Middle Eastern International Students' Identity in Canada

by

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Abstract

Through conducting interpretive case studies on eight Middle Eastern international students in Canadian universities and drawing on theories of Place and everyday life, Postcolonial theory, and Postpositivist Realist Theory of Identity, this research explores the ongoing process of Identity construction of Middle Eastern international students in the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and gender. The study examines the Middle Eastern international students' lived experiences, benefiting from a reflexive and collaborative research process, informed by an interpretivist approach under a constructivism paradigm. The findings of the study reveal that since identity construction is a discursive process, the discourse of war and conflict in these students' homelands has been affective in shaping who they are now and how they experience life in Canada. Although their experiences of war and conflict among these students varied depending on their country of origin and their exposure, the findings revealed that they see their "selves" as being the subject of constant fear and anxiety, disrupted sense of self, and lack of sense of stability and security due to their experiences of war, conflict, and displacement. Moreover, findings indicated that these students' everyday lives feature constant struggles against the Orientalist discourse in Canadian society which is characterized by racism, discrimination, and othering towards them as Middle Eastern Muslim individuals. The Middle Eastern international students' narratives suggested that these students' socially and discursively politicized experiences have made them adopt a new hybrid identity as a third, in-between space in which they feel safer and more integrated. This study can have important implications for policy makers, educators, communities, and individuals hoping to provide a space for resistance against the Orientalist discourse of Canada by producing counter discourse.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Shadi Mehrabi. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to:

My Mother

My role model, my angle, and the strongest woman I've ever known

My Father

My inspiration, my love, and the true believer in me

Acknowledgments

In conducting this thesis, there were some people without whose help, the fulfilment of the project would have not been possible. Although lack of space may not allow me to express my gratitude and appreciation to all those who have helped me in one way or another, there are a few who cannot be left unmentioned.

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Last, but not the least, my most genuine gratitude goes to my family, my life-companions, and my true friends in my life. I would not have been able to complete this momentous work without the unconditional supports of Mom, Dad, and Mohsen.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Middle Eastern International Students and the Issue of Identity

In the past few years, internationalization has become one of the biggest missions of Canadian post-secondary institutions. Altbach and Knight (2007) see "the economic, political, and societal forces" (p. 290) as the reason for such great international involvement. According to Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2015), Canada ranks as the world's 7th most popular destination for international students. CBIE (2015) reveals that there were 336,497 international students in Canada in 2014, representing an 83% increase since 2008. Over half (58%) of all international students in Canada are studying at universities and 7% are pursuing a college education (CBIE, 2015).

Although internationalization policies attempt to facilitate student mobility, they fail to address complexities in "everyday life" of international students in the new "place." Lakshmana (1979) argues that there is a significant difference between the "problems perceived as important" and the "difficulties actually experienced" by international students (p. 85). This lack of consideration has made these students struggle with their identity (who they are) and how it is shaped (how they become who they are) in the dominant culture. Among international students, those who come from Middle East conflict zones, such Iraq, Iran, Palestine, and Syria, some may have different experiences at universities and in society, mainly due to the limited international relations between Canada and their countries, as well as negative and unfavorable public opinion towards their states.

Tuan (1992) believes that *place* is a source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity. For Middle Eastern international students, there is the problem of feeling placeless. On one hand, living in their home country is difficult due to the existing wars/conflicts, and on the other hand,

living in Canada as a country which is involved in exerting extra economic and political pressure on their home country (by enacting economic sanctions, for example) leads them to become resentful about their new home's policies and actions. According to Ellis (2005), "the dynamics of achieving a sense of place support the establishment of both a sense of self and a sense of community" (p. 59). Such a view is important in realizing whether or not international students' uncertainty about who they are or want to be is related to feeling placeless. Thus, understanding Middle Eastern international students' lives and the challenges they face in their everyday life in their new place (Canada) can help understand how these students construct their identities. Such knowledge is very important for policy makers and educators to provide a space in which international students do not fall in the trap of feeling as "Others" and feel more supported and integrated.

In this study I have tried to reflect Middle Eastern students' voices in Canada. To this end, I have used postcolonial theory and philosophical hermeneutics (which will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4) to inform my methodology and the collection and analysis of the data. This study was conducted as an interpretive qualitative case study, using pre-interview activities and conversational semi-structured interviews to collect data.

Where Is the Middle East?

As I mentioned earlier, Middle Eastern students usually have unique experiences in their lives mainly because the Middle East has been the target of international imperialistic interventions and is thus known as a region of political strife (Kliot, 2005). Although the term "Middle East" is usually associated with notions of war and conflict, the so-called Middle East consists of many countries with divers populations, cultures, and way life. When we look at different resources to identify the borders of so-called Middle-East, we notice that there is not a

consensus on a unique map. Indeed, from time to time, the term has been used to refer to different areas with different borders, depending on the political context of the usage. According to Volk (2015) , the so-called Middle East is where Africa, Asia and Europe meet. He argues that the Middle East

> comprises three geographic subregions: North Africa (the northern tip of the African continent along the Mediterranean from Mauritania to Egypt), Southwest Asia (the territory east of the Mediterranean, including the Arabian Peninsula), and Caucasus and Central Asia (from Armenia and Azerbaijan via former Soviet Central Asia, to Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). (p.16)

> Although Armenia and Azerbaijan have long ties to Asia and the Middle East, but in

recent years, they have begun to align more with Europe in terms of political and economic trends (Worldatlas, 2014) and thus are not considered as part of the Middle East. Moreover, it is usually debated whether Afghanistan and Pakistan are considered as Middle East countries. Analyzing different historical literature, Encyclopedia Britannica (2014) gives a clear understanding of the today's Middle East:

> The change in usage began to evolve prior to World War II and tended to be confirmed during that war, when the term Middle East was given to the British military command in Egypt. By the mid-20th century a common definition of the Middle East encompassed the states or territories of Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and the various states and territories of Arabia proper (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, or Trucial Oman, now United Arab Emirates). (Para. 2)

Since the use of the term "Middle East" is unsettled, in this study I will base my research on the most common usage of the term, without considering Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia as part of the Middle East map.

The diversity among the countries in the Middle East map confirms that there are so many misconceptions about the region. Looking at the history of the region shows that although some countries in the region have been the battleground for nations seeking independence, power, or wealth, not all of the countries have been involved in war or conflict. Moreover, the Middle East is not all about Arab countries with Muslim populations. There are countries with different languages, dialects, cultures, and religions. Indeed, even though the majority of the region practice Islam, there are so many Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians in the region who speak either Arabic or Turkish, Persian, Kurdish, and Hebrew.

It is very important to note that in studying any subject or issue from the Middle East there is a need to elaborate that the region is so diverse and thus conceptualization related to any related matter can not be generalized to others. The countries that I chose for this study are among the ones that have experienced war or conflict in some ways. Although there are other stories from these countries, I wanted to uncover the unheard narratives of war and conflict that have affected the lives of people in these countries. So by narrating the stories of war I do not mean to victimize the people of the countries of my study.

Since the majority of population in the most Middle East countries are Muslim, people from this region have been facing a phenomenon knows as Islamophobia. Sadek (2017) argues that although "there is tendency to perceive Islamophobia as the West's fear-based reaction to Islamic terrorism, particularly following the events of 9/11" (p. 202), many scholars, have shown that prejudice against Muslims preceded Islamic terrorism by centuries (Massad, 2007; Said,

1978, as cited in Sadek, 2017). While the term Islamophobia connote the fear of Islam, it is argued that the literal meaning of the term can not address the phenomenon against Muslim people. The term is multilayered contextually and thus difficult to be defined. Allen (2010) argues that

> 'Islamophobia' groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is a 'fear' or a 'phobia' of Islam. However, we should distinguish between different kinds of discourse, for instance between academic discussions on the relations between Islam and modernity, public discussions on whether Islam recognizes the principle of separation of state and church, public outcries about Islam as 'a backward religion' or as a 'violent religion', and the forms of hate speech one can find on internet forums and in newspapers... It may well be that these different kinds of discourse and speech are elated and feed into one another, but we cannot simply equate them all and treat them as comparable illustrations of a core ideology named 'Islamophobia.' (pp. 20-21)

Sadek (2017) believes that the term presupposes that "the prejudice is against Islam, a non-living thing while the real victims of Islamophobia are living people of flesh and blood" (p. 202). Moreover, there is an assumption that prejudice against Muslims, as it is presupposed by the term, is aimed at their religion, Islam. However, prejudices against Muslims may be based on their race, ethnicity, cultural differences, socio-economics, or the mere fact that they are immigrants in Western countries. According to Cesari (2011), Muslims in many Western countries are considered part of the European underclass, making class-based contempt a possible reason behind the discrimination they face in these countries (as cited in Sadek, 2017).

In understanding Islamophobia and how it is affecting Muslim identity, it is important to consider that "Islamophobia is not racially blind" (Kalin, 20122, p. 11) and thus it is essential to keep in mind the complexity of the racial, ethnic, class, and religious undertones that are often conflated in the terms "Islamophobia", "Muslim" and "Islam." (Sadek, 2017). Considering the complexities around giving an exact definition of the term "Islamophobia," I will review the related literature in the next chapter, showing how this concept has been affecting the life and identity of Muslim people, specifically Muslim students, around the world.

Statement of the Purpose of the Research Study

As an Iranian international student living and studying in Canada, my everyday life in Canada has been affected by the social structure of society, policies related to international students, my relationships, and some political issues. Not being able to open a bank account in my desired bank in Canada because of financial sanctions against Iran (Mehrabi, 2014), not being able to receive citizen and consular services from Iranian embassy in Canada due to its closure upon severing diplomatic tie between Iran and Canada, and faced with negative attitudes in society as the result of Iranophobia/Islamophobia are examples of my everyday struggle in Canada. Coming from a conflict-ridden region as well as experiencing a challenging life in Canada as an Iranian student led me to become interested in understanding other Middle Eastern students' lives and experiences in their new life in Canada. So, my interest has been to explore the role of Canada, as a place, in shaping Middle Eastern international students' identities. I am also interested to know about the dynamics of achieving a sense of place that supports the establishment of a sense of self for Middle Eastern students who come from conflict-ridden countries. In order to address such interests, I have framed my interpretive research questions as the following:

Q1: How is Canada, as a place, at work in or part of the on-going dynamic process of a Middle Eastern International student's construction of identity?

Since everyday life experiences play essential role in constructing someone's identity (Ashcroft, 2001), it is important to focus on Middle Eastern international students' experiences:

Q2: How has [Participant's Name], as a Middle Eastern student, experienced being an international student in Canada?

Q3: How has a Middle Eastern international student's experience of war and conflict in his/her home country affected his/her life experiences in Canada?

Researcher's Position

I was born in the city of wars. My city, Tehran, has always been the center of wars and conflict: War between people and the government, war between political parties, and war between countries. Tehran is the capital of Iran and the capital of chaos. There are many stories from the midst of these wars: stories of mothers who had to bear their children in hospitals full of soldiers in 1980s, stories of children who had been celebrating their birthdays when their houses were devastated by bombs, and stories of fathers and mothers who had to work hard to protect their families.

When I was born, the Iran-Iraq war had been going for two years. Right after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, when Iran was trying to reach a state of stability after long-term chaos, hoping to take advantage of the situation, being backed by the Western countries Iraq started the war by simultaneous air and land invasions in September 1980. According to Molavi (2005), "the war was motivated by fears that the Iranian Revolution in 1979 would inspire insurgence among Iraq's long-suppressed Shia majority, as well as, Iraq's desire to replace Iran as the dominant Persian Gulf state" (p. 152). While Iranian people were trying to plan for their

country's development after changing monarchy into republic, they found themselves in an imposed war for eight years. In that war, the death toll was an estimated 1,000,000 for Iran with a population of 50 million and 250,000-500,000 for Iraq with population of 17 million (The Guardian, 2010). Abrahamian (2008) points to the post-war losses saying that many people died because of war injuries, many were suffering from permanent injuries from gas and chemical attacks in the trenches and many people suffered PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, known as "shell shock" (p. 175).

Children such as me grew up with fear, stress, and hope of a better future without war. We tried hard to study and to get educated to build our country; nevertheless, we were pushed by the situation, to leave the country. After 1979, in addition to long-lasting war and its effects, Iran has been faced with severe sanctions from other countries. I believe such sanctions, as the modern forms of wars, exert strong and severe economic and social pressure on people's lives and have made Iran a place difficult to live in and survive. Although the statistics and stories related to the losses caused by sanctions in Iran are not published officially by Iranian officials, in April 2015, US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew pointed to some of the consequences of the sanctions against Iran as:

- Sanctions have cost Iran over $160 billion in oil revenues since 2012—revenues Iran can never recoup. And even if Iran were able to quickly double its current oil exports—a big if, given how low oil prices are today and how much improvement Iran's infrastructure needs to produce at this level — it would take more than three years for Iran to earn that much money, and that would not come close to regaining lost economic activity.

- Iran's GDP shrank by 9 percent in the two years ending in March 2014, and it is today 15 to 20 percent smaller than it would have been had it remained on its pre-2012 growth

trajectory. It will take years for Iran to build back up the level of economic activity it would be at now had sanctions never been put in place. (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015)

To show the damages of such international sanctions, I can also point to the consequences of the same kinds of sanctions against Iraq in 1990s. Halliday (1998) argues that opposing sanctions in Iraq killed "4,000 to 5,000 children" every month, because of the breakdown of water and sanitation, insufficient diet and the terrible internal health situation (Para. 13).

I left my country to continue my studies in a place which I had heard was far from all the world's conflict. However, soon after I moved to Canada I realized that it was also involved in shaping a discourse of conflict around some countries such as my own, Iran. I have found that wars and conflict will never stop for people from some of the countries, such as some Middle Eastern ones, due to political reasons. I learned that war is not all about militarized forces against a country. I noticed that there are different shapes of war, such as economic sanctions against a country that can cripple people's lives in a country. As a Middle Eastern international student in Canada, I have been seeking to hear my peers' stories and experiences in order to see how they have dealt with being an international student and how being an international student from Middle East has impacted their lives in Canada. The background that I have, though, may result in some biases in the process of this study. Johnson and Christensen (2011) see researcher bias as a problem and argue that in qualitative research "the researchers 'find' what they want to find, and then they write up their results" (p. 264). Although using bias in the research process and analysis may seem a limitation for some researchers such as Johnson and Christensen (2011), I do not really see it as a limitation. Indeed, I have chosen interpretive inquiry, which has its roots

in hermeneutics, because I do not believe in objectivity and universal truth. Interpretive inquiry often places subjects as active participants in their research who are not "bound, static, atemporal, and decontextualized" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 11). The stories told by participants represent the empirical data, invaluable to "understand[ing] how people create meanings out of events in their lives" (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Thus, the "data" acquired through interpretive inquiry are inevitably "imbued" with interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). Each experience has different meanings for every individual (there are multiple realities) and stories told by people can be reinterpreted differently with different individuals, depending on their life circumstances, relationships, values, beliefs, social, and cultural contexts and background. So in this study I have reflected my own interpretations of each participant's story due to my background, which might be different from the other researchers. Thus, I could not put aside all of my background in the process of my research, and as a Middle Eastern international student in Canada, I have my positionality throughout the study. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) believe that positionality "reflects the position that the researcher…adopt[s] within a given research study," and is identified by locating the researcher in relation to the subject, the participants and the research context and process (p. 71). Foote and Bartell (2011) also argue that "the positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes" (p. 46). While some of my culturally and geographically ascribed positionality such as my nationality (being Iranian) and my race (being Persian), my country's geographical location (being part of the Middle East) have influenced my choice of the subject of this study, my life history, as someone who has experienced war, conflict, and transition from my country to Canada influenced my relationship

with my participants as well as my understanding of their life stories. During the process of my study, using reflexivity, I have disclosed my "own selves" in the research, seeking to understand my part in the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011, p. 225).

Significance of the Study

Review of the related literature shows that there have been quite a few studies focusing on detailed Middle Eastern students' lived experiences (e.g. Abukhattala, 2004; Mustafa, 2006). Thus, this study can shed light on the factors that affect these students' lived experiences and can reveal the actual challenges that these students face in their new home, Canada. Moreover, since I wanted going to find out how these students' identities are shaped by their experiences of war and conflict, this study can be a valuable source to address the interplay of political context between countries and international students' identity. Hence, this research can make a contribution to the research in the areas of higher education and international relations, promoting peace and justice for all.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Research Study

Creswell (1994) defines delimitations as how the study will be narrowed. The fact that I have chosen to understand "Middle Eastern" international students' lives has delimited this study. The reason for my choice is that Middle Eastern students' experiences are unique compared with many other international students due to the political context of their lives; I narrowed my choice to these students to capture such uniqueness. Besides, the four countries that I have chosen (i.e. Iran, Iraq, Palestine and Syria) have some similarities, such as being involved in war, experiencing economic sanctions by Western countries, such as Canada (Canada International, 2015a), and having a large Muslim population. I just need to mention that, when I refer to these countries as "Middle East countries" throughout my study, I do not mean to neglect the diversity of the region and to generalize my findings. The term Middle East used for these

four countries in this study is actually meant to give them a shared bond. I have also chosen

Middle Eastern "international student" as opposed to Middle Eastern "immigrants" because these

students need to have a visa to enter Canada and a study permit to stay in the country and thus

have more limited access to opportunities and resources in Canada. For example, according to

regulations for international students in Canada, these students are not allowed to work off-

campus more than twenty hours in a week (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014) and may

struggle financially. Although this regulation is not limited to Middle Eastern international

students, students from Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria face extra difficulty due to the limited

relations of their countries and Canada. As an example, Canada does not have an embassy and

visa office in these four countries, and students need to travel to other countries to apply for a

visa. Again, the use of the term Middle Eastern students, as it is used in this study, does not mean

to imply that all international students from this region are Muslims who have experienced

war/conflict. However, the focus of this study is on international students with such experiences.

The reason of my choice of Canada as a "place" of analysis (in addition to the fact that as

a resident of this country, it is important for me to see how it is a place in shaping its people's

lives) is because of the stance that this country has against some Middle Eastern countries.

Canada has been actively involved in supporting security forces and so-called counter-terrorism

capacity in Middle East conflict zones such as Iraq, Syria, and Palestine (Canada International,

2015c) and it has been imposing economic sanctions against some countries such as Iran, Iraq,

Palestine and Syria (Canada International, 2015a). Moreover, Canada has had a close

relationship with Israel since 1948 and these two countries have "strong, multidimensional

bilateral relations marked by close political, economic, social and cultural ties" (Canada

International, 2015b, Para. 1). Such close ties with Israel position Canada in conflict with

countries that are opposed to Israel as an apartheid state in the Middle East. In my analysis, I have tried to find out in what ways this stance has possibly affected my participants' lives in this country.

This study is limited in the sense that due to the political sensitivity of the research topic, some of my participants, specifically those from Iran, were conservative in telling some stories, despite my attempt to ensure them about confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Internationalization of Canadian Higher Education

In order to pave the way for involving in the process of globalization, universities around the world engage in international activities. While in the context of higher education we may see globalization and internationalization as similar to each other, Altbach (2004) asserts that these two concepts are related but not the same. In a series of his works with different scholars (i.e. Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg, Rubley, 2009), Altbach points to the meanings of globalization and internationalization and how these two concepts are different. For him globalization is basically "the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century" and internationalization is "the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment" (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). As Altbach (2004) states, internationalization authorizes autonomy, initiative, and creativity in dealing with the new global environment.

In an updated account, Knight (2015) defines internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels "as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (p. 2). She further elaborates on the three key concepts in this definition and argues that the term "international" is used to give the sense of relationships between and among nations, cultures, or countries. She adds that "intercultural" is used to show the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions. She believes that the term "global" in the definition provides the sense of worldwide scope.

The increase in internationally mobile students shows growing university enrolment around the world (UNESCO, 2014). According to UNESCO (2014), in 2012, at least 4 million

students went abroad to study, up from 2 million in 2000, representing 1.8% of all tertiary enrolments or 2 in 100 students globally. Canada also has taken important initiatives towards globalization and has started systematic and serious actions toward internationalizing their higher education institutions by specific initiatives such as branch campuses, cross-border collaborative arrangements, and programs for international students.

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Educational Education (CBIE, 2014a), Canada ranks as the world's 7th most popular destination for international students. Their statistics also show that international student enrollment grew from 159,426 in 2003 to over 290,000 in 2013—an 84% increase comprising 8% of the post-secondary student population in Canada. As CBIE (2014a) publishes, Canada derives $8B annually from international student expenditures including tuition and living expenses. This is while, of the 293,505 international students studying in Canada, over half (55%) are studying at universities. Indeed, international students comprise approximately 8% of undergraduate university enrolment and 16% of graduate level enrolment. At the doctoral level, international students account for 26% of enrolment (CBIE, 2014b). A combined 26% of international students are at a *trade* school or at another post-secondary institution in Canada. Facts and figures in CBIE (2014a) reveal that international students in Canada come from all over the world (194 different countries), though the top five countries of origin, China, India, Korea, Saudi Arabia and France, represent almost 55% of total international student enrollment in Canada. According to Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada Internationalization Survey (2014), Iran, South Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and Hong Kong, together make 15% of Canada's international students. The AUCC survey reports that the remaining countries account for almost

30% of international students, "providing Canadian-born students with a tremendous breadth of culture in the classroom" (p. 2).

Canadian Universities Dealing with Middle East

In 2014, the federal government of Canada published Canada's International Education Strategy, aiming "to help Canada build on its already strong advantages and become more prosperous, innovative and competitive by capitalizing on the vast opportunities that currently exist" (Canada International, 2014, p. 9). According to the Advisory Panel and the Government of Canada much of the demand for international education comes from developing and emerging economies (Canada International, 2014). Considering such a reality and in order to be aligned with markets identified as "priority" under the Global Markets Action Plan, the International Education Strategy focuses on the following countries and regions in the world: Brazil, China, India, Mexico, North Africa and the Middle East (including: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates), and Vietnam. Canada's regional priorities are much affected by political and economic relations between the two parties. As an example, Canada has had a close tie with the state of Israel for a long time and as the result, Canada's major collaborator in education and exchange agreements in Middle East is Israel. The Canada-Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation (CIIRDF) and the Canada-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on culture and education (1999) are two major education agreements involving a Middle Eastern country (Canada International, 2014). Moreover, most of the mentioned countries have trade negotiations and agreements with Canada (as examples: Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement and Canada-Bahrain Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement) (Canada International, 2014).

These priorities are not only limited to attracting students but to motivate Canadian students to study in the mentioned regions. However, according to the AUCC Internationalization Survey (2014), there is a "lack of alignment between the countries identified as priorities in the 2014 federal International Education Strategy and the choice of destination of Canadian students" (p. 6). According to the Survey, in the record of countries that institutions report to be of high/medium interest to Canadian students, Brazil is in 16th place, China in 14th, India at 19th, Turkey at 22nd and Vietnam in 26th. Although the reason of the lack of interest to Middle Eastern countries is not mentioned in the reports and surveys, there might be political reasons such as the existence of conflict and lack of security in some of the countries/areas in the region.

Although Middle Eastern countries are mentioned as Canadian universities' regional priorities to focus, there is not much attempt for initiatives to attract Middle Eastern students or for providing special support for students who come from the region as international students. Some Canadian universities have responded to the conflict in the Middle East, specifically to Syria's crisis, by providing opportunities, such as providing scholarships and funding for Syrian students who have fled from Syria due to the war and are in refugee camps around the world. For instance, the University of Alberta has initiated a scholarship called *President's Award for Refugees and Displaced Persons*, helping ten Syrian refugee students to study at U of A. However, such supports, despite being valuable for many students from Middle Eastern conflict zones, do not target students who come from the region as international students.

International Students Abroad

In this section I will focus on the problems and challenges that are common among most international students studying abroad. In the next section, I will specifically address the

challenges and issues that are unique to minority international students such as Middle Eastern and Muslim students.

Literature on international students is mainly focused on the issue of adjustment in the host country. Many of these studies focus on the question of language learning (Mostafa, 2001; Sawir, 2005), academic adjustment (Andrade, 2006; Ramsay, Barker, Jones, 1999), and psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Myles & Cheng 2003; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2009). Although these studies, using socio-psychological models, provide interesting information about international students in host countries, they fail to address the detailed social and emotional challenges that international students experience during their studies in host countries. Moreover, reviewing literature shows a shortage of in-depth qualitative study on racial minority international students' (such as Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim students') lives and experiences.

Language learning barriers.

Reviewing literature related to international students' experience reveals that lack of second language competence is the source of many challenges in these students' lives (Mostafa, 2001; Mostafa, 2006). In a study in the UK, Elsey (1990) shows that amongst 13 factors, the English language problem is ranked as the second most important by international students. Sawir (2005) also examines international students' experiences in Australian universities and finds language learning as the key challenges in these students' lives. She argues that many international students from Asia, studying in Australia, "face serious learning difficulties and lack confidence in speaking and taking a proactive role in classrooms" (p. 567).

Hellstén and Prescott (2004) believe that lack of language proficiency has a negative impact on academic lives of international students. They argue that lack of language knowledge

contributes to poor communication between international students and their peers or between them and their teachers and prohibits them from collaborative learning. Similar to these authors, Wisker (2005) believes that lack of language proficiency hinders both thinking and articulation and consequently affects the student/supervisor relationship at the post-graduate level due to miscommunication and misinterpretations.

Mostafa (2001) believes that the effects of language barriers are not limited to academic environments and go beyond into interpersonal interactions and everyday relationships in the outside society. Kormos, Csizér and Iwaniec (2014) argue that lack of language efficiency hinders the process of acculturation and the way international students socialize in the host country. Pointing to the related literature, Trice (2004) argues that the poorer their English, "the less adapted international students were to the host culture", "the less satisfied they were with their social and community relations" and "the more difficulty they had making friends" (p. 673).

Academic adjustment/achievement difficulties.

Literature shows that international students have difficulties to get adjusted academically and reach success. Andrade (2006) notes that academic achievement is affected by language proficiency and educational background of students. In a study of an Australian university, Ramsay, Barker, and Jones (1999) reveal that international students have difficulties understanding lectures in terms of vocabulary and speed, and with tutors who spoke too rapid or gave too little input. Liberman (1994) examines the educational experience of Asian international students in the United States. According to his study, international students have difficulty adjusting to the interactive teaching style and critical thinking approach to learning and found it hard to get used the new system.

In an experimental study on 48 students at UBC, Westwood and Barker (1990) argue that international students' academic achievement is lower compared to local students. They believe that facilitating contact between international students and the host society is critical to the social and academic success of international students. In a related study, Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) examine the relationships among life stress (primary stressor), academic stressors (secondary stressor), perceived social support (stress mediator), and reactions to stressors (stress outcome), among 143 international students in United States. Their study shows that international students in the United States experience academic stress and consequently have greater reactions to other stressors encountered when adjusting to the educational environment. They believe that academic stress is a significant predictor of life stress.

Rienties et al. (2012) studied a large sample of international students in the Netherlands and argued that the degree of academic success of international students is multi-faceted. They believe that international students with a (mixed) Western ethnic background perform well on both academic and social integration and also attain higher study-performance in comparison to domestic students. In contrast, international students with a non-Western background are less integrated compared to other international students.

Social/Psychological challenges.

In a study of the lives of non-native English-speaking international students at Queen's University, Canada, Myles and Cheng (2003) argue that many of international students experience challenges such as isolation, financial hardship, and lack of family support, loss of social status, culture shock, managing workload, and having insufficient academic background in their area of specialization.

Much of literature on international students' experiences adequately addresses the issue of sense of belonging and the idea of home for these students. Wolff (2014) believes that students' satisfaction with university experience is much tied to students' sense of belonging. She further argues that according to her research, international students feel a lower sense of belonging compared to American students. Her study shows that experiences of discrimination along with English language deficiency contribute to international students' low sense of belonging.

In an Australian study on international students, Sawir et al. (2008) report that, international students in Australia experience both "personal loneliness because of the loss of contact with families and social loneliness because of the loss of networks" (p. 148). They argue that international students feel less lonely if they have higher sense of belonging. Their findings show that if international students find themselves in a denser network (more possible network members with whom the student has a connection; more frequent supportive actions), their sense of belonging will be enhanced, while they feel less lonely. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) also show that international students in the US experience high levels of loneliness and homesickness. They argue that this is because they left part of themselves at home, and in order to feel like home again, they need to build a strong social network

Visible Minority International Students

Discrimination, racism, and Islamophobia.

Most of the challenges that are unique to visible minority international students, specifically Middle Eastern Muslim students, are related to the discriminatory/racist actions, false stereotypes, and practices resulting from Islamophobia. According to CBIE (2013), although 82% of international students in Canada agree that Canada is a welcoming and tolerant

society, many indicate that they have experienced racism or discrimination as racialized students. Dei (1992) asserts that visible minority international students are usually exposed to discrimination and racism in the host country. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2009) study international students' lives in an American university. While their findings confirm the social hardships that most international students experience abroad, they show that Muslim students in their study complain about being poorly tolerated by American individuals and communities and believe that their religious concerns are very inadequately addressed in that university. Novera (2004) studies the academic lives of Muslim Indonesian students in Australia and reports that these students face discrimination and stereotypes in their everyday academic and social lives. The students in his study perceive media as a significant player in shaping anti-Islamic discourse in the society and consequently in Australian universities.

Doing a case study on university students, Lee (2002) uncovers "tremendous discrimination" against visible minority international students (p. 28). Her study reveals that students from the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and India endure far greater difficulties, as the result of negative stereotypes, discrimination and racism, in US institutions than students from Canada and Europe. Hanassab (2006) also assesses international students' perceived discrimination in an American university. She argues that international students coming from different regions of the world experience discrimination differently. Her study shows that students who come from Middle East and Africa experience more discrimination compared to other international students. Moreover, it is discussed that international students from these regions experience much more discrimination off-campus, for example when applying for a job.

In a study of Arab students' experiences at the University of Alberta, Mustafa (2006) explores the lives of five Middle Eastern international students from Egypt, Libya, Oman, Iraq, and Kuwait. The findings of his study show that in addition to challenges that other international students face, such as language problems and academic adjustment, Arab Muslim students sometimes experience hardship due to cultural differences and experiencing intolerance from society for their cultural/religious practices. Mustafa argues that there is a need for "specific attention and a tailored orientation to assist [Arab Muslim students] in accepting and adjusting to Canadian society" (p. 49).

Focusing on Muslim students, Nabi (2011) explores how Islamophobia is institutionalized in British Universities. Her empirical research on two case study universities shows that Islamophobia is "institutionalized through its governmentalizing function and is reflected in three key modes of "managing" Muslim students; "absence" (the absence and invisibility of Muslim students as a recognized collectivity within the official arrangements of the university), "presence" (the hyper-visibility of Muslim students as a troublesome fundamentalist/extremist community) and "inclusion" (the liberal multicultural practices that regulate Muslim students)" (p. 4). Her findings reveal that racism against Muslim students is visible in the very structure, relations, and practices in the British universities: "institutionalised Islamophobia operates diffusely across numerous sites and is exercised quite comfortably (and sometimes quietly), within the (secular) liberal space of the university" (p. 10).

Arshad Emtiaz Ali (2009) studied 24 Muslim college students' experience on four campuses in Southern California examining the construction of the label Muslim as an emerging racial and political signifier. According to the findings of his study, the participants feel that Muslims are being constructed in ways that were disparaging. They believe that that the

portrayal of Muslims is wounding and makes them feel as though they were not "real, organic members of US society" (p. 235), but citizens "under suspicion." In a discussion on how the students understand their relationship to the State as American residents and Muslims, Ali's study shows that the students see themselves in a state of in- betweenness, or feeling within and outside of the State in the same time. They define themselves outside of the US not of their own volition, but rather because of the popular depictions of Muslims as "foreign Others."

Abukhattala (2004) studied the educational and cultural adjustment of ten Arab students who study at McGill University. Participants were from Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco and have been in Canada for three to seven years. He notes that, despite the growing discourse on the importance and value of multicultural awareness in a culturally diverse society, some Arab students experience anti-Muslim encounters with some Canadian professors and complain of discriminatory utterances and remarks by their teachers. He argues that for some of these students, "the reaction to prejudice and stereotyping takes the form of denying their ethnic identity. They prefer to accept cultural invisibility rather than risk further cultural alienation or rejection" (p. 118). Abukhattala also argues that although Arab students appreciate the "freedom of religion" and the "relaxed atmosphere of the pluralistic environment" in the Canadian society, they find their experience not as smooth and positive as they expected. Students show that they strive for a tolerance and acceptance (p. 119). Arab students in his study report different instances of negative attitudes at the psychological and verbal level, specifically when it comes to the acceptance of "hijab." According to some of the students in his study, "misconceptions of their religious expressions and symbols by members of the host society fuel and reinforce hostility against them" (p. 120). These students complain about the stereotypes about them since

Canadians look on Muslim women with hijab as "victims of patriarchal structures" and "of oppressive male relatives" (p. 125).

Mian's study (2012) on seven Canadian-born Muslims who practice hijab, also confirms some of the findings of Abukhattala's study. In her study, Mian focuses mainly on her participants' identity and what it means to "be Canadian" for them within the Orientalist and multicultural discourse of Canada. Using postcolonial and antiracism feminism theories, and through a collaborative narrative inquiry, Mian finds out that in Canada racism is embedded in people's practice towards Canadian-born Muslim women who practice *hijab*, women who are Othered as their identities are misconstructed and unrecognized. Although Women of Mian's study consider themselves as Muslim "Canadian," they believe that they are being considered as a "problem" in the society when they keep their Muslim identity and practice their religion.

Although these studies show some of the difficulties that minority international students, such as Arab or Muslim students, experience in Canada and other countries of the world, there is a need for more research on the lives of such students in the Canadian society in order to pave the way for these students to feel more secure and integrated. My study of Middle Eastern international students' identity examines the experiences of these students in Canadian society aiming to uncover some untold stories of such students. In the next chapter, I will present the theoretical framework that I have used in analyzing my data of the study.

Summary

While internationalization of higher education seems like an expanding trend around the world, it entails emerging issues and challenges related to students and their lives in the target countries. A review of the related literature in this chapter shows that studies on international students and their lives are mainly focused on the issue of adjustment in the host country. Many

of these studies focus on the question of language learning, academic adjustment, and psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. The literature shows that while Middle Eastern international students usually deal with the same challenges as other visible minority students, they are mostly struggling with the discriminatory/racist actions, false stereotypes, and practices resulting from Islamophobia. Studies emphasize that many of Muslim students face intolerance from Canadian society for their cultural/religious practices. Although many of the studies focused on Arab/Muslim students' lived experiences in society, I could not find many studies that dove deep into the detailed experiences and identities of those who come from conflict or war zones. Thus in this study, I will narrate the stories of those international students who come from Middle Eastern countries who have been involved in national or international conflicts at different levels.

Chapter Three: Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I present the theoretical tools and conceptual lenses that I have used to answer my research questions. Mile and Huberman (1994) define "conceptual framework" as the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research. International students' challenges have been studied from different perspectives. I have found the following concepts and theories as appropriate tools to guide my study about Middle Eastern international students' experiences and identity in Canada. Although the theories presented in this section come from different scholars, I have tried to show how they are connected to each other and how they have guided me in my research about Middle Eastern international students' experiences in Canada.

Postcolonial Perspective

I believe, in analyzing Middle Eastern international students' experiences in Canada, a postcolonial perspective, utilizing features of postcolonial theory, is so helpful. According to Sharp (2008) postcolonial theory is "a critical approach to analysing colonialism and one that seeks to offer alternative accounts of the world" (p. 4). Although postcolonial theory is conceptualized and utilized by different scholars (Fanon, 1965; Spivak, 1999)**,** I have used the concept as it is proposed by Edward Said, in his famous account, *Orientalism (1987)*. Using the concept of "orientalism," Said argues that the West has created a binary way of thinking about the world by dividing the world into the East (orients: Middle Easterns, Asians) and the West, where the Western culture and way of life is considered as the norm:

> On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the
>
> former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding

real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (Said, 1999, p. 49)

He argues that Orientalism dates from the period of European Enlightenment and colonization of the Arab World and defines Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said, 1978, p. 17). Thus, as Andreotti (2006) argues, postcolonial theory can be considered as a series of thoughts that challenge representation of the developing world by Western people and addresses issues such as identity, power, and development that have arisen out of periods of colonialism and have been perpetuated through social institutions and practices. This means that postcolonial theory can inform any study related to the life and experiences of oriental minorities (e.g. Middle Eastern, Muslims, Arabs) in Western countries, since the colonial way of thought and discourse is embedded and reproduced in social life and practices of not only East, as colonized countries, but also West, as colonizers.

Pointing to Said's presentation of Postcolonial theory, Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2001) argue that this theory addresses the colonized people's struggle to control self representation through language, discourse and counter-narratives as well as their struggle over representations of place, race and ethnicity. Young (2003) believes that, "postcolonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being" (p. 2) while seeking "to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between different peoples of the world" (p. 7).

Although my study is not exactly happening in the colonized countries, I am studying the experiences and identity formation of the students who are, based on Said's definition,

considered as "Orients" and come from Middle Eastern countries which have been colonized in

different ways during the history of their existence. Since identity is a process which is

constructed and reconstructed over time (Said, 1995), I found it important to examine these

students' identities in the postcolonial world, either before leaving their homeland, or after their

transition to the new place (i.e., Canada). Rizvi, Lingurd, and Lavitata (2006) argue that

postcolonialism and globalization reside in almost the same conceptual territory. Concepts such

as home, place, identity, and power are key notions in understanding today's globalized world. In

the following section, I will revisit some of the key concepts and theories from different scholars

and I will discuss their implication in examining Middle Eastern students' experiences in

Canada.

Place/Space and identity.

The word "experience" is a "cover-all term" for the various modes through which a

person knows and shapes his or her world (Tuan, 1975, p. 151). This word may remind us about

the places/spaces in which our lives' incidents happen, the relationships and interactions we

have, the time of our lives' events, our feelings, and generally our everyday life and routines.

The relationship of experience, place, space, and time is, then, apparent: all our life experiences

happen in a specific place/space in a specific time.

Places are "significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (Relph 1976,

p. 141). In this regard, Smith, Light, and Roberts (1998) argue that place fundamentally shapes

human experience. They state that "it is deeply human to make places and to think in terms of

places" (p. 6). Relph (1993) believes that "a place is above all a territory of meanings. These

meanings are created both by what one receives from and by what one gives to a particular

environmental context" (p. 36). Brey (1998) defines place as "an area or space that is a habitual

site of human activity and/or is conceived of in this way by communities or individuals" (p. 240). Relph (1976) emphasizes that place is more than location, it includes an integration of everything "meaningful" therein (p. 3). He believes that "through particular encounters and experiences perceptual space is richly differentiated into places or centers of special personal significance" (p. 11). The consequence of this is a "sense of attachment or rootedness, a feeling of care and a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others" (pp. 37-38).

In his book, *Place and Placelessness*, Relph (1976) gives a review of space and its relationship to place. He argues that space is not a void or an isometric plane or a kind of container that holds places. He believes that, to study the relationship of space to a more experientially-based understanding of place, space, too, must be explored in terms of how people experience it. Although Relph says that there are countless types and intensities of spatial experience, he delineates a heuristic structure grounded in "a continuum that has direct experience at one extreme and abstract thought at the other" (Relph, 1976, p. 9). To elaborate on this relationship, Heideggar argues that "spaces receive their being from places and not from 'the space'…Man's essential relationship to places, and through them to space, consist in dwelling…the essential property of human existence" (as cited in Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p. 16).

Tuan (1977) argues that experience can transform the openness of space to the familiarity of place: "In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. 'Space' is more abstract than 'place.' What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (p. 6). He continues that "the ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threats of space, and vice versa" (p. 6).

Relph (1976) identifies three components of place: "physical setting," "activities, situations and events" and "the individual and group meanings created through people's experiences and intensions in regard to that place" (p 45). He believes that among these components, "meaning" is the most important, though very difficult to grasp. This is while Canter (1997) believes in four constituents for place as he calls them facets of place:

1. Functional differentiation: distinct characters and characteristics

2. Place objectives: different aspects of the goals of a person in a place. The distinct constituents each lead to a proposed distinct element (i.e., individual, social and cultural)

3. Scale of interaction: the issue of environmental scale; home as a place vs. city as a place

4. Aspects of design: form (or style) of a place

Although Canter, sees place as a "technical term" and believes that Relph's notion of place is "romantic" (Canter, 1988, p. 10), Relph's theory of place is very helpful in understanding the problem of "identity crisis" in people of diasporas or international students. According to Adams, Hoelscher and Till (2001), "place and place-identity are increasingly seen as significant media through which people construct an identity" (p. xxi). Nairn (1965) argues that everyone is, more or less, born with a demand for identification with his/her surroundings and a relationship to them; so "sense of place is not a fine art extra, it is something we cannot afford to do without" (p. 6). Relph (1976) defines "sense of place" as "the ability to recognize different places and different identities of a place." Hay (1988) also argues:

The collage of memories and meanings perceived over time forms a gestalt, a whole that represents one's life in a place. A sense of place helps to order that whole, giving one a locus, a place from which to feel the Earth and be connected to it. Through years of residence, a sense of place provides a center of continuity. From a strong center, where

one feels at home as an insider and a member of a community, a person can face the

unknowns of the larger world beyond…Developing a sense of place aids in this process

of community and self-identification. (p. 163)

Ashcroft (2001) believes that most of the times, a sense of place is embedded in "cultural

history, in legend and language, in art and dance, without becoming a concept of contention and

struggle, until colonization disrupts a people's sense of place" (p. 125). He continues his

discussion by pointing to the issue that such intervention may disrupt this sense in several ways,

depending on the nature of the colonization: "by imposing a feeling of displacement in those

who have moved to the colonies; by physically alienating large populations of colonized peoples

through forced migration, slavery or indenture; or by dispersing peoples throughout the world"

(p. 125).

Ashcroft (2001) points to the case of people of diaspora and argues that for these people,

"place" does not necessarily refer to a location, "since the formative link between identity and an

actual location might have been irredeemably severed" (p. 125). He adds that:

All constructions and disruptions of place hinge on the question: "Where do I belong?"

Looking at the case of diasporic people, shows that the place of a diasporic person's

'belonging' may have little to do with "spatial location, but be situated in family,

community, in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared

ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland. (Ashcroft, 2001,

p. 125)

In his work, Relph (1976) points to a concept he calls "identity with place" which he

defines through the notion of "insideness": the level of affection, contribution, and concern that a

person or group has for a particular place. Hay (1992) argues that "bonds to place enable

meaningful relationships and strong social networks to develop" (p. 101). Hay (1998) believes

that "people who are insiders in a place through birth and /or long residence often reach social

standing and a sense of security from that status" (p. 247). Over time, a person becomes part of a

place as "the culture creates a norm while the place creates a habitat" (Hay, 1988, p. 163).

The ideas of "sense of place" and "insideness" have important contributions to

understanding and interpreting people's experiences. Feeling inside prompts a person to feel

"safe rather than threatened," "enclosed rather than exposed," and "at ease rather that stressed"

(Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 45). This means that someone's having sense of place is very much

dependent on how he/she considers himself/herself as an insider.

Home.

The idea of "insideness" and identity is much related to a concept which is used by

scholars such as Tuan (2004) and Said (1995; 1999) (i.e. "home"). As we live in a globalized

world, we struggle to have a sense of place and attachment to the places we live in. While

globalization promotes removing the boundaries and seeing the whole world as one united place

to live, people around the world still strive to find a place to which they feel they belong.

Although Massey (1991) believes that in today's globalized world there is a need to have a

"global sense of place," people such as international students and those who have to leave their

home country always face the questions of whether the new place is safe and secure enough to be

called home. This is because people are emotionally engaged with a place with boundaries they

call home. They feel like an "insider" in their home with their own people in their own

community. Tuan (2004) explains home as "where [people] grew up, where their sense of self

developed along with their sense of place, the integrity of the one meshing with the integrity of

the other in the subtlest of mutual influence" (p. 54). Heideggar also describes home as "an

overwhelming, inexchangeable something to which we were subordinate and from which our

way of life was oriented and directed, even if we had left our home many years ago" (as cited in

Vycinas, 1961, p. 84).

Therefore, home is foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a

community, "the dwelling place of being" (Ralph, 1976). Holloway and Hubard (2001) argue

that the attachment of meaning to new places can be thought of as a way of bringing places into

the realm of human understanding: "making a place meaningful makes it belong to us in some

way, simultaneously, meaningful places become part of who we are, the way we understand

ourselves and, literally our place in the world" (p. 71). This means that our meaningful

relationship with places we live in play a significant role in the construction of our identity.

Edward Said offers a powerful account of identity formation in the post-colonial world. In his

works, he clearly states how place and its artifacts play important roles in shaping someone's

identity. Locating himself in a space between being Palestinian and being American, Said (1999)

sees himself as "other" whose identity is much affected by the place he lives in:

> Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain in
>
> exile…we are the 'other', an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus.
>
> Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss. (pp.
>
> 16-17)

He ties the idea of "otherness" to "identity" and argues that the construction of identity

entails the construction of opposites and "others." He believes that identity of self or of others is

not static and is a process that "each age and society recreate". He further argues that identity is

constructed "over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest

involving individuals and institutions" (Said 1995, p. 332). Said (1999) notes that the "exclusion

of others" is the key point in identity formation. He believes that debate around the concepts of "self" and "other" can be found in every place and community; he points to the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you," who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there (p. 40).

Power.

Jackson (1989) argues that as a result of unequal power relations in Western societies, certain values are incorporated as mainstream and others are pushed to the margins. So in examining the life experiences and everyday landscapes of any individual, it is necessary to consider the importance of the role of power, since it is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse (Rabinow, 1991). The theory of "power" that I will utilize in my analysis is mainly informed by the insights of the prominent scholar, Edward Said.

Knowledge and discourse.

In his book, Orientalism, Said (1978) suggests the idea that "knowledge" is a way that the West exerts power over the Orient. He argues that the West has misrepresented the Orient (the East) and such skewed knowledge has created a discourse against the East (mainly Middle East Muslim World). For Said (1978) Orientalism is ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promotes the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). Said (1978) believes that in studies of the Arabs and Islam, there are four prevailing dogmas:

1) The absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.

2) Abstractions about the Orient…are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities.

3) The Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore, it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing it from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically 'objective'.

4) The Orient is at bottom something either to be feared…or to be controlled. (pp. 300-301)

He believes that the discursive knowledge, which is basically created without actually observing the Oriental World, has been the key of Western power and control over the Orient (Said, 1978). For Said (1978), texts that are produced by the powerful West create a false discourse around the Orient and perpetuate a wrong ideology about them. He states that the Orients (The Middle East and Asia) are viewed with prejudice and racism, since the West has presented them as people who are backward and uncultured needing Western people to help them become educated and cultured. This discourse, which is created by power, is used as "instruments of social control" (Parenti, 2011, p. 12). So, power can create new knowledge about an object or group of people, shape new discourse around them, and establish a new social ideology (racism for example) and thus form new practices in society.

It is important to mention that although the dualism introduced by Said in his first account (1978) has been redistributed and reshaped in a different form by "escalating waves of globalization," the core concept has remained more or less in place (Samiei, 2010, p. 1145). Samieiargues that while the world has become much more interdependent, and political interrelations between the West and Islam have changed significantly, the Western hegemony is manifesting itself in different shapes and the power relations are not removed from the states' relation and from modern people's lives.

Such an understanding of hegemonic power and discourse has implications in examining the lives of my participants as Middle Eastern students in Canada. Seeing Canada as a Western country that has created a biased discourse about Middle Eastern people was so helpful in answering my addressed questions in the study. Such discourse is embedded in social practices of people, governmental policies, and academic rules and can be grasped through looking at the experiences of students.

Identity

So far, I have identified the theoretical lenses through which I have looked at the international students' experiences. As I mentioned earlier, the world experience is bound to the concept of identity. Although I talked about the concept of identity in the postcolonial world in the previous section, I will more explicitly introduce the framework that I have used to analyze international students' identity in this study.

The concept of identity has been broadly investigated by social scientists in recent years. However, the term "identity" is somehow vague and controversial. Gleason (1983) believes that the meaning of identity as it is currently used is not well captured by dictionary definitions, which reflect older senses of the word and which focus on the uniqueness of self. He adds that our present idea of identity is a fairly recent social construct and a rather complicated one at that. Buckingham (2008) believes that there is a paradox in the concept of identity that is indeed inherent in the term itself. From the Latin root "idem," meaning "the same," the term implies both resemblance and difference. He argues that on the one hand, identity is something unique to each of us that we assume is more or less consistent and hence the same over time. On the other hand, it implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. He adds that, in the latter identity is about "identification" with others whom we assume are similar to us,

if not exactly the same, at least in some significant ways. This means that individuals are unique and, for example, have their unique identity cards which show who they are. At the same time, they vary according to the social contexts in which they are located; so they are by no means entirely free to choose how they are defined. Bauman (2004) notes that the concept of identity is even becoming more problematic in the new globalized world. In this regard Buckingham (2008) argues that:

> Globalization, the decline of the welfare state, increasing social mobility, greater
>
> flexibility in employment, insecurity in personal relationships—all these developments
>
> are contributing to a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, in which the traditional
>
> resources for identity formation are no longer so straightforward or so easily available.
>
> (p. 1)

Bauman (2004) believes that "identity" only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way (identity crisis) and needs to be explicitly asserted. Ideologies, practices and relations in Postmodern, postcolonial, and globalized societies have affected individuals' experiences dramatically and have caused a crisis in their understanding of selves.

It is important to note that there are different views about the notion of "identity" and scholars from different disciplines may address the concept with different perspectives. In the following section I will elaborate on three main theories of identity that have shaped scholars' view about the notion.

Theories of identity.

In this section, I will introduce three different perspectives on the concept of "identity".

Essentialist theory of identity.

The idea of identity has been examined and theorized by different disciplines in human sciences. However, the majority of the works are found within sociology and psychology disciplines. Pointing to Mohanty (1993), Wilkerson (2000) identifies three paradigmatic theories of identity. He believes that "experience" and "identity" are two related concepts. For him, an *Essentialist theory* of identity argues that identity shared by members of a social group is stable and based on shared, self-evidently meaningful experiences. Cerulo (1997) believes that here the notion of identity addresses the "we-ness" of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce. He argues that a collective's members were believed to internalize qualities emerging from psychological traits, psychological predisposition, regional features, or properties of structural locations, suggesting a unified, singular social experience, a single canvas against which social actors constructed a sense of self. In elaborating on the notion of identity in the traditional sense Kellner (2003) says:

> In traditional societies, one's identity was fixed, solid, and stable. Identity was a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths which provided orientation and religious sanctions to one's place ' in the world, while rigorously circumscribing the realm of thought and behavior. One was born and died a member of one's clan, a member of a fixed kinship system, and a member of one's tribe or group with one's life trajectory fixed in advance. In pre-modern societies, identity was unproblematic and not subject to reflection or discussion. Individuals did not undergo identity crises, or radically modify their identity. One was a hunter and a member of the tribe and that was that. (p. 231)

Moya (2000) believes that such an essentialist approach to identity suppresses the heterogeneity within identity-group while it posits arbitrary rules for what counts as, for example, "the authentic woman" (p. 3) (in my case as "authentic student").

Postmodernist theory of identity.

Postmodernist theory of identity asserts that identities are fabricated and constructed, but they cannot be deduced from experiences. Postmodernist theory argues that "experience" is not a "self-evident" or even reliable source of knowledge and cannot be seen as grounding a social identity (Mohanty, 1993, p. 30). This means that for Postmodernists, experience is not a source of "objective knowledge" and a "foundation of other social meanings" (Mohanty, 1993, p. 42). Postmodernist theory of identity, as it is introduced by some scholars such as Mohanty drives substantially from poststructuralism. Mohanty (1993) argues that scholars influenced by poststructuralist theory

> have undermined conventional understandings of identity by discounting the possibility of objective knowledge. Instead of asking how we know who we are, poststructuralist-inspired critics are inclined to suggest that we cannot know; rather than investigate the nature of the self, they are likely to suggest that it has no nature. The self, the argument goes, can have no nature because subjectivity does not exist outside the grammatical structures that govern our thought; rather, it is produced by those structures. Because subjects exist only in relation to ever-evolving webs of signification and because they constantly differ from themselves as time passes and meanings change, the self—as a unified, stable, and knowable entity existing prior to or outside language—is merely a fiction of language, an effect of discourse. (pp. 5-6)

Criticizing the Postmodernist ideas of social and cultural identities that are argued, as similarly "fictitious" because the selves they claim to designate "cannot be pinned down, fixed, or definitively identified" (Mohanty, 1993, p. 6), Stone-Mediator (2002) poses some exemplar questions to challenge such understanding of identity: "How can we demand a truthful representation of the world, if we view all truth-claims as equally unreliable?" "How can we address our oppression as members of specific social groups, if we treat identities as fictions?" "How can we defend a politics committed to social justice, if we see moral norms as mere conventions?" (p. 126).

Postpositivist realist theory of identity.

In response to critiques to postmodernist view, Satya Mohanty (1993) develops a postpositivist realist theory of identity in which "personal experience" is socially and "theoretically" constructed. He believes that it is in this mediated way that experience "yields knowledge" (p. 45). According to Postpositivist Realist theory, identities can be both "real and constructed"; they can be "politically and epistemically significant, on the one hand, and variable, nonessential, and radically historical, on the other" (Mohanty, 1993, p. 12). Stone-Mediator (2002) argues that for postpositivist realists, knowledge-claims about "experience, memory and identity, can have truth value, even when they are mediated by socially produced conceptual frameworks" (p. 126). She argues that postpositivist realist approach draws our attention to "the way that our everyday lives are affected by certain social, political, and cultural axes of difference" (Stone-Mediator, 2002, p. 132).

Considering different theories of identity and what I explained in the earlier section regarding place/space, home, sense of belonging, power, and how they are at work in shaping individual's identity, the framework that I chose to use in my study of Middle Eastern

international students' experiences is close to the postpositivist realist framework of identity. My framework consists of the following insights:

1. *Identity is a socially constructed and constantly changing process* (Said, 1995; Mohanty, 1993): According to Said (1995) and Mohanty (1993), identity is not static; it is a constantly-changing process that takes place in societies in relationship with people, places, powers, rules, histories, and politics. International students leave their homeland in which they "have become" who they are and bring their "selves" with them to the new place. During this transition, they go through the process of "becoming" a new person.

2. *Identity is subjective and open to interpretation* (Mohanty, 1993): Mohanty (1993) ties the concept of identity to experience. For him "there are different ways of making sense of an experience, and the way we make sense of it can in fact create a new experience" (p. 46). He believes that people make sense of their experiences differently in different political frameworks. This means that people's identity is constituted by the way they view the world. International students who come from Middle East have gone through different experiences that have made them different from other international students. Also, experiences and consequently the worldview of each Middle Eastern student in Canada might be different from other Middle Eastern students in the same country. Depending on the worldview that they have at the moment of talking about their experiences and about themselves, they may reveal a different "self" in different times (Mohanty, 1993). Moreover, in the context of making sense of these students' identity and experiences, I, as the researcher may have my own interpretations and understanding. So, identity is a concept that is open to interpretation in different contexts at different times.

3. *Identity is constructed through place* (Eyle, 1989; Relf, 1993; Tuan, 1975): Tuan (1975)

   believes that places are the sources of experiences. Relph (1993) also argues that "a place

   is above all a territory of meanings" and shapes the way we live (p. 36). Moreover, Eyle

   (1989) argues that through our actions and experiences in everyday life in different places

   we "build, maintain, and reconstruct the very definitions, roles, and motivations" in our

   lives (p. 104). This means that we both create and are created by the place in which we

   live. International students coming from different places have different experiences. It is,

   then, important to see how Canada, as a new place, shapes the way they live.

4. *Identity is discursive* (Mohanty, 1993; Said 1976): The way people think, act, and live in

   a place is constructed through the discourse of the place (Mohanty, 1993; and Said 1976).

   Discourse, as a system of representation, plays an important role in the way we are

   identified by others and identify ourselves. Narratives around international students who

   come from Middle East determine the ways these students are perceived by society. Such

   perception will consequently affect the ways the society relates to and interacts with these

   students. Thus, these students' experiences and accordingly their identities are shaped

   through narratives and the discourse around them.

Summary

People's experiences shape their worldviews and who they are. Yet, experience does not

happen in a vacuum and is shaped in relation to people in places/spaces characterized with different

discourses. Looking at the experiences of Middle Eastern students in Canada through the lens of

postcolonial theory can elucidate hidden layers of these students' stories and experiences and will

be helpful in understanding how they deal with the existing discourse and ideology in the society.

Moreover, postcolonial theory provides an important lens to understand how Canada, as a place,

is at play in perpetuating the colonial way of thinking about students from the Middle East and how they shape these students' identity by their practices. In the next chapter, I will explain my research methodology and will elaborate on each step that I have gone through to answer my research questions.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Qualitative Research and Constructivist Paradigm

This research has adopted a qualitative approach within the constructivist paradigm and is informed by key ideas from hermeneutics. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note that "qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). To put it simply, qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). According to Merriam (1998), in qualitative research reality is constructed by individuals relating to and interacting with their social worlds. This means that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how they make sense of their worlds and the experiences they have in the world" (Meriram, 1998, p. 6). Since qualitative research can reveal how all parts work together to shape a whole (Merriam, 1998), in my research I have tried to find the parts (artifacts, relations, and factors) that form the Middle Eastern international students' experiences in Canada, as a whole.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) believe that three interconnected activities define the qualitative research process: ontology (what kind of being is the human being, what is the nature of reality), epistemology (what is the relationship between the inquirer and the known), and methodology (how do we know the world, and gain knowledge of it). This net that contains the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises is termed a "paradigm" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Mertens (1998) defines a research paradigm as "a way of looking at the world that is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action" (p. 6). Since I see my research situated in the constructivist paradigm, it is informed by a

special worldview ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically. The constructivist

paradigm assumes a relativist ontology in which there are multiple realities, a subjectivist

epistemology in which knower/subject creates understandings, and a naturalistic set of

methodological procedures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that

knowledge is socially constructed, and understanding develops through a conversational

exchange between the participant and the inquirer. They assert that the purpose of the

constructivist paradigm is to develop understandings that are more informed and sophisticated

than those previously held.

As I mentioned earlier, in order to understand international students' lived experiences, I

have adopted an interpretivist/constructivist approach by doing a qualitative case study on

Middle Eastern international students in Canada. I have addressed my research questions by

adopting a hermeneutic perspective, since the central themes of hermeneutics include the

question of understanding and creative activity of interpretation (Smith, 1999). As an

international student from Iran, being experienced in living and studying in Iran and Canada, I

shared my understanding of transition processes with my participants, while hearing their stories,

being open to different transitions and interpretations. I believe this is compatible with the

hermeneutic point of view, in which understanding is rooted in a sense of the dialogical,

intersubjective, and conversational nature of human experience (Smith, 1993).

Interpretive Inquiry and Hermeneutics

As a qualitative study, the purpose of this study is to grasp/perceive the meaning of

people's narratives and experiences rather than hypothesis testing. Gadamer (1995) asserts that

perception is interpretation. So, this research is self-consciously interpretive, which means that it

intends to create new understanding for me, as the researcher. Yanow (2000) argues that

"interpretive methods are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. In this world, there are no 'brute data' whose meaning is beyond dispute." (p. 5)

As I mentioned, understanding Middle Eastern international students' experiences is an interpretive case study within the constructivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative research in the constructivist/interpretive paradigm is necessarily hermeneutical. Hermeneutics has been described as "the art of interpretation" and "the theory of understanding" (Vaselenak, 2009, p. 34). Smith (2002) defines hermeneutics as "trying to make sense of things we don't understand, things that fall outside of our taken for-granted assumptions about the nature of experience" (p. 183). Smith and Blase (1991) believe that the purpose of any hermeneutic study is to reach an interpretive understanding of the meaning that individuals ascribe to the situations they find themselves in. Ellis (1998a) also notes that, any discussion of interpretive inquiry ought to start with key ideas of hermeneutics. She presents three key ideas from hermeneutics, identified by Smith (1991; 2002), 1) aiming for holistic understanding rather than reducing what is learned to pre-existing categories, 2) the importance of clarifying whole-part relationships to inform more adequate interpretation, and 3) appreciating that the language and history of one's community both enables and limits interpretation (Ellis, 2006). These key themes and principles from philosophical hermeneutics can inform understanding of the researcher's process in interpretive inquiry.

Interpretation as a holistic and creative activity.

The purpose of interpretation is to understand the meaning behind someone's expression. To this end, I, as the researcher, have used all my knowledge from my participants and the context in which the study is done to inform my interpretation of the meaning of international

students' experiences. According to Ellis (2006) "to use everything one knows to inform the interpretation means that the researcher is working holistically rather than using a categories-first approach that can reduce the complexity of a participant's experience to a few pre-determined variables" (p. 115). Mayers (2001) believes:

> It is not about reproducing the world so that there is a finite, obdurate, static truth that can be measured against some other truth, but rather it is about engaging in a dialectic and multilayered conversation that is continually in flux, changing, evolving, and shifting. (p. 3)

This means that the researcher, as interpreter, needs to be creative and engaged actively in constructing the meaning of what the participant says and does. According to Smith (2002):

> the work of interpretation is profoundly creative, that it attempts to suggest possible meaning and interpretations creatively and show relations between things in new ways rather than simply document or record them or play off against each other in a kind of epistemological power play. (p. 186)

The importance of part-whole, micro-macro relationships.

In any interpretation, we need to keep in mind the importance of being attentive to part/whole relationships and micro and macro contexts. In the process of interpretation of the meaning of my participants' experiences, I moved constantly between the specific and the general and an awareness of contexts within contexts to show relations between events and people. This movement back and forth between the parts and the whole, micro, and macro in the process of understanding is described by the hermeneutic circle. Smith (1993) explains:

> Hermeneuticists of all manner and variety agree that any interpretation of meaning must take place within a context. In the paradigmatic case of the interpretation of texts, this

means that to understand an individual part of a text requires that one understand the whole text; yet it is equally clear that to understand the whole text requires that one understand the individual parts. When applied to the interpretation of intentional and meaningful human expressions, historical expressions included, this means that interpretation can only be pursued with a constant movement back and forth between the expression and the web of meanings within which that expression is lodged. (p. 16)

Prasad (2005) states that, "No undertaking in hermeneutics is possible without understanding and using the hermeneutic circle, one of the foundational pillars of the tradition" (p. 34). Ellis (2006) asserts that the hermeneutic circle invites researchers to recognize the stories uncovered in their research as "microcosms of large macro stories" (p. 116). This means that "without reading individual stories in the larger stories of which they are a part, researchers are not likely to interpret critically the conditions contributing to the individual stories they have uncovered" (Elis, 2006, p. 116). Accordingly, in interpreting stories of Middle Eastern international students in Canada, I have considered the larger stories of the political conflict between the Middle East and Canada, for example.

The key role of language and history.

As the researcher and interpreter of my participants' experiences, I have also considered the pivotal role of language and history in my understanding. I knew that the language available to me from my participants might be different from my own language, since it reflects the influence of tradition and is linked with their history. So, since the interpretive work is a conversational process between the researcher and the participant, the role of the both parties is to find a shared meaning for the language to interact and to interpret such an interaction. On the importance of language, Mayers (2001) asserts: "Accompanied by the importance of questions

and conversation, of hermeneutic circles and understandings, language undergirds all that we can bring to the interpretive engagement" (p. 15). Ellis (1998b) argues that:

> Since language and understanding are linked, no final or fixed understanding of ourselves or others is possible, just as there can be no fixed or final language to express our understanding. Understanding is always temporal, since, as our prejudices change and our language changes, so do the interpretations we can make. (p. 9)

In this research, I was aware that in interpreting the context and the meaning of the experiences of my participants, I needed to avoid impulsive conclusions that could risk the meaning of the experience that participants gave expression to and the language they used to articulate it (Davies, 2013).

Interpretive Case Study

I see my research as a qualitative case study. Merriam (1998) characterizes qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). Wolcott (1992) sees it as "an end-product of field-oriented research" (p. 36). Merriam (1998) believes that a researcher can "fence in" what she/he is going to study. She argues that a researcher who chooses qualitative case study is interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. This means that the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon/entity, by focusing on a single phenomenon or entity (Merriam, 1998).

I chose case study because this research intended to search for deep and rich understanding of concrete experiences of Middle Eastern international students in a particular context of cross-cultural experiences, and this goal was much aligned with characteristics of case study as it is characterized with three features: (1) "particularistic": case study focus on a

particular situation, event, program, or "phenomenon"; (2) descriptive: the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study; (3) "heuristic": case studies illuminate the readers' understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-30). So my aim has been "in-depth enquiry" about my participants' lives, as cases, rather than "generalizing" my data to a population at large (Chadderton and Torrance, 2011).

Merriam asserts (1998) that although in doing a case study the researchers do not need to use particular methods for data collection or data analysis, in qualitative case study some data-gathering and analysis characterizing qualitative research, such as interviewing, are emphasized.

Strengths and weaknesses of case study.

In choosing my research design, I considered both its strengths and weaknesses. Collins and Noblit (1978) discuss the strengths of the case study research as:

[Case Study] better captures situations and settings which are more amenable to policy and program intervention that are accumulated individual attributes. Second, [they] reveal not static attributes but understanding of human as they engage in action and interaction within the contexts of situation and setting. Thus, interferences concerning human behavior are less abstract than in many quantitative studies, and one can better understand how an intervention may affect behavior in a situation….[They] are better able to assess social change than more positivistic designs, and change is often what policy is addressing. (p. 26)

Merriam (1998) argues that there are some limitations for doing a case study. She believes that although a case study researcher desires a rich and comprehensive description and analysis of a phenomenon, she/he may not have the time or money to devote such an understanding. She adds that even if such time is devoted to produce a good case study, the final

product may be too lengthy and detailed for busy policy makers and educators to read and benefit from. Merriam (1998) also notes that qualitative case studies are limited by sensitivity and the integrity of the investigator. It means that sometimes there is a lack of training for observation and interviewing and guidelines for final reporting; so "the investigator is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42).

Chadderton and Torrance (2011) point to a criticism mainly attributed to case study and argue that case study is limited in generalizability from one or a small number of cases to the population under study as a whole. In this regard Merriam (1998) argues that case studies are limited in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability. She points to Hamel (1993):

the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness…and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to this study. This lack of rigor is linked to the problem of bias…introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher" and others involved in the case. (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 43).

Chadderton and Torrance (2011) believe that case studies invite the reader for "naturalistic generalization"; that is, "the reader recognizes aspects of their own experience in the case and intuitively generalizes from the case to their own situation, rather than the simple (of one) being statically representative of the population as a whole" (p. 54).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) also add another limitation of the case study as "case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs" (p. 377). Moreover, they believe that readers of a case study may think

that case study is "account of the whole"; this means that they "tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part—a slice of life" (p. 377).

Considering the strengths and limitations of the study, one may doubt the value of case study pointing to the number of limitations. However, Merriam (1998) argues that "case study is the best plan for answering the research questions; its strengths outweigh its limitations" (p. 41). Considering this point, I believe "interpretive case study" was the best approach to answer my question of "how do Middle Eastern international students experience life in Canada?" and to see how their everyday life in Canada is constructing their identity. This kind of research helped me to develop typology, a continuum, or categories that conceptualize different issues in international students' lives, rather than just describing what was observed or what these students reported in interviews (Merriam, 1998).

The role of the researcher.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe the qualitative researcher as bricoleur who produces a pieced-together set of "practices that provide solutions to a problem in concrete situation" (p. 2). This means that a researcher is a jack of all trades whose job is producing an emergent construction that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle. Bricoleur is skilled in performing a large number of tasks, ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal stories, historical document, and self-reflection. The bricoleur "understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, class, race and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3). Thus, the product of bicouleur's effort is a bricolage, which is a complex, detailed, reflexive work that represents the researcher's image, understanding, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Mertens (1998) believes that the researcher "is the instrument of data collection" (p. 175). According to Boostrom (1994), many researchers have the problem of choice in picking up the useful data. He believes that any researcher may go through a six-step process when doing research and observing the environment under investigation. A researcher's role might be as *videocamera* who records whatever she/he sees/hears without perception and understanding the significance and meaning of them. Boostrom believes that the researcher's role will change over time gradually when she/he knows the environment and participants better; so, his/her role can change from videocamera to *playgoer* for whom everything is not seen just as mere objects but as well-rounded characters with stories of emotions and conflict, just like an ongoing drama. Gradually the observer might see himself/herself as an *evaluator* whose job is giving feedback to the environment under study. In this level, the researcher is judgmental and his/her attention is on instances of bad/good practices. In the next level, the observer becomes *subject inquirer* for whom the interaction and stories are not limited to the environment under investigation without the presence of the researcher. In this level, the researcher realizes his/her role in construction of the events in the research setting. In the next level, the researcher sees himself/herself gradually become part of the onstage action, needing to observe himself/herself. He/she will move inside the events that he/she is trying to describe; so, his/her role changes to be an *insider.* In the last step which he describes as the richest step, the researchers, as observer, becomes *reflective interpreter.* This change in perspective means that the researcher is fully entered in the field and is a full insider contributing to conversations; someone who tries to make sense of every interaction, every relationship.

During my research process, I tried to remember what Merriam (1998) points to as traits of a good researcher. Merriam (1998) believes that since the researcher is seen as a "human

instrument" to gather and analyze data, she/he is limited by characteristics pertaining to human beings, such as "mistakes" and" personal biases interference" (p. 20). She then points to necessary traits that a researcher needs to possess: She believes that the qualitative researcher must have a vast *tolerance for ambiguity*, since there is a lack of guidelines for data collection and data analysis. She/he should know that the best way to proceed is not always obvious. The researcher should be sensitive to the context and all variables within it and needs to be *highly intuitive*. She/he also needs to be a *good communicator* empathizing with respondents and establishing rapport, asking good questions and listening intensely (pp. 20-23).

Plan of the Study

While nowadays there is huge student mobility, mainly from Eastern countries to the Western ones, there is a lack of understanding of how these students deal with their everyday life in the target country and how the new place shapes who they are and how they think. In this study, I have focused on Middle Eastern international students and have tried to show parts of these students' lives by interpreting and reconstructing their stories and experiences they brought to me. In this section I will show different angles of my study.

Research site.

Since I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta living in Vancouver, BC, I chose those students who were studying at the University of Alberta, University of British Colombia (UBC), and Simon Fraser University (SFU). Although I had advertised in different Canadian universities, I received more applicants from these universities since they had noticed in the advertisement that I am a University of Alberta student living in the Vancouver area.

The University of Alberta sits among the top five Canadian universities and is one of the top 100 universities in the world (University of Alberta, 2015). The university has a diverse

population of students coming from different countries in the world. International students make

up 20.52% (7864) of the total student population of the university (University of Alberta, 2017).

The Iranian Students' Association of University of Alberta (ISAUA) and Muslim Students

Association (MSA) are a couple of active communities at the U of A that link students from the

Middle East together.

University of British Colombia (UBC) is located in the province of British Colombia and

is also is "a global center for research and teaching, consistently ranked among the 40 best

universities in the world" (UBC, 2016). UBC has a diverse group of students with 11,965

(33.1%) international students in its both campuses, Vancouver and Okanagan (UBC, 2015)

ranked second in Canada for the number of international students after University of Toronto.

UBC also has very active communities for international students from the Arab and Muslim

world: The Arab Student Association (ASA) at UBC, UBC Persian Club, and Solidarity with

Palestinian Human Rights Association are among communities that help students from Arab and

Muslim countries connect with each other.

Simon Fraser University (SFU), located in the province of British Colombia, is claimed

to be the "Canada's most community-engaged research university, with three thriving urban

campuses" in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey (SFU, 2017a). According to the SFU

International Fact and Figures (SFU, 2017b), as of September 2014, SFU had approximately

4,257 international undergraduate students (up 16.9%) and 1,233 international graduate students

(up 28.3%) for a total of over 5,490. The Muslim Student Association (MSA), SFU Iranian Club,

and Arab Student Association are the most active communities at the university that engage

Middle Eastern students in different social and political activities.

My interviews took place in different locations chosen by my participants. Most of the time they preferred to meet together on campuses or close to their workplaces and residential areas. Libraries, coffee shops, and some public areas on the campuses were our most common venues for the interviews.

Participant seleciton and demographics.

The process of finding participamts for this study was quite challenging. When I decided to focus my study on the four mentioned counties, I had no idea that finding international students from these countries, except Iran, was a challenging one due to the actual war and conflict in these countries. In order to approach students from these countires, I tried to use different strategies such as using my personal social circles (convenience sampling), asking intermediaries and benefiting from their word of mouth (snowball sampling), hanging flyers at different Canadian universities, using announcements in Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim and Iranian social/academic communities, and broadcasting on social media. Since my research questions were addressing identities of international students (with student visa) from the Middle East, I recruited those students who were either international students in Canada at the time of the interviews or were considered as international students at some point of time during the last few years of their studies.

Among the students who approached me, I chose the ones who met my criteria and were interested to talk openly about their experinces. I chose eight students from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. Although being Muslim was not my criteria, only Muslim students approached me and showed interest. I chose one male and one female student from each country of my investigation in order to keep it gender-balanced. The reason that I chose a small number of participants was that, as I mentioned earlier, case study is featured with small number of participants and in-depth

and detailed analysis (Merriam, 1998). I recruited my participants using different tools and

media such as. The following table shows the participants' demographic information. In order to

keep the participants' names confidential, I have used pseudonyms in the study.

Participant's Name	Country of Origin	Country of Residency Before Canada	Age	Education	Citizenship Status at the Time of the Interviews
Maryam	Iran	Iran	32	Ph.D.	On Visa
Farhad	Iran	Iran	33	Ph.D.	Permanent Resident
Borhan	Palestine	Jordan-Emirates	24	Undergraduate	Permanent Resident
Olaa	Palestine	Jordan- Kuwait	30	Master's	Permanent Resident
Sarah	Syria	Syria-Saudi Arabia	22	Undergraduate	On Visa
Adnan	Syria	Syria- Saudi Arabia- Bahrain	29	Master's	On Visa
Nada	Iraq	Iraq-Syria	32	Master's	On Visa
farooq	Iraq	Iraq-Syria	30	Master's	On Visa

Table 4. 1 Participants' Demographic Information

In the process of recruiting participants, I tried my best to have a genuine invitation that

develops a sense of trust (Weber, 1986). In the first place, I talked to them personally either by

phone or face-to face and then I sent a more formal invitation letter. After finding my

participants, I invited them for interviews and asked them to choose the place for the interview.

This was because I wanted them to feel safe and comfortable for a trustful conversation.

Interviews: pre-interview activities and open-ended questions.

After receiving acceptance from my participants and before starting the interviews, I asked each participant to sign a consent form (Appendix A). Then, I invited them to complete a pre-interview activity (Appendix B), which consisted of a drawing, diagram, or list that was related to either my research topic or the participant's life more generally I offered several pre-interview questions being divided into two sets and sent them to the participants one week before the actual interview. The first set included questions related to general life and interest of the participants. The second set was related to my research topic. Moreover, I prepared some open-ended interview questions pertaining to the research topic and the participant's life in general.

Ellis et al. (2011) argue that pre-interview activities and open-ended questions (Appendix B) are "intended to support participants in recalling and sharing stories related to the research topic or their lives more generally" (p. 13). They believe that since participants can communicate their experiences through their narratives, these activities and questions will help them to share more stories. However, in asking open-ended questions, I was careful not to ask questions that seemed too interrogative, prying, decontextualized, or exhausting. I conducted two to three one-hour one-on-one interviews with each participant, with their desired period of time in between. I wrote the interview questions on file cards, with one question per card. This helped me to not worry about losing the place of each question in the interview schedule while following up on responses to a question (Ellis, 1998c). Although I had prepared some questions in advance, sometimes the conversations with my participants directed my next questions without forcing me to stick to my prepared questions. I audio recorded all the conversations in the interviews with permission from my participants. I also gave the authority of stopping the recorder whenever

they felt uncomfortable. During the interviews, I wrote some field notes about the expression and events that could not be captured by the tape recorder.

My role as a researcher and an interviewer was developing trust and commitment. To this end, I tried my best not to show a controlling, in-the-know face of myself (Weber, 1986). I assured my participants that the interviews were for "seeing the between" and "meeting to share viewpoints" (Weber, 1986, p. 68). I empowered my participants by giving them the authority of controlling the interviews with their stories and knowledge. Weber (1986) calls this respect for the participant, which implies my openness and willingness to learn. Moreover, since hermeneutic interviewing is supposed to have a collaborative conversational structure in which questions ought to beget more questions, I kept the interviews as collaborative conversations.

In order to find which questions were good to use in my actual interviews, I field tested the questions in a pilot study with a close and trusted friend before the actual interviews with my participants. This process helped me to shape the scope of my questions in a better way. Moreover, it was a good practice for me as the interviewer to get to know the difficulties in an interview and to familiarize myself with the process of interviewing.

After each interview, I listened to the tape and transcribed our conversation and asked my participants any questions of clarification regarding their stories. During the process of my study, I gathered my own journals, stories, field notes, and reflections as part of the process. Since in order to understand the experiences of my participants, as international students, I needed to see a bigger picture, I used the policy and political documents related to the relationship between these four countries and Canada and the effects of such relationships on people's lives. I also benefited from the literature and previous studies related to my research topic.

Analysis and interpretation approaches.

Patton (1990) believes that in organizing, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data there is not a unique and prescribed method. Thus, I chose Ellis' (1998c) model of research analysis. After gathering all data, I wrote narrative/interpretive portraits that presented an opportunity to make connections and develop insights from patterns and relationships I found among my participants' collection of stories and ideas (Ellis, 1998c). Ellis suggests that it was helpful to start the analysis by clustering the stories and statements and then looking across the clusters of stories attempting "to discern values, concerns, predispositions, ways of proceeding, or ways of making sense of social situations that reappears across clusters of stories." (p. 41)

I started my analysis with writing a narrative portrait for each participant as a sketch incorporating the most prominent aspects of him/her as a person. After giving a big picture of my participants' lives, I started to look for narrative threads among all my participants' stories. I also wrote reflections on my interpretive inquiry to help to see what and how I learn, discover, miss, and change during the process. By examining the bigger historical context behind my participants' stories, I nourished the narrative accounts with bigger narratives.

Ellis (1998a) notes that to track the process of an interpretive inquiry project, the researcher can visualize the process as a series of loops in a spiral. She explains that each loop in the spiral represents a "separate data collection and analysis activity" within the study or a "return to a constant set of data with a different question" (p. 20). The question for each new loop has been influenced by what was uncovered in the inquiry represented by the previous loop. Considering this model and hermeneutic circle, I saw my research as a spiral in which the forward arc was my pre-understandings and biases coming from being an Iranian international student (projection), the loops were searching the literature, the interviews with students,

analyzing related documents, writing narrative accounts, and the backward arc was re-examining the data for confirmation, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies (evaluation). Packer and Addison (1998) identify four approaches to evaluating interpretive accounts: 1) requiring that it be coherent; 2) examining its relationship to external evidence; 3) seeking consensus among various groups; 4) assessing its relationship to future events. They argue that a true interpretive account will help the researcher and the people he/she studies progress with addressing their concern. They also add that the test for an interpretation is whether or not it reveals a solution to the issue that motivated the inquiry. When the interpretive accounts were ready, I gave them to each related participant and asked them if everything that they wanted to say was included in the stories or if they wanted any changes in their accounts.

Since I wanted to see what factors would affect Middle Eastern international students' identity in Canada, I made sure that my interpretations of my participants' stories and experiences would accord with what they wanted to be heard from their stories so I asked them to revise the accounts in the way they liked it better.

Ethical considerations.

Before conducting the research project, I received approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board. I also sent each participant a consent form before starting the interview. In the consent forms, I assured them about confidentiality for data and anonymity of their real names. I also assured them that I was the only one who had access to the raw data, which was saved on my password-protected personal computer. My participants and I started very good relationship with each other, and I have been in touch with them since the interviews.

Summary

Internationalization is an important goal, yet challenging for post-secondary institutions, and it calls for extensive research and planning. Since students are the central actors in the process of internationalization, it is very important for policy makers and educators to know about every aspect of students' lives. However, understanding international students' lives is not an easy task and needs a meticulous examination of these students' experiences and relations in the host country. More to the point, making sense of minority students, such as Middle Eastern students, is a more challenging and complex venture due to its political sensitivity. My goal as a researcher, then, is to provide a clear picture of international students from the Middle East in Western Canada, hoping to help policy makers and educators on their way of making universities a better place for minority international students.

To ensure reaching my goal, which is sense-making of untold stories of Middle Eastern international students, I tried my best to use proper tools and methodology. An interpretive qualitative case study under a constructivism paradigm helped me to reach my goal with the help of pre-interview activities along with in-depth interviews. Moreover, this study as a hermeneutic study, using reflexive interpretation and being informed by postcolonial theory sheds light to the meanings that Middle Eastern international students attributed to the situations they found themselves in. Such knowledge helped me, as the researcher, to reach an understanding about Middle Eastern international students' lives in Canada and led me to provide a lucid image from the challenges that these students faced in Canadian universities and in society. My hope at the end is to pave the way for a more just and inclusive educational system for all students.

Chapter 5: Narrative Threads

In the next two chapters I will try to depict the evolving map of my participants' identities through their experiences of war, displacement, resistance, and resettlement. Such a portrayal would not be fairly achieved if it is not colored with the analysis of different enforcing elements of identity construction. Identity construction does not happen in a social structural vacuum, but is rather a process of "positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586) in the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and gender. In analyzing the positionality and self-perception of my participants, I have used their own self portrayal through their narrations of their lived experiences. As the researcher, what I have done in the next two chapters has been to create a comprehensive, yet short vignette of each participant's stories as well as to analyze their stories in using an interpretive method of analysis. I have heard so many stories from each participant, and what I have depicted here for each person is my own understanding of their experiences and journeys. Indeed, I have chosen some stories to retell in order to give a better portrayal of their identity negotiations within a postcolonial framework. Gergen (2004) confirms that constructions of narratives co-create experiences between the researcher and participant:

> The mutual gaze, subtle signs of agreement or disagreement, silences, smiles, frowns, and comments related to shared or diverse experiences all lend shape to the story being told….As the story is co- created, it loses its unique authorship and becomes something mutual. It is not clear who should be given the final authority under circumstances of a story heard or even read. Thus the researcher is within the stories researched. (p. 280)

I will start this chapter by giving the big picture of my participants' life and experiences from their childhood to the point of our interviews as vignettes. Since my participants'

experiences are featured with their stories of war, conflict, and displacement, part of their

narratives are what Hirsh (1980) calls "postmemory." She writes:

> Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of
>
> cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they
>
> remember…as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so
>
> powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. (p. 76)

Such a representation may help a better understanding and making sense of their lives as

a whole as well as their detailed stories uncovered by them. I will also introduce the narrative

threads that I found in our conversations among their stories. After taking a closer look at our

conversations, I realized that all of my participants positioned themselves into two different

timespans: 1) from their childhood to the point they decided to move to Canada; 2) their life after

their transition to Canada, so I will frame their narrative threads in the same time span.

Participants' Vignettes

Iranian students.

Maryam.

Why do you seem offended by my dress code?
After all my veil does not cover my intellect nor taint my achievements
I am least bothered on whether or not you think I am pretty
My Hijab has rather strengthened me with inner beauty

Samudeen M. A. Ilimu, My Hijab

Maryam is a confident strong 32-year-old woman who was born and raised in Mashhad,

one of the most important religious cities of Iran, in a religious and affluent family. She moved

to Tehran when she was accepted to an engineering program at Tehran University. Upon her

acceptance at one of the best universities in Iran, she found it very difficult to convince her father

to move to Tehran alone, as a girl, to study. After a long struggle for the whole family with her father, Maryam was sent to her aunt's home in Tehran with tons of advice and worries. Maryam has one younger sister who studies at high school and two older brothers who are married and help their father in his business.

She describes her years of study in Tehran as her best years of her life, which gave her freedom, wisdom, and maturity. She believes that being far from family in a big and chaotic city like Tehran gave her the opportunity of experiencing so many ups and downs that shaped her identity in different aspects. Being in full Hijab, Chador, she found herself excluded in many communities in Tehran and the university. Although there were many Chadori women in Tehran and in her university, Maryam's first struggle as a minority was to be included in diverse friendship groups with non-Chadori students. She wanted to show them that she was similar to them in so many ways, and finally she was successful in finding many non-religious, non-Chadori friends. Moreover, during her study in the bachelor's program, she had her father's constant check on her, which she found somewhat disturbing.

Maryam's move to Tehran was a big step in her life to move forward. She received admission the Master's program at the same university without taking the university's big entrance exam, since she had earned the highest GPA among her peers in her program. This success was a door to another level of freedom for Maryam, as her father had become used to her life being far from the family and was also proud of her achievement. Although it took it long time for her to show her family that women could be successful and independent if they are given the chance, this endeavor paved her way to continue her study abroad. This time, Maryam's father did not resist her move to Canada when he heard that she was accepted in an engineering graduate program at a Canadian university. Maryam sees the social and political

changes in Iran after the 2009 presidential election and unrest as very influential in her father's

attitudes and becoming more open-minded. After the unrest, the government started extra

restrictions, pressure, censorship and surveillance on people's lives and specifically students who

were the most important activists objecting to the results of the election. Such governmental

behavior made so many conservative Iranian families reconsider their attitudes and beliefs,

Maryam believes. She thinks that people wanted change and since they did not have the power to

change the regime's attitudes and policies, they started it at the micro level from their own

families and from their own behavior. After what happened in 2009 for students and activists,

Maryam's father, like so many other Iranian parents, realized the importance of freedom, choice,

employment, and happiness for their children as they were being restricted by all means in

society. Maryam also believed that the economic situation of Iran after the recent international

sanctions against had been damaging her father's business, and this condition had made her

father suspicious and worried about the future of his children in Iran and wanted them to find a

way out. Maryam was happy that her father was open to change and gave her the chance to

discover the world by experiencing it.

Although Maryam had a big transition in her life moving from Mashhad to Tehran, her

move to Canada shifted her attitudes and shook her identity in different ways. Maryam, who had

proudly kept her religious identity by practicing full Hijab while living in Iran, had to take her

Chador off to better fit in with Canadian society. While still on hijab, Maryam sees

discrimination against Muslims embedded in the very structure and practices of Canadian society

and has found it very hard to feel included. Despite her attempts to fit in, she felt being perceived

as the "other" in society and had to hang out only with Hijabi women at the university. Maryam

never expected to have a hard time as an Iranian Hijabi in multicultural Canada. She found

herself not only excluded from the local and Canadian communities, but also excluded from many Iranians' communities as a Hijabi. She and so many other religious Iranian students at the university were unfavorably labeled as pro-Iranian Islamic government fellows by the other Iranian students. Living in the underprivileged intersection of being Iranian-being Muslim has made her life difficult at the campus since she has a challenging job to create counter narratives not only for her Canadian and international peers as an Iranian Muslim woman, but also for her Iranian fellows as a Hijabi. Such challenges, at some points in time, have made Maryam rethink about her Iranian identity and the ways to revive it in Canadian society.

Maryam proudly sees Hijab as part of her identity and does not want to let societal pressure push her to stop practicing it. She is hoping to change the attitudes of people around her towards Iranians and Muslims instead of changing herself. Maryam believes that the stories that are narrated by mainstream media play an important role in shaping how people think about Iranians and Muslims and sees an urge to finds ways to create counter narratives.

Farhad.

Since being cut from the reed bed I was born in,
I'm lamenting my fate and others have joined in.
Looking for a companion, a heart broken by longing,
Someone to hear my story of longing for belonging.
Someone like me; far away from his true home,
Longing to return to that place called home

Rumi, Masnavi, V. 2-4

Farhad is an outgoing and smart 33-year-old software developer working in a well-known American IT company in Vancouver. He received his PhD in computing science from the University of Alberta and moved to Vancouver with his wife for his job. Ranked 72 among half a million participants in a general entrance exam of the universities, Farhad did his undergraduate study in the computer engineering program at Sharif University, known as the best technical

university of Iran. He sees his undergraduate years of his study a great time of getting to know himself better as person and to find his way in his life. Farhad has a critical view about different subject matters, and he owes such a perspective to his extended study on politics, literature, and social sciences during the undergraduate years of his study. He also did his Master's degree in the same program at the same university. During his years of PhD study, Farhad was very much involved in political activities related to Iran. He believes that politics are part of Iranian students' lives and identities. He passionately talked about how Iranian universities have been the most important sites for political activities and how students have been engaged in different protests and objections to governmental policies and actions during the last two decades. When talking about his life, he repeatedly referred to his activities in Iran for different political incidents. The most significant event affecting his life, such as so many other university students' lives, was the 2009 Iranian presidential election after which Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the conservative president of Iran, was surprisingly announced as the next president of Iran for another four years. The irregularities in the results of the election led millions of people protest for their elected reformist candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who they believed should have succeeded without doubt. Farhad, who was an activist in the presidential campaign supporting the reformists before the election, also became involved in the series of protests against the results, and like so many other students, was investigated by the Iranian government for months for his political interests and activities. So many of Farhad's friends were arrested and sent jail for their political activities and this made Farhad very sensitive and skeptical to the politics of Iran and decided to leave the country to experience a new life without fear and distress.

Farhad sees the transition from Iran to Canada as a turning point in his political view changing his perspective about the world's relations and political affairs. He believes that

escaping far from the political context of Iran, along with his experiences in Canada as an Iranian Muslim, has helped him to get a better picture of the world's relations and incidents. Farhad sees himself being changed from someone who was following the fellow and mainstream knowledge to someone who questions everything before accepting it. As an Iranian, Farhad has found himself in the position of unprivileged dealing with the problems of policies and attitudes against Iranians. When he was in the third year of his PhD study, Farhad invited his parents to come to visit him and his wife. Since Canada suspended all relations with Iran in 2012, citing several factors including Iran's support for Syria and its threats against Israel, Farhad's parents had to travel to Turkey to apply for the Canadian visa. After two times commuting to Turkey for a visa, they found that his parents' visa application was rejected. Such an incident led Farhad to reconsider his view about the Canada which was known for him as a peaceful and welcoming country before his arrival. Farhad believed that Harper's government was reinforcing Islamophobia and Iranophobia by tarring these communities with the terrorism brush and enacting several policies and legislations (e.g., C51 bill). Farhad, who was expecting a peaceful life without social and political challenges in Canada, had found himself stuck in the quagmire of feeling placeless.

Farhad was very much emotionally attached to his family and his homeland, and he had scarified them all to reach a state of peace and happiness in a new place, which he had found "discriminating" and "unjust." Although Farhad and his wife received their permanent residency last year and could find good jobs in Vancouver, during the last few years of their stay in Canada, they had been thinking about going back to Iran to live. Farhad was concerned that although Canada was a multicultural society, in order to not be judged and questioned by the people around him, he had to pretend to be someone who was not actually him. He wanted to

keep his identity as an Iranian and a Muslim, bold and prominent, and the only way he had found

was to find people with the same background and culture to communicate with. Farhad's feeling

as an outsider in Canadian society had been a big barrier for him to feel like home even after

years of his stay in Canada and the idea of getting back to his roots was prevailing in every

moment of his life in Canada.

Palestinian students.

Borhan.

am the cry of liberty
No matter what they take from me,
They can't take away my identity
Or my dignity.
Palestinian am I

Edna Yaghi, Palestinian Am I

Borhan is a 24 year-old funny and energetic Palestinian young man studying biology to

enter medical school. He moved to Canada alone, as an international student, right after his high

school graduation in Jordan to start his bachelor degree at UBC. Upon his arrival to Canada, he

home-stayed with an Iranian family whose support helped him a lot to survive his first months of

being far from his family. Although his father helped him financially, during his years of being

an international student in Canada, Borhan used to struggle financially. However, his years of

difficulty and burden got over, when he finally received his permanent residency last year, in

2016.

Borhan is the oldest child in his family with one brother and one sister. He was born in

Jordan and moved to Dubai for his father's job. His years of study in Jordan were his best days

of his life filled with joy, friendship, laugher, and success. He used to be active in sport teams

and music bands in his schools and was known for his good singing voice.

Although Borhan was born in Jordan and raised in the Emirates, he neither knows

himself as a Jordanian nor an Emirati but a proud Palestinian whose identity is not very much

dependent on the passport and citizenship he has. Borhan's grandparents were born in Palestine

and had their life there until they were pushed out from their lands and had to walk into streets

with their small children to find their way to Jordan, where they settled. When Borhan was born,

his father did not want him to know about the Palestine-Israel conflict because he wanted him to

live with a peaceful mind. When Borhan was 10 years old though, he saw his father crying while

watching a violent and painful scene on TV about a ten-year old Palestinian boy and his father

who were both killed by Israeli soldiers. This incident changed Borhan's life afterward, made

him think and learn about the conflict and what he called "his people." Borhan's identity is very

much woven to the narratives of Palestinian people and their land. For him, living in Canada has

been an opportunity to get a better picture of the challenges that Palestinian people have in the

diaspora. Although he loves conversation about Palestine and its issues, he has found it very

difficult to get into such a conversation with other people even Arabs and Palestinians. Borhan

sees Canadian society very accepting and welcoming for him as an international student, but he

is afraid to reveal his Palestinian identity to people since he has been challenged in public by the

hostility towards Arabs, especially Muslim Palestinians, on different occasions during his years

of study in Canada. He believes that due to the sensitivity of the Palestine-Israel issue no one is

interested in touching the topic, and so many Palestinians in Canada prefer to hide their

Palestinian identity in order to feel safe and included even in other Arab communities.

Before coming to Canada, Borhan had never thought of national identity as an important

issue in his life. Now in Canada, he has found it important to have a place called "home" that he

can be identified with. During the last few years of his study, Borhan has been active in initiating

activities and events to open a public conversation about Palestinian identity. However, he has

been disappointed that the Arab people are not united with each other to change the world's

attitude towards them. Somewhere in his endeavor towards opening a peaceful conversation

about Arab identity in Canada, Borhan had found himself stuck in the lack of unity among

Muslims. Although Borhan has been discouraged by people of his community to continue such a

conversation, he tries hard to bring this issue to the surface in order to revive Palestinian identity

in Canadian society. He wants to show everyone that if the Palestinians are given the voice to tell

their stories explicitly and without fear, all people will embrace them with love and affection.

Borhan wants to be a doctor in Canada and he thinks such an achievement will make him

powerful on his way to reach his goal, which is getting back to his "home" in order to help his

"people."

Olaa.

Have you found a place in the world yet?
Perhaps just that one where you can belong?
A one place and time you have swept
A place you know you have lived to begone
Creating moments beyond grasp to flee
Have you that living moment for yourself only?
I would like to remember the moments that made me
Have I that touch unfelt to consider barely?

Joel Lee, Displacement

Olaa is a 30 year-old ardent Palestinian girl who was born in Amman, Jordan. Olaa's

father and his family were forced to leave their lands in Gaza, Palestine, after the 1967 Arab-

Israel War. Years after the 1948 conflict, the tension between Israel, as an independent state, and

its neighbors was increased to a six-day intense war in the Middle East, which led to the full

control of Israel over the Palestinian lands in Gaza and the West Bank and made so many

Palestinians leave their lands and move to other countries such as Lebanon and Jordan.

Olaa's father and grandparents were taken to Jordan and were settled as refugees for years. Being considered as stateless displaced refugees, her family could not have legal status in Jordan for years. After years of difficulty and deprivation of civil rights in Jordan, Olaa's father finally received his temporary Jordanian passport as a refugee and was settled there and married to a Jordanian woman years later. Since the Jordanian nationality is transmitted by paternity, Olaa and her brother could never have full Jordanian citizenship even though they were born in Jordan. Since Olaa's father as a refugee could not work in the same occupations and the same salary as the Jordanian people, he decided to take his family to Kuwait where he could earn a better salary in a good profession. Olaa's family was experiencing a more peaceful life in Kuwait where Olaa's father could work in an oil resort before the Gulf war started in 1990. After Iraq's invasion to Kuwait, her family had to flee back to Jordan where her mother's relatives supported them in different ways. Months after their arrival, Olaa's father luckily started working in the business of one his wife's family members.

Olaa's school years were filled with tension and stress. Jordanian policies do not support the refugees' access to public education. Thanks to the efforts and wealth of Olaa's mother, she could register in a private school where they had to pay high tuition fees. Although the "refugee" label accompanied Olaa in her years of schooling in Jordan, she was performing as the brightest student in her class. While Olaa was picked on at school and was pushed to the margins by her classmates, she was encouraged to focus hard on her study by her mother, who came from a cultivated Jordanian family. Olaa's performance in science was so great that her teachers reassured her that she could get into a state university. After high school, Olaa was admitted to a science program at the University of Jordan where she was the only girl in the program at the academic year of her admission.

Olaa's life as an international female student at the University of Jordan was a turning point in her life that gifted her happy friendship moments and hope for the future. Upon the start of her bachelor's program, Olaa started her activities in two different NGOs that were working for refugee people. She believed that her life experiences as a refugee in Jordan would help her to be a good activist since she knew the refugees' problems and challenges better than anyone else. Her work as an activist helped her to see her role in society being changed from a "passive victim of displacement" to an "active agent" who could make big changes in the life of the people of war and exile. She continued her legal service to refugee camps and led a couple of international initiatives in favor of refugees in Jordan.

After her graduation from university, afraid of not being able to work in the related profession in Jordan as a refugee, Olaa applied to Canadian universities to continue her study in a master's program. Olaa and her family were delighted when they found that the University of Alberta gave her admission, offering her generous financial aid. She sees the day she received her Canadian student visa as the best day of her life, since she could have been rejected because of her temporary refugee citizenship status in Jordan.

Olaa started her new life at the University of Alberta as an international student passionately and with great energy. She was an active member of Graduate Students' Association (GSA) and Muslim Students' Association at the University of Alberta. During her years of study in Canada and the years after she stared her work in a Canadian company, Olaa has been dedicated to reviving her Palestinian identity by retelling her stories and appreciating the history and culture of her land.

When Olaa received her master's degree, she applied for permanent residency of Canada and received her PR card a couple of years later. Meanwhile she started her work in a local small

company in Edmonton. Olaa sees Canada as her first and only real home, where she could finally

fit in and could experience peace and happiness. She never felt as an outsider in Canada and was

received with open arms and generosity. Although for Olaa it is very important to go back to her

land in Palestine one day, her hope is to keep her Palestinian identity in Canada and be in touch

with other Palestinians in Edmonton.

Syrian students.

Sarah.

When I am overcome with weakness, I bandage my heart with a woman's patience in adversity.
I bandage it with the upright posture of a Syrian woman who is not bent by bereavement,
poverty, or displacement
as she rises from the banquets of death and carries on shepherding life's rituals.
                              Najat Abdul Samad, When I am Overcome by Weakness,

Sarah is a 22-year-old enthusiastic woman who was born in Syria and moved to Saudi

Arabia when she was 3 years old. She finished her high school in Saudi Arabia and moved to

Canada as an international student at UBC three years ago. Sarah is majoring in International

Relations and minoring in Law and Society.

Sarah's parents were born and settled in Syria for years and then decided to move to

Saudi in order to earn more money. While in Saudi, Sarah grew up in a Syrian household with

Syrian culture and way of life. Sarah and her family used to travel to Syria every three months,

and those visits made Sarah very attached to Syria and her relatives there. She grew up with the

idea that they would go back to Syria one day, once her father saved enough money to start his

own business in Syria. A few years before Sarah's high school was finished, her father had

enough money to go back to their homeland, and he was just waiting for Sarah's school to finish

to move back to the place he had always known as his only home. But then the war started in

Syria and Sarah's family had to stay in Saudi, contrary to their wishes.

Sarah's life in Saudi used to be dangling between the joy of friendship at school and the pain of being a foreigner in society. She could never find herself as an insider in Saudi despite her attachment and love she had towards the people and the country. Still talking about her national identity and home, she knows herself partly as Saudi Arabian because of her bonds she has to the country. Yet, although Sarah never actually lived in Syria, she considers herself more Syrian because she believes that land plays an important role in shaping people's identity. Sarah is proud of her Arab roots and is very disappointed that so many Arab people change their name and identity when they go abroad. She sees the political and social pressure as the driving force behind such a decision that many Middle Eastern people make. Sarah's brother lives in London, England, and he is one of those people who decided to change his name after he was investigated at airport on different occasions because of his name. Her brother's first name is a common Arabic name, and his family name relates him to one of the most popular political activist group in Syria.

While Sarah is very honored that she is from a well-known political family who has played an important role in Syria's changes for decades, she is very concerned about the way that she and her family are treated in today's surveillance world in which every single step that Middle Eastern people make is considered as terrorist activity. Sarah believes that the way the world treats Arab people makes them hate who they are and where they come from. While her brother is ashamed of being an Arab, Sarah has found herself grounded. She knows what she wants and values the culture and the place she comes from. Sarah sees herself as a political activist who wants to show the West that Middle Eastern people have strong morals and ethics in their religion and cultures.

Sarah's life in Vancouver has been has been spiced with different experiences. She loves her program at UBC and sees it as a great opportunity to learn more about the world and its politics. However, she is disappointed that her life at UBC campus lacks the close friendship moments she used to have at school in Saudi Arabia. Although Sarah, as a Syrian girl, was perceived as an outsider in Saudi Arabia, she could make great friends because of the common language they spoke and the common culture they shared. Sarah sees common language as an important tool to feel connected and close to other people.

Although Sarah has experienced some difficulties because of being a Middle Eastern, she believes that Syrian people are kind of privileged over other Middle Eastern people in terms of being accepted by Canadian society. She thinks that Canadians see Syrian people different from their government and consider them as the victim of dictatorship and war, so they have opened their arms to them. Although she appreciates this openness, she believes that many people have accepted them out of pity and that they can never see any Middle Eastern as one of themselves. Sarah believes that if the people were really seeing Syrians and other Middle Eastern people as insiders they would have criticized their government's policies against them. For Sarah, as a political activist, life in Canada is a big struggle to challenge the mainstream stereotypes against Middle Eastern people.

Adnan.

Syria is my land.
Syria is my identity.
My sect is the scent of my homeland,
the soil after the rain,
and my Syria is my only religion.
I am a son of this land, like the olives

<div align="right">

Youssef Abu Yihea, I am a Syrian

</div>

Adnan is a 29-year-old calm Syrian young man, with a deep and peaceful look on his face. Adnan was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. He used to travel and spend the summers in Syria to visit his extended family. Adnan's mother was born and raised in Aleppo, Syria, in a middle-class Syrian family, and his father was born to a Kurdish family in a tiny village in a Kurdish area to the north of Syria near the border with Turkey. He moved to Aleppo when he was a child and adapted to a typical Syrian lifestyle, which he has practiced ever since. Adnan's parents moved to Saudi in hopes for a better quality of life for themselves and their children despite the challenges they knew they would be facing. A primary challenge was the fact that Saudi Arabia does not grant rights of citizenship to foreigners regardless of how many years they spend there. As a result, they would be considered as outsiders and treated differently. Adnan has been always bothered by this injustice. He believes that such a law reinforces discrimination against foreigners and leads to class stratification within the society.

Adan was a smart student during his school time, with a great aptitude for science and math. He was praised for his skills in problem solving and was proud of such a talent. However, he knew that his friendships were usually centered on his talent and his desire to help other students in their homework. For years, Adnan had been bullied and judged for being a foreigner; he was criticized for his Syrian accent, different clothing, and even his food preference at school. He tried his best to fit in but to no avail. Adnan describes the society in Saudi to be very conservative, restricted and limiting in terms of basic human rights. His life experiences in Saudi has made him believe that because of the power of the Saudi state, Saudi people may see themselves as "the best" amongst the Arab world and do not show interest in interacting with people of lower class, as they are unfairly defined.

After his graduation from high school in Saudi, Adnan decided to change his environment in order to experience a new life in a more open and accepting country. He then moved to Bahrain to start his bachelor's program in engineering in a good international university. Adnan's life in Bahrain was full of great new experiences that made him a different and open-minded person. He finally could find new international friends who were caring and could freely go to the cinemas and watch international movies and go to bars and clubs, even though he did not drink alcohol because of his faith. He loved that Bahrain was a country in which people could choose their lifestyle instead of being forced into a certain way of life, as is the case in Saudi Arabia.

Upon his graduation from the university in 2008, Adnan found a job as a mechanical engineer in a pressure vessel manufacturer company in Saudi. He filled his time back in Saudi interacting with coworkers in his workplace and also enjoyed his family's gatherings. Adnan's social status as a well-paid engineer had made his life quite easy compared to his school years in Saudi. But then a life-changing tragedy happened to him in 2015 that shocked his life routine and sent him into a severe depression state for about a year. Although he did not want to talk about that incident, he sees it as a turning point in his life that shaped him into a better person. He believed that going through that darkness for such a long time, helped him to question his being and his way of life until that point of time. He then started a more charitable lifestyle in which loving and caring had become his most significant values.

After eight years of hard work in three different companies in Saudi, Adnan decided to move again to start a new chapter in his life. He moved to Canada to start his master's degree in engineering at SFU, Vancouver. However, Adnan's life on campus did not go the way he anticipated. After months of living in Vancouver he found that his happiness was strangled by

social isolation. He came to Canada to experience diversity and to form connections with different people, yet he became disappointed when he noticed that people tend to form closed circles with their own people and communities and do not let him enter their circles easily. Years after his struggle to fit in the Saudi's society, Adan was experiencing a similar situation in Canada. Although he believed that Canadian people are accepting, welcoming, and have high tolerance to people from different ethnicities, he found himself trapped in the ignorance of some people. He believed that being an Arab has associated him with a series of negative stereotypes and has made him isolated in society. Adnan's goal is to find a way to fit into Canadian society after all and to make it his home; the home he could never make in Saudi.

Iraqi students.

Nada and Farooq.

I wonder who will tell the loved ones that we have not forgotten them
That we in exile live nourished by their memory
That we have not ceased to think of them
That our friendship at the dawn of life still delights us
And still accompanies us in these deserts in exile
We are in this foreign land
The spiders of this foreign land build their homes in our corners
                                        Muḥammad al-Qaysī, In Exile, (as cited in Hamzah, 2016)

Nada and Farooq are an Iraqi sister and brother in the 32nd and 30th years of their lives, respectively. They were both born in Baghdad, Iraq and lived there until 2006 when their parents sent them away to Syria to be safe from the ongoing war in Iraq; the war that had started in 2003 by a US-led coalition to topple Saddam Hussein's government and had affected the Iraqi people's life and well-being in different ways. Nada and Farooq went to public schools in Baghdad and both had good performance in their studies. Nada was a bright student who loved extra curricular activities at school and had gained leadership skills by being active in different school activities. Farooq was a shy student whose main interests at school were mathematical

problem solving and reading about world politics and history. Although they had great days at their schools, their years of study were accompanied with insecurity resulting from different wars in their country. Nada and Farooq were too little to remember the Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) and Persian Gulf (1990-1991) wars, but they both have bad memories of the trauma and lack of hope in people's lives after both wars. So many of their friends had lost their families in different cities and so many others were waiting for their lost children to show up years after the war.

Nada and Farooq's father is a graduate of an American university and used to be a faculty member of the University of Baghdad, and their mother is a retired elementary school teacher. Coming from an educated family, Nada and Farooq were always encouraged to obtain higher education and be financially independent. Destiny played a different card, and when they were getting ready to enter university, the Iraq war (2003) shook the stability and security of their society in a way that the normal academic activity in Iraqi universities was harshly undermined. Since the war's deterioration of society was going on, Nada and Farooq's parents decided to send them to Syria to live with a friend's family. Upon their arrival to Syria, Nada started her bachelor's program in Education and Farooq was accepted in an engineering program, both at the University of Damascus. They were living in Syria when the unrest started in 2011. The war in Syria forced Nada and Farooq to be displaced for the second time. This time, they moved to Canada for their master's degrees.

While life in Canada has given Nada and Farooq a peace of mind and stability after years of living in the midst of wars and displacement, they have found it difficult to accept Canada's involvement in the wars in Iraq and its political pressure on the people's lives in Iraq by enacting different sanctions for years. They believe that being critical to the Canadian government's policies does not mean being ignorant to Canadian people's openness and welcoming attitude.

Although they have experienced some discrimination and have been labeled, they are thankful to Canadian society for giving them a sense of home; a feeling that they never expected to have in a Western country.

Narrative Threads

When I was looking for the common themes in my participants' stories, I saw some words being repeated many times by them during our conversations. Words such as war, fear, displacement, home, land, outsider, other, change, discrimination, and hope were the most common terms used in my participants' stories. Chronologically their experiences, during the time we were meeting and talking, started from stories of fear and displacement and ended with stories of hope and peace. For me, who comes from the same background as my participants, this thread absolutely makes sense. I was born in the middle of war and was displaced from my city, Tehran, which was the target of different air attacks, to a remote village far from the capital, without basic resources such as health care and an education system. Although I was not at school age, I remember my cousins commuting one hour a day to the closest school to sit in the only available class for all K-12 students in that region. The fear of the sound of any kind of warning alarm is still with me as it reminds me the air raid siren during war time. It takes me to the day that my parents took me hastily in their car to flee from our neighborhood, since a home close to our place was attacked by a bomb and everyone in it was killed. I have grown up with the recurring nightmares of the war days. It has never left me to this day, and I have found it as part of my identity. Although moving to Canada has given me peace of some sort, I have found myself tangled with the fear of wars of any sort. As Mojab (2003) says: "The war has never stopped for me; these modern wars continue—these wars of empire, capital and patriarchy" (para. 10).

Reading through the lines of my participants' stories, I realized that the study of Middle Eastern students' identity in Canada is not an easy task but a complex work that needs careful consideration for the different layers involved in shaping their identities. In this regard, the dual (and dueling) narratives of my participants should be heard within the historical context of war, colonialism, power, and imperialism in their homelands, and also as a product of oppression and marginalization that silence their voices outside of their countries in Canada (Jones-Gailani, 2013).

Stories of Being a Middle Easterner in the Middle East

Living in the midst of war and conflict in the Middle East.

It is as though some old part of yourself wakes up in you, terrified, useless in the life you have, its skills and habits destructive but intact, and what is left of the present you, the person you have become, wilts and shrivels in sadness or despair: the person you have become is only a thin shell over this other, more electric and endangered self. The strongest, the least digested parts of your experience can rise up and put you back where you were when they occurred; all the rest of you stands back and weeps."

Peter Straub, The Throat

Although my study's topic is "Middle Eastern Students' identities in Canada," our conversation with my participants very soon found its way to their experiences in their homelands. I found that these students do not see "who they are now" as an objective product without considering their life experiences from childhood, rather they see their identities being shaped in the process of negotiation between their "selves" and their "experiences" with the outer world. These students' stories made me realize that the way they experience being a student in Canada is much related to their life experiences both in their countries of origin and in Canada.

Embedded fear and anxiety.

All of my participants come from countries that have been witnessing instability as the result of war and conflict for years. Iran's imposed war with Iraq for eight years (1980-1988), Iraq's series of war with Iran, the Arab world, the United States (1980-1988, 1990-1991, 2003-2011), Palestine's conflict with Israel (1948 to present), and Syria's involvement in the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the country's unrest/war (2003-Present) are among the very reasons for instability and insecurity in these countries during the last few decades.

As Goldson (1996) states, "human causalities are the most immediate effect of armed conflicts" (p. 809). Although not all my participants had experienced war and armed conflicts directly, the most common thread in their stories was the fear and distress that war in the region had caused them in their lives. Most of the them had experienced war in their childhood and were still struggling with the sorrow and anxiety resulting from losing their loved ones, witnessing grief and pain in their families and their societies, and fear from being killed by a bomb in air attacks. Charlson et al. (2016) acknowledge the causal effect between war-trauma exposure and reduced mental health of the target population and argue that depression and anxiety are considered as the most significant consequences of war.

During our conversations about war, there were emotional moments when my participants remembered bitter memories from their past. Farhad, my Iranian participant, talked about his confrontation with the concept of war when he was a child:

> I remember that the neighbor next door went to war and he died. They called him a martyr and they renamed the alley after him. He had two kids that I used to play with them. I was only four years old but I remember how sad they were. I remember that the younger one did not have any idea of what has happened. I remember women crying. I

remember how miserable they were….Two of my uncles, my brother, four of my mom's

cousins went to the war to fight with Iraqi soldiers….One of her cousins lost her husband

and another cousin' son was held in captive in Iraq for years.

Farhad believed that the effects of war on children are irreparable, and the memories of

war will never leave them in their life. As post-traumatic stress disorder is reported to be

prevalent worldwide in people affected by wars (Sumerfield, 2000), Nada, my Iraqi participant,

pointed to her experience of war as something which had been following her all her life: "The

war was moving with me, wherever I went, from city to city, from country to country, suddenly I

found myself trapped in the fear and stress of war and conflict even in Canada."

Part of the fear and anxiety experienced by my participants were coming from their witnessing

the devastation of their properties, histories, and collective identities. Adnan, the Syrian student,

believed that experiencing war had made him vulnerable and somehow distressed by taking his

valuable things:

> I was born and raised in Saudi, I didn't see the air aids or never experienced the war the
>
> way you think, but the war in Syria has affected my family in a tragic way…my dad is 78
>
> years old. He saved all his money working far from his home to get back to his root and
>
> buy proprieties and lands…he bought olive tree lands in Syria and we were planning to
>
> move back. But our lands were attacked in the war and were taken and all his money was
>
> gone…all his hope was gone. Now we have nothing but a destructed historic land, the
>
> fear for our extended family who live there, and the loss of hope for our future…

Olaa, my Palestinian participant, associated her fear from conflict with the loss of her

cultural and collective Palestinian identity. She believed that her Palestinian identity was taken

forcefully in the conflict with Israel: "they took our lands, took our culture, and took our

Palestinian identity…we are not a nation with a state anymore and this is horrendous…" She stated that the feeling of fright would be embedded in her identity until they could get back to their safe lands and be "Palestinians in Palestine".

Talking about the imposed war against Iran, Maryam, my Iranian participant, pointed to the cultural belief in Iran about "martyrdom" and how such a belief led so many young people into the battlefield and frontlines and to be killed during the war defending their country. While the concept of martyrdom has played a significant role in the political encounters of Iran, and its associative narratives have been constantly used to fortify the determination of the Iranian people against any imposed war and conflict, Maryam believed that this cultural value has no rational base, and the consequence of believing in it could be devastating and distressful:

> In my country becoming a martyr is a value and encouraged since it is associated with nationalism and patriotism. They say that all the martyrs' sins will forgiven and they will go to heaven…yeah, they will go to heaven because they protect their people and country but they will leave their families in the hell of their loss…they will leave anxious and angry children

Disrupted social life.

Talking about the post-traumatic and mental effects of war on my participants' identities was followed by their stories of dealing with the physical and social effects of war on their lives. While the first thing that wars remind us of might be the death of people, their damages go beyond drastic death tolls. During our conversation with my participants, what I found about their lives in the midst of war and conflict in their countries of origin was that they all had the same direct or indirect experiences of being affected by the damages that war had on their social life. Stories of destruction of societies' infrastructure, lack of the very basic life resources such as

health and education systems, and closure of services and organizations were among the most remembered stories of their socially disrupted lives during the war time and even in the post war era.

Nada, the Iraqi student, talked about how the war had changed the shape of the country, especially, her city, Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. She remembered that so many health centers were destroyed, and those that were not damaged were not functioning adequately to help people in need. Nada narrated that when Iraq's war with the United State started, she and her brother moved to Syria, which was a safe country at that time. She remembered that when they were away their father had a heart attack, and because of the lack of an equipped health system his treatment faced a serious problem:

> we were hearing that our dad was dying, just because of that doomed war, which had separated us from our family, and had affected the health system in a way that nobody could help him properly.

Farooq, the Iraqi young man, believed that the war had changed his life in a drastic way. Right in the time of his transition from high school to higher education, Farooq was faced with the disruption of the work of the Iraqi higher education institutes and had to start his study in Syria. While he was interested in going to the school of Political Sciences in an Iraqi university to continue his study in politics, he had to switch to engineering in a Syrian university:

> I could not choose politics anymore, because I knew that I needed to find a good job in Syria or any other country than Iraq to be able to survive. If the war was not there I would be a good politician by now instead of struggling to be good in something that is not my passion.

Farooq saw the war as a life changing incident and supposed that not every international student in Canada had experienced the identity negotiations in the same way as he and so many other Middle Eastern students did since they never had to struggle with the effects of wars in their lives.

While there were so many stories about the militarized wars and their effects of my participants' social lives, they believed that wars for them were not only in the shape of military imposition but had different manifestations such as economic sanctions. Peksen (2009) states that economic coercion is imposed by sender countries with "a variety of foreign policy goals, ranging from preventing bloodshed between ethnic groups to punishing countries harboring terrorists, restoring democratic regimes, or ending the use of repression by the government (p. 59). Although economic sanctions against a country are supposed to exert pressure on its state, they mainly cause disproportionate pressure on ordinary citizens and violate human rights in that country (Mehrabi, 2014).

Sarah pointed to the economic sanctions against Syria and believed that the sanctions were not fair or socially just. For her, sanctions were crippling aid work from outside by impeding money and goods being transferred to Syria. Adnan also had the same story and told me about his extended families who live in Syria and are in need of money and help, while Adnan's family are not able to send them money because of the sanctions. Such observations and experiences are quite consistent with the related research on economic sanctions and their effects of the lives of ordinary citizens and on human rights in the targeted countries (Drury & Peksen, 2014; Hultman & Peksen, 2017; Mehrabi, 2014; Parker, Foltz, & Elsea, 2016; Peksen, 2009). Indeed, deterioration of human rights conditions is an unintended consequence of economic sanctions caused by disproportionate economic hardship on the civilians of the targeted countries

(Lopez & Cortright, 1997; Parker, Foltz, & Elsea, 2016). Parker, Foltz, and Elsea (2016) argue that it is difficult to successfully withhold economic transactions from perpetrators of the targeted countries "without the brunt of the effects being absorbed by vulnerable populations" (p. 23).

My participants' identities were inextricably tied to sanctions and embargos imposed on their countries. Economic sanctions' impacts on my participants' lives varied from impeding them from transferring money to their families' accounts inside their countries of origin to obstructing their access to medication and educational resource. Maryam believed that economic sanctions that were supposed to target the nuclear program of Iran paralyzed Iran's social and economic life. She also pointed to the impact of the sanctions on universities' function: "Iran has a good higher education system, but because of the economic sanctions universities were not able to upgrade their facilities, since importing technology was prohibited by international forces." Adnan also expressed his anger about the impacts of economic sanctions against Palestine:

> You know I guess it was around 2007 that Israel and its forever-ally imposed severe
>
> economic sanctions against Palestine which caused suspension of international aid to the
>
> Palestinians. You know it was a substantial damage on Palestinians' well-being.

Nada believed that economic sanctions could harshly target the cultural and collective identity of a nation by shaking their values in the time of hunger and lack of resources:

> Iraq is Muslim country with religious values…values such as sharing, hospitality, not
>
> stealing, bringing Halal money on the tables…we, as Iraqi people, have grown up with
>
> these morals…now imagine they don't let food and money get into the country. Imagine
>
> everyone is struggling with hunger and gastroenteritis because of the lack of clean

water…what would happen…they start to keep whatever they have for themselves, they stick to it and do not share it with anyone. They may start stealing from each other, crime increases. This is what I witnessed and heard of about the unjust sanctions. The society was lost; the Iraqi culture was somehow changed.

Ideological resentment against the West.

My participants' identity negotiations at the time of our conversations were weaving in and out of their past experiences, feelings, and memories of conflict. For them the wars and conflicts had rooted an ideological confrontation between their people and the West. Owing to the reliance of most social/political studies on histories and geographies that reproduce Western conceptions of world politics (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006), the base of the current conflict in years of hostile interaction between some of the Middle Eastern countries and the Western world is not easy to find. Yet, in my participants' views the conflict in the Middle East was the result of the Western countries' ambitions for the existing resources, such as oil and gas, in the region.

Our conversations revealed that the anti-imperialism/anti-colonialism view of some the Middle Eastern people has reinforced a broad antagonism and resentment against the cultural values and international policies of the Western world. This part of our conversations resonated with me as an Iranian, who used to be involved in different political sites and activities against imperialism and colonialism, when living in Iran. I realized that the political conversations around the wars in the Middle East usually do not raise questions about "imperialism's need for a supply of cheap oil" (Khan, 2002, p. x), rather they shift public opinions and raise questions about the lack of democracy and human rights as the products of the Islamic regimes.

My participants' identities were also negotiating between acknowledging their collective cultural identity and resisting against the Western cultural ideology. Farooq pointed to his

family's cultural values, which were based on the Islamic lessons and disqualify the Western

way of life:

> My father has taught us that some of the Western values are not compatible with the Iraqi
>
> lifestyle which is based on the Islamic values. He believes that the Western culture
>
> promotes individualism, alcohol, and sex and we, as Iraqi people, should try hard to stop
>
> them importing their values to our culture.

For Farooq and his sister, Nada, though, the reason behind Middle Eastern people's

resentment against the West is not all about the cultural differences, rather is about the unjust

international policies against Middle Eastern countries during or after wars. As an example, they

pointed to the Oil-for-Food Programme (OIP), established by the United Nations in 1995, based

on which Iraq could sell oil in exchange of food and medication (Hsieh & Moretti, 2006). Nada

believed that the unjust severe sanctions against Iraq supported by so many Western countries

and the United Nations pushed Iraq to sell its oil much cheaper than the standard market price

just for survival reasons and caused a big loss in the economy of the country.

> During our talks, I realized that part of the resentment against the West goes back to the

Western countries' support of Israel (Rubin, 2002) against the Palestine and the Arab world.

Sarah, my Syrian participant, was concerned that such a viewpoint about the West in Middle

Eastern families has rooted "hatred" in the heart of their children:

> I don't know if you had that when you grew up in Iran or not. But did your parents ever
>
> teach you about for instance Palestinian-Israeli conflict. When you grow up you will see
>
> that many of Arab countries such Syria, Egypt, Iraq are against Israel and are pro
>
> Palestine. So, you grow up hating every single Israeli and Western people who support
>
> Israel, because you have this concept that because of the government people have to be

the same and when I was very young I remember associating with the Jews, Israelis, and any other Western people, I remember I hated those people so much….It's sad that in the Middle East we have this culture of "hatred" towards the West…it's not our people's fault, they are angry, tired, and concerned.

However, during the conversations with my other participants I found that although there are feelings of mistrust of the Western world, they are not direct feelings of hatred. Indeed, they had found their identity in-between respect and resentment, anger and admiration, and even sometimes love and distaste. Maryam believed that there are so many valuable things in the Western culture and way of life; values such as freedom, democracy, honesty, and work ethics. For her, resisting against cultural invasion does not mean to hate the Western people and way of life. She saw resistance of some the Iranian people as an attempt to keep their own culture, history and language:

If we want to have our own culture and lifestyle, it doesn't mean we hate the Western culture. If we let everyone speak English in Iran, what would happen to the Persian language in long term? If we listen to Rap music all the time, what would happen to our traditional music which is full of beauties? The Western ideology has penetrated in every corner of Iranian people's lives…I hate this; I do not hate the Western people.

Our discussion around my participants' ideas about the West found its way to their ideas and expectations of Canada before their move to this country. Interestingly most of them asserted that although they were skeptical about Western policies and ideologies in general, they always knew Canada as a beautiful and peaceful country with equal opportunities for everyone. Farhad opened up the discussion about this issue by narrating his story:

My uncle has been living in the United States from 40 years ago. He is happy and

successful and used to be a kind of role-model for me. From childhood I dreamed to go

the States and study there, but my father always insisted that Canada was a better choice

for me since it was not meddling with other countries' affairs such as the States. I was

dreading Canada as a peaceful country in which I could be so free and happy…I am free

and happy, but of course here is not that utopia that I dreamed of.

Maryam remembered that before moving to Canada she was so excited that she would

move to a country with freedom of choice for everyone. She had heard scary stories from racism

in Europe and had never heard the same stories about Canada. She was confident about her

choice:

I was happy that wanted to come to Canada as a peace-loving country. I never wanted to

more to Europe because of the existing racism and discrimination….[She laughs] I never

considered Canada as a Western country…I mean "it is" a Western country but not in a

negative way that I used to think of as many other countries…

The discussion of whether or not their expectation of Canada as an amicable and peaceful

country was met will be discussed in later chapters.

Being displaced.

As I narrated earlier, my participants' self-representation and identity was much informed

by their experiences of war and conflict. As a Middle Eastern woman living through war and

post war hardship, I was empathetically understanding of my participants' attempts to bring up

part of their experiences that some of them never thought of as important players in shaping who

they are now. Looking back at their experiences, my participants asserted that being displaced

from one place to the other, as a response to the existing conflict and instability, had played an

important role in their identity formation. Although my participants saw their move to Canada as part of their displacement experiences, they revealed that for them the word "displacement" was associated with their experiences and narratives of their countries of origin. Moreover, as the consequence of war and conflict in their lives, all of my participants had either direct experiences or post-memories of dislocation and displacement in the Middle East, from one city to the other or from one country to another.

According to a report from the UN refugee agency "Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people than at any other time since records began to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety elsewhere" (UNHCR, 2015). The Global Trends 2015 compiled by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) reports that 65.3 million people were displaced at the end of 2015, which means that worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded. The concept of displacement due to war, conflict, and their social and political forces is tied with the concepts such as "force" and "coercion." Although many people see the word "displaced" as identical with the word "refugee," these two words are not necessarily interchangeable. UNESCO (2017) defines the "displacement of people" as

> the forced movement of people from their locality or environment and occupational activities. It is a form of social change caused by a number of factors, the most common being armed conflict. Natural disasters, famine, development and economic changes may also be a cause of displacement. (para. 1)

During the conversation with my participants, I found that although the movement of my participants from one place to the other seemed voluntary and by their choice in some cases, they all believed their migration from their countries of origin was "forced" in some ways. While the factors involved in my participants' displacement varied from social/economic hardship to direct

militarized conflict in their countries of origin, their identities were the subjects of negotiations among their experiences of being "forcefully" displaced.

Dislocated, discontinued.

Our discussions around the concept of "displacement" reflected the importance of "attachment," "continuity," "stability," and "security" in my participants' identity formation. As Tuan (1977) argues, places are "centers of felt value," with a quality of permanence, where our physical and psychological needs are satisfied. During my conversations with my participants I found that their experiences of constant move from one place to the other had caused a disconnect from their already established/practiced activities in their social lives as well as from their already established relationships. As Seamon (2015) suggests, emotional and body attachment is a key part of a place. My participants revealed that their attachment to a place is associated with routine, regularity, and the everyday (Seamon, 2015). Like so many other displaced people, my participants uttered that a sense of continuity is important in their lives. They expressed "strong urges to preserve" what they have and what they know (Holloway & Hobbard, 2001, p. 79) in order to feel powerful and secure.

Maryam expressed her concern of losing so many attachments in her life just because of her moves, from Mashhad to Tehran and from Iran to Canada. During my conversations with Maryam, I found that her attachment to the place in which she was grown up, along with her affection and connection to her past activities and relationships had created a space in which she felt disconnected and lost:

> I know I moved by choice, but I should confess that if Mashhad's universities were as
> equipped as Tehran's, or if the political and economic situation of Iran was different, I
> never moved to any other place in my life. Now, I feel disconnected from everything

happening in Iran. Before coming here, I was part of them, I was involved in the social changes, I had my friendship circles…but now, in Canada, I can't even vote for my favorite presidential candidate in Iran, why? Just because we are sanctioned and we don't have any embassy here.

Nada and Farooq who were also displaced two times in their lives, once from Iraq to Syria, and once from Syria to Canada, believed that the sense of disconnect in these two experiences were different for them. For these siblings being close to their families played an important role in their feeling of connection when in Syria. Nada and Farooq also believed that cultural similarities between their place of origin, Iraq, and their target place, Syria, had a significant role in shaping their experiences of feeling connected to their roots:

> When you are dislocated, being attached to your roots, your family and your culture give you a sense of comfort and connection. You know, we moved to Syria because of the war but when we were there at least our parents were close to us. We could travel back home quite easily if we needed to. Also, the Syrian and the Iraqi cultures are very close to each other, two countries from the same geographical region, with the same faith, the same language, and the same rituals…all of these made us feel connected to our original land, to our identity. In Canada, we feel far and disconnected. (Nada)

For my participants, continuity of experience entailed place attachment, stability, and sense of security. They expressed that their everyday life in their destination countries was filled with their struggles with their interrupted past experiences and the feeling of instability. Olaa's narration of her experience of displacement was complemented by her post-memories and the stories of her father's struggle after being displaced from Palestine:

My father had to start from scratch. New home, new neighborhood, new friends, new

social activities, new everything….His life in the refugee camp was not comparable with

what they had in their own land in Palestine. They were in a new place, in a new life with

their life left behind them. You know how it feels…It feels like interrupted and lost. We

are displaced and what we need is to have a stable life in one place without fear of losing

it again. We need stability and security.

Disrupted sense of self.

During our conversations, I realized that my participants' "self identification" around the

concept of displacement was much tied with their memories of being interrupted from their

everyday life routines and relationships. As Eyles (1989) states, "everyday life is…the plausible

social context and believable personal world within which we reside. From it we derive a sense

of self, of identity, as living a real and meaningful biography" (0. 103). So apparently, the

conversations around the importance of the role of place and everyday life continuity in my

participants' sense of attachment and security created a space for an important discussion about

the sense of self and identity. By referring to their disconnected routines, activities, and

relationships in their everyday life as the result of conflict and displacement, my participants

divulged that their sense of self had been affected and altered.

For my participants, place was a source of meaning. Their activities, their interactions

and routines in their country of origin were the "backdrop of meaning" (Eyles, 1989) for their

understanding of their experiences and consequently their understanding of their "self." They

showed that being attached to the place of their origin had given them a sense of self and

identification. My conversation with Farhad reached an agreement when we wanted to share our

ideas and experiences about the ways that being displaced had disrupted our sense of self:

I used to play leadership roles in different political activities and initiatives at my

university. I was perceived as a good leader by my friends and professors and I used to

identify myself with leadership traits in the realm of Iran's politics. Then I had to leave

my site of activities. I got literally torn apart. It's like I left that part of me there and can't

have it again because I don't have the same reasons, the same resources, and the same

site.

Farhad's story took me back to my childhood when we had to leave our home in Tehran

to move to my ancestor's village because of the war. I was a little girl whose identity was in the

process of being formed by major and minor encounters with everyday life. My confrontation

with the society before our move to the village was encapsulated in my kindergarten attendance.

Yet, I had identified myself with that only social confrontation and had perceived myself as a

happy kindergarten student with so many friends. Our dislocation took something to which I was

attached, something that "belonged" to me. My kindergarten was the only site of my social

activity that gave meaning to my everyday life. Displacement had disrupted my sense of self as I

could not define myself as "a happy kindergarten student with so many friends" anymore. Our

dialogical sense making from our past memories regarding displacement and identity uncovered

the importance of the sense of attachment and belonging in the process of the sense making of

our "self."

From our discussion around the sense of place, attachment, and belonging, then, emerged

a path to the concept of "home," which plays a significant role in the process of identity

construction. Although our conversation about "home" reached a point where everyone was

confirming that "home is where they grew up, where their sense of self developed along with

their sense of place" (Tuan, 2004, p. 54), my participants could not associate the concept of

"home" as they remembered to the notions such as "security" and "peace," as the word connotes. While being attached to the place they called "home" had given them the sense of belonging and security, the concept itself reminded them of "struggle," "instability," and "insecurity."

For Farooq home was somewhere he had his family, activities, and cultural routines, and also somewhere he had to struggle for "basic human rights, for well-being, and for a secure life." Although he believed that leaving his home took so many important things from him and left him a disrupted sense of self, he saw it as an opportunity to look for a secure place he could call "home."

The meaning of home was touched upon during the conversations with my participants so many times. As I decided to divide and present their stories into two differing eras, their lived stories of war/conflict in their homeland and their stories in Canada, some of the discussed concepts and stories could not take a side and be presented only in one of the sections. The discussion about home was touched on again when we were sharing our experiences and stories as international students in Canada. In the next chapter, I will uncover some more stories of "home," "homemaking," and "homecoming."

Summary

I started this chapter with introducing the vignettes of my participants, hoping to give a better and big picture of their lives and experiences before and after their transition to Canada. Since in an interpretative inquiry, understanding an individual part of a text requires that one understand the whole text and vice versa (Smith (1993), I have tried to show the interplay of the "whole-part" of my participants' stories first by portraying their lives as vignettes. I categorized the vignettes based on the participants' origins (Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Syrian) just to provide a better understanding of their background. The participants' narratives highlight their

expectations from Canada before their move to this country and how such expectations were met or were challenged by their experiences in their everyday lives in Canadian society. The vignettes also accentuate the point that although these students saw Canada as a welcoming society, they had some difficulties in finding themselves as insiders due to being Muslims or Middle Easterners.

When I was looking at my participants' stories for analysis, I saw that their narratives are situated in two different periods of time: their stories before and after moving to Canada. In this chapter, I presented narrative threads that depict the experiences of Middle Eastern international students in their homelands before their move to Canada. Since identities are subjective, not static, and are subject to change over the years due to many factors, such as globalization and extended mobility, examining the identity of those who are mobile from one place to another would not be possible without taking their past experiences from their homeland into account.

My participants confirmed that physical settings and artifacts both reflect and shape their understanding of "who they are as individuals and as members of groups" (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 281). They showed that part of their identity was formed and reformed through their experiences of war, conflict, and displacement in their homelands. As a consequence of living through wars and conflict, they had perceived their "selves" being characterized by embedded fear and anxiety, sense of disruption, sense of detachment, and sense of resentment towards some of the Western policies and practices towards their home countries. Their stories showed that their lives in their homeland, despite its beauties, were featured with social and economic hardship due to international sanctions or because of militarized war and occupation. As the consequences of such experiences my participants identified themselves with a "disrupted sense

of self" and were looking for a stable, safe, and peaceful place to which they can feel attached

and like they belong.

Chapter 6: Narrative Threads

Stories of Being a Middle Easterner in Canada

When I started visiting my participants to hear their narratives, I was so nervous about how I should track down the experiences that reflect their identity as Middle Eastern international students in Canada. Soon I realized that I just needed to hear their stories and let them uncover what they wanted me to hear. In this process, my participants continually restoried their pasts, "shifting" the relative significance of different events for who they had become, "discovering" connections they had previously been unaware of, "repositing" themselves and others in their networks of relationships (Mishler, 1999, p. 5). They uncovered that their identities were influenced by negotiations of their past experiences in their home countries and their lived experiences in Canada. This means that their identities were much entwined with their experiences of war and conflict, even though their understanding and perception of war and conflict varied depending on their exposure and experiences.

Since their past experiences were featured with their encounters with war and conflict they could not put aside that part of their identity which was informed by fear, anxiety, resentment, insecurity, instability, and disruption, even while living in Canada. My participants showed that the quality of their experiences as international students in Canada was much affected by their being of Middle Eastern descent. In this chapter I will discuss the eight Middle Eastern international students' stories in order to show how their identities were subject to their perceptions of Canadian society as well as being perceived as Middle Eastern students by it.

Living in the midst of war and conflict in Canada.

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality...I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.
Martin Luther King, 1964

When we reached a point that I wanted to hear more about their experiences in Canada, I realized that my participants had found themselves surrounded in insecurity resulting from the war and conflict discourse, even in Canada. Their stories showed that although they saw themselves as blessed and privileged compared to so many other Middle Eastern students who never had the chance to move to a safer country such as Canada, in Canada they had perceived themselves as unprivileged in so many ways due to their ethnic and religious background. One of the themes that emerged from our conversations was around their perception of the discourse of conflict in Canada.

Limited international relations of Canada with some of the Middle Eastern countries for various political reasons have created a discourse of conflict for Middle Eastern people, such as students, in Canada. The Canadian government has always been a staunch supporter of Israel. According to the government of Canada "support for Israel, especially its right to live in peace and security with its neighbors, has been at the core of Canada's Middle East policy since 1948" (Canada International Gateway, 2016a). Although Canada's government has declared its recognition of the "Palestinian right to self-determination" (Canada International Gateway, 2016b, Para. 2) and has expressed its support for a fair-minded approach to the Arab-Israel conflict, in practice its arrangements and policies are in favor of Israel's interests in the region. Limited consular services in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria in Canada and vice-versa, as well as constant international sanctions against these countries show Canada's stance on the relations with these states.

Farhad, my Iranian participant, was one of those students whose life in Canada was affected by such a limited relationship between the states. Farhad's life in Canada as an international student reached a point that he saw an urgent need to have his family beside him to

support him emotionally and financially. When he learned that his parents' visa application was rejected by the Canadian embassy in Turkey, he became severely distressed and offended:

> I came to Canada to get rid of the social and political pressures in my country. I started to struggle financially and emotionally from my second year of the study and I needed my family…they got rejected just because we are Iranians…if I was a German international student then I had the right to see my parents, but I am Iranian and I should be deprived…

> Canadian foreign policy toward Iran has been structured by a strategy known as "Controlled Engagement." This policy has limited the level of official contact between the two states (Bookmiller, 2011). In 2012, Canada closed its embassy in Tehran and expelled Iranian diplomats from Ottawa for different reasons, including "Iran's non-compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding its nuclear program and Iran's regional policies" (Canada's International Gateway, 2016c, Para. 4).

Once my participants were talking about their experiences of conflict in Canada, our conversations again became directed towards the economic sanctions and their effects on their lives. It turned out that the economic sanctions against the Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Iran have not only affected my participants' lives in their own countries but also have created an insecure space for them in Canada. Allain (2004) argues that while international law, such as economic sanction policies, are usually perceived "as neutral and benign, as a legitimate means of regulating and maintaining international order" in Western world, in the eyes of Middle Eastern people "it is understood to be little more than a tool of the powerful, used to coerce and oppress" (p. 1). This means that economic sanctions are the modern manifestation of colonialism and the use of power against the so-called Orient. The international polices related to sanctions

are such that different organizations could have their own interpretations of them. Maryam, my

Iranian student, never expected that she would experience the negative impacts of international

sanctions against Iran even outside of it, in Canada. Once Maryam wanted to open a student

account at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), and she was refused because of

being Iranian:

> She asked me "where are you from," I replied "from Iran," she nodded her head and said
>
> "I'm sorry, but our bank can't open a new account for you." I was shocked, "but why?"
>
> She said "because Iran is sanctioned…this is our new policy"…I was a student in Canada
>
> and I couldn't have a bank account, isn't it offensive?
>
> Although in their sanctions' statements there is no word about banning people from

opening accounts (CIBC, 2016; HSBC, 2017), some of the banks' interpretations of the policies

led students to be deprived from opening accounts at some points of time.

> Adnan and Sarah believed that the economic sanctions against Syria had affected their

lives in Canada indirectly. For them the economic sanctions had put an unjust restriction on their

lives by preventing them from helping their extended families in Syria financially. According to

the Government of Canada, "The provision or acquisition of financial services to, from or for the

benefit of or on the direction or order of Syria or any person in Syria" is prohibited (Canada's

International Gateway, 2017). This means that Syrian people inside Canada cannot provide any

help to their families in Syria, and such a restriction has reinforced the sense of anger,

resentment, and insecurity for Syrians living in Canada: "My people, my family need our support

in Syria and I cannot send anything to them, not a penny. I feel like I am tied up, like I'm forced

to forget about my ties, my family and my identity" (Sarah). My participants' experiences of

being challenged by and deprived of their very civic and social rights in Canadian society

highlight the point that international laws, such as economic sanctions, are reinforcing the ideas

of Orientalism, as discussed by Said (1978). Allain (2004) argues that international law, "in the

guise of capitulations agreements, the League of Nations' Mandate system and even in the UN

Security Council sanction regime, has been a major factor in turning the Orient from alien into

colonial space" (p. 2).

Talking about Canada and its policies, we reached an agreement that although Canada's

policies during the last few months of the current Liberal Prime Minister's ascendancy to power

have been more in favor of minority rights, the impact of global forces and policies on Middle

Eastern students in Canada is inevitable. Just one week before one of my meetings with Farooq

and Nada, US President Donald Trump banned travel from seven Muslim-majority countries

(Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan) to the US for 90 days, from January 27,

2017, in an executive order, titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the

United States" (Pierce & Meissner, 2017). We started our conversation with sharing our

concerns and resentment about such an unfair policy. Although Canada's response to the policy

was one to be proud of, my Iraqi participants believed that such policies would reinforce the

negative discourse against people of these countries even in Canada and would affect their

identities:

> I have applied for visa to attend a conference in the States, I don't know what would
>
> happen to it after this order. It's like everything is getting worse for us in the
>
> world…these polices scares us, it reminds us that we are from that region and should
>
> carry fright and anxiety with us wherever we go (Nada)

While my participants' experiences of conflict inside Canada varied from being affected

directly by the policies to being disturbed indirectly by international conflicts, they all saw their

identities being a subject of the discourse of conflict both in their homelands and in Canada.

Being questioned, being labeled.

On a hot summer day, Borhan and I sat on a bench at the SFU campus in downtown

Vancouver and wanted to follow up our previous session's conversation about our experiences of

being Middle Eastern international students in Canada. Since this was our third meeting I knew

that Borhan would not shake hands with me, as a woman, based on his Islamic beliefs. So right

after our introductory greetings and before we started more formally, I asked him if he wanted a

cup of coffee or tea, "oh, thanks for asking, but you know, it's Ramadan and I'm fasting," he

said. I was kind of ashamed about my question as a Muslim woman: "Right! Sorry I had

completely forgotten about it since I can't fast for health reasons," I said. Borhan looked at me

kindly and said "please…you shouldn't be sorry, every person should be free to choose his faith

and practice and shouldn't justify himself for his choice and the way he lives…you are free, I'm

free, no justification, no labeling…" This very first informal conversation between us directed

our later conversation to exchanging stories about our religious and ethnic identities in Canada.

The conversations around our race, ethnicity, color, faith, and language took us to the

way that we are represented as Muslim Middle Eastern students and the way we represent

ourselves to the Canadian society. The participants' stories in Canada revealed that Middle

Eastern international students' identity negotiations are significantly influenced by the prevalent

Orientalist discourse. Discussion around being recognized as "other" in Canadian society

uncovered part of their identity that is seen as "dissimilar." They showed that society had created

a discourse in which they felt "different, excluded, closed out, outside the game, outside the

circle, outside the set or to feel precluded, even disdained and scorned" (Udah, 2017, p. 7). My participants not only felt the burden of war and conflict in their lives even in Canada, but also felt the burden of being marginalized as Muslim Middle Eastern students in Canadian society. Madrid (1988) describes this marginalization as follows:

> If one is the other, one will inevitably be perceived unidimensionally; will be seen stereotypically; will be defined and delimited by mental sets that may not bear much relation to existing realities. There is a darker side to otherness as well. The other disturbs, disquiets, discomforts. It provokes distrust and suspicion. The other makes people feel anxious, nervous, apprehensive, even fearful. The other frightens, scares. (p. 56)

The narrative accounts of my participants suggest that my participants' identity formation is shaped in a dialogical tension between being a Middle Eastern Muslim and being a student in Canada. On one hand, there is their ethnicity and faith they want to practice and on the other hand there is life in the Canadian context as a minority group whose identity is scrutinized by the public. For them, the othering practices and encounters in their everyday life framed the way they engaged in identity negotiations in Canadian society. The way they were being depicted, represented, and encountered as "Muslim others" had created an unsafe space ornamented with stereotypes and labels.

My participants' narrative accounts suggest that they were faced with othering practices in two forms. On one hand, they were being portrayed negatively in Canadian society. This othering discourse is what Van Dijk (as cited in Hällgren, 2005) calls "being about the other" (pp. 324-325). This form of othering, as Van Dijk identifies, is usually acted out in groups between members of the dominant group, in a negative portrayal of "them," and often in

combination with a positive representation of "ourselves." On the other hand, they were being

explicitly the subjects of racist and discriminatory acts. This form of othering as Van Dijk

identifies is introduced as "being directed at the other" where it is expressed by members of the

dominant group in, for example, the use of derogatory slurs and insults in verbal interactions

with dominated group members. However, as Van Dijk asserts, since such verbal expressions are

usually seen as socially and politically inappropriate, they tend to be "subtle" or "indirect."

Although in many stories that my participants narrated, they revealed that they were the subjects

of indirect or subtle discriminatory discourse, they believed that such a negative context had

affected the quality of their lives and well-being in Canada. In the following section, I will retell

my participants' stories of being about the "other" and being directed at the "other" in their lives

in Canada.

Being about the other.

As a Muslim woman of color, in a time of overwhelming stigma, I fear of being othered, profiled and killed in a country I call my own. My identity is challenged. And my actions are heavily scrutinized. I'm simultaneously silenced into shame while being expected to apologize for the actions of a small group of people that do not represent me.
Srosh Hassana, Speech in the House of Commons, 2017

It was July 18, 2016, and I was waiting for Olaa to show up for our meeting. My

Palestinian participant was recognizable by her colorful headscarf as her usual style. As soon as

she reached me, she held my hand in her hands tightly and told me "Oh, Shadi, it's good we are

meeting today, I really need to talk to you." During the last few sessions of our meetings we had

become good friends sharing so many untold stories with each other. We found an empty room

and sat behind the desks on two close seats. I asked her if she was fine; "I've had such a terrible

weekend" she replied. I had no idea what she was talking about; I looked at her concernedly and

asked her about her experience. "Oh no don't worry, nothing happened to me specifically. Are

you following the news? I've been mourning for the victims of the Nice terrorist attack…" I just

realized what she was talking about. Four days before our meeting on July 14, 2016, a man

driving a truck ploughed into a crowd that was celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, France, killing

at least 84 people and injuring hundred others. The attacker was reported to be a Muslim

Tunisian citizen of France associated with the Islamic State (IS) (Indian Express, 2016). This

attack was among a record number of terrorist attacks that occurred in European Union countries

during the last couple of years under the name of Islamic terrorists. I showed sympathy and

asked her if she had a bad experience after the incident. Olaa was nervous and noticeably

distressed. She continued:

> This was not the first one and unfortunately will not be the last. But you know, this is not
>
> only about taking people's lives, it's about taking Muslim's dignity. These incidents have
>
> ruined us; I mean Muslim's face in the world; we are not loved. This is what I've been
>
> dealing with in my life here every single day as a Muslim student.

Olaa's accounts imply that her lived experiences in Canada as a Muslim woman is shaped

by the prevailing narratives about Muslims in society. The narratives that characterize Muslims

with negative stereotypes reinforce the "othering" process and push Muslims to margin. Beside

the negative image that the prevalent Orientalist discourse in Canada imposes, it suggests some

basic misconceptions about the Middle East. Ideas such as all Muslims are Arabs, all Middle

Eastern people are Arab and Muslim, Persians are Arabs, and so many other fallacies that frame

the narratives about people of that region. My participants' narratives show that Middle Eastern

students' identity is shaped through negotiations between the prevailing misconceptions about

them in an Orientalist discourse and what they defined as their "real" Middle Eastern or Muslim

selves. Since all of my participants were Muslims and two of my female participants (Maryam

and Olaa) were actually practicing hijab in their everyday lives, our conversations found their

way to uncovering their stories of living through the negative discourse against them as Muslim

students in the society.

Looking at history shows that although representations of the "Muslim Other"' have

existed in the Western world for so many years, this identity has developed more quickly in

recent years being under higher levels of scrutiny and attention (Rana, 2007). Historically,

beginning around the 12th century, "a Christian theological Orientalism began to consider Islam

as an irrational, violent, idolatrous and licentious religion" (Helly, 2012, p. 3). My participants

recognized "Islamophobia" as an element in Canadian society which has played an important

role in shaping their experiences as students and consequently their identities. Borhan, my

Palestinian participant, believed that "racism is not necessarily direct, showing Islam as a violent

faith is also discrimination and an example of racism." Farhad explained that "I'm not a very

religious person, but my parents practice Islam and what I've learned about Islam by living it is

much different from what is shown and represented by those who haven't lived it."

Misrepresentation of the Muslim world, and the representation of the way they live as

different from Western society, had placed a burden on my participants' lives. Farooq explained

that:

> any time that a terrorist attack happens in a Western country it makes the Islamophobia
>
> even worse in the whole world. We're seen as people who love war and violence. The
>
> other day one of my Canadian classmates asked me if it's true that Muslim men are
>
> allowed to control their women and even hit them. I don't know where he got it from, but
>
> it was painful. Islam teaches us to treat women with respect, it teaches us to be gentle and
>
> serene; but non-Muslims don't know these things, because we are represented the way

some powers want us to be represented. They have power to shape people's mind about us. Islamophobia discourse prevailing in the Canadian society affects not only Muslim immigrants and refugees but also Muslim international students.

When I started the interviews with my participants, the Liberal government had started its work showing more tolerance towards different cultures and faiths, specifically Islam. Still, the negative discourse resulted from the policies and practices of Harper's Conservative government were not faded from Muslim people's lives. For example, Yasmin Abu-Laban (2017) examines the changes in Canada's immigration policies between 2006 and 2016 mainly introduced by the former conservative government. According to Abu-Laban, during the last decade Canadian citizenship has become more difficult of obtain and easier to lose for racialized Muslim people, the number of refugees has been reduced (specifically for Syrian refugees), and surveillance of borders and belonging has been intensified in ways that are racialized and gendered. Most of my students who had lived through such an anti-Muslim discourse believed that their identity was attacked so many times by the conservative government of Canada. Nada believed that Harper, Canada's former Prime Minister, "was systematically disseminating anti-Muslim prejudices." Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) argue that the state has the power to determine "which identities and identity claims are taken into account and how they are represented in actions or policy, and conversely which ones are downplayed or even ignored" (p. 14). Harper's use of power against racialized people and his anti-Muslim language and vocabulary was seen as a danger to Muslim identities in Canada. Farooq expressed his concern about such language, which provokes negative dialogues and interpretations about Islam and Muslims:

Do you remember he called our culture as barbaric? When a society's leader thinks and talks like this, what can we expect from other people? You know, Canadian people are

educated and don't let such attitudes get common in the society, that's why they chose

Justin Trudeau, but it's inevitable when your leader repeat something over and over, you

accept it as a reality. I feel like my Muslim identity is tarnished with some unreal lies.

Maryam argued that the Conservative government "associated terrorism with Islam" and

consequently enacted policies and legislations that shaped cultural warfare on Muslims in

society. In 2011, promoting anti-terrorism dialogue, the prime minister stated that the biggest

threat to Canada was "Islamicism" (Seddiqui, 2015). Although he used this language to refer to

what is known as "radical Islam" or "extreme Islam," the word had the potential to open a space

for any kind of interpretation which others Muslims by associating Muslim identity with

extremism. Later in 2015, Harper called on an action to deal with some "barbaric cultural

practices" that victimize women and girls (Conservatives, 2015). Although he did not refer to

Islam directly, the contextual understanding of his speech was that he was referring to Islamic

practices. Nada unconsciously pointed to the hidden Orientalist and hegemonic mindset behind

such comments when she said:

> He didn't call on urgent action about missing aboriginal women in Canada or, I don't
>
> know like, women whose lives are affected by the Canadian policies. I don't get why
>
> these people think they are Muslim women's guardians. They think they know everything
>
> better than us…like we Muslim women are victims and are suppressed and don't have the
>
> ability to choose our own lifestyle. You can find bad people and bad practices
>
> everywhere in the world, but it's like all Muslims are bad.

Nada's point affirmed the white supremacy prevailing in Canada where the "white

European men…are seen to be superior to women and people from other racial and ethnic

origins" and their hegemonic systems of ideas and practices become "the premise on which

societal norms and values are based" (Ng, 1993, p. 52). My female participants' narratives insinuated that in Canada, they were represented as captive victims and alienated individuals without agency and power.

My participants' lived experiences suggested that the former Canadian Prime Minister's comments, along with the state's regulations and policies, legitimized the "othering" process, identifying Muslims as a group of people who need help, education, and cultural understanding of society's norms and standards, as of White people's way of life. In this regard, in a post-colonial critique of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Mjotaba Mahdavi (2015) challenges Immanuel Kant's idea of "perpetual peace," in which "the civilized, liberal and peace-loving world is obliged to bring in peace to the uncivilized and non-liberal world plagued by wars and conflicts" (p. 8). He problematizes the prevailing Kantian cosmopolitanism that underlines "the Western superior right and universal moral responsibility to save and civilize the *Other"* (p. 8). Although Mahdavi's critique focuses on global politics and international relations between states, it can be of valuable use in challenging the Oriental discourse in Canada. In his account Mahdavi (2015) proposes that the "hegemonic neo-liberal discourse of Humanitarianism" and a "paternalistic legacy of Orientalism" have broadened the gap between "us" and "other" by reinforcing the policing language of human rights (p. 7).

Dealing with stereotypes and labels and being castigated for their practices, behaviors and choices, such as hijab and fasting, had made my participants vulnerable as students in Canada. Being susceptible to any negative sign against them, my participants also identified media as a significant player in shaping public opinion about Muslim collective identity. Criticizing the destructive depiction of Muslims, Sarah believed that the media is complicit in the dissemination of anti-Muslim representation:

There is a discourse against us but why can't we do the same thing to the Western people

when they do terrible things, like hate crime and so on. We have values, we have much

moral and ethics in our religion and cultures. We let them market themselves and we

allow them interfere in our politics; we allow them to take over the world's media and

construct a false identity for Muslims…it's ridiculous that our life is directed by their

attitudes…their media shows us that way and when we move out we're immediately

ashamed. Everyday I need to tell myself: Don't be ashamed, show them that we are Arab

and we are proud to be Arab, don't shy away because they hate us, don't legitimize their

false depiction in the media…

My participants' identities thus were the subjects of unfavorable public perception that

was shaped by the pervasive perpetuation of falsifications of Islam by the media. Edward Said

(1978) argued that "since World War II…the Arab and Muslim has become a figure in American

popular culture" (p. 284). Stockton (1994) analyzed the American public media and cartoons and

identified eight assigned image themes in the portrayal of Arabs in media: sexual depravity,

creature analogies (e.g., vermin, camels), physiological and psychological traits (e.g.,

unappealing physical characteristics and fanaticism), savage leaders, deceit, secret power, hatred

of Israel, and terrorism (as cited in Perry & Poynting, 2006). Such a portrayal is not limited to

Arabs, though. My Iranian participants also declared that the Western media, specifically the

"American movies, like Argo and 300", and "the Canadian news" are following an

"Islamophobic/Iranophobic agenda," constructing an untrue image about Middle Eastern people,

tarring all Persians and Muslims with the same brush (Maryam). As Wintant (1994) states:

Today, racism has been largely—though not entirely, to be sure—detached from its

perpetrators. In its most advanced forms, indeed, it has no perpetrators, it is a nearly

invisible, taken-for-granted, ''commonsense'' feature of everyday life and global social

structure….[If] we define racism as the routinized outcome of practices that create or

reproduce hierarchical social structures based on essentialized racial categories, then we

can see better how it extends from the transnational to the national to the experiential and

personal, from the global debt burden to racial profiling, from Negrophobia to

Islamophobia (as cited in Rana, 2007, p. 148)

Hamdon (2010) believes that "failing to acknowledge the contextual and contested nature

of Muslim identities, these stereotypical images paradoxically contribute to the social forces

through which Muslim identities in the West become constituted" (p. 16). Despite the fact that

my participants were proud to study and live in Canada as a democratic and prosperous country,

they saw their identities being the subject of an Orientalist discourse in which anti-Muslim and

"othering" practices were instituted and intensified by the state and the media where Muslims are

shown as constructors of an "Islamic peril" (Karim, 2003). As Hamdon (2010) argues, "The

power of such negative images is aggravated by "the absence of portrayals of Arab/Muslim

identities as complex and contextual" (p. 17). This means that "a lack of representation

(symbolic annihilation) can…reinforce stereotypes" (p. 165). My participants also believed that

the Canadian media needs a foundational reform focusing more on showing positive images of

Muslims.

Being directed at the other.

I do agree that there are other groups that pose a terroristic threat to this country…I would say that the threat from radicalized Muslims is a unique and greater threat. It is the greatest threat…It's been going on for a thousand years, this problem with Islam and the West. We're dealing with a culture that is in its medieval era. It comes from a hate-filled holy book, the Quran, which is taken very literally by its people. They are trying to get nuclear weapons. I don't think Tim McVeigh would ever have tried to get a nuclear weapon because I think right-wing nuts, they think they love this country and they are not trying to destroy this country, they want to get it away from the people they see as

hijacking it. That's different than Muslim extremists who want to destroy it. And also it is a culture of suicide bombing, which is hard to deter from people who want to kill themselves.

Bill Maher, Real Time with Bill Maher, 2011

These insults and racist remarks about Islam and Muslims are made by a well-known American stand-up comedian, television host, author and actor in a popular TV show aired on the HBO channel. Such direct insults against Muslim groups are not limited to TV programs and are a quite common experience in these people's everyday life in Western societies, such as the US and Canada. When I was listening to my participants' stories about their experiences of being perceived as "others" in Canada, I realized that such an Orientalist discourse had provided "both motive and rationale for injurious verbal and physical assaults" (Perry & Poynting, 2006, p. 4) on them. Amira Elghawaby, spokeswoman for the National Council of Canadian Muslims, believes that othering Muslims and Islamophobia, as it is perceived in Canada, shape a space for the irrational fear or hatred of Muslims that leads to "discrimination" or "actual acts of harassment" or "violence" (Elghawaby, 2017).

In a literature review of Public Opinion Research on Canadian attitudes towards multiculturalism and immigration (2006-2009), published by Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship of Canada (Soroka & Roberton, 2010), the issue of discrimination towards religious groups was examined. The questions were not about perceived discrimination, rather, they were intended to capture discrimination directly. In a question about favorable versus unfavorable opinions towards different religions, Islam was recognized as the most unfavorable religion in Canada, capturing 52% unfavorable opinion. A survey of Canadian Arabs conducted by the Canadian Arab Federation in 2001-2002 (n=253) similarly showed 49.4% encounter racism in their daily interaction with people "occasionally" (41.5%), "frequently" (4.7%) or "all the time" (3.2%) (Khouri, 2003). Aligned with the finding of these studies, my participants identified

direct discrimination as part of their everyday life experiences. The participants, like so many other Muslim people, emphasized that they were "deeply troubled" (National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2015) by discrimination and awfully disruptive direct comments about their faith and culture in different occasions.

While "othering" Muslims with the use of propaganda and policies was a noticeable phenomenon in the conservative government of Canada as I mentioned in the last section, using direct verbal assaults were not also uncommon in the conservative Prime Minister's speeches. Olaa expressed her concern about racist remarks of state officials pointing to Harper's comment on Islam and terrorism when he singled out "mosques" as a "venue where terrorism is advocated and promoted" (Payton, 2015, para. 5):

> Mosque for us is not only a place to pray, but also is like a community center. We go there to meet our people and celebrate our time together. It's a sacred place in which we learn to love… you are Muslim, you know about it…I don't get it that he makes racist comments about us and only Muslim people show reaction. Why Canadian people don't protest against such an obvious practice of racism? (Olaa)

Borhan, like my other participants, asserted that there was a lack of collective action against racism in Canada. They believed that "only those who are the victims of racism are the one who take action against it" (Borhan). Maryam also acknowledged the existing overt form of discrimination and identified the lack of support against such discrimination. She conjectured that the Canadian people do not show enough support to Muslim people, considering Middle Eastern people' lives less valuables than White people's lives:

> When a terrorist attack happens in a Middle Eastern country, no one shows sympathy to the people of that country who live in Canada. But when something happens in a

European country, like the disaster in France, everyone mourns for them. Most of my

Canadian friends featured their Facebook profile pictures with the France's flag. It's a

beautiful way of showing empathy, but why do they forget about the individuals and

victims of terrorism in the Middle East. It's like their lives are more valuable than ours.

Why don't they cherish our people's lives by showing support in different way?

For Mayram and my other participants, the Middle Eastern and Muslim people's identity

was also constrained by the lack of recognition of their individual identity:

When a Muslim or Middle Eastern individual kills someone it's called terrorist attack and

all Muslims' lives get affected by an individual's action, but when a white person kills a

group of people, they call him an individual with mental problems. Believe me, after the

recent terrorist attacks in Europe, I get more racist comments in public places. It's like I

was the one who killed those people. No one says it was one stupid Muslim who did it,

they say you Muslims did it. (Farooq)

This example of Muslim people's identities being reduced to a mis-conceptual

understanding of a collective identity is much related to the Orientalist representation of Islam as

a risky and villainous religion whose followers are dangerous and terrorists. In relation to issues

around Muslim identity, Mythen, Walklate, and Khan (2009) argue that, due to the well-

publicized actions of a small minority, all Muslims are depicted as similarly risky. They

highlight the point that "extreme criminal or terrorist actions undertaken by white British people

did not lead to all white people being cast as dangerous or out of control, nor were white people

alluded to in the media as Christians" (p. 743).

By recognizing societal misconstructions of Muslim students' identity, my participants

acknowledged that in order to live through the discriminatory discourse against them, they need

to distance their individual identity from the societal constructs of their prescribed identity
(Mian, 2012). Farhad narrated his story of being insulted in by a Canadian lady:

> I was coming back from my PhD convocation ceremony having my degree in my hand
> when she got into the train. She looked into my eyes, raised her voice and started
> commenting about my life and my culture…Like what are you uneducated people doing
> in my country…get back to your country and kill your own people…and so many other
> terrible things…I was so shocked, so offended, but no one stood behind me to support
> me. People were just watching us without asking her to stop. I needed to revive my
> injured identity, so stood up and asked her to stop insulting me. I told her that I'm coming
> back from my PhD convocation party, so I'm actually very educated. I told her that the
> culture I'm coming from a rich culture as old as 2500 years. I was shaking and were
> defending myself and my identity with all my power. I told her if she continues I will call
> police so she left the train in the next stop. Just like this. I needed to show everyone there
> that I'm an educated Muslim man who is proud of the country and the culture he is
> coming from.

Farhad's experience of being singled out because of his race/religion was shared by a
quarter of the survey respondents in a recent study of 600 Canadian Muslims conducted by the
Environics Institute (2015-2016). The survey revealed that 30% of Muslim Canadians say they
have experienced discrimination because of their religion, ethnicity, or culture over the past five
years in their workplaces, in public spaces, schools, and universities. According to the survey,
discrimination and treatment of Muslims by the broader community was mentioned as the most
important issue facing Muslims in Canada today (The Environics Institute, 2016).

While all of my participants had experienced direct discrimination and racism in their

lives in Canada, the ones whose attire and appearance had made them more visible as "Arabs"

"Middle Easterners" or "Muslims" identified themselves as the subjects of more overt incidents

of racial/religious prejudices or what they called "hate crimes." Maryam and Olaa were my two

participants wearing headscarves. They believed that wearing a head cover had made them to be

identified as being "oppressed individuals" who "are the victims of their religions and beliefs"

(Olaa). Maryam argued that her clothing choice had troubled her associating her with Orientalist

constructs:

> My situation is so funny. As soon as people get to know that I'm from Iran, they start
>
> judging me and labeling me. Non-Iranian people think that I've been forced to wear scarf.
>
> The other day, one of my Canadian classmates was trying hard to convince me that
>
> because of the mandatory Hijab in Iran, women can't resist, and get used to and accept
>
> what they have been assigned to, forcefully. I argued with her that this is not true at all, as
>
> this is my choice and there are so many Iranian women who resist against the mandatory
>
> Hijab. She was like "you are oppressed and you don't know." But my bigger problem is
>
> with my Iranian fellows. They label me as pro-government just because I'm practicing
>
> my religious belief. I'm tired of explaining myself to some ignorant people…tired of
>
> being stared at in the buses, trains, and gyms, like I shouldn't exercise like other
>
> people…. It's a multicultural country and women like me are still dealing with racism.
>
> Believe me or not, it's even getting worse every day.

Maryam and Olaa's narratives confirmed that there is a general understanding that

Muslim women need being educated and regulated either because they are "seemingly unable to

distinguish what is good for themselves," or because they have been "brainwashed and cannot

see their own suffering" (Soltani, 2016, para. 9). Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) challenges some

stereotypical understandings of Muslim women and argues that veiling "must not be confused

with, or made to stand for, lack of agency" (p. 786). Abu-Lughod clarifies that veiling has

different meanings in different cultures, and it is mostly a voluntary act by women who are

"deeply committed to being moral and have a sense of honor tied to family" (p. 786). Hoodfar

(2003) argues that

> The assumption that veiling is a static practice which symbolizes the oppressive nature of
>
> patriarchy in Muslim societies has prevented social scientists and western feminists from
>
> examining Muslim women's own accounts of their lives, hence perpetuating the racist
>
> stereotypes which are ultimately in the service of patriarchy in both societies. (p. 16)

The perceived hostility from the Canadian society towards the visible cultural or religious

practices was not limited to my female participants. Farhad and Farooq's experiences showed

that they were the victims of more direct racism when they chose to practice what they believe

in:

> I like wearing beard sometimes. It's not about my religion or culture. Just like any man, I
>
> have this nature and I want to be able to use it. You know what I heard the other day
>
> when I was bearded? Some old man whispered in my ear: "ISIS in Canada." Isn't it a
>
> hate crime? I say it is and unfortunately this is how people think about and act upon a
>
> Middle Eastern bearded man.

Although Farhad and Farooq experienced "similar public scrutiny" as Maryam and Olaa,

their practices such as wearing beard "is not held up in public discourse as a symbol of

oppression," as Hijab for women is (Bullock, 2005, p. xvi). The fact that the number of police-

reported hate crimes against Muslims jumped by 60% in 2015 compared to the previous year

(Statistics Canada, 2017) reveals that Muslim people's identity is constructed through direct and indirect othering practices the society. The practices that have perpetuated disadvantage, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization for my Muslim participants in Canadian society lack recognition of their individual identity.

Feeling hybrid, being hybrid.

As a Mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine…
Anzaldúa, La Conciencia de la Mestiza, 1997, p. 273

When I started talking to my participants, I almost knew that our conversation around place and identity would not be limited to exchanging our stories from "here" or "there" positing ourselves bound to one specific geographical and cultural space. During our conversations, all of us agreed that from our very first encounters with Canadian society, we realized that in order to survive the new experiences in the Orientalist discourse of the Canadian society as well as the cultural differences, we needed to find an "in-between" space in which we do not get "limited to a duality of two cultural heritages" (Minh-Ha, 2014, p. 159). Such an identity negotiation accords with the general understanding of "hybridity" as: "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Rowe & Schelling, 1991 p. 231).

Schulz and Hammer (2003) have taken such a conceptualization of hybridity to the realm of identity formation in the globalized world, redefining hybridity as "the ways in which identities are formed anew in the process of meetings occurring through travels and movement" (p. 13). Having such an understanding of hybrid identities, I realized that all of my participants' identities as well as my own identity were hybrid to some extent in different layers. We were identifying ourselves as "Middle Easterner," "Muslim" "international" students who were considered as "others" in a society in which we wanted to integrate and live with peace of mind

and heart. This means that we had to navigate our individual identity negotiations in a "third space" by adopting a "hybrid" identity. We all believed that these "third," "in-between" spaces were indeed our "innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) in the Orientalist discourse of Canada:

> I'm Palestinian with a Jordanian passport. Yaʿnī [It Means, in Arabic] I'm coming from an Arabic culture with specific values…the values that I don't see in the Canadian culture. I was so strict to keep my Palestinian identity, so I was struggling to get integrated into the Canadian society. But then I realized that the Canadian culture has so many good things and it's good to take them; things like, the way they treat you as humans and respect you. So, I thought with myself it's actually good to feel Canadian sometimes. We don't need to leave out our culture to feel like Canadian. Now I feel like I'm neither this nor that, or how can I say…like somehow this somehow that… (Borhan)

Borhan's experience of in-between-ness confirms Anzaldúa's conceptualization of identity. As Gloria Anzaldúa states "identity can never be reduced to a 'bunch' of little cubbyholes…Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river, a process" (pp. 252-253). She describes cultural expectations as borders and argues that borderlands exist "wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 19). Instead of being completely assimilated to the new culture of Canada, I realized that most of my participants had created "an alien consciousness," "a new mestiza consciousness," or what Anzaldúa (2007) describes as "a consciousness of the Borderlands" (p. 99). While most of my participants narrated their stories of

taking a hybrid identity in the Canadian culture, Farhad was my only participant who insisted on living his own culture as he defines as "Iranian/Persian" and somehow "Islamic"

I don't know why, but I haven't been able to cope with the Canadian culture. I live in Canada, I deal with the Canadian people every day, they are great people. It's not about being good or bad, it's just that I can't get into it or make myself easy in it. I feel Iranian, I love practicing my Persian culture. My friends are all Iranians, I watch Iranian movies and TV shows and everything in my house is so Persian. I feel comfortable in my own territory, I'm happy to be Muslim, to be Persian, but then this is annoying when I have to get into the Canadian society and deal with it. I haven't been able to create that space for myself to be comfortable in the society and this is kind of painful for me.

One of the reasons that Farhad could not create a safe space in the borderlands of two cultures was that he had found the Canadian culture so pushy in imposing itself onto people of other cultures. Farhad had found sticking to the culture he is coming from as a site for resistance to such an imposition:

They want us to be exactly like them, to behave like them, to celebrate their culture, they want us assimilated and this is not what I want. They say our country is mosaic and everyone should be able to embrace his own culture but in reality, they are so pushy to make us accept what they think is good. They think they know everything and they are the best and that they can teach us what is best for us…some of them are so ignorant that don't even bother themselves to get to know about other cultures. I prefer to live my own life and don't get into this game. I'm afraid they take me from me by imposing themselves and by their humanitarian gestures.

Farhad's understanding of Canadian society was also, to some extent, consistent with the published statistics by Environics Institute (2016). In the survey done by the Environics Institute (2016), 26% of non-Muslim Canadians believed that Muslim immigrants/people have to learn English or French fluently. Also, 10% of non-Muslim populations asserted that Muslim people in Canada need to become fully assimilated into the Canadian culture. When being asked about the rights to religious practices, 31% of non-Muslim Canadian believed that Muslims should not have the right to pray in public schools and 32% believed that Muslim women should not be able to receive public services while wearing a niqab. Most relevant to Farhad's note, the survey had a question about non-Western, specifically Muslim people's cultural fusion to Canadian society. More than half, totally agree (29%) or somewhat agree (39%) with the statement "Immigrants of different values/ backgrounds should set aside their cultural backgrounds and try to blend into Canadian culture."

Indeed, these numbers confirm the existence of an Orientalist discourse in Canadian society that constructs a complex environment for an individual living in "double consciousness" (Mian, 2012). My Middle Eastern participants showed that they were struggling with a multi-faceted conception of "self" or as Du Bois (2007) calls a "double consciousness," a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 144). Studying and living in Canada had made my participants become involved in a struggle of "borders" and constantly negotiate their identity in a space of double consciousness trying to reconcile their cultural identity as Muslim Middle Easterners with the Canadian culture in which they are seen as "Oriental Others."

In a way of creating a new "Mestiza" on the borders of two cultures in the Canadian society, my participants suggested that "citizenship" plays an important role in shaping a safe space:

> We are international students; we are here on visa. It's like we are not fully Canadian, even if we want to or feel to, we are not citizens with full rights. We're like guests in Canada who need to get back to our own home when the party is over. I really want to feel stable and secure, without thinking of another displacement, I try my best to like here and to get integrated in my own way, but then I remember that I might have to leave this country after my study, if I don't find a job. So, sometimes I wonder what's the point of all these struggles. (Nada)

Although my participants saw citizenship as an important player in constructing a safe "third-space," their narratives revealed that they coped with the contradictions and ambiguity of borderlands by being tolerant and innovative. As residents of Canada, they learned to be Arabs, Persians, Middle Easterners in the Canadian culture, to be Canadian from an international student's point of view, to be Muslims in a secular society, to be law-abiding Canadian residents practicing Islam. They had "plural identity," and operated in a "pluralistic mode;" for them nothing was "thrust out, the good, the bad, the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 72). My Muslim Middle Eastern participants uncovered that they lived through "a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 78), to finally occupy a third cultural, national, and religious space in which they feel quite safe as international students in Canada.

Homecoming, home making.

Our discussion about "borderlands" and the ways that we, as Middle Eastern international students, create a new mestiza and occupy "third spaces" in the prevailing Orientalist discourse in Canadian society, could not be complete without refereeing back to the idea of "home." As I discussed earlier, my participants' narratives suggested that their identity was hybrid, in-between their past experiences, the culture that they were coming from and their new experiences and the culture that they were being assigned to in Canada. By developing a new mestiza consciousness, they had found their "own sense of belonging" to Canada, "an affirmation of this land" as their "home" (Moher, 2014, p. 224). Although most of my participants showed that they were quite successful in getting settled in a new third identity space, they uncovered that they were struggling with the concept of "home" as international students. In the process of their identity formation, my participants had found themselves trapped in the complexities of temporariness, rootlessness, and placelessness, brought about by their "inhabiting a third space that lies at the intersection of the host culture and the home culture" (Ncube, 2015, p. 19):

> You know what the problem of being a Middle Eastern international student is? You left your home because you wanted to be safe, you wanted to get rid of the conflict, the stress, the insecurity…then you came here and got involved in daily struggles as a Middle Eastern Muslim student. You tried to resolve the challenges and to feel good in your new place, you try hard to feel belonged, to make it as your home…but suddenly you remember that your families and roots are there, and you remember that you are not wanted here if you don't have a status after your study. You can't get back there and can't stay here, you're like wandering between places…You know what I'm saying? It's like a dead end…(Farooq)

My participants found themselves tangled with uncertainty and anxiety because of their temporary status in Canada which had made them feel dubious about their future and the place they need to consider as home. Some of them believed that while it would not be their best choice to go back home or for some of them, they did not have that choice because of the poor conditions of their countries, they might not have the choice of staying in Canada if they could not change their study permit to a work permit or Permanent Residency. Some of the participants found themselves being "unwanted" as international students both in their home countries and in Canada. Farhad puts such a situation as the following:

> When I was here on student visa I really wanted to get back home after my studies to make a change with all I had learned here at school. I knew that with my credential and all the experiences I had gained in Canada, I could have a happy life there with my family, while being helpful in improving my society. But the sad part was that any time I talked about my decision with my family and friends back there, they showed disagreement and dissatisfaction about my decision. My mom always warned me that I would have problem in getting integrated in the Iranian society because of my previous political activities and my friends told me that I should not leave a free country in which I have a happy life…I wanted to be beside them and they insisted that there was no place there for me…I knew that It was for my own good but It made me feel I was unwanted there while I was struggling to feel being wanted here in Canada too.

The participants showed that their feeling of home and insideness is associated with their experiences at school. Some of them believed that feeling placeless is connected with their being Middle Eastern students. They believed that their experiences as Middle Eastern international students were different in some aspects from other international students:

Being an international student itself is very challenging and makes you feel that you are an outsider; you have to pay double tuition fee, cannot apply for so many scholarships and have to cope with difficulties of being an ESL learner. But at least most of the other international students know that they have a safe place back home if they want to return. They have that ease and comfort about their homelands. You know, I, as an Iraqi student, do not have that security and ease of mind. I do not have that comfort here in Canada too, because I do not feel as an insider; let's say…for example, If I have financial problems what I should do…I cannot apply for major scholarships or governmental loans, I cannot count on my family back there too, because of their condition. This is a big burden…like being rootless… (Nada)

These narratives are consistent with the Relph's (1976) elucidation of "insideness." Relph suggests that if a person feels inside a place, she/he is safe rather than threatened, "enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed" (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 45). Relph believes that that the more deeply inside a place a person feels, the stronger will be his/her identity with that place. My participants argued that it was sometimes difficult to choose a right liminal, in-between cultural space and thus felt marginal, excluded, and "without identity" (Chakraborty, 2017, p. 146) in both cultures. Chakroborty (2017) defines liminal space as the "threshold," "in-between" location of cultural action, in which accordingly the meaning is produced (p. 145). Bhabha (1994) sees liminality as a transitory, in-between space, which can be characterized by ambiguity and hybridity. This is a space in which one may be lost as he/she cannot produce a meaningful and definite identity.

Although these students' stories uncovered that through their conscious or unconscious settlement in the third space, they could make bonds with Canadian culture and feel like home,

they were constantly swinging between rootlessness and being tied to different roots at the same time. Such a fluctuation between "having this and that" and "being deprived from this and from that" had made the process of home making as a "continuous effort and venture" (Maryam).

Drawing on Freud's concept of "uncanny," Bhahba (1994) describes such dismal states of fluctuation and lacking sense of home and feeling "homeless" as an "unhomely" state. He believes that feeling "unhomely" indeed is not the state of lack of home or being homeless but is the state in which one gets to know that the line between the home and the world is breaking down; it is an "uncanny feeling vacillating between self and other" (Farahbakhsh & Ranjbar, 2016, p. 108). Tyson (2011) argues that "Unhomeliness is an emotional state: unhomed people don't feel at home even in their own homes because they don't feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don't feel at home in themselves." (p. 250). The state of unhomeliness had made my participants live a "half life" in both cultures and thus had made life difficult for them who had occupied such partial spaces. Bhabha (1994) describes his own experience as:

I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at frontiers…gathering in the half-life, half light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language: gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively: gathering the past in a ritual or revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned: the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statues, immigration status. (p.139)

The concept of "reverse cultural shock" was mentioned as a big player in shaping an ambiguity and creating an unhomely state. Although my participants were involved in an everyday struggle in Canadian society, some of them believed that being culturally shocked when going back to their home country had played an important role in their feeling of placelessness:

I was so happy that I was getting back to my country for the first time after months of being away, but I was lost in my home country. It was like I didn't know the language of my own people, the way they behaved, the crowded streets, the crazy drivings…OMG everything was so uncomfortable. Before it, I couldn't wait to get back there, because I was thinking at least I didn't have to justify my choice of clothing and hijab in my own country, but actually I did have to. Every day I had to explain myself to my friends and relatives that why living abroad had not changed my attitude and way of clothing…When I got back to Canada, I was so sad for awhile; it was like I had lost part of me. I didn't like it that I didn't feel like home neither in Iran nor in Canada. (Maryam)

Some of the students believed that although making Canada as their home is a complex process that entails constant shifting of identity, they see themselves more towards tolerating the complexities, and making the new society their home, instead of getting back to their roots:

We came here with hopes and dreams, we have fought for what we have now and for what we are now, it's not easy to leave it and go. We went back to Iraq once last year, I really love that place; my memories, my family, my friends, they're all there, but then what I've made here during the last few years is so valuable for me that I don't want to leave it out. I want to work hard to make it as my home. Enough is enough, I'm done with displacement and resettlement. (Nada)

While most of my participants were sharing a similar understanding of the concept of home and homecoming and had gone through a similar process of homemaking, my Syrian and Palestinian participants were facing a more complex process of identification in terms of sense of place and home.

> Most of international students here have a place they call homeland. They can get back, visit their home country, and live there if they want to. But I can't. I was always dreaming about getting back to Syria, having a family, and living a decent life. But you see, there is no Syria anymore, my country is ruined and I don't have the choice of going back home after finishing my study. (Adnan)

In a session after I met Adnan, I had a meeting with Borhan. Since I knew that the Palestinian national identity was so important for Borhan, I narrated Adnan's story about his homeland being destroyed. He listened carefully to me and said:

> I totally understand him; but at least he has a place he can think of as home. Look at this…this is Palestinian map where you will never find Palestine, it's just called Israel. We were from Nablus, North of Palestine. When you hear this, it's just well-known to all Palestinians, but you can't find it on the map. It's just like my homeland does not exist anymore…I don't even know if years after this, the next world generations know what the Palestine is….So I always think that I need to revive the Palestine first, to have it exist, to empower it, and then to think about getting back there to live and make it home. For now, I have that home in my heart.

Similarly, Said (1986), as a Palestinian scholar in US asserts that the Palestinian identity in exile is a complex construct which is hard to maintain:

Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are - is difficult to maintain in

exile. Most other people take their identity for granted. Not the Palestinian, who is

required to show proofs of identity more or less constantly. It is not only that we are

regarded as terrorists, but that our existence as native Arab inhabitants of Palestine, with

primordial rights there (and not elsewhere), is either denied or challenged…. collectively

we can aspire to little except political anonymity and resettlement; we are known for no

actual achievement, no characteristic worthy of esteem, except the effrontery of

disrupting Middle East peace…We are "other," and opposite, a flaw in the geometry of

resettlement and exodus. (pp. 16-17).

Longva (1997) argues that Palestinians consider their lives in diaspora as "liminal—time

stolen from normal time" until they could go back to their roots and homes (p. 3). Kahil (2013)

argues that the idea of "returning home" signifies the Palestinian identity in exile. Turki (1994)

describes such a state as:

He [a Palestinian] cannot say…that he does not believe in the Return. To reject the

Return is to rip up the tree on which his history and raison d'être grow. The Return is the

rock on which our nation in exile is founded and the social homeostasis that has

cemented our people together in their encapsulated world. The passion for the Return is

an expression of our identity, an ecstatic embodiment of its inward movement and

preoccupations. It is as if the ultimate Palestinian question were: I want to return,

therefore, I am…[It is] pure and simply, Palestinian selfhood. (p. 69)

While having a sense of home and "the feeling of being rooted somewhere like you

belong" (Said, 1984, p. 53) plays an important role in the process of constructing a sense of self

(Hay, 1988), my participants' stories showed that the Orientalist practices and policies of Canada

were considered as a threat in sustaining a sense of home and consequently a sense of self. Still, they showed that they were able to cope with the existing threats and were successful to reach a sense of home in Canada by living in-between the borderlands and by occupying a liminal cultural space.

Summary

In this chapter I narrated my participants' stories of their lived experiences in Canada. As I narrated in the last chapter, part of the life experiences of my participants was affected by their being raised in the context of war and conflict. Their narratives in this chapter suggested that my participants' identity formation was shaped in a dialogical tension between being a Middle Eastern Muslim and being a student in Canada. For them, the othering practices and encounters in their everyday life framed the way they engaged in identity negotiations in Canadian society. Their narratives showed that they were more susceptible to being othered since it reinforces their already embedded sense of insecurity and instability as the result of living through war, conflict, and displacement.

Their narratives also revealed that in the Orientalist culture of Canada they had found a third and in-between space "as a terrain for elaborating new strategies of selfhood" (Bhaba, 2012, p. 1). My Muslim Middle Eastern participants uncovered that they lived through "a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 78), to finally occupy a third cultural, national, and religious space in which they feel quite safe as international students in Canada.

My participants' narratives also suggest that while the Middle Eastern students experience hardship resulted from the Orientalist discourse against them, they face challenges of uncertainty and anxiety due to their temporary status in Canada as international students. They

had found themselves struggling with the labels of "different," "outsider," and "international" at school, while being forced to pay double tuition fees and being deprived from some of the school's financial facilities such as major scholarships and awards. In their narratives, my participants showed they had experienced a state of unhomeliness and placelessness as Middle Eastern international students in Canada. Their stories, though, suggested that the state of feeling "unhomed" changed to a state of feeling more secure and included after they changed their study permit to work permit or received their permanent residency. This means that when the ties and bonds to a culture and a place increase, the sense of home and sense of identity becomes stronger.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The bitter truth is that in a racist society where a brown skin (along with other colors) can cost lives, people will embrace any ideology that seems to offer the hope of change. Even when that ideology proves counter-productive, the hope persists… nationalism, then, has to be seen as a complicated, two-edged sword. It can't be fully understood if we just dismiss it as "identity politics."

Elizabeth Martínez, *De Colores Means All of Us*

Journal Entry: 2017, Vancouver

I'm coming back from my last meeting with Olaa. Today just like the other two sessions, we had such an amazing conversation about our life experiences. I'm literally moved by these student's stories. I never thought I would be this much engaged in other people's life. I can't stop thinking about what some of these students have gone through in their lives. When I started this research and met these people for the first time, I never thought they would become an inseparable part of my life.

During the last four years of my study, I've experienced so much ups and downs in my life that made me question myself about my decision to get into the PhD program. In this journey there were moments in which I felt exhausted and moments I felt strong and empowered. This journey cultivated excitement, disappointment, love, fear, dissension, hesitation, weakness, power, and so many other feelings inside me and shaped the person I am now. And now I'm standing in the midst of the most beautiful days in this journey. I never felt this much empowered. These people, their friendship, their passion to be heard has made me feel powerful. They have trusted me and wanted me to be their voice. I should be the voice of this Palestinian woman, the voice of that Syrian man, I should be the voice of my Iranian fellows.

When I started this journey, I didn't expect to find this much common themes in our experiences. I thought that Iranian students couldn't have similar experiences with Palestinian

students, for example. Iran is a safe country who hasn't be involved in militarized war or terrorism for so many years, while Palestine is not even recognized as a country, so how could it be possible that students from these two regions understand each other so well. I was surprised when I realized that we all knew what conflict means, what displacement is, what being an international student means. After all, we're all "Middle Eastern" students coming from more or less similar culture. We are "Muslim" students living through everyday struggles in a country that despite being accepting and welcoming has elements of an Orientalist society. Although we had different lived stories, our stories had so much in common. We are different people, with different identities, and different stories, but we are tied to each other by our fears, our sense of insecurity, our sense of uncertainty, our sense of temporariness, our hopes, and our passion to make the world a better and safer place. I've learned that we all know what the insecurity means and we all agree that "love" is the only safe home and the only secure shelter for all people in the world.

My reflection on February, 7, 2017

These are the words that I jotted down after contemplating my research journey. When I started my PhD program, I was an international student who had been living in Canada for three years. During my Master's study in the same program at the U of A, I realized that most international students are subject to more complex struggles in their academic and personal lives compared to their Canadian counterpart (Grayson, 2011). I learned that lack of second language competence (Mostafa, 2006), isolation, financial hardship, lack of family support, loss of social status, and culture shock were among the most reported challenges in international students' lives (Myles & Cheng, 2003). Based on my lived experiences I could confirm that social/academic adjustment was a challenging process for an international student. I had gone

through financial hardship since I had to pay twice the tuition fee compared to my Canadian

peers, I had experienced isolation, detachment, and always saw myself one step behind those

students whose first language was English.

I was struggling more or less with these challenges in my life when I realized that I had a

bigger issue in my life: "the problem of identity." At some point in time I noticed that my

nationality, my religion, and my cultural background had resituated me in an unprivileged

position in the Canadian society. I identified myself as the subject of discrimination and

prejudice because of being Iranian, being a Muslim woman, and being a Middle Easterner and

thus found myself in an unsafe space in which I saw my "self" being scrutinized and

problematized by the Canadian society. This was the very first step in making me reflect upon

my "identity" and the ways it is negotiated with the outer world. Upon my self-reflection, I

realized that since identity is always in a dynamic state and is a fusion of its past and future

(Mason, 2004), I was not able to examine my "self" without taking my past experiences into

account. Indeed, a big part of my identity was constructed through my experiences in a "place"

where social and political conflict is embedded in its very structure.

Through the examination and contemplation of my past and present, I learned that

identity is "the result of the negotiation of personal given conditions, social context, and

relationships, and institutional frameworks" (La Barbera, 2015, p. 3). I was seeing myself as an

Iranian international student whose identity was the subject of the social and political conditions

of my homeland as well as the land I was trying to make as home. In my self contemplation, I

could identify three important periods in my life in which my identity was constructed through

different experiences. A big part of me, at that moment was constructed through my experiences

of war in my childhood, my experiences of dealing with social and political conflicts, as an

activist during my post-secondary education, and my experiences of being "othered," as a

Middle Eastern Muslim student in Canada.

Realizing that my experience as an international student was much informed by political

constructions of my nationality and my religion, it made me question the social and political

constructions of other Middle Eastern Muslim students' identity. I wanted to examine the life of

the ones who were coming from conflict-ridden countries in order to find out in what ways their

experiences in Canada are different from other international students. Thus, through hearing

these students' stories, I wanted to find the answers to the following questions:

Q1: How is Canada, as a place, at work in or part of the ongoing dynamic process of a

Middle Eastern International student's construction of identity?

Q2: How has [Participant's Name], as a Middle Eastern student, experienced being an

international student in Canada?

 Q3: How has a Middle Eastern international student's experience of war and conflict in

his/her home country affected his/her life experiences in Canada?

Since I believed that the case of Middle Eastern international students is distinctive from

other related populations such as other international students or Middle Eastern

immigrants/refugees, I chose interpretive case study to conduct my research. Consistent with

Ellis's (1998a) concept of interpretive spirals (refer to chapter 4), I saw my research as a spiral in

which the forward arc was my pre-understandings and biases coming from being an Iranian

international student (projection), the loops were searching the literature, the interviews with

students, analyzing related documents, and writing narrative accounts, and the backward arc was

re-examining the data for confirmation, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies (evaluation).

Since in understanding my participants' identity, I chose the Postpositivist Realist

perspective informed by postcolonial theory, I saw identity as a discursive process which is

neither "fixed" nor "timeless," as something that individuals do rather than something that they have (Jenkins 2008). So during the conversations with my participants I heard the narratives that had shaped their identities as individuals. Through their stories I realized that in fact, identity is the outcome of the negotiation between "self-representations" (meant as identification in terms of interpersonal differentiations) and "social categorization" (meant as hetero-definition in terms of categories that establish boundaries between "us" and "them") (La Barbera, 2015, p. 2). My participants' narratives, occurring in social settings, in relations to others and within complex sets of power relations (Mian, 2012) revealed that their identity was socially and discursively constructed.

My participants' narratives suggested that the intersection of their race (as being a Middle Eastern student) with their status in Canada as being an international student) is a challenging and complex intersection that has influenced their identities in some ways. Their stories showed that while these students have to face the everyday struggles of international students (such as financial and emotional hardships), they also need to deal with the feeling of placelessness and unhomeliness due to their background and conditions. Contrary to so many other international students, many Middle Eastern students who come from conflict zones do not have the choice of returning home when they find themselves in the quagmire of temporariness and statuslessness in Canada (after they finish their studies). Such a sense of placelesssness due to the existing conditions had made my participants feel anxious and insecure.

My participants' narratives from their homelands revealed that their identity construction was also informed by their collective history and identifications as Middle Easterners, Muslims, Arabs or Persians, and their individual experiences of war, conflict, and displacement. Through re-narrating their past experiences, they found themselves as individuals whose identity was

much affected and shaped by their experiences of war and conflict in their homelands and their

experiences of being perceived as "others" in Canada. My participants identified themselves as

Middle Eastern Muslim individuals whose very "beings," at the moment of the interviews, were

characterized by fear, anxiety, sense of displacement, sense of detachment, sense of disruption,

sense of insecurity, and sense of marginalization due to their experiences of war or conflict in

their countries as well as their everyday experiences of racism and discrimination in Canada.

A postcolonial analysis of my participants' narratives suggested that their identity was

constructed through the negotiation of their understanding of their "self" and an externally

imposed identity by the Orientalist society of Canada. While they identified themselves as

Middle Eastern Muslim students with embedded anxiety and a sense of insecurity due to their

experiences of conflict, they found their identity being confined by the negative reductive

stereotypes related to Muslims, Arabs, and Middle Easterners. For them religion was considered

as an important part of their cultures and consequently of their collective identity, as something

to be proud of. However, they found themselves struggling in an Orientalist discourse in which

Muslims were considered as "hostile, violent, untrustworthy and totally incompatible with…[the

Western] standards and values," (Calleja, as cited in Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 180).

My participants had found themselves in the trap of discriminative policies and behaviors

in society and believed that the prevailing "Islamophobia" was the consequences of the former

conservative government of Canada's policies against Muslims as well as Western media

propaganda against Islam. Associating Muslims with terrorism and enacting policies in the name

of national security has created a negative discourse against Muslim individuals in Canadian

society. Indeed, "today there is little…doubt in the nation's imagination about what a terrorist

looks like. It is always a Muslim man, construed as belonging somewhere else, [mostly] to some

Arab country, and carrying the hate of the West in his heart" (Patel, 2001, p. 50). Such a view

about Muslim individuals, such as Muslim international students, has reinforced the "othering"

process based on which "whiteness" is considered as the most legitimate way of being in Canada

(Tator & Henry, 2006). My participants had found themselves in a constant struggle to represent

themselves against the Orientalist legacies of Muslim men as "barbaric" and "threatening" and

Muslim women as "suppressed," "uneducated," and "in need of help." Despite trusting in

Canada as a multicultural and welcoming country, they revealed that in so many instances they

faced a lack of recognition as educated Muslim individuals. According to Taylor (1994):

> Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of
>
> others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the
>
> people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or
>
> contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm,
>
> can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode
>
> of being. (p. 25)

As Said (2012) argues it is through narratives and stories that the Oriental people can

assert their own identity and tell the stories of their past. My participants revealed that due to the

Orientalist discourse of Canada, they felt marginalized by not having space to reclaim their

identity through narrating their stories. Their "identity" was misrepresented, misrecognized, and

distorted by the narratives of those with more power. Said (2012) points out that "the power to

narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and

imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (p. xiii). Although my

participants were living in hybrid and in-between cultural spaces, they revealed that part of their

narrative was blocked by the existing discourse in Canada and saw a need to have a safe space to narrate their stories and to reclaim their identities.

When I heard these students' stories I realized that what they needed was to be heard, to be recognized, and to be identified as "insiders". They were all acting towards resisting the existing Orientalist discourse and being heard aiming to deconstruct the hierarchal system of power in the Canadian society. Bhababa (1994) argues that

> resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the "content" of another culture . . . [but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference. (p. 24)

My participants' narratives confirmed that there is a lack of discussion of the ongoing reality of discrimination and racism in the everyday lived experience of minorities in Canada (Abu-Laban & Garber, 2005). The Middle Eastern international students' endeavors to open spaces for a critique of discriminative and Orientalist discourse in Canadian society and to initiate a dialogue about political interplay of race, gender, class, culture, and identity is a form of resistance. As Bannerji (1997) suggests, only those who have been marginalized are able to disrupt the power imbalance in societies. She argues that "the possibilities for constructing a radically different Canada emerge only from those who have been 'othered' as the insider-outsiders of the nation" (p. 37). While power imbalance disruption should start from the margins by producing counter narratives, it is important to consider the role of those in the positions of power in providing a space for dialogue, recognition, and perception. It is only through a dialogical understanding in society that everyone feels safe and integrated. Jahanbegloo (2016)

proposes "dialogue between cultures" as a constructive way of narrowing the gap between the binary of "self" and "other." He argues that:

> The task of intercultural dialogue…would be to bring forth a shared minimum ethos. This ethical awareness is not specific to individual cultures and times. It is universal ethical constant which eliminates the traditional border between religious and non-religious and between traditional and modern. The essential aim here is to go beyond simple respect and tolerance of the other and to reach out for other cultures and seek to know them better. The intercultural imperative is, therefore, a dynamic and not a static phenomenon, where the changing self is observed in regard to the Other. (p. 135)

In the next section I will have some recommendations to facilitate the dialogue in the society in order to provide a safe and inclusive space for Middle Eastern international students in Canada.

Implications and Recommendations

When I decided to start this study, I was hoping to channel the Middle Eastern international students' untold stories into Canadian society aiming to narrow the gap between their self-perception and society's perception of them. By no means have I been aiming to victimize these students or to reinforce the Orientalist perceptions about them. Retelling part of the untold stories of their experiences of conflict in their homeland or in Canada does not mean that life in the Middle East is all about war or conflict or in Canada is all about racism and discrimination. Indeed, a big part of my participants' stories revealed the beauties of their life in their homelands as well as the advantages of their life in Canada. Still, since their identities were constructed through both their positive and negative experiences, I believed there was a need to highlight those stories that were negatively impacting their identities and thus their well-being.

Indeed, I thought the first step in the way of facilitating these students' integration to the society could be to hear their stories and to give them a voice through the medium of my study. This study as an interpretive inquiry has focused on "understanding (interpreting) the meanings, purposes, and intentions (interpretations) my participants gave to their own actions and interactions with others" (Smith, 2008, p. 460). This study is partly the product of an interplay between my interpretations of my participants' interpretations of their situations and experiences at the time of our interviews. To make sure to reflect what they wanted me to, I shared my narrative accounts and interpretations of their stories with my participants, and they added or removed some parts. The stories reflected here are supposed to address my research purpose. Though, I need to mention that as an interpretive inquiry these narratives are also open to interpretations on different interests and purposes. As Smith (2008) argues "various constructions of what is happening in a social setting at any particular time can be given, but none is free of further interpretation and reinterpretation" (p. 460). The narratives reflected here could have implications for educators, practitioners, and policy makers for both high education and civic society.

On having an inclusive international education: implications for higher education.

The study of Middle Eastern international students' identities can have important implications for internationalization of higher education policy makers as well as for educators. It can shift the focus from paying attention to students' integration and well-being as a product of a multi-layered process which is "situated, negotiated and often contested" (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 15).

As I discussed in the earlier chapters, the internationalization of higher education in Canada needs to narrow the gap between what is considered as important or challenging for

international students and what is really experienced by different groups of international students. Guo and Gue (2017) also confirm that there are discrepancies between internationalization policy at the institutional level and the experiences of international students at universities and in the society.

Moreover, internationalization of higher education in Canada is highly market oriented focusing on economic benefits rather than needs of different groups of students. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD, 2014), "international students in Canada provide immediate and significant economic benefits to Canadians in every region of the country" (p. 7). This is while many international students deal with different challenges and struggle in society and universities since most institutional internationalization efforts "naturalize existing racial hierarchies in the realm of education and beyond" (Stein, Andreotti, Bruce, & Suša, 2016, p. 2). Such reports reveal that the neoliberal approach in internationalization is merely focused on increasing the transnational mobility of knowledge and skills (Shultz, 2007), rather than providing a safe and inclusive space for all students with different cultures and backgrounds. Universities have become corporations in which "the violence of colonialism, along with its companions, patriarchy and imperialism's global capitalism, become embedded" (Shultz, 2015, p. 3).

Studying Middle Eastern international students' experiences in Canada suggests that internationalization of Canadian universities needs to change from a "neutral experience within normalizing conceptions of internationalization," to a "more layered understanding that highlights the connections between the geographical, historical, political, economic and cultural spheres in order for an 'engaged pedagogy' to emerge" (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, p. 3). Stein and Andreotti (2016) argue that the recruitment and reception of international students in

Western countries are both structured by racialized logics, as "both are embedded within the

dominant global imaginary and its colonial myth of Western onto-epistemological supremacy"

(p. 235).

The narratives of my participants urge policy makers to inform policies and practices

related to international students by the spatial challenges of a postcolonial frame. In this regard,

Rizvi (2009) argues that it is important for educational policies to be informed by postcolonial

theories since they show "how contemporary social, political, economic, and cultural practices

continue to be located within the processes of cultural domination through the imposition of

imperialist structures" (p. 47). Taking a post-colonial perspective in understanding international

students' lives can uncover the raced, classed, and gendered constructions of these students'

experiences in the process of settlement and integration. Such a view will challenge the existing

neoliberal policies and practices at universities as well as the prevailing Orientalist discourse in

society. Post-colonial perspectives can move universities' market-oriented values to more ethical

considerations for international students. Berg (2012) argues that academics are in a paradoxical

position, in which they challenge and reinforce neo-liberal practices at the same time. While at

the universities, theories of racism, inequality, and social justice are taught, the institutional

practices lack a fair understanding of so-called "racialized" international students' lives and

experiences. Indeed, as Stein et al. argue institutionalized efforts need to

> to rethink and reimagine the patterns that reproduce the dominance of the
>
> modern/colonial global imaginary, including addressing power relations, overturning the
>
> supremacy of Western knowledge, and rethinking approaches to relationality that
>
> prioritize solidarity over competition, reciprocal partnerships over top-down leadership,

and substantive engagement and involvement of Indigenous and racialized students in place of tokenistic inclusion (pp.10-11)

Such an effort will help to modify the internationalization policies and practices to be more sensitive to the "differences" and "diversity" among international students' experiences. Postcolonial consciousness of international students' lives will also problematize and challenge the current pedagogy and practices at universities. Robert Young (2012) argues that

"Postcolonialism" is not just a disciplinary field, nor is it a theory which has or has not come to an end. Rather, its objectives have always involved a wide-ranging political project—to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below. (p. 9)

The postcolonial pedagogy informed by empirical research, such as this study, can address the "otherizing" process of racialized international students and challenges the fact that, and the reasons why, such students still live without "safety" and "welfare" that most of the domestic students in Canada take for granted. To address such a challenge, Stein et al. (2016) propose an anti-oppressive internationalization articulation that is based on a liability to work in solidarity for systemic change toward greater social justice in higher education institutions. They argue that the anti-oppressive approaches

contest internationalization practices that emphasize access but require as a prerequisite the negation or selective depoliticization of difference, and demand conformity to Western educational standards or modes of knowledge production….In doing so, they question the benevolence of higher education that is largely presumed by the global knowledge economy and global public good articulations of internationalization, (p. 9)

The anti-oppressive articulation can have valuable implications for Middle Eastern students in Canada as it centers on vulnerable peoples, their knowledge, their identities and their visions for justice and change, rather than to value and to practice Western knowledge and worldviews (Stein et al, 2016).

On having a just society: implications for society and communities.

This study can have implications for civil society and communities. As I mentioned earlier, part the challenges that my participants were facing was the lack of recognition of their identity as Muslim individuals who could serve Canadian society for good. Stein and de Andreotti (2016) argue that most racialized international students in Canada may become "understood as a threat if they try to diminish the spatial and temporal distance that allows the myth of Western supremacy to continue, and if they threaten Western entitlement to resources and opportunities" (p. 232). The discourse of competition along with the existing discourses of Islamophobia have created a condition of "social exclusion and hostility that has found expression both in the broader culture and institutional practices" (Bullock & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011, p. 3) and consequently have limited Muslim civic engagement. Thus, Muslim Middle Eastern international students' experiences and civic engagement is not only conditioned by their race and religion but also by their temporary status in Canada as international students. They are excluded from social and political decisions in society because of being Muslims (Razack, 2008) and are excluded from civic engagement because of not being Canadian citizens. Being positioned as "others," racialized international students are considered as "threatening outsiders who might either return home and enable their home country to compete better economically with the West, or who might overstay their conditional welcome and threaten the entitlements of national citizens" (Stein and de Andreotti, 2016, p. 233), and thus become excluded from the

civic engagements. This is while these students show high interest in engaging in community service and civic activities either for Muslim causes or for non-Muslim events. Banks (2015) notes that Canada, like so many other nations, experiences a phenomenon he calls "failed citizenship." He argues that failed citizenship occurs "when the social, cultural, economic, and political systems within a nation-state prevent marginalized groups from attaining full structural inclusion into the nation" (p. 152). Being considered as residents and not full citizens, Muslim Middle Eastern international students in Canada have not attained structural inclusion into Canadian society, experience discrimination and marginalization, and do not have civic equality or recognition either at schools or in the society (Gutmann, 2004). As I mentioned in the earlier chapters, in some cases these students fail to achieve Canadian identity as it is prescribed. As Banks (2015) suggests the social, cultural, economic, and political systems need to facilitate the structural inclusion of diverse groups into the nation-state and its dominant institutions. As I discussed in the previous chapters, one of the important conditions that seems to help Middle Eastern international students to feel confident and included is to know about their status in Canada after their studies. Fredeen (2013) implies that although the focus of immigration policies has changed from seeing international students as a revenue source to considering them as a source of human capital for the nation, "opportunities for immigration are narrowing in particular ways" (p. 2013). Immigration policies seem to have set some boundaries to choose a "perfect" and "proper" candidate from international students. Fredeen (2013) argues that "the subjectivity that aspects of government policy imply is that of the 'perfect' immigrant with English language proficiency; academic training in Canada; high employability…and, self-financing" (pp. 252-253). Such a view in policy making restricts many international students whose areas of study are not considered "highly employable" or are not financially stable.

Immigration policies then need provide the same opportunities for all students and need to be more inclusive.

Moreover, in order to feel more connected and included in society, Middle Eastern international students need to experience more community engagement. Although there are some organizations and communities for Muslims at university campuses and in society, there is a need for non-Muslim communities to have these students more engaged. This study is aiming to invoke awareness for government and community leaders about Muslim students' identity. They need to recognize that Middle Eastern Muslim students "find solace in their faith" (Bullock, 2011) and their culture, and thus facilitate these students' engagement in civic society. Political and social engagement of Muslim students will help to narrow the gap between these students' self-perception and society's perception about them. Indeed, interaction and collaboration in communities will provide a just space for a better mutual understanding and will slacken the "othering" process in the society.

On having informed people: implications for individuals.

When I started this study I was not expecting the process to be so empowering for both my participants and for me, as the researcher. Hearing some untold stories and considering my study as a medium for some unheard individuals' voices helped me to find postcolonial study as a site for resistance: resistance to the existing power relations in the society where some individuals' stories are not considered as important as others. Thus, this study can have implications for individuals, too. Although it is important to consider the significance of institutional and structural power relations in the society, we should not undermine the role of individuals in shaping a discursive construct in societies. This study showed that being informed of power relations can help individuals to find their ways of resistance to the existing Orientalist

discourse. Shahjahan (2014) points to Bhabha's theory of resistance where he locates resistance

in the spaces between colonial expectations and the Orient's response, so that "the disempowered

can calculate strategies, 'alter,' and 'displace' authority within these in-between spaces" (p. 276).

Such an understanding of colonial and Oriental spaces will help individuals (both the so-called

Orient and Occident) to deconstruct the existing power relations in society and to shape a safe

space for every individual.

End Note

The post-imperial writers of the Third World therefore bear their past within them—as scars of
humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices as potentially revised visions of the past
tending toward a postcolonial culture, as urgently reinterpretable and redeploy able experiences,
in the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement
of resistance, from the colonist.

<div align="right">(Said 2012)</div>

This study lies at the intersections of Educational Studies, Sociology, and Political

Studies being informed by Postcolonial scholarship. While there were a few studies examining

Muslim students' experiences and identity in Canada, I could not find any study in the literature

that addresses the identity of students who live in the intersection of "being international,"

"being Muslim" and "coming from Middle Eastern conflict zone." Although the number of

international students from conflict-ridden countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Palestine have been

limited in the past few years, due to the existing unrest and hardship inside their countries, it is

very important to recognize the importance of providing a safe space for them as minority

students with different challenges compared to other international students. This study has been

trying to highlight some the hardships that they face in their lives in Canada. The issue of

postcolonial identity is a very important matter that needs to be examined thoroughly by

researchers in different disciplines. I hope this study can be considered as a stepping stone to an expansive research agenda on Middle Eastern students' experiences and identity in Canada.

At this stage of my study, I can proudly call myself a Postcolonial researcher who has been trying to take the very first steps towards constructing counter-discourse on Middle Eastern students. Since understanding the nature of the construction of one's identity follows the deconstruction of hierarchical systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Mian, 2012), I hope this project will be considered as a site of resistance against the prevailing Orientalist discourse in the Canadian universities and society. As the closing words, I would like to share my poem that I wrote about my research journey:

Dazzled by Stories

I am dazzled by my participants' stories,

By my own invented stories

Stories of my childhood in a big city

Stories of being raised with war ditty

I am dazzled by my peers' stories

By their pretty, admirable glories

Stories of ambitions, hopes, and duties

Stories of being raised in farms full of beauties

I got to know about the world of Salmons

I bore in mind my story of country abandon

Coming to Canada with the hope of a better future

I found loneliness and competition being my life encroachers

I remembered how much I wanted to leave my country

Now, searching for a real friend, I've taken refuge in poetry

I told you Nadaa's bitter stories of her motherland

Stories of war, of mothers bearing their children

In hospitals, full of soldiers and villains

But with all stories of blood, fear and darkness

She remembered stories of friends, family and happiness

With all our gloomy or happy lived stories,

 We're searching for the meaning of dwelling

We're wandering between two lives,

Wondering to choose freedom or loves

Being here free without love

Or living there, confined, with a great love

I learned that everywhere in the world we have war

War of capitalism, power, and empire

I wish we had a peaceful globe

Living side by side with sodality and hope

I wish I could have my family here

Without Visa restrictions and fear

I wish I could go back to my country

Let it free from sanctions and penalties

I wish all people could hear each others' stories

To make a change in the world of tensions and conspiracy theories

I'm here on my way of making a change

Starting from myself to a wider range

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Middle Eastern International Students' Identities in Canada

Investigator: Shadi Mehrabi

I give my consent to be interviewed for this research. I understand that the interview will be recorded on tape. I understand that only the investigator, Shadi Mehrabi will have access to the audio tape and transcripts of the tape. I understand that the information I provide will be kept anonymous by not referring to me by my name or location, but by using a pseudonym. I understand that the information I provide may be used in an oral report in the research class but that my name will not be used. I understand that I will be asked if the visual representation I draw can be used in the oral presentation and that my decision about this is strictly voluntary. If I wish to see any speaking notes written from the findings of this study, I am free to contact [course participant's name] at any time and copies will be provided.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study 30 days after I receive the transcript of my final interview and to refuse to answer specific questions. I understand that participation in any aspects of the study is voluntary and that my interview activity has three parts: doing a diagram or drawing, an interview of one hour or less, and follow-up questions for approximately ten minutes.

I understand that there will be no risks involved in this study. I may, in fact, benefit from reflecting upon my experience.

If you have any further questions about the study and ethical issues, please feel free to contact me (Shadi Mehrabi) at (647) 949-3949, or my supervisor, Dr. Lynette Shultz, at (647) 949-3949.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

_____   **No**, I do not choose to participate in the interview activity.

_____   **Yes**, I agree to participate in the interview activity.

Name of participant (Please print)   _____

Signature of participant   _____

Date   _____

Appendix B: Pre-interview Activities and Interview Questions

Pre-Interview Activities and Interview Questions

Dear [name]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview with me for my Doctoral research.

Research Topic:

Middle Eastern International Students' Identities in Canada

For this interview, I will interview a student who was born and raised in Middle Eastern conflict-ridden countries and moved to Canada as an international student with student VISA. I would like to hear these students' lived stories either in their home countries or in Canada in order to see how their identities have been shaped through their life experiences. I would also like to see how Canada is at place in shaping these students' identities.

Research Question:

Q1: How is Canada, as a place, at work in or part of the on-going dynamic process of a

Middle Eastern International student's construction of identity?

Since everyday life experiences play essential role in constructing someone's identity (Ashcroft,

2001), it is important to focus on Middle Eastern international experiences:

Q2: How has [Participant's Name], as a Middle Eastern student, experienced being an

international student in Canada?

Q3: How has a Middle Eastern international student's experience of war and conflict in

his/her home country affected his/her life experiences in Canada?

Overview of Interview Process:
Pre-Interview Activities (PIAs)

Pre-Interview Activities (PIAs)

In our research course we are asked to have our participants prepare at least two diagrams, drawings or other visual representations to represent or explore 1) some aspect of what is

generally important to them in their lives, and 2) something that has been important to them regarding the research topic.

These are called Pre-Interview Activities (PIAs) and they take the form of visual representations. Please use pens, pencils and preferably coloured markers on blank paper when completing these. We will begin our interview by having you present these and talk about them. There are a number of purposes for using the PIAs in this way. For one, by completing these PIAs in a quiet time you may have a better chance to remember more ideas or details to include. And for another, if I can look at the diagrams or drawings while you talk about them it can help me see how your ideas fit together and what you mean by some of the words you use. The PIAs can give us a better chance for you to teach me about your experience.

PIA's:

"Getting to Know You Better" Pre-Interview Activities

Please complete <u>one or more</u> of the following visual representation activities and bring it to our interview to show me and tell me about. We will begin our interview by having you show and talk about these.

1. Make a drawing, map or diagram of a place that is important to you and use key words or labels to indicate the parts or what happens in each of the parts.

2. Draw a schedule for your day, week or year and use colours to indicate how time is spent. Make a legend to explain the colours.

3. Draw a diagram to show where your support or support systems come from.

4. Make two drawings showing what things were like for you before and after something important happened. Feel free to use thought bubbles or speech bubbles.

5. Make drawings of two places where you spend a lot of time. Have the drawings show how your time in each place is different.

6. Pick a meaningful activity or topic for you and make a timeline listing critical times or events when your experience of that activity or topic changed. Examples of activities or topics might be: how one experiences money/children/travel/home/teaching/sports.

Research Topic (Middle Eastern International Students'' Identities) PIAs

Please complete <u>one or more</u> of the following visual representation activities and bring it to our interview. We will begin our interview by having you present and talk about the ones you completed.

1. Make a list of 20 important words that come to mind for you when you think about home, and then divide the list of words into two groups.
2. Use three colors to make a diagram or abstract drawing that shows the way you experience being a student at the University of British Colombia, Canada.
3. Looking back on any of your school years in your home country, make <u>two drawings</u>: one showing a good day in school or class and another showing a not so good day in school or class. Use keywords, little drawings, or speech/thought bubbles.
4. Thinking about your educational experiences in Canada, make <u>two drawings</u>: one showing a good day in your program or classes and another showing a not so good day. Use keywords, little drawings, or speech/thought bubbles.

Open Ended Question:

The interviews are including but not limited to the following questions.

<u>Group 1</u>: questions are to get to know about what is important to him/her as a person.

<u>Group 2</u>: general questions about living in his/her home country;

<u>Group 3</u>: general questions about living in Canada;

<u>Group 4</u>: general questions about education when he was in his home country

<u>Group 5</u>: general questions about education in Canada

<u>Group 1</u>: *Questions to get to know about what is important to him as a person.*

1. Is there anyone you see as a kind of hero or heroine, someone you look up to and always wanted to be like?
2. What would you like to be really good at doing?
3. In the world of nature, things or people, what surprises you the most?
4. If you could pick one thing that you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be?

5. Have you ever done anything that surprised other people?

6. What's the best part of being your age? …..What's the hardest part?

7. If you could spend two weeks with someone who does a special kind of work, what kind of person would that be?

Group 2: *General questions about living in his home country.*

1. What are some of the things you remember enjoying about your <u>everyday life</u> in your home country?

2. What are some of the things you liked to do in your <u>free time</u> in your home country?

3. What were some of the things <u>about your life</u> in home country that you remember <u>liking a lot</u>?

4. What were some of the special occasions or activities you looked forward to each year..... What happened [in those occasions that you liked]?

5. As you look back on your life growing up in your home country, what are some of the things you learned deeply because you lived there?

6. Can you think of any changes that could have made your life in your home country even better?

<u>Group 3:</u> *General questions about living in Canada.*

1. When you were planning to come to Canada what did you think it would be like to live here?.......What did you look forward to?........What did you worry about or not look forward to?

2. Can you remember anything else that turned out to be the way you expected or was different from what you expected. ....Were some things surprising in a good way? ......Were some things disappointing or more difficult than expected?

3. Are there some things about living here that have gotten easier with time?

4. Are there some new things in your life—things that you really like-- that are there because you are here now? Do any come to mind?

5. What are some of the things you miss about your life in your home country?

6. What are some of the things you think about more now because you are living here?

7. What kinds of things do you think about or look forward to when you think about staying here longer?

Group 4: *general questions about education when he was in his home country.*

1. When you were in your home county what were some of the things you liked about being a student?
2. What were some of the things that you did not like so much?
3. What (else) could have made your student days better in your home country?
4. Do you recall any (other) favourite school work activities or parts of student life in your home country that you enjoyed?
5. Do you remember anything that helped you do better work or helped you in your confidence as a student in your home country—for example, certain ways of doing assignments, any special people, any special events, any special processes you used?
6. Over the years how did your interests as a student either change a lot or stay the same a lot?

Group 5: *General questions about education in Canada.*

1. When you were planning to come to Canada to be a student, what did you think it would be like in your grad program here?
2. What were some of the things you were looking forward to most in your studies here?
3. What were some of the things you were maybe a little concerned about when you were planning to start your studies here?
4. What were some of the surprises once you get started here?
5. What are some of the things that have helped to make life good for you as a student?
6. What are some of the kinds of things that could help to make it even better?
7. If you were giving a talk or advice to other students in your home country who were thinking about coming here to study, what would you say?