict with the institution's expectations, there are other thoughts, other feelings. Rania expresses feeling angry:

> I get angry a lot. But I'm also very mindful of how, who I allow to see that anger, right, who I share that vulnerability with, and I don't really share with anyone in the building. I always try to show, show a perception of me being calm and that nothing gets to me. Because I know as a racialized woman at the moment I show too much emotion, I'm also being looked at differently because I'm a brown woman, that I'm too aggressive, that I take these things too heavily or too emotionally. (Rania1, p.11)

Serving as 'happy diversity,' Rania expresses anger that cannot be spoken or expressed. She recognises that showing her anger will result in her being reduced to the caricature of the "aggressive," "emotional" "brown woman" who "takes things too heavily." In this place of 'happy diversity,' unhappy emotions, like anger, are viewed as expressions of being ungrateful, of wanting to inject bad feelings into the institution, of wanting others to feel bad for wanting to be happy and to celebrate.

Complaining, anger, and questioning are seen as a direct threat to the happy diversity schooling institutions seek to promote. After enduring extreme targeting and harm (discussed in the chapter on Systemic Erasure) Layla breaks from 'happy diversity' and files a human rights complaint. Seeking restitution for the injury caused to her and her family as orchestrated and carried out by staff, the previous administrator, teachers' union and senior team members. She withdraws her complaint because of the toll it continues to take on her wellbeing. When system leaders realise that Layla has withdrawn her complaint, they characterize her action as graceful.

> I was told that they've never seen a more *graceful* person than me. I hate using the word bullying because I feel that's used so loosely and I never use that word, but in my case, I do feel I was being bullied because it was consistent, it was targeted, it was intentional, and it was for two years. So, when I did not proceed with taking further action on that, I think everybody just kind of calmed down, no harm to the board. So, let's not even talk about it even more. (Layla1, p.15)

Rather than address the harms done to Layla and other Muslim women leaders, the senior administration is grateful for the silencing of the complaints. They view this as an act of grace on the part of the Muslim woman rather than a pattern of invisibilized harm experienced by Muslim women leaders (as discussed in the Systemic Erasure chapter) in school sites. In showing such "grace," Layla is seen as transcending her embodied and cultural limitations. Across the stories of Muslim women leaders performing 'happy diversity' means 'being the face of diversity', the 'MC of celebrations,' the "enthusiastic" participants, and the "graceful" one. Performing 'happy diversity' is about maintaining the comfort of others and accepting harm with grace. These techniques used on Muslim women leaders is intended to contain their critique of the very diversity that is promoted through their presence in schools. This containment also leads to Muslim women leaders to constantly check themselves, so they shrink their true identities and maintain the illusion of happiness and non-conflict that diversity has come to symbolize.

7.2.1.3 To be 'Flawless'

Part of the efforts to contain Muslim women leaders involves the pressure to demonstrate flawless behaviour under constant surveillance. This expectation stems in part from the liberal myth of meritocracy which asserts that achievements and advancements are the function of hard work and a demonstrated worthiness, something racialized women are assumed to lack as they enter through the diversity door. Their leadership roles are therefore viewed as unearned or undeserved (Khalifa et al., 2013; Patel, 2015). As a result, the Muslim women leaders of this study expend cognitive and physical energy to continuously demonstrate their competence and to pursue a leadership that is beyond reproach. Salma explains:

> You don't want to even give them the chance to say 'She doesn't know what she's doing.' That's what I think, that's why I'm constantly like, I have to know why we're doing this so I can explain it and I can justify it and I can prove these are the reasons, in fact, why we were

> doing what we were doing. I can't just put something out there for funsies…I cover my ass, I make sure everything is in there, why I need to, because I can't even give them a glimmer of a chance to say this is why we're going to go complain. (Salma2, p.8)

The scrutiny Salma experiences has her on high alert. As a result, she thoughtfully and intentionally plans every decision, every word, and every action. This kind of strategic thinking is valuable for a leader, but for Salma it is more than this. The Muslim woman leader needs to ensure that she anticipates all possible outcomes for students, staff, and community at all times. She must carefully deliberate over her choices and be prepared to explain them. The emotional energy and time this takes is depleting. Salma spends significantly more hours working in comparison to peers to ensure that no mistakes are made on her "watch."

Similarly, Noura speaks about always "being on,"

> My brain is constantly on strategy mode, constantly on strategy mode, because if I don't, it's too easy for somebody else to just say 'it takes time' and not to do anything at all. And then when I see the experiences of our communities, of our students, of our colleagues. But if you can do something, why not, why wouldn't you? (Noura1, p.9)

As a school leader and co-chair of the board's Muslim staff affinity group, Noura feels like she is always in "strategy mode." She is thinking ahead, anticipating, and planning. She is strategizing for her survival but also to ensure the transformations she is seeking for students and communities. Noura must ensure that she leverages her relationships and existing policies and procedures to strategically achieve her goals. She must find her way around the neoliberal obstacles of 'it takes time' and 'why do we need to make the change' which surface regularly.

Muslim women leaders discuss the importance of being "on" all the time. They describe pressure to not only perform all the time but to ensure perfection in this performance. This standard of perfection is controlling as it consumes time and energy and makes some paths too

risky to pursue. To be accepted, the Muslim woman leader must demonstrate that her decisions cannot be challenged on their merit or legitimacy. She must be flawless in her leadership.

A proven record of meeting expectations (being a good Muslim, happy diversity, flawless leadership) does not shield the Muslim woman leader from reprisal should she ever transgress the expectations. If the Muslim woman leader questions or challenges the limits placed upon her, she faces consequences at all levels of her profession. If these occur, she is left unprotected by the very system that claimed her embodied presence as evidence of arrival at 'equity, inclusion, and diversity.'

7.2.2 Tools of Containment

In the previous section, I discussed how cultural expectations and practices of containment are used to garner Muslim women leader's compliance in school environments. In this section I describe responses to women who resist these attempts of containment and control. Enduring scrutiny and surveillance, the Muslim woman leader who resists expectations that she submit to control unsettles proclaimed truths about schools, about leadership, and about Muslim women. As the recalcitrant Muslim woman leader, she faces particular responses that I describe as 'tools of containment'. Women interviewed in this study find that these tools are designed to discipline and punish them for not conforming to either the scripts of the good Muslim laid out for them or the normative cultures of the school and leadership (happy diversity and flawlessness as merit). The punitive measures are expressed in a series of reprisals which participants discuss in terms of White Emotionality, Teachers' Union Complicity, and the Blocking of Advancement.

They also speak of the absence of structural supports or protections to shield Muslim women leaders from systemic gendered and racialized harm.

7.2.2.1 White Emotionality

Defensive and upset emotions of staff, particularly White staff, appear in many of the stories shared in this study. Muslim women leaders discuss having to contend with what I am calling 'White emotionality' in response to a range of situations. In each story, the triggering of White emotionality occurs when the Muslim woman does not adhere to normative expectations intended to contain and control her. In this section, I think through some of the excerpts from participants to consider the ways White emotionality functions as a tool of containment.

After spending a year in a school where she experiences "almost daily microaggressions," Rania is ready to address her administrator partner, to speak to the harm she has endured and witnessed:

> When I felt I had regained my composure, I was calm enough and I knew that I'd be kind enough to say things from a place of love. I confronted her about many, many, many, many things and she started to cry. I mean *cry*, like, you know, bad mascara rolling down the face kind of crying …she wouldn't stop crying. And I thought, OK, and I know many of us do this right?! We're the victims of racism, and yet we are the ones comforting the person who's done the harm. (Rania1, p.12)

When Rania tries to express the ongoing microaggressions, discrimination towards students and families by staff in the school, her partner begins to cry. The tears of the White woman subvert the Muslim woman leader's efforts to redress harm. Instead through her complaint she is repositioned as the cause rather than target of the harm. As Ahmed (2012) explains: "Those who speak about racism become the blow. The cause of the injury." (p.146) The tears work to (re)claim White power in a situation that rendered Rania powerless. Although Rania is aware of

the ways that White women's tears are weaponized, she feels helpless to do anything but "comfort the person, who's done [her] harm." Faced with White emotionality, she feels she is expected to listen and accept the false claims of injury and provide comfort to White staff in their emotionality, an emotionality anchored in racial hierarchy and triggered in the disruption of dominant power relations. In my own journal, I reflect on my years as a system and school leader and the tears I have navigated,

> I have lost count of the number of upset White women I have had to deal with. They feel entitled to show me that they are angry or frustrated. The best is the tears. When I have asked what exactly is upsetting them, they will say "You are making me feel bad," "You are so intense," "You look like you are judging me," oh and the comments about my face "Being intense" ! I even once had a male peer explain to a superintendent that there is just "Something about my face" that "rubs people the wrong way." He shared this with me like he had just done me a solid, been a support of some kind. It's exhausting. Imagine having to practise how to look when you are in a meeting, how your face looks, having to be aware of what your face does. (08-20-21, p.1)

When I question the White emotionality, ask why they are upset, the staff members place the blame for their hurt feelings on me, the Muslim woman leader. White emotionality, expressed in tears or anger or defensiveness, seeks to re-establish the expected equilibrium.

Participants observe that neglect or indifference to White emotionality risks further upset amongst staff who characterise such an approach as a 'lack of care' on the part of the leader. Gendered expectations of school leaders shape the demand for (Muslim) women leaders as having to 'care' for their staff even when she is the "victim" of their harm. White emotionality, whether it be in the form of tears, anger, accusations, or even silence is intended to contain Muslim women's leadership and expressions of self. White emotionality intends to coerce the Muslim woman into silence.

7.2.2.2 Complicity of Teacher Unions

Along with displays of emotionality, Muslim women leaders indicate experiences of heightened scrutiny by teachers, who readily call on their local union leadership to express their disapproval and discomfort with the words and actions of the leader. Involving the teacher unions becomes another avenue to express White emotionality. In Ontario public (English) schools, all staff belong to unions except administrators, who are part of a professional association (Ontario Principals Council). Teacher unions hold much power in the education system, particularly with public school boards. While provincial teacher unions e.g., Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, promote and facilitate professional learning on a range of anti-oppressive issues, local chapters and their leaders continue to uphold dominant norms, including Islamophobia (Canadian Labour Congress, 2021).

Whether reacting to the words used in an email or to the implementation of a board-directed process, teacher union leaders are hyper-responsive to the complaints of their members when it involves a Muslim woman principal or vice-principal. "I don't know anyone else from my cohort of new administrators, who has to deal with the [union] like I have. And let's be real: I am not that incompetent to need them knocking every week." (Muna1, p.10) As a new school administrator, Muna has worked closely with her partner and her superintendent to ensure her decisions reflect board policy, procedures, and attend to the collective agreement (Union-Board). She still receives regular calls and visits from the union vice-president demanding explanation of the why and how of these decisions.

More than one of the women in the study was targeted by teacher union leadership. This was particularly palpable when the Muslim woman did not comply with expectations of being a good Muslim or upholding normative school culture and pedagogy. The administrators became aware of the intentional targeting by the union chapter through their own interaction with the union leaders or through the disclosure of trusted racialized teachers who reveal complicity between White staff and teacher union leaders to coerce the Muslim woman leader. Even in school settings where the relationship between union and administrator is amicable, the Muslim woman leader shares experiences of ongoing challenges from the teachers' union steward within the school to discuss the seemingly perpetual 'discomfort of staff' with decisions that challenge the homeostasis of school culture and pedagogical practices.

The administrators in this project describe complicity by the teacher unions in maintaining the gendered racial hierarchy of public schools. One participant explains: "They uphold misogyny. They uphold racism. They uphold Islamophobia." (Aiyah2, p.11) The union, as Aiyah explains, becomes the tool to maintain White racial privilege and assert the legitimacy of White emotionality. When challenged by the teacher unions, the Muslim woman leader is expected to step back, back down, down to where she is a token, representative, good Muslim, and enacting happy diversity. She must not assert her leadership, because it is in this assertion that she disrupts the White racial worldview teacher unions seek to protect. The teacher union leaders communicate (Whiteness') expectations, hiding behind collective agreements and claims of professionalism. Many of the administrators I spoke with spend time managing the upset of union leaders and school stewards who allegedly represent the grievances of staff, while further entrenching the existing social order and ensuring that the Muslim woman leader adheres to

prescribed expectations. The staff and the unions are not alone in their insistence that the Muslim woman be contained within the allowable parameters of her leadership, which include not posing a threat to the established school hierarchies and cultures. Should the Muslim woman leader step beyond prescribed limits, she risks being prevented from advancing on her professional path.

7.2.2.3 Blocking advancement

Another mechanism by which institutions attempt to contain and garner compliance of Muslim women leaders is through professional reprisal. Participants share their experiences of being blocked from advancement. Noura is given some 'helpful' 'career advice' to focus less on the needs of her community if she is to advance to promotion.

> I was told to leave it alone, and these, again, they're not loud exclamations of Islamophobia toward me. And I guess maybe they're like a step above a microaggression. But, then through promotion mechanisms, you know, not being promoted from, for example, vice principal to principal and being given the explanation that although I have a strong package that I forwarded of my experiences and my evidence, what I really need to do is focus a little less on the needs of my community (Noura2, p.2)

In her advocacy for Muslim staff and community, Noura is reminded of the risks. If the Muslim woman does not listen to the warnings, other ways can be found to make her listen. Noura describes how her professional achievements are reduced to a personal agenda, lessened in their importance and impressiveness. Blocking advancement serves as a final warning for her to remain silent on the harms she witnesses toward Muslim students and community. Salma takes in and internalised such warnings:

> I'm not going to speak up, I would be stupid, I spoke up for my kids six years ago and that pushed me back for years and I was lucky to have superintendents who saw me, and my administrators in high schools who saw me and said, do whatever you can to get her through because she's good for the system. But if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here. So I'm not fucking this up, excuse my language. I'm not screwing this up by sticking up on anything. I'm going to take whatever. (Salma1, p.5)

Salma understands that her advancement was blocked due to do her past advocacy for students. She realizes that she has only reached the heights that she has because others saw her as a talented leader. She also understands the precarity of her position as Muslim woman leader and has learned from past experiences. She will accept the efforts to contain her because she does not want to risk opportunities to advance in the system.

Blocking the advancement of Muslim women is multi-layered, (re)appearing along the path from aspiring leader to advancing into more senior and visible roles. The women are constantly warned about the possibility of having their professional aspirations withheld, prevented, and sabotaged. For many, advancement is blocked because of their refusal to comply. The lesson for Muslim women leaders from the experience of reprisal is to stick to the script, to play in the designated space, and to never make a mistake. If she fails to do so, she will find herself without any support or protection.

7.2.2.4 Lack of Protections/Support

In addition to the disciplining experiences of White emotionality, teacher union complicity, and the blocking of promotion, Muslim women leaders are coerced into conformity by the lack of any formal protections from, and supports against, gendered racism/Islamophobia. The narratives gathered here implicitly and explicitly make clear that there is no protection at the level of the school board and the education system for racialized leaders, and Muslim leaders in particular. When Muslim women assert their leadership and attempt to dismantle problematic and oppressive practices in their school, they face the tools of containment and reprisal discussed

above without any formal support. The absence of supports deters them from challenging normative expectations.

When asked the question, 'Who do you feel has your back in this role (as school leader)?' Aiyah becomes emotional, capturing the sentiment expressed across interviews:

> Who do I feel has my back? It's really interesting. That's an interesting question, I feel very alone in my role…I don't know, for the first time in a long time, I find this role very isolating, and I feel very alone. I think I have to reach out to other colleagues in the system and do a lot of political manoeuvring still. I don't know who has my back. I don't think anyone has my back. I think that I rely very heavily on the community. I don't think anyone else has my back, but my community. I feel sad to say it out loud. Oh, my God, I'm getting teary by that. It's probably why I feel anxious going back to work that it feels exhausting, just exhausting. (Aiyah1, p.10)

Aiyah sadly expresses a complete lack of protection by peers and colleagues in the schooling environment. The only people who she feels protect her are the students and community she serves. This informal support may be effective protection in places where racialized communities are present and organized but is not enough to protect women from the daily attacks on their personhood.

Noura views the absence of formal system supports as intentional. The Muslim woman must either conform to expectations or else accept that she will have to navigate the system independently:

> When you look for formal structures to support you, there's none that actually exist. And that becomes very obvious, and that's very intentional as well…you learn to build a tougher shell around you so that you can deflect that... I don't got any more bandages to put on these wounds...What are we going to do about it? I just need to know, what are we going to do? I feel there's an absence of that. (NouraFG, p.9)

Without protections, Noura discusses the expectation that she accepts gendered racialized harm as a natural growing pain that must be endured by those that are 'first,' the 'only,' or 'one of a handful.' The absence of formal structures to support and protect Muslim women leaders, who

are few in number and scattered across locations, normalises the gendered racialized experiences discussed in this study, and signals those experiences of being invisibilized, hypervisibilized, constructed as threatening, or constricted by tools of containment are permissible. Containing one's conduct and leadership to prescribed expectations implicitly becomes appealing, as it avoids gendered racialized targeting, harm, and reprisal. "Softening" your presence becomes a way to become acceptable, to become the "right kind" who does "not cause trouble" and averts it as well (Ahmed, 2012, p.158/9).

In a lengthy reflection, Rania connects the dots to make sense of the lack of protection as an actual tool of coercion and control. She explains:

> Right now in the board, 78 percent of our teaching staff are White and a majority of them are women. And they're trying to increase the percentage of racialized administrators. But these administrators are still serving the very same White staff… I don't think administrators are protected. They continue to be victimized …they work with the environment they're working with, the staff they're working with and really like OPC doesn't do anything. You and I both know that they don't do anything. There's nothing. There's nothing. If I were now going through racial trauma in my building. I could go on leave for my mental sanity, but I certainly don't expect anybody to come to my rescue. And that's a hard pill for racialized people to swallow, and this is why so many teachers I know never want to go through the admin route because they feel there's no protection and that needs to change. You can't build systemic equity unless you do that, bring all the racialized administrators in. But if you're not going to set them up for success, you've done nothing but cause more racial trauma (Rania2, p.11)

In her own analysis, Rania finds that Muslim women engage in the role of school leader in environments that are entrenched in Whiteness and a gendered racialized hierarchy. The school board and the association for Ontario Principals are also imbricated in this reality she further notes, rendering Muslim women leaders without any protective structure or support. In Rania's view, this reality discourages aspiring Muslim leaders from taking the necessary steps to acquire the qualifications and pursue their dreams of becoming a school administrator. The result is

fewer Muslim women leaders and fewer still who will challenge existing school cultures and pedagogical practices.

7.3 CLOSING THOUGHTS ON THEME III: CONTAINMENT

To understand the containment of Muslim women school leaders through the use of 'expectations' and 'tools' for coercion and reprisal, we must understand the context of public schools in Ontario as White properties (Harris, 1993; Billings &Tate; 1995; Subedi, 2013; Patel, 2015). As a system shaped by "White norms," education continues to centre and prioritize Eurocentric worldviews, knowledges, and practices (Subedi, 2013). This centring serves to further demarcate schools as White properties. It is in such a context that Muslim women attempt to lead in service of growing numbers of racialized students and communities. It is in such a context that they encounter the drive for a 'preservation' of the Whiteness of the space. This preservation narrative promotes an imagined loss of entitlements for Whites against a backdrop of changing demographic realities and an increased visibility of the demands for racial equity and justice. Subedi (2013) suggests "the need for preservation" in White nations has reached alarming levels since 9/11, calling for "preserving democracy, preserving freedom, and preserving 'our way of life'" with direct implications for schools as White properties. Unabashedly, the rhetoric to 'preserve schools' promotes the scrutiny and surveillance of those viewed as threatening and dangerous e.g., the Muslim woman leader.

Significant to thinking about this preservation of Whiteness as property, in schools and elsewhere, is the recognition of the intimate connection of Whiteness to Christianness discussed earlier. Razack (2021) has recently traced this connection from European settler colonial projects and transatlantic slavery through the insurrection on the American capital following the defeat of the populist president Donald Trump in the 2020 elections: "Scholars who work with concepts of colonialism, imperialism, and White supremacy…emphasize the territorial

imperative that is the heart of Whiteness [and] that imperative is unmistakably Christian, drawing from religion the emotional content required for making the White/European self. Whites ride into personhood as a superior race on a wave of Christian feeling." (Razack, 2021, p.226) The centrality of this Christian sense of being to Whiteness becomes particularly obvious when the perceived threat to White spaces is embodied by the Muslim other, the boogey-(wo)man of the 'clashing civilisations' discourse (Huntington, 1993).

Drawing historical connections, as CRT scholars encourage us to do, we recall the origins of Islamophobia in the encroachment of the Islamic Empire into Europe, through Andalusia toward the doorstep of Italy and into the south of France. The perception of a Muslim phantom threatening White entitlements and White spaces has long been imbricated in a Christian selfhood. The preservation and rescue of White spaces from the Muslim woman leader is, therefore, as much about upholding Christian worldviews and their entanglement in "White norms." The containment of the Muslim woman leader can therefore be understood as part of a strategy of gesturing to diversity without actually accepting social and racial difference in educational institutions. Through the stories and reflections of Muslim women school leaders, we recognise the expectations intended to control their expression of identities and leadership as well as the tools used to coerce them into containment when these expectations are transgressed threatening public schools as "White properties."

In this chapter, I have examined the ways that Muslim women leaders experience containment and control through the use of discursively determined expectations and tools for reprisal and coercion. The expectations emerging from the women's own stories include

performing good subjecthood as Good Muslim and Happy Diversity. They are also expected to demonstrate leadership beyond reproach, or what I refer to as being flawless. These expectations are coupled with tools that are enacted at interpersonal and systemic levels when the Muslim woman leader appears not to comply. White emotionality of staff and peers, the complicity of teacher unions, and blocking of advancement appear in conversations with participants as forms of reprisal. The harm of such tools exists in the absence of any forms of protections or support for leaders who encounter gendered racialized scrutiny and targeting. Collectively these approaches to containment are intended to ensure that the arrival of the Muslim woman into school leadership does not undermine schools as White property: spaces shaped to uphold the superiority of Whiteness as the standard and the norm.

CONCLUSION TO FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Conversations with Muslim women leaders surface three themes: Systemic Erasure, Constructed as Threat, and Containment. The previous chapters are an analysis of these themes, positioning the words and meaning making of the women themselves in dialogue with empirical studies on racialized women's school leadership, the wider literature on Islamophobia and the theoretical framework of this study. The testimonies, as evident through the themes, are compelling, at times, infuriating, but little was surprising. Nonetheless, the narratives of participants offer a specificity of how a normalised and widespread (gendered) Islamophobia in popular discourse and institutional practices comes to be written onto the lives of Muslim women leaders in public schools. The experiences of Muslim women educators and school leaders continue to be largely absent from educational studies. As such, these interviews are not only a gateway to addressing the existing gap, they also are a necessary contribution to the wider analysis of systemic racism in public education.

As with any interview (individual or group) based study, a flatness exists in the emerging life stories as participants responses focus on their professional lives. The building of the composite counter-stories enables me to remedy this flatness by bringing to light the affective dimension of the interviews and to locate the composite characters in lives that continue beyond the walls of the school building. The three themes (and the multiple subthemes) are woven throughout the two composite counter-stories in the upcoming chapters as is the impact of living these daily. I also bring forward the ways participants discuss their continuance in these spaces and what helps sustains them as they navigate their institutional realities. The composites include a contextual setting to provide insight into the realities of some of the public-school

settings Muslim women find themselves. The composites are intended to lift up the perspectives of Muslim women school leaders about these schools and the educational system more widely.

SECTION 3: COMPOSITE COUNTERSTORIES
Chapter 8: Composite Counterstory 1- Qissati, Zaynab

Context:
Zaynab is a vice principal in an elementary school K-8 school in the Greater Toronto Area. The school has 750 students. 95% of the students are racialized (5% Black, 40% South Asian, 40% East Asian, 10% racialized non-White, 5% White) and a third of families identify as Muslim. A third of the families identify as being of non-Christian faiths or non-religious, and a third Christian. Families live in multi-generational homes, and some in multifamily homes where relatives live together, each with their own family.

There are some basement apartments and a few low-rise buildings. The community includes hidden pockets of poverty. Students are largely 1st generation Canadians, 25% born outside Canada, 40% of those having started school in their country of birth. Most students speak a language other than English when they start Kindergarten. Only a small percentage of learners are identified or supported as ELLs in K-5 and those identified tend to be newcomers. Seventy-eight percent of staff are White, all but three are women and range in age from 30 to 60. Racialized staff are largely in non-teaching roles (office, caretaking, EAs) with four racialized teachers (three East Asian and one Black (who works in the self-contained-Special Education classroom). The school climate survey reveals 50% of students find school learning relevant and interesting, 54% feel they matter to people at school, 50% say they see themselves in their learning. There is a designated multi-faith/meditation space in the Main Office conference room which doubles as a storage room. The school principal is a seasoned principal, a White woman in her early fifties, married with two college-aged sons. They have a family cottage in the Muskokas and her husband's family own a stable north of the city. The principal has close personal relations with a few teachers in the school evident in visits to each other's homes with family at the holidays, invitations to the cottage, and the occasional after work glass of wine at a nearby restaurant.

Module 1:

The flight is on time. Zaynab hugs both girls goodnight. She feels blessed. At 13 and 15 her daughters feel more like her sisters, sometimes even mothers to her in the past year. A flutter of guilt travels across her body. They deserve better, she thinks to herself. She had such hopes when she was appointed as vice-principal more than a year ago. She was aware that the job would mean longer hours at school and the occasional evening event, but after five years as a regional coach in instruction and pedagogy and twelve years as a classroom teacher she expected the new role to enable her to be more present when she was at home: no more workshops to prepare, no more papers to grade or report cards to write. She could finally give more of herself, her attention, her physical presence to her family.

The drive to the airport takes a little under an hour. The alone time is a welcome interlude. Tomorrow is Eid el-Fitr and Zaynab has taken the day off at her mother's insistence. Her Auntie Mona is flying in from Boston and Zaynab is 'volunteered' to do the pick-up. She adores her mother's sister. Zaynab's mother insists that Zaynab and Mona are "two peas in a

pot," Amaji-ing the idiom and insisting it made more sense than "pod" whenever anyone offers the correct version. Thinking of her mother, and her many many 'isms', brings a smile to Zaynab's face.

Zaynab looks the least like her mother; her petite frame, curly mane, and striking eyes contrasts with her mother's height, delicate features, and dark shiny bob. Zaynab has always been close to her mother but has sheltered her from the work-related news of this past year. It would hurt her mother to know what her 'daughter with a graduate degree in language acquisition pedagogy and a resume of shining achievement' has been dealing with.

Zaynab loves learning and has always challenged herself to expand her repertoire as a teacher. It is this drive that carried her into leadership roles as a classroom educator and then as an instructional coach for the district. Principals and superintendents often encouraged her to apply to be a school administrator, praising her facilitation skills and her command of her content. She had a visceral understanding of acquiring English as an additional language, not just from her own experience but also that of those closest to her, including her Francophile Ama. When she began her Masters, she debated focusing on social justice but opted for something 'more practical.' Still, she filled up her elective selection with courses focused on race and gender. "You and Mona...two peas...vouloir réparer le monde!"

A final paper she handed in on gendered Islamophobia had earned her top marks and an invitation to apply to the PhD program. "Your voice is needed," wrote professor Hossein in her feedback. She thought about that paper now and the brilliant, mostly Muslim women, scholars she learned from during her research. Her journey as a vice principal is this learning coming to life. Zaynab realized she had never felt as acutely 'oppressed' as a Muslim woman until she joined her current school.

Zaynab knows that discourses regarding Muslim women did not originate with 9/11. She recalls her grade 11 'Man and Society' teacher encouraging open debate about Iran's danger to the world, the first Gulf War, the righteousness of Israel as a national project. Each of these episodes left her dumbfounded by the unchecked claims and language that students were permitted to use. Zaynab came to dread the closing of each debate as she was 'spotlighted' by Mr. Aiken to share 'the Muslim/Arab perspective.' Stumbling over words, resisting the cultural essentialism and yet wanting to correct the misinformation, these experiences left her angry, exhausted, and guilty, as if she had let down all Muslim people; not unlike her encounters with microaggressions at her current school.

She understands that being a Muslim woman in leadership creates a paradox in the minds of her colleagues. Zaynab recognizes this in her principal's repeated comment "really, you are one of us" and the teachers who fall into fits of laughter as they insist "we will get a wine glass in your hand before you leave this place!" Should she express more gratitude for being one of a few Muslim women in her role in the district?

Understanding her experiences cognitively, has done little to alleviate the mental exhaustion, creeping anxiety, and the slow breakdown of her physical wellbeing in the past 16 months. It had taken weeks to ease into the last summer. Sleeping twelve to fourteen hours and

spending hours binge-watching Netflix. By the time she finally re-emerged as herself, her partner of twenty years had accepted a new position in his company, taking him to Calgary every other week. Still, she said little to her family about what had precipitated these changes. As the new school year approached, Zaynab's insomnia has returned as have the signs of her irritable bowel syndrome.

Module 2:

"Thank you for coming to get me after a long day," says Auntie Mona "your mother says you are working too hard these days. She is very worried about you." Small talk had never been Mona's strong suit. Straight to the point. "It is my pleasure, Auntie. You know I would never pass up the chance to have some alone time with my favourite Aunt!" croons Zaynab, hoping to shift the attention away from her life. "Tell me, how is it to be a visiting scholar at Harvard University Graduate School of Education?" "Eh!" Typical Mona. A feminist and sociologist, Mona had lived, worked, and taught all over the world. Zaynab never heard anything more than "eh" to describe any institutions. "As long as they just let me do my work, I have no issues" is Mona's mantra. A lifelong academic, she understands institutional life, and as a post-colonial and critical race feminist she understands institutional racism and sexism.

"How about you get me one of those overpriced fancy tea drinks before dropping me off?" Zaynab knew what this was; her aunt was setting the stage for some real talk. "Okay, I will text mum that we are going to make a tea stop on the way home and that IT IS YOUR IDEA."

Mona cradles the extra hot London Fog in her hands. "So now, talk." Zaynab looks out the windshield into the dark parking lot. The lamppost across the lot casts a bright circle over the only other car. In the corner of her eye, she can see her aunt holding her in her gaze. "Zay, please tell me." Zaynab refuses to let herself cry. She takes a deep breath, steadying herself.

When I walked into the office on the first day, I heard laughter. A group of staff gathered in the principal's office talking about their holidays at their cottages, the presents they got and gave for Christmas, and the Caribbean vacation the principal had taken over the new year with her husband. They all had their phones out, showing pictures, and giggling. When the principal saw me, her face shifted, silence took over the room, then finally she said she had not expected me until the following week. The laughing stopped, phones were shoved into pockets, and everyone dispersed without so much as looking at me. No introductions were made. "Well, you are here, so come in" was all the welcome I got.

My principal, Heather, explained that the staff in the school were like a family and that they were all good people. I was told to get myself a copy of the duty schedule and see if it needed updating. I know a duty schedule is set and revised early in the year, so I was not sure what I was to do with it given that we were nearing the end of term one. Still, I said nothing. A promotion from my regional role as an instructional lead to a school VP was not typical mid-year, but the previous VP, a young White man, had been hired as a principal to a rural board, leaving the vacancy that I was to fill.

Heather could not say enough about how much she loved Brad (the exiting VP). "He really got the staff here and they appreciated that about him." Everything she said was about the staff: how caring they were, what they did for each other, how they were loved by the kids and families, and how grateful the community was for everything they did. When I asked what she wanted me to focus my energies on, she looked at me for the first time since I sat down, "I realize you have experience with ESL [I had been the language acquisition instructional lead for the entire board for nearly five years] but I have an incredible ESL teacher."

She went on to tell me that the ESL role was brand new for this teacher. The previous ESL teacher had been on medical leave for a number of years, and they kept having new temporary teachers fill in. "I wanted some stability for these poor kids, so Jennifer agreed to take it on." A seasoned primary teacher, Jennifer Carter, I would later discover has no professional learning, accreditation, or experience in teaching students new to English. Nonetheless, the message I received was to keep away from the ESL program and this lead teacher. "She is excellent and has it all under control."

That was just day one, Auntie. Every day I get the message that my skills and knowledge are not valued or not equal to others in the building regardless of my achievements and experiences. Whenever I have tried to suggest, never mind assert, something or that we reconsider an approach, I am shut down or ignored. Not just by the principal, but also by a number of teachers.

There are two teachers that have given themselves permission to speak to me in ways that are disrespectful and out of line, especially in a professional setting. At least one of these incidents took place in the presence of my principal and a number of other teachers, and not one interrupted what was happening or addressed it with me afterwards. Something catches in Zaynab's throat and Mona places her hand over Zaynab's.

In the last year, I have really made an effort to get to 'know the staff' and even the principal. I have written cards, acknowledged birthdays and holidays, baked cookies. [Mona's shaped eyebrows shoot straight up, and she tilts her head with that "what are you saying?!" look.] *Yes, I have turned into Ree Drummond Pioneer Woman, trying to be positive and happy...but Auntie, I am not happy or positive. I just feel unseen and unheard. Erased.*

Honestly, the only time anybody speaks to me with interest is when they want me to explain Islam and Muslims to them. And you should hear the questions they ask. 'Why can't you just eat, it's cloudy outside?' 'Why do Muslim women let the men tell them what to wear?' 'Why would parents want their children "to do the Ramadan"? Isn't that like abuse?' I feel like I am constantly teaching. Still, they assume I don't know what I am talking about, that I am at best biased or worse, I am so helpless and under the spell of a fanatical religion.

Of course, I can't show them any of my emotions. They expect anger and aggression, so I give them nothing. I have spent so much time deadening my emotions, the girls and Tarek say I am like a zombie. Tarek is gone all the time and I don't blame him. I wouldn't want to be with me either.

The dam finally breaks and a tidal wave of hurt rushes through. The tears feel warm. Zaynab tries to stop them but it's too late. She crumbles on to the centre console between her and Mona, who wraps her arm around Zaynab, kissing the back of her head. "We all want to be around you, princess Zanoubia," reassures Mona, conjuring Zaynab's childhood alter ego. Princess Zanoubia, warrior against injustice and lover of all things glitter. *I have not seen her in a long time, Auntie,* sniffs Zaynab as she swipes her sweater across her face.

When the staff make comments or jokes about racialized families in the school, I don't say anything anymore. The few times I did, I was accused of "trying to make everyone feel bad all the time." The principal even suggested that the teacher making blatant racist comments about parents was just "passionate" about teaching and was expressing his frustration. When I suggested that she tell a teacher to take an Islamophobic post off social media, I was told that the teacher was "just trying to engage Muslim families." I have been discouraged from being involved in incidents with students where Islamophobia specifically, or any racism in general, is involved, because I am, and I quote, "too emotionally invested." Zaynab has gone from devastation to fury.

Apparently, I am not "too emotionally invested" to prepare the Islamic Heritage month display though. After asking Heather to include the board memo about IHM in her weekly email to staff, which I have done for every heritage month, she came to me to put something together for IHM to "make us look good." I knew I could not go to any of the staff for support or to ask them to facilitate student learning and work that we could showcase, they already think I have an agenda.

When one of the Muslim parents saw me working on the display after school, she asked if I wanted some help and before I knew it there were dozens of students and mothers knocking on my door that week. I gave them my office initially, but there was not enough room, so we moved to a conference room. With the door open, I hear two teachers laughing and making comments about 'Little Mosque on the Prairie'. I could not bear to look at the kids and mothers, as I am sure they heard it too. The next day I was told by the principal that the office staff could not work for 'all the noise we were making.'

I am, also, not "too emotionally invested" to manage any complaint, concern, question from all Muslim and South Asian families. It's as if I am the "bridge" between school and home. To be honest, I care deeply for the community and do want to support them in navigating the system, accessing what they need and want, and even encourage them to elevate their concerns beyond the school. Of course, I do that very quietly. As soon as there is a faith accommodation request, it is expected that I will look after it, with false compliments about how skilled I am in this regard. Before I got to this school, I never coordinated the religious accommodation process, but I do it because the families should have a supportive and compassionate experience.

Mona smiles. *Okay, so maybe a little Princess Zanoubia stuck around. I am so much more than this, though. I was a great teacher and a very effective instructional leader and coach. I hardly ever get to do any of that work anymore. If I think something is pedagogically important, I talk about it casually in front of a few teachers who have the principal's and staff's trust and then let them pretend it was their initiative. It is the only way to be heard.*

None of my White peers are having these experiences, Auntie. I go to the new VP induction meetings. None of the White VPs are teaching their staff about their identities, they are not disrespected so openly by their teachers, they don't have their skills devalued, and they are not viewed as biased angry zealots looking to ruin everybody's fun!

Zaynab is surprised by how much she has said and how much she remembers. Each incident, each statement, each interaction is imprinted in her very being. How could she let this staff and this school leader get to her? How has she carried herself through the last nearly two years without saying anything, without complaining?

Zaynab takes a deep breath and looks over at Mona. Mona holds Zaynab's eyes and smiles, nodding. As the car is turned back on, both women look out of the windshield. The rest of the drive passes in silence.

Module 3:

Zaynab and her sister-in-law, Areeba, have been clearing and washing Eid dessert plates and empty coffee and tea cups for much of the afternoon. The chatter and giggles of Zaynab's girls and their cousins rise and fall from the family room, as do the voices of Zaynab's elders and their family friends in the formal living room.

It is an unexpectedly warm day for early May, the sky is clear and sun envelopes the back deck of the house. Zaynab slips on her jacket and settles onto one of the seats recently uncovered from a winter hiatus. Closing her eyes to enjoy the sun on her face, Zaynab hears the sliding glass door open. "There you are!" It's Amal.

Zaynab and Amal have known one another since they started Quran classes during the second grade. Amal has recently been promoted to principal in a school board neighbouring Zaynab's. The two women had been close as young children. Around the same age, they always found one another in the many community events their families attended. They continue to see one another a few times a year on special occasions.

"I have not seen you in….gosh...since the summer before you became a VP!" Zaynab wonders if Amal joining her parents for their Eid drop-in is another attempt at 'care' by her mother. Normally she would be frustrated with this but it is becoming clear to Zaynab that the impact of the last year is much more visible to her family than she had realized.

Zaynab and Amal exchanged knowing glances. She is coming from a place of care and love. "We don't have to talk about it if you don't want to," Amal assures her. Her voice is warm and calm.

"It's fine, really. We can talk about it. I didn't realize I needed to until last night." The childhood friends ease into familiar co-existence, eyes closed, enjoying the early spring sun. After exchanging some pleasantries about kids and families, Amal lets out a deep sigh.

Amal: You know what I will never understand?! When I applied to go through the process, to become a school administrator, every person who reviewed my package before I submitted it told me to make clear that I am Muslim and give examples of how I have supported Muslim parents and students. I actually found it a little insulting at the time. As if that was the most important thing, the only thing that would make me stand out, make me viable as a candidate. I know you were part of starting the affinity group in your board and it would make sense for that to be on your resume, it's part of your leadership experience. For me, I just felt like, if being a stellar educator and showing leadership across all of the schools I have been in is not good enough then don't promote me.

Zaynab had received the same 'well intentioned' advice. She heard it for what it was, allowing the institution to show itself as committed to equality and diversity. Having navigated the political waters of a regional role as a Muslim woman, Zaynab knew that her arrival in new spaces was intended to signal change, transformation, and erasure of the unsavoriness of White supremacy. It seemed a given for herself and Amal, they were now exposed, their boards were already 'doing race through' their bodies as Muslim women.

Zaynab: And now? What do you think about…'the importance of being a Muslim' school leader?

Amal: It was never about having Muslim women leaders. Unless you think being Muslim is about getting dressed up for Eid and having a community Iftar. That's when the superintendents and trustees show and have their picture taken. I know it's cynical. I am grateful for being in this role, I really am. But I have had to learn some hard lessons. Being asked to show that I am Muslim on my application does not mean that institution thinks being a Muslim woman should matter to anything I do or experience as a leader, as an educator, or how I am engaged with as a colleague. As a VP, neither the principal nor the teachers in the school paid any attention to me nor to the Muslim students in the school when the anniversary of the Quebec Mosque shooting came up; Ramadan came and went and all that my principal said was, "it must be nice to have all these extra days off!" A teacher once snorted in a staff meeting and questioned the need for accommodation for track and field day for fasting students. Ramadan was in June that year, June! She actually said out loud, "They shouldn't be allowed to take advantage of the system and not support their classmates." What do you say to that?

This sounds so familiar, thought Zaynab.

Amal: I had to teach myself how to respond to the blatant disrespect and questioning I faced by staff. Like, practising in front of a mirror what I would say, and what my face would look like as I said it.

Oh, the face! How many times had Zaynab heard about her face over the years?

Amal: I noticed over time that certain topics were off limits. Often those were the topics that were most relevant to me as a Muslim woman. People want me to answer their questions about Muslims and sometimes want to debate me about what they assume is THE MUSLIM position. Foolishness! But if I brought forward data to show how we are under-serving Muslim families

and students in the school, I would get shut down by my principal. If I want to engage with thinking about Islamophobia, or even racism in general, in our school, I get shut down, once even by the superintendent at a family of schools meeting. When I first put forward my papers to be promoted to principal 6 years ago, it was made clear to me that I was not viewed as 'ready.' My superintendent shared that "they would eat me alive" and I was advised to diversify my initiatives beyond "Muslim-related" items. After that, I decided to just let it go. I still connect with students and families, Muslim and not, but I don't talk about being Muslim or about Islamophobia. You just need to play the game. I figure my presence is disruptive enough.

Zaynab's hand instinctively taps Amal's. What was it that Mona once said? "When you expose a problem, you pose a problem." (Ahmed, 2017, p.36) Amal, like Zaynab, is constructed as the problem.

Zaynab: I am so tired, Amal. Remember when we thought we could lead change and that our sphere of influence would grow as administrators? I have never felt as restrained as I do now.

Amal: It does get a little better as a principal, but you will still have to tread carefully. The energy I spend on making people feel good and cared for consumes a great deal of time. When anything related to Muslim identity comes up in school, like in my current school with its large Muslim community, a group of intermediate students initiated a Muslim student group, I support them but then make sure to visibly support the Gay Straight Alliance. In doing that, I circumvent the assumptions and tales that would be told about the Muslim principal. The teacher advisor of the GSA had already asked me repeatedly if I was sure that I "was okay with having a GSA in MY school." [Amal shaking her head]

Zaynab: It is no wonder we are exhausted all the time. Just think about the amount of emotional labour we put into trying to stay whole in such spaces. The expectation is that we smile and be grateful and be willing to be shown off as a board success story.

Comforted in Amal's company and the shared experience, Zaynab's thoughts turn to wondering about her continuance in school leadership. Could she 'play the game' and 'tread carefully' until retirement? Could she sustain herself personally and professionally if she did not 'play the game'? What would be the impact of shrinking and staying quiet in the long term? Could she show gratitude while being made a perpetual guest in this institution?

Module 4:

Zaynab shakes her umbrella. Opening the entrance to the cafe, leaves blow in behind her. Fall has arrived in full force. Zaynab surveys the layout, she is not sure how a discussion group would have privacy in this open space. The young woman behind the counter, recognizing the perplexed look on Zaynab's face, comes over with a smile. "The group meeting?" Zaynab nods, "Yes...I" "They are in the private room on the right." Relieved, Zaynab can feel her shoulders relax. She thanks the young woman, orders herself a London Fog, extra hot, and makes her way to the room.

Zaynab learned of this group through Amal. A PhD student, she was told, was gathering the stories of Muslim women administrators in public schools. After the initial individual conversations all of the participants were invited into a space together. Zaynab had been anxious at first, but the move to her new school had been a positive change. Things were not perfect, but working with a racialized woman principal and a racially diverse staff had brought new opportunities for learning and leading. Zaynab continues to struggle with 'playing the game' but she doesn't feel the same level of erasure as in her previous setting. Or was she just learning to accept certain things, she wonders.

"Good morning, everyone, thank you so much for your willingness to give your Saturday morning to be here together. We will get started in just a couple minutes, if you want to find a spot in the circle. Grab what you need from the cafe next door, and we will introduce ourselves to one another, go through the agenda for the morning and a quick review of all the study-related housekeeping." Zaynab makes her way to the circle of chairs in the middle of the room. She spots Amal chatting with a striking woman wearing a hijab. The woman's eyes are glassy with tears. Sara, the host and researcher, comes over to introduce herself to Zaynab. All of their conversations had been on the phone or online to this point.

Sara begins the dialogue by reintroducing herself and the goal of the study to make visible the realities of public education by understanding the experiences of Muslim women school leaders. She reviews the research process, the informed consent which they had all signed, and some agreements for the conversation. Zaynab surveys the seven other women in the circle. Most appear to be around her age, two of the women wear a hijab. As they introduce themselves, it becomes clear that most of the women are in elementary schools.

Sara highlights the emerging themes of the individual interviews: systemic erasure, being constructed as a threat, control and surveillance, and illusions of secularism. Hearing this, Zaynab feels affirmed and disappointed. So much harm captured so simply. Yet these words convey so much, bringing Zaynab's experience into a collective, a collective witness, to hold, and to walk forward together.

A short discussion about the themes ensues. When a natural quiet comes over the group, Sara shares,

You also spoke about what being in a school leadership role means for you and the pockets of possibility you have found and created. I heard you talk about coming into the role as an opportunity to demonstrate that Muslim women are leaders and for your Muslim students to see themselves reflected in their school administrators. Many of the participants are nodding their heads in agreement. *Many of you have found ways to work with and for Muslim families, supporting their navigation of the education system in their advocacy for their children. You also shared that being in the role allows you to support racialized staff, and Muslim staff in particular, in ways that the institution does not. I heard much gratitude for the opportunity to do this work and recognition that it has not been without its challenges and pain.* Zaynab catches the eye of the hijabi woman she noticed earlier, Farah. They share a knowing half-smile.

I would like to invite you to share what are your healing spaces in your journeys as Muslim women school leaders?

There is a pause. Glancing around, Zaynab notices each participant waiting to see who will begin.

Zaynab: I can go if that's okay...I think this project and this room have been healing. Every time I speak to another Muslim woman who is finding her way through school leadership, I feel seen and heard. It tells me that I am not alone and that it's not me. I know many people going into a new role speak of an 'imposter syndrome,' I believe what we are experiencing is something else, something outside of ourselves. When I listen to my sisters here, I know it is real.

Farah: It is real. When you are the first person, the first Muslim woman and for me visibly Muslim, to be a school leader in a school board, having an affinity space is not just healing, it is survival.

Holding space for Farah's words, Amal looks down at her hands quietly. Then she adds,

Amal: For me, I have had to find continuance in networks with other racialized women leaders. Being in an affinity group with Muslim teachers is important to support the students and families, even the educators, but I am not sure this space is enough to support me in navigating my leadership role. Everyone is supportive and compassionate, but I don't feel comfortable sharing some of my experiences I have had with peers or superior with teachers and community members.

Yasmin: For me, my healing comes in my practice as a Muslim. Prayers, even during the school day, remind me that I am part of something larger than myself and that I am not alone on my path. I also remind myself daily that this is my job, it is not who I am. It has almost become my mantra. It is sad really because when I was teaching in a classroom, being a teacher was my everything. Now, when I get home I turn it off. At least for most of the evening. I spend time with my family and do the mundane things that keep me feeling human and connected.

Amina: My mentor has been my lifeline. She has helped me tremendously to navigate my way to the role and how to get through the day to day.

It is apparent that the other participants are surprised to hear about the mentor. "It is so wonderful to hear that you have that, sister. It gives me hope," reassures Zaynab.

Amina: Yes, I know it really was a gift, and an unexpected one. Even though this person has left our board, I feel like I have a community in those of us she mentored. I am still searching for someone who can take her place…maybe we need to build our own mentoring pipeline.

Cacophony of agreements fills the room. "That and more of this, just time together, not only to feel supported but to have a collective that can speak in our joint voices," adds Amal.

The conversation becomes more informal and new ideas bubble up as the participants discuss how to stay connected and what might be some next steps. Sara is elated by what she sees happening. “This is why,” she whispers to herself, a gentle reminder of the purpose of her work.

As the last of the participants say goodbye and exchange numbers and hugs, Zaynab finds Amal. “Maybe there is a way to stay and not lose ourselves?” “Maybe,” says Amal with that look Zaynab knew was a signal that Amal’s mental wheels were turning.

Chapter 9: Composite Counterstory 2- Qissati: Farah

Context:

Farah is a vice principal in a secondary 9-12 school in the Greater Toronto Area. The school is home to 1200 students. There is a shifting demographic here, with a legacy of students from predominantly White conservative families (70%), largely working-class. New families moving into the area include first-generation students of Tamil ethnicity (15%), second-generation students of South Asian, East Asian, and Black identities; and transient Arab families who arrived as a result of refugee settlement. Muslim families comprise about 10% of the population. The neighbourhood is predominantly single-family homes with pockets of new smaller builds with multigenerational homes. Correlated with newcomer status- the recent arrived families are in the smaller homes. Students are also bussed in from more rural parts of the school board. Many of the students play sports together outside of school. Student misbehaviour is a common concern and student discipline occupies much of the administrators' time, particularly for Farah. The school has high reengagement numbers (to remedy dropping out) relative to the board average. The school council is dominated by White conservative parents. Conflict between parents and between parents and teachers is not unusual. Staff turnover is low, most teachers having taught at the school for much of their career and have also taught multiple generations of the same families in the community. Pedagogical practice is stagnant across the school and there is a high VP turnover.

The principal, Susan, is White woman who is a seasoned, kind, and strong operational leader, but intimidated by strong instructional leaders on staff and inclined to defer to them. She claims to be open but often undermines antiracist efforts, falling back to colour-blind diversity and using passive aggressive language to manage her administration team. The staff is predominantly White and Christian. The racialized staff tend to be younger, Christian, and in temporary roles (LTOs). The leadership team includes the department heads, the literacy teacher, the Guidance head and Student Services (special education). All are White except for the Students Success, ESL department heads who are younger and recent additions to the team.

Module 1:

Farah adjusts her blush pink hijab in the rear-view mirror and reapplies her coordinated lipstick. Maintaining a stylish appearance has always been important to her. The youngest of her four siblings, Farah has been more like a big sister to her nieces and nephew, who are now teenagers themselves. They too look to their young aunt for advice in navigating relationships with peers and parents, and how to reconcile being Muslim in spaces that locate this identity outside of belonging. Salma, Aaliyah, and Firoz keep Farah in sync with what is trending and have educated her about having meaningful relationships with the students in her own school.

Fred Varley High School is Farah's second placement as a vice principal. She is thankful to have had the opportunity to develop her operational knowledge in her previous school, an environment that was less fraught with discipline cases. Farah feels like she spends much of her day dealing with student behaviour, a good part of which could be avoided through changes in

pedagogy and the provision of professional learning for teachers. The small number of racialized students in the school represent a fair number of the teacher referrals for discipline. It frustrates Farah to hear the students describe what amounts to teacher provocation and a lack of understanding of students' experiences. In the last month, she has increasingly walked students back to classes and invited teachers into conversations about how to create learning environments that attend to all the learners. It has not made her popular with the staff. She has to tread carefully as her administration team already seems uncomfortable with her suggestions to rethink how school engages with student identity and spirituality.

Farah asks critical questions about courses like grade 9 health during destreaming planning. "What if we centered 'spirit' when we think and teach wellbeing? What could that look like? Imagine drawing on students' wisdom traditions in health pedagogy." Silence. The conversation shifts back to supporting students in destreamed math, reminding Farah that there is no space for talk of spirituality and faith in 'secular' public school, particularly not if led by a Muslim woman.

Walking into the main office this December morning, Farah wonders what 'secularism' means to her peers. The office, including Farah's door, rivals any retail centre display of Christmas decorations. After the Halloween exhibition earlier in the fall and her discovery of two cupboards full of embellishments for every season, including Lunar Year which the office assistants still refer to as Chinese New Year, Farah was nonplussed when the tinsel hit her door in November. She feels a pang of jealousy when her colleague and new friend, Amal, shares over a recent phone call that her elementary school held community cultural events. "Don't be," reassured Amal, "celebration is as far as I am allowed to go. When I brought in some learning about the model minority myth, to my predominantly East Asian serving school, the staff staged a revolt about how I was being divisive and accusing them of being bad people." Farah knows that, like Amal, she is considered a threat to the social order in this school, the legacy practices, and the hierarchies. Her daily experiences, while more subtle, are no less exhausting.

The office assistants gush over her 'sense of style' daily, especially her 'matching headdress', leaving her feeling like an exotic doll. Her VP partner never misses an opportunity to spotlight Farah's otherness. "Do the door decorations offend you?" she had asked after the office assistants' had stayed late the day before to put up the decorations. "I told them you would be offended." This was the same VP who suggested in a staff meeting, with the entire staff present, that she herself may be "better suited" to support the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) when Farah had spent nearly two months working with the equity department and a number of the younger staff to bring the GSA to fruition in a school where homophobia and heteronormativity were rampant.

Turning on the computer, and settling into her office chair, Farah hears a knock on her open door. She is pleased to see Sawsan, a grade 11 student who has been in the school for just over a year. "Ms. Mohamed, may I speak to you about something?" Sawsan recently transitioned from the ESL course she had been placed in by her guidance counsellor, into academic English. Sawsan's family had arrived in Canada from Syria, where she had been in a British private school since kindergarten. Sawsan's mum, who had been an English professor at the University of Damascus, had come to see Farah in September to ask that her daughter be

considered for academic English. Understandably, the family did not have school documents but a short conversation with Sawsan demonstrated fluency in both conversational and academic language. Farah had to push against the heads of both Guidance and English departments to secure the course change. Fortunately, the LTO (long-term occasional teacher) in the ESL headship, a young teacher with significant experience in language acquisition, supported the change.

Now Sawsan was looking for support to organize an event for January 29th, the National Day of Remembrance of the Quebec Mosque shooting. The murder of the Afzaal family this year makes this upcoming Remembrance even more critical. The school lacks a Muslim Student Association, as no teacher will serve as a faculty advisor. Securing a prayer space is something Farah is still navigating. In Sawsan's face, Farah sees the hopefulness and passion she knows from her own nieces. Farah wants to support Sawsan and believes deeply in what Sawsan is advocating, but she worries if she can even be effective as a visibly Muslim woman. Islamophobia is not part of any conversation at this school. Will supporting Sawsan be another example of Farah's perceived 'Muslim Agenda'?

Farah has been cautious in every decision and action, working to counter staff and peer 'expectations and perceptions' of her as a Muslim administrator. The assumption of her 'Muslim Agenda' and an encroaching Islamization stemming from the presence of a Muslim person in leadership looms. There was gossip last year when a Muslim hijabi teacher had been hired for a short-term French position. Farah had not even been involved in the screening or interview process but had heard 'half-joking' questions from a few students and more than one staff member as to whether the teacher was Farah's sister or cousin. When Farah had to address the interaction of a teacher with a student and the student's parents, the teacher argued that Farah's upset was rooted in the student's 'Pakistani' identity. The student was Tamil.

While Farah is trusted to handle discipline cases and complete 'paperwork' and reporting on a range of operational matters, she is not asked to be part of instructional leadership in the school. The principal defers to the other VP and literacy lead for all professional learning. Destreaming was the first (and only) time Farah was asked to lead learning on a Professional Development (PD) day. She suspects that this was the result of the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the leaders for destreaming and their expectation of resistance on the part of the staff. In other words, it was a set-up. Nonetheless, Farah, a long-term proponent of destreaming since her days as an English teacher, prepared thoroughly for this PD, anticipating every question, every defence, every reaction. She practised compassionate yet firm and clear responses. She expected to be left by her admin team to deal with the staff emotion. What surprised Farah on the day was the personal comments and questions challenging her competence as an educator and a leader. Never did her principal step in and shut down the onslaught.

Joining a research project on Muslim women's school leadership in the summer, Farah learned of elementary principals and vice-principals facing teacher unions who empower White teachers in particular to maintain entitlements to teach and interact with racialized children without challenge or question. These union chapters escalate matters to senior leaders of the board in an effort to undermine the direction and action of the Muslim woman administrator. Farah is grateful not to have had this experience and yet as a hijabi and an administrator she

knows that her presence is always viewed as 'disruptive.' Staff and peers are surprised to hear about her dancing at a cousin's wedding, or being on thevarsity basketball team in university, or even that she chose to wear the hijab while she was at university. It seems that just living her life challenges every preconception.

The Muslim women's school leadership research project has been a safe haven and space of healing. Farah has connected to educators and advocates across the city. After years of focusing on her school and feeling isolated, she is finding her voice in new spaces. An invitation to speak on a panel about Muslim staff experiences in public schools has Farah excited and anxious. Although the panel is on a Saturday, she will need to inform her principal in case her school board affiliation becomes known to the audience.

As she thinks through how to best support Sawsan's request from the morning, Farah will first need to deal with her own 'request.' Susan, her principal, is kind and makes an effort to appear encouraging, but her discomfort with Farah's Muslimness is evident in her questions, her silences, and mostly in her regular interruptions of Farah's challenges of the taken-for-granted ways of this school's culture and teaching practices. When Farah shared what her nephew faced in his transition to public school from an Islamic school in grade eight, Susan cried in disbelief: "This is not the way in public schools in Canada." When Farah asked to support learning about spirituality and identity as part of the anti-oppression professional learning, Susan reminded her that this is a 'secular' space and that she should coordinate any work with the Head of Guidance, a veteran teacher, who has "done a lot of the stuff on wellbeing and mental health." Instead of reacting, Farah hides her emotions in these moments and finds a way to express gratitude for Susan's support, reasoning that it serves no one to antagonize her principal. Sharing that she intends to be on this panel will be tricky.

As usual, Farah thinks through everything she will say to Susan, every possible response and how to handle them. Farah has become accustomed to constantly being 'in strategy mode.' She could argue that it allows her to anticipate and control her surroundings, but the mental exhaustion of 'strategy mode' has her wondering if she is the one being controlled. What can she do? Farah knows her hijab marks her as an outsider; claiming herself in an explicitly Muslim space could further impact how she is viewed and if she would continue to be seen as 'leader material.'

Farah's well-rehearsed explanation and responses to Susan's questions seem to be effective. "I just worry for you, you know, in the long run," Susan pauses. "Let me check in with the superintendent and the head of communications. You know... for your protection."

Later that afternoon, Susan lets Farah know that she had 'central' support to be on the panel. "The director is invited to the event and will be in attendance. She is thrilled to hear that you will be on the keynote panel." Somehow this sounds more like a warning than a compliment.

Module 2:

"I was so excited to see your name among the speakers today!" Farah looks up from reviewing her notes to find Zaynab Ahmed, whom she met through the research project. "I don't know what is wrong with me today," exclaims Farah ``I feel like I am going to be sick. My director is going to be here and who knows who else!" Zaynab crouches down beside Farah and takes her hand. "You are an incredible leader and a brilliant woman. You being on this panel means that we are all on this panel with you. Allah subhanu wa taalla is with you," she smiles "and we all have your back, sis. Breathe and read the Fatiha. This space is ours and today is for us and our children." Farah is comforted by Zaynab's words. The school board and its senior leaders may not have her back, but the community does.

Entering the auditorium a few minutes later, Farah is amazed that it is standing room only. There must be several hundred people. She catches the eyes of a few people from the research project including Zaynab, who smile encouragingly. Farah notices the director of her board seated with a few other older White folks in suits. She assumes they are other senior leaders in boards. "BismiAllah," whispers Zaynab as she joins the other panellists on the stage.

She has met everyone through the Zoom prep meetings facilitated by the organisers: a few faculty members from the university and a teacher from another board. The only Muslim superintendent in local boards had been strongly discouraged from participating for fear it would make him look "too Muslim." "To whom?" asked Farah during their last prep meeting. He just shrugged his shoulders and wished them all well for the panel.

Getting the panel underway, the moderator asks, "what are the most pressing issues facing Muslim staff in our public schools today?" Dr. Wafaa raises her hand:

> Speaking from a location outside of schools, but having a number of focus groups with students, staff, and parents I would say the issues can be captured as invisibility of being Muslim on the one hand and yet being viewed as a constant threat. This perception means that participants in my research are under constant surveillance, are subject to all kinds of controls which can range from direct punishment to expectations of assimilation therefore hiding their identity, and being told that they cannot speak, neither about Muslimness nor about Islamophobia.

"I would like to add, if it's okay Dr. Wafaa," interrupts a young woman from the middle of the room, who seems to know Dr. Wafaa,

> that both my faith as a Muslim and my humanity seem to be up for debate, like it's okay for me to be in a class where teachers allow, and sometimes even lead, discussions about Islam and Muslims that are based on what they see in the news and read online.

Farah glances up and into the audience. Young and old, heads nod in agreement. "Ms. Farah, would you like to add on?" asks the moderator. Farah avoids looking toward her director. Instead, she makes eye contact with Zaynab, who is joined by Sara, the PhD student who brought them together, and Amina, one of the other school leaders in this group. Their kind smiles carry their support and care across the room.

> I think we are expected to constantly reassure those around us, whether students or staff, that we are 'safe'. I have heard Dr. Wafaa use the term 'Good Muslim.' In that we are expected to answer questions, educate others, never express unhappy emotions, and most of all never question the way things are done even if they are silencing or harmful to us.

A woman in the front row jumps in, "I think Ms. Farah is politely sharing what my own children and I experience in our interaction with the school; we are constantly resisting the stereotypes and misinformation about Muslims, especially about Muslim women." Farah appreciates the directness of this parent advocate:

> Yes, I agree, it is like we are always working against a tide of unshakeable assumptions. These assumptions and the effort to work against them contains us and prevents us from having critical conversations and doing the work we need to do to make schools spaces in which Muslim students, and staff, belong and feel whole.

Looking back at this parent Farah adds, "I think the community has enormous gifts to share with us in schools. Unfortunately, I know that when teachers or even administrators who are Muslim bridge the relationship to Muslim or even racialized communities it is viewed as suspect." Moving the panel along, the moderator asks, "Dr. Wafaa and Ms. Farah refer to this idea of control or containment as Muslims working in a public school. Can you explain more about what this looks like? Is this about faith in public institutions or is there something more?"

The panellist exchange a knowing look and almost simultaneously call out "something more!" Over the chuckles from the Muslim members of the audience, Ms. Mona, the educator on the panel begins:

> The control I see as a staff member, and a union member, is the ways the federation is mobilized by staff, particularly White non-Muslim staff to prevent Muslim administrators from addressing any problematic teacher practice. I heard staff in one school I served in on a short-term basis, try to get the union to block the Muslim VP from visiting their classroom because she supposedly was getting too "cosy" with the kids. When I asked them to explain what they meant, they said that she spent too much talking with kids and trying to be their friend.

There it was again, the use of the union as a tool to uphold existing power hierarchies and legacy practices of a school. Dr. Hasan, the other academic on the panel, has also conducted work with Muslim educators and leaders. He remarks, "I agree, it is my finding that teachers who are Muslim face many obstacles to leadership but then the few who are successful are constantly navigating, as you said [gesturing to the moderator], the assumed secular spaces." Confident in his assertion, he continues with "let me be clear, I say 'assumed' because public schools are normatively Christian spaces." There is a noticeable discomfort in the corner of the room where school board leaders are congregated, as officials shift in their chairs and some texting seems to be taking place. Dr. Hasan does not relent, "When Ms. Farah speaks of the expectation to certify herself as safe or a Good Muslim, what she is experiencing is the expectation that she upholds Whiteness and Christian dominance" -- he pauses for effect -- "which she can never fully do because she is viewed as embodied disruption."

Surprisingly, Farah feels affirmed. She knows she should be worrying about how this is all landing with her director. That and her daily experiences are nothing to be excited about. For a

moment, however, there is something empowering in owning being "embodied disruption." Catching Dr. Hasan out of the corner of her eye, she can see that he is anticipating the unsurprising argument about Canadian values and multiculturalism. Breaking the silence, Farah says,

> "Embodied disruption" sounds pretty powerful. But it does capture how I feel I am taken up by the adults in my building. When I nudge in the slightest way, I encounter a wall of silence, sometimes tears, and pretty regularly an entitled hostility. There is an expectation that I should be grateful: grateful to be in the role, grateful to exist in Canada, grateful that there is any tolerance for my existence and that of racialized families and students, including the Muslim ones. As Muslims we always say AlhamduliLah, even when things are sour. Our gratitude is to the Creator. It is very challenging, however, to always show gratitude in spaces that I see harming students, harming families, even harming me. I try to not complain and show gratitude, I really do. But even when I do, I am torn. Staying in gratitude keeps me from becoming bitter and disillusioned, but it also feels like my hands are tied. When you don't have support, you have to be careful, stay in your lane, and not antagonise those around you.

Farah has spoken her heart and now it is beating its way out of her chest. She takes a deep breath and steadies herself with a sip of water. A hand goes up in the audience. "So, what does this mean for addressing Islamophobia in schools?" Dr. Wafaa gently offers,

> While it cannot be the work of Muslim staff alone to name and address Islamophobia in schools, we can confidently say that Muslim teachers and even more so Muslim administrators, are prevented from actively working against Islamophobia in their own school settings. Those that do, face often destructive challenges to their careers. Most have to work through separate channels, groups like the Alliance of Educators for Muslims Students or the Muslim Educator Network, to influence senior leaders to take Islamophobia seriously.

The audience is clearly perturbed to hear this. As the noise of the crowd goes up, the moderator steps in, to help bring the panel to its conclusion. "My last question to you: In face of the challenges that Muslim staff face, why do they stay? Why do they pursue leadership?" "Because we love what we do! We believe in the importance of the work and that our presence makes a difference for students and families," says Ms. Mona, followed by Farah who offers, "I do this work for the young people in my building who deserve to feel belonging, to be seen as whole, complex people, individuals and members of communities. I know what I do makes a difference, sometimes in ways that are unnoticed by the majority of staff and my peers." Allowing the audience to clap, Dr. Hasan adds,

> It is important that the systems [he looks directly to the board leadership group in the audience] stop tokenizing Muslim staff. Recognize their leadership skills, notice what they bring to your schools...don't tell me you are committed to hiring more 'diverse' educators and leaders just to make your district look good, look progressive. Putting these brilliant and dynamic people, particularly the women, in hostile spaces and expecting them to fix what has been designed to exclude them, Muslim children, and Muslim families. Then leave them unprotected and unsupported, telling them to use these neoliberal leadership notions of relationship and dialogue. The Muslim education leaders I speak with use words like 'abusive' and 'terrorizing' to describe their experiences in public schools. How can we hope for much better for our children?

Dr. Hasan has the audience on its feet. He looks over at Farah and blinks and nods. She is not sure how he knows, but at this moment she is grateful. 'Shukur,' she whispers to Dr. Hasan. As the crowd begins to disperse, she sees Zaynab, Sara and Amena making their way towards her.

They will have to continue their struggle in schools, but for today they can feel the power of affirmation and the respect of the community.

SECTION 4: Looking back- Looking forward
Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1 LOOKING BACK: THIS STUDY

Over my decades-long career as an educator and school leader, the terms used in Ontario public education to characterize the response to racism have changed, moving from 'diversity' to 'equity and inclusion', and now to decolonization and anti-racism. And yet colonial and racial legacies continue in public schools as does the invisibility of power relations that maintain them as spaces of inequity and inequality for racialized students, teachers, and leaders. The appointment of Muslim women leaders to positions of authority in schools seeks to symbolically demonstrate the institution's growing inclusivity and acceptance of Muslims in public education. The testimony of the seven women in this study indicates that their arrival into school leadership roles brings them into conflict with dominant assumptions about leadership in public schools.

The experiences of racialized women leaders, Muslim women specifically, in Canadian public schools are absent from much of the educational scholarship. This dissertation addresses this gap by adding to the limited number of empirical studies on Muslim experience in public (K-12) education institutions. The dissertation also seeks to highlight and illustrates Muslim women leaders' perceptions and meaning making regarding the systemic and discursive racial barriers to the leadership they experience. *Examining the narratives of seven Muslim women school leaders, the study investigates and depicts the experiences of Muslim women principals and vice-principals in public K-12 schools in Ontario. It also seeks to represent their authorship of their experiences of leadership in schools through the stories they tell.*

To frame these experiences, I engaged popular discourses of Muslims and Islam pre-and post-911, reviewed theoretical and empirical studies on Islamophobia, Critical Race Theory, and racialized women's school leadership, and conducted a critical analysis of individual and group interviews and autobiographical writing. These scholarly and research activities are synthesized in multi-module composite counterstories. The stories animate the complexity and nuance of Muslim women's experience of school leadership in a Canadian context. Through the presentation of the emerging data in multiple forms, I aim to lift up the findings for further discussion and engagement in academic and educator communities. The key learnings are captured below.

10.1.1 Islamophobia as a process of Racialization

My review of existing scholarship against the experiences of participants emphasizes the importance of engaging with Islamophobia as a form of racialization with a long history and varied manifestations in Western multicultural and settler societies. Despite the intentionality, historicity, and transglobal span of Islamophobia, Ontario schools continue to take up Islamophobia as a faithism. As such it is misleadingly addressed through faith-based accommodations and cultural competence 'training.' Less examined are the ways in which those who are not Christian are constantly barred from spaces in school that are founded in the values and beliefs and cultural habits of the institution. Implicit Christian values and beliefs in falsely secularized education culture and processes further maintains the existing power relations and racial hierarchies within public schools. My study finds it necessary for education policy and practice in Ontario (and in Canada) to grasp race more broadly and to recognize Orientalism (a precursor to Islamophobia) as a shaping logic of education along with settler colonialism and

anti-Black racism (Smith, 2016; Perera & Razack, 2014). Disrupting popular cultural discourses on Islam and Muslims will require intentional actions to understand how Muslims have been (and continue to be) racialized discursively and systemically and how this racialization is implicit to White supremacy. For this reason, I conclude that the dismantling of Islamophobia in schools should be enacted through a reconceptualising of Islamophobia as a racism.

10.1.2 Expanding Critical Race Scholarship

My study finds that analysing Islamophobia as a form of structural racism that operates in schools and through the practices of schoolteachers and leaders requires greater connection to global racial histories and contemporary social hierarchies within Canadian society. I found Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism to be effective tools in beginning a journey toward this goal. Adopting such a theoretical framework in this study of Islamophobia unsettles "reductive identitarian formulae, which tend to see 'Islam' and the 'West' as deep, stable, ongoing cultural entities rooted in distractive moral principles." (Kundunani, 2017, p.38). It also enabled a critical examination of participants' narratives which surface the ways a gendered Islamophobia is "produced and is reproduced" in schools (Zine, 2002).

This dissertation, meanwhile, contributes the counter-narratives of Muslim women school leaders, voices that continue to be under-represented and under-examined within Critical Race research in education. The stories of women in this study demonstrate that normalising technologies and tools are intended to produce school leaders who enact a Whiteness imbued in Christianness. This is most blatant in moments of performing Christian traditions (e.g., Christmas, Easter celebrations) and in instances of expressing Muslimness (e.g., wearing of the

hijab, fasting, not drinking alcohol). Muna reminds us of this struggle when she says, *"I can't be seen as the Muslim VP who 'cancelled Christmas'."* Rania, meanwhile, encounters staff who jokingly state that they often forget she is Muslim and question why she won't just join them for a glass of wine. Muslim women leaders experience schools as Christian spaces, as much as White spaces, compelling a rethinking of how Christianity (Christianness) is imprinted on Whiteness in schools. I found such an analysis to be lacking in current Critical Race education scholarship. Greater attention to theorizing of gendered Islamophobia (e.g., Zine, 2002,2004, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2022; Mirza, 2012, 2013; Ali Mahomed-Wilson, 2017, 2020) and critical race feminist research centering anti-Muslim racism in a post-9/11 world (e.g., Jiwani, 2010, 2017; Selod, 2019; Thobani, 2007, 2010, 2014; Razack, 2005, 2011, 2017, 2021, 2022), as I have done in this study, are necessary for education scholars, advocates, and policy-makers. This expansion to the Critical Race scholarship in K-12 education will enable analysis of and response to Islamophobia and the underlying, and largely unexamined, Christianity of Whiteness in Canadian public schools.

10.1.3 Emergent themes

School leaders in Ontario public schools continue to be largely White and Christian women and men. The discussion of Muslim school leaders' experiences in the analysis chapters, and the resulting depiction in the composites, indicate that Muslim women leaders are perceived as "space invaders." (Puwar, 2004). Their presence heightens prescribed "boundaries of who can pass as the universal human, and hence who can be the ideal figure of leadership." (Puwar, 2004, p.55) The proximity of the 'space invaders' to the previously reserved elite positions triggers processes of discrimination and harm discussed in my analysis of interviews and

autobiographical writing. These processes intend to reinforce historic racial boundaries of leadership and institution and maintain the gendered racialized discourses attached to Muslims. As such, the continued efforts across public school boards to diversify leadership, achieve employment equity, and sustain Muslim women in leadership roles must be accompanied by an unsettling of existing frameworks for education leadership in Ontario. This unsettling includes a re-visioning of school leadership, and the development of system supports for racialized and Muslim women administrators.

10.1.4 Offering composite counterstories as teachings

The study finds that composite counter-stories can serve to lift up the voices of female Muslim school leaders, expose discrimination and harms they face while unsettling existing understandings of school leadership. The composite counterstories represent a synthesis of the findings and complexity of being Muslim women in public spaces and institutions. The composites seek to give a multi-faceted and embodied view of Muslim women's lives to counter the White mainstream, one-dimensional and stereotypical understanding, and representations of Muslim women's lives in media, cultural discourses, and schools. The composite counterstories also make accessible the popular discourses and theorizing pertaining to Muslim women to help us recognise and understand what is typically invisible in institutions. The accessibility of the composites does not take away from the rigour of the preceding critical analysis that makes their composition possible. The critical and rigorous analysis and intentional construction of the composites renders them instructive for both Muslim women leaders and the public school system they navigate. While these stories cannot stand in for all Muslim women, they do offer us teachings that can be taken up in service of social change. In the composites I do not seek to

'represent' reality but rather offer the multiple truths through the embodied wisdom of Muslim women. The composites, and the dissertation more broadly, offer "new ways of knowing" Muslims in Canadian public institutions and allowing for layers, ambiguity, and paradox (Razack, 1998). The composite counterstories offer a significant intervention in this regard.

10.2 LOOKING FORWARD: FURTHER STUDIES AND ACTION NEEDED

In the following section, I discuss future directions for study and action suggested considering this dissertation:

10.2.1 Examining the complicity of 'secularism' in the racial reality of public schools

The narratives shared in the study suggests that being a Muslim (woman) leader in public schools surfaces imagined dynamics and assertions surrounding the concept of 'the secular' and an assumed impending injury to be caused to the 'secular' school by Muslim women's leadership. This further illuminates dominant societal fears of a Muslim invasion undoing 'secular' public institutions. Yet, analysis of secularism in schools does not appear in existing literature on racialized women's leadership experiences in English-speaking public schools. Further exploration of the ways the racial hierarchy and power relations within public schools are constructed through the mythology of the secular is warranted and necessary.

Participants in this study expressed frustration with the insistence of senior leaders, peers, and educators on the secularism of schools- a space they do not experience as such. But what is meant when education staff "use the language" of secular space? The findings in this project suggest that secularism of public schools continues to be equated with dominant Christian

cultures. Further, Islam, viewed as monolithic and static, is considered secularism's antithesis. Liberal and imperial frameworks shaping schools entrench secularism as a form of supremacy that is deeply embedded in contemporary Islamophobia (Blencowe, 2021). Secularism, "an expression of race, class, and gender privilege…and a laundered version of Judeo-Christianity," has become a tool for containing Muslims as an 'Other' within and beyond education (Spivak, 2012, p.393, cited in Blencowe, 2021). The insistence on the 'secular' has become a way to police particular forms of spirituality in schools while the assertion of privatised religion maintains the (Christian) privilege of those whose worldviews are centred and embedded in the structures, processes, content, and culture of education. Aiyah poignantly captures this in her own reflections,

> Being a Muslim leader is very, very challenging in an institution that is very Christian. It is very stressful. And I say that because of the number of different ways where this belief around being a secular system is communicated, and that it is OK somehow. The number of times that language actually comes up is a bit ridiculous. It's frustrating at every juncture, I find it very challenging… there is a silence around spirituality and faith and it's seen as something, or perceived as something, that is your business, that is done privately. It is challenging because for me, it's so central to who I am and how it is that I engage as a leader in my building.

In this 'secular' construct, Muslimness is to be left outside of the public institution (school) while "Christianity slides into the realm of culture and heritage and is embedded in Canadian life, and Islam visibly … [a] religion…[is to be] accommodated or tolerated, and in some cases adjudicated. [Christian] Culture, in contrast, is assessed as part of our values and heritages and thus escapes scrutiny." (Selby, Barras & Beaman, 2018, p.184) To 'claim secularism' as a denial of racism is also evident in the stories of the participants as they encounter a continued disregard and denial of Islamophobia in Canadian schools and society, and the erasure of global and transnational harm to Muslims in school discourses. Several of the study participants speak of the dismissal of Islamophobia and violence against Muslim in Canada and elsewhere and the

view that attention is unwarranted in 'secular' public schools, "*Islamophobia is seen as about religion, but schools are secular"(Salma).*

Understanding this use of secularism in schools compels an investigation of the origins of secularism and the history awakened in its contemporary invocation in public spaces. The continued insistence that schools are secular, "ignores the voices of those that experience [them] as Christian." (Selby, Barres & Beaman, 2018, p.120) Structures like 'faith-based accommodation' uphold a Christian normativity as Muslims (and other faith groups) are expected to seek permission and follow a strict protocol to achieve 'acceptable' expression of religiosity in public spaces. Beyond the inter-relational impact, the discursive constructions of a normalised Christianity disguised as secularism and an Islam imagined as invasive to public space, drive the creation of policies, procedures, and institutional actions which only further the scrutiny and control of Muslim individuals and students, and the Muslim woman leader.

The leaders in this project are attuned to the various conceptions of the secular and the ways they are invoked to (re)claim the space as White and Christian and to erase the need to confront the harm caused to Muslim students and staff. These leaders navigate their spaces, attempting to teach their colleagues about that which is unspoken. Layla explains to us how and when to take on teaching others about being Muslim, "*I started educating people, you know, explaining this is what it means. And that's how this is and this is the reason for that and all that. But then, too, I felt I'm justifying [their thinking]. Why am I explaining myself to someone? Do I have to, should I be doing that?"* The leaders in this study narrate a reality that remains invisible even to the antiracist research and advocacy in public education. Further studies are required to

investigate secularism as a disguised or "laundered" Christianity enmeshed in a colonial Whiteness and White supremacy that shapes education cultures, practices, and policies. My participants find that the myth of secularism operating in Ontario schools maintains Islamophobia, colonialism, and other forms of racism. Such a finding can inform the antiracist and anti-Islamophobia work of education advocates and organisations and contributes to a re-imagining of institutional cultures so that they will be invested in the success of Muslim women school leaders.

10.2.2 Going beyond 'hiring' diversity to institutional/leadership change

Provincial policy frameworks and action plans have compelled Ontario school boards (particularly in the Toronto area) to recognise the leadership capacity and skill of racialized aspiring leaders. It is in such a context that the Muslim women of this study enter the role of school leaders. Implementing these provincial goals of increased diversity in leadership enables school boards to reify the 'goodness' of the existing (White) education system. This symbolic and surface gesture supports a view of schools as tolerant and benevolent and eclipses the "codified territoriality and the social relationship borne of stratified property rights protected for Whites and inaccessible for people of colour." (Patel, 2015, p.660) Increasing diversity, however, may not always be the force for good claimed to deliver us into a post-racial age (e.g.Razack, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007; Goldberg; 2013). Critics emphasize that the 'diversity approach' can be complicit in masking (and therefore maintaining) racial injustice. Study participants' narratives attest to this reality in that their presence is not enough to bring about racial justice and social change. In everyday interactions, education staff (staff, peers, superiors) reassert 'thresholds of tolerance' for the Muslim woman leader, confirming her

containment (Jaffe-Walter, 2016). Participants express feeling immense pressure to adopt practices and perform leadership in ways that counter their own values as leaders and sense of self. As Salma explains it, *"sometimes you just have to play the game."* The use of 'expectations' and 'tools' for coercion and reprisal is intended to maintain the status quo of public-school leadership. The counterstories of Muslim women leaders demonstrate that increased diversity in leadership without structural and cultural changes to the teaching and educational practice and cultures of public schools does not change the hierarchy, marginalisation, and inequitable realities of schools. Instead, it leaves Muslim women leaders disenfranchised and barred from participation in their own aspirations for leadership.

In her analysis of higher education institutions as sites of White property, Patel (2015) suggests that "when people are reared to believe that the privileges they enjoy are due to their inherent superiority and/or hard work and that the inverse is true for those how have lower status, this logic appears through entitlement and disdain which leads to feelings of resentment when the entitlement is perceived to be denied by those less worthy." (p.661) This is evident with K-12 staff and peers "reared to believe…their own superiority" and who read the arrival of the Muslim woman leader as improbable and undeserved. Patel (2015) suggests that diversity-focused hiring that does not reckon with such White property entitlements in institutions results in containment and harm toward incoming racialized staff. Containment is an implicit feature of this 'increased diversity.' This is evident amongst study participants who are expected to "deliver racist institutions from the appearance of racism" through their embodied presence and accept the gendered racialized targeting and violence that may emerge in the throes of preserving schools as White property. Without addressing both the discursive and structural truths that maintain an

invisible and unspoken gendered Islamophobia in education, Muslim women leaders will continue to encounter erasure and the expectations for compliance and tools of coercion/ containment.

Substantive cultural and structural change requires intentional system analysis and new policies to address the ways racialized school leaders are supported, valued, and empowered (Patel, 2015). We must also contend with the ways Whiteness continues to shape and circulate in schools. My study finds that a courageous stance is necessary to name these and to implement specific measures that disenthrall schools from Whiteness. Along with examining Whiteness, it is time for the education to become "attuned to the knowledges and skills that [Muslim women leaders] bring with them, a stance that is necessary for a long-term goal: cultural transformation rather than the mere inclusion in a system that is expert in refreshing its stratifying logics." (Patel, 2015, p.672). Without commitments to address the experiences of Muslim women leaders we foreclose the possibility of rethinking inequities that maintain gendered Islamophobia in schools. This, quite possibly as some of my participants claim ("*When you look for formal supports and find none, it becomes very obvious that that's very intentional*,"- Noura) allows the continued punishment of Muslim women leaders for making these inequities visible.

Permitting Muslim women and other racialized administrators to lead in authentic and transformative ways necessitates the implementation of supports and protection against racial targeting and harm by staff, peers, and senior administrators. My participants call for intentional learning that promotes a recognition of patterns of conduct and system policy/ practice that buttress the preservation of Whiteness through the harm of Muslim women leaders. Such

learning for all leaders can be conducted by school boards and leader associations (e.g. CODE, OPSOA, OPC) and must include attention to how Whiteness operates in schools and in society and the ways it resists disruption, interpersonally and systemically. It will also be necessary that associations go beyond the provision of affinity spaces for racialized leaders to taking direction from such groups regarding the vision for leadership and the forms of support required for greater Muslim women leaders' retainment. Processes and tools for intervention and accountability for the racial targeting and harm to school leaders by staff, peers, or senior administrators are necessary. The tools need to shake off the conventional models prevalent within the Ontario leadership paradigm which ignore systems of oppression. Further, a cadre of personnel with experience and expertise in antiracism and school leadership may be appointed to support the system and its leaders in being responsive to the racial targeting of school leaders by staff and community. Finally, my study advances a reimagining of leadership development programs for the principal and superintendent qualification process which centre race and racism, going beyond general references to equity and diversity. It is incumbent on associations and the Ontario College of Teachers to engage in specific learning and actions that historicize Islamophobia and locate it within the White supremacy observed in schools and school systems. Leaders at all levels of the education system need understanding and skills to respond to processes of racialization entrenched in public education. In another paper (Aoudeh et al, 2022), the team discussed the leader knowledges and capacities needed to subvert Whiteness in public education and offer a revisioning of the Ontario Leadership Framework. The experiences of participants in this dissertation point to specific understanding and actions to address gendered Islamophobia as an aspect of revisioning educational leadership in the province.

10.3 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

In the previous sections, I have discussed the key findings of this study and the future explorations it suggests. In the following, I highlight my theoretical contribution and the role of these composite counternarratives in scholarship. The stories of Muslim women leaders in this study offer us insight regarding the ways the claim of secularism shapes schools as white property. The duty of educators to "inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality," is explicitly stated in the Education Act and is deeply embedded in school culture. Yet, it remains invisible to most who adhere to the claim of 'secular' schools. Claims of the 'secular' have long served to signify progress and maturity of White societies and institutions. At the same time, this assertation denies the presence and the influence of White Christian worldviews in shaping the values, culture, policies, and practices of schools, a reality recognized and named by Muslim women school leaders. Secularism works to disguise Christianity as it slides into the realm of culture, it also hides the power relations at play in public education. In disarticulating religion from phenotypic conceptions of difference that are salient to dominant understandings of racism, secularism works to deny anti-Muslim racism/ Islamophobia insidious in public schools. The stories of study participants show the 'secular' experienced as a form of policing of the Muslim, simultaneously reifying the binary trope of the Muslim woman as 'meek' and 'monster' (Kapoor, 2019). Through the repeated assertion of 'secular' space, White Christian worldviews and ways of being continue to be depicted as under threat from the (always gendered) Muslim phantom. This study has shown the presence of Muslim women leaders as an opportunity to further consolidate whiteness of schools and the instrumentality of claims of secularism in this effort.

The composites seek to bring this along with the rest of the findings into the discourse of public education. Using the different sources of data enables composites to stand against majoritarian narratives that on the one hand exalt multicultural secular schools and on the other hand align all that is right with whiteness. They offer an articulation of how being a Muslim woman is lived in schools. It was helpful in the journey toward their development to have a deep knowledge of the context to ensure that composites can fit the data. It is therefore important to underscore that while the composites are a compilation of the narratives shared by the participants that they come to fruition through my authorship. It is the aspiration of this project that the counter-stories elicit more complex conversations about the ways race and racism operates in schools and the construction of leadership in these spaces.

10.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This dissertation examined the experiences of seven Muslim women administrators in Ontario public schools in the Greater Toronto Area. Although the counter-stories offer profound insight into the discursive and systemic realities of their experiences as Muslim women leaders in spaces of school, they cannot stand in and speak for all. More studies on how intersections of difference impact on Muslim women's leadership experiences might offer greater complexity to the counter-stories presented in this study. The women who participated in this study became school leaders in the last 10 years, during a time of increased attention to equity in education and culturally responsive schools. As such, all of the participants were familiar with issues pertaining to identity, oppression, and Islamophobia. While this may not be a limitation of the study, it did inform participants' awareness of racial hierarchies in schools and the meaning making attached to their experiences.

10.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

This project was a journey toward emotional and intellectual healing. Its origins began with conversations in the hallway and after workshops with racialized leaders, Muslim and non-Muslim, during my time in a district EDI (equity, diversity, inclusion) role. Becoming a vice-principal a few years later further opened my eyes to the insidiousness of Whiteness in schools in ways I had not recognised as a Muslim classroom teacher. My racialization as Palestinian and Muslim became the focus for my school's staff in my every action, every decision, even every expression of kindness or humour as a school administrator. The lack of understanding on the part of my well-intentioned White principal partner who advised that I 'turn the other cheek' to every aggression and challenge had me looking elsewhere for support. My system-assigned mentor, a retired White woman principal, was equally unable to grasp the nature of what was unfolding and reverted to advice about building relationships with staff to remedy the situation. Like the women in this study, I found the absence of structures to turn to within the board and in the principal professional association left me isolated and depleted.

This project and the writing of the dissertation became a way to grapple with the realities seen and heard in my own experience and that of my Muslim sisters. It afforded me a language to make meaning of these experiences and to locate them in a broader context socially, historically, and discursively. Consequently, I came to understand the ways White supremacy globally and locally travels through Islamophobia. Although the specifics of political imaginaries change over time, Muslims continue to be viewed through a gendered lens as monstrous and threatening in Western multicultural and settler societies. Popular cultural discourses propagate an anti-Muslim affect, reinforcing the demand to discipline Muslim

subjects and thus authorizing the containment and erasure of Muslim women in public spaces (Razack, 2022). As Razack (2022) explains, White subjects and White nations "appoint themselves as keepers of the universal" and invoke imagined ideals to preserve the structures and practices of Whiteness (p.8).

The analysis work that led to the composite counter-narratives of this dissertation makes clear the importance of engaging Christianness as part of the cultural calculus of Whiteness to make visible realities that are often unseen. It is incumbent for Critical Race studies in education to take on how Christianity is critical to maintenance of White supremacy in Canada. Although there is work on the bind of Whiteness and Christianity in the other sectors and contexts, there is yet to be sustained attention to its operation in Canadian societies and institutions. The emerging field of Critical Muslim studies may support such a direction but will need to adopt an intersectional analysis to allow for an understanding of the complexities of Canadian multicultural and settler society and its public institutions.

Finally, as Muslim women and leaders, we must acknowledge the ways our bodies and our commitments to serve students are simultaneously leveraged to rescue Whiteness. When we do not or cannot offer this rehabilitation, we are punished for threatening the social order Whiteness seeks to maintain. This study demonstrates that Muslim women leaders need to build our own collectives and spaces outside of existing structures to maintain our sense of self, to work with community, and to drive change both within and outside the institution. The hope offered through 'alternative' spaces does not diminish the emotional labour, time, and resources that are needed to ensure the success of the collective. Nonetheless, the participants in this

project make clear that our continuance in our roles as school leaders and our ability to support others on their way to school leadership is in living and working with and through our racialized and Muslim communities. In coming together in interviews and then focus group, we were afforded the opportunity to affirm intolerable realities that we may at times believe to be of our own making. During the collective conversation, we could disclose experiences that had never been spoken publicly. The process of speaking, being heard, offering and receiving witness became a gateway to imagining other ways of support and continuance. "*Truth is, the space lands differently here from some of the other spaces I am part of, being only women and all being Muslim it makes a difference."* -Noura. The project has been a first step to finding a path in leadership that transgresses the one prescribed by the liberal multicultural school.

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Appendix A- Section 5 of Form TD2: Research Ethics Protocol Form for Dissertation

Recruitment Procedure

An invitation to participate will be sent through Twitter (see below*) and through the distribution lists of a few educator contacts across the GTA (in both the Muslim and non-Muslim community). The invitation will include several methods to contact me. Those who express interest will be contacted by email/phone to share the scope of the project and to share some of the details regarding time commitment, process, and my accountabilities as a researcher. There will be a small stipend-gift card for participating that can be provided in a format determined by the participant (i.e., to which retailer). Should the person express interest in moving forward they will be invited to a brief informal meeting at a time and location of their choosing for introduction and sharing of the informed consent process.

***Muslim women who are principals and vice-principals in English public school in GTA. An opportunity to be part of a research project about your leadership in schools. Qissati: Muslima's Stories of Leading. Your story matters. Please DM or email: MuslimaStories@gmail.com for further details.**

Methods

Method #1 - Interviews

Once participants are identified for this study, each will be invited to an informal introductory meeting. The purpose of this initial contact is to begin to build relationship. An overview of the study will be briefly reiterated, and consent forms will be shared, read together and discussed. Participants will have the option to sign at the time or to return the form at the first formal interview. This meeting will be an opportunity for the participant to ask any questions about the project or about me as the researcher and to begin to feel at ease about sharing her stories.

There will be 2 individual interview opportunities and one focus group. Interviews will take place prior to the focus group. The interviews will take place in locations and times determined by the participant (online in the context of Covid-19). During the first interview, we will review the overarching research question which guides this project and narrators will be provided with a few broad topics (Appendix 2) that may assist them in beginning their storytelling. Rather than having these topics be informed by the literature, which maintains control of the storytelling by the researcher, they will simply be prompts to elicit the stories which the narrator determines to be important (e.g. tell me about being a Muslim girl in school, in Canada; tell me about your first year as an administrator; what do you want me to know about being a Muslim woman school leader). I will also have a few more structured questions should the participant be reticent to share (also in Appendix 2). The interview will be audio recorded. I will take notes during the meeting and compose a reflective journal after each encounter.

The second interview will be based on a preliminary review of the first to identify possible areas for further exploration or clarification. The interview will be transcribed and offered to the participant ahead of time should she want to elaborate on something not highlighted in my own review. The transcript may also serve as a springboard for further stories.

Interviews (individual and group) will take place over a 3-month period based on the availability of the participant and will be as long as the narrator needs them to be. The participant will have my contact information and be invited to contact me should she want to talk further about anything related to her interview (clarify, add on, share emotions etc…) in between interview dates.

Methods #2 - Focus Group

Based on field notes/reflective journals and a review of all transcriptions from individual interviews, themes will be extracted (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2013). These themes will capture ideas repeated by multiple narrators in multiple stories and will be expressed as theme statements. Statements will be shared with participants and input will be invited regarding the appropriateness of the themes as the basis for focus group conversation.

The focus group will be arranged at a time and place accessible to participants. Child minding will be provided should it be supportive to the participants. Refreshments and a meal will be provided at the onset, as an expression of appreciation and as a way for participants to meet one another outside of the formality of the research. A prayer space and access to running water will be considerations in the selection of the location. Name tags will be provided, and seating will be arranged in a circle. A research assistant (a fellow graduate student) will be present to assist with notetaking. The conversation will be audio-recorded. Before beginning we will review parameters of confidentiality.

- Open with a land acknowledgement connected to the context of the research.
- Introductory remarks communicate the purpose for which the group has been assembled, the parameters around discussion (time/space for all to share, respect of different opinions, confidentiality).
- Welcome participants and thank them for attending. The time we need is determined by you – take the time you need to share, to add on, to question.
- Note taker in the room will be introduced and their purpose is made explicit.
- Explain the process of the focus group interview and ask if people have any questions.
- Reminder it's okay if there are divergent views, as focus group interviews are not meant to achieve consensus. Sharing can be in the form of a story, an opinion, a reflection, even a question to the group.
- The list of themes emerging from interviews (after participant feedback) will be shared (chart) and invite participants to engage with any of the themes – no particular order needs to be followed.
- Prompts (What do you think of …? Would you explain further? Would you give me an example of what you mean? Would you say more? Is there anything else?) will be used only if needed.

In closing

- Ask if people have any final thoughts to share.
- Explain what will happen next (e.g., data will be analysed, how findings will be shared back).
- Thank people for coming.
- Debrief and supports available for participants (e.g., Naseeha).

- All observations or reflections after the participants have left the session will be recorded in a reflective journal.
- Privacy: notes, consent forms, audio-recording etc. stored in a secure location. Everything is labelled with the date and time of the focus group interview meeting, and notes/transcripts do not contain any identifying information.

Analysis

Audio-recording and note taking during interviews will aid in ensuring the accuracy of what is shared. There will always be, however, a level of interpretation. Maintaining authenticity will require sharing transcripts with participants, and asking them to review transcripts for accuracy, encouraging the story-teller to make whatever changes she deems appropriate. Then repeating this process with the drafted individual stories. Narratives need to convey the story-telling style and words of the narrator. Asking participants to review their stories with the goal of hearing their own voice will encourage feedback for greater authenticity.

Data will then be analyzed through an iterative process that allows for both reflection and inductive analysis. Once the individual and group conversations are transcribed and the autobiographical accounts written, an initial review will determine the codes. The first engagements with stories will draw on Saldana's (2016) in vivo method because it is attentive to the participants' own language and voice and promotes an immersion in the stories as told by the narrator. Additional first cycle coding methods to be considered include emotion coding and values coding – which surface the participant's sense-making of structures, processes and the impact of these and interactions on Muslim women in schools. For all *emic* coding, I will be paying attention to embedded counter-stories and majoritarian narratives in the transcripts and accounts (Cook, 2013). Concept coding will also be used in the initial cycle guided by the research question and the sub-questions: *How do Muslim women principals and vice-principals in public K-12 schools in Ontario author their experiences of leadership in schools? What are the stories they tell?*

1. How do race-gender-faith intersect and shape the participants' stories of leadership?
2. How do existing structures and discourses impact the leadership of Muslim women?
3. In what ways do participants describe how they sustain themselves as leaders and as Muslim women?

As suggested by Saldana (2016), initial coding, particularly concept coding, will be accompanied by analytic memos to explore the "abstractions and generalities" that emerge from the use of the codes. The analytic memos present a space to think through the process, the meaning I am attaching to codes, the assumptions and thoughts that shape the decisions made through the analytic process.

The emerging categories from this initial round of coding will be placed in conversation with the relevant concepts and salient themes from CRT and CRF (focused on Muslim women) scholarship. It is anticipated that axial coding will be used at this stage as codes will be sorted, grouped, relabelled. Cook (2013) cautions against the danger of biasing results when using *etic* codes (from theory) and encourages mitigating for this by staying close to participants' words. To this end, she produced narratives for each of her participants prior to the development of composite counterstory. The production of the individual narratives provides an opportunity to

deeply know the narrators in nuanced ways- for example through their body language, tone of voice, and expressions of personality including humour and idiosyncrasies. These can then be leveraged in the development of the composite characters for the final counter-stories.

Appendix B - Interview Guide

Opening statement (include goal/ and guiding questions, confidentiality, recording, and general structure of the interview).

Can you please tell me about your journey to become an educator?

Can you please share the story of becoming a school leader?

What do you want me to know about your experience of leading in a school as a Muslim woman? What stories do you want to share?

Tell me about being a Muslim woman and a school leader. What has the experience been like for you?

(Back-pocket prompts
How is your Muslimness (e.g. hijab if worn) taken up staff, community, students?
What do you think shapes the way your Muslim identity is taken up in school?
Can you share a story(s) about the challenges you have encountered being Muslim and being a school leader?
In what ways have you been supported or not by system/ your supervisor in being Muslim woman in this role?
How do you navigate being Muslim and being a school leader? What is important to you?
In what ways do you maintain mind-body- spirit connection as a Muslim school leader?)

Appendix C - Informed Consent Form

Date:
Study Name: Qissati: Muslima's Stories of School Leadership
Researcher name:

Nada Aoudeh, Doctoral Candidate, York University. Principal Investigator
naoudeh1@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research:
This is a study for Muslim women by a Muslim woman. It is an act of emancipation – to hear and understand how our sisters sustain themselves in the face of a legacy that has constructed us as Other, inferior, and alien. It is a space to learn how some navigate staying whole, remain anchored in the ethics that brought us to leadership, and continue to serve the students who need us to be "exceptional."
This study asks: How do Muslim women principals and vice-principals in public K-12 schools in Ontario author their experiences of leadership in schools? What are the stories they tell?
This study will begin to address an existing gap in education literature, an undertheorized area of marginalization in schools, through the lens of leadership. Exposing structures and discourses of schools which foster and uphold dehumanization and exclusion of Muslim students, family and staff/leaders contributes to the dismantling, as well as visioning of other ways of learning and leading. This study will explore the specific ways Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism and sexism intersect and play out on the bodies of Muslim women through their stories of leadership and continuance.
This study will involve individual and group interviews. The purpose of each is to gather stories of the participants about their experiences of leading while being a Muslim woman. These stories, along with that of the researcher, we will be written, analyzed and presented as a dissertation, as well as forming the basis for articles and conference presentations. An executive summary of key findings will be shared with interested school boards and National Council for Canadian Muslims.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:
Each participant will be asked to participate in two individual interviews over three months- the time (and location) to be determined by the participant. The length of the interview will be at the discretion of the participant.
In addition, one group interview (focus group) will take place after the 2nd interview in which the emerging themes from the interviews will be discussed and explored as a group. In light of the Covid-19 restrictions, all of the encounters will take place online in a time that is convenient to the participants. The platform will be Googlemeet.
The focus group will be 1.5-2 hours.
All participants will be offered a $100 gift card in the format of choice (grocer, petrol station, drug store, iTunes, bookstore, movies).

Risks and Discomforts
There are limited but noteworthy risks to the participants in this study. Psychological and social risks are possible if participants share stories, perspectives or opinions in oral history interviews that surface emotions of hurt or sadness. Therefore, all efforts will be made to ensure that participants are not put in undesirable positions and contact information of counselling sources are made available. The research team will maintain confidentiality between participants. No value judgments will be placed on participant interview responses and participants are free to withdraw at any time from the interview without penalty or withhold consent for the collection, use and/or disclosure of any information that involves them, without penalty. All participants will be provided a transcript of their interview to ensure they are comfortable with the transcription and to ensure its accuracy.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:
This study seeks to claim space in educational leadership literature for Muslim women. Through the study there will be the opportunity to reflect on experiences and connect with other Muslim women leaders. The outcomes of the study can inform policy decisions and leadership learning in public schools by making transparent the existing structures and cultures which maintain discrimination and marginalization of Muslim staff and leaders in particular.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you decide to stop participating, you may withdraw without penalty, financial or otherwise, and you will still receive the promised inducement.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:
The study will not make reference to any people or specific events that may cause social, professional or psychological harm to individuals. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of people. The documents (printed transcripts) will be kept for 3 years upon completion of the study and then discarded. The recording of the individual/focus group interviews and note-taking during interviews/focus groups will not be associated with identifying information. All information supplied during the interview will be held in confidence. All interviews/focus groups will be digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Interview data will be secured (electronically) and kept under lock and key (group meeting notes, audio recordings and audio/visual data) for 3 years following the completion of the study at which point it will be erased and destroyed. The computers containing research data will be kept away from public areas. Computer passwords will be used on data files and computers will be equipped with

firewalls and anti-virus software. All data will not be used for purposes other than those intended by this research. Any USB keys will be encrypted for further security. Participants will also be provided with a copy of the final research report upon completion of the study. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Unless you choose otherwise, you will receive a pseudonym to be attached to your narrative, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The final results of the research will be presented in a composite format thereby enhancing the anonymity of all participants.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at naoudeh1@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Aparna Mishra Tarc at AMishraTarc@edu.yorku.ca. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Education at 416-736-5018; gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I <<fill in participant name here>>, consent to participate in Qissati: Musslima's Stories of Leadership conducted by Nada Aoudeh. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

- I consent to the audio-recording of the group meetings.
- I would like a summary of the results of the study.
- I consent to having the findings of this study shared with the larger educational community in the form of reports, presentations and/or academic journal articles.

Signature _____ Date _____

Participant

Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator