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Traditional Muslim Social Workers in Secular Contexts

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Abstract

In the current context of social work that advocates for inclusivity and diversity, amidst the growing traditional Muslim population in the Greater Toronto Area, the following qualitative study addresses a pressing subject and provides insights that can promote meaningful change. By engaging in six in-depth semi-structured interviews, the following papers address how religious, traditional Muslim social workers navigate and reconcile their traditional beliefs in a secularized social work context. The traditional Muslim has a complex relationship with Western models of social welfare, as evidenced by critiques from scholars such as Azmi (1991), Rasli (2022), and Ali (1989). These scholars highlight the traditional Muslim worldview is grounded in divine revelation and accordingly perceives social science frameworks through a unique lens, being built on Islamic principles. Moreover, an interpretive phenomenological approach (Beck, 2021) paired with Edward Said's postcolonial theory (1978) within the enquiry revealed rich themes that delved deeper into underlying structural oppressions beyond the participant's personal experience. These themes included: ideological conflicts, a hostile context, and coping strategies adopted by participants. Despite the challenging context and emotional strain, participants note the value of social work skills and how they reconcile their religious worldview with secular social work practices. The study exposes the need for Social Work education to overhaul its anti-Muslim biases and assumptions to accommodate diverse religious perspectives within educational settings and the field.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is home to a substantial and growing Muslim population, marking 14% of Toronto's population (CBC, 2019). Muslim populations historically have been identified as a highly practicing religious grouping, with the dimensions of religiosity and spirituality being integral facets of their member's lives (Mark, 2004). The Toronto region has witnessed a significant increase in mosques, escalating from 53 to 136 in the past decade (Masjid in Toronto, 2019). These mosques serve as hubs for unofficial social work practice, providing various supports: rapport building, relationships of reciprocity, tangible supports (long-term employment and housing, etc.), and opportunities for civic engagement (Lamia, 2022).

This growing population of traditional Muslims within Toronto, much like any other demographic, exhibits an array of social needs. However, effectively addressing specific needs requires "professional work in a way consistent with the expectations … regard[ed] as appropriate" (Este, 2007, p. 95). The term Muslim has a variety of interpretations; thus, for clarity, the focus of the study pertains to traditional Muslims—those who follow a long-established normative body of revealed primary sources and teachings from the Qur'an, believed to be the directly revealed word of God, and the *Sunnah*, the sayings, and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Nasr, 1994). This clarification is essential as a "Muslim" could fall into one of the four primary religious perspectives in the contemporary Muslim world: traditionalist, messianic, fundamentalist, and modernist (Azmi, 1991). Correspondingly, traditional Muslim social workers aim to honour such expectations, spanning various aspects from a Traditional Islamic welfare model, *Ummah*, *Dhikr*, *Adm-Tahqeer*, *fitra*, *huqooq-ul-awlaad,* and more.

In comparison to the Western model of social work which has its origins in Christianity, religions but today is largely secular, a traditional Islamic model would reflect a metaphysical

reality in which the human has three dimensions the *Jism* (physical body), *Nafs* (the psyche or individual personality), and *Ruh* (the Essential Divine Substance) (Azmi, 1991). Traditional Islamic welfare instructs not to be deluded into focusing exclusively on the lower two human dimensions of the *nafs* and *jism,* which is the almost exclusive focus of the Western Eurocentric model. The lower two dimensions are considered necessary elements of concern in the *Dunya* (the material world). Still, they are not the primary and most essential element required for human fulfillment, which is the quest for spiritual realization of the Ruh deep within the human being (Azmi, 1991). This pursuit has an essential social dimension as it can only be fulfilled for the vast majority through collective activity as part of the *Ummah* (the broader worldwide body of Muslims). The well-being of all community members is essential to everyone's fulfillment (Brodard, 2022). Thus, Adm-Tahqeer (Stigma Reduction) practices are integral as they build rapport and reconnect service users to the broader Muslim community, fostering acceptance (Lamia, 2022). *Dhikr* (Divine Remembrance) is vital for steering focus away from the materialism of the *nafs,* and *jism* gravitates towards and draws users back to the *Fitra* state (Lamia, 2022). *Fitra* embodies the innate human impulse towards positive actions that foster spiritual growth and personal well-being, signifying the 'original purity' or 'original disposition' (Abdullah, 2015).

While applying such principles sounds promising, the problem arises within Canadian institutions' secularized framework for social work practice and education that generally separates the Church from the state and accordingly lacks accommodation towards religious perspectives, more specifically. Elsayed et al. explain that Social Work has accommodated some religiously affiliated social work practices such as Catholic Children's Aid or Jewish Children's Aid (2022); however, by and large, the provisions did not wholly address the diverse needs of all religious identities. Nonetheless, this lack of accommodation can foster discriminatory practices and often lead to intense feelings of alienation, underutilization, and under-participation in dominant social work activity (Keller, 2022). The dismissal of traditional

religious approaches to social work has contributed to the experience of discrimination by students of several religious backgrounds, including Muslims and evangelical Christians. Experiences of discrimination may include traditional religious practitioners being disproportionately critiqued, including questioning student abilities, instructing students to exclude their beliefs, and even outright threats to withhold student success in obtaining degrees (Thyer & Myers, 2009). Strategies in response to the discrimination marginalization by religious practitioners have led to various less-than-ideal coping strategies, including silence and 'a selective ear,' adapting one's worldview to fit in, offloading incompatible cases to others, remaining in a familiar group (Ranz, 2021; Thaller 2011). Unfortunately, aspects of traditional Islamic social work practice and education remain an underexplored field. This practice research paper project aims to help fill this gap.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Academic literature related to how traditional Muslim social workers reconcile their religious beliefs and navigate secularized social work contexts is virtually non-existent. After an extensive search and review, I found little literature specific to this question. Consequently, I expanded the search to explore related themes that could guide me in my area of focus. I identified three related literature categories, which I will review below. These three categories are (1) experiences of religious social work students and practitioners in education and practice with their coping strategies, (2) Islamic social work practice in secular contexts, and (3) theoretical perspectives on traditional Islamic social work.

Literature Search Strategy

The articles identified for this literature review were obtained through a comprehensive search utilizing the following academic databases: JSTOR, ProQuest, Omni Search, and Google Scholar. Specific journals such as the *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (JSSR), and the American Journal of Islam and Society (AJIS) were also accessed. During the search, the following key terms were utilized: "Traditional Islamic Social Work," "Reconciling Faith," and "Secular Social Work." Since it was difficult to find scholarly sources on the research focus, the search was extended using the alternative terms of: "Spirituality in social work," "Coping strategies," "Religious discrimination," "Secularization," "Canada," and "United States." The Boolean operator "and" was used, and neither quotation marks were included to broaden the search scope and retrieve more related content. Additionally, citation chaining was employed by reviewing reference lists to find interconnected literature.

The inclusion criteria included individuals adhering to traditional Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) and applying their faith principles in social work or the social

sciences. Texts that explored the complexities and dilemmas encountered when integrating religious beliefs into the secularized domains of social work were also included. Various exclusion criteria were also set to ensure the research's focus and relevance. Literature from non-social science fields, such as STEM disciplines, was excluded. Furthermore, non-theistic perspectives, overly broad aspects of spirituality, assimilation practices/strategies, and non-English literature were omitted.

Traditional Islam/Muslim?

Given that my research focus explores traditional Muslim practitioners of social work, it is necessary to clarify the terms “traditional Muslim” and “traditional Islam.” Most of the literature explored in the review neglects to define the terms altogether—those who do define the terms often provide loose, subjective interpretations. To clarify the research focus, I need to clarify what I mean by these terms informed by religious literature and my personal religious experience. Islam is a worldwide religious civilization with many forms and expressions, but the overwhelming number of followers follow a long-established normative body of revealed sources and teachings (Azmi, 1991). Islam has two primary sources of guidance: the Qur’an, believed to be the directly revealed word of God, and the *Sunnah*, the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad. Traditional Islam comprises the teachings of the two primary sources of revelation and the normative interpretation of these by the long-established tradition of *Ulama* (religious scholars) (Nasr, 1994). Subsequently, the traditional Muslim adheres to these normative interpretations (Topolski, 2018).

Religious Social Work Students within the Secular Context

One area of research related to my research focus was the experience of religious social work students and practitioners. Mayhew et al. (2014) contribute significantly to this area through a quantitative study utilizing the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey. The

sample for their cross-sectional study included 633 college juniors from two institutions, a private research university and a liberal arts college, during the spring of 2011. Their paper informs of North American colleges' prevailing liberalizing and secularizing impact on students' political outlooks, societal values, and religious orientations. They focus their study on three self-identified worldviews: religious majority, religious minority, and non-religious (Mayhew et al., 2014). The authors conclude that religious minority students perceive a more favourable campus climate than religious majority students. However, these findings are not consistent with the conclusions drawn by other scholars (Baum et al., 2014; Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Hodge, 2003, 2006, 2007; Mayhew et al., 2014; Thyer & Myers, 2009; Thaller, 2011). Mayhew et al.'s quantitative study has limitations in fully capturing the complex nature of religious discrimination experiences. Additionally, it relies on a limited sample size of just two universities with an overall limited response rate of 17.36%.; as the authors noted, "the small number of institutions limits the generalizability of these findings" (Mayhew et al., 2014, p. 232).

Hodge (2006) delves further into the literature on religious discrimination within social work by studying 391 U.S.-based religiously identifying Christian MSW students. Hodge attempted to determine how evangelical Christians, theologically liberal Christians, and mainline Christians view religious discrimination within social work education. Theologically conservative Protestants and Evangelical Christians, according to Hodge, were more likely to perceive discrimination. However, one limit of this study was it lacked a definition of 'religious discrimination,' thus offering the possibility of differing interpretations among participants. Furthermore, the absence of a thorough investigation into the reasoning underlying their reported perceptions highlights the need for qualitative research to obtain a fuller picture. Hodge, however, to address a limitation of his study, the absence of other religious viewpoints, including Muslims, mentioned that evangelical Christians' viewpoints could serve as a proxy for the perceptions of a broader community of traditional believers, like Muslims and Jews (Hodge, 2006). Hodge argues the necessity of adapting curricula to be more inclusive and foster safe

classroom spaces for open and meaningful discussion. Thaller (2009) similarly argues that introducing religious content doesn't equate to promoting religion, per se.

Thyer and Myers (2009) further extended the discussion with their qualitative inquiry on religious discrimination within social work programs delving into the narratives of social work students, faculty, and graduates who experienced the discrimination. They draw from their extensive experience of 45 years in the field and present a qualitative inquiry of case examples. The authors explicitly indicate that the paper's purpose was not due to any "concurrence with the religious views of the individuals described herein but rather from our perspective that violence is being done to social justice" (p.145). However, their connection to the topic through their personal experiences raises the concern that a potential bias within the study may be present, thus influencing how they interpret and present the data in favour of highlighting instances of religious discrimination. However, this personal connection can benefit the literature by providing valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the issue. Thyer and Myers reveal concerning incidents of discrimination against students and faculty expressing religious beliefs to such an extent that applicants' statements were derided for mentioning they held religious beliefs' (p. 146). Faculty members reinforced the secular context as some 'critique[d] Muslim students for wearing a religious headscarf to class and question[ed] the student's ability to function effectively as a social worker' (Thyer & Myers, 2009, p. 145). One participant was instructed to separate her Christian beliefs from her professional role and omit references to God for political correctness. Other participants were 'interrogated by faculty members who attacked her religious beliefs and threatened to withhold her degree' (Thyer & Myers, 2009, p. 145). Elaborating on the philosophical underpinnings of the discrimination, they observed that "social work programs seemingly enforced a strongly liberal political and social agenda as official school policies" (p.147). The case example data vividly portrays the ongoing issue of religious discrimination in social work programs.

Thaller (2011) and Ranz (2021) expanded this body of research through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with seven Christian social workers & students and twenty religiously identifying social work students (ten Jewish and ten Arab-Muslim), respectively. Thaller focused on self-described devout Christian social workers and students throughout the United States to further understand religious social workers' strategies to reconcile their beliefs in their education and practice amidst discrimination and hostility (2011). Thaller identified four reconciliation approaches. First, positive, and negative reactions. Negative, such as the fear of ridicule, social workers remain silent. Positive, perceiving their faith as a springboard for personal and professional growth. Second, feeling a sense of freedom after transitioning from university to the workplace to practice their faith openly. Third, practicing practitioner self-determination: When core religious beliefs conflict with practice, practitioners transfer the case to another social worker—fourth, challenging the status quo of their faith communities to accommodate differing worldviews.

Ranz (2021) explored how religious female Israeli Muslim and Jewish social work students coped as a minority in the face of hostility. They mention that Western American philosophies have significantly influenced Israeli academia since 1950, resulting in a liberal and secular environment within universities and colleges (Ranz, 2021). Like Thaller (2011), Ranz (2021) identified four pathways these students followed: one was ‘silence and a selective ear,’ where students kept their opinions to themselves; two, 'remaining in a familiar group,' connecting with people who shared their religious tradition, thus gaining a sense of legitimacy; Third, increased personal religiosity, with studies strengthening their religious identity; Lastly, 'opening the door,' embracing others, including homosexuals, lesbians, and Arabs, despite their differences.

Both Thaller (2011) and Ranz (2021) concluded with two similar themes: silence due to fear and adapting one's worldview. The collective articles illustrate the development of literature in understanding the experiences of discrimination among religious social work students and

practitioners and their reconciliation methods. However, there was a clear gap in specifically addressing traditionally identifying Muslim social work practitioners and how they reconcile their beliefs in a secularized context.

Muslim Social Work Practice

Amidst the contemporary secularized liberal context of social work, there is a growing amount of Muslim social work practitioners, service users, and literature surrounding Islamically grounded practices. The following literature section can offer insight into how practitioners navigate the delicate balance between their religious beliefs and social work principles.

Brodard's (2022) study discusses how Islamic social work organizations operate in Western Europe. He explores the apparent contradiction in Muslim-based organizations' claims of neutrality while primarily serving Muslim communities. His study combines data sources, including his doctoral research on Islamic organizations in Switzerland, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal stakeholder interviews. However, the organizations' prioritization of Muslims in services is due to their overrepresentation in marginalized groups, not due to religious preference. Moreover, the act of adapting practices to the secular and liberal context is strategic, aimed at obtaining funding and partnerships by framing the social work practice as respecting ‘cultural diversity’ while still adhering to Islamic principles such as solidarity of the *Ummah*, community empowerment, and focusing on the excluded and vulnerable.

The organizations mentioned by Brodard (2022) elaborate on the dimensions in which Islamic concepts are consistent with traditional understandings of secular, Western social work. They see themselves as part of the *Ummah* (Broader Muslim community) and consider it their responsibility to serve the service users who desire to receive support from those who” consider their religious and cultural perspectives” (Brodard, 2022, p. 29). Empowering the community involves supporting vulnerable populations like prisoners, the homeless, and youth through

advocacy and fostering self-reliance (Brodard, 2022). Brodard's inquiry offers a glimpse into understanding how Islamic social work organizations reconcile their religious principles with the secular and liberal context in Western Europe.

In her article, Irfan (2022) further explores Muslim social work practice by studying the role of religious communities in successfully resettling Muslim offenders using data drawn from life story interviews with 17 Muslim male offenders in England and Wales. Her study sheds light on the profound impact of religious and community support. She explores how offenders achieve desistance, which means abstaining from crime despite challenges, and redemption, rooted in religious atonement for wrongdoing (Irfan, 2022). This paper exhibits that adhering to the Islamic principles of *Ummah*, *Dhikr*, and *Adm-Tahqeer* deters participants from criminal activities and fosters redemption narratives. The offenders received support from peers and the Muslim community (*Ummah*), assisting them with housing and employment. The participants' engagement in post-work *dhikr* (Remembrance) services shifted their focus away from materialism, emphasizing that "there is more to life than money and that it cannot bring happiness" (Irfan, 2022, p. 57). *Adm-Tahqeer* (Stigma Reduction), part of Islamic moral norms and values, fosters acceptance, empowering offenders to build new social connections and a positive identity. Spiritual leaders enacting *Adm-Tahqeer* support redemption rituals, helping the offenders break free from their lingering experiences of stigma through acceptance: 'Our Sheikh's different, it's no *sakhti* [strictness], there is no *sakhti'* (Irfan, 2022, p. 56)."

Abdullah (2015) describes how social work has shifted from viewing clients as morally deficient to adopting clinical-based psychoanalytic approaches and, more recently, embracing systems and strengths-based models. In her conceptual exploration piece, she suggests an alternative of *Fitra* to the traditional strengths-based model, which historically aligns with the concept of moral deficiency influenced by Judaeo-Christian beliefs about human sinfulness. In Islam, *Fitra* represents the innate human impulse toward positive actions that foster spiritual growth and personal well-being. It signifies 'original purity' or 'original disposition.' Abdullah

(2015) recommends substituting the strengths-based model with the principle of *Fitra* in interventions with Muslim clients.

Moreover, Verba and Guélamine (2022) highlight the issues and ineffectiveness when working with Muslim clients without considering Islamic principles. In their literature review, non-Muslim practitioners needed to adapt to new religious perspectives while working with Muslim service users, sometimes revisiting neglected social work's Christian origins. They described this situation as challenging and paradoxical, hesitating between a hostility rooted in secularism and accommodation for the individuals they were assisting (Verba & Guélamine, 2022).

The examples provided by the authors effectively illustrate the challenges in these incompatible situations. For example, one practitioner stated, "I'm here to help people integrate professionally, but when it comes to this [Muslim] woman who doesn't want to consider a job where she has to remove her veil, I don't see what I can do" (Verba & Guélamine, 2022, p. 70). Another service provider reacted negatively when a young girl asked them to respect Ramadan. However, some advocate otherwise, such as a prevention educator recommending open dialogue to benefit practitioners and clients. These experiences emphasize the necessity of implementing an Islamic social work model guided by culturally competent practitioners.

Beyond the anecdotal examples demonstrated by Verba and Guélamine (2022), Hutchinson & O'Leary (2016) emphasize the unique responsibility of social work in developing religiously appropriate practices. They present an academic paper combining interviews, focus groups, and case studies, to gather in-depth insights into the experiences of young Muslim mothers and the perspectives of key stakeholders in the contexts of Islamic practice. They highlight that many social workers frequently misunderstand or misapply Islamic teachings in Muslim communities due to a lack of cultural proficiency and understanding of religious and cultural beliefs. This misunderstanding leads to non-Muslim social workers perceiving the young Muslim clientele as incompetent and unqualified.

Hutchinson and O'Leary's (2016) study sheds light on various Islamic principles related to childbearing. For instance, *Huqooq ul Awlaad* (Sacred Rights of Children) emphasizes the importance of the entitlement to life and being safe against harm during pregnancy and birth, as both are considered blessings in Islamic teachings and that children have the right to a meaningful name to prevent psychological and emotional damage. Hutchinson and O'Leary (2016) stress the importance of collaborating with local *Imams* for knowledge mobilization within the Islamic model, as Islamic principles yield the importance of Imams. Such partnerships can develop comprehensive messages on care for young mothers. These insights show how practitioners navigate the delicate balance between their religious and cultural beliefs and social work principles when working with Muslim communities.

Traditional Islamic Social Work Theory?

The following section reviews a traditional Islamic social work model to highlight its discrepancies in comparison to liberal secularism. Such an exploration provides a deeper insight into the potential practice context for traditional Muslim social workers.

From a fundamental aspect, social workers' most rudimentary goal is to “enhance human well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of all people, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (National Association of Social Workers, 2023). Azmi (1991) delves into the question of what a traditional Islamic social welfare model looks like. However, before answering the question, he provides the traditionalist's critique of the recent trends of the 'Islamicization' of various sciences as they 'proceed from a modern epistemology, which is essentially positivistic and rationalistic' (p. 169).

Traditional Islamic education has historically been grounded in divine revelation through the precise science of *Ta'weel* (hermeneutics) and starkly contrasts with modernity or post-modernity, more specifically concerning the needs of humanity. Azmi analyzes Maslow's hierarchy of needs, indicating that the current welfare model focuses on material needs within

the hierarchy: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs. However, he contends that traditional Islam speaks to a metaphysical reality in which human beings have three dimensions: the *Jism* (physical body), *Nafs* (the psyche or individual personality), and *Ruh* (the Essential Divine Substance) (Azmi 1991, p. 169). Traditional Islam identifies the material needs identified by Maslow as illusions of the *Jism* and *Nafs*, and the actual needs are that of the *Ruh*, which cannot be possible without *Jihad* (self-struggle) in the *Dunya* (material world). Azmi further contends, ' Secular liberal civilization is seen as fundamentally ill-conceived because it inverts this ordering, thereby leading individuals and societies to pursue false and subhuman 'needs" (1991, p.211). The satisfaction of the lower needs of the *Jism* and *Nafs* in any society is essential for man's persistence in the *Dunya* (the material world), which is a necessary starting point for the spiritual quest of fulfilling the needs of the *Ruh*.

Rasli (2022) also disagrees with Maslow's hierarchies' innate reductionist logic, its insufficient explanation of the nature of human needs and assumes a universal explanatory model. He further contends that such models cannot be extended to Muslims who hold a contrary worldview. Muslims regard Maqasid Sharīʿah (the objectives of Islamic law) as a means to achieve Maslahah (social welfare) in this world and the hereafter. Five codes of preservation are integral to this model: *Ad-dīn* (religion and connection to Allah) *An-nafs* (self), *Al-aql* (intellectualism), *An-nasl* (family), *and Al-mal* (wealth). Religion is considered the highest priority, as Muslims who cannot fulfill their *Ad-dīn* are seen as spiritually impoverished (Rasli, 2022). Secondary is the *An-nafs*, followed by *Al-aql*, as Muslims are encouraged to utilize their intellectual resources for the remaining codes of the self, family, and societal well-being. In Islam, basic human needs are not straightforward, similar to what Azmi's (1991) argument contended. Still, they also have bodily and spiritual requirements to maintain relations with other human beings and God. Thus, Rasli's (2022) paper shows the necessity of grounding the needs of Muslims through the Islamic lens.

Ali (1989) offers a basis for an Islamic model within all social science fields. He grounds his paper on the preliminary premise that the paradigm of individualism in Western social science is inappropriate for Islamic social science because it is secular (disregard of revelation). Unlike other approaches to Islamization that are Western frameworks in disguise, Ali calls for the "immediate need of Islamic social science to construct a distinguishable paradigm of its own." (Ali, 1989, p. 239). Ali does not present a framework per se but offers possible insights into its theological, philosophical, anthropological, and societal concepts. Within anthropology and society, he mentions the need to center the Islamic purpose of human life: service to God, unity of *ad-din wa ad-dunya* (joining together and integration of the world and sacred), the responsibility of all Muslims for the state of the *Ummah* (Humanity), and the well-being of all its members. Ali elucidates the clear incongruencies and urges the need to explore an Islamic model further with the Ulema's (Islamic scholars) collective effort.

Furthermore, Schmid and Sheikhzadegan (2022) investigate the underexplored nature of Islamic social work research, especially in comparison to other faith-based initiatives. They explain that adopting Islamic social work can be perceived to challenge the dominance of Western social work approaches. They note that social work must be rooted in Islamic principles to be defined as Islamic. And how might Islamic social work be implemented into secular societies that are built on Western liberal democratic ideals such as freedom for the individual and individual autonomy and separation of church and state? It’s an interesting question.

Despite the complexities and incongruencies with the current secularized model, there's a belief in the potential alignment of 'Islamic principles' with core social work values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and more. Their discussion encourages a deeper exploration of the intersection between Islamic traditions and social work, shedding light on the need for further research in this evolving field as the current state of “research on this topic is quite scant" (Schmid, & Sheikhzadegan, 2022, p. 2)

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

This research exposes the colonial nature and history of social work. Accordingly, this project applies post-colonial theory to understand how traditional Muslim social workers navigate and reconcile their traditional beliefs in a secularized social work context. Zachariah (2013) explains that, unlike other theories, postcolonial theory is not a single monolithic theory; it is a broad field encompassing a range of methodologies and interpretations, “too large …that it could take in the world as a whole as its geographical area of concern” (p.5). It is multifaceted in its origins and stems from various thinkers and histories; it does not have a coherent set of positions or theoretical engagements to define it as a homogenous field. However, it can be identified as a critical approach to researching the cultural and social linkages between the former colonial powers and the contemporary post-colonial states, including reflections on identity formation and influence on the outside world's perceptions (Armchair Academics, 2023). The theory seeks to challenge the hegemonic Eurocentric perspectives and give voice to historically excluded and marginalized groups impacted by colonial structures, thus changing how colonialism and its consequences are thought and written about (Zachariah, 2013)

Post-colonial theory cannot be traced to a single founding figure nor a date as to its origins. It emerged in the context of a resistance growing out of anti-colonial and imperial resistance in the 20th century and coalesced into an eclectic and heterogeneous body of art and literature (Armchair Academics, 2023). However, academics point to Frantz Fanon (1961), Homi K. Bhabha (1994), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), and Edward Said (1978) as crucial players in the origination of the theory, each with their unique and separate perspectives (Zachariah, 2013).

Zachariah (2013) notes that Spivak is best known for her contributions to subaltern studies. A subsection of postcolonialism that focuses on the experiences of the ‘subaltern,’ a group historically excluded from dominant narratives. The term ‘subaltern’ was coined in the

early 20th century by Gramsci, an Italian Marxist thinker (Zachariah, 2013). The concept of the “subaltern” gained prominence in post-colonial theory through Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Spivak argues that ‘subalterns’ can use essentialist categories (such as race or gender) to mobilize politically and articulate their experiences within dominant discourses. She calls this approach "strategic essentialism," it is a potent tool for the ‘subaltern’ to challenge the dominant discourses that marginalize them. However, adopting this approach also poses the potential risks of erasing the nuances of individuals in the group and perpetuating overarching stereotypes. Nonetheless, this strategy, as Spivak advises, is a balanced approach to promoting social change through its collective impact and recognizing the unique individual experiences and identities therein.

Zachariah (2013) continues to explain Homi Bhabha’s description of colonial mimicry as a process in which the victim, or more specifically the colonized, lives in mockery, subject to the narrow, derogatory stereotypes of the colonial mindset, founded in the axis of differentiation between the colonizer and the other. To counter this axis of differentiation, he presents the deconstruction tools of the ‘hybridity,’ the ‘ambivalence,’ the ‘in-between-ness,’ and ‘fluidity’ of human experience for fellow victim communities. These tools offer a step into the “third space,” where the colonized can adopt new identities and resist the archaic colonial system.

Fanon was an outspoken activist for independence amidst Algeria's war with France (CBC, 2022). Zachariah (2013) explains that Fanon focused on not only the political dimension of colonization but also the mental dimension. He notes that imperial colonialism has severe psychological impacts on the colonized. Thus, he ushered in decolonizing the mind through radical transformation and rejecting imposed colonial identities, values, and superiority. The last key figure Zachariah (2013) details in his paper is Edward Said; he was fundamental, and many argue him to be the most prominent figure within postcolonialism due to the impact of his world-renowned book “Orientalism” (Said, 1978). As a Palestinian Christian immigrant who studied in the house of the colonial—the pristine universities of Princeton and Harvard, he abhorred how

the colonizer had juxtaposed the West with the East, as the Occident (British, French, or American) and the Orient (an oversimplification of the East). In his book, he discusses the conflict between the colonizers and the colonized through the construction of the Orient, power relationships, 'othering,' and criticisms of Western dominance. While the Orient conceptually covers all non-European colonized worlds, Said focused his analysis on the Middle East, primarily on Muslim/Islamic experiences with colonization.

In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) elucidates how the construction of the Orient fortifies the imperial state; "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience." (p. 2). The 'helpful' colonizer must guide this barbaric, backward, mystical, exotic, and dangerous personality. Cramer, the minister upholding the colonial role in Egypt, depicts the Orient in his work "Modern Egypt" as intellectually deficient and morally flawed:

> The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are *singularly deficient in the logical faculty*. (Said, 1978, p. 38)

Said (1978) continued to explain how such orientalist prejudices were reinforced during colonial times across all mediums: academic literature, radio, television, films, and all the media's resources. These prejudices were not merely a discriminatory practice but an essential tool within the imperial configurations of power, as the relationship between Occident and Orient was instead a relationship of power and domination of a complex hegemony. Said (1978) argued that when academics address the Orient, they are not within a vacuum but instead play into the benefit of the colonial project. Through the solidification of the stereotypes, justification surfaces to commit crimes against humanity- or the orientalist; academics aren't neutral; they are the tools of imperialism.

Said's (1978) work within post-colonialism finds its theoretical origins in Marxism and Fucoidan thought. He explicitly mentions Michel Foucault," to whose work I am greatly indebted"

(p. 23), as his discourse and power preservation ideas encouraged Said's comprehensive examination of Orient literature. Moreover, he also frequently quotes Gramsci. Gramsci differed from Marx in some dimensions, as he emphasized that the maintenance of the status quo between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was through ideological dominance. Said adopted Gramsci's concept of hegemony to depict how the Occident exerts rule over the Orient through its claimed intellectual and moral superiority.

Jeffery (2002) extends this concept of the imperial. She applies it to the institution of social work, arguing "that social work has a profoundly imperial heritage which continues to shape the profession today" (p. 29). She contends that the profession's practices are entrenched in its imperial past. Using the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, where institutions and practices produce knowledge to govern individuals and populations by shaping and regulating the orient behaviour, identities, and social relations, she highlights that the social work profession similarly desires to know, govern, and manage disenfranchised populations. In his work "Culture and Imperialism," Said (1994) highlights the governmentality of imperialism:

> The term, "imperialism" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant … Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, political collaboration, economic, social, and cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire(p. 9).

Post-colonial theory, formulated by Said in the context of the Middle East, is a particularly appropriate approach to ground my study, focusing on traditional Muslims (orients) and their experience navigating a modern secular enterprise of social work. However, as Ali (1989) indicates, undoubted theoretical incongruence exists between postcolonialism; both are unique and grounded in distinct worldviews. However, there is nothing incongruent in employing a post-colonial theoretical perspective to understand the experience of Traditional Muslim social work practitioners, which, from their perspective, is an alien colonial enterprise.

Chapter IV: Research Questions & Methodology

Research Question

For the following research project, an interpretive phenomenological approach was chosen to map and explore the question: How do traditional Muslim social workers navigate and reconcile their traditional beliefs in a secularized social work context? An area of exploration is lacking literature, as the existent literature only addresses the experiences of Muslim and Jewish students in Israel (Ranz, 2021) and Christian professional experiences (Thaller, 2011). Thus, my study furthers the existing literature to provide an understanding of the phenomenon in the context of the Greater Toronto Area. However, it may have broader applicability in other geopolitical regions. Since my study will concentrate on an area with limited research and literature, I engaged in an exploratory research model to gather data using semi-structured interviews paired with postcolonial theory, specifically Edward Said's take, to provide a nuanced lens to interpret the data.

Methodology

This project adapted the interpretive phenomenology Beck (2021) describes in her book *Introduction to Phenomenology: Focus on Methodology*. Phenomenology is a study of philosophy pioneered by Edmund Husserl in 1913 that aims to describe phenomena's essence as they appear in the conscious experience. As Husserl believed, the essence defines the very nature of a phenomenon, and without it, that phenomenon would not be. His focus was different from the prevalent scientific approach that champions objective claims of existence, instead on the perception of events:

> Scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical and the spiritual world, is in fact. But can the world, and human existence in it,

> truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as true only what is objectively established in this fashion? (Beck, 2021, p. 2).

Husserl highlights a fundamental difference between the scientific and phenomenological approaches, as the scientific method establishes truths based on verifiable evidence and prioritizes objective, empirical observations. Husserl's investigation calls into question the scientific method, which is considered the gold standard of study in his day. He suggests that although objective truth is significant, it might not adequately convey the essence of human existence and the meaning we assign to it, therefore ignoring its subjective, experiential aspects. This subjective dimension of human life —the lived experiences, perceptions, and integral in everyday conception- shapes our understanding of the world.

Beck (2021) explains that phenomenology is a robust method for comprehension and exploring the world's phenomena from our perspective. Describing a phenomenon is not merely facts; it requires the *play of fancy*, an exemplification within the experience, perception, memory, and imaginative order.

However, according to Husserl's student's student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the philosophy of phenomenology moved beyond the essence of the lived experience to an interpretive approach that explicates (Beck, 2021). He analogized the interpretation process to the fusion of horizons: the texts' horizon and the interpreters'; "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not to look away from it but to see it better…in truer proportion" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 304). Gadamer contends that meaning comes from the historical context at the intersection of the past, present and future, between which the interpreter oscillates while assessing the whole text and portions (Beck, 2021).

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) present a detailed approach within their book *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis,* offering a thorough and robust approach to interpretation. They described the process adhering to three elemental principles: (1) focusing the research on the phenomenological experience of the participant, (2) profoundly engaging in

interpreting the participants' descriptions, and (3) examining each participant's description in detail (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021). I have employed the Smith et al. (2009) method for the following research project.

Sampling

This project included traditional Muslim social workers who practice in the Greater Toronto Area. Smith et al. (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021) recommend that the individuals within the sample should embody a perspective on the phenomenon studied; it should not be merely the population. However, regarding sample size within interpretative phenomenology, Smith et al. (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021) explain that no correct answer exists; however, they explicitly indicate that a "reasonable sample size for a student's project is between three and six participants" (p. 3). Thus, six participants were targeted to collect varying perspectives rather than a homogenous group of participants from one place to adhere to Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendation. I connected with these participants through purposive sampling and the snowball technique.

These six participants identified as traditional Muslim social workers who have studied and practiced in Greater Toronto. Among them, ages ranged from 26 to 50+, with a gender representation consisting of two women and four men. The participants' practice locations varied, with two working in secular social work contexts, one in a non-social work setting, and two in traditional Muslim social work contexts, while one participant was unemployed at the time of the study.

Regarding educational background, all participants graduated from schools of social work within the Greater Toronto Area. The participant's pseudonyms for my study are Ahmed, Aamir, Ali, Abdullah, Zaynab, and Maryam. This diversity across age, gender, practice settings,

and educational institutions aimed to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights, enriching the depth and breadth of the study's findings, and thus offering a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced intersections between traditional Muslim identity and social work practice in the Greater Toronto context.

Data Collection

The participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions; however, they could explore additional avenues depending on where the conversations flowed (Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Beck, 2021). The questions in my interview guide surrounded the phenomenon's topics: overall journey, Muslim identity, possible challenges, etc. I aimed to have the interviews take place in person to catch non-verbal forms of communication, such as subtle gestures, facial expressions, and body language, contributing to rich data that better encapsulates the participants' experiences and perspectives. A secondary purpose of in-person interviews was to help foster a deeper connection and rapport between myself, the interviewer, and the participants and, accordingly, cultivate an environment conducive to meaningful dialogue. However, two out of six interviews took place on the online video call platform Zoom due to the inability to find a suitable time.

When collecting data in interpretive phenomenology, Beck (2021) clarifies that the researcher aims to conduct the interviews using conversational language and avoid abstract, academic, or research terms. This conversational approach invoked a sense of comfort, allowing me to connect with the participants genuinely and evoke honest, deep conversations surrounding their experiences and feelings on the matter. Another vital engagement approach I employed was open, active listening, where the participants could direct how their tale was told without too much interference from my end—such participant autonomy further ensured genuine rich data during this collection process. Afterwards, as a practice of rigour and trustworthiness in the interview data, I followed up with the participants to get their feedback and ensure I

understood what they stated correctly and had recorded the messages they wanted to convey. During this feedback process the participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the interview process or the interview guide itself, and I accordingly adjusted based on participant feedback. This process helped improve the overall quality of data collection.

Each interview was audio recorded and whereafter transcribed using a hybrid method combined with a manual and technologically assisted approach. I utilized Microsoft Word transcription software, which converts audio into text while noting the speaker and placing time stamps. I manually reviewed the content to ensure that words were accurately captured and removed incorrect words, especially Arabic terms, as the software does not recognize Arabic words.

Data Analysis

For my approach to data analysis, I adopted Smith, Flowers, and Larkins's (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021), which presents a six-step process for analyzing IPA texts from interviews. I opted for a more hands-on approach to conducting the steps because I am more visual and hands-on. After completing all interviews and transcribing the contents, I printed each transcript with a large margin on the sides. Then, I engaged in the first stage of familiarizing myself with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. Smith et al. describe it as a process of immersion, where the researcher immerses themselves in the data (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021). The second stage is the initial noting, which requires the researcher to make three types of notes: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Thus, I used decontextualization to make my notes, reading the data in one paragraph separately and backwards to remove myself from the conversation and focus on the words. I highlighted significant portions and placed sticky notes on the side margins with the note categories recommended by Smith et al. through observing the descriptive description of the phenomena from the participant’s lens; linguistic, the use of

language by the participant; and conceptual, deeper conceptual aspects. Furthermore, during the note-taking during decontextualization, I highlighted with a different colour any gems that I found, as Smith, Flowers, and Larkins describe as “a singular utterance made by a participant with great resonance across the case and corpus” (2009, as cited in Beck, 2021, p. 303). These gems were short passages with significant and valuable insights into the experience of the phenomena and come in three variations: secret, easily missed, suggestive, requiring some attention to be noticed, or shining, which is apparent.

The third step in IPA is developing emerging themes by purposefully and carefully reviewing the notes. Thus, upon completing the note process, I assessed the notes from the first transcript to observe if any emergent themes are developing the five dimensions of commonalities that Benner and Wrubel (1989, as cited in Beck, 2021) share that IPA is interested in. The five dimensions are to explore: *situation*- the historical and present situation of the participant; *embodiment*- underlying the perceptual, bodily, and emotional responses of participants; *temporality*- how the participant projects themselves into the future; *concerns*- things that matter to participants; *common meanings* - implicit interpretations that shape perceptions and interpersonal conflicts.

According to Charman, there is no assurance that broad common themes will surface from the responses during the analysis process, as each participant's opinions reflect their unique perspective on the topic (Charman, 2017). However, specific themes emerged during my analysis surrounding the topics of social work training, professional practice, and reconciliation. After this, I assessed if there were connections across emergent themes within each transcript, stage four.

After I completed the notetaking and theme-extracting iterative process, I repeated steps one to three for all transcripts, and such is the fifth stage of analysis. In the sixth, and last stage, I searched for larger patterns among the different transcripts, and I identified the following

themes: traditional Islamic roots: *ummah* & *mashwera,* hostile academia: navigating religious identity amidst the secular hegemony, navigating the 'grey area' in the shadow of fear and silence, institutionalized ideological strain: emotional turmoil of traditional Muslims, strength against the strife: embracing the benefits of social work skills, navigating secular spaces: challenges and triumphs in social work practice, interrogating boundaries: reconciling traditional Islam and secular social work, and an appreciation of a platform and safe space to voice themselves.

The utilization of phenomenology with semi-structured interviews has been previously utilized by academics such as Thaller (2011) and Ranz and Allassad (2021). However, implementing post-colonial theory adds a nuanced dimension to exploring how colonial influences manifest in the participant's perceptions, identities, and experiences. Moreover, Said's focus on challenging hegemonic narratives and power relations between the Occident and the Orient (Muslim) can contribute to profound insights into the interpretation process.

Ethical Considerations

As noted earlier, the focus topic of this research needs to be more studied. Thus, the proposed topics aim to fulfill the “expectation that social workers will engage in research that contributes to the knowledge base of the profession” and, simultaneously, be cautious of the ethical dilemmas (York, 2020, p. 4).

Before data collection, a Major Research Paper protocol form was completed and submitted to the Office of Research Ethics at York University, answering the following: project description, participants, recruitments, inducements, risks, benefits, conflict of interest, data security, and more. Although a comprehensive ethical review process was completed for this project, it does not guarantee ethical research practice (Rosaline, 2008). Thus, to ensure a better, honest approach, I explore and consider the ethical implications of the studies in the following section.

Participants had the autonomy to choose whether to partake in the study and what risk they wished to undertake (Rosaline, 2008). Each participant completed consent forms, which entail the “basic purpose and description of the study, voluntary nature of participation, the researcher’s identity, expected duration, any possible risks and benefits, the right to withdraw at any time, and be adults 18 years or older”. These consent forms were completed before any data collection.

Furthermore, in research, the obligation is to maximize any benefit while minimizing possible harms, ensuring the benefits outweigh the risks for the study participants (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2018). Thus, my research proposal identified two potential benefits. Firstly, the research offers the participants a platform for self-reflection on navigating the secular social work context. Thus, the conversations could have validated the participant's experiences and built community and support, knowing others face similar problems. Secondly, participating in the study may have allowed participants to contribute to developing new knowledge and bridge a gap in the deficient literature surrounding traditional Muslim social worker experiences. Such robust qualitative data could inform schools and the College of Social Work about accommodating the crucial perspectives of the participants. However, it is integral not to overstate the potential of this promising research; “it's like adding to a pile, a heap of debris” (Rosaline, 2008, p. 8).

Regarding the remuneration of participants, noting that there tends to be greater than regular queries by ethical boards due to possible coercive dimensions, I remunerated participants with a 25$ gift card (Rosaline, 2008). The participants received this regardless of whether they completed the study, as indicated on the consent form (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2018). However, all participants successfully completed their interviews.

Moreover, the target population for this research, traditional Muslim practitioners, is a relatively low-risk group; however, psychological, physical, legal, social, or economic harms cannot be entirely discounted (Rosaline, 2008). Thus, in my study, the participants were only

asked to provide their experience surrounding the phenomena; thus, the likelihood of harm was minimal, aligning with the nature of various human service research endeavours (York, 2020). The only harm I anticipated was that the participants might have found the research distressing, as talking about their experiences confronting a hegemonic social work may cause distress. However, talking to me, the researcher, who was not emotionally involved, might have also offered relief (Rosaline, 2008). For traumatic reflection, I prepared a list of Muslim external support resources, the Naseeha helpline and the Khalil Center support and crisis line, for the participants.

To maintain the participants' privacy, security, and comfort in participating openly, I adhered to the guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure *anonymity*, no identifying information, such as participants' names, ages, occupations, or names of organizations, was shared publicly (Faulkner & Faulkner 2018). Accordingly, each participant had a pseudonym: Abdullah, Ali, Aamir, Ahmed, Zaynab, and Maryam. All interviews were de-identified during transcription. For confidentiality, the participant's answers were placed in secure locations: secure drives and encrypted biometric locked folders to prevent external access to the information (Faulkner & Faulkner 2018).

Lastly, other ethical considerations that Faulkner & Faulkner (2018) recommend were avoiding data laundering, manipulating the data collected to reduce errors, faking data, making up desired data or eliminating undeveloped research findings, and plagiarism.

Positionality

Furthermore, noting my positionality within this research, as a traditional Muslim who also has experienced a discriminatory experience during my experience in social work courses, is crucial. My experiences inevitably influenced my perspective and approach to this study; thus, reflecting on my own bias was integral to maintaining the integrity and impartiality of the

research process to avoid any form of unconscious altering of the data to match hypotheses that may be affixed to my personal experience and bias.

However, while my identity as a traditional Muslim posed risks within the study, it also brought benefits, as my shared cultural background with the participants helped foster rapport and understanding. However, I was cautious of further biases that could have come from the shared identity markers. Thus, I was reflexive in continuously examining my position and interrogating my perspectives throughout the research process.

Chapter V: Results

The interviews explored how traditional Muslims navigate a secularized social work context. Many participants indicated they enrolled in social work due to an inspiration from traditional Islamic beliefs. However, these same participants felt a “slap in the face” when the same traditional beliefs that inspired them to social work education were unwelcome and directly attacked at various times. Some participants navigated the context by opting for silence to avoid confrontation, while others courageously voiced themselves, resisting the hegemonic Western secular liberal philosophy. Some participants noted they benefitted from the social work skills they learned despite the negativity they experienced. However, the impact of the hostile context left deep emotional wounds, such that some participants avoided professional practice in a secular liberal context; those who participated in such contexts expressed that they did face hostility. Overall, the participants indicated that traditional Islamic views are not reconcilable with secular liberal social work philosophy at a theoretical level, but that reconciliation is possible in areas of practical overlap.

Traditional Islamic Roots: Ummah & Mashwera

Interestingly, a majority of the participants indicated that they became interested in social work due to inspiration from fundamental Islamic beliefs of supporting the *Ummah* (Greater Society). Ahmed indicated that he was inspired by the “Islamic idea or the psychology of giving back to the community” while connecting the idea back to the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as “one of the reasons of prophethood is to do things that are pro-social, for example, helping and assisting.” Maryam shared, “Helping people is the prophetic way of doing things. In social work, I feel like I'm emulating part of my *Deen* (religion) while assisting people.” Ali enrolled, “looking for something that I felt fulfilling and my real aim in life was to serve the community in ways that I could do so best with my own dispositions.” Similarly, two other participants shared that it was

through the traditional Islamic process of *mashwera* (consultation) with their teachers and friends that they became interested in social work; “I went to him [teacher], and I asked him, ‘What do you think I should do,’ so he said to me, go into the line of social work,” “ I was recommended by my friends to go back to school to becom[e] a social worker.” Ultimately, I found that participants shared that their Islamic principles—such as a dedication to the Ummah, comprehension of the prophetic model, and participation in *mashwera* (consultations)—acted as a catalyst and inspiration to pursue their social work degrees. Furthermore, these participants displayed how deeply they valued their Islamic principles as they were driving forces within crucial life decisions, such as life careers.

Hostile Academia: Navigating Religious Identity Amidst the Secular Hegemony

The participants shared an experience that extends beyond the literature review, as we know that Ali (1989) contends that the Western frameworks of social sciences are inherently secular and disregard revelation and creed therein, a clear divergence from traditional Islam. All the participants experienced such misalignments between their religious worldviews and the schools’ ethos, which extended to palpable friction, “the elephant in the room,” according to Ahmed. On the other hand, only Abdullah, when enquired, shared that he did not experience any tension between his traditional beliefs and the school of social work. However, his claim revealed some inconsistency when he later indicated that in situations of practice with clients whose needs are “going against my religious beliefs,” he felt incapable and “couldn't feel like [he] could serve” them properly. Abdullah’s contradictory accounts suggest the possibility of internalization of repression amidst the colonial domination experienced, on the one hand, feeling compelled to deny any experience of repression and, on the other hand, suggesting its experience.

Nonetheless, the resultant discord shared by the participants was impossible to ignore as it was more than a subtle disagreement, as Ahmed put it, the daily “clear contradiction between religious morals and what was being taught… to an extent where I actually fe[lt] like a lot of the classes were actually more of preaching instead of teaching”. This tension wasn't an isolated occurrence; instead, it was a recurring theme that manifested within the participant's experiences throughout their academic career, affecting how they engaged with their schoolwork, peers, and overall sentiments regarding the educational institution. It was a widespread concern amongst all participants, each grappling with it at different intensities.

Some participants framed the tension as a subtle undercurrent within the teaching methodologies, lectures and discussions. For them, the ideological misalignment was not overtly expressed but experienced as a nuance struggle by the participants between the content and their religious beliefs. Zaynab elaborated on how this personal struggle would play out, pointing to an internal struggle she had during a discussion surrounding client autonomy and the social worker's role, explaining:

> Suppose a student comes up to a Muslim social worker discussing relationships. In that case, they're younger, like 12 years old, and they want to participate in what we would consider a *Haram* [forbidden] relationship. All that matters is that the two students are consenting. You would have to uphold that student's wishes, right? …you wouldn't be allowed to bring in your Islamic values in a situation like that.

Comparatively, other individuals had a more noticeable and overt type of tension. It felt to them like a direct assault on their fundamental beliefs rather than just a case of presenting different viewpoints. Ahmed shared instances where his religious beliefs were directly challenged, and the curriculum and classroom endorsed perspectives that portrayed religion negatively. He shared how one of his professors “made a mockery of religion” and then further undermined the whole concept of God;” you could pull the rug if you just asked the famous question of the rock’. ‘Can God create a rock that's heavier than him?’” Ahmed was dismayed as the professor posited a question challenging the very essence of the divine and later approached him during his office hours and argued the question was “not a question; it is a

fallacy in itself, a logical fallacy.” Ahmed's experience offers a compelling glimpse into an experience of overt tension in the educational setting, embodying the legacy of colonial hegemony suppressing religious perspectives.

On another occasion, Ahmed shared that the same professor explicitly asserted in a class that "religion is the cause of oppression." A statement that is reflective of a broader sentiment within the educational environment as Ahmed elaborated that within the context of the social work classes such as the one he described earlier,” if you don't subscribe to this certain *ideology*, then you're not with us… a trend in the majority of the classes.” The secular liberal ideology, described by Ahmed, perpetuated a binary environment – either conform or be deemed an outsider. Ahmed also noted that he was sitting in the front seat in class wearing a traditional Islamic robe when this statement was made and experienced a sense of isolation, feeling targeted and compounding the feelings of alienation experienced for being a religious individual and having a distinguished attire. He elaborates, “The experience was quite a bit of a shocker, stating that in class to a group of students who might actually be religious themselves.” The impact of Ahmed's professor's words extends beyond Ahmed as they invalidate religious students’ beliefs and cultivate a hostile environment, reinforcing a dominant narrative that undermines diverse perspectives within the academic setting.

Within her orientation to social work, Zaynab also encountered the secular liberal context. She stated that the professor clarified that “they stand for *certain ideologies* like this is who we are, and this is what we want, and this is what we're looking for in our students.” She highlighted that the emphasis on conforming to a secular liberal viewpoint extended beyond the orientation into the classes, where although social work claims to be very objective,” it was obviously subjective what they were putting out in terms of what is correct to say and what is not correct to say, which groups are acceptable and which groups are not accepted?”

The overall emphasis on conforming became evident to Zaynab, who highlighted a clear lack of “space for intellectual dialogue,” a significant departure from the notion that universities

claim safe spaces for intellectual discourse, more specifically, within social work. She emphatically expressed:

> There should be an opportunity to actually get up and, debate these things. I do believe that there are spaces for that in other departments like, philosophy or religious studies. But when it comes to social work, it just wasn't there.

Ahmed describes the approach as “our way or the highway**...** forcing people to believe certain things a certain way”. The participants' vivid depictions of how the social work education environment expects students to conform, a process that stifles intellectual dialogue, contrasts with the supposed ethos of open discussion within university settings, as Ahmed explains, “something which contradicts the purpose of education itself, the purpose of critical thinking.”

Ahmed also recounted a hostile incident a close colleague had undergone to illustrate the severe consequences of objecting to professors' theories and/or imposed ideologies. He detailed how his friend,

> A religious individual himself was actually suspended from his classes because he disagreed very politely in a class against one of the points on gender that was brought up. He wanted to discuss with the professor …however, he was put on probation and finally suspended from the class.

Ahmed's colleague’s ordeal illustrates a glimpse into the severe consequences religious students can face if they decide to challenge the hegemonic secular liberal academic narratives.

A context within universities where it is “pretty rough out there.” Ahmed further explained that challenging the secular liberal philosophy is equated to oppression, and such equivalence “makes the environment uncomfortable for the students,” paradoxically existing within universities that advocate for inclusivity, yet “the atmosphere on campus is an anti-religious atmosphere.” Aamir felt that social work was hypocritical as “the standards and principles that were supposed to follow and be all for equity, diversity and inclusivity, EDI… when it comes to applying to Muslims [it goes] out the window”. The perception of hypocrisy described by Aamir and Ahmed indicates the failure of the dominant secular liberal ideology to adhere to its

professed values of inclusivity, as it paradoxically perpetuates a bias against religious individuals. They feel the system marginalizes them and does not meet their needs.

Zaynab agrees that the School of Social Work misconstrues dialogue as oppression; for example, about social justice values, one who does not accept “these values, therefore you are against; therefore, you are promoting oppression.” She referred to such discussions regarding the anti-oppressive practice that favours Western secular liberalism in class as two sides of coins, where it is either “you are for… [or] you're speaking against,” and in the latter, “you're going to be labelled as somebody who is a *bigot*.. as it doesn't align with social work values”. Zaynab further explains that this binary context extends to cancel culture in which there was a prevalent tendency among students to engage in a sort of ‘witch hunt’, she terms "detective work." She shared that the students would scrutinize the views and opinions of historical social work theorists and question whether they align with contemporary social values to determine “is he cancelled or is he not cancelled? Is he a good guy, is he not?” Zaynab’s mention of the term "good guy,” was evidently about having an ideological alignment with the Western secular liberalism perspective prevalent in the classroom. This ideology, as Zaynab put it, relegates those who do not concur as the contrary to a ‘good guy,’ a bad guy, and labelled as a bigot; an interrogative system of policing that entails the marginalization of traditional beliefs that can conflict with the secular liberal contemporary values.

Lastly, Ali experienced overt and hostile tension during his Ph.D. in social work; Ali faced significant challenges finding a professor within the social work school willing to work with him on his chosen topic related to traditional Islamic practices. He approached several professors; however, many were subtly resistant and even tried to push him toward alternative research approaches. Ali reflected on their reluctance, stating: "I think they were very negative, *hostile* in general to Islamic approaches in life, and they were trying to guide me to ways of studying and research on a different focus." Despite the difficulties, Ali continued and found a supportive, pragmatic professor who had a broader conceptualization of social work and focused on macro

policy and became a vital ally in Ali's academic future. However, the challenges continued, and during his thesis defence, he encountered resistance. One of the professors reacted negatively to his thesis and said," You know, we shouldn't let this kind of *garbage* go through." Ali did get to move ahead. However, the overall journey experienced by Ali highlights the systemic challenges faced by a traditional Muslim who wanted to preserve his identity and beliefs and chose to research related material. Moreover, the professor's comment revealed how hostile and unwilling universities can be towards non-secular perspectives, emphasizing entrenched academic biases rooted within Western secular liberal ideology.

Ostensible Accommodation in the Secular Institution

Amidst the philosophical tensions experienced, the participants indicated that the schools provided some accommodations and understanding of certain aspects of their traditions, specifically their religious practices. Abdullah explains that he "was having a hard time finishing a couple of papers because Ramadan was around the time." To alleviate the difficulty, he connected with his professor regarding the difficulty of completing the assigned work at night due to fasting. Correspondingly, the professor offered him an incomplete assignment, "basically where you request an extension on your papers beyond the deadline of the winter semester… [an] option for students that are having trouble finishing their work". Beyond classwork, Abdullah shares that regarding prayers, quite often, he "would just tell the professor I'm going to pray, and it was not a problem." Similarly, Ali explains that he was able to engage in prayers but found logistical challenges.

> Praying Salah and its time, especially in the winter, was a challenge, and sometimes, in the middle of courses, had to leave and there was no prayer space. So, pray in hallways and wherever classrooms are free.

Moreover, Ali mentions that he experienced friction and tension due to his traditional uniform;" I think my dress and attire definitely alienated some people or was definitely a source of friction." Overall, participants indicated that their schools accommodated their religious practices, such

as extending deadlines during Ramadan and allowing time for prayers, but did not fully accommodate and comprehensively address the diverse array of all traditional practices, such as finding suitable prayer spaces and experiencing discomfort due to traditional attire.

Navigating the 'Grey Area' in the Shadow of Fear and Silence

Amidst the anti-religious educational context, the participants shared a common experience of adopting a tactic of silence. Such silence was not merely the lack of words but one emanating from apprehension, a self-preservation tactic in the unreceptive and ideologically homogenous environment. The participants found themselves treading cautiously and engaging in mental strife between personal convictions and the imperative to conform throughout their educational careers. They were frightened of the potential consequences of engaging in any counter-discourse. For example, Aamir elaborates that in classes: “when certain topics would come up that challenged my religious views,” he would vigilantly evaluate the situation and “try hard to find ... a *Grey area*”, a place of ambiguity and safety. After this strenuous mental exercise, he would “leave it as that, just so that it doesn't become a problem,” emanating from a fear of potential repercussions. Not adopting such “Gray area” searching could “threaten my grades and my chances of graduating,” compelling him to prioritize self-preservation over vocal expression.

In one of his classes, Aamir further shared his personal experience where a sensitive topic surrounding the Palestinian occupation was brought up by a fellow classmate, at which Aamir “mentioned something, the teacher shut it down right away.” After class, he received a private message on WhatsApp from fellow students who asked, “Can we discuss this further? And they're both from Jewish backgrounds”. Thus, Aamir shared that he opted for silence and didn't discuss as he was afraid of punitive measures that could result from divergence and having a “stance on something [that] is maybe different from what the school is, from what the professor is, and what the students are.” He elaborated that such counter-discourse could be

interpreted as antisemitism by which he'd be kicked "out the course and be out of the Bachelors, and that's like what's going to happen to me? I'm screwed". This incident exhibits how ideological clashes extend beyond the classroom and into online spaces, which serve as an additional avenue for potential discord, making the intensity of conforming to the prevalent secular liberal perspectives constant. In his account, Aamir explained that he tries to

> stay in a *grey area*, and then I just stay quiet. I put in my little input that this is what I believe and think. And, you know, I defend it, but after a bit, I kind of walk away because I don't see the benefit.

Zaynab, likewise, opted to remain silent and navigated her terrain in diligent fear. She compared herself to others who may face similar junctions in which Western secular liberalism conflicts with her traditional Islamic beliefs, describing that others could boldly challenge the narrative, "maybe even face the consequences. But for me … I'd rather stay silent than face like judgment and just like get cancelled." Zaynab's silence illustrates a deep-rooted fear that permeated her everyday experience, as the looming fear of repercussions shut down the prospect of resisting and thus reinforcing the dominance of Western secular liberalism due to a limitation for alternative voices; "in that case, I would not be allowed to be heard out."

Abdullah shared a pragmatic and cautious approach akin to Aamirs'. He described that in "intersections with his religious beliefs," he would "try to *steer away* from them, steer clear from them." He elaborated on his '*steering clear'* strategy with a case scenario regarding course material. He indicated that where two options are given, he would opt for the option**"** more in line with my religion, that I would have less trouble religiously reading." His approach is to avoid being in challenging situations that would disturb "feel[ing] comfortable Islamically." Abdullah's approach can be seen as a form of strategic essentialism as it displays a process of resolving the tensions traditional Muslims must undertake to resist assimilation into the secular norm.

Overall, the participants shared various aphorisms that vividly depicted their approaches. Ahmed had been advised by a graduate colleague to "*fake it till you make it"* and thus opt for silence "when I would hear anything which went against my own beliefs … and I would just let it

go". Aamir had his aphorism, "*Whatever floats your boat, but don't sink mine,"* indicating how he respects others' choices and decisions and expects the same in return, an approach of coexistence emphasizing individual autonomy and mutual respect. Aamir further compared himself to others who

> feel like, oh, you know, they want to continue arguing this… To me, [it] is a waste of time; I couldn't care less. Once that course is done, these people will never know you again anyway. So what's the point?

Zaynab's aphorism comedically was inspired by the penguins of Madagascar and would *"just smile and wave boys, smile and wave*," connotating a playful reminder and lighthearted approach to navigating the challenges.

Nonetheless, all participants shared personal aphorisms that represented various strategies of avoidance and silence grounded in fright of punitive repercussions, as otherwise would be how Aamir clarified:

> open[ing] that *can of worms* because I'd lose my position…I don't know what would happen, and the point of all this, my masters, and all this getting to this place was, then opening your mouth and just losing it.

The silent and avoidant strategy was typical, except with one bold and courageous participant who was open about his faith and traditions. Ali elaborated that he would attempt to integrate and bring the "Muslim experience into the studies" and accordingly would search for possible directions that would enable him" to bring that identity and that experience into the courses." Within this strategy, he would frequently write on "how the Muslim experience of this was, and how Islam viewed this." Correspondingly, he felt most teachers were "reasonably supportive in that regard. They didn't object." However, he did note that the faculty, overall, didn't "really [have] any experience with Muslims or even religious people," thus indicating that the faculty at that time was unaware of fundamental incongruencies, a potential blind spot within the educational system during his studies. This account contrasts the prevailing silence of the other participants through the proactive incorporation of Islamic perspectives into his studies, which challenges the dominant secular narrative.

Institutionalized Ideological Strain: Emotional Turmoil of Traditional Muslims

The participants elaborated on the complicated terrain they had to navigate, highlighted by a constant fear from challenging the prevailing Western secular liberal ideology. This fear resulted in most participants opting to maintain silence and avoid conflict, but one bravely stepped forward to engage in counter-dialogue. Moreover, my interviews provided a platform for the students to speak their hearts, as each participant had different sentiments surrounding the experience. Ahmed indicated he “felt really guilty at times being in certain classes and hearing certain things;” he further paralleled his sentiments to being helpless like a lone sheep; “the level of hostility, if I were to raise my hand, I would be taken down like a sheep in front of everyone that literally has a certain stance against it… so uncomfortable, defeated.” Ahmed described the trauma of witnessing professors attack his faith: “Actually, I'll almost say it's a bit traumatic, to be honest, because of how negative those situations were, and how I could actually be there and listen to this and not able to do anything about it.” Zaynab expressed a discomfort akin to Ahmed’s, as she “can only describe it as like discomfort, really, and I guess even frustration, a lot of frustration not being able to articulate myself.”

Other participants elaborated on their apprehension, clarifying that it wasn't a typical fear rooted in personal anxiety. Aamir shared that it was instead “fear in the sense that I'd lose what I worked for, not that I'm scared of any institution or anything like that. I just feel worried.” The participant's sentiments reveal the emotional turmoil experienced by traditional Muslim students in academic settings as Ahmed's analogy captures the sense of isolation and vulnerability; Zaynab's discomfort and Aamir's perspective add to this, emphasizing the fear of jeopardizing academic progress. Together, these quotes highlight the complex emotional experiences faced by students grappling with ideological tensions in academia.

Ali, however, revealed a distinctive and nuanced experience, diverging from the other participants. He described a desensitization process with a reduced emotional response due to persistent exposure to hostility.

> I was used to being in an environment where there was hostility to Islam… and It was a real struggle of trying to maintain and push Islamic identity in the context of hostility all around, so I don't know. It's obvious you experience tension, you experience frustration... but you just got used to it."

His narrative reflected a gradual desensitization from tension and frustration to emotional muteness. The participant's range of sentiments, from guilt and trauma to discomfort and frustration, showcased the complexities of maintaining Islamic identity amidst hostility from the enduring legacy of colonialism within educational institutions.

Strength Against the Strife: Embracing the Benefits of Social Work Skills

Albeit the participants indicated the persistent hostile environment, they all indicated the fruitfulness of the skills gained, "give credit where it is due," as Ahmed put it. He further expands on acknowledging the positive amidst the negative as:

> Things were a bit rough, but at the same time, there's a lot of good as well, and just to elaborate on some of that, the theories for actual practice, really, really beneficial. I still use some of those practices.

Ahmed elucidated that many social work skills that the layperson would not be aware of were really beneficial as they "really helped with just understanding people, building rapport, all of these things," describing them as "actual education on how to do social work. "

Other participants valued and cherished the training they received from their education; as Zaynab indicated, "The training was good. It was helpful" and elaborated that the skills of applying theories, counselling, resource finding, referrals, building rapport with clients, behavioral change strategies are highly applicable and that till date "I continue to use it." Aamir similarly mentioned their benefits but distinguished the value based on educational level; "I'd say 95% or above, everything I learned in college is what I use now," critiquing undergraduate

and graduate level knowledge as the “Theories and all that stuff. It does not apply. It gives you an understanding of how things work and whatever, but it doesn’t make a difference”. The participant's acknowledgement of some benefits of social work skills illustrates some strength against the strife, revealing how the acquisition and application of social work skills are a glimpse of positivity amidst the sea of hostile negativity.

Navigating Secular Spaces: Challenges and Triumphs in Social Work Practice

The participants openly discussed their experiences beyond the educational institutions within the professional realm of social work. Many highlighted how the outlook they cultivated throughout their studies severely altered the trajectory of their career outlooks. Out of the six participants, only two continued within secular social work roles surrounded by philosophical misalignment and, at times, overt hostility.

Maryam**,** an outspoken tenured social worker highlights that she is “very vocal, I demanded” accommodations to overcome the philosophical misalignment with her religious belief. However, she elaborates that the demand for accommodation was not a straightforward process due to discrimination from inherent and apparent biases “in the field as a visible Muslim! And on top of that, I'm a visible female Muslim. So that's an added layer, right?” Unlike the other participants, Maryam was not paralyzed by the fear of repercussions and shared a story illustrating the impacts of inconsistent philosophical underpinnings coming to life visibly. On her first day, she noticed hesitancy from her manager, a gay white man who “kind of stiffened, I said, good morning. How are you? It's not that he wasn't receptive or polite. You could just tell there was a bit of a hesitation”. She further explained that tension emerged as the manager unnecessarily micromanaged her, making her think, “Why does he have it out for me… and later, it came out” that the manager had concerns working with Sadia, as he believed” Muslims think like we're all going to go to hell and this and that."

Maryam, taken aback by the exposure of the internal conflict, promptly leveraged her vocal nature. She asserted the professional nature of the job, " irrespective of my religious beliefs or your assumptions about them. It's not okay for you to be defensive and think I will look at you and treat you a certain way." Later in the year, the manager said, “You're not what I expected you to be.” Maryam, not one to shy away, re-engaged and sought clarification, stating, "I beg your pardon." The manager responded, “I'm a very gay white man. You're covered head to toe, you know.” Maryam found this remark offensive and racist and confronted the manager's bias, questioning, “So what does being covered head to toe imply?” and continued engaging in discourse until the manager apologized and explained, “My understanding of Islam is all from the TV.” Maryam elaborates on her unflinching approach to navigating challenges in practice that do not align with her beliefs, such as "a very real example, like Pride Month,” indicating that if instructed to participate, she will opt out “not at the expense of my Deen [Religion],” but clarifies that such abstention is not intended to discriminate, “Will I treat someone from that umbrella of identity differently? No, I won't. I will still service them!" Maryam’s account highlights the challenges of navigating philosophical misalignments and biases entrenched within the professional sphere. It offers an alternative approach to addressing biases and misconceptions against Muslims by advocating for dialogue and discourse embodying Said's notion of speaking truth to power, which can maintain the integrity of one's religious beliefs by exercising the right to disagree.

Maryam emerged as the only participant who directly confronted the misalignments in the context of secular social work practice. Aamir, who also works in the secular Western social work context, shares his insights. At work, he feels that his manager harbours unspoken assumptions, which Aamir labels as “healthy assumptions,” which work in his favour, relieving him of potential conflicts. Aamir shares, "I look traditional, right? When given certain cases or files. The supervisor, he's not gonna officially say this. Still, I'm pretty sure he's giving me either

Muslim families or, you know, somebody from my background," indicating the diversion of cases that might involve religious conflicts; “That is not gonna work, you know."

Later, Aamir shares his thoughts on the hypothetical situation of being forced to handle a case that might clash with his religion, stating he is " praying I can avoid it," highlighting the extension of fear in the professional field he had in the educational institution. While he doesn't have a concrete navigation plan, he expresses that in such a conflicting case, he would do "the most minimum I can possibly, and if that works, then leave it at that." Aamir’s account shows how the fear of repercussions permeates the professional context as the perpetuation of colonial influences in contemporary settings.

Ali recounts his departure from the professional social workspace; after graduating with his Ph.D., all his colleagues were given positions within various universities, but he struggled and was rejected. He attributes his rejection to the ingenuity of social work’s commitment to diversity, as he felt his conflicting philosophies were a perceived threat, leading to his exclusion from opportunities, akin to how the occident marginalizes and excludes the Orient to maintain hegemonic structures (Said, 1978). After an extensive process, he mentioned that he was short-listed for a faculty position at a university in Toronto. However, he was ultimately denied, upon which the faculty advisor informed him of the decision and shared that “the panel was unsure about your political beliefs,” even though such was never explicitly explored during the interview. Ali believes that what they had in mind was his religious beliefs, an investigation by the university akin to the ‘witch hunt’ Zaynab described as “detective work”; he shares, "Like basically, religious people are not welcome in social work education, especially as teachers. What's going on in these faculty groups when hiring is implicit understandings of what they want as an *outcome*, right?" Ali’s rejection was to preserve the hegemony of Western secular liberalism within the university, where rhetoric about openness and diversity frequently conceals more subtle exclusions based on ideological conformity.

Ahmed and Zaynab work in an Islamic social work context and share how their experiences contrast with the secular context. They both attribute their selection to faith-based reasons. Zaynab indicates that due to the secular context of organizations having “its own set of expectations,” with limitations in autonomous practice, she accordingly avoided them as she would “have to conform to the values of that organization.” She openly expresses that she would be uncomfortable to be unable to be her true self, which she can be in the Islamic context, “it's almost like acting hypocritically, right? Because, to someone's face, I would be very accepting and validating. But inside, I'm like, oh, my God!”. Ahmed, likewise, illustrates his trepidation as a fear of working in a context where “giving them advice based on religion, his license could be revoked.” His selection within the Islamic context is due to fear of such repercussions: “I’ll be very frank with you. That's a big reason I'm avoiding working in a regular social work setting.”

Furthermore, Zaynab shares her professional internship experience with a hospital providing end-of-life care. She indicated that the other students didn’t have “the education on how to deal with this. because they weren't provided that perspective, ever,” referring to the consideration of religious dimensions within practice. She explains that the secular nature of practice tends to push towards “the removal of religion,” however, in her secular practice, “a major theme was religion because people were thinking about the purpose of their lives … and looking forward to the next life.” Zaynab's internship experience underscores how Western secular liberal social work tends to sideline the importance of religious dimensions in practice and overlook the cultural nuances and complexities inherent in non-Western societies, even though religion profoundly impacts social work practice, such as end-of-life care. Both Zaynab’s and Ahmed's avoidance of secular liberal social work practice contexts reveal the enduring legacy of colonialism within social work, as the hegemonic colonial perspective promotes epistemic violence, where non-Western perspectives are silenced or attacked.

Interrogating Boundaries: Reconciling Traditional Islam and Secular Social Work

The findings have shed light on participants' nuanced experiences and navigation techniques within the secular social work context in the Greater Toronto Area. However, an underlying subject that emerged from their stories is the reconciliation of traditional Islam within a secularized social work context. Ali elaborates on the traditional Islamic worldviews and explains that they are centred on the "belief of the divine" and the belief in "the one total reality truth": a single objective ultimate truth. Thus, regarding reconciling with social work, the Islamic "belief is totally inconsistent with the underpinnings of modern life in general; most modern academia does not believe in it." Ali points out that theoretically, both are "polar opposites," thus, fundamentally, a theoretical reconciliation is not possible between a belief in "ultimate truth and conformity to that, and an individualistic centred lifestyle." Ahmed, on a similar note, recollects the concepts of objective and subjective truths, indicating that the postmodern society demands that "there is no singular objective truth or objective reality. So, reality or the truth is subjective, meaning whatever you feel is right, is right and whatever you feel is wrong, is wrong." He then contrasts that notion to Islamic *Usool* (Principles); "in Islam, you have the *Usool*, and you have the rulings which are derived from those principles" and accordingly, "in Islam, we have the objective truth." This clear epistemological divergence, spelled out by Ali and Ahmed, can result in a daily dilemma for the social worker, as Zaynab explains, due to secular social work practice being rooted in a "particular worldview and Islamic practice [being] rooted in a particular worldview. So fundamentally, there's a tension and that fundamental tension can play out in everyday practice." Zaynab elaborates on this tension by sharing the aspect of spirituality and mindfulness from one of her classes, in which the secular "understanding of spirituality is different from ours," ignoring the religious dimensions of these concepts and rather focusing on "connecting to the self, focusing on yourself, clarifying your thoughts, a cognitive

exercise labelled as a spiritual practice," and later points out the irony of calling it spiritual without even having the "recognition of a spirit."

Nonetheless, amidst this dilemma of two divergent worldviews the traditional Muslim social worker is required to embody, the participants articulate that a practical reconciliation is possible, as Ali explains that it requires identifying commonalities and practical realms where overlaps exist within which the traditional Muslim can engage in social work practices that align with their core religious beliefs without conflict. Ahmed echoed this same approach and elaborated that social work practice and theories can be applied "for the Muslim practitioner, as long as our morals are based off what Allah says in the Quran and Sunnah… and it conforms to that." However, when conflicts occur, Ahmed suggests the school needs to be more cooperative, "That's where accommodation needs to be made from the College of Social Workers, from the higher-ups." Aamir, however, disagrees with any possible reconciliation, indicating "it's not going to happen" as he believes it is an insurmountable task "because you've got to change the entirety of society, change policies, governments." Aamir describes the matters as an unrealistic colossal undertaking "simply to accommodate Muslims". His sentiments highlight the overwhelming nature of the challenge and the perceived impracticality of achieving reconciliation for traditional Muslims in Western Liberal Secular societies.

Appreciation of a Platform and Safe Space to Voice Themselves

Half of the participants thanked me and showed a profound appreciation for my project and the opportunity to voice themselves during the interviews as if it were a cathartic release of bottled-up emotions. Ahmed recollects the difficulty he had in traversing the secularized landscape, "something that I was fighting with within my full BSW," and shared thanks and prayers to me: "I appreciate the fact that you're, you know, doing a thesis based off of this… Allah bless you." He further shared that the study has substantial implications as he "believes every traditional Muslim is concerned about this." Ali echoed a similar notion on the more

significant implications:" I think this research work you're doing is very important. It can support people, traditional Muslims around the world." Furthermore, in acknowledging the project's importance, Aamir shared that one conducting such a project" would have to be courageous *mashallah* (Allah's Praises) … it would not be an easy task." Such sentiments of appreciation display the profound impact of providing a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and the disheartening state of social work as the participants in this study felt compelled to suppress their emotions and experiences within the social work context.

Chapter VI: Discussion

In the following section, I will discuss and expand on the experiences of traditional Muslim social workers living the GTA, drawing from the insights of Edward Said's postcolonial theory. In this discussion, I aim to analyze and interpret the implications of the research within the broader context of postcolonial discourse.

Social Work: A Hostile Colonial Venture

This qualitative research study unravelled an analogous shared experience by the participants of a pronounced hostility surfacing from the incongruency between their traditions and beliefs and the prevailing secular liberal worldviews within social work education and practice. These encounters not only extend the limited findings in my literature review but also contribute further nuances to the phenomena, especially the navigation techniques that social workers with religious backgrounds observe. Ranz (2021), while studying how religious Jewish and Muslim students of social work cope in a secular college, indicated that coping with conflicting worldviews for these populations is inevitable. Due to the school of social works' "desire to become a 'respectable' academic discipline, recognized and valued in both professional and academic circles," it has accordingly opted for a secularizing approach in which "religion has either been pathologized or relegated to student-led 'corridor discussions', far from the ears of skeptical, even hostile, academic staff." (pp. 2323-2324).

Adopting Edward Said's postcolonial lens upon the described phenomena exposes the power dynamics and the institutionalization of an exclusively Eurocentric perspective within the Western secular liberal social work framework. These dynamics construct and define populations such as traditional Muslims as the non-Western "other" who, accordingly, must grapple with and navigate a context in which the dominant secular worldview marginalizes them. This phenomenon resonates strongly with the participants' navigation accounts, in which the pathologizing impact of their religious beliefs was vividly evident. The participant's encounter

with hostility, the process of subjugation, and the pathologization of their religious beliefs can be viewed as a manifestation of Orientalism, as Said describes the stereotyping, generalization, and devaluation of non-Western cultures (1978). For instance, Ahmed's account of his professor's assertions, "religion is the cause of oppression," challenging Ahmed's fundamental philosophies, depicts the process of pathologizing religious beliefs. The professor's over-generalization ignores complex sociopolitical dimensions of the phenomena and acts as a catalyst in perpetuating a negative stereotype in which religion, particularly Islam, results in adverse outcomes: subjection to oppression. This process of pathologizing religion by labelling it as an inherently oppressive force and overall problematic eliminates any possibility of academic discourses and discussions to incorporate or respect religion and/or spiritual beliefs.

Similarly, the harsh comparison of Ali's thesis topic during his defence to "garbage" also illustrates the notion that religion does not belong in the university, nor beyond its walls—relegated to a metaphorical trash can. The comparison made by the professor exhibits a sense of dismissiveness and contempt towards religious perspectives, marginalizing them to the point of demotivating and crushing the idea of scholarly contributions of traditional Muslim experiences and knowledge within the sphere of academic literature. This demotivating and crushing process ensures that diverse perspectives remain suppressed, thus reifying a hierarchical framework in which, as Edward Said puts it, the Western secular dominant discourse functions as a tool of intellectual imperialism, perpetuating a narrow, singular understanding of knowledge and truth.

Additionally, Aamir's encounter with topics that conflict with his religious views being shut down in class exemplifies the dispiriting atmosphere in the pathologization process. This instance displays the suppression of diverse perspectives, indicating that they are incompatible within academic discourse, contributing to the environment Ahmed indicated as "our way or the highway**...** forcing people to believe certain things a certain way." The participant's experiences of pervasive antireligious sentiments suggest adverse educational outcomes. This creates an

environment where students reside in a hostile and demotivating atmosphere, hampering the potential for meaningful dialogue and fruitful discussions due to the binary divide of religion as incompatible and inferior. Thus, the relegation of religion to the periphery or pathologizing it, as Ranz (2021) defines, displays how the institutions perpetuate a colonial residue that reinforces the superiority of secular Western ideals. In this experience, Aamir and most participants felt that their diverse beliefs should be excluded, thus opting for a coping mechanism of remaining silent amidst the divergence due to persistent discouragement of active participation.

Both Thaller (2011) and Ranz (2021) conclude with two similar themes regarding the navigation methods religious social work students and practitioners opt for amidst experiences of discrimination: silence due to fear and adapting one's worldview. In alignment with their findings, my research points toward a similar theme of navigation of silence due to fear by many participants. Additionally, two participants indicated that they openly advocated their religious beliefs. However, my participants did not indicate adapting their worldview in response to their challenges, a divergence from Thaller’s (2011) and Ranz's (2021) findings. This divergence could be due to a fundamental difference between the focus of their studies and mine. Thaller (2011) and Ranz (2021) examined the experiences of religious social work students and practitioners, including Muslims, but my research specifically targeted traditional Muslims within this demographic. Between the different typologies, Azmi (1991) spells out: traditionalist, messianic, fundamentalist and modernist; the traditional Muslim strictly adheres to the normative interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah (Topolski, 2018). Thus, traditional Muslims are less inclined to waver or adapt their worldview in response to external challenges. Furthermore, my research extended beyond the existing literature, which only focused on Muslim social work experiences within educational institutes; my study highlighted traditional Muslim social workers' reconciliation and navigation techniques within academic institutions and the profession.

A navigation strategy was inevitable due to the incongruence between the underlying religious philosophies and the predominant secular worldview within social work education and practice. The selection of most participants opting to walk in silence due to apprehension indicates that the matter is deeper and more alarming than the pathologization of religion; they delve into a dimension of power dynamics that result in suppression and exclusion. This process of exclusion, as Edward Said contends, is the deliberate scheme of the secular Eurocentric institution upon traditional Muslims and ensures they are perceived as fundamentally different and must exist in the periphery as the 'non-Western other.'

Aamir's approach of "staying in the gray zone," Abdullah's method of 'steering clear', Zaynab's choice of silence, and being absent within a secularized social work practice context all represent the nuances of a silent approach. Aamir's strategy of "staying in the gray zone" ensures a space of ambiguity for him to traverse in, like an umbrella, that will cover him and eliminate potential religious compromise due to overt conflicts. However, maintaining this 'umbrella' requires a persistent and rigorous mental exercise on his end to grasp the surrounding imperial power structures without challenging them directly.

Abdullah, akin to Aamir, practices a mental exercise of 'steering clear' of situations that will place him in an uncomfortable position conflicting with his Islamic principles: avoidance of direct confrontation. In contrast, Zaynab opts for silence, which serves as a shield to protect her from potential judgment, scrutiny, or adverse consequences that could otherwise result from her engaging in open dialogue.

However, all these strategies overall reflect an acknowledgment of power differentials within social work, as the traditional Muslims sense a lack of power compared to the institution and those who philosophically align with the intuition. The hegemonic secular and liberal views of the university, or as Ahmed tactfully refers to it, the "certain ideology," dominate and wield tremendous power, and it is such influence that the traditional Muslims fear. They fear the repercussions of challenging and resisting, "losing it all," in which their education can be at risk,

their degree, their livelihood, things that these individuals have worked so hard for and at extreme lengths ranging from a bachelor's, four years, to a doctorate, nine plus years. This is a distressing anxiety these individuals live with daily. These pains are further exacerbated as the participants recollect that the same traditional principles that propelled them to pursue this field, once entered, were no longer welcome, a sense of disillusionment and betrayal.

Only two participants held onto their beliefs firmly and did not budge; instead, they opted for a navigation approach by openly engaging about their religious beliefs. However, only Maryam, still practicing as a social worker in Toronto, could sustain such an approach. However, as she detailed, she still experiences layered challenges as a visible female Muslim. On the other hand, Ali was not as fortunate and experienced the exclusionary influence of the secular institution as he “struggle[d] of trying to maintain and push Islamic identity in the context of hostility all around.” He was not welcomed in any social work workspace and was even explicitly informed that the exclusion may have been due to his ‘political beliefs’, eliminating the presence of the ‘other’s’ view. Ali’s and Maryam’s accounts indicate the secular institution's power dynamics and the repercussions those who dare to challenge them face. Nonetheless, all participants narratives served as a testament to the power differentials within the field of social work, leaving many traditional Muslims in a dilemma on how to navigate with their estranged beliefs.

Nevertheless, Traditional Muslim social workers reconcile their religious beliefs within secularized social work contexts through strategies like ambiguity, avoidance of confrontation, and silence due to reconciliation being implausible. These approaches reflect power differentials in the field, where Muslims often feel marginalized. Some engage in open dialogue, while others face challenges maintaining their Islamic identity.

Social Work Implications

The findings of my interpretive phenomenological research clearly display significant implications for the field of social work. The context of the study was around the challenges faced by traditional Muslim social workers within a secularized context of social work education and practice. Thus, within such contexts, hostile experiences, power dynamics, and coping strategies were exposed, and accordingly, there is a dire need for reflection and reform within social work education and practice. Neglecting the accounts participants share will uphold the hegemonic force that maintains their silence and bottled-up sentiments. Several vital implications and recommendations emerge from the study, including, but not limited to, a paradigm shift, re-evaluation of curriculum, creating a safe and inclusive space for religious minorities, an overhaul of religious bias and assumptions, and facilitating conflicting worldviews in social work.

Paradigm Shift

Edwards Said's postcolonial lens as a theory within my study exposes the need for a paradigm shift to include Muslims in social work education and practice. Said contends that the occident, otherwise known as the dominant Eurocentric perspective within academia, preserves a hierarchical framework in which non-Western cultures, oriental, are marginalized and relegated. Similarly, in the context of the current study, traditional Muslims' perspectives were dismissed and pathologized, such that Zaynab felt that after expressing such results in being "labelled as somebody who is a bigot.. as it doesn't align with social work values."

Thus, there is a need for a paradigm shift, moving away from the current dominant secular liberal approach to one that values and incorporates diverse cultural perspectives. Fostering inclusivity for religious minorities is essential within the profession, as the Canadian Association of Social Workers upholds a core value to "all individuals, families, groups, and communities to be free from oppression, exclusion, racism, and discrimination" (2024, pp. 11).

Social work needs to be at the forefront of recognizing and alleviating this form of oppression upon a religious minority rather than being the oppressors perpetuating the oppression.

Curriculum Re-evaluation

The participants' experiences clearly indicate that the current social work curricula must be re-evaluated. Social work, in its current state, fails to adequately address concerns dear to the traditional Muslim population, like Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Moving beyond this requires that education reflect diverse perspectives, including traditional Muslim viewpoints. As Aamir indicated, this role can only be authentically fulfilled by the presence of traditional Muslim scholarship within the social work faculty, akin to Indigenous studies. Aamir eloquently describes the traditional Muslim identity as "very different to a regular person" and has a different worldview that is "god-central" that transcends the material concerns of the world as every aspect of life revolves around religious practices and beliefs, from the first-morning prayer to the final prayer before sleep. Thus, genuine inclusion of Muslims within social work will need to go beyond waving the flag of diversity and representation and recognize and honour the profound significance of traditional Muslim scholarship perspectives and contributions. This innovative integration will make the current curricula culturally relevant and better equipped to address the complex realities faced by the diverse population within universities.

Creation of a Genuine, Safe, and Inclusive Space

The participant's engagements in mental acrobats to avoid conflicts reveal the exclusionary hostile context of social work and the current socio-political climate. The participants' experience with social work suggests the artificiality of social work's claim of inclusivity. The dissonance between the claims and the experienced reality of students prompts the need for a genuine, safe, and inclusive space for many religious minority group members to feel welcome and respected. As the participants expressed their distress about feeling compelled to be silent, social work must recognize its involvement in silencing voices and

relegating them to the periphery by upholding dominant discourses that dictate the boundaries of acceptability. Accordingly, social work must alleviate this shortfall and cultivate a safe environment that truly embraces diversity, equity, and belonging rather than simply paying lip service to these promises. This reform is entirely possible by the following protocols: implementing policies that discourage discrimination based on religion, developing support resources for religious minorities, and promoting open dialogue so that students can freely discuss their opinions without worrying about being silenced or facing negative consequences. Such reform could enable social work education and practice settings to fulfill their promise of empowering individuals and communities on the margins of society, and working across differences.

Overhauling Religious Bias and Assumptions through Collaboration

Beyond the paradigm shift, curriculum revamps, and cultivation of safe spaces, just as social workers are encouraged to engage in individual introspection through the social work skill of critical reflection, social work as an institution needs to examine the assumptions held regarding traditional Muslims critically. Such institutional reflection will identify and address implicit biases essential in nurturing genuine inclusivity and equity within the field. Furthermore, the institution of social work needs to collaborate with traditional Muslims in genuine dialogue.

The premise of such a genuine collaboration would be that social workers look beyond their initial judgments of traditional Muslims rooted in their assumptions. Whereafter, the dialogue would invite traditional Muslim scholars, practitioners, and community leaders to participate in professional development and the policy-making processes. Such direct engagements would expose the institution to traditional Muslims' experiences, challenges, and needs, thus fostering a more accurate and respectful representation of the traditional Muslim.

Facilitating Conflicting Worldviews in Social Work

Social work professionals and academics urgently need to enhance their capacity to tolerate and embrace conflicting worldviews, and effectively manage the tensions that inevitably arise. Despite the expectation that such skills should naturally align with conventional social work values and practices, it is evident that they have fallen short, particularly in the case of traditional Muslim social work students and professionals within the secular field. Addressing this significant gap is imperative for fostering inclusivity and promoting cultural understanding within social work.

Limitations

The following research project has expanded the literature surrounding the severely understudied experiences of traditional Muslims. However, it is equally important to note the limitations of the study. In the following section, I will discuss some limitations as my study contributes to the literature despite the limitations: potential research bias, limited geographical scope, and time restraints.

Firstly, my own identity as a traditional Muslim is a potential limitation of this study, and as such, it could give salience to one specific perspective in the research process. Even though I was diligent in attempting to remove myself from the research by practicing reflexivity, and questioning my assumptions, it's essential to recognize that my background can potentially influence the interpretation of the data. However, amidst this potential research limitation, I believe it positively affects the literature as my identity facilitated rapport building with the participants and offered a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to extract richer data accordingly.

Another limitation is the geographical scope of the study, as I only focused on traditional Muslims in the GTA. Yes, the research I conducted shed light upon the experiences of traditional Muslims within Toronto, but the findings cannot apply to geographical areas beyond. However, this limitation can be more beneficial for the literature than limiting as it indicates an opportunity

for growth through future research in different regions. This potential direction will be elaborated within the following section of future directions.

Lastly, as the following project is limited to the duration of the Master of Social Work program at York University, explicit time constraints affected the depth of data collection and its analysis. However, to address this physical time limit, I rigorously planned the project by generating a work plan with a clear timeline; I also ensured efficient time management strategies were implemented. Moreover, this limitation sets the stage for future studies by making way for possible studies in the future.

Future Directions

As initially presented during the introductory chapters of this research paper, Vallerio (2022) explains that even though the Muslim populous is the second largest and fastest-growing religious grouping, it is comparatively understudied. Thus, there is a need for future directions on the phenomena of study, which would rectify the current research's limitations. Nonetheless, some possible future approaches are longitudinal, comparative, intersectionality, policy analysis, and client perspectives.

A longitudinal study would provide extended rich data on the traditional Muslim experience beyond the limited duration of my research. This approach would follow participants long-term and determine the extended impact of a secular context, the sustainability of various navigating strategies, and other dimensions not observed in my research. A comparative approach could move beyond Toronto and identify commonalities, differences, and unique factors in the experiences of traditional Muslims in different geographic locations and cultural contexts.

An intersectional study could focus on the intersection of identity with other intersections of the traditional Muslim social workers' identities, such as race, gender, and ethnicity. The importance of such an approach was alluded to within Maryam's dialogue, which influenced the layers of her identity. Her being a Muslim female wearing a hijab generated a unique navigation

experience. Thus, an intersectional approach would provide a deeper understanding of how multiple identities intersect and influence traditional Muslim experiences.

A policy analysis could provide an opportunity to assess and critically examine the existing equity and diversity policies. This study could help identify the hidden colonial residues within the system. Lastly, a client perspective approach would take a different take on the phenomena by assessing how traditional Muslim service users experience the secular social work context. Such a study would help inform how these users approach the services, their satisfaction, and treatment outcomes and thus accordingly inform culturally responsive practice approaches.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Albert Einstein aptly stated, "You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew." This sentiment echoes the implication from the findings of my study, indicating the need for a fresh new perspective from which to view the matter at hand. The six in-depth semi-structured interviews in the interpretive phenomenological approach paired with Edward Said’s postcolonial theory uncovered rich qualitative data that revealed the severity of the situation. These participants indicated their daily dilemmas surrounded by anxiety, fear, extreme distress, and constant remaining in silence – without any room to speak up and those who do face severe repercussions and challenges. Amidst the hostile terrain, the participant's efforts to reconcile their religious worldview with secular liberal social work seem implausible. Thus, the following research is pressing and can promote meaningful change and cultivate a more inclusive environment by implementing the recommendations shared that acknowledge and address the challenges the participants faced. The schools of social work must reflect and implement such amendments, as such will allow further growth in providing true diversity and genuine space for healthy dialogue that is true to the fundamental principles of education rather than promoting indoctrination.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Email

Subject:
Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Social Work: Seeking Insights from Traditional Muslim Practitioners

To Whom It May Concern,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Waseem Munir, and I am a Master of Social Work Student at York University in Toronto. I am conducting a study focused on exploring the integration of Islamic beliefs within the professional context of social work, specifically within the greater Toronto area.

The study revolves around the following topic: the experiences and perspectives of traditional Muslim social workers navigating the complexities and hostilities within secularized social work environments.

Traditional Muslims are defined as those “following a long-established normative body of revealed sources and teachings from the two primary sources of guidance: the Qur’an and Sunnah, and the normative interpretation of these by the long-established tradition of Ulama (religious scholars)”

Your organization's standing in the social services field leads me to believe that your network includes enthusiastic practitioners who may be eligible and interested in participating in the study. I will conduct confidential interviews with practitioners willing to share their valuable insights and experiences. Your assistance would be extremely appreciated by connecting us with practitioners who might be interested in contributing to this research. All participants will be compensated with a 25$ gift card honorarium as a token of appreciation to the location/store of your choice. All interview data will be kept strictly confidential, ensuring the privacy and sensitivity of the information shared.

Please feel free to contact me directly at 647 688 9490 or by e-mail.

Thank you for your attention.

Regards,

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Date: _____

Study Name: Traditional Muslim Social Workers in Secular Contexts

Researchers: Waseem Munir | Master of Social Work Advanced Placement Student at York University (220440822)
Graduate Supervisor: Kinnon R. MacKinnon, kinnonmk@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research: Masters Practice Research Paper

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: We ask participants to partake in a 1-1.5-hour interview, preferably in person, if not over Zoom. The participants will be asked questions to explore 'how traditional Muslim social workers reconcile their belief principles in a secularized social work practice context within GTA (Greater Toronto Area).' All participants will be compensated with a 25$ gift card honorarium as a token of appreciation to the location/store of your choice.

Risks and Discomforts: The research project is relatively low-risk and approved by the York University Office of Research Ethics. However, there is the possibility of feeling potential discomfort by exploring upsetting experiences. In mitigating these possible negative emotions, the researcher aims to create a supportive and safe environment for participants, fostering an atmosphere where you will feel comfortable. Moreover, to prevent participant fatigue or burnout, participants will be offered a midway break and additional, if needed, ensuring reasonable activity durations and providing rest to maintain participant well-being. Maintaining open lines of communication throughout the process is integral as it will allow you to ask questions, voice concerns, or provide feedback at any stage. Lastly, we encourage connecting to culturally appropriate support resources if you need additional support following the interviews:

Naseeha Helpline: 1-866-NASEEHA (627-3342)
Khalil Center Support & Crisis Line: 1-855-5KHALIL (4-2545)

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: The research can offer a platform for self-reflection, validation, and support. By engaging in the topic at hand, traditional Islam and social work, you can reflect on your religious beliefs and how they impact your practice. This engagement may result in possible coping mechanisms, strategies, and techniques you have developed throughout your years of practice. Furthermore, the conversations within the interviews could validate your experiences and build a sense of community and support, knowing that others face similar problems. Additionally, the research can benefit the scholarly community by exploring a potential gap within the literature, providing rich data to inform practice and creating a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The rich qualitative data can inform schools of social work and the college on how to accommodate these crucial perspectives for practice within the field of social work.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: 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 your relationship with York University either now or in the future. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the 25$ gift card honorarium for agreeing to participate in the project, even if you withdraw without completing the research. Moreover, In the event of withdrawal, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence, and unless you specifically indicate your consent, we will ensure your anonymity in any report or publication of the research.

In the case you consent to waive your anonymity, the principal investigator will keep a link that identifies you to your coded information, but this link will be kept secure and available only to the principal investigator and/or selected members of the research team. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential.

Your data (audio recordings) will be safely stored in the principal investigators' offline Sony voice recorder and their secure personal computer. Only the principal research investigator will have access to this information. As this research is groundbreaking and pioneering in traditional Islamic social work, the data collected in this research project ***may*** be used – in anonymized form, unless consented to otherwise- by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry till December 31st 2024. After such dates, the data will be deleted and destroyed without the possibility of recovery using data shredder software.

This study will primarily utilize in-person interviews; however, if scheduling, mobility, or other scones arise, Zoom will be used secondarily, an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet, privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk that a third party may intercept your responses (e.g., government agencies or hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please get in touch with 647 688 9490 for further information.

Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password-protected file to research team members' local computers, not the cloud-based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting/data collection session."

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or your role in the study, please get in touch with Dr. Kinnon R. MacKinnon by telephone at 647 534 5058 or by e-mail (kinnonmk@yorku.ca). You may also contact the primary investigator, Waseem Munir, at 647 688 9490 or by e-mail (muniwase@yorku.ca). This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board. It conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or your rights as a study participant, please contact the Director, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, 3rd Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I (insert name)_____consent to participate in "The Imperial Institution of Social Work and the Traditional 'Oriental'" conducted by Waseem Munir. 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.

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent

Audio recording

I (insert name)_____consent to the audio recording of my interview(s) regardless of being in person or online via Zoom.

Consent to use of quotes

I (insert name)_____consent to using quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research.

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

General research question

How do traditional Muslim social workers reconcile their religious beliefs with secular social work training and in the context of their social work practice in Canada.'

Preamble and consent

Should describe the focus of the research and on what basis the individual was selected for the interview. Also, you should speak to the voluntary nature of their participation and that they are free not to answer any questions and leave the interview at any time. You should also clarify how their confidentiality and privacy will be protected and how the data will be used to generate a research paper. If not already obtained have them sign a consent form.

Questions

A) Entry into social work and training

i) How did you become interested in social work and what was the experience of your training?

Prompts (only if necessary):
Tentative

- What drew you to social work studies?
- Where did you study and what was your focus?
- Were your religious beliefs and practices an issue in your studies? How so?
- Are there any specific incidents that demonstrated these challenges for you?

ii) What should be done in social work education to better facilitate the training of traditional Muslim students?

B) Social work practice

i) Where have you been active in social work practice following your training?

Prompts (only if necessary):

- Have you ever worked in a secular social work setting? If so where? If not why not?
- Have you ever worked or been active in a social work setting in a Muslim setting? If so where? If not why not?
- How much has your social work training been a factor in your social work practice

ii) How do you reconcile your traditional religious beliefs and practices with social work practice?

Prompts (only if necessary):

- Have you ever felt tension between your religious beliefs and practices and the CASW code of ethics and social work guidelines? If so, please describe. how do you manage this?
- How do your religious beliefs and practices affect your social work practice? Have you perceived resistance or other tensions in connecting these? How so? How have you addressed these?
- How do your religious beliefs and practices influence your services or approaches when working with clients if any? What about clients who are non-Muslims?
- If working in a secularized social work setting, what kind of support systems or coping mechanisms do you rely on to navigate potential conflicts between your religious beliefs and practices and your social work setting?

iii) Is there a need for more dialogue and collaboration between traditional Muslim social workers and their secular counterparts? What can be done to facilitate this?

C) Thoughts on reconciliation

i) Do you believe integrating traditional Islamic beliefs into social work practice is possible? If so, what would be the core component of such an integration?

ii) Are there specific areas of social work where you believe the integration of traditional Islamic values is less or more challenging?

Prompt (only if necessary)

- Counselling?
- Advocacy?
- Community development?
- Policy?

D) Last thoughts

i) Any last thoughts on the subject?

Appendix 4: Research Ethics Certificate

PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE 2022

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Waseem Munir

successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)

Certificate # 0000952119 **9 September, 2023**