

Stories We Live *By, With, and In*:  
A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Canadian Muslim Girls and their Mothers

by

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## Abstract

Drawing upon my experiences as a Canadian Muslim woman, mother, and researcher, I engaged in a two-year multiperspectival narrative inquiry (Houle, 2012; Huber, Clandinin, & Murphy, 2011) alongside three Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers as girl co-inquirers transitioned into adolescence. Together, co-inquirers and I asked: What personal, familial, intergenerational, institutional, linguistic, cultural, temporal, faith-based/religious, and social narratives do we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013)? What stories have been planted in us, what stories are we planting in ourselves and others, and what stories are being relationally shaped and reshaped?

Drawing attention to our familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011) practices, co-inquirers and I engaged in telling, living, retelling, and reliving stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) alongside each other through multiple one-on-one and shared conversations within familial curriculum-making landscapes. For over two years, co-inquirers and I composed and inquired into diverse field texts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in the form of researcher field notes of events and meetings, researcher and co-inquirer reflective writing, recordings and transcripts of conversations, digital communications, and artifacts. Three narrative accounts, one for each daughter and mother co-inquirer pair, were relationally composed alongside co-inquirers with attentiveness to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Reverberating across the stories co-inquirers and I shared and inquired into are threads of our experiences of living in the midst of, and in relation to, multiple arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009). However, sharing, living, and inquiring into

these stories alongside one another foregrounded the many ways we lived stories of relational resistance. Co-inquirers and I call attention to how we are continually composing our lives with imagination and improvisation (Bateson, 1989) amidst a multiplicity of ongoing transitions.

While Muslim girls and women are often storied as victims of oppression in mainstream Canadian media and literature (Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009), little is known about our diverse experiences – particularly within familial and community landscapes. This research contributes a unique and important perspective to the academic literature, one that possesses the potential to shift dominant narratives of the experiences of Muslim females in Canada. It will also provide insights into ways families, teachers, and community members can help shift dominant narratives and better support Canadian Muslim girls, youth, women, and families in the many places we compose our lives.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Muna Saleh. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Canadian Muslim Girls and Mothers During a Time of Transition”, No. Pro00053938, 01/09/2015.

## Dedication

*Bism 'Allah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem<sup>1</sup>*

For Malak, Ahmad, and Maya.

May the stories we plant together  
 root and sustain you  
 the way they sustain me,  
 and may Allah (SWT) grant you innumerable blessings  
 in this life and in the next.  
 I love you.

*And in loving memory of Jiddee Mahmoud (Abu Hussein) Saleh, Sittee Khadijah (Um Ahmad) Tarshahani, and my dear cousins and brothers Billal and Yehia Al-Bekai.*

*Allah yirhammun wa yija3l mathwahun al Jannah ya Rubb. Ameen.*

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<sup>1</sup> This Quranic invocation, translated from Arabic, means “In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace” (as translated by Muhammad Asad, 1980). This phrase is used by Muslims throughout the world before praying, eating, writing, reading, and many other activities, including embarking upon a challenging task.

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Words cannot express how much your love and encouragement have meant to me over the last several years. Thank you for the early morning and late-night Tim's coffee runs, letting me sleep in after countless sleepless nights, and your unparalleled patience. I love you so much.

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May Allah (SWT) bless and guide you and keep you in His mercy now and forever. Thank you for your love and everything you continue to do for me. I am who I am because of you.

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I have been so blessed to have grown up in your light. May Allah (SWT) continue to grant you countless blessings and may we all continue to derive sustenance from your love and wisdom.

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### **My brothers Mohamed and Walid Saleh**

Thank you for always being just a phone call away (I know you both will understand this reference to an inside joke). Love you both.

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### **I would also like to acknowledge the generous funding of this research by Killam Trusts**

Receiving the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship allowed me to focus upon researching alongside co-inquirers for over two years and I am eternally grateful.

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## Chapter 1: Rooting (Autobiographical) Stories to Live *By*, *With*, and *In*

Spring 2014

*It was a busy after-school day. Noor<sup>2</sup>, Yehia, and I had just finished supper and I was trying to persuade baby Hannah to eat so that we could go cheer Noor on for her soccer game. My cousin Billal (Allah Yirhamu<sup>3</sup>) was co-coaching her team this year, and he usually drove Noor and his daughter (Noor's friend and teammate) to the field in time for pre-game warm-up. Yehia, Hannah, and I (and Wissam if he was able to leave work early) would join them later.*

*I was calling out to Yehia to get the bug spray ready while trying to feed an uninterested Hannah when Noor rushed into the kitchen to fill her water bottle for the hour-long game. She was in full soccer gear, including her team jersey, shorts, shin pads, and knee-length soccer socks. Looking at her I thought, for the umpteenth time since she was a baby, about how fast she is growing (she will be in grade 6 next year!). A few days earlier, the children and I had visited my childhood home and I told them about the time their Jiddo<sup>4</sup>, Khalto<sup>5</sup> Suha, and I planted my grade 1 Arbor Day tree seedling some thirty years ago. I thought about how some plant roots can grow deeper/wider than the stem and branches grow tall/wide ... and I wondered what stories are alive in Noor. What stories are being planted in her, what stories is she planting, and what stories sustain her as she continues to compose her life?*

*Unaware of my musings, Noor rushed back out of the kitchen. Before she left the house, however, she yelled out, "Bye Mama, make Duaa<sup>6</sup> for us!"*

*Always my love, I thought as my entire being smiled, always.*

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this work to protect the anonymity of co-inquirers, friends, and family.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic for 'May God have mercy on him.' A glossary of Arabic and/or Islamic terms is included in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Grandfather in Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> A colloquial way of saying maternal aunt in Arabic.

<sup>6</sup> This is an Arabic word that roughly translates to supplication, or, in this case, a prayer to Allah (SWT) for blessings. Duaa is viewed as an integral form of worship in Islam.

## Rooting a Research Puzzle<sup>7</sup>

*“Neither myself nor my narrative can have, therefore, a single strand. I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces; and, in any case, I am forever on the way. My identity has to be perceived as multiple, even as I strive towards some coherent notion of what is humane and decent and just” (Greene, 1995, p. 1)*

As I reflect on my experiences throughout this research, Greene’s (1995) words help me to appreciate the intimate ways that experience and identity are narratively connected (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Crites, 1971; Sarbin, 2004). She reminds me that the stories of my being and becoming – and those of research co-inquirers – are shaped by an intricate multiplicity that cannot be understood independently from each other. The stories in the forthcoming autobiographical sections illustrate that I live – and live *in* – multiple interconnected, familial, intergenerational, cultural, temporal, spatial, social, linguistic, institutional, faith-based/religious, and personal stories (Clandinin, 2013). My body knows these stories (Johnson, 1989); they have shaped, and continue to shape, me in indescribable ways as I composed my life (Bateson, 1989) alongside co-inquirers, family, friends, and others. However, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me, these stories are neither fixed nor frozen. Rather, they are fluid, shifting with time, new knowledge, changed perspectives, diverse places, and relationships. They have been told and retold, lived and relived<sup>8</sup> (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly,

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<sup>7</sup> Clandinin (2013) noted, “Rather than thinking about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer, narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that carries with it ‘a sense of a search, a ‘research,’ a searching again” (p. 42).

<sup>8</sup> Clandinin (2013) explained,

The terms – *living, telling, retelling, and reliving* – have particular meanings in narrative inquiry. We understand that people *live* out stories and *tell* stories of their living. Narrative inquirers come alongside participants ... and begin to engage in narrative inquiry into our lived and told stories. We call this process of coming alongside participants and then inquiring into the lived and told stories *retelling* stories. Because we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories, we may begin to *relive* [Emphasis added] our stories. (p. 34)

2000) innumerable times as I continue to compose my life with improvisation and imagination (Bateson, 1989; Greene, 1995).

Lugones (1987) referred to the fluidity and multiplicity of identity as “a plurality of selves” (p. 14). She highlighted the movement among and within the selves we embody in particular times, situations, places, and relationships – in various ‘worlds’<sup>9</sup> – in her discussion of world-travelling. Reflecting upon my (ongoing) autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014), I think about who I am, who I have been, and who I am becoming in the worlds I inhabit. I think about how I have mainly felt a strong sense of belonging, of being at home, in my familial, school, and community worlds (Lugones, 1987). Lugones, however, reminds me that world-travelling can occur with varying levels of ease. While I acquired the ability to travel to, within, and among the worlds I inhabit, there have, at times, been worlds where I was constructed in ways that did not fit my construction of myself. As I approached this research, I thought about my travel to, within, and among multiple worlds amidst shifting levels of ease, and I wondered ...

I wondered about Noor, Yehia, and Hannah and how they have experienced – and how they will continue to experience – their childhood worlds. I wondered about the experiences they will have as they compose their lives as second-generation<sup>10</sup> Canadian Muslim children. I wondered especially about my eldest daughter Noor, who at close to 11 years old was poised “at

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<sup>9</sup> A ‘world,’ Lugones (1987) elucidated, “need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some ‘worlds’ are bigger than others” (p. 10). I revisit Lugones’ concept of ‘worlds’ later in this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> While Statistics Canada (2011a) defined second-generation Canadians as “individuals who were *born* [Emphasis added] in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada” (p. 3), my conceptualization of this term is broader. For this research, I attend to the experiences of Muslim girls who are composing their lives in Canada, whether they were born in Canada or elsewhere, and have at least one parent who was born outside Canada.

the edge of adolescence” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 1)<sup>11</sup> at the commencement of this research, would experience her time in the spaces between girl and woman. I wondered how she experiences the worlds she inhabits, and how she will experience the worlds she will inhabit along the way, in her transitions to adolescence and womanhood.

These wonders compelled me to think about other second-generation Canadian Muslim girls who, similar to Noor, are transitioning into adolescence. How do they experience this time of great significance in their lives (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1995)? How are they composing their lives (Bateson, 1989) as they experience this transition? What are the stories that root<sup>12</sup> and sustain them (Lopez, 1990)? What stories do they live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013)<sup>13</sup>? How are they storying their experiences as they transition from elementary to junior high school? How do personal, school, familial, intergenerational, cultural, temporal, social, faith-based/religious, and other narratives shape them as they compose their lives and identities?

Okri (1997) highlighted, “One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves” (p. 46). As I engaged in experientially rooting my research puzzle, I thought about how the women I love, my Mom, Sittee, my sisters, Aunts, cousins, and friends, have planted so

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<sup>11</sup> In their five-year study alongside one hundred participants between the ages of seven and eighteen attending a private school in Cleveland, Brown and Gilligan (1992) discussed how adolescence marks a “crossroads in women’s development: a meeting between girl and woman, an intersection between psychological health and cultural regeneration, a watershed in women’s psychology which affects both women and men” (p. 1).

<sup>12</sup> Throughout this work, I play with ecological metaphors of growth, soil, roots, trees, seasons, and so forth.

<sup>13</sup> Clandinin (2013) highlighted that we live *by* stories; the term stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) refers to a narrative conception of identity at the nexus of narrative understandings of knowledge and contexts. We also live *in* stories – in the midst of continually unfolding personal, familial, intergenerational, institutional, social, cultural, temporal, linguistic, school, and other narratives (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin (2013) helps me to understand that living *with* stories is a relational way of living with the multiplicity of stories we and co-inquirers are always in the midst of. The conceptual framework of living *by*, *with*, and *in* stories is threaded throughout this work and will be revisited in Chapters 2 and 6.

many of the stories that live in me. I thought about other women who, like me, are looking for ways to make sense of mothering Canadian Muslim girls during a time of significant life transition. Who are we in relation to our daughters? What stories of motherhood are we living? What stories are we planting in our familial curriculum making (Huber, Clandinin, & Murphy, 2011)<sup>14</sup>? What stories are being – and have been – planted in us?

These wonderings shaped my research puzzle as I prepared to engage in a multiperspectival narrative inquiry (Houle, 2012; Huber et al., 2011) alongside co-inquirers. To root and deepen my personal, practical, and social/theoretical justifications (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)<sup>15</sup> for engaging in this inquiry, different times, relationships, and places in my life are brought in and out of focus with stories, poetry, literature, reflections, and inquiry. The following chapters highlight a multiplicity of stories co-inquirers and I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) and the ways personal, familial, intergenerational, cultural, school, linguistic, temporal, faith-based/religious, and social narratives, among others, shape our experiences and stories of becoming.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) reconceptualised children's curriculum-making as occurring within two worlds: familial and school curriculum-making worlds. I attend more closely to Huber et al.'s (2011) work in Chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> Clandinin (2013) elucidated three justifications that must be addressed in inquiries:

Personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals; practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice; and socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make to theoretical understandings or to making situations more socially just. (p. 35)

My justifications for engaging in this research are discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>16</sup> This research is not a study *about* Islam. Rather, my focus is upon narratively inquiring alongside Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers to come to deeper understandings of our multilayered experiences, and the stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), as Muslim females composing lives in Canada.

### (place-ing myself with) A Beginning Story

*Fully aware that anyone noticing would think I'm a creeper, I slowly drive up the neighbourhood street before coming to a stop in front of the aged yellow and white-trimmed house. It looks so much smaller than even the last time I visited, about thirteen years ago. Back then I had driven this way to show my then-fiancé, now-husband, Wissam, my childhood home.*

*Now, Noor, Yehia, and Hannah sit, tucked in by their seat-belts, as I try to explain why tears are welling in my eyes. I tell them about playing in the areas we have just passed with my siblings and cousins. I tell them about how my beloved cousin, Yehia (Allah yirhamu<sup>17</sup>), lived with us for the first five years of my life in this house. I tell them how he helped teach me how to play soccer and hockey among so many other important lessons. I tell them about the two pine trees that their Jiddo<sup>18</sup>, Khalto Suha<sup>19</sup>, and I once planted, now gone for reasons unknown.*

*It was the spring of 1986 and I excitedly, albeit cautiously, stepped off the school bus and quickened my pace. I couldn't wait to get home and plant my new tree seedling! Grade 1 students in Alberta receive seedlings as part of a long-standing Arbor Day tradition, and I happily received a small pine seedling in school that day. Later that evening, I helped my dad dig a second hole in the front lawn of our home, identical and adjacent to the one that was dug the year before for my sister Suha's seedling. Reminded to say Bism'Allah<sup>20</sup>, we planted the fragile looking seedling together, and I then showered it with water. Walking back to the house, I silently prayed that it would survive and grow, if even a little bit.*

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<sup>17</sup> Arabic for 'May God have mercy on him.'

<sup>18</sup> A colloquial way of saying Grandfather in Arabic.

<sup>19</sup> Suha is my older sister.

<sup>20</sup> This is a shortened version of the opening Qu'ranic invocation highlighted in the first footnote.

*Looking at the places on the front lawn where two pine trees should be standing proudly, I am aware that Noor, Yehia, and Hannah, would not view the house and lawn with a remembered landscape layered atop the current one. I smile as I remember how the tree did indeed grow – it grew to be quite large quite quickly! And I loved watching the two pine trees grow, although I don't imagine this was ever a conscious thought as, day after day, I walked by the two trees that grew to be much taller than me. I think the only time I ever really thought of the trees' significance was when I looked wistfully back at my childhood home during our drive away from it, and towards our newly constructed home, in the spring of grade 8.*

*Driving away from the house with a heavy heart, I wonder what happened to the trees. Did they grow to be too large? Were the roots disturbing the house or nearby sidewalks? Were they shedding needles, obstructing views, and otherwise deemed to be nuisances? I thought of these possibilities as I quietly mourned them, not realizing until I was driving away how much I had been looking forward to seeing them.*

*Noor, intuitively perceptive, asks me if I'm really disappointed that the trees aren't there. I answer truthfully that even though the trees are gone, they have forever changed the landscape. Their long-ago presence is still felt in the soil, in the places once shaded, and in the habitats they once provided to living beings.*

*Besides, I tell her smilingly, reassuring myself as much as I try to reassure her, how could they ever be truly gone if their roots still live inside of us?*

## **(revisiting) What I Knew First**

*“The narratives we shape out of the materials of our lived lives must somehow take account of our original landscapes if we are to be truly present to ourselves and to partake in an authentic relationship with the young. As I view it, it is on that primordial ground that we recognize each other, that ground on which we are in direct touch with things and not separated from them by the conceptual lenses of constructs and theories” (Greene, 1995, p. 75)*

I marvel at how much has changed since I lived in that first home within my childhood familial landscape. I think about some of these changes, and wonder at the shifts that have simultaneously occurred within me, in unseen yet embodied places. Wondering about, and inquiring into, the often taken-for-granted shifts and changes of my life as part of engaging in autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014) propelled me to (re)visit my childhood home alongside my children. I wanted to live and relive, tell and retell (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000) some of my stories alongside them. Like Caine (2010), I “realize that in the midst of seeking a new story to live by, each story will always begin with my past” (p. 1304). As the opening quote by Greene (1995) illuminates, I needed to (re)visit what I knew first<sup>21</sup>.

Inquiring into this story, I was originally puzzled about why I felt that the disappeared trees were deeply significant to my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Was it because of my belief that, as Basso (1996) and Silko (1996) so eloquently posited, identity is intricately connected with the land? However, similar to Basso (1996), I also believe that our imagined landscapes – those of the heart and mind – are imbued with moral wisdom, “This ever-changing landscape of the active heart and mind rewards repeated visits. For wherever one journeys in the country of the past, instructive places abound” (p. 4). Along with his assurance

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<sup>21</sup> A reference to Patricia MacLachlan’s (1995) beautiful picture book “What You Know First.”

that physical landscapes live within us just as surely as we live within them, Basso (1996) further helped guide me to the probable root of my dis-ease:

In this convulsive age of uprooted populations and extensive diasporas, holding onto places – and sensing fully the goodness contained therein – has become increasingly difficult, and in years to come, I expect, it may everywhere be regarded as a privilege and a gift. (p. xvi)

Basso's words resonated profoundly for me, because only a few months before (re)visiting my childhood home, I had been sitting with my beloved Sittee<sup>22</sup> discussing some of her life experiences. In what follows, I represent, in poetic and narrative form, my understandings of multiple conversations I shared with Sittee over the course of several weeks in the spring of 2014. These understandings stem from several conversations whereby, attending to wonders guided by temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), Sittee and I shared and inquired into stories alongside each another.

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<sup>22</sup> An Arabic way of saying Grandmother.

### Sittee's Stories of Being Uprooted<sup>23</sup>

*My body is a story  
a remembrance in the making  
sit here next to me love  
and I will tell you its tale.*

جسدي قصة  
اجلسي بجانب حبيبي  
الذكريات التي أعيشها، سأرويها لك

*I am happy that my knees are limber once again  
allowing me to travel across this earth  
but, in truth, I sometimes long for the ones I was born with  
the ones that played in, and sought refuge from, the land flowing in my veins.*

إنني سعيدة لأن ركبتي  
تستعيد حركتهما وتساعداني على السفر حول أنحاء العالم  
ولكنني أتمنى بعض الأحيان  
لو أن ركبتي اللتين كنت العب بهما في الارض التي ولدت فيها، وهربت منها

*These eyes, ya bintee<sup>24</sup>, are clouded not with the burden of rain  
For healing saltwater has oft showered these pores  
but with the memory of loved ones from times past  
forever alive in the lucid landscapes of my dreams.*

عيني يا ابنتي ليست مملوءة بالدموع  
ولكن بذكريات الاحباء  
الذين يعيشون في احلامي كالغمامة

*The faint borders written across my belly  
were stroked by giving life to eleven beloveds  
don't be sad, my love, that only nine walk this land  
for there are two beautiful birds waiting for me in Jannah insha 'Allah.*

الخطوط المرسومة في بطني  
علامات حملي احدى عشرة مرة  
لا تحزني، تسعة منهم يمشون على الارض  
وطائرين منهم ينتظروني في الجنة إن شاء الله

<sup>23</sup> I wrote this poem for Sittee in English to represent (Ely, 2007) the stories she shared with me. My mom helped me to translate the poem into Arabic. However, as always, some meaning and nuance is lost in the always incomplete travel between languages.

<sup>24</sup> Arabic for 'My daughter.'

*These lines engraved on my hands and around my eyes  
were ploughed with hard work  
turned by working the earth, in cleansing waters and generous sun  
as I nurtured love with the fruits of my labour.*

خطوط العمر المرسومة على يدي،  
وعيناى حفرهما العمل الشاق في الحقول في الصيف الحار  
لتربية الثمار التي انجبتها

*Every strand of silver is a wistful celebration  
of life danced in sweet defiance  
to hard-hearted dictators and expectations  
playfully reminding me to stay soft and fluid.*

الخصل الفضية في رأسي  
هي احتفال لي لأنني تحديث الصعوبات في الحياة  
من الناس والحكام  
ولكن تذكرني بأن أبقى طيبة ومملوءة بالفرح

*Let not the bullet lodged in my back grieve you my child  
I am at peace with it  
for alongside pain came the knowledge of your father  
and without his life you would not be here to grieve.*

لا تحزني علي من الرصاصة المغروسة في كتفي يا ابنتي  
انها دائما تذكرني، أنه من ألمها علمت بحملي بوالدك  
الذي من دونه لم تكوني لتولدي وتشاركيني حزني.

*Ya habibty<sup>25</sup>, smiles and laughter etched the grooves around my mouth  
joyful witnesses to a blessed life  
for I sit, here, now, embraced by the memory of different times, places, and people  
telling one beloved, of many, my body's - for now - story.*

يا حبيبتى، الإبتسامات التي رُسمت حول فمي  
شاهدة على الحياة المباركة التي اعيشها، وعشتها.  
فأنا هنا، اجلس، أروي لمن أحب الذكريات التي عشتها،  
والتي تعانقتني عن قصة جسدي.

<sup>25</sup> Arabic for 'My beloved.'

**(revisiting) What Sittee Knew First**

“Muna, I think it will be good to videotape this.”

“Yes, I think so too Sittee.”<sup>26</sup>

Sittee and I retreated from the cozy chaos of my parents’ family room to the relatively quieter living room. I had asked Sittee to sit with me so that I can ask her some questions about her experiences growing up in Palestine. I wanted to create a mini movie or slideshow presentation for her for Mother’s Day, and I thought it would be nice to include some of Sittee’s early stories of experiences alongside more recent ones. Sittee loved the idea of creating a digital imprint that will bear witness to her experiences. What I thought would be a straightforward Mother’s Day project, however, evolved into a series of conversations over the course of several weeks that shifted so many of my stories of Sittee and of our relationship. I wrote the poem on the previous page as one way to honour Sittee and the stories she shared with me.

Sittee had come to live with us in the fall of 1990. I will never forget my excitement as my family and I waited at the Edmonton International Airport for her plane to touch down. Both my grandmothers had always lived in Lebanon, and I was not yet five years old the one and only time we had visited, so I was ecstatic that I was finally going to have one of my Sittees living with us! As I think about my excitement that day in the here and now, after hearing so many of her stories, I wonder about how Sittee might have experienced that moment, farther away than ever from Palestine, the land she still dreams about.

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<sup>26</sup> While I share what Sittee and I discussed in English, my conversations with Sittee are always in Arabic.

Sittee had a far-away look in her eyes as she wistfully recounted some of her stories. She said that her earliest memories were of working alongside her mother and sister on the family farm. With a glowing smile, as if she could still smell the groves, Sittee told me how she loved harvesting the fruits from her family's olive, fig, and date trees, and tending to other plants at different times in the year. Born in the early thirties in a small village next to the larger community of Safad in northern Palestine, Sittee explained that girls didn't really go to school at the time because it just wasn't part of their traditions. She stressed, however, that many boys were also not sent to school because the nearest school was quite far away and because a lot of villagers felt that it was a waste of time – time that could be better spent helping the family earn a living.

### **Scattered About Like Leaves**

Like many girls of that time and place, Sittee was married at a very young age. She explained that she is not exactly sure how old she was because age was not really tallied according to birth days or years, rather by the cycles of the moon and rhythms of farm life. However, Sittee *thinks* that she was about 16 years old on her wedding day sometime in January of 1948<sup>27</sup>. Sittee recalled how, as a newlywed bride a few months later, she heard the distant sounds of gunfire steadily approaching, and the sounds of men, women, and children screaming, running, and crying. She remembered hearing someone yelling at her to gather a few necessities

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<sup>27</sup> This is a significant year for Palestinians. Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) described how the *Nakba* (Arabic for 'catastrophe') of the 1948 War, where 88% of the indigenous Palestinian population became refugees after their land was confiscated, has become "the demarcation line between two qualitatively opposing periods" (p. 3) for Palestinians. That is, Palestinians often use the *Nakba* to differentiate their experiences *before* Israel was created in 1948 from the harsh ones *after*.

so they can flee the violence, but she didn't remember who it was that yelled. All she remembers, she somberly said, is the terror and confusion.

With measured tones and resolute grace, Sittee narrated how a bullet struck her in the back as she tried to run alongside her friends and family. She depicted some of the horrific scenes she witnessed as she, a few months pregnant with my father at the time, slipped in and out of consciousness as a result of her injuries. Sittee described holding on to consciousness long enough to learn that she was in a hospital in neighbouring Lebanon, finally able to ask about her loved ones. Hearing that her husband, unborn child, and immediate family were safe brought immense relief. However, she continued, coming to understand that she may never know the fate of so many extended family and friends, who had scattered about like leaves in all directions that fateful day, was especially sorrowful. The realization that she may never be able to go back home carried a different kind of pain that would always live at the edge of her consciousness<sup>28</sup>.

### **Sittee's Stories Live in Me**

As part of our familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011)<sup>29</sup>, Sittee had generously shared her stories with me at different times of my life – usually to illuminate wisdom(s) her experiences have taught her. I had never, however, sat alongside Sittee to narratively inquire (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) into her stories<sup>30</sup>. For this reason perhaps, her stories lived within me for a very long time, strumming painful chords of

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<sup>28</sup> Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) noted that place is central to the stories and memories of Palestinian people.

<sup>29</sup> The curriculum-making that occurs within familial and community contexts. I attend more closely to Huber et al.'s (2011) work in Chapter 2.

<sup>30</sup> I specifically asked Sittee questions related to temporality, sociality, and place – the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I expand upon the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in Chapter 2.

recognition from deep within me. The resonant pain I experienced hearing Sittee's stories was a feeling infinitely more complex than empathy. Drawing from her study of three families living in Israel<sup>31</sup>, Lev-Wiesel (2007) explored what she referred to as the intergenerational transmission of trauma, that is, trauma that is passed from a first-generation family member who had directly experienced a traumatic event to members of the second and third generation. Participants in her study included a Palestinian family who were forcibly dislocated from their homeland<sup>32</sup>. That event lived on in second and third generation family members in the form of sadness, anger, and intent to return to their original homes if the opportunity should ever present itself, still feeling a strong sense of belonging to their original homeplace several years after their family's traumatic displacement in 1948<sup>33</sup>. This resonated profoundly with me as a third-generation survivor of the *Nakba* of 1948<sup>34</sup>, as a woman who does not live in Palestine, but in whom Palestine lives.

What makes Sittee's story all the more compelling and powerful for me is its sense of unfinishedness. Nearly 70 years later, the story of the *Nakba* is a narrative that is still unfolding (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007)<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, another horrific round of violence had erupted in the Gaza Strip as I began writing about Sittee's experiences<sup>36</sup>. The uprooting and continued assault

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<sup>31</sup> While Lev-Wiesel (2007) refers to this land as Israel, my family members refer to it as Palestine.

<sup>32</sup> The family had taken refuge in another part of Palestine/Israel (they were internally displaced).

<sup>33</sup> Young (2005) similarly discussed intergenerational trauma in her narrative inquiry into the relationships between *Anishinabe* language and identity; she highlighted "intergenerational narrative reverberations" in relation to first and subsequent generation survivors of Canadian residential schools.

<sup>34</sup> Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) outlined a series of events which led to the *Nakba* of 1948, including: the establishment of the World Zionist Congress in 1897, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (where Britain announced support for the creation of Israel on Palestinian lands), British occupation of Palestine during WWI, Palestinian resistance to British occupation and subsequent defeat from 1936-39, WWII and the Holocaust, the Nov. 29, 1947 United Nation Resolution on the Partition of Palestine, and the 1948 Israeli offensive. Henceforth, what was once known to the indigenous population as Palestine was referred to as Israel post-1948.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion, also see Beinin and Hajjar (2014).

<sup>36</sup> The Gaza Strip is an area of land in southwest Palestine/Israel that borders Egypt. This region possesses a long history of strife and bombardment, most recently the 2014 Israeli offensive that killed 2,139 Palestinians (and injured approximately 11,000 – the majority of whom were civilians), 64 Israeli soldiers, and 6 Israeli civilians (Dearden, 2014).

of indigenous Palestinians by occupying forces is an oft-told tale in my family. As important as this familial story is, however, it is only one of many that have been planted within me, one of many that I must honour as I compose forward-looking stories (Lindemann-Nelson, 1995) alongside loved ones.

Reconsidering Sittee's stories as I prepared to inquire alongside three second-generation Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers as the girls transition into adolescence, I thought about the many cultural, temporal, and intergenerational stories (Clandinin, 2013), embodied and expressed in diverse ways (Johnson, 1989), that are alive within me. I wondered about the stories living within co-inquirers ... what are the cultural, temporal, and intergenerational stories shaping their experiences? Thinking about the reciprocal relationship between roots and surrounding soil, I wondered about the ways co-inquirers are (re)shaping the stories planted in them ...

As I continued to deepen my understandings of my inquiry puzzle before coming alongside co-inquirers, I turned to another amazing woman I love, my mother, and to the stories that our relationship planted in me. I attempt, through the following sections, to represent my continually evolving understandings of several of the stories my Mom has shared with me over time.

## Dear Mama

*my  
mother  
was  
my first country.  
the first place i ever lived.*

— *lands*, by Nayyirah Waheed

## Mama Teaching Me to See the Forest for the Trees

*We had a house full of guests (again!) on a night I will never forget. Suha and I were expected to serve the refreshments, wash the dishes, entertain the younger children, and otherwise help out. While I always wanted to help Mama, I felt annoyed by these almost nightly visits and grumbled about it to Suha as we were washing the latest round of dishes. I didn't see that Mama had come into the kitchen and overheard me. I turned around at the sound of her voice, edged with tears and disappointment, as she said, "Muna, don't ever complain about having guests over. You should say Alhamdulillah<sup>37</sup> and be grateful to Allah (SWT<sup>38</sup>) that your father is alive and that people visit this house."*

*I was in grade 6 at the time, and yet I don't think I've ever felt as bad as I did in that moment.*

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<sup>37</sup> An Arabic word that is said in instances of gratitude. It means 'All praise is for Allah (SWT).'

<sup>38</sup> Allah is the Arabic word for God. For Muslims around the world, the acronym SWT usually accompanies the verbal or written mention of Allah (SWT). It stands for "Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala," meaning "Glory be to Allah, the Exalted."

### (revisiting) What Mama Knew First

“Mom, can I please just ask you a few questions about your experiences growing up to make sure I don’t get anything wrong?”

“Of course Muna, ask me anything.”

My mother was born in Bar-Elias, a town in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley. A child of the 60’s, she recalls the big hair and short skirts fad that gripped the then-small town that had become more than a temporary home to hundreds of Palestinian refugees who still lived there almost fifteen years after the *Nakba*. I remember my Mom laughingly recounting the time she and her sisters shortened their skirts by hand after buying ‘acceptable’-length skirts of the sort my beloved maternal grandmother, Sittee Um-Ahmad<sup>39</sup> (Allah yirhama), approved. As I think about the stories of Sittee Um-Ahmad that Mom has shared with me, I wonder at the ways Sittee Um-Ahmad negotiated gendered norms and expectations at a time when the opinions she held in relation to girls’ education, travel, and professional aspirations were not at all commonplace.

When my Mom describes her early family life with Sittee Um-Ahmad, Jiddee Abu-Ahmad, two older brothers, and three sisters, she usually mentions the steady stream of people who would visit her Dad, a well-respected activist in Bar-Elias’s Palestinian refugee community. Beaming whenever she tells this part of her story, Mom says that she and her siblings were always at the very top of their class. She noted that the eldest child in her family, Khalee<sup>40</sup> Ahmad (Allah yirhamu), was actively courted by several post-secondary institutions in Lebanon

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<sup>39</sup> It is customary in traditional Middle Eastern cultures to call mothers and fathers by the name of their first-born son (and sometimes their first-born daughter); for example, Um-Ahmad means ‘the mother of Ahmad,’ and Abu-Ahmad signifies ‘the father of Ahmad.’

<sup>40</sup> Maternal uncle.

before he eventually decided to travel to Russia. She said Khalee made the difficult decision to move because, unlike Lebanon, Russia did not stipulate employment options or areas of professional specialization for Palestinian refugees<sup>41</sup>. Khalee was in the process of earning a PhD in Physics after several years of study; however, he died when my Mom was 11 years old, just as he was completing graduate studies. Mom says that, while they wholeheartedly believe that life and death are in Allah's (SWT) hands, the pain of Khalee's untimely passing likely contributed to Jiddee's death approximately two years after his eldest son passed away.

Mom says their deaths changed everything. Accustomed to a full house throughout her childhood, the steady stream of visitors slowly waned, and then stopped almost completely the year after Jiddee's passing. Mom said that, because Sittee now needed other sources of income to pay for her children's school tuition, everyone agreed to help. Still a middle school student, Mom secured weekend and summer jobs working nearby fields, helping seamstresses, and whatever other odd jobs she could to save enough money to pay for her own tuition. Mom said this was her routine for several years, saving enough money for her tuition during weekends and holidays, before she married my dad and joined him in Canada in her final year of high school.

### **Travelling to Mama's Worlds**

My relationship with my mother has shaped, and continues to shape, who I am, who I was, and who I am still becoming (Bateson, 1989; Greene, 1995)<sup>42</sup> in indescribable ways. Our relationship, however, has shifted over the years ... as well as my perceptions of it. As a child, I remember feeling an overwhelming sense of love and attachment, but also of confusion and

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<sup>41</sup> In Lebanon, my Mom and her siblings were still considered Palestinian refugees regardless of the fact that they were born in Lebanon.

<sup>42</sup> Both Bateson (1989) and Greene (1995) viewed life as composed over time with imaginative possibilities.

longing. I knew without a doubt that my Mom would give me anything and everything she could give, always so generous with her love, strength, and presence. But, for the longest time, she withheld something I longed for – her stories of childhood. I wanted to know her beyond what I knew, to see her through her eyes. I would get so confused when she would change the subject any time I tried to ask questions about her childhood experiences. With time I have come to understand that her silence was protective, shielding her from very painful memories. Mom started to share her once-silenced experiences several years ago, at first in sparse, almost bare language, but in increasing detail with every re-telling<sup>43</sup>.

Reflecting upon my relationship with my Mom, I think of Lugones (1987), who, in a beautifully written paper weaving together her “coming to consciousness as a daughter and ... as a woman of color” (p. 3), differentiated between loving and arrogant perception. For Lugones, loving perception entails an identification, appreciation, and willful travel to another’s worlds. A ‘world,’ she clarified, “need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some ‘worlds’ are bigger than others” (p. 10). Lugones emphasized that ‘worlds’ are *constructions* – created by and for each of us, by and for ourselves and others. She argued that we may or may not agree with the worlds others have constructed for us, but that we may nonetheless “be *animating* such a construction” (p. 10) due to the limited space available for us to manoeuvre in certain times, places, and relationships. However, it is possible to negotiate a multiplicity of worlds, Lugones

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<sup>43</sup> Rich (1979) beautifully discussed the possibilities when women begin telling one another that which they had previously silenced:

It isn’t that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you. It means ... that we both know that we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us. The possibility of life between us. (pp. 193-194)

asserted, because one “can ‘travel’ between these worlds and one can inhabit more than one of these ‘worlds’ at the very same time” (pp. 10-11). A playful, loving attitude, Lugones affirmed, is what allows us to remember ourselves whilst appreciating others, is what “enable[s] us to *be*” (p. 8), in this back and forth among and between our own – and each other’s – worlds.

In contrast, arrogant perception entails an agonistic, colonizing attitude. Lugones (1987) stressed that it is impossible to ‘world’-travel with arrogant perception without attempting to colonize that ‘world,’ and, by extension, its inhabitants. Drawing upon her experiences as a woman of colour in the West and her relationship with her mother, Lugones illustrated how women are often both perpetrators and victims of arrogant perception depending on the situation.

I find myself reflecting upon my relationship with my mother every time I read Lugones’ (1987) words because, similar to Lugones, I held several assumptions of mother’s worlds. I grumbled about the constant stream of guests and accompanying chores that night without considering that my mother genuinely loved this part of our familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011). I assumed that, like me, she was privately annoyed with the continuous stream of visitors, but did not express her annoyance because of cultural norms and expectations. And I felt sorry for her. My arrogant perception, however, started to unravel that night. I now appreciate that I imposed my own preferences and ideals on what I believed my mother’s worlds to be. As anyone who has ever witnessed my mother’s life-making can attest, “there are ‘worlds’ where she shines as a creative being. Seeing myself in her through traveling to her ‘world’ has meant seeing how different I am from her in her ‘world’” (p. 18). I feel that I have often imposed a reductionist view of my Mom’s worlds, and her unparalleled beauty and strength in travelling among and between myriad worlds, without lovingly attending to who she is, who she is

becoming, and how *she* views her worlds. Mom would always model gratitude for me and my siblings, saying ‘Alhamdulillah’ in instances that didn’t seem to warrant gratitude. That night, I began to understand that Mom wasn’t saying ‘Alhamdulillah’ superfluously. As one of her most cherished stories to live by<sup>44</sup> (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), one planted in me, her gratitude for Allah’s (SWT) blessings is authentic. When she says ‘Alhamdulillah,’ she means it.

As I prepared to come alongside co-inquirers in this research, I thought about the stories I knew first and how familial stories have been so integral to my being and becoming. The most profound stories that I live and that live in me are those composed alongside my mother. Through travelling to her worlds, I learned to recognize the loving and arrogant perceiver within myself. I wondered about the familial stories that co-inquirers live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) ... do they too involve world-traveling between and amongst the worlds of mother and daughter? Is their world-travel accompanied by, at turns, loving and arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987)? I wondered what stories have been planted in the mothers and daughters, what stories they are planting in each other, and what stories are being relationally shifted and shaped as they continue to compose their lives over time in different places and relationships.

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<sup>44</sup> Connelly and Clandinin (1999) used the term ‘stories to live by’ to refer to a narrative conception of identity.

## Planting Seeds of Home

*tap tap tap tap tap tap tap ...*

**Smack**

*The scene is so familiar, so vivid. Stirring from a deep sleep to the sounds, smells (the absolutely glorious smells), and emotions inspired by early-morning ka3k<sup>45</sup>-making. The trek out of the bedroom to follow the tantalizing aroma, the comforting sounds of Mama and the Aunties<sup>46</sup> chatting rhythmically in Arabic, and – of course – the sounds of ka3k dough being pressed into, and then forced out of, the mould...*

*tap tap tap tap tap tap tap ...*

**Smack**

*The race to the kitchen to see if any ka3k had come out of the oven yet. The sheer joy if there were warm and fluffy ones waiting for me. The giddy anticipation if they were still baking. Carefully biting into a fluffy and warm ka3k followed by a sip of my sweetened, milky shai<sup>47</sup>. Savouring this delicious breakfast alongside my siblings, soothed by the voices of the women we love in the background.*

*This is what I knew first.*

*This is home.*

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<sup>45</sup> Ka3k, at least the way my family makes them, are a hybrid between cookie and cake. Made with cinnamon and cardamom, among other aromatic spices, the dough is pressed into a large wooden mould (*tap, tap, tap*), and then the mould is hit against the side of a hard surface (*Smack!*) to help loosen and release the smooth and beautifully imprinted, soon to be baked, ka3k.

<sup>46</sup> I was taught to refer to all my elders as Khalto/A3mto (Auntie) or Khalee/A3mo (Uncle). ‘The Aunties’ are family members, family friends, and neighbours.

<sup>47</sup> Arabic word for tea.

### **(revisiting) What I Knew First**

I was born on a cool Edmonton evening in the fall of 1980. My parents, alongside my Aunt and Uncle (my Dad's only two siblings in Canada at the time), had just saved a sizeable down payment to secure the home that we lived in for the next eleven years. Just like our bodies tell a story (Caine, 2010), so does my childhood home. A place I still dream about, I return to it every so often to remind me of important stories, and I remember ...

I remember my Mom and the Aunties and early-morning *ka3k* making. I remember planting trees and raking leaves with my Mom, Dad, and siblings. I remember celebrating birthdays, Eids, Christmases, Halloweens, and get-togethers with our wonderful neighbourhood community. I remember playing soccer, tag, and water games with my beloved cousins Billal (Allah yirhamu), Marina, Monzer, Cristina, Mohammed, and Yehia (Allah yirhamu) in the backyard. I remember sledding down the side hill that bordered the street. I remember the time a bird flew into the window my Mom just cleaned. I remember trying to nurse the poor bluebird back to health but, alongside Suha and Marina, laying it to rest under a tree next to our home as we read the verses that we knew from the Qur'an. I remember teaching my brother Mohamed to skate in the community rink about a block down the road. I remember my sweet little sister Fatima yelling for us to wait up when we rode our bikes down the back alleyway searching for crab apples. I remember my adventurous baby brother Walid always bruised, scratched up, or worse because he loved to jump off anything even remotely above ground. I remember Sittee patting the floral-upholstered loveseat and asking me to sit and share *shai* and stories with her. I remember Jiddee (Allah yirhamu) laughing his unforgettable belly laugh and telling me to go outside and make some mischief. I remember all of this and I think of my youngest sister,

intelligent and beautiful Eman, who was born the year after we moved out of what still seems to be a place brimming with magic.

It is not my intention to gloss over the difficult moments in my life, or to create an idealized ‘good’ story of childhood. While that home nurtured so many beautiful, sustaining stories (Lopez, 1990), tension-filled stories were also being lived. These too are stories that live in me. However, these are not the stories that flood my senses when I (re)visit my childhood home. The stories I hold close and nurture, the ones that hold and nurture me, are those that make my blood hum and my legs long to run or bike down the street. Alongside more tension-filled stories, I tell, live, retell and relive (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) these sustaining childhood stories alongside my children, co-inquirers, and others to both help them travel to my worlds (Lugones, 1987) and to help me travel to theirs.

Reflecting on the stories I have shared thus far of early experiences, many wonderings emerged. I wondered about co-inquirers and the stories they knew first. I wondered how these stories have shaped, and continue to shape, their experiences. I wondered about the stories that sustain and nurture co-inquirers as girl co-inquirers travel(led) the spaces between childhood and adulthood. And I wondered about the ways they experience multi-layered cultural, temporal, familial, intergenerational, social, and personal (Clandinin, 2013) stories that they live ...

### Keeping It All in Perspective(s)

Sittee: I can see her smiling as her eyes follow the words across the page and my heart smiles with her. I feel bad that she hides away in her room to read; I think she is afraid that someone will tell her to put the book away. I tell her to never mind their worrying but I think she does anyways. I am so grateful that she has the opportunity to go to school and to learn, Alhamdulillah. Habibty, she looks so intent on what she's reading. I will ask her to sit and have shai later and tell me about the story.

Mama: Look at my little reader. I am so proud of her, but I worry about her too. Even though I am happy that she loves reading, I worry that she is closeting herself away from her family and friends far too often. Imagine! Just yesterday a group of children came to the door to ask her to join them in play outside and she says, "Thanks, but maybe tomorrow." I love that she loves to read but I do wish she would be more balanced about it.

**Me: Yay! I can finally get back to the story! Evening chores took forever after a loooong day of school. Oh, I so want to find out what happens next ... but there is way too much noise here. Sigh. They will get upset with me if I sneak away to read in my room. They will say that I need to be more involved with the family. But I get so overwhelmed with all the noise and chores and people and ... hmmm, maybe they won't notice if I slipped away this time.**

## Things Aren't Always What They Seem

*I think of Sarris (1993)<sup>48</sup> as Mom and I sit side by side in my parents' living room in a familiar potato peeling and prepping process. I had called my mom about an hour earlier, "Salam Mom, I just bought a rotisserie chicken ... wanna share?" That's how we came to be sitting together, preparing a side of mashed potatoes. I was peeling the potatoes with a vegetable peeler (I had given up trying to shed the skin as thinly as Mom expected with a plain old knife) and Mom was cutting them into large cubes so they can be easily boiled and mashed. Pausing to look at the play of light shining through the designs in the draperies, I ask Mom for a story of me as an elementary school student and, without hesitation, she says, "You were always reading your books! You would just read and read all the time. Even in very poor light. I used to really worry about your eyesight." I chuckle a bit at her worry, an old habit not easily suppressed, and Mom looks unimpressed as she focuses on her task. But, peeking at her side profile, I could tell she was having a difficult time trying to force the corners of her mouth all the way down.*

## Learning to Travel to (real and imagined) Worlds

Reflecting on my Mom's words, I recalled the tensions caused by my book-wormish ways, often perceived by family members as an anti-social way to hide away from them. My love of reading was indeed partly related to stealing away for personal time, as, in the late 80's and early 90's, dozens of paternal relatives steadily joined us in Canada. By the time I was in grade 6, our extended family grew from just one Aunt and Uncle living in Canada to boast over

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<sup>48</sup> Narrating a potato-peeling story, Sarris (1993) detailed how Mabel McKay, a well-respected Cache Creek Pomo elder, taught him that "things aren't always what they seem" (p. 3).

30 members. My parents lovingly opened our home to every family member joining us in this beautiful land.

For my siblings and I, however, these changes meant innumerable shifts in the way we lived alongside our parents and each other, innumerable shifts to the worlds we inhabited (Lugones, 1987) and the ways we travelled to, within, and between them. While my parents worked hard to secure lodgings for our relations, the entire family needed to extend space, time, and energy to the process as well. I recall sharing a tiny room with my sisters Suha and Fatima for several years, not to mention the sharing-a-single-bathroom-with-a-dozen-or-more-people part of growing up. While I loved my family and enjoyed playing with my cousins, I often found it challenging to negotiate the chores and the lack of privacy. Being amongst the elder children in our large extended family, I was also expected to help with the household chores and younger children. I cherished whatever stolen moments I could secure to learn, explore, and dream alongside the characters of my literary worlds.

Sarris (1993) posited, “In understanding another person and culture you must simultaneously understand yourself” (p. 6). For me, stories, whether narrated orally or unfolding through the written word, were much more than a way to escape the beautiful chaos of my childhood. Travelling alongside countless people, real and literary, learning about so many worlds helped me to know *myself*, to travel within and between *my* worlds (Lugones, 1987). However, real and textual stories aren’t external resources from which I can draw upon at will. Like the land, they live in me, rooting me, providing me with life-making sustenance and strength. From the moment I am drawn into a story, its imagined landscape intertwines with those that live in me, and those that I live by, shifting and shaping the real and imagined

boundaries of both locales. For, as Basso (1996), Silko (1996), and Caine (2010) all affirmed, I am also a part of the land, giving of myself, changing it irrevocably.

Thus far, I have literally and metaphorically laid my story alongside those of my Mom and Sittee to illuminate the impossibility of attempting to attend to only one story or one perspective in the stories of my being and becoming. Ruminating on coming alongside co-inquirers, I thought about the many familial, temporal, intergenerational, cultural, and social stories living in me and I wondered about the stories living in them. What are the stories that co-inquirers live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), especially in an increasingly global (Smith, 2003) world<sup>49</sup>? What stories do they draw upon as they imagine forward-looking stories (Lindemann-Nelson, 1995)? For, as the forthcoming sections illustrate, I have gratefully drawn upon the strength and sustenance of many of the stories planted in me in the process of composing my life.

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<sup>49</sup> I foreground globalization here because, while my love of books was so important to my childhood stories, I wondered about the experiences of co-inquirers in a world of social media, where borders may not always be physically crossed, but are increasingly traversed digitally.

## Worlds Forever Changed

*On the morning of September 11, 2001, I woke up late following one too many slaps of the snooze button. The process of running around (where are my keys?) and of driving to the nearest transit station were pretty ingrained practices considering it was my fourth and final year of undergraduate studies. On the transit ride to campus, I overheard two women across from me discussing Osama Bin Laden. I thought the topic of their conversation was odd, but I also understood that terrorism was discussed with increasing frequency since the 1993 World Trade Center bombing by so-called Muslim extremists. I took pride in my Muslim heritage, but I did not wear the traditional Islamic headcovering, often referred to as the hijab, at that time, so the women did not seem at all awkward discussing Muslim extremists in front of me. As I stepped off the platform, I shook my head and mentally shrugged my shoulders and continued walking.*

*It was the first day of classes of the semester, and towards the end of my first class, the professor said something that really confused me; she said something along the lines of her family being really blessed but how afraid she was that some maniac would decide to target the oil rigs her husband worked in as an engineer. I puzzled over her comments, but mentally shrugging my shoulders again, I headed to the Students' Union Building for a quick break between classes. There, I saw students crowded around the TV sets in the cafeteria. I walked closer to see what it was that was captivating their attention, but felt my cellphone vibrating.*

*I answered and it was Mom on the line – she sounded frantic, “Muna! Where are you? I’ve been calling for over an hour!”*

*I had gotten married a few months ago and no longer lived at home, so I assumed Mom forgot that I had begun my fall term. I told her that I was at the University and that she had nothing to worry about . . . but, interrupting my words, she said she needed me to come home.*

*“Now?”*

*“Yes, NOW!”*

*Heart skipping, I asked if everything was okay? Was someone sick? She said that everyone was fine but that she needed me to come home right away. So I did. I literally ran to the transit station and then drove the last leg to my parents’ place with a heavy heart, all the while thinking that someone had passed away but Mom didn’t want to tell me over the phone.*

*There was a sombre feel that I wasn’t accustomed to as I walked into my parents’ house - it was usually filled with a lot of people and a lot of noise. My parents, Sittee, and my siblings, were all sitting in the family room and watching unfolding coverage on CNN of what appeared to be an airplane hitting a tall building. But no, that couldn’t happen, could it? Did the pilot fall asleep at the wheel? Did the plane lose the ability to navigate somehow? These thoughts whirled around in my head when Mom noticed me standing in the doorway. She jumped up and crushed me in a protective embrace, saying “Alhamdulillah,” and started explaining that she heard that Muslims were being attacked on busses and even in their schools and places of work because of what was happening. That even people who weren’t Muslim were getting harassed because they looked like they may be.*

*At that point it all clicked ... the women’s conversation in the morning, my prof’s seemingly random fears, the students crowded around the TV’s, Mom’s frantic call . . . I looked*

*at the TV and my entire being shook, “Oh my God. Oh no.” My family all talked over and alongside one another, explaining the footage and all the horrifying details that were still emerging. I sat on the living room couch next to Sittee and held her hand as we tearfully watched the coverage that was replayed again and again in dismay, shock, and fear.*

*Later that evening, after the dinner table was cleared of mostly uneaten food, we sat dejectedly in front of the TV again, each of us in a sombre shock-induced reverie. And I silently prayed. I prayed for the victims. I prayed for the survivors. I prayed for the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives or were injured. I prayed for those who witnessed the attack. I prayed for the emergency responders. I prayed and I wondered what would happen next ...*

*I went to the University the next morning to visit the professor for the class I missed the day before. I wanted to introduce myself and to pick up course materials. When I approached his office, I noticed the door was open and that he was bent over some reading on his desk. I knocked on his door quietly, introduced myself, and was about to explain why I had come by when he motioned for me to come inside, and gestured to the paper he had been reading, while asking, “What does this word mean? Do you know?”*

*I don't recall what exact word he was pointing to, but it was a derivative of the word “Jihad,” a beautiful Arabic word that means “to struggle” that has sadly become associated with terrorism. I was somewhat taken aback and wondered how he knew that I understood Arabic. I responded uncomfortably to his question and then awkwardly tried to explain that I was hoping to get the syllabus and any other course materials I had missed from the day before. He asked me why I had not attended the first day of class and I answered truthfully, explaining a little about my Mom's worry. He responded by saying something about how I couldn't afford to*

*miss class because it was very challenging to get a good grade ... even with proper attendance. I thanked him for the materials, but left his office feeling incredibly judged.*

*I did not miss another class, and studied a little more diligently for his class than the rest of my courses that semester. I think it was because I wanted to prove that whatever assumptions he held about me based on that one missed class and/or my cultural/religious heritage were unfair. By chance, I happened to run into this professor at the beginning of the winter semester, and he stopped to ask me how I had done it? I asked what he meant. He said that most students complained that his tests were overly challenging, but that I was able to achieve near-perfect grades. Was I a straight-9 student? I chuckled and said I did all right, but that his class was actually the one and only class in which I ever achieved a 9 standing. But how? Why? What was different about his class? He seemed genuinely confused. I then explained how I felt that day in his office and how I had resolved to change whatever perceptions he had of me. He apologized for inadvertently making me feel that way and even offered me a letter of reference. I accepted his offer and we made arrangements to meet for coffee a few days later. When we met, he apologized again and said that he reflected on what I had said and felt awful about the whole situation. I smiled and said that it had not been a completely negative experience after all - I gained a good mark, a letter of reference, and a new friend in the process.*

*Over fifteen years later, that tragic day's horrific events continue to shape so many lives around the world, innocent victims of the attacks and their families and communities, innocent victims in the 'War on Terror,' and everyday lived experiences of Muslims – or those who look to be Muslim – around the globe . . . all of whom continue to pay the price for the actions of deranged individuals and groups claiming Islam as their banner.*

## Disrupting Single Stories

I sat and stared at my computer screen for what seemed like hours after I typed, read, and re-read the story of my experiences during, and immediately following, the horrific events of September 11, 2001 (9/11). I struggled with how to approach the story and its unpacking with nuance and fidelity. What could I possibly write that could approach its profundity? How can I ever come close to portraying the infinite ways that people's worlds (Lugones, 1987) all over the globe changed that day? This feeling of enormity is all the more difficult because I type these words at a time when the so-called Islamic State<sup>50</sup> is committing unspeakable atrocities in a region that is, all too often, ravaged by violence.

In conversation with my supervisor Jean, however, I was reminded that I need to begin with, and stay close to, experience. I need to attend to *lives* composed over time, in different places, and in relation (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), because, pulled though I may be to engage in generalizations about 'the Muslim experience' post-9/11, "people are never only ... any particular set of isolated theoretical notions, categories, or terms. They are people in all their complexity. They are people living storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). Muslims are incredibly linguistically, culturally, politically, and even theologically diverse (Ali, 2012; Aslan, 2011; Niyozov, 2010; Ramadan, 2013; Ramji, 2009, 2013). I am trying to be wakeful (Greene, 1995) and honour this diversity by sharing my experiences in a way that does not attempt to generalize my personal experiences to the over 1.6

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<sup>50</sup> My family refers to this group as Daesh, a derogatory Arabic word for 'those who trample and crush.' This treacherous group is known by many different names, such as IS (Islamic State), ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

billion people who identify as Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2012). My experiences are mine, rooted in specific times, places, and relationships.

Adichie (2009) also discussed the impossibility of generalizing lived experiences. Drawing upon her experiences in Nigeria, Mexico, and the United States, Adichie argued that ‘a single story’ is created when places and/or people, in all their multiplicity, are repeatedly (mis)used to represent a singular construct. She asserted, “So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become” (09:26). As I share stories of times I have, as a Muslim girl and woman, contended with single stories and discrimination in the pages to come, I stress, using Adichie’s powerful words,

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (12:57)

In the next section, guided by the metaphoric three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I highlight some of the ways my personal stories of experiences with discrimination relate to some of the concepts in the literature I reviewed.

### **Salam ... Is So Hard to Live**

*Screeeech ... “Hey!!”*

*I was in grade 8 and Suha and I were crossing the busy street after purchasing lunch and a slurpee across the street from our junior high school when the car full of high-schoolers accosted us. The summer before my grade 8 year, after attending Friday classes at the Masjid<sup>51</sup> for over a year, we decided to don the veil<sup>52</sup>. I had been so pumped! I knew it wouldn't be easy, especially considering that we were basically the only girls wearing hijabs at our school, but I never imagined we would have to contend with several instances of overt discrimination.*

*I turned around to see a car full of older boys. One of them had opened the window to stick his head out and shout, “Do you mind if I borrow that rag off your head to clean my car??”*

*Waves of mortification. Then, anger represented by a finger raised even as the boys drove away laughing. More mortification ... but mainly with myself this time. Suha cast a sideways look at me, trying to conceal her embarrassment and anger, “Why would you do that?”*

*“Because they deserved it.” I stated with feigned confidence while my insides twisted. Why did I do that??*

*Word travels fast in school. People approached me to say “Good for you!” but I was so embarrassed and unhappy, not only to have been the target of derision, but because my reaction was contrary to what my hijab signified for me – Salam, or translated into English, peace.*

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<sup>51</sup> Mosque in Arabic.

<sup>52</sup> The head covering that some Muslim women don is also referred to as the hijab or headscarf. While many scholars are careful to differentiate between the terms headscarf/veil and hijab, arguing that the concept of hijab is infinitely broader than a piece of fabric meant to cover a woman's hair, I use the terms headscarf/veil and hijab interchangeably. I do this because this is the term many veiled Muslim women use to refer to their headscarf/veil. However, the concept of hijab includes a requirement for men and women to observe modesty in demeanour and dress. The headscarf/veil is considered a form of hijab, and Islamic scholars from diverse Muslim communities differ in their opinions as to whether it is required to fulfill hijab for women.

## On (mis)Representation(s) and Community

While the reverberations of 9/11 continue to be felt, anti-Muslim and/or Islamophobic<sup>53</sup> sentiment and rhetoric is not a new phenomenon (Aslan, 2011; Mattson, 2013; Said, 1978). However, the days, weeks, months, and years following that tragic day involved increasingly salient and disturbing narratives (mis)representing Islam and Muslims in mainstream media and literature<sup>54</sup>. For me, some of the most jarring stories and images have been those related to Muslim girls and women. One of my most striking post-9/11 memories is listening to U.S. First Lady Laura Bush's radio address to Americans on November 17, 2001 (The American Presidency Project, n.d.):

Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.

While her words were intended to bolster a grieving nation at war<sup>55</sup>, I recall feeling a heady sense of indignation. I struggled to understand how raining bombs upon people – the vast majority of whom are innocents – can ever be equated with rights and dignity. Alongside the damaging narratives, images of at turns mysterious, suspicious, exotic, and wounded girls and

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<sup>53</sup> Islamophobia is described as “prejudice towards or discrimination against Muslims due to their religion, or perceived religious, national, or ethnic identity associated with Islam” (The Bridge Initiative, n.d.).

<sup>54</sup> Ramji (2013) noted that, for Muslim participants in her study, the tragic events of, and narratives following, 9/11 seemed to invite purposeful study and reflection about what it means to be Muslim.

<sup>55</sup> The U.S., along with several allies, launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

women filled television screens and book shelves. Images of girls and women who looked like my Mom and Sittee and friends and family and ... me<sup>56</sup>.

Ahmed (2011) highlighted how Mrs. Bush's words, and the inundation of rhetoric surrounding the so-called 'War on Terror,' were used to spin a story of the need to rescue oppressed Muslim girls and women, ironically serving to simultaneously legitimize the violence sometimes forced upon them. Muslim women – especially veiled Muslim women – are often storied by the media and in literature as any combination of the following: poor, uncivilized, oppressed, meek, exotic, suspicious, less-than, and primitive<sup>57</sup>. These narratives ignore the very real historical, cultural, and imperial contexts that have sown and grown conflict, distrust, and extremism in the Middle East, Africa, and other areas with sizable Muslim populations (Mattson, 2013). They also ignore vast national, linguistic, cultural, racial, political, and theological diversity within Muslim communities (Aslan, 2011; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Niyozov, 2010; Ramadan, 2013; Ramji, 2009, 2013). Thus, a single story (Adichie, 2009) has been perpetuated about a global community of 1.6 billion people, comprising approximately a quarter of the world's population (Pew Research Center, 2012)<sup>58</sup>. In Canada, Muslims are the largest non-Christian religious group (Statistics Canada, 2011b), with projections that 3 million Muslims will

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<sup>56</sup> I do not intend to equate hijab and/or veiling with the experiences of all Muslim women and girls. Indeed, many Muslim girls and women choose not to veil for a variety of reasons. Rather, I intend to highlight how the damaging (mis)representations have shaped my stories of becoming as a Muslim woman.

<sup>57</sup> See: Abo-Lughod (2013); Ahmed (2011); Aslan (2011); Bullock and Jaffri (2000); Eid and Karim (2011); Keddie (2014); Khan (2009); Nagra (2011); Ramji (2009, 2013); Sensoy and Marshall (2009, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> Based on a large multi-year Gallup study between the years 2001-2007 (and tens of thousands of hour-long, face-to-face interviews with Muslims from more than 35 nations), Esposito and Mogahed (2007) asserted that the 'clash of civilizations' narrative that has been perpetuated in regards to Islam and the West is "far from inevitable. It is more about policy than principles" (p. xi).

live in Canada by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010). However, despite this ongoing demographic shift, there is a lack of understanding of Islam (Eid & Karim, 2011; Mattson, 2013).

The (mis)representation of Muslim girls and women as oppressed victims in need of rescue is damaging on multiple personal and social levels. While Muslim girls and women in different parts of the globe have unfortunately been forced to cover<sup>59</sup>, it is deleterious to deny that, like me and the females in my family, many girls and women *choose* to cover<sup>60</sup>. Muslim girls and women practice hijab in a multiplicity of ways and for reasons as diverse as the girls and women themselves (Abo-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 2011<sup>61</sup>; Ali, 2012; Aslan, 2011; Barlas, 2002; Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Khan, 2009; Ramji, 2009, 2013<sup>62</sup>). Ramji (2013) and Khan (2009) highlighted the complex and diverse reasons and ways that Canadian Muslim girls and women in particular conceptualize and practice hijab.

My profoundly spiritual, continually unfolding relationship with my hijab has been tension-filled. I chose to don the hijab for the first time when I was in grade 6, only to remove it a couple of weeks later because I was not comfortable with the decision. I thought I was ready to try again in the summer before grade 8, but I removed it again in the summer before grade 9. I struggled to come to terms with a practice I knew was viewed with varying degrees of suspicion, curiosity, and sometimes outright contempt by others with the meaning and esteem it held for

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<sup>59</sup> Some Muslims believe that girls are required to practice hijab at the onset of puberty, others believe it is a personal matter of deciding when one is prepared to practice hijab, while still others do not believe that physically donning hijab is required (Abo-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 2011; Ali, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Hijab, and the extent to which Muslim women choose to cover different parts of their bodies, varies greatly.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmed (2011) contended that, contrary to stereotypes, Muslim women have sometimes decided to don the veil to assert gender equality and control over their bodies. She also highlighted the ways that this empowering narrative has all too often been co-opted by others, particularly by men and mainstream media.

<sup>62</sup> Ramji (2013) highlighted how, for many of her veiled Muslim participants, hijab helped them to “negotiate their private religious identities in the public sphere” (p. 120).

me. For me, veiling is symbolic of my faith – a visible manifestation of my jihad. The word jihad itself, a beautiful concept so integral to my faith, has often been coopted. It means to strive or struggle in the way of the Creator<sup>63</sup>, including the struggle against turning away from the Creator and striving against oppression and injustice (Aslan, 2011).

A child of the 30's, Sittee veiled according to the local custom of her family's Palestinian village; my Mom decided to veil when she was in her early 30's; and my sisters Suha, Fatima, and Eman, all second-generation Canadian Muslim girls, donned the veil when they were in junior high school. Following my failed attempts at veiling, I was content to practice my Islam as a mostly private matter, one between me and Allah (SWT), until, shaken by the events of, and narratives following, 9/11, I decided to veil shortly before my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, the month after I discovered I was pregnant with Noor. I resolved to live my Islam more publicly, with sincerity, and in peace. I sometimes struggle<sup>64</sup> with this resolve, however, as it is often tested.

Reflecting on some of my experiences with discrimination, I think about how I have often tried to respond with an “I-couldn't-care-less-what-you-think” cover story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). I confronted my doubts and my pain in private, supported and nurtured by family and friends. I still struggle to negotiate what it means to live as a veiled Muslim woman alongside others. Elsewhere (Saleh et al., 2014), I wrote of my struggles with silence and to allow for vulnerability in public settings:

While deeply personal, my decision to wear the hijab is also extremely visible and public, carrying with it a myriad of stories – stories that shift depending upon the eye of the

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<sup>63</sup> Allah (SWT) is referred to by 99 sacred names in Islam. The Creator (*Al-Khaliq*) is one such sacred name.

<sup>64</sup> The Arabic word for struggle is Jihad.

beholder. Some of these stories hearten and sustain me, some confuse and irritate me, and some intimidate and frighten me. Although the stories shift depending upon the beholder, I often feel the weight of each beholder's single story (Adichie, 2009) of who/what I am and who/what I should be like in their stories of a woman who wears a hijab. I often feel their stories of me bumping up against my stories to live by, stories that are multiple, multifaceted, experiential, contextual, and always shifting. Feeling this weightiness and the bumping up of, at times, conflicting stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) caused me, over time, to construct a defensive wall of silence. (p. 274)

Later in the article I wrote,

I sense that I will continue to struggle against the urge to hide behind silence as I work to co-compose spaces of belonging .... I am aware of the ethical *necessity* of struggling against silence, for how can I be fully present in a caring, open, and reciprocal relationship if vulnerability is a one-sided expectation? (pp. 274-275)

Indeed, regardless of the discrimination and (mis)representations I have experienced and will likely continue to experience, I continue to struggle against silence, to try to “wage beauty” (Gonzales, 2013) in my everyday interactions and live my Islam with peace and integrity... for myself, for my children, family and friends, and for all the worlds I inhabit (Lugones, 1987) and communities to which I belong.

Continuing to deepen my understandings of my research puzzle as I prepared to inquire alongside co-inquirers, I wondered what personal, familial, cultural, social, and institutional stories they might bump up against (Clandinin et al., 2006) as they compose their lives. Do they

disrupt single stories (Adichie, 2009) with their stories of being and becoming? Do they at times animate constructions (Lugones, 1987) others have of them? As I considered the time period of this inquiry – in the midst of girl co-inquirers’ transitions into adolescence – I was reminded that this time of transition may be spiritually profound as well. Ali (2012) discussed the significance of secondary school as a time when most Muslim girls become *baligh*,

a term used in Islam to refer to one’s coming of age, signified by reaching puberty. Once an individual is *baligh*, they are responsible and held accountable for observing religious practices. Though the exact age varies between Islamic sects, it is usually during their teenage years that Muslim girls are expected to actively observe their faith. (p. 8)

For Muslim girls in the process of transitioning to adolescence, this active observance may include expectations to fulfill, to the best of their ability, the five pillars of Islam<sup>65</sup>, and some form of hijab<sup>66</sup>. I wondered if/how co-inquirers have experienced these expectations and if/how they have already shaped some of their experiences?

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<sup>65</sup> These pillars include: The belief in one God and that Muhammed, Peace Be Upon Him, is His final messenger, five daily prayers, giving whatever one is able to give in charity, fasting the month of Ramadan, and performing Hajj (pilgrimage to the Ka’ba in Mecca) if one is physically and financially able.

<sup>66</sup> Again, this varies according to the sect/interpretation one follows.

## Go Home (???)

*Breathing deeply, I check the time on my phone. Why does it seem to be moving backwards? It's Mother's Day. I should be sitting and getting pampered in some spa somewhere, not in a noisy overfilled amusement park ... but there was no way I could have escaped bringing the kids when they knew their cousins were here. Thinking about grabbing a much-needed coffee on the way home, I turn to see Suha coming up the steps of the latest ride, tears rimming her eyes. Concerned, I ask her what happened. She gestures to a man standing with two small children at a nearby ride and says that he had pointed at her and shouted, "Shoot Bin Laden!" and "Go home!" while she and the children, seven in total, were playing a laser tag game. The children seem confused and disturbed, either unsure why their Mom and Aunt was attacked, or – even more heartbreaking – somewhat familiar with the hate lobbed their way.*

*I breathe deeply again, this time out of anger. The man was looking at us at that point, and at turns shouting for us to go home, or about terrorists. Without much thought, I physically bridge the space between us. Feeling for the children beside him and extra cautious with my language for fear my rage would spill over into my words, I ask him, "So, who is the terrorist in this situation?" He pauses for a few moments, but then, shouts, "You! Look at how you look! Look at what's on your head!" Recognizing the futility of engaging any further with him I say, "I feel sorry for you, and especially for these innocent children, for the hate you are living."*

*I turn, ready to walk away as he continues spewing vitriol, when I see security guards approaching us. They ask what is going on and the man shouts something about terrorists causing trouble. When I am finally able to speak, I explain what happened, all the while embarrassed by the crowd of onlookers that had formed. The four guards seem to be visibly*

*upset at the words and hate still being shouted, one even has tears in her eyes. Finally, a guard shouts, "Enough! I'm Muslim. Do you have a problem with me too?" The man finally stops shouting. The same guard guides us to a quieter area in the park and apologizes profusely to us for being attacked like that. After escorting the man to their office, the guard tells us to please try and forget about the incident and enjoy the rest of our day.*

*Suha and I were too upset to continue playing, so, emotionally drained, we left the park. Noor and Yehia, 7 and 5 years old at the time, ask why the mean man kept shouting at us, and why the police took him away. I try to explain a little about people who could be mean just because of how you look, but that seemed to only confuse them more. "But why Mama?" I don't know what else to say so I tell them that some people were just unhappy in life and would attack others just because. They are uncharacteristically quiet and I wonder how they are making sense of everything. Knowing we will talk about this again, when we've all had more time to process, I think about the man's children and wonder if they too are asking questions and how they are making sense of the day's events. I wonder what stories were planted in Noor and Yehia and in the other children who witnessed the events that day ...*

*The guard who had said he was Muslim called later that night and told me that the man was banned for a year from the mall that housed the park. He said that he isn't actually Muslim, but said so because he was so disturbed for us and for the children who witnessed the man's rage. He said he was really sorry that we were attacked so unfairly. It was only then, after thanking him and disconnecting the call, that I finally allowed some tears to fall. They were shed, however, not because of one man's hate but because of another's kindness.*

## Home is Where the Heart (and soil) Is

*“I am turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999)*

‘Go home!’ is unfortunately a directive I have heard several times in my life. I know the same is true for many family and friends. The first time I was actively aware of the perception of some that I was *not* home was in grade 6 when a running child shouted it at me in passing. After that, however, it seemed to be hurled in my direction or the direction of those I love, with increasing frequency. In grade 7, I remember my Mom coming home one day, visibly shaken, saying that a woman swore at her in the supermarket parking lot and shouted at her to ‘go home.’

Mattson (2014), reflecting on the concept of ‘home,’ discussed how home is a place where you have nurtured the soil, where you have dug and planted and watered, where you have lived a give-and-take relationship with the land. She asserted, “If you know your water, your land, your woods, you are going to feel at home.” Caine (2010) described home as embodied and ontological, existing “somewhere between my memory and nostalgia for the past, my present and my future dreams and fears .... Home is also tied to people I have come to know and to significant events that are inscribed in the landscape” (p. 1305). Home, then, is where the heart (and soil) is. Like the land, it lives in us.

As I contemplated my research puzzle, I thought about my experiences with discrimination and the roots that held me to the lands of my birth and ancestors. I thought of arbitrary lines drawn upon flat representations of topographical terrain, of places sacred and embodied (Basso, 1996; Silko, 1996). I thought of what the word *home* signifies for me and for my Mom and Sittee... and I wondered what it means for my daughter Noor and other Canadian

Muslim girls and their mothers, for co-inquirers in particular. I thought of the multiple studies in literature related to Muslim children, youth, and families that I have come across, and how many writers situated their studies around research questions related to “belonging” ... as though it was assumed a priori that Muslim children, youth, and families would feel a *lack* of this general, all-encompassing concept. I thought about some of my experiences with discrimination and I wondered if co-inquirers have contended with similar experiences, especially in light of recent world events<sup>67</sup>. I wondered what home places and spaces might look like for co-inquirers and if/how these spaces are being composed/found within familial and school landscapes. I wondered about girl co-inquirers’ experiences in particular, as the scarce literature around the diverse experiences of Canadian Muslim females usually revolve around older youth and women ... what interior and exterior locales are the girls tied to, heart and soil?

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<sup>67</sup> At the time of writing, the horrific exploits of IS/ISIS/ISIL/Daesh were very much in the news. Further, several studies in the research literature highlight the ramifications of discriminatory post-9/11 landscapes for Muslim students and families (see, for example, Callaway, 2010; Guo, 2011, 2012; McDonough & Hoodfar, 2005; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Tindongan, 2011; Zine, 2003, 2008).

## Prayers through the Storm

*Grief and shame and fear  
 Wash over  
 A vast ocean of bewildering tides  
 From the East and the West  
 Moments of lucidity  
 Within cyclical storms of horror and hate  
 Torrential showers of grief  
 And shame  
 Because one thought was  
 Please Allah, please don't let them be Muslim  
 Amidst prayers  
 That this is not true, not really happening  
 That loved ones can return home to their beloveds  
 That humanity can survive and rise above  
 Storms of horror and hate  
 Butchers who invoke God's name as they slaughter  
 Leaders who invoke security as they rain bombs  
 Terrorists shouting 'terrorist' at one another  
 Treacherous currents that threaten all*

.....

*When the most powerful waves recede  
 I am washed ashore  
 lost  
 pained  
 weary*

*And I force myself to rise up once again  
 To cleanse myself in calming waters  
 Offer another prayer for the day*

*and ask Allah*

*To rain love on the victims, their loved ones, and us all  
 To shower peace and blessings upon them, their loved ones, and us all  
 To pour strength and mercy on us all*

*to resist, I pray*

*That I will continue to be blessed with the strength and courage  
 To leave my house  
 To smile at strangers  
 To project peace  
 And love  
 And prayers  
 Without shame or guilt or suspicion or fear.*

### **Growing (maternal) Stories of Uncertainty**

*Leaving the theatre's party room smiling, I join the birthday girl, my niece Rana, and her friends in the ladies' washroom. The fourteen girls, ranging in age from 5 to 12 years old, had just finished eating requisite pizza and birthday cake, interspersed with musical chairs and freeze-dancing games. Remembering how I used to dream of going to the movies when I was a child, and not having stepped into a theatre until I was 14 years old, always makes movie theatre parties extra special for me.*

*Before we moved from the party room into the theatre, my sister Suha and I thought it would be a good idea to partner each older girl with a younger girl to visit the washroom. I walk the short distance to the washroom and see that most of the girls were now washing or drying their hands and preparing to leave. I lift one of my younger nieces, Reanne, so she could wash her hands at the rather high sink when I hear a voice shouting, annoyance lacing her words, "Move out of the way girls!" I turn to see my daughter Noor squeeze herself between two hand dryers to make room as a woman shoves past her. The woman catches my eye, glares at me, and shakes her head disapprovingly. Ignoring her, I proceed to move with Reanne to the drying area when I notice Noor looking at me with a mixture of confusion and surprise. I understand her look, one that questions why I didn't say anything in response to the woman's rudeness. I shake my head slightly and, without thinking, bite the bottom part of my lip in a gesture my Mom always used to signify the need to hold myself and my words, not to say or do anything rash. Noor stares at me, obviously unhappy, then, looking away, walks out of the washroom a short distance behind the unimpressed woman.*

*No longer smiling as I hold Reanne's hand to return to the party room, I think about who I was in that moment in relation to the woman and to Noor. I wonder if the woman is having a bad day and had behaved in an uncharacteristic way. I wonder if she has a son or daughter and what she would have done in my situation as a mother. I wonder if she has ever felt the need to be extra cautious with her words and actions because of her gender, cultural or religious background, or because of different reasons altogether. I wonder if she would have yelled at the girls like that or shaken her head at me if she knew the context of why we were there, taking up more space than she felt appropriate. I wonder if it would have made a difference if she knew that, for me, the birthday party had been a brief reprieve from anxiety amidst so many uncertainties facing my family.*

*Sitting in the darkened theatre after the chaos of sorting seats and snacks, I think about Noor and how I used to dislike it when my mom used that lip-biting gesture with me – how often I felt upset at being silenced as a child and youth ... although as a mother I now appreciate the overwhelming urge to protect my children and to try to slow down moments that could become even more ugly. I think about the infinite times Noor has witnessed me speak up, trying to remain calm and respectful even while incredibly upset, when words or actions directed at me or my loved ones were not okay and I understand her surprise at my silence. I think about so many of the stories I haven't shared with Noor about some of my friends' experiences in the wake of several global terror attacks ... like one friend being shouted at to "go home" by a man at the bus stop, or how another was accosted while waiting in a fast-food drive-through by a woman who got out of her car with the express purpose of pounding on my friend's window to yell, "Take that f'ing rag off your head!" Stories that anger and terrify me and make me extra*

*protective, extra cautious. Stories that I haven't shared with her because I want her to love every part of herself without fear or disillusionment.*

*On the way home, I ask Noor if she liked the movie. She responds that it was okay, but then immediately asks me why I didn't respond to the woman who, in her words, "Freaked out at us." Gathering my thoughts, and carefully choosing what to (not) share before answering, I tell her that, as a woman in hijab, I often feel the need to weigh my words and actions extra carefully. I talk about how uncertain I am in these types of situations – do I speak up or not? Is it worth a possible escalation? Will I be upset with myself if I don't say anything? Will I just be reinforcing stereotypes if I do? All of these thoughts and many stories, the woman's and mine, hovered in the spaces between us in that tense moment before I decided to turn away. I tell Noor that, even though I really wanted to say something, in this situation, speaking up probably wouldn't have been advisable, because it may have ruined her cousin's birthday party. Noor seems to be listening intently and contemplating my words but doesn't really respond. We ride in silence for the remainder of our drive home.*

### **On (not) Sharing (single) Stories**

*my whole life  
i have  
ate my tongue.  
ate my tongue.  
ate my tongue.  
i am so full of my tongue  
you would think speaking is easy.  
but it is not.  
— for we who keep our lives in our mouths*

*by Nayyirah Waheed*

Reflecting upon the events at the movie theatre that day, I worry about the stories I am planting alongside Noor in our familial curriculum-making<sup>68</sup> (Huber et al., 2011). I worry about how and when to share stories that may upset her, stories that have the potential to shift the stories she lives and tells as a Muslim girl alongside me and others ... and I wonder if mother co-inquirers have experienced a similar urge to ‘eat their tongue’ (Waheed, 2013, p. 78) to protect their children? Do they too worry about how, when, and/or if they should share stories that could be painful to hear? Reconsidering the stories I live(d) alongside my Mom<sup>69</sup> and alongside my children, I wonder about how other mothers negotiate the tensions of making their children aware of the existence of potentially painful stories ... without unintentionally foretelling foreboding (single) stories of what their experiences *will* be?

### **Growing Forward ... and Rooting a Narrative Inquiry**

Through engaging in autobiographical narrative inquiry, I tried to attend to and honour the stories and wonders living within me as I prepared to engage in a multiperspectival narrative inquiry (Houle, 2012; Huber et al., 2011) alongside three Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers as girl co-inquirers transition into adolescence. Contemplating the layers of complexity in the stories I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), I wondered what stories would be called forth as I engaged in inquiry alongside co-inquirers. Sitting with the stories I live as a second-generation Canadian Muslim woman, (grand)daughter, mother, wife, teacher, graduate student, researcher, sister, niece, cousin, and friend, I wondered about who I was, who I am, and who I will become as I come alongside co-inquirers. Looking forward to the next chapter, I will make

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<sup>68</sup> Huber et al. (2011) described familial curriculum-making as curriculum that is continually composed by children, youth, and families within familial and community landscapes. This concept will be revisited in Chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> Discussed in the “Dear Mama” section earlier in this Chapter.

visible the ways I tried to ethically attend to and honour the stories living within me and co-inquirers, the stories we lived *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), as we engaged in this relational work alongside each other.

## Chapter 2: Rooting (and growing<sup>70</sup>) a Narrative Inquiry

Through autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Saleh et al., 2014), I have attempted thus far to illuminate the interconnectedness of some of the stories I live(d) *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013). As noted in Chapter 1, the conceptual framework of living *by*, *with*, and *in* stories is threaded throughout this work. Clandinin (2013) affirmed that we live *by* countless stories; the term stories to live by was developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999) to refer to a narrative conception of identity as at the nexus between embodied personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988)<sup>71</sup> and knowledge contexts<sup>72</sup>. Drawing upon Okri (1997)<sup>73</sup>, Clandinin (2013) also discussed living *in* stories<sup>74</sup> – in the midst of continually unfolding and enfolding personal, familial, intergenerational, institutional, social, cultural, temporal, linguistic, school, and other narratives. Clandinin (2013) helps me to understand that living *with* stories is an ongoing process of living *in relation*<sup>75</sup> (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to the countless narratives we are always in the midst of.

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<sup>70</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use the metaphor of growth from a Deweyan perspective. Like Dewey (1938), I conceptualize growth as profoundly experiential. For Dewey (1938), growth in an educative sense is built upon the continuation of experience, in that “experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies it in some way” (p. 35). He also cautioned, “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25).

<sup>71</sup> Clandinin and Connelly (1995) conceptualized personal practical knowledge as “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7).

<sup>72</sup> Connelly and Clandinin (1999) referred to these knowledge contexts as metaphoric knowledge landscapes.

<sup>73</sup> Okri (1997) wrote:

In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves (p. 46)

<sup>74</sup> Crites (1971) also discussed how “stories, and the symbolic worlds they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling-places. People live in them” (p. 295).

<sup>75</sup> The concept of living *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) is discussed later in this chapter.

In making visible some of the stories I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), I have attempted to simultaneously illuminate my belief in the *storied* nature of experience (Bruner, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Crites, 1971). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) help me to understand that

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters a world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

My deeply rooted belief that we live *by*, *with*, and *in* a multiplicity of stories called me to engage in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside co-inquirers to deepen our understandings of our experiences in relation, over time, in different places, and always in the multilayered midst of stories (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is philosophically grounded in Dewey's (1938) pragmatic and transactional<sup>76</sup> view of education as life and life as experience.<sup>77</sup> This conceptualization is built upon Dewey's two criteria of experience, *interaction and continuity*<sup>78</sup>, enacted in *situations*. The

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<sup>76</sup> As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted, "Dewey's ontology is not transcendental, it is transactional" (p. 39).

<sup>77</sup> Dewey (1938) differentiated between educative and miseducative experiences. An experience can be miseducative if it "has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). An educative experience, in contrast, encourages the growth of further experience.

<sup>78</sup> Dewey (1938) emphasized, "The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience" (p. 44)

first criteria, *continuity*, calls attention to how “experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies it in some way” (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Dewey’s conceptualization of the second criteria of experience, *interaction*, “assigns equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*” (p. 42). Working from Dewey’s ideas, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed the metaphoric three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality and place.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that it has been important to situate narrative inquiries from within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space throughout the research. However, Clandinin (2013) emphasized,

The three dimensions in the inquiry space are interconnected and interwoven.

Temporality is threaded into place and into events and emotions. The dimensions are not separated from one another ... as we compose and co-compose interim research texts, we awaken to the interwovenness of life experience. (p. 50)

When I began writing some of my stories of experience as part of an extensive autobiographical narrative inquiry<sup>79</sup>, I was awakened to the impossibility of placing my experiences into compartments independent of other experiences. My awareness that my stories were intimately connected to those of my Mom and Sittee called me to attend to, and honour, familial and intergenerational stories planted in my living alongside them and how these stories continue to live in me and shape who I am and who I am becoming. The interconnectedness of temporality,

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<sup>79</sup> As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, “Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (p. 121).

sociality, and place, and the interconnectedness of the myriad stories co-inquirers and I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), lived at the forefront – and periphery<sup>80</sup> – of my awareness as I engaged in inquiry alongside co-inquirers.

### **Growing Forward ... Always *in Relation* and *in the Midst* of Stories**

As I prepared for and engaged in this study, Clandinin (2013) reminded me that *thinking* narratively – honouring experience as an inherently storied and relational phenomenon – will help me to stay wakeful (Greene, 1995) to the interconnected wholeness of lives lived in relation, over time and place. She reminded me that thinking narratively makes visible the threads of relation woven throughout personal and social stories lived within certain times and in particular places. Narrative inquirers view themselves as people *in relation* inquiring alongside others *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000). Co-inquirers and I live *in relation* to our past, present, and not-yet-lived future. We live *in relation* to others – to family, friends, and many others. We live *in relation* to, and in the midst<sup>81</sup> of, personal, social, intergenerational, cultural, temporal, historical, political, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2013). In this view of life and research, ‘*I*, the researcher’ cannot be considered as somehow detached from ‘*Them*, the researched.’ For, as Clandinin (2013) wrote,

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<sup>80</sup> I purposely wrote the word ‘periphery’ because, as Bateson (1994) beautifully noted, I know that if I look very narrowly and hard at anything I am likely to see something new – like the life between the grass stems that only becomes visible after moments of staring. Softening that concentration is also important – I’ve heard that the best way to catch the movements of falling stars is at the edge of vision. (pp. 103-104)

<sup>81</sup> As I prepared to inquire alongside co-inquirers, Clandinin (2006) helped me to remember, Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants’ stories, inquirers’ stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. (p. 47)

As we tell our stories and listen to participants tell their stories in the inquiry, we, as inquirers, need to pay close attention to who we are in the inquiry and to understand that we are part of the storied landscapes we are studying ... We are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to intersubjective, relational, embedded spaces in which our lives are lived out. We do not stand metaphorically outside the inquiry but are part of the phenomenon under study. (p. 24)

Inherent in this commitment to honouring life as profoundly relational is a commitment to honouring co-inquirers and our stories – stories that root and sustain us (Clandinin, 2013; Lopez, 1990). For these reasons, narrative inquiry is rooted in relational ethics (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006).

### **Growing an Inquiry Rooted in Relational Ethics**

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) highlighted,

An honest empirical method will present inquiry as a series of choices, inspired by purposes that are shaped by past experiences, undertaken through time, and will trace the consequences of these choices in the whole of an individual or community's lived experience. (p. 40)

These words reminded me to ground and orient my puzzle from within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, that is, to continually attend to temporality, sociality, and place(s) throughout the inquiry. They reminded me of the importance of situating this research from within the experiential, embodied, and interconnected stream of lives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). They reminded me that inquiring alongside co-inquirers in

relationally ethical ways entails a great deal more than what institutional ethics boards require (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They also reminded me to continually (re)consider my research puzzle and personal, practical, and social/theoretical justifications (Clandinin, 2013) for engaging this inquiry<sup>82</sup>.

As I rooted and grew a story of engaging in a narrative inquiry that honours the stories co-inquirers and I told, retold, lived and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), Huber, Clandinin, and Huber (2006) helped me to understand that my relational responsibilities to co-inquirers are akin to the responsibilities of my friendships in an “ethics of life” (Charon & Montello, as cited on p. 218). Clandinin and Murphy (2009) similarly emphasized that, although I must necessarily attend to the “so what?” and “who cares?” justifications for engaging in the inquiry, my uppermost consideration must be to honour co-inquirers and the stories of experiences they have entrusted me with, as “the ethical stance of narrative inquirers is best characterized by a relational ethics” (p. 600).

Turning to reconsider the stories I shared alongside my children, Sittee, my Mom, and other loved ones in Chapter 1, I think of how difficult it can be to inquire alongside others in ways that honour relational ethics. I experienced a great deal of uncertainty as I thought and rethought, considered and reconsidered some of the stories I (re)presented (Ely, 2007). Although I tried to be careful when inquiring alongside my Mom and Sittee into the stories of experience they shared with me, I understand that our conversations – and my representations – included memories of painful experiences. My loved ones approved of the writing I shared with them; however, my experiences inquiring alongside them emphasized for me the profound

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<sup>82</sup> My personal, practical, and social/theoretical justifications for this research are discussed in Chapter 7.

responsibility in honouring the stories co-inquirers entrust me with (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013), for as Lopez (1990) reminds me, “the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them.”

### **Growing Forward ... and Thinking of Transitions<sup>83</sup>**

The above scholars and considerations, alongside others, helped me to root and grow an inquiry that honours the myriad stories co-inquirers and I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) as we inquired alongside one another as girl inquirers transitioned into adolescence. Clandinin, Caine, and Steeves (2013) remind me,

As narrative inquirers we are fundamentally concerned with people’s lives and so our wonders around transitions are inextricably linked to wonders around identity, stories to live by .... identities are shaped in the living of lives in particular times, places, and relationships. We are troubled with conceptions of transition that do not acknowledge the improvisatory nature of change over time, that are shaped by people and contexts. (p. 51)

Greene (1995) and Bateson (1989; 1994) similarly helped me to consider that the stories co-inquirers and I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) are always in the making, continually (re)composed with imagination and improvisation. These wisdoms were particularly important to remember as I inquired alongside co-inquirers during a period of significant life transition(s).

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<sup>83</sup> Heilbrun (1999) conceptualized transitions as a threshold experience ... providing to the actors involved the condition of liminality. The word ‘limin’ means ‘threshold,’ and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. (p. 3)  
I revisit Heilbrun’s work in Chapter 6.

## Growing Forward ... Alongside Co-inquirers

Following institutional ethics approval in early January 2015<sup>84</sup>, I contacted several friends, colleagues, and community liaisons from my work as a teacher and community volunteer to assist me in inviting co-inquirers to this research. I was ecstatic when, a few weeks later, in mid-January 2015, after a close friend passed my introductory letter to Zahra<sup>85</sup>, her mother Ayesha contacted me to express an interest in participating in this research<sup>86</sup>. A week later, in late January 2015, another close friend called me to excitedly share that her friend, Safaa, and Safaa's daughter, Rayyan, were looking forward to a phone call from me to discuss possible participation in this research.<sup>87</sup> Safaa later shared that, upon hearing of my search for co-inquirers from our mutual friend, she wanted to participate alongside Rayyan because she remembered me fondly from my work as her eldest daughter's teacher several years ago. Layla and Maya were the third co-inquirer pair to come alongside me in this research in the summer of 2015. While I initially was unsure about inviting Maya and Layla to participate in this research for several reasons<sup>88</sup>, including the close relationship Layla and I already enjoyed over several years of friendship, I realized that inquiring alongside a mother and daughter making their lives in rural Alberta is an important way to be inclusive of the diversity of Muslim girls, women, and families composing their lives in many different places.

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<sup>84</sup> Appendix E includes institutional ethics-approved recruitment and information letters, consent and assent forms.

<sup>85</sup> Zahra was twelve years old at that time.

<sup>86</sup> A narrative account of inquiring alongside Ayesha and Zahra, including a detailed account of how we negotiated coming alongside each other as co-inquirers, is in Chapter 4 of this thesis. For a record of our meetings and conversations, see Appendix C.

<sup>87</sup> A narrative account of inquiring alongside Safaa and Rayyan, including a detailed account of how we negotiated coming alongside each other as co-inquirers, is in Chapter 3 of this thesis. For a record of our meetings and conversations, see Appendix B.

<sup>88</sup> The multiple considerations and wonders I attended to in inviting Layla and Maya to participate are discussed in our narrative account in Chapter 5 of this thesis. For a record of our meetings and conversations, see Appendix D.

In larger group gatherings with our families, conversations with mother and daughter pairs, and one-on-one conversations, co-inquirers and I have frequented each other's homes, picnicked in community parks, dined out together, shared coffee and play dates, enjoyed movies and movie nights, and planned field trips and mosque visits/events together<sup>89</sup>. Always in the midst of a multiplicity of stories, we engaged alongside each other in ways that blurred the (always unclear and shifting) boundaries between our research and our living and growing as co-inquirers and as friends. However, as Huber, Clandinin, and Huber (2006) remind me, like the rhythms inherent in all life relationships, research relationships require continual care, nurturing, and wakefulness (Greene, 1995) to not only honour relational responsibilities, but to make visible the possibilities of living our stories in different ways.

Thinking about the many different places co-inquirers and I engaged in inquiry, I am reminded of how Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) were awakened to the curriculum-making continually composed by children, youth, and families within familial and community landscapes<sup>90</sup>. Drawing upon Lugones' (1987) notion of world-travelling, Huber et al. (2011) reconceptualized curriculum-making as occurring within two worlds – familial and school curriculum-making worlds. Wondering about the world-travel children engage in as they live in, and move between, familial and school curriculum-making worlds, they wrote:

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<sup>89</sup> Clandinin (2013) discussed two possible starting points for narrative inquiry – living stories or telling stories. When inquirers begin with living stories alongside participants, they “create a space to come alongside participants or become part of an ongoing space” (p. 45). This inquiry involved an overlapping of living and telling stories, whereby “conversation create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard” (p. 45).

<sup>90</sup> Earlier, drawing upon their appreciation of the connections between context, knowledge, and identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999), and of curriculum as composed in the dynamic interaction between students, teachers, subject matter, and milieu (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), Clandinin et al. (2006) made visible the multiple ways that a *curriculum of lives* was continually being composed within school landscapes.

Given these two worlds, what seems important is to more clearly understand how both worlds are places of curriculum making and that, as parents, teachers, and societies, we ask children to move between two places and live in both worlds on a daily basis. It seems imperative then to keep asking about, and working towards, understanding how we might engage children, teachers, and families in playful world travel with loving perception. (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 141)

While this inquiry included explorations of co-inquirers' in-school and out-of-school experiences, it was situated within familial and community contexts. This involved coming alongside co-inquirers within the diverse array of contexts they chose to invite me to, including familial homes, restaurants, playgrounds, theatres, sports arenas and centres, community functions, shopping malls, and mosques. I agree with Huber et al. (2011) that, while both familial and school curriculum-making need to be regarded as valuable to the composition of lives, school curriculum-making has been prioritized in the study of curriculum. Through purposefully inquiring alongside co-inquirers into our familial curriculum-making practices (Huber et al., 2011), we valued and made visible the curriculum-making that occurs within our familial and community contexts.

### **Rooting and Growing Relational Field Texts Alongside Co-Inquirers**

I iteratively collected, co-composed, and analyzed field texts<sup>91</sup>, and simultaneously composed and negotiated interim and final research texts alongside co-inquirers throughout the inquiry – from February 2015 to February 2017 for two pairs of mother and daughter co-

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<sup>91</sup> I use the term field texts rather than data “to signal that the texts we compose in narrative inquiry are experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46).

inquirers, Ayesha and Zahra, and Safaa and Rayyan, and from June 2015 to March 2017 for Layla and Maya. Part of negotiating participation with co-inquirers involved asking each mother and daughter if they would like to relationally co-compose field texts alongside me, and if so, what forms of field texts they would like to compose. Ayesha, Safaa, and Layla, three busy women and mothers, indicated that they would enjoy engaging in face-to-face, digital, and telephone conversations. Zahra, Rayyan, and Maya, three talented girls in the midst of transitioning to adolescence, were more varied in their responses to my question. As we began our conversations, I gifted all three girls with disposable cameras, sketchbooks, coloured gel pens, and journals as possible ways to co-compose field texts. While I engaged in multiple conversations and community excursions alongside Zahra, Maya, and Rayyan, only Maya decided to include her artistic and reflective compositions as field texts. Other field texts include recordings and transcriptions of multiple one-on-one and group conversations, field notes of all conversations and communications, including telephone and digital communications, co-composed and/or co-inquirer composed annals, and our reflective and creative writing. Memory box items (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), including photographs, home videos, letters, and other artifacts were also used to help guide some of our conversations. Field texts were composed alongside co-inquirers with attentiveness to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Attempting to be mindful of the multiplicity of stories co-inquirers and I live *by, with,* and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), I sought to engage in relationally ethical (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Menon et al., 2015) ways alongside co-inquirers. In Menon et al. (2015), I wrote about how “living ethically alongside one participant may mean giving her time and space to reach out to me when she feels ready to share her experiences rather than giving in to my urge to

follow a pre-set conversation schedule” (p. 86). For another participant, living ethically “may mean leaving my beloved audio recorder at home (!) so that she feels more comfortable sharing some of the more tension-filled experiences she has lived” (p. 86). I wrote,

These shifts to what I had originally imagined when planning this study are not simply for ensuring comfort; I make these often difficult decisions in the hopes of living in ethically relational ways with participants—girls and women who have agreed to live and inquire alongside me for deeper understandings of our often ignored/silenced/misconstrued experiences as Canadian Muslim females. (pp. 86-87)

### **Growing from Field Texts to Interim Research Texts**

Clandinin (2013) reminds me that the move from collecting, composing, and co-composing field texts to writing research texts is a recursive, always relational, process oftentimes laced with tension and uncertainty. Still living in the multilayered midst of stories alongside co-inquirers, I began to move towards composing interim research texts. As I began to compose initial accounts of inquiring alongside one another, I wondered how I could give a sense of our experiences that calls forth the gaze of loving perception (Lugones, 1987). How could I write of our experiences in ways that eschew sanitizing and colonizing our stories for voyeuristic consumption? Elsewhere (Menon et al., 2015), I ruminated about inking words to paper in ways that honour co-inquirers and our ongoing life-making “without reducing our diverse and nuanced experiences to a single (stereotypical) story (Adichie, 2009) of what it means to be a Canadian Muslim female” (p. 88). I wondered, “How can I give a sense of the artistry and improvisation (Bateson, 1989) with which we have composed our lives amidst

myriad personal, familial, intergenerational, social, cultural, linguistic, institutional, and temporal plotlines (Clandinin, 2013)” (p. 88)?

As I slowly moved from composing field texts to interim research texts, to help root and sustain my work as a narrative inquirer, I carefully attended to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, and often revisited my personal, practical, and social/theoretical justifications (Clandinin, 2013) for engaging in this inquiry. I also engaged in several conversations about my writing process alongside co-inquirers, my supervisor Jean, and my response community friends, Jinny Menon and Hiroko Kubota. Trying to be wakeful (Greene, 1995) to the multiplicity of (ongoing) stories co-inquirers and I embody (Johnson, 1989) and live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013), I approached the composition of interim texts with a profound ontological commitment to take care of our stories, and of the friends and co-inquirers who have generously shared and lived them alongside me (Caine et al., 2016).

### **Growing from Interim to Final Research Texts**

Planted in me over many seasons of inquiry, the stories co-inquirers and I lived and shared alongside each other continue to live in me. The narrative accounts<sup>92</sup> in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are rooted in embodied, experiential living and inquiring alongside co-inquirers for approximately two years. Before, during, and after each conversation (as well as during the times between them), I composed detailed field notes, including my observations, wonderings, resonances, and tensions. I re-listened to our conversations and re-visited field notes often,

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<sup>92</sup> Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012) explained,

The term narrative account, or perhaps narrative accounting, allows us to give an account, an accounting, a representation, of the unfolding of lives, both participants and researchers, at least as they became visible in those times and places where our stories intersected and were shared. (p. 9)

adding new wonderings and considerations over time. Each time I transcribed our conversations, a process which would occur over a period of two to three days depending on the length of the recording, I travelled back to earlier times and places alongside co-inquirers, pausing often to make notes of wonderings, resonances, silences, continuities, discontinuities, tensions, and the emergence of possible threads in the margins of the transcript or in my nearby notebook. Every time I revisited the recorded and/or transcribed conversations, more notes would be added and more connections and disconnections would become visible. I carried these notes and wonderings with me to the next conversation and, as we discussed them, new wonderings and possibilities for future discussions and inquiry often emerged.

In the fall of 2016, I began an intense process of (re)turning to the field texts with the intent of discerning resonant threads for each pair of mother and daughter co-inquirers. I searched for “threads that echoed and reverberated across” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 14) the stories of being and becoming that co-inquirers and I lived, told, retold, and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside one another over time. Feeling overwhelmed by the number of field texts we had composed and co-composed over two years of inquiring alongside each other, I resolved to somehow organize field texts for each pair of mother and daughter co-inquirers. I chronologically ordered transcribed conversations, field notes, and other field texts co-inquirers and I composed because I felt that this would help me in identifying the shifts in our telling, living, reliving and retelling over time.



Figure 2-1. Field Texts organized in binders.



Figure 2-2. Organized chronologically.

Because research texts, including interim texts, are interpreted texts composed via the understandings co-inquirers and I have of the resonances, threads, “disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and incoherences” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50) of the stories we lived and shared, I then painstakingly and repeatedly (re)listened to our conversations and (re)read all of the newly organized field texts to identify continuities, discontinuities, silences, resonances, tensions, and wonders. I engaged in this intense process for all three pairs of mother and daughter co-inquirers and composed detailed notes in the process.

This intense and iterative process of reading and re-reading field texts, and revisiting recorded conversations, involved identifying, and then making visible, resonant threads and the connections among and between overlapping, deeply intertwined stories that co-inquirers and I told, lived, relived and retold (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) over time. After identifying stories and threads that seemed particularly important to include in our narrative account, I met with co-inquirers to discuss their thoughts about my interpretations of our discussions and inquiry. I typed and printed out a page of emerging threads, as well as a few pages of initial writing about how we came to inquire alongside one another. As we read these pages aloud, I felt nervous and wondered if I had, in some way, reduced or misinterpreted our conversations and/or living alongside one another? I asked

variations of the following questions: “Are you comfortable with this? Do you recognize yourself in this? Do you feel that it honours the stories we shared, lived, and inquired into alongside one another? Is anything missing? Does anything seem out of place or did I seem to misunderstand or misinterpret anything?”

As I began writing about my experiences inquiring alongside Safaa and Rayyan in November and December of 2016 (I later wrote narrative accounts of inquiring alongside Ayesha and Zahra in January and February of 2017, and Layla and Maya in February and March of 2017), I decided to organize my writing chronologically, by writing about our conversations in the order we engaged in them. I did this to *show*, rather than simply tell about, our coming alongside each another over time as co-inquirers. For, as Ely (2007) noted,

our reports must glow with life. This not only to honor our stories but, more important, to support the ethic that undergirds them ... narrative researchers are obligated to present the stories of those people in ways that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared. (p. 569)

As I strove to “cleave as closely as possible to the essence” (Ely, 2007, p. 569) of the stories and experiences co-inquirers and I told and retold alongside one another, I then decided to restructure my writing by representing our conversations through the initial *telling* of our conversations in chronological order, then, following each telling section, unpacking our stories by drawing out resonant threads in *retellings* sections. To give a sense of the difference between the telling and retellings sections, I used the present tense in the *telling* of our conversations, and the past tense – as a way to indicate reflectively looking back – for *retellings* sections.

As I engaged in this work, I felt that referencing the specific dates of our conversations did not give a sense of the many months we engaged in this inquiry. Contemplating this, the idea to structure our conversations (and the times between them) around the seasons began to take root in my mind. Later composing narrative accounts of inquiring alongside Ayesha and Zahra, and Layla and Maya, I felt that continuing the representational form of tellings and retellings helped me to show rather than simply tell about how we relationally composed our inquiry over many seasons. I met with co-inquirers often during this process and we read over, and negotiated<sup>93</sup>, interim texts, including initial drafts of our narrative accounts, together.

Following the co-composition and negotiation of narrative accounts alongside co-inquirers, I began the process of looking across our narrative accounts for resonant threads in the stories Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I told, retold, lived, and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in our inquiries. As I engaged in this recursive and reflexive process, many resonances, tensions, continuities, discontinuities, silences, and educative possibilities were made increasingly visible in our life-making as Canadian Muslim females. Holding our embodied, experiential stories of being and becoming (Vinz, 1997) close, in chapters 6 and 7, I draw attention to some of the threads that echoed across our narrative accounts. In these ways, throughout our transition(s) from composing field texts to composing research texts<sup>94</sup>, I sought to honour the ways co-inquirers and I relationally lived and inquired alongside each other over time.

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<sup>93</sup> All three pairs of mother and daughter co-inquirers approved of the writing within this thesis. More details about negotiating our narrative accounts are included in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

<sup>94</sup> It is important to note that the narrative accounts in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 were co-composed alongside co-inquirers. I authored Chapters 6 and 7 with attentiveness to some of the stories co-inquirers and I lived *by, with,* and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) during the course of this research.

### Chapter 3: A Narrative Account of Inquiring Alongside Rayyan and Safaa

Rayyan & Safaa's Family:

**Safaa** – Mom  
Ahmad – Dad

Children by Age:

Leila  
Ali  
Sadia  
**Rayyan**  
Marwa  
Amina

*Thinking Back ... and Growing Forward*

*I am sitting with many thoughts after Safaa, Rayyan, Marwa, and Amina's visit tonight. We spent the last two hours reviewing transcripts and interim research texts and discussing possible ways forward in the writing of our narrative account. I reflect on composing a relationship alongside them, and I think about time. I think about how the meaning and measure of time changes for me, over time of course, but also in relation to different periods and moments in my life. How many times have I been impatient to begin or end something ... and how often have I wished for time to go slower, to find moments and spaces to think, reflect, savour, just be. I have been blessed to live and inquire alongside Rayyan and Safaa over many seasons, getting to know them and some of their stories slowly. I have been blessed with time to co-create spaces to share our stories, and the hopes, fears, resonances, and struggles we have had and continue to have moving forward.*

*Our relationship has undoubtedly shifted over time, and I felt I needed to show these shifts through telling the story of our co-composed inquiry over the many seasons we spent together. However, the rhythm of our relationship cannot be quantified or measured by the seasons or with a calendar. Composing our lives alongside one another has been a process of learning to travel to one another's worlds with loving perception (Lugones, 1987). While this study will be drawing to a close, I know that time is not over for our relationship, for we have become friends for all seasons<sup>95</sup> ...*

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<sup>95</sup> While I refer to our discussions by season and year in this chapter, a detailed list of our face-to-face discussions is provided in Appendix B.

### **Rooting a (research) Relationship – Winter 2015**

The smell of buttered popcorn, along with sporadic wafts of chlorine and the splashing and hollering from the nearby pool, overwhelm my senses as I wait to meet with Safaa and Rayyan at the YMCA café area. A close friend called me a few weeks ago to tell me that her friend is interested in participating in this study alongside her daughter. Ecstatic at this news, I thanked her for helping to connect us. She said, “Safaa remembers you Muna, she said you used to teach one of her older kids.” Surprised, I asked her for my former student’s name. She replied, “I think that her children’s last name is different than hers, but the child you taught could have been Ali, or Leila, or maybe even Sadia?” I had taught many youth with those names in the past and was so curious and excited to find out just who I would be getting (re)acquainted with. I wondered what stories they have of me as a former teacher, what stories I (may) have of them, and how these stories could shape our living alongside one another as co-inquirers.

I once again look around the busy YMCA café, and nearby entrance and pool areas. Rayyan and Safaa will be joining me at any moment and I am feeling acutely aware of just how many familiar faces I have already glimpsed in this always bustling community place. Safaa had suggested meeting here because Rayyan had a swimming lesson that evening, and she thought it would give us a good opportunity to reconnect before Rayyan joined us. A week ago, after playing phone tag for a few days, Safaa and I spoke on the phone for a little over half an hour and she helped me to fondly recall teaching her eldest daughter, Leila, several years ago. Having taught hundreds of students in my teaching of youth in grades 6 to 9, there are many parents and caregivers who I had never met face to face. Safaa, however, was a parent I had met with on more than one occasion and I vividly remember the sense of warmth she exuded each time we engaged in conversation.

I am nudged awake from my reverie at the realization that Safaa is walking towards me. Walking behind her are three beautiful girls; two of the girls look to be around the same age and are wearing hijab, and the third is very young and extremely cute. All three girls and Safaa are wearing bright colours that tease of summer under the winter chill still clinging to their coats. With a wide smile and hug, Safaa breathlessly apologizes for being late, turns to the girls behind her, and directs them towards the doors of the swimming pool, calling out to them in the Somali language as they rush away. Safaa turns back to me, apologizes again, and sits down with another wide smile while gesturing for me to please sit too.

I smile back at Safaa and laughingly say that there is no need to apologize - as a mother of three, I totally understand! She chuckles and asks me about my children – what are their names and ages? How are they doing? Do they know that their Mama is in school too? I share a few details about Noor, Yehia, and Hannah and then ask how Leila is doing. Safaa smiles and says that I probably wouldn't recognize Leila anymore – she is a grown woman now about to finish her University degree! Safaa tells me that Leila is a wonderful role model to her younger sister, Rayyan, who is in grade 6, and to her four other siblings, Ali, Sadia, Marwa, and Amina. I look at Safaa in amazement and tell her I didn't recall that Leila had five siblings, mash'Allah! She smiles widely again and says, "Yes, Alhamdulillah, we were blessed with six kids." In response to my incredulous look and to my question of "How do you do it?", Safaa says that life is indeed busy for them, but that Allah (SWT) makes it easy. She is able to balance family life, and her work as a full-time medical practitioner and as a multicultural consultant with the help of God and with the support of her husband and children.

Safaa asks me what led to my interest in studying the experiences of Muslim girls and mothers in particular, "Why girls, Muna?" I explain that my daughter Noor is currently in grade

6 and I have a lot of wonders about her experiences transitioning into adolescence, especially because she is coming of age in the current sociopolitical climate<sup>96</sup>. I also share some concerns I have after reading the literature in relation to the experiences of Muslim girls and women<sup>97</sup>. Safaa begins talking about how, in her experience, raising her only son, Ali, during his transitions through adolescence and young adulthood was more tension-filled than raising her two eldest daughters, Leila and Sadia. I didn't have the opportunity to ask Safaa any more questions about this comment as Rayyan, Marwa, and Amina join us, all fresh-faced from swimming.

I greet each of the girls and say how wonderful it is to meet them as Safaa formally introduces us. Rayyan quietly responds that she has met me before, she was with her mom once when they visited my classroom. I laughingly reply, "Then, it's wonderful to see you again!" We talk about the study and I try to emphasize that I am not asking for their commitment tonight, I want them to talk about it with each other before signing any of the consent forms since it is a longer-term commitment. Safaa responds by saying that they are already committed because, turning to look at Rayyan, "It's important to help others, right?" Rayyan smiles back and nods and I get the sense that this is a familiar familial refrain. We hug each other good-bye, talk about connecting again soon, and walk out into the cold February night and towards our cars, together.

### **Rooting Stories of Being and Becoming Alongside Safaa – Spring 2015**

The continuous whirring of multiple caffeine machines along with the nearby caffeinated conversations usually wouldn't give me pause. Anyone who knows me (or has seen the ever-

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<sup>96</sup> Two days before our conversation, on February 10, 2015, three Muslim students, Razan and Yusor Abu-Salha, and Deah Barakat were murdered by their neighbour in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in what many have deemed to be a hate crime (Elliot, 2015; Talbot, 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Discussed in the "On (mis)Representation(s) and Community" section of Chapter 1.

present coffee cup in my hand) knows that I thoroughly enjoy coffee and the establishments that specialize in it. However, as I wait for Safaa, I look around and wonder if it would be okay to ask her if we might sit on the outdoor patio. It has been a few months since we have been able to meet in person and I was really hoping that we would be able to talk in a place that would allow for an intelligible voice recording. Safaa called me a little over a week ago to ask if I would be free to meet with her and Rayyan over the weekend, but I was in Chicago for a conference at that time. I asked if it would be possible to meet during the week instead. She said that she would be able to meet during a break from work, but that Rayyan would be in school. We eventually agreed to meet alone for this first research conversation and try for a second meeting with Rayyan when things were less busy. It wasn't how we initially hoped to begin conversations, but we soon discovered that some of our expectations needed to be continually negotiated in the midst of busy work, school, and family schedules that were often beyond our control.

Safaa texted me to tell me that she was running about ten minutes late, so I replied that it wasn't a problem and asked what I could order for her while I waited. Sitting with our beverages and pastries, I jot down a few observations and test my voice recorder as I wait. I look up as I sense an approaching figure and stand up to greet Safaa. She greets me with a warm hug and enthusiastic "Muna! Assalamu Alaikum!" Before I could suggest it, Safaa asks me if it would be okay if we sit outside. It's a beautiful sunny day, she explained, and the winter seemed extra long this year. I laughingly tell her she read my mind and we take our things and head outside.

We exchange pleasantries as we get settled and I, in my typical awkward fashion, ask Safaa if it would be okay to record this conversation. She laughs and says, "Of course!" As Safaa speaks, I begin sketching a timeline to help me understand Safaa's stories chronologically. I am struck not only by her words, but by the incredibly rhythmic way she recounts her experiences.

Her manner of speech is poetic, drawing my attention again and again to her melodic storytelling and turns of phrase. For this reason, below, I arranged some of the stories Safaa shared that day using her words, only shifting words or sentences for temporal clarity.

### **Safaa in Her Words**

*My dad and mum got divorced when I was little*

*so I was raised in a very big extended family, aunties, uncles, Grandma ...*

*I started school in Somalia when I was 5, and when I was 6 we moved to Kenya*

*It was a really big transition for me*

*I came to [live with] my father and his wife and it was totally different in Kenya. The school was run in English and the language of the community was Swahili.*

*Language was an issue. I think that's where I get the passion for helping people with language*

*When I was younger I would look forward to going to high school.*

*I said I liked math, so after I finished high school I went to college for accounting.*

*I didn't finish, you know that's when the Somali civil war broke*

*and then we got so many people coming to us ... I don't know what happened, I got distracted*

*the refugees came and my dad rented a big house near our home and that was his siblings and their children that were coming*

*So I stopped going to school.*

*That was one of the things my grandma was upset about. She came to live with us when the civil war broke.*

*When the refugees came to Kenya, I was volunteering my own time, you know helping people, interpreting for them*

*I found I had a passion for that, it was something that I enjoyed doing, and I would go out of my way. And at that time I think I was 16, so that's how I started the work in the community.*

*I was sometimes not around at home, and my Grandma always wanted me to be around with her*

*I know my rights with my Grandma, and the rights that they have on us.*

*And my Grandma actually gave me a name ... my name is Shirko, something that is shared.*

*And she used to complain to my dad and say, "Your daughter? She is shared. She belongs to everyone" [laughing]*

*She was a powerful woman. She was strong. She was an amazing woman.*

*One of the things my Grandma told me before I left was "Is this how you're going to behave when you are with your husband? Being shirko [shared]? Your marriage is not going to work out if you are going to be behaving this way, I'm telling you" [laughing].*

*Coming to Canada I didn't stop. I like to help people and go out of my way.*

*I got married to my husband in 1994 and came to BC. It was just me and him.*

*It wasn't good. I got pregnant right away, I got sick, you know new husband, new to the country, new to everything ... body changing*

*I wasn't even here for 9 months when I had Leila. I had pregnancy-induced hypertension so they had to induce me before 9 months*

*it was a rough time actually.*

*but I managed Alhamdulillah*

*I used to go out, walk around you know, because language wasn't a barrier for me*

*We lived a little bit far from where everybody in the community lived, so my husband would take me on the weekends, on Saturdays and Sundays, to the Madrasa and that's how I would get to know women in the community.*

*At around 7 months [pregnant], I moved from where I was. I came to live at the centre of the community, I said "No I'm not going to be alone here"*

*we moved and it was really a great neighbourhood, the women would help each other with childcare and all that*

*Ali was born about 2 years later and Sadia was born in 2000, so by 5 years I had three children.*

*And then I moved to Alberta in 2002 and Rayyan was the first born here in 2003.*

*Before we moved here I was going to school, I was doing accounting in BC*

*also applied for the medical practitioner program and they put me on the waiting list there ...*

*I always like to keep myself busy [laughing]*

*Marwa was born when Rayyan was 2 and I decided to apply to the medical practitioner program*

*I got in when Marwa was 2.*

*I love people. I love numbers, but I like to work with people. I don't want to be isolated with papers*

*the reason I think I was doing financial management in BC was because my husband was self-employed, he had a business, and I was just doing that for that sake*

*When I came here to Alberta, I was just looking around at organizations that support immigrants*

*I directly approached an organization and visited with the director and had a talk with her and a few months later they said, "Are you interested to work with us?"*

*And I enjoy it, I work with immigrant and refugee newcomers, you know, interpreting for them.*

*Actually I started school here in Alberta in 2007, when I was with the organization. I finished my medical practitioner program in 2011.*

*I always loved school, it was my grandma's inspiration actually. She would always tell me "go to medical school"*

*You know back home, when someone is sick, they always put up IV's at home and give the fluids, like nobody goes to the hospital, so if a family has a medical practitioner they have a treasure*

*My grandma always used to tell me, "You are smart, you can do it, go for it"*

*By the time I was finishing my program, I was pregnant with my little one, Amina.*

*I finished the program in April and then actually got the job as a casual at the time sometime in June and Amina was due sometime in July*

*So I didn't even go, I didn't start the job, I just went to the orientation.*

*By the time Amina was 4, I started as a casual, once a week kind of thing at the Hospital. Amina was my number six [child]. [laughing]*

*Many people asked, “We thought you were going to quit when you [got a full-time job]” but even if I leave the job [as a multicultural consultant], I would still work with the community.*

*[laughing] that’s who I am*

*With the help of God, I didn’t do it myself. I had very good family support as well. My husband was supportive, I wouldn’t have done it by myself. He did it with me.*

*Actually, I am telling my children, “I’m thinking of doing my Master’s” and they all say “Mama, please no!” [laughing]*

*But it’s just about the timing.*

## **Retellings**

### **“I made a family” (Safaa, Spring 2015)**

As I re-read Safaa’s words from that first conversation, I am once again in awe of her strength and improvisation through so many discontinuities<sup>98</sup> across her life. I think about how five-year-old Safaa, raised by her paternal grandmother and large extended family in Somalia following her parents’ divorce as a baby, might have experienced learning that she will be moving to another country to live with her father. I imagine how she may have felt the first time she attended her new school in Kenya, trying to understand the language of the community

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<sup>98</sup> This term refers to periods of change and uncertainty during life compositions (Bateson, 1989). Clandinin (2013) elucidated how, among other theoretical concepts, the concept of “continuity and improvisation as a response to the uncertainties in life and life contexts (Bateson, 1989, 1994) ... also ground our understanding of experience as narratively composed” (p. 12).

(Swahili) and the language of instruction at school (English). I wonder at sixteen-year-old Safaa's decision to put her studies on hold to help translate for and otherwise support the influx of Somali refugees in Kenya. I envision twenty-three-year-old Safaa moving away from her extended family yet again, and settling in Canada as a new bride, pregnant and far away from the beloved people and places that helped raise her. I listen to the recording of that first conversation and am once again transported to different times and places, attending to so many parts of our conversation that I now realize were likely painful for Safaa to share. I read our words with more knowing eyes and hear our inflections with more discerning ears for we have lived several months and seasons alongside one another since that time.

I sit with Safaa's early life stories, stories of family and community and taking care of one another. I wonder if moving to Kenya, away from Somalia and the only family she had known, was as difficult for her as she says her later move across the globe, and away from her family and community in Kenya, to join her new husband in Canada was. While I later learned that Safaa regularly reconnects with her mother, half-siblings, and extended family in America (sometimes referred to by Safaa and Rayyan as 'the States'), and her father and half-siblings in Kenya (not to mention cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews in many different places around the world), I am reminded of the multiple times in our conversations where Safaa has talked about *building* familial and community relationships in the various places she has lived, not necessarily composed of blood connections, but those of the heart: "I have a good support network, lots of friends .... I *made* a family." I am also reminded of how often Safaa has said that she has "managed, Alhamdulillah" ... that while she was challenged during different periods in her life, her faith and her family helped her to negotiate these times and sustain her: "With the help of God, I didn't do it myself. I had very good family support as well."

## The Two R's

As I read over, and listen once again to, Safaa's words, my attention (re)turns to when Safaa said,

One of the things my Grandma told me before I left was, "Is this how you're going to behave when you are with your husband? Being shirko [shared]? Your marriage is not going to work out if you are going to be behaving this way, I'm telling you." [laughing]

Although she laughed as she shared her grandmother's words, Safaa understands her grandmother's warnings about not giving so much of her time to others that she would not be able to fulfill familial responsibilities: "I know my rights with my grandma, and the rights that they [grandparents/elders] have on us."

I think of the many conversations where Safaa has talked about rights and responsibilities. One conversation in particular from the winter of 2016 elucidates the importance of rights and responsibilities – the "Two R's" – in Safaa's familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011). We had been enjoying tea in my home when Safaa shared that she tells her children,

Everybody has rights and responsibilities. If we are careful with those two R's, then you are going to survive ... you have rights *and* responsibilities ... I tell them, "You don't allow anybody ever to take your rights away. *Anybody*. But make sure you also fulfill your own responsibilities. If you are careful with those two R's, then you will be okay."

For Safaa, the Two R's of rights and responsibilities are inherently communal. She believes that personal and interpersonal responsibilities are intricately intertwined with personal and interpersonal *rights*. This deeply rooted belief will be revisited in future sections of this account.

### Trying to (slowly) Plant Seeds of Trust – Spring 2015

I am sitting under a tree, on an orange and white checkered park mat, to the side of the main YMCA outdoor playground and spray park, as I write field notes before Rayyan and Safaa join me. It is Victoria Day, a late May holiday, and many children, youth, and families are at the park enjoying the beautiful spring day close to the end of the long weekend. The squeals of joy make me smile and I vow to come back soon with my children. Last weekend, after weeks of trying to connect, Safaa invited me over to their home for tea, but I suggested meeting at the park this weekend instead. I knew that she had just gotten off of an unexpected night shift at the hospital and I didn't want her to feel like we needed to stick to our original plan regardless of whether she was tired or not. I am glad we agreed to meet today instead – with the food and drinks spread around the mat, we should be able to enjoy a lovely picnic as we engage in conversation. I'm so excited to begin conversations with Rayyan and I make duaa that she will feel safe and comfortable sharing her stories with me.

I soon spot Safaa, Rayyan, Marwa, and Amina to the side of the main playground and I walk over to greet them. Safaa and I hug, and I turn to the girls as Safaa smilingly urges, "Say Assalamu Alaikum!" I immediately reply with "Assalamu Alaikum!" We all laugh because it is clear that I wasn't who Safaa intended the reminder for. After Safaa says a few words in Somali, Marwa and Amina run off to play while Rayyan, Safaa, and I walk back toward the picnic area. We sit in a way that allows us to watch Marwa and Amina play as we engage in conversation. Turning my phone's voice recorder on, I start by asking Rayyan a few questions related to some of her earliest memories and begin sketching a timeline of the stories and details she shared. Just as with Safaa, it is important to highlight what Rayyan shared with me using her own words to give a sense of how she storied herself in that first recorded conversation.

**Rayyan in Her Words**

*So my birthday is in June*

*I remember every year when we would go to [large indoor playground] when I was a baby with my mom and dad and sisters and brother*

*I remember being sad when [siblings] leave [for school] and being happy when they came home.*

*I didn't like that they were gone.*

*Oh on my first day of preschool my mom was teaching me!*

*they taught us four different languages, they taught us in Somali, Arabic, English and Kurdish and I'm good at Somali and Arabic*

*I went to [Islamic School] for kindergarten and I still go there*

*I didn't like it when we would have to wake up early because my mom had school, but I didn't understand, I was little*

*I regret saying it.*

*My teacher's name was Ms. [Teacher] and my best friend was [name of friend] and I remember going to the zoo that year*

*I liked snack and lunch time best [laughing]*

*When I ended school early, Leila would let me go to her locker.*

*School was cool but then after a couple of years it got boring.*

*Ms. [Grade 5 teacher] is my favourite teacher because she's kind and she made everything fun*

*Like in Social, we did plays and stuff and everything*

*and I love Islamic Studies because we can learn the Qu'ran.*

*I remember there was a girl who would call me names in Grade 1 and 2 but then it stopped.*

*I told the teacher*

*Actually my teacher sometimes has to call parents because people are saying mean things to each other.*

*Me and my friends like to play Red Rover and soccer*

*I like soccer a lot, I play for my community team*

*I like going to visit our family in Seattle and when we go to Family Fun Centre*

*We're going there this summer*

*We text with them all the time*

*I like riding my bike and going places with my mom. I like swimming*

*I like eating [laughing]*

*I really like writing poems*

*I will bring you my poetry book for next time.*

### **Retellings**

#### **“I'm quiet sometimes, but not shy” (Rayyan, Winter 2016)**

From the above word image, it is clear that Rayyan did not offer very many details about herself in that first recorded conversation. This is partly because we talked for approximately

forty minutes before Rayyan's longing looks in the direction of the playground prompted me to say that we could continue our conversation at another time so that she can join her sisters in play. I vividly recall her smile of appreciation at my words. Another conversation we shared in the winter of 2016 gives added insight into why Rayyan, who I originally assumed was shy, spoke sparingly that day. Sitting at a halal foods restaurant with Rayyan and her sister Marwa several months after that first conversation, I asked Rayyan how she would describe herself to someone she was meeting for the first time? I intended the question to be a different way of asking her to describe herself. She responded by saying,

I would tell them my name, my age, my hobbies, like how we go swimming on Sundays, and that I like to read books, um... and play on my iPad ... And maybe that I like soccer .... if I didn't know them and didn't trust them, I wouldn't tell them very much.

During that same conversation, Rayyan explains that she is "quiet sometimes but not shy":

Marwa: When I'm around other people I don't know ... I get shy ...

Me: Me too ... how about you Rayyan? Do you get shy too?

Rayyan: Sometimes ...

Marwa: No! When she met our cousin for the first time she was like, "So." [confidently] and she just kept talking ... [laughing]

Me: Okay, so there are times you're shy and others where you aren't shy?

Rayyan: Like, I'm quiet sometimes but not shy ... and it depends on if they're talkative. If they're talkative, then I'm talkative. But if they're not talkative, then I'm not either ....

In her quiet but profound way, Rayyan drew my attention to the importance of reciprocity in every interaction, every relationship. As she spoke, I recalled our first conversation and inwardly cringed ... because, in that moment, I realized that I hadn't really shared much about myself in

the beginning, and yet had asked Rayyan to share a lot about herself. I now recognize that Rayyan shared what she felt were safe stories at first because we hadn't yet built a trusting relationship. All she knew of me was that I was a former teacher to her eldest sister Leila, and that her mom felt it was important to participate in this research. Over the course of this inquiry, Rayyan has repeatedly helped me to appreciate that, while she may be quiet at times, she is not shy ... and that she will take her time deciding if/what/when she will share. She too knows the value of building relationships and communities carefully.

**“She learned that your language is not only at home” (Safaa, Spring 2015)**

As we enjoyed our picnic at the park, I was surprised when Rayyan exclaimed, “On my first day of preschool, my mom was teaching me!” Perhaps reading the look of surprise on my face, Safaa explained, “It was a pilot program for a cultural preschool. They were in groups, so four different languages, and for each language group, they had to have somebody that speaks that language. I worked with them that year.” I remarked about how interesting it was that they both remember family members teaching them in their first year of school. I reminded Safaa that, in our first conversation, she had shared that her Aunt Sadia (a mentor/mother figure in Safaa's life who she named her daughter Sadia after) was her first teacher. After I remarked about this connection, Rayyan and Safaa looked at each other, smiled, and Safaa said, “We are so blessed.”

Safaa and Rayyan later explained that Rayyan's preschool program had been designed to encourage the home languages of students and families of their community school. They discussed with excitement that four languages were taught at the preschool that year: English, Somali, Arabic, and Kurdish. Safaa spoke fondly about working at the school as a Somali language consultant and teacher, and about how this approach

made a difference for the whole family, and the other kids too. Rayyan going to school and speaking her own language ... she got a strong base for the language and she would bring new words to the house .... she learned that your language is not only at home.

While she lamented that this pilot program was discontinued shortly after that trial year, Safaa said she loved how Rayyan learned that her home language, and the rich oral storytelling traditions of the Somali language, were valued alongside other languages.

### **“Why Girls?” (revisited) – Summer 2015**

Parking my car, I reach into my glove compartment and retrieve the running arm band to house my phone. I am not a runner. I purchased the arm band this morning because I am meeting Safaa for a walk around a community lake that we both love. I am hoping that the arm band will allow me to walk and talk alongside Safaa as my phone (hopefully!) records our conversation. Stepping outside, I once again appreciate the beautiful sunny afternoon and think about how long it has been since I have seen Safaa. We have been in contact over the last few months via texts and phone calls, most recently to wish each other Eid Mubarak after long spring and summer days in Ramadan fast. A week ago, after Safaa, Rayyan and her siblings returned from visiting family in Seattle, we talked on the phone about how peaceful Ramadan was this year. It has become somewhat of a familiar refrain, “Oh, the days were long for sure, but it was actually much easier than I thought it would be.” My family, friends, and I say a version of this comment almost every year and somehow still find ourselves surprised the following Ramadan that the approximately nineteen-hour fast (no, not even water) isn’t as hard as we feared it would be.

I am just about to text Safaa to let her know where I am when I glimpse her driving in. We wave and she exclaims, in what I recognize as her habitual way of greeting me, “Muna!

Assalamu Alaikum!” We hug before we agree on the route our walk would take and venture off. We begin by revisiting one of her comments from our first conversation. I ask Safaa, “Can you say more about your comment of ‘Why girls?’” I remind her that she said that raising Ali during his transitions into adolescence and young adulthood was more tension-filled than raising Leila and Sadia. She responded,

Well, Leila is in university and Sadia is in grade 11 now ... and I think the reason why I said this, is that my kids stayed in Islamic school until grade 9 and then left [to public school] in grade 10 ... but now that I think about the focus of your research, going from elementary to junior high, I think that’s when most students have biological changes happening in their body? .... I think that with high school, I think that’s the age when they decide where they want to go, where they can be influenced, where they want to be and feel independent, you know, they’re growing to be a woman kind of thing?

Safaa explained that she feels fortunate that her two eldest daughters, Leila and Sadia, negotiated their transitions into adolescence and womanhood with great poise: “And I do find that I haven’t had a problem with my daughters Alhamdulillah, they are amazing ... I was very lucky.” She believes that their attendance in a community-based Islamic school throughout their elementary and junior high school years, the same school Rayyan now attends, helped guide them during these significant life transitions. Safaa discussed the changes her children experienced leaving the comfort of a school that “was like home to them” to large public high schools where they felt they needed to ask for special accommodations:

With the high school that Ali went to, they give support to Muslim kids .... and actually the *kids* are the ones that fight for that. I always tell my kids, “Nobody knows what you

want, you have to ask.” They give them a room to pray in on Friday, but they say, “I want to pray Dhuhr<sup>99</sup>.” I say, “Go to the office and get it. Ask!” I think that when we bring our need out, and talk about it, the majority of people listen to you. Especially in this Canadian culture whereby the laws are written to be multicultural and people are equal, they don’t want to seem like they are not supporting this ... they may not be, but they cannot plainly say “No!” you know?

Safaa believes, for her children and for the children, youth, and families she supports as a multicultural consultant, it is important to feel represented in schools: “Our kids want to see someone who looks like them in the school system.” She discussed how she views her work as a link to the system ... and it feels good, you know, I work with and have a partnership with [the public school district] .... It makes a difference when you have an Egyptian teacher, or a Falasteeni<sup>100</sup> teacher, or a Somali teacher, a Muslim teacher in the school system, you know? It changes children’s self-esteem and confidence .... Our children need to see people like us everywhere, right?

### **Retellings**

#### **“A mother’s conversation is always there” (Safaa, Winter 2016)**

In responding to my query of why she had initially asked “Why girls?”, Safaa centred her response on her experiences with raising her eldest daughters, Leila and Sadia, through their transitions into adolescence and young adulthood. She later spoke about her concerns and fears

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<sup>99</sup> One of five daily prayers interspersed throughout the day, *Dhuhr* is the afternoon Prayer.

<sup>100</sup> This is an Arabic way of saying ‘Palestinian.’

in relation to the tragic number of deaths of young men in the Canadian Somali Muslim community in recent years. Safaa worries about families who have lost loved ones to drugs and/or violence, families she knows through her work with Muslim and Somali community organizations or through ties of friendship. Safaa has expressed her concern, anger, and fear at the rising number of deaths in the Somali community over the course of our inquiry. In the winter of 2016, she spoke of worrying about her son Ali because

there were so many boys his age who were not doing great in our community, ended up doing drugs, you always talk with them about that. That's the worry you have, you know? .... I give them stories, give them a heads up, and when Ali was growing up we always talked about this ... so there is always a fear when you are raising kids. And the fear is even about their surroundings, what is surrounding you and what is happening to you in these surroundings, you know?

Safaa emphasized the importance of open conversations alongside her children on an everyday basis, not primarily because an event or issue necessitates it. She said that her husband also engages in discussions with their children, but not in the same ongoing way that she does. She stressed, "I will always talk to them, *always* give them a heads up .... A mother's conversation is always there, it never, never, ends."

**"I always tell my kids, 'Nobody knows what you want, you have to ask'" (Summer 2015)**

Safaa has shared many stories with me about the importance of encouraging her children to advocate for themselves and others. For Safaa, this story to live by is intricately connected to another that I discussed in a previous section – the Two R's of rights and responsibilities. She

teaches her children, family, friends, colleagues, and those she supports as a multicultural consultant that everyone has the right and the responsibility to resist when faced with injustice.

During our conversation in the summer of 2015, Safaa shared the story of how Sadia, Rayyan's older sister who was in high school at the time, challenged a teacher who she felt had been making unfair comments related to Islam and Muslims. Safaa said that she was already worried about Sadia because her teachers had been telling her that her daughter should participate more in class:

The issue that I had with my Sadia in Islamic school is that teachers would tell me, "She won't stop talking! She chats so much, being social is more important to her" and when she went to public school, the teachers would tell me, "She needs to ask questions, she needs to speak up." It was so unexpected. I asked her, "What's wrong with you? Why don't you speak up?" And she says, "I can't, I'm shy in front of all these people" [I would say,] "But teachers used to complain about you talking too much!" [She would respond,] "That was my home!"

Safaa couldn't understand how Sadia, usually outgoing and talkative, seemed to be getting more and more reluctant to share her opinions and questions in class, instead approaching teachers during break times or after school. However, Safaa was proud that Sadia was able to overcome this reluctance during a class discussion about terrorism. Safaa explained that the teacher had been making remarks in relation to Islam and Muslims that were painful for Sadia to hear: "She confronted that teacher, and she was upset ... she told him, 'That hurts me, you can't say that' ... and I think at the end he apologized." While Safaa was proud that Sadia challenged the teacher's remarks, she felt it was important to also speak up as a parent:

I talked to him, I said that it's not fair for our kids to be exposed to that kind of talk you know? Because this teacher was consistent you know, he would say who did 9/11, and other things. So I went to him and said, "I believe it's not only her who feels like that, you have more [students] than her who are of the Muslim faith ... and they don't feel good about what you're saying. Sometimes your words can be really sensitive to others" ... but he was understanding actually.

Other stories Safaa and Rayyan shared with me highlight the many times Safaa taught Rayyan and her siblings the importance of speaking up and advocating for themselves. A deeply troubling story was shared by Rayyan and Safaa in the winter of 2015. I had voiced my concerns about how my daughter Noor was feeling excluded by a group of friends. Rayyan responded by telling me about her younger sister Marwa's experience in school:

Rayyan: She left them because they were being racist.

Me: What do you mean *habibty*<sup>101</sup>? How were they being racist?

Rayyan: The girls were saying, "Oh, you're dark chocolate." Sadia was with her too [when they went to tell the teacher] and the teacher said, "But she *is* dark chocolate," and Sadia slammed her hand and said, "You have *no* right to say that!"

Safaa: I went to the teacher and Sadia was with me at the time and we said that Marwa is having issues with these girls and one of the things they are saying to her is, "[In an angry tone] Stay away from us, you look like the *darkest* chocolate!" And then he said, "Of course you are dark chocolate!"

Me: And that's so not okay.

Safaa: And Sadia took the lead and what grade was she? I think grade 9 at that time. She said, "It's not what they said, it's *how* they are saying it."

Me: Yes.

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<sup>101</sup> Arabic word for "My beloved."

Safaa: It's *how* it is being said. Of course, we are proud her skin is like beautiful dark chocolate but it's not about the colour, it's about what they *mean* ...

Me: He was so uncomfortable probably with what was happening, but that was so insensitive.

Safaa: Sadia said it before I even spoke! [Rayyan laughing]

Me: Mash'Allah, good for her.

Safaa: And he apologized to us after that and said he will talk to the girls and he did.

As I reconsider this profoundly disturbing story, I think of how racism and discrimination between Muslims from diverse backgrounds is an often unseen and/or unacknowledged and/or silenced story. In my field notes that day, I wrote:

Sitting with the stories Rayyan and Safaa shared today, I'm so troubled and disgusted at how lip service is paid to Muslims being one Ummah<sup>102</sup> while racism and discrimination within Muslim communities is an often unacknowledged, silenced story. Friends and former students have shared countless stories of feeling discriminated against by other Muslims because of their race or cultural heritage or how 'pious' (or not) others deem them to be, and in so many other ways ... (Field Notes, Winter 2015)

In challenging the racism Marwa experienced, Safaa, Marwa, and Sadia resisted the teacher's attempt to smooth over the racist intent behind the words "dark chocolate," for, as Sadia eloquently stressed, "It's not what they said, it's *how* they are saying it." They resisted the invitation to gloss over racism and asserted their right to speak up in the face of injustice.

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<sup>102</sup> The Arabic words *Ummah* is an Islamic concept of Muslims being intricately connected to one another as one body, one community.

Safaa has also repeatedly encouraged me to advocate for my children. I am reminded of how, upon hearing news of my youngest daughter Hannah's diagnosis with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the summer of 2016, Safaa immediately began asking who I've been in contact with and advised, "You can't be shy asking for supports Muna." Every time we meet, Safaa always asks me, "How are you and Hannah doing?" and, "Are you feeling supported?" I am also reminded of how, in the spring of 2016, Safaa responded to another troubling story I shared about Noor experiencing bullying in school, "Muna, you need to talk to her teachers and to the Principal, she needs to feel safe in school." Safaa and Rayyan have repeatedly taught me, through sharing their stories and through responding to mine, about how important it is for me to live a life of speaking up and advocating alongside my children ... because teaching them about rights and responsibilities necessitates *living* the Two R's alongside them.

### **Growing into Grade 7 ... and in Comfort Alongside Each Other – Fall 2015**

I survey the veritable snack feast spread across my kitchen table and know I probably overdid it. Okay, not probably. I overdid it. I really want Rayyan, Safaa, Marwa, and Amina to have a good time tonight. I am also starting to worry about having already engaged in three one-on-one conversations with Safaa but none with Rayyan so far. I am trying to be patient and to go slow. I haven't yet asked Rayyan if she would like to have a conversation with just the two of us ... I wanted to slowly build more comfort and trust in our relationship. But time has definitely not been supportive over the last few months. We have already rescheduled this shared conversation two times over the last few weeks because of our conflicting schedules – Safaa has been working night shifts at the hospital, I have been busy with back-to-school activities and with Hannah's many appointments, and Rayyan's time has been busily spent with school, soccer

team commitments, and other extracurricular activities at school. Looking out into the autumn evening, I make duaa that our conversation goes well and that we will be able to share our stories within co-composed conversational spaces (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012)<sup>103</sup>.

The doorbell rings and I rush to the door to find Hannah and Yehia already there, waiting to greet our guests. Noor is upstairs getting ready for her Aunt to pick her up for a fundraising event they had purchased tickets for weeks ago. I open the door and embrace Safaa, Rayyan, Marwa, and Amina as they walk in. Noor joins us as I am greeting them and I make the introductions. Safaa and I are surprised and excited to discover that Noor and Rayyan already know each other and we remark at what an incredibly small world it is! Closing the door after Noor leaves, I invite everyone to have a seat at the nearby kitchen table. Wissam comes home from work almost as soon as Noor leaves and I laughingly introduce everyone again. After filling our plates and laughing at Hannah's at-the-top-of-her-lungs singing in the next room, Safaa, Rayyan, Marwa, I sit down and begin, as always, with "Bismillah."

Rayyan begins by sharing some of her experiences over the last three months. While she still attends the same K-9 Islamic school, Rayyan has already experienced many shifts and changes in her transition to grade 7. She talks about enjoying her grade 6 graduation celebration (especially the throwing their caps in the air part), year-end field trip, their recent trip to visit family in Seattle, and school supply shopping. Rayyan says she was glad that she was able to go home after her year-end exams because she was fasting for Ramadan, "So it was pretty good."

I ask Rayyan what she had been most looking forward to at the end of grade 6, and she immediately exclaims, "Getting a locker!" Rayyan explains that "getting a locker" was

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<sup>103</sup> This concept is discussed in Chapter 6.

something she “waited so long for.” Rayyan continues, “It was so hard to use a lock! I was practicing for a week!” Safaa explains that she purchased the combination lock for Rayyan the week before school and, “I told her, ‘You need to practice every day.’” She continues,

Safaa: Yeah, I couldn’t imagine giving her a lock the day of or the night before school ...

Me: Oh that makes so much sense because that’s what we did [with Noor]. [laughing]

Safaa: Because she’s your oldest, I think I have experience!

Our conversation later shifts to the upcoming federal election, including the disturbing rhetoric of the so-called “niqab issue” and proposed “Barbaric Cultural Practices Hotline” (see Macdonald, 2015). Safaa incredulously says, “Can you imagine that? What they are saying in the news? ... They are playing their mind games. It’s very sad.” I express my fears that this rhetoric might embolden people in their xenophobia and share a recent experience of being made to feel invisible and uncomfortable at a public lecture. I was the only woman wearing hijab in the room as several attendees debated how to respond to the call for a ban on niqab during Canadian citizenship ceremonies. One woman said something akin to, “Let’s not forget that the niqab itself can be seen as a way of oppressing women.” I share how, body and voice shaking, I responded to this woman’s comment with the thought that “we have to be very careful of imposing an arrogant understanding of the reasons Muslim women often *choose* to cover.” Safaa says, “Good for you!” and Rayyan responds by sharing a recent grocery store experience:

Rayyan: I was going like this [fanning herself] because I was really, really, really hot and then a lady came ...

Safaa: She was really hot because we just came from Friday prayer and it was crowded.

Rayyan: And the lady said, “Don’t worry, when you’re 18 you won’t have to wear that [points to her hijab] anymore.”

Safaa: Because you're in Canada now [rueful laughter] ...

Rayyan: Yeah, she said, "Don't worry, when you're 18" ...

Safaa: Yeah, when you're older you can take it off and nobody can force you.

Me: Nobody is forcing her *now*.

Safaa: Yes, that's what I told her, that nobody forced her to wear it ... but that's what she thought, that we are forcing the little ones to wear that ... make inquiries don't make assumptions. And, of course you are mad, but you don't want to be *seen* as being mad ...

Rayyan: And you don't want to hurt someone's feelings.

Troubled that the woman at the grocery store assumed that her hijab was symbolic of coercion/oppression, Rayyan explains that, inspired by her mom and older sisters, she had chosen to don the hijab in grade 3. She says she has never considered taking it off and considers her hijab an integral part of her faith: "I will never take it off ... it's important to me as a Muslim." Safaa states that she is so proud of her daughters for choosing their hijabs at young ages and shares that she was inspired by her close friends' and neighbours' example to don her veil when she was around 16 years old. As we talk, I wonder about our children, and so many others, growing up in the midst of what feels like ever-increasing suspicion, misunderstanding, and vitriol. But I also marvel at the compassion Safaa and Rayyan demonstrated in their responses to what must have felt like an attack on their agency and familial practices.

### **Retellings**

#### **"That's how we learn, it's through living" (Safaa, Winter 2016)**

In the midst of our conversation, Safaa reminded me not to feel guilty for not thinking of encouraging Noor to practice opening her combination lock before school began: "Because she's your oldest, I think I have experience!" At the time, I thought she was mainly trying to reassure

me as a fellow parent. However, I have come to appreciate that, while she was indeed being kind and supportive, Safaa also strongly believes that we learn from experience. In the winter of 2016, Safaa reflected, “As parents, we like everything to be perfect ... and it’s not.” In this same conversation, reminiscent of Dewey’s (1938) view of education as life and life as experience, Safaa stressed that parenting

is a process. They learn through modelling, every day. It’s not something we can give them with a spoon. I don’t know how to explain other than this – they live it. It’s something they will be learning every day, right now, step by step, daily reminder, conversations. That’s how I grew up, nobody ever told me, “Do this, and do that.” It was through lived examples .... that’s how we learn, it’s through living.

Safaa believes that she has learned much from living alongside her children. In the summer of 2015 and again in the winter of 2016 she discussed how her children help her to learn about new technologies, social media, and, perhaps most profoundly, about kindness and patience. She shared this story with me in the winter of 2016:

Something I can never forget is when Leila was four or five [years old]. I had gotten them Eid clothes and they had tried them on and put them away. Then Sadia comes into the kitchen and I was busy cooking and she has her Eid clothes on. She says, “Mama look, don’t I look pretty?” and I said [in annoyed tone], “Go put your clothes away!” and then Leila said [in a gentle tone], “*Abayo*, sister, you look so beautiful but it is not time to wear these clothes. They are for Eid.” I felt so bad! She pulled my heart so much! It was so sweet, but I felt so bad. You know sometimes your kids teach you a lesson.

Safaa's vulnerability in sharing this story reminds me that, while I will likely continue to experience uncertainty and regret as a parent, reflecting on my practices and experiences and continuing to grow with them can open possibilities.

**“Not every Muslim is like what you see in the news” (Rayyan, Winter 2016)**

Sadly, Rayyan and Safaa shared several other experiences related to discrimination. Similar to the way Rayyan shared her story of being arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) by a woman at the grocery store after I shared my fears and experience related to the “niqab issue,” some of our stories were shared in response to the rhetoric of 2015 Canadian Federal election cycle. During a discussion at Dairy Queen in the fall of 2015, Rayyan shared that she feared that the incumbent Conservative government would be re-elected because “Harper doesn't like Muslims.” Hearing this statement troubled me as I realized that Rayyan believed this about the only Prime Minister she had known at that point in time. Later, in the winter of 2015, Rayyan talked about the reactions of her family, friends, and classmates to the election of Justin Trudeau and how “everyone is happy Harper didn't win.”

At different times, Rayyan and Safaa shared a story related to discrimination that Leila, Rayyan's eldest sister, had experienced. During our conversation in the winter of 2016, Rayyan and Marwa shared the story in the following way:

Marwa: Leila was on the bus and a guy said, “Go back to your country! You don't belong here!” to her and ....

Me: Sorry? To Leila?

Rayyan: Yeah, on the bus ...

Me: And this was recent?

Rayyan: Last week. He said, “Go back to your country!” and ...

Marwa: She called Ali and talked to him in our language so the guy wouldn't understand.

Rayyan: Because she was scared he would hurt her. So she never answered him and kept talking to my brother and ignoring him.

Me: Oh, so sad ... and that's the first time something like that's happened to her?

Rayyan: Yeah.

Me: And how was she doing when she got home?

Rayyan: She was afraid of that man. When she walked in, she said, “Guess what happened to me today?” and told us about it ... that's the first time that's happened to anybody in my family ...

Me: I'm so sorry that happened to her.

Rayyan: Yeah, because not every Muslim is like what you see in the news.

Me: And how many people were on the bus?

Rayyan: She said it was full but that nobody said anything.

Me: Why do you think they didn't say anything?

Rayyan: They were probably scared of him too ... but even if you're not Muslim, you should always stand up for people.

Safaa shared the story in the spring of 2016 with me as we sat at a neighbourhood park:

Leila was on the bus and there was this man who was yelling at her about her hijab, “Go back to your place!” and all of that. So Leila ignored him but what surprised her is that nobody on that bus said anything about it. She was shocked ... so she had to call Ali and was talking to him to feel safe. But she said, “It wasn't him that was the problem Mama, there might be a mental health issue or something going on with him. What surprised me most was that nobody on the bus said anything about it.”

Safaa thinks that anti-Muslim rhetoric during Canadian and American election cycles along with terrorist attacks contribute to people being increasingly fearful or suspicious of Muslims: “It happened after the France attacks .... and can you imagine the things Trump is saying?”

However, she cautioned, “But we cannot say all society acts like that.” Rayyan attributed the bystanders’ silence to their fear of the man on the bus. My heart hurting as I listened to her, Rayyan said that she wishes people would realize that “not every Muslim is like what you see in the news” and that “even if you’re not Muslim, you should always stand up for people.”

### **Continuing to Grow and Nurture Trust – Fall 2015**

Parking my car in front of Safaa and Rayyan’s house, I take a deep breath and recite the duaa my mom taught me to recite when I feel unsettled<sup>104</sup>. I am fifteen minutes late in picking Rayyan and Marwa up. Hannah had been upset all morning and I didn’t want to leave the house until I settled her down for her afternoon nap, but it had taken a lot longer than usual. I messaged Safaa to let her know that I was running late and she responded, “Salam sister, the girls are ready. Drive safe dear.” I smile and as I walk to their door as I think about how Safaa always begins her text messages to me with “Salam sister<sup>105</sup> ...” The warm thought helps put me at ease.

I knock on the door and, almost immediately, Rayyan opens it. Marwa is standing behind her and we smilingly exchange Salams and hugs. Safaa is standing at the top of the stairs, “Muna! Assalamu Alaikum!” She is wearing an apron and I can smell delicious home cooking being prepared. I take my shoes off to jog up the stairs and embrace Safaa, and she tells me that

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<sup>104</sup> *Rabbi ishrah lee sadri, wa yasr lee amree, wahl al3kdata min leesanni, yafkahhu kawwli*. O my Lord! Expand for me my chest (grant me self-confidence and contentment); Ease my task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech, so others may understand what I say [Qu’ran: 20, 25-28].

<sup>105</sup> It is common for Muslims to call one another “sister” and “brother” as a sign of goodwill and respect.

she has just woken up after a night shift to take a meal to a niece who recently had a baby. I tell her, “Mash’Allah, I don’t know how you do it.” She laughs and says “Alhamdulillah, Allah makes it easy for me.” As I head back down the stairs to put my shoes back on, Safaa speaks a few words to Rayyan and Marwa in Somali, and wishes us all a good time.

With Rayyan in the passenger seat and Marwa in the seat behind her, we decide to go to a nearby Dairy Queen for ice cream. Although it is October, the weather is unseasonably warm and we agree that it would be a good idea to take advantage of the beautiful weather. As I drive out of their neighbourhood, with Rayyan and Marwa guiding me, I remark about the beautiful tall trees that still have a few colourful leaves on them flanking the streets and tell them that what I miss most about my childhood home are the mature trees. They tell me that they love their neighbourhood, they’ve lived and played there for as long as they can remember and can’t imagine living anywhere else. Marwa remarks about the election signs littering the yards in front of many homes and Rayyan tells me that their Islamic school staged a mock federal election. She laughingly shares that she doesn’t think anyone voted for the Progressive Conservative party after all their talk about Muslims and Marwa laughingly agrees.

We order Blizzards when we get to the Dairy Queen counter and choose to sit on the outdoor patio to enjoy the beautiful sunny day. Rayyan has a plastic bag with her and tells me that she brought the poetry book she told me about and a few of her favourite photographs. We read through some of her poems, and I am touched at the love she often expresses for her mom in the collection. In response to some of her poems, we talk at length about friendships and how they change over time. Rayyan shares a story about a friend she has distanced herself from because she talks about others behind her back: “I don’t like that .... but I don’t give her the evil

eye or anything, we still say Salam, we still talk, but we don't really hang out anymore." Rayyan describes negotiating a way to remain friendly with this girl because she's "friends with almost everyone in class," and believes it is important to be kind to everyone. Rayyan laughs as she talks about her best friends, "They're all really, really tall, much taller than me, some are even taller than my Mom!" Rayyan and Marwa laugh when I say that I was shorter than most of the people in my class too, but that I prefer to describe myself as "short and sweet."

We laugh a lot during our conversation, especially at their playful explanations of Rayyan's photographs and at the following story shared by Rayyan and Marwa about their brother Ali growing up as the only boy amidst five sisters:

Marwa: Ali went to Seattle when he was 14 by himself after Amina was born ...

Rayyan: He told my mom, "If it's a girl then I'm leaving," and when she was born he left [all laughing] ...

Marwa: He came back and Amina was big! [laughing]

Rayyan: When I was born he was like, "I'm sick of girls!" and then when Marwa was born, he said, "I'm sick of girls!" [laughing] ...

Marwa: And then he cut Sadia's hair bald and then he put shorts on her [laughing] ...

Rayyan: He tried to make Sadia a boy and named her Hassan. [laughing]

Me: [laughing] Oh my goodness ... I can't imagine how your mom reacted to that!

Rayyan: Sadia was crying ...but we all laugh at it now. [laughing]

On the drive back home, Rayyan shares her excitement about an upcoming play she will be performing in. She says she has been practicing with her cast mates all week and even into the weekend. Hearing her passion and joy, I smile and tell her that I am so glad she is able to nurture

her love of the theatre. She smiles and says, “Alhamdulillah!” On my drive home, as I reflect on the stories we shared, I too am smiling and saying “Alhamdulillah.”

### **Retellings**

#### **“Me and Marwa are always together” (Rayyan, Fall 2015)**

As I type this, I think of the last time I saw Rayyan and Marwa. They had visited with me in my home, alongside Safaa and Amina, in the fall of 2016. We looked over some of our conversation transcripts and identified resonant threads we felt were most important to include in the interim research texts. I asked Marwa and Rayyan if I could include a piece in the interim research text about how special their relationship is. I said that, considering how Marwa was usually alongside us in our conversations, it would be a way of honouring and representing our inquiry process. Rayyan thought this made a lot of sense, and Marwa smiled and said she felt like she was a part of this research journey alongside us. I said that she *has* been a part of it.

Rayyan and Marwa were born two years apart, but they have an incredibly close relationship. In the fall of 2015, Rayyan shared, “Me and Marwa are always together.” In coming alongside them, I witnessed this closeness and the many ways they support, encourage, and laugh with/at each other. In the spring of 2016, Safaa and I were talking about their relationship:

Me: They really remind me of me and my sister Suha ... we seemed to bring things out of each other that almost isn't noticeable when the other person isn't there ...

Safaa: Yes ... and every night they discuss their day and their thoughts .... that's just a routine they made for each other by themselves.

Me: Me and my sister did that too ...

Safaa: They are very close, and they are both very gentle with each other. Even when they were little, if someone gave one of them candy, the other would say, “What about Rayyan or Marwa? What about my sister?” They were always like that, even when they were two or three [years old]. Mash’Allah people would think they were twins.

There are many stories I could share to give a sense of their special bond, but the one that calls to me most is when we were eating together at a halal restaurant in the winter of 2016. After Rayyan had made it clear that she wouldn’t tell someone she doesn’t know or trust much about herself, I reframed my original question to get more of a sense of how she stories herself:

Me: Okay, how would you describe yourself to someone you really trust? [laughing]

Rayyan: Well ...

Marwa: Maybe that you are fun, beautiful ....

Rayyan: That’s conceited!

Me: I know how hard it is to talk about yourself, but no pressure and we will never judge you or think that you sound conceited.

Rayyan: Well, I already know I’m pretty, I’m kind ... I’m generous ...

Marwa: She really is.

Me: Can you tell me about a time where you were being really generous?

Marwa: [After long pause] I have one. I lost my iPod and I tell Rayyan. She says, “Until you find your iPod, for the time being, I will let you share mine.” That was so nice.

As they spoke, I travelled back in time to my memories of growing up with Suha, my older sister and best friend. I shared a few of stories of my childhood adventures with Suha and how we even grew up sharing a bedroom like they do. I said that the only thing I didn’t like about being so close was when teachers or relatives (negatively) compared us. Marwa agreed and said that teachers sometimes tell her to be more like Rayyan, “My teacher said, “You have to be more like

Rayyan, more *open*, more drama-ish.” But both girls agreed that they are fortunate to have each other because, as Marwa said, “We’re best friends.”

**“She really makes us laugh, she has a great sense of humour” (Safaa, Spring 2016)**

Once Rayyan started to feel more at ease with me, I was impressed with her ability to joke, quip, and play with puns in a way that made everyone around her laugh, but never in hurtful ways. As is clear from our Dairy Queen conversation, Rayyan and Marwa often play off of each other’s words, engaging in sisterly banter that reminded me of my relationships with my sisters. We often laughed at Rayyan’s witty responses and stories. One that made us laugh the longest was shared by Rayyan and Safaa in the spring of 2016:

Safaa: She really makes us laugh, she has a great sense of humour ... you know what she did one time? Did I ever tell you? She went to a website called *nikah*<sup>106</sup>.com and ...

Me: No way? [laughing] ... I’m already laughing!

Safaa: [laughing] Yeah, she went there and she put their names like Leila’s names and all their names ... [Everyone laughing]. [To Rayyan] Tell her about it ... I still don’t remember how you did it!

Rayyan: I was reading Quran on Qu’ran Explorer, it’s an App<sup>107</sup> I have on the iPad, and a message pops up about this website called *nikah.com* and I thought it would be funny to register Leila ... so I put all her information in and went and showed her. [laughing]

Safaa: Leila was saying, “People will think I am so desperate!” It was a year ago?

Rayyan: It was when I was 10 ...

Safaa: When you were 10, my goodness ... and she said to Leila the other day, “If you don’t find a man in two years, I’m going to go back to *nikah.com* and find you one!” [laughing] ... it was so funny! ... to that extent, she’s just very mature, *very* mature ... and very fun. [laughing]

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<sup>106</sup> *Nikah* is an Arabic word used by Muslims to connote marriage.

<sup>107</sup> The word ‘App’ is shorthand for ‘Application,’ or downloadable software.

### **Sowing Seeds (and filling buckets) with Kindness – Winter 2015**

Parking in front of Safaa and Rayyan's home, I pause in my warm car to make duaa before I walk up the snowy sidewalk towards their house. I am happily surprised to see Safaa drive into their driveway; we walk out of our cars at around the same time and Safaa says that she will be joining me inside as soon as she brings the groceries in. I say that I had just done the same thing that morning and, despite her protests, begin hauling the boxes and bags inside with her. We are soon joined by Rayyan and Marwa and within minutes Safaa's trunk is emptied of its contents. Safaa asks me to please sit at the table she has already set with homemade pastries while they quickly put the groceries away. In the meantime, she has asked little Amina to show me some family photographs. Amina takes her task seriously, pausing at each picture and looking at me intently to ensure I have time to appreciate it. I ask her questions about the photographs and struggle to suppress my smiles at her adorable responses.

We are soon joined at the table by Rayyan and Safaa, who embraces and thanks Amina profusely for helping to make their guest feel welcome. Amina smilingly walks away and Leila walks into the room to greet me. It has been a while since I've seen her and I ask how she is doing? How are her studies going? We reminisce a bit about when I was her teacher and she updates me about some of her former classmates who she is still in contact with. As I sit back down at the table, Rayyan's dad, Ahmad, comes into the room and Safaa introduces us, "This is Muna ... [to me] He's heard a lot about you!" We exchange Salams before he leaves with Leila. I am feeling extremely welcome and cared for as we begin to engage in conversation.

Safaa and Rayyan update me about some of their experiences in the last few months. Rayyan happily talks about a play she has recently starred in and Safaa tells me about how

impressed she is that Rayyan manages to do so well in school while also being involved in the theatre, soccer, and a few other extracurricular activities. She shares that she never feels the need to remind Rayyan about her responsibilities: “She will never give up and quit. With all of them growing up, I have never seen anybody like Rayyan, she tries hard mash’Allah.” However, Safaa expresses worry that sometimes Rayyan expects too much of herself, often working or studying *too* hard: “She sometimes pressures herself too much ... *a lot*.” Rayyan listens quietly and smiles at her mom, seeming to silently reassure her.

We talk about the Canadian federal elections that took place a few months ago and Safaa says that our new Prime Minister is “a good man.” She continues, “He talks about justice and all of that, you know I was surprised when the Syrian refugees started coming, he went to the airport! Who does that? Especially at his level?”

After I ask about how the school year is going so far, Rayyan shares a recent experience she had with another girl in her class. Safaa and Rayyan explain that the girl became agitated at a perceived slight from Rayyan and responded by being very aggressive, physically intimidating Rayyan and verbally threatening her:

Rayyan: I didn’t say anything, I slowly moved her back away and just walked away.

Safaa: And then what did you do?

Rayyan: And then when she was walking out, she said the B-word to me ...

Safaa: And then what did you do?

Rayyan: And then I told the teacher.

Me: Good for you.

Safaa: And then what happened to her?

Rayyan: She got suspended.

Safaa was prompting Rayyan to remember that it was her action of telling a teacher about the intimidation that helped mitigate against any further harassment. Despite this experience, Rayyan stresses, she usually gets along with everyone in class and is “friends with everyone.”

As we continue talking, more stories of experiences with bullying are shared. Safaa tells me about how a mother she works with had recently expressed her love for Rayyan and Marwa because, unbeknownst to Safaa, they had helped the woman’s daughter to feel cared for at school. The woman explained that, a few years ago, Rayyan had noticed her daughter sitting by herself at recess and had invited her to play with her and her friends:

Her daughter started school and you know when you are new to school sometimes the kids will push her far away .... Rayyan and Marwa were younger than her, but they really helped her make friends. And until now the mum says, “Oh I love your daughters, they are so sweet!” because even if they couldn’t find someone to play with her they would leave their friends and play with her ... so amazing. I was really happy mash’Allah.

While the girl later became friends with her classmates, her mother said she will never forget Rayyan and Marwa’s kindness. I ask Rayyan how she noticed that the girl was by herself that day. She responds:

Rayyan: Maybe because when I was in kindergarten [turning to Safaa] you gave me meat for lunch and the girls moved away from me ...

Safaa: Because of the food that you were eating?

Rayyan: Mmm hmm.

Safaa: And then you felt it and that’s why maybe you don’t like anyone to feel that way?

Rayyan: Yeah.

Me: And you remember that still ... Subhan Allah ...

Rayyan: Yeah.

Safaa: Because she has experienced it and doesn't want any child to experience what she has. That's where it's coming from mash'Allah.

Safaa and I are deeply moved at the quiet but profound way Rayyan explained why she notices when others are excluded – she still remembers the feeling of being excluded in kindergarten and actively supports others going through similar experiences.

Later, Rayyan reminds Safaa about another experience with bullying at school:

Rayyan: Do you remember what happened in grade 2?

Safaa: What happened in grade 2?

Rayyan: With Ms. Teacher?

Safaa: Oh! What was the story? ... I remember we got that book ...

Rayyan: Yeah.

Safaa: What did they do to you? ... I think it was a similar experience to Marwa's whereby some of the children in class didn't want to play with you ...

Rayyan: No, they were fake-friending me.

Safaa: There was that book I took to your teacher, what was the name of it?

Rayyan: *How Full is Your Bucket?*

Safaa: I gave it to the teacher ... actually I even wrote a paper on that book when I was in school ... it was like when you insult me, my bucket gets empty ...

Me: And you took the book because you said that somebody was fake-friending you ... I'm sorry, I'm not sure what that means?

Rayyan: They were faking being friends.

Me: Oh okay, and how did you figure out that was what they were doing?

Rayyan: Because some of the other girls in my class told me ...

Me: And what did you do when they told you that they were fake-friending you?

Rayyan: I told my teacher ... but she said, "Okay," and then she didn't really do anything so I told my mom and she went to school.

As Safaa explains that she had taken the book *How Full is Your Bucket?* (Rath & Clifton, 2004) to Rayyan's teacher to suggest reading it to the class, Rayyan is searching a nearby laptop for a YouTube video of the book being read. We watch the video together and I learn that the book uses the metaphor of an imaginary bucket atop someone's head as a way to describe emotions. When the imaginary bucket is full, the person is feeling happy, and when it is empty, the person is feeling sad. The main lesson of the story is to encourage people to add to each other's buckets when possible and to avoid taking away from others' buckets. The story ends with the main character realizing that by filling others' buckets, he is also filling his own.

### **Retellings**

#### **Travelling Across Familial and School Curriculum-Making Worlds**

I sit with the stories Safaa and Marwa shared with me that day. As I read through the transcript and listen to the audio recording of our conversation, I am reminded that I asked Safaa, "How did you think to share curriculum materials with Rayyan's teacher?" She responded, "I used to read it to the kids and they really enjoyed it. We always used to say, when someone would do something between the siblings, 'Oh imagine what happened to Rayyan's bucket?'" She said that she thought it would be a good idea to share the book and metaphor with the class, and that the teacher thanked her for doing so. As I think of Rayyan's "fake-friending"

experience, I am in awe of the courage it must have taken for Safaa to suggest a familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011) resource to Rayyan's teacher. But I also recall that Safaa had been a teacher in Rayyan's preschool and that, through this experience, she may have learned to travel between familial and school worlds with greater ease (Lugones, 1987).

As I reconsider the stories of bullying and discrimination that Rayyan and Safaa shared, I once again turn to Safaa's belief in the Two R's of rights and responsibilities and her interconnected belief that everyone has a responsibility to speak up in the face of injustice. These stories to live by seem to be foregrounded in the stories Rayyan and Safaa shared that day. I think of Rayyan's experience with being excluded in kindergarten and her ability to notice others who are experiencing exclusion, to travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987). When Rayyan and Safaa shared the *How Full is Your Bucket* story, I started to get a sense that this familial metaphor of filling each other's buckets, alongside Safaa's teaching of the Two R's and speaking up in her familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011), helped guide Rayyan and Marwa in travelling to that girl's world (Lugones, 1987) and then *act* to try to fill her bucket ... and theirs in the process.

### **Rooting Stories of Motherhood - Winter 2016**

I am excitedly setting the side tables in my family room with snacks and traditional tea<sup>108</sup> as I prepare for Safaa's visit this afternoon. Hannah has just fallen asleep for her afternoon nap, Wissam is at work, and Noor and Yehia are at school ... so it is one of the rare times that the house is quiet. I am really looking forward to spending time with Safaa – it has been almost three months since our last conversation and I have missed her. I rush to the door at the sound of

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<sup>108</sup> The tea, *Aynar*, is a mixture of anise seeds, ginger root, cinnamon, and cardamom my Mom taught me to make.

someone knocking and I open it to find Safaa smiling. After I invite her in, and out of the cold February weather, we exchange Salams and hugs and I exclaim about how happy I am to see her. She laughingly replies that she is happy to see me too – it has been way too long!

After we get settled on the living room couches, sitting kitty-corner to one another, we talk about some of the recent developments in our lives. I share that it has been a very hard few weeks for my family as we recently learned that my cousin Billal (Allah yirhamu), who is like an older brother to me, was diagnosed with cancer<sup>109</sup>. Safaa immediately makes duaah that Allah (SWT) will grant him health and a long life. I respond to her duaah with, “Ameen ya Rubb<sup>110</sup>.” Safaa reminds me, “Make duaah Muna, that is all that we can do ... everything happens for a reason.”

Moved and thankful for Safaa’s duaah and counsel, I say, “Yes, Subhan Allah.” After a few moments, I ask, “How are the kids? I’m so excited to see Rayyan and Marwa next week.” Safaa shares that she is extremely proud of Rayyan because

she tries so hard. If she didn’t try hard she wouldn’t be doing as well as she does. Even Mr. Teacher says, “I have never seen a student like Rayyan” .... Alhamdulillah she cares. She is that kid that will always check her marks. She is my first kid to be like that, the rest of them I have to chase after them, but she does it on her own.

Safaa muses, “And you know, in my culture we have a saying, ‘We learn discrimination from our mothers’ wombs’ ... everyone is different, Subhan Allah.” Safaa describes how each of her

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<sup>109</sup> Billal (Allah yirhamu) passed away in the summer of 2017.

<sup>110</sup> “Amen, O Lord.” This is a common response for many Muslims when a duaah is made.

children are different in their personalities and says, “It’s so funny, hey? In the family you have a mixture of people .... My children are all different Alhamdulillah.”

I wonder aloud if Safaa thinks one of her children is most like her, and Safaa responds, “I think they all have different sides ... Leila has one side of me, Sadia has another, Rayyan has some sides of me, and Marwa also has some sides of me.” She continues,

For example, Rayyan, mash’Allah is very kind. Today, her and Sadia were not on good terms. Rayyan was trying to tell her a joke and Sadia says, “I don’t care!” [in grumpy tone] and Rayyan got very upset. But then Sadia was telling us something and Rayyan was laughing and I asked her, “Rayyan why are you laughing? She was mean to you,” and she said, “Mummy, I don’t want to be unkind. Whatever she does, I am not going to be unkind.” Can you imagine that? So I said, “Sadia, look at that, this is your younger sister” you know? “I don’t want to be unkind” That’s the answer she gave me.

Pausing to consider her words, I ask Safaa, “As you were talking, I was thinking about some of our other conversations, and I wonder if you find that raising a boy is different than raising a girl? Does gender matter as much as personality?” Safaa contemplates my question and then says, “Actually I don’t see a difference. Alhamdulillah, Ali was never trouble ... Even with my daughters, I see families who struggle and I thank Allah for this Alhamdulillah, I haven’t gone through a tough time with them.”

After talking about how important it is for her children to understand the Two R’s of rights and responsibilities, and of learning to view life experience as education, both of our

phones announce the call to prayer<sup>111</sup>. After we pray, Safaa shares that she has learned a great deal about parenting from two important women in her life:

There are two people that I admire in my life – my aunties. One is in Australia and one passed away three or four years ago in Seattle. They were very great examples in my life. So amazing, each of them had their own unique characteristics .... I remember one day, I think I was a teenager, and I admired my aunt and said, “Oh my God, I love you so much. I wish I could be like you.” She was amazing, just very kind, leading with example, she raised great kids. She said, “You know what I made sure of in life? That they would be good people .... because Allah, when he asks me about my life, is not going to ask me what University they went to, or any of that. Allah will ask me about their manners and behaviour ... for them to be good human beings is what I care for.”

I express my resonance with her words and share some of my recent worries as a parent. Safaa reminds me,

But Muna, when we plant a seed in the ground, it won't go shooting straight up. Sometimes, it wants to go over here [gesturing to the right with her hands], and we have to say, “No, not that way” and we nudge it over, away from that area that harms them. We need to be patient and help our children to grow in the right way insha'Allah<sup>112</sup>.

Expressing my admiration at her eloquence, I say, “Insha'Allah.” I share that, in my writing, I have been playing with the metaphors of planting and growing and am amazed at her beautiful words – she has made me reconsider my worries in a new way. She laughs and asks, “So did we

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<sup>111</sup> We both have a prayer App on our phone that alerts us when it is time for one of the five daily prayers.

<sup>112</sup> Arabic for “God Willing.”

achieve anything today?” I laughingly tell her, “Safaa, you are amazing and your stories always help me to think at a deeper level.” She again says, “Insha’Allah.” After Safaa leaves, my head and heart are incredibly full and I am so thankful for the blessing of being alongside her.

### **Retellings**

#### **“Everybody is different” (Safaa, multiple conversations)**

Throughout our conversations, Safaa has repeatedly called my attention to how “everybody is different.” In the fall of 2015, as we discussed how negotiating household chores can be difficult, Safaa laughingly said that her children are very different when it comes to doing their chores: “[laughing] But they say you learn discrimination from your mother’s womb ... they all come out as different people!” A few months later, in the winter of 2015, Safaa and Rayyan shared the story of Rayyan and Marwa befriending a girl who they noticed was being excluded, and Safaa shared, “Actually, when they were young, Rayyan would always say, ‘Mama, that person is by herself, she doesn’t have a friend’ and she would always look for those people ... she is different.”

In the spring of 2016, I shared a story with Safaa about feeling judged as a mother. After months of pleading and negotiations, Noor had recently purchased a cellphone with money she had saved up and I was told by a few female acquaintances that I was making a poor parenting decision. They asserted they would never allow their children to own cellphones until they were in high school and couldn’t imagine what I was thinking. Safaa was indignant on my behalf:

Safaa: But everybody’s different!

Me: Exactly. And I actually thought of you and how you told me about how different Leila and Sadia were when it came to wanting cellphones ...

Safaa: And these are sisters!

Me: Yeah I know ...

Safaa: Everybody is different, you can't compare anybody to anybody else ... and you don't want to hear Aunties comparing you to anybody, it's not nice. She is unique and is a different person.

Through sharing her stories of mothering, and through responding to mine, Safaa often reminded me of the importance of recognizing and honouring my children's unique personalities, needs, talents, and abilities ... because "everybody is different."

### **Growing Forward (and looking back) with Rayyan and Marwa – Winter 2016**

I knock quietly on Safaa and Rayyan's door, hoping that it's loud enough to hear but not loud enough to wake Safaa up. Safaa had responded to my text last night asking if Rayyan and Marwa are still okay to come for lunch with me today: "Salam sister, the girls are excited to go with you. I will be catching up on sleep when you come but they will be ready insha'Allah." I know that Safaa had likely worked the night shift at the hospital and I was worried that I would have to knock again when Rayyan answers the door. Her hijab is not yet pinned in place and she quietly says that she and Marwa would be ready in a few minutes. I whisper that I will wait in the car for them and they join me a few minutes later. Marwa sits in the front seat this time and I know from our last trip that they take turns sitting up front with me. Their passenger seat negotiations remind me of similar negotiations with my siblings and I smile.

As I drive, we debate about where to go for lunch and eventually decide on a large restaurant near their home that offers halal food options. Rayyan and Marwa share their

excitement about an upcoming science fair. Each of them had chosen incredibly creative projects to delve into and, fascinated, I ask a lot of questions about their inquiry process. We are still talking about their projects as we are seated at a corner booth at the restaurant.

Saying “Bismillah” as my phone begins recording our conversation, I ask Rayyan and Marwa how the last few months have been. Rayyan and Marwa tell that they had a good time going to the zoo with their family a few weeks ago. Rayyan explained that the whole family went to the zoo, except for Laila, who travelled to Seattle to visit their maternal Grandmother. As they talk about their extended family, the rhythm of their sisterly discussion holds my attention:

Rayyan: We love to go to Seattle, we have fun when we’re here too, but we go almost every year ...

Marwa: Because it’s good to see your family ...

Rayyan: And we might still go in the summer ...

Marwa: My dad wants to go but my mom isn’t too sure ...

Rayyan: And we have lots of family in Texas too now, so we now have two summer spots ...

Marwa: Yeah, my dad’s sister and all her kids are there and my mom’s first cousin too.

Me: So both sides of your family live in Seattle and in Texas?

Marwa: Yeah and some family in Kenya because my Mom’s dad had kids after my Mom left Kenya ...

Rayyan: The last time my Mom saw her Dad was ...

[Rayyan and Marwa in unison]: in 2009

Me: And you guys remember when your Mom went to Kenya in 2009?

Marwa: Yeah.

Rayyan: We stayed in Seattle with my Grandma ...

Rayyan and Marwa continue talking about their extended family and how their maternal grandmother had recently visited them in Alberta. Rayyan said that they were so happy that their Grandma was able to visit them because their Mom “was so happy to have her here.”

After Rayyan makes it clear she would not share details about herself with someone she doesn't know or trust, our conversation shifts to Rayyan and Marwa sharing their older sister Leila's recent experience with being yelled at and told to “go home” on the bus. While Rayyan believes, “Even if you're not Muslim you should always stand up for people,” she says that she doesn't know what she would do if she witnessed something similar happening to someone else:

Rayyan: If I wasn't wearing hijab maybe I would speak up because then people wouldn't know who I am ...

Marwa: It's easier for men because nobody can tell if they're Muslim or not ....

Me: Well I guess it depends on what they're wearing ... and I guess if they *look* Muslim in some way to others ... and even their name ...

Rayyan: Yeah ...

Me: But I did notice a difference in how people treated me after I wore hijab ... especially now ...

Rayyan: After all the attacks ...

Me: Yes.

I then ask Rayyan to say more about why she thought she would be more likely to speak up if she weren't wearing hijab:

Rayyan: Well, because of all the stuff that's happening, even Donald Trump and that stuff ... saying, “Oh Muslims this and Muslims that” ...

Me: And you feel like that's made a difference in the way people treat you? Or see you?

Rayyan: Yeah.

Marwa: He's crazy ...

Rayyan: Because he says things he doesn't think about it ... and even Stephen Harper!

Me: I just think it's so sad ...

Marwa: I am so happy about Justin Trudeau, you know that video of the Syrian refugees coming to Canada ... he went to the airport and was even helping them ...

As we prepare to leave, just before I turn the phone recorder off, Marwa and Rayyan lighten the mood and make me laugh as they share how much they are looking forward to the renovations planned for their home because they will be moving into a bigger room:

Marwa: Ali and Leila have *huge* rooms!

Rayyan: Even bigger than my Mom and Dad ...

Marwa: Leila is my Dad's *princess* ...

Rayyan: Because she's graduating ...

Marwa: And he never argues with her, he always takes her side ... but my Dad always calls us his princesses and queens ...

Rayyan: And he says Ali is his favourite son even though he's his only son! (all laughing)

We are still laughing as Rayyan sits in the passenger seat on our way home.

### **Retellings**

#### **“It's good to see your family” (Marwa, Winter, 2016)**

As I revisited our conversation, my attention turned to when Rayyan and Marwa talked about visiting their extended families and how, as Marwa elucidated, “It's good to see your family.” The importance of reconnecting with family is a strong thread running across the stories Safaa and Rayyan's have shared with me. In the spring of 2015, during our first shared conversation, Rayyan talked about looking forward to visiting with family in Seattle. She said

that they stay connected via FaceTime and text, and Safaa reflected, “It’s interesting, I watch them and for the first five or six months they stay in touch and then you see them detaching as time goes by. So I say, ‘Okay, it’s summertime, time to get that relationship again!’”

As time went on, Safaa and Rayyan shared more stories of staying connected with their extended family. In the summer of 2015, a few weeks after returning from their family trip to Seattle, Safaa shared with me that she started using Facebook as a way to reconnect with family:

We went to the States and we saw how they used Facebook to connect with our family in Australia and everywhere, we are spread out all across the world, and I brought Facebook into the house and I said, “We need to get in touch with our families.”

Later, in the winter of 2015, Safaa said, “Insha’Allah I have to go back [to Kenya] and see my dad again if he can’t come to us ... I’m trying to have him come visit and I hope he can come.” Rayyan responded with excitement upon hearing her mom say this and fondly remembered when her Grandma came to Alberta to visit with them. During our last recorded conversation in the summer of 2016, Rayyan and Marwa expressed disappointment that, for the first summer in a long time, they weren’t able to visit with family in Seattle. But then Rayyan, reassuring herself and Marwa, said, “We will probably go next year, insha’Allah.”

### **“Muslims this and Muslims that” (Rayyan, Winter, 2016)**

My heart tightens every time I re-read Rayyan’s words about how she would be more likely to speak up if she ever witnessed an incident similar to her sister Leila’s bus experience ... if she weren’t wearing hijab: “Well, because of all the stuff that’s happening, even Donald Trump and that stuff ... saying, ‘Oh Muslims this and Muslims that.’” As a mother, and as a

woman who wears hijab, it was deeply troubling for me to realize that Rayyan and Marwa are acutely aware of the dominant story of Muslims told via mainstream, disturbingly normalized, rhetoric. It pains me that Rayyan feels that being an identifiable Muslim sometimes limits her options of how/when/if to speak up. I thought of the countless times Noor or Yehia have asked me about something they've seen on the news or have heard through various sources ... and I wondered yet again about how I can teach my children to be very aware and cautious of dominant stories without succumbing to fear, cynicism, and/or insularity?

### **Continuing to Grow Our Relationship and Inquiry – Spring 2016**

Shielding my eyes from the early May sun, I search the crowded picnic areas at the YMCA park for a shaded area. I quickly realize that all the available spaces are too close to other picnickers. I'm not surprised. It is a beautiful Saturday afternoon and this park is typically packed on the weekend. Resigned, I settle for a park bench that is mostly shaded and faces the playground. I barely settle myself on the bench before I hear, "Muna! Assalamu Alaikum!" I turn with a smile and embrace Safaa, and then Rayyan, Marwa, and Amina. Safaa says a few words to Marwa in Somali as Marwa holds Amina's hand and leads her to the swings.

I express how much I have missed them and Safaa says that they have missed me too. She shares that the last few weeks have been very busy. Their days and nights have been full with school, work, and also with spending time with extended family members who had fled the recent Fort McMurray wildfire (see CBC News, 2016). Safaa says that, while their family members have been provided with comfortable lodgings while they are here, they have spent most of their time with Safaa and her husband in their home. Safaa shares how distressing watching the videos of the Fort McMurray fire and evacuation has been for her:

Safaa: Just watching the people running away and having no water, it just reminds me so much of the civil war in Somalia ... but at least that was something where you can hide. But a fire? You cannot hide anywhere ... it just is so swift. You know it's really stressing me out ... it's not because I'm afraid of it coming here, but because I am afraid for what people are going through ... who predicted this will happen? You know, this is a big country, a strong country, we are helping others out ... 25,000 refugees ...

Me: Yeah, I see what you mean, they are calling them evacuees, but ...

Safaa: But they are like refugees for now. You know, they lost their home and their jobs, so many things ...

Rayyan: Yeah a girl in my class came from there and her house burnt down and even her school too ...

Safaa: And what's amazing is how everyone is welcoming them and helping them, right? [My family] have their own rooms, and even cards to buy food and things they need, can you imagine that? They were invited to a big hotel and so last night they were going out for dinner – can you imagine? We live in the best country, Alhamdulillah. Even when they were driving, youth were helping and making sure they have gas and water ...

Me: Alhamdulillah, so much help ...

Safaa: Yeah, it's not self-interest or self whatever, that's the value of giving and community you see over here right?

Rayyan shares about her school's response to the Fort McMurray wildfire and says, "We are fundraising a lot." Safaa says that she loves and admires the community response to the crisis and to the recent Syrian refugee efforts in Canada, "It's just amazing."

Later in our conversation, as I scan the playground looking for Marwa and Amina to offer them snacks, I realize that it has been almost a full year since we had our first shared conversation at this very park. I share this realization with Rayyan and Safaa. Safaa replies, "Can you imagine? Time flies!" As we exclaim about time, a little girl who looks to be about five or six years old approaches us and asks, "Why is Rayyan sad?" Rayyan responds, "I'm not sad." But the little girl is not convinced. She asks, "But why aren't you playing?" Rayyan reassures her by saying, "I'll play with you in a bit!" Safaa laughingly explains that the girl is the daughter of

one of her close friends and isn't used to seeing Rayyan sitting at the park. I feel bad and tell Rayyan that we can catch up at a later time, to please go ahead and enjoy the playground! Rayyan smilingly says that she will go play with the girls and "come back soon!" As we watch her leave, Safaa laughs and says, "She is a mother to Amina and the little ones my Rayyan."

Still laughing, I ask Safaa if she has noticed changes in Rayyan over the last year? She replies, "Yeah actually, she is more confident I think. If I look even from September to now, it's totally different. She is more confident and even more mature. She's ready to be a woman, that's what I see." Rayyan returned to sit with us and Safaa and Rayyan then share the nikah.com story. We are laughing uncontrollably as Marwa and Amina join us for juice and snacks. Marwa looks at us with curiosity and the story is shared again. Our laughter continues for a long time.

Later in our conversation, I share my frustration at feeling judged as a parent for allowing Noor to save her money to buy a cellphone. Safaa shares her indignation with me and says, "Yeah, and with Aunties, culturally, we sometimes say things that we don't think is going to be hurtful but the kids who are raised here think differently. They are completely different actually." Safaa reminds me, "You know your daughter and what is best for your family."

### **Retellings**

#### **"The kids who are raised here think differently" (Safaa, Spring 2016)**

Looking across our conversations, I realized that Safaa has shared in different ways and at different times her belief that "the kids who are raised here think differently." In the winter of 2015, as we enjoyed tea and homemade pastries in her home, Safaa shared that she sometimes compares the way that she was raised with ways she is raising her children, and worries:

There, we say it takes a community to raise a child, so there was minimal interaction between the parents and the child because the child belongs to *all* the community, right? Whereby here you have long interactions, one-on-one interactions .... We grew up in a *rich* community whereby we learned from everybody, but for them it's just you, and how much teaching can you give them by yourself to grow as you grew? It's very difficult ...

However, reminiscent of how Safaa said, "that's the value of giving and community you see over here" during our conversation at the park, in the winter of 2016, Safaa shared her response to a female relative advising her, "You really have to take your kids somewhere where they can learn their culture," saying, "But, Alhamdulillah, I feel like they are rich. They have enough culture. And, you know, Canadian culture has so many things that are good, like they are honest, polite and my kids have that too." Safaa shared that, while she sometimes worries about her children, she knows they have been raised in a "family where they are loved," and also feels blessed that she and her husband have been able to take them for almost yearly trips to visit with extended family. She also feels that attending a community-based Islamic school, which "is like home to them," has helped her raise her children in a community of people who care for them.

### **"She is more confident" (Safaa, Spring 2016)**

As I think back to our conversation at the park that day, I once again think about our first shared conversation. I remember originally assuming that Rayyan was really shy and slowly realizing that her reluctance to share intimate details about herself was not shyness. Rather, it was a way of asserting her right to speak when/where/if and to whom she wants. It was Rayyan's way of coming alongside me carefully over time. This realization humbled me. It also made me

appreciate Rayyan's keen sense of self-knowledge and how she quietly but confidently began to share more when she felt more comfortable with me.

I admit that I was surprised at how Rayyan's confidence in her knowing seemed to be rooted so beautifully at such an early age ... and that, as Safaa reflected, Rayyan seems to have become even "more confident" over time. During my review of the literature before commencing this research, I became familiar with the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992). They contended that girls transitioning into adolescence seem to hold "the reluctance to know what one knows and the fear of one's experience, if spoken, will endanger relationships and threaten survival" (p. 41). After reading their work, I had assumed that girls transitioning into adolescence would become more uncertain over time. However, I wonder at how Rayyan seems to have *grown* in confidence and self-awareness during her transition into adolescence ...

### **Growing into Grade 8 – Summer 2016**

The sun is glaring as I park my car in front of Rayyan and Marwa's favourite halal restaurant. We excitedly talk about our favourite dishes and what we will order as we walk into the (thankfully) air-conditioned seating area. It is a late Thursday summer afternoon and we are the only customers in the restaurant. We happily choose our own booth and head to the front to order. We already know what we want. As we sit back down with our drinks and wait for our food, we talk about Ramadan and how it wasn't as difficult as we feared it would be to fast during the last month of school and into the first week of July. Rayyan says, "It was actually nice because after exams we could go home."

Marwa and Rayyan then tell me about staying in the city this summer rather than visiting with family in Seattle like they usually do. Rayyan says, “My mom said, ‘We’ll have fun in [the city], we’ll go around to the areas that we don’t go that much and just have fun there.’ So we went to a lot of the parks ...” Marwa adds, “And the lakes.” They express excitement over their plans for the weekend to go swimming, jet-skiing, and hiking with family and friends. They also talk about some of the new renovations taking place in their home and how nice everything looks so far. They love that they will have a bigger room to share. Marwa says, “We get to move into Leila’s old room which is *huge*, and she will take our old room, which is medium-sized.”

Our conversation shifts to talking about the last month of Rayyan’s grade 7 school year. Rayyan said that it was mostly “okay” but that she felt bad for some of her classmates who “don’t get their work done and then regret it.” I ask Rayyan, “Why do you think they don’t get their work done?” She replies,

Maybe they spend a lot of time on their phones, on Snapchat<sup>113</sup> ... even when I’m studying, I get so many snaps from my friends saying, “I’m bored” so I’m like, “Well do your homework,” and they’ll be like, “Stop being annoying.” [laughing]

Rayyan also thinks that classmates are sometimes distracted by their cellphones during class, “because people text other people in the class or school ... Like some people will message and ask, ‘Are you understanding any of this?’ and stuff like that.” She continued, “And lots of people skip class too.” I ask Rayyan why she thinks people skip classes and she replies, “Sometimes their friends are skipping and they just go along with them.”

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<sup>113</sup> Snapchat is an App that allows users to send self-deleting images or messages (called ‘snaps’).

Later in our conversation, as we enjoy our donairs and fries, I ask Rayyan if she is still friends with the same group of girls she told me about when we first started having conversations. She responds,

Yeah ... mostly. Some of them started to slack in school, like I had a friend who was being influenced in doing bad stuff. Like, I understand listening to music, but some of the songs have *bad* swears and stuff in them. And she would be like, “Rayyan, listen to this,” and I would be like, “Sorry, I can’t listen to that.” And she would be like [teasing voice], “Aww, you can’t listen to music? Aww ...” and I was like, “Well I listen to music but not *that* song” ... it was stuff that even an adult shouldn’t listen to ...

I ask Rayyan if she noticed any other changes in her classmates in the transition from grade 6 to grade 7. She says, “Well, definitely people matured and were more responsible. In grade 6, they would be more kid-ish like laughing if someone said ‘doody’ or something, but now they’ll say, ‘Stop acting like a kid.’” Rayyan later clarifies her understanding of the concept of maturity:

Marwa: I feel like Rayyan got more mature ...

Me: Do you agree with that Rayyan?

Rayyan: [smiling] Yeah.

Marwa: Like one day I was asking Rayyan to play this silly game we sometimes play and she was like “Umm, I don’t want to play that” ...

Rayyan: Some people think that they’re more mature but they don’t really know what mature means. Like if I’m staying inside rather than outside, and I’m on my phone, then I’m a big girl, you know what I mean? Being mature means being responsible, you have more responsibilities ...

Me: So being mature doesn’t necessarily mean acting like you’re an adult, being mature means taking your responsibilities seriously?

Rayyan: Yeah people think mature is, “When I was in grade 6 I used to play inside, but now that I’m a teen, I go inside and am on my phone all day.” No, that’s not mature ...

Rayyan shifted to talking about how social media, especially Snapchat and Instagram, have “lots of fun stuff on there, like my Mom uses Instagram for a lot of Islamic stuff,” but how these Apps sometimes contribute to, and escalate, conflicts. She shares the story of friends who had a very public rift:

Some girls will fight about pictures on Instagram. They’ll take pictures of stuff and post it. Like, a girl posted a picture of her and her ex-best friend, who wasn’t wearing her hijab in the picture. The girl who posted it was like, “Well she deserved it!” ... and she even wrote about who her crush was.

Appalled, I ask Rayyan if anything like that has happened to her? She replied, “No, I usually go on my Mom’s Instagram to see pictures, but I don’t have Instagram. I only have Snapchat and only have a few people on it [who can see my pictures].”

Before we clean our booth, we end our conversation that day with Rayyan looking forward to starting grade 8 in a few weeks, saying, “I like school, so I’m excited.”

### **Retellings**

#### **“Being mature means being responsible” (Rayyan, Summer 2016)**

I re-read Rayyan’s words, “Being mature means being responsible,” and I think about the many times Rayyan and Safaa have talked about responsibility. A few months after Safaa shared her deeply rooted belief in the Two R’s of rights and responsibilities, she shared, in the spring of 2016, that Rayyan has “been growing and improving, working hard ... she’s always worked

hard, but is taking even more responsibility.” Our discussions over several months and seasons have made visible that, for both Rayyan and Safaa, maturity and growth in educative (Dewey, 1938) ways is intricately connected with fulfilling their rights and responsibilities ... including the right and responsibility to nurture relationships, and to *be* nurtured, with kindness.

I am reminded of the conversation I shared with Rayyan and Marwa at Dairy Queen in the fall of 2015. During our conversation, Rayyan shared a story about a friend she has distanced herself from because she would talk about others behind their backs: “I don’t like that .... but I don’t give her the evil eye or anything, we still say Salam, we still talk, but we don’t really hang out anymore.” After I remarked, “That is such a mature way of looking at it,” Rayyan stressed that it is important to be kind to everyone. I am also reminded of when Safaa shared the story of Rayyan laughing at her sister Sadia’s joke even after Sadia was cross with her because she didn’t want to be “unkind.” Her view of maturity, as elucidated in our conversation before Rayyan’s grade 8 school year, entails rights and responsibilities toward herself and others ... and is profoundly rooted in her belief that kindness is essential to growing herself and her relationships. For Rayyan, kindness is a way of being – and of becoming – in relation with others.

### **Epilogue: Tending to Each Other (with love and care) – Winter 2017**

Walking the halls of the children’s wing of the hospital, I am reminded of the many nights I slept by Yehia’s bedside in this area when he was just months old. Saying Alhamdulillah for his health and for his remarkable growth over the last eleven years, I turn the corner and my thoughts turn to Rayyan and Safaa. I make duaa that Allah (SWT) grants Rayyan a quick recovery. On the phone earlier today, Safaa assured me that Rayyan was in the hospital because of her dehydration following a vicious influenza bug that lasted longer than it should have.

However, from my own experience, I know that it is hard to be in the hospital and constantly waiting for updates from doctors and medical staff. Safaa and Rayyan have been here for three days and I brought some gifts and treats in the hopes to brighten their day.

I ask a nearby nurse if she could guide me to Rayyan's room and she laughingly pointed to the one behind me. Smiling sheepishly, I thank her and make my way to the room. Walking into the room, I could not see who was behind the curtains that were drawn around the first bed, so I walked past it to the second one. Spotting a sleeping infant in a crib with no one else around, I silently make duaa for the baby for a long, healthy life as I turn and see that the curtain is not fully drawn on this side of the room. I suddenly hear, "Muna! Assalamu Alaikum!" and I rush forward to hug Safaa and then Rayyan, who is resting on the hospital bed. After thanking me for coming, Safaa tells me that she tries to keep a watchful eye on the baby next to them as her mother has other little ones at home and cannot be here as often as she wants. My heart constricts a little at her kindness and I say, "Jazakum Allahu Khairan"<sup>114</sup> Safaa, you are always so thoughtful." Smilingly waving my words away, Safaa asks me how I am doing, "How are the kids? How's Hannah?" I smile again at her questions, not surprised that she is asking about me and my family even as she and Rayyan are spending their time in the hospital.

I tell Safaa that I have just left a funeral service for a dear, beloved friend, Dr. Joy Ruth Michelson (May she rest in Peace), and that I already miss her. Safaa reminds me that "Inna li'Allah wa Inna Ilayhi Raj'oon"<sup>115</sup> and says that death is a right that life has upon us. I nod somberly and ask Rayyan how she is feeling. She quickly responds, "Bored. I miss school." I

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<sup>114</sup> This is an Arabic and Islamic saying which translates to, "May Allah reward you with all that is good."

<sup>115</sup> This is an Arabic and Islamic saying that is commonly used upon news of death, "We belong to Allah and to Him we are destined to return."

respond by taking out the bag of goodies I have brought with me. Rayyan excitedly reaches for the hijabs I picked out for her while Safaa exclaims at the bag of fresh, homemade ka3k and asks if I made them myself? I say, “No, but I watched my Mom and Sittee make them and served as a taste-tester.” We laugh and continue to catch up on each other’s lives.

Eventually, we venture into a topic that has been oft discussed in mainstream news and media, and by family and friends – the recent announcement by the United States of a “Travel Ban<sup>116</sup>” of all refugees and passport-holders from seven Muslim-majority countries. While the Canadian government assured worried Canadians that this ban will not affect them, I shared with Safaa how worried I was that my cousin Billal (Allah yirhamu) would not be able to travel to see a cancer specialist he has been consulting with in America due to the fact that he was born in Libya. Safaa responded by saying that she was worried too, especially when the ban was first announced and there were reports that Canadian dual citizenship holders with ties to one of the seven countries would not be able to travel to the United States. Born in Somalia, she worried that her almost-yearly trips to visit with family in Seattle would not be possible anymore. We say, “Insha’Allah khair” and are interrupted by one of the machines beeping. Rayyan looks at her Mom questioningly and, with experienced hands, Safaa quiets the machine manually as she softly explains why it was beeping. Reminded that Safaa works in a hospital setting, I ask her if she has taken this time off of work. She responds that she has cleared her schedule until Rayyan is better and I recognize her love and faith as she smiles and says, “Insha’Allah soon, we should be out in the next few days.” I smile back at her and at Rayyan and say, “Insha’Allah very soon.”

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<sup>116</sup> As Donald Trump had repeatedly called for a “Muslim Ban” during his (ultimately successful) presidential campaign, many are of the mind that the “Travel Ban” from seven Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen) is a less direct version of his previous calls for a “Muslim Ban” (Yuhus & Sidahmed, 2017).

## Chapter 4: A Narrative Account of Inquiring Alongside Zahra & Ayesha

Ayesha & Zahra's Family:

**Ayesha** – Mom  
Hassan – Dad

Children by Age:

**Zahra**  
Sarah  
Zainab

*Growing Forward ... Amidst Uncertainty*

*Sitting in front of my laptop with pages (and pages) of field texts spread across the kitchen table, I contemplate how to begin writing this narrative account of the almost two years I have lived and inquired alongside Zahra and Ayesha. How do I give a sense of our coming alongside one another over time? How can I write about engaging as co-inquirers – and as friends – when our relationship and our inquiry has evolved so profoundly since we first met? How can I represent our conversations in ways that give a sense of our becoming without somehow constricting the complexity and fullness of our life compositions (Bateson, 1989) and embodied experiences?*

*I think back to the conversation Ayesha, Zahra, and I shared two weeks ago. Indulging in tiramisu after enjoying supper at Zahra's favourite pasta restaurant, we talked about composing research texts. We had already reviewed threads and stories that might be included in our narrative account, and I asked them about some of the hard to tell stories they had shared or that we had lived alongside one another, "Are you sure you are comfortable with sharing that?" We talked for a long time about what to include and what to leave out of our writing. Before we left the restaurant, however, Zahra turned to me and said, "Don't worry Muna, we trust you." Ayesha and Zahra have expressed a variation of this sentiment every time we discuss the writing of research texts. Their trust heartens me ... and worries me. I worry that I will fall short of the immense trust they have (placed) in me.*

*Breathing deep, I make duaa that I will be able to show how our inquiry and relationship(s) unfolded over time. Saying "Bismillah," I begin to type ...*

### Will You Be My (research) Friend? – Winter 2015

Parking the car after a long drive, I check the message from Ayesha yet again to make sure I am at the right house. I try to calm my nerves as her text confirms that this is indeed where I am supposed to be. Making dua as I gather my things and make my way to their door, I wonder if Ayesha and Zahra will want to participate in this study after we engage in this initial conversation. Ayesha and I had spoken a few times over the phone over the last few weeks and, yesterday, met for the first time at the Chapel Hill vigil<sup>117</sup>. Taking one more deep breath, and saying one more prayer, I knock tentatively at the door.

Ayesha answers the door without her hijab and envelops me in a warm hug, “Assalamu Alaikum!” Ushering me into their cozy and delicious smelling home, Ayesha asks me to have a seat at a nearby loveseat. I follow her request, but stand moments later as Zahra and her two younger sisters, Sarah and Zainab, approach me to greet me with “Assalamu Alaikum” and hugs. Ayesha then asks Sarah and Zainab to give us privacy as we engage in discussion. Zahra, in the meantime, brings out a tray of snacks of mixed nuts and dried fruit and the most delicious traditional tea with cardamom and cinnamon for us to enjoy as we chat. I smile widely as they talk about how happy they are that our mutual acquaintance has connected us to one another, and how excited they are to participate in this research.

After over an hour of engaging in discussion, Ayesha walks me to the door. I thank her again for agreeing to participate and for making me feel so welcome. She hugs me good-bye and says that she is looking forward to engaging in our inquiry as she thinks it would be lovely to

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<sup>117</sup> Ayesha and I had been in communication a few days before a planned candlelight vigil to honour the lives of Razan and Yusor Abu-Salha, and Deah Barakat. The three Muslim American students were killed by a neighbour in what many deemed to be a hate crime (Elliot, 2015; Talbot, 2015).

think more deeply alongside Zahra about their experiences during this time. Alhamdulillah is in my mind, on my tongue, and reverberating throughout my body as we begin making plans for our first extended, shared conversation as co-inquirers. Insha'Allah Khair!

### **Planting Beginning Stories – Winter 2015**

Excited and nervous ahead of our first research conversation, I make duaa as I knock on Zahra and Ayesha's door. It is cold outside and I am grateful to be invited inside by Ayesha and Zahra with warm hugs and smiles. Eschewing the large living room couch in favour of the comfortable futons arranged so invitingly on the floor, Zahra, Ayesha, and I commence with sketching annals<sup>118</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) around their early childhood experiences. Ayesha and I soon discover we were born a few months apart and also became mothers for the first time, to Zahra and Noor, months apart. Ayesha laughingly exclaims, "We were parallel!"

Later, as her Mom is preparing tea in the kitchen, Zahra shares, "I was born in Afghanistan, the same place my Mom and Dad were born, ... and I came here [to Canada] when I was six months old." I ask Zahra what the circumstances were that led them to leave Afghanistan. She replies, "I'm not really sure, my parents just tell me that we were there, but that there was war again and stuff... and then we had to go to Pakistan for a little while and then we came here." Emerging from the kitchen and setting the tray of tea and cups down, Ayesha sits next to her daughter and talks about growing up in Afghanistan, explaining her family's process of deciding to come to Canada by sharing several (hitherto untold) stories:

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<sup>118</sup> Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described annals as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like. Students or participants construct timelines beginning, for example, at birth; at some distant important period or date in the past history of the person's family; or at some more recent date, as a kind of beginning benchmark. (p. 112)

*I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. My father is a doctor and my mother is a teacher. They both worked and were very busy. I grew up in a big family. There are six of us, three brothers and three sisters. I am the oldest.*

*I remember when we used to go to daycare, my Mom used to drop us off... I didn't like the teacher there, I can remember her face still ... I was afraid of her I think.*

*Then when I went to school ... I don't know if it was the grade one teacher or grade two ... whenever I wouldn't pay attention or something like that, the teacher would say, "Oh you're the daughter of the doctor?" [sarcastic tone] and this and that, you know? But they did that to everybody there.*

*I moved schools for grade four and five because, at that time, the regime was run by Russians<sup>119</sup> ... and the Russians were imposing Russian ideologies there. My Dad didn't like that so he moved me. In grade 7, I came back to this school because the regime changed and there was no Russian teaching going on anymore.*

*When I came home from school, if they made something special, my Grandma would keep it fresh for me and make it when I come ... I used to teach her. Actually, she was not literate ...so I used to teach her language and she was such a brave woman. For the longest time I didn't know that she was illiterate, because she was so knowledgeable in everything... and at that age she wanted to learn and I admire her for that ... she went through a lot too, they had a good life and house and everything, but during the war, they had to abandon their house, and they sold it for very little money and moved to Pakistan and they didn't have a very good life there ... and then my Grandpa also died ...*

Although Ayesha and Zahra both shared that they had been born in Afghanistan, and although I recognised that Ayesha's stories of childhood could include stories of sociopolitical unrest, I was not wakeful to the ways that constructing annals alongside one another in our first research conversation could create spaces where some of our previously unspoken stories of childhood experiences could be voiced. As Ayesha continues to share, I notice Zahra is listening to her Mom with wide-eyed, rapt attention.

*I was about twelve years old and I remember it was so scary. There were bomb blasts everywhere, rockets, and I remember it was so hard ... it was so scary we*

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<sup>119</sup> While the history of colonialism and conflict in Afghanistan is extensive, I consulted with the Centre for Research on Globalization (Visalli, 2013) to help me understand more of Afghanistan's sociopolitical context.

*had to move from there. The Russians were out, but the government was still there, the Afghan government, and these Mujahideen<sup>120</sup> were attacking the capital, they were throwing the grenades, those rockets, from other places, outside the city ... so it would just drop anywhere ... and that was just so terrifying ...*

*We were living in tall buildings, and the buildings had holes from the fighting and it was so terrifying ... At night we used to go to the underground basement of the building because it was dangerous to be in the house. Even when we were in the house, we would not go in the rooms, we would be in like a back kind of den because there's no windows, so if a rocket is coming in ...*

Although/because I often struggle with voicing my doubts and fears (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014), I have never been comfortable with silences. Perhaps because of my experiences and struggles with silences (from myself and others), I sometimes feel them in the spaces around me. I wonder if this embodied knowing is why I have such a strong sense that Ayesha had not yet shared these stories of growing up in Afghanistan with Zahra.

*It was horrific. I remember being so scared whenever you would hear the [making a long, high pitched whooooo sound of rockets being launched] and you don't even know if it's going to come to your house or if it goes to another ...*

*It's horrific.*

*That's what we went through, all the children there. And what's happening is that my Dad didn't have work, he couldn't go to work, because there was fighting going on. And my Mom wasn't working and food was scarce and we had to ... you know, be more careful, not to waste and stuff like that ... and we didn't have water running in the building, so we had to go and get water from a distance and we had to go and walk and then bring buckets of water home ... [long pause]*

*Lots of people were injured, like in our building, so many times the rockets fell near the building and people were injured ... upstairs in my building a guy was injured ... it was so hard to see all those things ... and I was also scared of those Mujahideen, they were always staring at you, you know? They did so many things, like forcing themselves and taking girls out of their families, and I was so scared.*

*It was just horrific.*

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<sup>120</sup> Fighters opposed to the Afghan government were known as Mujahideen, or 'fighters for Islam.' (Visalli, 2013).

How was Zahra experiencing hearing these stories? Could/should I somehow try to comfort her? Could/should I comfort Ayesha? Should I redirect the conversation (even with awareness that Ayesha *chose* to share these stories)? Was this conversation too intense, too soon? I continued to listen.

*And for a while it was good, and I was still scared ... I remember sitting outside one day playing with my friends and a guy walked by, he looked like one of the Mujahideen. I knew the other people in my building, and he was different, so he walked by and then he turned back and he came towards me and he was looking at me and I was terrified. I just got up and ran home ... whenever I remembered him I thought he was going to come back and get me and I was so scared. They could do anything and there's no law or anything to protect you.*

*My Grandpa really took it to heart ... losing all the life that they made ... they had to live off the money that was sent from my Aunt from here [Canada] every month. And he had to live in our house in Pakistan, after we left Afghanistan, and my Dad was good ... but still, living in his Son-in-law's house was hard on him.*

As we sit in that comfortable living room with the delicious aroma of traditional tea embracing us, we are transported, through Ayesha's stories, to earlier times and places of conflict. In this moment of profound disruption, I think of Sittee's stories of our family's exodus from Palestine. Although I am an intergenerational survivor of Palestinian displacement<sup>121</sup>, I wonder how I can possibly compose thoughtful responses to Ayesha, when, having grown up in Canada, her stories were "outside the realm of the imaginable" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49) for me.

*My Dad sent money here [to Canada] for my Aunt to put in the bank ... they wanted to show that they had enough money for when you come here, but still the sponsorship was taking time. We were like, "It's probably not going to happen, it's probably rejected" ... but the embassy did contact us when it was time.*

*My father was always struggling to get us out of Pakistan, because life wasn't very good there, there was no future there. We were not allowed to go to the*

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<sup>121</sup> In using the term "intergenerational survivor," I draw inspiration from Dr. Mary Young's (2005) discussion of the "intergenerational narrative reverberations" in relation to first and subsequent generation survivors of Canada's residential schools.

*Pakistan University [as Afghan refugees] ... I wanted to become a doctor, so I was in the medical program in an Afghani University, but even that was closed, so that's why I couldn't pursue my career ...*

*When we went back to Afghanistan I was around 22 years old ... it was a lot better. There was security and you would not be afraid of any rockets being fired ... so, that was good ...*

*We were living in Peshawar Pakistan when I got married, we got married there in 2002. And then we were working for nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] and at that time, when we got married, the Taliban were done in Afghanistan ... then, these nongovernmental organizations started going inside Afghanistan ... so that's how they moved in Afghanistan, and we had to move too because our jobs were in these NGOs ...*

*We moved there and Zahra was born there ... and then we came here because my Aunt lives here and she had sponsored us. And then, during these three years that we were sponsored, it was just like we totally forgot about it. We thought it was not going to happen ...*

Unsure of how to respond, I continue to listen, asking a few questions for clarification or repeatedly stating, with sincerity, "I can't imagine." My main response, however, is to reach out to squeeze or hold Ayesha's hand as she shares.

*And then I got married, and then finally after that, we heard from them [the Canadian Embassy] ... I told them that I'm married now and I have a daughter ... we never thought we would hear from you so we never told you anything, so they were kind enough to include my husband and my daughter in the sponsorship, so we all came together ...*

*We came here.*

*I'm the oldest so I don't know, my brother and the second oldest sister probably remember ... I don't know about the others, but I remember that we were all trying to find stuff to do at home because we were always at home, you can't go outside to play ... I think they would remember ... but we don't talk about it ...*

*I never talk about it. This is the first time I've talked about this.*

Unspoken for so long, Ayesha's stories seemed to flow out of her and reverberated for a long time in the spaces around and between us. Although Zahra and I were mostly silent in

response to Ayesha's stories, we are able to articulate some of what we were thinking and feeling later in the conversation, with Ayesha and Zahra comforting each other:

Me: Wow. Subhan Allah. Thank you so much for sharing because, like I said ... I can't imagine. I can't imagine living like that.

Ayesha: Yeah, it's hard.

Me: I can't imagine. Is this the first time you've heard this Zahra?

Zahra: Yeah ... [Reaching over to hug Ayesha] You scared me to death Mama!

Ayesha: Really? I'm sorry baby!

Ayesha's vulnerability in sharing these never before told stories fashioned a space where Zahra and I can also share previously unspoken stories. As she recounts her earliest school memories, Zahra shares a story that Ayesha was surprised to hear for the first time. She talks about being bullied in grades 1 and 2 by a group of older boys in her school. Ayesha asks Zahra why she didn't confide in her or a teacher at the time? Zahra tears up and doesn't answer Ayesha's question. Unsure of what to do, I steer the conversation away to give Zahra space and, for the first time, I voice how uncertain I am about Noor choosing the junior high school she wants to attend – what if she chooses to leave the Islamic school she has grown up in? Zahra responds by sharing why having the freedom to choose a junior high school for herself is so important to her, particularly after six years of attending a school with Islamic studies programming:

I want to go to public school because I hear, "There are going to be people who force you to do drugs and stuff" and I want to test and see if I ever experience it. I want to be like, "Ok, I know how to say no to things" ... I want to see if I'll be able to do that.

Ayesha adds, “Maybe we need to let them experience the things we’re fearful of and let them try it. And it’s not final, she can always go back.”

We end our conversation with hugs and promises to see each other soon. Driving home, our conversation and stories are “working on [me]” (Basso, 1996, p. 59). An Apache Elder shared the profound wisdom of sitting and thinking with stories with Basso (1996):

That story is working on you now. You keep thinking about it. That story is making you want to replace yourself. You think only of what you did that was wrong and you don’t like it. So you want to live better. (p. 59)

Thinking about the last part of our conversation, I resolve to compose more spaces for choices alongside my children. With their vulnerability and their courage, Ayesha and Zahra inspire me and make me want to “live better” (Basso, 1996, p. 59) alongside my children and loved ones.

### **Retellings**

**“At some point we need to let go and accept our children’s choices” (Ayesha, Winter 2015)**

Re-reading my field texts, I gain a renewed sense of the many wonderings that lived in me after that first research conversation alongside Zahra and Ayesha. In my field notes, I wrote about Ayesha’s experiences of not being able to choose where she lived/attended school, and the lack of choice in so many other areas of her life as a child and youth. Reflecting on Ayesha’s words that “maybe we need to let them experience the things we’re fearful of and let them try it,” I wonder if experiencing a lack of choice(s) as a child and youth shaped her stories to live by as a mother who creates spaces for her daughters to choose for themselves.

Ayesha shared other stories that give a sense of her belief in the need to create spaces for choice(s) alongside her children. In the winter of 2015, Ayesha and I were enjoying dinner at one of my favourite restaurants when she shared the story of falling in love with her husband. She talked about how her parents, after initially opposing the relationship, came to accept her decision. She stressed, “At some point we need to let go and accept our children’s choices ... otherwise you might ruin your relationship with them.” Later, in the spring of 2016, as we enjoyed lunch, Ayesha reflected on the shifts in her parenting over the years. During this conversation, I started to get the sense that, for Ayesha, creating spaces for her daughters to choose for themselves is intimately connected to listening to them. In relation to creating spaces for choice(s) alongside Zahra, she shared, “I try to *listen* more and I try to tell her that it’s her choice and I don’t mind whatever she chooses.” In the fall of 2016, Ayesha emphasized that really listening to what her daughters are trying to tell her is an ongoing work in progress, “The biggest challenge that I face with my girls is saying, ‘Okay, I’m going to just listen, just listen,’ and then say something without really listening.”

**“We were parallel” (Ayesha, Winter 2015)**

Reflecting on composing a relationship alongside Zahra and Ayesha, I think of Bateson’s (2000) words, “Wherever lives overlap and flow together, there are depths of unknowing” (p. 3). There have been many times where I felt suspended in ‘depths of unknowing’ during this research. Reminiscent of my uncertainty about how to respond to Ayesha’s stories during our first research conversation, I have experienced other moments and periods of uncertainty in how to move forward alongside Ayesha and Zahra. One such period of uncertainty was during the weeks and months following our first research conversation. Although Ayesha and I remained in

contact through text and WhatsApp<sup>122</sup>, and even had an ‘off the record’<sup>123</sup> conversation in the spring of 2015, coming alongside Ayesha and Zahra has been a slow process of negotiating our relationships and who we are, and are in the process of becoming, alongside one another.

I asked for an ‘off the record’ conversation at that time because I was afraid that Ayesha was reconsidering participation in the research. I had a strong sense that Ayesha was hesitant to meet with me again and I wondered if the intensity of our first research conversation contributed to her hesitancy. After three months of trying to meet, I messaged Ayesha and asked if we could discuss a few things ‘off the record.’ I wanted to share that I would understand if she wanted to leave the research. I later learned that Ayesha was in the midst of many life changes. She had recently quit her job, was moving into a new house, and was experiencing many other changes and challenges. She later shared, through a WhatsApp message in June 2015, “I feel like everything is happening at the same time.” In response, I wrote, “I completely understand! I just moved a month ago and I can’t imagine dealing with that and all the other things going on for you right now.” Over the phone later that week, I offered to help her move because I have experience – I’ve moved three times in the last five years. She laughed and said that she has moved about seven times since coming to Canada twelve years ago. I laughingly conceded, “Okay, you win.”

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<sup>122</sup> WhatsApp is a downloadable phone messaging application.

<sup>123</sup> After several months of trying to connect face-to-face with Ayesha and Zahra after our first research conversation, I asked Ayesha if we could meet “off the record.” We continued to use this phrase to signify times when we were meeting to discuss issues that might not be included in research texts. While many of our “off the record” conversations were later addressed by either Ayesha or Zahra in recorded conversations, I introduced the option of “off the record” conversations because I wanted Zahra and Ayesha to know that I would not share anything that they weren’t comfortable sharing.

Experience with moving was not the only area of resonance I felt with Ayesha. We seemed to be “parallel,” as Ayesha noted, in many other ways. Born a few months apart, we experienced the transition into adolescence at around the same time, although in very different contexts. Noor and Zahra were born a few months apart, and, as we watched home videos in the summer of 2015 in their home, we discovered another similarity in our lives:

Ayesha: When Zahra was a year old, I remember I started working in the summer ...

Me: Yeah, I remember I started teaching, my very first year, when Noor was about five months old ... I felt so guilty but I had to because of financial reasons ...

Ayesha: Oh my goodness! Yeah, I know what you mean, us too ...

Although our first research conversation mainly (and unexpectedly) focused on Ayesha’s experiences, and although I was mainly in communication with Ayesha at first, Zahra, Ayesha, and I creatively co-composed our research relationship(s) over time. We engaged in conversations together and then, after several months as trust and comfort were taking root, I also met with either Zahra or Ayesha alone<sup>124</sup>. As our lives met and overlapped (Bateson, 2000) through our inquiry, we became close friends. Our relationship is one of my sustaining stories, and I am incredibly grateful.

### **Planting Seeds of Trust – Summer 2015**

Adjusting the air conditioning in my car on the drive to Zahra and Ayesha’s home, I think about how wonderful a large Slurpee would be. I am not really a frozen beverage person, usually preferring a hot cup of coffee or water, but fasting the long, hot days of Ramadan this year has me yearning for a huge cup of frozen, sugary, caffeinated slush. However, I am feeling pretty

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<sup>124</sup> See the record of our conversations in Appendix C.

mellow because of the lack of caffeine or sugar (not to mention sleep) in my system, so my anxiety about my upcoming conversation with Ayesha and Zahra is not as high as it otherwise may have been. Pulling up to their new house, I wonder how Zahra and Ayesha are experiencing Ramadan. Cradling their housewarming gift, a potted white calla lily in bloom, I make dua and knock on their door.

Sarah opens the door with a smile and says that her Mom and Zahra will be down in a minute. She invites me to sit on the living room couch to wait. I place the calla lily on the coffee table in front of me and am about to sit down when I notice Zahra and Ayesha walking towards me. We exchange Salams and hugs and I compliment them on their new home. Ayesha smiles and tells me that there are still unopened moving boxes all around and I laughingly tell her that my home has “the nuisances” all over the place too. We smile wryly at each other and then talk about Ramadan and how hot it is today.

I ask Zahra how the last few months of grade 6 were and she laughingly responds, “It was fun ... minus the learning part.” She then talks about attending an open house at the junior high school she chose to register in and how she is feeling about her transition there. She replies, “I’m nervous ... I’m going to school with a lot of people who are not that close. Before [in elementary school], I was close with everyone and now I don’t know half of everybody.” However, Zahra said she is glad because “most of my friends are coming, a lot of us Alhamdulillah.”

Later in our conversation, we discuss Zahra’s grade 6 graduation:

Zahra: It was nice, I told my friends, “Oh I’m going miss you guys!” and then half of them were like, “But I’m going see you again over the summer!” But I said, “I’m still going to miss you and it’s not going to be the same.”

Me: Yeah, I know what you mean ... And how about you Ayesha? What did you think about Zahra's graduation?

Ayesha: It was nice, but I wasn't feeling sad [laughing]. Some of the parents were saying they cried at the graduation, but I was like, "I don't know, maybe I'm missing something?" I was not sad [laughing]. So people who have been here and have gone through it maybe know it, s going to be harder, but I don't know, I'm not sad, I'm happy.

Me: I think some of it might be worry? Like, "What's going to happen next year? What's the transition going to be like?"

Zahra: How are they going to *act* [laughing] ... a lot of my friends changed over the year.

Me: Really? The ones who went on to junior high before you?

Zahra: No, my friends from my class the past year have changed *a lot*.

I ask Zahra to please say more about these changes and she replies,

One of them changed the way she dressed. Like before she picked up random things and put it on. Now, she takes more time and stuff like that .... and one of them who was so quiet became really talkative and people started saying, "She talks too much!" [laughing]

Trying to tread carefully, I later ask Ayesha about her experiences transitioning to junior high school, "Are there special friends or teachers who stand out for you?" She replies,

Well ... when we moved to Pakistan, I was supposed to be in grade 7 but I went to grade 6 again. I don't know why, things were different there ... so there were Afghan schools funded by humanitarian organizations and I attended one of them and it was far from my house. I used to walk to school. But the school was just a yard with tents, and we would sit under the tents and those were our classrooms and the teachers would come and teach. It was not very good because in Afghanistan we had proper schools ... it was such a big change. I was not taking it seriously and I was like, "I don't want to go here, I don't even

want to go to school.” So I decided to just stay home for a few days and my Mom was saying, “Okay, no, you have to go to school, it’s okay whatever it is, you need to go.”

Ayesha continues talking about her experiences transitioning to life in Pakistan and how there were many shifts for her and her family at that time:

I was thirteen [years old] when we moved ... and because my Mom was in the hospital with my brother, he got sick and she was in the hospital for a few weeks, I was the eldest at home and I had to do everything ...

I express resonance with her story, sharing how I had learned to shoulder more familial responsibilities in grade 8 after my youngest sister Eman was born because my Mom had gotten sick after giving birth to her. However, I continue, “I think my sister Suha would relate even more ... there’s something about being the eldest.” I turn to Zahra and ask if she has ever felt added responsibility because she’s the eldest:

Zahra: All the time.

Me: Noor says so too, but in what ways, at what times do you feel that most strongly?

Zahra: When we have to do our chores ... I have to do a little more than them.

Ayesha: One of my friends, she’s also the eldest in her family and she doesn’t like the idea that you give more responsibility to the eldest, but I think that it makes sense. You count on them more, just like you will count on the younger ones too when it’s time.

Zahra later talks about her relationship with her sisters Sarah and Zainab:

Zahra: We are pretty close sometimes ... depends on what time it is. [laughing]

Me: When I was growing up, me and my sisters would argue or get annoyed with each other a lot, but it was also nice to have someone to talk to and laugh with ...

Zahra: Yeah, me and Sarah, if one of us gets in trouble, even if we're not talking to each other, we make faces and start laughing.

Ayesha laughs and says Zahra and Sarah get annoyed watching home movies of Zainab as a baby because they say, "She's just sitting there and doing nothing!" We laugh as Zahra says, "It's true!" I ask if they would be comfortable watching some of their home movies with me at some point and Ayesha invites me to visit next month right after Eid celebrations. We laugh wistfully as I say, "We won't be fasting then, so I volunteer to bring the popcorn!"

## Retellings

### (eldest) Sister Stories

Zahra's stories of who she is and who she is becoming alongside her younger sisters has profoundly shaped her life-making. Living alongside her for the last two years, I repeatedly witnessed Zahra's love and care for her sisters. Born one year apart, she is closest in age to Sarah, and I was reminded of my relationship with my sister Suha as I watched home movies with Ayesha, Zahra, Sarah, and Zainab in the summer of 2015:

Zahra: When we were younger we [me and Sarah] always had identical clothes ...

Me: That's exactly like me and my older sister [laughing] ...

Ayesha: And they would still fight over the dresses sometimes!

Several months later, as we enjoyed breakfast at my home in the winter of 2015, Zahra said her relationship with Sarah has changed over the years, particularly as Sarah experiences her own transition into adolescence, "She goes through everything I went through, so she'll be like, "I hate this!" and I will say, "Ugh, I remember that, I hated it too." Zahra said she likes helping her sisters negotiate some of the challenges of growing older, "Now, when my sisters are going

through everything, I'm glad I can help and tell them how to go through it, although they might not always listen!" While Zahra feels that she has extra responsibilities as the eldest, I also gained a sense of her as a proud older sister. I had asked Ayesha and Zahra to bring a few of their favourite photographs with them and one of the photographs that Zahra brought was of Zainab sitting on a toilet as a toddler. Giving me a sense of her deep love and care for her younger sister, Zahra smilingly explained that she chose this photograph because she remembered how hard Sarah had worked to help potty-train Zainab.

While Ayesha said, in the fall of 2015, that she and Zahra "grew up completely different," she has also highlighted the many ways that being the eldest (sister) amongst her siblings has shaped her life-making. Explaining that the responsibilities of eldest siblings cannot be simply reduced to more chores, Ayesha said, "There's other responsibilities too ... I think that my younger sister suffered even more than I did, she's so traumatized still, she's still haunted." I asked Ayesha to please say more about this and she said, "After we left Afghanistan, she would cry and was sick all the time. I would feel so bad and I would try to help her feel better." As the eldest (sister), Ayesha has felt – and still feels – responsible for helping her younger siblings live and grow in sustaining ways. In the fall of 2016, Ayesha expressed excitement that she is helping her sister prepare for her upcoming wedding, "It feels good to see her so happy." In the many seasons we have inquired alongside one another, Ayesha has shared many stories of love, and sometimes concern, for her siblings that highlighted her sense of responsibility as the eldest (sister) and the many ways her siblings' happiness and sadness are interconnected with hers – stories that make me consider how the responsibilities of being the eldest sister can sometimes feel similar to the responsibilities that accompany motherhood.

### Rooting Beginning (in Canada) Stories – Summer 2015

Excitedly carrying three bags of pre-popped, flavoured popcorn, I knock on Ayesha and Zahra's door. It is a beautiful summer afternoon and we will be having a home movie viewing party. Looking beautiful as always in her flowy hijab, Zahra opens the door with a smile and "Assalamu Alaikum!" She leads me to the family room where Ayesha is adjusting the T.V. Ayesha turns to greet me with a hug and we are getting settled as Sarah and Zainab come into the room and ask if they can join us. Ayesha asks me if that would be okay and I say, "Of course!"

Settled with our bowls of popcorn and iced drinks, the first home movie we watch features two adorable toddlers playing dress-up:

Zahra: That's me and Sarah [laughing]

Me: *So* cute – I love your poncho! [laughing] How old were you here?

Zahra: I think I was two [years old] ...

Ayesha: No, you were about two and a half [years old] ...

Ayesha: This was a time when we had gone to visit my in-laws and they speak Pashto, their language, and she had learned a few words there and I'm just trying to speak that language with her and telling her, "Give me some raisins please."

Ayesha explains that there "are many cultures and languages in Afghanistan," and that her familial language is Farsi while Zahra's father's familial language is Pashto. Zahra tells me that she knows both languages and her parents also know both languages. Ayesha said that she also learned Urdu during her years in Pakistan. I express amazement, "Mash'Allah, so you know four languages and Zahra knows three." Ayesha says she tries to practice the other three languages when she can because she feels that she is mostly communicating in English lately.

As we continued watching, I ask Ayesha if they still film home movies:

Ayesha: They can do it yeah, but they don't *want* to do it ... like they do funny things but they don't want us to take videos ....

Me: How come?

Zahra: It's embarrassing ... you guys post it on Facebook!

Ayesha: No I don't [laughing] ...

Zahra: Daddy did that one time ...

The second home movie begins playing and I ask what year it was made in:

Ayesha: This was 2006, Sarah was about a year old.

Me: Oh okay, and you were home at this time?

Ayesha: Yeah I stayed home with them for about one year ... then I worked at night when Hassan came home and that's when I would go to work ... I would go to work three nights a week, I would come home at 12 [in the morning] and start at 6 [in the evening] ...

We laugh often, especially at the home movie of Zahra and Sarah opening Eid gifts with their parents, baby sister Zainab, maternal aunts, uncles, and grandparents:

[Zahra rubbing baby Zainab's head in the home movie and everyone laughing]

Me: You're rubbing her head like a good luck charm! [laughing]

Zahra: [laughing] I still do that sometimes.

Me: It looks like the gift wrapping are in Christmas colours, was this in the winter?

Ayesha: Yes, it was during Christmas time ... At that time Eid was around Christmas and Zahra would always say "magical Christmas" ...

Zahra: I wanted shiny wrappers that sparkle, I thought that was magical, so that's what they gave us ...

[Hassan saying "Eid" in a drawn-out way in the home movie and everyone laughing]

Ayesha: Eeiiddd!! [laughing]

Me: He sure knows how to set the mood! [laughing]

Ayesha: Yes, Zahra was talking about Christmas so much, and so her Dad wanted to say Eid is good too. [laughing]

Before I leave, our conversation turns to talking about school starting soon. I share that Noor has decided to continue attending the same school for grade 7 because she wants to stay with her close friends, even though she is annoyed that she will be expected to wear a uniform:

Zahra: Ugh. I feel so bad for her.

Me: So Noor is already saying she doesn't feel like she's moving to junior high because they're also not sure about getting lockers this year ...

Zahra: Oh! That's the one thing that makes it junior high! I feel so bad for her right now.

As I prepare to leave, we agree to try to meet again after school starts in September. I am smiling on my drive home, our earlier laughter echoing in my ears.

### **Retellings**

#### **“It's hard to go back to the way we used to be” (Ayesha, Fall 2016)**

Listening to the recording, and reading the transcript, of our Summer 2016 conversation, I realize how difficult it must have been for Ayesha to share not only previously untold stories of conflict and displacement, but also stories of familial experiences. Over the almost two years that we have lived and inquired alongside one another, Ayesha has repeatedly talked about how her familial relationships changed over time, as refugees in Pakistan after leaving Afghanistan, and later as newcomers to Canada. In the fall of 2016, as we enjoyed breakfast in my home, Ayesha reflected on her relationship(s) with her family and said that she has been thinking a lot about

“how our experiences growing up still affect us.” Ayesha has expressed this thought in different ways throughout our conversations. During a dinner conversation in the winter of 2015, Ayesha discussed her family’s experiences with making a life in Pakistan after fleeing violence in Afghanistan, and later making a life in Canada after Zahra was born. Thinking back to her family’s transition to living in Pakistan, Ayesha spoke of her shifts in perspective over time, “I wasn’t really paying attention to the challenges my parents were going through at that time.”

Ayesha described her father’s belief that Pakistan “could not be the final destination” for them, as there were limited school and career options for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Ayesha remembers her father seeking opportunities to move to another place where they could be free to pursue a better life, even deciding to hire an English language tutor for them all to learn a language that might help them leave Pakistan: “My father wanted to get us out from there in any way and was like, ‘Take the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] and maybe we can leave’ ... I remember just struggling like that.”

Earlier in our conversation, Ayesha discussed the many ways that her family had “changed” over the years. While Ayesha said that arriving in Canada was “like a dream come true with my whole family there, my brothers and sisters, my Dad and Mom, my husband and baby,” composing a life in the weeks, months, and years following their arrival was challenging. While Ayesha’s comment that Hassan “wanted to say Eid is good too” in response to Zahra’s childhood love of “magical Christmas” gives a sense of the challenges of adapting to a society and calendar centred around different beliefs and values, Ayesha says that living with Hassan and Zahra in the three-bedroom apartment they shared with her parents and five siblings was what made their early experiences in Canada “so hard.” She recalled everyone feeling the

pressure to contribute financially, but finding it difficult to find jobs at first. Eventually, after securing employment, Ayesha, Hassan, and Zahra were able to move out and live on their own. However, even then, “We were constantly fighting, I don’t even remember about what.” Ayesha reflected, “I’ve learned the hard way that it’s hard to go back to the way we used to be.”

A few months later, as we enjoyed dinner together, I was surprised when Ayesha shared that Hassan and her family have become estranged in recent years. Ayesha discussed some of the events which led to their estrangement and how difficult it is for her to negotiate her relationships with her loved ones as a result. She shared her pain and anger as a result of their continued conflict, “I feel betrayed. My situation is that my family thinks I’m not of them and my husband thinks I’m not of him.” While she continues to visit with her parents and siblings alongside her children, she says they do not talk about her husband or the past. It is a deliberate, studied silence. However, Ayesha said that Hassan sometimes brings the past up:

I told Hassan to just leave it because he brings it back every once in a while, it’s always there, it’s never going to go away. I told him, “Don’t bring this up anymore, it’s not going to get solved, I’m not talking about this anymore.” So hopefully, we’ll see how it goes, but Alhamdulillah, we are still so blessed and there’s always going to be problems. I just think that it’s not fair that you hold on to the past ...

Reminding me of when she said “It’s hard to go back to the way we used to be,” she continued,

We just need to move away from it, or to move away from each other. Our religion says that that if you forgive somebody, don’t bring it up again, it’s not fair ... and if you don’t

want to forgive, then you just need to leave ... Nobody can do anything about the past anymore, we need to keep going.

Taking a deep breath, as though she is drawing on her faith for sustenance, Ayesha said, “But Alhamdulillah, whatever Allah has planned, it’s good.”

### **“My parents signed The Parent Contract” (Zahra, Fall 2016)**

I smile as I think about how Zahra expressed the reason she refuses to make home movies anymore: “It’s embarrassing ... you guys post it on Facebook!” I am reminded of the many times Zahra laughed and covered her face in bemused embarrassment as we watched their home videos and of a thought Zahra playfully shared during our breakfast date in the winter of 2016:

I feel like before I was born my parents signed The Parent Contract, like, “You embarrass your child, you wait five years before you get them a phone, and you make sure they go through a lot of trouble to get what they want.”

Before jokingly sharing her thought that embarrassing their children is obligatory for parents, Zahra had earlier been talking about her parents’ reluctance to allow her to buy a cell phone because she’s “still [their] baby”:

Zahra: My Dad, before he makes a decision, thinks about it for a long time and is like, “But you’re so little!” And I’m like, “Daddy, I’m twelve [years old].” And he says, “Yeah, but you’re still my baby.”

Me: I still see Noor as my baby to be honest ...

Zahra: My mom, she always says that, and I’m like “Mom, I’m twelve years old!” And, oh my God my mom, she’ll be like, “I remember when you used to do this ...” and I’ll be like, “Shhh, we’re in public!” [laughing]

Reminding me of how often Noor says I embarrass her in public, Zahra later talked about how Ayesha discussed menstruation with her for the first time during a mall trip:

It was the beginning of grade five, and I was like, “Mom, I think you should tell me,” and she’s like, “You’re so young!” But she ended up telling me and we were in the mall and she was like, “And THEN,” and I was like, “Oh my God Mom, shhhh!” Because she sometimes talks loudly when she doesn’t need to talk loudly, and I was like “Mom!” and she was like “SORRY!” [exaggerated yelling voice]. [Both of us laughing]

I ruefully responded, “I think I’ve signed The Parent Contract too!” I laughed again at Zahra’s playfulness as our pancakes were served: “Let’s send my Mom pictures and make her jealous!”

### **Growing Trust Alongside Zahra – Fall 2016**

I excitedly knock on Zahra and Ayesha’s door and appreciate the relatively mild November weather as I wait outside. Ayesha opens the door in her pajamas, greets me with a hug, and says that Zahra is ready and excited to go with me. As if on cue, Zahra approaches the door with her jacket on and sneakers in hand. We exchange hugs and Salams and are soon out the door, with Ayesha calling out to us to have fun.

Ayesha, Zahra, and I (alongside Sarah, Zainab, Noor, Yehia, and Hannah) have met several times over the last few months, enjoying breakfasts and brunches at each other’s homes and a movie date last week. After I asked her what she would like to do for our next research conversation, Zahra said she’d like for just the two of us to go somewhere. This will be the first research conversation we engage in alone. Directing me to a nearby coffee shop, Zahra is smiling

as we talk about the movie we watched last week with Noor, Sarah, and my niece Hannan. Zahra makes me laugh often with her quirky observations as we wait for our drinks.

Settling down in a quiet(er) sunlit corner of the shop with our drinks, Zahra tells me she misses her old neighbourhood but likes her new house. Zahra then talks about school and how she loves playing volleyball. She later shares an experience she had in gym class:

Zahra: In gym class, we have wrestling and I was like, “Okay, I don’t want to ruin my hijab,” and you’re not allowed to have straight pins on anyways, so I just took it off. And everyone was like, “Oh my God, you look so nice like this, your hair is so nice!” And I was like, “Okay, it’s not going to hurt me, it’s not going hurt me,” but then one of my friends said, “She looks so nice with it on or off.” And I was like, “*Thank you!*”

Me: Because you do mash’Allah, you’re beautiful with and without it.

Zahra: Thank you too. [laughing]

Me: I know what you mean though, getting compliments that don’t really feel like compliments ... so was it difficult going to a new school as someone wearing hijab?

Zahra: A little, most of my old friends who were with me [in elementary school] still wear it so nothing changed with them, but I made new friends and most of them don’t wear it. And they’re sometimes like, “Oh I like your hair,” and it’s like, okay, stop ...

I ask Zahra when she started wearing hijab:

Zahra: Well, it was kind of on and off, and then in grade 6, it was like kind of at the beginning, I had to wear it ....

Me: So when you say you ‘had’ to wear it, that was when you hit puberty?

Zahra: Yeah.

Me: Okay, so was that something that you felt strongly that you should do at that point?

Zahra: Well, sometimes I don’t want to, but then I think, “I’m going to wear it eventually someday, so it’s best to do it now.”

I share my experience with donning and removing my hijab multiple times in upper elementary and junior high school, “It was a journey I had to go through ... actually it’s an ongoing journey for me.” Backtracking a little, I ask Zahra what she meant when she said her “new friends” don’t wear hijab? She replied, “My old friends were not the best ... they say, ‘It’s your fault, you made new friends,’ and I was like, ‘The reason I made new friends is because you guys didn’t treat me like a friend.’” She continues, “I guess when I made new friends they kind of thought that I didn’t need them anymore, so when I tried to show them that I did, then it kind of got better.”

I ask Zahra if she turned to anyone for support during this challenging time. She responds, “Sometimes I talk to my Mom, sometimes Sarah ... but sometimes I don’t say anything.” I ask Zahra why she sometimes doesn’t share:

Zahra: Because, my Mom will sometimes get worried and start to say, “You need to do this or that,” and I’m like, “Mom, I just want to tell you how I feel right now.”

Me: That sounds so familiar, I do that to Noor all the time ...

Zahra: I do it to Sarah too, because there’s a girl in her class who is so rude to her and I’m like, “Sarah, why don’t you do this?” and then I’m like, “Oh my God, I’m doing it!”

I share that I sometimes tell Noor it would be helpful if she tells me what kind of response she needs from me sometimes, “Does she need me to just listen or offer advice, you know?” Zahra replies, “I did, but my Mom sometimes forgets ... and I can’t blame her anyways because she would never talk like that with her mom, well at least not openly, because it was different for them.” I share my resonance with what she said because my relationship with my Mom has been one of learning to be more open with each other over time. Zahra shares,

Yeah, and plus my Mom is going through a hard time, like she has a new job and she's trying to adjust ... she doesn't have as much time to just sit down with us and she feels guilty. I feel bad for her and I try not to give her too much trouble ...

Later, our conversation turns to talking about nightmares Zahra has been having following the Paris terror attacks<sup>125</sup>:

Zahra: I want to be a forensic scientist because it's cool. I love watching movies where there's like thrillers and I always wanted to be a spy and all that stuff. But my dad's like "No, you'll have nightmares," and I was like, "I already have nightmares!"

Me: Aw, you've been having nightmares?

Zahra: Yeah, I recently had one that was really bad ... and it was because my dad told me about ISIS after what happened in Paris, and so my dream was that they came to our house and they almost killed me and my sisters ... oh my God, it was so scary.

Me: That sounds terrifying ... have you ever discussed terrorism in school?

Zahra: My teacher, in social class, she talks about stereotyping and how it affects us ... she'll pretend to be someone who's weird, and she'll be like, "Oh, you're such a terrorist" and then we'd all get up and fight that ... what happened in Paris made me so upset and so scared and it didn't really affect anybody that much, like everyone was like, "Pray for Paris" and then left it, but I still think about it ... I'm so traumatized by it.

Zahra then connected terror attacks to the recent rhetoric about accepting refugees from Syria<sup>126</sup> by sharing how her social studies teacher talked about welcoming Syrian refugees:

Our teacher was like, "Why are people doing this to Muslims? Like there's the KKK and nobody blames all Christians." She was saying, "It's wrong," and she asked, "What do you think about Syrian refugees coming? What would you say?" and I was like "Come,

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<sup>125</sup> A group of attackers killed 130 people and injured hundreds in coordinated attacks in Paris, France on November 13, 2015. (CBC, Nov. 13, 2015).

<sup>126</sup> Although there had been much debate about the Liberal government's plan to resettle Syrian refugees, a Forum Research poll conducted on November 17, 2015 suggested more Canadians supported the government's plan of resettling 25, 000 Syrian refugees than opposed it (Grenier, 2015).

let's be friends," that's what I would do. And she said her dad said, "No, I don't think they should come," and because she's Ukrainian, she asked her dad, "Well what if this was about Ukrainian people? Would you say the same thing?"

Our conversation later turns to Zahra reminiscing about hearing her Mom's stories of growing up in Afghanistan and Pakistan in our first conversation:

Zahra: You and my mom are very alike, like the way you talk and can spill your guts, like I was surprised how my mom just met you and spilled everything ... she never told me half that and I was like, "Wow." [surprised tone]

Me: I was so worried about you because you were hearing so much for the first time ...

Zahra: I was like, "Oh my God" ... but I could imagine it, I could imagine myself with her ... I love her so much. I always tell her, "Mom, I'm so happy you're my Mom."

Zahra and I suddenly realize that our supposed hour-long conversation turned into an over two-hours-long one and we hastily collect our things. Dropping Zahra back off at home, I hug her and thank her for a wonderful time. She says, "No, thank you for the hot chocolate and for listening!"

### **Retellings<sup>127</sup>**

#### **"My friends are different now" (Zahra, Winter 2016)**

My attention turns to when Zahra said, "The reason I made new friends is because you guys didn't treat me like a friend." Zahra has shared many stories of experiences with friends she says have taught her about trust. As we enjoyed hot chocolate (Zahra) and coffee (me), Zahra shared how she negotiated a recent experience of learning a friend she grew up with had been talking about her to other friends. She said that she hadn't been aware that the friend was upset

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<sup>127</sup> The stories that Zahra shared of her hijab and of terror attacks will be retold in subsequent Retellings sections.

with her and described how she negotiated the unexpected conflict. Giving a sense of Zahra's belief in talking openly and honestly, she explained, "I went to her and said, 'If I did something wrong, just tell me to my face ... and I'll do the same for you.'" Zahra said that, after trying multiple times to talk openly with her long-time friends, she has learned to avoid the back and forth gossip that might arise, "Other girls come and tell me things and I'm like, 'It's okay girls, just leave it,' because then they're going to go behind my back and tell her. They've done it before, so I don't say anything."

Several months later, as we enjoyed breakfast at one of our favourite restaurants in the winter of 2016, Zahra shared that her long-time friends "are different now":

Before, they were nice and actual friends ... I was like, "Oh, they're my best friends," and we were always together. And it's like now they sometimes don't even want to hang out with me. I was really upset at first ... in the beginning of the year I was so sad.

She continued, "Girls are so mean to each other nowadays ... And it's not visible, it's with the things they say or the way they look at you." Zahra said she negotiated the pain of feeling rejected by her friends by becoming closer to "friends who I can trust" and sharing these experiences with Ayesha, "I would always tell her and feel better about it after."

**"I could imagine myself with her" (Zahra, Fall 2015)**

Over the last two years, I have witnessed and experienced how, for Zahra, love and care for others is rooted in an appreciation of the complexity of their experiences and perspective(s), in the ability and willingness to travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987). Thinking back to when Zahra said, "My Mom is going through a hard time, like she has a new job and she's trying to

adjust,” and “I could imagine it, I could imagine myself with her,” I am once again awed by her ability to travel to her mother’s world (Lugones, 1987).

Several months later, as Ayesha and I enjoyed lunch in the spring of 2016, we discussed Zahra’s ability to travel to her Mom’s world with loving perception (Lugones, 1987):

Me: Zahra told me something that I just had to share, she said that she loves when you go to lectures because it makes you happy, and when *you’re* happy, that makes *her* happy ...

Ayesha: Yeah she told me that too and I was so happy when she said that ... sometimes she just [tilts head] and looks at me and I ask, “Why are you looking at me?” and she says, “I just like looking at you” and it just makes me laugh and laugh ... [laughing]

Me: She said you like attending things where you’ll learn and grow ...

Ayesha: And she always asks me when we leave those kind of places, “Are you happy? Did you like it?” and I just feel sometimes for her age to be like this is just amazing ...

Continuously surprising and heartening me, Zahra repeatedly travelled to my world during our inquiry. For example, in the summer of 2016, engaging in conversation over breakfast, Zahra and I discussed some of the changes in our lives over the last year. I said that I am learning to vocalize my love for – and pride in – my children rather than assuming they know it already, “I know I don’t do that often enough.” Zahra, traveling to my world, said, “But you sometimes just don’t notice it, you know? You have a lot going on ... and you’re trying though.” This experience, alongside many others, helped me to recognize the profoundly relational way Zahra composes her life alongside family and friends.

### **Rooting (hard) Stories Alongside Ayesha – Winter 2015**

Glancing at the digital clock on my car’s dashboard, I resist the urge to speed up. I am running ten minutes late for my dinner date with Ayesha. She had sent me an unexpected

WhatsApp message a few hours ago asking me if I had plans tonight. I answered, “Nope ... what do you have in mind my friend?” After Ayesha and I agreed to meet at one of my favourite restaurants for a late supper, I hurriedly finished making dinner and waited for Wissam to come home from work so that I could head out. He, of course, wasn’t able to leave work on time today, so I sent Ayesha a message to let her know I might be ten to fifteen minutes late. She replied, “That’s okay luv, take your time. I will get us a table.”

Making dua as I walk into the restaurant, I spot Ayesha seated at a booth close to the entrance. We hug as I laughingly thank her for getting me out of the house. She laughs and thanks me for meeting her on short notice. She explains that she has been preparing all week for a large dinner party with family friends tomorrow and needed to get out of the house too. We excitedly look over the menu as we wait to order. After we order way too much food (“We can take our leftovers for lunch!” I reason as Ayesha laughs), Ayesha tells me more about the new job she started about three months ago. Ayesha explains that, especially in comparison to her old job where she “never felt appreciated,” she loves working at this new position: “I am enjoying it and the people are amazing ... I’ve never worked with people like this, they are so nice.”

Ayesha says that she is feeling more confident as a result of feeling respected and appreciated at work. She shares how, after a recent argument with someone she loves, she reacted in an uncharacteristic way:

Ayesha: And the funny thing is that instead of having a panic attack like I usually do, I was like, “Go ahead, I don’t care” [in relation to an ultimatum that was given to her]. I don’t know if it was my job, getting so much respect and attention .... I mean, it was surreal to me to have the kind of treatment that they gave me, I don’t know why they treated me like I am a very high person, just so good, I was never treated like that ...

Me: You deserve to be treated like that.

Ayesha: I don't know, I just felt like ... not arrogant, but like I'm worth it ...

After comforting one another as we share stories of familial conflict, our conversation turns to the recent terror attacks in Paris. Ayesha says that she hasn't felt a shift in attitudes or perceptions at work after the tragedy:

Nobody talked to me about it ... but whoever I'm talking to, I talk mostly about my private life a lot ... what I'm doing with my daughters and things like that, so they know that this is a person like me and they have a family like I do.

She laughingly continues, "And those people in reception, they are the key people. They have been there a long time and if they know you, then everybody will know you." I laugh and say, "That's like administrative assistants in schools." She says:

Yeah ... and I can't defend any of those things. It's not my responsibility to defend it ... and I can't. I just don't understand why people do such bad things. But we can't live in fear, we need to try to be positive. Fear feeds on fear, so it just builds paranoia. One of my friends, she's so sweet, but she gets so anxious ... and I told her that we have to make sure these things don't disrupt our inner peace.

Over dessert, our conversation shifts to Ayesha expressing her worry that Zahra is experiencing pain because of her friends. However, she says that she knows that Zahra will be okay because "she's so mature for her age. Subhan Allah, I told her that I couldn't have come up with this duaa for myself that Allah gave you to me in this form. And she was like [sweetly], 'Oh Mom.'" Ayesha said that she shared her own experiences with feeling left out with Zahra:

Ayesha: I told her I grew up being so unpopular all the time ...

Me: You? I'm shocked.

Ayesha: Yeah, no, I was so passive ... I don't want my children to be like that but Alhamdulillah they're not, so I tell Zahra all the time, "When I was your age, I would *love* to be friends with you, I was never like you!" and she's like, "Oh mom, I feel bad for you!" [laughs] ... Alhamdulillah.

I say that I'm really beginning to appreciate the many ways that Zahra is able to show love and care for her sisters and for Ayesha. Ayesha responds,

Yeah, when she feels I am upset, Zahra will tell her sisters, "Just let mom be relaxed for a while." She does that all the time and sometimes I get mad at her like, "Zahra, I can take care of it!" But she says, "Mom, I just want to help," and I feel so bad. I don't want her to feel the responsibility to keep the house going, you know? She's not responsible for that. I don't want her to feel responsible, otherwise she will be abused.

I wonder yet again at Zahra's ability to travel to her Mom's world (Lugones, 1987) as Ayesha continues,

Like even this week, I was so stressed out ... sometimes when their rooms are messy it doesn't bother me, but sometimes I go into their rooms and it's messy and I get mad. We get mad at our children, and it has nothing to do with them ... like you'll come home and the shoes will be all over the place and you'll say [in a singing voice], "Oh they're home!" but another day you'll see the shoes and you'll say [in an angry voice] "Put your shoes away!" ... it's *us* and I hate that. What happens to us?

Feeling a heady sense of resonance with her words, I stammer, "Subhan Allah ... I do that all the time." Ayesha sighs and says, "Subhan Allah."

Almost three hours after our conversation begins, we reluctantly get up and prepare to leave. Outside, I hug Ayesha tightly and we agree to meet with our children during the winter break in a few weeks. Her vulnerability and her words live in me as I drive home and I make duaa that Allah (SWT) showers us, our families, and loved ones with countless blessings as we grow into the new year.

### **Retellings**

#### **“I sometimes don’t know how to help her” (Ayesha, Fall 2015)**

Ayesha’s question, “What happens to us?” still lives in me as I write this, over a year after she posed it. Ayesha has questioned, or expressed uncertainty about, her parenting practices many times during the course of our inquiry. I am drawn to a conversation we had in the fall of 2015. Ayesha sent me a WhatsApp message that Zahra was “thinking of taking her hijab off. Her new friends don’t wear hijab and she says she fears being left out by them too.” I responded, “I’m so surprised and sorry that Zahra has been feeling left out.” Ayesha’s next message left me tearing up, “I sometimes don’t know how to help her when she feels so empty.” Reflecting upon this moment, and of Ayesha saying, “I don’t want her to feel the responsibility to keep the house going,” I am awakened to the realization that Ayesha is repeatedly traveling to Zahra’s world (Lugones, 1987), even as Zahra travels to hers. After several minutes of struggling to form a response, I type, “I’m so sorry. Can we talk in person or over the phone soon? I want to share a story that this reminds me of, but it will be hard to text it.” Over the phone, we talk about how hard it can be to make and/or maintain friendships and I share some of my experiences with feeling excluded in junior high school. I say that I don’t have answers for what they are

experiencing, but that it always helped me to know that I had a loving family supporting me, “and I know that Zahra has that too.”

**“We can’t live in fear” (Ayesha, Winter 2015)**

As Zahra, Ayesha, and I composed our inquiry, we have talked about terrorism and politics during times of disturbing rhetoric and/or terror attacks. Our discussions make me think about how terror attacks, and the narratives that stem from them, can reverberate across the globe ... and how they can shape our lives and the ways we story ourselves and others. In the summer of 2015, as we were fasting the month of Ramadan, Ayesha mentioned the upcoming Federal elections and we discussed some of the troubling things that were being said and done by the former Conservative government - including the passing of Bills C-51<sup>128</sup> and C-24<sup>129</sup>. Surprising me at that time with her words, Zahra said, “We can’t be afraid ... we need to be honest and keep speaking up.”

Later, as we engaged in a breakfast conversation in Zahra and Ayesha’s home in the fall of 2015, Ayesha and I were talking about voting in the next day’s Federal elections, and Zahra shared a story of being made to feel uncomfortable in her grade 7 social studies class. She said that candidates from numerous political parties in her school riding had visited her class to introduce themselves and their platforms. She talked about how the Conservative party candidate said, “I don’t support the wearing of the niqab<sup>130</sup> during citizenship ceremonies.” Zahra, who

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<sup>128</sup> Bill C-51, the supposed “anti-terrorism legislation” championed by the former Conservative government has been widely criticized for being too vague and lacking in adequate oversight (Watters, 2015).

<sup>129</sup> Bill C-24, also known as “The Citizenship Act,” was controversial because it allowed dual citizens convicted of terrorism to have their Canadian citizenship revoked. This was regarded by many as creating two-tiered citizenship (Globe and Mail, June 30, 2014).

<sup>130</sup> See Macdonald, 2015.

believes in the need to be “honest and keep speaking up,” said that she felt upset and was just about to challenge his words when the Green party candidate’s response helped put her at ease, “He said, ‘We don’t ask you to take your turban off, shame on you!’”

Months later, a few days after the terror attack in San Bernardino, California<sup>131</sup>, Ayesha sent me a YouTube video of one of our favourite speakers, Nouman Ali Khan, saying we need to remember ourselves and our faith as attackers hijack our religion to sow fear and division. On WhatsApp, Ayesha wrote, “I am so tired of this. With Paris and now this, it is too much!” She continued, “I try not to think about it, but it is hard.” Her words reminded me of how Zahra, during a breakfast conversation a few weeks before Ayesha sent me the video, said, “What happened in Paris made me so upset and scared. I still think about it ... I’m traumatized by it.” The pain Zahra and Ayesha expressed pulled at the deeply rooted sorrow I have felt (and continue to feel) mourning innocent lives in incomprehensible terror attacks alongside the sharp pain of feeling shamed and blamed – by those who commit horrific acts in the name of my faith and those who generalize these horrific acts to Islam and all Muslims.

Several months later, in the spring of 2016, Ayesha sent me a few WhatsApp messages of her worries after the shootings in Orlando, Florida<sup>132</sup>. She wrote, “Orlando is being used by Donald Trump so badly against Islam,” and also wrote, “The crime has really affected Zahra.” During a conversation I had with Zahra in the summer of 2016, she shared a class discussion her teacher had initiated the day after the shootings:

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<sup>131</sup> A Muslim American man and his wife were killed by American authorities after they killed 14 people and injured 22 others at an office party in San Bernardino, California on December 2, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> 50 people were killed and 53 injured in the Pulse nightclub attack by a Muslim American in Orlando, Florida.

She was like, “Okay, so there’s something we need to discuss as a class, have you guys heard about the Orlando shootings?” and some people didn’t know about it and she explained it to them. And then she was like, “So what do you guys think?” and everyone was saying that just because you don’t agree with people about something doesn’t mean you need to ruin everything ... you have *no* right to tell people what to do.

Ayesha had earlier, in the winter of 2015, expressed appreciation for the way Zahra’s teacher encourages these types of class discussions: “Her teacher makes people aware about the things that happen and talks about how we should react, which is so good, right?”

In the late fall of 2015, Zahra expressed her continued pain and confusion following several terror attacks. As a Muslim woman who deeply believes in the interconnectedness of peace and justice, her words strummed resonant chords within me. Zahra, who has talked about experiencing nightmares and feeling “traumatized” as a result of terror attacks, expressed outrage, confusion, and pain at the attackers’ unfeeling brutality:

When I think about it, I get so sad. And I wonder about them [attackers], like, “Do you not feel bad about doing that? Do you not feel *anything*?” I could never ever hold that much guilt. I promised myself since I was a kid that I would never hurt or wound anybody ... because if I were to have that much guilt in my heart it would just kill me.

### **Deepening our Inquiry - Winter 2015**

I am in the kitchen, getting ready for Ayesha and Zahra’s visit, as I hear a soft knock at my door. I open it and invite Zahra and Ayesha in. They both look so lovely in their elegantly draped hijabs and outfits. It is close to noon as Zahra, Ayesha, Noor, Yehia, Hannah, and I enjoy

pancakes and traditional breakfast foods, and we talk about how nice winter break has been, especially being able to sleep in.

Our conversation turns to Noor recently purchasing a cell phone. Zahra has had a cell phone for a few months already and she and Noor have a good time making fun of familial cell phone rules. “No phones at the table.” “No phones before bed.” “No phones if you don’t do your chores.” “No phones when ...” They laugh openly and Ayesha and I (unsuccessfully) try not to smile as we look at each other. I say, “Hmm ... no phones in general might be a good idea,” and Noor groans, “Mommm.” I think of The Parent Contract as Zahra and Noor look at one another knowingly. After everyone helps to clear and wipe the table, I ask Noor and Yehia if they can look after Hannah in the next room while Zahra, Ayesha, and I engage in discussion.

Zahra begins by telling me she brought some of their favourite photographs to show me. I had asked Ayesha and Zahra to bring familial artifacts and was excited to see what they wanted to share. Zahra passes me the first photograph and I see two young girls about four or five years old grinning at the camera. One of the girls was dangling from a couch with the other behind her:

Zahra: I was four or five, and my mom was taking a picture of me and Sarah, and she’s like, “Cheese!” and I’m like, “Wait let me hang off of this first.” [laughing]

Ayesha: Making a duck face. [laughing]

Me: And you’re wearing a bracelet too ... you *still* look fashionable! [laughing]

Ayesha: She was always wearing accessories, ever since that time she is like that ...

The photograph prompted Ayesha and Zahra to reminisce about the townhouse that it was taken in. Zahra recalled loving the house because it had a basement that she and Sarah thought of as their very own playground. We talk about Ayesha and Zahra’s many moves over the years

(seven times in total), describing the homes they have lived in before they moved into the one I originally visited them in. They lived in that home for the longest stretch of time – six years – before moving into their current home.

Our talk about their different homes over the years turns to talking about which home was closest to Zahra’s former elementary school. Ayesha said that some of their homes were farther away from the school than she would have liked to drive, but that she loved that the school offered Arabic and Islamic classes alongside the Alberta Program of Studies. She also loved the familial atmosphere of the school, “I was so involved and volunteered all the time. It was so nice, it felt like a family there.” I ask Zahra if she felt this way about her former school and she said, “Yeah, I guess.” I ask her if she feels as comfortable in her current school:

Zahra: Well, at first it took me a while to understand, because I missed the orientation where they show you where your locker is, where classes are, and everything because I was in B.C. with my mom. So I was looking for my homeroom and I couldn’t find it, and then the bell rang and I still couldn’t find the class, so they looked in the office to get my timetable and then I went to my class ...

Me: And this was the first day of school?

Zahra: Yeah, and I wasn’t sure what to do with my school supplies, and then my homeroom teacher said, “When they call for the lost children, just go with them,” and I was like, “Okay” [laughing] ... She’s a funny teacher.

Me: Okay, so it was a joke ...

Zahra: Yeah it was a joke ... and then some school people came and asked, “Who doesn’t have a locker?” and me and my friend went with them, and then they showed us where our lockers were. I shoved everything into my locker and just grabbed a pencil and went to my classes. I lost my timetable again the next day and found it a week later. [laughing]

Me: It sounds like it was a confusing first week ...

Zahra: Yeah, it took me about a week to be fully adjusted.

Zahra then shares a story about almost getting in trouble in class:

Zahra: One time I was on my phone in class and the teacher was like, “Why are you on your *calculator*?” and I was like, “*Oh*, you’re right, my bad.” And she was like, “You’re smarter than that” ... and I was like, “Thank God I didn’t get in trouble for that!”

Me: That’s interesting because you once said that your friend is the one who gets in trouble for talking even if it’s you ...

Ayesha: [Laughing] I taught her how to win their trust at first. Tell Muna about that.

Zahra: She was like, “You have to be really good at the beginning, do everything they want, be quiet, study, get your homework done, and all that.” So I did all that and then they never had any problems with me ...

Ayesha: I said just do that and then all year long you won’t have problems, they will just love you. [laughing]

Zahra: Yeah, I owe it all to my mom. [laughing]

The next photograph Zahra hands me features Ayesha behind a stroller with a rosy-cheeked baby inside. There is snow all around and both are bundled up from the weather. Zahra explains, “I was thinking about one with both of us and I remembered my Mom and me and the snow and this snowsuit and I was like, ‘Oh yeah, we have to show Muna this one.’” Reminiscing about when Zahra was a baby, Ayesha shares, “She was such a playful baby, always happy, always talking, I mean she would just always play and talk with anybody.” We laugh as I say, “I feel like you’re still like that Zahra!” Ayesha laughingly responds, “Yeah ... if she saw someone, she would just say, ‘Hi! Hi! Hi!’ [excitedly] ... she pretended, ‘Oh I’m speaking English’, and she would just say something ... but she only spoke Farsi with us at home.”

The third photograph Zahra shows me is of Zainab being potty-trained by Sarah and she talks about her relationship(s) with her sisters. Our conversation then shifts to Zahra talking about feeling excluded by her friends. She says, “I’m not surprised though, I knew that would happen.” I ask, “That they would change?” She answers, “Yeah. And they did.” I am confused at first, but then Zahra explains some of the history of their relationship:

Zahra: Well I was a bit of a bully when I was younger ... I was so bossy, and then, in grade 4, my entire class just got so fed up that they didn't want to play with me. I was so upset, but then the teacher had a class meeting and they were all like, "You're so bossy!" and I said I'm sorry and then I tried not to be bossy and to be nicer, but they didn't want to be nice back ... and I found out it was all because of one girl. She ruined my life.

Me: How?

Zahra: Because she told everyone so many bad things about me, and told the teachers so many lies that I even had to go to the Principal's office because of her.

Me: Oh wow ...

Zahra: And I hated myself for the longest time because I thought it was my fault, that I did it, but I didn't ... and I don't know why I believed that for the longest time.

Me: You thought that you deserved it ...

Zahra: Yeah, and everyone hated me ... and then she left and it got so much better. My friends told me the stuff she would say and that they didn't really like her or believe her.

Ayesha: And they never said anything until she left, they were so afraid ...

Zahra: But I didn't have any friends for the longest time, and now they're back to that.

I express my sadness that Zahra is feeling excluded by the same group of girls who had mistreated her in elementary school. Ayesha says, "I think we sometimes take it for granted that the people closest to us will be the ones who can be the most hurt from us." Zahra looks at her Mom and says, "But you guys were there for me, you've always been there."

### Retellings

#### **"I wouldn't do it again, I'll tell you that" (Zahra, Summer 2016)**

Zahra shared many stories of grade 7 experiences over time. In the winter of 2015, she talked about being surprised by some of her experiences in the first few months of junior high:

Zahra: I mean, in grade 6 we were all excited because it will be different, but then after a few days, life carries on. I had an idea, based on a few books I've read, of what junior high would be like, but it's totally different ...

Me: Really?

Zahra: Yeah, I thought that there would be this really popular mean girl and stuff like that but there's no such thing.

Me: Well that's good [laughing] ... So what else surprised you?

Zahra: Well, we aren't allowed to go to our lockers between classes and stuff like that ... but I guess I adjusted-ish ...

While she shared many painful stories of feeling excluded by her friends as they transitioned from elementary to junior high school, Zahra talked about feeling supported in different ways in her transition from a faith-based elementary school program to a public junior high school. She said, "There are lots of Muslim kids in [her] school" and was happy that there was a designated space for prayers at lunchtime. She continued, "Even the students who aren't Muslim know a lot about Islam, like they'll ask, 'Do you go to the Mosque? Oh, that's cool' and stuff like that." She also talked about enjoying school because of a few teachers she has really come to like:

My L.A. and Social teacher, she's easy to talk to and is really nice, she is not the type to just talk about school, like she'll turn talking about a book into something personal somehow ... And my Gym teacher is also my Homeroom teacher and she's really nice, like our entire school loves her. She's that type of teacher who makes everything fun.

In the summer of 2016, as Zahra and I engaged in discussion at our favourite breakfast restaurant, I asked Zahra how she experienced the last few months of her grade 7 year. She responded, "It was stressful." After I asked why it was stressful, Zahra said, "Finals. Studying

and studying and paying attention in class. It was Ramadan too so I'd go home and sleep late and then I'd get up late and go to school late. I was so tired." However, Zahra said that being able to "leave [school] after exams" and "sleep lots after school" helped to lessen her fatigue.

While both Ayesha and Zahra later shared that things had gotten better for Zahra in the second half of the school year, during our conversation in the summer after the completion of her grade 7 year, Zahra surprised me by saying, "I hated this year, it just really sucked." She explained, "It was the first year, a lot of change, you know, people changed, and you change too ... it was hard and it was fun and it was bumpy ..." After Zahra paused, I responded, "So there were good moments, but ..." and Zahra completed my sentence by saying, "I wouldn't do it again, I'll tell you that."

### **"I learned that I have to stand up for myself" (Zahra, Fall 2016)**

Our many conversations about experiences with bullying make me wonder about how these experiences, once planted, continue to live in us. Although Zahra said she knows the hurtful things said about her in elementary school aren't true, she often described her younger self as a bully – a label Ayesha rejects. During a dinner conversation alongside Ayesha and Zahra in the fall of 2016, Zahra talked about learning from her experiences with friends:

If I'm nice to someone who's mean to me, it just gets worse. You have to show them, whoever it is, that it's not okay ... and that worked for me. Because I used to try to be nice to some of the people who were mean to me and it wasn't good, so now I can be mean right back. I learned that I have to stand up for myself.

I asked Zahra when she started to realize that she needed to stand up for herself:

Zahra: After a really long time. Like, I had one friend who wasn't nice to me ... and so I started saying, "No, I'm not doing this anymore."

Me: But I wonder if you're being *mean* when you do that ... you're standing up for yourself, which is very different from being mean ...

Zahra: Yeah, I guess, just showing that this is the kind of quality that I want in my friendships and if you give me less, then I don't want that friendship anymore ...

Ayesha: But maybe you were like this even when you were younger?

Zahra: No ...

Ayesha: But your friends used to say that you're bossy ...

Zahra: Because I *was* bossy ... I was so mean. I was really a bully at that age ...

Ayesha: I don't think that you were.

Me: You sharing that story of learning to stand up for yourself, that's so important. Because even me sometimes, even though I *know* that it's not okay, too often we teach girls to just be nice, not stand up for their rights ... just don't make a big deal about stuff.

Ayesha: Yeah, and something we don't do as much in teaching them to set boundaries. Especially as women, we just give and give and give and I guess not really demand anything in return ... or just the minimum? That's how our value is sometimes forgotten.

In asking, "But maybe you were like this even when you were younger?" Ayesha was trying to remind Zahra that her assertiveness in speaking up is likely what contributed to the perception of Zahra as "bossy" in elementary school. She was trying to remind Zahra that the stories others told about her in elementary school were not true. In questioning whether standing up for herself was being "mean," I was also thinking about how Zahra had once shared, "I promised myself since I was a kid that I would never hurt or wound anybody ... because if I were to have that much guilt in my heart it would just kill me." Zahra's earlier experiences with being storied as a bully, however, continue to live in her. These stories are deeply rooted and continue to reverberate in the stories she composes alongside others. As will be revisited in

future tellings and retellings, Zahra has learned that speaking up and sharing her opinions can sometimes be perceived by others in unintended ways.

### **Continuing to Grow Alongside Zahra - Winter 2016**

Driving on the way to our favourite breakfast restaurant, Zahra shares a story about the time her Dad's car got stuck in the mud when they visited the Dinosaur Provincial Park a few years ago. We are still laughing as we are seated at a small table at the back of the restaurant. Ordering our usual – blueberry pancakes – Zahra surprises me by talking about the possibility of attending a different school for her grade 8 year:

Zahra: My mom wants me to switch schools ... they have this program called pre-AP. They teach the way I'll really be able to learn. Instead of just doing paper and pencil stuff, they teach with projects ... it's the same curriculum, but they teach you differently.

Me: Are you still thinking about moving schools or you've already decided to?

Zahra: I'm thinking about it but my Mom's already made up her mind I think.

Me: How did you hear about this school?

Zahra: My friend goes to that school and she told me about this program and so then I told my Mom about it ... I kind of don't like my school but I do sometimes ... I'm confused [laughing]. So I told my Mom. "Let's go check it out." But I told her that I'm scared that I'll be the new girl and not know anyone.

As we enjoy our pancakes, our conversation turns to Zahra talking about how her friends have changed this year, and I ask if she thinks she has changed too:

Maybe? I don't know ... I do feel like since all my friends aren't with me anymore I'm more confused ... my self-esteem kind of dropped a little. I felt bad about myself and didn't want to go out as much anymore. I kept telling myself, "No, no, you should be

proud of yourself and not feeling bad about who you are.” So I started pulling myself up like, “You know what? You need to stop.”

After we share stories of negotiating friendships, Zahra talks about how she is really enjoying her Social Studies class this year. I ask her if she remembers a time when she didn’t enjoy a class for any reason:

Zahra: That’s never happened in this school, but in elementary school, there was a teacher who if you spoke up you were considered disrespectful because he was a Sheikh. Everyone respected him so much it was insane. I mean, yes, he taught us Qu’ran, but he also said a lot of things that weren’t fair, like he said, “Oh girls, you’re not supposed to do this or that,” and we’d be like, “Why?” ... he always said things I disagree with ...

Me: And how would you feel when you heard, “You shouldn’t do this or that?”

Zahra: Annoyed. Don’t tell me what to do or what not to wear.

We ended our conversation earlier than usual because I promised Ayesha that I would drop Zahra off to their volunteer commitment at a Helping Hampers organization. On my drive home, I sit with Zahra’s stories and I make duaah that Allah [SWT] guides and protects her.

### **Retellings**

#### **“You’re better than this” (Zahra, Winter 2016)**

As we engaged in discussion that day, I gained a strong sense of Zahra’s self-awareness. After she described telling herself, “No, no, you should be proud of yourself and not feeling bad about who you are,” Zahra expressed disappointment in herself for behaving in uncharacteristic ways alongside friends:

Sometimes my friends say really inappropriate things and I just laugh because I want to be their friend. Then I think about it and say, “What is wrong with me?” and I really feel bad about it. I say, “Why? Why are you doing this to yourself? You’re better than this.”

In the summer of 2016, Zahra talked about reminding herself of who she is (and who she wants to be) when she realized that a girl who had once mocked her was her classmate:

When I saw her on the first day of school, I was like [to herself], “Ew, go away,” and later on, I was feeling jealous of her because she had things I didn’t have, so then I said to myself, “Zahra, you’re not that kind of person, don’t do that to yourself.” And the funny thing is that we are now close friends.

During our breakfast conversation in the winter of 2016, Zahra talked about imagining her experiences as a YouTube video and encouraging herself when she is feeling down:

I just talk to myself like, “It’s okay,” you know? And in grades 5 and 6, I used to watch a lot of “Draw my Life” videos, and when something big happens, I’m imagining how I could draw it out in a YouTube video ... so in every video, it goes, “I went through this,” about the hard times, and so I always think, “Well everyone goes through this, it’s just a rough patch, it’ll be over, just try not to make yourself feel bad.”

**“You shouldn’t force someone to do something” (Zahra, Summer 2016)**

Zahra has repeatedly expressed her belief that people should not be forced to behave or dress in certain ways. Like Ayesha, she believes in the profound right to choose. In the summer

of 2016, Zahra shared a story about a recent experience that reminded me of how she spoke of her Qu’ran teacher telling girls they weren’t supposed “to do this or that:”

This older guy we know walks into the party and ... he’s kind of weird, I mean he stares at women and it’s creepy. And then he comes up to me and was like, “Oh, you’re not wearing your hijab?” and I was like, “Who are you to ask me that?” A lot of people have so much respect for him but he doesn’t deserve that respect.

Later in our conversation, Zahra expressed indignation that a classmate “got dress-coded:”

In my school, you can wear anything, but if your stomach shows or if you have tiny straps, they dress-code you. My friend got dress-coded once for wearing a short shirt and you could kind of see her stomach. One of the teachers called her over and took her outside and talked to her. I was like, “How embarrassing!” I don’t get it, out of school everyone can dress the way they want, but in school they can’t? It doesn’t make sense.

Zahra continued, “It’s their decision, you shouldn’t force someone to do something or wear something because they’ll start to hate it.”<sup>133</sup>

### **Growing Stories to Mother By Alongside Ayesha – Spring 2016**

I take a deep breath outside the restaurant doors. I am late for my lunch date with Ayesha because I was trying to make sure everything and everybody was settled at home before I left. It is spring break and the kids are home, but when Ayesha asked me if I wanted to have lunch a few hours ago, I replied “Yes!” almost immediately. A few days ago, she had shared, through a

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<sup>133</sup> Zahra’s belief that people shouldn’t be forced to dress or act in certain ways will be revisited in a later section.

WhatsApp conversation, that her Mom had a stroke last week and Ayesha has been spending all her free time by her side. Ayesha said she will be heading back to the hospital right after we have lunch. I pause to make duaa and try to feel a little more grounded as I walk into the restaurant.

I walk up to the front and tell the hostess that I am here to meet a friend who has already been seated. Without asking me for my friend's name, the hostess immediately leads me to Ayesha. Admittedly mischievous, I ask her, "How did you know she was the person I was looking for?" She shifts uncomfortably and I laughingly say, "I'm just kidding." Ayesha laughs heartedly as we hug. She looks beautiful, although I know she hasn't slept well in days. Before I can ask her the same question, Ayesha asks, "How are you doing?" with concern in her eyes and I try to fight back tears. Ayesha knows that the last few weeks have been very hard for me. Along with worrying about Hannah's upcoming appointment at the Autism clinic, I have been grieving for an incredibly gifted, kind, brave, and loving friend, Dr. Julie Long (May she rest in Peace). I have also been deeply worried about, and making duaa for, my cousin Billal (Allah yirhamu) who was recently diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cancer. I wipe my tears as I say, "I'm doing okay Alhamdulillah ... I'm sorry, I don't mean to cry." Ayesha then makes me laugh:

Ayesha: No it's okay, just let it go, you don't have to say sorry ...

Me: I think it's the Canadian in me, I always feel like I have to say sorry. [laughing]

Ayesha: [laughing] That reminds me of some comedy thing I watched ... "No *I'm* sorry!" or even, "Oh, thank you and sorry for opening the door!" [laughing]

Wiping my tears as we laugh, I ask Ayesha how her Mom is doing:

Alhamdulillah, she's a lot better. She's a person who really takes a lot of stress in. She always thinks about everyone, and is always thinking about everything, and she worries so much. I told her, "Mom, you need to forget about us and just live your life, maybe go to English classes or computer classes ... keep your mind off your kids!"

Later, as we enjoy our appetizers, Ayesha tells me about how Zahra had recently asked her for permission to attend a school dance:

I said, "A year ago, you wouldn't even think of this, and now you think it's okay. How much have you changed?" The next day, I texted Zahra, "Thank you so much for not going. I'm so proud of you." And she texted me back and said "Mom, I'm so sorry, I was going to go but I just saw your message."

Ayesha said that Zahra's friends had been pressuring her to go to the dance, "Her friends were telling her 'Why aren't you coming?' and I told her, "You have to say, 'Why are *you* going?'" I say that I can't imagine Zahra saying something like that to her friends and Ayesha says:

She used to do it, but she stopped ... kids would call her Grandma because she would be like, "Oh, you have to put this away," and then her friends called her bossy. I would explain, well this is probably happening because of this or that, and she would learn. Some people don't learn no matter what you say, but she learns.

I ask how Zahra was feeling when she got home that day. Ayesha replies, "She was a little edgy and uncomfortable but I didn't have time to spend with her. I wanted to take her for coffee or something, but that was the day I had to take my mom to the hospital." Ayesha says she is so proud of Zahra and how she is negotiating all the challenges she is facing, "I can understand

how she must be feeling because at that age that's all you want, right? You don't see the bigger picture." She explained that she and Zahra talked about the school dance at length during one of their nightly bedtime conversations, "I try not to make her feel bad if she does or doesn't do something. We talk about it." I express amazement that Ayesha continues to have nightly bedtime conversations with each of her girls. She responds, "I'm not able to talk to them for as long because it's been so busy. But they like it so much, it's their special time."

As we eat, I ask Ayesha about the possibility of Zahra attending a new school:

We were thinking about it but we will probably not move her, she's doing so well this year. Zahra's getting straight A's and she's now established herself ... I don't think her circle of friends is that good, but if she goes to a new school maybe worse people will be there ... who knows? Changing schools doesn't solve the problem, right?

Ayesha says that Zahra seems to be doing better at school, so she isn't as worried about her. I then ask Ayesha how she sustained herself during the challenges of the last year:

From different things ... I go to lectures or listen to them, I read, or watch videos ... if you only look at all the things that are wrong you're stuck in one spot and your heart is just so hard. I just try to distance myself from that. I don't need that in my life.

### **Retellings**

#### **"She has an old soul" (Ayesha, Fall 2015)**

In talking about how classmates likened Zahra to a "Grandma," I was reminded of Ayesha telling me, in the fall of 2015, that she sometimes feels guilty for speaking so openly

with Zahra about topics that might be too mature for her. She said, “But she’s so easy to talk to and really understands ... she has an old soul.” Later, as we enjoyed dinner in the winter of 2015, Ayesha said, “She’s so mature for her age, that’s what her teacher told me too, she said that she’s one of those students who actually thinks about what I say and then asks thoughtful questions.”

However, after being storied as “bossy” and a bully, Ayesha says that Zahra has learned not to share her thoughts or opinions with friends. I got a strong sense of Zahra’s reluctance to express her opinion(s) about others’ choices as we had breakfast in the summer of 2016:

I have this friend who I really like to talk to, and we laugh a lot, but when she’s with our other friends, she’s so different and will do and say things that are really inappropriate.

And I won’t say anything because I don’t want to be the one who’s acting like the mom.

They told me they hate it and I realize that it’s true, I do act like that sometimes ...

Zahra continued, “So when people do something I don’t like or wouldn’t do, I just sit there and laugh ... I can’t tell them what I really think because they’ll just get mad.” While Zahra had previously expressed her belief that it is important to “be honest and keep speaking up,” she doesn’t want to be perceived as “bossy” or “acting like the mom.” She says she has learned to share her thoughts only when she is asked, “If they ask me for advice, then I *would* talk about what I think with them.”

**“I understand why my Mom doesn’t think it’s a good idea” (Zahra, Summer 2016)**

Zahra shared her perspective about not going to the school dance as we had breakfast together in the summer of 2016:

I wanted to go with my friends and my mom was like, “No, you’re not allowed to go.” I was about to go anyways behind her back and then she texted me, “I’m so proud of you for not going.” And I was like, “Oh great, why mom, why?” and so all my friends went and I had to be like, “I can’t go.”

Zahra discussed talking about the dance during a bedtime conversation with Ayesha, explaining that her Mom reminded her that dancing in a mixed-gender setting is not advisable as a Muslim girl. Zahra continued, “I was mad at first, but I understand why my Mom didn’t think it was a good idea.” In the fall of 2015, in relation to this familial bedtime routine, Zahra said:

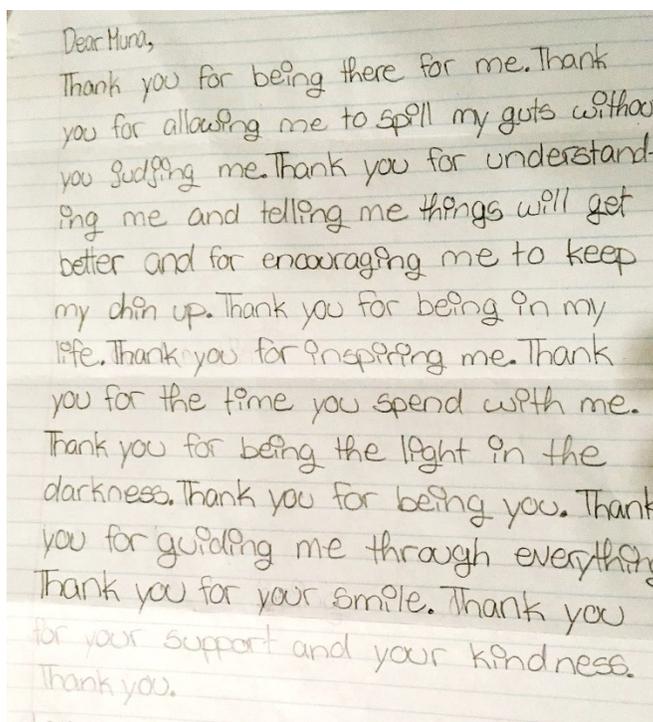
Every night before bed she comes in and says goodnight and talks with us in our rooms for a little while, each one of us. Sometimes I say, “Mom, if you’re tired, you don’t have to,” and she’s like, “No, I love doing this with you guys,” so I don’t tell her not to because she really likes it ...

I smile as I realize that both Ayesha and Zahra spoke of how much the other person enjoys their bedtime conversations. From what I witnessed and heard alongside them, they are both right.

### **Growing Forward Alongside Zahra – Summer 2016**

I hug Zahra tightly when she opens the door to their home. It has been a few months since I have seen her and I exclaim, “I miss you!” Zahra covers her mouth as she laughingly says she misses me too. Ayesha comes to the door and we hug before Zahra and I head to my car. As we walk away, I ask Zahra, “How do you feel about your new braces?” and she says, “Ugh. I’m not used to them.” During our drive, I notice that she covers her mouth often.

After we order pancakes, Zahra asks how my writing is going. We had met alongside Ayesha a few months ago to negotiate a chapter I was writing about coming alongside one another. At that time, Zahra surprised and honoured me with a letter she wrote to me as part of a class assignment to write a thank-you letter to a person of her choosing:



*Figure 4-1. Zahra's Letter to me (shared with her permission).*

We talk about the research writing and reminisce about our relationship:

Me: I'm finding it hard to write ... because when someone trusts you with their stories and experiences, how do you write about it faithfully?

Zahra: It's so hard ...

Me: But even though we'll be ending our research conversations soon, we'll still be seeing each other lots insha'Allah, because you guys are like family now ...

Zahra: Yeah, my Mom always talks about you and says, "I'm so happy we know her," and I love meeting up with you.

Me: Me too wallah.

Zahra then talks about how things have gotten better with her friends since we last talked, and discusses how the end of the school year was stressful because she was writing finals during Ramadan. After Zahra talks about why she “hated this year,” I ask her what advice she would give to others transitioning into grade 7:

Zahra: Hmmm ... I'd tell them to learn how to open a combination lock ...

Me: That's so funny! Another participant said the same thing. [laughing]

Zahra: When I first got there, I didn't know how to do it, but one of the teachers was like, “Let me show you how to do it” [laughing] ...I'd also say, “Keep yourself organized.” Organization is literally one of the biggest things, because if your stuff isn't organized, be prepared for a year of getting yelled at. I swear, one kid who isn't organized, a teacher yelled at him every single day and I'm like, “Why don't you organize your stuff?” and he was like, “No.” [laughing]

Zahra reminds me of Ayesha's advice about “how to win [teachers'] trust,” when she says, “I would also tell them to be careful not to get in the teacher's face, especially in the beginning.” She then shares the story of her friend getting dress-coded and says, “You shouldn't force someone to do something or wear something because they'll start to hate it ... that's what my Dad did with me, he forced me to wear the hijab and now I hate it.” While I have gained a sense in the many seasons we spent alongside one another that Zahra felt pressured to don the veil, I had never heard her say it in such a clear and troubling way. I reach across the table to hold her hand and say, “I'm so sorry Zahra, it's not okay that you were made to feel like that.”

After thanking me for my words and thinking quietly for a few moments, Zahra continues:

Zahra: And I'd say to the girls, don't let boys be annoying and mean.

Me: How can they be annoying and mean?

Zahra: They weren't mean to me, but my friend got involved with a group of friends and there were a bunch of guys there and you know how guys can be .... So I told her, “You

need to back off, these guys are crazy.” But she didn’t, and then they started a rumour about her that went around the entire school ... I felt so bad for her.

I express my sadness that her friend experienced this and said, “It’s interesting that you said, ‘You know how guys can be.’ That reminds me of our first conversation when you said, “Boys will be boys” about the group of boys who used to bully you in grades 1 and 2.” Zahra says, “They were more teasing, rather than bullying. I was very dramatic.” I say, “Subhan Allah, you used to consider it bullying last year and now think it was just teasing ... why do you think your perspective has changed?” Zahra responds, “I think when I got older, I realized how boys are.” I ask, “I wonder though ... the expression, ‘Boys will be boys,’ do you remember when you first heard it?” Reminding me of how Ayesha said Zahra has an “old soul,” Zahra says, “I don’t know ... it’s funny, we say it, but don’t think about what it even means.”

As we enjoy our pancakes, Zahra talks about how people have changed over the year. I ask her to please say more about how they have changed and Zahra responds, “I can’t really explain it, but it’s like they’re different. Like you know this person, but kind of don’t know this person anymore.” She continues, “Even me, I’ve probably changed in the way that I’ve thought of other people, and the way I thought about a lot of things.” Zahra explains how she has learned not to give advice unless she is asked because she doesn’t want to “be acting like the Mom.” I ask her if she remembers giving someone advice recently and she says,

This good friend asked me, “Zahra, do you think it’s bad that I changed? Some people tell me I’ve changed and I don’t know if it’s good or bad,” because she used to be really quiet and now she is way more outgoing. I was like, “It’s not a bad thing that you’ve changed. It’s normal and it’s okay. And it’s good that you are more open.” I said, “You should do what makes you happy.”

Pausing for a few moments, Zahra continues,

So another thing, when you were asking what advice I would give, is that you need to find a *good* friend who you can talk to ... a lot of things are going to change, the way you think will change, the way you see yourself will change ... you're going to have other friends, but you need at least one good friend who you can *really* talk to.

As we prepare to leave the restaurant, Zahra says she is looking forward to being taught by her favourite teacher next year, "She was about to leave the school and we were all so sad but then she told us she was staying and that she will teach us in grade 8." Zahra continues, "We were all so happy, the whole room was like, 'Yeah!' because she is one of the teachers who you can never forget ... she's amazing."

### **Retellings**

#### **"You're a woman now, you have to do this and that" (Zahra, Fall 2015)**

Zahra has expressed her tensions with her hijab several times during our inquiry. Zahra's relationship with her hijab reminded me of my journey with donning the hijab and taking it off multiple times as a child and youth. However, my decision(s) to don or remove my hijab has always been *my* decision. I began to get a strong sense that Zahra felt pressured to wear the hijab during my many conversations alongside Zahra and Ayesha. In the fall of 2015, Zahra shared that she felt that she "had" to wear it after she reached puberty and also talked about feeling increased expectations alongside this milestone, "My Dad's always like, 'You're a woman now, you have to do this and that,' and I'm like 'Don't remind me ... please.'" Ayesha had earlier shared with me, during a brunch conversation in my home in the fall of 2015, that her husband

viewed hijab as obligatory when a girl reaches puberty. She said she worried about Zahra and how Hassan would react if Zahra ever decided to remove it. Ayesha repeatedly emphasized the importance of choice during this discussion. Almost a year later, Zahra asserted, “You shouldn’t force someone to do something or wear something because they’ll start to hate it ... that’s what my Dad did with me, he forced me to wear the hijab and now I hate it.”

It is very difficult to type these words. Throughout my life and scholarly work, I have challenged the single story that veiled girls and women are forced to cover. However, as Adichie (2009) reminds me, “The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (12:57). While countless Muslim girls and women, including me and other co-inquirers, chose to don the hijab, many others have been unjustly pressured or forced to do so. As someone who, like Ayesha and Zahra, believes in the profound (human) right to choose for ourselves, hearing Zahra say, for the first time, that she hates wearing her hijab because she was forced to wear it filled me with sorrow. For this reason, when I met with Ayesha, Zahra, Sarah, and Zainab alongside my children for lunch in the late summer of 2016, I was happy to see Zahra walk in to the restaurant without her hijab. Zahra looked at me somewhat self-consciously and, hugging her joyfully, I exclaimed, “As always, you look so beautiful *habibty*.”

I didn’t speak with Zahra about her decision to remove her hijab until a month later, in the fall of 2016. Ayesha had recently separated from her husband and I knew that Ayesha, Zahra, Sarah, and Zainab were in the process of learning to compose their lives and relationships in different ways. I also knew that Zahra and her sisters were just beginning to (re)negotiate their relationships with their father after weeks of not seeing him after their parents’ separation. I

picked Zahra up for a dinner date at our favourite pasta restaurant, intending to simply enjoy her company that night. I did not want to pressure her into talking about anything she wasn't ready to talk about. As we followed the hostess to our booth, Zahra nudged me and whispered, "Did you see that?" After we were seated, I asked her, "See what? Sorry, I didn't notice anything." Zahra replied, "That guy made a face and moved away from you when you walked by." I said that I didn't notice him doing that and asked Zahra if she has noticed anything different in other people's behaviours towards her after removing her hijab. Reminding me of how Ayesha had talked about sharing personal and familial stories at work and in public places so that others "know that this is a person like me and they have a family like I do," Zahra replied to my question with sympathy in her eyes and voice, "Yeah ... I'm sorry to say this, but it's *so* different Muna. I feel like I don't have to do anything extra to show people that I'm normal."

### **Epilogue: Negotiating Our Narrative Account [and boundaries] – Fall 2016**

Waiting for Zahra and Ayesha at our favourite pasta restaurant, I reflect upon the many seasons we have lived alongside one another. Images flash in my mind of some of the moments we have lived together. Laughing with Zahra in my car. Talking over yet another dessert and laughing over yet another coffee or tea with Ayesha. Raking the sand with my feet as Zahra and I talk on the playground swings, sharing secret stories with the same abandonment as our swinging. Hugging Ayesha tightly and telling her how brave she is and how much I admire her. Giving Zahra my Just Olive Tree<sup>134</sup> bracelet that I often see her wearing, telling her I hope it

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<sup>134</sup> This is a bracelet I purchased from [justolivetree.com](http://justolivetree.com). The website says this company "is a Canadian-based Jewelry company specialising in genuine Middle Eastern Olive Wood Jewelry collections for a Just cause - the Palestine Children's Relief Fund."

helps ground and sustain her as it has for me. Feeling Ayesha's hand on my shoulder as she says, "It will be okay, Muna. Allah will guide and protect her."

I smile when I see Ayesha and Zahra approaching and we exchange hugs and Salams. As we get settled into our booth, I ask Zahra how grade 8 is going so far? They had moved again in August following Ayesha's separation from her husband and Zahra and Sarah are now attending the junior high school in their new neighbourhood. She responds, "It's okay ... I like the teachers a lot and it's a good school. And I like walking to school with Sarah ... I poke her when I see her in the hallway [laughing]." Zahra talks about making a lot of friends at her new school, but, as "the new girl," it is hard to become close with someone.

After we order, we talk about the writing of our narrative account. In specific, I ask about the inclusion of a few (hard) stories, stories which continue to shape their life making:

Zahra: I think it's okay if you say, "Later on I found out that ..." but not the details ...

Me: Okay ... and what about you Ayesha?

Ayesha: I think I want to share the details actually ...

Me: The thing is that your stories are going to be like this [making an interconnected steeple with my fingers] ... so if Zahra doesn't want it in the writing, it can't go in ...

Ayesha: What I want is for women who read ... this is something that could help someone ... I've already had women telling me that my story helped them ...

Zahra: I'm just scared that someone will read it and know it's me. Especially specific people ... I have a lot of people in mind who have said mean things about me in the past.

Ayesha: But those people will never read this right?

Zahra: You never know.

Me: That's right, I can't guarantee they won't.

Ayesha: But the thing is, they will never find out it's us because our identities will be hidden ... even if you read it, you might not realize it's yours and be surprised it is you.

Me: I honestly can't guarantee that ... but you know what? Just think about it and let me know later. You don't have to decide tonight ... I don't want you to feel pressured or to put something in that will make you feel bad. Ever.

I later ask Ayesha, knowing what she knows now, what she would share with other moms whose daughters are transitioning into adolescence:

My advice would be to communicate with your child as much as possible, to empathize with them ... that's the hardest part sometimes, but find out what it is that they're thinking and feeling ... and encourage them to grow ...

Ayesha talks about how her faith has been her sustaining story ... alongside practicality:

Ayesha: My faith did give me so much hope, hope that the problem will go away, that it's not going to be there forever ... but to also be really practical, like how am I actually going to work this out. Faith is good for guidance, but you still actually have to find a way to make that happen.

Me: That's so important to think about, because sometimes when things are really hard, people will tell you, "Just make dua" ...

Ayesha: Or that "you have to trust Allah" ...

Me: And it's true, we do have to have faith and trust Allah, but ...

Ayesha: But you also need to *do* something, you need the tools to actually do it ... I would ask questions from my friends and even from you, *mash'Allah*, and people in my circle, some of the girls who went to school here, like how do I do something about this?

Emphasizing the importance of choice, Ayesha talks about the challenges as they continue to learn to live in new ways alongside one another:

Ayesha: As moms, we have to give our kids power to make decisions. I've been trying to form the structure of that, what things should they decide for themselves, what things should I decide, what things we'll decide together ... we didn't grow up with that, and

our parents didn't really teach us that way. And for the longest time I haven't really disciplined the kids because there was so much happening ...

Zahra: I was wondering about that [everyone laughing]. I was like, "So wait, I can do anything and she won't take my phone? Ohhhh ...." [laughing]

Ayesha: Yeah and I did that intentionally because they were going through so much, and I didn't want to, or even couldn't do it ... but now I feel like we are in a place where we should set the rules, we should set those boundaries ...

Driving home that night, I continue to reflect on composing this inquiry alongside

Ayesha and Zahra. I think about how strangers can become friends and friends can become family. Feeling profoundly grateful, I think about growing our relationship(s) over time, and I wonder what future seasons will bring ...



Figure 5-1. Maya's beautiful watercolour art. Maya's artwork is displayed throughout the following chapter with her permission.

## Chapter 5: A Narrative Account of Inquiring Alongside Maya & Layla

Layla & Maya's Family:

**Layla** – Mom  
Mahmoud – Dad

Children by Age:

Ahmed  
**Maya**  
Adam  
Rema  
Jamal

Maya's Aunt/Layla's Sister (who joined many of our conversations):

Sara

*Growing Forward ... Alhamdulillah*

*Watching her gracefully whirl and spin and move her body, I feel a surge of love, pride, and admiration. As someone who trips over my own feet, I am fascinated at the way Maya can smile as she maintains her balance in the midst of improbable positions on the ice. I look over at Layla and smile at the way she is lovingly watching her daughter with riveted attention, knowing she is feeling an even headier overlapping of emotions than I am right now.*

*I think of how different this skating exhibition feels from the one I attended last year. I remember how nervous I had been for Maya at that time. She had experienced a heartbreaking moment at a skating competition a few months before last year's exhibition. Still reeling from her Tata's sudden death (Allah yirhama), Maya had been unable to complete her routine, leaving the ice in tears. However, I remember how she had bravely laced her skates up once more a few months later and skated as gracefully at last year's exhibition as she is now.*

*Maya waves at the crowd of loved ones who had come to support her and we all wave enthusiastically back. She blows a kiss at Layla who blows several back to her and I am surprised by the sudden tears welling my eyes at their display of love. I know that Layla and Maya have weathered many changes in the seasons we have lived and inquired alongside one another, but their loving exchange reminds me that they have weathered these changes together.*

*I close my eyes for a brief moment to make dua that their relationship(s) continues to grow and flourish ... and to sit with the immense gratitude I am feeling at having been blessed with the opportunity of living and inquiring alongside Maya and Layla over the last several seasons, Alhamdulillah.*

### **How Do Friends Become Co-Inquirers? – Summer 2015**

After parking my car on the side of the familiar street, I think of how strange it feels to be walking up to this home – one which has been one of my home places for almost fifteen years – with information sheets and notebook in hand. I have lived many stories alongside one of my closest friends, Sara, in her familial home. This home is also where I had the privilege to become friends with many of Sara’s family members over the years – including her younger sister Layla. In February 2015, as Sara and I discussed my research, she asked me, “Why don’t you invite Layla and Maya? I’m sure they would love to participate.” Confused, I ask, “Wasn’t Layla born in Canada?” Sara responded, “Yeah, but her husband Mahmoud was born in Lebanon.”

While I thought it would be fascinating to inquire alongside a mother and daughter who were both second-generation Canadian Muslims, I was unsure about inviting Layla and Maya to participate in this inquiry for several reasons. The primary source of my uncertainty was that Layla would feel pressured to accept my invitation because of our long-term friendship. I was also hesitant because Layla and Maya live in a small town that is an over two-hour drive from the City and I was unsure about how often we would be able to engage in discussions. Because of these considerations, I waited several months before inviting Layla and Maya to participate in this research. I eventually decided to discuss the possibility of participation with Layla and Maya after seeing Layla at a community function. After exchanging hugs and Salams, Layla had excitedly asked, “So when are we going to start the research?” Amused but not surprised that Sara had already mentioned the research to Layla, I laughingly replied that I would call her soon.

Layla’s enthusiastic, unprompted question during that community event helped ease my concern that she would feel pressured to participate in this study. Later discussing the possibility

of inviting a third set of co-inquirers with Jean, she reminded me that, if Layla and Maya agree to participate, I would need to be particularly wakeful (Greene, 1995) to our overlapping relationships as friends and co-inquirers. Jean and I both agreed that engaging in inquiry alongside Layla and Maya would allow us to inquire into, and learn about, their experiences composing their lives in a rural Albertan context – a place that is different from the large, urban setting where other co-inquirers and I live.

During a telephone call with Layla a few weeks later, we agreed to meet at Layla's parents' home, close to where I live, because they would be in the City that weekend. Layla said that she drives to the City almost every weekend to visit with family, and suggested we meet to engage in conversations on weekends when possible. As we spoke, I (silently) exhaled a sigh of relief. I realized that I had been foregrounding reasons why inquiring alongside Layla and Maya may not be advisable, rather than the unique experiences and knowledge they embody and can share as Canadian, Muslim, Lebanese females making a life in small town Alberta.

Walking up to their parents' house, amidst the sights and sounds of Sara and Layla's children playing outside, I see that the garage door is open and that Sara and her Mom are sitting at a picnic table loaded with fruits and snacks. I smile at them and this familiar sight. It is one that greets me almost every time I visit their home during the summer season. As we exchange Salams and hugs, Layla joins us in the garage. After we catch up for a few minutes, Sara and Layla's mom says that she will be going inside to change for her errands run. Layla asks her Mom to tell Maya to join us in the garage, and within moments, Maya is approaching me, "Hi A3mto Muna!" We hug and I marvel at how much she has grown since I last saw her. With her jet-black long hair and sun-kissed skin, she is as beautiful as ever. I ask Maya how she is

enjoying the summer so far. She tells me about some of her adventures since school ended a few weeks ago and asks me about Noor, “Did you bring her with you?” I reply, “Not today, because I wanted to talk to you a little more privately about the research I’m doing for school.” Sara excuses herself and starts to head inside as Layla asks, “Sara can’t be here when we talk about this?” Smiling, I reply that Layla and Maya are more than welcome to ask anyone they wish to be alongside us in our conversations. Layla laughingly calls out to Sara, “Sara! Get back here.”

As we fill our plates with snacks, I tell them about the study and how it has been unfolding thus far alongside four mother and daughter co-inquirers. Maya asks thoughtful questions as we talk, “A3mto Muna, I’m not always the best at telling stories, my mind goes too fast sometimes ... but I’m good at writing and drawing?” In response, I bring out the bag of research-related supplies I had prepared and explain that I have given the same supplies to other girl co-inquirers. I place a large sketchbook, pack of gel pens, journal, and disposable camera in front of me and tell Maya that she can take the supplies and use them in whatever way she likes, “You don’t have to use any of these supplies for the research, but I would love to include whatever you decide to use.” Maya excitedly asks, “Can I start right now?” Smiling at her, I say that she can take whatever she wants, even if she doesn’t think she wants to participate. Layla laughingly says, “Muna, I think we have both already decided we want to be part of this.” Laughing, I bring out the information sheets and ask if we could please read them together first, just to make sure they are fully aware of what the research will entail. Layla jokingly rolls her eyes and says, “Okay, go for it.” As I read, I notice that Maya is doodling in the sketchbook and I smile because I too like to doodle when I am listening to something or someone.

Later, realizing that I have already been there for almost two hours, I ask Layla and Maya if they have any questions before I leave? They both respond that they don't, so, as I pack my things up, I leave two consent forms on the table and ask them to please consider participation over the next few days. I say that I love them and will understand if this commitment doesn't work for whatever reason for them. Layla laughs and signs her consent form in response. Maya does the same. Waving away my protests, Layla hugs me and says she is really looking forward to being a part of this research and that she is so proud of me. With my heart feeling full, I turn to hug Maya before I leave and she thanks me for the research supplies and promises to write as much as she can over the summer. I say that I would love to see anything she chooses to share with me. Still smiling as I drive home, I reflect on my relationship(s) with Maya and Layla and I wonder how our long-time knowing of one another will shape our inquiry ...

### **Retellings**

#### **“We Trust You” – (Layla and Maya, Multiple Conversations)**

Listening to the audio recording of our research conversations over many seasons, I smile often. The sounds of doors opening and closing, phones ringing and pinging, and children laughing take me back to many different places as a co-inquirer alongside Layla and Maya. These sounds, overlapping with our meandering discussions, are similar to the sounds accompanying countless get-togethers over many years of friendship, and I continue to wonder about how our long-term friendship and knowing of one another has shaped, and continues to shape, our research inquiry and our relationship(s).

After Sara introduced us over thirteen years ago, Layla and I have built a friendship of mutual love and appreciation. We have visited and celebrated with one another, laughed often with and at each other, and supported one another during pregnancies, illnesses, ambitions, and disappointments. My children call Layla ‘A3mto’ [Auntie] and her children do the same with me, for they have grown up alongside us and each other. Our love for, and comfort with, each other was always present during our conversations, and in the early winter of 2016, Layla voiced what I was feeling after several seasons of inquiring alongside one another:

You know, it’s hard to remember what we’re talking about sometimes because we’re friends and we just talk anyways. I love talking to you, because there’s a friendship behind it too, but I learned to love you even more than I already did, Alhamdulillah.

As we engaged in multiple conversations for the purposes of this inquiry, I was both heartened and fearful of the level of comfort we have with one another. I was heartened by it because I know that Maya and Layla trust me to take care of the stories they shared and lived with me. However, this trust is also what I fear. When Maya and Layla repeatedly say, “We trust you,” I feel their trust as a tremendous blessing and as a tremendous *Amanah*<sup>135</sup>. Making duaa as I type this, I pray that I am able to fulfill this *Amanah* to the best of my abilities Insha’Allah.

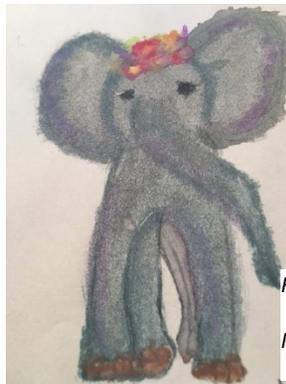


Figure 5-2.

Maya’s artwork depicting one of her favourite animals.

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<sup>135</sup> An *Amanah* is the Arabic word for ‘a trust.’ In Islam, the concept of an *Amanah* signifies a faith-based, moral obligation to uphold and carry out a sacred obligation.

### Rooting a Research Relationship – Summer 2015

Standing in front of what Sara's children have labelled the Toys R Us Room, I marvel at the number of toys on display and at their organization. Sara is showing me around Layla and Maya's home as we wait for Layla to join us. We arrived in Tree Town<sup>136</sup> about ten minutes ago with five children clamouring to get out of their seats after a more than two-hour drive. Noor, Yehia, and Hannah, along with Sara's children, Mariam and Omar, were greeted by Layla's children as soon as we parked the car. Noor and Maya immediately disappeared to Maya's room while the older boys stayed outside to either play basketball with Layla's eldest son Ahmed and two of his friends, or ball hockey with Layla's third child, Adam. As Layla's youngest children, Rema and Jamal, guide our younger children to the Toys R Us Room inside, Layla calls and says to please make ourselves at home while she runs a few errands and that she will be returning home soon.

Standing in front of the toy room, after Hannah impatiently wiggled her way out of my arms to go explore the forest of toys, I say "mash'Allah." There are rows upon rows of shelves with bins upon bins, all labelled, of toys. Sara laughs at my expression and explains that, since Layla has five children, she has been collecting their toys – many of which were gifts from friends and extended family – over the last thirteen years. I can see that the kids are enjoying playing in this room immensely and now understand why Layla urged me to bring Noor, Yehia, and Hannah with me today, "Believe me Muna, they won't be bored at our house."

Sara then gives me a tour of her sister's home. It is beautiful, spacious, and incredibly clean and organized. She tells me that it was built a short while after Layla and Mahmoud first

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<sup>136</sup> This is a pseudonym for Layla and Maya's town.

moved to Tree Town. Shouting out greetings, Layla joins us as we finish touring her home and, with whirlwind expertise, carries several bags into the kitchen. Sara and I follow her to offer assistance when Layla stops, looks around, and asks, “Where’s Maya? I thought you would be talking to her by now?” I say that we had just finished touring her home and that Maya and Noor are catching up with each other in Maya’s room. In response, Layla calls out, “Maya! You need to come to the kitchen so A3mto Muna can talk to us!” I laughingly say that we don’t have to rush our talk, as Maya and Noor walk into the kitchen. Layla asks, “Okay, so how are we going to do this?” Feeling multiple eyes on me, I stammer, “Um ... I know that a private conversation isn’t going to be possible right now, so how about we just talk and see how it goes?” Maya asks if Noor can stay in the kitchen with us and I respond, “Of course she can, if that’s what you want.” My original plan for this first research conversation was to sneak away to a quiet place to begin composing annals alongside Layla and Maya while Sara and Noor help to look after the younger children, but I now know that this will be challenging considering how the children have been walking in and out of the kitchen from the toy room and from outside. Unsure of how an unexpected group conversation will proceed, I prop my cellphone on the kitchen table and ask if I can begin recording? Layla says, “Of course,” and I press ‘record’ on the audio recorder.

I ask Maya how school is going and she responds that the first few weeks of her grade 6 year is “already really boring ... recess is fun though.” I notice that Maya is turning the journal I had given her a few months ago over in her hands and she explains, “I didn’t take pictures or anything, but I’ve written this.” Maya hands me her journal and I leaf through several pages, exclaiming, “Habibty, you wrote so much!” To which Maya replies, “Yeah, I tried.” Layla says, “Maya is a good writer ... her teacher says she loves to read her stories.” I turn to the front page of the journal, to a page entitled “Things I Love” and ask, “Can I read this out loud?” Maya says,

“Yeah,” and I begin reading, “Figure skating, piano, swimming, baseball, drawing, unicorns, my friends ...” and, after reading the long list of things Maya loves, I exclaim, “I love how you drew little symbols next to each item, so creative!” Maya reaches for the sketchbook I gave her and says, “I drew some fashion designs in this. My best friends, Yasmeeen and Jessica helped too.”



Figure 5-3. One of Maya's fashion designs.



Figure 5-4. Another one of Maya's fashion designs

Later in our conversation, Layla shares that her children were born in Tree Town, except for Ahmed and Maya. She said that they moved to Tree Town when Maya was about six months old<sup>137</sup> and that “most people in town know each other or at least recognize them.” She says that there are three elementary schools in town and “next year all the kids will be together in the only junior high ... so it'll be a culture shock for a lot of these kids.” I ask, “Why will it be a culture shock?” Layla responds, “My kids go to the school where there are a lot of low-income families, and there is a school that is more middle [income] and one with wealthy people.” She continues,

The kids' school is next to our restaurant, so they can walk there after school and

Mahmoud can pick them up if something happens. Plus, not everyone's born rich and we

<sup>137</sup> In our second research conversation, Layla explains her family's history of moving.

don't want to make our kids shayfeen hallun [Arabic for 'arrogant'] and cocky, you know? This is what we can afford, and we treat everyone equal no matter what.

Layla explains that Tree Town “depends on oil,” but that the downturn in oil has “hit a lot of people really hard:”

Layla: Work is slow now because so many people who used to work in oil lost their jobs because there's no work anymore. People got laid off because there's no work for them.

Maya: But in the elections, Elizabeth May<sup>138</sup> was saying how we need to get rid of oil.

Layla: Yeah, but if it wasn't for oil, Tree Town wouldn't exist Maya ... and Baba's<sup>139</sup> business wouldn't exist either.

Me: You know, we hear the arguments about the need to get rid of dependency on oil, but the discussions don't always keep in mind the communities that depend on it ...

Layla: Especially here in Alberta, the rest of the world doesn't really live off it, but Alberta really does.

As we enjoy pizza, fruits, and veggies after filling plates for the younger children, we talk about Maya's love of figure skating and Layla prompts, “Maya, tell A3mto Muna about the exhibition. [Turning to me] I'm going to get you guys tickets!” Maya says, “Yeah, our exhibition is in February. Rema and Jamal will be in it too. [Turning to Noor] I want you to come.” Noor and I say that we'd love to watch Maya's exhibition and I thank them for inviting us. Maya talks about how a lot of her friends attend figure skating lessons with her and Layla says,

That's the thing about this town, when you're in activities you meet other people. So when they go to junior high, it's not so hard. Like [eldest son] Ahmed is in hockey, so

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<sup>138</sup> Leader of the Green Party of Canada.

<sup>139</sup> Arabic word for 'Dad'.

when he went to junior high he knew a lot of the kids. For those kids that are from out of town or that don't do much outside of school, it's so hard ...

As Sara and I prepare to leave, I tell Layla how amazed I am that over thirteen children have been coming and going in her home, but they all seem to be having a wonderful time either outside or in the Toys R Us Room. Layla reflects, "You know, I used to play with a girl next door because she had the nicest baby stroller and I never really had much toys." Sara says, "Our parents weren't used to having toys as kids. That's the thing, our kids are used to having lots of toys, but we didn't have that growing up." Layla responds, "I don't know what it was. My neighbour had tons of toys ... our toy room? She had that."

Hannah toddles in to the kitchen for a third time alongside Layla's youngest child, four-year-old Jamal. He proudly announces that he helped Hannah find the kitchen. Smiling widely, I thank him and tell Layla that he has grown so much already, "I remember how small he was when he was born!" Layla responds, "And I remember how I made you take me to my Doctor's appointments when I was pregnant with him." I laugh and say, "You never *made* me Layla, I wanted to." I had been so scared for Layla at the time. She had been living in the City for the duration of her high-risk pregnancy with Jamal so that she could be closer to her in-laws and extended family. Layla continues, "No, I remember how much you were there for me and I appreciate it." Shaking my head, I say, "And I appreciate how you and Sara were there for me when Yehia was in the hospital."

Driving home after our three-hour afternoon visit to Layla and Maya's house, Sara and I laugh at some of the events of the day. Later, sitting in silence while most of our children sleep, I silently say Alhamdulillah for this opportunity to inquire alongside wonderful friends.

## Retellings

### **“We have so much stuff going on” (Layla, Winter 2016)**

Listening to the recording, and reading my field notes and transcript of our first research conversation, I once again get a strong sense of the bustling, busy lives that Layla and Maya live. Neighbours and friends joined Layla’s children in play throughout the afternoon that we spent there, and later, in the course of the many seasons we engaged in inquiry alongside one another, I was introduced to several of Maya’s and her siblings’ closest friends and neighbours, who Layla says “are part of the family” (Fall, 2015).

Layla’s comment during our conversation that “when you’re in activities you meet other people. So when they go to junior high, it’s not so hard,” gives a sense of the importance she places upon extracurricular activities for her children. For example, figure skating is only one of many activities that Maya enjoys. She has also learned to play the piano and is an avid swimmer. During a conversation in the winter of 2016, Layla proudly shared, “Maya could be a lifeguard with the level of swimming she’s completed.” Maya’s siblings are all registered in multiple activities too, including hockey, figure skating, archery, wrestling, and gymnastics. Alongside almost weekly travels to visit with family in the City, helping with schoolwork, and driving her five children to their many activities and visits with friends, Layla is also a weekly volunteer in her children’s elementary school, works with and helps translate for newly arrived Syrian families, and sometimes helps her husband with the restaurant he owns in Tree Town.

Although Layla believes it is important for her children to be engaged in extracurricular activities, she knows that the demanding schedules of their activities has contributed to her

neglecting her own needs. In the winter of 2016, during a telephone conversation, Layla said that, while she loves that her children are able to pursue their passions, she is feeling fatigued:

We have so much stuff going on, I honestly don't have time to take care of myself too. By the time we wake up and I clean up, make food, drop them off at school, pick them up, and all their activities, have supper and clean up again, my whole day is gone. And going to the City every weekend and all the work that comes with it? My body is tired.

When I asked Layla if she has considered limiting her children's extracurricular activities to one activity for each child, she responded, "I would feel bad if I did that though, they love their activities." I laughingly counter, "Layla, only Noor and Yehia are in activities right now and I told them that they can only be part of one activity per season in order for me to stay semi-sane." Laughing, Layla says, "I think that I just have to get better at asking for help when I need it."

**"I wish for our daughters something different" (Layla, Fall 2016)**

Layla's musings about her childhood neighbour's toy room in response to my Toys R Us Room comment is tied to a persistent thread running throughout our conversations. Layla, in many different ways, has expressed her desire – and I have witnessed her actions – to ensure that her children enjoy experiences she wishes she would have had the opportunity to enjoy. The first time I gained a strong sense of this was in late fall of 2015, as Layla, Maya, Sara, and I enjoyed cake and coffee in Layla's in-law's home. As Layla discussed her dream of Maya attending a post-secondary institution, she said,

I want Maya to have the full University experience, because when I got married, I used to see Sara come and go with her friends and with you, and she really got to experience that

time of her life and I didn't have that. I enjoyed it for Sara and so I want that for my kids.

I don't regret getting married and having kids, but I'd like those experiences for Maya.

Layla repeated this wish again in the fall of 2016 as we engaged in conversation alongside Maya in my home. Layla and I had been talking about how we both got married at young ages. Layla, who is younger than me by a year, married Mahmoud when she was 19 years old. Wissam and I were married when I was 20 years old, in the summer before my last year of undergraduate studies. Reflecting on getting married so young, Layla said, "I wish for our daughters something different Muna. I wish for them to finish school and take their time and enjoy it."

Layla's hope and determination for her children to experience what she wished she could have enjoyed as a child was again highlighted in a lunch conversation Layla, Maya, Sara, Noor, and I had in my home in the winter of 2016. Layla and Maya were talking about the yearly overnight camping trip<sup>140</sup> that grade 5 students in Maya's elementary school look forward to when Layla explained why she felt it was important for Maya to participate in the overnight camping experience, "We weren't allowed to sleep outside the house, but I wanted my kids to enjoy that."

### **(in the Midst of) Tending to Life and Relationships– Fall 2015**

The familiar smells of *qahwa*<sup>141</sup> and *shai*<sup>142</sup> being prepared, and the sights and sounds of children and visitors coming and going amidst multiple overlapping conversations, makes me smile. If I closed my eyes, I would think I was in my parents' home right now. I inwardly

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<sup>140</sup> Grade 5 Camp will be discussed in future sections.

<sup>141</sup> This is the Arabic word for coffee. Traditional Middle Eastern coffee is very strong, with a consistency similar to espresso.

<sup>142</sup> This is the Arabic word for tea.

chuckle at how Layla texted me earlier in the day to ask if we could meet to engage in conversation at her in-laws' house since the house would "be empty." Thinking it would probably be quieter there than my home, and wanting to begin composing annals alongside Maya and Layla in a quiet setting, I happily agreed. Walking into the home I've visited numerous times over the years, I hug Layla, Maya, and Sara at the door and we head to the kitchen table which is, of course, already bearing several plates of snacks. Just as we begin to engage in conversation, Maya's paternal grandmother (Allah yirhama) walks into the room, wearing her seemingly perpetual smile. I rise from my seat to greet her the way I was taught to greet elders, with kisses on alternating cheeks and, "Assalamu Alaikum Hajji<sup>143</sup>!" I ask Layla and Maya if we should postpone our conversation because I know that Maya's grandmother (Allah yirhama) is feeling anxious about her day surgery tomorrow, but Sara says that she will gladly spend time with her so that we can engage in discussion. I am happy to hear them laughing a few minutes later.

As we enjoy huge slices of carrot cake (with Layla pressuring me to "Eat!"), and as more people begin streaming into the house, Layla says, "I'm sorry, this house is always like this but I really thought it would be quieter tonight." I laughingly reply, "My parents' house is the same way, but I don't want to be making you feel like we have to continue this conversation right now. We have lots of time insha'Allah." Layla replies, "No wallah, it's fine, we love you and want to do this." Maya and Layla then talk about having fun at a trampoline park earlier in the day, I ask Maya about how school has been going in the two months since we've seen each other:

Maya: It's kind of boring ...

Layla: Why is it boring?

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<sup>143</sup> Hajji is an Arabic word used to address a woman who has completed the Hajj pilgrimage. I was taught to address female elders as 'Hajji' and male elders as 'Hajj' as a sign of respect.

Maya: Well, it's fun when we do Social and Science ...

Layla: Tell A3mto Muna why you like Social and Science.

Maya: I have an awesome teacher, she taught me last year, and she's teaching grade 5 and 6 in the same class this year. But I like Social and Science because we get to go to the grade 6 class where all my friends are.

I ask Maya who her closest friends in school are, and she names a few girls, and says, "But Yasmeen is my best friend, we've always been best friends, ever since we were babies."

Later, Maya talks about an upcoming skating event she is looking forward to, "My skating competition is next week!" Layla interjects, "Her *first* skating competition, it's at a place that's an hour and a half drive from Tree Town." Maya exclaims, "I will be doing my first solo routine ... but I'm not sure about two of the jumps in my routine." Layla smiles at Maya, "You'll get it insha'Allah." With pride, Layla tells me, "Her skating teacher is so impressed with her and I am too." Maya excitedly talks about how she is also practicing multiple routines for the Tree Town Skating Exhibition in February. Layla shares that she is volunteering as one of the organizers of the exhibition, and how her basement is currently "full of boxes." Perhaps recognizing my look of confusion, Layla explains:

Layla: I'm in charge of ordering all the younger kids' costumes ... but this year we have to sew our own for Maya because the costumes are too short.

Me: Oh okay ...

Layla: She wears thick tights anyway, so it's okay [laughing]. But some of them are *really* short... it's okay though, I always order the same material for her dresses ...

Maya: I don't like it when they're so short like that.

Layla: But do you have a hard time because your costume is different?

Maya: Kind of ... but, I don't really care because I always have nice dresses. I mean everyone has long sleeves though ...

Layla: They all have long sleeves, but they're usually very short. Like last year, I just added an extra piece of material at the bottom so it didn't really make much of a difference, it just looked more flowy.

Layla's question to Maya about feeling 'different' prompts me to ask if there are many people of Muslim background in Tree Town? Layla answers that there are about a few dozen families, "But only three hijabis," who make a life in Tree Town. I ask if they are ever made to feel different because they are Muslim, and Maya responds:

Maya: What I see on social media and stuff, I don't see any of that at school ... there's one kid, he's from ... I'm not sure where, but he was in my class because he was kept back a grade, so I see grade 5'ers saying mean things to him like, "Go back to your country!" and I'm like, "This *is* his country."

Layla: Good for you.

Me: So when you defend him, do they say or do anything to you?

Maya: No, nothing, they don't say anything.

Layla: Good for you for speaking up though.

Later, as we begin to compose annals alongside one another, Maya and Layla share stories of their earliest memories, with Layla making us laugh at her first memory of school growing up in another small town in Alberta, First Town: "I have a memory that's in my head now ... in Kindergarten, bissit sabee [Arabic for 'I kissed a boy'] and was like, "Oh my God, if my Mom and Dad ever find out they're going to be so mad!" As our laughter eased, as a self-described "small-town girl," Layla says, "I was born in the City but I only remember living in First Town." Maya interjects, "Same. I was born in the City and only remember Tree Town." Layla describes her many moves after marrying Mahmoud, "We got married and moved around a lot, in First Town for a year, in Second Town for a few months, in the City for less than a year, and then we finally moved to Tree Town and we've stayed there since." Layla explains that she and Mahmoud finally settled in Tree Town after taking advantage of an opportunity to buy the

restaurant that they still own. I ask Layla why they only stayed in Second Town for a few months and she replies,

We moved to Second Town because Mahmoud found work there, but we just hated it. It was so different there, like even though there were lots of Muslims, just because I'm a hijabi, they would call me Hajji – and I was only 20 years old! [laughing]

Later in our conversation, Layla asks me, “Did you see on Instagram and Facebook how I got surprised with flowers?” I shake my head and say that I'm not on social media, but I heard about how, after the Paris attacks a few weeks ago, Layla received a gift delivery of flowers and a supportive note from an anonymous friend:

Layla: And do you know what? I never found out who they were from ... but I posted that I really appreciated it because I did. The thought was so nice, especially when so much is going on with the politics and all the talk about Muslims and whatever ...

Me: Do you guys feel a difference since the attacks at all?

Layla: [To Maya] Do you feel like anyone says anything because you're Muslim?

Maya: No, everyone likes me.

Layla: But it's tied to popularity at this age I think, so because she's popular, it's fine, you know?

Maya: Well, in school we talk about that, like my teacher is against people doing and saying mean things to other people because of things like culture ...

Layla: That's so good ... And you know, I don't really feel racism in town, I really don't. *But* we have an opinion page in Tree Town, and I see a lot in there ... I don't see it when I'm out and about or at the arena or anything. At the arena, we're like a family, all the people who have their kids in hockey and skating, we all kind of know each other. And you know how I am, I'm pretty bubbly and will talk with them so they have almost no choice but to talk to me [laughing]. I'm not doing it for any specific reason wallah, it's just me, it's who I am ... and they might be like, “Well how can I be rude to her and she said, ‘Hi, how are you?’” and maybe they think about it and things change ... and yes, I might get a few stares here and there, but I don't think about it ...

Me: That opinion page you were talking about, that was in the paper?

Layla: No it was online. There's lots of racism in there actually, like one guy was responding to a lady who was like [in relation to recent terror attacks], "They're not real Muslims," and he was like, "No, they're all like that." I don't really respond on there, but I did report his comment because you can report stuff like that.

Troubled, I ask Layla if she knows the person who posted that comment. She replies,

No, because he commented anonymously. But there's this one Dad from Ahmed's hockey team that wrote something in the opinion page. He said, "*They* need to do something, their people need to stop them," and wrote, "Don't say I'm racist because my buddy is Muslim." It's true, because he talks to Mahmoud and kicks jokes with him<sup>144</sup>. So I said to Mahmoud, "It's funny that he thinks we can do something, like I forgot I have ISIS on my callers list [sarcastic tone]." I mean we don't know who these people are and we can't stop them, but others think we can. I wish we could, but we can't. I told Mahmoud that if I ever see him at the arena, I'm going to say, "So you think I have these people on my speed dial or something?" but I didn't see him yet.

In response to her Mom, Maya says, "I don't think Muslims can do that kind of stuff. They're not Muslim. And there are no terrorists in Canada! But, yeah, they think we're terrorists ... but just because one person does it, doesn't mean everyone will." I ask Maya why she said that "they all think we're terrorists," and, with tears in her eyes, she says, "Well I listen and I know about it ... Because you know in the Paris attacks, one of the guy's brothers didn't know that he was doing that and everyone just assumes that the whole family is like that." Layla listens to Maya with concern in her eyes and says, "Yimkin flitna bi'l hakee shway [Arabic for "Maybe we let

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<sup>144</sup> This is a colloquial way of saying 'jokes around with him.'

our conversation get out of hand”] ... but they have to know about it too, I always tell them don’t ever be ashamed of who you are.”

### **Retellings**

#### **“Don’t judge a book by its cover” (Maya, Summer 2015)**

Maya’s response to her Mom that it can be “kind of” hard to be different than her skating peers because of the alterations Layla makes to her costumes gives a sense of a recurring thread running throughout our conversations. Earlier, in the summer of 2015, I read the following excerpt from Maya’s journal aloud:

At school when it’s hot out and all of the girls are wearing shorts and tank tops and I can’t wear that stuff it’s kind of hard, and when I swim all the girls wear bikinis and I have to wear shorts and a swim shirt, but clothing has nothing to do with my personality in other words – don’t judge a book by its cover.

After I finished reading that excerpt, I looked at Maya and said, “I totally understand ... It’s so hard when it’s hot outside and you’re so covered.” Maya sighed, “It sucks. My friend Yasmeen is Muslim and can wear shorts, tank tops, and even bikinis.” Layla interjected, “It’s hard because I know that clothes are a really big deal for her ... I try to tell her that not all Muslims practice the same and that we don’t have to do what everyone else is doing.”

Expectations related to how Maya should dress can be hard for Layla to negotiate too. During a telephone conversation with Layla in the early winter of 2016, she shared her

frustration after a female family member expressed displeasure after seeing a picture of Maya in one of her skating costumes:

Layla: You know how they have a professional photographer who takes pictures that you can pay for? Well, there was one of Maya jumping and it's one where her legs show and the skirt looks really short and she [family member] was like, "Hmm ... no comment."

Me: Yeah, but I saw her skating that day and she was wearing really thick tights too ....

Layla: Yeah, and Maya wanted it because it shows her jumping really high ... but I was so surprised at Mahmoud. When he heard that Maya might not skate next year, he was like, "Why?" and I was telling him she might want to try something else and it's okay because I know he doesn't like the outfits they wear sometimes, and he was like, "The ones she's been wearing are fine, I want her to skate if that's what she wants to do" ... he doesn't want to take that from her, you know? I was so happy he said that ...

Me: Okay ... did you tell him about the comment you got about her skirt being too short?

Layla: Yeah, and he said to just ignore it but it did bug me ... I get it, you know, someone seeing a picture, it can come across like, "Shoo labsee? [Arabic for 'What is she wearing?']" but at the same time, that's the problem with our kids, they can't participate in anything because of stuff like that, you know? It's not fair to our kids to say no to participating in sports and activities because of things like that ... and Maya doesn't seem to care that I alter her costumes, she just loves skating. I asked her if she minded and she said no, and you *know* that she'd tell me if she didn't like it [laughing].

Later, during that same telephone conversation, Layla talked about being surprised at the reason Maya was unsure about participating in a swimming field trip:

For Muslim girls it's hard sometimes ... the other day, Maya was saying how, for their Gym options class, they're going swimming for the day and she said, "I want to go and I don't want to go." And I was like, "Why? Because you have to wear shorts and your rash guard and everyone else will be wearing swimming suits?" And she was like, "Kind of," and then I said, "So you're not going to have fun with your friends because of what you're wearing? I don't think they care what you're wearing." And then she was like, "Yeah, you're right, I'm going."

Contemplating Layla's words, I wonder when Maya started to notice that she was expected to dress differently than her friends. I think about how, for me and Noor, difficulties with expectations related to dressing are perhaps not as pronounced because the majority of Noor's friends attend Islamic school with her. They know that, upon reaching puberty, choosing to observe hijab<sup>145</sup> may, depending upon the interpretations of Islamic texts they follow, include covering their hair and/or all parts of their body except for their face, feet, and hands<sup>146</sup>. The stories I lived and shared alongside Layla and Maya, however, make me contemplate how expectations related to dress and other cultural and faith-based/religious beliefs and practices can, in myriad ways, be extremely challenging for Muslim girls and their mothers to negotiate.

**“Good for you for speaking up” (Layla, Fall 2015)**

Intricately connected to Maya's belief that it's misguided to “judge a book by its cover,” is the way that she actively defends those she believes have been arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987). Maya's story of coming to the defence of a boy in her class who was told to “go back to [his] country” is only one of many stories she or Layla have shared of Maya speaking up in defence others. In the summer of 2016, as we enjoyed Ramadan iftar<sup>147</sup> in Sara's home after a long day of fasting, Maya talked about becoming friends with a girl whose poetry she admired:

Maya: She's so nice, and she's always been taller than everybody ... the other kids don't really make fun of her, but they don't really talk to her either ... and this is the first year I actually started talking to her because she's in my class this year and she's so nice, and funny too, so I told her I have her back<sup>148</sup> [laughing].

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<sup>145</sup> Refer to the glossary in Appendix A for a more detailed explanation of the concept of hijab in Islam.

<sup>146</sup> Some Muslims interpret Islamic texts as requiring women to completely cover all parts of their body. This is often achieved through the wearing of a niqab (that has slits for a woman's eyes) or a burqa.

<sup>147</sup> This is an Arabic word for the meal that breaks a fast. We were fasting the long, hot summer days of Ramadan.

<sup>148</sup> This is a colloquial way of saying 'I will support you.'

Me: It was nice of you to notice that, people don't often notice when others are ignored.

Maya: Yeah I notice everything ... like for example there's this new kid in school and he's kind of chubbier, and some of the other people have first assumptions but I talked to him and he's nice, and when some of my friends said mean things about him, I was like, "Well, I like him, he's nice." And there's this other guy in my class, he came to the school in grade 3 and he was taller and bigger than everyone, so everybody made fun of him when he ran in gym, but he's so nice and so funny too and I would tell them to stop, and then in grade 4 everyone started noticing how funny and smart he is ...

Several months later, as we enjoyed another dinner in Sara's home in the winter of 2016, Maya shared a story of a younger girl trying to "add [her] on Instagram." Maya explained why she declined the girl's request, "I told her, 'Nope. You're mean to my [younger] brother.'" She continued, "I feel like I'm even more friendly this year, but I can be tough ... if someone isn't nice to my family or friends, I can be tough."

In the winter of 2017, as Maya, Sara, Layla, and I engaged in a late night discussion, Maya shared a story of speaking up for a friend who has been the subject of many rumours:

Maya: I was mad at my friend because she called one of my other friends a "Ho" ...

Me: What? Who?

Maya: [Name of friend] called another one of my friends a "Ho and an alcoholic" ...

Layla: And Maya was like, "You don't even know her, why would you say that about her?" so Maya got mad ... and then [the friend's] Mom noticed they weren't acting the way they usually do, so she called me and asked what's going on and I told her what her daughter said ... and she [friend's Mom] was so mad because she said, "I never want my daughter to say that about anyone" ... I'm so happy Maya told her it's not okay ...

Maya: [Tearfully] I feel so bad for her because so many people think that about her and they keep spreading that rumour ... they talk about her because she's so pretty and ....

Me: So others just assume these things because she's pretty?

Maya: Yeah, but we've been friends for a long time, even before we went to school together ... and she's not like that.

As I think about this troubling story, and many others that Maya shared, I think about how brave Maya is to speak up in defence of others, even/especially when she's defending others to her friends. I wonder if Maya's experiential knowledge of being a Muslim girl expected to dress in different ways, and of being the daughter of one of a few veiled women in Tree Town, helps her to travel to the worlds (Lugones, 1987) of others who are judged and/or ridiculed for being different. I think of Maya saying, "I told her I have her back," and of how often Layla has said "Good for you", or has otherwise encouraged Maya to speak up ... and I wonder if Maya draws some of her strength and courage from the knowledge that Layla will have *her* back.

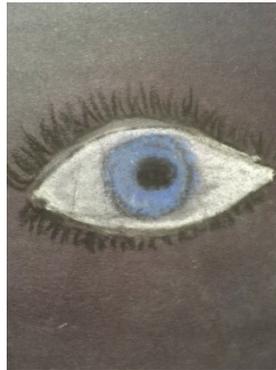


Figure 5-5. Maya's charcoal art.

### **Facing (internal and external) Arrogant Perception(s) Alongside Maya and Layla**

Inquiring alongside Layla and Maya for many seasons, I have often wondered – and still wonder – about arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) ... including my own. As I prepared to inquire alongside Maya and Layla, I expected to hear stories of discrimination because, I am ashamed to admit, the single story (Adichie, 2009) I held of small town Alberta was one of discomfort with, or even intolerance of, difference. However, in coming alongside Maya and Layla and their stories of making a life in Tree Town, I quickly learned that my arrogant perception of rural Albertan communities was constructed without wakefulness (Greene, 1995)

to my lack of experiential knowledge of small town life. In the fall of 2016, Layla and Maya spoke of building a sense of community in Tree Town:

Layla: I'm finding that Maya doesn't want to come to the City as often on the weekends anymore, she wants to stay in Tree Town.

Maya: Because I get to hang out with my friends.

Layla: And in a small place like Tree Town you have to *make* a community. Our friends are like our family.

Maya: Because they're good to us and we're good to them ...

Layla: Like ladies from the school will come over for coffee or if we have a skating meeting I'm always the first to offer my house, and they always laugh and tell me, "Oh, you're such a good hostess."

Me: And has it been like that since you've moved there?

Layla: It happened more when the kids started school and their activities. But have I ever felt that anyone was mean to me? No. In the beginning it might have been a bit weird like, "Oh, she's Muslim" or whatever, but now it's, "Oh, that's just Layla," which is nice ... I find that in the City there seem to be more looks and racism to be honest.

While, in my everyday life and scholarly work, I warn about single stories and arrogant perceptions in relation to Muslim people and communities, Maya and Layla helped me to realize that I too can engage in arrogant perception of people and places I have limited knowledge of.

My conversations alongside Layla and Maya have repeatedly reminded me about my ability to be an arrogant perceiver, including the ways I might judge others' parenting practices. Layla's experience with a female family member who was unimpressed with Maya's skating costume makes me think about how mothers can be subjected to the arrogant perceptions of others ... and how we can also be perpetrators of arrogant perception(s). In the winter of 2016, Layla shared how a friend questioned her parenting after she learned that Maya and her siblings are permitted to participate in sleepovers outside the home. Laughingly, Layla shared how this same friend then allowed her daughter to participate in an overnight camping field trip. In

response, I said, “Moms can be so judgemental of other Moms.” Layla said, “Yeah, I can be judgemental too though.” I replied, “Me too.”

Layla and I also discussed the arrogant perceptions others may hold of us as Muslim women and mothers. In response to a story I shared of an experience with feeling arrogantly perceived as a veiled mother to a child with ASD, Layla said,

It’s so sad because people see us and make assumptions about our kids or the way we are as parents ... it even happens with people from poor communities or with Moms who smoke or with people who are a different race ... the stereotypes are so strong sometimes.

Layla’s words make me wonder about deeply rooted single stories (Adichie, 2009) that shape so many lives. I think of Maya’s tearful explanation of why she said, “They think we’re terrorists,” and of Layla stating, “I always tell them don’t ever be ashamed of who you are,” and I wonder about the myriad ways single stories and arrogant perceptions – whether they stem from family, friends, classmates, and/or strangers – shape the experiences of Muslim children growing into adolescence and adulthood. How do single stories and arrogant perceptions shape their knowing of themselves, and their families and communities? However, Maya’s tearful comments during our conversation makes me wonder yet again about how parents and other educators can discuss stereotypes and assumptions others may hold about Muslims and Islam with Muslim children and youth in ways that encourage awareness while rejecting fear and cynicism.

### **Growing Forward Alongside Layla and Maya ... in the Shadows of Loss – Winter 2016**

Breathing deeply as I set the table, I make duaa that our conversation will be calming after what I know will be an emotional afternoon for Maya and Layla. Along with Maya’s

younger siblings, and Sara and her children, Layla and Maya will be coming over for a late lunch conversation. Layla just texted to let me know that they are running late after deciding to visit her mother-in-law's grave (Allah yirhama). A few months ago, Sara tearfully informed me that Maya's Grandmother (Allah yirhama) passed away because of unexpected complications related to her day surgery. Shocked, I tearfully recited the words my Mom taught me to recite upon hearing news of death, "Inna li'Allah wa Inna Ilayhi Raji'oon"<sup>149</sup>. As I arrange the table, I think of Layla and Maya's visible heartbreak when I saw them at Maya's Grandmother's funeral.

*Maya's Grandmother's funeral, in accordance with Islamic custom<sup>150</sup>, was held the afternoon of her passing (Allah yirhama). With a heavy heart, I walked into the Masjid and through the doors to where I knew Layla and Maya would be sitting along with the rest of their family to accept condolences. Remembering Jidee's and Yehia's (Allah yirhamun) funerals, I made dua'a that Allah (SWT) pours sabr<sup>151</sup> into the hearts of all who mourn this incredibly kind woman (Allah yirhama). Walking into the room, I began offering my condolences to the first row of women, all of whom I know, saying "Allah yirhama" repeatedly. By the time I reached Layla and Maya, I am crying silently, and wordlessly embraced them each tightly. I held them longer than is customary in offering condolences, for there were others who were waiting to offer condolences, but I did not want to end our embrace while they held me as if they too were reluctant to let go. In my ear, Layla whispered, "Subhan Allah, we were just together in her home, Allah yirhama."*

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<sup>149</sup> This is an Arabic and Islamic phrase that means, "We belong to Allah and to Him we are destined to return."

<sup>150</sup> According to Islamic custom, burial of the deceased should take place as soon as possible.

<sup>151</sup> *Sabr* is an Arabic word for patience. The concept of *sabr* in Islam is one of patience, perseverance, and acceptance of Allah's (SWT) Will. Praying for *sabr* in the face of hardship is a common Muslim invocation.

*After the Janaza prayer<sup>152</sup>, I made my way outside to where I knew Maya and Layla would be standing to say their good-bye's before Maya's Grandmother (Allah yirhama) is driven to her final resting place. I noticed Sara, Layla, and Maya standing to the side and walked over to them to hold Maya tightly as the hearse carrying her Grandmother (Allah yirhama) drove away. We stood like that for a very long time before someone called out to Layla that they needed to leave. Hugging Layla and Maya one more time, I left the Masjid, but my heart remained with them.*

The knocking on the door interrupts my thoughts and I usher Layla, Maya, Sara, Jamal, Adam, Rema, Jamal, Mariam, and Omar inside with hugs. As we fill the younger children's plates with food, I ask Layla and Maya how they have been doing:

Layla: It's been a bit tough Alhamdulillah, but Maya has been doing a good job of taking care of her Jiddo, she's so hannunee [Arabic for tender-hearted]. I don't know, it's been hard ... but next week you guys have to come to Tree Town for the skating exhibition.

Maya: Yeah!

Me: I'd love to wallah.

Layla: Bring all the kids too.

As we settle down in our seats with our plates in front of us, Layla remarks, "Subhan Allah how the last time we talked was right before she passed Allah yirhama ... how have things changed for you since then Maya?":

Maya: Bad. Bad changes.

Sara: What? Why?

Maya: [Tearfully] I don't know ... everything sucks.

Me: I'm so sorry habibty, the last couple of months have been so hard ...

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<sup>152</sup> Salat Al-Janazah, the Muslim funeral prayer, is offered in congregation.

Maya: Yeah.

Heart aching, I try to give Maya space by asking Layla if the boxes of skating costumes are still in her basement. Her eyes brimming with unshed tears in response to Maya's words, Layla laughingly replies, "Yeah, it's like Party City ... the other moms were saying, 'Oh, the costumes are so ... *warm* this year.'" We laugh as Layla says, "How can you expect little kids to skate in those tiny costumes on the ice? It's so cold!" Maya says, "I love skating, but I hate the competitions ... I failed horribly." Layla explains:

Layla: Remember her Grandma passed and then the week after was her competition? So I asked her if she still wanted to go and she did. But this rink was different, because in Tree Town we have lines on the ice and this one didn't ...

Maya: And I just froze.

Layla: Yeah.

Maya: And then I got scared, and I started crying, and then I left.

Layla: But Mama<sup>153</sup>, there were lots of emotions going on and that's just normal.

Later in our conversation, Layla talks about visiting Maya's Grandmother's (Allah yirhama) grave in a way that surprises me:

Layla: You know, I had never been to a graveyard before, and so my kids learned it [the protocol for visiting graves] earlier than I did ... they've learned that it's *wajib* [Arabic for duty/responsibility] to go visit their Grandma and anyone that has passed ... and if they go with us, that's what they'll know, right? And the sad thing is that sometimes it takes a sibling or a Mom or a Dad or Grandparent to make you go.

Me: Jiddee and Yehia Allah yirhamun are buried there but I've never visited their graves.

Layla: Oh really? I'm surprised Muna.

Me: My whole body tenses at the thought of going.

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<sup>153</sup> An Arabic form of saying "My child."

Layla: I thought it would be hard too, but honestly it's relaxing ... isn't it relaxing when you go see Tata<sup>154</sup> Maya?

Maya: No not really.

Layla: Well for me, it's relaxing. I cry when I'm there, but I don't feel bad.

Maya: They brought a bench to Tata's grave ...

Layla: So we can sit and read Qu'ran to her ... wallah you'd get a sense of relief if you went to visit them Muna. It will be hard, and you'll cry, but it'll be a good cry and Subhan Allah it's so peaceful and it feels so good to just talk to her alone ...

As they prepare to leave, Maya talks about being disappointed in herself for not doing as well as she expected in her recent report card:

Layla: But you did so good ...

Maya: I got four Excellents .... But I didn't get any medals ...

Layla: [To me] You need to get an Excellent in everything to get a medal, and so she beats herself up if she doesn't get a medal ... she has such high expectations for herself, and it's good to have high expectations, but you don't have to push yourself so hard Mama, I'm so proud of you for doing so good and for trying.

Maya: [Sighing] But it sucks.

Later, waving goodbye as I promise to see them in Tree Town for Maya's skating exhibition next week, I close the door with a heavy heart and make duaa for Allah (SWT) to guide and bless them and for Maya's skating exhibition to be a joyful time for all.

### Retellings

#### **“We learned to appreciate life and our family a little bit more” (Layla, Summer 2016)**

Living alongside Maya and Layla as they mourned the death of Maya's Tata (Allah yirhama), and then transcribing and listening to our conversations during their process of

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<sup>154</sup> An Arabic term of endearment for Grandmother.

learning to live in different ways in the wake of her loss, has been an incredibly emotional experience for me. Maya's special relationship with her Tata reminds me of my relationship with Sittee, a relationship I am blessed to still draw sustenance from, and my heart aches at the profound pain Maya feels. Throughout our conversations, I would (re)visit my memories alongside Maya's Tata (Allah yirhama), the most recent being when Maya, Layla, and I engaged in conversation on the eve of her surgery, listening to the part where I exclaimed, "Assalamu Alaikum Hajji!" and her quiet response over and over again. Coming alongside Maya and Layla during their process of mourning and learning to live in new ways with their stories of Maya's Tata, I would also (re)visit my stories of Jiddee and Yehia (Allah yirhamun) often.

Maya's tearful comment that "everything sucks" in the months following her Tata's death (Allah yirhama) prompted me to be cautious about asking about her Tata. I wanted to be respectful of Maya's mourning process. However, I later discovered that in the spring of 2016, Maya wrote the following passage in her journal, "I'm back ... It's been a long time since I wrote in this journal. I stopped writing because my Tata left us last year. It really hurt and I really miss her a lot but I'm staying strong."

Later, in the fall of 2016, a few weeks into Maya's Grade 7 year, Maya opened up about the deep pain she still feels after her Tata's (Allah yirhama) passing. Engaging in conversation in my home, I had asked Maya and Layla to construct annals of their experiences in a form similar to cardiographs so that the emotional 'highs' and 'lows' of their lives could be visually represented. I was surprised to see that much of their annals looked almost like continuous 'highs' ... with the exception of a deep dip in both their annals:

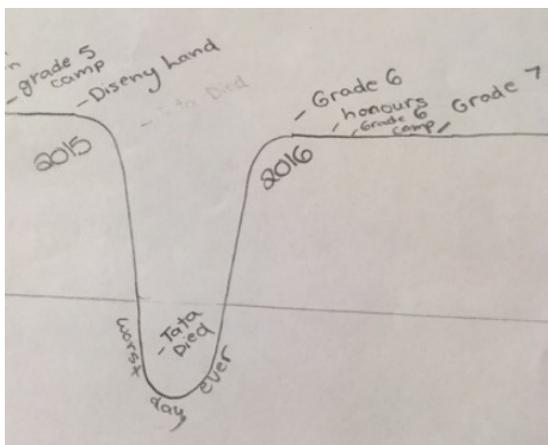


Figure 5-6. Part of Maya's annal.

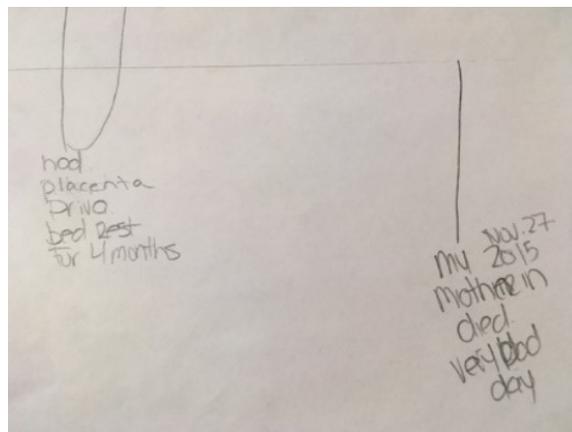


Figure 5-7. Part of Layla's annal.

Me: Wow, you both have a lot of 'highs' Alhamdulillah.

Maya: Yeah, all of these are highs ... until Tata passed away.

Layla: Alhamdulillah, there was good and bad in that though ...

Maya: There was no good in it.

Layla: No, there was good and bad that came from it Maya, she's at rest and isn't suffering anymore ... and we became closer with you guys because of it, right?

Maya: Yeah.

Layla: We learned to appreciate life and our family a little bit more ... So Subhan Allah, there was good and bad that came from it.

Reading their words, I am awed by Maya and Layla's strength and vulnerability in sharing their profound pain in the midst of mourning. I think of how Layla encouraged me to visit the graves of my loved ones as a way to encourage a sense of peace, and the way she framed these visits as *wajib* in honouring loved ones who have passed. In the winter of 2017, I visited Jidee and Yehia's (Allah yirhamun) graves for the first time and stood for a long time talking to them. Layla and Maya taught me that, while it is painful to remember our loved ones who have passed, it is important for me to still be in conversation with them and to fulfill my *wajib* to them.

**“I worry sometimes about how hard she pushes herself” (Layla, Winter 2017)**

Maya’s disappointment in herself for not achieving more “Excellents” in her report card, and Layla’s gentle reminder that, “It’s good to have high expectations, but you don’t have to push yourself so hard,” gives a sense of a continuous thread running throughout our conversations. A conversation we had in the winter of 2017 gives a sense of Layla’s support and encouragement in the midst of Maya’s high expectations of herself:

Me: Maya, your Mom often says that you have really high expectations of yourself ... do you feel like you do?

Maya: Yeah, like in grade 5 I would cry if I didn’t do as well as I wanted to do in school ... and for a Science test this year, I was so mad when I got only 80%.

Layla: She texts me her marks every day [laughing] ... I feel like in grade 5 it kind of bugged her that she didn’t get the awards she wanted, so by grade 6 she pushed herself to earn them. Maya really pushed hard last year even though she was so busy with skating and with the family going through a hard time with Tata passing away Allah yirhama, she got honours and a Merit award ... she did so good but I worry sometimes about how hard she pushes herself ...

Me: What’s a Merit award?

Maya: It’s not that important [laughing].

Layla: Yeah it is! So the teachers get one plaque and pick one kid that they feel did the best that year in terms of attitude, marks and everything and Maya got it mash’Allah.

Living and inquiring alongside Maya and Layla over many seasons, I gained a deep appreciation of the many ways that Layla encourages Maya even as she warns her about pushing herself too hard. Layla’s encouragement of Maya, even as she worries about Maya’s high expectations of herself, often made me wonder if I don’t encourage Yehia and Noor often enough for their academic achievements. My reply to them if they excitedly tell me about achieving a high grade is usually a form of, “That’s nice, but are you happy about what you learned?” My conversations

alongside Layla continue to make me wonder about how I can better support Noor and Yehia's (academic) accomplishments without prioritizing grades and external sources of validation.

### **Rooting Beginning (and Growing) Stories Alongside Layla and Maya – Summer 2016**

Tired but excited, I sip my much-needed cup of coffee as I wait for Maya and Layla to join me. Seated at a booth far away from the entrance of the restaurant, I text Layla that I am here for our lunch date, but to please take her time and drive safe. I cradle the cup of surprisingly good coffee as I think about the morning I've had. Encouraging Hannah, Yehia, and Noor to have breakfast and then help clean the house is always challenging, but doing so after Hannah's continuous night-waking was especially difficult today. Wissam had returned from a month of visiting with his family in Lebanon a few weeks ago, and his departure and arrival have meant that Hannah's routine – a routine that she particularly needs as a child with ASD – has been severely disrupted. We are in the process of trying to return to a regular(ish) routine, but it seems that routines are easier to break than they are to (re)create. Wissam expressed guilt that his trip contributed to our collective sleep deprivation, but I reminded him that he didn't have much of a choice ... if my Dad was sick and oceans away, I too would be on the next flight to see him!

I notice Layla and Maya smilingly approaching me. Although we've enjoyed Maya's skating exhibition, a spray park play date, and a Ramadan meal and sleepover since our last shared conversation, I hug Maya and Layla and exclaim, "I miss you guys! It feels like forever ago that we had our last conversation together!" Layla laughs and says, "I know, Alhamdulillah we are all so busy, but I'm so happy to be here now!" I laughingly reply, "Me too." As we choose our appetizers, Maya shares her excitement about meeting new friends at "Grade 6 Camp" in June. She explains, "So four people from every school are in each group ..." Layla

interjects, “And they invited the three elementary schools ...” Maya continues, “Yeah, before grade 7, so we can all meet each other and hang out.” Layla explains that, in Tree Town, there are annual Camps in grades 5 and 6 for students from the three elementary school in town to become acquainted with each other before they all attend the same junior high school. Grade 5 Camp is an overnight camping experience and Grade 6 Camp is a day camp. Layla said, “My Mom never let us sleep outside the house, but I wanted Maya to experience Grade 5 Camp.”

I ask Layla why she thinks her Mom didn’t want them to sleep outside the house:

Layla: I think she was super protective ... but my Mom doesn’t really talk about *why*, like if you ask a question, she will answer but we don’t have any stories from my Mom ... you know? My Dad is the talker, so the stories we know are from my Dad ...

Me: I wonder why that is ... have you ever tried to ask her?

Layla: No, we never really had that friendship with her in the beginning, we were never friends ... but we are different as Moms, we tell our kids we love them, sit and talk, like “How was your day?” ... we never had any of that. My Dad was more like that for us ...

Me: Where do you think that came from then, that desire to be like that with your kids?

Layla: Maybe from growing up here, I don’t know ... but not everyone is like that even in Lebanon, I just think my Mom grew up like that. Her Dad died young and her Mom had to be a young single mom ... I think my Mom was about 17 when her Dad died ...

Me: My Mom was around 13 when her dad died ... and it’s hard for her to talk about her earlier years too ...

Layla: Maybe they’re not used to it because their Moms just didn’t have much time to sit and talk with them, especially as single moms ... they were too busy trying to figure things out, getting their kids to school and work and trying to raise their kids, you know?

Pausing for a moment, Layla says, “And it was just so busy in our house, we had all of my Dad’s family living with us after they came from Lebanon and we had The Ma7hal<sup>155</sup> too.” I smile, thinking Layla could be describing my childhood, “Subhan Allah, we had that life too.” Layla

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<sup>155</sup> The Ma7hal is an Arabic way of saying ‘The Shop.’ I capitalized The Ma7hal because I will be using this as the name of the restaurant Layla’s parents owned in First Town.

says, “It was work, work, work ... we grew up in The Ma7hal and worked there when we got older.” I laughingly respond, “Yup, us too.” Maya makes us laugh when she says, “I remember growing up in my Dad’s ma7hal too ... but I don’t think my Dad *wants* his kids to work there.”

As we enjoy the unhealthiest dishes we could order, Layla shares her uncertainty about a recent decision she made for her youngest daughter, Rema:

Layla: I’m feeling guilty about agreeing to repeat Rema’s grade 1 year ...

Me: But didn’t you repeat grade 1 too Layla?

Layla: Yeah, because I didn’t speak English that well, I talked A3raby<sup>156</sup> all the time ... and now my kids can barely talk A3raby.

Me: It was the same for me in school too ... I only spoke A3raby before kindergarten ...

Layla: It’s the worst, and our parents don’t make it any better, they talk to them in English all the time and I’ll be like, “Talk to them in A3raby! What are you doing?”

Me: My parents are the same way [laughing] ... but was it hard to make the decision to repeat Rema’s grade 1 year because of your own experiences repeating grade 1?

Layla: Well ... they say you won’t remember and I do remember it. I remember the older kids saying “Weren’t you in class or in playschool with me?” ... people still remember and I didn’t want that for Rema.

Over dessert, I share my discomfort at a new rule in Noor’s Islamic school that girls in junior high must wear the hijab as part of their school uniform, “I teach Noor wearing hijab is a *choice* she can make out of deep faith, but what do they do? They force it.” Layla responds:

Layla: My parents didn’t even discuss the hijab when we were growing up, my Mom didn’t wear it until she was 45. When I wore it, my Dad was so proud. I think he’s proud that we did it without them ever saying anything about it. This generation and our parents’ generation is so different though ... I think my Mom wore it out of a sense of, “Ok, I’m now 45 years old and maybe it’s time,” it’s more of a cultural thing whereas lots of these girls are doing it for the faith part, not the cultural part of it ...

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<sup>156</sup> The Arabic word for the Arabic language.

Maya: I'm going to do it before graduation ...

Layla: Insha'Allah, you never know Maya ... and it's funny that you say that now, because remember not too long ago you said you never want to wear it? [laughing]

Maya: [Laughing] First of all, I was a brat back then. But I'm going to wear it one day anyways so maybe I should just start early ...

Layla: But don't make your decision based on what you *think* you'll feel ... it's day by day. Because it's a hard decision to put it on too, right? And thinking "I might as well just do it" might not be the best way to make a big decision [laughing] ...

Maya: [Laughing] But you know that hijabi figure skater Zahra Lari? She's my hero ... I even wrote about her for school.

Layla: That's amazing, what made you write about her?

Maya: Because she's a hijabi sister who skates! [Everyone laughing] And I love how she doesn't care what people think about her.

### Retellings

#### **"It was work, work, work" (Layla, Summer 2016)**

I resonate with many of the stories Layla shared of her childhood experiences. I think of how Layla said, "It was work, work, work ... we grew up in The Ma7hal," and remember how, during our first conversation in Tree Town, Layla said that her earliest memories were of being in The Ma7hal her parents still own:

We were there all the time ... and I remember even when we weren't there, because we used to live right behind The Ma7hal, My Mom would use the back alley and bring us food back and forth and we used to sneak away too, back and forth ...

I said, "I know what you mean, us too, my Dad's ma7hal is still a huge part of our lives," Layla replied, "And now our ma7hal in Tree Town is a big part of our lives Subhan Allah." Maya expressed resonance with our experiences as ma7hal kids, "Yeah, I grew up in our ma7hal."

Another “me too” moment for me was when, in the fall of 2016, Layla explained some of the memories and events she had represented in her newly constructed annal:

Layla: One of my earliest memories is when my Dad’s family came [from Lebanon] to live with us in First Town ... I was 5 [years old] maybe?

Sara: I was in grade 7, so you were closer to 7 [years old] I think ...

Me: Yeah, I was around 10 years old when my Dad’s family came to live with us.

I felt another heady sense of resonance with Layla when she later explained how becoming a mother helped her to lovingly travel to her Mom’s worlds (Lugones, 1987):

I feel like my Mom was so busy with everyone all the time and that our relationships with her suffered because of it ... we’re close now but she didn’t have the time to be that close with us back then, she was so busy taking care of everyone else ... it took us as adults, becoming Moms, to realize that that’s why my Mom wasn’t able to develop the kind of relationships we saw other Moms and daughters developing ... she really just didn’t have the time for it! She was taking care of too many people, just think about it, *nine* people from my Dad’s side coming and living with us ... and I think about what she went through and I don’t think I could’ve done it.

Thinking about how my Mom and I grew a closer relationship after I became a Mom, and of how arrogantly I had perceived my Mom’s worlds growing up<sup>157</sup>, I replied, “Yeah, my Mom juggled our ma7hal and so many people in our house when we were growing up ... I don’t know how she does everything she still does mash’Allah.”

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<sup>157</sup> Discussed in the “Travelling to Mama’s Worlds” section in Chapter 1.

As I think about learning to travel to my Mom's worlds, and Layla describing gaining a more loving perception (Lugones, 1987) of her Mom's worlds, I think about the stories of motherhood that are rooted so deeply in us. Alongside our mothers' love and care for us, we have also learned about maternal selflessness and self-sacrifice, plotlines that are all too present in dominant stories of (good) motherhood (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Gore, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007; Rich, 1976/1986). I think of Layla saying, "We have so much stuff going on, I honestly don't have time to take care of myself too," and of how I have been trying to negotiate parenting, school, and household responsibilities in the midst of sleepless nights. I think of our wonderment at how our mothers contended with so many responsibilities alongside raising us ... and I wonder if Layla and I have more in common with our Moms than we realize.

**"I'm worried that her generation is going to lose their A3raby" (Layla, Fall 2015)**

I think back to when Layla, drawing upon her experiences of repeating her grade 1 year, expressed guilt about "agreeing to repeat Rema's grade 1 year" because, "they say you won't remember and I do remember it ... people still remember and I didn't want that for Rema." While Layla said that she agreed to repeat Rema's grade 1 year because she believed it will "give her more time" to grow socially and academically, Layla has repeatedly expressed her discomfort at the thought of Rema experiencing the embarrassment Layla felt as a result of repeating grade 1. In the fall of 2016, as we discussed the annals Maya and Layla had just composed, Layla described repeating grade 1 as "a bad time in [her] life":

Layla: A bad time in my life was getting put back in grade 1 ... I think I didn't feel bad at the time, but then when I was older, thinking "I went to school with these kids and now I'm with these younger kids, how embarrassing" ... I was always the oldest in class.

Maya: But Rema's age is really close to the rest of the grade 1's ...

Layla: I know it wasn't that big of a deal, but it's just me, some self-esteem stuff, right?

Earlier, in the fall of 2015, Layla explained that she repeated her grade 1 year because she only spoke A3raby at home before going to school:

Layla: I got put back in grade 1 because I only talked A3raby before I got to school ... and I remember getting special help, like going to another class, we used to always go with a teacher to another room and read and stuff like that ...

Me: I remember getting pulled out of class in grade 1 too.

Layla: I got pulled out of class all the time and I remember getting embarrassed, just hating it so much ... it was just so embarrassing.

Me: I know ... you didn't have problems with English at school, did you Maya?

Maya: No, because I barely spoke A3raby ...

Layla: I feel bad because I feel my kids don't speak A3raby as well as they should.

Layla's comment that she feels "bad because [her] kids don't speak A3raby as well as they should" was later elucidated in a telephone conversation with me in the winter of 2016.

Discussing her work alongside Syrian newcomer families in Tree Town, Layla said:

I'm worried that Maya's generation is going to lose their A3raby, I tell her, "See how we talk to our grandparents and can help translate? Or when I went to the school and translated for [girl in school]? Or when I went to help Syrian families who came to Tree Town?" I want her to be able to do things like that when she's older ...

Later in our conversation, I began to get the sense that Layla's fears of her children "los[ing] their A3raby" are intricately connected to her memories of repeating grade 1, memories Layla repeatedly described as "embarrassing." For, while Layla attributes repeating grade 1 to her lack

of proficiency in English, she worries that her children will experience a reverse hardship – experiencing embarrassment because of their lack of proficiency in A3raby:

Layla: Alhamdulillah, we have to be so grateful for our kids ... like my biggest worry right now Alhamdulillah is just the A3raby ... especially Maya, if she thinks it's not coming out of her mouth properly, she doesn't want to say it, she doesn't want to even try it, because she's a perfectionist right? ... And unfortunately, when we're together, ninety percent of our talk is in English right?

Me: Yeah, us too ...

Layla: I don't want her to ever feel put down ... because I hear things like, "Oh, why don't they know how to speak A3raby?".... it's not the end of the world or anything, but at the same time I just want her to have that card in her hand, so that nobody ever puts her down and says, "Oh my God, you don't know A3raby?"

As Layla discussed her myriad efforts to help her children learn A3raby, including computer software, private lessons, and planning an upcoming trip to visit with relatives in Lebanon, I was reminded of how Layla encourages her children to pursue multiple activities, and passions and also of the Toys R Us room that she lovingly maintains for her children. I think about how I ensured that Noor and Yehia are well-versed in swimming and skiing – activities I wish I could have participated in as a child. I think of Layla saying, "I wish for our daughters something different" ... and I wonder how often we try to mother in ways that shield our children from the challenges, disappointments, and/or embarrassments we experienced growing up?

### **"I just love my hijabi sisters!" (Maya, Summer 2016)**

I think about how Layla cautioned Maya against donning the veil without thoughtful consideration, "Don't make your decision based on what you *think* you'll feel ... it's day by day. Because it's a hard decision to put it on too, right?" Layla's comment takes me back to when, as

we engaged in conversation around their annals in my home in the fall of 2016, Layla said that, shortly after giving birth to Maya, she decided to don the veil following a conversation she had with a close friend:

She was just diagnosed with cancer and I was like, “How are you laughing when you have cancer and you have two kids?” And she was like, “Battikkul a3la Allah [Arabic for ‘I put my faith and trust in Allah’] and wearing hijab is a part of it.” And I’d go home and cry and think about it and ... she was alive when I wore hijab and it was because of her, how brave and amazing she was ... But I’m glad I did it when I was young and innocent, because I think that the older you get, the harder it is to put on.

Layla discussed experiencing hardship in relation to her hijab soon after she donned it. Before she and Mahmoud eventually decided to move to Tree Town, Layla talked about living in Second Town, another small town in Alberta, for only three months “We moved to Second Town and that was absolutely terrible, we lived there for only a few months ... everyone called me Khalto<sup>158</sup> and Sittoo and Hajji because I’m hijabi.” I remember being surprised at Layla’s words, asking, “But I remember seeing lots of hijabis in Second Town when I went there a few years ago?” Layla responded, “Then maybe things have changed, because when I was there, other people, *Muslims*, made fun of me for wearing it so young.” Shaking my head, I said, “Subhan Allah, I can almost understand when people who don’t know much about Islam give you a hard time about it, but it’s even more disturbing when other Muslims do it.” Layla responded, “But Muna, that’s the thing ... a lot of people in Second Town *didn’t* know much about Islam.”

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<sup>158</sup> See the *Glossary of Arabic and/or Islamic Terms* in Appendix A.

Layla’s gentle rejoinder reminds me of how, during our lunch conversation, Layla said, “This generation and our parents’ generation is so different ... lots of these girls are [donning hijab] for the faith part, not the cultural part of it.” I feel a sense of resonance with Layla’s words because I remember how, when I tried to wear the hijab in grade 6 and then again in grade 8, many relatives chided me for acting like a “Khityara [Arabic for ‘old lady’].” For many of my relatives at that time, observing hijab was considered a cultural, rather than faith-based, practice that was reserved for elders in our communities. For my family and for Layla’s family, however, inter- and cross-generational culture-based perceptions of hijab and other Islamic practices have shifted alongside advancements in literacy, increased construction and availability of Islamic centres in Canada and around the globe, the advent of the world-wide web, and unprecedented availability and access to (Islamic) texts in many different languages.

I smile as I remember how, discussing the Summer Olympics of 2016, Maya, Layla, and I marvelled at young female athletes in hijab representing multiple countries in multiple fields:

Me: Subhan Allah, our children are seeing women in hijab doing amazing things like that Alhamdulillah ...

Layla: All over the world. And that it doesn’t stop them from doing what they want to do. Maya knows it won’t stop her for doing what she wants to do if she chooses to wear it.

Maya: I just love my hijabi sisters! [Everyone laughing]

I think of Maya choosing to write about Zahra Lari, a veiled Muslim figure skater, as her (s)hero for a school assignment ... and I wonder if Maya sees a version of herself growing in the light that Zahra Lari casts for other Muslim girls and women?



Figure 5-8. Maya’s charcoal art.

## Rooting Stories of Being and Becoming Alongside Maya and Layla – Fall 2016

*Alhamdulillah for Sara*, I think as Maya, Layla, Noor, and I settle into our seats at my kitchen table. Yehia and Sara and Layla's younger children have already filled their plates with the snack foods spread across the table and, just as we were about to follow suit, Hannah began pulling my hand to indicate that she wanted to go outside. Understanding what Hannah was urgently asking of me, Sara offered to sit outside with Hannah so that Layla, Maya, and I could engage in discussion. Listening to the sounds of Hannah playing outside, I say *Alhamdulillah* once again for Sara's friendship.

Layla and I talk about how busy things have been since Eid Al-Adha<sup>159</sup>, and we then laugh at how Rema and Jamal convince Maya to spray the whipped topping intended for the strawberries straight into their mouths. Layla exclaims, "Oh my God, they're so embarrassing, that's the only way they like to eat it!" Still laughing, I ask Maya how the first few weeks of her grade 7 year have been:

Maya: It's been pretty good, but I was not really excited the first day ...

Layla: She was nervous ...

Maya: Yeah, I was really nervous the first day.

Layla: And now?

Maya: I'm excited to go to school and don't like the long weekend ...

Layla: And how about your old friends?

Maya: My old friends just went away from me and I was like whatever ...

Me: Really?

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<sup>159</sup> The two Muslim feasts/festivals/holidays are celebrated to commemorate important events in the Islamic lunar calendar. Eid Al-Fitr is celebrated after the completion of the holy month of Ramadan and, a few months later, Eid Al-Adha is celebrated after the completion of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, during the holy month of Dhul Hijjah.

Maya: Yeah ...

Layla: Because she was excited to see her other friends.

Maya: Yeah they stopped talking to me. I say “Hi” to them and they don’t say “Hi” back.

Surprised, I ask Maya, “They weren’t impressed that you were making new friends?” She replies, “I don’t know ... I don’t know why. They don’t tell me ... they don’t even text me anymore or anything ... they just stopped talking to me.” Layla interjects, “Maya made a lot of new friends from Grade 5 and 6 Camps and from skating ... they [old friends] kind of stuck together but she made new friends.” Maya exclaims, “Because I’m nice to everyone!”

Maya begins talking about how much she’s enjoying junior high school so far, “Learning to open my lock was crazy but fun [laughing].” She continues, “And there’s a lot of different teachers and I like that ... because if I don’t like a teacher I still have a lot more teachers ... but I like all my teachers so far.” Laughing, Maya continues, “On the first day [of school], I screamed at [older brother] Ahmed, “Hey twin!” so loudly at the assembly, and he was like [unimpressed face].” Layla laughingly says, “He was like, ‘Who are you? I don’t know you [sarcastic tone].””  
Maya continues talking about some of her junior high experiences:

Maya: And all the girls from Ahmed’s grade come and talk to me and I’m like, “I don’t know you, but okay ...”

Layla: They’re maybe just trying to be nice ...

Maya: Like one time I was in class, and this girl in his grade walked by and was like, “I like that girl Maya,” and I was thinking, “I don’t even know who you are,” but I was like [giving exaggerated thumbs up sign] ...

Layla: [Laughing] It can be like that when you have an older brother that girls like ... And Ahmed keeps an eye out for her too, like when this one kid wanted to hug her ...

Maya: Yeah this boy from my class literally said, “Let me hug you so your brother can get mad,” but I wouldn’t let him hug me.

Layla: And when Maya told Ahmed about it at home, Ahmed texted that kid and said, “Don’t you ever do that again.”

Maya: And the next day, that boy was like, “I hate your brother, he’s such an asshole.”

Sara and Hannah join us at the table as I ask Maya and Layla to construct annals of their experiences as emotional ‘highs’ and ‘lows’, discussed earlier. As Maya and Layla compose their annals, Layla and Sara reminisce about their childhood:

Layla: I have a lot of ‘highs’ ... wallah we had a lot of good times ...

Sara: I remember thinking that we were so happy growing up ...

Layla: Yeah and I always tell my husband that I want my kids to feel the way that I felt growing up ... like Rema tells everyone that her Dad’s the President ...

Me: The what? [Laughing]

Layla: She tells everyone that her Dad’s the President [laughing] ... I don’t know of what ... and I think, Subhan Allah the way that kids see their Dads and how important it is for them to be able to love and respect them ...

Sharing parts of her annal later in our conversation, Maya says, “Some of the best times in my life were at my Dad’s ma7hal.” She continues, “And I remember how me and [childhood best friend] Yasmeen we were always at her Dad’s ma7hal ... and then we would go to the back of my Dad’s ma7hal and play all the time, every day.” After Layla and Maya discuss the deep valleys in both their annals after Maya’s Tata’s passing (Allah yirhama), Layla says,

We learned to appreciate life and our family a little bit more ... So Subhan Allah, there was good and bad that came from it. Mahmoud changed because of it, with me, he’s more appreciative because he sees how his Dad is so sad over his Mom, Allah Yirhama.

After two hours of conversation, Layla announces that they have to leave to visit with friends and family for Eid. Wishing each other “Eid Mubarak<sup>160</sup>” again, Layla, Maya, Sara, and I hug and promise to see each other soon. Closing the door, my heart is singing *Alhamdulillah* for many blessings, and for the love and joy that seem to blossom in Maya and Layla’s presence.

### **Retellings**

#### **“I’m nice to everyone” (Maya, Multiple Conversations)**

While Maya said “I was like ‘whatever’” as she shared her experiences with being ignored by her childhood friends in the first few weeks of her grade 7 year, she later said, in the winter of 2017, that she was hurt and confused by their treatment,

This year has been kind of hard because I would smile at my elementary friends in the hallways and they wouldn’t say anything ... we used to be really close and they would tell me their secrets and I would tell them mine and now we barely even talk.

During a dinner conversation alongside Maya, Layla, and Sara in the fall of 2016, Layla shared stories of her changing friendships and of being considered part of “The Popular Group”:

Maya: I guess I’m part of [using air quotes] The Popular Group this year ...

Sara: What does it mean to be popular?

Maya: [Theatrical whisper] I don’t know ... everyone says that I’m part of [using air quotes] The Popular Group but I’m like, “What? I don’t get it” ... my elementary friends have all stayed friends and I’ve moved on ... but I’m still very nice to them.

Layla: But are they mad at you do you think?

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<sup>160</sup> This is a common Islamic saying during Eid celebrations. It means, ‘May you have a blessed Eid.’

Maya: Kind of.

Sara: And how does that make you feel?

Maya: [Shrugging] I'm just like, okay if they're mad at me just because I made new friends, whatever, that's okay ...

Me: So you wanted a change, and to hang out with different people at that point?

Maya: Yeah, Yasmeen was kind of changing, but two of them are *way* different than they used to be ... Me and Jessica are still best friends because we're neighbours and both of us are figure skaters, and Yasmeen and me are best friends because we grew up together and our families are really close, but these two other girls, they just want to party and hang out with boys and stuff. And this year they didn't make any new friends, but they tell me, "You're friends with everyone," and I'm like, "Because I'm nice to everyone."

Later, in the winter of 2017, Maya expressed her frustration at "The Popular Group" being replaced by the label "The *It* Group" and "The Plastics"<sup>161</sup> to describe her group of friends:

Maya: I'm friends with almost everyone at school and they know I joke in a funny way, and they know I'm not a mean girl and they don't take my jokes personally ... I don't take it too far. But everyone calls me and my friends "The *It* Group" and ...

Layla: See, I don't like the label they gave you guys ... who came up with that name?

Maya: [Names a student in her school]

Layla: But did your friends like that name? Were they happy with it? Or did somebody tell them that that's who they are?

Maya: No, they don't think of themselves as "The *It* Girls" or anything ... other kids started calling us "The *It* Group" and "The Plastics" because all the girls I'm friends with are pretty and popular ... and everyone is like, "Oh, they're so mean" and I'm like, "No they're not, you don't even know them!" ... it's not fair.

In the winter of 2016, reminding me of her belief that people shouldn't "judge a book by its cover," Maya shared the following wisdom after I asked her what advice she would give to other girls transitioning to grade 7:

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<sup>161</sup> This is a reference to the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*. In the movie, the 'mean girls' were a group of pretty, popular girls labelled "The Plastics."

Don't listen to other people's opinions about others. Like one of my friends, people would talk about how snobby she is, but she's so nice ... because I got to know her before I judged her ... so get to know someone before you judge them.

As I (re)consider Maya's words, I wonder at the way she used air quotes at the labels "The Popular Group" and "The *It* Group" to describe her new friends. I think of how often Maya has stressed that she's "nice to everyone" and cautioned against judging others before getting to know them ... and I think of how difficult negotiating her grade 7 year must be for Maya, not only because of the way her long-time friends reacted after she made new friends, but also at the way she and her new friends have been arrogantly perceived and labelled.

**"We look like twins!" (Maya, Summer 2016)**

Thinking of Maya's story of a boy in class wanting to hug her to annoy her older brother Ahmed, and of how Maya confided in Ahmed about being made to feel uncomfortable, I think of the close relationship Maya shares with Ahmed. While Layla's comment during our conversation that "Ahmed keeps an eye out for her," might initially give a sense of Maya being surveilled at school by her brother, Layla later shared how she appreciates the ways Maya "helps to watch out for Ahmed too." In response, Maya laughingly shared stories of ensuring that Ahmed goes to school and classes on time and of reviewing his social media feeds, "I'm keeping him on track!"

Maya repeatedly laughed at her stories of/with Ahmed, including one in the winter of 2016 that she and Layla shared as they discussed Maya's hopes of being on the junior high honour roll in grade 7. Maya laughingly said, "Ahmed gets on there because of his looks!" and Layla replied, "I've got teachers telling me how good looking he is, and I'm like, 'Umm, he's

13' ... and next year they'll be in school together, so we'll see how that goes." Several months later, as we enjoyed iftar at Sara's home in the summer of 2016, Maya talked about looking forward to her grade 7 year alongside her "twin":

Maya: I think it'll be okay ... well, it's just that lots of people know me from skating and stuff and my brother ... and the girls are so weird [laughing] they literally try to follow me on Instagram and try to be my friend and I'm like "I don't know you."

Me: He's adorable though, you can't blame them [laughing] ...

Maya: We look like twins! [laughing]

A few weeks later, as Maya, Layla, and I were preparing to wrap up our lunch conversations late in the summer of 2016, Layla encouraged Maya to share a recent experience that troubled her:

Layla: Don't shut off the recorder yet Muna, let Maya tell you about how she was upset because she felt like some girls were being her friend because of her older brother ...

Maya: Yeah, because everyone has a crush on Ahmed, like everyone! And now one girl is trying to talk to me ... we were really good friends in grade 3 because people would bully her and I would stick up for her and then in grade 4 she went to another school, and then in grade 6 she wanted to start talking again ... and then I saw her on Ahmed's Instagram and she would always write thing like "Hot" ... I was like, "What?" ...

Layla: I told her that it will probably work both ways, where people will maybe talk to Ahmed to get closer to you and vice versa ... Because lots of these girls are crushing on Ahmed and when they find out she's his sister, they'll try to get close to her ... and I told her to be careful, like not to think everyone is using her, but to be careful.

In the fall of 2016, a few months into Maya's grade 7 year, I asked Maya if she still feels like girls sometimes try to get close to her to try to get closer to Ahmed. She replied:

That was in the beginning of the year, because there were a couple of girls who would just go after my brother right away ... so after that, I felt like my friends sometimes talk to me just to go after Ahmed ... but the girls I'm friends with now, they stay loyal to their girlfriends and aren't that obsessed about boys, and that's nice ... and I know that a lot of

people like me because of me, because I'm pretty chill [laughing] ... I'm not stuck up and annoying, I just go with the flow and I'm funny.

While Maya loves Ahmed, she often expressed worry that people would try to befriend her to get closer to her handsome older brother. However, the last time Maya spoke of her friends, it was with confidence in her ability to make friends who she said “like me for me.”

**“Subhan Allah the way that kids see their Dads” (Layla, Summer 2016)**

Layla's comment, “Subhan Allah the way that kids see their Dads” as we laughed at the adorable way that Rema tells other children that her Dad is “the President,” brings to mind the multiple times that Layla and Maya have shared their stories of Maya's Dad, Mahmoud. During our conversation in the summer of 2016, Layla said that Mahmoud has “changed” since Maya's Tata died, “With me, he's more appreciative because he sees how his Dad is so sad over his Mom Allah Yirhama.” I am reminded of how, in the winter of 2016, Mahmoud advised Layla to “just ignore” the judgements and comments from family members who were unimpressed with Maya's skating costumes and how Layla felt surprised, but supported, by his encouragement.

As we spoke on the phone in the winter of 2016, Layla laughingly shared stories of Mahmoud negotiating parenting a girl who is in the process of becoming a woman:

He made me laugh the other day, he was looking at the Visa bill and asked me, “What is all this stuff from Le Vie En Rose and Pink<sup>162</sup>?” and I was like, “It was stuff for Maya,” and she was standing right there and he was like, “Oh okay, yeah, get whatever you want

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<sup>162</sup> Retail stores that sell undergarments and lingerie.

Baba<sup>163</sup>.” [Laughing] He doesn’t want to hurt her ... he’s tougher on the boys, but with Maya he wants her to enjoy herself, you know? And she told him the other day, “Oh Baba, I got 91 percent on my test the other day,” and he’ll say, “Oh mash’Allah, I’m proud of you” ... she likes that encouragement from him and tries to make him proud.

A few weeks later, during a dinner conversation in Sara’s home, Maya shared, “I tell my Dad about my marks and he’s always like ‘Keep it up’ ... he knows I’m smart [laughing].”

In the winter of 2017, during a late-night conversation in Sara’s home, Layla and Maya laughed at how Mahmoud jokingly intimidates boys who might be interested in his daughters:

Layla: Maya was sitting at a restaurant with a whole group of kids, girls and boys, and her Dad didn’t say anything. I was surprised actually ... because Mahmoud is the kind of guy who, if a kid goes to the ma7hal, will ask him, “Hey, do you know my daughter Maya?” and if he says yes, Mahmoud will say, “Okay, well don’t talk to her.” [Laughing]

Maya: Yeah, every boy in my class, I tell him, “If you go to my Dad’s shop, don’t tell him you know me.” [laughing]

Layla: Yeah it’s a joke now, because even when they’re really young, like for Rema, when a kid goes to his shop, he’ll ask, “Do you know Rema? Don’t talk to her,” and the Moms and Dads will laugh and say, “Oh my God, your husband is so funny.” [laughing]

After many seasons of inquiring alongside Layla and Maya, I have a strong sense that Layla’s belief that the relationships girls have with their fathers is important stems from Layla’s love and respect for *her* Dad. In the fall of 2015, as we engaged in conversation in Maya’s grandparents’ home, Layla described her Dad as “more understanding” and “modern” than many of her extended family members, “He wanted us get our driver’s licenses and to finish school and get jobs ... he got us cars as soon as we could drive.” Later, in the summer of 2016, Layla

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<sup>163</sup> An Arabic way of saying ‘my child.’

shared that, in her family, her Dad was “the person who would sit with us and talk to us” and how Mahmoud, whose father was “tough,” learned to appreciate her Dad’s style of parenting,

The way I grew up was so different than the way Mahmoud was raised, it was more of a learning approach rather than a tough one, and I feel like Mahmoud understands that and he sees how we all respect my Dad, and he tries to be like that too.

While our inquiry centered around the experiences of Muslim mothers and daughters during this time of significant life transition, the stories Maya and Layla shared of their Dads, and the stories other co-inquirers shared of their (grand)fathers, brothers, husbands, and uncles make me wonder about the ways that male family members shape the lives and experiences of girls and women.

### **Rooting Transition Stories alongside Maya and Layla – Fall 2016**

I smile at Sara, Layla, and Maya as I open Layla’s car door. Sliding into the back seat beside Maya, I laughingly urge, “Hurry Layla, let’s go before they call me back!” Laughing, Layla drives away from my house and towards my favourite restaurant. When Layla, Sara, and Maya invited me out for lunch a few days ago, I had originally said, “Maybe we can have lunch at my house instead ... Sunday afternoons are hard for me because Wissam usually gets home from work at around 6 in the evening.” Hearing me talking on the phone, Noor offered, “Mama, you can go out with your friends, I’ll look after Hannah.” Tears welling my eyes at her thoughtfulness, I said, “Are you sure Noor? Maya will be coming too and I know you like hanging out with her.” Noor relied, “It’s okay, I can hang out with her another time insha’Allah.” Marveling at her maturity and kindness, I hug Noor and say, “Thank you so much habibty.”

As we look over the familiar menu, Maya reaches into her bag and hands me her journal and sketchbook, “I wrote a few more things in my journal and made some charcoal and watercolour art<sup>164</sup>.” Sara, Layla, and I appreciate Maya’s artwork:

Layla: She’s very good at drawing and painting ...

Sara: So talented ...

Me: It’s beautiful Maya ... what were you thinking about when you made this?  
[watercolour of a tree – this artistic work is displayed on the first page of this account]

Maya: I just love trees and drawing them and the whole design and look of circles ...

Layla: So you can maybe use it as a cover of your book ... I feel bad that we’re so busy and Maya doesn’t really have the time to make more of her art ...

Maya: And I love this one [watercolour of an elephant with a flower crown displayed earlier in this chapter] because I love elephants. And me and [neighbour and best friend] Jessica did this one together [watercolour of half a tree displayed on the last page of this chapter] ... we each painted half of the same tree.

Me: I love them all Maya ... they will look beautiful in our chapter insha’Allah.

Maya offers to read the last entry of her journal, and we listen as she reads with quiet confidence:

I’m in the second month of grade 7 and I really like it ... I’ve been doing pretty good from the last time I wrote. I don’t think I’ve changed much but I did get taller I guess.

This year I was so happy for fall but it snowed early ... but that’s Canada for you.

Smiling at Maya’s words, I say, “I wonder if we can revisit that first entry you wrote? The one of your favourite things?” We laugh as Maya edits the over-a-year-old list of her favourite things, “Oh my God, unicorns, rainbows, and bows? Nah [scratches them out], and I’m going to take out

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<sup>164</sup> Maya’s artwork is displayed throughout this narrative account.

baseball and write basketball instead.” Explaining that she’s now on her school’s basketball team and thinking of joining other school teams, Maya adds rugby and hockey to her list.

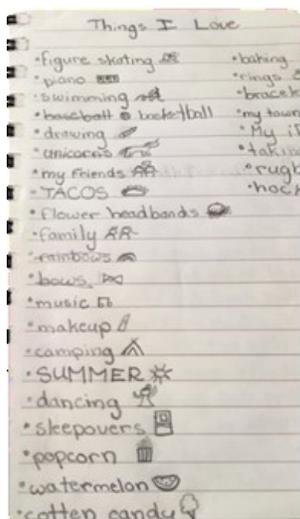


Figure 5-9. Maya’s revised list of favourite things.

We discuss other changes Maya has experienced in her transition from elementary to junior high school, with Maya surprising me with a forward-looking story of being an orthodontist:

Me: So Maya, you said you don’t think you’ve changed that much in the past year ...

Layla: But you have ... I feel like she’s all about her friends, yes, but school is still very important to her, she’s a go-getter ... she’s more mature and knows what she wants.

Maya: School is the most important thing ... and that comes with being a braces person.

Me: A braces person?

Maya: Yeah, an orthodontist.

Layla: [Laughing] She watches these videos on root canals and how to do braces ...

Maya: And wisdom teeth.

Layla: She’s preparing herself for her future ... the other day she was like, “Mama, look how they did this root canal!”

Maya: No, wisdom teeth ... with a root canal, they drill the teeth ... I love it. Anytime I see anyone with braces I’m like, “Let me see your teeth?” [laughing]

Later, after Maya shares how her relationships with elementary school friends have changed, Layla mentions how it is sometimes hard to negotiate relationships with other Moms. She shares a story of a relative expressing annoyance that her daughters' friends seem to really like hanging out with Maya:

Layla: That's not fair, like Maya wouldn't care if [the woman's daughter] hit it off with her friends ... sometimes family can be hard to deal with too.

Me: And I was just reading an article, Subhan Allah, about how important it is to teach our kids to be wary of emotional manipulators, people that don't want you to be friends with others and try to control you ...

Layla: Yeah and there's a lot of that in our families ...

Me: We were taught to be trusting and that it's okay if someone mistreats you when it's people in our families who aren't being kind ... they love you so it's okay ...

Layla: Just suck it up.

Sara: Because you have to be respectful.

Me: It's not our place to not like it.

Layla: Yeah, exactly.

As we enjoy our meals, Layla and Maya share a story of a family friend who storied Maya's love of attending school sports games in an unsettling way:

Layla: So Maya and some girls went to watch the game, and Yasmeen's Mom goes there and texts me, "Your daughter is not in the gym." So I texted Maya, "Where are you?"

Maya: I was at a friend's locker.

Layla: Because A3mto said she seen you with boys.

Maya: I'm with my friend at her locker and these boys were following us and even asked us to sit with them and I was like "No."

Layla: But Yasmeen's Mom took it that these guys are hanging out with them ... so she called me after the game and I told her that Maya said that these boys were following her and she was like, "I was going to tell you but I wanted to see if she would tell you first."

Maya: I got really mad ...

Layla: She was like, “Don’t get mad at me, but your daughter doesn’t really watch the game” ...

Maya: No duh. It’s boring. We suck. [laughing]

Layla: And I don’t like that about A3rabs, like when they see a girl talking to boys, they think that there’s something going on, and I don’t like that. I used to talk to boys all the time and they were just friends. My teacher’s son used to drive me to work experience every day because I was like, “Hell no, I’m not walking all that way alone.” And it’s funny because my Dad knew but my Uncles didn’t know because they wouldn’t like it.

Shaking my head at Layla’s words, I say, “So true ... it’s not fair.” Layla continues,

You know, if someone doesn’t accept her for who she is and she has to hide things, then they can just get lost .... You know I have a friend that to this day, over ten years after she got married, still lies to her husband about being allowed to go to grad with one of the boys in her class ... *Why?* This is me. You want me for who I am? Great. You don’t? Hit the road Jack. This is how we live, I’m not going to hide or put on a lie for you.

### **Retellings**

#### **“Don’t say or do this or that” (Maya, Summer 2016)**

Re-reading our words that day, I think of the story Layla and Maya shared of the family friend who felt the need to make Layla aware of Maya’s whereabouts during the game. Still troubled by the way Yasmeen’s Mom arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) Maya’s actions, I think of the many stories Maya and Layla shared of being judged by others, often by those who are closest to them. In saying, “Don’t get mad at me, but your daughter doesn’t really watch the game,” Yasmeen’s Mom, who Layla considers one of her closest friends, knew that she was insinuating much more than Maya’s lack of interest in watching a sports game. For Layla, her words “were a slap in the face” because she was insinuating that Maya was more interested in

hanging out with boys than watching the game. As a Muslim and Arab woman who knows the cultural and religious implications of insinuating that a girl of Muslim and Arab heritage is not being truthful about her relationship with boys, Yasmeen's Mom knew that her words would be hurtful, but she nonetheless expressed her disapproval. Later, in the winter of 2017, Maya tearfully shared her pain at Yasmeen's Mom's arrogant perception of her actions, "She said that I always hang out with boys but my own brother who goes to school with me said that's not true!"

In the summer of 2015, during our first conversation in Tree Town, Maya and Layla shared another story of feeling judged. As we were engaging in conversation, I laughed as Maya and Noor posed for a selfie<sup>165</sup>. Layla incredulously asked, "Are you guys taking a selfie while we're talking?" Noor nonchalantly responded, "Yeah, I'm posting it on Snapchat." Maya added, "Mama, I just downloaded Snapchat." Layla replied, "Remember what A3mo did when you got Vine<sup>166</sup>?" Maya responded, "Yeah, he's so annoying." Layla and Maya explained:

Maya: So I posted a video of Jamal saying, "Heyy Girlll!" on my Vine [laughing] ...

Layla: And her Uncle must've seen it and he called Mahmoud, and was like, "Mahmoud, did you see what your daughter is doing?"

Me: For God's sake ... our girls are so policed ...

Layla: I know ...

Because of their experiences with Maya's Vine being policed by her Uncle, Layla felt it was important to remind Maya to be careful with her activities on social media.

As we engaged in inquiry, I started to get a heady sense that Maya was not the only one who felt policed by others' arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) – Layla often felt the same

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<sup>165</sup> A 'selfie' is a term used to describe a (typically digital) image people take of themselves.

<sup>166</sup> Vine is a social media application that allows users to share six-second videos.

way. Reminding me of the stories Layla shared of a female relative expressing disapproval at Maya's skating costumes, Layla and Maya shared the following story in the summer of 2016:

Layla: I just told [female relative], "I'm going to come get her from your house, because we have an appointment to do Maya's eyebrows," and she was like, "Why are you taking her to do them? She's still so young!" ... like *calm down*, it's not a big deal.

Maya: She is so [imitates relative] "Don't say or do this or that" ... it's so annoying.

The stories Layla and Maya shared of feeling policed by others' judgements resonate profoundly with my experiences of feeling judged as a girl, woman, and mother. I think of the countless times I have been told by those closest to me why something I do/say, or that my children do/say, is not appropriate. I think of how Layla and I discussed being raised to be quietly respectful/tolerant of loved one who try to 'advise' us, even if their 'lessons' are/were unfair and/or hurtful. While we both expressed annoyance with these early stories, they are deeply rooted in us. Contemplating the many arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) Maya, Layla, my children, and I have experienced, and will likely continue to experience, I think about how we can continue to disrupt these stories in ways that affirm our right to speak, act, and live in ways *we* deem appropriate, even (and maybe especially) if hurtful judgements come from loved ones.

### **"I can do anything" (Maya, Winter 2016)**

I smile as I think of Maya updating her list of favourite things in her journal, and of confidently expressing her dreams of becoming an orthodontist. Throughout our inquiry, I have admired Maya's quiet confidence, her passionate defence of the people she loves, and her ability to speak her mind. Maya has often shared her love of reading, writing, drawing, painting, skating, school, and sports and I have admired how she expresses her belief that she is good at

the activities she loves. I think I admire Maya's confidence most because, as a middle-aged woman and mother, I *still* find it difficult to have confidence in myself and my abilities.

In the winter of 2016, Layla expressed her admiration of Maya's love of learning, and Maya responded with her unique way of speaking with confidence, humour, and thoughtfulness:

Layla: She does so good in school, and I like that she cares and that she loves learning ...

Maya: At recess, I act funny because I'm obviously a funny person [laughing], and when I make a joke, everybody laughs and it's nice because I don't want to be that serious person who's annoying and controlling. But, in class when I need to listen, I listen.

In the fall of 2016, Maya laughed as she shared a few stories of her grade 7 experiences:

Okay, so at the school assembly, in front of the whole school, I accidentally walked into the boy's bathroom, and I was like, "Crap, this is the boys' bathroom!" And then when I walked into the girl's bathroom, I fell on the floor because I was laughing so hard [laughing] ... and when I walked out, I went and sat with my friends ... it was so funny.

I think about how Maya laughingly negotiated an experience that would have embarrassed others, once again meeting awkwardness with her confidence and humour.

During our conversation in the winter of 2016, I was reminded of Maya becoming more confident that her friends "like [her] because of [her]" after she has initially feared that some girls try to get close to her brother Ahmed by befriending her. After I asked Maya what advice she would give other girls transitioning into adolescence, she said:

Don't try to be someone else. I know this one girl who tries to be like other people and lots of people call her fake. Like you might think this girl is so great, and try to be like

her, but she's actually not who you think she was and less people will want to talk to you and you won't have many friends. You just have to be yourself basically.

In the winter of 2016, as we enjoyed dinner in Sara's home, Maya talked about feeling more confident than ever, "I can do anything, I can clean for myself, I can get a job for myself, I'm independent." I think of Maya resisting the single story of being part of "The *It* Group" by repeatedly emphasizing, "I'm nice to everyone," and I am reminded of the conversation Layla and I shared over the phone in the winter of 2016. Expressing her love and pride in Maya, Layla shares the changes she has noticed in Maya during her transition into adolescence:

I feel like she's gotten more kind and more understanding of where I'm coming from ... she's also helping me out more and she's just even a better person ... I'm so proud of her ... she knows what she wants and she's a good student and a good person mash'Allah.

Marveling at Maya's ability to maintain her confidence and humour amidst the ongoing arrogant perceptions of others, I remember the wisdom that Layla shared with me during a phone conversation in the winter of 2016,

I want my kids to *feel* my love and support. They already have enough to deal with without me adding more. They need to see their Mom supporting them and telling them that they're awesome and that they can do it. So that's what I try to do for them.

I think of how Maya and Layla taught me how important it is for me to regularly express my love and belief in, and support for, my children ... because one of my duaas as a mother is for Noor, Yehia, and Hannah to confidently believe in themselves and say, "I can do anything."

**“This is how we live, I’m not going to hide or put on a lie for you” (Layla, Fall 2016)**

As I continue to admire Maya’s confidence and Layla’s loving support of Maya, I am reminded of Layla’s assertion, “This is how we live, I’m not going to hide or put on a lie for you.” Layla’s belief that it is important to live unabashedly was elucidated during a conversation we shared in the winter of 2016. Discussing her fears of her children being judged because of their lack of proficiency in the Arabic language and/or Islamic scholarship, Layla said,

But then I think about it like, okay yeah we don’t have the Arabic and all the knowledge when it comes to Islam, but I feel like we’re *living* our faith ... I live in a way that shows that I’m not ashamed of being Muslim, especially here where I was the first woman to wear hijab ... and even with helping Syrian families in town, I try to help in whatever way I can. Allah gave me that chance Alhamdulillah.

Layla’s words bring to mind the countless stories she has shared, or that I have lived alongside her, of *living* her beliefs. During our lunch conversation in the summer of 2016, Layla interrupted Maya’s story when she felt that Maya was being judgemental of another girl, “Maya, it’s not nice to talk about other people like that ... there’s going to be a day when people talk about you and you don’t want that.”

I smile and think of Layla living her beliefs ... even when she would rather not. In the winter of 2016, Layla spoke of her recent experiences with her swimming instructor, laughingly saying, “She pushes me too hard.” Likely noticing my surprised look, Layla explained that a summertime scare motivated her to register in private swimming lessons:

Layla: We were on our boat and I really wanted to try to go on the tube, and Mahmoud was like, “Just put a lifejacket on and go, what’s the worst that can happen?” ... and so I went on but nobody told me not to put too much weight in the front and I did, so I started to panic and got scared and flipped into the water. And everybody started screaming! But then I calmed down and said, “Okay, this life jacket is going to work” ... and so I kept telling myself to stay calm and Mahmoud was yelling out, “Layla, you’re going to be fine! You just have to relax!” but I think it didn’t take me long to calm down ...

Maya: At first when you fell, you were scared, but Baba was coming and you were like [making calm face] ... and Rema was *screaming!*

Layla: Subhan Allah, when you hear your kid screaming, you calm down, she was *so* scared. When I fell, I couldn’t figure out what to do, so I just told myself, “Don’t move because the lifejacket will make me float” ... so anyway, when I went back to the beach, I was soaking wet and still shaking, and Rema was still so scared and was like, “Oh my God, are you okay Mama?” and I was trying to sound calm and was like, “Rema, look at me, I’m fine!” and inside I was like, “Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah!”

Maya: Mama, see what happens is, if something scares you once, it takes you a while to calm down, like if a big dog is chasing you, you will still be scared even after it’s gone ...

Layla: Yeah ... and you know, everything happens for a reason and maybe I needed to do something about my fear of being in the water.

While Layla could have chosen to stay away from large bodies of water, she instead decided that she needed to “do something” about her fears because “everything happens for a reason” and registered in private swimming lessons. Smiling as I type this, I marvel at Layla’s courage and at the rich curriculum she is composing (Huber et. al, 2011) alongside Maya, Ahmed, Adam, Rema, and Jamal as she lives her beliefs and faces her fears.

### **Epilogue: Nurturing Stories of Growth Alongside Layla and Maya – Winter 2017**

Carrying a tray of Tim Horton’s coffee drinks, I walk into Sara’s house and laughingly say, “I’m so happy to be here right now.” I had just put Hannah down for bed when I received a text from Sara on our shared WhatsApp group with Layla, “Hey, we’re going to be hanging out at my house tonight if you can come over.” I replied, “I’d love to. I’ll pick the Tims [coffee] up.”

About a half hour later, at close to 10 p.m., Maya and Layla rush through the door, Layla exclaiming, “Sorry we’re late! It took us forever to get away!”

As we settled into the living room couches with plates of snacks, Layla and Maya make me laugh as I try to talk about our research journey:

Me: I was thinking about how this is one of our last research conversations ...

Layla: I was thinking the other day about how bad I feel that you have to go back and listen to these conversations again [laughing] ... Maya, can you get closer to A3mto Muna’s phone so she can hear you later?

Maya: Want to listen to me chew A3mto Muna? [laughing as she chews near the phone]

Layla: [Laughing] This girl is so not me ... she’s social, but she’s so sarcastic too ...

Still laughing, I try again:

Me: [Laughing] Maya, remind me of the advice you gave to girls transitioning into grade 7 from the last time we talked ...

Maya: I think I said, “Be yourself” ... and something like, “Don’t let other people choose your friends?”

Me: I think you said, “Get to know someone before you judge them” ...

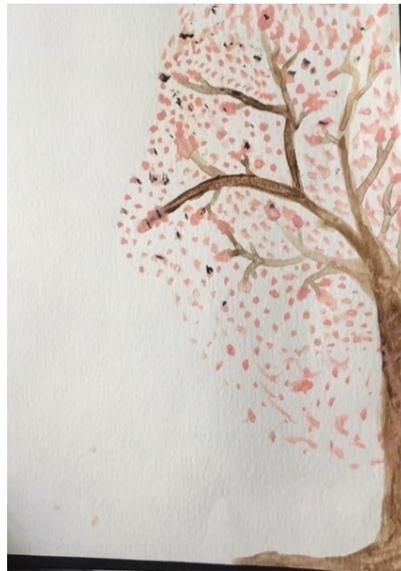
Maya: Yeah, because “The *It* Girls” are all my friends and they’re really nice ... and I think I’d tell them that I was really nervous and worried for nothing ... like you expect things to be like the movies and it’s not like that ... You have more freedom and you can talk to more people and make new friends ... like if someone isn’t working out for you as a friend, then you can get closer to someone else.

Complimenting Maya on her advice to other girls, Layla then offers advice to other mothers during their daughters’ transitions into adolescence:

I would tell mothers that their daughters should have more freedom but that you still have to guide them ... their bodies are changing, their thoughts are changing ... you don’t

always want to be saying “No, no, no, and haram<sup>167</sup>, haram, haram” ... let them live and have fun too ... I really try to be fair with Maya, she’s so good, and she cares about school, so why would I say “No” to everything that she wants? Why would I tell her “stay at home” while I’m dropping her brothers off to have fun with their friends? It doesn’t make sense. It’s not fair to let Ahmed do what he wants, so I expect the same things from them both ... and that’s where we sometimes go wrong in our community, we say that boys will be okay no matter what and girls need to be protected and that’s not fair ... so I would tell Moms to be fair and expect the same things from their children.

With Layla’s powerful words still resonating in the spaces around us, I check the time and am surprised to discover that it’s past midnight. Promising to see each other soon, we leave Sara’s house with hugs and more laughter. Getting into my car, I say Alhamdulillah once again for my relationships with Maya, Layla, and Sara, and driving back home along the familiar snowy roads, my heart dreams of spring.



*Figure 5-10. Maya’s watercolour art.*

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<sup>167</sup> Arabic word for forbidden.

## Chapter 6: Resonant Narrative Threads

Looking across the narrative accounts that I composed alongside Zahra, Ayesha, Rayyan, Safaa, Maya, and Layla, several resonant threads “that echoed and reverberated across” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 14) our accounts were made visible. Weaving my understandings of some of the stories that co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into throughout this chapter, I will explore three threads echoing across our narrative accounts<sup>168</sup>: *Composing Lives in the Midst of Arrogant Perceptions; Living Stories of Relational Resistance; and Imaginatively Composing Lives ... in relation*. It is important to note that this research should not be used to generalize about the experiences of Canadian Muslim girls and women, mothers and daughters, in the midst of life transitions. Rather, to understand our multilayered experiences, co-inquirers and I invite you to come alongside us and metaphorically lay the multiplicity of stories you live *by, with, and in*<sup>169</sup> (Clandinin, 2013) alongside the multiplicity of ours.

### Thread 1: Composing Lives in the Midst of Arrogant Perceptions

Reflecting upon coming alongside co-inquirers over the last two years, I think about my assumption – born of experiential, embodied knowing (Johnson, 1989) as a Canadian Muslim woman<sup>170</sup> – that co-inquirers would likely share stories of being made to feel judged and/or

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<sup>168</sup> While other threads may exist, I explore the threads that strongly resonated across our accounts.

<sup>169</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, the stories co-inquirers and I live *by, with, and in* (Clandinin, 2013) are interwoven – we are always in the process of simultaneously living *by, with, and in* multiple, often overlapping, stories. For example, Safaa lives *by* a story, that is, her identity, of being a Somali Canadian Muslim woman who advocates for herself and others. She lives *with* this story in relation to – and *in* the midst of – familial, intergenerational, faith-based/religious, and cultural stories of having the right and responsibility to advocate ... but, as will be discussed later in this chapter, she also lives *in* stories that expect her to be ‘good’ in some way. Because the stories we live *by, with, and in* are inexplicably interwoven, it is my intent to *show* their interconnectedness and the many ways we compose our lives in relation to these stories.

<sup>170</sup> I shared some of my experiences with discrimination in Chapter 1 and in our narrative accounts.

discriminated against as Muslim girls and women<sup>171</sup>. And I did hear these stories. My heart hurt as Rayyan and Safaa shared the story of a woman approaching Rayyan to say, “Don’t worry, when you’re 18 you won’t have to wear that [hijab] anymore.” I experienced resonant pain upon hearing that Rayyan’s eldest sister was told to “go home” by a belligerent man on a bus as she was returning home from school. I was disturbed by Safaa’s story of her daughter Sadia being made to feel uncomfortable in class by her teacher’s words about Muslim perpetrators of terror attacks. I shook my head in troubled indignation as Layla shared the story of an acquaintance’s online opinion post, “*They* need to do something, their people [other Muslims] need to stop them [ISIS/terrorists].” I felt waves of resonant sorrow when Ayesha and Zahra expressed how, in different ways and at different times, they have been made to feel the need to prove that they are ‘normal.’ Alongside mother co-inquirers, I puzzled about how to talk with our children during times of increased vitriol and rhetoric, particularly in the wake of several terror attacks<sup>172</sup> committed by those who identify as Muslim, and during the 2015 and 2016 Canadian and American federal election cycles.

However, while I was expecting to hear stories of feeling judged and/or discriminated against as Muslim girls and women, I was surprised by their stories of feeling arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) in many other ways, sometimes by those closest to them. I was surprised by my surprise, for I too have experienced multiple forms of arrogant perception. As a Muslim woman, mother, teacher, student, and scholar in hijab, I too have experienced arrogant

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<sup>171</sup> For Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, and Layla, as visibly Muslim girls and women who wear hijab.

<sup>172</sup> However, terror attacks in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia (which often target Muslims) do not typically provoke the international news coverage and/or global indignation that attacks committed in ‘Western’ nations call forth. Also, while terror attacks committed by those who identify as Muslim are extensively discussed and covered in the ‘West,’ the majority of attacks in the ‘West’ are overwhelmingly committed by those who do not identify as Muslim (Global Research, 2016).

gazes perceiving me as not Canadian/Muslim/critical/scholarly/good *enough* from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada.

While Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I have all, in different ways, expressed our frustration with contending with multiple forms of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987), I was not wakeful (Greene, 1995) to this deeply reverberating thread at first. Rather, it was a slow dawning of awareness following many months of inquiry alongside co-inquirers. The first time I puzzled with the idea of multiple forms of arrogant perception was in the winter of 2015. Deeply troubled by the story Rayyan and Safaa shared of a group of girls in Rayyan’s Islamic school calling her younger sister, Marwa, “dark chocolate” in a derogatory way – and of her teacher’s attempt to smooth over the racist intent behind their words – I wrote:

Sitting with the stories Rayyan and Safaa shared today, I’m so troubled and disgusted at how lip service is paid to Muslims being one Ummah<sup>173</sup> while racism and discrimination within Muslim communities is an often unacknowledged, silenced story. Friends and former students have shared countless stories of feeling discriminated against by other Muslims because of their race or cultural heritage or how ‘pious’ (or not) others deem them to be, and in so many other ways. (Field Notes, Winter 2015)

As our inquiries alongside one another deepened over the seasons, co-inquirers repeatedly called my attention to the array of arrogant perceptions they face from other Muslims. I think of Layla’s stories of being made to feel uncomfortable in Second Town because, as a woman in hijab, she was mockingly called ‘Sitto,’ ‘Hajji,’ and ‘Khalto’<sup>174</sup> by other Muslims.

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<sup>173</sup> The Arabic word *Ummah* is an Islamic concept of Muslims being intricately connected as one body, one community.

<sup>174</sup> See the *Glossary of Arabic and/or Islamic Terms* in Appendix A.

Rayyan, Zahra, and Maya also shared stories of contending with judgements or bullying by other Muslims girls and women. Rayyan's stories of experiences with racism, bullying, and discrimination include a deeply rooted story of being made to feel excluded by girls in her Islamic school kindergarten because classmates didn't approve of the traditional Somali lunches she brought from home. Later, in grade 7, Rayyan experienced verbal assault and physical intimidation from another girl at her Islamic school because of a perceived slight. At different times, Zahra shared stories of experiencing bullying, and of being storied as a 'bully,' by long-time friends and classmates from her elementary Islamic school. As our narrative account made visible, these stories continue to live in Zahra and are sometimes expressed in her uncertainty about if/when/how to speak up and share her opinions. For Maya, feeling judged and arrogantly perceived painfully stemmed from females within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada, including the mother of one of her best friends, a Muslim woman she has grown up referring to as 'A3mto'<sup>175</sup>.

### **Stories of 'Good' Girls and Mothers**

Reflecting upon the stories of arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) that co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside each other, I wonder about some of the expectations of what/who/how we *should* know/be/ behave, some of the stories of 'goodness,' we negotiated as Muslim girls and mothers. I consider how, while there are countless stories – constructed and enforced by different people, families, and communities – of who can be deemed a 'good' girl and mother, each construction involves the creation and perpetuation of a single story (Adichie, 2009) of 'goodness.' Inquiring alongside Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya has

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<sup>175</sup> Arabic word for 'Aunt.'

made me wakeful (Greene, 1995) to how (single)<sup>176</sup> stories of ‘goodness’ are undergirded by personal and social constructions of normativity (Goodwin & Huppertz, 2010<sup>177</sup>). Because these (single) stories can be deeply rooted, those considered to be on the margins of, or outside, the borders of constructions of ‘goodness’ can be arrogantly perceived as deficient or lacking in ‘goodness.’

The following sections make visible how co-inquirers and I experienced (single) stories of ‘goodness’ as any combination of the following constructions and expectations of who/how/what we *should* be/act /dress/know as (Muslim)<sup>178</sup> girls and mothers: modest, deferential, (should not) wear hijab, bilingual, nice, and selfless. However, considering the diversity of stories co-inquirers shared of their experiences in relation to (single) stories of ‘goodness’ as Muslim girls and mothers, it is important to note that these stories are neither fixed nor frozen; for, as Goodwin and Huppertz (2010) asserted, the form and expression of constructions of ‘goodness’ are rooted in ever-shifting personal, cultural, societal, geographic, and temporal/generational narratives, contexts, and expectations. Weaving the ideas of several theorists<sup>179</sup> and the stories co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside each other, the following sections make visible a number of (single) stories of ‘Good (Muslim)

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<sup>176</sup> I place brackets around ‘single’ because there are multiple and diverse single stories (Adichie, 2009) that are constructed, perpetuated, and enforced by different people, families, and communities of who can be deemed a ‘Good (Muslim) Girl/Mother.’

<sup>177</sup> While Goodwin and Huppertz (2010) discussed continually shifting stories of ‘good’ motherhood within Australian contexts, I draw on their work to better understand (single) stories of ‘goodness.’

<sup>178</sup> I place brackets around the word ‘Muslim’ to give a sense of the multilayered ‘Good Girl’ stories co-inquirers negotiated. As our narrative accounts and the next sections elucidate, co-inquirers faced multiple forms of ‘Good Girl’ stories from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada.

<sup>179</sup> The theorists and ideas I draw upon will be elucidated in the following sections.

Girls/Mothers’ we experienced from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada.

### **‘Good (Muslim) Girl’ Stories**

As I reconsider some of the stories of judgements and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) that Maya, Zahra, and Rayyan shared, I think of Brown and Gilligan’s (1992)<sup>180</sup> discussion of how girls “at the edge of adolescence” (p. 91) often experience increased expectations to be ‘good,’ and begin to un-know their knowing in their efforts to “connect to the world of adult shoulds.” During this time period, the authors posited, “Girls learn to separate what they know from what good girls should know, what they do from what good girls should do, what they feel and think from what nice girls should feel and think” (p. 91). As I sit with their words, however, I think about how Shweder et al. (2006)<sup>181</sup> cautioned against constructing universalized understandings of continually evolving selves – and the diversity within and across continually evolving cultures<sup>182</sup>. These authors help remind me that Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) study was undertaken in a very different context – in a different time and place, and alongside a

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<sup>180</sup> In their five-year study alongside one hundred participants between the ages of seven and eighteen from a private school in Cleveland, Brown and Gilligan (1992) discussed how adolescence marks a “crossroads in women’s development: a meeting between girl and woman, an intersection between psychological health and cultural regeneration, a watershed in women’s psychology which affects both women and men” (p. 1).

<sup>181</sup> Shweder et al. (2006) contended that considerable diversity can be found within and across cultural communities (including within and across families and familial practices). They also posited, Culture provides the scripts for “how to be” and how to participate as a member in good standing in the cultural community and particular social contexts. Simultaneously, cultural psychologists recognize that children and adults actively constitute their own cultures, initiating changes in their relations with others and thus in their immediate cultural settings. (p. 750)

<sup>182</sup> Shweder et al. (2006) cautioned against any attempts to “universally define progressive development using abstract criteria, for instance, from behavior to traits or from context-dependent to context-free” (p. 752).

different group of girls<sup>183</sup> – than this narrative inquiry. However, their discussion of narratives of ‘goodness’ nonetheless resonate with the stories co-inquirers lived and shared alongside me.

As I re-read Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) words twenty-five years after they published their work, I am struck by the thought that girls transitioning into adolescence may continue to face expectations of ‘goodness.’ I think of Maya’s stories of feeling policed in her use of social media by her Uncle, policed in her skating costumes by a female relative, and policed in her interactions with boys by her best friend’s mother. I recall how, in relation to the latter story, Layla said,

I don’t like that about A3rabs, like when they see a girl talking to boys, they think that there’s something going on ... I used to talk to boys all the time and they were just friends. My teacher’s son used to drive me to work experience every day .... And it’s funny because my Dad knew but my Uncles didn’t know because they wouldn’t like it.

Like Maya, Layla felt policed as a youth by the judgements and arrogant perceptions of *some* of her family members, for not all of the adults in Layla and Maya’s lives held/hold the same (single) stories about what a ‘Good (Muslim) Girl’ should know/be/do/say/feel/think.

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<sup>183</sup> Responding to criticisms that participants of their research were socially advantaged because they all attended a private school, Brown and Gilligan (1993) acknowledged the “privileges which American society offers to those born in favorable conditions” (p. 12). However, they argued:

Although most of the girls attending Laurel School live in middle-class or upper middle-class families and the majority are white Americans of European descent, it is important to emphasize here that 20 percent of the girls in this study are from working-class families and are attending the school on scholarship, and 14 percent of the girls in the study are of color and are of African and Asian descent. In this group of girls, then, color is not necessarily associated with low social class, and neither color nor low social class is associated with educational advantage. (p. 12)

For Zahra, expectations to be a ‘Good (Muslim) Girl’ include her Dad’s “adult world of shoulds” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 91) in the form of his (single) stories of the ways Muslim girls and women should dress/act/think/be. As I think of Zahra’s father telling her, “You’re a woman now, you have to do this and that,” in relation to his expectations that she don the hijab upon reaching puberty, I am reminded of Ali’s (2012) discussion of how, in some families and communities, Muslim youth who become *baligh*<sup>184</sup> “are responsible and held accountable for observing religious practices<sup>185</sup>” (p. 8) and Bateson’s (2000) words, “In many cultures, menarche is the time when girls ... must become docile and demure ... when they are lectured about necessary sacrifices” (p. 54).

Zahra’s stories of feeling policed by the judgements and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) of her childhood Islamic school friends draw attention to how adults are not the only source of a ‘world of shoulds.’ While Brown and Gilligan (1992) argued that adults can perpetuate the (single) story “that ‘nice girls’ are always calm, controlled, quiet ... never cause a ruckus, are never noisy, bossy or aggressive, are not anxious and do not cause trouble” (p. 61), I think about how Zahra was storied by her elementary school friends as a “bully” and “bossy” because of her outspokenness and assertiveness. Reflecting upon how Zahra said she learned to only offer her opinions when asked, I am reminded of Brown and Gilligan’s discussion of “the tyranny of nice and kind” (p. 88) as girls in the midst of transitioning into adolescence may learn to silence themselves and their knowing to maintain unhealthy<sup>186</sup> (Lugones, 1987) relationships.

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<sup>184</sup> See the *Glossary of Arabic and/or Islamic Terms* in Appendix A.

<sup>185</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, this depends upon the beliefs and interpretations of diverse Muslim communities.

<sup>186</sup> I draw upon Lugones’ (1987) conceptualization of lack of health:

So, though I may not be at ease in the “worlds” in which I am not constructed playful, it is not that I am not playful because I am not at ease. The two are compatible. But lack of playfulness is not caused by lack of ease. Lack of playfulness is not symptomatic of lack of ease but of lack of health. I am not a healthy being in the “worlds” that construct me unplayful. (p. 14)

Thinking with the experiences Zahra shared of being single-storied by her childhood friends, Lugones' (1987) powerful words take on new meaning for me: "I am not a healthy being in the 'worlds' that construct me unplayful" (p. 14). Sitting with these thoughts, I wonder when Zahra's elementary school friends began to correlate assertiveness (in girls) with bossiness ... and when the seeds of these stories began to take root and live in Zahra.

Thinking of Adichie's (2009) words about "how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children" (1:44), my attention is drawn towards Rayyan's reticence to name herself as fun and beautiful because she didn't want to seem "conceited:"

Me: Okay, how would you describe yourself to someone you really trust? [laughing]

Rayyan: Well ...

Marwa: Maybe that you are fun, beautiful ....

Rayyan: That's conceited!

While Rayyan later named herself as "pretty," "kind," and "generous" after she was assured that her sister Marwa and I would not judge her for naming herself in complimentary ways, I continue to wonder when and how Rayyan learned to silence herself from describing the many beautiful facets of her being and becoming (Vinz, 1997<sup>187</sup>) so as not to provoke judgements in others. However, as our narrative account made visible, Rayyan seemed to grow in confidence during her transition into adolescence. Wondering at her increased confidence amidst multiple experiences related to bullying and judgements from female classmates, I think of the many times that Rayyan's mother, Safaa, emphasized that "everybody is different" and reminded Rayyan of her right and responsibility to advocate for herself. Safaa's words remind me of

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<sup>187</sup> While Vinz' (1997) ideas are centred around teachers' 'becoming,' I draw upon her work to better understand the "continuous reformulations of the sel[ves]" (p. 139) that co-inquirers and I are always engaged in.

Adichie's (2017) letter to a friend who had requested advice on raising her newborn daughter a feminist<sup>188</sup>: "Teach her never to universalize her own standards and experiences. Teach her that her standards are for her alone, and not for other people. This is the only necessary form of humanity: the realization that difference is normal" (p. 62). In continually asserting that "everyone is different," Safaa was teaching Rayyan that arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) – both internal and external – are unfair, for they smooth over personal, cultural, racial, generational, and other forms of difference. She was teaching Rayyan that "her standards are for her alone, and not for other people," just as Rayyan cannot use other people's standards as benchmarks with which to measure herself. Safaa's words draw my attention to how internal and external judgements of who can be deemed a 'Good (Muslim) Girl' can obscure difference(s) and impose countless single stories (Adichie, 2009) of 'goodness' from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada. However, my attention is also drawn to how, with her love and gentle teaching, Safaa helped Rayyan to eschew multiple arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and grow her confidence.

### **'Good (Muslim) Mother' Stories**

While I gained a strong sense that girl co-inquirers faced (single) stories of goodness relatively early in our inquiry, my realization that Safaa, Ayesha, Layla, and I faced (single) stories as 'Good (Muslim) Mothers' occurred in the latter seasons of this research, as I constructed narrative accounts alongside co-inquirers. Narratively inquiring alongside Layla into the many stories she shared of feeling arrogantly perceived as a mother by friends and extended family members created spaces whereby my resonant experiences in relation to 'good mother'

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<sup>188</sup> For Adichie (2017), feminism is contextual, and is undergirded by the belief in the equality of the sexes.

(single) stories (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Goodwin & Huppertz, 2010; Gore, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007; Rich, 1976/1986)<sup>189</sup> and those of mother co-inquirers, were made increasingly visible.

As I reflect upon the stories mother co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside one another, I am drawn towards Austin and Carpenter's (2008) discussion of the cultural narrative of (good) motherhood<sup>190</sup>:

This narrative characterizes a mother as a person in an interdependent relationship where she is self sacrificing, nurturing, selfless, emotional, compassionate, connected to nature, and gives efficient and effective attention to everyday tasks; she is always available to her children and assumes complete responsibility for them, she is unselfish and supportive .... This narrative of the mother describes the taken for granted assumptions of what motherhood *is* and how it *should* be enacted. (pp. 380-381)

Sitting with Austin and Carpenter's words, I contemplate the multiple *shoulds*<sup>191</sup> that co-inquirers and I experienced in relation to single stories of 'Good (Muslim) Mothers.' I think of Layla's stories of feeling policed in her mothering by extended family and friends. After seeing a picture of Maya in her skating costume, a female relative told Layla, "Hmm ... no comment" to convey her disapproval. Maya's best friend's mother also expressed her disapproval, and arrogant perception, of Maya's relationship with boys in a manner that, for Layla, felt like "a

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<sup>189</sup> The ideas of these writers and theorists are woven throughout this section.

<sup>190</sup> Austin and Carpenter (2008) explored the experiences of mothers of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Alongside participants, the authors trouble(d) constructions of good mothers and argued that "the term good mother establishes the possibility of the bad mother and the detailed criteria of good mothering in themselves detail the criteria of bad mothering" (p. 383).

<sup>191</sup> Similar to Austin and Carpenter's (2008) discussion of 'shoulds,' Goodwin and Huppertz (2010) contended, "Above all, mother has been established as a normative construct, a mechanism through which women do what they 'should'" (p. 4). Their discussion of narratives of 'good' motherhood will be discussed later in this section.

slap in the face.” Safaa was also the recipient of unsolicited mothering advice by a female relative who told her, “You really have to take your kids somewhere where they can learn their [Somali] culture,” an arrogant perception that Safaa rejected because, as she asserted, “Alhamdulillah, I feel like they are rich. They have enough culture. And, you know, Canadian culture has so many things that are good, like they are honest, polite and my kids have that too.”

Austin and Carpenter’s (2008) inclusion of the words ‘selfless’ and ‘self sacrificing’ in their discussion of the cultural narrative of (good) motherhood resonate with many of the stories co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside each other. In our narrative account, inquiring alongside Layla into our stories of learning to re-story our relationships with our mothers, I wrote:

As I think about learning to travel to my Mom’s worlds, and Layla describing gaining a more loving perception (Lugones, 1987) of her Mom’s worlds, I think about the stories of motherhood that are rooted so deeply in us. Alongside our mothers’ love and care for us, we have also learned about maternal selflessness and self-sacrifice, plotlines that are all too present in dominant stories of (good) motherhood .... and I wonder if Layla and I have more in common with our Moms than we realize.

Reflecting upon our stories, I think of how Lugones (1987), drawing upon her relationship with her mother, wrote,

There is something obviously wrong with the love that I was taught and something right with my failure to love my mother in this way .... There is something obviously wrong with my having been taught that love is consistent with abuse, consistent with arrogant

perception. Notice that the love I was taught is the love that Frye (1933, 73) speaks of when she says “We can be taken in by this equation of servitude with love.” (p. 6)

While Lugones later discussed how this characterization of her mother’s efforts was a form of arrogant perception, her words make me wonder once again about plotlines of selflessness and self-sacrifice rooted in (single) stories of ‘good’ motherhood. Sitting with these thoughts, I consider the busy-ness of mother co-inquirers and I – and other stories we lived and shared alongside each other that give a sense of these plotlines - as we composed our selves (Lugones, 1987) and lives over the past two years. I think of Safaa working as a medical practitioner and multicultural consultant alongside raising six children, and of Ayesha learning to negotiate the intense demands of a new job while taking care of her daughters, parents, and siblings. I think of Layla saying, “We have so much stuff going on, I honestly don’t have time to take care of myself too,” and of how I repeatedly engaged in conversations alongside co-inquirers after sleepless nights with Hannah. Reminiscent of Lugones (1987), Adichie (2017) wrote, “We teach girls that a large component of their ability to love is their ability to sacrifice their selves” (p. 56), and I wonder about stories of (‘good’) motherhood (Austin & Carpenter, 2008; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Gore, 2007; O’Reilly, 2007; Rich, 1976/1986) planted (and rooted) in Safaa, Ayesha, Layla, and I ... and the stories we are planting alongside our children.

Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) discussed how, while “what are regarded as good mothers change with time, fashion and context” (p. 2), mothers have always been subject to close scrutiny by others<sup>192</sup>. They contended, “Above all, mother has been established as a normative construct, a mechanism through which women do what they ‘should’” (p. 4). Thinking about the

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<sup>192</sup> Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) emphasized, “The good mother appears differently in different settings – she is a nuanced and multiple form” (p. 1)

innumerable *shoulds* we have faced as girls, women, daughters, and mothers, I also wonder about how we all have expressed annoyance at being arrogantly perceived by other women. However, recalling a conversation alongside Layla in which we admitted that we can also be arrogant perceivers, I am reminded of Lugones' (1987) words, "So, women who are perceived arrogantly can perceive other women arrogantly in their turn" (p. 5).

Reconsidering the many stories of feeling arrogantly perceived that co-inquirers and I shared, I think about how we can also arrogantly perceive *ourselves* and our mothering practices. I am reminded of Goodwin and Huppertz' (2010) assertion that "the good mother is known as that formidable social construct placing pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge themselves" (p. 1) as I think about Ayesha's frustration with herself because she felt inconsistent in her responses as a mother, "It's *us* and I hate that. What happens to us?" Ayesha also expressed, "I sometimes don't know how to help her" as she struggled to support Zahra in negotiating tension-filled relationships with friends. For Layla, uncertainty and guilt about agreeing to repeat her youngest daughter Rema's grade 1 year are rooted in Layla's fears that Rema may experience the embarrassment Layla experienced as a child who repeated the first grade. Layla's also worries that her children will experience embarrassment because of their lack of proficiency as Arabic language speakers:

I don't want her [Maya] to ever feel put down ... because I hear things like, "Oh, why don't they know how to speak A3raby?".... I just want her to have that card in her hand, so that nobody ever puts her down.

Layla and Ayesha's stories remind me of Rich's (1976/1986)<sup>193</sup> words about becoming a mother, "Soon I would begin to understand the full weight and burden of maternal guilt, that daily, nightly, hourly, *Am I doing what is right? Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much?*" (p. 223). Like Ayesha and Layla, I worry often about my expectations for Noor and for myself ... and I wonder about how arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) of who can be deemed a 'Good (Muslim) Girl/Mother' can stem from single stories (Adichie, 2009) within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada ... stories planted and rooted deep within.

Continuing to reflect upon deeply rooted single stories of 'Good (Muslim) Mothers,' I think of Safaa's repeated reassurances when I voiced my many uncertainties and worries. I recall when, expressing embarrassment at my lack of foresight in not advising Noor to practice opening her combination lock before the start of the school year, Safaa exclaimed, "Because she's your oldest ... I have experience!" With quiet confidence born of experiential, embodied knowing<sup>194</sup> as a Somali Canadian Muslim woman who grew up in a large extended family in Kenya, Safaa repeatedly reminded me that "everybody is different" and how, "As parents, we like everything to be perfect ... and it's not." Reconsidering Safaa's words and how often co-inquirers and I spoke of high expectations for ourselves, Safaa, alongside Layla and Ayesha, help me to appreciate that motherhood, as a creative and continual work in progress, cannot be reduced to

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<sup>193</sup> Weaving her experiential knowing and reflections of mothering and motherhood alongside a historical overview of motherhood as a social institution, Rich (1976/1986) discussed her experiences with considering herself, at turns, a 'good' or 'bad' mother. Critiquing the countless, often paradoxical, expectations inherent in narratives of mothers and motherhood – expectations mothers are made to compare themselves and their mothering practices to – Rich wrote, "I can imagine the guilt of Everymother, because I have known it in myself" (p. 223).

<sup>194</sup> In her narrative inquiry alongside mothers of boys who have been labeled 'Behaviour Disordered,' Mickelson (1995) highlighted the experiential knowledge mothers embody – knowledge "grounded in practice" (p. 172) that is often overlooked in discussions of 'expert knowledge.' She asserted, "Mothers' knowledge ... carrying with it the socially constructed overlay of sentimentality and sacrifice ascribed to motherhood, is heard 'en passant,' often listened to through a filter of pre-judgements by half-blocked ears" (p. 135).

single stories of *shoulds* ... and I think about how “even when we cannot quiet outside detractors, we have to resist the urge to join them” (Gore, 2007, p. 760)<sup>195</sup>.

### **Thread 2: Living Stories of Relational Resistance**

Although the above discussions foregrounded some of the ways co-inquirers and I live in relation to multiple arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009), we all, in many different ways, also live *in resistance* to countless single stories of what we should know/say, how we should act/think, and who we should be. The word resist stems from the Latin word *resistere*, or to "make a stand against, oppose" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Over time and within co-composed conversational spaces (Clandinin et al., 2012), co-inquirers and I shared and lived stories that troubled, challenged, and made “a stand against” a plethora of single stories (Adichie, 2009). For, as Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012) asserted,

Conversational spaces are not spaces to exchange and confirm already familiar understandings, but, rather, are characterized by emergent occasions for exploring other possible stories. They are relational spaces characterized by mutuality and possibility, where embodied, lived tensions become resources or triggers for telling and retelling stories. (p. 18)

The following sections highlight the many ways mother and daughter co-inquirers co-composed and lived stories of relational resistance - that is, stories of resistance to countless stories of

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<sup>195</sup> Drawing upon her experiences as a young mother and as a writer and editor for magazines about the culture and institution of mothering in the U.S, Gore (2007) asserted, “The world tells us all – in a thousand ways – that we are not enough for our children” (p. 758) ... and highlighted that “it’s easy to slip into believing those voices.”

‘goodness’ alongside me and each other as we composed our selves (Lugones, 1987) and lives (Bateson, 1989) over the last two years.

### **Resisting ‘Good (Muslim) Girl’ Stories**

While Brown and Gilligan (1992) described girls transitioning into adolescence as learning to un-know their knowing to maintain relationships, Maya, Zahra, and Rayyan all shared stories that, for me, highlight the ways they have *resisted* unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) relationships and (single) stories of ‘goodness.’ As our narrative account elucidated, for Maya, being in relationship does not entail animating arrogant constructions (Lugones, 1987) of what/who a ‘Good (Muslim) Girl’ should be/know/say/do. Sharing a story of refusing to befriend a girl on Instagram who was “mean” to her brother, Maya asserted, “I feel like I’m even more friendly this year, but I can be tough ... if someone isn’t nice to my family or friends, I can be tough.” Supported by her mother Layla, Maya often spoke out in defence of herself and others who have been arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987). Maya’s stories of resisting “The Popular Group” and “The *It* Group” labels others had imposed upon her and her friends remind me of her advice to other girls transitioning into adolescence: “Don’t listen to other people’s opinions about others... get to know someone before you judge them.” These stories, and others Maya shared and lived alongside me, give a sense of the many times she actively resisted multiple arrogant perceptions and single stories (Adichie, 2009).

Inquiring alongside girl co-inquirers made me increasingly wakeful (Greene, 1995) to the ways that silence(s) can be acts of resistance. I think of my realization that, contrary to my assumption that Rayyan did not share many stories during our first research conversation because she is shy, she *chose* what to (not) share with me because we were just beginning to

build a relationship ... and because I hadn't yet shared much with her. In our narrative account, following a conversation alongside Rayyan in which she asserted, "I'm quiet sometimes but not shy ... and it depends on if they're talkative. If they're talkative, then I'm talkative. But if they're not talkative, then I'm not either," I wrote:

In her quiet but profound way, Rayyan drew my attention to the importance of reciprocity in every interaction, every relationship. As she spoke, I recalled our first conversation and inwardly cringed ... because, in that moment, I realized that I hadn't really shared much about myself in the beginning, and yet had asked Rayyan to share a lot about herself. I now recognize that Rayyan shared what she felt were safe stories at first because we hadn't yet built a trusting relationship. All she knew of me was that I was a former teacher to her eldest sister Leila, and that her Mom felt it was important to participate in this research. Over the course of this inquiry, Rayyan has repeatedly helped me to appreciate that, while she may be quiet at times, she is not shy ... and that she will take her time deciding if/what/when she will share. She too knows the value of building relationships and communities carefully.

Rayyan's quiet but profound insistence on the importance of reciprocity in our relationship brings to mind Brown's (2012) discussion of vulnerability: "Vulnerability is based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust. It's not oversharing, it's not purging, it's not indiscriminate disclosure ... [it's] about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them" (p. 45). The stories that Rayyan and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside each other continue to teach me of my responsibility as a co-inquirer – and as a friend – to carefully co-compose relationships with mutual vulnerability.

Reflecting upon the stories Rayyan shared and lived alongside me and her mother Safaa, I think about how Rayyan's belief in the importance of mutuality in relationships is intricately connected to her belief in the importance of the Two R's of interpersonal rights and responsibilities – a deeply rooted story that Safaa plants alongside her children in their familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011). I am reminded of how, after sharing the story of her eldest sister's experience of being verbally attacked and discriminated against on a bus, Rayyan stressed, "Not every Muslim is like what you see in the news ... even if you're not Muslim, you should always stand up for people." I think of how, after being arrogantly told by a woman, "Don't worry, when you're 18 you won't have to wear that [hijab] anymore," Rayyan responded to the woman with silence<sup>196</sup>, but then later asserted to me, "I will never take it off ... it's important to me as a Muslim." These stories, and others that Rayyan shared and lived alongside me, give a sense of her confidence in resisting unhealthy relationships, arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987), and single stories (Adichie, 2009) of what she should say/know/think/do, and who she should be, in her transition into adolescence.

Zahra, however, reminds me that silence can be used and perceived in different ways (Belenky et al., 1997). For Zahra, resisting single stories (Adichie, 2009) and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) was a process of learning when to speak up and when to allow her silence to speak<sup>197</sup>. I think of how, after trying multiple times to talk openly with long-time elementary school friends about their unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) relationships, she learned to distance herself from them and to use silence as a way to avoid having her outspokenness and

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<sup>196</sup> However, Safaa responded to the woman by asserting that Rayyan chose her hijab.

<sup>197</sup> I am reminded of how Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) discussed the "roar which lies on the other side of silence" (p. 4) when women own their voice and "use it to gain control over their lives."

assertiveness perceived in unintended ways. However, Zahra also said she has learned to “stand up for [her]self” during her transition into adolescence:

If I’m nice to someone who’s mean to me, it just gets worse. You have to show them, whoever it is, that it’s not okay ... and that worked for me. Because I used to try to be nice to some of the people who were mean to me and it wasn’t good, so now I can be mean right back. I learned that I have to stand up for myself.

During our conversation that day, alongside her mother Ayesha, I questioned Zahra about her use of the word ‘mean’ to describe her defence of herself:

Me: But I wonder if you’re being *mean* when you do that ... you’re standing up for yourself, which is very different from being mean ...

Zahra: Yeah, I guess, just showing that this is the kind of quality that I want in my friendships and if you give me less, then I don’t want that friendship anymore ...

While painful experiences of being storied as a “bully” and “bossy” in elementary school still live in Zahra, she has learned to live in relation to these experiences in ways that create spaces for authentic relationships built upon mutual trust, care, and respect. This embodied knowing was elucidated in Zahra’s stories of becoming close to someone she feels she “can trust,” and her advice to other girls transitioning into adolescence:

So another thing, when you were asking what advice I would give, is that you need to find a good friend who you can talk to ... a lot of things are going to change, the way you think will change, the way you see yourself will change ... you’re going to have other friends, but you need at least one good friend who you can *really* talk to.

I sit with Zahra's words and the story she shared of reassuring a friend who was facing arrogant perceptions of what others deemed to be negative changes in her personality, "It's not a bad thing that you've changed. It's normal and it's okay ... You should do what makes you happy." Zahra's words and stories bring to mind Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer's (1990)<sup>198</sup> discussion of how adolescent participants often questioned, "Was it better to respond to others and abandon themselves or to respond to themselves and abandon others?" (p. 9). They continued, "The hopelessness of this question marked an impasse in female development, a point where the desire for relationship was sacrificed for the sake of goodness, or for survival" (Gilligan et al., 1990, p. 9). Similar to Brown and Gilligan (1992), Gilligan et al. (1990) contended that girls transitioning into adolescence often faced a paradoxical puzzle – do they move away from the possibility of being authentically in relationship for the sake of maintaining inauthentic, yet familiar, relationships? As I contemplate the stories Zahra shared and lived alongside me, I think about how, while she puzzled with this conundrum many times during our inquiry, Zahra learned to reject unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) relationships in her transition into adolescence and chose to move toward the possibility of being authentically in relationship. Through learning to "stand up for [her]self" in different ways, including embracing the "roar which lies at the other side of silence"<sup>199</sup> (Belenky et al., 1997; Elliot, 1885), Zahra resisted countless arrogant perceptions and 'Good (Muslim) Girl' (single) stories.

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<sup>198</sup> Gilligan et al.'s (1990) work draws upon the same study as Brown and Gilligan (1992) in which one hundred girls/youth in a private school in Cleveland who were between the ages of seven and eighteen were interviewed once a year over a five-year span.

<sup>199</sup> Belenky et al. (1997) borrowed this powerful phrase from George Eliot (1885), who in *Middlemarch* wrote: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (p. 183).

While this section highlights girl co-inquirers' resistance to some of the arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and (single) stories of 'goodness' they faced, our narrative accounts made visible that Rayyan, Zahra, and Maya are supported in their resistance by Safaa, Ayesha, Layla, and other family, friends, and community members<sup>200</sup>. Although seemingly disconnected from their stories of resistance, the junior high school locker stories that they all shared, for me, are an educative metaphor for how Rayyan, Zahra, and Maya found and/or co-created space(s) to be and to become (Vinz, 1997) amidst multiple arrogant perceptions and (single) stories of 'goodness.' However, sitting with the stories we lived, shared, and inquired into, I continue to wonder at the ways that family, friends, teachers, and community members from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada can better support girls and youth in their being and becoming ... or, at the very least, try not to impose (single) stories about what a 'Good (Muslim) Girl' should be/know/do/say/feel/think.

### **Resisting 'Good (Muslim) Mother' Stories**

Austin and Carpenter (2008) asserted, "By speaking back, speaking out and choosing who to speak to, mothers trouble and actively challenge the notion of what it is to be a good mother" (p. 389). As we lived stories of resistance alongside our daughters, Safaa, Ayesha, Layla, and I also faced arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009) about who we should be and what/how we should think/know/act as 'Good (Muslim) Mothers.' However, as our narrative accounts made visible, we also lived alongside each other in ways that "trouble and actively challenge the notion of what it is to be a good mother" (Austin &

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<sup>200</sup> This is further discussed in the next section.

Carpenter, 2008, p. 389). My conversation alongside Layla and Maya in the fall of 2015 draws attention to the ways mother and daughter live and co-compose stories of relational resistance:

Maya: What I see on social media and stuff [related to arrogant perceptions of Muslims], I don't see any of that at school ... [but] there's one kid, he's from ... I'm not sure where, but he was in my class because he was kept back a grade, so I see grade 5'ers saying mean things to him like, "Go back to your country!" and I'm like, "This *is* his country."

Layla: Good for you .... Good for you for speaking up though.

As one of a few Muslim women wearing hijab in a small town, Layla teaches her children to stand up for others. She teaches them that being in relation with people with diverse backgrounds, values, practices and beliefs – including diversity within and across Muslim communities – is a part of life, "I try to tell [Maya] that not all Muslims practice the same and that we don't have to do what everyone else is doing." Giving a sense of Layla's embodied knowing as a woman in hijab, Layla mused, "It's so sad because people see us and make assumptions about our kids or the way we are as parents ... the stereotypes are so strong sometimes." However, Layla repeatedly assured Maya that although wearing the hijab is a choice that must be carefully made with awareness of multiple considerations, "it won't stop her from doing what she wants to do if she chooses to wear it."

Alongside Maya, Layla also lives in resistance to (single) stories that some extended family members and close friends hold of 'Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers.' Layla, feeling policed in her mothering by a female relative who did not approve of Maya's skating costumes, creatively shifted boundaries and expectations through slight alterations to Maya's skating costumes and through encouraging Maya to pursue her passions. Layla's comment in the winter of 2016 gives a sense of her frustration with countless *shoulds* in relation to covering/dressing expectations for 'Good (Muslim) Girls:' "That's the problem with our kids, they can't participate

in anything because of stuff like that, you know?” Reflecting on Layla’s words, I recall a conversation in the fall of 2016 alongside Layla, Maya, and Layla’s sister Sara about some of our unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) familial relationships:

Layla: Yeah and there’s a lot of that [emotional manipulation] in our families ...

Me: We were taught to be trusting and that it’s okay if someone mistreats you when it’s people in our families who aren’t being kind ... they love you so it’s okay ...

Layla: Just suck it up.

Sara: Because you have to be respectful.

Me: It’s not our place to not like it.

Layla: Yeah, exactly.

By supporting Maya to pursue her passions in the face of arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) from some extended family members, Layla resisted (single) stories of ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers,’ and eschewed the living and telling of cover stories<sup>201</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996): “If someone doesn’t accept her for who she is and she has to hide things, then they can just get lost ... This is how we live, I’m not going to hide or put on a lie for you<sup>202</sup>.” I also think of Layla’s passionate assertion, “We’re *living* our faith ... I live in a way that shows that I’m not

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<sup>201</sup> Thinking with Layla’s stories of relational resistance in her familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011), I am drawn towards Clandinin and Connelly’s (1996) idea of *sacred*, *secret*, and *cover* stories that are lived and told within in and out-of-classroom places on school landscapes:

Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators, and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes, and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape ... [this has] the quality of a sacred story ... Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret ones .... When teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school. (p. 25)

<sup>202</sup> The stories Layla shared, lived, and inquired into alongside me in relation to feeling policed and arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) as a mother – and of resisting myriad *shoulds* others attempted to impose upon her and Maya – bring to mind Mickelson’s (1995) words to co-inquirers: “Your knowing enabled you to make decisions that were difficult for you and your children. Decisions that were filled with uncertainty and held little promise of ... social sanction” (p. 142).

ashamed of being Muslim, especially here where I was the first woman to wear hijab” ... and I am struck by Layla’s strength in resisting, alongside Maya, a quagmire of arrogant perceptions and (single) stories of what/how others deem they should know/act/think/do, and who they should be as ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers.’

For Safaa, resisting arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009) – including (single) stories of ‘goodness’ – is intertwined with her belief in the Two R’s of rights and responsibilities:

Everybody has rights and responsibilities. If we are careful with those two R’s, then you are going to survive ... you have rights *and* responsibilities ... I tell them, “You don’t allow anybody ever to take your rights away. *Anybody*. But make sure you also fulfill your own responsibilities. If you are careful with those two R’s, then you will be okay.”

Alongside her children and others, Safaa lives a curriculum<sup>203</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) of the profound right and responsibility to speak up and advocate for themselves and others: “I always tell my kids, ‘Nobody knows what you want, you have to ask.’” I think of how Safaa often lived this story alongside Rayyan by encouraging Rayyan to speak out against injustice in their stories of experiences with bullying, racism, and discrimination. I am also reminded of Safaa’s stories of encouraging her children to advocate for prayer spaces in school, speaking up alongside her children to resist stereotypes when a teacher painfully single-storied Muslims as perpetrators of terror attacks, and against racism at her

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<sup>203</sup> Drawing upon Schwab’s curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) conceptualized curriculum as a *living, evolving composition*, a “course of life” rather than simply a course of study. Huber et al.’s (2011) conception of familial curriculum-making as distinct from school curriculum-making is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

children’s Islamic elementary school. Reflecting on Safaa’s resistance of a female relative’s unsolicited advice about the need to take her kids somewhere they can ‘learn their [Somali] culture,’ I think of how Safaa encouraged me to draw upon my knowing when I was given unsolicited advice about Noor: “You know your daughter and what is best for your family.” I think of the many times that Safaa urged me to advocate for myself and Hannah, stressing, “You can’t be shy asking for supports Muna,” and I marvel at how Safaa not only resisted arrogant perceptions and (single) stories of ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers,’ but at how she also encouraged and supported Rayyan and others to actively speak out and resist them as well.

Contemplating our stories of relational resistance, I am drawn to a conversation Ayesha and I shared in which Ayesha discussed resisting stories that a family member was trying to impose upon her:

Ayesha: And the funny thing is that instead of having a panic attack like I usually do, I was like, “Go ahead, I don’t care” [in relation to an ultimatum that was given to her]. I don’t know if it was my job, getting so much respect and attention .... I mean, it was surreal to me to have the kind of treatment that they gave me, I don’t know why they treated me like I am a very high person, just so good, I was never treated like that ...

Me: You deserve to be treated like that.

Ayesha: I don’t know, I just felt like ... not arrogant, but like I’m worth it ...

In affirming that Ayesha “deserve[s] to be treated” in kind and respectful ways, I was supporting and encouraging Ayesha’s resistance to unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) relationships. Ayesha’s words about feeling like she’s worthy of good treatment also brings to mind her resistance to Zahra being storied as a “bully” and “bossy” by elementary school friends. During a conversation in the fall of 2016, Ayesha attempted to remind her daughter that these stories were likely in response to Zahra’s outspokenness and assertiveness:

Ayesha: But maybe you were like this [assertive and outspoken] even when you were younger?

Zahra: No ...

Ayesha: But your friends used to say that you're bossy ...

Zahra: Because I *was* bossy ... I was so mean. I was really a bully at that age ...

Ayesha: I don't think that you were.

Me: You sharing that story of learning to stand up for yourself, that's so important. Because even me sometimes, even though I *know* that it's not okay, too often we teach girls to just be nice, not stand up for their rights ... just don't make a big deal about stuff.

Ayesha: Yeah, and something we don't do as much in teaching them to set boundaries. Especially as women, we just give and give and give and I guess not really demand anything in return ... or just the minimum? That's how our value is sometimes forgotten.

While Zahra previously shunned the labels imposed upon her in elementary school because they were “lies,” she later rejected this knowing by expressing, “I was really a bully at that age.”

However, Ayesha attempted to remind Zahra that it was likely her assertiveness and outspokenness which contributed to the stories of Zahra as being “bossy” and a “bully.” She was trying to teach Zahra that “demand[ing]” mutual care and attentiveness in relationships is important, otherwise, “that's how our value is sometimes forgotten.”

I wonder at how Ayesha, through speaking and living stories of resistance alongside Zahra, troubled single stories of ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers.’ Drawing upon her experiences growing up as an Afghan refugee in Pakistan and feeling the weight of additional responsibilities as the eldest sister in her family, Ayesha expressed not wanting to burden Zahra as the eldest girl in their family: “I don't want her to feel the responsibility to keep the house going, you know? She's not responsible for that. I don't want her to feel responsible, otherwise she will be abused.” At the time of writing this chapter, Ayesha had formed a support group for Muslim women who

are recently separated or divorced. I think of Ayesha's wish to include details of stories that Zahra was uncomfortable with sharing in our narrative account, saying, "What I want is for women who read ... this is something that could help someone ... I've already had women telling me that my story helped them," and I am reminded of Rich's (1976/1986) words:

The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is the sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities .... Only when we can wish imaginatively for ourselves can we wish unfetteredly for our daughters. (p. 246)

Sitting with Rich's words and the stories Ayesha, Zahra, and I lived, shared and inquired into, I am inspired by Ayesha's courage in imaginatively composing and living stories of relational resistance to 'Good (Muslim) Girl/Mother' (single) stories in ways that created spaces for us to "wish unfetteredly" for ourselves, our daughters, and other Muslim women.

Reflecting upon how often co-inquirers and I felt arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) – including by other Muslim women and girls – I am reminded of Lugones' (1987) discussion of "worlds" and "world"-travelling. Lugones' assertion that "knowing other women's 'worlds' is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them" (p. 17) brings to mind how Layla and I discussed learning to travel to our mothers' worlds with loving perception. Recognizing that "only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (p. 17), Lugones asserted that loving perception is crucial for women, who can, depending upon the situation, be arrogantly perceived and/or arrogant perceivers:

We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So travelling to each other's "worlds" would enable us to *be* through loving each other. (p. 8)

Our narrative accounts made visible how, through lovingly travelling to each other's worlds, and expressing "disloyalty to arrogant perceivers, including the arrogant perceiver in ourselves, and to their constructions of women" (p. 18), co-inquirers and I often create(d) spaces for ourselves, each other, and other women to resist arrogant perceptions and single stories. We create(d) spaces for ourselves and others to *be* ... and to become (Vinz, 1997).

### **Thread 3: Imaginatively Composing Lives ... *in relation***

Bateson's (1989) discussion of life-making as an imaginative, ongoing composition resonates with the many ways that co-inquirers and I "have worked by improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (p. 1)<sup>204</sup>. Working from within a conceptualization of life-making as an active, imaginative, experiential, embodied, and storied construction (Clandinin, 2013), the following sections highlight how co-inquirers and I imaginatively composed our selves (Lugones, 1987) and lives *in relation*<sup>205</sup> (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to familial and intergenerational stories, and in the midst of multiple past and ongoing transitions.

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<sup>204</sup> Sarbin (2004) viewed imagination as storied, experiential, embodied, and enacted – whereby "imagining (not to be confused with imagery) is not an internal *happening* (such as experiencing 'pictures in the mind') but a 'doing,' a set of actions that can be described as attenuated or muted role-taking" (p. 6).

<sup>205</sup> In Chapter 2, drawing upon the ideas of Clandinin (2013), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Huber (2000), I discussed the concept of being *in relation*.

## Composing Lives *in relation* ... Amidst Multiple Past and Ongoing Life Transitions

As I reconsider some of the stories of transitions that co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into over the last two years, I think about how, when I first imagined this study, I foregrounded girl co-inquirers' transitions into adolescence as *the* primary transition for co-inquirers. However, as I think about the many changes in our selves (Lugones, 1987), our relationships, and the stories we lived *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) over time, I am now wakeful (Greene, 1995) to a multiplicity of ongoing transitions that co-inquirers and I experience(d). I am wakeful to how, while transitions into adolescence were/are undoubtedly periods of significant transition, we are always in the process of imaginatively composing our selves (Lugones, 1987) and lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to countless people, places, and past and ongoing stories.

Heilbrun (1999) conceptualized transitions as

a threshold experience ... providing to the actors involved the condition of liminality.

The word 'limin' means 'threshold,' and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p. 3)

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Co-inquirers and I live *in relation* to our past, present, and not-yet-lived future. We live *in relation* to others – to family, friends, and many others. We live *in relation* to, and in the midst<sup>205</sup> of, personal, social, intergenerational, cultural, temporal, historical, political, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2013).

For Heilbrun, liminal spaces of transitions are in-between spaces of uncertainty and unsteadiness, but also of imagination and possibility<sup>206</sup>. Over the last two years, co-inquirers and I shared and lived many experiences of life transitions alongside each other. I think of Safaa, leaving the only home she had known as a young child in Somalia to live with her father in Kenya, learning to speak several new languages during her transitions into a new home, school, community, and society. I think of how, leaving Kenya to travel to Canada as a newlywed, Safaa says she “*made* a family.” I think of seeing Rayyan a few months ago, after her weeks-long stay in the hospital, and how she is learning to live in different ways in relation to a life-long medical diagnosis. I think of Ayesha’s stories of war and displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan amidst her transition into adolescence, and the stories she lived, told, retold and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) about learning to compose her life in different ways as a refugee in Pakistan, as a newcomer to Canada, after many moves and job changes, and in the midst of separating from her husband. I think of the stories Zahra shared of learning to stand up for herself in the midst of unhealthy (Lugones, 1987) relationships with elementary school friends, and the stories she shared of learning to compose her life in new ways following her parents’ separation, moving to new schools, and removing her hijab. I think of the stories Layla shared of negotiating multiple moves and periods of uncertainty, and of Layla and Maya’s strength and vulnerability in the midst of profound grief at the loss of Maya’s grandmother. I think of how co-inquirers supported and sustained me as I learned of Hannah’s diagnosis with ASD and how, together, we navigated many transitions over the last two years.

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<sup>206</sup> Heilbrun (1999) posited, “Women have always had a particularly close relationship to changeable terrain .... [however], when recognized, liminality offers women freedom to become themselves” (preface, 1).

While our narrative accounts made visible the ways that co-inquirers and I are imaginatively composing our lives in the midst of multiple ongoing transitions, they also made visible moments and/or periods of liminality (Heilbrun, 1999) we have all experienced. As I reflect on some of the stories Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I lived and shared of facing arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009) amidst experiences of loss and grief, separation and divorce, illness, terror, and trauma, I think about the ways we (re)storied many of our transitions – some of which included moments and/or periods of profound uncertainty. I think about how, “as we live our lives we continue to seek coherence, sometimes in situations in which coherence seems impossible” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 48). However, while we sometimes experienced a lack of coherence (Carr, 1986)<sup>207</sup> in our life-making, we continued to imaginatively compose our lives in the midst of uncertainty and possibility (Heilbrun, 1999). Our laughter and playfulness (Lugones, 1987)<sup>208</sup>, support and encouragement of one another, and continued growing, resisting, and (re)imagining alongside one another as we composed our selves (Lugones, 1987) amidst multiple ongoing transitions bring to mind Carr’s (1986) words, “The unity of sel[ves], not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pregiven condition but an [imaginative and ongoing] achievement” (p. 97).

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<sup>207</sup> Carr (1986) discussed the need for narrative coherence in our storied lives:

Our lives sometimes admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. (p. 97)

<sup>208</sup> Like Lugones (1987), I view playfulness as, “in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight” (p. 17).

### **Composing Lives *in relation* to Familial and Intergenerational Relationships and Stories**

Through our inquiry, co-inquirers and I made visible the ways we have drawn upon our experiential, embodied knowing and the stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) in composing lives (Bateson, 1987) and curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) alongside others. For me, some of the most profound stories co-inquirers and I retold and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) involved familial and intergenerational narratives – deeply rooted narratives that shape, and are continually (re)shaped by, our living. While many of the stories in the ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers’ sections of this chapter highlighted arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009) of some of our relatives, co-inquirers and I also lived and shared many stories of learning with, and from, our families and of feeling supported and sustained by our familial relationships.

In her uniquely poetic manner of speech, Safaa often shared familial, cultural, and intergenerational wisdoms with me. I think of how Safaa said, “You know, in my [Somali] culture we have a saying, ‘We learn discrimination from our mothers’ wombs’ ... everyone is different, Subhan Allah,” and of parenting advice she still draws upon:

I think I was a teenager, and I admired my aunt and said, “Oh my God, I love you so much. I wish I could be like you.” She was amazing, just very kind, leading with example, she raised great kids. She said, “You know what I made sure of in life? That they would be good people .... because Allah, when he asks me about my life, is not going to ask me what University they went to, or any of that. Allah will ask me about their manners and behaviour ... for them to be good human beings is what I care for.”

I also think of Safaa’s stories of her relationship with her grandmother, who she described as a “powerful,” “strong,” and “amazing” woman. Safaa’s grandmother encouraged her to continue her studies and become a medical practitioner even as she cautioned Safaa about giving so much of herself that she becomes *shirko* (shared). As our narrative account made visible, these familial and intergenerational stories continue to live in Safaa and reverberate in her life-making alongside others.

Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya also shared many stories of intergenerational and familial relationships. I think of Rayyan’s stories of her father and siblings and of looking forward to visiting with extended family – especially her grandmothers. I think of Ayesha’s love and continued care for her parents and siblings, and her stories of her grandmother’s love and wisdom. I think of Zahra’s stories of her sisters, of looking forward to her aunts’ weddings, and of being her grandmother’s “favourite.” I think of Layla’s stories of growing alongside her Mom and Dad, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins for most of her childhood and of how she continues to compose her life alongside extended family. I think of the stories Maya shared of being in the midst of family “all the time,” and her relationships with her Dad, brothers, sister, Aunt Sara, and her beloved Tata (Allah Yirhama). These and other stories that co-inquirers and I shared give a sense of feeling loved, supported, and sustained by intergenerational and familial relationships.

(Re)considering some of the intergenerational narrative reverberations (Young, 2005)<sup>209</sup> co-inquirers and I shared, lived, and inquired into alongside each other, I think about how the stories Ayesha shared of experiencing war and displacement continue to live in her and

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<sup>209</sup> Young’s (2005) work was introduced in Chapter 1.

reverberate in her relationships, life-composing, and familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011) alongside her daughters and other family members. I am reminded of Zahra listening to her mother's stories of earlier experiences in Afghanistan and Pakistan for the first time with tear-filled, wide-eyed surprise ... but how, months after hearing some of Ayesha's stories of experiences of conflict and displacement for the first time, Zahra said, "I was like, 'Oh my God' [at first] ... but I could imagine it, I could imagine myself with her." Our narrative accounts made visible that co-inquirers and I often experience(d) home as places where we learn(ed) to travel to multiple familial and intergenerational worlds (Lugones, 1987) ... and where we learn(ed) to imaginatively compose our selves (Lugones, 1987) and our lives (Bateson, 1989) *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to a multiplicity of familial and intergenerational narratives.

### **Composing Lives *in relation* to Our Faith and Each Other ... and Imagining Possibilities**

Reverberating across our stories of being and becoming (Vinz, 1997) as Muslim girls and women are resonant threads of composing our lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) – including in relation to our faith. I think of Safaa repeatedly saying "Alhamdulillah, Allah makes it easy for me" and reminding me to make dua in the face of hardship and uncertainty; Rayyan drawing upon her faith in her resistance to arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009); Ayesha saying, "Alhamdulillah, whatever Allah has planned, it's good;" Zahra's weekly halaqa<sup>210</sup> alongside other Muslim youth and women; Layla saying she *lives* her faith unabashedly; and Maya's stories of admiring women in hijab who "[don't] care what people think." However, while co-inquirers and I are

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<sup>210</sup> Halaqa is an Arabic word for 'circle.' In Islam, a halaqa is a group gathering to discuss issues related to faith.

guided and sustained by our faith, our narrative accounts made visible that, for us, composing our lives with faith is not a disembodied, passive process. For, as our stories and Ayesha's powerful words elucidate, "Faith is good for guidance, but you still actually have to find a way to make that happen .... you also need to *do* something." The stories we told, lived, retold and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) made visible the many ways that co-inquirers and I are sustained and guided by our faith as we actively imagine forward-looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995).

Alongside many wisdoms, Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya repeatedly taught me about imaginatively composing lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) as mothers and daughters. I think of Ayesha saying that it is important to "communicate with your child as much as possible, to empathize with them ... that's the hardest part sometimes, but find out what it is that they're thinking and feeling ... and encourage them to grow." I think of Safaa emphasizing,

But Muna, when we plant a seed in the ground, it won't go shooting straight up.

Sometimes, it wants to go over here [gesturing to the right with her hands], and we have to say, "No, not that way" and we nudge it over, away from that area that harms them.

We need to be patient and help our children to grow in the right way insha'Allah.

I continue to feel resonance with Layla expressing that she wants her children "to *feel* [her] love and support. They already have enough to deal with ... they need to see their Mom supporting them and telling them that they're awesome and that they can do it." I think of Rayyan, drawing upon her familial knowing of imaginatively composing her life *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000), emphasizing, "You should always stand up for other

people.” I am still inspired by Zahra saying, “I learned that I have to stand up for myself,” and by Maya asserting, “I can do anything.”

As I ponder the changes to the stories co-inquirers and I live(d) *by, with, and in* (Clandinin, 2013) over time, I think of Greene’s (1995) discussion of the importance of imagination in life compositions<sup>211</sup>: “Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities” (p. 3). Co-inquirers and I made visible the many ways that we are imaginatively composing our selves (Lugones, 1987), lives, and forward-looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). I think of Safaa repeatedly expressing her desire to pursue a Masters degree; Rayyan’s stories of wanting to become a teacher; Ayesha planning to continue leading a support group for women; Zahra’s stories of wanting to become a forensic scientist; Layla planning to travel to Lebanon with her family and continuing to face her fears and learn to swim; and Maya continuing to skate and study videos of orthodontic practices. I think of our love and support for one another – especially the profound love between mother and daughter co-inquirers – and I am reminded of Rich’s (1976/1986) words, “Before sisterhood, there was the knowledge – transitory, fragmented, perhaps, but original and crucial – of mother-and-daughterhood” (p. 225). As co-inquirers and I imagine forward, I sense that our life-making will continue to be imaginatively composed *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) ... including to our faith, embodied knowing, and each other.

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<sup>211</sup> Reminiscent of Bateson’s contention, “Composing a life involves an openness to possibilities” (p. 63), Greene (1995) wrote, “A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility” (p. 22).

### (Re)Connecting Threads

While the resonant threads in this chapter were identified and discussed separately, they are indelibly interconnected and interwoven with each other and other threads in the tapestry of our life-making. Co-inquirers and I are always in the process of simultaneously composing lives in the midst of arrogant perceptions, living stories of relational resistance, and imaginatively composing lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) – amidst many other threads of our being and becoming. We are always in the process of facing and resisting stories of who we are and who we should be as ‘Good (Muslim) Girls/Mothers’ as we compose our selves (Lugones, 1987) and lives with embodied knowing, faith, and imagination alongside family, friends, teachers, community members, and others in the myriad worlds (Lugones, 1987) we travel to and inhabit.

The stories Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I lived, told, retold and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside one another in this research do not and can not tell *the* single story of who we (and other Muslim females) are and who we are always in the process of becoming. However, they do provide insights into the multiplicity of stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) and into the ways we – and perhaps other Muslim girls, women, children, youth, and families – can be supported in our life-making. Looking forward to the next chapter, I continue to think and wonder with the stories co-inquirers and I shared and lived together as I reflect upon my growing understandings of my research puzzle ... understandings rooted in two years of narratively inquiring alongside Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya.

## Chapter 7

### “So What?”: Personal, Practical, and Social/Theoretical Justifications of this Research

Clandinin (2013) reminds me that all researchers “need to be able to answer the questions of ‘So What?’ and ‘Who Cares?’ about our studies” (p. 35). These questions can be responded to by thinking of the personal, practical, theoretical/social justifications of a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin (2013) explained that narrative inquiries must be justified

personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals; practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice; and socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make to theoretical understandings or to making situations more socially just. (p. 35)

Throughout this chapter, as I make visible the justifications of this research<sup>212</sup>, it is my intent to be in metaphoric dialogue<sup>213</sup> with co-inquirers, teachers, teacher educators, writers and theorists, and other members from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada.

### Theoretical Justifications of this Research: Making Visible Complex Layers of Experience

As I prepared to come alongside co-inquirers, I engaged in a review of literature from Canada and around the world in relation to the experiences of Muslim girls, women, children, youth, and families. Throughout this process, I was troubled by work that seemed to dichotomize

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<sup>212</sup> While I discuss the social/theoretical, practical, and personal justifications for this research in separate sections within this chapter, it is important to note that there are many overlappings between, among, and across them.

<sup>213</sup> I do so because I want to speak *with* co-inquirers and people from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada, rather than *to* or *for* them.

‘Muslim<sup>214</sup>’ and ‘Western<sup>215</sup>’ worlds, cultures, experiences, and beliefs. This was especially evident in literature where second (and subsequent) generation Muslim children and youth were positioned as bridges between their familial and school worlds, whose role it is to soothe tensions that arise amidst (ongoing) clashes. For example, Sirin and Fine (2008) asserted, “Indeed, it is the job of the second (or one and a half) generation to calm the home space” (p. 117) and described how some Muslim American youth “live in, and commute between, two parallel, separate, worlds” (p. 141). Discussing the ‘double consciousness’<sup>216</sup> of Muslim children and youth in the U.S.<sup>217</sup>, Tindongan (2011) similarly asserted, “Keeping a foot in each of two worlds is the job of a minority” (p. 75). She continued,

The kind of identity influenced by double consciousness requires attending to two worlds, two realities. The conflict double consciousness creates is that not only must one learn the “language” of the oppressor, but he or she must also remember his or her own

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<sup>214</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, Muslim individuals and communities are often written about in monolithic ways. The vast personal, familial, national, racial, linguistic, cultural, political, and theological diversity within and across Muslim communities (Aslan, 2011; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Niyozov, 2010; Ramadan, 2013; Ramji, 2009, 2013) is often ignored.

<sup>215</sup> This is often a reductionist perception of the multiplicity of worlds, cultures, experiences, and beliefs in ‘The West.’

<sup>216</sup> In clarifying her understanding of the concept of ‘double consciousness,’ Tindongan (2011) wrote:

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1994) wrote of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Double consciousness is an experience in which one’s perception of his or her self is colored by the experience of his or her subordination. Double consciousness is “this 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. 75)

<sup>217</sup> While Tindongan (2011) states that her work focuses upon “Muslim immigrant communities” – giving a sense that her research involves recently arrived Muslim youth and families – she later clarified that she is using the terms “Muslim immigrants, Muslim students, and Muslims interchangeably” (p. 73). I found this collapsing of several diverse groups – and the inherent equation of Muslims, students, and immigrants – into one label extremely troubling. Further, while she states that her work focuses upon Muslim youth in the U.S., Tindongan later argued, “Muslim immigrant communities in all their varieties of origin and practice have been Othered by the West, and held hostage to Orientalist misunderstandings and exoticized impressions perpetuated by Western governments, media, religions, and hysteria” (p. 75).

language and be adept at transitioning from one to the other, never forgetting where each voice must be used. (p. 76)

Another example of a dichotomization between familial and school worlds can be found in Zine (2001) who, drawing upon Al-Jabri, discussed the “split personality syndrome”<sup>218</sup> (p. 406) Canadian Muslim youth may embody to cope with competing and confusing expectations in familial and school worlds.

As I continued reviewing the literature, I gained a strong sense that discussions of/about Muslim girl/womanhood seemed to often reduce us and our experiences to the hijab (Bullock & Jaffri, 2001; Kassam, 2007; Khan, 2009; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009) – an uncomfortable and exoticizing fixation with why we do/don’t do it, how we negotiate expectations related to it, and what happens when/if we do/don’t do it. While this focus on hijab may assist some educators and Muslim women in finding and/or creating spaces of increased understanding, it is also disturbingly narrow – for Muslim girls and women are so much more than our hijab or lack of it<sup>219</sup>. I was deeply perturbed by these and other social narratives about Muslims – particularly single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Muslims (and Islam) as prone to terrorism/violence (Eid & Karim, 2011; McClure, 2012; McDonough & Hoodfar, 2005; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009, 2010), and of Muslim women as oppressed (Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009, 2010). Thinking with ideas from scholars within and across educational and other disciplines, and my understandings of the stories co-inquirers and I lived, shared, and inquired into alongside one

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<sup>218</sup> This involves constructing and animating two separate identities for school and home/community contexts.

<sup>219</sup> This will be revisited in a forthcoming section.

another, the forthcoming sections will trouble these single stories of the experiences of Muslim girls, women, children, youth, and families.

### **Social Justifications of this Research: Shifting Understandings of the Experiences of Canadian Muslim Females**

As I contemplate the wider significance of inquiring alongside co-inquirers for deeper understandings of our experiences as Canadian Muslim females, I am drawn towards the stories we shared and lived alongside one another that make visible the many ways we imaginatively and relationally compose(d) our lives. Through our life-making, we challenge(d) single stories (Adichie, 2009) of what/who we *are* and/or *should* be. In the sections that follow, I discuss two ways we challenge(d) single stories: *Challenging Single Stories of Victimhood/Oppression* and *Challenging Single Stories of Muslims and Islam*.

#### **Challenging Single Stories of Victimhood/Oppression**

As I reviewed research literature in relation to Canadian Muslim girls and women<sup>220</sup>, I gained a profound sense that while we are often storied as victims of oppression in mainstream media and literature (Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009), little is known about our diverse experiences – particularly within familial and community landscapes<sup>221</sup>. Our narrative accounts made visible that co-inquirers and I regularly face(d) arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009) from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada of who we *are* and/or *should* be. However, the stories we shared and lived alongside

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<sup>220</sup> See: Ali, 2012; Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Hoodfar, 1993; Kassam, 2007; Khan, 2009; Ramji, 2013; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009, 2010; Zine, 2001, 2006, 2008.

<sup>221</sup> The very limited number of experiential studies I have found in relation to Muslim girls and women are typically situated within school contexts.

each other challenge(d) single stories of Muslim girls and women as victims. Through telling, living, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) our stories, co-inquirers and I rejected arrogant gazes and made visible the agentic ways we are composing our lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000).

An example of a prevalent single story (Adichie, 2009) of the inability of Muslim girls and women to agentially compose their lives is in the field of physical education. A basic Google Scholar search will result in multiple studies and stories about the barriers Muslim girls face in their (lack of) participation in physical education classes, sports programs, and/or other extracurricular activities<sup>222</sup>. However, Rayyan, Zahra, and Maya challenged this single story (Adichie, 2009) through their participation in a combination of the following activities: figure skating, theatre, swimming, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and art. Co-inquirers helped me to appreciate how, with awareness of different personal, familial, cultural, and faith-based/religious narratives related to dress, propriety, and/or contact with boys, they are always in the process of (re)negotiating multiple expectations, boundaries, and arrogant perceptions in their life-making. Our narrative accounts highlighted how, for co-inquirers, these diverse expectations, boundaries, and arrogant perceptions are fluid, shift over time, in relation to new stories/knowing, and/or are *shifted* by co-inquirers. Alongside her mother Layla, Maya creatively shifted boundaries, expectations, and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) through pursuing her passion for figure skating and through slight alterations to her costumes. I am reminded of how, in the midst of feeling arrogantly perceived about not covering *enough* and/or being *too* covered, Maya wrote about Zahra Lari, a Muslim figure skater in hijab, as her (s)hero for a school assignment. While

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<sup>222</sup> See, for example, Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad (2011); Elliott & Hoyle (2014); Stride & Flintoff (2017).

Layla and Maya's stories of the disapproval of some female relatives make visible the arrogant perceptions and single stories they face(d) and resist(ed) alongside each other, co-inquirers were mainly supported in their participation in extracurricular activities by others within familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011). However, reflecting upon how Muslim girls and women have sometimes been forced to choose between their hijab and the sports/activities they love<sup>223</sup>, I think about how Muslim girls and women may sometimes face multiple expectations related to 'appropriate' attire from others within and across familial, school, and community/social worlds.

I wonder about the ways these expectations and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) – if imposed – can bump up against the stories *we* live by. I wonder about how these and other arrogant perceptions can shape the stories Muslim children, youth, and families live and tell within and across familial and school worlds. The stories Layla shared of not participating in overnight school camping trips as a child and youth, and the stories that Ayesha and Zahra shared of Zahra's desire to attend a school dance with her friends, draw attention to the need to be very cautious about arrogantly determining why Muslim girls may not participate in school/community activities, dances, overnight trips, etc. Layla emphasized that the girls *and boys* in her family were not allowed to sleep outside of the house likely because her Mom feared for their safety as, for her mother, it was uncommon for children to sleep anywhere other than their home. Ayesha's refusal to allow Zahra to attend a school dance stemmed from her belief that it is inappropriate for Muslim girls *and boys* to dance in a mixed-gender setting. For co-inquirers, lack of participation and/or modified participation was not indicative of unfair, gendered, and/or oppressive practices; rather, mother co-inquirers made visible how families

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<sup>223</sup> See, for example: Agerholm (2016); Bryson & Ouachtouki (2011); CAIR (2017); Chiari (2014); Mokhtar (2016).

worried about safeguarding their children's safety and/or honouring familial, faith-based/religious, and/or cultural beliefs.

Another prevalent single story of victimhood/oppression is the notion that Muslim girls and women in hijab suffer from a lack of agency (Bullock & Jaffri, 2000; Kassam, 2007; Khan, 2009; Sensoy & Marshall, 2009, 2010). The story Rayyan and Safaa shared of Rayyan being told “Don't worry, when you're 18 you won't have to wear that [hijab] anymore” by a woman at a grocery store brings to mind Abo-Lughod's (2013) contention, “Representations of the unfreedom of others that blame the chains of culture incite rescue missions by outsiders” (p. 20). Abo-Lughod later asserted,

Veiling must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency. Not only are there many forms of covering, which themselves have different meanings in the communities where they are used, but veiling has become caught up almost everywhere now in a politics of representation – of class, of piety, and of political affiliation. (p. 39)

While my embodied knowing resonates with Abu-Lughod's powerful words, I would add the word ‘agency’ to her list of the hijab's “politics of representation,” for the stories co-inquirers and I lived, told, relived, and retold (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside one another foregrounded our agency in choosing how we wish to express our faith – including whether or not to don the hijab. While Zahra's stories of feeling forced to wear hijab make visible that Muslim girls and women may sometimes be pressured/forced to don hijab<sup>224</sup>, the stories Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Layla, Maya and I shared make visible that we *chose* whether or not to veil. Reflecting upon the woman's arrogant

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<sup>224</sup> However, Zahra later expressed her agency in how to express/live her faith in her decision to remove her hijab.

perception (Lugones, 1987) that Rayyan did not choose her hijab<sup>225</sup>, I think about how Muslim girls and women in hijab may sometimes contend with others hijab-splaining<sup>226</sup> the significance/meaning of our hijabs *to us*. As discussed in Chapter 1, Muslim girls and women may choose to don hijab for reasons as diverse as we are. However, reflecting upon the stories of hijab co-inquirers and I shared and lived alongside one another and on my choice to live as a Canadian Muslim woman in hijab, I feel a profound sense of resonance with how a participant in Ahmed's (2011) study asserted that she wears hijab

for the same reason as some of my Jewish friends wear the yarmulke: as a way of openly identifying with a group that people have prejudices about and as a way of saying “yes we’re here, and we have the right to be here and to be treated equally.” (p. 8)

However, as I reconsider the single story in mainstream media and literature of reducing Muslim girls and women to the hijab, I think about how it is ultimately a form of erasure. The stories co-inquirers shared – particularly the stories Ayesha and Zahra shared of being made to feel the need to prove that they are ‘normal’ – give a sense of how, as girls and women in hijab, we are hypervisible<sup>227</sup> but often made to feel invisible. For, while our hijab is an extremely visible marker of our faith, it also triggers an array of single stories (Adichie, 2009) about who we are and/or should be ... as though the fabric covering our hair and bodies seems to also cover the eyes, ears, hearts, and minds of those who arrogantly perceive us and deny our right to full

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<sup>225</sup> I also wonder about the woman's assumption that Muslim girls/youth are not capable of *choosing* how they want to express their beliefs because of their (relatively) young ages.

<sup>226</sup> In using this term, I draw inspiration from the popular culture term ‘mansplaining’ that is used when males “comment on or explain something to a woman in a condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner” (dictionary.com).

<sup>227</sup> Ryland (2013) explained, “Hypervisibility is a type of scrutiny based on perceived difference, which is usually (mis)interpreted as deviance” (para. 2). She later asserted that “hypervisibility really is just another way to deny people recognition and the right to be truly seen” (para. 8).

personhood. However, thinking of Zahra and Maya (and my daughter Noor), I (re)consider how unfair equating hijab with Muslim girl/womanhood is for Muslim females who choose not to wear hijab, for they may be arrogantly perceived as not Muslim *enough* by others and/or held up as examples of agentic/integrated/feminist Muslim women (Hoodfar, 1993). As I think of how, as elucidated in our narrative accounts, Maya and Zahra's faith-based beliefs and practices are interwoven in their life-making, I am reminded of Ali's (2012) contention that Muslim girls who do not wear hijab "are often no less religious or conscious of their religion" (p. 8) than those who wear hijab. The stories co-inquirers and I lived and shared alongside each other make visible that we are actively and imaginatively composing our selves (Lugones, 1987), our lives (Bateson, 1989), and our faith ... and that we are infinitely more than our hijab or lack of it. They make visible the agentic ways we are composing our lives ... stories that defy single stories of us as victims of oppression.

### **Challenging Single Stories of Muslims and Islam**

While Muslims are often discussed, critiqued, and imagined as a monolith, the stories co-inquirers and I lived and shared alongside one another make visible the diversity and multiplicity of personal, cultural, familial, intergenerational, linguistic, racial, temporal, and *faith-based/religious* narratives we live *by, with, and in* (Clandinin, 2013)<sup>228</sup>. Barlas (2002) argued that the Qu'ran, and other Islamic texts, are *interpreted* texts; Muslim individuals, families, and communities interweave their embodied, experiential, and relational knowing with their interpretations of Islam<sup>229</sup>. However, as I think about how co-inquirers and I struggled to

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<sup>228</sup> However, it is important to stress that co-inquirers and I do not and *can not* represent the diversity of Muslim individuals and communities.

<sup>229</sup> Perhaps I should have written *Islams* because beliefs and practices differ for the multiplicity of Muslim individuals, families, and communities.

comprehend the repeated devastation of terror attacks committed by those who identify as Muslim, Barlas (2002) reminds me that Islamic texts also allow for the possibility that sacred themes and principles for living with divine guidance can be *mis*interpreted. For, as Aslan asserted in an interview with Singal (2014),

People don't derive their values from their religion — they bring their values to their religion. Which is why religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, [and] Islam, are experienced in such profound, wide diversity. Two individuals can look at the exact same text and come away with radically different interpretations. Those interpretations have ... everything to do with the cultural, nationalistic, ethnic, political prejudices and preconceived notions that the individual brings to the text. (para. 8)

Barlas (2002) wrote, “To identify Islam inseparably with [violence and] oppression is to ignore the reality of misreadings of the sacred text” (p. xi). As our narrative accounts made visible, co-inquirers and I are acutely aware of single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Muslims as terrorists/violent/suspect even as we experience(d) grief, fear, and trauma in the aftermath of continued terror attacks. I think of Maya, reacting to Layla's stories of troubling posts in their town's online comments page about Muslims being complicit in terrorism, tearfully saying, “I don't think Muslims can do that kind of stuff. They're not Muslim ... But, yeah, they think we're terrorists.” I think of Layla saying, “I mean, we don't know who these people are and we can't stop them, but others think we can. I wish we could, but we can't.” I think of Safaa's story of her daughter Sadia confronting her high school social studies teacher following his remarks about Islam and terrorism, “She confronted that teacher, and she was upset ... she told him, ‘That hurts me, you can't say that.’” I think of Rayyan and her sister Marwa sharing the story of their eldest sister (who wears hijab) being told “Go back to your country! You don't belong here!” by a

belligerent man on a bus and of Rayyan saying, “Not every Muslim is like what you see in the news.” I think of Safaa sharing the same story with me a few months later and, connecting her daughter’s heartbreaking experience with terror attacks and disturbing political rhetoric, saying, “It happened after the France attacks .... and can you imagine the things Trump is saying?” I think of how, after repeated terror attacks in late 2015, Ayesha expressed, “I am so tired of this. With Paris and now this, it is too much! ... I try not to think about it, but it is hard.” Her words reminded me of how Zahra said, “What happened in Paris made me so upset and scared. I still think about it ... I’m traumatized by it.”

However, although we regularly contended with grief, trauma, and fear in the wake of terror attacks, vitriol, and rhetoric, we actively and passionately resisted single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Muslims as terrorists/violent/suspect. I am reminded of Zahra saying, “We can’t be afraid ... we need to be honest and keep speaking up.” I think of Ayesha saying, “I can’t defend any of those things. It’s not my responsibility to defend it ... and I can’t. I just don’t understand why people do such bad things. But we can’t live in fear.” I remember how Safaa, in the wake of her eldest daughter being verbally attacked on a bus, cautioned against single-storying others, “But we cannot say all society acts like that.” I think of how Rayyan asserted, “Even if you’re not Muslim, you should always stand up for people,” and of Maya tearfully saying, “Just because one person does it [engages in terrorist acts], doesn’t mean everyone will.” I once again wonder about when/how/if to discuss single stories of Muslims with children and youth as I think about how, after noticing Maya’s tears, Layla questioned, “Yimkin flitna bi’l hakee shway [Arabic for ‘Maybe we let our conversation get out of hand’]”, but then powerfully asserted, “But they have to know about it too, I always tell them don’t ever be ashamed of who you are.”

I experienced great tension in writing this section because I am fearful of centering yet another discussion of Muslims and Islam around terrorism. I am fearful that I will invite arrogant gazes and constructions in ways similar to (mis)representations of Muslims and Islam in mainstream media and literature<sup>230</sup>. However, while the stories we lived and shared alongside each other give a sense of our imaginative and relational resistance to single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Muslims and Islam, *they also make visible that we are always living in relation to these pervasive constructions*. I wonder about the short and long-term reverberations in our life-making, and in the life-making of other Muslim children, youth, families, and communities, as we experience ongoing trauma – of continued terror attacks, of being made to feel linked to terrorism/violence, and of possible ‘retaliatory’ attacks against us. For, although our narrative accounts made visible that single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Islam and Muslims were only some of the single stories co-inquirers and I live in relation to, they also made visible our embodied knowing of potential danger – particularly those who are visibly/identifiably Muslim or who *look* like they may be Muslim<sup>231</sup> – in the aftermath of large-scale terror attacks. Co-inquirers and I regularly expressed fear, worry, and dis-ease as we learned of the stories of Canadian Muslims – many of whom were women in hijab – being threatened or attacked in the wake of several terror attacks in the last few years<sup>232</sup>. We were collectively shocked and terrified as we learned of the horrific murder on January 30, 2017 of six Muslim men in prayer in a Quebec City mosque by an extremist with Islamophobic views (McKenna & Montpetit, 2017). However, while these stories remind us of the need to be aware of potential danger, they cannot be represented as *the* single

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<sup>230</sup> Similar to Bullock and Jafri’s (2000) contention that, “Because of this Western cultural fixation on Muslim women’s dress as a symbol of oppression, Muslim women often have to focus on that aspect of their identity as well, even if they would rather talk of something else” (p. 37), co-inquirers and I often expressed frustration, angst, and grief following terror attacks committed by those who identify as Muslim.

<sup>231</sup> See: Basu, 2016; Abhasakun, 2017.

<sup>232</sup> See: CBC News, 2016; Chin, 2015; Da Silva, 2016; Pelletier, 2015.

story of our experiences as Canadian Muslims. The stories co-inquirers and I lived and shared – and the stories of Canadians of all backgrounds standing alongside their Muslim family, friends, and neighbours in the wake of hate crimes and terror attacks committed by perpetrators of all backgrounds – call attention to how we, alongside multitudes, are standing up and speaking out to condemn discrimination and other forms of hatred and violence.

### **Practical Justifications of this Research: Troubling Perceptions of Fixed Borders between Familial and School Worlds**

The preceding sections offer important practical insights for families, educators, and community members looking to better support Canadian Muslim girls, women, and families undergoing life transitions. However, this study also troubles perceptions of fixed borders between familial and school worlds (Lugones, 1987) for Muslim children, youth, and families. For, while many studies in the literature about Muslim children, youth, and families in relation to schools and schooling give a sense of fixed borders between school and familial worlds fraught with tension-filled attempts at border-crossing (see, for example, Sirin & Fine, 2008; Tindongan, 2011; Zine, 2001), our narrative accounts made visible that – although we at times experienced moments of tensionality – co-inquirers and I did not experience our travels across familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011) in this way<sup>233</sup>. The stories co-inquirers and I lived and shared alongside one another made visible the multiple ways that our familial and school curriculum-making worlds met ... and overlapped.

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<sup>233</sup> It is not my intention to deny that others may feel this way. Rather, it is my intention to make visible that the stories *co-inquirers and I* shared do not give a sense of fixed borders.

In their research alongside children, youth, families, and teachers, Huber et al. (2011) discussed learning

how easily arrogant perception can cause children, families, and teachers to overwrite one world of curriculum making. We see the dangers of making it impossible for children and families to compose forward-looking stories when school curriculum making becomes too dominant and assumes a kind of arrogant perception of familial curriculum making. We also recognize the dangers of arrogant perception when familial curriculum making may overwrite school curriculum making. (p. 149)

While co-inquirers and I shared many stories that draw attention to the importance school curriculum-making holds in our life-making, our stories foregrounded the centrality of our familial relationships and knowing to our stories of being and becoming. This should not be perceived as suggestive of the need to only prioritize familial curriculum-making in the lives of Muslim girls (and boys), women (and men), and families. In foregrounding our familial curriculum-making experiences, I purposely attempted to illuminate a world of curriculum-making that is often not seen or recognized (Huber et al., 2011) – particularly for (female) Muslim children, youth, and families.

I am drawn to how, for Safaa, familial curriculum-making is a relational, reciprocal, imaginatively co-composed process alongside her husband, children, extended and chosen family, friends, teachers, and community members. Alongside living a familial curriculum of the right and responsibility to advocate for themselves and others in the face of racial, religious, cultural, social, and gendered arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009), Safaa also teaches her children the importance of reconnecting with family as often as

possible in her repeated efforts to travel to America to visit with extended family. Having grown up in the midst of a very large extended family, familial relationships are important to Safaa because of mutual love and care, and because they are imbued with educative (Dewey, 1938) spaces: “That’s how I grew up, nobody ever told me, ‘Do this, and do that.’ It was through lived examples . . . . that’s how we learn, it’s through living.” Reflecting upon her parenting practices alongside her husband in their relatively smaller family unit in Canada, Safaa drew upon her experiences growing up in Somalia and Kenya when she mused,

There, we say it takes a community to raise a child, so there was minimal interaction between the parents and the child because the child belongs to *all* the community, right? Whereby here you have long interactions, one-on-one interactions . . . . We grew up in a *rich* community whereby we learned from everybody, but for [our kids] it’s just you, and how much teaching can you give them by yourself to grow as you grew?

However, Safaa later expressed appreciation for how values like honesty and politeness within “Canadian culture” have shaped her children’s knowing and their familial curriculum-making practices. Safaa’s stories made visible that, while her children are learning and growing in different ways and places than she did, she has “*made* a family” in Canada which includes members of her children’s Islamic school community – one of the places they call “home.”

Whether within public or Islamic school environments, co-inquirers shared many stories of the ways school narratives and curriculum-making practices shaped their familial curriculum-making. However, I am drawn to their stories of the ways their personal and familial knowledge and practices have (re)shaped school curriculum-making worlds. I think of how, guided by their belief in the Two R’s of rights and responsibilities, Safaa and Rayyan shared familial curriculum

resources within school curriculum-making worlds in their stories of resisting bullying, discrimination, and racism. I think of how Layla and Safaa drew upon their knowing of familial languages to teach within school curriculum-making worlds<sup>234</sup>. I think of Safaa's stories of encouraging her children to advocate for prayer spaces in schools and of her work as a multicultural consultant alongside many children, youth, families, and school educators. I think of Ayesha teaching Zahra "how to win [teachers'] trust," and of Ayesha volunteering in her daughters' school library. I think of how Maya, drawing upon her embodied knowing and Layla's support, confidently spoke up in defence of others who had been unfairly judged and/or bullied. Co-inquirers and I made visible the ways that familial and intergenerational knowing live in us ... and how, while our lives are profoundly shaped by the worlds (Lugones, 1987) we inhabit, we also (re)shape myriad worlds in our ongoing and imaginative life-making.

Returning to reflect upon how co-inquirers and I face(d) and challenge(d) countless single stories (Adichie, 2009) and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987), I think about how family, friends, teachers, and other community members help(ed) support us in our resistance to these stories. For Ayesha, resisting single stories (Adichie, 2009) and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) includes co-composing a curriculum of choice(s) alongside her daughters. Ayesha purposefully create(s/d) spaces for choices through listening to her daughters in their nightly routine of bedtime talks. This resonates in how Ayesha repeatedly spoke of appreciating the ways that Zahra's grade 7 Social Studies teacher discussed single stories of Muslims with Zahra and her classmates: "Her teacher makes people aware about the things that happen and

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<sup>234</sup> All three mother co-inquirers – Layla, Safaa, and Ayesha – expressed their belief in the importance of learning and/or teaching the languages of their cultural heritage within familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011). I am reminded of Young's (2005) discussion of the intricate connection between identity and language: "Wherever I go, wherever I am, I will always remember I am *Anishnabe*. I will speak it even if no one understands; it is a way of centering myself" (p. 22).

talks about how we should react, which is so good, right?” I am reminded of Layla receiving a gift of flowers with an encouraging note from an anonymous friend/community member after the Paris attacks in November 2015. I think about how Zahra described being troubled in class by a candidate for the federal Progressive Conservative party discussing his views that women in niqab should not be allowed to take the ceremonial oath of Canadian citizenship if they do not remove their niqab, and how she felt more at ease when another candidate responded, “We don’t ask you to take your turban off, shame on you!” I think of how Maya said she doesn’t experience discrimination as a Muslim in school because “in school we talk about that, like my teacher is against people doing and saying mean things to other people because of things like culture.” However, I also think of the story Safaa shared of how she and her daughter Sadia confronted Sadia’s grade 10 Social Studies teacher for his hurtful rhetoric about Muslims as perpetrators of terror attacks: “I believe it’s not only her who feels like that, you have more [students] than her who are of the Muslim faith ... and they don’t feel good about what you’re saying.” While our narrative accounts made visible that we draw upon our embodied knowing to resist single stories and arrogant perceptions, they also made visible that this profoundly hard and necessary work often requires allies.<sup>235</sup> They made visible how allies can help co-compose conversational spaces (Clandinin et al., 2012) where we can speak *with* each other and listen *to* each other, spaces imbued with possibilities for world-travel with loving perception (Lugones, 1987) ... and possibilities for (re)shaping our world(s).

As the stories Safaa shared of her experiences confronting teachers alongside her daughters made visible, co-inquirers and I sometimes experienced tensionality in our movement

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<sup>235</sup> I resonate with MuslimGirl.com founder Amani Al-Khatahtbeh’s conception of how to be an ally with Muslim women and against Islamophobia (in Kahn, 2017).

between familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011). We shared many stories of bullying, racism, and discrimination *from other girls and youth* – many of whom were Muslim – within school worlds. However, the stories Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I shared made visible the diverse ways that we draw upon personal, familial, and relational knowing in our resistance to bullying, racism, discrimination, single stories (Adichie, 2009), and arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) from within and across the multiplicity of worlds we travel to and inhabit. Contemplating the stories we shared of travelling between and across familial and school worlds, I think about how we found and/or created borderland spaces (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999) of liminality and possibility within, between, and across these curriculum-making worlds, spaces that are continually shifting and *shifted* through our living<sup>236</sup>. Ruminating on fluid boundaries permeated with borderland spaces between our familial and school curriculum-making worlds, I wonder at how constructions in the literature, and also in practice, of fixed borders between familial and school worlds suggests a lack of agency for familial and school learners/educators to (re)shape the curriculum-making worlds we inhabit ... a suggestion that co-inquirers and I challenged alongside multiple friends, educators, and community members.

However, Safaa's stories of her work as a multicultural consultant remind me that co-inquirers and I are all fluent in the English language and have been blessed with many different kinds of familial, community, and school supports in our life-making. Discussing her work as a

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<sup>236</sup> Weaving autobiographic writing as a 'mestiza' (defined by dictionary.com as "a woman of mixed racial or ethnic ancestry, especially, in Latin America, of mixed American Indian and European descent") in the United States (U.S) alongside a historic overview of the relationship between Mexico and the U.S., Anzaldúa (1987/1999) elucidated, Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (p. 3)

multicultural consultant with the Canadian Somali community, Safaa reflected upon her work alongside families and teachers to co-compose (borderland) spaces of increased understanding:

I go to some schools and teachers will tell me that they haven't seen a parent the whole year, but maybe they have reasons ... like this Mom is a single working Mom, she is still learning English, the father died back home, she's raising four kids and one of them [is] now diagnosed with schizophrenia, she has so many other things to think about ... Also, in [our] culture, the mother will tell her child, "Oh you did this today? I'm going to tell your teacher," and the teacher will discipline the child. That's the power that schools had ... so that's where these women are coming from, they don't even get involved with the children's school.

Safaa's words call attention to the need for continual dialogue between learners/educators<sup>237</sup> from within and across familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011). Her words call attention to the need for learners/educators within both curriculum-making worlds to travel with loving perception (Lugones, 1987) within and across a multiplicity of worlds.

**My Personal Justifications for Engaging in this Research: Growing as a Muslim Woman,  
Mother, Daughter, and Narrative Inquirer**

Clandinin (2013) wrote "no one leaves a narrative inquiry unchanged" (p. 201). As I reflect upon the many changes to my selves (Lugones 1987) and the stories I lived and told as a Muslim woman, mother, (grand)daughter, scholar, and narrative inquirer over the last two years, I think about the many wonderings I had when I first imagined this study. I think about my

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<sup>237</sup> I purposely do not separate learners from educators here, for as Huber et al. (2011) noted, these labels are fluid and shift depending upon the context.

wonderings about my daughter Noor’s experiences as a Muslim girl poised “at the edge of adolescence” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 1), my experiences as a Muslim mother with a daughter transitioning into adolescence, and the experiences of other Canadian Muslim girls and mothers on the cusp of significant life transitions<sup>238</sup>. Over three years after my wonderings led to this research, I think about some of the changes to the stories I live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) alongside Noor, Yehia, Hannah, and so many others ... and about some of the lessons that inquiring alongside Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya have planted in me<sup>239</sup>.

The stories that Safaa lived, shared, and inquired into alongside me continue to teach me about building relationships and communities with care. Safaa asserted she “*made* a family” in the many places she has lived, not necessarily composed of blood connections, but those of the heart: “I have a good support network, lots of friends .... I *made* a family.” However, while Safaa emphasized the importance of building loving and supportive familial and community relationships, she also stressed the importance of attending to the Two R’s of rights and responsibilities in every relationship:

Everybody has rights and responsibilities. If we are careful with those two R’s, then you are going to survive ... I tell [my children], “You don’t allow anybody ever to take your rights away. *Anybody*. But make sure you also fulfill your own responsibilities. If you are careful with those two R’s, then you will be okay.”

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<sup>238</sup> Discussed in the ‘Rooting a Research Puzzle’ section in the first few pages of this dissertation.

<sup>239</sup> While our inquiries alongside one another have taught me multiple lessons, because of limited space in this chapter, I share only a few that have profoundly shaped my living and growing alongside my children and others.

Coming alongside Safaa and Rayyan awakened me to the importance of *living* the Two R's alongside my children – a lesson I continue to try to nurture in my familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011). In our narrative account, I wrote:

Safaa has also repeatedly encouraged me to advocate for my children. I am reminded of how, upon hearing news of my youngest daughter Hannah's diagnosis with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the summer of 2016, Safaa immediately began asking who I've been in contact with and advised, "You can't be shy asking for supports Muna" ... I am also reminded of how, in the spring of 2016, Safaa responded to another troubling story I shared about Noor experiencing bullying in school, "Muna, you need to talk to her teachers and to the Principal, she needs to feel safe in school." Safaa and Rayyan have repeatedly taught me, through sharing their stories and through responding to mine, about how important it is for me to live a life of speaking up and advocating alongside my children ... because teaching them about rights and responsibilities necessitates *living* the Two R's alongside them.

Safaa has also taught me about carefully composing a familial curriculum (Huber et al., 2011) that is attentive to my children's uniqueness. I recall how, in the spring of 2016, I shared a story with Safaa about feeling judged as a mother by a few female acquaintances. I had recently purchased a cell phone for Noor and the women asserted that they would never allow their children to own cellphones at Noor's age<sup>240</sup>. Incredulous, Safaa stressed, "Everybody is different, you can't compare anybody to anybody else ... and you don't want to hear Aunties comparing you to anybody, it's not nice. She is unique and is a different person." Through coming alongside

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<sup>240</sup> Noor was 13 years old at that time.

Safaa, I have become more wakeful (Greene, 1995) to the stories I live in my curriculum-making alongside Noor, Yehia, and Hannah ... for, as Safaa affirmed, “Everybody is different.”

Like her mother Safaa, Rayyan taught me powerful lessons about carefully composing relationships – particularly as a narrative inquirer. I recall how, during our first one-on-one conversation in the fall of 2015, Rayyan discussed not sharing “much” about herself with people she isn’t close with. She explained, “It depends on if they’re talkative. If they’re talkative, then I’m talkative. But if they’re not talkative, then I’m not either.” In our narrative account, I wrote:

In her quiet but profound way, Rayyan drew my attention to the importance of reciprocity in every interaction, every relationship. As she spoke, I recalled our first conversation and inwardly cringed ... because, in that moment, I realized that I hadn’t really shared much about myself in the beginning, and yet had asked Rayyan to share a lot about herself. I now recognize that Rayyan shared what she felt were safe stories at first because we hadn’t yet built a trusting relationship .... Over the course of this inquiry, Rayyan has repeatedly helped me to appreciate that, while she may be quiet at times, she is not shy ... and that she will take her time deciding if/what/when she will share. She too knows the value of building relationships and communities carefully.

The stories Rayyan lived, shared, and inquired into alongside me continue to live in me and continually remind me of the importance of mutual reciprocity in every relationship – including research relationships.

Ayesha and Zahra taught me about the importance of co-composing spaces of choice(s) alongside my children in our familial curriculum making (Huber et al., 2011). I recall how, in our

first conversation alongside one another in the winter of 2015, I shared with Ayesha and Zahra my reservations about allowing Noor to choose the school she would like to attend in junior high – I was worried that Noor would choose to leave the Islamic school she has grown up in. Zahra responded to my dis-ease by sharing that it was important to her to be able to choose to attend a public junior high school after six years of Islamic school programming because she felt the need to challenge herself in a different setting. Ayesha added, “Maybe we need to let them experience the things we’re fearful of and let them try it. And it’s not final, she can always go back.” I later gained a sense of some of the multilayered roots of Ayesha’s belief in the importance of creating spaces for choice(s) in her familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011). Initially assuming that Ayesha believed in the importance of choice(s) because of her lack of choice(s) growing up in the midst of conflict in Afghanistan and as a refugee in Pakistan, Ayesha later discussed, in the winter of 2015, falling in love with Zahra’s Dad ... and the friction this initially created between her and her parents. She stressed, “At some point we need to let go and accept our children’s choices ... otherwise you might ruin your relationship with them.” For Zahra, some of the roots of her profound belief in the right to choose include her experiences with feeling pressured to don the hijab. In the summer of 2016, Zahra shared the story of a classmate getting dress-coded<sup>241</sup> and said, “You shouldn’t force someone to do something or wear something because they’ll start to hate it ... that’s what my Dad did with me, he forced me to wear the hijab and now I hate it.” In our narrative account, I wrote about how the stories we lived and shared alongside each other are “working on [me]” (Basso, 1996, p. 59)<sup>242</sup> and made me resolve to

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<sup>241</sup> Discussed in the ‘You shouldn’t force someone to do something’ section of our narrative account in Chapter 4.

<sup>242</sup> An Apache Elder shared the profound wisdom of sitting and thinking with stories with Basso (1996):

That story is working on you now. You keep thinking about it. That story is making you want to replace yourself. You think only of what you did that was wrong and you don’t like it. So you want to live better. (p. 59)

compose more spaces for choice(s) alongside my children – including Noor’s profound right to choose the school she would like to attend. For, as I wrote in our narrative account, “With their vulnerability and their courage, Ayesha and Zahra inspire me and make me want to ‘live better’ (Basso, 1996, p. 59) alongside my children and loved ones.”

Inquiring alongside Layla and Maya helped me to become more wakeful (Greene, 1995) to arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) ... including to the arrogant perceiver within myself. In our narrative account<sup>243</sup>, reflecting upon my assumptions of their experiences composing their lives in Tree Town<sup>244</sup>, I wrote:

As I prepared to inquire alongside Maya and Layla, I expected to hear stories of discrimination because, I am ashamed to admit, the single story (Adichie, 2009) I held of small town Alberta was one of discomfort with, or even intolerance of, difference. However, in coming alongside Maya and Layla and their stories of making a life in Tree Town, I quickly learned that my arrogant perception of rural Albertan communities was constructed without wakefulness (Greene, 1995) to my lack of experiential knowledge of small town life.

Layla repeatedly reminded me of my ability to be an arrogant perceiver. In the winter of 2016, as Layla shared a story of feeling judged in her parenting practices by another mother, I lamented, “Moms can be so judgemental of other Moms.” Layla responded with honesty, “Yeah, I can be judgemental too though,” prompting my honest (with her and myself) reply, “Me too.” Earlier, in the summer of 2016, I felt a profound sense of resonance with Layla when she explained how

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<sup>243</sup> Discussed in the ‘Facing (internal and external) arrogant perception(s) alongside Maya and Layla’ section in our narrative account in Chapter 5.

<sup>244</sup> Pseudonym for a rural town in Alberta.

becoming a mother helped her to lovingly travel to her Mom's worlds (Lugones, 1987). In our narrative account, reflecting upon my continually evolving relationship with my Mom, I wrote:

Thinking about how my Mom and I grew a closer relationship after I became a Mom, and of how arrogantly I had perceived my Mom's worlds growing up<sup>245</sup>, I replied, "Yeah ... I don't know how [my Mom] does everything she still does mash'Allah."

These and other stories Layla, Maya, and I lived, shared, and inquired into have helped to make me more wakeful to the ways I can arrogantly perceive others as a woman, mother, daughter, and researcher.

Maya, Layla, and I also discussed the arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) others may hold of us as Muslim girls and women. I think about how Maya, drawing upon her experiences as a Muslim girl and as a friend to those who have been arrogantly perceived, cautioned, "Don't judge a book by its cover." In the winter of 2016, in response to a story I shared of an experience with feeling arrogantly perceived as a veiled mother to a child with ASD, Layla said,

It's so sad because people see us and make assumptions about our kids or the way we are as parents ... it even happens with people from poor communities or with Moms who smoke or with people who are a different race ... the stereotypes are so strong sometimes.

As we later discussed multiple single stories (Adichie, 2009) in the wake of several terror attacks, Layla stressed, "I always tell [my children] don't ever be ashamed of who you are." Layla's belief that it is important to live unabashedly was elucidated during a conversation we shared in the winter of 2016, "I feel like we're *living* our faith ... I live in a way that shows that

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<sup>245</sup> Discussed in the "Travelling to Mama's Worlds" section in Chapter 1.

I'm not ashamed of being Muslim, especially here where I was the first woman to wear hijab.” However, Maya, Layla, and I also discussed arrogant perceptions from within Muslim communities. Maya and Layla shared many stories of being judged by others, often by those closest to them. However, Layla asserted their right to live in ways *they* deemed appropriate: “This is how we live, I’m not going to hide or put on a lie for you.” Inquiring alongside Maya and Layla has taught me the importance of being more wakeful (Greene, 1995) to internal and external arrogant perceptions ... and the importance of *living* my faith unabashedly.

Bateson (2000) wrote, “Wherever lives overlap and flow together, there are depths of unknowing” (p. 3). While inquiring alongside co-inquirers has been an incredibly illuminating and fulfilling process, it has also been tension-filled work imbued with uncertainty. As our narrative accounts made visible, I have experienced “depths of unknowing,” and wondered about how to negotiate innumerable aspects of narratively inquiring and living alongside co-inquirers, as our lives met and continue to “overlap and flow together.” I have frequently wondered who I am – and who I am always in the process of becoming – as a Canadian Muslim woman, mother, (grand)daughter, graduate student, teacher, scholar, and narrative inquirer alongside co-inquirers. However, as I reflect upon the many wisdoms<sup>246</sup> Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya have planted in me, I am grateful for the opportunity to live and inquire alongside six girls and women who taught me about imaginatively composing lives (Bateson, 1989, 2000) *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to personal, familial, social,

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<sup>246</sup> The stories we lived, shared, and inquired into alongside each other bring to mind Bateson’s (2000) words: “Wisdom comes not by the accumulation of more and more experiences but through discerning patterns in the deeper mystery of what is already there .... Wisdom, then, is born of the overlapping of lives, the resonance between stories” (p. 243).

cultural, temporal, institutional, linguistic, faith-based/religious, and other narratives (Clandinin, 2013) ... for depths of knowing grew within me in the process.

### **Reflecting Back ... and Imagining Forward**

Bateson (2000) contended, “The encounter with persons, one by one, rather than categories and generalizations, is still the best way to cross the lines of strangeness” (p. 81). By engaging in this research alongside co-inquirers, I foreground additional dimensions to the literature and to wider narratives and discourses that are too often *about* Muslim girls and women, yet do not acknowledge us as integral to framing and shaping discourses in relational, experiential, and profoundly complex/interconnected ways. Through our narrative inquiries, Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, Maya, and I made visible many of the stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013) as Canadian Muslim girls and women in the midst of ongoing life transitions. The stories we lived, told, retold, and relived (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside each other made visible the many ways co-inquirers and I are composing our lives *in relation* (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber, 2000) to myriad people, places, and stories. They made visible the personal, familial, cultural, faith-based/religious, and intergenerational knowings we draw upon in relationally resisting arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) and single stories (Adichie, 2009). They made visible the many ways that we are agentially and relationally (re)shaping our familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Huber et al., 2011), the multiplicity of our selves (Lugones, 1987), and the stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin, 2013). They made visible that we are always in the process of composing forward-looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) alongside each other, family, friends, school and community members, and others. The

stories we shared, lived, and inquired into alongside one another call attention to the need to be cautious about single-storying Muslim girls and women ... and the need for educators, researchers, and community members from within and across Muslim and other communities in Canada to listen to/amplify *our* voices rather than presuming to speak for us.

As I reflect upon our narrative inquiries alongside each other, I think of how blessed I have been to inquire alongside Safaa, Rayyan, Ayesha, Zahra, Layla, and Maya during this time of multiple life transitions. I think of all that I have learned and the many understandings and wonderings that continue to live and grow in me as I ruminate about the many changes to our selves (Lugones, 1987) and the stories we live *by*, *with*, and *in* (Clandinin (2013) over the last two years. As co-inquirers and I continue to imagine forward, I wonder about the changes future seasons will bring ... and those *we* will bring into being.

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## Appendix A

## Glossary of Arabic and/or Islamic Terms

**A3mo:** Colloquial way of saying ‘Uncle’ in Arabic.

**A3mto:** Colloquial way of saying ‘Auntie’ in Arabic.

**Alhamdulillah:** A word that is said in instances of gratitude. It means ‘All praise is for Allah (SWT).’

**Allah (SWT):** Allah is the Arabic word for God. For Muslims around the world, the acronym SWT usually accompanies the verbal or written mention of Allah (SWT). It stands for *Subhanahu Wa Ta’la*, meaning Glory be to Allah (SWT), the Exalted.

**Allah yirhama:** May God have mercy on her.

**Allah yirhamu:** May God have mercy on him.

**Amanah:** An *Amanah* is the Arabic word for ‘a trust.’ In Islam, the concept of an *Amanah* signifies a faith-based, moral obligation to uphold and carry out a sacred obligation.

**Baligh:** Ali (2012) described this as “a term used in Islam to refer to one’s coming of age, signified by reaching puberty” (p. 8).

**Bism’Allah:** This is a shortened version of ‘Bism’Allah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem,’ which means, “In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace” [as translated by Muhammad Asad, 1980]. This invocation is used by Muslims throughout the world before praying, eating, writing, reading, and myriad other activities, including embarking upon a challenging task.

**Burqa:** A long garment covering a woman’s body, except for her eyes.

**Duaa:** This is a word that signifies supplication or a prayer to Allah (SWT). Duaa is viewed as an integral form of worship in Islam.

**Eid:** The two Muslim feasts/festivals/holidays are celebrated to commemorate important events in the Islamic lunar calendar. Eid Al-Fitr is celebrated after the completion of the holy month of Ramadan and, a few months later, Eid Al-Adha is celebrated after the completion of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, during the holy month of Dhul Hijjah.

**Eid Mubarak:** This is a common Islamic saying during one of the two Eid celebrations. It means, ‘May you have a blessed Eid.’

**Haram:** Forbidden.

**Habibty:** My beloved.

**Hijab:** While many scholars are careful to differentiate between the terms headscarf/veil and hijab – arguing that the concept of hijab is infinitely broader than a piece of fabric meant to cover a woman’s hair, I use the terms headscarf/veil and hijab interchangeably. I do this purposely because this is the term many veiled Muslim women use to refer to their headscarf/veil. However, the concept of hijab includes a requirement for men and women to observe modesty in demeanour and dress. The headscarf/veil is considered a form of hijab, and Islamic scholars from diverse Muslim communities differ in their opinions as to whether the headscarf is required to fulfill hijab for women.

**Hijabi:** This is a colloquial term for women who wear hijab that Muslim women often use with one another. It is considered derogatory by many Muslim women, but, as a Muslim woman in hijab, I use it with co-inquirers and friends in a loving and playful manner.

**Inna li’Allah wa Inna Ilayhi Raj’oon:** This is an Arabic and Islamic saying that is commonly used upon news of death, “We belong to Allah and to Him we are destined to return.”

**Insha’Allah:** God willing.

**Insha’Allah khair:** May this be good/bring blessings, God willing.

**Jazakum Allahu Khairan:** An Islamic saying which translates to, “May Allah reward you with all that is good.”

**Jiddee/Jiddo:** A colloquial way of saying Grandfather.

**Jihad:** This means to struggle, or strive in the way of the Creator, including the struggle against turning away from the Creator and striving against oppression and injustice (Aslan, 2011).

**Ka3k:** For my family, ka3k are a hybrid between a cookie and cake.

**Khalee:** Maternal uncle.

**Khalto:** A colloquial way of saying maternal aunt. I was also taught to refer to elder female family friends as Khalto as a sign of respect.

**Masjid:** This usually refers to a mosque, a congregational place of worship for many Muslims.

**Mash’Allah:** This is an Arabic phrase used to express appreciation for Allah’s (SWT) blessings and/or creation.

**Nakba:** An Arabic word used to refer to the ‘Catastrophe’ of the Palestinian experience following the 1948 War.

**Nikah:** Islamic word for marriage.

**Sabr:** *Sabr* is an Arabic word for patience. The concept of *sabr* in Islam is one of patience, perseverance, and acceptance of Allah's (SWT) Will. Praying for *sabr* in the face of hardship is a common Muslim invocation.

**Sittee/Sitto:** A colloquial way of saying grandmother.

**Subhan Allah:** This is an Arabic phrase that means "Glory be to God." This phrase is used to connote wonder and amazement.

**(SWT):** For Muslims around the world, the acronym SWT usually accompanies the verbal or written mention of Allah (SWT). It stands for Subhanahu Wa Ta'la, meaning Glory be to Allah (SWT), the Exalted.

**Ummah:** An Islamic concept of Muslims being intricately connected to each other as one body, one community.

**Wajib:** Duty/responsibility.

**Wallah:** A way of expressing truthfulness and/or sincerely, wallah means, "I swear by God."

**Qur'an:** Muslims consider the Qur'an to be the holiest, foundational Islamic text.

## Appendix B

## Record of Research Conversations Alongside Rayyan and/or Safaa

Getting (re)acquainted conversation at YMCA: February 12, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Coffee restaurant conversation with Safaa: April 21, 2015 (Spring 2015)

Shared conversation with Safaa and Rayyan at YMCA: May 18, 2015 (Spring 2015)

Lakeside walk and walk with Safaa: August 21, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Shared conversation with Rayyan and Safaa in my home: October 3, 2015 (Fall 2015)

DQ Conversation with Rayyan and sister Marwa: October 17, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Shared conversation with Safaa and Rayyan in their home: December 19, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Conversation with Safaa in my home: February 14, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Restaurant conversation with Rayyan and Marwa: February, 25, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Shared conversation with Rayyan and Safaa at YMCA: May 7, 2016 (Spring 2016)

Restaurant conversation with Rayyan and Marwa: August 11, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Shared conversation with Safaa and Rayyan in my home: November 12, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Visiting with Safaa and Rayyan in the hospital: February 5, 2017 (Winter 2017)

Negotiating our narrative account over dinner at a restaurant: February 18, 2017 (Winter 2017)

## Appendix C

## Record of Research Conversations Alongside Zahra and/or Ayesha

Meeting for the first time at Chapel Hill vigil: February 13, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Discussing participation with Zahra and Ayesha in their home: February 14, 2015 (Winter 2015)

First research conversation with Zahra and Ayesha in their home: March 1, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Conversation with Zahra and Ayesha in their home: July 10, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Watching home movies with Zahra and Ayesha in their home: August 19, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Brunch conversation with Ayesha and Zahra in my home: September 6, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Attending presentation with Zahra and Ayesha at a mosque: October 12, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Breakfast conversation with Ayesha and Zahra in their home: October 18, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Coffee shop conversation with Zahra: November 28, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Dinner with Ayesha at a restaurant: December 5, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Pancake breakfast with Ayesha and Zahra in my home: December 25, 2015 (Winter 2015)

Conversation with Ayesha at a mosque: February 5, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Breakfast conversation with Zahra at a restaurant: February 28, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Lunch conversation with Ayesha at a restaurant: March 28, 2016 (Spring 2016)

Conversation with Zahra and Ayesha at a restaurant: April 28, 2016 (Spring 2016)

Coffee shop conversation with Ayesha and her Mom: July 10, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Breakfast conversation with Zahra at a restaurant: August 7, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Conversation with Ayesha in her home: August 10, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Playground conversation with Zahra: August 24, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Lunch conversation with Ayesha and Zahra at a restaurant: September 4, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Breakfast conversation with Ayesha in my home: September 16, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Dinner conversation with Zahra at a restaurant: October 5, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Dinner conversation with Ayesha and Zahra at a restaurant: November 27, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Breakfast conversation with Zahra and Ayesha in my home: December 18, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Negotiating our narrative account in my home: February 25, 2017 (Winter 2017)

## Appendix D

## Record of Research Conversations Alongside Layla and/or Maya

Discussing participation with Layla and Maya in Sara's home: July 12, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Research conversation with Maya and Layla in their home: September 13, 2015 (Summer 2015)

Conversation with Layla and Maya in Grandparents' home: November 22, 2015 (Fall 2015)

Lunch conversation with Maya and Layla in my home: February 15, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Attending Maya's skating exhibition: February 20, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Mall trip with Maya and Layla: February 28, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Spray park date with Layla and Maya and my children: June 5, 2016 (Spring 2016)

Telephone conversation with Layla: June 18, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Breaking Ramadan fast with Maya in Sara's home: June 18, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Lunch conversation with Layla and Maya at a restaurant: August 17, 2016 (Summer 2016)

Conversation with Maya and Layla in my home: September 18, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Dinner conversation with Layla and Maya at a restaurant: October 30, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Attending Maya's skating competition: December 3, 2016 (Fall 2016)

Telephone conversation with Layla: December 7, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Dinner conversation with Maya in Sara's home: December 17, 2016 (Winter 2016)

Conversation with Maya and Layla in Sara's house: January 20, 2017 (Winter 2017)

Negotiating our narrative account in my home: March 27, 2017 (Winter 2017)

## Appendix E

### Information and Recruitment Letters, Consent and Assent Forms

#### Recruitment Letter for Community Members/Organizations

My name is Muna Saleh and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. As a Canadian Muslim woman, and a mother and teacher of Canadian Muslim girls, I am interested in learning more about the experiences of second-generation Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers as the girls transition from elementary to junior high school. I would like to research alongside Muslim mothers and their daughters to gain insights into the personal, cultural, school, familial, and social narratives shaping their experiences. This involves meeting with Muslim mothers and their daughters separately 7-8 times over the next two years to hear about and reflect upon their experiences.

Narrative Inquiry, the methodology I will be using to help me engage in this study, involves telling stories of experiences and may involve the sharing of artifacts, memory box items, photography and creative work, and/or the creation of life timelines. One-on-one conversations will be held in locations of participants' choosing.

It would be helpful if you could guide me to potential mother and daughter participants who:

- Identify as Muslim
- Are in grade 6 as of January 2015 (daughter participants)
- Would be interested in participating

The privacy and confidentiality of participants is extremely important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty.

My research process and methods has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

If you are aware of possible participants who meet the above criteria, I would appreciate it if you would – with their consent – share possible mother participants' contact information with me. Thank you for your consideration of this request. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. D. Jean Clandinin (my research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Muna Saleh  
 PhD candidate  
 Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development  
 University of Alberta  
 email: [mhsaleh@ualberta.ca](mailto:mhsaleh@ualberta.ca)

### Information Letter for Girl Participants

My name is Muna Saleh and I am a student and researcher at the University of Alberta. I want to learn more about the experiences of Canadian Muslim girls who are moving from grade 6 to grade 7. The title of this study is “A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Second-Generation Canadian Muslim Girls and Their Mothers as the Girls Transition from Elementary to Junior High School.”

I would like to invite you to tell me more about what it is like to experience this time of change. I would also like to know what it is like for your mother in this time of change and I will be talking to her too. Everything that you share with me will not be shared with anyone else unless you give me permission to share.

I will be visiting with you in locations that you and your mother choose so that we can share our stories of experiences. I will sometimes be writing notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear. I will record our conversations and will write about them as part of my research. I will talk to your mother separately and I will record these conversations too. I will always show you what I write and make sure that you give me permission to share my writing with others. Your real name will never appear in any of my writings. As an important participant in this research, you will be able to help decide what stories of experiences you think should be included in the papers and presentations and in the dissertation I am writing.

You do not have to talk to me if you don't want to, or if you don't feel like it. If you have any questions, please ask me. I will be happy to answer them for you. I am looking forward to spending time with you.

Sincerely,

Muna Saleh  
Student/Researcher  
PhD candidate  
University of Alberta

## Information Letter for Mother Participants

Dear Mrs./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Muna Saleh and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. My research study focuses on the experiences of Canadian Muslim girls and their mothers as the girls transition from elementary to junior high school. I would like to work with your daughter and with you. This involves meeting with you and your daughter independently 7-8 times over the next two years to hear about and reflect upon your experiences, and your daughter's experiences, as your daughter transitions from grade 6 to grade 7.

The title of my study is "A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Second-Generation Canadian Muslim Girls and Their Mothers as the Girls Transition from Elementary to Junior High School." Narrative Inquiry, the methodology I will be using to help me engage in this study, involves telling stories of your experiences and may involve the sharing of artifacts, memory box items, photography and creative work, and/or the creation of life timelines. One-on-one conversations will be held in locations that you and your daughter choose. These one-hour conversations will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Writing based on this inquiry will be used in my dissertation and submitted for publication in journals, and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. Your privacy and confidentiality is extremely important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Study data, including personal information about you, will be securely stored for 5 years after the study is over, at which time it will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You, and your daughter, have the right to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. If you withdraw, the data collected from observations, conversations, and other activities will only be used with your consent. My research process and methods has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Your daughter's experiences and yours as a mother are important in this research project. I would appreciate it if you would sign the attached consent form. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact Dr. D. Jean Clandinin (research supervisor) at [jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca](mailto:jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

Muna Saleh  
PhD candidate  
Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development  
University of Alberta  
email: [mhsaleh@ualberta.ca](mailto:mhsaleh@ualberta.ca)

## Assent Form for Girl Participants

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled “A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Second-Generation Canadian Muslim Girls and Their Mothers as the Girls Transition from Elementary to Junior High School.” I understand that this research will be carried out by Muna Saleh, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Muna will write about what she sees and hears from our conversations together. I know that she and I will talk about my experiences as a Canadian Muslim girl during the transition from grade 6 to grade 7. I know that Muna will record our conversations, will write about them, and when our conversations are typed, we will talk about them. I also know that she might use some of my creative writing for her research. I know that Muna will talk to my mother about helping me during this time of transition.

I am aware that Muna will write papers and share with other people what she is learning from our work together. I know that when she writes or talks about me, she will not tell my name or my family’s names.

Muna has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I can stop doing the research at any time and I don’t need to talk if I don’t want to. If I change my mind, all I need to do is to tell Muna.

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Name (Please Print)

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Signature

---

Date

### Informed Consent Form for Girl Participants

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I give permission for my daughter \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the research study entitled, “A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Second-Generation Canadian Muslim Girls and Their Mothers as the Girls Transition from Elementary to Junior High School.” I understand that this research will be carried out by Muna Saleh, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

As a parent of a child participant in this study, I have been informed that Muna will write field notes of her participation. I have been informed that on 7-8 occasions, Muna and my daughter will engage in one-on-one tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, they will share observations, reflections, and understandings of my daughter’s experience of her transition from grade 6 to grade 7. I understand that some of my daughter’s photographic and/or creative work may become part of the inquiry. Muna will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants:

(<https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Policies/Human-Research-Ethics-Policy.pdf>)

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of my daughter and our family, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

My daughter and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my daughter’s participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw her from the research at any time without consequences. In the event that my daughter withdraws from participating in the study, any data relating to my daughter that has been collected to that point will only be used with my consent. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data related to my daughter’s participation any time before January 31, 2017. I feel comfortable in talking with Muna about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Informed Consent Form for Mother Participants

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I agree to participate in the research study entitled, "A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Second-Generation Canadian Muslim Girls and Their Mothers as the Girls Transition from Elementary to Junior High School." I understand that this research will be carried out by Muna Saleh, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Muna will write field notes of her participation with me and that, on 7-8 occasions, we will engage in one-to-one tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where we will share observations, reflections, and understandings of my experiences as the mother of a Canadian Muslim girl during my daughter's transition from grade 6 to grade 7. Muna will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants

([http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID\\_page=37738](http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738)).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and that presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of my daughter will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data related to my participation any time before January 31, 2017. I feel comfortable in talking with Muna about this possibility if it should arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date