

YEARNING FOR TAWHID: THREE MUSLIMS' JOURNEYS IN JUSTICE WORK IN THE  
SETTLER COLONIAL CONTEXT OF TORONTO

by

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## ABSTRACT

Yearning for Tawhid: Three Muslims' Journeys in Justice Work in the Settler Colonial Context of Toronto

Master of Social Work, 2018

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This critical narrative study seeks to explore two central research questions: 1) How do Muslim peoples understand, approach and engage in social justice work in and around Toronto and what are their experiences, and 2) What are the ways in which Islam and spirituality influence, impact and shape their social justice work? Using a lens that involves critical race theory, anti-colonialism and Islam, I delve deep into my own experiences and perspectives on Islam, spirituality and social justice work, as well as those of two other Muslim social justice advocates involved in Indigenous sovereignty, Black liberation and anti-Islamophobia movements. The findings of this study offer deep critical insights on the state of anti-oppressive and transformative social work and social justice spaces in the settler colonial context of Toronto. Central concepts explored in this work include dynamics of anger, significant relationships and Islamic concepts such as *tawhid*. It has been completed as partial completion of the Master of Social Work Program at Ryerson University.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. I have uttered these words since I was a child with little understanding of the layers of meaning and blessings they hold, and even now as a twenty-seven year old revert I have still so much more wisdom to gain of their significance. It is with a full heart that I acknowledge the wisdom, gifts, relationships and opportunities that God has given me and continues to gift me that have led to this study. I hold immense gratitude and love for my parents who have sacrificed so much for my benefit and were my first teachers in Islam, as well as for my sisters who have shown me unending support. I also want to acknowledge and extend gratitude to my soul-friends for their patience and friendship; Hannah, Sarah, Jayal, Amal and Harpreet. Furthermore, without the guidance, inspiration and phenomenal resistance work of Gordon Pon, Purnima George, Jennifer Poole and Notisha Massaquoi, this work would be impossible. Lastly, I have so much respect, gratitude and awe for the two incredible souls who shared their words and heart with me for this study; thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*And among those We created is a community which guides by truth and thereby establishes justice.*  
—Surah Al-A'raf: 181

My father tells me every year on the day that I grow in age that I was born at *maghrib* during the month of *Ramadan*. It is one of the few details my parents have spoken of consistently about my coming into the world, or of my childhood for that matter. When I was younger, I did not pay much attention to his story. It was only a few months ago, twenty-seven years into existence, that I truly heard the only memory of my birth that my father has kept all this time. The ways in which I have come to finally understand it, and hear it in my heart, is bound up in the justice work I have embarked on throughout my young life.

Over the past three years, I have whole-heartedly begun a personal exploration of my own past and tradition in an attempt to challenge my complicity in ongoing colonialism, as well as to re-gain a sense of my identity and purpose. Before this, I engaged in social justice work such as poverty-reduction organizing, environmental protection, and supporting Indigenous sovereignty movements as a student and social work practitioner, but without a strong connectedness to my own ancestral land, faith and culture. This brought about overwhelming feelings of confusion and loss, and without strong anchoring in my identity and heritage, I often found myself following Western and colonial knowledge systems and practices that contradicted the greater intentions of the work I was partaking in. At the center of my return-to-self and re-learning has been reigniting and nurturing my spirit through my Islamic faith.

As a younger person, I knowingly and unknowingly distanced myself from my culture, faith and heritage. Growing up as a Pakistani/Punjabi, non-headscarf-wearing, second-generation-Canadian, settler, daughter of hardworking parents who immigrated during the South

Asian diaspora of the late 1970s, Muslim woman is an experience marked by layers of difference. I have come to understand that the anger towards and distancing of my identity, faith and heritage I experienced as a younger person were a direct reaction to the pain of existing at these multiple intersections in a Western, Eurocentric and racist society such as Canada. Not only did I feel unsafe, unheard, unworthy and unseen within the broader Western, Canadian and white society I was surrounded by, but the realities of being Ahmadi Muslim meant that I also received such exclusion and disregard from those I would least expect it from; fellow Muslims in faith. As a younger person, I emotionally struggled to make sense of this all, and truly failed to.

This return to self and Islam has been a complicated and blessed journey that is continuously unfolding; and the relationships, experiences and teachings I have been gifted through the justice work I have engaged in has been integral. This study is my first attempt at weaving together the ways in which spirituality, and more specifically Islam, can and does impact, shape and guide social justice work in the settler colonial context of Canada. Rather than present broad-reaching conclusions, I am more interested in diving deeply into the stories of two fellow Muslim, Toronto-based social justice advocates, as well as my own. Using an anti-colonial, critical race and Islamically-grounded approach, this narrative study seeks to unveil, explore and consider the ways in which myself and two other Muslim, spirit-oriented social justice advocates navigate and experience ourselves, our faith and our work in the settler colonial context of Toronto.

My intentions to engage in this study involve a deep desire to carve out a space for myself and fellow Muslim peoples who engage in social justice work from a spirit-centered place; it represents my search for some sort of representation of not only Islam, but of the many intersections that Muslims are positioned within and around in social justice literature and



practice. These intentions to engage in this work were set over a period of time, as I transitioned through many different experiences of engaging in activist/solidarity work, beginning with formal social work education in a Canadian university, working for an Anishinaabe social service agency in Northwestern Ontario, continuing to engage in activist/solidarity work and enrolling again into formal social work education for this Master of Social Work degree. Throughout these various contexts, I searched for belonging, comfort, solidarity, healing, familiarity; a place/space where I could be and nurture my full self. The most hostile and dismissive of all the contexts I mentioned above was my formal undergraduate social work education. Motivated from years of engaging in solidarity and resistance work with grassroots organizations and spaces focused on Indigenous sovereignty, poverty-reduction and social justice education, I entered my social work studies believing that the field had similar values that I witnessed and expressed in this critical work by activists. I quickly realized that the formal field of social work, despite its stated values of social justice, can be quite disconnected and can perpetuate oppression in many forms. I witnessed and experienced this in many ways, including the heaviness of whiteness within my formal education, the ways in which spirituality was continuously devalued, the prioritizing of documentation and surveillance over peoples' agency, and the focus on professionalism. For instance, critical anti-oppression and the commitment to transformational social justice were so absent from my undergraduate education that a tenured social work professor was successfully able to use his own personal experience of being a white man who was excluded from the Black liberation movement in South Africa during apartheid as an example of oppression. The other students in my class, all of whom except for three were white-presenting, did not challenge or question this story or the professor; in fact many of them had never learned of anti-oppressive practice or social justice frameworks previously and were

thus unable to see how dangerous that statement was. I, already experiencing rage, disbelief, disappointment and grief from all of my classes including this one, disputed this professor, who kept his cool and assured me that he was right. It was in these circumstances (which were unfortunately abundant throughout my undergraduate studies), that I reached a breaking point and could no longer sit silently while such anti-Black, colonial, racist and violent beliefs, ideas and actions unfolded before me. The lack of representation of racialized, spirit-centered, Muslim, immigrant and non-Western perspectives, and the accompanying heartbreak, loneliness and grief that result from such exclusion propelled me to the foundational focus of this study.

The term ‘social justice advocate’ in this paper refers to an individual who engages in activist, political organizing, and/or decolonizing transformative work that seeks to address and eradicate forms of oppression including settler colonialism, racism, colonialism, capitalism, homophobia, transphobia, sanism, ableism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, misogyny, and other forms of institutionalized marginalization. The term ‘social justice advocate’ will also be used interchangeably with ‘social worker’ in this paper, since it is my understanding that the core principles of the field of social work align with the work of transformational social justice. Muslim voices and perspectives are lacking from social work education and the broader literature on social justice work (Baksh, 2016; Ghafournia et al, 2017; Ross-Sherrif, 2017; Shahjahan, 2005) especially in the settler-colonial context of Canada. In a time where Muslims are especially targeted for brutal violence, hate, mistrust and suspicion, making meaningful space for our voices, lived experiences, perspectives and justice work is more vital than ever. The following chapters will include a literature review, an in-depth theoretical framework, discuss of methodology and an exploration of research findings. This study will conclude with a discussion of limitations and recommendations for future work.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I will explore significant issues that emerged when conducting a review of relevant literature pertaining to the experiences of Muslim social worker practitioners, and Muslims engaging with the field of social work in general. I will also discuss major themes from relevant literature found, as well as discuss prominent gaps. In my search, I explored journal articles, doctoral dissertations and books . I conducted these searches online using the Ryerson University Library and Archives (RULA), Google Scholar and the Social Services Abstracts database. The key terms I used in my searches included “Islam”, “Muslim”, “social justice”, “social work”, “social worker” and “spirituality”, “religion” and “Canada”. I often kept my searches broad by only using the terms “Islam” and “social work” to glean as much relevant literature as I could from the information available on the data engines I used to conduct my searches.

While conducting ongoing and diverse searches to find relevant literature, I was not necessarily surprised by how little exists that specifically speaks to the perspectives and experiences of Muslim social justice advocates in Canada or elsewhere. Nevertheless, there were some insightful articles and books that did speak on the topic of Islam and Muslims and social work in general. The following literature review comprises of twenty-four works in total, two of which are books, one of which is a doctoral dissertation, and the remaining twenty-one from journal articles. In all of my efforts to find relevant literature, the doctoral dissertation by El-Amin (2009) was the only work that explored the perspectives of Muslim social work practitioners on spirituality, religion and practice, however, this study was based in the United States. Two other studies by Gilligan and Furness (2006) and Hendriks and Ewijk (2017) explore the perceptions and experiences of social work practitioners directly, some of whom identify as

Muslim. Gilligan and Furness' (2006) study explored the perceptions of social work students and recent social work practitioners in the UK and USA around the use and relevance of spirituality in social work practice; they identified that 23% of respondents in the UK are Muslim. The findings, however, did not differentiate perceptions based on faith identification, meaning that Muslims' views were lost within the whole. Hendriks and Ewijk's (2017) study, however, did specifically seek to explore the experiences and perceptions of Dutch Muslim women who identify as Turkish or Moroccan, and sought to understand what kind of professional they desired to be, and what barriers they faced in the field of social work. Although this study does directly explore the perceptions of Muslim social work practitioners, it does not specifically explore their relationship with, perceptions and impacts of, their faith and spirituality, as I hope to do in this study.

Two other articles are important to note when considering direct relevance to the research topic of this study. Ross-Sheriff (2017) and Baksh (2016) both discuss their own personal experiences of being Muslim in the field of social work, either as a student (Baksh, 2016) or as a practitioner (Ross-Sheriff, 2017) in the context of North America. Although these articles do not comprise of empirical research, their personal experiences offer great insight on the topic of this study, as they involve the personal reflections of Muslim practitioners in a North American context. Another study (Khan, 2006) included in this review, offers some insight on the experiences of Muslim youth workers in the UK. It will be included in this study since it offers Muslim practitioners' insights, and since youth work is very closely related to the profession of social work and social justice work in general.

Although the remaining eighteen sources included in this review do not directly speak of practitioners' experiences and perceptions, they still offer great insight into what the literature in

general knows about Muslims, Islamic spirituality, social justice work and social work. There were four themes that emerged from the twenty-four sources examined in this literature review. These themes include: 1) Islam as a protective factor, 2) the lack of spirituality in social work practice, 3) Islamophobia as a barrier, and 4) the need for an Islamically-grounded approach. The literature that is included in this review emerges from a plethora of epistemologies such as positivist, interpretive, and critical; which ultimately illuminate the underlying assumptions and scope of these resources. The following sections will explore the major themes that emerged within the literature.

### *Islam as a protective factor*

In an age where Muslims are increasingly discriminated against in the West (Ghafournia, 2017; Ross-Sheriff, 2017), it is vital that Muslims and Islam receive positive representation. Ghafournia's (2017) study seeks to explore the meanings of faith and religion for Muslim women who have experienced domestic violence, since often the perception by non-Muslim, Western society is that Islam justifies the actions of their violent partners in an Islamic worldview. Ghafournia (2017) proves this perception to be unfounded, and found through in-depth interviews with fourteen Muslim female survivors of domestic violence, that their Islamic faith and practice was a source of guidance, strength and reassurance for them. In related articles, Islam is presented as a prominent factor that improved the wellbeing of clients, who self-identified as Muslim (Abdullah, 2007; Al-Krenawi, 1999; El-Amin, 2009; Hall, Livingston, Brown & Mohabir, 2011; Hendriks and Ewijk, 2017; Rassool, 2016; Warden, Scourfield & Huxley, 2011). In Rassool's book (2016), he explores the ways in which Islam as a spiritual practice has positive impacts on Muslim clients' mental health, physical health and overall wellness. Warden et al.'s (2011) study specifically explored the perceptions and experiences of

Muslim clients who accessed services at an Islamic social service agency in the UK. In this study, a large majority of participants self-identified as Muslim and stated that the Islamically-based interventions and approaches to services improved their wellbeing. The fact that so many of these studies essentially sought to prove the overall goodness, helpfulness, and positive factors of Islam in the lives of Muslim is indicative of the strong Islamophobic and harmful beliefs that exist in Western countries like Canada.

### *The lack of spirituality in social work practice*

The literature suggests that Islamic faith and practice, and spirituality in general, is a direction that social work practitioners should explore. Ragab (2016) emphasizes that Islamic practices align with the profession of social work in multiple ways, and suggests the theory of integralism from human psychology to align with factors within an Islamic worldview. There is also discussion within various articles that point to the profession's need to acknowledge and incorporate spirituality into practice (Abdullah, 2015; Al-Krenawi, 2016; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2000; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Baksh, 2016; El-Amin, 2009; Farooqi, 2006; Gilligan & Furness, 2006; Graham and Shier, 2009; Hall et al., 2011; Haynes et al., 1997; Rassool, 2016; Scourfield, et al., 2013). Abdullah (2015), Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000), Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003) Graham and Shier (2009), Gilligan and Furness (2006), and Hall et al. (2011) specifically discuss the ways in which Islamic practices align, complement and fit into already existing practices and concepts within the field of social work. For instance, Abdullah (2015) explores the ways in which the Islamic principle of *fitra* (primordial human state of goodness) aligns with the strengths-based perspective within the field of social work. Other scholars, such as Al-Krenawi and Graham (1999), Haynes et al. (1997), Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000), Al-Krenawi (2016), and Rassool (2016) focus their work on informing Western social

workers of Islam as a spiritual practice to be considered when working with Muslim clients. Scourfield et al. (2013), Hall et al. (2011), Graham and Shier (2009) and Gilligan and Furness (2006) explore the perceptions of social workers on spirituality in practice, as well as the relevance of spirituality in social work education and emphasize the importance of considering spirituality within social work practice.

Many scholars also explicitly stated that the field of social work is unequipped to work with Muslim clients, particularly due to its lack of acknowledgement of spirituality, but also due to the lack of understanding about Islam on the part of practitioners (Azmi, 1997; Baksh, 2016; El-Amin, 2009; Ragab, 2016; Rassool, 2016; Ross-Sheriff, 2017). In his article that describes insights from his longstanding career within social work, Ross-Sheriff (2017), who self-identifies as Muslim, outlines the ways in which the field is unprepared to work with Muslim clients due to the lack of acknowledgement of different worldviews and ways of being within the field of social work. Baksh (2016), who also self-identifies as Muslim, reflects on the lack of consideration given to spirituality, but particularly non-Western ways of being within her social work education and considers implications for practice. Azmi (1997), one of the only scholars whose work specifically focuses on Muslims in the Toronto area, highlights the striking lack of social services that are accessible for Muslim peoples within the area. Scholars including Ragab (2016), Ross-Sheriff (2017), El-Amin (2009), and Azmi (1997) call for the field of social work to intentionally address the lack of representation, accessibility and space for Muslim peoples to be providers, as well as recipients, of services.

#### *Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination*

Many of the articles explored in this review primarily focus on Muslim peoples or spirituality in a Western context. Many authors included in this literature review justified their

desire to study Muslim peoples in more depth due to the disproportional levels of poverty amongst Muslim populations in Western contexts. Others also highlighted the need to make space for Muslim voices due to the high level of anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamophobia in Western countries such as the UK and Canada. Islamophobia is a manifestation of white supremacy and racism that targets peoples who are followers or are perceived to follow the faith of Islam; Islamophobia is manifested through structural and interpersonal forms of violence and exclusion (Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2008). Islamophobia involves a fear, hatred and distrust of Muslims, the faith of Islam, and those perceived to be Muslim (Iqbal, 2010). Ghafournia (2017), Hall et al. (2011) and Hendriks and Ewijk (2017) specifically discuss Islamophobia in their respective local contexts within the United States of America and the UK. In contrast to this, Warden et al. (2011) discussed the disproportionate levels of ill health and social welfare experienced by British Muslims, but did not discuss the social, political and structural reasons for this. Ross-Sheriff (2017) and Ragab (2016) go beyond a Western-specific context of Islamophobia and discuss global social, political and cultural factors that have resulted in growing dissent towards Islam and Muslim peoples across the world, and call for the profession of social work to acknowledge and address this by building Islamic approaches to social work practice. El-Amin (2009) thoroughly discusses the perceptions of Muslims within American society both historically and currently, and emphasizes the relevance of Islamophobia in the daily lives of Muslim peoples and communities.

#### *The need for an Islamically-grounded approach*

The final prominent theme that emerged from the literature is a clear call to action from Muslim scholars for the need for an approach to therapeutic justice work that is grounded within Islamic practices and concepts. Ragab (2016), Rassool (2016) and Barise (2005) explore the



potential frameworks that could be used and developed upon for a Muslim-centered approach to providing therapeutic and transformational care for Muslims. These frameworks are informed by the concepts and practices from the Qur'an, Sunnah and greater Islamic traditions. These works urged the field of social work to embrace and make space for Muslim practitioners to incorporate traditional methods of healing and wellness from the Islamic faith when working with Muslim peoples, rather than infusing Islamic principles into Western, mainstream social work practices (Barise, 2005; Hodge, 2005; Khan, 2006; Ragab, 2016; Ross-Sheriff, 2017; Warden et al., 2011).

### *Critical discussion of the literature*

Other than the themes that emerged, there were many pivotal factors that shaped the available literature concerning Islam, Muslims and social work practice. One such issue is that of the underlying epistemologies that are represented in the available literature. Out of the twenty-four articles included in this review, only eleven were grounded within a critical perspective. Scholars such as Ross-Sheriff (2017), Baksh (2016), Hendriks and Ewijk (2017), Ragab (2016), Ghafournia (2017), El-Amin (2009), Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003), Hodge (2005), Azmi (1997), Khan (2006), and Barise (2005) actively positioned themselves within the research, considered structural factors that impact Muslims such as racism, Islamophobia and colonialism, and employed approaches to their studies that emerged from post-modernism. The remaining studies were grounded in an interpretive approach, positivism or a combination of the two. This is a critical consideration for this study, since the strength of literature that fails to consider a critical perspective is often limited in providing an accurate and inclusive account of the lived realities of Muslims who interact with the field of social work and beyond.

Another critical factor that emerged from the literature is that Muslims were almost always positioned as the client and the practitioner was positioned as a Western, non-Muslim and

non-spiritual person (Abdullah, 2007; Abdullah, 2015; Al-Krenawi, 1999; Al-Krenawi, 2016; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2000; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Farooqi, 2006; Gilligan & Furness, 2006; Graham & Shier, 2009; Hall et al., 2011; Haynes et al., 1997; Hodge, 2005; Scourfield, et al., 2013). These articles, as well as the Warden et al. (2011) and Gilligan and Furness (2006) studies, which are embedded within positivism and interpretive social sciences, lack a structural analysis of the ways in which Muslims experience and interact with social work and social justice spaces. Furthermore, only three articles focus on dynamics in Canada (Azmi, 1997; Baksh, 2016; Barise, 2005) and none of the literature reviewed include an acknowledgement or discussion of settler colonialism. Lastly, the majority of literature reviewed is focused on the field of social work, rather than social justice work in general. The term ‘social worker’ is trademarked by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and thus excludes many advocates whose work, principles and ethics align with and go beyond those in the field of social work.

This literature review has provided much insight into the scope of literature that pertains to Muslim voices, perspectives and practices in the field of social work; the scope is quite limited. Due to the gaps and themes that emerged from a review of relevant literature, it is clear that a study that amplifies the voices of Muslim social justice advocates and explores Islamic spirituality in this work is more necessary than ever.

Towards this end, my study addresses this gap by asking the following guiding research questions: 1) How do Muslim peoples understand, approach and engage in social justice work in and around Toronto and what are their experiences?; 2) What are the ways in which Islam and spirituality influence, impact and shape their social justice work?

### **CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As discussed in the literature review, the epistemological assumptions and perspectives that exist when Muslims and Islam are discussed in the context of social work literature are unfortunately uniform. The predominance of positivist leanings has real repercussions on the ways in which Islam is positioned and conceptualized, as well as the ways in which Muslims interact with social services and social justice work. In my study, I hope to respond and react to these trends and gaps not only in the topic of my research, but through my theoretical framework for this work.

I approach this research through multiple lenses as a Muslim, female, Pakistani, Ahmadi, able-bodied and cis-gender social work practitioner and community advocate that is a settler on Indigenous territories, specifically of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Huron-Wendat peoples of the Dish of One Spoon territory. It is from these vantage points that I intend to understand myself, the stories and perspectives of the Muslim voices involved in this study, and the social context that we exist within, and literally occupy, here in southern Ontario and across Canada. Therefore, the theoretical framework, which I use within this study, is one that consists of an Islamic worldview, critical race theory and anti-colonialism.

Before specifically identifying the Islamic principles that inform my theoretical framework, it is important to emphasize that this research paper in no way aspires to essentialize, define or discuss Islam as a whole. Islam is a faith that has a 1400-year-old history, and it would be irresponsible and unethical to limit the vast, complex, and evolving principles and positions that exist within the Islamic faith to the facets I will be discussing in this paper. Instead of trying to define Islam, I will attempt to speak on the aspects and specific teachings within my faith that have directly shaped my understanding and approaches to social justice, wellness and healing.

Islam is often thought of as a set of rules and beliefs that followers are obligated to live by, and although facets of this are true, Islam is truly so much greater than that.

### *Islam*

The principle of *tawhid* and its declaration (the *Shahada*) illuminate the central belief within an Islamic worldview: that all things are created, gifted, taken, and shaped by God. The Islamic concept of this awareness, that God (Allah) is at the core of all things, happenings, beings and existence, is called *taqwa*, also referred to in English as God-consciousness.

*And the good end [Paradise] is for the [people of] taqwa*

- Surah Taha: 132

These three principles speak to the deep embedded-ness of spirituality in every part of life.

Living our lives as Muslims with a consistent practice of *taqwa* is a central and interconnected aspect of the way of being that Islam enables and guides for followers. A central teaching within Islam is balance, harmony and moderation; over and over again we as Muslims are reminded to be conscious of God, but to continue to seek fulfilling social, emotional, and intellectual lives that are all deeply woven to our spiritual practice.

The sources of knowledge within Islam are divine in origin and are defined by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. The Prophet's (*saw*) way of being (the *Sunnah*) in all aspects of life is a sacred guide for all Muslims and serves as a supreme example for how to live an ethical, spiritual, just, and righteous life. Some of the principles within the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* speak directly on the responsibility of Muslims to resist oppression, to not oppress others, and to engage in social responsibility:

*Believers! Be upholders of justice, and bearers of witness to truth for the sake of*

*Allah, even though it may either be against yourselves or against your parents*

*and kinsmen, or the rich or the poor: for Allah is more concerned with their well-being than you are. Do not, then, follow your own desires lest you keep away from justice. If you twist or turn away from (the truth), know that Allah is well aware of all that you do.*

*–Surah An-Nisa: 135*

*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.*

*-Surah Al-Maida: 8*

*“None of you believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”*

*-Hadith of the Prophet (saw), Sahih al-Bukhari*

*“O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another.”*

*-A message revealed to the Prophet (saw) from Allah, Ahadith Sahih al-Bukhari*

It is these specific principles that will be used to analyse and critically reflect on the data collected through this study. It is important to note that Muslims do not exist in isolation and that although Islamic teachings and knowledges are whole, they often do not exist intact, complete and static in the social world. Since this is a study about Muslims, I cannot ignore the social, political and economic realities Muslims exist within historically and currently. To do so means to acknowledge and expose the ways in which this country was established and continues to operate; through white supremacy and settler colonialism. Therefore, in order to discuss the experiences of Muslims and the justice-work they do in the settler colonial context of Canada, my analysis must include and be shaped by critical race theory and anti-colonialism.

### *Critical race theory*

Critical race theory emerged within the 1980s from racialized legal professionals and scholars that sought to expose and confront institutionalized racism following the gains of the Civil Rights movement in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). A central tenant within critical race theory is that racism is an ordinary, daily, and embedded reality within our society, but it is rendered invisible through legal, social and cultural structures. Racialized people in the United States, and in the Canadian context of this study, experience racism on a daily basis in various forms, and due to its occurrence as so commonplace within our legal, educational, social and cultural systems, it is made difficult to recognize (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This is a deliberate and intentional dynamic, since average citizens would not go about a process to address, challenge and overthrow racism if they are unable to even see it. Scholars such as Delgado and Stefancic (2007) emphasize that since working class people and elite white folks with substantial wealth both benefit from racism within North American society, there is little incentive to eradicate it in our mainstream political, social, economic and cultural spaces. Furthermore, critical race theory emphasizes that all other forms of discrimination are impacted by race, including gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability and so on, and since race is the most central factor that determines privilege and oppression, it is inextricably interconnected to these other forms of structural discrimination (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory emphasizes that ‘race’ is socially constructed to develop violent power imbalances that categorize so-called ‘white’ people as morally, biologically, intellectually and spiritually superior than other, ‘non-white’ peoples. Other central tenets within this theoretical framework include the commitment to social justice that is transformative and liberating on the basis of race, gender and class as well as other forms of subordination, a commitment to expose and make explicit the

dominance of white supremacy by challenging notions of neutrality, colourblindness and equal opportunity, and legitimizing and amplifying the experiential and ancestral knowledges of racialized peoples (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory is a vast framework that intentionally extends itself into many disciplines, including law, sociology, history, women's studies, social work, education and beyond. White supremacy is a system that seeks to concentrate power in the hands of peoples that are considered to be white; such power includes resources, capital, social status, knowledge systems, religion and so on. White supremacy seeks to keep power out of the hands of non-Western and racialized peoples, as well as deepen socially constructed racial divides in order to continue to consolidate and maintain power of white peoples and Western worldviews (Dei, 1996).

In order to deepen my analysis, I will also incorporate in my theoretical framework critical race feminism. Critical race feminism is a complimentary theory that emerged from critical race theory and women's studies. Critical race feminism emerged in Canada over the past 18 years or so through the scholarship, analysis and resistance of Indigenous and racialized women whose approach to transformative social justice focuses on the elimination of and resistance to the intersects of colonialism, racism and white supremacy (Pon et al., 2011). Particularly in the settler colonial state of Canada, critical race feminism provides a framework to understand, represent, analyze, and deconstruct the lived realities of racialized women and the structural forces that impact their lives and our broader society. In this emancipatory praxis, critical self-reflexivity and power-sharing are emphasized, and a transdisciplinary approach is used to expose and resist interconnected structures that perpetuate ideas of the state as gender-neutral, colourblind and liberal. In the Canadian context, critical race feminism focuses on

identifying and challenging the ways in which different forms of power and oppression intersect to strengthen and reinforce settler colonialism and white supremacy (Pon et al., 2011).

### *Anti-Colonialism*

Main scholars including Dei (1996), Smith (1999), Alfred (1999), Tuck and Yang, (2012) Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995), and Hart (2017) have paved the pathway for frameworks of anti-colonialism, the central tenant of which is to strengthen and enact Indigenous sovereignty through decolonization processes on their traditional territories. Anti-colonial frameworks expose and challenge settler colonialism, and focuses on the lived realities of Indigenous peoples and the structural forces that shape them. Settler colonialism, as discussed by Tuck and Yang (2012), is a “total appropriation of Indigenous life and land” (p. 5). This distinct form of colonialism, which involves the permanent settlement of colonizers and their institutions, affects Indigenous peoples in distinct ways as they not only experience displacement and erasure through genocidal policies and frequent re-locations, but also a “special” designation that enables further institutional oppression through the form of hyper-surveillance and control from the state (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism and white supremacy is key to anti-colonialism, as is the centrality of Indigenous sovereignty and worldviews. Indigenous ways of being and worldviews are pathways to social justice and liberation, especially on Indigenous territories. The conceptualization of the body/mind/spirit/heart interconnectedness so central to Indigenous ways of being is in direct opposition to European Enlightenment-era ideas that influenced the social construction of race that later justified colonialism, slavery and other horrific systems of oppression. Discussions of settler colonialism are key in this study, as the Muslim peoples involved, including myself, are settlers on Indigenous territories.



Anti-colonialism and critical race theory deeply impacts the lives of Muslims here in Canada, a settler colonial state, and beyond. It is within the contexts of settler colonialism and white supremacy that Muslim peoples engage in the field of social work and social justice work. I intend to use these multiple frameworks as a means to weave together the dynamic, myriad and interconnected stories shared through this research.

## CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a narrative approach of inquiry will be used. As discussed in Creswell (2013), a narrative approach to qualitative research focuses on the collection and interpretation of participants' own lived experiences and perceptions of particular events, happenings or periods in time. This approach is embedded within an interpretative approach to research, which emphasizes that meaning and knowledge is socially constructed; meaning that the ways in which people understand and engage in this world is based upon the meanings they make through direct lived experience (Neuman, 2006). The focus of narrative studies is not on only stories, but also the greater meanings of these stories, including issues of identity, power, social justice, epiphany, tensions and contexts where experiences were had (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry also aligns with critical race theory and post-colonialism since it places the focus on the participant's interpretation of their experiences, enables the writer to reflect and involve themselves in the interpretation and meaning of the work, and also legitimizes the knowledge of stories, perceptions, ideas, and experiences of the writer and participants directly (Creswell, 2013). Delgado (1989), a prominent critical race scholar, emphasizes that when racialized peoples engage in storytelling, which he calls counter-storytelling, that it is inherently an emancipatory process and a manifestation of resistance. Due to the lack of representation of Muslim social justice advocates and social workers in the broader social work literature, using a narrative approach to emphasize these voices is an attempt at addressing this massive gap in the literature. Enabling myself and other Muslim advocates to speak for ourselves is a necessary part of ensuring that our perspectives, lived experiences, identities and personhood are represented, considered and ultimately, included. Furthermore, Islam has its own emphasis on an oral tradition, since one of our most important sources of knowledge is from *Ahadith*, a collection of

sayings of the Prophet (*saw*) as narrated by those closest to him. The emphasis of an oral tradition in Islam is further centralized through significance of Qur'anic recitation; indeed when the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet (*saw*), it was shared and taught orally for many years. These factors influenced my decision to approach this study using narrative inquiry.

Since the research questions directing this study seeks to understand the experiences of Muslim-identifying peoples who engage in social work and social justice organizing, willing and interested participants were invited to engage in semi-structured interviews as a method for gaining access to these perspectives. After the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University approved this study, the recruitment and data collection process began. The following sections will describe in more depth the recruitment, data collection and data analysis strategies used in this study.

#### *Participation within the Study*

The eligibility criteria for participation in this study were very specific. In order to explore the dynamics that impact, influence and shape a Muslim social justice advocate's experiences within the Toronto context, there were particular identities and associations that potential participants had to align with.

All potential participants considered for this study had to self-identify as Muslim, a social worker, social justice advocate, or community organizer, and be located within Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area. They must also be at least 18 years old, and be able to communicate in English. In terms of inclusion, potential participants did not need to be officially registered with any professional College, or have obtained any formal education in social work. In order to use the title of 'social worker', one is legally required to be registered with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) (OASW, 2018) and thus excludes

many advocates whose work, principles and ethics align with the field of social work.

Participants do, however, need to have experience working or volunteering within social work agencies, or be involved in grassroots organizing around social justice issues such as Islamophobia, anti-racism, human rights, poverty, labour rights, and/or Indigenous resistance movements.

### *Recruitment*

A greater intention that guided this work was the strengthening of relationships amongst Muslim-identifying social justice activists; an intention that was not only guided by Islamic teachings, but also with the hope of further solidarity and network building that strengthen the necessary social justice work that such folks are engaging in. To fulfill and act upon these intentions, I decided upon using the purposive sampling method to recruit participants in this study. Purposive sampling is described as a means of recruiting participants that is focused and specifically inviting particular individuals who can purposefully contribute narratives that are relevant to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). In this case, I reached out to specific individuals within the greater Muslim community and social justice organizing circles within Toronto and surrounding areas that I am personally connected to in some way.

I began my recruitment process by specifically reaching out to individuals in my personal networks in the Muslim and social justice community based in and around Toronto. As discussed in an anti-oppressive framework, research that fails to be action-oriented is not and cannot be considered part of the process of transformative social change. My use of such a specific kind of recruitment in this study enables me to nudge this work into the realm of action-oriented, since the deepening and strengthening of relationship are at the center. Furthermore, seeking out members of my own community to share their stories and insights enables me to be responsible

and accountable to them, as well as enact the intentions of people-centered, reciprocal, community-based and empowerment-seeking work that comprises transformative anti-oppressive research.

In my recruitment process, I sent out invitations on my personal social media, through Facebook and Whatsapp specifically, to recruit potential participants for this study. Each invitation included a poster and a copy of the full consent agreement in addition to a brief message that detailed the intentions and focus of the study. Please see Appendix A for the recruitment script, poster and consent agreement I used in this process. A maximum of two participants were recruited for a semi-structured interview in order to explore their stories, experiences and insights in depth, as well as to make space to include my own story.

#### *Data collection*

As previously mentioned, participants were invited to engage in a semi-structured interview that lasted between 60-120 minutes long. A digital audio recorder was used to capture the participant's and my own responses, insights and discussion throughout the interview. Audio from the interview was also simultaneously recorded on my personal laptop. The research questions of this study, as well as the theoretical framework, helped to guide the formation of possible interview questions and topics. The narrative approach used in this study guided the format of interview questions, which were often open-ended and broad to encourage openness, flexibility and agency for participants. Follow-up questions were led by the participant's responses, and I often probed participants further for context, clarification and explanations when appropriate based on my judgment at the time, the participants' body language and willingness, and the relevance of the topic. Please see Appendix B for the interview guide used in the data collection phase of this study.

### *Data analysis*

The data analysis process in this study was guided by a narrative approach to qualitative research. As discussed in Padgett (2017) and Neuman (2006), a narrative approach involves specific steps to guide the researcher's analysis. This process includes transcription of interviews, coding, memo-writing, restorying and identifying themes from the collected data.

True to the method of narrative analysis, all audio that was recorded during interviews was transcribed verbatim over a period of a few weeks. Once all audio was transcribed, I reviewed the scripts line by line in a coding process to identify events, feelings, insights, contexts, interactions between myself and the participant, relationships, power dynamics, and central stories. As explored in a critical narrative analysis approach, unearthing and identifying power, structural factors, silences, space and dynamics between participants and me were also central items I sought to identify throughout the coding process. I also wrote memos in a separate document related to particular codes and quotes from the transcripts that included significant insights, interactions, contexts, epiphanies, turning points, and contradictions.

After reading through the transcripts several times, I engaged in a process within narrative inquiry called restorying. Using this process, I reorganized the stories shared by participants to follow a chronological order based upon the timelines, incidents and events that were identified through the analysis of the transcripts. As discussed by Creswell (2013), the restorying process can enable the researcher to make causal links between the stories and insights shared by participants more apparent and visible. Although I did find this process helpful, in terms of my own ability to deeply engage with and understand the stories that were shared with me, how they shaped or influenced the participants, and the meaning that was made through them in their lives, I realized that the restorying process is entirely for the benefit of the

researcher. The most troublesome aspect of the restorying process is the ‘rewriting’ part of it, which I refrained from engaging in in this study. Rewriting pieces of a person’s life history felt unethical, consumptive and irresponsible, since it required me to fumble around with and represent another person’s realities. It also seems like a very colonial concept, since the emphasis is on cutting and pasting a person’s storytelling into a linear amalgamation written and arranged in a way that is not the pure original voice.

The data analysis process enabled me to identify several themes across all my own and the participants’ stories. The following section will discuss these themes in more detail, however, it is important to note that not all themes I identified are included in this study. The most prominent themes, those that reoccurred across all three stories the most and most closely align with the research questions of this study, were included. Themes that were more minor were excluded in an attempt to keep this study within the designated page limit as determined by the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

Once the analysis process was completed, I engaged in member checking by sending those who accepted the option as indicated on the consent agreement. This is another facet of narrative inquiry that involves collaboration between research and participant, and emphasizes the importance of the relationship between participants and researcher (Creswell, 2013). Interested participants were provided with a copy of the transcript for their feedback and clarifications. As an act of respect and in the spirit of accountability, the final phase of the member checking process included sending participants the final draft of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5. THEMES AND FINDINGS**

During the month of Ramadan, I met with two Muslim social justice advocates based in and around Toronto for individual semi-structured interviews. Both Yasiin and Uba (pseudonyms) have been engaged in social justice advocacy and activism in various contexts, including challenging Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, settler colonialism and white supremacy. Yasiin identifies as a Middle Eastern Muslim man in his twenties, while Uba identifies as a Somali, Canadian-born, Black, visibly Muslim woman in her twenties. I had met both of these phenomenal and inspiring individuals prior to this study, though in separate contexts.

Uba, named after her pious, generous and kind grandmother, is a Black, Somali-Canadian, and Muslim, twenty-something year old woman who was born and raised in Toronto. Uba shared with me that as a young girl she embraced assimilation into the broader “Canadian” society, particularly by engaging in so-called “white” activities such as swimming and guitar lessons, as well as embracing rock music and pop-culture. Not until she was in high school did she consciously begin to identify the differences between the ways in which white peoples around her were treated and received in comparison to her and other Black peoples surrounding her. During this time, especially after the happenings of September 11, 2001 in New York City, she also consciously and unconsciously hid her Muslim-identity. After beginning to consciously accept and nurture her Black identity in high school (which will be explored in more depth later on in this study), she began to actively acknowledge and pursue her Muslim identity in the last year of high school. After graduating from high school and before entering into her first year of university, Uba decided to commit to wearing hijab, and has been visibly-Muslim since then. Uba’s involvement in social justice work began relatively young, though her deepening involvement sprouted and flourished once she entered into university and continues to this day.



Over a span of at least six years, Uba has engaged in social justice work in varying contexts, including education, resisting gentrification, and solidarity work with distinct Indigenous and LGBTQ communities. As she emphasized during our brief time together, her deepest and most powerful engagement in social justice work involved interfaith work and Black liberation work in and around the Toronto area. Most of the snapshots of Uba's story will revolve around these two spaces; interfaith and Black liberation work, and her experiences within them.

Yasiin is an Egyptian twenty-something year old Muslim man who grew up in Kuwait and immigrated to Canada on his own about 8 to 10 years ago. Although based in Kuwait for much of his life, Yasiin's familial and cultural connectedness to Egypt is strong. A native Arabic speaker, Yasiin settled in a city one hour outside of Toronto and engages in social justice spaces that span across Toronto and surrounding cities . During our time together, Yasiin shared that much of his engagement in social justice work started in university as a student, and continues to this day. Over the span of a number of years, Yasiin's engagement in social justice work spans across many contexts, including anti-poverty, social justice education, Palestinian human rights and solidarity work with Indigenous communities. As expressed by him, his most powerful and embedded work has been in the areas of Palestinian liberation and Indigenous sovereignty work. Instances in this study regarding Yasiin and his story will emerge from these contexts. There are many parts of both Uba and Yasiin's stories that I can find pieces of myself within, and the following pages will explore our inter-connectedness. Even with the brief snapshots shared here in this study, it is vital to emphasize that these insights cannot possibly hold in their entirety the complexities, uniqueness, power, struggles and realness of Yasiin and Uba as whole people. Regardless, I will attempt to paint a faint but striking picture of each of their stories and contexts.

The following discussion will focus on the insights, teachings, experiences, stories, memories, dreams, feelings, and aspirations that were shared with me.

### *Difference Amongst Ourselves*

Although the following sections will primarily focus on common themes across all of our stories, I want to spend some time acknowledging the differences between us, as they are significant and impactful in whom we are as people and how we experience the world. I must begin by emphasizing that Uba's experiences as a Black, Somali and visibly-Muslim woman will inevitably differ from mine as a South Asian, brown-skinned, Muslim woman. Furthermore, the ways in which Yasiin experiences the world as a Muslim man will differ from ours as well. The framework of intersectionality as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), a Black feminist and legal scholar, explores the ways in which interlocking power structures such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on impact peoples and create marginalization and structural oppression. It is with this lens that I understand the ways in which my, Yasiin and Uba's lived experiences can and do differ.

The ways in which anti-Blackness is so deeply embedded within Canadian society renders Uba's experiences as distinct from ours, and as you will see in the following sections, more violent than either of what Yasiin and me have disclosed. Islamophobia, as discussed previously in the literature review section of this work, is an irrational fear, suspicion, hatred and "Otherness" of Muslims which not only intellectually and emotionally impacts non-Muslim psyches in Canada and beyond, but has a direct impact on interpersonal behaviour and socio-political and economic policies and structures. The presence of this discrimination lays heavy on all three of our beings, as Canada as a state has Islamophobic media, educational policies, government institutions, and stereotypes that drive the average citizen as well as white

supremacists to not only protest against, but murder and injure Muslims at our places of worship (Lamoureaux, 2017). Over the past several years, hate crimes against Muslims in Canada have been drastically on the rise, increasing by 253% from 2012 to 2015. Visibly-Muslim women, those who wear hijab, niqab and other forms of Islamic dress, are targeted far more than others (Minsky, 2017). As a non-visible Muslim woman, I understand that I am less of a target of harm, ridicule, exclusion and verbal harassment fueled by Islamophobia. The embeddedness of anti-Black racism within Canadian society amplifies the ways in which Black Muslims, particularly Black women who are visibly Muslim, are continuously put into a position where they are targets of violence, discrimination, exclusion, suspicion, and disregard. As non-Black racialized peoples with varying degrees of light-skinned privilege that may be perceived as closer to whiteness than others, I can firmly say that we are not subjected to the same degree of structural and interpersonal violence.

Another significant difference in the way we are positioned within Canadian society has to do with language and citizenship. Both Uba and I are Canadian-born and native English speaking people, while Yasiin is not. This power imbalance is important to note, since it impacts the way in which we are physically, socially and politically able to participate in Canadian society.

Other than the ways in which race, gender, citizenship and language differ between us, I must also highlight the impact of Islamic sect, especially in this study that aims to explore our experiences as Muslims within particular spaces. Both Yasiin and Uba identify as Sunni-Muslim, whereas my family and I belong to a smaller sect called Ahmadiyya. Prosecution against Ahmadi Muslims has been so widespread and complete in the global Muslim community that it is not even accepted as a sect of Islam, especially by mainstream and leading scholars and religious

leaders in the Sunni community. Discrimination in Pakistan against Ahmadi Muslims, where most of the community exists, is particularly vile as in the 1980s under the pressure of a majority of Sunni-Muslim muftis, Ahmadi-Muslims were declared non-Muslim through the secular legal system of Pakistan's government (Rashid, 2011). The legal ordinance (Ordinance XX in 1984) made it illegal for Ahmadi Muslims to call themselves Muslim, pray in a mosque, call their own prayer spaces mosques, own Qur'ans, recite Qur'an, bury their dead following the Islamic protocols and in the Muslim-section of the cemeteries in Pakistan, hold congregational prayers and many other dehumanizing restrictions. Prosecution against Ahmadi Muslims, particularly in Pakistan and throughout the world, continues to this day (Rashid, 2011). Although in a place like Canada where discrimination against Ahmadi peoples is not necessarily physically violent, it continues to fester as staunch and hostile exclusion, disregard, negative stereotyping and verbal harassment. As a person who was raised Ahmadi, I continue to feel uneasy in disclosing my sect-affiliation for fear of exclusion and disregard. These dynamics, of our social context, anti-Black racism, patriarchy, and discrimination against Ahmadis, are often left unsaid and are ongoing factors that impact the ways we understand and relate to each other in the interview process and beyond. Our privileges, either as lightness of skin, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, language, and sect also shape the ways in which we understand ourselves, how we are received by others and impact our abilities to navigate the world.

Differences needing to be acknowledged, embraced, and accounted for is a defining feature of equity. Both Uba and Yasiin expressed similar ideas when asked how they understand or define social justice. Uba said:

Uba: I think social justice for me is just being able to be alive...for me, it's choices. Islam does have a lot of rules but I feel like, if you give people the choice to love who they

want to love, to live how they want to live, to believe how they want to believe...everyone has their own path...Social justice to me is like, love and choice. And I think when we begin to limit people's choices is when we start developing injustices. When you tell people you cannot love who you want to love, you cannot live where you want to live, you cannot believe in certain things...your rights are taken away or hindered or something...that's when I think social justice is needed.

Yasiin echoed a complimentary perspective on social justice when he said:

Yasiin: I think it's....access. To the necessities of life and access to everything that ensures that a person can live their best life and grow spiritually and morally and ethereally in the best way that they can. So in a way that they're not spending their lives trying to to live but spending their lives growing and seeking the truth and stuff like that.

*F: Correct me if I'm wrong but, it sounds like, rather than be in a state of survival, you can be striving towards a state of like, transcendence in a way.*

Yasiin: Yes. That's perfectly put, yeah.

Evidently, being attuned to, accepting of and cherishing difference is embedded within these ideas, and due to the ways in which both Uba and Yasiin act upon their beliefs, as I strive to do, the heaviness of our differences were not barriers in the time we spent together, at least not in ways that I could discern. Genuineness and gentleness existed in both of these interviews; I gifted and I received both. Alongside the distinct ways in which all three of us are different, the kindred-ness between our stories and experiences also exists. I intend to explore this through identifying themes that emerged from the interview process. In the coming pages I attempt to excavate, unearth, wrestle with, understand and build upon the ways in which we three Muslims,

distinct and whole in our own ways, experience social justice work and our faith. Central themes that emerged from our stories include: 1) experiences of discrimination, 2) anger, 3) relationships and turning points, and 4) yearning for *tawhid* and experiencing fragmentation. These themes will be explored in depth in the following sections.

### *Experiences of Discrimination*

As discussed earlier in this section, the ways in which all three of our identities, personhood and life stories differ is significant, especially in the ways in which we are and are not all targets of the harshness of anti-Black racism, and experience Islamophobia, xenophobia and state violence. One way in which anti-Blackness makes itself visible in the stories explored here is in the ways in which we have experienced discrimination and oppression. Although our life stories reach far beyond the confines of the stories involved in this study, it is interesting who drew upon stories of persecution and who seldom did in the interview process. For instance, Yasiin did not mention any experiences of oppression he has faced as a Muslim man, though he did discuss the ways in which his various communities have. For instance, Yasiin discussed in depth the ways in which imperialism which has been rampant in the Middle East has deeply shaped the violence, legal systems and human rights realities for Middle Eastern communities, of which he is a part of. Furthermore, Yasiin made mention of Islamophobia existing within his social world (as it is deeply embedded in the Canadian context within which we live); however, he did not disclose personal experiences of it when probed in the interview process. I certainly do not intend to imply that he has not experienced Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination just because they were not discussed in the interview process, as I believe that as a Middle Eastern man who has immigrated to the settler colonial, racist and Islamophobic

context of Canada the likelihood is high. Still, in contrast to the other stories involved in this study, this distinction is worth noting.

The stories shared by Uba paint a different picture altogether. Over a span of two hours, Uba shared several stories of instances where she personally faced racism and discrimination. These instances, she stated, violently and abruptly reminded Uba of what the colour of her skin means in a place like Canada. Further, and maybe most incriminating, is the fact that almost every single person who was the perpetrator in these instances were white adults. Even further proof of the embedded and harsh violence of anti-Black racism in a place like Canada and specifically Toronto, is that most of these white adults were in positions where they are purposed to guide, teach, mentor, support, and safeguard Uba. Many of the instances of this unacceptable abuse of power and trust occurred at school, while Uba was either a child or a teenager. In one instance, Uba shared how she was continuously forced to acknowledge that she was Black, and that her blackness resulted in less kindness, opportunities, trust, understanding, and perceived capability by the white people around her. For instance, Uba shared an incident that she experienced with a custodian in her high school where she was treated in the complete opposite manner as her white friend:

Uba: This is just a story but my friend couldn't open up her locker. She forgot her combination and I was like, this happened to my friend like last week- she was a white girl - and the caretaker just came and cut it. And my friend was also Somali, and I was like let's go come on, I know the guy let's go! We went and we asked him, and I'll never forget it, he looked us down and said 'how do I know it's your locker? What if you're trying to steal something?' He's like, 'get a note from the office and then I'll do it'. My friend was like whatever, 'you know who cares Uba'. And I was like (scoffs), at first I

was like ‘Noo’ (in a surprised tone), and I was like let me acknowledge it. And then I was like to my white friend, ‘please I’m going to hide behind this wall and I need you to knock and say the same thing that we said’. So she’s standing with a white guy and she knocks and says, ‘Hi, my locker...’ Blah blah blah, and he’s like “okay!” And he goes back into his room to get his big plier things and when he comes out in the hall, I’m standing with her and I’m like ‘what is going on’. And he is going red in the face and he’s like ‘no, I also told her get a note and we’re going to be walking past the office’ And my friend’s like, ‘you didn’t tell me anything about a note’. And he was mortified. And I was like, “I knew it! You are racist!” You know it was like this movie moment. I was a really good kid too, I don’t yell at teachers, I don’t yell at...something, like awoke in me.

In another instance, Uba discusses how a white guidance counselor automatically stated and assumed that she would fail from high school and be unable to graduate:

Uba: He was telling me I was going to fail, and it was in that moment I felt, like, he wouldn’t say this...There were so many things that happened in that semester that made me realize, I’m being spoken to like this because I’m Black. This would not happen to my white friends.

F: *Were you in a very white neighbourhood?*

Uba: Yeah. But there was still a large Somali population. But a large Somali population that was viewed a certain way.

F: *Absolutely.*

Uba: You know, “we’re all violent”, “we’re all in applied”. I was also taking only academic classes, which was, he was like you’re going to fail. I will never forget him telling me this.



In her undergraduate student-placement, Uba continued to experience this anti-Blackness manifested as a continual undermining of her intellectual capabilities and her trustworthiness. In another instance, Uba shared a story of an interaction she had with the principal of an elementary school in the Toronto District School Board where she was seeking placement as a student-teacher as part of her university education:

Uba: But the principal at that school, who was white, like, held my police check to the light...in front of me. And I was like, this is the system that I'm getting into. This is like, who I'd be working for.

F: *Absolutely, because it's not just teachers, it's administrators.*

Uba: It like, shook me. When he did that, and he didn't do it to the white girl that was with me...I was like, what? What is going on? And that's when I applied to York [for a Masters degree], because I was confused.

Anti-Black racism is so embedded within our society that it enables entrusted white adults to abuse and weaponize their power against Black children.

Like Uba, I have memories of experiencing discrimination from my childhood that I only truly understood after beginning my critical self-reflexive and social justice education process. Unlike Uba however, these experiences were less often at the hands of white adults in the school system, and much less commonplace in general. One instance that comes to mind is from when I was about five or six years old, and my extended family had gathered to celebrate Eid. During our time together, the adults had received news that an Ahmadi mosque in Pakistan had been attacked, leading to the deaths of many brothers and sisters in faith. Seeing the tears of my father flow, and the heavy silence of my aunts and uncles as they scrambled to listen to the news of who it was that lost their lives that day has been embedded on my heart in ways I am only

beginning to understand. Even though I was not directly a victim of violence, it was this occurrence of community-oriented discrimination that I understood the danger that difference can result in, and the related feelings of fear, isolation and sadness that come from being a target. As I continued to grow, the instances of discrimination I faced were often in the form of backhanded remarks from my classmates about Islam and Muslims (particularly after the 9/11 attack), racial slurs about being brown-skinned and Pakistani, and “well-meaning” comments and questions from white peers and colleagues about my culture that are inherently disrespectful.

Experiences of discrimination, including anti-Black racism, patriarchy, Islamophobia and racism are woven throughout the fabric of our lives; indeed they are too commonplace and often overlooked in the colonial contexts we live in. The experiences shared above only offer a glimpse into our lived realities, but they carry immense meaning on how Uba, Yasiin and I understand ourselves and our connections to social justice and liberation work.

### *Anger*

Across all of our stories was a shared experience of anger; at the people who have discriminated against us, at the system that enables it, and at the myths we had been fed about this place we call home. These myths include the supreme politeness of Canadians, the benevolence and inherent peacefulness of Canada historically and currently, and the notion that slavery was only a widespread and common practice in the United States and not Canada. Although this rage continues on in many ways, both Uba and Yasiin discussed the ways in which anger propelled them further onto their path towards justice work and the impact on their spiritual practice. For instance, Uba talks about how her grandmother urged her to respond to the anger she felt by turning to prayer. Here, Uba is reflecting on the anger she felt when her family unexpectedly relocated to the Middle East when she was in high school:

Uba: But while I was there, I was so upset and I was so angry at my mom. And my grandma would tell me, Uba, just pray. Just pray. And I was like, fine!

*F: (laughs)*

Uba: And so I literally would wake up at night and pray. And then when I got to go home I thought, oh my God, my prayers were answered.

In another instance, once she was deeper in her Black liberation work, she again echoed the role of anger in her life:

Uba: I mean my social justice work is like, my Black-work and my Muslim-work. And my Black-work makes me really angry. I carry a lot of anger. My Muslim-work is like, oh okay there's *jannah* you know? Just be patient, have *sabr*, like, be patient. But my Black-work is a lot of anger, like the endless killing and all that...so my grandma just like, the fact that she had so much patience and-

*F: MashAllah*

Uba:-like, I realized I have to balance my emotions and bring it back to that; being patient and there's an end goal. She always reminded me of heaven, not really hell, but of heaven.

*F: It's like, you know where you want to be.*

Uba: Mmhm.

*F: And...how could there not be anger, right? Sometimes I think about how I know that this life is not it.*

Uba: Yeah. But it's hard. It's hard to remind yourself of that when things happen that are just so, unjust. You know...like, I don't want to wait for the day of judgement...like, give me some justice now.

For Uba, prayer and faith are linked to liberation in this world and in the next; and anger is both a propelling and igniting force for her spiritual connectedness through prayer and direct action work, as well as a naturally painful experience due to the heaviness of discrimination and violence piled upon her and the broader Black and Muslim community.

When Yasiin talks about anger, he also discusses it as an igniting force that propelled himself and others around him to engage in resistance and social justice work. Similarly to Uba, anger is interconnected to his spiritual self and practice. He says:

Yasiin: I think from my understanding, I guess my spiritual personality is one that seeks, where you know, social justice to me is that manifestation of seeking the truth....It started with, and this is something that a lot of activists start with you know, it starts with anger at the system. Anger at the oppressor, anger at so on and so forth. But then, it has to grow into...growing for a purpose, like having a purpose. Because if you just work because you're challenged by falsehood, you're always going to hit a ceiling. But to then transform from someone who does the work because of being challenged by falsehood, to someone who does the work because the truth is meant to be sought....that is a whole other approach... It opens up your capacity to approaching things from a place of love as opposed to a place of anger and a place of hate.

Here, Yasiin identifies in his experience and understanding that anger is a propelling force for himself as an activist, but to only be moved and motivated by anger is limiting for one's personal and spiritual growth. He also identifies seeking truth as a spiritual practice and characteristic, and thus by seeking truth as an approach to social justice, it is also connected to his spiritual practice and expression. Both Yasiin and Uba's experiences of anger are

interconnected to their pursuit, understanding and strengthening of their spirituality as well as social justice work. It is also related to their pursuit of knowledge and truth and for Yasiin, love.

In my own story, I continuously see parts of myself reflected in the parts of themselves that they shared with me. Anger has truly been a continuous and central force in my justice work. It is also deeply connected to my spiritual expression and health. Early on in my social justice work, I was involved in a small grassroots organization that focused on providing young Canadians with experiential learning opportunities as an approach to social justice education. Here, I was able to connect, talk and visit with distinct and diverse Indigenous peoples, primarily individuals from Coast Salish and Plains Cree territories in the west, that the myths I was fed about the creation, history and policies of Canada began to shatter. The anger and sadness I felt as I listened, learned, talked and shared ignited my resolve to continue to deepen my knowledge and commit to building relationships in such a way that did not continue the erasure and concealment of Canada's true status as a violent colonial state. The impact of this knowledge, and the resulting rage, sadness and confusion, was profound on my spirit, and much like Yasiin and Uba, finding solace in prayer and connecting justice work to greater spiritual truths was both a necessary, intentional, serendipitous, and blessed shift for my overall wellbeing. The interplay between anger as a positive igniting force and anger as a volatile entity for our emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing, is one that, for Yasiin, Uba and me, Islam has provided a holding place, refuge and remedy.

### *Relationships and Turning Points*

Another major theme emerging from the stories shared in this study is the significance of relationships. In all three of our experiences, relationships have served as the source of personal turning points; in knowledge, self-awareness and engagement in social justice work and

spirituality. For instance, Yasiin discusses the influence of a friend who in some ways introduced him to the Palestinian liberation movement:

Yasiin: There was one particular friend who was actually with me in high school in Kuwait where I grew up and came to university here as well...He's Palestinian. His passion and his, just like, rallying of people around campus was just really inspiring. I think that was a huge part for me to get involved. My very first thing was a little bit of a big undertaking.

Later, Yasiin shares how through relationships he is introduced to the decolonization work being done through a grassroots organization and the impact it's had on his understanding of justice and pathways to justice:

Yasiin: That was probably my first time really learning about the Indigenous experience and kind of Indigenous history and stuff like that. Now, that was *so* mind blowing, like it was *huge*...With the BDS movement there was a jump of education and stuff like that...and then came the exchange and it was completely out of chance. My friend sent me an email, and told me that his brother had done this exchange and then another friend actually sent me the link to that same exchange; they don't know each other. It was just completely by chance, *alhamdulillah*. And then I applied, and I went there for the weekend, it was pretty huge. I met some pretty amazing people.

Once he started to deepen his understanding of the true history of this country, Yasiin expressed how his focus shifted towards supporting Indigenous sovereignty in ways that are appropriate for a settler such as himself. I experienced a similar turning point in my own journey; once I began to truly understand the depth and scope of oppression against Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island historically and currently, my entire sense of self and responsibility shifted. Centering

Indigenous sovereignty movements is a way in which I attempt to uphold my treaty obligations, however, it is important to note that my own and Yasiin's unlearning was only possible because of the ongoing generosity, kindness, and acceptance of the Indigenous communities and peoples who invited us into their territories and homes to learn and unlearn. In this way, Indigenous communities continue to give, and we settlers, continue to gain; is this much different from the state of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in the past? In what ways can settlers like myself actively and consciously seek to support Indigenous sovereignty movements in such a way that does not replicate dangerous, consumptive and abusive power relations that persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? Indigenous scholars and those at the forefront of resistance movements such as Eve Tuck, Cyndy Baskin, Pam Palmater, Niigan Sinclair and others urge settlers like myself to show up and challenge settler colonialism in many different ways; though I still wonder how easily settlers can centre themselves and their own agendas instead of the ones we are seemingly supporting.

In Uba's life, there have also been significant relationships that have led to turning points within her spirituality and social justice education and engagement. The most prominent relationships that she discussed during our time together are those with her maternal grandmother and mother. While talking together, she shared the strong influence of her mother from a young age:

Uba: When I think of social justice work, I feel like I've been doing it since I was a kid, but I didn't view it that way then. My mother worked for this organization that help with new immigrants to Canada and I was in that space a lot as a child. Because I was in that space a lot, I was introduced to like different kinds of peoples. My mom just introduced

us to these topics at a very young age, so at school, I was empathetic. I had a lot of emotion for people who were treated differently.

She also shared the ways in which the relationships she made during her Master's degree paved a way towards engaging in Black liberation work in a much deeper way. All of these opportunities to learn and engage emerged through the strength of relationships, which were formed over time, unexpectedly, and through our personal choice to put ourselves in contexts where likeminded peoples with similar commitments and understandings of justice may come together. In Islam, there is a common teaching that emphasizes the importance of keeping the company of those with good intentions and actions, since the peoples we surround ourselves with have an immense impact on our individual character and behaviours. Not surprisingly, anti-colonialism emphasizes the importance of relationship-building, especially since colonial policies and practices sought to destroy the strong relationships Indigenous peoples had with the Earth, each other, and their way of being. Indeed, Indigenous worldviews are inherently relational; interconnectedness is a central characteristic of reality. In this way, strong relationships, especially in resistance work, is of the utmost importance.

#### *Yearning for Tawhid and Experiencing Fragmentation*

Yasiin: I was talking to a friend of mine recently, and she was at this seminar in the States and the instructor was telling them to move away from describing things as Islamic, to *tawhid*-ic. Which is really nice because again it goes back to that purpose and ultimately, your purpose as a human being is to seek the truth; the truth being *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala* and getting to know Him because through that, your characteristics as a human being will reflect His divine characteristics. And through that you will seek to



serve His creation because that's just who you are. So that's what I understand *Tawhid*-ic to be....that's the decolonization that I think would serve young [Muslim] people better.

In an Islamic worldview, the reality of *tawhid* is the most important concept and belief of all. *Tawhid* means 'oneness', and is the most important attribute of Allah/God/Creator. In the context of this paper, the concept of *tawhid*, as is true for many concepts in the Islamic tradition, informs a Muslim's whole life and way of being; therefore, since God is One, we as Muslims can also strive towards oneness, or wholeness, in our lives as a means to seek closeness to Allah.

A major theme, and the most significant, emerging from the ways in which the Muslims in this study engage in social justice work and spaces in the Toronto area is a searching and yearning for *tawhid* that is, as of yet, unmet. The absence of oneness, or wholeness, for Muslim peoples engaging in social justice work is a critical finding of this study. Across all three of our stories and experiences, the desire to be our whole selves, as practicing and devoted Muslims who carry the responsibilities, commitment and knowledges of social justice, particularly settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, LGBTQ rights, and so on, has not been realized in social justice spaces and movements in Toronto. In the spaces, movements and communities that I have engaged with, I often found that the particularities of being a Muslim person with an Islamic worldview, which emphasizes belief in Allah, centrality of spirit, the existence of an afterlife, and the heart as the home of the soul and intellect, were not present, embedded or welcome in the social justice spaces that I was involved with. The only spaces in which spirit, prayer and acknowledgement of a Creator was embedded in movements was in particular movements and actions held by various Indigenous peoples, particularly the spaces I've shared with folks in Anemki Wajew and Anishinaabe Aki (Treaty Three Territory). These spaces have always received me with care and respect, and it is one of the few times that I've felt the closest

to wholeness in life, but also in justice work. When visiting with Yasiin, he expressed a similar sentiment:

Yasiin: As a Muslim, as someone who is spiritual, my connection with God is also a massive part of my human condition. So that's lacking in that [Marxist-oriented organizing] space. So sometimes I'll find myself a little disconnected in that space. The biggest, honestly, the most natural space for me has been with Indigenous peoples.

*F: Why do you think that is?*

Yasiin: Because of my spiritual personality being one that seeks justice and their spirituality very much tied to their justice and tied to justice for everyone else around them. There's a very powerful connection. And I don't find that even in a lot of Muslim circles...A lot of Muslims are, besides of course, Black Muslims who are descendants of people who were forcibly removed; they are the first Muslims here. But a lot of other Muslims who are and aren't Black who migrated to Canada, they're here for economic opportunity. They're here without having much of a choice. They participate in the system, they participate in the state, with the colonial kind of process. So, a lot of them don't really explore social justice because they're here because they want a better life. They're from previously colonized ancestral homelands so they move out to seek economic opportunity; for their kids more than for themselves. Which of course, is monumentally appreciated. But I find that we don't engage too much with social justice, even though our mosques are on, some of them, on unceded territory. Some of them are on territory that is governed by treaties but is completely disrespected. So, it's very much a part of our lives but we don't engage with that too much. So sometimes I find myself in Muslim circles a little, a little disconnected...depending on the kind of mood that I'm in

and the kind of growth that I'm in at a certain point. Like with some circles of course, it's really nice to have that connection with the religious sciences, religious knowledges, very important stuff; I love that... So those two circles, the circle of Muslims and the circle of Indigenous peoples are the most nourishing for me. I can't live without, like, I need both - I can't without either of them.

I cannot emphasize enough that the phenomena of both Yasiin and I experiencing significant spiritual connectedness amongst spaces and movement led, held and carried by Indigenous peoples is complicated. First, non-Indigenous peoples, particularly white ones, have been appropriating Indigenous cultures for centuries, particularly the spiritual connectedness so central to Indigenous worldviews. Cultural appropriation involves peoples who are not of a particular culture or community (do not have any direct relation to peoples from that culture and heritage) to steal, abuse, misuse and financially benefit from peoples, practices, customs and material items of significance of that particular culture or community (Bird, 2017). It is demeaning, disrespectful and inappropriate, as it undermines teachings and protocols that hold social, spiritual and ecological significance, as well as commodifies practices, material items and customs that are sacred. Cultural appropriation is not only consecrated against Indigenous cultures, but many other across the globe.

Appropriation of Indigenous cultures in Canada comes in many forms; from the wearing of ceremonial eagle-feather headdresses, to the social misuse of attributes such as spirit animals/totems, the commercialization of spiritual and cultural items such as dreamcatchers, and the commodification of spiritual and cultural practices, spaces and ceremonies that are run and owned by white, non-Indigenous peoples. Although both Yasiin and I have not personally (to my knowledge) engaged in such disrespectful, unethical and gross behaviour, I believe it's important

for settler peoples such as ourselves to be careful, cautious and mindful of the ways in which we occupy spaces held, carried, created and entrusted by Indigenous peoples and the ways in which we relate and communicate about such interactions. To simply state that there is a spiritual connectedness in our experiences without an acknowledgement of the danger, harm and theft that have been the outcomes of such statements by non-Indigenous and settler peoples is irresponsible and perpetuates the cycles of colonial violence.

The acknowledgement and experience of spiritual connectedness in social justice movements and spaces carried by Indigenous peoples for both Yasiin and I, Islamically speaking, is a reflection of the state of our hearts at those particular points in time. In Islamic traditions, being conscious of God/Creator/Allah, or *taqwa*, is a phenomena and state that is directly related to the state of one's heart. There are many ways to understand the relevance of spirit to the heart, as its relevance is so important in an Islamic worldview. In this instance, I am referring to the ability of our hearts to recognize spiritual significance, transcendence, and connectedness to Allah. Yasiin describes it so well in how he understand his ability to relate to Indigenous spirituality, as for him, it is another pathway back to the same universal force; Creator/Allah/God.

Yasiin: The Anishinaabe creation story is so similar to our creation story of Adam. So Adam in the second verse of the Qur'an, everything was created before him and then he was created and he was told all the names. That is very much, from what I've read, very close to the Anishinaabe creation story. So that was really nice to pick up those connections. I like to think of Native peoples as people who are upon *tawhid*. They believe in one Creator, and although their conception of life is different, we believe in the

same Creator. I firmly believe that someone like the Great Peacemaker was a Prophet from God.

Although the significance and strength of this spiritual connectedness is important, it is vital to emphasize that all three of us recognize how important it is to maintain a distinction between our spiritual practices. Spiritual connectedness does not necessarily mean that as Muslims, our whole selves are embedded or present or actualized in social justice work and spaces here in the Toronto area.

A common thread throughout our stories was how social justice spaces and movements often put us in positions of disconnection, or fragmentation of our whole selves, especially as a Muslim and as a social justice advocate. Throughout the various work that we have engaged in, from poverty-reduction, education, Palestinian liberation, challenging Islamophobia, Indigenous resistance, environmental protection and on, all three of us continuously were put in positions where our Muslimness was confronted, challenged, or strained, our cultural heritage/ethnicity was made invisible, or our critical social justice perspectives were unwelcome or lacking in the spaces we engaged in. Uba often described it as feeling as though she was being forced to choose between her Muslim identity and her Blackness in many contexts:

Uba: And when you're working in those spaces, I feel like in Black liberation work, there's not a lot of Muslims. I remember I took this prison abolition course, and I talked about 'Oh in heaven, there's going to be so many Black people!' I could see my professor be like 'uhhhm' and I was like ohhh right okay, like not everyone believes in heaven! I just want to find that balance.

\*

Uba: So university comes. I'm entering with the hijab on. I also just started to wear the abaya. I was entering as a Muslim praying five times a day. I found prayer space. I did what any Muslim would want to do; I joined the Muslim Students Association (MSA). And I thought, this is going to be great. And...I hated it. It was the first time I felt like I had to choose between my Muslimness or my Blackness.

\*

Uba: Losing my grandma...my faith was kind of rocked. I was like, you know, I still want to be Muslim but I'm going to put pants on. If I miss a prayer here and there it's fine...And it was really tough. I don't remember when but there was a point where I was thinking about taking off the hijab. Part of me, I felt that I had to choose between my Blackness and my Muslimness in a lot of spaces. I stopped engaging in the MSA because I felt like I experienced anti-Blackness. It was like an unwelcoming feeling. MSAs can be really clique-y too and I didn't fall into any cliques, so I was like I don't feel welcome here. Being in the teaching program, it's very white and I had one other black student; we just became really good friends. And then I felt like I had to really hold onto, really fighting for this idea of what it means to be a Black student. You know, like engaging these experiences and acknowledging my own experiences that I've pushed back. I remember my friend [the only other Black student in the class] and I went to this recruiting for teachers; we went to a lot of stalls that had Black people and they weren't looking at me. They were only looking at my friend. And I was like great, do I have shed my Muslimness now? My friend and I talked about this. I was in this battle, like I can't be both Black and Muslim? I experienced Islamophobia from Black people. That was like really hard.... I haven't experienced a lot of Islamophobia in Toronto...But when it's

from Black people...it's just more painful....because it's like, you're supposed to be on my team!

\*

Uba: When I got into the work, I was like yes! I'm finally getting involved with Black issues, with Black liberation- it was so exciting. I didn't understand...but I kind of felt like I put spirituality on the backburner. I was like I don't need it, like I can pray when I'm home...but I didn't understand that in this, in Black liberation work, I needed spirituality. I was burnt out and tired and always angry...I just realized it has to go hand in hand. To me, it's so confusing because I look at people who don't have Islam and I think how are you doing it? What is your source? Sometimes I understand, like Black liberation work can be very complex and of course we have our own issues within the community... So understanding for me to survive the frontlines, or even what white supremacy wants to present of what Black liberation work is...and then for me to also survive the community organizing side of it, I'm dealing with people who don't view, who you know don't understand my spirituality side- sometimes I have to get out of my meetings, I need to go pray- like little things...I realized, in order for me to survive both spaces, I need my spirituality.

\*

Uba: It's just interesting how my source of strength always has been my spirituality. And it's interesting because in the Black liberation movement, sometimes their source of strength is the idea of being liberated, the idea of getting freedom...but like for me...I don't know when I'm going to die. My source of strength is my religion. But it's taken me a long time to get there and to realize that.

Yasiin emphasized experiencing a related sense of fragmentation as discussed earlier when emphasizing the disconnection he feels at times within social justice spaces without a spiritual awareness and Muslim spaces without that are not engaged in critical social justice work. He later echoes this again by saying:

Yasiin: I think this speaks to the absence of the Muslim narrative in social justice and the absence of social justice education in Muslim circles.

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Yasiin: And I think one of the biggest things that I'm going to try, hopefully with this collective of Muslims I was telling you about, is try to communicate to other young people is like, try to think about liberation outside of just socialism vs capitalism.

Because then you're using language and methodology and a framework that isn't yours, that doesn't come from your teachings, that isn't *tawhid*-ic. It's not grounded in purpose.

\*

Yasiin: Some of them identify as Muslim, and some of them don't but the work is grounded in materialism. Even if a person identifies as Muslim, their work is not necessarily *tawhid*-ic.

Above, Yasiin and Uba both express continuous moments and interactions that challenged or hindered their abilities to be their whole selves, as complex Muslim peoples who work from spirit-centered places and carry their own cultural and ancestral heritages wherever they walk. Another dynamic present in the stories they share, and within my own, is the reality of lateral violence. Uba expresses it when discussing facing Islamophobia from Black peoples, as well as anti-Blackness from non-Black Muslims. Yasiin expresses it when discussing the disconnection he feels in Muslim circles that lack an acknowledgement of settler colonialism and



the engagement in ongoing colonial violence by his fellow Muslim community that goes along with it. I also experience lateral violence within the broader Muslim community by ongoing exclusion and disregard for Ahmadi beliefs.

The experience of fragmentation across all of our stories I believe is connected to a principle that is embedded within Islamic traditions; the reality of *tawhid*. This desire for *tawhid*, for oneness, that myself, Uba and Yasiin have expressed within not only social justice movements but also as an attribute of justice is an underlying dynamic within each of our lived experiences. Oneness is a transcending quality, one that seeks to marry all integral parts of self including the mind, body and heart, which is the source of spiritual and emotional self in an Islamic worldview. By striving to express, include, embrace and live by our whole selves in the spaces we occupy within justice work and beyond, we are striving towards a wholeness, or oneness, that is at the centre of our deepest understanding of life, reality, existence; or in other words, Islam. The Most High has many names, one of which is *Al-Adl* (the Most Just) and if the One is the Most Just, then there is an interrelatedness between *tawhid* and justice.

Critical social justice work which informs and is informed by anti-colonialism and critical race feminism are comprised of concepts that illuminate similar elements as discussed above. For instance, anti-colonialism emphasizes a vehement opposition to the separation of mind, body and spirit, since it is in direct conflict with central teachings within Indigenous worldviews (Pon et al., 2011). Furthermore, Black feminists that have forged the field of critical race feminism with care and resilience have discussed a concept called spirit murder, or spirit injury (Williams, 2002; Wing, 2002).

I first heard the term spirit injury from an Anishinaabe elder based in the territory of Anemki Wajew who was discussing the ways in which murderous, wretched and inhumane

colonial practices and policies such as the residential school system has impacted the wellness of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. Little did I know at that time, Black feminists such as Patricia Williams (2002) and Adrien Katherine Wing (2002) have been writing about the concept for many years. Spirit murder is defined as the cumulative effect of thousands of spirit injuries and assaults from violence, exclusion, disregard, undermining, stereotyping and abuse spanning across the lifetimes of Black peoples due to the harsh realities of anti-Blackness and white supremacy (Opi & Wane, 2007). Williams emphasizes that all Black women in particular are lifelong victims of spirit-murder due to the ways in which patriarchy and anti-Black racism impact and shape their lived realities. I will use the term ‘spirit injury’ instead of ‘spirit murder’ to follow the example of Adrien Katherine Wing in *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (2003), since the harm to the spirit that is a result of the fragmentation discussed in this paper, especially that of Yasiin and myself, is in no way a complete representation of the lifelong experiences of the peoples involved in this study. Furthermore, I do not wish to equate the experiences discussed in this study to the harsh and brutal realities of spirit murder against Black peoples, and more specifically Black women. Critical race theorists and anti-colonialism scholars further emphasize the necessary distinctions between the ways Black peoples are treated and experience the world through settler responsibilities; Sharma and Wright (2008) rightly query whether it is accurate to consider African slaves who came to occupy lands on Turtle Island through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as “settlers” with the same settler responsibilities as non-Indigenous folks such as myself. As a non-Black woman, I feel that this distinction is crucial. I wonder if the fragmentation experienced by me, Yasiin and Uba, which undeniably has a negative effect on the heart/spirit, can also be considered as a form of spirit injury? With Islamophobia and white supremacy on the rise across Canada, the violence of these structural forces undeniably have a

spiritual impact. Furthermore, all three of our ancestral lands have been targets of imperialism, which makes me wonder how those legacies carry across generations to the present in such a way that also affects spirit. As explored above, the ways in which Yasiin, Uba and I experience, perceive and interact in social justice work in the settler colonial context of Toronto as spirit-centered Muslim peoples is evidently fluid, dynamic and complex. Throughout our time talking together and embedded in the pieces of these discussions included here is a profound, deliberate and thoughtful awareness of self, justice and spirit embodied by both Uba and Yasiin; I am both humbled and inspired by this. The possible implications of the dynamics explored and presented above will be highlighted in the concluding section of this study.

## CHAPTER 6. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

### *Limitations*

As previously mentioned, this study in no way captures the fullness of Uba, Yasiin and my own life stories; rather it serves as a significant glimpse into our lived experiences. A major limitation of this study were factors that were out of the researcher's control, including the program structure and design in the Master of Social Work program which limits the amount of time, attention, and capacity students such as myself are able to dedicate to this study. The questions and dynamics explored and exposed through this study can serve as a starting point for more in-depth work on the experiences and knowledge systems of Muslims, and transformative approaches to justice work. Furthermore, excavating and re-working the ways in which Muslim peoples can engage in justice through *tawhid*-ic frameworks is a task I could spend my entire life attempting, practicing and exploring; this can certainly be a focus for future work. In the future, expanding the depth of exploration as well as the scope by involving the voices of other Muslim peoples who engage in critical social justice work could provide fuller answers to the questions posed in this study.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

This critical narrative study explored the ways in which Muslim social justice advocates in and around Toronto experience social justice spaces and movements, as well as the role of Islam in their approaches to such justice work. Across mine, Yasiin and Uba's stories are many differences; in identity, social location and focus of justice work, though the ways in which our stories intersect are the most powerful findings of this study. The fine balance between destructive and motivating anger, experiences of personal and community discrimination, the centrality of personal relationships and a profound sense of fragmentation from being unable to

find Muslim and social justice spaces that align with our worldviews, justice-perspectives and Islamic beliefs are shared experiences between us all. This study highlights the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia in the settler colonial context of Toronto through weaving together the diverse and interconnected experiences of Uba, Yasiin and I as we seek justice and spiritual refinement in our lives and work. As Muslims, we are called to seek justice, challenge oppression and embed love and remembrance for Allah throughout it all; but our stories shed light on how difficult and complex this can be in the social justice spaces we have existed in so far. To find and build spaces that are truly committed to justice on Indigenous lands while expressing our own connectedness to Islam is something I believe is possible, and perhaps Uba, Yasiin and I started to create such a space in our time sharing, talking and listening together. In terms of why these spaces have impacted our spirit, heart, mind and intellects the way that they have here is a question for the broader anti-oppressive practice community in the field of social work and justice-seeking movements. Our experiences of disconnection, exclusion, fear, exhaustion and fragmentation while engaging in social justice work are reflections of the embeddedness of white supremacy, Islamophobia and ongoing colonialism that exist all around us. Such interactions bring the wisdoms of Audre Lorde's words to light; "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"; so why do we as practitioners refuse to throw out the toolbox? To my fellow social work practitioners and social justice advocates, I am called to ask: is our work truly transformative without authentic and diverse representation? Is our work truly transformational if the sovereignty, voices and knowledges of Indigenous peoples whose territories we live and work on are not centered? Is our work truly transformational if we ourselves are not transformed? I hope to seek the answers to these questions; on my own, in community and *inshaAllah*, through my Maker.

## APPENDIX A



### **Ryerson University Recruitment Process**

#### **Recruitment Process:**

I intend to use my personal Facebook and WhatsApp accounts to recruit participants for this study.

Script for post:

#### **\*\*Attention Muslim social workers and/or social justice advocates\*\*:**

I will be engaging in a research study as part of my Master of Social Work program at Ryerson University that focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Muslim social workers and social justice advocates in the City of Toronto or Greater Toronto Area. The aim of this study is to amplify Muslim perspectives on the role of Islam on healing, social justice, social work and decolonization within the greater context of settler colonialism here in Canada.

I am choosing to engage in this study due to the lack of Muslim and Islamic representation within social work literature and social work practice in Canada. My own experiences, perspectives and meanings will be explored alongside those who will share their voices as participants in this study.

The two major questions I seek to explore in this Major Research Paper are: what does it mean to practice critical social justice work from an Islamic lens and how can Muslims engage in the process of decolonization led by Indigenous peoples within the context of settler colonialism that exists within Canada?

The voices of Muslim social workers in this study will help me contextualize, conceptualize and explore those two questions. I am looking to interview two people in total. I will also be hosting a focus group which can include up to 25 participants.

Please please please share this post with folks who may be interested.

If you are interested in participating, please do not comment on this post. Instead, send me a private message or email me at farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca.

Thank you for your support! I intend on publically sharing my Major Research Paper once it is submitted in the summer of 2018, inshaAllah!

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board



**Ryerson University  
Consent Agreement**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

**Islam, decolonization and me: An exploration of Muslim approaches to social justice work in the settler colonial context of Canada**

**INVESTIGATORS:** This research study is being conducted by Farah Ahmed, under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Pon, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Farah Ahmed through email at [farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca](mailto:farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca). Or you may feel free to contact Dr. Gordon Pon at [g2pon@ryerson.ca](mailto:g2pon@ryerson.ca)

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** This study seeks to explore the experiences, perspectives and practice of Muslim social workers and social justice/community advocates located within the City of Toronto or Greater Toronto Area. The researcher is interested in exploring Islamic approaches to social justice, healing, social work and decolonization within the context of settler colonialism in Canada. A total of two participants are being sought for a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 1-3 hours. Participants are also invited to partake in a focus group, which would take approximately 1-3 hours, and will involve up to 25 participants. Anyone that self-identifies as Muslim, is located within the City of Toronto or Greater Toronto Area and engages in social work and/or social justice work in Canada is eligible for this study. Participants do not need to be registered with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) to be eligible for participation in this study. This study is being conducted by a graduate student in partial completion of a Masters of Social Work degree, and results will be submitted as a Major Research Paper to the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

**WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS:** If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Contact Farah Ahmed by email or phone to state your interest in being involved in the study as a participant in an interview and/or focus group
- Read an overview of the study
- Schedule an interview with Farah Ahmed, either in-person or through Skype

- Sign a consent form
- Engage in a semi-structured interview with Farah Ahmed that may take up to 1-3 hours long. Interview questions will explore your approaches to social justice work, your experiences as a Muslim person within the field of social work and/or social justice work, your perspectives on faith and Islam in social justice work, and your perspectives on Islam as an approach to healing, wellness and decolonization within the context of settler colonialism.
- Participants may be invited to attend a focus group with Farah Ahmed and other participants, which would be 1-3 hours long
- Participants will be provided with the audio recording of the interview and transcript as prepared by Farah Ahmed at any time during the duration of the study
- Participants will be given a rough draft of Farah Ahmed's Major Research Paper during the summer of 2018 to assess whether she gathered the essence of their experiences in an appropriate and accurate way, and will be able to provide feedback and suggest changes (within 5 days of receiving it) on the sections that pertain to what they said during the interview
- Participants in the focus group will be asked questions that explore their approaches to social justice work, experiences as a Muslim person within the field of social work and/or social justice work, perspectives on faith and Islam in social justice work, and perspectives on Islam as an approach to healing, wellness and decolonization within the context of settler colonialism
- Participants involved in the focus group will not have access to audio recordings or transcripts in order to protect confidentiality of other participants involved. However, all focus group participants will be able to access a draft of the study in the summer of 2018 and suggest changes/offer feedback on section that include statements they made during the focus group. Participants will have 5 days to respond after receiving this draft.
- All participants will be sent a copy of the final Major Research Paper by September 2018 if they choose to receive it.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** Participants may find it beneficial to share their experiences of being a Muslim in the field of social work and community social justice efforts with a fellow Muslim social justice advocate and social work practitioner (Farah Ahmed). Furthermore, the researcher is hopeful that this study will add to social work and social justice literature that considers non-Western and Islamic ways of engaging in social work practice, social justice and healing.

I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:** The potential risks involved in this study are very low. However, since the researcher intends to capture experiences, perspectives and meanings of Muslim social workers in their practice, a participant may experience unpleasant memories or discomfort, depending on their life history. Furthermore, issues of Islamophobia will be discussed, which also may lead Muslim participants to experience emotional discomfort when recalling their



experiences of discrimination. Please note that specific information pertaining to a participant's exact workplace, masjid/religious affiliations, and organizational affiliations will not be asked during the focus group as a way to protect participant's privacy. All personal information will be handled with the utmost care from this researcher, and pseudonyms will be used throughout the writing of this study.

The researcher also acknowledges the potential for 'group risks' as Muslim peoples who live in a societal context of Islamophobia. Please know that this researcher intends to clarify throughout the entire research process that the Muslim voices included do not and could not possibly represent every facet of the great teachings within Islam, and that each person involved speaks only for themselves, including the researcher. This study will take careful and intentional precautions to protect Islam and Muslims from Islamophobic sentiments, and will challenge Islamophobia throughout. Please note however, that any representations of Islam and Muslims can be used inappropriately by peoples who intend to engage in Islamophobic actions.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Confidentiality of participants is of utmost importance to this researcher throughout the entire research process. Any data that is collected, such as signed consent forms, your personal information, audio recordings of interviews and transcripts of interviews will be stored digitally on a password protected external hard drive that only the primary researcher, Farah Ahmed, has access to. Data collected in the focus group process will also be stored in the same manner. Audio recordings of the focus group will be the property of the primary researcher, and may be used in the future for digital storytelling/podcasting purposes. All personal identifiers will be excluded to protect the identities of focus group participants if used in a digital story/podcast by the primary researcher. Any data will only be accessed by Farah Ahmed, the primary researcher, and Dr. Gordon Pon. Furthermore, your personal information, such as name, workplace, age, and contact information will not appear in the Major Research Paper in any way. Pseudonyms will be assigned in replacement of your real names, and ethnicity will only be referred to in general terms. Participants have a right to review the audio recordings and transcripts of the interview, which will be provided to them by the primary researcher. By signing this agreement, all participants of the focus group agree to uphold confidentiality of all participants involved, as well as what is discussed during the focus group. All participants in the focus group must not discuss the identities of any participants involved or share what has been discussed by any participant once the focus group has ended. This is a precaution in order to protect the privacy of all participants.

**INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:** Participants involved in an interview will be offered \$35 for their involvement in this study, as a token of appreciation. They will receive this incentive at the very beginning of the scheduled interview, either in cash or through e-transfer if the interview is not conducted in-person. Participants involved in the focus group will have access to refreshments as a token of appreciation for their involvement in this study. Please note that interviewees will be asked to volunteer more of their time and provide in-depth answers regarding their experiences in a one-on-one interview capacity. Those

involved in the focus group will be asked more general questions regarding their insights on Islam and social justice work.

**COSTS TO PARTICIPATION:** Participants may endure travel costs to meet the primary researcher at a location of their choice. Location will be limited to the City of Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area, specifically in Brampton or Mississauga. If traveling for an in-person interview is a barrier, please contact the researcher to discuss options.

**COMPENSATION FOR INJURY:**

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question and stop the interview if you choose. If you withdraw participation, you will not be asked to return any of the incentives described above. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study by withdrawing from the study completely. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator, Farah Ahmed and supervisor, Dr. Gordon Pon..

Participants should be aware that it is their right to refuse to answer any questions that are posed in this study during an interview or focus group. Furthermore, participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time before August 24, 2018, which is the date this study must be submitted to the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

**FUNDING:** This study is self-funded by the researcher.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. Contact:

Farah Ahmed  
Masters of Social Work, Candidate  
School of Social Work, Ryerson University  
farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca

Gordon Pon, MSW, PhD  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Work  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, On M5B 2K3  
Tel: 416-979-5000, ext. 4786

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:  
Research Ethics Board

c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042  
[rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca)

**CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I agree to be audio-recorded the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**RECEIVE UPDATES/DRAFTS OF THE STUDY:** Please check any boxes that apply to you.

☐

I want to receive the transcript and audio file of my interview, and would like the opportunity to provide feedback on sections of the draft MRP that include my experiences and insights

☐

I would like the final copy of the MRP sent to me

Please provide your contact information, such as email address and/or phone number:

\_\_\_\_\_

RYERSON UNIVERSITY MRP RESEARCH STUDY

# Muslims & Social Justice

*Are you a Muslim-identifying person that engages in social work practice, social justice organizing or community advocacy? You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore Muslim approaches to social justice, healing and decolonization.*

Contact:

Farah Ahmed, Masters of Social Work Candidate  
School of Social Work  
Ryerson University  
[farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca](mailto:farah.ahmed@ryerson.ca)

This research study has been reviewed by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board

## APPENDIX B

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Guide

Welcome and thank you for participating in this study! As you know by now, my name is Farah Ahmed and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Social Work Program at Ryerson University. As part of my degree, I am required to complete a Major Research Paper. The study I am conducting will be disseminated through the Major Research Paper, which will be submitted for internal review by the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

As was discussed with you earlier, your consent to participate in this study is incredibly important. I will go through the entire consent agreement with you at this time and answer any questions you may have before we begin the interview. Please note that you have the right to refuse to answer any question I may pose, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time. This interview will be audio recorded, and I require your written consent for this as well. Once this is completed, the audio recorder will be turned on. Please note that I have a legal obligation to report if you intend to harm yourself or anyone else in any way, as well as if a child under the age of 16 has or may be harmed. This is the only time that I must break my agreement to maintain confidentiality.

This semi-structured interview will be very informal. I intend to obtain some demographic information, and ask you questions about your experiences as a Muslim social worker and/or social justice advocate located within Toronto and surrounding cities.

#### **Demographic/background Information:**

What is your name, age, ethnicity, education (if applicable), workplace(s)?

#### **Open questions**

- Exploration of their relationship with Islam/how they conceptualize themselves as a Muslim/what has helped shape their understanding and relationship with Islam
- Exploration of their involvement with 'social justice work' – How they define 'social justice' and social justice work, what type of social justice work they've been involved in
- What has influenced/shaped their approaches and experiences within social justice work
- Exploring/defining their understanding of colonialism and decolonization, including settler colonialism
- Exploring/defining their understanding of spirituality, and whether it has any influence in their work/faith
- Barriers involved as a Muslim person in a settler colonial context, in engaging in social justice work
- Exploring experiences/perceptions of settler identities
- Exploring experiences/perceptions of social justice work that involves solidarity work with Indigenous peoples
- Exploration/perceptions related to sources of strength and resiliency

Thank you for your participation!

## APPENDIX C



To: Farah Ahmed  
Social Work  
Re: REB 2018-034: Islam, decolonization and me: An exploration of Muslim approaches to social justice work in the settler colonial context of Canada  
Date: March 9, 2018

Dear Farah Ahmed,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2018-034 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2018-034) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrizia Albanese".

Dr. Patrizia Albanese, PhD  
Chair, Ryerson University Research Ethics Board

The Following protocol attachments have been reviewed and approved.

- Recruitment Script - Phone,in-person, email script.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- List of Counseling Support Services.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Recruitment Script For Focus Group - Social Media.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Recruitment Script - Social Media.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Interview Guide.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Consent Agreement.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Comments to Chair.docx (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)
- Focus group guide.pdf (submitted on: 07 Mar 2018)

If any changes are made to the attached document throughout the course of the research, an amendment MUST be submitted to, and subsequently approved by the REB.



## APPENDIX D



### **Ryerson University Recruitment Process**

#### **Recruitment Process:**

I intend to use this script as an in-person, telephone and email script.

Script:

Salaam,

Thank you for reaching out to me about your interest in participating in my research study!

As you know, I will be engaging in a research study as part of my Master of Social Work program at Ryerson University that focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Muslim social workers and social justice advocates in the City of Toronto or Greater Toronto Area.

The aim of this study is to amplify Muslim perspectives on the role of Islam on healing, social justice, social work and decolonization within the greater context of settler colonialism here in Canada. I am choosing to engage in this study due to the lack of Muslim and Islamic representation within social work literature and social work practice in Canada. My own experiences, perspectives and meanings will be explored alongside those who will share their voices as participants in this study.

The two major questions I seek to explore in this Major Research Paper are: what does it mean to practice critical social justice work from an Islamic lens and how can Muslims engage in the process of decolonization led by Indigenous peoples within the context of settler colonialism that exists within Canada? The voices of Muslim social workers in this study will help me contextualize, conceptualize and explore those two questions.

Please confirm with me whether you are interested in participating in the study as an interviewee or a focus group participant.

If you haven't already done so, please find a copy of the Consent Agreement attached. Please read through it and let me know if you have any questions.

We will be reviewing this Consent Agreement together at the beginning of the interview, and I will ask you to sign it at that time.



If you would like to partake in the focus group, please send me a signed copy of the Consent Agreement. We will also be reviewing Confidentiality at the beginning of the focus group.

Thank you again for your interest! I look forward to including your voice in this project.

If you have any other questions, please contact me at any time.

Take care,  
Farah

### **List of Counseling Support Services**

Please refer to this list whenever you may need. This is not an extensive list, however, the agencies included here are free and located within the City of Toronto and Greater Toronto Area. If you require support in a different location, please let me know and I can pass along some resources, if possible.

- **Women's Health In Women's Hands:** Offers mental health and counseling services for no cost. They specifically service racialized cis- and trans-gender women from African, Caribbean, Latin American and South Asian backgrounds
  - Telephone: 416-593-7655
  - Email: [info@whiwh.com](mailto:info@whiwh.com)
  - Address: 2 Carlton St, Suite 500, Toronto, ON
- **Naseeha: Muslim Youth Helpline:** A helpline for Muslim youth that can be accessed across Canada and the United States of America between the hours of 6-9pm, Eastern Time. Counseling services are approached in accordance to Islamic teachings
  - Telephone: 1-866-627-3342
- **Tangerine Walk-In Counseling in Peel Region:** First come, first served basis and free for all. Located in Mississauga and Brampton, Ontario. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 8pm. Locations vary, please see their website for details.
  - Telephone: 905-795-3530
  - Website: <http://www.tangerinewalkin.com/>
- **What's Up Walk In Counseling:** Located in Scarborough. Youth-oriented, free and drop-in. Please see their website for times and locations:
  - Website: <http://www.whatsupwalkin.ca/>
- **Masjid El-Tawhid - Unity Mosque:** An inclusive, justice-oriented community of worship
  - Website: <http://www.jumacircle.com/>

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