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Becoming a 'good' Muslim Woman: C*omparing Habitus and Everyday* Lived Religiosity

An Ethnographic Study of Aotearoa New Zealand Muslim Women

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Hina Tabassum Cheema

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ABSTRACT

For women like us

Every day isn't about a sunrise

Every night isn't about a sunset

Between our sunrise and sunset

There are puzzles to solve

Of the pictures never seen before

Missing and broken pieces

And bits mixed up from other puzzles

But surprisingly

Sometimes we make them

And other times, they break us

And occasionally

They are left unsolved

Lingering in on our minds

Becoming part of us

This thesis is an ethnographic study of everyday lived experiences of Muslim women immigrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through a focus on *everyday lived religiosity*, I explore the lives of Muslim women, who are extremely diverse and in the state of *becoming* as depicted in the poem. I extend Bourdieu's theory of Habitus by introducing *Comparing Habitus* as an analytical tool which allows us to comprehend and analyse the diversity, multiplicity, complexity, intersubjectivity, heterogeneity, fluidity and unfinishedness of Muslim women's lived experiences in Aotearoa NZ.

I also use Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming and Das's theory of everyday to understand the complex and intersubjective ways of becoming 'good' Muslim women and their negotiations of everyday challenges in a non-Muslim context. I use the framework of lived religion to capture

my participants' experiences to understand these experiences as ordinary Muslims; e.g., what Muslims *do* rather than what *Islam says*. The use of poetry and autoethnographic commentaries throughout the thesis adds another layer to the analysis to confer insights and to help understand my participants' experiences in more depth.

The study concludes that being a Muslim woman immigrant in Aotearoa NZ is an ongoing agentive and complex process that is continuously defined and redefined, not always in a linear direction. Muslim women make sense of their lives through engagement with other Muslim women and use comparison as one of the key strategies to make everyday decisions. My research participants are on journeys to understand Islam more logically, using their agency to actively negotiate situations, and are constantly engaged in finding meaning in their lives. The study suggests the need to understand Muslim women as cultural and social beings who actively negotiate their everyday challenges.

To my mother,

Kaleem Akhtar

One of the sincerest and toughest women

with a distinctive approach to life

forever questioning

She may err in her actions

yet her intentions remain unwavering.

May life shower its blessings upon you.

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Writing acknowledgements is the happiest time of the thesis (refereeing to completion) and also the briefest one. I am so happy to reach this stage that I cannot think of bad moments even if I deliberately wanted to do so. Bad memories at this very moment have faded. But it does not mean they were never there. All achievements and journeys if simply put are a combination of good, bad and many in between moments. This thesis had all of them. Hence happily letting all those bad moments fade, I am focusing on good times.

Let me begin by acknowledging the journey itself. This has been a journey to explore myself, to doubt myself, my creation and the creator. There were times during this research when I stopped my PhD and started reading religious books to find out the 'right' way of doing a particular thing. I did google and YouTube searches, I kept awake many nights, I felt like crying out loud. There were times I felt accomplished and in peace. Those who born into religious families know how hard it is to question religion, God and his message. This journey gave me a lens to observe life differently, to see its smallness, entangled in the mundane, and its largeness, hiding somewhere unknown, maybe eternal. This research has taught me to acknowledge others as they are and to acknowledge their journeys which brought them to their way of life. This research has changed me, and the way I see and understand the world, outside and inside. There are parts in me with whom I have become more comfortable, and there are some parts I am in continued combat with. In short, these years were the most important and beautiful years of my life.

A profound thanks to all the women because of whom this work has been made possible. See the poem in the beginning of the methodology chapter that depicts the essence and importance of my research participants in this work. Simply put, this work could not have been accomplished without them.

I worked with four wonder women in this research: Sita Venkateswar, Carolyn Morris, Ann Dupis and Jackie Cook. Sita and Carolyn were my main supervisors, and Ann was part of my supervisory team initially, before her retirement. Jackie Cook was never officially part of my supervisory team but was a core part of my writing journey.

Sita, I remember you from our first meeting on the 6th floor common room when I spoke about my intention of doing a PhD and you showed your willingness to supervise me. Although that was way before I actually started my PhD, since then you were always there when I needed you. I understand how daunting it can be to work with a student who comes with lots of preconceived ideas about research – but you helped me, as I slowly let go all of that and prepared to enter in a state to observe things critically. You always understood the issues that could impact on my writing, and you gave me ample time to go through those and get back to work when I was ready. You saved me from undue stress and at the same time helped me grow analytically, letting me experiment with my thoughts, play with my ideas, while you pulled back on my string when

needed. You did all this in such a balanced way. I could have never asked for a better mentor. Thank you for your time, thoughtfulness, help and everything else.

Carolyn, there is a poetic verse in Urdu: '*Jab vo bolti hay to gulab jharrtay hen',* literally translated as 'when she talks, she sprinkles roses'. I would apply it to you, for 'when you talk you sprinkle theories'. From the day you let me sit in your theory class, even when I wasn't enrolled at Massey, and still today, I have thoroughly enjoyed your company and our shifting relationship. Your Facebook posts of 'food' translate a researcher's passion in her everyday world. This is what I am taking from you. The way your face expressions change when you talk of Bourdieu, Hage, Deleuze or Guattari, gives me another world to see and way to analyse things. We both know that I caused that 'migraine', but a whole chapter came out of that meeting. I hope this thesis is just the shift of our supervisory relationship to one of co-authoring. I look forward to writing lots of articles on food, Naan bread in Palmerton North and many more. I also owe you a special thanks for encouraging me to submit the thesis. I will always remember your words, 'a finished thesis is a good thesis'. I might still be working on it, making it perfect, if you hadn't given me the confidence to admit that it is not perfect but it is worth submitting – and also worth passing. Thank you so much for that.

You both made me curious to know whether you are good humans first, or good anthropologists? Does anthropology make good supervisors?

Jackie Cook is the person who helped me selflessly in this dissertation. She is a retired Cultural Studies professor from the University of South Australia. I met Jackie in the Elma Turner library in Nelson at a writing group she founded. Since then, she has been reading my work, proof editing it, and suggesting ways to make it better. Having Jackie beside me gave me assurance that I was writing okay. I was too nervous to send my draft chapters to my supervisors, but when Jackie started reading my work, my confidence grew that whatever I was writing was not too bad. From writing ethnographic chapters to the theoretical framework, conclusion and even responding to examiner reports, Jackie was a BIG help. I just do not have words to thank you, Jackie but THANK YOU for your time, selflessness, and reading my work as a priority. This thesis wouldn't be in the shape it is now without your help.

I also owe sincere thanks to Muhammad Imran. He genuinely wanted me and my family to succeed. The doors of Imran's heart, his office, and his home were always open for me and my family. There is one thing in the world that is priceless and most precious: time. Imran and his family (Ayesha Bhabhi, Hajra, Amina and Zainab) generously gave us theirs. Thank you for that, and I promise I will always continue this legacy of wishing others success and offering sincere advice whenever I have the opportunity to do so. While I am humbly thankful for your help, support, and time, I would also like to say that you were the only person in this journey who supported me when others discouraged me, and who *dis*couraged me when everyone else was encouraging me. I know you would call this *critical feedback,* but I found this *critical* support annoying at times yet fascinating – because I knew you have a heart of gold. The life lesson I learned from you is to 'do your part in life in the most sincere, passionate way and the rest will follow'. Thank you for being part of my journey and always being there when I needed you.

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My late father, Abdul Ghafoor Cheema, is no longer with us, and I deeply sense the void created by his absence as he is not here to share in the joy of my achievement. During my MPhil studies, I recall him proudly sharing the news with his friends that his daughter was on the path to becoming a doctor. I am confident that wherever he is, his happiness and excitement mirror what they would be if he were here. The only poignant distinction lies in my inability to witness his joy in person. Loads of prayers for you Abbu Gi.

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A note of love and affection for the tiniest human yet the biggest joy in our lives, Affan! What a perfect timing to join our family!

I realise that my acknowledgments may not fully capture the depth of gratitude I feel towards everyone mentioned here; their contributions far exceed what I've expressed. I also extend my sincere apologies to those I may have overlooked, as there are many who have played a significant role in this journey. Attempting to give each person the recognition they deserve would turn this into another thesis in itself. You know the extent of your involvement and how deeply I value your support. Thank you immensely for being there for me in times of need. Thank you everyone!

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This study was made possible due to the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan.

I understand that this thesis can be better. There is a lot of room for improvement, particularly in the ethnographic chapters, which could be richer in terms of analysis. The methodology chapter could benefit from tightening up. But at the time I submitted this for examination I was too tired. I had spent a lot of time on it and was reaching a point where I was feeling I might never be able to finish it. Carolyn said that it is not wise to run after perfection, and that I could spend a lifetime making it perfect and still there would be room for improvement. I hope, instead, to make those improvements in my publications.

Thanks April Bennett for helping me in choosing appropriate karakia to end this:

Tuia, tuia, tui / Stitching together
Tuia te Rangi e tū iho nei / Stitching together the celestial energies
Tuia te Papa e takoto ake nei / Stitching together the terrestrial energies
Tuia te muka tangata / Stitching together humanity
Ka rongo te pō / Resounding in the night
Ka rongo te ao / Resounding in the day
Tihei mauri ora / Behold – it is the breath of life

Hina Cheema
hishnaa@gmail.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / AKU MIHI iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

- An Introductory Poem 1
- Introduction 2
- The Origin of the Research Questions 10
- Immigrant Muslim Women in the Literature 17
- Theoretical Underpinnings 19
- The Aotearoa NZ Context 20
- On Defining a Muslim Woman 23
- Thesis Structure 27

CHAPTER TWO: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 31

- Everyday as a Methodological Concept and a Framework to Understand Muslim Women Lives 32
  - Lived Islam 34
- Habitus 36
  - Critiques of Habitus 39
  - Habitus at Changing Fields 40
  - Habitus and Migration 41
  - Habitus and Religion 44
  - Habitus and Becoming 47
  - Comparing Habitus 49
- Summary 53
- Comparing Habitus - A Poem 54

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE 60

- Anthropology of Migration 60
- Migration and Muslims 64

Studies on Head-covering: Hijab and Veiling 65
Hijab and Resistance 67
Hijab and the Workplace 68
Clothing, Fashion and Creativity 70
Studies on Multicultural Muslims 72
Studies on Muslim Women in Muslim Majority Countries 75
Muslims in Aotearoa NZ 80
Conclusion 85
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 87
Part One: Autoethnographic Context 90
Research Aim and Questions 97
Part Two: Research Methods 98
Insights Arising During the Pilot Study 98
Early Decisions: Serendipity and Fieldwork 100
Informal Conversations 105
Participant Observation 107
Part Three: Reflexive Engagements with Positionality 111
My Headcover Status 112
Residency Status 114
Religious Sect 115
Disposition as a Mother 116
Politics of Navigating within Small Groups of Women 116
Friends as Research Participants 118
Strong Friends – A Poem 121
Expectations of Constructing a 'Good' Image of Aotearoa NZ Muslims 124
Massey University Human Ethics Committees (MUHEC) 125
On writing Autoethnographically 129
Ethnographic Poetry 131
Role of the Supervisory Team 133
Conclusion 134
CHAPTER FIVE: AOTEAROA NZ MUSLIM WOMEN AND THEIR HEAD-COVERING CHOICES 138

Headcovering: The Most Discussed Issue Among my Research Participants 142
Protection, Comfort and Communication 143
Identity and Freedom of Choice 145
Compromises in Relationships 147
Socialisation with Men 152
The Search for a Meaning 154
Aotearoa NZ and Freedom of Expression 157
Critiquing Gender Equality within Western Cultures 159
Critiquing Gender Equality within Islam 161
Head-covering in Change of Context 164
Critical Evaluation of Religious Texts 166
Head-covering as a Family Tradition 171
Head-covering as a Symbol to Represent Muslims 173
Conclusion 174
CHAPTER SIX: CLOTHING BEYOND HEAD-COVERING 176
Part One: Shopping within and Outside Aotearoa NZ 177
Shopping on the Outskirts 178
Focused Shopping and Shopping for Leisure 180
Shopping for Swimwear 183
Shopping for Cultural Outfits 186
Part Two: Creating a Proper Muslim Outfit 188
Alteration 190
Layering 191
Deliberate Change 195
Shopping Compromises 197
Wearing Western Dress 198
Accessories 200
Passing on the Traditions 202
Relationship with Husbands 205
Conclusion 207
CHAPTER SEVEN: MULTIPLE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM WOMEN 210

Part One: Muslim Wedding 212
The Celebration - A Poem 213
Where was the Headscarf? 215
Gender Segregation at the Wedding 219
Fashion 223
Bridal Dress 226
Music 229
Part Two: Santa Claus Parade 231
Private Chat Group 231
Background of the Chat Group 232
Pakistani Community and Integration into Aotearoa NZ Society 235
Raising Pakistani Children in Aotearoa NZ 239
Identity of a Pakistani as a Cultural or Religious Being 246
Understanding the Santa Claus Parade 250
Diversity and Inclusion within the Group 252
Conclusion 255
CHAPTER EIGHT: EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF HALAL/HARAM 257
Concepts of Halal/Haram in the Quran 258
Women's Understanding and Practice of Halal/Haram 260
Cultural Construction of the Concept 263
My Understanding of the Pig 265
Stories of Pigs 266
Peppa Pig – A Pig without a Nose 266
Pig Toys "Chuck them in the Bin" 269
Peppa is Rude to Daddy Pig 271
Praying in a Pig T-shirt 272
Can I Please Feed the Pigs, Mama? 272
Bone China Crockery and Cosmetics 273
Halal/Haram Food Negotiations 275
Reading the 'List of Ingredients' 276
Halal Table 277

"Oh, You also Eat Halal" 277
"Everything was Halal including the Bacon" 278
Chicken, Beef and Lamb can be Halal or Haram 279
Halal Certification 280
Halal Meat Practices 281
Passing Halal/Haram Concepts onto the Children 282
'Not Even Beer?' 285
Bring Your Own 287
Work that Involves Dealing with Alcohol 288
Conclusion 290
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION 292
Comparing Habitus - A Poem 302
REFERENCES 305

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

An Introductory Poem

I wanted to begin this thesis

With an ethnographic account
A narrative
A story
An autobiographical moment

That hooks the reader
Problematises the thesis
The gist
The hook
The attention grabber
The explainer

But

The more I read my collected stories
Travelled through my own memories
Browsed my field notes

The more I became

Disappointed

And

The question arose:

Don't I have a story that could tell the story of these stories?

How bizarre

Frustrating

But it illuminates something

The Very Core

of

MY WORK

Un-captured-ness

Fluidity

Instability

Complexity

Everyday unfinished religiosity

Becomingness

Multiplicity

Impossible to tell in one story

Thus I begin with fragments
of
Uncertainty and difference

yet
Conscious and agentive
in
Bits and pieces

Like the lived experiences of these women

Introduction

> *"There are some things that are between me and my God. I don't allow anyone to come between my relationship with my God, not even my family and husband. I used to dress up differently before [not wearing a headcover] from how I do now, and this is purely my own choice. I don't judge other women, Muslim or non-Muslim, on their appearance alone, and I don't give others the right to judge me. We are all entitled to live freely with our own beliefs."*

"All I wanted was a perfect outfit to wear at Mani's wedding. Outfits in Papatoetoe [a suburb in Auckland] were terrible, not my taste at all. My sister is going to send me a dress and she is checking courier prices. Do you know which one is the cheapest but also reliable?"

"I don't know what I am doing and why I am doing it…sometimes I think I should leave everything [career, education, community activism] and just be like Someya and Fatemeh [pseudonyms], look after the children, cook food for the family, and stay home or…at times I just want to go home [country] and live with my family…. life here isn't easy [without family support] specially if you don't have a supportive husband… have you noticed how Someya and Fatemeh talk about their husbands? It looks like they adore them…. but that is not me, I can't be like them. I am not saying they are not good women but that won't give me meaning in life. I feel lost."

"Life as an immigrant is full of surprises. Every day you have a new one. Sometimes good surprises and other times bad ones, but they all keep on teaching lessons until you learn them…. but one thing is clear, once you leave your own home and family behind, nothing else (hardships, sufferings, difficult times) matters to you. You become resilient, flexible, unbreakable."

"My children love going home [country] only because they can eat anything. They eat out at KFC, McDonald's, they buy tons of candies as they don't have to worry about gelatine, here [in NZ] it looks like we live in food prison. I love going home because I love shopping.

… if we had good affordable schools back home and good jobs for us, I would love to settle there.”

The above excerpts from my fieldnotes highlight some of the everyday conversations of my research participants. These are ordinary conversations, yet carry a complex meaning; a negotiation, an agency and a comparison. However, although meaningful, these mundane conversations are neither how Muslim women are generally perceived, nor how media portray them. These conversations do not even confirm the dominant framing tropes produced by academics who study Muslim women.

This is an anthropological thesis that follows members of the world’s second largest religion, Islam, while they settle, and negotiate their new lives in Aotearoa New Zealand[1]. I explore the multiple, complex, ongoing ways of becoming a Muslim woman in Aotearoa NZ. Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, are perceived as a homogenous group who live under the concept of *Ummah*[2]. Muslim women in particular, I will argue, are widely (mis)understood through stereotypes of oppression and submissiveness.

Western[3] societies have come to see Muslim women's headcovers as symbols of a regressive, primitive tendency within Muslim culture. The meaning of the headcover in Western societies has remained mostly static, caught within colonialist and Orientalist perspectives, despite the very different social and cultural significance and functions of veiling within different Muslim cultures (Hoodfar, 1992). Such static, unchangeable perceptions indicate that Muslim women

[1] ‘Aotearoa’ is New Zealand’s name in Te reo Māori which is an official language. ‘Aotearoa’ is commonly used alongside ‘New Zealand.’ It is translated as ‘long white cloud’ or ‘long bright world’. The use of ‘Aotearoa New Zealand’ or ‘Aotearoa NZ’ also acknowledges the bicultural nature of the country and culture of Tangata Whenua (people of the land). The name is increasingly being used by members of the public, within media, businesses and government and it features on New Zealand’s passport. Thus, I will use Aotearoa NZ in my thesis.

[2] Ummah is an Arabic word meaning ‘community.’ As a theological concept ‘ummah’ transcends nationalism, race, class, genealogical and geographical divisions. This means that Muslims share a common history and constitute a supranational community. The word Umma is a synonym for *Ummat al-Islam*, which frequently is used to refer to the entire community of Muslim believers.

[3] My use of word ‘western’ is borrowed from Kahf (1999, p. 3) who states, “I am aware that to speak of “Western” culture, “Western” literature, a “Western” narrative is not to speak of one stable unitary field but of a multiplicity of cultures that have soldered together at various times in history, sometimes violently, for ideological purposes.”

are seen as a monolithic, fixed and unchanging group, archetypally victims of patriarchy, and needing to be liberated.

This perception has resulted in a vicious cycle of cause and effect that has not only negatively impacted Muslim women in western societies, but has also served a geopolitical discourse to legitimise US military occupation in Afghanistan and the French occupation in Algeria. As a result, it reinforces the image of Muslim women as being in need of liberation.

The cycle of perception has allowed development not only of military discourses, but also discourses from governments on both sides of the debate, some using the hijab to exert control over Muslim women's bodies, others banning it. In order to maintain a secular society, France and Germany have both banned the hijab in the belief that taking religious symbols out of the public sphere grants equalised secular status. Furthermore, an Indian hijab controversy has recently arisen in Karnataka, where Muslim students have had to remove their hijabs during class, in part, as a revival of Indian nationalism.

In contrast, both the Taliban and the Iranian governments have forced women to wear the hijab in public. In response to the recent death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, who was detained by the *Gasht-e-Ershad* (Morality Police) in Iran for wearing her headscarf too loosely, women across Iran including Muslims and non-Muslims have been burning their headscarves. Even though this issue is specific to the hard-core[4] regime of Iran, it nonetheless is a matter of power, of a state controlling women's bodies, and a human rights violation. However, a side-effect has been reinforcement of the preconceived notion that all Muslim women, regardless of culture, ethnicity and nationality, are forced to wear headscarves, inevitably reinforcing the western view that oriental Muslim women are oppressed and need freedom.

---

[4] My use of hard-core regime of Iran refers to the government of Iran, which is perceived as being authoritarian, repressive, undemocratic, and uncompromising in its policies and actions. Iran has had a theocratic government since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its political system is characterized by a combination of elected and unelected bodies and giving ultimate authority into the hands of the Supreme leader, a religious figure. My use of the term also refers to criticism of Iran's government for limitations on political freedoms, restrictions on civil liberties, censorship of media, and its stance on issues such as human rights and foreign policy. I understand that this term is entirely subjective, and the perception of Iran's government depends on one's political views and perspectives.

Thus, the narratives endure that Muslim women are docile, oppressed, conservative, controlled by Muslim men, have no agency, and so no control over their own lives; and are incompatible with modernity. Furthermore, they are seen as: brainwashed, buried under the burdens of patriarchy, wrapped in burqas, and yet are either (somehow) terrorists, or in support of terrorism. All of these, however much unproven or contradictory, demonise Muslim women as one group.

The role of mass media in disseminating this 'Western' view of Islam cannot be denied. Giroux (1997), for example, writes that mass media, besides shaping identities, both for an individual and for a nation, also serve as a lens with which to perceive truth. Immigrant Muslim women, particularly those who use a head-covering, have remained a target of Western media because of this overly visual, religious marker. Such perceptions are constantly reinforced by media, and particularly after 9/11 became a homogenous, dominant framing of Muslim women - one which is ignorant of the ethnic diversity, history and cultural richness of Muslims.

Although Islam originated in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, some 1400 years ago through the preaching of Muhammad (PBUH), the last prophet, it has spread to many different parts of the world since that time. At present, there are over 2 billion Muslims across the world, who constitute around 25% of the world's population (World Population Review, 2023). Although its followers are spread all over the world, Islam has six distinct linguistic and geographical zones: Arabs, Black African, Persian, Turkic, South Asian and Malay (Lewis, 2007). The vast majority live in the Asia-Pacific region in countries like India, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the largest of all in Indonesia, which means that there is an enormous cultural diversity among Muslims. Besides cultural and ethnic diversity, there is also diversity of religious sects and beliefs. Muslims are divided into different

religious sects, and beliefs, such as Sunni[5], Shia[6], Ismailis[7], Ahmadiyya[8], and sub-sects within these main sects.

Over time, Muslims living in different places have come to interpret Islam according to their own cultural needs, geography and socio-economic environments. Such a multiplicity of interpretations of Islam within the various Muslim populations is also reflected in the diverse lives of Muslim immigrants, particularly when they migrate to places where they become a Muslim minority. This is a grouping constituted through just their religion - defined not by themselves and their practices but according to largely media-promulgated views within the nation in which they have arrived. Yet Muslims migrate from many different countries and cultures, each with their own embodied practices of Islam.

Nonetheless, despite this vast diversity, Muslims in Muslim minority countries, especially in the West, are erroneously considered a monocultural group. Their national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds are not taken into account, and people are seen only through the religious lens. Since they are considered a homogenous group, Muslims in the West are perceived as mainly belonging to Arab/middle eastern culture. Other cultural identities and the extensive diversity amongst Muslims are overlooked (Sardar & Ahmad, 2012).

This is also true in the Aotearoa NZ context. Socio-cultural, ethnic and religious diversity among Muslims can also be seen among Muslim immigrants living in Aotearoa NZ. It is compounded by

[5] Sunni Islam is the branch of Islam with the largest following. Those who adhere to the Sunni faith follow Abu Bakr as the Caliph after Prophet Mohammad's death, rather than believing in succession through the Prophet's family.

[6] Shia Muslims believe that the Caliphate is supposed to have been passed down through the Prophet Mohammad's daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali rather than through his Companions.

[7] Ismaili Islam's followers are commonly known as Twelvers, and are related to the twelfth caliph. It is an offshoot of the Shia tradition, and it broke away from the mainstream in 765 A.D. Aga Khanis is the largest group of Ismailis who follow Aga Khan.

[8] The Ahmadiyya Islam movement was started by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed in 1889 in Northern India, and its followers refer to it as the renaissance of Islam. In Pakistan, Ahmadis are persecuted and declared non-Muslims because mainstream Muslims consider this branch of Islam "blasphemous" because Ahmadis do not believe Muhammad was the last Prophet, one of the core beliefs of all other Muslims.

the fact that Aotearoa's Muslim population also includes second or third generation Muslims, whose parents or grandparents were the original immigrants, adding yet another layer of diversity. Some New Zealanders of other migrant and indigenous descent have converted to Islam. Such diversity among Aotearoa NZ's Muslim population underscores the potential breadth and variation of Muslim worldviews and everyday life-practices.

Muslims in Aotearoa NZ are seen through a religious lens, associated with terrorist or fundamentalist-activist and revolutionary activities being carried out by terrorist groups such as ISIS. Ordinary Muslim women living in Aotearoa NZ thus suffer stigma for extremist actions. John Key (Aotearoa NZ's Prime Minister 2008-2016) referring them as 'jihadi brides' is one example (Watkins & Livingstone, 2015). Before him, in 2005, Winston Peters (Leader of Aotearoa NZ First Party) had shown his concerns, asking in a speech if Muslims were suitable as immigrants, since they came largely, in his view, from countries without traditions of political freedom, and which harbour Muslim extremists (Scoop, 2005).

Many writers have highlighted how British Muslims are seen as 'potential threats' in Britain in just such a way (for example see Abbas 2019; Cohen & Tufail 2017). My research participants also felt that they were perceived as 'potential threats' in Aotearoa NZ, when a terrorist act was committed internationally by any Muslim group. Muslim minorities have been the subject of increased attention by intelligence services and law enforcement since 9/11 (Kolig & Shepard, 2006). This was confirmed by the Royal Commission of Inquiry's report, in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks. It found that intelligence services mainly focused on Muslims, overlooking other potential terrorist groups - such as white supremacists (Royal Commission, 2020).

Such colonial, oriental, political, global, national and local discourses impact on the lived experiences of Aotearoa NZ Muslim women who are affected at large by these widely existing, deep-rooted perceptions. Due to being such a visible minority, there have been a number of cases of islamophobia in Aotearoa NZ. One recently reported case happened in Otago Girls High School where a group of three students ripped off the scarf of a girl named Hoda and hit her

(Radio NZ, 2022). While Hoda was being beaten, others filmed her, with images later shared on various social media platforms. While the act was part of a subculture of peer-bullying targeting non-Muslims as well, here it was clearly motivated by the cultural visibility of the Muslim victim. Hoda was taken to the hospital immediately, and had concussion. Later she told media that it was not the first time she was the target of islamophobia, for she had frequently been the butt of rude gestures and had been called a terrorist by other students.

Since 2019, despite the Christchurch massacre[9] in which the Muslim community was the sole victim, there has been an observable rise in Islamophobia. Within three days of the Christchurch attack, two Muslim women were harassed at an Auckland train station (Russel, 2019.). A man wearing a Nazi sign on his singlet was noticed walking around the Manawatu Islamic Centre (Stuff, 2019). An activist group whose ideology is similar to that of the Christchurch perpetrator was identified in Wellington (Manch, 2019). A group of men yelled at Muslims at the Hamilton Islamic Centre, saying 'It's your turn next' (personal communication, April 22, 2019.) A letter containing a hate message was received on Race Unity Day in Nelson (personal communication, March 24, 2019). Endless anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim discussions were still doing the rounds on social media today in 2022.

Such incidents of harassment, exclusion, feeling unwelcomed, and acts of terrorism (large and small), demonstrate that despite no local history of Muslim terrorism in Aotearoa NZ, Muslims are nonetheless understood through an international 'war on terror' lens. Further, they show that Muslim women in particular, are perceived through the focus of negative stereotypes as a monolithic and 'othered' group.

On an ethnographic level, given this context, this thesis asks how Muslim women maintain their Muslimness while living as a minority in a non-Muslim context, which is predominantly charged

[9] On 15 March 2019, two consecutive mass shootings occurred in a terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The attacks were carried out by a lone gunman who entered both mosques during Friday prayer; the Al Noor Mosque in the suburb of Riccarton at 1:40 pm and at the Linwood Islamic Centre at 1:52 pm. 51 people were killed and 40 were injured.

with negative stereotypes. How do they keep their values and work to be a good Muslim and a good citizen in their new country, when their culture and values are so widely misunderstood?

The more I engaged with Muslim women through this ethnography, the more I became immersed in the diversity of their experiences and practices. Although it will become clear in the thesis that 'good' is a highly subjective concept in the lives of my participants, this thesis also contends that the struggle to become a 'good' Muslim woman was one that occupied all the women involved, despite ethnic and cultural differences.

The Origin of the Research Questions

This thesis is both an ethnography and an autoethnographic account of my own experiences as a Muslim, immigrant woman; experiences out of which the research topic and research questions emerged. My early encounters after moving to Aotearoa NZ were crucial in redefining my religious identity - in fact this suddenly and unexpectedly took over my ethnic, cultural and national identity, and created doubts about my sense of belonging to my homeland's Pakistani culture: an aspect that I later rediscovered was at the very core of who I am.

I came to Aotearoa NZ as a 'normal' Pakistani, for whom being a Muslim had never been an exotic experience. Regarding the head-covering for instance, various beliefs and practices persisted in Pakistan. Generally, women in Pakistan wear the *dupatta*[10] and the *chaddar* (a large shawl similar to a *dupatta* but bigger and not sheer) when going outside their home. These are the most common ways of veiling in Pakistan. Women who cover themselves are generally regarded as modest and respected by men, and by similarly minded women in Pakistan. Women who do not cover their head might be considered immodest - mainly by those who do cover, but they are not considered 'less Muslim'. Rather, they are labelled 'modern'. At the present time, however, the word 'modern' has other connotations. For example, the headscarf is becoming increasingly

[10] The *dupatta* is a shawl, a long scarf, traditionally worn by women in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and parts of India and Afghanistan. It is employed as a form of modesty - although it is made of delicate material, sometime see-through chiffon. It obscures the upper body's contours by passing over the shoulders. It has multiple ways of being worn, loosely wrapped around the head or shoulders or around the neck.

fashionable, and it is being made acceptable within the 'modern' social context. In this way, one can now be 'modern' and wear a headscarf at the same time.

When I came to Aotearoa NZ, I had an eight-hour long transit at Auckland airport. During my time at the airport, someone very politely asked if I was from India? I replied no, but did not fully understand his question. After a while my husband's friend came to pick me up from the airport, and then took me to an Indian restaurant for lunch, where the restaurant manager also asked me 'Do you come from India?' In a single day I had been asked this twice. The notion of anti-Indianness is prevalent in Pakistan, deeply rooted in the Partition[11] era, both before and after independence. I was not happy to be associated with Indian identity at all.

This was a strange feeling at the time: was it some kind of insult? Now I realise that people generalise nationality based on ethnicity: on appearance, and sometimes on language. For most New Zealanders, India and Pakistan seem the same - just as for most Pakistanis, it would be difficult to distinguish a German from a New Zealander, by sight alone. Indeed, for most of the world, distinguishing New Zealanders from Australians, or Americans from Canadians, just from their outer appearances (excluding accent) is next to impossible.

I also experienced a traumatic incident in Palmerston North. I was roaming around Palmy square with my friend (who was wearing a face veil), when we heard a loud voice say 'Osama Bin Laden.' We turned back and saw two men pointing towards us and shouting 'Osama.' We became very frightened and entered a shop. This incident happened exactly two days after Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan, and this was the news on international media at the time.

I also remember a night out when I went to dinner with friends from Jordan, Kashmir, Pakistan and Palestine. My Kashmiri friend and I were not wearing scarves, but the other three were. I ordered seafood; I usually do that, not only because I like seafood, but because I don't want to have the drama of asking about *halal* meat. The other safe option is to order vegetables, but

[11] After the end of Colonial British Raj in 1947, British India was divided into two independent countries – India and Pakistan, with different political borders and division of assets. As a result of the partition an unprecedented migration occurred between the two dominions and a large number of people lost their lives due to the riots based on political and religious differences. There were unresolved issues between Pakistan and India which resulted in many wars as well.

then I think that I can make vegetables at home. Vegetables are considered ‘second class citizens’ in the food family back home. If we have guests and we serve them only vegetables, it goes against the principles of hospitality. Anyway, my Jordanian and Palestinian friends ordered beef dishes. 'Angus beef is New Zealand’s best meat,' my Jordanian friend said.

I looked at her scarf, and because she was a friend, I knew I could ask her anything. I said to her, 'So, is this Mr. Angus *halal*?' She said, 'more than 90% of meat in NZ is *halal*, so I don’t care.' I was surprised, as I was eating out with her for the first time. I said in a humorous way, 'The way you cover your head implies that you must be very much a practising Muslim,' to which she said, 'It’s not my fault, it is the fault of others who think of me like that.'

As time went on, I became more and more confused about Muslim identity, practice and head-coverings in Aotearoa NZ. In Pakistan, I did not regularly use a head-covering. For me it was an occasional practice. I explored many ways of using veiling and head-coverings, and even no head-covering at all, at different stages of my life. However, in Aotearoa NZ I thought of myself as an ambassador of Islam and started covering my head with a headscarf in Arabic style[12] - something that I never did in Pakistan. Then I realised I was becoming increasingly religious. I started paying regular visits to Islamic centres. I even started doing volunteer teaching to children at an Islamic centre in Palmerston North. I am uncertain whether it was a response to all those questions, or whether I wanted to maintain my own individual identity, different from other immigrants.

I remember a day when I was doing voluntary teaching in a Sunday Islamic school, where I was teaching kids how to offer *Namaz*[13] (called prayer in English). I had learned how to offer prayer from my family and friends, and then from Islamic study textbooks in Pakistan. Another teacher

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[12] A small rectangular scarf tightly wrapped around the head, neck and chest, covering all the hair and neck but leaving the face visible. In Pakistan, head-covering is traditionally done with a long scarf (2.25-3meters) called a *dupatta,* wrapped around the head, neck and chest but very loosely, and not covering all of the hair. No pins or velcro are used with *dupatta*.

[13] *Namaz* (Urdu term), *Salah* or *Salat* (Arabic terms) refer to mandatory five times of daily prayer performed by Muslims. Although these are obligatory prayers not all Muslims perform them regularly.

at the Sunday School overheard me, and after the class asked me if I could explain the difference between *Nafil* and *Ghair Mokadda Sunnat,* both of which were non-obligatory prayers. He was a Palestinian Arab, and he did not understand what I had said. I took the marker and walked towards the whiteboard where I drew a prayer table to teach the children. He patiently listened to me and was much surprised that this is how we perform prayer in Pakistan. At the end of our conversation, he smiled and said: "*Go on sister, it is always not too bad to do extra prayers*." Prior to this incident, I had always thought that prayer and its various forms were universally consistent, immutable, and beyond question, with the only notable exceptions being the slight variations in Shia Muslim prayers. After this, I started to observe the differences in practices and beliefs, comparing them to my own perspectives and experiences. Compared to Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country, I encountered a rich diversity of Muslim practices in Aotearoa NZ, stemming from various cultural backgrounds. These were eye opening moments, and sometimes involved alarming observations. It was difficult to absorb the realisation that Islam can be so differently interpreted and performed.

During this time, I also met with other immigrant women, especially Muslim women who had come to Aotearoa NZ from various countries and cultural backgrounds. I realised that my Islamic practices (originating from Pakistani culture and the Wahabi version of Islam) were different from other Muslim women, from other Muslim majority countries. Offering five sets of prayer is a basic principle of Islam, but even this was practised differently by Muslims from different countries. Similarly, I met women who were dressed in tight jeans, but covered their heads. This was a perfect Muslim outfit for them. However, at that time in Pakistan, women who wore tight jeans were considered provocative. It was not acceptable or proper Muslim dress.

In Aotearoa NZ, I observed different versions of Islam, different ideas of modesty, and different cultural and food practices among immigrant Muslim women. It was at this time that I first understood how cultures impact on religion. Among all these differences however, immigrant Muslim women faced similar issues regarding settlement in a new country, Aotearoa NZ.

My conversations with Muslim friends from different cultures exposed me to the very different challenges they faced around racism, islamophobia, and diverse practices within Islam. Issues in Aotearoa NZ were different from those encountered in Pakistan. Refugee issues, discrimination, a lack of cultural understanding and social acceptance, were all mixing into a background soup of confusion. Issues in the foreground were around finding a good job, and how to balance work and religious practices. Most of these issues centred around their 'Muslimness' in a new country, and how to be a 'good' Muslim woman.

I had these experiences in the early years of my arrival in Aotearoa NZ, at a time when I had no intention of doing a PhD. Almost every interaction with a Muslim from another culture was either a shock or a surprise to me. I had grown up in a place where women wore all kinds of head and face coverings; anything from a scarf, a veil, a *burqa*, a *chador,* to even sleeveless tops with no head-covering. It was more of a cultural thing for Pakistani women not to show their legs. Popular interpretations of religion continue to forbid showing flesh, however, sleeveless and half-sleeve tops are very common in big cities in Pakistan. Similarly, popular religious practice is to cover the head (not showing the hair) - but many Muslim women do not wear head covers at all in Pakistan. Besides, as I became exposed to the diversity within Islam in Aotearoa NZ, I also learned about prejudice, discrimination and the challenges that immigrant Muslim women face, mostly because of their visibility. In Pakistan, no one would yell at a *Niqabi* woman, calling out 'Osama-Bin-Laden,' for example or assuming a *non-hijabi* woman must be an Indian.

Thus, the broader questions that occupied my mind at that time were rooted in a religious framework, questioning not the monotheistic nature of Islam but its multi-practice manifestations. Only with time did I realise that the answers to my questions lay in social, cultural, and historical practices. The following poem highlight my thinking around that.

If there is one Allah
And one Quran
Why are all Muslims not alike?
If Islam is a way of life for all humanity

Why are men and women treated differently?
If Islam is a religion of peace
Why do extremist Muslims even exist?
If Islam is a matter of internal piety
Why do so many societal judgements prevail?
If Islam makes a human a better person,
Why are all Muslims not perfect?
And while there are so many perfect Muslims out there
Why are Muslims portrayed so negatively?

This was when I found the opportunity to resume my own studies as a doctoral candidate. Based on my experiences of being an immigrant Muslim woman and meeting with other Muslim women, I became fascinated with these new experiences and distinctive pressures on an Islamic identity for women. I wanted to explore these issues. At one level this was an opportunity to reflect on something that I had myself experienced, and to examine again those questions that had been inside me all my life (see autobiographical section in Chapter 4). Further, beyond the personal, it was also a very timely and topical issue for a globalised and complex world, where Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular were suddenly at the forefront of media attention.

My main research question involved exploring how Muslim women maintain their Muslimness in an increasingly diverse, multicultural Muslim context where they have first-hand opportunities to observe, question and compare from across different Muslim cultures. They were able to access scholars from different school of thoughts - yet no clear, standardised road map to being a good Muslim woman has emerged. I was also curious to know the specifics of how the non-Muslim context of a new home country, impacts and shapes my participants' Muslimness.

In searching for answers to the above questions, the following more focused research questions emerged from the ethnography:

- What are the motivations for choosing to wear a head-covering? Why do some Muslim women wear a headcover, while others do not? What shapes a Muslim woman's decision to wear a head-covering?

- How do Muslim women create a proper Muslim outfit, with or without head-covering? Are there any differences in their practices? If so, what shapes these differences, and how do they perform modesty through clothing in their everyday lives?

- How do Muslim women create strategies to maintain their faith identity as a minority group? What shapes what they do? How do they respond to differences among their fellow Muslims, whether from the same culture or other cultures?

- How do Muslim women understand and practise the concepts of *halal* and *haram*? How does belonging to Islam - which is perceived within the dominant 'host' community stereotypically as a controversial religious community - affect the mundane lives of immigrant Muslim women?

What emerged after the discussions with my research participants was that there was no one-fit-for-all strategy or agreement about what it was to be an ideal or a good Muslim woman. Instead, during our conversations, women compared themselves to others, as well as to their previous and current contexts, in order to work out their understanding of a good Muslim woman. Such discussions made me curious to know how the perception of a good Muslim woman was developed and practised in the everyday lives of Aotearoa NZ Muslim women. Also, how do Muslim women navigate their lives among diverse Muslim and non-Muslim cultures in contemporary Aotearoa NZ? How does migration impact on their everyday religiosity and practices? It was becoming obvious to me that the concept of good Muslim women was subjective, fluid, flexible, complex and mutable, through everyday acts of comparison.

I turned to the academic literature on immigrant Muslim women to see how it could help me make sense of what I was finding in my research. The existing literature on immigrant Muslim women mostly portrays them in binaries of traditional vs. modern. Although some research has challenged the stereotypes around Muslim women's clothing and head-covering practices (Abdurraqib, 2005; Ajrouch, 2007; Ahmed, 1992; Dwyer, 2000; Dunn & Hopkins, 2016; Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Jelen, 2011; Kabir, 2004) none of these works have captured the complexity, diversity, constant comparison, and inherent tensions that these issues stimulate among Muslim women. The present study endeavours to contribute to this body of research.

Immigrant Muslim Women in the Literature

A few trends are strongly evident in the existing literature on Muslim women immigrants, namely the focus on the *hijab* and on the nature of macro-cultural communities.

The first most obvious and well debated trend in academic literature is to study Muslim women through their clothing. Most of the studies focus on Muslim women's clothing, to identify associated stereotypes. These attach to: the visible marker of head-coverings and islamophobia (Ajrouch, 2007; Ahmed, 1992; Dunn & Hopkins, 2016); the challenges women face due to their visible marker, including challenges related to workplace, health sector, and education system (Abdurraqib, 2005; Barnes & Eicher,1992; Forstenlechner & Al-Waqfi, 2010; Jelen, 2011; Kabir, 2004; Pasha-Zaidi, Masson & Pennington, 2014; Syed & Pio, 2009); head-covering as a tool of resistance, agency, identity and modesty (Dwyer, 2000; Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Göle, 2002; Mohammad, 2005; Ruby, 2006; Wilson, 2006). A recent trend has evolved which makes a link between hijab and fashion (Almila, 2015; Bucar, 2017; Dwyer, 2008; Lewis, 2007, 2013). Most of the studies on resistance, agency or identity, either challenge the existing stereotypes attached to Muslim women or see agency and identity as barriers to integration and assimilation (Tarlo, 2005). Reference is made to Muslim women as problematic immigrants (Dossa, 2004; Patton, 2014) who cannot assimilate. However, since these studies focus only on head-coverings to explore the above issues, in a way, they reinforce the image of a Muslim women in a headscarf as authentic or creating a strong representation of identity. Such studies conflate Muslim women's identity with headcovers and homogenise diversity.

In recent decades there has been a surge in studies on Muslim women immigrants, especially after 9/11. The majority of the studies have been done in the United States (Huda, 2006; Johnson & Miles, 2014; Khatib, 2014), the United Kingdom (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Hussain, 2008; Nagel & Staeheli, 2009), Canada (Shalabi, Mitchell & Andersson, 2015), Australia (Dunn, Atie, Mapedzahama, 2016), and Europe (Almila, 2015; Aytar, & Bodor, 2019; Kolb, 2023; Lara, 2022).

A small number of studies were done in Aotearoa NZ (Dobson, 2011; Kolig, 2006, 2010; Kolig & Shepard, 2006; Sayadabdi, 2019; Sayadabdi, & Howland, 2021; Shepard, 2006; Shepard, 2006; Soltani, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2022; Salashour & Boamah 2020; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Spoonley & Peace, 2012), particularly after 15/3 Christchurch Mosques attacks (Ash, Tuffin & Kahu, 2019; Crothers, & O'Brien, 2020; Kolig, 2022; Ward, Stuart & Adam, 2019). Most of these studies were set in the context of big cities and towns where Muslim lives could largely be lived within ethnic, cultural and national communities.

Another trend that can be observed is that most of the studies of Muslim women immigrants have focused on one cultural, ethnic, or national group. Examples include Pakistani Muslims (Giuliani & Tabliabue, 2015; Khurshid & Shah, 2019), Moroccans (Giuliani & Tabliabue, 2015) and Arabs (Nagel & Staeheli, 2009; Shalabi, Mitchell, & Andersson, 2015). Furthermore, many other studies that use 'Muslim women' in their title also explore only one secular group (for examples see Ali, Pereira, & Ariss, 2017; Furseth, 2011; Humphrey, 2007; Ternikar, 2009; Watt, 2012). All of these contexts are very different from multi-cultural Palmerston North, in Aotearoa NZ.

Very few studies explore women's clothing practices through a lens of overall styles of dress (Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Mohammad, 2005; Mossiere, 2012; Mirza, 1989) or focus on *non-hijabi* Muslims (Clarke, 2021; Fadil, 2011). There is a gap in the literature about the everyday lived experiences of *hijabi* and *non-hijabi* immigrant Muslim women through a more holistic focus on their mundane practices. Examples might be how immigrant Muslim women maintain their dress; shopping, sewing, altering, mixing and matching clothes. Although studies on Muslim fashion do introduce a new angle to the field, they too create dichotomies between what is considered fashionable versus traditional. My study addresses this gap.

By widening the group to include *hijabi*, *non-hijabi* and occasional *hijabi* wearing Muslim women from diverse ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds my study also adds to the existing literature on diversity and the notion of multiplicity among Muslim women.

Theoretical Underpinnings

After developing an understanding of the existing literature, I turned to theory to frame answers to the research questions that emerged from the ethnography. I found Bourdieu's theory of 'practice,' in conjunction with the conceptual framework of 'everyday, lived religion,' and Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of 'becoming' the most useful tools to grasp women's lived experiences as a religious minority in a multi-cultural and predominantly non-Muslim western context. All of these concepts are discussed in length in the next chapter.

Bourdieu used the concept of *habitus* to understand how human beings navigate within a particular social environment; how a body exists in a social world and how a social world exists in a body. He also introduces the idea of field. *Field* for Bourdieu is a web of power relations which is constituted of different types of *capitals*. Field is a social space where humans interact for the purpose of acquiring, generating, improving, maintaining, or changing their social dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). These concepts are discussed in length in chapter two. Bourdieu's concepts help me to analyse women's lived experiences. Thus, on the theoretical level, this study is about the 'theory of practice' of a diverse group of Muslim women whose understandings of Islam and its practices were rooted in a primary habitus. Yet these were also ever-changing, shaped and reshaped as a result of entering new fields of power relations which were unstable and constantly changing. Thus, the techniques that women use to respond to the cleft habitus are a product of disjunctures of the different *fields* which result from constantly ***comparing***. The women develop ***Comparing Habitus***, the term I introduce which is an extension of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, to navigate, negotiate, resist, respond, create, strive, thrive, act, and to exercise their agency in an environment and a space which is diverse, negatively charged, Islamophobic, stereotyped, complex, unfamiliar to their pre-existing beliefs and practices - and so challenging. This notion of **Comparing Habitus**, as indicated by its name, keeps women in a

state of *becoming* rather than being. They were constantly engaged in *becoming* good Muslim women for themselves and their families, developing their own subjective conception of 'goodness' which itself was generated through an inter-subjective process of *comparing*.

At a theoretical level, the narratives of Muslim women contribute to a deeper understanding of Bourdieu's theory of practice by providing deep insights into the contemporary nature of habitus and of field, which are constantly changing due to the contemporary nature of societies. These narratives also offer possibilities with which to analyse the mundane lived experiences of the women through Deleuze's lens of *becoming*. Thus, I argue that Aotearoa NZ Muslim women immigrants are in a process of *becoming* 'good' Muslim women by developing **Comparing Habitus** as a strategy to negotiate everyday challenges around their Muslim-ness.

The Aotearoa NZ Context

Aotearoa NZ, apart from being known as the 'land of the long white cloud,' is also known as a country of immigrants (Bedford, 2001). In 2018, it was home to 60,621 Muslims (Statistics NZ, 2018). Aotearoa NZ Muslims are ethnically diverse and almost 75% of them are overseas born. They come from many ethnic, social, economic and cultural backgrounds, which influences their understandings, interpretations and practices of Islam.

Three main Muslim bodies claim[14] to represent Aotearoa NZ Muslims. The first one is known as the 'New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA),' set up in 1950 when there were only 200 Muslims in NZ. The second is the 'Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ)' and was formed in 1979. Neither has ever had Muslim women members represented in their governing body (or executive teams) although many of the FIANZ associate member groups have women representatives as their members. The third Islamic body is the 'Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ),' which was formed in 1991 to provide support for Aotearoa NZ Muslim women and claims to represent all NZ Muslim women. Khadija Leadership Network (KLN) was also

[14] I am cautious in saying that these Muslim bodies are representatives of all NZ Muslims, since I have had numerous conversations with research participants who do not associate with any of these organizations and understand them as political and economic entities.

established in 2017 for the personal and professional development of NZ Muslim women. Besides these mainstream bodies, different ethnic and sectarian Muslims have their own regional and national associations all over NZ, as for example, the Afghan Association of NZ Inc., Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at NZ Inc., Azerbaijan – New Zealand Friendship Society, Bangladesh NZ Friendship Society Inc., Iranian women in NZ, regional Pakistani associations, and many other associations. The detailed list of these organisations can be found on the Ministry for Ethnic Communities website (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2022).

There are around one hundred Islamic centres[15] throughout Aotearoa NZ (Kiwi Muslim Directory, 2020). Most of the Islamic centres cater for five congregation prayer sessions and for Friday prayer each week. Some of the large centres also cater for *Iftars* in *Ramadan* (evening meals in the fasting month) and *Travi* Prayers (extra prayers in the fasting month). Most of the Islamic centres have a women's prayer area, smaller than the men's. These are unlike Pakistani mosques where women's prayer areas either do not exist at all, or if they do, have capacity for no more than 5-10 women. Only tourist mosques like *Badshai Masjid* in Lahore and *Faisal* Masjid in Islamabad have larger women's prayer sections. Although it is a common practice for women to attend Mosques in Middle Eastern countries and also in Malaysia and Indonesia, it is not common in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh for women to regularly attend Mosques.

Aotearoa NZ Masjids/Islamic centres are very different from those in Pakistan. In Aotearoa NZ, people eat in Masjids, while children run around and play. In some Masjids there are trampolines in the backyard and most of them have a fully functional kitchen. Masjids are like community hubs. Masjids are a place where I make friends and I meet the majority of my Muslim friends from other cultures there. We can sit for long hours after prayers and chat. Some of my Indonesian and Malaysian friends also have been known to take naps at the Massey University Islamic centre, which was very unusual for me, since I grew up knowing Masjids only as places of worship.

[15] Islamic centre or mosque or Masjid are interchangeable terms used among Aotearoa Muslims to refer to places of worship.

FAINZ and NZMA generate income through providing *halal* services to the Aotearoa NZ meat industry. Since the Aotearoa NZ meat industry is one of the largest *halal* meat exporters to Muslim and non-Muslim countries, the Aotearoa NZ Meat Industry Association (MIA) relies on these organisations to provide *halal* slaughterman, *halal* training, and also *halal* certification to other food businesses in NZ (Meat Industry Association, 2022). With the revenue generated, they support the construction of regional Islamic centres and other services for the Muslim community - such as burial facilities. The detailed list of their services can be found on the website.

The differences in understanding and practice of Islam become more explicit in small cities and towns where the composition of the local Muslim community is more visibly diverse, and often rapidly changing.

One of my primary locale sites, Palmerston North, colloquially called 'Palmy,' is a good example. Although Palmy is notorious within Aotearoa NZ for its dullness: John Cleese, a British comedian, nicknamed it "the suicide capital of the world" (Stuff, 2009), it is nonetheless home to 150 ethnicities which makes its demography very varied (Palmerston North City Council, 2022). This is because it is a university town and thus an ideal research site to observe differences as a small town with a range of ethnicities, and many chances to interact with different cultural groups.

Muslim women in Palmy originate from multiple ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds, although many belong to a similar middle-class. Most Muslim families arrived in Palmy to study at Massey University, and then settled there. For some Palmy Muslims, the town has become their home, while others have used it as a stopover in their academic or professional careers. The Palmy Muslim community can be characterised by the many Muslim families who come and go throughout the year, changing the Muslim community's ethnic and cultural composition, which gives Palmy a unique character.

On Defining a Muslim Woman

In theology, a Muslim is defined as one who witnesses that there is only one God and no other gods, and that Muhammad is Allah's last prophet (Gitsels-van der Wal et al., 2014). This is a holistic, theoretical definition of a Muslim follower, which seeks to explain an individual's religious association with Islam. However, there are many sects, school of thoughts and sub-sects within Islam.

The first fundamental difference when defining a Muslim is sect. The two main sects are Sunni (87–90%) and Shia (10–13%) (Miller, 2009). Within Sunni Islam, there are four major divisions, the so-called Law Schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali and Shafi. The Four Law schools have no fundamental differences, although small distinctions exist. Shia Muslims differ from Sunni Muslims mainly over questions of religious authority and leadership after the Prophet Muhammad's death. Sunni Muslims follows the *Sunnah* (practice) of the Prophet Muhammad directly, while Shia Muslims follow the Prophet's Muhammad's sunnah through his lineage; Hazrat Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and then the four imams (Knott & Francis, 2016). There are three main branches of Shia Islam: the Zaidis, Ismailis and Ithna Asharis ('Twelvers' or Imamis).

A second category of difference involves practice: practising and non-practising Muslims. Bendixsen (2013) defines a practising Muslim as one who offers prayers five times daily, fasting in the month of Ramadan, performing a pilgrimage to Mecca (at least once in his/her lifetime), and giving *zakat* (mandatory charity). However, within practising Muslims there are many kinds of Muslim followers, some who strictly follow all rules and regulations of their affiliated sect, e.g. Sunni or Shia, and then within those sub-sect affiliations. Some follow what they find to be logical and somewhat convenient, while others mix and choose what seems most suitable to them. It is not a neat or simple set of categories. The category strands might be: *fully practising Muslims*, *semi-practising Muslims*, *partially practising Muslims*, *occasionally practising Muslims*, and those *trying to be a practising Muslim one day*. The underlying philosophy of all these possible categories entirely depends on a subjective understanding of what constitutes a practising Muslim, for that particular Muslim.

Among non-practising Muslims, the essence of being a Muslim is simply to be a good person. As one of the participants of a study into Muslim values said, to have a clean heart is to be a Muslim (Gitsels-van der Wal et al., 2014). A non-practising Muslim could also be an occasionally practising Muslim, or one who follows only certain Islamic practices/rulings. Further, a non-practising Muslim can range from someone who does not offer regular prayers, or fasts, or one who drinks alcohol, or indulges in forbidden behaviours in Islam - but still considers him/herself a Muslim. Again, the category of non-practising, yet self-identifying as Muslim depends on how that Muslim chooses to define him/herself, and on his/her understanding of Islam and its practices.

Apart from the debate around defining practising and non-practising Muslims, other ethical values such as to love, not to steal, not to lie, to help others, to be honest, not to kill, not to cohabit, and to think positively about others, are important to being a Muslim (Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014). In a qualitative study conducted to see the role of religion in decision making regarding ante-natal screening for congenital anomalies, Gitsels-van der Wal et al. (2014, p. 298) developed a more generalised anthropological definition of a practising Muslim: "A practicing Muslim is someone who described himself or herself as a Muslim."

This PhD study builds on Gitsels-van der Wal et al.'s (2014) anthropological definition of a practising Muslim, but without emphasising the actual practices in play. I do not use the word 'practising' when establishing my participants' religious associations. My anthropological definition for this study accepts that anyone who associates him/herself with Islam, is a Muslim.

My research participants do associate themselves with Islam and call themselves Muslims. The important question here is to ask Muslim women how they experience themselves as *Muslims in Aotearoa* NZ, and how *Aotearoa* NZ as an entirely different 'field' informs their everyday acts.

One reason for using this definition is to be inclusive of all Muslim experiences encountered, in order to be able to examine what a woman means by that identification, and to unpack the relevance of that self-definition in her life.

My inclusive definition of Muslim women for the PhD study also permits consideration of my own head-covering status, as a Pakistani Muslim. I will discuss that in the reflexivity section of the methodology chapter (Chapter 4).

In most cases a 'good' Muslim family means that there is a 'good Muslim woman' in the house. For a good Muslim man it is important to have a good Muslim woman alongside him. If the children are not practising Islam within a family, blame goes towards the mother first. There is a common saying in Urdu, that '*Aurat ghar bnati hay,'* which means 'it is a woman who makes the home.' A man builds a house, and a woman makes it home. Women are considered the bearers and passers-on of tradition and culture.

This is where my own Pakistani identity played a role. Unintentionally, many of my Pakistani friends became part of my research. Whenever we met, we discussed my research. They gave me suggestions, acting as an informal group of 'critical friends,' and over time, also started sharing their own stories, which I found very relevant and interesting for my work.

I sought their permission to use these conversations for my research. They accepted. We began meeting on weekends, sometimes at family gatherings, sometimes women and children only gatherings, while at other times, women only parties. We met at potluck dinners. Sometimes we went out to movies, dinners, and a few times even went to pubs and bars to experience and observe different cultures. We also walked along the Manawatu River. We went camping, watched cricket matches, made overnight trips, and had sleep overs at each other's homes. I also actively participated in private social media platforms and observed women's engagement on different issues.

Research became part and parcel of my life. I became so involved in spending time with my friends that I started taking my research too casually. I had forgotten that I am a researcher too. To counteract this evolving pattern, I scrupulously wrote up notes when I came home.

I also had to remind myself that I needed to have different research participants, not just my comfortable Pakistani 'critical friends.' The second group with whom I was comfortable were women from Fiji and India. Some Fiji-Indian-Muslim and Indian Muslim women used to hang out

with the Pakistani community, mainly due to sharing a similar language. Urdu, Hindi, and Fiji-Hindi are very similar languages, particularly in the spoken format. I became friends with them. They were welcoming, and generous enough to offer their help. Once I established relationships with a few Fijian and Indian friends, I used snowball sampling to get to know more women from their communities.

The third group of women with whom I became more comfortable were Arabic speaking women, from the Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt. Although I met most of these women through my Pakistani friends my regular interaction with them started at the Massey University Islamic centre, the Palmerston North City Masjid and at the IWCNZ conferences. We also met during Ramadan at breaking fast gatherings (evening meals). We would sit in a circle and have Arabic coffee (Turkish coffee) and conversation. I, and a couple of Arabic speaking women, became the ones organising women-only gatherings and activities. We also went to fitness classes together, with female fitness instructors. We attended weddings, and farewells. In short, after Urdu, Hindi, and Hindi-Fijian speaking women, I was most comfortable with Arabic speaking women. They became fast friends.

Then I also began to meet women from Sri-Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. As Islam is a very festive religion, and one of the criteria of a 'good Muslim' is to be hospitable, we met at lunches and dinners. Sometimes I invited them to my home, while at other times they became the hosts. I became so close to them that it became difficult to maintain a critical distance – which is a key element of research. I had to remind myself many times that I was amongst them, but I was also a researcher.

In total I talked regularly to twenty-eight women, thirteen of them Urdu/Hindi speaking, seven Arabic speaking, while the remaining eight spoke other languages. Yet over the period of my fieldwork, I met more than two hundred Muslim women across Aotearoa NZ. Sometimes our encounters were brief, but were critical in highlighting an issue, while at other times we sat for hours. I have included many of those extended and brief encounters as observations.

Thesis Structure

In the following chapter, 'Developing a Theoretical Framework,' I discuss the theoretical approach in more depth. I explore the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ in his theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977). I also consider the theory of ‘becoming’ as conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari (Biehl & Locke, 2017) and the concept of ‘everyday’ through Veena Das’s work (Das, 2014), combining the everyday with the frameworks of lived religion. These works articulate well with the context of the diverse, lived experiences of Aotearoa NZ Muslim women immigrants. These women come from diverse ethnic, social, cultural, national, educational, and sectarian backgrounds, and settle in different cities in Aotearoa NZ, each of which has its own distinctive response to its Muslim community and therefore the lived experience of being Muslim in each location. I extend Pierre Bourdieu’s work by developing the concept of the Comparing Habitus as a new flexible framework for understanding the complexity, fluidity, diversity, and multi-Muslim-ness in an increasingly diverse context.

In Chapter Three, I turn to the existing literature on Muslim women and migration. I provide an overview on studies on Muslim women immigrants living in different western contexts, and consider as well the work done on them in Aotearoa NZ. I also review the work of Muslim women feminists undertaken in the Muslim majority context, providing useful information and insight about the context of the countries Aotearoa NZ Muslim women came from. By reviewing the existing literature on Muslim women, I identify how Muslim women's bodies have been surrounded by discourses of ‘traditional’ Islamic clothing: the hijab, burka, and veiling or niqab, which examines only one part of their identity, and thus homogenizes them. The image of a Muslim woman has rarely shifted away from these popular discourses and does not even show the many other forms of dress that Muslim women wear - those who do not opt for traditional Islamic clothing. This framing not only ignores those women who do not associate their Muslim-ness with traditional clothing practices - and particularly head-covering - but also homogenises Muslim women into a monolithic category.

After the review of literature, in Chapter Four I explain my research methodology and how I conducted this research, as well as the research context - including use of auto-ethnographic commentaries and my own positional development as a Muslim woman. The chapter includes reflections on both my research locale and research methods, and how my approach changed after experiencing some unforeseen circumstances during my initial fieldwork. I explain who the Muslim women in my research were, and how I interacted with them.

Use of ethnographic research methods meant that I spent extensive periods of time with the participant women at various research sites; both physical and virtual. I also describe my writing process in this chapter, as well as my inclusion of ethnographic poetry throughout the thesis. Finally, I discuss how Massey University's Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) requirements initially had a negative impact on the research process, in particular on the recruitment of my initial research participants - and how serendipity became a defining moment in the research.

Chapter Five, *Aotearoa Muslim women and their Head-covering Choices* is the first of four ethnographic chapters. I begin my first ethnographic chapter with the same dominant framing of studying Muslim women through the headcover. This is because the hijab was an important and most frequently talked about topic among my participants; among *hijabi*s and *non-hijabi*s and occasional/casual *hijabi*s. I provide stories of wearing and not wearing a headcover, from Muslim women of diverse backgrounds. The stories show that being *hijabi* or *non-hijabi* was not a permanent disposition in their lives. Rather, it was part of a process of 'becoming' which was continuously (re)shaping their lives, based on their agency of comparing themselves with both new and old contexts. Thus, the notion of Comparing Habitus becomes very much part of the process. These stories provide multiple ways to understand and analyse existing stereotypes that surround Muslim women's agency and identity, and ideas about what constitutes a 'good' Muslim woman. These stories also challenge the monolithic perception of Muslim women by offering deep insights into their decisions around the headcover, as they navigate life in Aotearoa NZ.

Following this, in Chapter Six, 'Clothing beyond Head-covering,' I discuss the wider dress choices of Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ, including how women demonstrate modesty through their clothing and headwear, either by opting in or opting out. The chapter details the experiences of creating a modest outfit that includes sewing, altering, mixing and matching clothing elements, and buying a dress from physical and online stores. Such ethnographic details highlight the struggles of these women in managing a 'proper' dress style that fits their own subjective perceptions of modesty, defined by their own criterion for a 'good' Muslim. The chapter also highlights how these women are impacted by the 'outside' Aotearoa NZ culture, making choices by comparisons based on what is important to them. The chapter concludes that there is not one way to practise modesty, which appears subjectively defined and refined, as it is continuously shaped by the environment in which they are living.

Chapter Seven, 'Multiple ways of being Muslim(s) women,' I provide ethnographic accounts of two events, a Muslim wedding and a Christmas parade. The Muslim wedding is a composite of a few weddings I attended during my fieldwork. Although one of the main focuses of this chapter is on Muslim women's dress, unlike the previous ethnographic chapters which are based on women's individual choices in practising head-covering and modest dress, in this chapter I observe their encounters with other Muslim women from different Muslim cultures. The chapter also describes how 'comparing' is key to Muslim women's own understanding of their Muslim-ness, and how they use comparisons to justify their versions of Islamic cultural practice.

The second part of the chapter, 'Christmas parade,' highlights the diversity of opinions amongst Pakistani Muslim women who were considering whether their local association should have representation in the Santa Claus float on the day of the local Christmas parade. This is the only part of the ethnography which documents the views of a single cultural group, Pakistani women, and challenges the homogenous perception of Muslims not only from diverse cultures, but among Muslims that belong to the same cultural and national background. This part offers useful observations of the comparisons that Muslim women draw between their own faith and culture and those of Aotearoa NZ and Christianity. It is fascinating to trace how, and how often, comparing manifests in their discussions from an entirely different angle.

In Chapter Eight, 'Exploring the concepts of *halal/haram*,' the final ethnographic chapter, I explain how the concepts of *halal*/*haram* manifest in the everyday lived experiences of these women. Although the popular understanding of the concepts of *halal*/*haram*, among both Muslims and non-Muslims, revolves around food, the concept has wider meanings that are translated differently in different cultures. I use one of the most interesting observations and stories from my fieldwork in which the children's cartoon character Peppa Pig is the central point of contention. I then use the story to explore how *halal/haram* are understood among these women. Like the above chapters, comparing is again one of the main conceptual threads that reveals itself in the ethnographic details. The chapter concludes that maintaining Muslim-ness around food is one of the everyday and unfinished challenges which keeps on shaping my participant's experiences - sometimes even when food itself is not actually under discussion.

In the conclusion, I turn to a discussion of the gaps I have identified in the literature and reflect on the theoretical framework I have advanced. I argue that my participants' lived experiences are complex and diverse, impacted by their *primary habitus*, and their ever-evolving *dispositions*, because of the instability of their *fields*. The contemporary society in which they find themselves, their access to different online Islamic scholars and religious texts, the opportunity to navigate within diverse Islamic cultures and to meet women from different Muslim cultures as well as from Aotearoa NZ's own complex social environment, all provide these women with opportunities for comparison, and force them to make choices that suit their needs and preferences.

My research participants were in the process of becoming 'good' Muslim women - an unfinished and non-linear 'becoming.' Their experiences can best be understood using the theoretical framework of a Comparing Habitus that allows an understanding of multiplicity, complexity, and fluidity - not only within the disjuncture of changing social and national fields, but also within the virtual fields which 'connect' them back into the old, and the new, of their own cultural pasts.

CHAPTER TWO: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"If the foot of the trees were not tied to earth, they would be pursuing me. For I have blossomed so much, I am the envy of the gardens." Rumi

"The whole is a greater than the sum of its parts." Aristotle

Rumi's quote helps me to understand the connection between a theoretical framework and ethnography. The conceptual framework not only helps me to answer the questions that arose during the fieldwork, but also links the mundane negotiations to broader philosophical concepts. The theoretical framework is the foundation *(foot)* of the ethnography *(tree)* which relates to the broader knowledge *(earth). Blossoming* and *envy* can be understood as eternity, the same eternity to which I refer as *'water of life'* in my poem, *for the participants* in the methodology chapter. Together this *tying* makes a whole, as Aristotle says 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'

The theoretical concepts I use in this chapter are: the *everyday*, *lived religion*, *habitus*, and *becoming*. I argue that these concepts can provide foundations to understand mundane experiences of immigrant religious groups: in this case, immigrant Muslim women. *Everyday,* and *lived religion* provide a broader theoretical (and also methodological) framework in which to situate (and study) *Muslim women's lived* experiences. Use of Comparing Habitus (the concept I introduce), and *field* become relevant in the context of immigration or in *changing fields*. *Becoming* provides both a connection and a lens to understand the fluidity and change of the mundane negotiations in everyday fields of migration. Initially, *becoming* was not part of the proposed framework, however after writing the ethnographic chapters, I found this useful to add as it provides more fluidity and flexibility for change to analyse my participants' experiences.

Before mapping out the connections within these concepts, and how when used together they offer interesting possibilities to understand the complexities of the participants' lives, I will briefly introduce the concepts and their operational use within the study.

Everyday as a Methodological Concept and a Framework to Understand Muslim Women Lives

The concept of *everyday* was approached by Veena Das (2014) through the work of Stanley Cavell, a Wittgensteinian philosopher. By heavily drawing on Cavell's (1988) work[16], Das conceives everyday as carrying a 'dual character' in itself, "a space of routine and habits," and a space that contains the "potential of generating world annihilating doubts giving it an uncanny character" (Das, 2014). For Cavell, "everyday is about expressing a desire, the craving for … [the] ordinary, humble and actually it is about "shadowing of everyday" by being both sceptical and conventional" (as cited in Das, 2014, p. 286).

Das's dual conception of everyday fits nicely with the study of immigrant Muslim women. The first part of the definition - "a space of routines and habits" (Das, 2014 p. x) - potentially allows us to explore embodied religious practices. The second part of the definition, "potential of generating world annihilating doubts giving it an uncanny character" (ibid., p. xx) has the possibility of analysing how women thought of their own experiences. Her work mainly focuses on three events: the partition of the Indian subcontinent (1947), Anti-Sikh riots (1994), and the Bhopal gas tragedy (1984).

Das's work on critical events explores the relationship between suffering and language. Yet the critical events do not speak for those who are not the direct sufferers, but are made so by

[16] Cavell (1988) developed the idea of the 'ordinary' to make it a touchstone, and to deny the power that lies in extraordinary authority of specialised or established knowledge. Cavell thought the ordinary was marginalised by specialised knowledge, which made it look strange, odd and uncanny. To reiterate the ordinary, for Cavell, it required facing the threat of scepticism: the disavowal (or partial disavowal) of the existence of others and of the world. He said that all knowledge needed to be disowned if we wanted to acknowledge the ordinary which lies in the everyday (Cavell, 1988).

external forces. I argue that her analysis of 'event' can be extended to the lives of those Muslim women immigrants who are not the direct sufferers of critical events. I refer to this notion, to explore why and how worldwide terrorist events in the name of Islam, actively create doubt in the lives of immigrant Muslim women by transforming their ordinary moments into extraordinary, critical events. For example, when any critical event happens anywhere in the world in which Muslims are involved, such as 9/11, or Bin Laden's death (2nd May 2011), or the Australian Lindt Cafe incident (15-16 Dec 2014), they have a significant impact on the everyday lives of these women.

In this chapter, I follow Das's event analysis to understand the relationship between the everyday lives of sufferers and critical events. The Christchurch Mosque attack on 15th March 2019 was an event which impacted on Muslims living throughout Aotearoa NZ, and similarly, those globally who were not directly affected by the incident. The incident created fear, hate, and anger - but also empathy, entirely different emotions. Some Muslim women who were not even involved in the incident became Islamophobic targets and yet others received flowers - appearing differently in everyday ordinary moments of lives. And so, Das's (2014) conception of everyday also proves useful to understand the daily process of transformations in routine interactions.

The 'everyday' has particular relevance and implication in the context of migration; where what used to be taken-for-granted, conventional, and ordinary can no longer remain taken-for-granted, ordinary and conventional. For Das (2014) the extraordinary, exceptional and dramatic are also found in everyday ordinary moments. Through observing the everyday lives of people, we can not only see suffering but also how people can function and adapt when needed (DiFruscia, 2010). In the context of immigrant Muslim women, their everyday lives do not remain ordinary when they migrate. They remain in a constant process of (re)shaping themselves by attaching or removing new meanings to their lives. The 'everyday' allows an in-depth understanding of the complexity and precarity that they have in such moments.

The 'everyday' as a methodological framework and as a fieldwork site is an ideal place to explore mundane and ordinary acts and has the potential to inform about the consciousness of the

(trans)formation of habits in a detailed way. The elements of agency and consciousness somehow are not always reflected in everyday acts. However, Das describes and views everyday life as a type of achievement not just as part of habit, and demonstrates through this, that events are vital in shaping, and creating everyday life (DiFruscia, 2010). Here, I also argue that embodied practices that go unnoticed in one culture, become prominent and sometimes ‘odd’ or ‘alien’ in another. I can see immigrants’ everyday lives in relation to critical events where they were not involved directly, but nonetheless these events shaped their lives. Das’s ‘event analysis’ and the focus on ‘everyday’ is useful to understand the experiences that were evident within the mundane, ordinary moments that make up the everyday life. I apply event analysis to see the impact of critical events on those who are not direct sufferers of the events but are affected and stigmatised as a result.

Lived Islam

The conception of ‘everyday’ is also not new in the scholarship of Islam and Muslims. Recently, it has become a trend to study Islam and Muslims using the frame of everyday - everyday practices, everyday performances, etc. (Deeb, 2006, 2015; Dessing, 2014; Fadil & Fernando, 2015a, 2015b; Mahmood, 2012; Rinaldo, 2014; Schielke, 2015). Fadil and Fernando’s (2015a) study “Rediscovering the everyday Muslim” critically analyses this trend of including ‘everyday’ in the contemporary scholarship. They argue that everyday literature on Muslims shows its “dual commitment to humanity’s heterogeneity and commonality” and “its dual imperative to account for dominant social structures and individual resistance” (p. 59). The authors also contend that in exploring everyday aspects of ordinary Muslims, anthropologists have focused on Salafi or activist Muslims only. According to them recapturing of the ‘everyday’ in the anthropology of Islam only focuses on one side of Muslims, the religious side, and presents pious Muslims as unreal, an ideal type, entirely defined by religion (Fadil and Fernando, 2015a).

Apart from Fadil and Fernando's (2015a) criticism of the use of everyday frameworks, studies have tended to group Islam and Muslims into neat binaries, such as 'organized,' 'un-organized,' 'official' and 'non-official' (Bectovic, 2011; Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014; Jeldtoft, 2011; Jeldtoft & Nielsen, 2011; Jensen, 2011; Kuhle, 2011; Kühle, 2014; Silvestri, 2011). In these frameworks, everyday religion means what an ordinary Muslim does with his/her religion outside the religious structure. The apparent division between 'organized,' 'un-organized,' 'official' and 'non-official' Muslims can also be seen in the frameworks of lived Islam and doing Islam (Avishai, 2008; Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014; Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen, & Woodhead, 2014b; Jeldtoft, 2011; Jensen, 2011; Nielsen, 2014; Otterbeck, 2013; Roson, 2014).

The framework of 'lived religion' allows a focus on personal experiences and practices in everyday life (McGuire, 2008). This thinking was instrumental in developing and advancing the idea of lived religion in the sociology of religion. According to Orsi (2011), who is regarded as the founder of the concept, lived religion has "an eclectic, dynamic, and ambivalent nature and is always situated in a specific social and cultural context" (as cited in Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014, p. 89). This implies that ordinary people do not take on the complete set of religious codes provided by a given religion. Instead a person's religiosity is always changing, defined and redefined by different experiences and practices (McGuire, 2008). Thus, attention is focussed away from hyper-visible institutional forms of religion to less visible but popular forms, that exist outside institutional structures (Dessing, Jeldtoft, Nielsen, & Woodhead, 2014a). The framework of 'doing religion' also works similarly to lived religion, but its focus is more on the religious aspect of the individual. Avishai (2008), for instance, studies the agency of Jewish Israeli women and argues that "doing religion is associated with a search for authentic religious subject-hood and that religiosity is shaped in accordance with the logics of one's religion" (p. 409).

As it may appear from the terms 'doing religion' and 'lived religion', both see individuals in their everyday. They both focus on the religious practices of religious followers. However, my study uses 'everyday' as a thread to interweave the religious, social-cultural, and migrational aspects of Muslim women. Furthermore, in my conception of 'everyday,' in contrast to Das and the frameworks of 'lived' and 'doing' Islam, I do not necessarily draw a dividing line between

everyday and event, organized and unorganized, official and non-official, Islam and Muslims. Rather I see them in relation to each other as a continuum, rather than distinct categories. As mentioned above, my operational conception of everyday, does not only connect Islam and Muslims, but also explores how Muslims make sense of Islam, continue to be the members of the religion and still perform their everyday. The 'everyday' also connects with the critical events happening anywhere in the world in the name of Islam.

Habitus

The origins of the concept of 'habitus' can be traced back to Aristotle and the medieval scholastics, then reinvented by Pierre Bourdieu (Nash, 2003; Wacquant, 2016). Since Bourdieu, the concept has become popular among academics, particularly educationalists, sociologists and anthropologists. Bourdieu used the concept to understand how human beings navigate within a particular social environment; that is, how a body exists in a social world and how a social world exists in a body. In *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu defines the concept of habitus:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, **structured structures** predisposed to function as **structuring structures**, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as "structured structure" and "structuring structure" (p. 72). ***Structured structure*** refers to the profound influence of the past on the present, most

particularly through the processes, interactions, and status negotiations of an individual's foundational familial interactions, education, and occupational experiences. ***Structuring structure*** means a kind of structure that shapes present and future practices. Such structures are largely non-random, patterned and also systematically ordered, creating psychological and social embodied dispositions which are manifest in practices which are relatively stable and also transferrable from one social field to the other. This means that the everyday mundane actions that people perform, such as sleeping, eating, talking, are all embedded and embodied in their habitus, which performs a dual function; as a reflective process and as a generative or reproducing action. This everyday, mundane aspect of habitus, Reay (1995) suggests, has the potential to allow us to understand social behaviour.

Habitus provides a framework for exploring the interdependence of social determination and human agency, the contextual movements between fields and the peculiarities of the socialized body, as well as a body's capacities of inertia and malleability. Bourdieu (1991) suggests that it is the capacities, in the notion of habitus, which enable improvised human behaviour, the "practical mastery" of social spaces. Manifest in our acts, modes of appearance and bearing - posture, behaviour, techniques of communication - they engender social life. To explain habitus, Bourdieu introduced the terms **dispositions, field** and **capital.**

Dispositions are simultaneously mental and physical; mental in the form of "schemes of perception and thought" and physical in the sense of "bodily postures and stances" (Bourdieu 1977, p.15). Since habitus is a mechanism of "durable and transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977, p.72), these are the dispositions that generate "thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55) among social actors. Thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions thus transform into practices in unconscious but systematic ways (Bourdieu, 1990) and determine the reasonability of a conduct and draw a line between "thinkable and the unthinkable" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.12). In this way, dispositions are also "classificatory schemes" between good and bad, and right and wrong (Bourdieu, 1998, p.8). Thus, dispositions determine paths of actions, which in turn produce durable ways of actions such as "standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.70).

In his autoethnographic account of deafness, Hage (2013) explains disposition as "a capacity, social or biological, that has been transformed through the process of co-evolution with a particular social space/field […] capacity is a 'raw' or 'pre-social-field' power that the body brings into a field before it is being transformed within that field into a disposition" (p.83). Hage illustrates the idea that one must exert effort and energy to go against one's disposition and if one's disposition cannot be followed, then frustration may also arise. He referred to dispositions as "active variable[s], possessing a "causal power" that does not cause a body to act in accordance with its predisposition (p.84).

Field for Bourdieu is a web of power relations constituted of different types of *capitals*. Field is a social space where humans interact for the purpose of acquiring, generating, improving, maintaining, changing their social dispositions.

Humans can move socially upward by acquiring *capital* relevant to the field they occupy. Bourdieu categorizes capital into four types: social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital and economic capital. Although acquiring one type of capital is interlinked and dependent on all other types of capital, Bourdieu maintains that there is a difference in all of these capital types. Social capital refers to social networks within a given field; cultural capital means qualifications, skills, tastes in food, clothes, music; symbolic capital means honour, recognition, respect; and economic capital means money and tangible wealth resources. Thus, capital(s), field and habitus function collectively in order to produce practice. Habitus is thus a linking site for the concepts of capital and field. Bourdieu generates the equation to explain his theory of practice by using all the terms in the following manner:

"[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101)

This equation shows that practice is neither a matter of one's habitus (present or past), nor a product of acquiring a certain capital but it is a process of interplay between habitus, capital and field. Bourdieu himself notes that practice should not be understood as generated "from the present conditions which seem to have provoked them or from the past conditions which have produced habitus," but should be deduced from their "interrelationship" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56).

Bourdieu (1990) made a significant contribution to the analysis of social practices by conceiving of 'habitus' as a system of long-lasting and largely unconscious bodily dispositions that guide human action. ‘Habitus’ not only helps us understand how social relations are internalised as natural, but also how certain types of physical, linguistic, cultural, social, and economic capital enable humans to take certain kinds of actions, depending on the social field (Noble, 2013). The scholarly use of habitus has come to be dominated by the logic of social reproduction, although habitus is not simply the manifestation of socio-structural location (Noble, 2013).

Critiques of Habitus

Although widely used, habitus has also remained as the “most contested concept” of Bourdieu’s theory (Reay, 2004, p. 432). It has been critiqued as being static, and not responding to continuity and change, which is the central issue of our contemporary rapidly changing world (Archer, 2007; Mahmood, 2005). Archer (2007) has abandoned the use of the concept on account of it being non-agentive. Archer describes Bourdieu’s approach as being historically specific, and since the world has changed from the time in which Bourdieu was living, his approach is also not relevant anymore. Archer (2007, 2010) gives her own theory of reflexivity, which she thinks is capable of responding to social change. However, there are many studies that have taken Archer’s criticisms of the concept of habitus seriously and have responded to them while arguing that habitus holds the ability to respond to continuity, change and transformation (Akram & Hogan, 2015; Davey, 2009; Mellor & Shilling, 2014).

While Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to resolve the binary of structure and agency debates, Bourdieu (1977) in his earlier work defines habitus as unconscious and non-agentive, i.e., agents act through it unconsciously and not aware of their own actions. He considers habitus “beyond the grasp of consciousness” (p.94). This definition of habitus leaves little room for people to analyse the change and reflect on their actions and thoughts.

Habitus at Changing Fields

Davey (2009) argues that despite critiques, habitus can still offer a lot to research. She laments that commonly, its application has remained as a stand-alone concept, i.e., using the concept of habitus without referring to field, dispositions and capital, which means reducing its value to little more than decoration. She argues that habitus does recognise the potential for change, which can be seen through the movement across social space, which Bourdieu describes as field. In her own words, "if habitus operates below the surface, can we ever know what it was… [or what it] … has become?" (p. 283). Her answer is, that habitus becomes evident through individuals' reflections of their everyday experiences and their ways of talking, moving, or dressing.

Later, a more reflective Bourdieu himself admitted that habitus has the potential to change when it encounters a different field. Bourdieu (2000) writes in *Pascalian Meditations* that habitus has been misunderstood as repetitive and conservative because of its mutual adaptation between structure and habitus, which is not the case. He says that he actually began working on the concept in the 1960s in Algeria, when he encountered an imbalance between objective and incorporated structures. He argues that one's existing habitus can cause discomfort under new situations, and one cannot be at ease until one re-adjusts habitus according to the new circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu calls this the hysteresis effect, or inertia, a term borrowed from physics, meaning that new, re-adjusted habitus comes from one's existing or earlier habitus. A key characteristic of Bourdieu's theory is the distinction he makes between the habits that a person acquires at different stages of their life and the relationships they show between them. The most durable and resilient habitus for Bourdieu is the habitus that social actors acquire at an early age, which becomes embodied and forms the "the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). This implies that person's primary habitus is so strong that it never diminishes or goes away, but reshapes or modifies itself according to new contexts.

Friedman (2015) in his study in the context of social mobility argues that such a shift between habitus and field can cause psychological pain. Agents can feel disconnected and that can lead

to feeling torn between competing worlds, caught in the middle. Such psycho-social impacts are also evident in the work of Reay (2002, 2004) and Ingram (2011). This mismatch between field and habitus has offered insights to scholars studying social and educational mobilities and migration (I will discuss the use of habitus in migration studies later in the chapter).

Similar to Friedman (2015), Bourdieu (1997, 1990) and Reay (2002, 2004), Davey (2009) also argues that the ability of habitus to respond to change becomes apparent at disjunctures or lack of fit between habitus and field. McNay (2000) also sees the concept's reflexive potential in the context of changing fields. For McNay (2000), when habitus encounters an unfamiliar field, the subsequent disjuncture can cause change and transformation.

It is here at the disjuncture of changing fields that I also find a potential for new discoveries and new explorations of the immigrant women's experiences. Researching lives of immigrant Muslim women who encounter dramatic interruption in their social, religious and cultural continua through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice could provide a useful analytical explanation. Interruptions are not only matters of difference in everyday life but also of contrasting difference where one's acquired dispositions are challenged. As Bottomley (1992) argues, if migrants embody experiences of disorientation and reorientation in the resettlement process, then their bodies are the most obvious places to see disjunctures. Furthermore, their experiences illustrate that the body is more than a repository of social tradition. Migrants create a new sense of belonging by reorienting themselves in relation to the new social field, and making themselves at home again, regardless of whether it is within new or old circumstances.

Habitus and Migration

Bourdieu's own work in the context of migration is not particularly significant. He engaged with migration scholarship in his early work on Algerians (Bourdieu, 1979a) and then as a collective work in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., 1999). He does mention general experiences of marginalisation and displacement, referring to them as mismatches between field and body, in his work on peasants (Bourdieu, 2008). Later however, while talking about his own conflicted

experiences, Bourdieu uses the term ‘cleft habitus’; a habitus which results due to mismatching requirements of differences in fields, positions and dispositions, causing an internalisation of dividing structures (Bourdieu, 2000, 2004).

A number of scholars have referred to Bourdieusian habitus in studies of migration. For example, many refer to pre and post migration spaces as different fields wherein habitus becomes reflective and responds to change (Guarnizo, 1997; Jung, Dalton, & Willis, 2017; Noble, 2013; Plus, 2009; Radogna, 2019 Sayadabdi, 2019). In the context of international migration, the concept of habitus has been extended to transnational habitus (Guarnizo, 1997; Plus, 2009); cosmopolitan habitus (Jung, Dalton, & Willis, 2017; Radogna, 2019); ethnicized habitus (Noble, 2013), to name a few. These have been used to make sense of the impact of transnational migration on the habitus of social actors and how habitus shapes the experiences of migration. The studies highlight the discomfort of resettlement (Plus, 2009), which Bourdieu refers to as discomfort and suffering at the change of fields, or successful negotiation of the challenges (Jung, Dalton, & Willis, 2017), also embodying the awkwardness of new fields (Noble, 2013; Sayadabdi, 2019).

Jung, Dalton and Willis (2017) in their study of North Korean migrants who moved to South Korea and then later to Australia, identify that North Korean migrants face isolation, disorientation, discrimination and alienation, even in South Korea, because of cultural differences between the two Korean countries. North Koreans’ habitus becomes dysfunctional in the South and so they experience resettlement issues. The authors also analyse strategies that North Koreans employed to navigate such stressful situations and how they reformulate their own habitus. After experiencing these conditions, they consciously chose to acquire cosmopolitan habitus, which are skills of communicating in the English language, and an openness to diversity and acceptance of others. Further they decided to leave South Korea and move even further away to Australia. The authors suggest that the concept of cosmopolitan habitus is a must-have habitus for global citizens, since it allows global citizens to move across the world more successfully. Their study shows a clear mismatch between field and habitus and reveals the ways in which North Korean migrants adopt a habitus that allows them to be more globally mobile. Radogna (2019) notes

that cosmopolitan habitus could be understood as a preliminary condition from which to develop transnational habitus, "being the totality of attitudes and knowledge that facilitate the adaptation in a transnational context" (p. 65).

Many other scholars used the term transnational habitus in the context of migration research. The term was introduced by Guarnizo (1997) in his research on people returning to the Dominican Republic from the United States. Guarnizo's use of translational habitus refers to dual dispositions of migrants that emerge in the migratory process in transnational contexts. Due to the duality of habitus, social actors display seemingly dissonant behaviours as a result of multiple identities.

Pluss (2009) uses the term transnational habitus to refer to the role that cultural capital could play in the resettlement process of Singaporean migrants. In order to access cultural, economic, and social resources in different geographic and cultural spaces, the author assumes that migrants experience changes in their cultural identities. She also refers to Singaporeans' cosmopolitan habitus and the bilingual education system in particular, which permits them to live in Hong Kong and provides them with chances to increase their social, cultural and economic capitals.

Noble's (2013) study analysing the resettlement experiences of migrants, extends the concept of habitus by adding an ethnic dimension. The author proposes that migrants' experiences of moving across and switching between social fields can be explained by drawing on a micro-sociological language of settings.

> …some migrants acquire a corporeal and social awkwardness which embodies the learning of the 'difference of difference.' This differentiation is less about personal experience than social location, and it is less about some primordial 'ethnicity' deriving from the homeland than an 'ethnicised' habitus that reflects that location within Australian social fields (Noble, 2013, p. 341).

Besides, bringing another dimension of ethnicised habitus, Noble also builds the conception of field. He says that in a continuously changing world, it is not helpful to understand field with analogies of sports fields: “Fields are not simply adjacent or juxtaposed planes, they are imbricated and turn into each other in a kind of four-dimensional social space. Ethnicity is such a field" (p. 354). Such fields of ethnicity he calls a ‘virtual field’ which is not dependent on spatial dimensions but is something one carries within the self. Noble calls the habitus produced by such four-dimensional fields, ethnicised habitus.

Noble's (2013) study provides an interesting and very necessary analysis in understanding the notion of field which helps me to situate and define ‘field’ in my research with immigrant Muslim women. Field allows me room for analysing the relationship between habitus, reflexivity and change. This is because the multiplicity, plurality and diversity of my participants is so enormous that I need to stretch the boundaries of field in a way that can respond to such multiplicity, in an ever-changing contemporary social world. My participants continuously overlap, switch, cross, and move back and forth within different fields.

I have discussed some of the studies conducted in the context of migration which extended Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in migration studies. While the developed terms provide a useful analysis of different participant groups in different ethnographic contexts, none of them help me to analyse the complexity, multiculturalism, diversity, intersubjectivity, unfinishedness, creativity, and agentive reflexivity of my participant’s experiences. Before proceeding to my analysis in the following chapters, below I will briefly review some of the studies that have used the concept of habitus in the context of religion.

Habitus and Religion

As in migration studies, the use of habitus in studies of religion is very popular (Berlinerblau 1999; Collins 2002; Verter 2003; Rey 2007; Mellor and Shilling 2010) - yet it is also critiqued (Asad 1986, 1993; Mahmood 2005). Criticisms of the concept of religious habitus are very similar to those in

migration studies, discussed above, and centre on two areas: its inability to be reflective, and its lack of capacity to cope with rapid change within contemporary societies.

Asad is a well-known scholar in the field of anthropology of religion, but his notion of habitus differs from that of Bourdieu. Asad (1986) builds on an Aristotelian tradition that focuses on habituation patterns capable of directing people's actions, including feelings and desires, through acquired moral character. Asad's understanding of religion through tradition largely derives from observation of his parents' religious practices. His father was a Jew who converted to Islam at a young age. Asad had observed both his parents' religious approaches, which were entirely different to each other. Asad's father had a more reason based, defensive and promoting kind of stance of his newly learned religion. In contrast, his mother who was an Arab, had a more embodied, ritualistic religion which was integral to her life. Thus, religious tradition can be seen as an instrument for redefining past, present, and future through the use of embodied pedagogies which impart knowledge and virtue in social actors (Asad, 1986). Mahmood (2005), who was Asad's student, built on Asad's argument by grounding religious agency in the Islamic tradition. In her ethnography of the Egyptian women of the piety movement, Mahmood specifically mentions in her work that she is not talking about women's own agency, but emphasises the agency of tradition in Islamic theological discourses and practices, rather than individual agencies (Mahmood 2005).

Neither Asad's nor Mahmood's work focuses on individual agencies which highlight changes, plurality and multiplicity among Muslims as social actors. Rather, they focus deeply on ways that virtue is cultivated and religious knowledge is transferred through tradition (Asad, 1986; Mahmood, 2005).

Mellor and Shilling (2014) identify their definition of religious habitus which differs from Bourdieu's. Religious habitus for them, derives from the interactions between religious phenomena and people's experiences, and as a result such reactions do not give assurance of their reproductive consequences. They re-conceptualise religious habitus "as something reflexively re-made or *instaured* [renewed or restored], through the cultivation of a subjectivity

that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other worldly realities” (p. 275).

Waltrop’s (2015) research explores how young Muslim women in Copenhagen navigate everyday life using their smartphones and social media services, in the process, redefining morality, modesty, gender, and generational relations. She focuses on love and marriage and how young Muslim women engage with both, while maintaining family honour through virtuous behaviour, and also appearing ‘cool’ among peers. She extends the concept of habitus to that of composite habitus by asserting that:

> ….it underscores the aspect of a habitus that is split between (sometimes contradictory) composite parts. The composite habitus of the young women is more than a hysteresis effect (where disposition and field are in mismatch and the habitus misfires), as the composite habitus also opens up to a range of possible strategies (p. 49).

Waltrop (2015) further maintains that the concept of composite habitus helps her to analyse her participants’ lives which are informed by multiple fields and forces in a modern and globalised world. Also, she argues that this does not imply that social actors would disregard or apply their composite parts of habitus in a conscious and flexible manner.

As discussed above, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus both in studies of migration and religion, has been instrumental in analysing a broad range of migration and religious experiences despite being critiqued in both disciplines. In relation to my study, I find it useful to apply the concept of habitus to analyse my participants' experiences, although I find it limiting as it does not entirely capture the unfinished, complex negotiations of the mundane. Thus, Habitus or cleft habitus and existing extensions of habitus i.e., ethnicized habitus, composite habitus, re-conceptualised religious habitus, transnational habitus, and cosmopolitan habitus are inadequate for an analysis of diversity, multiplicity, instability, complexity, and most importantly the unfinished and continuous nature of immigrant Muslim women’s lived experiences in Aotearoa NZ.

Rather, habitus, as per the understanding developed from my research, is a continuous process of filtering information, skills, taste, and capital that not only keep changing as per conditions of fields but also change as part of one's learning and exposure to information and experiences.

Since the world we live in is continuously changing, dispositions too are changing rapidly, and thus habitus is continuously adapting and changing. Field is also no longer stable and provides a space where social actors of similar dispositions negotiate or socially mobilise their capitals (Noble, 2013). I would also like to problematize the notion of field here, by borrowing Noble's (2013) definition of 'virtual field' which is not dependent on spatial dimensions but something one carries within self. I will explain this further in this chapter.

Habitus and Becoming

To develop my concept of habitus in accord with my research context, I add the concept of *becoming* to *habitus* in order to capture the *continuity, complexity,* and *unfinishedness* of my participants' lives. I understand habitus as an ongoing process of making and remaking, negotiating and renegotiating, orientation and reorientation as it comes to appear in the lives of the women. I argue that Bourdieu's theory of practice, in the case of immigrant Muslim women in particular, could be further enhanced by adding ideas derived from Deleuze and Guttari's (1987) theory of becoming. From their perspective, a person's self remains in the process of becoming. Throughout their lives people make decisions about their lives and explore the environments in which they live. Deleuze calls these "dynamic trajectories" (p. 61).

In philosophy, becoming refers to the conceptual idea that the universe - including the world we live in and the people within it - is continuously changing and re-forming. According to Deleuze, entities, including humans, always change, shift, reform, evolve; becoming, thus, is always a process of movement. Humans make sense of their lives in the context of movement, and change. Yet, despite these forces, humans consistently use agency to resist and shape their environments (Biehl & Locke, 2017; Jackson, 2013).

Patton (2000) explains that for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is "the processes of creative transformation and the lines of flight along which individuals or groups are transformed into something different to [sic] what they were before" (p.2). Deleuze and Guattari focus on movement and change as two integral parts of becoming. There is no such thing as forever stability, and no such thing as everlasting unchanging. Everything is in flux, moves, and changes unceasingly at varying speeds and intensities (Waller, 2018). This could be translated into my participants' lives which are continuously in flux and changing at varying speeds and intensities, levels and degrees of complexities. Conolly (2011) maintains that becoming happens as a result of repetitiveness of past experiences as they unfold themselves into present and specific situations, in ways that create entirely different entities. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the analogy of a rhizome stem to explain their concept of becoming, referring to it as a process of "no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (p. 25). Becoming can also be understood with an analogy of a map that has various entry and exit points and more than one path to reach a destination (Biehl & Locke, 2017).

The theory of becoming is relevant to my study as it provides room to understand my participants' lives as a 'process' of continuous change, rather than a linear or static phenomenon rooted in stability. I also found the theory extremely useful to understanding my research in its multiplicity, along what Deleuze and Guattari call 'lines of flight' (1987) referring to an endless numbers of future possibilities provided and compelled by constant change.

Naveeda Khan (2012) in her book *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Scepticism in Pakistan* explores the relationship between Pakistan and Islam in the context of postcolonialism, arguing that Pakistan's relationship with Islam has remaind experimental, ever since the foundation of Pakistan in 1947. Through her ethnographic accounts and philosophical perspectives, she observes Pakistan's self-expression in the forms of legal and theological debates, literature, and in everyday contestations around mosques. Her work presents a complex picture of Pakistani Muslim society which is striving towards perfection, rooting its tradition in discursive practices of orthodoxy and yet open to multiplicity. For Khan, Muslim identity for Pakistani people is not "striving towards a determinate end" (p.55) but is an open negotiation, with many loose ends

that the future might hold. Khan alludes to the Deleuzian framework of becoming to analyse everyday Islam in Pakistan, arguing that Pakistani society can still be seen in a state of becoming. Although Khan's study was carried out in the context of Pakistan - a young society still grappling with political, theological and economic issues - I find her work useful for analysing the experiences of my participants because her analytical framework provides room to situate the multiplicity and diversity in practices and actions within Islamic faith. However, I do not draw heavily on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming and the detail of rhizomatic multiplicities and assemblages.

My main theoretical framework relies on habitus, and the concept of becoming helps to understand the potential for simultaneous, continuous, and changing habitus and field at every point of time and space. Lives are not static, for nothing in the universe is static, and becoming illuminates unfinishedness.

Comparing Habitus

As outlined above, habitus as a concept and theory, no matter how contentious, still offers useful ways to understand migrant lives which are exposed in the disjunctures caused by changing, continuously overlapping, fields. Here though, my central critique of habitus theorisation is that it cannot explain why the migrant women's experiences that emerge in my study are so different from other research, even when the women have similar forms of cultural and social capital, and similar forms of religious habitus.

My work with Muslim women leads me to extend the concept of habitus beyond cleft or split habitus, with their focus on 'difference(s)' resulting from disjunctures caused by changing fields. I extend the use habitus to one of an analytical tool, in order to make sense of the everyday lives of my research participants - but also to find out if, and how far, the concept helps to understand their very diverse experiences, varying in both degree and complexity.

I found it extremely interesting that women from the same nationality, ethnic background, city, qualification status and work status did not have the same position on even one single issue; for example, wearing the headscarf, or their understanding of what is an appropriate Muslim outfit

and modesty (Chapters Five, Six, Seven); their position on participating in a Santa Claus parade (Chapter Seven), or following prescribed food choices (Chapter Eight). Their continuous, unfinished positions on everyday matters, even when they were becoming familiar with new fields, proved to be never-ending.

Habitus then, to me, is not a matter settled once and for all time - a matter which emerges clearly and powerfully in the experiences of migration - but one which, I will argue, is central to all the now mobile and globally oriented communities and cultures of the contemporary world. The negotiations which ensue are also both reflective and agentive; that is, my participants know how they are perceived when they dress or behave in a certain way. They discuss such concerns within their close, trusted circles, and make decisions which are mostly based on comparison of themselves with others.

Comparing was one of the most important tools in these women's decision-making processes, negotiating certain aspects of their everyday lives and deliberating on unclear situations. They used acts of comparison in single or multiple forms simultaneously; for example, comparing their own pre- and post-migration ethnicity, cultural and national status, as well as building self-comparison into their own views on religiosity, either before or after migration, or their religiosity at different stages of their lives. They built comparison into what their friends or acquaintances spent their everyday lives doing, their ways of managing a household (marketing, the availability of food choices and prices); into ways of cooking; ways of celebrating events like Eid, or weddings; comparison of past and present situations in managing their own and family members' dress (buying, availability, aesthetics, fashion, including wearing the hijab for hijab-wearing Muslims).

A key technique involved comparison of ways of childrearing, which religious scholars say to study and follow when making rulings on the Quran and Hadith and Muslim practices. Comparison of practices within cross-cultural Islamic communities, and of the intersections between Islam and ethnicity, were central to discovery - and were sometimes quite shocking - as migrant women learned that what they had assumed within their 'homeland' communities to be centrally Islamic codes, were in fact tied to national, or even localised, ethnic traditions.

The comparisons that women made were reflexive; intersubjective; place and space-oriented; social; cultural; religious; as well as gendered and age-related in nature. Above all else however, these comparisons were not one-off moments, but part of a continuously changing, evolving worldview, supported by equally changeable layers of comparison, taking multiple factors into consideration. Clearly, the fields in which these women were mobilising new or modified behaviours to meet new conditions, were not stable.

In this context, I find it useful therefore to add an extension to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Emerging from my research is a mode of habitus I call Comparing Habitus, where habitus is recognised as an unending and unfinished process of 'becoming.' It is one where the primary way of making sense of the fields and forms of social and cultural capital is the act of comparison. The term, with its present-participle '-ing' ending, captures practice, agency, continuity and becoming. I was inclined to work with the term Comparing Habitus-*ing* but I was not sure of using two verbs together, although I believe that using Habitus-ing instead of habitus also points to practice, agency, change and becoming. I discussed it with one of my supervisors and we thought it would also be annoying to read!

I also pondered *comparative habitus* and *comparison habitus*. However, neither of these concepts proved sufficient to capture the ongoing and unfinished nature of the act of comparison. The tension set up by the simultaneous occupancy of two or more possibilities on one space of practice or belief, recognises how the comparison that my participants might make on one single day to help them navigate one single matter, can prove to be not necessarily compatible with other, similar, situations. The term 'Comparing Habitus' builds in that open-endedness and tension; never a stable set of dispositions, but a complex, continuous wheel of unfinishedness, always, still *becoming* dispositions.

This term could be seen as an extension of reflexive habitus; the concept introduced by Sweetman (2003) in order to connect Bourdieu's habitus with theories of reflexive modernization. He argues that "a reflexive orientation toward the contemporary environment may itself be regarded as a form of habitus, itself the outcome of an *adaptation to* – rather than

a distanciation from – the changing nature of the social terrain" (p. 543). However reflexive habitus as Sweetman conceives it, does not necessarily emerge from constantly comparing, nor does it inevitably respond to the unstable nature of contemporary fields. Here then, I extend Noble's definition of virtual field (Noble, 2013). I add that field itself becomes an overlapping space which is itself in the process of becoming - so that habitus can be reflective within the same field. This form of habitus intensifies its reflectivity at its meeting with a virtual field; within the self, as a consequence of continuous comparisons of different capacities, forms of capital and dispositions, as well as from a resultant learning inward, since reflexivity is expanded by incoming and outward flowing information, a condition of our lives in an age of saturation of accessible information.

I argue then that the concept of Comparing Habitus, besides providing room for the analysis of my participants' experiences, also responds to the many processes that cause change. Noble (2013) notes that it has been rare for scholars to focus on the processes by which habitus changes under conditions of migration. The focus on the use of habitus in regard to a migrant experience has been founded mostly on dualistic dispositions, binary and dichotomous in nature, and on the constraints that migrants embody (Erel, 2010; Kelly & Lusis, 2006). Comparing Habitus, which is more than just the matter of comparing pre- and post-migration experiences, instead challenges dichotomies, highlighting comparison as an integral process of my participants' lived lives.

This study is an unfinished attempt to highlight multiplicity, diversity, internalised struggles, reflexivity, self-talk and self-perception through both an insider and outsider lens, in response to external challenges, comparing subjectivities, and stories of successful yet ongoing agency. Islam as a religion leaves room for interpretation, and hence the different cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, and women in this study - including myself - operationalise Islam as per our own understanding.

Beyond the dichotomies of right and wrong, true and false, good and bad, all of these women have set out on journeys to a better life, in terms of living standards (compared to their pre-migration countries) and to give a better and safer future to their children. But they were also on spiritual and religious journeys to be 'good' Muslims, as framed by their own subjective

understandings. ‘Good’ here is a subjectively interpreted term. For some, becoming more religious is being a good Muslim, and for others becoming not so religious is being a good Muslim in the context of a less religious Aotearoa NZ.

Rumi’s famous poem articulates this argument perfectly. I read this poem in light of my proposed theoretical concept of Comparing Habitus and it illuminated for me new possibilities of understanding human lives beyond dichotomies and life’s stabilities.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field[17]*. I’ll meet you there.*
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase “each other”
Do not make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don’t go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don’t go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorstep
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don’t go back to sleep. (Rumi)

Summary

In this chapter I have considered the ways in which my participants’ experiences could be understood through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu’s conception of habitus. This means a focus on the everyday, on lived Islam, and on ideas about 'becoming.’ I draw heavily on Bourdieu’s

[17] Field here could be referred to Noble's (2013) ‘virtual field’ which is an extension of Bourdieu’s concept of field.

theory of practice to examine my participants' real-world experiences, as the main theoretical lens supported by concepts of lived religion, everyday and becoming.

I have also explained the rationale behind these concepts, and how they help find answers to questions of difference, multiplicity, reflexivity, inter-subjectivity and inter-relationality that arise from the many mundane experiences of my participants. I argue that the lives of Muslim women immigrants are complex and in a constant process of transformation, and that the changing of fields affects the transformation of their self. The women are constantly negotiating a space where they can justify their beliefs, norms and culture both to themselves and to others.

None of the existing extensions of Bourdieu's habitus quite fit the experiences of my participants however, and so I have proposed the term Comparing Habitus. My participants were mindful of the changes they bring to bear (or do not bring to bear) within themselves to fit-in or to stand-out within their newly encountered fields. I also contend that by and through Comparing Habitus immigrant Muslim women are continuously in the process of becoming within the fields of multiplicity, inter-subjectivity and inter-relationality, which are ever-changing, overlapping and intersecting with each other.

I end with the following poetic expression of these processes of Comparing Habitus that show reflexivity, and the suffering experienced within this strained and multi-layered habitus, not only at the disjunctures of changing fields and socio-cultural fields, but also in the expanding virtual fields - one in which migrant women are especially exposed, charged with 'keeping contact' with 'home.' The poetic expression also shows the constant self-dialogue and associated issues of agency, which are particularly evident among those women who unwillingly or semi-willingly force themselves to bring about some change in themselves in order to fit in.

Comparing Habitus - A Poem

This is I, the sole resident of my body

The body of flesh and bones

The body of norms and values

The body of beliefs and convictions

The body that is 'becoming'(changing) in itself - day and night

BUT

The pity, the shame, the misfortune is

The body has to deliberately change itself too

To fit into a new 'field'

So it stays bright

Like a flashing light

The body has to retain

What is considered 'Right'

In past and in the present sight

Once, I asked my body, is this the fright of the new field?

If not, why do you tirelessly fight?

She said: This is not about the fight

But an unending struggle to look, to feel, to sound right

A field of different expectations

In which my already learned norms and values merely become accusations

Puts my whole-self into the situations

Where I always end up giving explanations

To avoid those times of hesitations and frustrations

I deliberately choose to change, to leave, to abandon, to reform

So I gain a good reputation

For myself, my fellows and for my coming generations

I know, I am aware of, I am conscious

That all my efforts to tirelessly fit in

May put me 'between and betwixt'

Because the body is baggaged with its social 'habitus' from its conception

To bring a sudden change in this is just a deception

BUT

The pity, the shame, the misfortune is

The body that looks mine

Feels mine

Assures myself – it is me

Without any doubt -

I am the owner of my body

The sole resident

It is mine, yes mine, just mine

Aahhhh

Indeed is thine, society

It is always you who define

My everyday norms and regulations

How to dress, talk, behave, drink and dine

It is always you who draws the line

In the struggles to fit in

I am walking away from the Divine

I have forgotten, I had to forget

To listen to what my heart says, my own opines

My body now is merely a sign

It has become just like a shrine

A place controlled by the people, society

For their own pleasure and fine

BUT

The pity, the shame, the misfortune is

My soul does not get any answer

When she speaks to me in rebel moments,

Is that really you ‘my home’?

Let me live the way I want,

Let me follow what I desire

Let me be where nature leads me

I want to fly over oceans,

With my wings made of my own emotions

I want to swim in the air…

I want to wander in dark nights,

I want to lose myself in the limitless sky…

Then I hear the whisper….

This is a ‘wrapped’ body…

The body that maintains multiple norms

Norms that carry the modalities of the East

Norms that carry the modern(ities) of the West

You are not allowed to follow your heart

But behave in a way so your own are proud of you

And others do not see you differently

You have to show ‘yours’ that you are ‘pious’

And to ‘others’ that you are not too ‘different’

I told my body

In 'becoming' 'pious modern'

I have lost my spirits, my flair, my aesthetics

In the rehearsed milieu of longings and belongings

I found my 'self' nowhere

Let me re-discover myself or let me allow leaving you

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The aim of this chapter is to offer an understanding of the existing literature on immigrant Muslim women, to find out if and how the existing literature contributes to understanding diversity, multiplicity, multiculturalism within Muslim cultures. Although I tried to be focused, in my search for studies that present a holistic picture of immigrant Muslim women's everyday lived experiences, most of the studies I found dealt with one aspect of the lived experiences of Muslim women, such as head-covering or issues Muslim women face in their employment. Thus, based on the existing literature, I review some of the key work done on immigrant Muslim women living in a minority context and in Aotearoa NZ. In so doing, this chapter outlines patterns of migration of Muslims to western countries and issues that immigrant Muslim face there. I also review key literature on Muslim women from the contexts of Muslim majority countries that discuss issues of Muslim piety and agency which I believe is important in order to understand the experiences of my participants.

Below, I will provide a detailed overview of extant research which contextualises my study and the work that has been done concerning similar issues. I will begin with a brief overview of the Anthropology of migration.

Anthropology of Migration

Migration and migration-related issues, such as identities, citizenship, religion, family, language, education, culture, workplaces and labour markets, are currently prominent in the discipline of Anthropology (Vertovec, 2007). However, interest in studying migration was not very strong until the 1960s, when the discipline was largely shaped by a "sedentarist bias" (Malkki, 1995, p. 208). For this reason, Anthropology, unlike other social science disciplines such as Sociology, Geography, Political Science and Economics, did not give much attention to the study of migration (Brettell, 2022). However, the nascent field of "migration studies" has truly become an interdisciplinary one (Foner, 2003). Anthropologists should be mindful of this while "making a case for the unique perspective emerging from the ethnographic process" (Suarez-Orozco,

2003, p. 55). To understand this context, it is imperative to present a brief history of theoretical and other contributions made by anthropologists to the study of migration.

Historically, anthropologists conducted fieldwork in “foreign” communities with the assumption that societies and cultures were “bound by place” (Horevitz, 2009, p. 747). However, during the 1960s, anthropologists could not ignore the wide-spread rural to urban migration (particularly in Africa and Latin America), and started to look at the migration phenomenon in detail, as it not only affected the communities they were studying but also their very identities (Brettell, 2022; Horevitz, 2009).

Kearney (1994) discusses the anthropological theories of migration as representing three main phases: modernisation theory, dependency theory, and articulation theory. Modernisation theory, which emerged during the 1960s, used “anthropological and sociological models of social change and neoclassical economics, all of which… exercised strong influences on migration theory [and in a] Victorian sense of history and development” (Kearney, 1994, p. 333). Migration, mostly considered as rural to urban, was perceived as a positive phenomenon that helped the process of modernisation (Horevitz, 2009). Migrants were considered as “progressive types who would have a positive impact on development by bringing back to their home communities innovations and knowledge that would break down traditionalism” (Kearney, 1994, p. 333).

In the words of Brettell (2022, p. 199), anthropologists who were working through the modernisation framework “emphasised the rational and progressive economic decisions made in response to differentials in land, labour, and capital between where a migrant lives and the locale to which he or she has chosen to migrate.” In the modernisation framework, the unit of analysis was the “individual” (Horevitz, 2009, p. 750), who was considered to be rational and capable of becoming an agent of change in their home communities (Brettell, 2022). This framework saw international migration through a “cost-benefit decision” lens on the part of the migrant (Massey, Arango, Kouaouci, & Taylor, 1994). The expectation was that such migration would result into a “more equitable balance between resources and population pressure and the

ultimate elimination of differences between rural-agrarian and urban-industrial areas" (Brettell, 2022, p. 200).

The shortcomings of the linear development model associated with modernisation theory started to be questioned through the historical structuralist/political economy approach (Brettell, 2022). In the 1970s, Latin American anthropologists and economists started to recognise that "development had not proceeded as predicted by modernization theory" (Kearney, 1994, p. 338). This led to a shift in focus from an individual level of analysis to a macro-level focus in a neo-Marxist framework, also known as dependency theory (Horevitz, 2009). Dependency theory considers migration in the context of a global economy, core-periphery relations, and enforcement of under-development. Brettell (2022, p. 200) argues that this resulted in an "internationalisation of proletariat… to describe the inequalities between labour-exporting, low-wage countries and labour-importing, high-wage countries."

Anthropologists found it hard to operationalise dependency theory due to it being "too macro" and started to shift away from it in the late 1970s. As a result of this, two main post-dependency theories have emerged: world system theory and articulation theory (Kearney, 1994; Brettell, 2022). World system theory, which is a "hybrid offspring of dependency theory" (Kearney, 1994, p. 340), analyses the movements of people and products from underdeveloped to developed countries. It sees this to be "less of a 'willing choice' on the part of the individual and more of a forced extraction by the global capital market system" (Horevitz, 2009, p. 751). Unlike dependency theory, which focused on the impact of migration on receiving communities, world system theory "captured the effects not only on the receiving community but on the sending community and thereby helped anthropologists to focus more locally" (Horevitz, 2009, p. 751).

In the 1980s, articulation theory emerged as an alternative to both dependency and world system theories. The main unit of analysis in articulation theory also shifted towards households in the communities from which labour was extracted (Horevitz, 2009). Articulation theory allowed anthropologists to "return to the community level fieldwork, but in a way that overcomes the former liabilities of conceptualizing it either as a socioeconomic and cultural isolate or as a dependent tail wagged by the capitalist dog'' (Kearney, 1994, p. 344).

Another theoretical lens, transnationalism or transnational theory, emerged as an alternative to articulation theory. This theory criticised the notion of migrants as "pre-capitalists" who were forcefully "extracted" from their home communities by the labour market (Brettell, 2022; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Rather, transnational theory sees migrants as having agency, who can move freely across international borders and between different cultures (Vertovec, 1999, 2009).

Transnationalism sees social action in a "multidimensional global space with unbounded, often discontinuous, and interpenetrating sub-spaces" (Kearney, 1995, p. 549). It is closely linked to the broader interests that emerge from postmodern, poststructuralist and feminist theory, all of which have provided new ways of thinking and research (Brettell, 2022). The "transnational turn" in the anthropology of migration has provided new ethnographic data and understanding of the dynamics of migrants' lives across national boundaries and multilocalities (Vertovec, 2007, p. 966). Further, transnationalism has produced new research on social issues, such as borderlands (Dorsey & Diaz-Barriga, 2015; Fleuriet & Castañeda, 2017), embodied experience of migrants' journeys (Holmes, 2013), and diasporic communities and families (Tseng, 2002; Werbner, 2002; Watson, 2005; Vora, 2008). Transnationalism remains relevant today as it is constantly "being shaped and debated in such sub-fields as gender studies, diaspora studies, refugee studies, and border studies" (Horevitz, 2009, p. 756).

My research is situated in the broader field of the anthropology of migration. It highlights the complexity of contemporary migration of Muslim women into non-Muslim minority contexts. The phenomenon of migration in contemporary societies must be approached through the lived experiences of social actors who made the conscious decision to migrate to a certain country, in my participants' case- Aotearoa NZ, and who also weigh the compromises they must make. The other very important aspect to consider in a temporary migration context is the question of negotiating change. The change to which I refer does not apply to pre and post national contexts but to a continuous change within the self, experienced by my research participants as they responded to change through comparison. In other words, the act of comparison was pivotal to recognising the nature of the change within themselves and responding to it.

Migration and Muslims

Migration from developing countries to western countries is a common phenomenon in the modern era. There are many reasons for this. For example, migration provides better work and job opportunities, helps improve migrants' financial and living conditions, and provides better safety as compared to migrants' home countries (Carem, 2019). Khan (2017, p. 431) highlights that choices to migrate are a "combination of politics, educational opportunities, and economics, [that] continue to serve as some of the more important driving factors of westward migration." According to Said (1978), the West and Europe had a role in making Islam known to the world.

However, many authors highlight that migration is a complex process and is an interplay as well as negotiation among religious, cultural, ethnic, and national dimensions of self (Berry et al., 2006; Britto & Amer, 2007; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; Phinney, 1990; Stuart, Ward, & Adam, 2010).

While migration research has been dominated by a focus on migrant workers or refugees, from the 1990s onwards the focus increasingly shifts to Muslim immigrants (Kanitz, 2021). Kandil (2010, p. 548) highlights how his identity, as ascribed by his German colleagues, transformed many times, from identification as 'migrant' to his religious affiliation as 'Muslimness.' After World War 2, foreign people were described mainly as migrant workers and were referred to by their ethnicity (Kanitz, 2021).

During the 1980s, movements such as Pan-Arabism and the Iranian Revolution in Iran in 1979, brought "the Muslim stereotypes into the foreground" (Kanitz, 2021, p. 52). This means that all Muslims from different political and ethnic backgrounds began to be amalgamated as Muslim immigrants. The experience of being an immigrant Muslim in the West however has changed distinctly after 9/11 (Schissel, 2005). However, this Western known version of Islam most often presents Islam as a backward, fundamentalist and 'terrorist' religion. Göle (2003) argues that migration has a strong relationship with religion, and in fact that migration paved the way for the transmission of religion to other places. In the context of Muslim migration to Western countries, this impact is more complex. Some studies highlight that migration to a Western

country leads migrants to strongly attach themselves to religious beliefs. Maliepaard, Phalet, and Gijsberts (2015), for example, argue that discrimination against Muslims in Western societies has increased their religious attendance and they became more religious, which they refer to as 'reactive religiosity.' This is very similar to Leila Ahmed's (1992) argument that the reimagining of Islamic attire and traditional culture is itself a product of Western modernity.

Studies on Head-covering: Hijab and Veiling

In the Western context, studies on immigrant Muslim women have been conducted mostly in the context of 'problematic' immigrants (Dossa, 2004; Patton, 2014), and around their religious attire. The hijab or veil is often labelled as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression and always remains a barrier to integration and assimilation (Ajrouch, 2007; Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2011; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Bruenig & Fleischmann, 2015; Dwyer, 1999; Foot, 2000; Göle, 1996; Jelen, 2011; Kassissieh, 2006; Moors, 2009; Ruby, 2006).

Immigrant Muslim womens' clothing, such as veiling, has been considered a symbol of 'otherness.' The hijab used is an evaluation tool to judge Muslim women's integration and assimilation into the host society. Ajrouch's (2007) study presents a comparative picture of Muslim women wearing the hijab in two different western contexts, the USA and France. While arguing that the choice of wearing hijab is based on an individual's negotiation and interpretation of Islamic norms and values, the particular local context is identified as having an influential and critical role in shaping the interpretation of veiling. The author takes the examples of the USA and France and analyses the policies of both countries to see their flexibility regarding the incorporation of religious minorities. While both the countries announce themselves as secular, they nonetheless have starkly different interpretations of being secular. In the United States, secularity gives the freedom to its people to publicly demonstrate religious symbols and legally recognises differences by ethnicity and race. In contrast, in France, secularity refers to the removal of all signs and symbols of religious affiliation from public places.

Ahmed (1992) writes that "veiling - to Western eyes… became the symbol of both the oppression of women and the backwardness of Islam" (p. 152). Building on this point, Abdurraqib (2005)

highlights that the veil and resultant ‘symbolic otherness’ is perceived as Islamic or religious identity, rather than being also seen as national, racial or any other ethnic identity. He highlights in the context of United States that Muslims, especially since 9/11, were viewed only in two categories: practicing ones who were labelled ‘extremists,’ and ‘secular’ Muslims who would distance themselves from their religion. In the same vein, immigrant Muslim women who choose to veil are caught up in this discourse. Abdurraqib (2005) further discusses how dress or clothing “maintains cultural difference and this maintenance generally falls to the shoulders of women because women reproduce culture” (p. 58). In this context, a Muslim woman must choose from four categories identified by Hermansen (1993, p. 193), which are to either "(a) not overtly express the fact of being Muslim; (b) express her Muslim identity context-dependent; (c) visibly express being part of the Muslim minority in America, but continue regular career and social activities; (d) totally modify her lifestyle." Each of these options requires a Muslim woman to negotiate her clothing practice, because a “desire to avoid isolation may inspire Muslim women to remain covered, but the fear of ostracism within mainstream society may cause Muslim women to reconsider their dress” (Abdurraqib, 2005, p. 59).

Because of the perception that veiling is imposed on women by Muslim men or a patriarchal religious order, the veiling practice is construed as signifying a lack of agency by Muslim women. Such discourse does not recognise that women might veil of their own volition or through their cultural consciousness. Mohja Kahf highlights this point in “Hijab Scenes,” a series of poems. For instance, in “Hijab Scene 7” the narrator asserts her American status despite wearing a headscarf:

> No, I'm not bald under the scarf
> No, I'm not from that country
> where women can't drive cars
> No, I would not like to defect
> I'm already American
> But thank you for offering (p. 39).

Ruby (2006) for example explores the relationship between gender and identity by discussing the concept of the hijab and its various associated meanings. She points out a gap between western understandings of the hijab and her participants' experiences. According to her, the negative portrayal of the hijab in the Canadian media is due to the lack of understanding about the cultural and historical background of the immigrant Muslim women. As a consequence, there is a gap between a negative and 'oppressed' portrayal of Muslim women in western societies and the experiences of immigrant Muslim women themselves.

Hijab and Resistance

Muslim women's dress has also been studied as an expression of resistance and reaction to the negative perception towards Islam created by political and international terrorist events (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Göle (2002) for example labels the show of resistance by British Muslims through dress as an active "performance of difference" (p. 187). Muslims use dress and other Islamic codes to signify resistance to the anti-Muslim perception in the British environment. Wilson (2006) also stressed this point by quoting one of her research participants: "Afghanistan was attacked, Iraq is being bombed, Muslims are dying – that's why I am wearing the hijab these days. I want people to know I am a Muslim. I am proud of my culture" (p. 24).

Adherence to a particular dress pattern signifies solidarity and loyalty to the "imagined global Community, the *ummah*" (Mohammad, 2005, p. 381). This is also an act of "rejection and resistance" to the "West" and popular media stereotypes that Muslim women are oppressed and passive victims (Tarlo, 2005, p. 15). In doing so, women are creating their own identities as modern Muslims living in a Muslim-minority context. As Göle (2002) explains, this identity is one that "they [Muslim women] are playing with ambivalence, being both Muslim and modern without wanting to give up one for the other … they are outside a regime of imitation, critical of both subservient traditions and assimilative modernity" (p. 181).

Hijab and the Workplace

Studies on veiling and the hijab also discuss discrimination against immigrant Muslim women. For example, the clothing itself, religious attire and their relationship with work have become very popular topics among academics (Forstenlechner & Al-Waqfi, 2010; Ghumman & Jackson, 2009; Jelen, 2011; Pasha-Zaidi, Masson, & Pennington, 2014; Syed & Pio, 2009). Syed and Pio (2009) highlight the need for multifaceted understandings of the challenges working immigrant Muslim women face in Australia. They face 'triple/multiple jeopardy' because of belonging to multiple personal and social identities such as ethnicity, religion, gender, minority status, and country of birth. The study finds that these women face more problems than migrant men and their other mainstream white 'sisters.' The study participants experienced the negative effects of social stereotypes related to veiling, skin colour and religious rituals. In some cases, significant links were found between the wearing of the hijab and increased problems such as more reserved behaviour of bosses and colleagues, and rejections at job interviews. One respondent shared an interesting experiment that replacing the picture in her CV from 'uncovered to covered,' significantly lowered her chances of job interview calls. Muslim migrant women also experienced discrimination on the basis of their names, their appearance, and the way they spoke the English language.

The study by Pasha-Zaidi, Masson & Pennington (2014) found that the hijab has a negative influence on the perceptions of employability of Muslim women in western societies, which could consequently limit their employability, and can cause psychological stress if they have to choose between faith and work. All these factors have negative influences on the employability of *hijabi* women and also have the potential to confirm negative stereotypes of Muslim women in the West.

Forstenlencher & Al-Waqfi (2010) also highlight that Muslim employees, including women, encounter discriminatory attitudes at the workplace in various forms, such as unfair treatment by colleagues and supervisors, and the lack of accommodation of religious practices. Many Muslim employees also noticed that changing their names, such as shortening Mohammed to

Mo, increased their chances of interview calls, or women removing their headscarves before appearing in an interview. To cope with such discrimination, Muslim employees seeking work either try to find a job within their ethnic religious and cultural group or in an organisation with other Muslim employees.

In the same vein, Ghumman & Jackson's (2009) study explains that there is a direct relationship between religious attire and expectations of a job offer among Muslim women in the US. Also in the US, a 153% increase in workplace discrimination against Muslims after 9/11 was reported. Muslim women who used religious attire *(hijabi)* at workplaces experience more discrimination than Muslim women who did not *(non-hijabi).* Social psychology posits that stigmatized individuals are more likely to conform to the stigmas (negative characteristics) attached to their (stigmatized) group. Hence a stigma attached to hijab-using Muslim women causes them to perform poorly at work and also reduces their expectations of getting a job offer. The results of the study confirm that *hijabi* women had lower expectations of receiving a job offer than the expectations of *non-hijabi*s. A difference in expectation also increases for jobs which require more public contact than ones with less public contact.

A further study done by Pasha-Zaidi et al. (2014) found that the hijab has a negative influence on the perceptions of employability of Muslim women in western societies when compared to majority Islamic contexts. Muslim women are considered 'outsiders' in western societies because of the different values and norms in these societies. Negative perception then has various consequences that may limit employability of *hijabi*s. Undue psychological stress too can be caused if they have to choose between faith and work, that may further influence the efficacy of Muslim women and their commitment to an organisation.

In line with the findings of the above study, Kabir (2004) gives an historical account of Muslim settlement in Australia, highlighting tensions between Muslim immigrants and the broader Australian population that have arisen recently. Although she does not focus entirely on immigrant Muslim women, she briefly mentions the perceptions of Muslim women towards their

acceptance in Australian society. One of her respondents, a Syrian born woman but an Australian qualified optometrist, said that she did not get an appropriate job because of her religious attire.

All of these studies show that the headscarf is an important symbol which has come to signify the cultural divide between the West and Muslim immigrants (Crabtree & Husain, 2012). It is not only a symbol limited to expressing religious affiliation, but is also portrayed as a symbol of oppression, submission, and patriarchal norms. Further, orthodoxy has led many European countries to impose a ban on the headscarf at public places (Bruenig & Fleischmann, 2015; Foner & Alba, 2008).

Clothing, Fashion and Creativity

There is a recent trend among scholars to observe Muslim women's clothing through the lens of fashion. Muslim women's clothing has become an important topic within studies on fashion, religion and gender (for example see, Akou, 2007; Almila, 2015; Bucar, 2017; Buggenhagen, 2012; Dwyer, 2008; Lewis, 2007, 2013; Moors & Tarlo, 2013; Moors, 2009, 2013; Mossiere, 2012). Almila (2015) explores clothing strategies of two Muslims groups in Finland – Somali immigrant women and local Finnish women who converted to Islam. She highlights how fashion, anti-fashion and non-fashion strategies are used by Muslim women to express as well as gain cultural capital. Fashion (or non-fashion) strategies are used to express belonging to a certain ethnic group and to gain social and cultural capital. For example, young Somali women seek "fashionability and elegance by combining 'exotic' Middle Eastern styles with contemporary 'Western' garments, thus seeking the recognition of their peers, both Finnish and Somali" (p. 98). In the same vein, Dwyer and Crang (2002) highlight how South Asian Muslim women in Britain actively create fashionable clothing based on the intersection of Western and Eastern cultures.

Similarly, Bucar (2017) uses the term 'pious fashion' or 'fashion veiling' rather than 'modest clothing' in her book where she explores the relationship between dress, aesthetics, and morality. According to her, 'modest clothing' is generally considered as 'decent and demure,' while Muslim women's dress is more than that and signifies "character formation through bodily

action, regulating sexual desires between men and women, and creating public space organised around Islamic moral principles" (p. 3).

After doing ethnographic field work in three different cities (Tehran, Iran; Istanbul, Turkey; and Yogyakarta, Indonesia), she was able to identify similarities and differences around interpretations of the hijab and fashion. She argues that instead of considering the hijab as a "problem" in terms of its demure connotation, this should be considered as a Muslim woman's deliberate decision and analysed as such. This is because Muslim women have a great deal of choice in the ways that they can dress every day. She concludes that Muslim women's dress, including the hijab, should be considered through pious fashion. This is because piety is not:

> … just about obedience to orthodox interpretations of sacred texts: it also incorporates good taste, personal style, and physical attractiveness. And fashion becomes a key location through which piety can be realized and contested. Piety is not only about being good – it is about appearing to be good as well... [Muslim women] are pious because they are using clothing and adornment to cultivate their own characters, to build community, and to make social critiques (p. 190).

Recently, Soltani, Johnston & Longhurst (2022) analysed how Muslim women in Hamilton, NZ worked within the binary of modesty and fashion. According to them, Muslim women challenge as well as conform to the gendered norms of modesty through the use of fashionable clothing and accessories. They also highlight that "fashion is not usually associated with Muslim women who wear hijab and cover their bodies" (p. 394). However, Muslim women in Hamilton embody "hybrid" identities by negotiating their gender, religious, ethnic and national identities in both physical and online space.

Muslim women's dress has often been discussed in academic studies of gender (for example see Ahmad, 1998; Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Franks, 2000; Mirza, 1989). However, authors have highlighted various aspects of Muslim women's dress. For instance, Dwyer (2000) highlights how Muslim women in Britain used their dress to not only maintain their ethnic "purity" but also to find new

possibilities for challenging existing stereotypes and thus creating "hybrid" identities. They mixed the 'Asian' and 'English' clothes to create these identities, as one of her research participants said:

> it's like wearing a long skirt, wearing westernised clothes, which cover you up. We say we're right because we're covering ourselves and there's nothing wrong with wearing it (p. 481).

Similarly, Mohammad (2005) highlighted how Muslim women used their dress to conform to the community expectation while simultaneously switching to another dress at the place of their destination. So, this was the "maintenance of outward conformity while simultaneously engaging in inner rebellion" (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. 230).

Most of the studies discussed above gaze upon Muslim women immigrants through the hijab, stereotypes related to it, issues that the hijab creates and ways that Muslim women use the hijab as resistance or as fashion. What unites these studies is that they tend to homogenise Muslim women, focusing on what they have in common rather than their differences.

Studies on Multicultural Muslims

In the context of British Muslims, Hussain (2008) highlights that they are mostly viewed through the prism of religion which gives a 'one-dimensional' label and underplays the complexity and diversity among Muslims. Muslims have multiple ethnicities and identities; however, they are mostly viewed through 'religious' identity. In the words of Nagel & Staeheli (2009, p. 99):

> The stereotype of Muslims assuming an identity that is religious above all else and that is incompatible with the secularized, modern public sphere belies the highly variable ways in which Muslims practice and conceive of relationships between religion and politics and between cultural difference and membership in the public.

A small number of studies have viewed the diversity of Muslims, rather than seeing them as homogenous and through the lens of religious identity. For example, Foroutan's (2011) study

highlights how different groups of Muslim migrants in Australia experience discrimination based on religious identity and Muslim migrants' employment level. The study used quantitative analysis and divided Muslims based into Middle Eastern/North African Muslims and Eastern European, on the basis of specific dress codes and Islamic names. The results show that employment levels of Muslim migrants (belonging to the Middle East and North Africa) who display a religious identity (dress code, Islamic names, hijab) is lower than those of Muslims who were less likely to display a religious identity (from Eastern Europe).

Huda (2006) also discusses diversity among Muslims in the United States by researching American Muslim organisations. She highlights that "the American Muslim community is diverse in every conceivable way" (p. 17) asserting that diversity is reflected in the number of national and regional Muslim organisations dedicated to civic, religious, cultural, political, and social issues. Although this report does not discuss Muslim diversity in terms of ethnic or national contexts, nor the ways in which Muslims make sense of their everyday in the US, it nonetheless does elaborate on the breadth of Muslim organisations working on diverse issues in order to promote harmony and positive perception of Muslims in the US.

in the context of Australia, Dunn, Atie, & Mapedzahama (2016) highlight that Australian Muslims are ethnically diverse and arrived in Australia under different migration categories (refugee, family migrant, assisted passage, skilled immigrant). Additionally, they have a diverse range of settlement experiences in the country. Despite their multiplicity, Australian Muslims are similar in their everyday hopes, dreams and issues. The study identifies experiences of racism in Australia through surveys and randomised telephone interviews, trying to capture the diversity among Muslims by approaching different mosques/Islamic centres, including those established by Turkish, Lebanese, Iranian, Balgladeshi, Bosnian and other multi-ethnic groups. The study emphasises that the majority of Muslim participants are supportive of diversity and multiculturalism in wider Australian society and refutes the notion that the Muslim community supports uniformity against diversity.

In a similar vein, Kolb (2023) examines Muslims' attitudes towards diversity and other religious groups in Austria. To capture the diversity among the Muslim population, this study uses quota sampling based on age, place of residence, socioeconomic status, nationality, ethnic background and level of education, rather than recruitment through mosques (Dunn et al., 2016). The logic behind Kolb's selection process was that the majority of Muslims (around 80%) rarely or never visit a mosque or a prayer room. The findings highlight that the majority of Muslims hold open and sympathetic attitudes towards people belonging to other religions. This is the opposite to the claims of rigid and negative attitudes towards other religions claimed for Muslims by media and popular discourse (p. 2). Yet, while acknowledging the diversity within Muslim populations, these studies do not report the findings based on the participants' ethnic or cultural identities.

Diversity and multiplicity among Muslims are revealed in some research by comparisons of issues about Muslim women belonging to two or more ethnic and/or national backgrounds. For example, Almila (2015) compares clothing strategies employed by two distinct Muslims groups in Finland – Somali immigrant women and local Finnish women who converted to Islam. The Muslim community in Finland is diverse, and divided by ethnicity as well as by a Sunni/Shi'a religious affiliation divide. The author selects Somali immigrant Muslim women for the study because they are the largest and most visible group of Muslims and employed "distinct dress styles which differ significantly from mainstream Finnish clothing aesthetics" (p. 83). Muslim women's dress styles are compared to the rapidly growing group of local Finnish women who convert to Islam. This research stressed that Muslim women's clothing style depends upon their social position and location.

Correspondingly, Aytar and Bodor (2019) investigate identity and accounts related to wearing and not wearing the hijab among immigrant Muslim women and local Hungarian women converts. Ethnographic methods of participant observations and interviews document the different challenges, experiences and performances of these groups of Muslim women. Although immigrant Muslim women evidently have different experiences and encounter challenges based on different ethnicities, cultural and educational backgrounds, that diversity is not explicitly discussed in the article.

Giuliani & Tabliabue (2015) conducted qualitative investigation of Moroccan and Pakistani Muslim women immigrants' cultural identity and challenges during their integration into the Italian context. They compare these diverse ethnic Muslim groups and highlight that both groups of Muslim women feel emptiness, a lack of emotional bond with the host country, and a strong cultural ambivalence, although in a different way and intensity for each group.

Another group of studies focuses on Muslim immigrants belonging to single large regions, such as Africa, Arabia and the Middle East include Johnson, & Miles, 2014; Khatib, 2014; Lara, 2022; Shalabi, Mitchell, & Andersson, 2015. These studies highlight that although they share a common language and general culture, Muslims belonging to wider, aggregated regions are also diverse in religious orientation, national and political orientation and lifestyles.

The above studies highlight the cultural, ethnic, language and national diversity within Muslim immigrants. However, most of the studies do not capture the complexity and diversity within each of the sub-groups or cultural groups they study. Rather, they focus on what women have in common, as a result of a shared religious identity. Overall, there is a dearth of studies which explore the diversity, complexity and cultural richness of Muslim women and how they make sense of their everyday lives in a host country environment by employing the theoretical lens of the everyday.

Studies on Muslim Women in Muslim Majority Countries

Much of the literature in majority-Muslim countries also focuses on clothing and piety, no matter where the study is conducted. For example: Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 1992, 1999; Ahmed, 1982; El Guindi, 2015; Hafez, 2011; Lewis, 2011; Mahmood, 2005); Iran (Jamal, 2008); Niger (Alidou, 2005); Lebanon (Deeb, 2006; Deeb & Harb, 2013); Bangladesh (Huq, 2011); Turkey (Shively, 2014); Malaysia and Indonesia (Rinaldo, 2008). Muslim women's piety is a key dimension of daily life in majority Muslim country contexts, where maintaining pious behaviour by women is socially and culturally normalised. In the last two decades, a trend has emerged for the study of Muslim women's piety in relation to the challenges posed by Western modernity in Muslim majority countries. This research is specifically focussed on ways in which Muslim women tend to reject

Western ideas of freedom and liberalism, and instead maintain their pious selves while choosing to perform traditional Islamic roles (Mahmood, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Shively, 2014).

Mahmood's (2005) central argument in *the Politics of Piety* challenges Western feminist assumptions about women in conservative religious movements. She contends that women in the Islamic revival movement in Egypt actively choose to embrace religious practices and conservative gender roles, asserting their agency and subjectivity. Mahmood urges a more nuanced understanding of how religious engagement can empower women, while critiquing the imposition of Western feminist perspectives onto non-Western contexts. Her work prompts a reconsideration of the relationship with religion.

Her work is a significant reference point in discussions of everyday piety and the circumstances that surround it. Her work is based on two years (1995-97) of ethnographic field work in Cairo, Egypt where she became involved in the daily lives of urban pious women of a Sunni sect, who were running a mosque movement as part of a larger Piety or Dawa movement for Islamic revival. Mahmood's work shows the complexities of interpreting Islamic norms of piety and embodying them in everyday lives. She argues that the cultivation of a pious, virtuous self is achieved by the women through the use of their agency. She criticises the Western secular conceptions of agency, which in her view are synonyms to freedom and liberty. She, on the other hand, asserts that women of the piety movement have an agency which is the opposite of the standard notions of Western agency. Mahmood refers to this as the ability to choose submission and docility. Although many appreciate her exploration of a docile, submissive form of agency, Mahmood has also received criticism. Wadud (2006) highlights that piety and politics are not "adequately defined to synchronize their choice vis-à-vis her research subjects" (p.816). Others say the context for the rise of piety movement is not elaborated (Marcotte, 2006).

Mahmood (2005) emphasises that women of the mosque movement started Islamic lessons in their homes, and then later shifted the venue to mosques. This shift of venue was important, as Mahmood explained that the mosques had remained a men's domain in Egypt and women are not expected to go to mosques. In the case of the women of the piety movement, they use their

agency to embody piety, to become extra religious, as well as to further their religious knowledge and practices. Mahmood argues that this docile form of agency might be rooted in patriarchal Islamic norms, which are so embodied in their lives that their dispositions were developed permanently.

Deeb (2006) has worked with Shi'i Muslim women in Al-Dahya, Lebanon who were involved in piety movements. Deeb, like Mahmood, was concerned with Muslim women's everyday cultivation of piety. Unlike Mahmood, whose participants belonged to Sunni sects of Islam, Deeb worked with Shi'i Muslim women. Deeb's (2006) book entitled *An Enchanted Modern* indicates exactly what we can find in her work, a simultaneously enchanted and modern soul. Her study participants' practices of public piety include "community activism," the "commemoration of a historic-religious martyrdom" to protect against a military occupation, and wearing the hijab (p. 228). Deeb explains that the 'pious modern' is an ethos, a way of self-presentation, and a social norm. According to her, the pious modern is neither a "traditional" woman, who blindly follows religion without understanding it and where women are confined to the sphere of the home, nor an "empty modern" person, who is "selfish, materialistic, and obsessed with her appearance and social status" (p. 30).

For Mahmood, piety is the self-cultivation of moral and religious norms. However, Deeb's participants see piety as doing social work, like building hospitals and engaging in public debates for the rights of the marginalised. The nature of pious acts varies greatly in both works. Deeb (2006) explores the importance of the hijab among her participants as a public expression of piety. She maintains that it is not necessary that religious women always veil, and that it is also not inevitable that the women who do not veil are not religious. But donning the veil is enforced by the women involved in piety movements in order to maintain a 'pious' image of the action group. Deeb's (2006) work is insightful for understanding how Muslim women contextualise modern-ness and how they can be religious and modern simultaneously.

There are many dilemmas and contradictions to accommodate. Mahmood (2005) challenges the idea that religious piety is inherently oppressive to women. Mahmood argues that women in the

piety movement find a form of feminist expression and subjectivity within the framework of Islamic norms. This challenges the assumption that all religious practices are inherently oppressive to women. In contrast, Deeb seems more inclined towards liberal forms of piety but tries to maintain a balance between the orthodox and the liberal.

Rinaldo (2013) also studies Shi'i Muslim women between 2002 and 2010 in Indonesia. Her study participants are pious women activists from four different political parties. Based on the variety of responses she received, she grouped participants into three categories in terms of agency: pious critical agency, pious activating agency, and feminist agency. She emphasises that the socio-economic background of women plays an important role in shaping women's agency and pious practices. Women with pious critical agency were able to interpret Islamic texts, the Quran and Hadith, according to the needs of the contemporary era. The other group of women who possess pious activating agency were orthodox and trying to act in any capacity according to the Quran and Hadith. The women she grouped as using 'feminist agency' were more secular and liberal and asserted women's rights within Islam.

For Rinaldo's participants, the practices of piety were not stand-alone practices which stop them from playing their role actively in Indonesian community. This is quite different from pious women's practices in Egypt (Mahmood, 2005). The intent of Egyptian pious women's cultivation of a virtuous self is to embody the pious practices. The comparative element that Rinaldo adds in her study by grouping women into three different categories is interesting, as it allows an understanding of diversity among women and also raises the importance of socio-economic class and the role of gender in making choices around piety and religiosity.

Alidou's (2005) study "Engaging Modernity" explores of the lives of three, well known (or high status) important and active Muslim women in Niger. Two of them are from the urban élite and one of them is an important national figure. Alidou's participants are not involved in any kind of movement, but they are capable individuals who are ready to respond to challenges. Alidou (2005), in line with above studies, looks at the meaning of modernity in the lives of her three participants. Her findings show accounts of "alternative modernities" (p. 56). All of her study

participants are devout Muslims, but at the same time they challenge orthodox patriarchal interpretations of Islam. Although Alidou's study does not speak of piety as such, it explores the characteristics of devout Muslims and how they create new forms of modernity by resisting patriarchal domination.

Abu-Lughod's (1992, 1998, 1999) works are very important representations of the complexities of veiling, and embodied religious acts among Muslim women in the Middle East. She challenges the colonial construction of Muslim women as submissive, oppressed, and living under the burden of patriarchy. This notion about Middle Eastern women is developed in her later work, although she revised her earlier works (1986) about women of the Awlad tribe to place the poetry of tribal women within a resistance framework. Later, she critiqued her own work by saying that it would be unfair to depict women through resistance frameworks, as the women themselves were unaware of these. Abu-Lughod asserted that the kind of resistance Bedouin women show needed to be studied as alternative forms of power that lie within the values of capitalist consumerism and urban bourgeois culture. One of the major contributions of Abu-Lughod's work is an alternative form of power framework, that emerges from within a specific context.

Leila Ahmed (1992) discusses similar constructs of oppression in her book *Women and Gender in Islam*. The book traces the ancient roots of oppression and situates them within contemporary debate. She has highlighted examples from Egyptian, Iranian, and Arabian history and criticises the existing literature on women in Islam for not responding to feminist frameworks. The analysis finds that pre-Islamic Middle Easterners were more independent and privileged than urban women, who enjoy fewer economic and legal rights. Veiling was popular among urban women of that time, considered as a marker of respect. This veiling tradition was present in Sassanian society before Islam, which brought practice with them after converting to Islam. Subsequently Muslim women also adopted the veil. Since the veil was a symbol of respect among urban women of Sassanian society, the Prophet's wives were asked in the Quran to use the veil in order to distinguish themselves from other women and to maintain the highest standards of piety.

Leila Ahmed contends that in the post-colonial era, the reappearance of Muslim attire is a resistance to colonial constructions of Muslim women, and Western modernity. She maintains that this kind of veiled and reimagined Islam is a direct result of Western discourses regarding Muslim women. Neither Leila Ahmed nor Abu-Lughod speak of women's piety directly. However, their arguments about the colonial construction of Muslim women and their presentations of historical and empirical evidence have inspired other feminist scholars, such as Saba Mahmood, Alidou, and Lara Deeb, to undertake further the scholarship on Muslim women.

All these studies show that Muslim women are not submissive and simply at the mercy of patriarchal institutions. This is a useful insight that challenges Western definitions of agency and also responds to their 'alien,' non-agentive perception of Muslim women. However, all of these examples have adopted the point of view of pious women who were involved in some kind of 'movement(s),' except for Aildou's (2005) study. Thus, there is a risk that while focusing on the participants of one particular movement, there is a high possibility of getting similar, homogenous responses from participants who consciously or unconsciously share the movement's agenda. None of these studies has taken a comparative approach where participants of multiple movements were contrasted[18], nor investigated where participants in the movement were compared with people who had left the movement. They also ignore women who are not part of any particular movement. Such comparisons would have provided other viewpoints regarding the construction of piety on an everyday basis. In this thesis, I argue that cultivating pious selves in ordinary moments of the everyday, where women are not part of any movement, could be more challenging for women, particularly among immigrant women, as there is no agreed set of practices that signal piety.

Muslims in Aotearoa NZ

Although extensive research has been conducted in Aotearoa NZ on immigrants in general and Muslim immigrants in particular (Dobson, 2011; Kolig, 2010; Kolig & Shepard, 2006; Shepard,

[18] Except Ronaldo's study but she has focused on political movements, not the Islamic revivalist movements. I explain this later in the study.

2006; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Spoonley & Peace, 2012), studies on Muslim women immigrants are few. Stephanie Dobson (2011, 2012a, 2012b) has conducted several ethnographies on Aotearoa NZ Muslim women immigrants in terms of identity creation in the lives of Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ after 9/11. 'Hyphenated identities' and 'third space' are used to explain the process of identity formation through the self-concetions of Muslim women from different national origins such as Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Although the primary focus is upon the issue of identity negotiation among Muslim women, Dobson briefly explains the perceptions among Muslim women immigrants of Aotearoa NZ. The research highlights that "most of the women participating in this study described New Zealand as a peaceful society with a lot of 'kind people,' but they felt discrimination manifested itself in the job market, basing these opinions on personal experiences of difficulties in securing employment" (Dobson, 2012a, p. 95).

Kolig (2006, 2010) also discusses Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ. He highlights the challenges of multiculturalism by discussing the 'Burqa case' drawing upon the concepts of 'decency' and 'gender inequality.' Other issues studied include: the intergenerational cultural gap and transition, the adaptation of Muslim women (Joudi, 2002), Muslim women's clothing and head-covering (Boulanouar, 2006) and the psychological wellbeing of Muslim women (Jasperse, 2009).

Sayadabdi and Howland (2021) highlight the relationship between foodways and national identity in the Iranian diaspora in Aotearoa NZ. Bourdieu's concept of 'cleft habitus' is used as framework to analyse 'hyper-reflexivity' among their participants. Conscious and unconscious efforts are made by this group to not only show 'romanticised aspects of imagined Iranian pasts and modern Iranian nationalism,' but also to try to distance themselves from the perception of being seen as Muslims, fundamentalist Arabs, and Middle Easterners. This article was based on Sayadabdi's (2019) doctoral dissertation in which he employed Bourdieu's (1977, 1979b) theories of habitus, capital, practice and field to investigate the role that food plays in the construction of Iranian diasporic identity, their sense of belonging and building of the feeling of 'home.'

Sayadabdi and Howland (2021) employ the 'four modalities of national identity construction' identified by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008): talking the nation, choosing the nation, consuming the nation, and performing the nation. These four modalities are discussed in relation to foodways, identity discourses and cultural celebrations. The example of food highlights how Iranian immigrants in Aotearoa NZ constructed their Iranian identity as distinct from (and superior to) Islamic and Arab influences, and more akin to and compatible with European New Zealanders (Pākehā) culture. For example, in a gathering where there were Pākehā present, participants in this study would consume Islamically-prohibited food items, such as pork and alcohol.

Sayadabdi and Howland's (2021) work is a significant contribution to the ethnographic literature on food, especially with regard to immigrants and how they make conscious efforts to reimagine their identity in a 'western' environment. The article resembles my study in terms of how the immigrant Muslims (Iranian in this instance) make strategies to fit into the NZ society, however the article is more focused towards identity construction through food practices. Furthermore, the article is focused on only one national/ethnic group, while my study focuses on Muslim women immigrants from different national/ethnic backgrounds.

Similarly in the context of Hamilton, Aotearoa NZ, Soltani (2018) has highlighted how Muslim women expressed their multiple identities, such as gender, religious, national, migrant and professional, through three different spaces – body, workplace, and play places. In the body space, she elaborated the interaction of women with the hijab, its modification and relation to fashion and modesty. In the workplace space, she focused on Muslim women's employment-related issues and opportunities, while in the play spaces, she examined Muslim women's understanding of leisure and how it was being shaped through the intersection of religion, age, marital status and culture. This is important research and contributes to the ethnographic understanding of Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ.

Furthermore, there is some research conducted on discrimination against Muslims and mistrust within the larger society towards Muslims in Aotearoa NZ (for example see Greaves et al., 2020; Salashour & Boamah, 2020). Salashour & Boamah (2020) studied discrimination towards Muslim

staff in Aotearoa NZ universities. Their study highlighted that one in four Muslims were made to feel uncomfortable or hurt because of their religious identity. While not being the direct victim, the majority of participants in the study "frequently felt that assumptions were being made about their abilities to carry out the job and tasks assigned to them as a result of their religious identity" (p. 508).

A useful study by Shaver et al. (2017) examines the level of warmth shown towards other communities by New Zealanders. The study indicates significant difference in levels of warmth towards ethnic and religious groups. For example, the levels of warmth shown towards Muslims and Arabs were significantly lower than the levels of warmth shown towards other migrant groups.

Pio & Essers (2014) state that immigrant women remain in a continuous struggle to negotiate their identity in host countries in the context of ethnicity, gender, and negative connotations attached to non-western women migrants, in this case, the experiences of Indian women in Aotearoa NZ. All of them are successful business owners who devise and adopt different strategies to decentre the 'otherness' that they experience and to leverage advantage in their businesses. These women are aware of the negative stereotypes attached to migrant women like subjugation, illiteracy, and low skills and continually struggle to show others that it is not always the case. 'Extra efforts' have to be made such as living in rich NZ European areas, distancing themselves from "typical" Indian businesses, understanding and utilizing the NZ legal system, and capitalising on the gender freedoms being offered in NZ, while maintaining their Indian outlook and culture. Three life stories of migrant Indian women are presented. Although these women deployed different ways and means to gain agency, they became successful in consolidating their presence and business in Aotearoa NZ society. The study utilises a transnational feminist perspective to capture the experiences and stories of migrant women and provides a useful example of prior research into immigrant women and their issues in the Aotearoa NZ context.

In the wake of the Christchurch terror attacks, a few academic reactions and studies investigated the implications of the event and its impacts on the broader issue of Muslims in Aotearoa NZ. For example, *Waikato Islamic Studies Review* dedicated an entire issue to this event in 2019. The preface stated that “the date March 15, 2019, will henceforth be remembered as the time in which a unique faith community in Aotearoa NZ was systematically attacked and subjected to terror” (Drury, 2019, p. 4). The Issue also highlighted that due to the minority status of Muslims and their relative isolation, Muslims had for the most part been perceived as ‘other.’ The perception is compounded in the post 9/11 era which intensified religious and political extremism, as well as counter-extremism activities globally, especially with regard to “concern over large-scale migration patterners of Muslims following a myriad of conflicts in Muslim majority countries” (Drury, 2019, p. 4).

Similarly, the *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* within one month of the Christchurch shooting published a special issue which covered initial reactions on the shooting, loss of lives from an Islamic perspective, terrorism anxiety, attitudes towards Muslims and experiences of being Muslim in Aotearoa NZ. The issue did raise some very pertinent questions and challenges, for instance, how islamophobia intersects with other forms of racism, and historical forms of ethnic relations, as well as gendered forms of inequality.

Another notable journal that published a special issue was *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences.* The editorial of this special issue highlights how “social sciences are not always effective in explaining particular events, but their study does provide insights towards better explanations and guidance for interventions” (Crothers, & O’Brien, 2020, p. 247). The editorial also highlighted how the Christchurch massacre was embedded in a world-wide nexus of Muslims, terrorism, white supremacy and rise of islamophobia. The other articles in the special issue discuss attitudes towards Muslims in Aotearoa NZ, far-right discourse and its presence in the country, and media/news coverage of Muslims post Christchurch shooting.

In the three years following the Christchurch attack, *Waikato Islamic Studies Review* published another special issue in 2022, which discusses issues such as the state of Muslim integration, the

longer-term impacts of the Christchurch terror attack, and memorialising trauma. Most of the articles, understandably, discussed the Christchurch terror attacks and their impact on Aotearoa NZ society in general and on the Muslim community in particular.

All these articles highlight some of the underlying reasons for terror attacks, general societal perceptions of Muslims in Aotearoa NZ, the Christchurch terror attacks in particular, and media coverage of the incident. Some articles also emphasise the focus of the police and security agencies' approach to terrorism, which at the time, was largely focused around Muslim terrorism while giving very little attention to 'white supremacist' threats. This was confirmed by the Royal Commission of Inquiry report (Royal Commission, 2020, p. 22). However, there are very few articles which highlight the social issues and interaction of Muslims with wider Aotearoa NZ society with regard to their ethnicity and their perceptions and experiences in Aotearoa NZ (see Ward, Stuart & Adam, 2019; Ash, Tuffin & Kahu, 2019).

An article by Ash, Tuffin & Kahu (2019) is very relevant here. They analyse the experiences of six hijab wearing Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ. The reasons for these women wearing a hijab range from commitment to religion to personal choice and freedom. Despite the feeling that the wider society was 'unconcerned' about whatever they wore, four out of the six Muslim women describe encountering discrimination based on their hijab. They blamed the media for stereotyping and portraying hijab-wearing Muslims in a certain way, based on international events. Nonetheless, these women highlighted that they feel a responsibility to represent Islam and "described responding to interpersonal difficulties through this [Muslim] faith" (Ash, Tuffin & Kahu, 2019, p. 119).

Conclusion

The review of existing studies on Muslim women immigrants shows that studying Muslim women through the headcover has remained a dominant lens. Although literature on headscarves helps others to understand the diverse, intersective, cultural reasons for wearing the headscarf, it also has reinforced the idea that being an authentic, pious and good Muslim women is associated with a head-covering. Regrettably, studies done on *hijabi* women to explore issues of integration

and assimilation also reproduce the stereotypical image of Muslim women. The emerging trend to study women's clothing and hijab through fashion is important in giving women agency in relation to their clothing choices, however such studies still do damage by homogenizing Muslim women. The trend of homogenizing Muslim women can also be found in studies done in Muslim majority contexts. They focus on Muslim women involved in a movement or a particular sect, exploring the experiences of a single group.

I conclude this chapter by saying that there is a need for holistic studies that cover everyday aspects of Muslim women's lives from cultural, ethnic, religious, educational and economic backgrounds, to highlight the diversity in their practices and understandings of Islam. These are important, inter-linking issues, which can help mount a challenge to existing homogenising frameworks that themselves contribute to Islamophobia - from within the field of research itself. My study aims to contribute to answering this challenge.

In doing so, it must now seek out research technique which can help locate and observe everyday practice among populations and individuals negotiating 'good Muslim' identities within both culturally-mixed Aotearoa-NZ immigrant sites, and the confrontations those sites and their constituent individual women encounter as they rub-up against 'mainstream' local pratices and expectations. The following extended chapter examines which techniques offer ways to collect and interpret such experiences, how they may need adaptation to a complex 'becoming' focus on identity - and not least: how I myself, as one among my research focus of Muslim immigrant women, can accommodate experiences and insights from episodes in my own daily life. This must therefore be, to that extent, a developmental and critical set of methods - one with potential to make some contribution, however small or target-specific, to methodological understandings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the research participants

This research not only cannot be accomplished without you,

It cannot even begin without you…

Your participation is like planting a flower in the desert

Your time is like watering that flower …

I am no more than a gardener

Who promises you to look after your flower

To use your water as Aab-e Hayat[19]*.*

To keep the flower alive forever

So its fragrance can reach

Where we ourselves cannot

In 2007, I watched a Bollywood film, *Madhoshi*[20]*,* a Hindi psychological thriller. It was the story of a schizophrenic girl, Anupama (Bipasha Basu), who creates an imaginative character, Aman (John Abraham) and falls in love with him. When her fiancé comes back from abroad, she tells him that she has fallen in love with Aman and cannot marry him anymore. In shock, her fiancé asks about Aman. She tells him many things about the imaginary lover but cannot prove Aman's existence. Finally, they come to understand that Aman is just a figment of her imagination. Everyone in the family tries to convince Anupama that Aman is not real, and that she should not think about him anymore. However, she refuses to accept any of this - until her fiancé finally undergoes plastic surgery, to look like the sketches Anupama has drawn of Aman.

[19] Aab-e-Hayat in Urdu means 'the water of life,' a sip of which brings eternity to life.

[20] *Madhoshi* (English: Intoxication) is a 2004 Indian Hindi psychological thriller film. It was directed by Anil Sharma and stars Bipasha Basu, John Abraham, Shweta Tiwari and Priyanshu Chatterjee.

This story echoed for me throughout my fieldwork research. I felt that I too was schizophrenic[21], like Anupama, driven to imagine alternative realities, when those I confronted were inadequate, or unacceptable. I had no grounded way of designing how to research my chosen field as institutionally, I had to propose research methods before the start of my fieldwork. Perhaps every researcher undergoes this dilemma. I was different from Anupama in one way, for of course no one was going to alter themselves to match my imagined realities - and certainly not to the extent of plastic surgery. Heroes (always male) save girls and sing songs for them only in movies. I was on my own.

In that moment of despair and pessimism a phone call from Sita, my supervisor, reminded me that research is about the process of discovery - and this was part of that discovery. 'Everything is a finding,' she told me. 'Everything is fieldwork. You write about what happens in the field. Do not worry if you are not finding women to talk to, research never goes as you have planned.'

So, then I knew - the hero does not have to be a charming male. This time a woman saved me. She showed me that this apparent flaw is the beauty of the anthropology discipline: that we write about each and every thing that happens in the field - and then we make sense out of that. There is no single magic formula: some pre-arranged shape, to what we find. We simply should not imagine an ideal.

This one phone call broke the spell: the pouring of hope into some imagined perfection.

Thus, this chapter reveals my initial dreams for what my research *should* find, and how the spell broke, and how I recovered after that. To put it simply, the chapter discusses first the methodological frameworks suited to the task, and then the methods I used to collect data.

[21] My use of schizophrenia is not glamourizing this disorder as was done in parts of the movie. Instead, I am using it to describe my mental state as I imagined the fieldwork methods, carefully devising them after completing full ethics application - a process that made me reflect on methods extra carefully and critically. I was not only feeling a sense of accomplishment in reaching the stage of beginning my fieldwork but excited and hopeful that my being extra careful would result in productive fieldwork. However, the first month in Auckland was just a month of despair and hopelessness. I will discuss this in the Ethics part of the chapter.

The chapter has three parts.

In the first part, I reflect on how I developed an interest in this topic as I grew up, a Pakistani Muslim in a particular socio-economic, cultural, religious and familial context. I show how this interest became intensified during some unpleasant experiences in Aotearoa NZ, and how these experiences further triggered my interest in the topic. It explains why I chose to use an auto-ethnographic approach to methodology and writing.

In the second part, I explain the methodological framework which evolved within the project. Here, I also outline the insights I received from a reference group in Palmerston North - on the basis of which I started fieldwork in Auckland. I also reflect on some of the more unexpected happenings during my fieldwork in Auckland, and on how serendipity: admitting the unexpected, became a guiding principle of my research. Serendipity becomes a main element across this research, from choosing the topic, to writing up my thesis. Only after having admitted this principle into the core of the work, did it become possible to fully formulate the research methods and structure the fieldwork reflections. Serendipity affected the selection of the fieldwork sites, who my participants would be, how we interacted with one another, and how the research subjects actively guided my research. It is this which explains how auto-ethnography and poetry became a central part of my research.

The third part discusses my own positionality within the research, and how I engage with it reflexively. My own dispositions of being a Muslim woman, researcher, mother, and Pakistani Muslim were having an impact by the act of comparison that I was continuously doing. Dispositions that I under-estimated at the time of proposing the research, had an ongoing impact on the research. I also discuss how these shaped my writing and my methodological choices, and include consideration of supervision procedures, limitations of the emergent research design, and some conclusions on the methodological focus used. The idea of *comparing* became central in almost all of these procedures.

Part One: Autoethnographic Context

Once a researcher admits their own presence within the act of data collection and analysis - and even that of project design and formation - their own presuppositions and experiences, both past and present, become more central to what is undertaken. Autobiographical research draws upon the researcher's personal experience and presents it as a narrative, using the researcher's first-person voice. These insights can offer innovative insights into the cultural and social forces shaping a particular practice (Taylor & Settlemaier, 2003). Research methods such as personal narrative and ethnographic research exemplify autobiographical research (Harder, Nicol, & Martin, 2020). Both research methods have been used by anthropologists and sociologists over a long period (Reed-Danahay, 2017). The autoethnographic method has its roots in anthropology and was developed as a method for studying groups that researchers themselves belong to, putting their lived experiences at the centre (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Although triggered, as I will show, by the experience of a few key incidents that I discussed in the introduction chapter, this approach did not come to me suddenly, or easily. There was no overwhelming epiphany: no sudden conversion to the auto-ethnographic perspective. It has been a long, and slow, lived and reflective process.

I have always asked certain questions of myself: questions which underly this project of research. Why women practice religion more than men? Why are women not regarded as equal to men? Has this inequality anything to do with religion, or it is a broader cultural practice? Why do women need to cover themselves (to keep men's morality) - not just in Islamic cultures, but in varying ways, across many cultural formations. Why are men not asked to mind their own business - to give up dictating what women should do, or not do?

Sometimes all of these behaviours achieve extraordinary levels of detail, within many different fields of social custom. For instance, growing up in Pakistan I learned that women were encouraged not to wear certain kinds of jewellery - the kind that tinkles and makes sounds when they walk - for it might attract men. At first glance there is an absurdity in these matters - and

yet, when they are examined more closely, they all reflect the same principle: that women are responsible for men's responses to them; that they, and they alone, must self-discipline.

These persistent questions, and others like them, already signal that my thinking was moving well beyond the personal. Before I start reflecting on my paths to examining women's experiences in majority-Muslim communities, I want to acknowledge that the thesis is neither an autobiography nor a semi-autoethnography. While I do discuss those parts of my own life which shaped my understanding as a Punjabi-Pakistani-New Zealander-Muslim-female-anthropologist, the accounts which accrue do not exhaust that set of experiences. Nor do I suggest that these in any way represent all women: not even all women from that very limited, specific set of socio-cultural conditionings. What I provide here can be called some *slice(s) of (my) life,* similar to those Guène (2006) provides in her novel *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, an auto ethnographical novel because it combines autobiographical and autoethnographic perspectives. The novel provides insights into how it was for the narrator, Doria, to live in France as the child of immigrants, and how her childhood in the home shaped later immigration experiences. As Reed-Danahay (2017) highlights combining critical ethnographic and autoethnographic perspectives to move beyond the insider/outsider dualism and to better understand the personal experiences through the broader contexts of social inequality that shape life trajectories and the stories told about them" (p. 152). There are many important events and incidents of my own life that I have chosen not to include in my account of these formative experiences; some for personal reasons, and others because they have little relevance. More importantly, through my engagement with Muslim women from diverse backgrounds, encountered during this research, I have learned how far other women, encountering much the same experiences as me, have interpreted their experiences and responded in very different ways.

What emerges as I collect and share the narratives, and later still as I begin its analysis and interpretation, is the diversity of responses formed in the multicultural fluidity of today's world - and especially within the many transitions of the migratory experience. It is this, as much as the specifics of the experiences recorded and analysed here, which is 'the finding' of this research. Part of the 'why' in the questions that began the research: 'Why must women behave in this

way?' 'Why does a society or culture insist on this, or on that, behaviour?' - proves to be the first part of a wedge which opens up just how far no culture, and no social order, ever successfully exerts control over such matters. Not only do circumstances change, but interpretations, right down to the level of individual responses, show very wide variations.

I found that in myself. I had long been aware that I was becoming an observer sort of young woman - and yet these kinds of questions were becoming part of my self while growing up in Pakistan; a place which had evolved and promulgated exactly these detailed forms of disciplinary practices. How could both be happening at once?

I tried to search for answers to these questions, talking to family, friends, and religious scholars, as well as reading books on my religion. However, I never found any satisfying answers. I was a misfit in my own society, forever questioning and challenging the patriarchal norms. My family sometimes labelled me a 'rebel' daughter.

If I try to recall my childhood, I find myself in pretty frocks, getting lots of compliments from relatives and friends. 'You are so cute.' 'You look beautiful in this dress.' Dresses became an important part of my identity. I do not exactly remember when I was made to feel that I was now a grown-up girl, but I remember when our neighbour, *Khala*[22] Bashiran, came to our house and suddenly commented on my dress in a new way. 'You should cover your chest with a *dupatta*. You are growing into a girl, and when you walk your breasts move - so better to cover it with a *dupatta*.' Actually, it was a hot summer day, and I was wearing a lawn fabric, semi-sheer. I still remember the pattern and colour of that *kameez*[23] I was wearing that time. I felt insulted and offended after her comments. I was annoyed at her, and questioned who she was, telling me what to do. I went inside our *bethak*[24] and cried a little. Perhaps if my Mum had told me the same thing in private, it would have felt different. Nonetheless, I started covering my chest with a *dupatta*. This experience made me question why boys didn't have to change their dress patterns as they grew older. Why Allah made different rules for girls and boys? It was the first time that I

[22] *Khala* is an Urdu word for 'aunty.'.Aunty and Khala are used interchangeably.
[23] Long top.
[24] *Bethak* is an Urdu word for drawing room and is generally used to host the father's and brothers' friends.

felt I was a girl, different from the male friends with whom I had played in the neighbourhood during my childhood and teenage years.

In Pakistan talking about bodily changes wasn't a normal, everyday thing. It was a kind of taboo to talk about such rites of passage. Girls mostly deal with such changes by themselves. I am not sure if mothers are getting friendlier over time, but my mother wasn't too expressive in such matters. My sister who was nine years older than me, wasn't too helpful either.

Within our family, my father, unlike my friends' fathers, had never objected to how myself and my other two sisters dressed or what we did. My father was gentle with us, even if often an angry person at home. My mother's personality was stronger than my father's. My mother has told me that she completed her education after her marriage, in order to become financially independent, because she started having issues with my father over money. Anyway, my mother became a teacher in a government school and served there for over thirty years. She also made the decision to give us (her three daughters and my brother) a quality education. My father had almost no interest and took no part in our education, with the one exception that he never stopped my mother from sending us to schools and universities. However, my brother, who was nineteen years older than me, never supported my mother on this. His views on raising girls were contradictive to my mother. I often found myself challenging my brother's views and openly expressing my own opinions.

My sister-in-law was a very faithful, loving and hardworking woman. I never saw her resting or taking time-off from household chores or spending money or time on herself. She was a devoted housewife who had given her whole life to my brother and their children. I asked her a few times to consider employing a full-time maid, but she would refuse, saying *he [my brother] likes to eat food cooked by myself.* She fulfilled all the criterion of a 'good' wife or maybe a goog Muslim woman. I could never find a "brother"[25] in my brother, but I have found that brotherhood in his

[25] Affection and friendliness are associated with the term brother.

sons – my nephews, particularly the oldest one. We share each and every thing - all of our secrets, laughing at silly things, and can chat for hours. He is the total opposite of his dad.

This then was the environment in which I was brought up. A strong 'feminist[26]' mother, a distant but loving father, and an angry elder brother. My father was a very religious person and had never missed a single prayer out of the mandatory five daily sessions. This was a hard job for my mother, who said that behaving well with people (God's creatures) was more important in the eyes of Allah (God).

My mother was a very social and philanthropic person. She helped a lot of poor, widowed women in finding jobs and marrying off their daughters. I always wondered why she didn't come home straight after school, or why she brought visitors home all the time: Irshad, Shamim, Tanveer, Raheela, Zubeda, Zahida, Makhdoom, Rahat, Kalsoom and Sajida. I can count many names and recall hundreds of faces. These were the women my mother helped to get employment or education. I never saw my mum offering regular prayers, but she always said, it is our duty to help a person in need. Allah can forgive our neglect of what we owe him, but he will ask us not to neglect what is owed to others.

The field of Anthropology played a critical role in my understanding of the social world. It did not provide answers to my questions, since at the beginning at least, it had not applied its analysis to the sorts of societies and questions my own life was confronting. Its broad theorisations, however, helped me in understanding and analysing just those experiences. I also started understanding religion differently. Anthropology gave me a new lens through which to see the social world in which I was living. It gave me opportunities to travel extensively within Pakistan, widening my observation of contemporary social life. Huma Haq[27], who taught me anthropological theory and initiated my reading of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, opened my mind to how social realities, power structures and cultural practices were

[26] My use of 'feminist' here is to show my mother's strong belief that women and men are equal. She was a strong advocate of women's education and financial independence. She lived her belief in her own life and also helped a number of women in getting education and employment - including her two younger sisters.

[27] Lecturer at the time in Anthropology department of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

formed and enacted - and how they could be, and were, re-formed, as social circumstances changed. Unlike my small world of my mother's neighbours, the broader social and cultural order could, it seemed, shift and adapt.

During that time, a massive earthquake hit northern Pakistan. I joined an international organisation to help displaced people. Working in those refugee camps shook me to my soul. I worked with people who had lost their family members, houses, livestock, and even body parts - and that was the most disturbing experience of my life. I continued working in the humanitarian aid sector. I travelled extensively to different parts of Pakistan. I met for the first-time children who would eat only roti[28], three times a day. Roti with sugar, Roti with milk. Roti with water. Roti with potato. No schools, so no education. Just poverty, with no way out. I met with women who were beaten by their husbands but had no other place to go. My exposure to such living conditions was challenging. I saw at first hand women suffering from domestic violence. One of the interviewees' comments still echoes in me:

> *Marrainda aay, kuttainda aay, per hay boo-ho changa* [unknown]
>
> Translation: [He] beats me and hits me - but he is very nice.

I wasn't certain whether she lacked an understanding of what she was experiencing, embraced it as her fate, or endured it to fulfill the role of a good wife. Growing older, I began to realise that life for women was not easy in my society. The ideals of the 'good' woman were very strong in the society I was living in. A good daughter never breaks the trust of her parents, and marries the person of her parents' choice. A good sister listens and follows her siblings, particularly her brothers. So, a good woman is the one who goes outside her home only for necessities, keeps herself within the limits of modesty, and does not indulge in unnecessary conversations with men. This then was the foreground of my story: how I was raised, and became critical of societal norms.

[28] Round flat bread generally made with whole meal flour.

However, I consistently found myself questioning these notions of goodness and contemplating the various ways in which different women respond to this ideal. After completing my M.Phil. degree, I continued working in the humanitarian sector. Afterwards, I got married - and I continued to work after marriage.

I was working as an assistant manager with an NGO in Pakistan when my husband got the opportunity to study at Massey University. It was an exciting opportunity, not just for him but for me as well. However, soon I realised that it was important to think about options for me, and how it would be for me, a woman and a wife, currently living in Islamabad, if I were away from my relatives. Should I leave my career, and move with my husband, or stay there on my own and continue working? Neither was socially very acceptable in Pakistan. I sought answers through religion, but it did not provide the satisfaction I was looking for. I thought the only practical choice left for me as a woman living in a patriarchal society was to move with my husband. This was how I came to Aotearoa NZ.

After joining my husband in Palmerston North, I started looking for work. It was very hard for me to stay home all day, particularly when I used to work in Pakistan. However, I could not find a job, even a part time one. My mailbox was full of 'thank you but sorry' letters. We used to laugh that at least here they acknowledge that they are not hiring you, unlike in Pakistan. However, this was the time I started getting to know the Palmerston North Muslim community and made friends. After a couple of years, my daughter was also born, and my newly developed disposition of mother made me aware of the issues of bringing up children in Aotearoa NZ.

I have explained in the introduction chapter how people's misperception of me as an Indian and/or non-Muslim elicited in me a new identity as a head-covering Pakistani immigrant woman. This was a very unexpected and yet powerful experience, which forced me towards the defensive side of Muslim identity, wrapping around all my other identities. As time passed, I became comfortable with my surrounding environment in Aotearoa NZ, owning my Pakistani-Muslim-New Zealander identity, which is still shaping itself as my experiences get wider.

All these reasons somehow contributed to my choosing this research topic. I wanted to explore how women negociate religion to respond to diverse cultural and social norms. Are there shared traits or distinctions among Muslim women from varying cultures? Importantly, how does residing in a non-Muslim, secular context influence the daily religious practices of women? What remained was the selection and design of techniques of 'capture': ways of isolating these different strands of the experience, comparing them with how other Muslim immigrant women had reacted, and finding suitable ways to analyse whatever might result.

Research Aim and Questions

The aim of the thesis is to explore immigrant Muslim women's experiences of their everyday lives in Aotearoa NZ, in relation to their negotiations around Muslimness within diverse Muslim cultures, and in a non-Muslim-minority and Western context.

How do immigrant Muslim women negotiate their beliefs to strive to be a 'good' Muslim woman, and express them in how they present themselves in Aotearoa NZ, on an everyday basis? What are the ways in which migration, a complex and forceful example of a changing field, impacts on the religious understanding and practices of immigrant Muslim women? How do the pressures of migration manifest in the everyday lives of the women and (re) shape their understanding of Islam?

In the introduction chapter I have added my research questions, which let me explore broader anthropological questions of how Muslim women practice or continue to practice their religiosity. Where and how do their embodied dispositions, and their cultural, social, religious capital, become a matter of everyday reflexivity? How does their habitus change, adapt, resists, and become a process of *becoming*? My experience in Palmerston North helped to critically reflect on my own cultural and religious practices which were deeply embodied, yet were coming out to the surface in my everyday interactions with Muslims from my own culture, and from other cultures - as well as non-Muslims.

Part Two: Research Methods

In this study, I selected classic ethnographic methods of participant observation, choosing from within its repertoire the tool of conversational interviews, in order to 'hang out' with my participants. This enables me to become 'immersed' in the social context of the participants, collecting data both from their conversations and by observing what they do.

The main focus remains on participants' experiences, and how they themselves explain them. The research aims to explore how immigrant Muslim women navigate and make meaning of the complex, ever changing and entirely contradictory social world they chose to live in. Their 'everyday' is the undergirding philosophy for the whole research design. It provides the basis for selecting the methods, conceptualising the theoretical and methodological framework which endorses the validity and integrity of those methods, and in formulating the research questions.

Insights Arising During the Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in Palmerston North, before designing and initiating the actual fieldwork. Its rationale was to test the research questions, and to build a reference group of women who could help guide the study in terms of relevant questions to ask during the fieldwork. Four immigrant Muslim women made up this group, from four distinctively different Muslim communities: from Palestine, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Fiji.

The discussions with the reference group in Palmerston North ranged across issues which helped focus how various group members understood their different ways of constructing Muslimhood, in public and in private places. I met with them individually, and in a group. Normally I would meet with them during lunch times, but sometimes we started around 6pm - and these sessions often lasted till midnight. Our conversations were light and humorous. We cracked jokes when different practices came to our attention. Even a serious discussion would end up in light mood. This was an unconscious effort by everyone - lightening up, so the environment would not get stressful.

All of my participants felt strongly about women's rights and regarded women as equal to men. They would joke around their husbands as 'useless' at home, spoiled by their mothers. They told me about their marriages, even sharing their honeymoon experiences, and then the time when they raised their kids together, as well as problems associated with their relationships. I still remember when I told one of my Palestinian participants (who was a native Arab) that in 'Pakistani Islam' it was commonly understood that when a husband calls his wife for intimacy, she should leave everything and rush to fulfil his wishes - even if she is making *roti* - flat bread on the *tawa* - hot plate. My participant laughed so loudly that she had tears in her eyes. She said this was not the case in Arab culture, where *roti* is not even a staple food - and it would be definitely a Pakistani version of Islam.

Experiences and contributions such as these from the pilot group helped me phrase my questions - but they also went beyond that. Participants were more than capable of their own forms of analysis - and as the research progressed and the 'surfacing' of experiences and behaviours developed, they contributed more and more of what they were beginning to 'see' in their own lives. They were encouraging me more strongly than ever to do this research, and so break apart the homogenising 'one Muslim' category. They highlighted their own sense that they must themselves do something to correct perceptions of a monolithic Islamic world among the wider Aotearoa NZ community. Although all New Zealanders should try to understand Muslims, in their view the responsibility was also with Muslim immigrants to put extra effort into helping people understand them.

A pilot study is designed to help critically evaluate the potential of the research project, fine-tune its aims and its research tools - in this case, the interview questions, and the approach to interviews. It is a recommended research strategy within ethnography (Sampson, 2004), enabling the testing of research methods and observation methods before initiating the main phase of the research gathering.

In this case however, conversations were so rich in detail and the participants so aware of the procedures which would or would not 'work,' that the Pilot Project became a permanent part of the research. Not only did it help form the rest of the project and how it was conducted, it provided crucial clues to methods which work with this group of Muslim women - and to the

deeper analysis of how immigrant Muslim women adapt, often in unexpected ways, to their new circumstances.

Both parties then: researcher and researched, experienced insight and transformation as part of this research. This was the rationale behind applying a 'deep hanging out' methodology framework as a form of deep engagement within an ethnographic frame, to maximise the information collection - but it also commands an equally deep reflexivity on the part of the researcher, and it critiques the research act itself. However, at that time, I underestimated the fact that I had already a good relationship with the reference group. I had known them for quite a few years, and they were not only open to discussing everything with me, but fully supported me as I embarked on my research. This pilot study gave me confidence and hope that my research methodology would be productive, and I also was hopeful that Auckland - my proposed fieldwork site at that time - would be similarly exciting and successful.

However, the insights that were emerging so strongly early in the design stage, also made it difficult to distinguish the usual progression of stages in the research process.

With that in mind, while full description of research findings and their analysis will be provided in later chapters, this discussion will now move to a more fine-tuned account of what both the Pilot Group and the Auckland groups advised me to do, and how early decisions to change the Auckland field site resulted in adding Palmerston North, Nelson and Tauranga as field sites.

Early Decisions: Serendipity and Fieldwork

Auckland is the largest city in Aotearoa NZ, and hosts most of the country's immigrants because of its metropolitan lifestyle, great environment and good schools (Ho & Bedford, 2008). The majority of immigrant Muslims are also settled in Auckland (Kolig, 2010). Thus, Auckland provides a good opportunity to meet immigrant Muslim women, who come from very different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds (Pratt, 2012; Shah & Culbertson, 2011).

Before starting my fieldwork in Auckland, I identified potential research participants. I had met with a number of Muslim women from Auckland at the Islamic Women's New Zealand Council

(IWNZC) conferences in Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton, and at a Muslim youth camp in Rotorua. These were useful opportunities to make contact with intended participants. At these events I explained my research to a number of women, and they showed interest in participating. We exchanged contact details for future correspondence. Serendipitously, several my close friends also moved to Auckland from Palmerston North, and they assured me they would help in connecting me to other Muslim women.

Our conversations were warm:

> *Auckland is your home, just buzz us when you will be there, and I would love to help you.*
>
> *It is so interesting you have chosen this topic for your research. It is so important and timely, we will definitely be proud to be part of your research project, you are welcome any time.*

However, when I actually started the fieldwork, the responses changed.

> *Yes, of course, I remember you but actually I have changed my job and I am very busy at the moment, I am afraid I won't be able to help you this time.*
>
> *I had a chance to look at your information sheet and it seemed a very intrusive kind of research. I personally do not have time to get involved in your project, but I can pass it on to ladies who might be interested.*

I was not able to connect with many of the women in Auckland who had provided their contact details previously. I did, however, manage to meet two of them, who said they could only talk in one sitting, and could not spare more time afterwards, as mentioned in the information sheet I had attached. 'Other' women, introduced to me by these women who were now unavailable, refused to sign a consent form, but were willing to give me an interview.

This mix of responses was not what I planned or expected. How much compromise was possible? What was it that was so problematic, from the perspective of the prospective interviewees?

Amidst all this, I happened to meet a woman from Palmerston North who was doing fixed-term work in Auckland. She offered to have me stay with her at her rented property. This was the moment when things started to happen - in an unplanned but constructive way, with several serendipitous moments. I spent useful time with her. Each morning we would both set off for our respective destinations; she would go to her work while I started following up my participants; then in the evenings, we would go out shopping, watch movies, and have dinner. During this time, she shared her personal and work-related stories with me. It was easier for me to gain her trust because we had many mutual friends, and also because we had known each other in Palmerston North and were having such a good time together in Auckland.

I was trying to solve too many puzzles at once, questioning my proposed research locale and methods. Those worked well with the pilot group - but why they were not yielding positive outcomes in Auckland? How could the sort of intimate account of life experience that I was seeking for my research, be based upon just these kinds of limited social encounters? Was my expectation of an immediate opening into rich veins of insight unrealistic? Were the research instruments I had designed too stiffly official, and so intimidating?

One of the difficulties was the written consent form, and too much detail in the information sheet. A few women who agreed in Auckland to do an interview, were reluctant after reading the information sheet. I will discuss this issue in detail under the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) section but raise now the need for cultural adaptation in research conventions - especially with migrant communities, where relations with social authorities and provision of personal data can rest on very different sets of experiences.

When I returned to Palmerston North, one of my friends visited, sharing her own stories and discussing how her religious beliefs were central to her life. Until this point, based on my very few successes and many refusals, I was becoming pessimistic. I reminded myself of what my supervisor had said to me on the phone: 'Follow the path, and everything will be a finding.' My findings to date had meant a very cold, brief conversation so far: all I had to report was what I

considered to be failure. She was far more positive, and her comment proved crucial: ‘Do not worry. Whatever is happening, is in itself a finding. Things do not have to be the way we plan.’

I had totally forgotten my anthropological training, and the key characteristic of anthropologists: the need to observe what they are not prepared to see. Among the key characteristics (and strengths) of the ethnographic method is serendipity, along with reflexivity and openness (Rivoal & Salazar, 2013).

Answers seemed then to lie not in the neatly ordered input I had hoped to generate, but in the very complications I was encountering. This was, in itself, vital information. I too was part of what the women I was contacting found 'difficult' in their new and half-assimilated situations. It was up to me - not them - to accommodate to these responses, and to find out what they meant.

It no longer seemed useful to restrict my recruitment to Auckland. I included women from Palmerston North, and then from other cities across Aotearoa NZ. Thus, my fieldwork site expanded, as insightful responses came in from other Muslim women. Later, due to personal circumstances, I moved to Nelson, and then Tauranga. Those two cities became my field sites as well.

Thus, letting serendipity: ‘the art of making an unsought finding’ (Andel, 1994, p. 631), a guiding principle of my research, I included women from these different cities. Nor am I alone in this strategy. Pieke (2000) considers serendipity “the essence of fieldwork research” (p. 138). At the same time, I was responding to the insights I had received by recognising the importance of a relationship with research subjects.

Many of the women I was now contacting were already social acquaintances, so I did not have to spend time building rapport. They knew me, trusted me, and were keen to share their stories with me. They related their stories at length, because they were sharing with a familiar person, a sort of friend, and the detail provided - as well as their own capacity to analyse and reflect upon those experiences - were to be invaluable to my research. Later, our relationships turned into friendship, which had its own benefits and challenges, which I will reflect on later in the chapter.

The poem below captures my first two years of research:

One year of extensive planning

Working on every detail

My proposal finally starts developing

I move forward to the research destination

Fieldwork, interviews, conversations, data are collected

Also encountered: confusions, tensions, mistrust, insecurity.

Plans are reviewed, in the light of both positive and negative encounters

12 months, 365 days[29]*,*

sleepless nights, arguments with my family...

I begin to realise that as researcher

I am not immune from the 'outcomes' of the research.

Is this, too, an outcome?

Wait, breathe, close your eyes

No destination, but a process

To find out what suits

And suits the best...

Suits them, for whom this endeavour is designed

I am finding…

And I will find …

The way to them...

[29] Referring to the pre-confirmation/proposal development stage.

Informal Conversations

I have met more than two hundred[30] Muslim women across Aotearoa NZ in different capacities[31]. I only had formal interview conversations with the pilot group in Palmerston North, which made me realise that loosely structured discussions - even conversations for the sake of conversations - were better at generating insights.

Out of two hundred women I encountered during the study, twenty-eight women served as a key reference group with whom I remained in touch throughout the course of my study. These women were first generation immigrants. I selected these women based on languages spoken rather than ethnicities and countries of origin. This selection happened organically when my Pakistani friends started showing interest in my research. Almost all of our discussions happened in Urdu. Thus, thirteen women in the key reference group speak Urdu, Hindi and Fiji-Hindi. Hindi and Fiji Hindi languages are similar to Urdu, particularly in speaking. Then came Arabic speaking women from Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This was because most of these women were friends of Pakistani women and often would come to Pakistani events and gatherings. Thus, seven of my research participants speak Arabic. The rest of the women spoke other languages, but they became the part of my key reference group because the frequency of my encounters with them was regular. They were either colleagues, neighbors, family friends or have shared interests with me. These women were from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Sri-Lanka, and Denmark. These women also included immigrants who were converts.

I would either meet them in person or would talk to them over phone and messages. With the rest of the women, I conversed less often, sometime only in social media private groups. There were also women with whom I met only once. All these encounters, including social media group observations, provided insightful discussion material that I continually discussed with the key reference group. After the pilot study and my trip to Auckland field site, it became clear that

[30] These include Pākeha and Māori converts who were not immigrants.

[31] By different capacities I mean I encountered Muslim women in various roles, positions, functions and situations, such as in their professional roles, student roles, social roles, and in different contexts and circumstances. It also implies that I did not meet them in just one specific way.

informal conversations and observations were more useful rather than formal or semi-structured interviews, so I focused on them. Conversational interviews provide the researcher with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the participants' world views and thought processes. This can provide insights into social experiences, self-concepts, and the meanings associated with particular activities (Lamont & Swidler, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, the conversations took place in informal settings, sometimes individual meetings, and other times in small groups or at large gatherings. Sometimes these gatherings were women only, and other times mixed-gendered. I remained passive whenever it came to choosing meeting locations, and let participants decide. I was active only when I was host and invited them to my home, or when I was the organiser of a party. We had lots of trips together, including shopping, dining, hiking, camping, cinema visits and walking.

I also attended weddings, women's conferences, Eid gatherings, Ramadan fasting, and birthday parties. The duration of our meetings also varied. There were times when I bumped into my participants, and we exchanged brief conversations. I also actively participated on private social media platforms and observed women's engagement on different issues.

All the women I encountered were aware of my research and verbally consented to be part of the research. I explicitly told them about myself and my research. The social media groups that I was part of were constantly changing, with new women joining and some leaving. So, if I was conducting any discussion there, I would explicitly mention that this was for my research and ask for their permission to include their comments in the research. Sometimes, women themselves asked me, how things were progressing: 'Hope you have enough data collected for your research?' I always answered 'yes, and I will include this in my thesis, but with pseudonyms, and if anyone doesn't want their comments included, please let me know.' At times, women messaged me saying not to include their comments, so I took those comments out. In chapter seven, part two, for instance, I have included a chat from a private social media platform.

I became a familiar figure in the Muslim community, and women and men both would ask how my work was going. Sometimes, women would ask me 'could you please include my story in your

research?' or ask me to write something specific: ‘I want Kiwis to know that Muslim women do not shake hands. Could you write an article on this?’ My researcher position within the Muslim community was also highlighted because of the newspaper op-eds I wrote (Cheema, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2022). This worked well for me as I became well known to the community. They were more willing to share their experiences with me and knew that I intended to write a thesis about their experiences.

As my engagement with these participants increased, our friendship developed. Over time, this relationship grew stronger and deeper, so that the boundaries between myself and my participants got blurred. This is further discussed under the heading ‘Friends as Research Participants’ in this chapter. My physical body and mind remained in a constant ‘state of fieldwork’ once I began that fieldwork. Whenever I found something interesting, I would note it. I did not audio-record interviews. I will discuss the reasons for this in the section on research ethics later in the chapter. The long quotes provided throughout the thesis come from field notes, phone and social media conversations, text messages, remembered conversations and observations. These are constructed narratives and composites hence I have written them in italics. This mixed method and mixed representation approach adds resonance and depth to the research.

Participant Observation

Observation is a hallmark of anthropological research, as it provides another layer to data collected by interview. Bernard and Bernard (2013) point out that during interviews participants present information it can be represented as consciously highlighted illustrations - or conversely, as semi-aware asides. Hence, observation adds another layer to the data collection, complements major themes, and fills possible gaps. When observation is used along with participation in the daily activities of people in the field, the research method is referred to as ‘participant observation,’ according to the anthropological research tradition (Jarvie, 1969; Tedlock, 199). This ethnographic research method is used to get an overview of a phenomenon,

and to gain important leads for further in-depth exploration. Bryman (2006) characterises participant observation under six points:

1) to understand the world with an insider's perspective,
2) to collect in-depth description, including even minor details,
3) to contextualise the research,
4) to help in analysing the broader context,
5) to allow more flexible research design,
6) to prevent skewing research by over-selecting data which fits existing conceptual frameworks.

Participant observation thus makes significant claims of research-outcome validity, at the point of research design, and during data collection.

For the present study, wherever and whenever possible, I participated in the everyday activities of my research participants. When or where participation was not possible, I used observation. As mentioned earlier, I met my research participants on weekends and weekday evenings, sometimes with their families, sometimes with women and children only, while at other times, meetings were in women only groups.

To surface issues resulting from the mixed and sometimes conflicting Muslim cultures of these Aotearoa NZ migrant communities, I attended multi-ethnic pot-luck dinners,

religious celebrations such as Eids[32], Chand Raat parties[33], Eid open homes[34], Ramadan iftars at Masjids[35], as well as online chat groups and in-person Quran classes. I also attended Moharram gatherings[36] to observe Shia Muslim practices. Social gatherings such as birthday parties for children and adults, and wedding receptions all became research sites. My daughter still complains that 'I ruined her birthday party by inviting the children of friends who were not *her* friends.'

I also actively participated in private social media platforms and observed women's engagement on different issues. Research became part and parcel of my life. Fieldwork was no longer a

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[32] Muslims observe two Eids in one Islamic year: Eid-ul-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan with special prayers, festive meals, and acts of charity, symbolizing joy and unity; and Eid-ul-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, commemorating Prophet Ibrahim's obedience with prayers, animal sacrifices, and charitable meat distribution, emphasizing values of sacrifice and compassion.

[33] Chand Raat, or the night of the new moon, is celebrated by Muslims on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr. This festive night marks the end of Ramadan, and people, mostly women, engage in various celebratory activities such as late-night shopping, applying henna, and preparing for the upcoming Eid festivities. Chand Raat parties often include music, lights, and communal gatherings, adding to the joyous atmosphere of the occasion. In Aotearoa, NZ, my Pakistani participants often get together to apply henna designs, listen to loud music, and often dance.

[34] Eid Open Home is a practice of opening one's home to friends, family, neighbours, and even strangers during the Eid celebrations. It is a cultural and social tradition in many Muslim communities where people welcome guests into their homes to share the joy of the festive occasion. Hosts often prepare special dishes and treats for their guests, and it's a time for socializing, expressing good wishes, and strengthening bonds within the community. Many of my Fijian, Malaysian, and Indonesian participants organised Eid Open Homes. It was quite a new experience for me and my Pakistani participants.

[35] In Ramadan, the month of fasting, Muslims gather at Masjids for iftar, the evening meal. These gatherings signify unity and solidarity, featuring diverse meals and an atmosphere rich in prayers and shared spirituality. This tradition fosters a strong sense of community, strengthening bonds among worshippers.

[36] Muharram gatherings typically refers to the events that takes place during the month of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Muharram holds particular significance for Shia Muslims due to the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in the Battle of Karbala. Muharram gatherings often involve various religious and communal activities, especially on the 10th day of Muharram known as Ashura. These activities can include processions, recitations of poetry and elegies (known as "Marsiya" and "Noha"), and speeches that narrate the events of Karbala. Shia Muslims, in particular, participate in these gatherings as a way of mourning and expressing solidarity with the values exemplified by Imam Hussain.

different work site for me. Nor did it stop, until I finished the last word of this thesis. My observations started before I commenced my studies and seem likely to continue.

During family meet ups, sometimes men would join in the discussion. Some would talk about the characteristics of a ‘good Muslim’ wife and daughter, while others confronted them. Couples that were already having a difficult time in their relationship would use this discussion to express their personal opinions (sometimes against each other) and to gain legitimacy for their views. Such scenarios broadened my observations. I met all sorts of Muslim men during the research, from those who believe that women’s role in Islam is to serve men, to those who believe that Islam is a personal matter, that men and women are equal humans and that the husband-wife relationship runs on love and respect - and many who fall in between these two poles.

Sometimes children and teenagers would jump into the discussion. Although I didn’t engage them in conversations because my research did not involve engaging with children, their discussion with their parents and friends was insightful and sometimes. I would pick up a conversational thread from such observations and use that to engage my participants. All the quotes/narratives in this research in which children are mentioned were collected from their parents. I did not speak to the children directly.

To garner the broader socio-cultural context, I observed people’s attitude towards Muslim women in public places. Whenever I felt comfortable, I engaged in conversations with non-Muslims about Muslims, whether these were at school pickups and drop offs, at work, at the University, or with trade-me traders, fellow passengers, in the GP's waiting room or the physiotherapist's, at pools, or with neighbours. These were interesting insights. Most of the people I spoke to, had no idea about what constitutes Muslim belief. After the Christchurch Mosques attacks in 2019, people had started becoming familiar with the idea that scarf-wearing women are Muslims. I always felt disappointed after an encounter with someone who knew nothing about Muslims, but at the same time, I realised that my research could provide a richer and more complex account which would aid understandings of ordinary Muslim lives.

Part Three: Reflexive Engagements with Positionality

Mahmood (2005) begins the introduction to her ground-breaking book, *Politics of Piety* by announcing her positionality as a Pakistani feminist whose roots are embedded in a progressive leftist tradition.

> Even though this book is about Islamist politics in Egypt, its genesis owes to a set of puzzles I inherited from my involvement in progressive left politics in Pakistan, the country of my birth (p. iv).

In her statement, she does not mention Pakistani Muslims, which may be a way of distancing herself from Islam/Muslims and yet relating more closely to Pakistani culture. It gives readers a clue on how to read her work, and how important it is to acknowledge one's own positionality in order to maintain the validity of the researcher’s position. A Muslim political scientist, Najib Lafraie, from an Afghan refugee background in Aotearoa NZ, responded like this when he was asked about how being a Muslim impacts upon his work:

> How does my faith affect my work as a political scientist? I think our values and beliefs always affect our deeds whether we know it or not. The notion of neutrality, of being scientifically objective, is a myth. What we can do is to be aware of our biases, our views, our values, and to be honest about them, and then try to approach our subject of study with that awareness and honesty (Jansen & Westra, 2009, p. 61).

My disposition as a Punjabi-Pakistani-New Zealander-Muslim-woman-anthropologist has a heavy bearing on this research. At times, I am sharing my lenses with the readers to show them the world of my participants, although I also try to explore my participants' world through their own eyes, however much my own dispositions play a role in understanding my participants' experiences. Thus, my positionality is beyond the categories of insider and outsider. Like all who are experiencing the transitional status of migrants, I am not-quite-either, but always both.

In this research, my positionality in relation to being an insider or an outsider can never be entirely clear. I initially expected to operate as an ‘insider,’ and then, when I travelled to a different fieldwork site, in Auckland, I expected that I would achieve an interesting 'control' view by being an outsider. It didn’t happen. Throughout my research, I was both insider and outsider simultaneously, in varying degrees and in varying capacities. Even when fieldwork sites extended to other cities, there was no clear separation between insider and outsider in relation to the new fieldwork site.

According to Geertz, ‘travelling towards the field,’ ‘travelling back home,’ and ‘displacement’ are essential elements, providing analytical distance and an outsider perspective which enables analysis (Geertz, 1998). In my case, however, there was no ‘travelling’ to and back from the research field. ‘The everyday’ as a field of focus meant that any lived moment could become a field site. I was constantly insider, outsider and in between these two positions.

I already shared the habitus of a Muslim woman but had not realised how far many other factors would have a bearing on this insider positionality. Faith or religion is too broad a category, subject to endless variation, and open to many forms of cultural predisposition. What becomes important is not any attempt at definition, but ways of capturing and recording how I, as a researcher, navigate my positionality.

On the other hand, the fact of my belonging to the Pakistani culture and nationality also gave me some elements of the status of an outsider - an alienated, ‘outsider-looking-in’ gaze, which could recognise ‘difference’ in Islamic practices not shared in my own Islamic national culture. This too proved an interesting phenomenon, with elements of the classic outsider perspective which can help keep an analytical distance.

My Headcover Status

I was very conscious of my pre-dispositions as a Pakistani Muslim, as signalled in for instance, my own head-covering status. I initially thought it a good a strategy to cover my head, or sometimes not to, mirroring, while interviewing women participants who either covered their head, or chose

not to. However, this strategy did not bring the expected outcomes. Rather than reflecting their own choices, my occasional head-covering status made my women participants suspicious. Was I mocking the hijab? One of my Muslim friends said that I must wear a hijab like a Muslim believer, and ‘not like a researcher’s hijab.’

It took me a while to digest that comment, but slowly I saw that it was an issue for my own status within the research. I decided not to cover my head during the fieldwork, and at the same time became vocal about my head-covering status. However, in our meetings I would find a way to communicate to my head-covering participants that I really liked and respected those women who do cover their heads and suggested that I might start doing this one day. I also said that I used to cover before, and explained how there were mixed ways of covering, some classic Islamic and some more variably cultural. We also had discussions about Hindu and Sikh women (in the Indian sub-continent context) who also cover their heads.

At first, I thought this was to make my interviewees feel comfortable with me, but more and more, it became a way to access the sorts of experiences they were undergoing, as they entered the migrant life in Aotearoa NZ. This was not a 'research tool,' but a central issue within the research - and one which would later prove to focus a great deal of the analysis.

As I mentioned earlier, I had started wearing the headscarf after coming to Aotearoa NZ, as I negotiated cultural identity in the Aotearoa NZ context. One of my friends, seeing me without a headcover among other people, particularly in women-only gatherings where I would wear sleeveless tops and short skirts, would often openly tell everyone: ‘You must see her photos in a red *chador*, her iconic image of when she first came to Aotearoa NZ.’ Her need to make this comment implied that I had changed; had become ‘modern,’ and yet it was not simply that. She knew that red *chador* was the latest addition to my wardrobe and that I have a habit of wearing newly bought clothes continuously for some time, until I had enough of them. From group to group, individual to individual, my responses to how a Muslim woman dresses, or 'should' dress, remain contentious.

Head-covering is not only a Muslim-western issue but an issue in Islam itself, although there it comes with its own contextual set of understandings and is not categorised into strict binaries of 'oppression' and 'freedom,' but sits instead at varying degrees along a continuum. The head-covering, however, was not the only disposition that I underestimated at the time of writing up a research proposal and planning a first draft of the research methods. My position within the many different Muslim communities in Aotearoa NZ became an issue in its own right.

Residency Status

Another disposition that I under-estimated before the start of my fieldwork was my own residency status. I did not have permanent residence (PR) in Aotearoa NZ at the time of commencing my fieldwork. Rather, I was in the country on a student visa, which had a bearing on how immigrant Muslim women perceived me, both as a researcher and as a potential long-term friend.

My friends often urged me to apply for PR. Many told me that their close friends had left Aotearoa NZ because they did not have PR. According to them, they should not have invested their time and energy in building a friendship with people who would not live here permanently. My friends were disappointed when they referred me to the Manawatu Muslim Society as its women representative, and later discovered that I could not be eligible for this role, as I did not have PR. After that, an unspoken fragility developed in our relationship. However, my friends kept on encouraging me to apply for residency. They introduced me to the points calculator system at the Immigration New Zealand (INZ) website and urged me to apply.

I had not expected that among the issues relating to how to be a Muslim woman in Aotearoa NZ, there would be one focused on whether or not - and how urgently - I also wanted to be 'Kiwi.' While this was represented to me as a desire not to lose my friendship(s) - and perhaps also my role as a researcher and social commentator advocating for Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ, in part it may also represent a less consciously formulated desire to see Islam take shape within 'Kiwiness' itself: to find expression not as some alien 'other,' but as an option inside a multi-cultural social formation. With no 'research questions' prepared to examine such a possibility,

once again the 'participant-observer' role and a far more open form of talk with research participants allowed for intriguing possibilities such as this to emerge.

Religious Sect

Initially I thought that my belonging to the Wahabi sect might have a bearing on my research. I was becoming more conscious of my disposition towards the particular sect to which I belong within Islam, and its practices. I was raised in the Wahabi sect (a sub-sect of the Sunni), and then married a person who belonged to the Bralevi sect[37] that contradicts Wahabism. I myself do not identify with either of these sects; but I do not disown them, either.

In Aotearoa NZ, the mosques and areas where I conducted this research were mostly under the control of people from Arab countries; they were generally Wahabi. In Palmerston North, as refugees from Afghanistan began to settle, a burgeoning Shia community emerged, primarily engaging in social activities within their close-knit circle. Mostly they socialised within their own circle. One of the women told me that Mosque administration did not allow the Shia community to organise their *Majlis* in *Moharram* (the first month of Islamic calendar), and they had to book a community hall. Shia Muslims organise gatherings in Moharram to commemorate the Karbala tragedy of 680 CE. Other women from the Sunni sect who celebrate Milad (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH) said that they were not allowed to celebrate Milad in the Cook Street Islamic centre. In 2019, another Qadri Islamic centre was established in Milson, Palmerston North. They do celebrate Milad and other Shia religious rituals there.

I wanted to be inclusive to women from all sects, so I attended Shia Majlis in Moharram. I was invited by an Afghani woman from a refugee background. I met three Pakistani Shia women there. I kept going to the Majlis every day in one of the Moharram in an effort to build rapport with Shia Muslims in the community. However, instead of gaining the confidence of Shia friends, I encountered more suspicion. It was like, ‘what are you doing here?’ This was the time when I realised that my attempts to build rapport were overly intrusive in the lives of the women. I also

[37] Another sub-sect of Sunni

recognized that daily access to the field sites was counterproductive in forming positive connections with the potential research participants. A few of these women started keeping their distance from me at social events, until I stopped making an effort to connect with those women and kept my engagements with those who were willing to connect with me.

Disposition as a Mother

Apart from these religio-cultural distinctions, my role as a mother gave me an insider-status when I interviewed married women with children. We had more time to relate to the everyday experiences of the role, and it helped make our conversations more interesting, and even humorous. Zavella (1996) contends that insiders 'are more likely to be cognisant and accepting of complexity and internal variation' (p. 139). These dispositions did not however build barriers when interviewing single women and women with no children. In fact, these participants appreciated how I was managing to study, despite having a child.

Politics of Navigating within Small Groups of Women

It is important to note here that the Muslim women whom I was contacting and recruiting, as with the entire Aotearoa NZ Islamic community, can be divided into different countries, cultures, ethnicities, age groups, marital status, and key beliefs and practices within Islam. The only commonality among them was that they all shared the main Islamic belief that there was one God, and that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the last prophet of God. This core belief is the unifying commonality that bonds different cultures in the Muslim community in Aotearoa NZ (Dobson, 2009). It does not however mean that they are a homogenous group.

In this context, these Muslim women had their own small groups, and generally liked to meet among themselves. For instance, Pakistani Muslim women would prefer to meet with other select Pakistani women, based on their shared interests and views about religion (ideology).

I began to note that shared beliefs and practices were always the key feature of the emergence of these small groups within the one big group. At first, as a researcher, I tried to be a part of all

of these different, small groups, such as Pakistani, Arab, and Indonesian circles of women. Soon though, I realised it was not possible for me to be viewed as both a neutral, 'broad group' Muslim woman, and at the same time be a friend to all the small-groups and sub-groups. For instance, when I met with women in one group[38], they would sometimes ask me not to meet with other women in other groups. Sometimes, in subtle ways, they conveyed to me that they disliked those women and suggested I should not meet with them.

I began to see how important these 'small group' experiences were to my research subjects - and that my 'crossing' them placed their hard-won security at risk. Identification of a 'like-minded' social network focused on small but important differences - and in the midst of a mass of large-scale social difference, some of it still incomprehensible, and even unacceptable, to the women concerned. Such small details became more important. I was beginning to see how the expression of cultural identity became more, rather than less, important during the migration experience - and I needed to adapt to that, within my own program of research.

I also organised many women-only get-togethers. These gatherings provided me space to observe how women from diverse nationalities and cultures would interact in a relaxed and fun social space. This was designed to establish a space in which Muslim immigrant women could come to terms with their own practices, and asses their cultural identities within a shared Islamic frame.

As I started sending invitations to these women, they began asking me who else was coming? I was in a strange position, feeling 'dishonest' to my friends, while striving to remain true to my discipline. I asked myself, 'Who do I really belong to?' I had become good friends with women from each of the different groups. I did not want to hurt them, by arranging for them to meet

[38] Here, my use of the term 'group' refers to small or large numbers of Muslim women who formed friendships. These friendships were not primarily rooted in cultural, ethnic, or sectarian ties; instead, they were founded upon shared interests, values, and hobbies. Some of these women also had children of similar ages who attended the same school as my daughter. To put it simply, there existed numerous tight-knit circles or groups that had strong bonds with each other, which may not have extended to the broader community of Muslim women.

with other women they disliked. At the same time, as a researcher I wanted diverse opinion, and I wanted to meet women from different groups.

There were moments when I felt embarrassed. For instance, I was having a meeting over coffee with one of my participants at the Plaza food court in Palmerston North, when one of my friends (who was also a participant and told me that she explicitly disliked the woman I was meeting) saw me and said hello. I was both embarrassed and confused. I stood up, and after saying hello told her how I had accidently met my participant, and that we were talking generally about issues from my research. Such situations were tricky to handle.

I began to realise that I would have to explain my position very clearly to everyone. However, this might have negative effects on my research, but at least they would know that I was not 'cheating,' or 'playing the middleman.' This strategy did not work either. I was losing their trust. Finally, I chose to be with one small group from Arab and Pakistani communities. Later they became good friends, however research with friends had its own challenges. I will discuss that below. However, I did not encounter this problem with women from other communities, such as Indonesians, Sri Lankans and Indians.

Friends as Research Participants

As time passed by my friendships with my participants deepened, despite the many different personalities. We started spending more time together, and sharing personal matters with each other, and I started blurring the boundaries of my position as a researcher.

Having friends as participants has its own advantages and disadvantages. This has also been discussed in the ethnographic literature especially in relation to 'rapport' and 'friendship as a method' (Fine, 1994; Glesne, 1989; Owten & Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). The traditional (positivist) paradigm requires the separation between researcher and participants on the basis that any personal involvement of a researcher would bias the research, disturb the natural setting, and contaminate the results (Douglas & Carless, 2012). In contrast other researchers (for example see Breckenridge, 1999; Hoffman, 2007; Owten & Allen-Collinson,

2014) hold that emotional involvement, reflexivity and friendship can provide a rich resource for ethnographic researchers. This friendship approach seeks to "reduce the hierarchical separation between researcher and participant" (Owten & Allen-Collinson, 2014, p. 285). My research has also followed the friendship approach.

The biggest advantage I felt was my participants were easy to access, willing to help me by sharing their stories and viewpoints. The other advantage was that I did not have to spend time to build rapport and gain their trust. It saved me a lot of time. Their accounts were rich and in-depth. Some friends told me that they loved the way I was listening to their stories. There were also times that they would remind me (in a light and humorous way) that I was a researcher and that rather than having fun with them (eating, listening to music, dancing) I should be focusing on doing research. This 'reduction of hierarchical separation' helped me to gain access to my participants' inner world. As Owten & Allen-Collinson, (2014, p. 286) explain "… [this] is a level of investment where researcher and friendship roles weave together, expand and deepen each other."

Managing and negotiating the dual role of a friend and researcher can be challenging, "demanding and even stressful for researchers" (Owten & Allen-Collinson, 2014, p. 301). In my case, my participants were loyal to me, and they expected the loyalty back from me as well. They wanted me to spend time with them and not with others with whom they did not get along well. This meant to me that spending time only with a likeminded group could be a hurdle in capturing the diversity of practices and viewpoints. So, I had to very carefully take them into my confidence and clarify to them my role as a researcher and that it was important for my research to have a diverse group of people. This worked, but I had to limit the groups of women in order to maintain my trust and loyalty within different groups. (Please see the heading *Navigating within small groups of women).*

Many of my friends were going through some challenging situations in their personal lives. I was becoming good at keeping secrets, but bad at being a researcher. There were times when I had to choose my priorities. In my close friends' circle, I always preferred to be a friend first and

researcher later - which means a lot of information they shared with me is not included in the thesis. I built that trust, and it had to work both ways. My commitment to ethical practice required a number of adaptations and limitations to the data-collection methods I had designed - with implications for the overall methodology. I found myself carrying the emotional burden of my friends' situations. Many of them started confiding in me. I felt helpless at times: there was nothing I could do for them, apart from being a good listener. I tried to advise them and help as best I could. Some stayed over when they had difficult family times, or phoned me for hours, crying on my shoulder. Sometimes I spent days and weeks counselling them, and then would worry about my writing time being compromised. But if they were willing to spend time with me when I needed them for my research, this was my time to return the favour. There is a saying in Urdu which means: 'If someone asks you for a favour, it means Allah has chosen you, when it is not difficult for Him to choose someone else.' I strongly believe in that saying. However, as a researcher, I was trying to find an ethical and practical balance between my personal and professional life.

Working with friends as research subjects throws up any number of challenges. Because they knew that I was doing research, when commenting on a sensitive topic, they would sometimes ask me not to include it, 'not even with pseudonyms.' They were clear where the limits lay, even if I was not. At other times they would laugh and say I was a very 'mean researcher,' who would not miss any opportunity to collect or observe information. One friend said that I was a 'dangerous' friend, and she warned others to watch what they shared with me. One of them called me 'a spy.' At times, they would in a humorous way say that they were not sharing their views on the topic under discussion. I understood that their comments were intended in a lighthearted or humorous manner, but I consistently viewed these moments as opportunities to reaffirm my position as a researcher and to assure the women that I would always seek their permission before including anything in the thesis.

Sometimes our sittings would go longer than usual and because I was not recording or taking notes, I would forget most of the detail before I found time to jot notes. I would remember only very key points, and those were not exact in their expression. On occasions like these, I would

then get back to my friends and ask for their in-depth views on that topic. This proved useful, as my friends knew then that their comments were going to be part of the research.

I must acknowledge that the fieldwork started in a disappointing way, but it concluded with exciting and rewarding data and findings. The participants with whom I regularly talked were just a text away. They trusted me, and always engaged in the discussion most excitingly. Our discussions never went smoothly, because of the strongly held opinions behind our beliefs - but along the way we learned to respect each other's views, and the way a person is. Our friendships went beyond those personal differences. I have tried to reflect my friends' personalities through this poem written during my fieldwork: 'strong friends.' It shows the intensity and diversity of our opinions, a feature of the research that will be reflected further in the upcoming ethnographic chapters.

Strong Friends – A Poem

You know your strengths

You believe in you

You have trust in yourself

You may not be a good fit with other women around you
You may not qualify on the standards of traditional gendered norms
But you have a view
a plan
a horizon
a perspective
On your life

You have big dreams

You work to make those true

Your husbands may (not) show respect to you

Your families may (not) be proud of you

Your kids may idealise you

For me…

You are an inspiration

You know that!

This makes you a different woman!

Misfit in society

But this all makes you a strong woman!

You are making a generation

Of which many would be proud

You have different personas

Likes and dislikes…

Ways of living…

Standards of judgement…

Biases…

Tastes…

Habits…

But one thing binds us all together

At this place

And in this space

We all are strong women

Aware of our strengths

Our opinions

And it is not unusual to get angry, annoyed, and furious at each other

Not easily convinced

Being convincing is not ideal, perhaps

We are strong headed

Opinionated

Acknowledge this

Ignore the things within each other that bother you

Focus on strengths

And positives

We are lucky

To find each other

To breathe in an environment that encourages us to be ourselves

It is in itself a blessing

Not to be among the dumb and defeated

But to question and challenge what is uncomfortable

It is not easy

To be friends with strong women

But we made it so far

Cheers to all the future disagreements, disliking, arguments, and fighting

But despite all of it

Let’s continue to support, admire, appreciate and love each other

Long live our friendship!

Expectations of Constructing a ‘Good’ Image of Aotearoa NZ Muslims

From the outset, I had an expectation that I would somehow produce and promote a ‘good’ image of Islam and Muslims in Aotearoa NZ: that my findings would be positive, and not critical.

One of the complexities of doing this research was to make a clear distinction for my research participants that my field was anthropology, and not theology or religious studies. I had to remind them that my commitment to my discipline was to explore the everyday lives of Muslim women; how they practise their understanding of Islam, rather than what Islam says in religious texts and how religious scholars interpret that.

However, I must acknowledge that in the beginning of my research journey, I was altogether too much inclined towards reporting only a good image of Islam. Here is an excerpt from my field notes:

> *I am in trouble: I feel the responsibility to my academic promises, to my discipline; anthropology, I observe and want to write, but I have a belief. Although that belief does not stop me writing about anything, still I struggle, between my responsibility and maintaining a good image of the Muslim community. I remember*

> *his [FIANZ president at the time] words "Hina, whatever you do I want to maintain a good image of the Muslim community." But my question is, why a good image only? Why shouldn't he, and all of us, actually work, not only on making a good image but on the real work - to **make** us a good community, to create a good society, a society where we do not **need** to work on the image.*

I also remember one of my friends saying: 'you cannot be a feminist **and** a Muslim believer.' There were so many encounters in the field which not only confused me but made me question my own beliefs.

Massey University Human Ethics Committees (MUHEC)

I completed a full ethics application, despite my concern that immigrant Muslim women could be uncomfortable with questions related to their experiences.

I and my supervisor, Sita Venkateswar, were invited by MUHEC to attend a meeting to discuss my full ethics application. The committee discussed many scenarios that could potentially arise during my interaction with the participants. Finally, the committee asked me to do the following things:

1) add a list of people (community 'gatekeepers') who could be available to help women participants, if necessary,

2) write more details in the information sheet, specifically mentioning the time participants might spend on the research.

I revised my application and added all the details the committee advised.

While the Ethics process had identified a few issues with the research, the potential research participants proved another matter. The formality of the form-filling and Information Provision

procedures appeared to them very formal and intimidating. Some humbly apologised, no longer willing to participate.

Because the information sheet contained details of my research, and required a signature at the end, they felt that the research was too formal, and that whatever was written on the sheet was going to proceed exactly as outlined - like a government interview. I told them it was perfectly fine if things developed differently, but my verbal explanation had little impact. The written word - and especially the written word with university credentials and crested letterhead - was intimidating.

One of my participants said that this research was too intrusive, and that it would be hard for her to manage time off work and the interruption to her daily routine. I totally understood these feelings, and yet I had to comply with the formal procedure. Now I began to see that this was one of the reasons that I had found it hard to recruit research participants. A few of the Auckland women asked me to leave the information sheet with them and promised that they would call me later. All of them, later, apologised, and declined to take part in my research. The information sheet was problematic, but I had also asked participants to sign a consent form, which also seemed too formal to them. Asking someone to make a commitment to my research after just one conversation was too hard. We had not built a trusting relationship. Beyond that however, I had not considered the cultural experiences of migrant women - both in their home country, where 'official', written exchanges with government sources could prove problematic, or in Aotearoa NZ, where most, if not all, were still negotiating for Permanent Residency, with complex document exchanges and many investigative intrusions into their lives.

Formal documentation of the research act is designed by a university to protect both research participants and their privacy and ultimate ownership of their data - but it also protects the institution, a feature not lost on those called to assent and to formally sign their agreement. Letterhead with traditional heraldic symbols; named contact officers with their credentialling and role descriptions - all of these sign themselves with authority, power, and the law. To a migrant woman, still learning how things work in the new country, and aware that she will be

asked to detail her personal life experiences in what she knows is a contentious, even deadly socio-cultural zone, 'signing over' her experiences and views is a difficult and dangerous decision. For the Auckland women in particular who did not know me at all well, my 'non-local' status must have seemed problematic. Who was I? Why was I not from a local University? Did that matter - did it mean, for instance, I was somehow less accountable?

Adding the names of ‘support persons’ to the information sheet did not go well either. Although I added what I thought were neutral and popular names from the community, there were divisions and groupings within the Muslim community, based on religious sects, the mosques they went to, Imams they listened to, and areas they lived in. I observed strange expressions on women’s faces when they were reading the names of the support persons in the information sheet, signalling their disapproval. I told them that if they did not feel comfortable meeting them, they could always go to any other person they felt comfortable with meeting. Nonetheless, this created the impression that I was not on their side; that I was advocating for selected people within the community, and not others - all without discussion or consultation.

One solution that worked was to defer the formal processing of research subjects. I started working on my relationship with the participants before I introduced myself as a researcher. I also moved my focus back to Palmerston North, where some women who already knew me had helped by introducing me to other women. Since Palmy was a small town compared to Auckland, women had time after work or on weekends for a catch up.

Additionally, I began first to explain the research verbally, obtaining preliminary verbal consent. Later, when I had built trust, I could ask subjects to sign the consent form. Almost all of the women said that verbal consent was fine. I assured them again that their names would not appear anywhere in my research, to hide their identity. A few women participants said that they were not bothered by being identified. I also had to move to two other new cities during the research, Nelson and Tauranga. I continued meeting with Muslim women there and followed the above procedure to build trust - getting verbal consent. It worked well at both locations.

It seemed then that following formal ethical procedures mechanically was not useful in my research. The procedures over-formalised the research relationship, and the women subjects were not ready to make a commitment to the project - especially to the processes so carefully outlined in the information sheet. When I explained my research verbally and removed or deferred any pressure on them to sign forms, they became excited and willing to participate.

I began to adapt the process even further. For instance, I had mentioned in the information sheet that whenever possible I would be happy to go out shopping as we talked or make social visits. They women appeared to feel pressured to go out with me. It felt intrusive. However, when I told them verbally 'you do not have to spare time for an interview; I can just catch up with you whenever possible,' they were more than happy. I explained that whenever I was with them, I would be observing, and maybe leading our conversation around to research issues - and they were perfectly willing to have that happen.

A few women asked me how I would maintain confidentiality in my research, and I explained the use of the abbreviation of names in my field notes, and the use of pseudonyms throughout writing. However, three women said that even if I used pseudonyms, they would still be too easily recognisable. I then decided to use several names for their comments - so it does not appear as one story. This technique worked well to maintain their confidentiality.

Conventionally, ethical codes demand locked storage of working notes and records, and careful consideration of who can gain access, and how. A particular issue here involved sound recording. While it is a standard option in most modern research, many women in this research were not comfortable with it. Whenever the recorder was on, I found that the women became more self-conscious, and more focused on what they were saying. It was no longer a natural conversation. Sometimes they would stop me in the middle and ask me not to include that line in my interview. Some would ask, 'can you please delete this recording? Let’s make a new recording!' Once a woman asked me if I could stop recording outright, because it was confusing her. After a few such experiences, I stopped using the recorder.

While the conventions of a full ethics application and getting ethical clearance mean that field work is more rigorously designed, it may not necessarily mean that it is carried out ethically. Countervailing influences may arise - as they did here. During my initial experience of following ethics committee guidelines formally, I found out that 'ethics' is a subjective and culturally sensitive matter. This is more relevant when conducting research within the framework of religion. For example, many women were doubtful about the gatekeepers/support persons' names I added in the information sheet. Although I chose those names very carefully, for many women those names created suspicion, rather than providing a support mechanism. Processes which serve an accurate and logical bureaucratic ordering, that guarantee a university's research probity, and match the methodological understandings of a particular research approach, may not entirely reflect the predispositions and cultural values of every research population.

Does this mean that the fieldwork which results will be carried out imperfectly? Many methodologists report that flexibility is needed; that strict adherence to the ethical regime can act as a barrier, in some cases (Dingwall, 2008; Haggerty, 2004). Research is, by its nature, partly experimental. Its findings are valued precisely because they challenge the status quo - and that also includes challenging the research methodologies. Those absolutes which do exist within an ethical research regime - ultimately, the requirement that all research be designed to minimise harm to participants, has to acknowledge that ethics procedures themselves may produce some degree of such harm - especially in cross-cultural contexts, and in cultural transition locations, such as the experience of migration.

On writing Autoethnographically

Writing has so many dimensions; as a process, as a methodology, as a framework. The uniqueness in the writing of anthropologists is that they not only write *about* the world, or *in* the world, but it is argued that they write *with* the world, making meaning of broader social realities in light of their own experiences (Ingold, 2008). It is where this ethnographic adventure becomes autoethnographic, bringing in autobiographical background and personal commentaries as part

of the analysis throughout the thesis. As mentioned in the positionality section above, my dispositions continuously shaped my experiences during the research and writing.

Including autoethnography as a research method was not a planned (or pre-informed or deliberate) choice; rather it emerged after realising the importance of my personal experiences in understanding my participants' lives. Chang (2016) notes that autoethnography uses the researcher’s personal experiences as part of the primary data, to understand, analyse and interpret the sociocultural meaning of people’s experiences. This method of inquiry has the capacity to critically examine both the researcher and the researched, using multiple social and cultural lenses.

A number of Muslim scholars have used autoethnography as a research method to explore the self in relation to others (Adriany, Pirmasari, & Satiti, 2017; Martin-Anatias, 2019). Zempi (2017) has also used autoethnography in detailing the workings of Islamophobic victimisation. Reflection in this genre of methodology comes through immersive fieldwork. The researching self, as a participant and an observer, makes sense of the wider social world through their own experiences, considered alongside those of others - like or unlike. Autoethnographers include cultural elements of personal experiences (Hamilton, 2008). As a believer and a Pakistani Muslim woman, my own experience adds to those of my research subjects - and cannot do otherwise. As an immigrant, I had observed differences in the many practices and beliefs of Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ which I would not have noticed while living in Pakistan. Living in Pakistan as a Pakistani Muslim was like *fish in the water* where my habitus was aligned with the rules of the fields. My embodied dispositions were based on shared social, cultural and religious understandings and despite small or big differences they were part of the same game. Here in Aotearoa NZ those dispositions entered a constant state of comparing, not only in relation to others but also self-comparisons, developing my own Comparing Habitus and making it a key strategy to learn, reflect, analyse, and create my own worldview as an immigrant Pakistani Muslim woman. This is what appears in my writing throughout the thesis. Thus autoethnography, a look at self within the broader context (Hamilton, 2008) became part of my methodology. I am the researcher *and* the researched, participant *and* observer. Autoethnography brings the

unsettled elements of self into discussion, in comparison with the broader social context (Coia & Taylor, 2005).

Ethnographic Poetry

If I had been formally trained in creative writing, this thesis would have been read entirely differently. Despite lacking this training in writing creatively, I started writing my ethnographic chapters in the form of a play. The inspiration came from Joanna Sheridan's PhD dissertation (Sheridan, 2014) in which she has presented her findings as a drama. I had reached the middle of writing the play when in our thesis supervisory meeting we discussed the way I was writing it, and how it was leaving less room for analysis and discussion. I had to leave the play in the middle, but I could not stop writing poems. These came to me effortlessly and at times I had to shut down my poetic brain and force myself to write academically. My supervisors encouraged me to add those poems to the thesis. It was then that I discovered other ethnographies and anthropological research which used poetry as part of their data presentation technique, as well as for helping develop analysis and discussion.

The field of anthropology has become more open to both literary theory and literary forms since the 1980s, and ethnographic poetry has been accepted in the discipline (Daniel & Peck, 1996; Tarn, 2007). Presenting research findings in creative ways opens up new ways of reflexive engagement (Denzin, 2003). Ethnographic poetry is also important when doing research with different cultures. For example, Battaglia (1999) connects ethnography and poetry by saying that if ethnography is a practice of knowledge production able to generate productive uncertainties and disjunctive possibilities, then ethnographic poetry can be a powerful tool in exploring feelings of doubt and displacement that can emerge when conducting a cultural study within a different community.

These ideas connected immediately with my own experiences. They admitted and took seriously some of the 'messiness' and contradiction I had been encountering - not only in contending views of 'a good Muslim woman's life' as practised in Aotearoa NZ migrant communities, but in my own

sense of a woman Muslim self - and even, as outlined above, within the seemingly neutral formal research-management rules and tools of the University sponsoring my research.

Ruth Benedict argues that poetic ethnography allows anthropologists to enhance their artistic quality by working within familiar genres. She poses a question: 'We have a lot of poetic poets out there, but tell me, how many poetic anthropologists do you know?' (as cited in Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010).

Not surprisingly, she goes on to pose a rhetorical challenge to anthropologists to add more poetry to their prose, rather than pursue sloppy or 'sappy' mawkish verse. Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor (2010) also raise a concern that "poetry as ethnographic representation is doubly challenged: to be well crafted, artful verse, and to attain validity in its research results" (p. 12). They also point out the difference between a poet and an ethnographer, describing how an ethnographer writes about what they already know, unlike a poet, who writes to consider what they don't yet know. Combining these characteristics, they say that the "ethnographic poet and the poetic ethnographer must do both" (p. 12).

All the poems in the thesis are in a way of 'found poems,' because I used participants' words, sentences or ideas to 'create' the poems. The technique helps focus emerging issues as the ethnography was analysed, foregrounding what might otherwise remain minor or unexamined tropes, and taking seriously what participants themselves might otherwise regard as 'throw-away' lines.

The use of poetry also allows me to re-examine techniques used in some of the languages used by women in this study. Urdu poetry *(S̲h̲āʿirī,)* has always fascinated me. I am especially interested in the work of Iqbal (1877-1938), a national poet of Pakistan. His few books were always on the shelf in my father's book collection, but because Iqbal's poetry has lots of Persian and literary Urdu words, I never fully understood him. Iqbal was a strong proponent of the political and spiritual revival of Islamic civilisation across the world.

The tradition of poetry is also very strong in Arabic history, and in the language of the Quran. Ghamidi, in his interpretation of the Quran, has emphasised how the meaning of the Quran is tied to its literary structures, arguing for a literary and poetic coherence rather than the linear coherence of academic and legal language (Doss, 2012; Ghamidi, 2011). Each chapter, called a *Surat* in Urdu and *Surah* in Arabic, has a complete linguistic, literary, and thematic structure (Hassan, 2014). This connection between poetry, Islam and Iqbal by no means makes claims for my own poems achieving the heights of these influences, but acts instead as a reminder that 'creative' texts can underlie those with major claims on 'truth.' The utility of poems in ethnography is established in many ways.

Role of the Supervisory Team

One thing often missing in methodological discussion is any reflection on the role of mentors and supervisors in influencing and shaping the research - and the researcher.

My supervisory team's support and cross-cultural questioning created an environment for me where I became focused on developing critical and comparative elements which allowed me to observe, collect and analyse the competing strands of the expression of Muslim identity in the Aotearoa NZ context.

Sita, having grown up in India, knew a lot of about Muslims. Her questions, based on her knowledge and exposure to Muslims, helped me think about how different things were in India. Sita also encouraged me to experiment with my creative writing. On the other hand, Carolyn was born and raised in Aotearoa NZ and extensively well-travelled. She was also familiar with Muslims but in a more general way. This mix within the supervisory team helped me to be more reflexive, open, critical and comparative in my thinking, as well as in my conversations with participants, in my observations and throughout the writing. Carolyn's way of talking about Bourdieu was instrumental in developing my theoretical framework.

The freedom they gave me to experiment within the ethnographic chapters in the form of drama and poetry let me explore ways of adding the poetic into the work, a form of expressivity which

linked to my female participants' 'performance' of Muslim identity, at an unprecedented level of detail. Without their encouragement, I would never have explored this dimension.

In a very interesting study, *How can PhD supervisors play a role in bridging academic cultures* in cross cultural supervision contexts, Elliot and Kobayashi (2019) find three important facets in the PhD supervision process between supervisors and PhD students. These are: acknowledging difference in learning approaches, checking for mismatched expectations on giving feedback, and the careful development of critical thinking. While my supervisors are in the best position to comment on the first two, I will focus here on the third finding, the development of critical thinking.

I contend that creative supervision can play an important role in the formation of a PhD project. The capacity to achieve a sort of internal, project-centric reflexivity suits both ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, where the observing/participating 'self' watches as a project forms - including those processes in the writing. Rather than the more conventional 'writing-up' of 'findings' used in traditional scientific research, anthropological methods 'write into being,' allying themselves with techniques from the creative arts, as they cast the net wider than usual, and into immersivity, in their search for meaning. 'Supervision,' literally a 'watching over,' becomes a new activity: a meta-analysis, inculcated into the project design and the understanding of the student-researcher as their project develops its own, task-specific, shape and techniques.

Conclusion

Thesis writing is a complex process

More complex than doing fieldwork

Even if the fieldwork was as serendipitous as mine

Though the final product [the thesis]

Is presented in a form

Much refined, structured, smooth

The process itself was

Raw, unstructured, bumpy

If I were allowed to present this work

In the way(s) it was developed

Only bits and pieces would be understandable

Like the stories of my participants

You may understand their everyday lives

In parts, fragments

No matter the methodology

All that remains is an effort

To gaze out. To see.

Like installing a window to look outside

- This thesis is my window

To look from the inside out, auto-ethno-graphically

This is an image

That you can borrow

For some of you the looking position will be different [outside in]

Here I reach the conclusion of this chapter

With so many questions in mind, at the tips of my fingers

Desperate to reveal all on my desktop screen

This chapter is the story

That tells how and why other stories were collected

The role of the storyteller

And her ungrasping subjective realities

And questions

If there is one Allah

And one Quran

Why are all Muslims not alike?

If Islam is a way of life for all humanity

Why are men and women treated differently?

If Islam is a religion of peace

Why do extremist Muslims exist?

If Islam is a matter of internal piety

Why do so many societal judgements prevail?

If Islam makes a human a better person,

Why are all Muslims not perfect?

And while there are so many perfect Muslims out there

Why are Muslims portrayed so negatively?

The coming chapters

Cannot hope to answer all of this

But perhaps...

Perhaps...

They will begin the process

Of thinking

Anew

Again

Differently

CHAPTER FIVE: AOTEAROA NZ MUSLIM WOMEN AND THEIR HEAD-COVERING CHOICES

> *My dear! We, Turkish women, are not known in Europe at all. I can even say that we are much less known than Chinese and Japanese women. They make up really unimaginable stories about us. Not important! They anticipate us to be slaves, to be imprisoned in rooms, to live only behind lattice windows, to be chained up and watched over by ferocious black and other slaves who are armed from head to foot and who are also sought to put us into sacks and then throw us into the Bosporus from time to time. We are assumed to live in a group of numerous rivalling wives, and they expect every Turkish man to have a harem of his own, that is, to have at least eight or ten wives (Göle, 1996, p. 27).*

An excerpt from the letter of Ottoman princess Seiha Sultan that she wrote to her French friend, Simone de la Cherte in 1910, to express the manner in which the West viewed Turkish women. More than a century later this perception has not changed, neither in the west nor among non-Muslims across the globe. More recently, it has grown worse and 9/11 has played a major role in this. In the past it might have been less important what others thought about Muslim women when they were not physically present, however, it does make a substantial difference when a Muslim woman migrates to live or stay in countries that have the tradition of the 'Secular West' and where they have been historically misunderstood. To live in such a tradition in which "belief, the conceptualisation of belief, is cut off from believing" (Crapanzano, 2014, p. 263) can be quite challenging.

This chapter is about immigrant Muslim women's head-covering choices. The narratives presented in this chapter focus less on experiences of discrimination and islamophobia in everyday lives but more on the motivations behind head-covering choices. There are a number of studies on Aotearoa NZ Muslim women that document discrimination based on perceived

association of Muslims with terrorism and visible Muslim women become targets of such discrimination. The Human Rights Commission has received a number of complaints by Muslim women who have experienced discrimination based on their attire (Human Rights Commission, 2010). A study done on Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ to find out about the nature and consequences of religious discrimination on the psychological wellbeing of women highlighted that Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, were vulnerable to discrimination (Jasperse, 2009). Bihi (1999) in his study of successful acculturation and wellbeing of Somali refugees, also highlighted that Muslim women were highly vulnerable in Aotearoa NZ because of their visibility. A study conducted with Auckland Muslim women shows that Muslim women have to justify their position when any terrorist incident happens worldwide (Griffiths, 2017). Muslim women face discrimination and Islamophobia and they are perceived as a monolithic, homogenous, static group.

The narratives also show that the women were aware of existing negative stereotypes attached to Muslim women. The women were familiar, for example, with the possibility that their headscarf could impact on their chances of getting a job, or that they were likely to experience negative public reaction to their presence in quite ordinary, everyday locations. Other studies in the Aotearoa NZ context have also highlighted this (see Ward, Stuart & Adam, 2019; Ash, Tuffin & Kahu, 2019). An article by Ash, Tuffin & Kahu (2019) is very relevant to discuss here. The authors discuss the experiences of six hijab wearing Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ. The reported reasons for wearing a hijab were 'obligation to God' as well as 'personal choice or freedom'. While obligation or commitment to God was the prime reasons for women to wear hijab, most of them also highlight that they do this out of their personal choice and freedom in contrast to the perception that hijab is forced on Muslim women. Despite the feeling that the wider society was 'unconcerned' with whatever they wore, four out of the six Muslim women described countering discrimination based on their hijab. They blamed the media for stereotyping and portraying hijab-wearing Muslims in limited and limiting ways, based on international events rather than on local circumstances. Despite this positioning however, these women highlighted how they felt a responsibility to represent Islam more correctly, and "described responding to interpersonal difficulties through this [Muslim] faith" (p. 119).

This chapter explores the multiple motivations behind wearing and not wearing a head-covering, and it highlights how Muslim women from different cultures have very different understandings and practices of head-covering. The chapter also shows that head-covering is not a permanent, fixed disposition in women's lives. Nor are women simply and always either *hijabi* or *non-hijabi*. Moving to a new and multicultural Muslim field brings the issue of head-covering to a point of conscious reflection for many women – they have to make a decision about whether to cover or not. And they make this decision (which is sometimes interim) through a process of comparison, by comparing themselves to what they had thought or done in the past, and to other women within their present context, both from their own cultural background and from different cultures.

Thus, the chapter shows that head-covering in the lives of my participants is a strategy, part of a process of becoming a good Muslim woman, and so part of an unfinished journey. There are many studies in the existing literature that show multiple reasons for Muslim women wearing headcovers (Abdurraqib, 2005; Ajrouch, 2007; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Bruenig & Fleischmann, 2015; Dwyer, 1999, Gilliat-Ray, 2010, Franks, 2000), and not wearing a headcover (Fadil, 2011; Fernando, 2009; Kütük-Kuri, 2021; Mas, 2006), some in the context of Aotearoa NZ (Ash, Tuffin, Kahu, 2019; Griffiths, 2017; Soltani, Johnston & Longhurst, 2022). None of them however approach head-covering as a changing disposition developed by Comparing Habitus, viewed through the *everyday* framework of *becoming*. Such an approach, I argue, allows a researcher to comprehend the flexibility, fluidity, complexity and unfinished nature of my participants' choices in opting in or opting out of headcovering.

Before I begin the narratives around head-covering, it is interesting to consider some of the conversations with one of my research participants, who wanted me to interview only head-covering Muslim women, in order to write favourably of head-covering, so presenting a positive image of Muslim women. This is an excerpt from my conversation with her:

Scenario: A few of us are sitting in a café during lunch time.

Alia: Why do you try to find negative things about Islam, and Muslim women [referring to my search for women who do not wear the headscarf. Her point was it was a personal choice for women not to wear a headcover, but it is not Islamic and hence shouldn't be a concern for me.] If somebody tells you a positive experience, you still ask questions which might lead you towards the dark side.

Me: How can you say that I am after negative experiences?

Alia: You always ask questions about our experiences, and it looks like you are after some juicy stories.

Me [embarrassed]: But experience can be positive, isn't that right? Aren't they? What is wrong in asking women about their everyday experiences or their clothing choices? I just ask about their experiences, and women tell me what they want to.

Alia [aggressively]: But you should present a positive image of Muslim women and Islam. In this society, there is already lots of negativity and we do not want these kinds of things anymore.

Me: Look my friend, I am a researcher, and my study is in social anthropology. I am not a journalist in search of 'juicy' stories, I don't have to sell my thesis. As a researcher, it is part of my training to see things in a holistic way rather than looking at them as black and white. I am neither doing a thesis in religious studies, nor do I have any authentic knowledge of the Quran and its interpretations. I am just collecting stories of women who are living in New Zealand and who are willing to talk to me about their experiences. I do not even have a proper questionnaire. I just follow what women want to speak about.

Alia: Yes, but you are a Muslim too.

Before I could speak, someone else at the table interfered and I chose not to carry on the discussion, as things were getting heated.

This kind of discussion did not happen just once. As I became familiar in the community many women (and men) expected me to write a 'good' story, a positive one that promotes the image of Islam and Muslim community in Aotearoa NZ rather than presenting them in fragments and pieces, and unlike a 'genuine' *Umma* (See footnote 1).

Alia became a good friend. She had a PhD degree herself, which was why I tried to give her an explanation about the academic discipline into which my research falls. Many other participants also expected me to write positively about Muslim women who wore the headscarf, and to support their act of head-covering, by taking quotations from the Quran and other Islamic texts. This citing of authority is a familiar way of managing the issue among Muslims.

Many women also suggestedto me that I should read the Quran, and delve more deeply into other Islamic texts, such as the Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad), to better understand Islam, and so promote Muslim women's head-covering - and correct my own practice.

Headcovering: The Most Discussed Issue Among my Research Participants

One of the most common and intensively discussed issues during my interviews was head-covering. It is important to mention here that not all Muslim women wear a headcover, even the ones who consider themselves practising Muslims. Similarly, many Muslim women wear the head-covering only occasionally, on a needs basis, for instance in the mosque, during prayer times, or during any other religious/social activity. Nonetheless, during my discussions, head-covering was a hot topic of debate, irrespective of those women's head-covering practices. All had different logical reasons for head-covering, derived from their understanding of the Quran, Hadith, and opinions of Islamic scholars. Although women linked the head-covering debate with religion, whether it was an obligation for them or not, this practice was dependent on the way

they were brought up in their home cultures. It is, in Bourdieu's terms, a matter of habitus and 'taste.'

The following narratives show that many women who wore headcovers started this practice at different stages in their lives. This includes women who had been wearing a headcover from a young age and were simply continuing this familiar tradition. Some women who started head-covering at a later stage in their lives had to face family hostility because in most cases they were the first in the family to wear a headcover. The reasons for their decisions are diverse, and rooted in specific socio-cultural-religious contexts.

The narratives also show that many women had stopped head-covering practices when they realised, they did not need them. Some decisions were based on their understanding of Islam in the 21st century and their experiences of living in a western context. It is difficult to neatly thematise the reasons behind women's head-covering, because there is no single reason. Sometimes multiple reasons lie behind an individual woman's decision. The other important thing to note is that their decisions were not static, but were reflexive, meaning they changed their views of head-covering practices even if they continued their practice because of social pressure.

I will begin with Aqilah's story, since she started head-covering when she started using public transport in her home country more frequently. For Aqilah the decision to wear a headcover was linked with protection and comfort.

Protection, Comfort and Communication

Aqilah came to Aotearoa NZ in 2007. She came to study, initially on her own, and then she settled here. She is a single woman in her forties. In the following quote, Aqilah talks about how she made the decision to wear a headcover.

> *I was the first one in my family who started wearing head-covering and a gown [long fabric coat]. I still remember when I started college [in her Muslim majority home country] I knew that I will be using public transport*

more often so I asked my parents if they could buy me a scarf and a gown. It was bit surprising for them and for my siblings. My siblings understood this as my emotional decision, which would fade away with time. But for me it was something very convenient and a protecting outfit, particularly to travel in public transport. I felt more confident and more protected in that gown and scarf. Till today, twenty-eight years after, I am sticking to that decision, and it was a timely decision I took in my life. In my country, I did niqab sometime, but I removed that after coming to New Zealand. That was making me a bit uncomfortable here and I did not need the feel of doing niqab here. I replaced the gown with coats in New Zealand. Winter coats in winter and thin fabric coats and long cardigans in summer. It is a kind of my uniform now for me [laughs]. But if I go back to visit my home country and visit my office colleagues [referring to males] they still have not seen my face. I wear niqab when I visit my male friends in my home country.

For her, the headscarf is a matter of protection and comfort in Pakistan but in Aotearoa NZ she does it for convenience and to communicate something abiout who she is.. Aqilah had been yelled at a few times in public due to her headscarf, and she understands that her head-covering isn't providing her with protection in Aotearoa NZ, the very reason that made her choose this decision. She says that in Aotearoa NZ her headscarf speaks for her:

It tells others that I am unique, I am different, I am anti-social, I must have dietary requirements [referring to her colleagues]. It speaks a lot, including stereotypes, which now I do not care about, as long as it serves the purpose.

Aqilah has a strong personality, and she says that her beliefs give her strength. She says too that her dress code has become her uniform, and she feels most comfortable like this. She used to wear colourful, shiny headscarves, but then she became extra conscious when her colleagues passed remarks such as 'beautiful, colourful scarf.' She then sometimes chose to wear light, pastel-coloured scarves that would not stand out. She never took off her headscarf in public or in front of men. Despite her headcover, she has regular haircuts, hair dyes, hair streaks. She takes extra care of her hair. Over the years, Aqilah became a close friend and I sometime tease her

saying "why are you spending time and money on your hair when no one is going to see it?" She would gently pass a smile and reply "I do this for me, head-covering outside my home doesn't mean I do not have the right to look beautiful." Being on her own, Aqilah had gone through many difficult times, and it was her faith that gave her strength to survive them. Aqilah started wearing the headcover for a sense of protection and even continued it when it was not. Although Aqilah didn't change her head-covering practice after coming to Aotearoa NZ, she changed her practice of face-covering, in the niqab. She told me that her colleagues in her home country had never seen her face. She also changed her clothing from traditional long gowns also known as *abayas* to standard coats that she can easily buy in Aotearoa NZ and so her dress style despite the headscarf doesn't look odd, she said.

Aqilah's story challenges a number of existing stereotypes bedevilling Muslim women. This supports studies which highlight the view that Muslim women are not oppressed or passive victims; rather they actively create their own identities within a minority context (Almila, 2015; Göle, 2002; Soltani, Johnston & Longhurst, 2022; Tarlo, 2005). As mentioned above, Aqilah was a Muslim woman living on her own, without any support from men, with a career ambition, and had made her own choice regarding head-covering.

Identity and Freedom of Choice

Aqilah did not have to face family hostility, except a few mocking comments and questions from her parents and siblings regarding her head-covering. But for another participant, Laila, the head-covering was a difficult matter, which resulted in family unrest, as her husband was not supportive of it at the start. Laila tells her story below:

> *I moved from a Muslim majority country to another Muslim majority country, and I never noticed that my headcover would become a symbol of my identity. The country I moved to was more multi ethnic and there were a lot of Indians [non-Muslims] there. Once I attended a symposium and one of the Muslim girls said 'namaste' to me. It surprised me, I thought she was joking. I said wa-alaikum-salam in return. She smiled and said she found it*

very beautiful when people respected each other's beliefs. I got more confused, and I told her that I am Muslim too - and then the other girl apologised and explained that all the Muslim girls in the company wore headscarves, so she thought I was a [non-Muslim] Indian as I was not wearing a headscarf. This incident had a great impact on my life. I came home and I started thinking, who am I? I never wanted to disassociate myself from my religion. Also, I was not a very good practising Muslim, like I missed on prayers, and I sometimes lied - but despite this, I did not want to be mistaken for non-Muslim. It took me few months to make this decision though. I still remember, one day, I told my husband about my decision, and I thought he would be happy and supportive. However, he became very angry. In the beginning, he opposed me but when he realised I was serious, he said 'Well fine, you have to choose between me and your headscarf.' After that we started having big fights, louder arguments, we screamed and yelled at each other. I cried for days and then one day I told him that I was ready to leave him. At that time, I did not have children, so I thought it was better and easier to leave him. Although a divorcee has no social status back home, I was educated, skilled and confident. When I told him about my decision, he asked me to take my time and rethink my decision. I told him that he needed time to rethink as I was not going to leave my headcover. Later, almost after a week of dead silence between both of us, he accepted me with the headscarf, and we promised never to argue on this matter again and literally we never did.

Laila was an educated and confident woman who deliberately took this decision in order to maintain her religious identity. Laila said that period of her life was the toughest time of her life, especially when she was away from her parents and family and living overseas with her husband, who did not show any kindness or respect for her freedom to self-express. Laila's story contradicts the pre-existing stereotype that men in Muslim families force women to wear the head-covering. Laila was herself aware of this and said:

[…] it was so unlike the perception that men force women to do the hijab. In my case, I forced my husband to accept me in a headcover and showed him that I could take my own decisions in life. Marriage did not mean compromising liberty and freedom, it should be uplifting and freeing oneself. Husband and wife should be supportive of each other and wise enough so that they can run the unit of the family in harmony. If someone is not mature enough [referring to men], they should not marry.

Frequently, as in this case, discussion would include how husbands (or other men) take up their roles and responsibilities. In this story, the wearing of the headcover did not compromise the woman's lifestyle, and it did not limit her in doing outdoor adventures or pursuing further education. In fact, Laila had become more vocal and confident about wearing a headcover. Laila wears her headcover in multiple styles, very different from women from her own culture. She learned this during her stay in another Muslim majority country where the hijab is worn in different ways. She had a creative sense of fashion and would try different styles of headcover and overall clothing. At the time of taking the decision to wear a headcover, Laila had not even thought about what Islam said about head-covering. The main motive behind her decision was to maintain her identity as a Muslim, a more cultural version of faith. This aligns with many studies on the hijab that maintain that the hijab has been studied through the discourse of identity for immigrant Muslim women (Abdurraqib, 2005; Dwyer, 1999, Gilliat-Ray, 2010, Franks, 2000). Laila's story highlights further that she preferred the hijab as an identity marker for her, over any other thing.

Compromises in Relationships

Unlike Laila's experience of facing hostility from her husband for wearing the headscarf, one of my other participant's experiences was quite the opposite. Maya was forced by her husband to wear a headcover, in line with the typical view that Muslim men 'force' women to wear the headscarf, thus making it as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression (Ahmed, 1992; Jackson & Monk-Turner, 2015). I am not sure about using the word 'force,' but there was a continuous

negotiation between my participant and her husband about wearing the headscarf. The way Maya wore her headscarf did not look like a 'proper' Islamic head-covering. Her hair was always visible, and most of the time she wore a loose style of very small handkerchief-type of scarf tied around her face while showing her neck, and arms. After spending a lot of time with her, she once opened up and told me about it. See this excerpt from our conversation:

> *I: "Do you know when I first saw you, I got confused. I did not understand your way of dressing. This was because you were wearing a skin-tight top with see-through mesh sleeves. Your hair was shown from all sides of your headcover and only the middle of your head was covered in a mini sheer scarf, tightly tied under your chin. Seriously you look like... 'a joker?' she added, and we both laughed like crazy.*
>
> *Maya: Yes, I remember that, and you know I do not care what other people think about me. I always think of myself first and then, if I am in good mood, I think of my husband. Even that day, the headscarf was for my husband and the rest of the dress was for me. He actually doesn't care what kind of clothes I wear, seriously, it does not bother him if I wear half sleeves or even go sleeveless. You must have noticed I always wear tops above hip length, my sleeve length is never appropriate, and he never asks me anything, the only thing he is concerned about is that I should have a headcover."*
>
> *I: Yeah that is strange, my husband does not bother about a headcover at all, but he is most concerned that my tops should be long enough to cover my hips – lol! [laughs]*
>
> *Maya: Nah my one is crazy, sometimes I think he has mental issues and that is why I don't argue with him. I usually keep such mini square scarves in my handbag. I take one out before leaving home in front of him and keep it in my bag when I don't like to wear that. [Laughs again].*
>
> *I: What if he sees you doing this?*

Maya: Oh, he knows, he has seen me many times at bus stops, at work on the days I am using my headscarf in the morning and coming home without it. For him it is enough I take one in the morning. I think he knows that asking this in a forceful way might lead into serious altercations so we both fool each other and ourselves [laughs again].

I: Well, now I know you and you do not seem crazy at all [laughs]. We perceive people just by how they look, but when we know them in person, they challenge our perceptions. You did the same.

Maya: I know, by the way I also never thought about you in a good way. Before, you seemed very different from what you are now. Oh, we are so busy talking I even did not ask shall I make you some tea?

I: Yes please, I never say no to tea, you know. What time is your hubby finishing work today? I must leave before he comes. I even don't have a scarf today [laughs].

Maya: Don't worry, he will come for a tea break. He is not that scary. He respects my friends and all women. It is just me that he wants to change. And I only do certain things because I love him. I still remember my crush on him. And whenever I remember those days we spent with each other, I fall in love with him again and I ignore all the bad things and just focus on good things. Afterall, he has very small wishes. I wear the headscarf and I will live with his mother in the future, either his mother comes here, or we will go back. Apart from these two, he never interferes in my life, such as what I want to do with my career, how much I spend on shopping and my relationship with my family. He has proved to be an amazing, unconventional dad: helping in nappy changing, making bottles, feeding our children. When I was studying, he paid my fees, and he knew that I was not working so he gave me his bank card and he never asked where I spent and why. Even when I was working, he never asked me to spend any money on

house utilities and he never asked me how much money I had. He thinks as a [Muslim] husband it is his duty to look after me [money-wise] which I like about him. Keeping all this in mind, I forgive and forget his demand of wearing a headcover.

I: You are very lucky in lots of respects. And you are right, when we love someone who has lots of qualities, it is easy to forgive or ignore one. But you know, your situation is like many other Muslim women where men control the way women dress, reinforcing the existing stereotype that Muslim men 'force' women to wear 'Islamic' clothing. What do you think about this?

Maya: You know me, my situation and my story very well now. Do you think I am forced into wearing a headcover? Or I wear it because my husband would use physical force or abuse me? Also, the way he supports me financially as the majority of Muslim men do, do western women get that kind of support from their partners or spouses? I feel, I am a free woman. Look, I just pretend to wear the headscarf. I negotiate my terms if I wear it, I do it to make him happy. I sometimes laugh inside myself about how innocent he is, or how conventional his views are about Islam and Muslim women. But this is the way he is, he was brought up like this. I also pretend to wear it because I chose to compromise on certain things in my life to keep the peace in my family. I chose this so my children do not see fighting parents all the time. I am an independent woman, I would never compromise on something which is dear and close to me, but for now, my children are the most important thing in my life, and I want to raise them in the most successful way. So, I chose to compromise on little things for the sake of big life goals.

Also, what is the guarantee that other men do not control their women? Like whom to meet, how to run a family, how and where to spend money? It is not only about dressing. These are just the expectations which prevail in every family, whether it is eastern or western, whether it is a married couple

or partnership, this must even exist in LGBT couples, so why are only Muslims being stereotyped? You are a researcher, what do you think about this?

In line with her ideas about head-covering, she was committed to training her children in ways that would value inner morality rather than outside appearances. She questioned many things in Islam, including the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH). She criticised many contextual rulings and tried to see them in relation to the present times.

Maya is in her thirties and knows herself very well. She loves spending time on her own [reflecting on herself], as well as with her family, friends and neighbours. She, most of the time, does not follow societal norms and expectations of being a woman. Knowing Maya this well and understanding the reasons why she wears a headscarf sometimes challenges my researcher self, when it comes to analysing her situation. After all, using an outsider's eyes, Maya's story fits into the stereotype of Muslim men controlling their women, yet seeing it through Maya's eyes, reminds us of the compromises in all marriages. "Show me one woman who has not made any compromise in her marriage," or "show me one man who never expected anything from his wife," are statements which make me think this is the story of all women, not just of Muslim women like Maya.

Maya was a deep thinker and had developed a comparative view in analysing her situation with other Muslim and non-Muslim women. She often mentioned that she was at least better than that woman [referring to another Muslim woman] whose husband did not support her financially and also was a strict dad. She also used to draw comparisons with her family system and Aotearoa NZ family systems, saying that "our family system [referring to financial security that women get, freedom of work and yet no obligation to send money to the family] was better." However, whenever she had a fight with her husband, she would say that "their [New Zealand] women are much better off, at least they can leave their partners and move on… not like us, getting stuck with one man our whole life."

Maya's marriage was a love marriage. She admitted that she fell in love with her husband in university although at that time she knew someone who could be better as a husband, but he

wasn’t as good looking as her husband was. She also admitted that in the early years of their marriage her husband wasn’t as ‘conservative.’ My impression of meeting with Maya’s husband was that he was quite shy because he always talked to me with his eyes and head down. Maybe ‘lowering the gaze’ was his way of dealing with women.

The way Maya’s story confirms stereotypes of Muslim men controlling their women opens up many thoughtful avenues. Maya’s worldview is deeply situated in the philosophy of comparison. Maya never justifies her actions or seeks strength from her faith, as was obvious in the case of Aqilah. Maya’s story also breaks stereotypes around views on Muslim women’s forced marriages, their inability to choose the work they do or their visibilty in public spaces. Although she was wearing a hijab because her husband asked her to do so - a behaviour which some authors regard as inherently oppressive (Jackson & Monk-Turner, 2015Pasha-Zaidi, 2015), she was negotiating her hijab wearing as an act to “enhance emotional and physical intimacy in marriage” (Hodge, Husain & Zidan, 2017, p. 244).

Socialisation with Men

Like Maya, one of my other participants, Naela, took to head-covering because her husband asked her to. She explained that when she got married, she was not used to wearing a headcover. This remained the same after the marriage as well - until she started to meet her husband’s friends and their families. In her husband’s friends' circle, all women wore a headcover. According to her, “once my husband asked me if I wanted to meet with his friends and their families, I had to consider wearing the headscarf too.” For Naela, it was quite disturbing, as her husband knew her position on head-covering before their marriage. She refused to listen to him, and when their relationship got worse, she went to her parents’ house.

> *I told my parents that we had a fight, and he was asking me to wear a headscarf. You know what my father said? He said, for us it is better that you go back to your home. It is not a reason to fight but something you need to learn, to be a role model for your family.*

Naela said she felt vulnerable as she thought her parents would be her biggest support, but they sent her back. Since that day, she has been wearing a headcover. Naela said that she never felt that her head-covering was unique until she came to Aotearoa NZ. She added:

> *In New Zealand, I am the only woman at my workplace who wears a headcover, so people recognise me from a far distance. Due to my scarf, they keep a distance from me, they don't invite me to bars, so it is a kind of telling them of my beliefs without actually saying something verbally.*

This is similar to what Aqilah said about her headcover: that it is a form of communication. Naela has also been living a very happy married life. She is outgoing and has developed good friendships with her colleagues, including male staff. Her male colleagues visit her at her house, and they are good friends with her husband as well. Naela said that one of the reasons for not wearing a headcover before the marriage was that she was not mixing with any men in social and family gatherings. So, she did not feel the need to do head-covering - until her husband said so. Furthermore, she did not have the confidence to talk to strange men, however after her marriage her confidence grew. Her headcover added to her confidence in interacting with strangers. Although Naela has had to bear a lot of nasty comments in public, particularly when she is on her own, with people asking her if she has hair at all, or if she can speak English, she says "the best strategy is to ignore the ignorant."

This is another story that illustrates the ways Muslim women are controlled by their men. Again, however, seeing this story from different angles, and in more detail, brings different understandings. Naela had the choice of not socialising with family friends and not wearing a headcover, even if she went out regularly. Naela says her father never asked her to wear a headscarf, as he never brought his friends inside their house. Her husband gave her the option of meeting with his friends and their families, on the condition that she covers her head. She says that for her husband, it was social pressure, and nothing else. He did not want her friends to gossip about them.

Naela's story, along with Maya's story, conforms at one level to typical portrayals of the hijab as enforced by society (men, husbands) and as an act of women's oppression (Ahmed, 1992; Ajrouch, 2007; Al Wazni, 2015; Bruenig & Fleischmann, 2015). However, Naela's story also sheds light on how the hijab can be an empowerment strategy, a liberating factor and a means of participating in social life, including mixing with the opposite sex in public spaces (Droogsma, 2007; Hodge, Husain & Zidan, 2017; McGinty, 2014). It can allow women to access wider social relationships, especially in non-Islamic circles, such as the workplace, which can increase their social independence. For Naela, the headscarf is now a symbol of her identity and a way of conveying her values to others. The headscarf creates a distance from other men, much as the wedding ring was designed to do - but more effectively, being a broader sign - but it also allows her to have friendships with men.

The Search for a Meaning

Some women's life experiences and their search for meaning in their lives has lead them closer to religion and the headscarf was a means of doing so. Barie was the first one in her family to wear a headscarf. She too faced hostility from her family and husband, although not to an extreme, as in the case of Laila. Her husband remained annoyed, and became quiet for a few weeks, but later agreed to her decision to wear a headcover. Barie said that she often used to think about what the meaning was of her life? She found material things uninteresting. She felt suffocated in social gatherings that had no objective other than having fun. For her, fun was being "at peace with oneself." She started feeling uncomfortable at weddings and family events, both mixed gatherings. She often used to think, why do I adorn myself on occasions like this and not dress like this at home? She started questioning what would make her happy and found that it was experiences that brought her own inner peace, rather than pleasing others. This is an excerpt from her story.

> *As I went on to discover myself, I felt myself in continuous pain. I became more confused, and I found that even though we are Muslims, we have no meaning to our lives. I have lost the meaning of my life, my creation, in doing*

things for others, not for Allah. We do so many things that do not have an objective. You know, whenever I was getting ready to attend ceremonies, like putting makeup on, and dressing beautifully, I often thought that I was doing all this to get others' attention. I started comparing myself with prostitutes, who do the same thing in order to look beautiful to get people's attention. Justifications like dressing for myself became unsatisfactory to me. Finally, I stopped doing everything and I adopted simplicity. If I show you my wedding photos and the way I look today, you wouldn't even recognise me. I used to wear sleeveless dresses and now I am covered all the time and wear clothes that are not attractive. I do not wear makeup as I just do not like this. I have found an inner peace and I feel that my life has a meaning, to obey Allah. I keep very few clothes, mostly tops below hip length, straight pants and jeans. I do not wear tight revealing clothes because the headcover loses its meaning if you wear revealing clothing. But at the same time, I do not doubt the Muslim women who wear tight clothes with headscarves, particularly Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim women. Their concept and way of head-covering is very different from Muslim women living in other countries. I found them more practising Muslims as well. The Quran is part of their everyday life, and they are so gentle and harmless. But it is a big no for me, I cannot stand a dress that I am not comfortable in. I cannot stand a gathering which has lots of music and dances, I cannot stand such parties. It is just not me and I am glad and satisfied that I have found my inner peace, in simplicity, and in moderation.

Barie also mentioned that her new-found lesson of bringing simplicity into her life has saved her from many troubles and given her strength during hard times in Aotearoa NZ. For her, it was not an easy move to leave their settled life and to re-establish their family in a new country. She and her husband had seen hard times during the settlement period in Aotearoa NZ, but her headscarf and her belief that Allah would never leave them alone helped her.

Hard times were there to test us. If I had removed my headscarf at that time, things could have been easy for me, for example in a job search. But I remained consistent with my decision. I knew that the hijab was the reason that I was not invited for many job interviews. Even then, I decided not to give up, and finally as I believed, Allah helped me.

Head-covering, for the believing women, is a source of strength, and it is a physical manifestation of their belief (Al Wazni, 2015; Cole, & Ahmadi, 2003). It provides a sense of 'doing something for Allah,' or 'pleasing Allah' (McGinty, 2014), giving a psychological satisfaction to the believers. It is important for their emotional well-being (Hodge, Husain & Zidan, 2017; McGinty, 2014), as well as an enhanced level of body esteem (Husain & Aziz, 2014). Barie accepted the challenge to continue wearing the headscarf only for Allah, especially in a Western society, where it is attached to negative stereotypes, so that Allah wouldn't abandon her during times of hardship. She found that the hardships only strengthened her belief.

Naeema, too, started wearing the hijab after recovering from a life-threatening illness. Naeema invited me to her house for dinner. While she was in the kitchen I had to go to the toilet, which was at the end of their corridor. On my way to the toilet, I noticed her photos on the walls of the corridor, where she looked a different person. In our discussions before, she had never mentioned that she had started head-covering at a later stage of her life. Since I had met her, she had been wearing the headcover, and so I assumed she always had. It was at that dinner that she shared how a life-threatening disease led to this decision.

I got very sick a few years ago. The doctors did not know what had happened to me. I was in the hospital and then I stopped responding. I went into a coma and that was the most terrible time of my life. I was listening to everything and wanted to talk but I could not. My own self was not in my control. I felt helpless and weak. I thought, what if I die now? Would it matter at all, and to whom? So, I decided to search for ways to get closer to Allah as it was my belief that only He could save me. Can you imagine when

even the doctors lost hope and were unable to diagnose the disease, my family, my husband, my kids, and my friends all prayed for my health, and I recovered, miraculously. This incident changed me, and my approach to life. The head scarf was one part of this change, it is a constant reminder to me that we were created with a purpose. This headscarf makes me stay down to earth. For me it is kind of an alarm clock – a reminder of my creation.

We had a long discussion at the dinner table. Many other women were also there, and they shared their experiences and motivations for wearing the headscarf. One of the women said she had only started wearing it on the request of her teenaged sons. "My sons asked me one day, Mum, you are so nice, a helping and caring woman, you do everything that Islam asks, what if you start wearing the headscarf too?" She said, the way her sons requested, she could not say no. She loved this practice and for her it was also very practical because "being a working professional and wearing the headscarf means you are saving a lot of time." This woman was also going through family problems, separation and divorce. For her, the headscarf was also a shield, a protection, from other men and the community, helping them to recognise her as a 'good woman.'

Aotearoa NZ and Freedom of Expression

Another participant, Sania, adopted head-covering when she saw a lesbian couple practising freely their belief. Sania had been living in Aotearoa NZ for a long time and she always wanted to wear a headscarf, but she had never gathered enough courage to wear the headscarf until she met the lesbian couple, enrolling their child at school. She said that couple made her realise that we live in Aotearoa NZ and the country respects our rights to practise our beliefs freely. Sania said:

Two women came to my office and started talking about enrolling their child. Initially I misunderstood them as friends but when they filled out the child's enrolment form and used their names as parents ... I got to know their sexual orientation, a homosexual couple. They both were very confident. I

> *realised that we are living in a free society. I thought if they can be so confident and committed to their belief and practise freely what they thought was right, so why could I not do this? I always wanted to wear the hijab, but honestly, I thought what people would think of me? My job involved dealing with lots of people, young kids and their parents and I did not want to offend them. But this incident proved to be a life changing incident for me.*

She added "it took me decades though to find this courage. I can't be more grateful to that couple that made me brave enough." Sania's story has a lot to offer to understand Muslim women's fears of those who want to wear a headcover but are restrained due to attached prejudices against head-covering. Many studies have highlighted this point that fear of ostracism within mainstream society has impacts on Muslim women's clothing and hijab choices (for example see, Abdurraqib, 2005; Dunn & Hopkins, 2016; Pasha-Zaidi, Masson & Pennington, 2014; Soltani, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2022). Sania also feared that her hijab might get her into trouble of some kind. Although she was a business owner, manager and interacted with other New Zealanders on a daily basis, as well as being active in the Muslim community, it took her 'decades' to become comfortable with herself as she wanted to be.

Sania's story also speaks to the Comparing Habitus in the way she compared herself with the lesbian couple in the sense of 'being free.' Sania did not straight away start her head-covering practice after meeting that couple, but took many months to consider it. She said she had been thinking all the while about what might happen, how she could be othered, what impact it might have on her business, and the fear of being isolated by non-Muslim friends - all of these were obvious concerns. Sania came from a country where Muslims are in a minority. She moved to Aotearoa NZ at a young age, but she had always feared practising her faith freely. She was very reflective, comparative and aware in almost every aspect of her life.

Critiquing Gender Equality within Western Cultures

Sania finds the courage to follow her belief in the equality of rights of Aotearoa NZ citizens. Eby also believes in equality but in her case, it is gender equality which is most important to her. She says women are not only equal to men but are more capable of multi-tasking, more talented, more resilient. Yet patriarchal systems that exist in every society, western or eastern, have confined women to an object of (sexual) entertainment by capitalising and commercialising women's bodies.

Eby, who has worn a headcover from an early age, says that she had never reflected on her practice till she came to Aotearoa NZ. For her it was out of the question to reconsider her practice, as this was Allah's will. She was a working professional and for her the headscarf was her companion in difficult times. It gave her strength and made her feel equal to her male colleagues. According to her, male colleagues need to interact with women's brains (minds) rather than their looks.

> *I do it, so I am recognised as a human, not as a woman. I do not wear makeup at work, I just want people to interact with my brain, see my skills and knowledge, not because I am a woman with high heels and short skirts. I don't have a problem with women who dress according to the feminine constructs of beauty, but why don't men wear high heels, short skirts, and sleeveless tops? This is just because it has become a norm that men wear full, decent clothes and women don't. This is a western bias, I would say. Don't men feel hot in summer? Or women feel cold in winter? Why must women show themselves? Keeping Islam aside, I do not like this. I love to be myself, without make up and covered in clothes just like men. I don't wear ethnic clothes at work, I wear western tops and full-length pants and nice comfy flat shoes. I even choose neutral colours just like the colours of men's clothing, simple, boring, nude colours. But still because of the hijab I get picked on. My daughters did not want to wear the headscarf and I totally respect their decision. Many people ask me if at some point I will force my*

teenagers to use a head-covering. No I won't. I have told them how important it is in Islam to cover the hair and how important it is for them to guard their modesty, but it will be their decision. My older daughter decided to wear the headcover but soon she stopped. My younger daughter follows the footsteps of her older sister, not mine [laughs]. I and my husband are fine with it. We just don't want them to marry a non-Muslim man. This is the only matter we are reluctant about.

Eby is in her early fifties and works full-time. In her look she tries to be a traditional Muslim woman because of the style of her scarf. When my friend referred me to her, even I thought for a while 'would she be interested in talking to me?' This was my bias from when I had seen her before, and she didn't appear friendly to me. Our conversation came as a surprise. She was a true feminist woman, believing strongly in gender equality. Her conversation was filled with questions such as "Why women? Why us? How long are we supposed to work more than men and get less pay and reward?"

We women, working or not [in paid work], get to do double work and our work remains invisible. We are expected to be a good wife, mother, daughter, sister and then a beautiful woman who cleans the house and yet is dressed beautifully, her figure like a model in a catwalk show, and her intellect like one can talk about everything with her, woohoo, how many double standards, how much expectation. Wait, decide: are you asking all these things from a woman, and not a magical creature.

Eby said that the hijab saves her a lot of time in doing her hair, and her long cardigan (like the Abaya, or Muslim gown) over her tops means she does not spend too much time on clothing. She said, "I just don't want to get overtired to maintain fake societal standards." For Eby, the hijab was a tool to express dissatisfaction about "Western" societal and fashion values as projected in the media (Droogsma, 2007; Zimmerman, 2015). This is in line with the study by Paz & Kook (2021), which highlights how the wearing of a hijab for Muslim women was "as an expression of active agency, as a tool of political resistance against the attempts to silence them,

and an expression of independence, expressed in the control they demonstrated over their bodies and the choices in their lives” (p. 2988-9).

Eby uses the hijab as a tool to express her freedom, independence and the notion of equality, while there were other Muslim women, for example Farzand, who critique the practice of hijab wearing as being oppressive and refuse to wear it.

Critiquing Gender Equality within Islam

Farzand, who has opted out of the headcover, is even more assertive and more vocal about equality between men and women. Farzand admits having no religious knowledge or references to support her position. She did not want to read the Quran or research religious knowledge. According to her all religions were there to supress women.

She used to wear the *dupatta,* mainly for cultural reasons, in her home country. She stopped wearing the headscarf after coming to Aotearoa NZ. She believes the headscarf is a way of policing women. In her own words:

> *The order for purdah should be same for men and women, so why don't men wear the headscarf? Why must women be covered so men do not see them? Why are women responsible for sending men to heaven? It is just not right. I do not believe that Allah could say so. How can the creator of the universe be so unfair and discriminatory? He has created men and women both, he would never be so unjust, but these are just men, who have used religion to supress women, so they can enjoy their life.*

Farzand is unlike most women I spoke with whose discourse generally centred around their husbands and food. Instead, she discusses politics, religion and its interpretation, as well as global issues of injustice and security, Netflix series and so on. She is an assertive and emotional woman, who takes on initiatives for capacity building among women. She also openly debates with her husband on various issues. Initially I thought that her husband understood her point of

view as Farzand gave me this impression in the initial years of our friendship, but later I recognised that they had conflicting views on almost every issue: for example, the role and status of women in Islam. However, she told me that her husband had done some ‘experiments,’ such as drinking alcohol and smoking, before ‘returning’ to religion and becoming religious in his everyday practice. According to her:

> *Now, if he [her husband] questions me about how I should dress, or what I should do to be a good Muslim, I always tell him that you have experienced everything in your life and then you have chosen what is right for you. Let me explore my life myself, as well. I am not a teenage girl, and you are not my dad. We are husband and wife, which means we are adults. I do not want to be dictated to, and I would not dictate to you. Living with each other, we are two independent human beings with different interests and set of minds. In the beginning of our married life, we used to fight a lot, but now after ten years we better understand each other. He does not impose things on me, and neither do I. We love and respect each other but it is not loving like love birds who cling to each other all the time, do everything together. We even share almost equal time with our kids. Life is not an easy thing and living in a minority makes it more difficult. We are already stressed enough that I do not want to take on more stress, thinking about what a Muslim woman should wear? I hardly get time to think of such things. I have so much going on in my mind and life that this would be the last thing on my mind, how a Muslim woman should dress.*

Farzand is not in favour of any dress code for Muslim women. For her, women and men are equal, and they should be treated equally. She always focuses on how women are not responsible for men’s actions. Men should be strong enough to own their actions and guard their own beliefs. Her own beliefs were influenced more by her cultural and social up-bringing than by Islamic texts. Like Inaya, who doesn’t seek authentic religious sources to justify her practices, Farzand does not feel the need to back up her position from Islamic sources. She still wears a headcover when

visiting her home country during holidays, in order to avoid the undue attention which women get if not wearing a head scarf; a practical rather than religious decision.

When we had the above conversations, she told me that she was having a good relationship with her husband. A couple of years later (maybe when her trust in me grew) she told me that her husband was getting religious and had developed an inclination towards conservative interpretations of religion and wanted her to behave in a traditional way. For Farzand, it was out of the question that someone would dictate to her, particularly using religion as a tool of policing. Despite increasing arguments with her husband, she wanted to compromise with him for her children's sake. However, she said that there were a few things she could not tolerate. She said "some things are the very core of me. I am all my ideology, and I would not compromise on things that make me." She suspected that her husband had started socialising with men of their community who had conservative understandings of religion and that this was why he had changed.

Farzand noted a particular, major change in her husband's attitude. Initially when they had moved to Aotearoa NZ, they did not have many Muslim friends. They used to socialise with people from their workplaces or their neighbourhood. At that time her husband was not demanding that his wife should look more religious. It could also be that it was their honeymoon period as they moved to Aotearoa NZ straight after getting married. However, as their friendships within Muslim community grew, her husband started getting more critical of Farzand's dress. Farzand said that "he started comparing me with his friend's wives who were mostly homemakers and more inclined towards religion compared to me." This was the change of context, which Farzand and her husband were internalising differently. Farzand was becoming more vocal, aware of her rights, but her husband was taking another path, becoming aware of his rights as a Muslim man which he was learning from his new Muslim friends. Although Farzand never wore a proper head-covering, even before moving to Aotearoa NZ, she did not ever wear three-quarter length skirts either. These are new learnings, made in a new context for both Farzand and her husband, which were very much shaped by comparisons.

Head-covering in Change of Context

A change of context for another woman, Inaya, had some similarities with Farzand. For Inaya, head-covering was not a permanent religious disposition; rather it was a cultural requirement to which she always responded when needed. In her home country, she did not wear a head-covering until she joined a Co-ed University. She said that after joining the university, she had to travel between cities by herself and she found head-covering was a sort of protection for her. This is very similar to Aqilah who wore both a headcover and full Niqab when she started college and began to use public transport. Aqilah removed her face-covering after moving to Aotearoa NZ but continued her head-covering practice. However, Inaya felt that her head-covering was not helping her in the new national context.

> *When I came to New Zealand, I used to wear the headcover. In my home country I started head-covering when I went to university. I felt the need of a headcover as it was not only a protection from the unwanted male gaze, but it was also an indicator of piety among girls. After coming to New Zealand many years ago, I kept doing the head-covering, not in a traditional way but in a looser style. However, I felt an unspoken distance from my non-Muslim co-workers. I worked in a lab, and we had so many combined projects that needed a lot of communication and coordination. I got the feeling that my colleagues thought I was not very social. I tried to be more social by doing things I usually did not do, such as attending all the social gatherings and making efforts to mix with my colleagues. Then I wore the headscarf occasionally, keeping it around my neck or over my chest. I did wear loose style tops to keep my modesty on days when I did not wear the headscarf. Believe me, this made a big difference. Suddenly, people started talking to me, passing smiles. For me, the headscarf was not even a religious choice. I felt it culturally appropriate to do this. However, I feel for those women for whom it is a matter of their faith and religion. They go through a lot of stress.*

Inaya now works in a managerial position. She has developed a critical understanding of Islam and Muslim practices. However, whenever we talked in-depth, she did not ever give religious references to justify her responses, just like Farzand. She would only give examples, showing that the whole point of the headscarf, which was modesty, meant not to stand out (show-off) by wearing revealing clothes. According to her, if the headscarf makes someone stand out, then the whole point of *purdah* becomes irrelevant.

She thinks that many Muslim practices are culturally rooted, and so irrelevant in this modern age. Once she said, "there is nothing in the Quran about the variety of sea creatures, mainly just fish are mentioned, and this is because the Quran was revealed in a desert area where there was no sea close by." She used many such examples to convey her understanding of the Quran as contextually rooted, arguing that the Quran must be understood in the context of the needs of present times. She wore the headscarf when she thought it would bring her safety, comparable to many studies showing that the hijab or Islamic dress bring perceptions of safety and belonging for their participants (Paz & Kook, 2021). Furthermore, Inaya added that she would take the headscarf off when she thought it was becoming a barrier in her communication, as a sign of "otherness" (Bilge, 2010; Bullock, 2002; Zine, 2006).

Inayah's story not only resembles Aqilah's, but also echoes Naela's, since socialisation is the key motive in both stories. The only difference is that Naela took *on* the headcover when socialising with her friends, and Inayah took the headscarf *off* in social contexts with her colleagues. This confirms the findings of some of the literature which highlight that the hijab or Islamic clothing is multi-purposed, agentic, and often a political decision (Afshar, 2008; Jamal, 2011).

Like Inaya, Eenai also stopped her head-covering practice when she found out that it was not helping her in small town Aotearoa NZ. However, unlike Inaya, Eenai had knowledge of an Islamic text i.e., from both the Quran and Hadith. Eenai chose to wear the *Niqab* after being influenced by Islamic texts, but gave it up after coming to Aotearoa NZ.

> *Wearing the niqab was the most beautiful experience of my life. I did it for equality. The idea that all women are equal took my heart. No matter,*

whether beautiful, ugly, dark, light, with big noses or small eyes, they are all equal in Niqab. How beautiful! It is better to hear remarks like 'go back to your home' than 'she has a big nose,' or a dark skin. I wore Niqab in New Zealand too, but I lived in a very small town in New Zealand where I was the only one wearing Niqab. It started working as a barrier to my integration within the community, so I took it off. I would not have met my husband if I had kept wearing Niqab. I met my husband in New Zealand who later converted to Islam. So yes, I did wear Niqab when I felt like it. In New Zealand, however, I felt it became a barrier. I wear full sleeves and long length dresses though, no matter how hot I feel. I also spend a good amount of time with my kids to logically explain Islamic values to them. They often ask critical questions, like why do other women wear clothes that show their body parts? I told them that if you come across such women, you just lower your gaze and then pray to Allah that they are blessed and forgiven. I tell them that everyone has their own ways of life, and we are not the ones to judge. We need to stick with our values and the rest we should leave to Allah.

Eenai was born and raised in a minority religious group. She has visited the country of her parents' birth only twice. Her views are different from those who were born in a Muslim majority country and then moved to Aotearoa NZ. Her views and reasons for donning the hijab are different from other women, and are based on her understanding of religious texts.

Critical Evaluation of Religious Texts

Inaya, without reading the Quran in detail, always referred to it more generally by relying on her overall cultural and social knowledge alongside her observations, concluding that the Quran should be understood and implied according to contemporary needs. This was one of the reasons that Inaya opted out of head-covering. However, another woman, Timara, does not wear a headscarf because she believes that it is not a compulsory rule for her. She studied the Quran in

depth. Her reasons do not come from cultural and social experiences but from reading Islamic texts critically. Timara told me that she did not find a clear, single view in a verse in the Quran about women's head-covering. At the time of our conversation, she said she would send me references to the verses she had found. She explained that there were only three verses in the Quran out of six thousand six hundred and sixty (6,666) that are regarding *purdah*. She was very clear in her argument and articulated it very well. She says:

> *The rulings of purdah are equally enforced on both men and women. In fact, the verses start by addressing men first, and then women. None of the three verses mentioned in the Quran uses the word Hijab. Also, in the Arabic language, Hijab does not mean a piece of cloth, it is an imaginary separation, a partition. In the Quran the word Khimar has been used, which means an outer covering. Now, any layer that is not your undergarment, is Khimar for you [she holds her top by a corner] this is Khimar, an outer layer. We also need to understand the context when these verses were revealed. The main purpose of the verses was to protect women. I have read pre-Arab history, and slave women used to walk bare chested, which meant they were available to men. The rich women used to wear Khimar, the outer garment. The verses thus revealed that all believing women should cover themselves with a Khimar, so that they would be known and respected. Now, in this era, if women are not protected because of the headscarf, why do they need to do it? Ahh… a long debate.*

She refers to the Quran many times in our conversation. She says that whenever she gave her opinion on head-covering to other Muslim women, they immediately assumed that she had never read the Quran.

> *Last time, I had this discussion at a women's get-together, and a woman told me that I should read the Quran. This made me angry, and I asked 'how can you assume that I have not read the Quran? I have read the Quran*

> *thoroughly, and multiple times. I do not even read the Quran traditionally [just reading the text in the Arabic language without understanding the meaning], I always read it with a translation.' The Quran is not here to be read for rewards, but to understand and follow. I only read the translations.*

In her opinion modest dress is what Muslim women need without linking it with head-covering. During our conversation, at multiple points, she brought up the issue of sex, and how men were depicted as devils. "It seems all men are portrayed as animals who just need sex, and women are born to serve them." She questioned a hadith which says wives should be available to their husbands when they want intimacy. To her, women and their sexual needs are suppressed, and men's sexual needs are over exaggerated. "How can a religion humiliate men? It is an attack on their morality, their dignity. They are much more than just a sexual being."

Timara has developed her position based on Islamic texts and has religious references for everything she talks about. She belongs to one of the minority sects within Muslims. As such, she says that when we belong to a minority, we are very mindful of our beliefs; but when we belong to a minority within a minority (referring to her minority sect among Muslims in Aotearoa NZ), it takes us to another level. This status of the minority within a minority makes her read more about Islam. She considers herself a pious, practising Muslim but uses religious texts to support her position.

Like Timara, Salma also says that head-covering was not compulsory for Muslim women, but Salma herself, who had been wearing a headscarf for many years, could not stop this practice. She also reads the Quran in detail and understands the relevance of certain verses in context. She says;

> *It took me a long time to reach to the decision that headcovering is more a cultural practice rather than a religious one. I heard a number of Islamic scholars and I reached the conclusion that the religion of Islam is the most uplifting religion for women. Although there are certain areas where I am still seeking answers, I have come to peace knowing that in the age of*

women slavery, burying girls alive, no rights for women in property [….] in that context Islam brought many novel ideas for women's rights and protection. Arab tribes were wild, illiterate, and had no respect for women and the weak. Slavery was customary. At that time Islam introduced these ideas for women and the weak. My own experience of a manager and managing a group of twenty-five people, I know how hard it is to introduce something new. I have to work it out through existing structures just to bring in a new idea, so if I see in that context what Islam offered for women, I am convinced that it was liberating for women, empowering and uplifting. What most people [including scholars] do is to see things out of context and apply them in today's world, assuming if it was Islamic practice hundreds of years ago, it can be relevant today. Some rulings were context specific. Just take an example, there were no phones, no internet, at that time so how do people define rules to use the internet in Islamic ways? No, things don't work this way. If New Zealand can be proud of itself by being the first country to give women voting rights, why can't I [Muslims] be proud by knowing that Islam liberated women from slavery, saved them from burying girls alive and gave them rights in property when there was not any such practices existing. People ask why a Muslim man can marry four women at the same time, they don't know that in the context when this order was revealed, Islam was putting a limit on men's marriages. Because Arabs used to have uncountable women in their Harem. Islam legalised their relationship with women by making them wives and then put a limit of four and, yet if you read the full verse in the Quran that says… only marry them [four women] if you can give them equal justice and you wouldn't be able to do so' means the Quran is inherently telling you not to marry more than one. But no one reads the full verse and sees this in that context [….] so when I got convinced that head-covering isn't a requirement for today's Muslim woman living in western countries where the purpose of the hijab was to protect women and these

times it doesn't give that protection, there is no point in wearing a headcover. So, I decided to take the headcover off. But soon I realised fear of hell can be compromised, but fear of others, what people think of me, was unavoidable.

Salma is a well composed woman who was working at a managerial position. She was confident and very logical in her reasoning and discussions. She firmly believes that the rule of the headscarf was mainly for the Prophet's wives. She reflected on how in a context where the practice of headcovering could not provide protection, the ruling on headcover [if it were for all women] becomes nullified. She is well researched on the issue but yet caught up in thoughts of 'what other people will think of her if she removes her headcover.' She says she doesn't want to be a point of discussion and for people to tell her children that your mother has gone modern. Her daughter doesn't wear a headscarf, but her daughter is friends with many *hijabi*s. She says she discusses her point of view in gatherings that have 'openness' and 'flexibility' for such dialogues. She does not share her views with those who are 'fixed' and 'strict' in their thoughts and practices, as it is just a waste of time to have a discussion with such people.

This issue of undoing the headcover was not uncommon but Salma's story is unusual in that she firmly believes that there is no religious reason in wearing head-covering, yet she could not find the courage to remove it. Another woman, Deena, who is not clear on her own take on women and the headscarf, said she wants to remove her headcover, but couldn't face people afterwards.

People have seen me in a headcover for the last eight years, it has become my identity. Now if I remove it, I don't know what kind of a reaction I may have. I just don't have the courage to face that.

Deena started head-covering as a cultural and religious norm in her country, but now she says although she has no religious motivation for wearing the headscarf, she still does it. She loves her scarf that has become her identity, but she wouldn't mind removing it if she moves to another country [if she did not know the community].

The stories of these women highlight how besides their understanding of religious texts, they regard the hijab as a cultural tradition. Since women are assigned the "role of bearers of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community" (Moghadam, p. 4), it comes to them to carry on with this tradition. Many writers have pointed out the importance of culture and values in Muslim women's clothing practices (Dwyer, 1999, 2008; Kahf, 2003; Lewis, 2007; Shirazi, 2000). For example, Shirazi (2000) highlights versatility in veiling practice which has no fixed meaning and depends upon the cultural context. Similarly, Lewis (2007) regards clothing practices (including the hijab), and other expressions of modesty and even makeup, as dependant on the cultures of Muslim women.

Head-covering as a Family Tradition

In a similar extension of the influence of culture on Muslim women's clothing, the role of family tradition was also shown to be one of the influencing factors. Unlike Timara, who did not wear a head-covering because she believed it was not compulsory; and Inaya, who considered head-covering as a social and cultural need; and Farzand, for whom gender equality in every matter including dress was important; there were many women who did not reflect on their head-covering practice. Rather they followed head-covering as a given, consistent with their having been raised in a family tradition.

Zaeen who never wore a head-covering, had never thought about why she did not wear a headscarf until I asked her.

> *I have not seen my mother doing it, neither my elder sisters, nor my cousins and friends. My dad and brothers never talked about this. This is how I grew up. We are Muslims and we often pray, my family stays away from alcohol and haram food, we are not allowed to marry any non-Muslim and that's it. We did fasts in Ramadan and my parents even performed a Hajj. The head-covering was out of the conversation in our family and we were comfortable with this. I do not think the Hijab makes anyone more and less Muslim. Our faith is between us and God, nothing else matters.*

I felt that our conversation regarding the headcover made Zaeen uncomfortable. Her facial expressions suggested that she was wondering if this conversation really mattered. She thought that women who wore the hijab were basically following their family practice. She asked, 'why Allah would judge women on a piece of cloth, when there were so many other more important things?'

> *I always feel uncomfortable with this idea of women's dress. It is something that I always struggle over and find hard to understand. Muslims need to be good humans first, and it will automatically make them good Muslims.*

Zaeen's story is similar to Eby's for whom the head-covering practice was rooted in her family tradition. She grew up seeing her mother and close family following the practice and she took on the practice from an early age. However, Eby became more reflective when she came to Aotearoa NZ, whilst Zaeen was still uncomfortable while talking about head-covering status. Both stories are similar, yet different.

This elaborates the point that Muslim women's practices are a combination of cultural and family traditions. For example, Dwyer (2000) stresses that Muslim women's identities are a combination of different cultures and the values they adhere to, reflected in their clothing practices. Along with culture and family tradition, the economic status of Muslim women also impacts on their clothing pattern (Dwyer, 1999, 2008).

I observed Zaeen covering her head during Ramadan, when she visited the masjid and at some the community gatherings. Zaeen's position on head-covering was *occasional*. Over the years of our friendship she became more reflective in many other matters. She says "I felt discrimination at work despite my best efforts to mix and mingle [assimilate]." She says "as a woman of colour we have to do extra work to prove our worth." She also says that in the early years of her work she never asked for flexible work hours, but when she asked to start and finish her shifts early in the fasting month, she was not accommodated, despite being senior staff. The reflexive journey for Zaeen was slow. Despite not letting herself engage in the head-covering debate, she often used to talk about how much money she spends on buying high end cultural dresses to wear on

Eid and community gatherings. Whenever she saw me wearing dresses or skirts that were a little above the ankle, she would say that that her husband would not approve of her wearing skirts and dresses above her ankles. She constantly compares herself with others in almost every matter of life: who cooks better and worse than her, who has a better or worse house than her, who wears which clothes and why she likes and dislikes them. Zaeen was not at all talkative or vocal when we initially met a few years ago, but over time she became strongly opinionated and aware of what she has and how an ideal life should look.

Head-covering as a Symbol to Represent Muslims

Zaeen's position contrasted with Hamina's who stopped wearing her headscarf when she made friends with a *non-hijabi* Muslim. Hamina says that a headscarf openly labels a woman as Muslim and thus she has a high level of responsibility to maintain that conduct. She was inspired by her friend whom she found more Muslim than herself. Hamina said:

> *My friend was so good on the inside, helping others, doing charity and volunteering, but never wore a head-covering. I met many women wearing a headcover, but they were not good in their dealings. I have seen hijabis lying, backbiting and cheating on others. After I met my friend, I thought that I was not ready to cover my own head, which meant I was telling others I was Muslim, without carrying out and practising what Islam said. If my friend started wearing the headcover, she would be a perfect Muslim, but I cannot suggest that to her. I am way behind. I will reconsider wearing the hijab one day, when I will feel it is the right time. Announcing myself Muslim in this society means I am preaching my religion. This is a huge responsibility, and I am not ready for this.*

Hamina considers that the headscarf means representing Muslims and Islamic teaching in the public eye. She wants to correct herself first, by practising all the basic teachings of Islam, and would start to wear a headscarf when she considered she was a good enough Muslim. This is a unique way of thinking about a headcover.

This logic has been used for both opting in and opting out of wearing the headcover. While Hamina keeps the headscarf at the end of her journey towards Muslim virtue, another participant, Abeer, places it top of the list of ways to *become* religious and pious.

Abeer was of the view that some Islamic practices were easy to follow, while others took a very long time.

> *I know I am not a perfect woman. I have some really bad habits, like gossiping about other people. I am not gentle in my behaviour as I get irritated very easily. I lose patience over minor things. However, I wear the hijab. I think that this [wearing a headcover] will police me and my activities, it will act as a constant reminder of who I am and how should I behave. Whenever I am going to do something wrong it will serve as a reminder that I need to correct myself. This is what I can do at the very least. Habits take ages to change but this is something that I can do straight away.*

In both these narratives, the ways that social experience impacts on the decision to wear the hijab can be seen. These women are similar in age and cultural background, but their approaches towards the headscarf differ. One thinks that the hijab should be taken when one becomes a truly practising Muslim in all respects, while the other is of the view that the hijab can provide a base to being a good practising Muslim. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many studies have understood the relationship of the hijab and Muslim identity (Abdurraqib, 2005; Dwyer, 1999, Gilliat-Ray, 2010, Franks, 2000). In both stories the life experiences of women are different, however, the hijab is highly valued and viewed through a religious lens and as a depiction of Muslim women in public. So, both these women regard the hijab as an identity marker.

Conclusion

In this chapter I draw on Muslim women's understanding and practice of head-covering to argue that head-covering is a social, cultural, and religious issue, and there are multiple reasons for practising or not practising head-covering. The chapter highlights that similar reasons can shape

women's experiences of opting in and opting out of head-covering practice. For example, under the heading of *Head-covering as a symbol to represent Muslims*, Hamina opts *out* of the head-covering practice while Abeer *starts* head-covering. Similarly, in the *Family Tradition* section, Zaeen and Eby both follow family traditions - but in different ways.

The chapter also shows that head-covering is not a once-for-all-time decision. The practice is changeable, depending on the context. The chapter argues that there is no one rationale behind the decision to wear or not wear a head-covering within the Muslim communities of Aotearoa NZ. The motivations behind use of a headcover vary, and it seems that for many women the matter remains unresolved and open to further transformation.

Head-covering was a space where I could see Comparing Habitus at work, as women compared various ways in which to decide what to do: how and when to wear head-covering in a new field; how to use it as a tool to negotiate their relationships; as a strategy to socialize with men; to find meaning in their life; to practise their understanding of Islam. Behind their negotiations was a process of comparison – of their present self with their past self; of their sense of their self-compared to what they think others will think of them; of their actual self with an ideal 'good Muslim woman' - with the goal of finding a way to have a good life in Aotearoa NZ and to be a good Muslim woman. Through such comparisons within themselves and other people, texts, or scholars, they developed Comparing Habitus (which we can see in other fields as well) and thus the very disposition of Muslim women through which they are generally identified and understood: *Head-covering*, remains in a state of *becoming,* depending on the conditions of *fields.* Further, it is one of the ways in which a Comparing Habitus becomes instilled, as a disposition that women also exhibit and develop in other fields.

The next chapter explores immigrant Muslim women's negotiations in locating dress-patterns or styles of dress, and making a proper Islamic or Muslim outfit, with or without a headcover. It focuses on the overall clothing practices of these women, highlighting in more detail the meanings that women attach to a proper Islamic outfit.

CHAPTER SIX: CLOTHING BEYOND HEAD-COVERING

The chapter explores immigrant Muslim women's negotiations in putting together a 'proper' Islamic or Muslim outfit, with or without a headcover. As is becoming obvious (in the previous chapter), not all Muslim women consider head-covering a mandatory part of Muslim attire. This chapter focuses on the overall clothing practices of women by highlighting the meanings that women attach to a proper Muslim outfit. The chapter also shows the struggles, challenges, and creativity of these women in creating a proper Muslim outfit in Aotearoa NZ.

The chapter details women's experiences of virtual and in-store shopping in Aotearoa NZ, their strategies for creating a Muslim outfit: such as mixing and matching, contrasting, layering, altering, using accessories. The chapter also shows that through proper Muslim dress, women perform certain functions in this society that include preserving their traditions by passing them to their children, managing their relationship with their husband, navigating between western and Muslims cultural contexts, maintaining their respect within the Muslim community and identity in a non-Muslim context, and participating in leisure activities.

The existing research on Muslim women's clothing mostly revolves around head-covering (Ajrouch, 2007; Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2011; Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Gilliat-Ray, 2010, Foot, 2000; Franks, 2000; Moors, 2009; Ruby, 2006). Even the studies that focus on clothing overall see women through the lens of piety, modesty, and Muslim identity (Almila, 2015; Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer & Crang, 2002; Mohammad 2005; Soltani, Johnston & Longhurst, 2022). The women in my research did not talk about piety while discussing their dress choices. Some women in the research did mention modesty as a background context to convey what they meant by modesty in clothing, but they did not refer to it when talking about everyday dress choices or how to dress to an occasion. They did however refer to fashion and different styles.

The understanding of modesty also appears in a variety of forms and degrees. For some women, modesty is related to head-covering as well as to a fully covered mode of dress, leaving the face and hands in view, while for others modesty means wearing a sleeveless blouse with a knee

length skirt, and for a few others, it falls in between these two ends of the spectrum. For some Muslim women to view their manner of dress only through the lens of modesty reduces all other aspects of it such as fashion, style and efforts that go into thinking and choosing a particular dress.

Hence, I mainly use the phrases ‘proper Muslim outfit' or 'proper Muslim dress,’ rather than saying ‘modest or pious dress.’ In this way, I do not reduce Muslim women’s clothing to just piety or modesty, but try to show the complexity and richness of ways to dress, as well as documenting the becoming and comparing aspects of their clothing choices.

In order to create a proper Muslim outfit, the comparing sites are mostly cross-cultural, involving Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, many women compare the price, quality, and cultural norms of clothing practices to their home countries, and reflect upon how they modified, or had to modify their clothing practices after coming to Aotearoa NZ. The pressure, or need to bring about a deliberate change, shows the sites of comparing and becoming.

The chapter is divided into two parts. I begin the first part by highlighting everyday contemporary shopping practices of these women within and outside Aotearoa NZ, both in physical and virtual stores. Their narratives show how these women remain at the borders of mainstream practice, and feel either excluded or ‘forcefully included,’ when shopping. The subsequent section discusses how despite the barriers, women not only find strategies for managing their clothing options in ways that support and express their beliefs, but also find ways to use and modify them in order to integrate into Aotearoa NZ. Both parts show sites of comparison throughout their narratives, which help to understand and analyse women’s Comparing Habitus.

Part One: Shopping within and Outside Aotearoa NZ

Here I follow women as they buy clothes from stores inside and outside Aotearoa NZ and wear them to communicate their Muslimness. Their stories reveal how quite ordinary clothes, available in stores, when worn with modifications can carry a different meaning, both for the wearers and for others. While shopping and window shopping for clothes is considered a leisure

activity, this is not the case for majority of the women in my study. Shopping for them remains a high-intensity act of cognitive processing, filled with comparative evaluations, and projections into the possible consequences of their selections. Their descriptive discourse is filled with projective formulations, framed as ‘if,’ ‘I wish’ and ‘I could.’

For many of my participants, shopping for a proper Muslim outfit within Aotearoa NZ was very challenging, if not impossible. It was not only about the availability of their desired clothing in stores, but also about finding the desired styles of proper Muslim clothing. Many women I interviewed wanted long sleeved tops, full length maxis, and full-length skirts. *Hijabi* women also wanted different styles of scarves. If they found a dress that fit with their criteria it would be either in a different colour (mostly in black) or sometime the fabrics would be of a different variety. Furthermore, full priced items would be expensive and when these go on sale, there would be very limited sizes. Many women’s experiences are that they always remain on the outskirts of shopping activity.

Shopping on the Outskirts

These women had feelings of exclusion while shopping for clothes in mainstream Aotearoa NZ outlets. Inclusiveness means in part the availability of clothes in a variety of patterns and styles, but also the attitudes and behaviours of other shoppers present at that time, and the welcoming behaviours of shopkeepers. My participants felt that they were excluded from some part of the whole shopping process. Alia shared her experience of ‘feeling different’ in one of the stores. She said:

> *I understand if other people look at us differently [referring to her headcover], I mean with curiosity or like ‘what are you doing here?' - but shopkeepers must not behave like this. For them, we are their customers. Or maybe people like us don’t buy much or look weird when shopping? I often get intimidated with how salespersons look at me. Sometimes I only buy things to make an impression that I am not just looking.*

Alia wears simple scarves, sometimes two; one to cover her head and another to drape around her neck. Alia told me that she sometimes bought clothes she did not much like, just to show that she was there to shop, to feel more worthy of shopping, and to act on behalf of other hijab-wearing Muslim women. She hardly ever goes shopping by herself. Most of the time she would go with friends. Alia feels a form of social pressure, particularly when there are not many people at the stores. Once a shop manager had asked her where she generally buys her clothes. Alia had replied: *"generally from anywhere."* The manager responded: *"I thought you women have specialised stores."* Alia said the way the manager said this was *"literally insulting and saying like leave the shop and go and buy from your specialised stores."*

Alia has a very strong personality. She does most things by herself and takes all the important decisions in her family. She does not get offended easily. It was surprising for me to hear Alia saying this. Alia was not alone in sharing such an experience. Timara, also shared that:

> *I usually do not put much focus on what I am wearing, I generally wear all kind of tops over jeans and trousers but that day I didn't realise I was wearing a top over shalwar [loose trousers generally popular in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh] when the store lady told me that the store is closed now. I said it is still half an hour to closing time but she said 'yes, but now the clothing section is closed'.*

Timara then saw more women coming to the store's clothing section, and the assistant did not ask them anything about why they were there. She felt insulted, but this experience did let her step into the shoes of other women - those who generally dress in their traditional clothing.

> *I used to wonder why women complain about having issues related to the hijab as I myself wear the hijab [occasionally] but never had any issues. Inside, I always thought women might not have enough confidence to carry the hijab confidently. That day was a lesson for me, maybe I needed a lesson not to judge others. I wasn't in a good mood to argue with shopkeepers that*

> *day. I felt very down and like I do not belong here. I couldn't forget that incident for many days and never went to that store for at least a year.*

These kinds of experiences are also reported by women in other Muslim-minority contexts. For example, Alkayyali (2019) documents the experiences of Muslim women's shopping in Paris, France. She highlights how Muslim women felt racialised and objectified while they were shopping in retail settings. Although some research has been conducted on consumer racial profiling in the retail environment, most of this work focuses on the experiences of African-American consumers and how they feel different in relation to other consumers, mostly white (Bennett, Hill, & Daddario, 2015; Gabiddon, & Higgins, 2007; Henderson, Haskian, & Williams, 2017; Pittman, 2020). There is a scarcity of research examining Muslim women's experiences in the retail environment (studies by Alkayyali (2019) and Soltani (2021) are among the few exceptions). However, even these studies do not analyse the process and efforts that women put into creating 'proper' Muslim outfit.

The encounters that my research participants mentioned above, highlight that they felt at the margins of shopping as a social practice. The responses from the retailers either stop or limit Muslim women's active participation in shopping activity.

Focused Shopping and Shopping for Leisure

Besides facing harassment, a number of women shared that there was no use wandering about local stores, as they were not going to find anything they liked. The gap between their habitual self-styling, and those offered in the stores, is too wide to achieve any kind of resolution. For example, Laila said that she has given up.

> *I don't go to malls anymore. I hardly ever find anything suitable there. If that was my lucky day and I found something to my liking, it is never on sale. I can't justify spending hundreds on a dress. I's do better to donate that money to someone needy. Once I loved a top, it was just my style but that was $289 on sale. It was not within my budget, so I had to leave that with a*

heavy heart. I'd do better to ask my sister to send a bag of clothes from our home country for that price.

Laila is a kind-hearted woman, always ready to help people. She is involved in a lot of volunteer work. She says that she would not justify buying expensive clothes, but I noticed her wearing Augustine[39] clothes - their icon tops have sequins at the front, with ribbed cuffs. She has an amazing taste in clothes. She belongs to a well-off family and is very generous. Her idea of a Muslim outfit does not include head-covering; rather it should not be revealing and not show body curves.

She has identified some shops and/or brands where she would go to buy her dresses and has stopped doing shopping for leisure. Although she does not undertake shopping as a leisure activity, there are some women in my research who do regard shopping as a leisure and fun activity. Some other studies also highlight that Muslim women regard shopping as a leisure activity and shopping malls as places where Muslim women can socialise (Collins, & Shantz, 2009; Soltani, 2018). For example, Soltani (2018) highlights in the context of Hamilton, Aotearoa NZ that Muslim women use shopping malls and restaurants for leisure purposes. Their choice and particular activity depends on their age, marital status and family composition. However, participants saw shopping malls as places for leisure and socialisation, rather than shopping as a leisure activity, which my research investigates, as part of the overall search to identify proper modest clothing.

As mentioned above, Laila's experience of not finding her desired things stops her going to malls. Yet for the same reason, Hira's visits to shopping malls increased over time as they provided her with an opportunity for leisure, as well as keeping up with the latest dress trends.

I go to the plaza often on Thursday or Friday evenings as it opens till late, and sometimes I get some good stuff at a bargain price. But only sometimes. My husband was noticing that I have started making more trips to the plaza

[39] Augustine is a high-end women's clothing label in Aotearoa NZ. Only a few women in the study knew about Augustine and fewer shopped from there.

recently, I told him that it is not easy to get things I like. 'You are not a woman, you won't understand' I said to him. In the beginning he didn't like me going to the plaza often but then he started coming with me and the kids too. Now it is sort of a family activity. We go there almost every week, roam around, if I like anything for my family or as a gift to take home I buy. We then eat something. It is fun.

Hira is a very active woman in her thirties. She is vocal and loud. It was hard at times for me to even complete my sentence or a question during the interview. She would pick up a question halfway through and take the discussion where she wanted to. Her dress style was unique, one could easily recognize her in a crowd. Although her work clothes were dresses similar to the brand *Kameez,* mostly available at Pagani, Kmart, and Ezibuy (Capture, Grace Hill) stores but with no slits in sides. She wears them with loose trousers, usually black. She never wears leggings with knee length dresses. She said she is not comfortable revealing the shape of her legs. She only wears leggings with long dresses. She also has a matching scarf, very elegantly wrapped on her head but not covering all of her hair.

Unlike Aliya, she never buys anything out of pressure. She is a window-shopping 'expert' and a very careful buyer. In contrast to Laila, Hira would very loudly engage with sales staff, saying 'hello,' 'how is your day going,' even if she intended to buy nothing or was 'just looking.'

This is one of the coping mechanisms, or strategies, to deal with potential exclusion or discrimination experienced while shopping. As Alkayyali (2019) notes, Muslim women use different coping strategies when they feel harassed, racialised and objectified while shopping at malls. Some of the strategies include changing the style of the hijab, putting on colourful clothes and shoes, avoiding peak shopping hours, and developing a "co-shopping" tactics, such as shopping accompanied by friends or spouses.

When shopping, Hira is not only using loud engaging tactics as a coping mechanism to avoid potential stereotypical attitudes of shopkeepers, but also creating a 'belonging to Aotearoa NZ,' to become more 'Kiwi.' She would share her shopping with friends and proudly tell them how cheaply she purchased something and she would offer to others that she might accompany them on their shopping trips.

Shopping for Swimwear

Shopping for special occasions and activities was also another field where my participants feel left out, at the margins or at times fully ignored. Many women say they want to learn to swim, but they were not comfortable with the idea of wearing swimwear, even it was fully covered. They are especially concerned to find swimwear for their daughters. The participants I spoke to have very different views of swimming. For some, swimwear that is attached to the skin reveals body parts. One of the women says she did not see any difference between wearing swimwear and being naked. She and other women with similar mindsets are mostly from countries where either they did not have easy access to swimming pools or had no beaches. Swimming is not a national pastime, so that unavailability of swimming pools or beaches shapes their understandings around swimwear.

There are also women who are sent burkinis from their home countries and use them very confidently in Aotearoa NZ. Most of these women are from Malaysia and Indonesia. One of my Indonesian friends brought me beautiful swimwear. I wore mine without the headcap, but it was too tight at the neck, I felt like my neck was being slightly strangled. One of my swimsuits is a bit bigger, so I gave the tight one to another friend who is a fellow swim class member. I usually wear my gym tights and a rash top (form-fitting shirt to protect skin from sunburn) for swimming. My swimsuit top sometimes untucks during swimming, exposing my tummy as the top is not attached to the leggings and I often have to pull my top back into place during swimming.

Another friend of mine wears half-sleeve or sleeveless swimsuits with gym tights. She says she doesn't care who notices her, it is really not their business. She sent me her photo with a tummy coming out and I said, "you look amazing," and she responded that she knows: "It isn't looking

cool, but it is fine." She also said "that man" from the community saw her and she just ignored him. Many times, it is "men from the community" whom women would want to avoid when wearing clothes that in their own opinion, were less modest.

This reminds me of another woman, Latifa, who in a humorous mode once said that she would wear anything [without thinking about the aesthetic side of swimwear] on beaches, without caring if anyone was looking at her:

> *Why will these men look at me [more than half covered and in a random coloured swimsuit] when they have so many other perfect and beautiful bodies [non-Muslim women in bikinis or short swimsuits] there to look at. No one in this society cares how women like me look [laughs], if they are looking at me [leaving all other women in bikinis] then what I can say about the misery of these men [satire and joke]. It is like picking a stone from a fistful of diamonds.*

Latifa is a fun-loving woman who cracks jokes all the time. She keeps herself in the centre of a discussion and voluntarily makes jokes about herself. However, Latifa's view of *why one will look at her* shows that she has developed a disposition of not being beautiful if she wears clothes that cover. This means that on the one hand she admires women who wear revealing clothes but on the other hand she uses clothes as a protective shield to hide from visibility.

Latifa knows that looking different makes her stand out. She says "one should do in Rome as Romans do, but within one's limits." Her point of view about covering is based in culture and religion, but it is hard to differentiate what was more important to her. She would often say that God knows that "I am at the beach to have fun. I do not have any intention to attract the opposite gender." She said:

> *I'm pretty sure hat if any man would notice me here (at the beach) that would be someone from my community and he will go and tell his wife how*

shameless was I [referring to when she doesn't wear covered swimwear] ….
[laughs].

Lately, I have met many women who express their interest in swimming, but they say they are too shy to go and learn in mixed gender pools. During my stay in Nelson, I started organizing women-only swim sessions just before COVID-19 happened. It was intended for Muslim women only, but we kept it open to all women. Many Muslim women attended those sessions. It was worth noticing that only a few Muslim women came in regular swimsuits. Most wore fully covered swimsuits. Most of the women who came knew how to swim, only I and another person were learning to swim. Other women, who were not Muslim, also came in tankinis. None of those women wore headcaps. One woman came to me afterwards and said, "Hina I touched water after ten years, I never thought if I would ever swim again. This is a wonderful initiative, and we should keep it going." She went home on a bicycle. She swam in her burkini and said that the burkini allows her to swim without compromising her modesty.

Similarly in Palmerston North, regular women-only swim nights are held at the Freyberg Pool. Many women come there for their daughter's swimming classes and do not enter the water themselves. Once, I asked a friend to come into the water with me and she said she does not have a swimsuit. I asked her to just come in whatever clothes she had but she would not swim. She said she does not like it, but after a few years she told me she likes to go swimming, but she is too shy. Similarly, another friend of mine who always says she has water phobia, asked me if I had a female swim instructor and said that she is considering joining swim classes.

Many studies explore Muslim women's swimming-related issues and concerns especially in the Muslim-minority context (Alkayyali, 2019; Lennis, Agergaard & Evans, 2022; Michalowski & Behrendt, 2020; Soltani, 2021). These concerns mainly include feelings of exclusion or 'othering' due to their 'modest' swimwear, that is generally at odds with the wide-spread social norms around swimming (Alkayyali, 2019; Soltani, 2021), as well as within organisational and political discourse (Dwyer, 2008; Lennis & Agergaard, 2018; Michalowski & Behrendt, 2020). Add to these difficulties related to women's leisure and women-only swimming places (Soltani, 2021). Most

of these studies however take such swimwear as a given and do not talk about the time, effort and struggle Muslim women have to undergo when choosing and making an appropriate swimwear choice. The stories of my research participants highlight that finding appropriate swimwear within Aotearoa NZ is a challenge, and women shop for it mostly online.

Although there are many other cultural reasons, like traditional gender and cultural norms, that limit my participants' access to swimming (Soltani, 2021), proper swimwear and gender segregated facilities are two of the major reasons that my participants report. It is important to note that many Muslim girls take swimming lessons in their early years and as they grow up, they stop going to pools. Even if they go to beaches, they do not fully immerse themselves in the water. One of my participants has two girls, aged twenty and sixteen. She tells me they just do not go swimming, even if she asks them to go. It is important to note here that not all of my research participants say that they are water shy. There are women who regularly go swimming and some of them wear proper burqinis. All of the burqini-wearing participants however report strange looks and verbal comments by other people. As a coping mechanism some of them reduce their frequency of visit to swimming places while others try to choose less busy times. Some started to go in groups and some even stopped completely.

Most of the participants say that there are limited shopping options to buy swimwear. Those who regularly go for a swim in burqinis manage to buy swimwear from online stores. Hence, limited local shopping options pushed my participants to explore virtual shopping options. The online shopping strategy is used in cases where my participants do not find their desired clothes in physical stores due to the reasons mentioned in the narratives above.

Shopping for Cultural Outfits

Although for some of my participants online shopping is a failure, others continue to experiment with this. Most of the participants who shop for casual, everyday clothes from physical stores in Aotearoa NZ use online sites to buy traditional dresses from their home countries. For example, Naela says she mostly bought long gowns and *abayas* [a kind of long gowns] from online websites, while her sister also sent her some traditional dresses.

Once I spent a fortune to buy a long sleeved maxi dress through a website, but it was a total waste of money and time. It was not the right size and colour and even not the right embellishment. It looked marvellous in photos, but it was a disaster. I complained about it but I never got an answer from them. So, it's better to rely on my sister's choice for traditional dresses; at least if I don't like them, I can send them back.

Many participants who socialise more often, within and outside their community, bought cultural dresses, which they could only find in big cities like Auckland, or from social media shopping sites, such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook market pages or Facebook groups. These groups are mostly formed by women living in Auckland and Wellington. They buy clothes in bulk and sell them on social media sites. Jia bought her dress from one of these sites, and said:

I bought this [abaya/long gown] from a Facebook group, and it is not the same quality as pictured. Maybe just a good camera trick. But it was still worth the price. Better to have one than nothing.

Jia bought the gown to attend gatherings at the mosque. She wore this on top of her regular work dress, and it saved her a lot of time and effort in getting ready for prayer. For Jia, the gown is a comfortable and worry-free dress to go to the masjid and to mixed-gender gatherings. It is modest and carefree.

The opportunities for online shopping outside and within Aotearoa NZ have given my participants ways for self-expression. They also feel less pressure in dealing with retailers and other people in stores. As discussed earlier, Muslim women develop creative ways of negotiating the racial discrimination while shopping (Alkayyali, 2019). Switching to online shopping is also one of their coping strategies, besides it provides more options in terms of choice and type of clothing. Despite limitations in buying a dress, women are creative enough to find clothes that they like.

Shopping is not only a matter of buying online or in physical stores however, it is also about how women have different styles in wearing clothes and preferences for buying a dress. For some

women wearing a knee length dress with full sleeves with leggings is appropriate, but for others, loose trousers, not leggings, should be worn, so as to not to reveal their body shape. While for some women the shopping budget matters more than time, for others it was the other way round. Despite all of the barriers, limitations and online shopping experience failures, my participants remain engaged in shopping activities and successfully and creatively negotiate and create outfits for themselves. Their shopping strategies mainly revolve around comparison between what is available to them both now, in Aotearoa NZ, and before they arrived here. Their understanding of dressing also changes over time after meeting Muslim women from different cultures and observing and learning from Aotearoa NZ culture. The women also explore their creative sides by consciously constructing their desired proper Muslim outfit, using the strategy of altering what is available to them. The following section, Part Two, explores idiosyncratic creativity in making a 'proper Muslim outfit' – the perception of which is always changing and is different in every instance – leaving participants then, in a state of *becoming*.

Part Two: Creating a Proper Muslim Outfit

This part is about exploring multiple ways of creating a proper Muslim outfit. Here, I purposely use the word 'creating' an outfit rather than buying, shopping, making or managing dress. This is because when I was thematising the interviews, I noticed that putting together a desired outfit that fitted with all the standards of my participants, was more than shopping in-store or online. A lot of creativity and effort was involved, such as how, when and where to wear an outfit that matched the occasion, looked good aesthetically, did not offend others, and yet was appropriate enough to sustain their sense of modesty. My participants' creativity is not only limited to creatively altering, or matching up the various elements of dress, it also operates within their thoughts and cultural interpretations. Hence, I use the word 'creativity,' since I encountered it during every conversation with my participants, whether it was related to altering clothes or responding to thoughts.

Once Hira and I were in a local clothing store, Farmers, standing by a rack of the Harlow clothing line and looking at one knee length, short sleeved dress, when Hira praised the dress and said:

[...] this is stunning, very beautiful. I wish I could buy this but… no use. I have to find something to make the sleeves full length, a cardigan or something... a full sleeve undershirt and then trousers to cover the legs, and by that time the dress would lose its beauty. It is not meant to be worn like that. It is just beautiful to carry as it is. Let's do justice to the dress and not buy it.

We laughed and put back the dress in high spirits, but Hira's comment said a lot. She had developed a love affair with clothing quite recently, when she had made a few new fashionable friends. I had often noticed her admiring her friends' dress style and she seemed impressed by them. She always tried to learn fashion from her circle of friends. It was also a time when her husband had been promoted. She now had the motivation and resources to buy expensive clothes.

As mentioned earlier, Hira often took me with her on Thursday nights and we roamed around the shops, mostly doing 'window-shopping,' making comparisons of clothing styles, fabrics, prices, 'our way' and mainstream ways of dressing. Hira's wish to buy that dress and her perception of herself wearing it, as well as how it would appear to others, was a short-lived but deep perspective that she had come to embody. A space opened up between the intentions of the wearer of the dress, and interpretations of the perceivers of the dress. Hira tried to fill that space with a laugh. 'No' she said, 'the dress would lose its beauty.' She had not even experimented with the dress; not 'tried it on,' as women say, not only looking at herself wearing it, but listening to what others said, and 'getting the feel' of its tailoring.

Did she base the rejection of those 'trying on' processes on previous experiences when she decided to walk past those kinds of dresses? She was rejecting those clothes on aesthetic grounds yet with a deep-rooted idea of what a proper Muslim outfit should look like. For example, she could buy a dress she saw at the display window but then she imagined herself wearing loose trousers with it and leggings were a bit too revealing for her, so she dropped the idea. For some women, alteration and layering are a few of the methods to create a proper Muslim outfit, as explored below in detail.

Alteration

Altering clothes is a quite common practice among the women, mostly among those who know a little about sewing. All women do this according to their own capacities and some ask their friends to do it for them. Hira knows which clothes can be altered, and which would lose their beauty if altered or worn with other clothes. Here, again, Hira is seeing herself through the eyes of outsiders. Once she labelled this as a talent by saying "*how women like us have this talent to make everything [altering clothes] Muslim, but that talent is not always perceived as a talent.*" Hira has embodied the eyes of 'watchers' or 'others.' So much so, that she knows which kind of dress she can 'play around' with and yet still look good. Once she wore a full-length maxi dress which she had altered from a more ordinary dress, and she said:

> *We make everything Muslim, from clothes to food to houses. The designer of this dress must have not thought that someone would wear it like this [adding additional sleeves and lace on the neck and a frill on the bottom of a midi length dress]. From a sleeveless midi length dress, it was now a long sleeved, neck covered, full-length maxi. The designer would have died [in a humorous sense to make her point that designer would not be able to bear it] to see her creativity ending up like this [laughs]. We are very creative. I enjoy doing things like this. I have discovered this potential after coming to New Zealand. But I need to know more about what women like here.*

Hira and many participants like Hira who know a bit about sewing would do similar things with their clothes. 'Alteration' not only means altering clothes to their own taste but producing clothes that conform to their definition of appropriateness, as well as communicating their personal aesthetic, cultural belonging, and social inclusion. For many women, buying new clothes is associated with leisure time, hobbies, and their expression of pleasure. However, this is not that simple, especially when they had to go through the 'altering process.' The 'unavailability' of most of the items in clothing stores made them feel excluded. Hatim remarks:

It looked stupid to buy something new and take it for alteration. It is like mending old clothes. Once I took a new top for altering a size, it was only available in plus size and that tailor [referring it to a woman who is famous in the community for making alterations at a very low price] made it too small. It's like - what the… hell.

Hatim says that shopping makes her frustrated now. She does not find things she likes and has to compromise a lot. She feels excluded at shopping malls. She comments that "it looks things are not for us but then I tell myself that it is my decision to stay in New Zealand, which means compromising on many things".

Alteration remains a creative ploy for finding 'the right' outfit, since there are many dresses that my participants could not wear 'just like that,' or 'off the rack.' A number of participants either do not bother to opt for alterations, or keep it as an option if and when they have time to do so. Another interesting observation related to alteration is to attach 'sleeves' to an outfit as it was very common among women to ask 'what about sleeves?'

Although the sleeves can easily be added while layering the dress with an undershirt or cardigan it is not suitable for a summer dress. Summer dresses usually come without sleeves. In such cases, some women add mesh sleeves or see-through-chiffon sleeves to the dress which when analysed critically by some women does not fit within Muslim dress standards because skin still is exposed through such fabrics. However, women who do this thought it was a better strategy than wearing a sleeveless garment. Such perception shows that the understanding of what is proper Muslim dress varies among women, largely based on their own understanding of appropriateness.

Layering

Similarly, adding layers to clothing is in fact the most common practice of my participants' multiple ways of dressing appropriately. Irrespective of weather, or season: summer, winter, autumn or spring, all of the participants whose understanding of proper Muslim outfit included

long sleeves, short sleeves or three quarter sleeves, and full-length legwear, adorned themselves with layers of clothes. This is one of the guaranteed and 'safe' strategies for making themselves comfortable with shopping, when choice is limited to whatever is available in a non-Muslim local shop.

I had a shopping trip with Naela and Marwa on a weekend. After a long walk, we sat in a café inside the Plaza in Palmerston North. We had no intention of shopping until we saw a sale sign (up to 60% off) on women's wear. We decided to have a quick browse and to meet each other after fifteen minutes, outside the shop entrance. Instead of browsing on my own, I accompanied Naela. Naela quickly ran along a few clothing racks and grabbed one slip-on tunic top in a metal grey, flowery pattern. She asked me what I thought of that dress. I complimented her choice and asked what she would do for sleeves as Naela never wore sleeveless or short sleeve clothes. She said:

> *I have four or five neutral shades of long sleeve skin tights, matching leggings, and trousers. It makes my work easy. I am buying this tunic because it will go with both grey and black skin-tights and of course because it is on sale [she winks, with a smile]. I would never buy this at a full price, it's crazy. Back home, I can buy ten quality tops at this price. Here it is very expensive but never mind, this is a great sale price.*

Here, Naela is comparing dress prices in Aotearoa NZ and her home country. This is very common amongst all the women. Naela said she would show me her whole wardrobe when I visited her home. She has a range of colourful scarves, plain and patterned, with different lengths and styles that she brought with her from her home country. Although she mostly uses a black stitched (readymade) scarf, she keeps others for 'just in case,' and to use as an outer layer on a black scarf. She wears jeans/trousers and a loose jacket over her tops regularly, with abayas (long gowns) at mixed gender gatherings, and short dresses and short length miniskirts at women-only gatherings. Although Naela started to wear the headscarf at her husband's request, she has learned how to wear the headscarf in a stylish way. She mostly wears two to three layers of

clothing, in almost all seasons. She said she chooses lighter fabrics and loose clothing for summer months, and thick and snug-fitting clothing for winter. She also mentioned breathable Kathmandu and Regatta jackets, which she finds useful as summer layering options.

Naela mostly buys dresses from Farmers, Pagani, Zara, Kathmandu, Macpac and a few online sites because there she says she can find quality clothes at an affordable price, when they are on sale. In the first months of coming to Aotearoa NZ, she had found it hard to buy what she wanted because she never likes to wear full sleeved 'skin tights' (stretch fabric body garments and leggings) underneath every sleeveless outfit. As time passed however, she found that she had to be clever, compromising with creative and easy-going options in her dress choices. She said she always observes Kiwi women and she has seen many women using layers and that boosts her confidence.

> *My hijab already made me stand out; I did not want anything else to add to this. I always choose things and accessories that tone down my hijabi look. Once I went to pick up my son from day-care and one of the children asked me if I had hair? I then invited all his friends and their mums to our house, and I did not cover that day. I had so many compliments and questions. At that time, I used to wear a long abaya when I went out in public but after that, I decided to dress like normal. Since then, I am trying to wear normal yet modest and presentable. Now I have found out that this is the easiest way to wear all kind of tops and dresses with these long sleeve skin-tights and matching pairs of trousers or leggings. I always wear a loose jacket if my tops are too fitted.*

Naela has found a way to add sleeves by layering skin tights. In contrast, Maya would neither wear layers nor long tops most of the time. Maya, as I have explained in the previous chapter, occasionally wears the headscarf, only to please her husband. She said that she keeps an eye on the online websites for long sleeved tops, because she does not like layering up her dresses. She used to wear layers in the initial years of coming to Aotearoa NZ, but she found it difficult to

continue later. She prefers to buy long sleeved tops, but if she cannot find them, she would buy half, three-quarter or sometimes cap-sleeved blouses and tunics. Maya prefers not to wear sleeveless outfits in a mixed gathering or outside the home, however, very often she wears short skirts and sleeveless tops without any layering at home. This is an unusual practice for women from the same cultural background as Maya's. For Maya, the level of faith of a woman is not dependant on her outer self, portrayed by a dress, but rather is a matter of her internal self. According to her:

> *Women's dress should not define their level of faith. Scarf wearing Muslim women cannot be better than others. It should be more than a matter of personal choice. I do not have in-depth knowledge of Islam, but I know Allah cannot do this to women. Why should only women dress modestly and not men? And who will define what modesty is? For me, living in this society and wearing cap sleeves, three-quarter length and even knee-length dresses and skirts is modest. There is no harm in wearing those. I know it is not acceptable to most of the 'closed-minded' Muslim women but for me, it is totally fine. Most of our women are not brainwashed by men or others but by themselves. They have stopped thinking, as if thinking is like committing a sin or something. I feel pity for such women but at the same time it is what they have chosen for themselves so I think we should let them do what they are comfortable doing. I can't be like them, and they cannot be like me. I just cannot hide in layers of clothes and be invisible.*

I have always considered both Maya and Naela to be beautifully dressed. They both pay detailed attention to their clothing choices, even though their definitions of a proper Muslim outfit and modesty are different. It is important to note here that there is no universal definition of modesty for my participants. Some studies have also highlighted these individualised notions of modesty for their Muslim women participants (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010). In the example of Canadian Muslim women, Litchmore & Safdar (2016) note that women continue to

negotiate between their interpretation of modesty and self-defined standards of beauty and attractiveness.

In the case of Naela and Maya, they have their own interpretations of modesty. Naela did wear a headcover, while Maya did not. Naela chooses colours, loosely styled tops and tunics, and most of the time sporty jackets. They both love to wear natural-toned makeup. Naela has a variety of long boots, whereas Maya keeps to sandals and sneakers. Both try everything possible to be a modern, stylish Muslim woman. In women-only exercise classes, Naela wears on-trend labelled tanks (casual sleeveless shirts) and gym capris (pants longer than shorts, but not as long as trousers). Her experience of living in Aotearoa NZ has made her reflect on her clothing choices, and she has decided to be a *hijabi*, but also a fashionable woman. That combination is then not an exclusive position, but rather shows that 'good' Muslim women can be fashionable (Almila, 2015; Bucar, 2017; Dwyer & Crang, 2002).

Deliberate Change

Bringing a deliberate, considered change to clothing practices is not just true for Naela. Aqilah, for example, also changed her dressing style deliberately. However, unlike Naela, she is not comfortable wearing mid-to-hip length tops and jackets. This is not modest for her. Indicating her own, clothing, she points out that it *is* modest. She wears long tops with a knee-length coat. She acknowledges that coats, trench or winter, have become her uniform now. Aqilah also prefers ethnic tops, which she mostly gets from her home country. Once I admired Aqilah's top, and she said:

> *I got this from home country. Whenever I visit my home [country], I get these in bulk like 8 to 10 from a single shop. I got this from a local shop and even the shopkeeper looked at me in surprise. I think people don't buy this much at once. But for us [overseas people] it is easy to shop like this. We cannot buy them elsewhere and not in New Zealand. They are also cheap there. I also buy bulk scarves for myself and gifts. My female colleagues always comment on my scarves, so I get one for each of them. In New Zealand I*

don't buy a scarf which costs more than ten dollars, that's my maximum limit.

Although Naela and Aqilah both wear headscarves, their style of dressing and their understanding of modest clothing differs, based on the length of their tops and skin-tight legwear. Aqilah never wears leggings. She prefers wide leg, bootcut, tailor-made and harem trousers. Although she wears cultural outfits, her wearing of coats over dresses does not make her stand out. Aqilah's outfits look very similar most of the time, even when she dresses up for different occasions. This is different from Naela, who when she dresses up for special occasions, looks different every time. Aqilah is also not fond of makeup and jewellery, and according to her she never cares about what other people would think of her clothes. Dressing, for her, is something she does to make herself comfortable, and not to look normal in a given society. Aqilah has deliberately replaced her gowns with coats after coming to Aotearoa NZ but did not want to fully visually blend in with the wider society. She says, "I am different, and I like this difference." She tells me that people had yelled at her, saying she should go back home, but she feels pity for them as they were ignorant and do not know anything about her or other immigrants.

Almost all of my research participants have had to change how they dress. Some accept the change easily, while others struggle to accept and meet the challenge. This change is not about changing clothing practices only, it is also about changes in their manner of thinking. Farzand says that she had learned that religion is an individual's personal matter, and that no one should object to what's going on inside one's heart. This cannot be judged from what a person wears. Her views are similar to Maya's, but unlike Maya, she practices her views without any hesitation or fear of what others might think of her. She told me that she did not have a good reputation among Muslim men in her community. One of their male friends had told her husband about the gossip that men were exchanging outside the Mosque. She said "well, I don't care about this anymore. I am at a stage of life where 'I' matters more than anything. I do not judge people on their appearance, whether it is a niqab-wearing woman or women in bikinis."

Farzand chooses to wear casual western wear, a pair of trousers or three-quarter length tights under ordinary tunics and tops. She does not care if her outfit has no sleeves or is short in length. The only thing which concerns her is the suitability of her outfit. She is comparatively short and bulky, so she chooses styles and patterns which makes her look taller and thinner. Maya and Farzand both have similar opinions about clothing and its relationship to Muslim women. They are of the view that Islam has nothing to do with Muslim women's clothing, and it was just a cultural thing. The appropriateness of Muslim women's outfits and modesty for them is subjective.

Shopping Compromises

There are other women who say that they have had to compromise on a lot of things when it comes to shopping for clothes, including for example style, pattern, and fabric. According to Khola:

> *Everybody makes compromises and so do I. I was never into clothing like this before or I might have been into it without knowing it. I had so many choices there [home country], in a range of fabrics, styles, patterns, a budget, that I always took clothes for granted. Here, finding one proper outfit becomes a whole project and at the end of the day, I compromise at least 2-3 things in a dress. In short, I never manage to get what I want. And tailors here are so expensive. Once an alteration lady charged me eighty dollars for doing minor alterations to a dress, more than the price of the dress itself. I called my mother and told her she should start an alteration business here.*

Clothing choice is just one of the compromises that my participants have had to make. Many other women also say that they do not find clothes to their liking in this country and it impacts the ways they want to present themselves in society. Khola says that her colleagues think she is very simple and modest, while it was not always the case. She regards herself as vibrant with a newly developed interest in clothing and tries to be active, chatty, and vocal at her place of work.

She thinks that clothes play an important role in portraying an image of a person, however, it is very hard to find clothes to her taste and liking that fit her criterion of Muslimness.

Wearing Western Dress

A number of women shared their hesitancy in wearing western dress confidently, particularly women from Southeast Asian countries. Here when I say 'western dress' I am not referring to a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, but a formal dress for occasions like attending a marriage ceremony, conference dinner or graduation. Maya mentions that she could wear her cultural dress confidently on every occasion, but she is hesitant to wear western dress on special occasions, such as at a western wedding and her graduation.

> *I do not feel that I can carry 'western' [referring to an above-knee dress] dress on my graduation. They look beautiful on those who know how to carry them. I do not feel comfortable, it is not a matter of confidence, but you know if it is an eastern dress, I just feel like I can do anything with it, mix match, contrast etc., but I cannot do these things to a western dress, it is just not my area of expertise. I know many women in our community wear western dresses confidently, but I am just not one of them.*

This response from Maya was a bit of surprise to me as I have seen her wearing all sorts of dresses on many occasions. I have always categorised Maya as 'overconfident' in almost every respect; her views, the way she speaks - but she has drawn limits and specified the areas where she is confident and where she is not. Clothing was one of those where she is not confident.

Aliya shows similar confusion over deciding to wear formal western dresses. Both end up choosing their traditional dress for special occasions. This intersection of cultural and western dresses is most commonly seen amongst immigrant Muslim women from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, India and Pakistan, where they had a variety of cultural dresses. In contrast women from Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait wear long gowns over casual clothes. Many women from these countries confidently wear western dresses. Clearly, belonging to a country with a variety

of cultural clothing traditions impacts upon style-choice confidence, but so too does social status. Women from higher socio-economic status and educational backgrounds were more likely to wear western formal dresses confidently, regardless of their country of origin.

Many of my participants said they love all kind of clothes including ethnic[40], cultural[41] and Western[42]. Isha said, she loves clothes of all kinds. Isha is a very deep thinker. She regularly engages with Muslim scholars and also runs Quran discussion classes for children and youth. Her views on clothing are that “Islam is deeply personal matter and has barely anything to do with one’s outer-self.” She wears almost every kind of dress, sleeveless, midi lengths, jeans with tuck-in shirts, without any symbolic use of scarves.

Almost all women have different clothes selection processes when going to work, outside for leisure, shopping or groceries, attending small or large community gatherings, and when they are at home. Many clothing items had multiple uses and give an outfit a new look or help create whole new outfits. Like headscarves, they could be changed to give a dress a brighter or lighter look, or appear casual or formal if worn with accessories. Similarly, multiple use of the *dupatta* which can be used religiously, culturally or just for fashion could entirely change the look of an outfit. *Dupatta* can also be worn with a shawl in winter.

All participants have different sizes of wardrobe (collection of clothes) depending upon how much clothes interest them, but most have dresses to wear on different occasions, including parties, weddings, women-only get togethers, mixed gender meet ups, mixed ethnic meetings,

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[40] Ethnic clothing is closely tied to the traditions of a specific ethnic group or community. It is strongly knitted in to the group’s heritage, traditions and history. It is also often linked to a specific region and/or has religious affiliations.

[41] Cultural clothing is a broader term that encompasses attire worn by people within a particular culture, which can include various ethnic groups or communities. Cultural clothing can also encompass clothing worn for specific cultural events, rituals, or celebrations that are not limited to a single ethnic group. Cultural clothing may evolve over time and may incorporate influences from multiple sources.

[42]Western clothing refers to the attire that is commonly worn in countries and regions with Western cultural influences, particularly in Europe and North America. It is often characterized by certain styles, fashion trends, and clothing items that have evolved over time in Western societies. Casual western wear includes clothes such as t-shirts and jeans while formal western wear includes dresses and gowns for women and formal suits for men.

to name a few. This shows that they have invested time, effort, energy, and thought in improvising how to dress for an occasion. Their understanding of the appropriateness of Muslim based clothing changes in response to context, to the availability of clothes in Aotearoa NZ, from observing how Muslim women from other cultures dress, as well as their own ability to interpret religious texts within contemporary contexts.

Many women explicitly mention that their clothing ideas and styles have evolved and changed during their stay in Aotearoa NZ. This change is not a binary separation between traditional and modern but rather, a complex and non-linear transition in their perceptions of how a Muslim women should dress. This change also highlights the state of becoming and efforts that Muslim women put into their clothing choices appropriate to an occasion, to integrate into the host country and to create 'hybrid' identities (Almila, 2015; Dwyer & Crang, 2002; Soltani, Johnston & Longhurst, 2022).

Accessories

Many women use accessories, such as jewellery, handbags, heels and makeup to '*tone down'* their Muslimness and to make efforts to better fit into the Aotearoa NZ society. Many *hijabi* and *non-hijabi* women shared how they negotiate their social confidence by using one or more types of accessories. This includes jewellery, makeup, hijab pins, and handbags. However, this type of accessorising is practised by those women for whom adorning themselves, with or without use of a head-covering, was part of their expression of modesty. For other participants, modesty is inherent in simplicity, in wearing basic, practical, loose clothes and in looking unattractive. This even extends to not wearing perfumes, as that may be seen as seeking to attract others, particularly non-mahram men (men with whom women could potentially marry). Again, the understanding of modesty in using accessories varies among my participants.

Hijabi women who use accessories say that these items neutralise their hijab. So for example, if they are wearing a decorative hijab pin, people comment on the pin, or if someone adorns an outfit with a necklace it distracts attention from the headscarf and turns focus onto the more universally worn jewellery. Laila shares how she wore her headcover in different layers that

suited the shape of her face and used statement necklaces to tone the hijab down. "*It works wonders for me. I always get compliments and it also gives the image of the fashionable Muslim woman."*

Similarly, a few other *non-hijabi* women do the same. Farzand says:

> *I love statement jewellery. I wear it because I like it. I can't wear it back home [country] where only gold [pure gold metal] is prestigious. Here [in NZ] people wear all sorts of jewellery and hence I love it. I get lots of compliments, now it has become part of me to wear something bold when I go outside. It is kind of being one of them.*

Another participant, Sania, who wears her headscarf in a turban style says she wears earrings whenever she has a headcover on (referring to her turban). She told me that she was at a jewellery shop looking at earrings when someone at the shop looked at her with surprise and with a sarcastic smile, murmuring, "*earrings hanging with the napkin (scarf/cloth, not ears)."*

In her own words, she says:

> *For a second, I could not comprehend that smile and the comment [satire], but then I thought that was a mockery of my scarf. That day I was wearing a scarf in a different style that does not go with earrings but there were times when I wore a scarf like a turban and that was when I wore all sorts of earrings. But I wonder how come someone assumes that we wear scarves at all times and could not enjoy accessories with it.*

Eby's experience is similar to Sania's experience, not in relation to jewellery, but shoes. Eby was trying on high heels at a shoe shop when a saleswoman said, perhaps she should try a flat sole that would suit her dress style. Eby felt stupid, as if she had no dress sense.

She said it is only this scarf others can see, and not my full self. Eby says:

> *[…] some people knowingly try to make others feel bad. Most of the people pick differences, a few choose to find similarities. It is not they can't see; they choose not to see.*

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Muslim women face many stereotypical issues while shopping (Alkayyali, 2019). Nonetheless my research participants kept on shopping for accessories. They continue to adorn themselves, either to break the perception that an orthodox Muslim woman must look precisely as religion dictates, or to use the accessories as an assimilation strategy (Akou, 2007; Almila, 2015).

Besides accessories such as jewellery, makeup and shoes, a couple of participants focus on carrying a branded handbag as well. Eda said that "*sometimes it does not matter what you wear if you have an expensive handbag that says it all."* She says that she did not know this before, as she had mostly bought bags from brands like LV, MK, Gucci and Prada. Eda says she is not much into clothing, but she has an obsession with collecting handbags of all kinds and labels. Further, she says her husband knows about this obsession and he gifts her handbags on special anniversaries. Eda noticed that a couple of her colleagues who do not talk to her very often, look admiringly at her bags. Eda says that she is quite naïve, but another colleague told her that she was quite famous in her workplace because of her bags.

This *toning down* of Muslimness using accessories shows that women have embodied the orthodox perception, but at the same time are actively engaging in challenging those stereotypes. This also shows they keep on reflecting and creating strategies on an everyday basis, while they learn from comparison with their co-workers.

Passing on the Traditions

Clothing is mostly considered mundane; an everyday embodied practice, yet it is the most reflected-upon cultural processing activity in my participants' lives. It occupies far more time and energy than, for instance, food preparation and presentation, entertaining, home décor, or politics - all of those important elements that both maintain cultural identity and adapt to a new

cultural context. For these women, it is not just a matter of presenting themselves in public, but also of guarding their traditions and religion, and passing them on to their children.

For some, the 'cultural preservation versus social assimilation' debate can involve a mixed or split response. Most of the participants, for instance, said that they wear sleeveless outfits, short skirts, and even low-cut cleavage at their homes in the presence of their family members, including husband and children. A few, however, said that they did not wear revealing clothes in their homes because of their sons. Zaeen, whose son is five years old, says that she does not wear anything that is revealing at home because she does not want her son to see how his mother is dressed up. Contrary to this, Farzand, deliberately wears revealing clothes at home in order to show her son that it is okay to see women outside dressed up like this. She says,

> *I do not want my son to be disrespectful of other women who just dress normally. I do not want my son to look at them as if they are not good. My son should know the limits. When my son sees me, his mother, dress up in this way, it will be normal to him. I don't want to raise him judging women as good or bad based on their appearances. He is growing up in this society, it is my first and foremost duty as a mother and as a citizen here to make him culturally aware and to give him a view to see others respectfully. Nobody has a right to disgrace others particularly based on what they wear. I know women who are strict to their children and have a fear that their children might choose the wrong path. For God's sake... if such women think this way, they should not have chosen to live in New Zealand. If they have chosen to be here, then they should be respectful and teach their children how to be a normal and respectful human. If they make their kids good humans, they automatically will be good Muslims.*

While I was listening to Farzand's views, my mind was continuously processing Zaeen's and Enai's remarks on the same issue. How to train their children through their everyday clothing practices?

These three women think similarly that their clothing practices play a key part in forming their children's world view. However, they deal with the issue differently.

Zaeen would never wear anything that shows her cleavage or legs at home or outside, although she wears cap sleeved tops and dresses in both locations. For her, cap sleeves are fine. Zaeen follows this clothing practice to show her children, in particular her son, that it is an acceptable way for a woman to dress. Farzand, however, wears short, revealing clothes at home, and less revealing clothes outside, to show her son that there are different ways of dressing, depending on context.

Inaya, who does not wear a headcover but does cover her arms and legs, has told her son that every family has their own rules, norms and regulations. If they see someone dressed differently outside the home, she tells her children not to stare, but keep their eyes down and if they want, they can pray to God to keep us and them to the straight path. She told me that her son asks lots of questions all the time, and she has to be very clever about giving him satisfactory answers. She does not want her son to judge others or herself. She wants him to learn that people have different beliefs, and they have every right to live their lives according to their beliefs. She tells her children that if we see someone living with a belief different from ours, we do not have to ask anything of the person, but of God, praying that things go better for that person.

All the above conversations show that choosing what to wear is not just about covering the body and embodying modesty, it is also a way of framing children's viewpoints of the world they live in. The literature highlights that women are generally "assigned the role of bearers of cultural values, [and] carriers of traditions…" (Moghadam, 1994, p. 4). My participants also try to impart their values into their children. What is interesting in these conversations is their focus on sons, despite these women having daughters in their families. One of my participants told me that she never needs to teach her girl, because girls mostly follow what their mothers do. Girls are active observers, and most of the time tend to copy their mums; "*Like mother, like daughter,*" although this is not true for Eby, whose daughters refused to follow their mother's example. However,

using day-to-day clothing practices as a tool to transfer norms, thoughts, and viewpoints into children remains a common theme in my participants’ lives, while using different strategies.

Relationship with Husbands

Clothing is not only a tool to pass on cultural values to children, but it is also a way of managing relationships with husbands. Husbands, in the case of married women, are a key audience who impact women’s dress choices. Most of the women brought their husbands' views to our discussion on clothes, whether on clothing style, colour, or appropriateness. Farzand says:

> *[…] my husband forgets in the winter season that I now wear short sleeves, sleeveless and midi length dresses outside. Every summer is a shock for him when he sees me in summery clothes outside and then he gets to normalise it after a few arguments and fights.*

In a similar story Maya shared how her husband noticed her outside. She adds, “*I think in his mind he keeps taking notes and then he vomits all the details on me as we reach home.*”

The women whose husbands do not have a say or interest in their wives' dressing choices also frequently mention that their husbands do not care what they wear. Yet husbands remain the central figure in my participants' discussion on clothing. From preferred colours to clothing style and the appropriateness of the dresses - they influence my participants' clothing choices.

Once Inaya was showing me her wardrobe. I noticed a few unusual dresses that I had never seen her wear. One was a lace, knee-length dress with a sheer back and deep Vee neck. I asked her why I had never seen her wearing this. She told me that her husband bought it for her, and he wants her to wear this at home. She had a smile on her face, filled with shyness and love. Inaya says that her husband always wants her to dress freely at home and he likes revealing dresses.

Inaya, Farzand, Maya and Azzan were open to sharing their very personal life with regard to their husbands' clothing choices, however, other participants did not bring this into the discussion. They believe that is their personal life, and they must be respectful and loyal to their husbands.

They would only discuss what colours their husband liked, and if they considered those colours when shopping for clothes for themselves. Once I commented on Hatim's outfit. She dressed very aesthetically in a light grey dress, which she said is her husband's choice. He likes light colours and said: "*I mostly wear what he likes.*"

Razi's sense of dressing and her way of wearing her dresses with jewellery and make up is very aesthetic. Like Inaya's husband, Razi's husband also bought her dresses that if worn on their own, do not fit into her standard of suitable Muslim dress. Razi said her husband wants her to wear those dresses outside in public and at her work. Razi said she had always done cultural headcovering in the past but it is an issue for her to not wear a headcover as her husband also does not like her wearing a head-covering. However, she could not wear those dresses out in public. She says:

> *He has lost his mind. He wants me to be modern, extremely modern I mean. I have stopped head-covering and I wear very short sleeved tops and dresses at work but that is my limit. I cannot wear short skirts and dresses without covering my legs. He is out of his mind, and I cannot let him control myself. I have my own limits to be modern, but I cannot fully obey my husband as I can't cross my own boundaries.*

Like Razi, many of the women's lives revolve around their husbands. They consider their husbands' likes or dislikes when making choices for their daily outfits. Many participants told me that their husbands do not like makeup or the dress style they choose, and again, some women care about their husband's wishes while others do not. Many of them said that wearing what they liked was their own choice. Once Maya said:

> *When I do not ask him to dress up in traditional clothes on events or when going to Friday prayer, he does not have any right to dictate to me on this. I have every right to please myself the way I want to. I know several women would consider their husband's likes and dislikes, but I am not one of them. I know it's not you too.*

Once Inaya said a similar thing on wearing makeup:

> *He [my husband] does not like me when I wear makeup. He always says that I look beautiful without makeup. But I like makeup and I buy it, but I am not used to applying it. Whenever I do, he just passes a comment that makes me feel bad. Now after fifteen years of living together, I have overcome that way of feeling bad. I just wear makeup when I want. It does not lessen my love for him, but it does enhance my love for myself. I should be just me.*

Eeshal expressed a similar feeling:

> *I do not bother whatever my husband thinks. I wonder that he has enough time to think about what I or our girls are wearing. He has so many things going on his mind that it would be the last thing he passes comment on.*

Husbands were present in all the discussions on fashion or clothing and head-covering, as noted in the previous chapter. In my participants' lives, clothing remains a negotiator, an expression of love and care, but also a tool of resistance and rebelliousness when it comes to dressing like a wife.

Conclusion

Through the women's experiences and voices, this chapter highlights their understanding of an appropriate Muslim outfit that fits their standards of modesty - a definition however which largely varies amongst them. The women's engagement with clothes acts as a tool to perform several practices: defining and expressing their modesty; educating their children; negotiating their relationship with their husbands; challenging stereotypes of Muslim women. Many participants brought their experiences of jewellery, shoes, perfumes, and makeup into our discussions on clothing. Some women use these accessories to be a modest Muslim, while others deliberately avoid them to keep their modesty. Like head-covering, overall clothing practices

show that there is no universal way or universal thinking regarding what an appropriate Muslim dress should look like. The following quote from one of the converts shows this clearly:

> *When I converted [to Islam] a long time ago, the community gave me a big welcome. Many women brought scarves for me, and a few men gave me Islamic books. It was very interesting to see who had given what. A few books were interpretations of the Quran but contradictory to each other. Then a few women gave me outfits from their cultures, I remember there was one long gown, a Pakistani or Indian kind of outfit, a two-piece suit; skirt and a top and a big cape shawl kind of one-piece. I accepted those, although I never wore them, and that made me think that abayas are not Islamic outfits. Before converting, I searched Islamic and Muslim outfits on the internet and interestingly results always showed either abayas or long maxis.*

No matter what background and culture my participants belong to, they have a clear idea about the clothes they wanted. They have done their shopping based on that idea and wear the outfits they have selected. They also have a clear sense of how they are perceived by outsiders, insiders and across other Muslim cultures. Most of them have introduced deliberate changes to their dress style, and many of them have chosen "being themselves." No matter which way my participants choose to carry themselves, they are aware of their decisions and the potential implications.

Thus, creating a modest outfit in a non-Islamic society, such as Aotearoa NZ, is not simply a matter of choice, or a universally defined modesty or a one-off phenomenon, like buying a dress. Rather, it is a continuous, complex, reflective and a well thought through act that is based on their ability of comparing: their past and present contexts, their initial years of coming to Aotearoa NZ, and after going through their settlement period: their exposure to other Muslim women, and their understanding and interpretation of religious texts in the contemporary world. For many women an appropriate Muslim dress is not a permanent disposition but an ever-

changing one. There are stages in the evolution of a suitable style, from shopping, to wearing the new outfit, and on to negotiating the dress; both with themselves and with others. This is also not a straight progression. Stages are reversed and revisited, as possible solutions succeed or fail.

In the first part of the next chapter I explore women's clothing through a narrative of a Muslim wedding. Where Chapters five and six have explored women's own understanding and practice of head-covering and proper Muslim outfits, Chapter Seven highlights the interaction of clothing styles with those of other Muslim women, and how that in turn shapes their perception of themselves and others.

The second part of the next chapter highlights the differences in women's understanding of a Santa Claus Parade, and how attending might affect perceptions of Muslim identity. Together, the focus in these two parts will show that the act of comparison remains the key working strategy in women's lives, either in understanding the differences in their practices, or in negotiating them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MULTIPLE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM WOMEN

This chapter explores the differences between Muslim women from Arabic and non-Arabic speaking countries, as well as among women from the same ethnic and cultural background, through an analysis of two common events: a Muslim wedding and the 'Santa Claus Parade' (a parade of decorated floats, held at Christmas as an entertainment for children). The previous two chapters focus on Muslim women's clothing practices to build the argument that their understandings and practices of head-covering and clothing are not homogenous, but are rather different and even contradictory at times.

Like the previous chapters, the first part of this chapter, *Muslim wedding*, partly builds on women's clothing perceptions with a different angle. It shows how Aotearoa NZ Muslim women perceive the clothing practices of their fellow Muslim women from different cultures, undertaken through acts of comparing. The ways used to build and negotiate their own ideas about good Muslim women can be starkly different.

The chapter illustrates the comparing phenomenon by inviting the reader to attend a Muslim wedding, and to meet Muslim women from Arabic and non-Arabic speaking backgrounds. *Muslim wedding* does not give an in-depth illustration of wedding rituals in different Muslim cultures; rather it offers a taste of how post migration multicultural Muslim contexts shape women's understanding and perceptions of their own Muslim practices, made in comparison to other Muslim cultural practices. The wedding part of the chapter serves as a set of weaving threads, to illustrate the differences among Arabic and non-Arabic speakers' understandings of concepts such as modesty through clothing, religious 'authenticity,' the cultural role of wedding celebrations, and their cultural positioning on music or fashion, as forms of emotional expression and release.

The second part of the chapter highlights how diversity and multiplicity exist not only among Muslim women from different cultures but also within the same cultural, ethnic and national groups. By presenting the story of a Santa Claus Parade, the chapter takes readers to a parade of theme-decorated floats, with Muslim women and their families from Pakistan. Again, this part highlights the different understandings and interpretations among a group of Pakistani women.

Some Muslim women link the Santa Parade with the Christian religious festival, and so avoid attending it themselves, or taking their children to these parades. They are of the view that Muslims should avoid attending religious celebrations that promote other religions. There are however other Muslim women who understand Santa Claus Parades as a non-religious activity. They see it as holiday celebration, and part of the western culture where they now live. Some other Muslim women strongly believe such events are related to western religious celebrations, but yet allow their children to attend. They consider that their children are going to know about other religions and their religious celebrations anyway, so why not to take them to such events themselves and strengthen their Islamic beliefs by explaining the differences. Thus, this part shows the diversity among Pakistani women by analysing their arguments around a Santa Claus Parade event.

What ties these two events together are their reflections on the one common theme, that is, *difference*. Differences in understandings and the practice of Islamic teachings come from the home culture, wider cultural exposure, contextual readings of religious texts, education, socio-economic and family background, age-group, gender, and geography, but are not limited to these. Differences are evident not only among women from different ethnicities or cultural backgrounds, but also amongst women from similar socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Analysis of the two 'focus' events has the potential to surface some of the subtler and more nuanced modes of response to cultural pressures and to show that the women undergoing those pressures are not inert, passive receivers of messages of cultural power but are active agents in the processes of adaptation.

This phenomenon of *comparing* is also obvious in women's understanding of their own clothing and other practices such as music, dance, Arabic language, Arab culture as well as of the Santa Claus Parade. In almost all of the narratives, comparing can be observed, either among women's own understanding of the parade based on their religious, cultural, educational or familial background, or in the comparative aspects that arise as a direct result of living in non-Muslim cultures. The narratives also highlight that women's fluid, changeable dispositions towards their cultural Muslim practices keep them in a state of *becoming*.

Part One: Muslim Wedding

Although the discussion here is based primarily on observations of an Iraqi wedding, I have also added observations and comments that took place on several other occasions - other weddings and Muslim women-only gatherings - to enrich the insights offered by the women involved, as well as to extend a further layer of confidentiality to maintain the privacy of my research participants.

Throughout the course of my research, I attended eleven Muslim weddings. In three of these weddings the brides were Pakistani Kiwis, and the grooms 'imported' from Pakistan to marry. The three marriages were arranged according to cultural customs with the involvement and consent of the parents as well as the willingness of the brides and grooms. In the other two weddings, the brides and grooms independently selected each other, and the couples organised their weddings themselves, with the help of the Muslim community. Out of these two, one couple was from Pakistan and the other an Egyptian groom and a convert French Muslim bride. Another was a semi-arranged marriage, in which the bride was from Pakistan and the groom a Sri-Lankan Kiwi. The marriage was organised by the bride's sister, who was already living in Aotearoa NZ. In this case, the bride was the import. The seventh wedding was of a Singaporean bride to a convert Kiwi Muslim. Both had been living with each other for many years and decided to marry when the groom converted to Islam. Then there were two more Pakistani weddings, brothers who had grown up in Aotearoa NZ, one of them married to a Pakistani Kiwi bride, while the other brother's wife was her cousin from Pakistan. Both the marriages were organised by

their parents, one with the help of a marriage-celebrant. Then there was one marriage in which a Pakistani bride married a Fijian groom. The wedding was organised by an Imam Masjid. Lastly, there was an Iraqi wedding in which an Iraqi Kiwi bride married an Iraqi groom who came to Aotearoa NZ to marry.

Out of all these weddings, only the Iraqi wedding[43] was celebrated in total gender segregation. The rest of the marriages had mixed male and female gatherings, even if the men and women were sitting separately in the same hall. In the Iraqi wedding, there was a total separation of men and women. There was not a single man inside the hall where the bride was located. Only the groom alone came at the end of the event, and an announcement was made before he was due to enter the hall. All the women grabbed their outer-covering-garments and wrapped them around their bodies and heads. Hence this wedding was different for me, and for some women from non-Arab ethnicities. Most of these women spoke the Arabic language, but were from different parts of the world, including Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

The Celebration - A Poem

The colours

Were bright

Brighter than the Matariki stars

The music

Was melodious

More Melodious than the songs of Tui

[43] The extent of gender segregation in weddings in Iraq can vary depending on factors such as the region of Iraq, the specific cultural and religious beliefs of the families involved, and personal preferences. In more conservative and traditional communities, the segregation can be more pronounced, with separate seating areas for men and women, separate dancing and celebration spaces, and even different entrances to the wedding venue. In urban areas and among more liberal or secular individuals, gender segregation may be less strict, and men and women may mix more freely during the wedding celebration.

The dances

Were effortless movements

In synch with the bodies

The laughter

Was loud

Louder than the sound of the bellbird

The fragrances

Were absorbed in the air

Like in the garden of roses and jasmine

The glamour

And the glitter

Were like in the red-carpet gala

The whispers

The smiles

The wow

The awwww

Look at her

Look at the bride

What a dress

What a vibe

There were

No scarves

No hijabs

No jilbabs

No veils

No niqabs

No migrants

No modesty

Just a feel

To be home

At the beginning of the wedding ceremony, I sat at a table where women from other ethnicities were sitting. I joined a table with one other Pakistani woman, one Indonesian, one Sri-Lankan, two Palestinians, one Jordanian and one Kashmiri. Later another woman from India dragged her chair across to join our table. Most of the discussion that happened on that night, at the table, provided me with themes to explore the multiculturalism among Muslim women across different cultures, to which I added observations and comments from other gatherings too.

Where was the Headscarf?

One of the most strikingly different experiences is to see so many Arabic speaking[44] women dressed in entirely different outfits than I was used to seeing them in, without any headcovers.

[44] Arabic speakers represent a diverse group of people who share the Arabic language as a common linguistic thread. Arabic is a Semitic language and is spoken in 27 countries as an official or widely recognized language with numerous dialects and regional variations, and the Arabic-speaking world encompasses a wide range of cultures, ethnicities,

At first, I did not recognise many women at this wedding, since I had only seen them before in headcovers and fully-covered clothing. I would have been in total shock had I not attended women-only Arab gatherings before. One of the women sitting at our table, at the beginning, expressed her feelings in *Urdu,* secretly, in my ear. It was her first time to attend such a gathering. She was completely shocked. She could not hide her emotions, and said:

> *Adhi nangi, toba astaghfirullah. Ye to angrezon say be agay nikal gae hen, beshak yahan sari ortain hen lekin orton ki apas main be to koi haya hoti hay kay nae? Dekho us nay to sirf bra dikhanay kay liyay ooper bareek si top pehni hay. Mujay lgta hay hm in say kai behtr muslman hen ager sar per dupatta na be lain to pooray dhakay huay to hotay hen.*
>
> Translation: Half-naked, God forgive them. These women have surpassed English speaking women. There is no doubt this is a woman-only gathering, but there must be some modesty/shame among women. Look [at that woman] she has worn a sheer top just to expose her bra. I think we [Pakistani women] are much better Muslims. Even if we don't cover our heads, we cover ourselves [bodies] fully.

I understood what my Pakistani participant meant, and the level of cultural shock she was going through. For most Pakistanis, Arabic speaking Muslims are 'the real Muslims.' This is mainly because of the status of the language itself. The Quran was revealed in Arabic, and there is a general perception that Arabic speakers understand the Quran better. Hence, they must be 'better Muslims.' A second reason is that the Islamic pilgrimage of Hajj is in Saudi Arabia, so there is a sacred association with Arabic speaking Muslims. If a Pakistani woman has never travelled to

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and backgrounds. I am aware of the geographical, political, cultural, religious, socio-economic, historical, linguistic and ethnic diversity of these countries. However, it was evident that most of my non-Arab participants tended to view Arab speakers through a single lens. The prevailing perception held by many was that all Arab speakers were expected to be devout Muslims simply because they were familiar with the language of the Quran. I have discussed this in the chapter.

any Arab country before, and meeting Arab women has been her only first-hand interaction here in Aotearoa NZ, then she is likely to have high expectations.

For my new friend and fellow wedding guest, seeing Arab women in miniskirts, above-the-knee sleeveless dresses, and see-through mesh tops, was a total cultural shock. She did understand that there were no men around, but she still insisted that there should be some *haya* (modesty/shame) even among women.

Influence of Arabic (Arab culture) on other Muslim cultures

Before I discuss the marriage related aspects further, it is relevant to discuss the influence of Arab culture and Arabic language over other Muslim cultures. For example, in the last decade or so, many Arabic words have been added to the Urdu language (spoken in Pakistan), to express being a more/better 'Muslim,' because Arabic is the language of the Quran. In the Urdu language, for instance, the fasting month is pronounced 'Ramazan' (which has Persian roots), while in Arabic, it is 'Ramadan.' Interestingly, all of my friends sent me greeting messages with the phrase "Ramadan Kareem" (Arabic roots). It was never like this among Pakistani Muslims a decade or so ago. We used to say "*Ramazan Mubarak ho*" meaning 'Happy Fasting Month,' or 'congratulations on the arrival of the fasting month.' The same has happened with Eid greetings. Now '*Eid-ul-A**z**ha*' (with Z sound) is pronounced as '*Eid-ul-A**d**ha*' (with D sound), and good-wishes are expressed by the term "*Eid-Saeed*" or "*Eid-un Saeed-un*," instead of '*Eid Mubarak.*' Similarly, '*Khuda Hafiz*' has become '*Allah Hafiz.*' 'Khuda' is an Urdu word (derived from Persian) for God, and Allah is the Arabic word. This is a way of saying 'goodbye' - which most English speakers have forgotten is an abbreviation of 'God-be-with-ye' and means much the same: 'God protect you,' or 'I wish you God's protection.' I observed a discussion on the term '*Allah Hafiz*' in which a woman commented:

> *Khuda Hafiz is not how Muslims should say goodbye. It is only As-salamu-alaikum when you enter and when you leave.*

Similarly, one of the participants said that in Indonesia, people say As-salamualaikum when meeting other Muslims or entering/leaving someone's house, if the owner is Muslim too. The word from Arabic that is used sometimes is "*rejak.*" If someone says "*Ana rejak dulu*" it means "I am going to leave now." "*Rejak*" means leaving, "*ana*" means "I," and the words "*rejak*" and "*ana*" are believed to come from Arabic culture. These words are only practised among Arab communities when they are talking to their peers.

The increasing Arab influence is not limited to language only, but has spread to clothing, head-covering styles, and other cultural practices. Tight head-coverings with a headscarf were never mandated as Muslim dress in Pakistan and India. However, this is becoming popular now. I remember talking to one of the women from India:

> *I do not know if any dress style is Muslim or Islamic. The basic teaching of Islam is about modesty. Whatever one wears should not be revealing. My dadi [grandmother] told us that when they were living in Hindustan [pre-partition] she used to cover their heads with long dupattas, along with other Hindu, Sikh and Christian women. Hindu women mostly covered their heads with their Sari Palu [one end of the Sari]. If nobody questioned that during that time, centuries ago, why are things radicalising this way, now? We Muslims will lose our cultural traditions one day, and will become followers of Arabic culture, rather than following Islamic teachings.*

Similarly, becoming an 'authentic' Muslim (by following Arab tradition) also includes the disassociation with a few cultural practices which were different from Arab culture. For example, once a group of women planned to organise a cultural performance for a multicultural event, in which one woman suggested doing a *Mehndi* (first day of Pakistani wedding celebration) performance. Her idea was that a *Mehndi* performance would give the public an insight into Pakistani wedding celebration. This was only supported by three women in the group, while the remaining seven members did not support it or remained quiet. One of them said, "*I do not think Mehndi represents Pakistani culture. This is not ours; we have taken it from Hindus.*" This was not

the first time I had come across this comment. I have heard this from several other Pakistani women, who have commented that the way we celebrate weddings is not part of our culture. Although all of them celebrated Mehndi at their own weddings and is a core part of wedding celebrations in Pakistan, in 'theory' they did not agree with it, saying that *"this festivity/event has become part of Pakistani culture only because we used to live with Hindus before the partition of the sub-continent."*

This processing of an already complex formulation became even more complicated when these women migrated to Aotearoa NZ. The threats that come from living as a minority in a dominant culture appear to be producing a strengthening the affiliation with Islam, and a weakening sense of being Pakistani. However, their understanding about certain things also remains in continuous change when they interact with Muslim women from other cultures, especially Arabs, and then compare it to their own cultural practices.

Gender Segregation at the Wedding

Turning to the Iraqi wedding, which was strictly gender segregated[45], our conversation starts with a discussion about how Arab women dress at home and in women-only (gender segregated) gatherings. This is one of the frequent topics we have in women-only gatherings. For instance, a conversation between a few Pakistani, Palestinian and Egyptian women on the issue debated whether this was part of Muslim or Arab tradition. This proved especially insightful. The discussion occurs at a women-only party that I and one of my Palestinian friends had organised. Shanzay asks Farwa why Arab people mostly do not have mixed gatherings.

> *Shanzay: Why do Arab people not have many mixed gatherings? Is it because most Arab women wear short dresses? I often think that there might be no cultural outfits that these women can wear outside their*

[45] In certain Arab-majority nations, gender-segregated weddings are customary, although this practice is not uniform across the region. The extent to which weddings are segregated depends significantly on factors such as social class, religious beliefs, the level of devoutness within a family, and the specific country within the region under consideration. For instance, it's noteworthy that Muslim weddings in Lebanon and Palestine frequently do not adhere to gender segregation at all.

homes? Whenever I think of Arab women's cultural dresses it is just the Abaya that comes to mind. I have only seen Arab women in women-only gatherings in western clothes, they wear those because they are readily available, everywhere. I cannot forget the dresses that were displayed on mannequins in Medina [Saudi Arabia], they exhibit what women in Saudi Arab wear. The plazas there looked like those in Bangkok and Singapore. For a minute one forgets that she is standing in a Muslim country's shopping mall.

Mizzy: And also, it is strange that men do not attend wedding ceremonies. We have a kind of mixed gathering that we do in the same hall, and men sit at one side and women at the other, but if among family and family friends both men and women want to sit together, they can, with no restrictions. There are no hard and fast rules. I have limited knowledge of Islam, but I think this segregation comes from Arab culture rather than Islamic teachings. Because I don't understand: if Islam says that women should wear a headscarf in front of na-mehram men, this means in itself that Islam is allowing women to mix with the opposite gender. Doesn't it?

Farwa: Don't mix up what Islam says and what Muslims do. People who do not understand the Quran make a big mess of the real essence of Quranic teachings and cultural practices. If there is one thing in the Quran which is clear, let's take it clearly. The Quran clearly outlines how men and women interact.

[I have added the translation from the Quran, as I could not take exact notes while Farwa spoke].

Reference from the Quran: discussion on lowering the gaze:

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity .... verily, Allah is aware of all that they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms beyond what may be apparent thereof; hence let them draw their veils over their bosoms and do not show their adornments except to their husbands or their fathers or their husbands' fathers or their sons or their husbands' sons or their brothers or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons or their women or what their right hands possess or male servants free of sexual desires or those children who never know the private things of women, and do not stamp their feet so that it may show their hidden adornments, and repent towards God collectively O believers so that you may succeed (Al-Quran, n.d., Surah An-Nur: 30-31).

The quotation starts with 'lowering the gaze,' but what is meant by that? If men and women both are asked to lower their gaze, does it refer to free mixing, then?

Shanzay: Well, you are taking the Quran too literally. If we cannot comprehend Arabic, it does not mean we cannot understand the Quran. And now in this era when there are hundreds of applications and thousands of websites are available, the Quran has become more accessible and understandable than ever before. Lowering the gaze, I would not take it as if word for word. It could be interpreted as symbolic. Like when you meet, meet with respect, with good manners and good intentions.

Mizzy: Just let me add, why would someone be asked to lower their gaze if he or she is not supposed to meet the opposite gender? The verse itself legitimizes the mixing of men and women - in a respectable way.

On that night, earlier, and at this wedding table, we had an in-depth discussion outlining the reasons why most Arabs have gender-segregated weddings, debating whether gender

segregation is culturally rooted or Islamic. We concluded that in our experience, most Arab speaking women may dress freely within their homes (in the presence of *mahram* men only) and with their circle of women friends. Arab (speaking) women do not wear these outfits in a mixed-gender wedding.

In Pakistan, we traditionally have semi-segregated weddings. By semi-segregated weddings, I mean that although men and women sit separately, they are generally in one big hall, or else the hall is divided by separators/wall dividers, but men can visit the women's sitting area and women can also go to the men's area. However, in many urban parts of Pakistan, there are now weddings where there is no concept of gender segregation at all. Families and friends sit at tables together. I have attended many women-only gathering (mainly with Arabic speakers) in Aotearoa NZ, but I didn't know that wedding celebrations could happen in entirely segregated groups.

One of the Indonesian women shares the way things are done in her country:

> *Indonesia is an island nation, from Sumatera Island to Papua Island, almost 360 tribes with different cultural traditions for weddings. Separation is mostly done in Aceh, Sumatera Island in Padang Minang culture, as they try hard to bring Islamic traditions into daily life, influencing the local culture and traditions. We have five different religions, so regions with Islamic influence are practising Islamic traditions in their wedding celebrations, but on an Island like Bali where it is mostly Hinduism, a wedding is done in Hindu tradition. In Bimanese, Sumbawa Island, the eastern part of Indonesia, Islamic tradition is in place. In the past people have wedding celebrations going on for seven days, now they make it really short and simple because of time and budget.*

At this Iraqi wedding, in Aotearoa NZ, there was not a single man, not even the immediate family of the bride, such as her father or brothers. The groom is allowed into the hall only at the end of the wedding ceremony, to come in and take the bride, and before his arrival, a proper announcement is made. I ask where the men are celebrating? I am told that they are having

dinner at some restaurant. I ask, ‘So they won’t join the wedding celebration?' I am surprised to know that men usually have their own celebrations, and sometimes only dinners. My sense of having an ‘insider’ predisposition towards Muslim custom fades away, and I start to observe this wedding entirely as an outsider.

Fashion

My fellow table guests are not from Arabic speaking countries alone, as is the case with many of the other tables, hence, our conversations are mostly about ‘we and them’, discussing topics around clothing, fashion, culture, dresses, fabrics, style, embroidery, and ‘what we do’ and ‘what they do.’ In our conversations ‘they’ mostly refers to women from Arab speaking backgrounds, such as Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt, while ‘us or we’ refers to the rest of the table guests who are non-Arabic speakers. However, at times ‘they’ mean westerners and ‘we’ means Muslims, both Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers. As I reflect on our conversations below, I will make a clear distinction as to which group is referenced.

Fashion and culture remain hot topics around the table. As conversations become deeper and intense, it starts to become clear that fashion is both very subjective and culturally rooted. What is fashionable for women from India and Pakistan is not fashionable for Jordanian and Palestinian women at all.

The following conversation between Maya, Rahma and Kamar highlights this point further:

> *Kamar: By the way, at least we look different at parties and weddings. You [Indian and Pakistani women] all look the same whether it is a party or an everyday thing, or even a women-only gathering or a mixed one. Same clothes [long length shirt and loose trousers] style with a bit of glitter, shine or embroidery [laughs].*
>
> *Maya: What? Do we look the same? Now, this is something serious. We have a lot more variety of clothes, their styles, patterns, fabric, embroidery - and much more so than yours - and even compared to the world. Open your eyes*

wide and look at the fabric [she picks up the fabric of her dress and shows it to Kamar] - it is called chiffon. Not the chiffon that Annah Stretton or Kate Sylvester use in their designer dresses that you buy with utmost pride, not the one many New Zealand and Australian brands sell, they use georgette and call it chiffon. No one in our countries wears georgette now. It is old-fashioned, cheap, and an irritating fabric. We are the producers of quality fabric, whether it is cotton or silk.

Kamar: No, I don't mean different colours and fabric types, you people have lots of those. I mean like, the same loose baggy trousers - ummmm... always, and then the same tops, long length... like they look all the same style. Using all those varieties of fabrics you make similar outfits out of those. No offence, but it is quite monotonous to me. Then you wear them everywhere, I am not saying they are not beautiful, but I am certain they look the same.

Rahma: You need to make careful observations of fashion before making any such comments. Shalwar Kameez is our traditional wear, but fashion changes every other year. From above knee length Kameezes to full length and fishtail - and the same with Shalwars. We do fashion within our limits of modesty. I don't think that we are modern [with a satirical nod towards the short outfits those Arab women wear in women-only gatherings] like you people, and I think we can't be. Or maybe modern is the wrong word, maybe hypocritical. You know the first time I attended an Arab woman only birthday party, I was shocked; the women I saw in headscarves and gowns outside were wearing the smallest clothes I have ever seen and imagined. I felt I was present among beauty contestants, showing off their figures and the shortest dresses. Although I was wearing a Sari with a sleeveless blouse it seemed to me, I was the most covered women, as if I did not belong to the party.

Maya: [laughs and looks at Kamar] If you don't mind me speaking, I have had similar experiences too. I would think thousands of times about wearing a mini skirt. And if by all means, I wore that, the women in my [Pakistani] community would stone me to death with their looks and taunting remarks. I would never gain respect as a respectable woman, no matter if I started even wearing a niqab afterwards.

Kamar: Well, it is very weird. I never heard this before and for us, it is pretty normal to dress like this at parties. What's wrong with you both? These are all women here, so whom to shame? You both sound very conservative, and illogical.

This conversation reminds me of many similar dialogues among Muslim women during my research. Once I overheard a group of Pakistani women gossiping about women who were wearing short dresses at a women-only Eid get-together. They were saying that they would never wear such clothes, and that this could not be an Islamic way of dressing. They laughed, taunted such women, and tried to maintain their piousness by telling each other that they were better at making clothing choices, in an Islamic way. The strategy of 'comparison' was at play to define their own piousness in relation to other women who had made different clothing choices.

The above conversation between Maya, Kamar and Rahma was neither new nor entirely unique. The unique angle was that these women exchanged views about each other's cultures face to face, which rarely happened during the course of my research. These kinds of conversations usually take place among women of one culture, in which they talk about women from another culture. This gossip trend was most evident among Muslim women who had only recently migrated to Aotearoa NZ. Over time, as women gain social exposure, mingling with various Muslim cultures, the frequency and intensity of such gossiping becomes gentler. For example, if a Pakistani woman goes to an Arab Muslim gathering for the first time, her expressions, thoughts and gossip style will be different, but this will change over time with exposure to different Muslim cultures. She may or may not adopt those changes, but she will start seeing them as their/her

‘normal.’ After every Muslim women's gathering, such as Eid celebrations, IWCNZ conferences, women-only parties, such conversations happen within a group of Pakistani women, who comment on how Muslim women from other cultures can show their legs, or wear outfits that are revealing.

Bridal Dress

With random jokes, snack breaks, lots of laughter and comments on other women’s outfits and make-up, appreciative comments about the bride and her family, the conversation on our table continues. Amra says that the bride is very beautiful, and her dress reminds her of her own wedding in Sri Lanka. She says that she also wore a white dress, and then changed into a red Saree.

> *Amra: Will the bride have a change of dress?*
>
> *Sama: Maybe? It is her choice.*
>
> *Amra: Oh, I mean do brides in Iraq change from a white dress to their own traditional costume?*
>
> *Sama: I am not very sure, but we mostly do. But I know many brides who just cover up in a fancy gown at the time of departing the hall.*

Usually, it is understood that an Arabic speaking woman knows all about cultural matters. In Pakistani culture, brides usually wear a red dress on the main day of the wedding (second day after *mehndi*), although nowadays the choice of colour entirely depends on the bride and her family - but a pattern in the bridal attire style can still be drawn. For example, Pakistani bridal dresses are heavily worked with embroidery of different kinds. The bridal ensemble comes with a *dupatta*, which mostly has a separate top and a long skirt, a style called *Lehnga-choli*. This Iraqi wedding was different for me, as the bride was wearing a white dress with no head cover, and holding a flower bouquet at times. There is a beautiful wedding cake, and the food involves lots of baking and traditional Iraqi sweets. There is also loud music and dancing.

In Pakistan, brides do not change their dress. On *Rukhsati* [when a bride leaves her parents' home on the second day of the wedding], they sometimes wear a shawl on their shoulders, and at times over their heads, with fringing that covers half of the face. A close family member holds the Quran high enough so the bride can walk under the Quran, a ritual that seeks blessings in her married life.

Someone else comments on the bridesmaids' dresses. All the bridesmaids are from different ethnicities, including Pakeha New Zealanders.

> *Look at the bridesmaids' dresses [points towards the bridesmaids' dresses], they all are black, flowy, beautiful black. Just like black abayas with a bit of modification. How contradictory it is that abayas, gowns, and maxis are just the same thing, but they have so many different meanings. If a woman uses them to cover her body, it is conservative - but when a woman chooses them to adorn herself it is all acceptable.*

All the women, vocal or not, understood that Muslim women's dress had implications for their everyday life. They compared maxis with abayas and were certain that there was a difference in the ways Muslim women use them. The more revealing, the more western. One woman says:

> *I never understood how revealing clothes could liberate women? Or how the full body cover represses them? I never understood why clothes matter that much. Why does religion [Islam] and secularism end up arguing about clothes? It is just one act, an individual one. Why don't other values matter - ones that are more communal, societal? Why don't we all let each other wear what we choose to? Are we too short-sighted that we cannot think or see beyond appearance? There are people with beautiful hearts and minds, but maybe for too short-sighted people clothes are a barrier to exploring people holistically?*

This woman used to cover her head, but she stopped. However, after a few years she started using a face covering, continued for a few years and then she stopped again. She was very open to sharing her past experiences. Most of the women I met who had worn a head cover in the past and stopped at a later time were not comfortable mentioning it. However, this woman was very different. She said she was in the process of exploring herself, and the more she explored the more she becomes closer to Allah.

> *I have found peace. I have found the purpose in my life. I just want to love Allah. I love Allah. I see him everywhere. Nobody could tell what was in my heart through the ways I dress, and this does not bother me anymore. The other day one of our friends told me that I should dress more properly - you know, like the traditional Muslim way - and I was like, what? It is my and my Allah's matter. Who are you to say that to me?*

The search among my participants for an authentic Muslim dress was becoming more and more like an unsolved puzzle for me.

At the end of the wedding, women start to join the dance. There is one small circle in the middle, and one larger circle outside, maybe to accommodate as many women as possible in that space. There are laughs, glamour, loud music and beautiful dances. As the bride joins the dance, the excitement of the women increases. I join them for one dance, but then realise the dance is actually not one from Pakistani culture - or maybe I have never known how to dance. I do some random body moves, among amazing women who seem good enough to be professional belly dancers. I only know these random movements by watching dances in Bollywood movies. However, attending women-only dances, particularly with Arab women, I have learned to 'dance as if no one was watching.'.After I return to my table, another Pakistani woman asks me, "*are you trying to be one of them, despite knowing that music is haram in Islam.*"

Music

Again, all of my research participants have a different stance on music. Some say "who cares?" while others say, "Allah is merciful, and this was not something too sinful, so I expect Allah will forgive me." I met a number of women who say they do not listen to music at all, and they do not want to introduce music to their kids. I also met a woman who has found her passion for music, and she is taking music classes from a music teacher. Another woman explains:

> *If music does not lead you astray from your Namaz* [mandatory prayers] *and Deen* [religion]*, then it is halal. But if it gets in the way of your being a Muslim, then it is haram.*

Some women say only those instruments that were played in the Prophet's (PBUH) time were *halal*, such as the *Daphli* (a little drum). One of my Indonesian participants says:

> *In Indonesia, in Bimanese culture, traditional music, called Hadrah, is played when the groom and his accompanied family are entering the wedding venue. In the main gate, the Hadrah players start to play the music as part of the welcome ceremony. The Hadrah performers sing/recite the good names of Allah, by using the hands to make sounds on the Rebanas. The Rebanas are music instrument made from wood, and the skin of animals like cows. In general, people think of music as part of the culture in Indonesia, even Muslim weddings also have loud music, especially "dangdut" which is part of the trademark of Indonesian, mostly played during the wedding. Dances, traditional dances for weddings are part of wedding ceremonies. They have different names in many different places, it depends on the spatial locations and tribes. In Bimanese, the dance is called 'Dende Bunti Mone,' meaning the groom is accompanied to enter the bride's house.*
>
> *During the wedding vow ceremony, or in local language, it is called a 'lafa' event, the bride uses the traditional Indonesian 'kebaya' dress in a white*

colour, or wears an abaya in white colour, or modified wedding dress, mostly in white. During the wedding party, the newlyweds usually wear local traditional wedding clothes in Bimanese, red in colour, with all the accessories, such as traditional hat, sword, handkerchief, bracelet, necklace, and others.

Back at the wedding, there is an announcement that the groom is about to enter the hall. Within just a minute or two, all the women there have covered themselves in gowns and abayas, some in long skirts, and some, who were already wearing long skirts, cover their heads. The smiles and laughs were still there. The dancing stops. The music that was playing stops, or the volume is turned down. The groom comes in, happy and excited, and walks across the stage. He kisses the bride, and my Pakistani fellow-guest again whispers, *"Pakistani men would die kissing their wives in public.*" The groom holds the bride's hand and walks away (almost at a running speed).

This part of the chapter has highlighted the different standpoints of my research participants around wedding rituals, perceptions of Arabic language as the language of Islam, Arabic culture, fashion, clothing, music and modesty. Each of these elements is subject to individual interpretation. The differences in their perceptions and opinions are based on their traditions, culture, ethnic backgrounds and their own understanding of religious texts. This highlights the complexity, multiplicity and diversity among Muslim women, which refutes the widespread western conceptualisation of Muslim women as an homogenous group, who are mostly seen through the lens of religion alone (Hussain, 2008; Nagel & Staeheli, 2009; Soltani, 2021).

There is a dearth of studies which capture this multiplicity and diversity among Muslim communities (Karaman, 2022). Addressing this gap, this part of the chapter has analysed diversity within Muslims, highlighting how Muslim women negotiate meanings associated with Islamic practices by constant comparison, at the intersection of multiple positionalities based on different cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds.

Part Two: Santa Claus Parade

The previous section explored diversity and difference among Muslim women from different countries, ethnicities, and cultures, mainly Arab and non-Arab, and showed the myriad ways of being Muslim women. This section further explores the diversity and differences among Muslim women belonging to one national background, Pakistani women. Building on the comments of Pakistani Muslim women on the issue of participation in a Santa Claus Parade float, this section shows how the perceptions and interpretations of Muslim women vary not only if they are from a variety of national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, but that the views of Muslim women from the same country, who share the same culture, language and ethnicity can also be diverse. Thus, I intensify and strengthen my argument that there are not only myriad ways of *being* and *becoming* Muslim women, but also uncountable ways of *being* and *becoming* Pakistani Muslim women.

I have met Pakistani women who wear niqab and the hijab, and those who never think about wearing this attire. I have observed Pakistani women who never want to shake hands with the opposite gender, and I have also met Pakistani women who greet the opposite gender by hugging and cheek-kissing. None of these women consider themselves less Muslim than others. Nonetheless, the concept of '*good,,* and '*not very good,* Pakistani women has always existed, particularly in close-knit communities. The group chat I present here highlights the differences in women's opinions around participation in Santa Claus parade.

Private Chat Group

During my research, I had a chance to participate in and observe a virtual discussion regarding the participation of a Pakistani community in a Santa Claus Parade, on a social media platform. It was a private social media group, whose members were Pakistani Muslim women. The issue discussed was whether the Local Pakistani Association (LPA - a pseudonym) should represent itself to its local Aotearoa NZ community by participating on a Santa Claus Parade float. The idea was that some Pakistani community members with their families in traditional Pakistani dresses sit on the float waving a Pakistani flag. This turned out to be a heated debate, in which opposing

opinions were expressed, some in satirical tones, but maintaining the integrity and respect of the group members.

As I write this, I am not sure if I have done full justice to this chat in my analysis. While I re-read the chat, it takes me back to the same house, the very chair I sat in, and the prevailing atmosphere as it happened - and how I was feeling guilty for introducing a specific question to the chatroom thread about the Santa Claus parade float, which intensified the initial controversy. A few friends of mine personally messaged me alongside the postings on the group chat. I knew many women personally. The women in the group had known each other for a long time and were aware of one another's personalities and views. The chat ran to almost nine thousand words in total, and humour and anger were both present. Before going into the discussion on the Santa Claus parade, I will give a brief background about the chat group.

Background of the Chat Group

The chat group is usually used to convey general updates on group members, sending forwarded Islamic messages, sharing cultural jokes, introducing new Pakistani community members, giving farewell notices, and organising various Pakistani community gatherings. However, this is not the LPA's formal group for sharing notices. For that purpose, there is another, more formal group, which has similar membership. Only site administrators are allowed to post in that group.

The chat group was created a couple of years after the creation of the formal group. The need to create this chat group was felt after important notices from the LPA started getting lost within many other conversations and forwarded messages. Sometimes there were more than eighty unread messages when you opened the group after a few hours or a day of absence. An administrator made group rules to limit the messages but these were not followed, and so someone from the group suggested having two groups: one to convey notices and updates from the LPA, and the other for general messages/conversation. The following message was posted after creating the unofficial chat group:

Tehreem: Now we have this open forum for any kind of discussion. Please feel free to share your feelings about current affairs here ....

And anybody who doesn't wanna have junk mail is free to leave the group

...

Ajwa: Great job [admin]. Hopefully all ladies will use this group for all matters apart from LPA *Yainee laraee jagharay, bla, bla*... [means this groups is open to fights and arguments, etc etc...]

A year later, the administrator has had to made rules for this group too, to say that there should be no more than three messages, per member, per day. The rule was revisited after the discussion on the Santa Claus Parade and limited to one message.

Most of the women in this group belong in the age bracket of thirty-fifty years, and are married with young children. Although the group comprises sixty-five women, only eight women actively participated in the debate. There are a couple of community members who are not from Pakistan, but can read, write and understand the Urdu language, and share Pakistani traditions and culture, being part of the Pakistani community for many years.

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the group members, I have used pseudonyms. By using pseudonyms, I have hidden their identity as an interim measure, but if chat participants read this discussion, they will be able to identify who is whom. However, they already know one another, and about the chat, and about me and my research. I also sought their permission to use their comments in the thesis. All women in the group know that I asked questions on the LPA chat site for my research. One of the group members even mentioned this in the group chat.

Tehreem: "We have collected heaps of data for your thesis @Hina"

Fazila: "True that..."

> And Reda added at the end of the discussion:
>
> Reda: "Great and very clear point of view! At least we have opened a platform where we can have a dialogue!"

A few women participated only through 'thumbs up' signs or sharing emojis: smiles, angry and crying faces, or one-word answer. Instead of using their pseudonyms, I will use 'anonymous.' This will help to maintain the flow of the chat without inundating the discussion with names. I discovered later that some of the group members, who did not participate in the debate virtually, discussed this topic in other face-to-face meetings and at other gatherings. This chat remained a hot discussion topic for a few months over different gatherings.

Through this chat, I will highlight the diversity of opinions within the Pakistani group and their views regarding Santa Claus parade as a religious or a cultural festival, as well as how to integrate into wider Aotearoa NZ society, especially in terms of their children.

The discussion starts after an administrator posted a notice of the LPA's decision to participate in the Santa Parade. The administrator posts the following message in both the formal LPA and informal group.

> This year we are going to participate in the Christmas Parade as a community. A beautifully decorated float will enter the parade. Kids of 5-10 years of age are invited to join us on the Pakistani and NZ themed float. Kids will be dressed in beautiful cultural attires. Please RSVP for your kids' participation.

The controversial discussion started when I ask if the Pakistani community was participating as a cultural or a religious organisation?

My question provided a catalyst for many women to express their views about the participation of the Pakistani community in a Santa Parade, but it also made several women upset. One of them even left the group. I asked the question with a genuine intention as a researcher to know

their opinions, and I did not anticipate that the discussion would turn into a serious debate. To lessen my guilt at upsetting others, I tried twice to end the debate, but that did not work.

When I ask about the nature of participation, the administrator, also a member of the LPA's committee, replies as follows:

> Thank you, Hina. We are participating as Pakistani friends of the NZ community :) Just a positive gesture of seasonal greetings and best wishes to the wider communities in NZ.

Another group member, Saher, posts that it seems like cultural participation. The debate starts when a senior member of the community, Ajwa, an earlier immigrant in the city, well respected by the community, but also known to be outspoken, posts:

> So that means we are encouraging our kids to celebrate Christmas which is a Christian Festival. To watch the parade is something different from participating in it.

Pakistani Community and Integration into Aotearoa NZ Society

Ajwa's post invites other women to express their concerns about raising children as Pakistani-Muslim-New Zealanders. That further raises the issue of how we should live in Aotearoa NZ, and interact with the wider society, which remains the topic of overall debate in the group chat.

For some, it is important to integrate into the wider Aotearoa NZ society by participating in their culture and religious activities, while for others this is not an authentic way to integrate. There is no consensus, no shared understanding of how one should integrate, how to draw boundaries. All the women have set their own limits. A few women from the group post a thumbs-up to the post, and an administrator posts the following:

> Well, we should not be always at the receiving end.... try to learn to give as well... it works both ways... our attitude should be positive if we think NZ is our home for the rest of life...
>
> If their kids can perform *haka* in our Masjid to show solidarity .... they attended our Eid function in huge numbers.... and they attended our Islam open days .... why can't we be happy for them when it's our turn??? This kind of extremist mindset isolates us from them ... your religion won't change by showing acceptance towards others ... teach your kids to be humble towards every kind of "human beings" not only Muslims....!!!

The administrator gave the example of the haka (Aotearoa NZ Māori ceremonial challenge, performed in a group to represent a tribe's pride, strength, and unity) to imply ways that Pakistanis could compare how they might act with solidarity. Her mention of 'receiving and giving' refers to the 15 March mosque attacks in Christchurch, 2019, which was also an act of *comparing*. Many other women feel obligated to respond because of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's reaction towards the Muslim community after that incident. An intense sense of 'paying back' exists among many community members, and they are finding ways to play their own role in the wider Aotearoa NZ society, to show that Muslims are part of Aotearoa NZ. The administrator's comment also conveys the message of giving back, integrating and being respectful.

Another factor that could be considered relevant was that the administrator has been a full-time working woman since she arrived in Aotearoa NZ several years ago, while Ajwa only worked initially in her own medical business, and now mostly remains at home. When I revisit the entire chat, a trend can be drawn between the points of view of working and non-working women. Working women's responses to integrating into Aotearoa NZ society are fluid, always in the process of *making* and *unmaking,* mostly based on *comparison.*

Another full-time working woman from the group, Reda, who is also an official of KPA, contributes her own views. She had recently become quite vocal in the group, particularly after finishing her science degree.

> Couple of things that we need to learn as a Muslim are:
>
> The openness of our hearts towards other people and more important our religion teaches us to respect and love for everyone.
>
> Integration into society as a New Zealander, I don't understand the point of living in a home if you cannot understand and stand with a home mate in their sorrows and happiness.
>
> We must not close our religion into a box, we need to open the lid!
>
> Let's learn from our prime minister who wore Hijab to show us her love and support and let's show that back!! However, we also respect everyone's points of view if someone is not agreed with us that is fine, no hard feeling. Everyone lives in his/her own way.

Reda shares her life story and her learning and un-learning experience. She says there was a time when she used to cover her head when she was a student.

> I felt that people avoid you because of the way you look. Even Indians were behaving weird with me. For them, I was sure headcover would be a normal thing. I was very passionate about my work and anything that was coming on the way to my work, I had to let that go. I removed the headcover and believe me that the whole thing changed. People in the department started talking to me. Then I also thought maybe in this society a headcover was unnecessary. Allah would never want his followers to get stuck in difficult situations just for a piece of cloth.

Reda often says that she had learned a lot of things about Islam after coming to Aotearoa NZ. She mentions that we (Pakistanis) had made the biggest mistake in handing over Islam (as an

institution) to *Molvis* (Masjid Imams,) who had no authority to control Islam or Muslims. They were not qualified enough, and hence they misinterpreted and misrepresented Islam.

In her comment on the group, she focuses on how to be a good human who respects other religions equally. She says that Islam was a beautiful religion, and the more she learns about Islam the closer she gets to humanity. Whenever we talk about religion, she is protective of her Pakistani Muslim identity, and she also defends Islam and its teachings - but in a non-traditional way.

It was here that I could draw out another trend: that when one lives as a minority, one becomes more protective of one's own existence, beliefs, ideology, culture and especially religion. While protecting her Pakistani and newly discovered ways of being Muslim, she also wants to be a part of Aotearoa NZ society. She gives the analogy of Aotearoa NZ as her home, and all New Zealanders as being like a family. As a part of the family, she says that we should be there to celebrate happiness.

A number of other women express views on how they should act when they were living in Aotearoa NZ. Fiza commented in support of the initiative of the parade: *"good on you guys for being part of the wider community and thinking outside the box. It's about time we take a step forward and come out of our comfort zone."*

Fiza always tries to be inclusive within the Pakistani community. She and her husband have volunteered for Muslim and Pakistani organisations for many years. She does not wear a headcover but is a very devout Muslim. She is also however a non-conformist when it comes to traditional ways of being Muslim. She has become one of my good friends, and I am forever trying to ask her what the reason is for being more inclusive in her initiatives for the community. She never gives a straight answer, but I observed that her children have friends within the community, and she wanted to meet people because of her children. She spends time with non-traditional and non-conformist[46] Pakistani women. Hence, her speaking out clearly in favour of

[46] My use of non-conformist here refers to the women who refuse to conform to established norms, customs and practices of Pakistani and Muslim culture.

the Christmas Parade is significant. Fiza wants the Pakistani community to be more inclusive and integrate with the wider Aotearoa NZ society in 'out-of-the-box' ways.

Raising Pakistani Children in Aotearoa NZ

Another theme that emerged in the discussion was about teaching children. How should Pakistanis train their children, and should they become 'good' Pakistanis, 'good' Muslims, 'good' humans, or 'good' New Zealanders? I will begin this section also with part of Ajwa's's first post:

> So that means we are encouraging our kids to celebrate Christmas which is a Christian Festival.

And then she later adds,

> Well Team you are setting a new trend by giving your thoughts a practical shape. For me, it is highly undesirable as Christmas and Easter hold a religious tag with them. Liberalism and open-mindedness should have some parameters. We should teach our kids to respect other religious belief but not to follow it. Living in their country and surviving in their economy does not mean we are forced to adopt their religious activities; even they do not expect it from us. After all, we do have some self-respect. How many Christians in Pakistan celebrate Eid??? We are disintegrating our new generations by following their trends. And lastly, it is a dilemma that we hesitate to own our religious rituals which we should have felt to be proud of and just to please other nations we give some unjustified reasons to enter their cultural and religious festivals. Everything is not meant for fun; they have some after-effects too. Btw who is going to be Santa Claus from our community???! And then don't forget Easter. Good Luck with your innovative idea. Thx.

Ajwa has children, one of them now at university. I did not know Ajwa well, but in the brief interactions I have had with her I found her straight-forward and well informed. Whatever she would say, she had information and logic to support it. This is not to say that all would agree with her point of view, but she always presented her arguments with examples and evidence. I do not know whether her children received any religious education, but I know that she had children in universities and schools. One of her girls is an amazing emerging artist. She has won prizes in many art competitions, and she has a beautiful voice. After Ajwa's comment, I heard from another Pakistani woman that *"Ajwas's daughter sings so beautifully so is it not against traditional Islamic values. I think it was worse than participating in the parade."* Such comparisons were very normal among Pakistani women: 'if she did this, then why not that?' For example, 'if a woman wears the headscarf why does she shake hands with men?' or 'if a woman is very religious why are her children so independent?'

Ajwa wants to integrate into the wider community on her own terms. She insists that she was only against the idea of participating in the parade through the platform of the Pakistani Association. *"If it is done through the Association's platform, you represent your community and endorse it."* If people watch the parade on their own terms, it is a matter of personal choice. Her point was that children cannot think and analyse as adults. She says:

> Even if 1% of the total youngsters get inspired by it [Christianity and/or parade], that is alarming. Mature persons are not affected; only the fresh minds are affected. And consequences are far beyond our imaginations!!!
>
> She also adds "there are so many other ways to show solidarity with them. Why using our kids for that?"

Ajwa makes her concerns known to the group explicitly, by emphasizing that her concern was children. She does not like the idea of *using kids* for this form of integration. Neither she nor her girls wear a headcover, but she organises many religious community events such as Meelad and events to remember Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his grandson Ali (RA). Sometimes she had Shia women's support to organise such events.

Another group member supports Ajwa, saying:

> I couldn't agree with you more. Teaching children to be Muslims is hard enough in this society, why confuse them even more by letting them participate in such activities.

Agreeing with similar points that Ajwa and others had made, Fazila writes:

> True. If we do not teach and inculcate our faith in their minds and hearts. If we don't tell them about this point of difference, they can get confused at school when each year there is a Christmas celebration. More importantly when they will debate with others in schools and colleges over faith. If I ended up going [to the parade] I will try to use this to highlight our inclusiveness and tolerance and our point of difference with them. That's me. But of course, we all are different with different views. So, we should not criticise those who want to go and equally not criticise those who don't want to go.

Fazila is relatively new in the community but always speaks with logic and information. She told me that she has had tough questions from her teenage girl, and she wants to explain things with logic. She worked in academia in the past, and she mentions that she attended Bible classes and read the Quran to know the difference. She and her husband belong to different religious sects, and she says they have healthy debates at home. She is one of the women who tried to diffuse the heated arguments in the chat whenever possible. Her opinion on the headscarf was "Islam asks for modest clothes - and a headcover was not necessarily part of that." She wants her girl to be educated in her own religion, but to learn diversity and inclusivity toward other religions. She and Ajwa both have the same vision for their children, but achieved through different approaches.

Saher, another group member, seconds Fazila's comment by adding:

> If what you teach your kids will fall apart by mere participating in a parade, then there is something that is needed to be looked at. People have used the words alarming and detrimental so loosely regarding this participation that it feels like a crime.

Again, building on the approach that children should be informed, Rukhsar adds to the debate and asks the group members whether they had ever explained to their children who Jesus (PBUH) was and his role in Islam? See below a few messages that were exchanged:

> **Rukhsar:** So here is my question. Do u all have made your children's minds clear about this difference? Do they even know who the lord Jesus is in Islam? What was the history behind Christmas? It's not just the question of participating in parade sisters. The matter is what consequences we will get by allowing our children to participate in such activities.
>
> **Saher:** I don't know the consequences you are welcome to explain what that might be. We [as a minority] grew up watching *ramayan* and *magabarta*. Our elders were worried too. No one converted to Hinduism. If you feel the consequences for participating in a non-Muslim event are so bad for kids, then the kids can get influenced at school among atheist and non-Muslim kids, they get influenced on internet or elsewhere.
>
> **Fazila:** I went to Bible study to a church for a whole year to understand the basics. To make sure I understood the differences. I frequently talk to my daughter about these differences. The differences about our faith and Jewish, Hindu and Christians. I want her to have informed conversations with her friends. We are a minority. Minority should always know the differences otherwise the majority can influence them. There is so much that they discuss amongst themselves, watch on internet. It's important to use these opportunities to have conversations. That's my view.
>
> **Rukhsar:** Children get easily attracted towards any other culture or religious activities. If we don't make their mind clear about each and every religion,

they will readily accept every sort of religious activities, they will play Holi with Hindus they will sing hela lu ya with Christians do basant with Sikhs. Certainly, they may lose their identity. We know these ways lead them to hellfire and being parents, we should save them from it.

Saher: No, Children don't get attracted to religion or religious activities. Children are same everywhere no matter what community they come from they have the same response to an activity that can invoke a response of happiness. They don't understand anything other than a child activity of fun. We put religious beliefs in them or teach them so. They don't get attracted towards religion. It's not a lolly.

Rukhsar: They will be Muslims but so-called Muslims. I'm again saying that it's not only about parade, things are far beyond than this. If our children wish merry Christmas to fellow Christians then they are doing a biggest sin that is shirk we should think as Muslims before [we think as] Pakistanis. If Prime Minister [Jacinda Ardern] wore headscarf then we Muslim girls should also dress like mother Mary on 25th of December and tell them that we are doing this for solidarity with u Christians.

Saher: Good if you feel that this can have extreme consequences for you and your children please avoid this. That's what others have been repeatedly telling you all.

Rukhsar: But everyone doesn't think as Muslims first. That's the dilemma of today's era.

I did not ever meet Rukhsar in person. It was only through her forwarded messages on the group that I became familiar with her, and then a few close friends of mine told me about her. She has a post-graduate degree in Islamic education, and she mentioned once in a group that she had studied comparative religions. She often shares posts and YouTube videos of Dr Israr Ahmed, who was a Pakistani theologist, Islamic scholar and philosopher. He is well known among Muslims of South Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe and North America.

Many of the active women members of the group do not share Dr Israr Ahmed's views. They would not deny Dr Israr Ahmed his research and his Islamic scholarship, but they have issues with his opinions. One of the group members shares this with me:

> I do not deny his work at all and I am in no position to do that, he had been an excellent scholar and he spent his life in research. However, I do not follow his all interpretation. I do many but not all. I pick and mix from a number of scholars. But I know many women who are in the group and have never been a big fan of Dr Israr's. So, she [Rukhsar] should not have all the time shared his videos. It could be annoying to many.

Another woman says:

> My father was a big fan of Israr Ahmed, but I find him too strict. His talks frighten me. I heard his talk on Muslim women's dress, and I thought I will go to hell straight away. I listened to Ghamidi [a contemporary Islamic scholar] instead. He is more logical, polite and positive.

Rukhsar is vocal about ideology. She wants to spread her views, thinking that as a Muslim it was her duty to preach 'righteousness.' She also strongly believes that righteous people are always limited in number but are needed to carry on their mission. During this chat, she supports her stance by giving detailed references from the Quran which are about minority and majority views. She always provides references, but many say (verbally) that they must be out of context. No one from the group argues with her on the written references she provides. She had come to Aotearoa NZ just a few years before and was not working. She has started teaching the Quran to a few Pakistani children. I heard that a number of women do not like her way of using the group chat as a platform, and some even make fun of her messages. Once, she removed herself from the group, as she felt that the whole group was one team and that she had been 'cornered.' Later on, a few people suggested adding her to the group again. During this chat, at one time an administrator had responded to her directly:

> Administrator: @Rukhsar, probably you didn't understand what everyone is trying to tell you... You will learn how to respect other's "cultures" and acceptance of other beliefs over time I assume... let's just end it here...☺

Many women agreed that it was not worth discussing issues with Rukhsar, as she has been so strict in her ideology and does not appear to respect or listen to others.

The administrator was another who shares the view that we should teach our children, but she was also inclined towards Fazila and Saher's ideology. She at times opposes Rukhsar quite bluntly. She is of the view that if mainstream children (non-Muslim New Zealanders) have exposure to Islamic culture, then what is wrong in having our children (Pakistani New Zealanders) getting exposure to other cultures? Her point of view is "*teach your kids to be humble towards every kind of human being, not only Muslims."* She explicitly mentions *"also, we (the Pakistani association) are going to attend *Guru Nanak's 550th Birthday* on this weekend. Of course, my kids won't convert to Sikhism by this attendance."*

Reda also supported the view that Pakistani children should have exposure to and acceptance of the outer world. She writes:

> Acceptance of other religions: this will teach our kids that all people on this earth are good, [not that[only Muslims who wear Hijabs are great People! Further recent incidents even in our own community gatherings are pointing out that our kids need to learn that deeply!

As mentioned earlier, Reda is a very unconventional religious Muslim woman. In her comment, she refers to an incident that had made her very upset. She later told me that two teenaged girls had been having an argument over the hijab, and one girl (who had previously worn the hijab herself) had said to the other girl that she was a bad Muslim and did not know how a Muslim girl should dress.

Reda is concerned that her girls are not forced to face any such situation, and that they are well informed about other people's beliefs as well. Hence, she wants to make sure that her girls know

about other religions. She asks in her comment: *"So kids will not learn Islam if they participate in the parade, or will they not be good Muslims?"*

She believes that Pakistanis can be good Pakistanis, and at the same time good Muslims and good New Zealanders. She said this would need a different approach to religion and life, but it is all possible.

Identity of a Pakistani as a Cultural or Religious Being

The discussion of the participation in the Christmas parade was happening through the Pakistani Association's platform, so it was concerning for some women whether it appeared to be a representation of the Pakistani Association as a cultural association or a religious association. This debate went onto questioning our own understandings of what identity we had as Pakistanis, whether these are primarily cultural or religious, and if both, then which one comes first? Many women say that it was hard to differentiate, as Pakistan is officially an Islamic country, and the majority of Pakistanis are Muslims. One of the senior members of the group, Rehmat, posts the question on the issue of faith versus culture. She does not actively participate in the chat, but when she feels the need to explain something, she jumps into the discussion.

> Please keep the discussion focussed. Faith vs Culture. My faith is with me, but Culture is posing a challenge. How to conduct ourselves culturally?

Her comment on 'my faith is with me' took faith as a personal issue, which was not the case wih many other women in the group.

Another woman expresses her views by using the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) famous words. She uses the Urdu translation of the Arabic text which means, '*the rewards (of deeds) are according to the intentions, and everybody will get reward for what he has intended.'*

> '*Aamal ka daromadar niyaton per hota hey*' And what I feel from this discussion is that the intention of this Parade participation is mainly to represent the Pakistani community in a positive way.

In her opinion, religion is a personal issue. She is one of those women who would not care what Pakistanis and Muslims are doing in terms of participating in a Santa Claus Parade. She is a mathematician, and has good analytical skills, so is able to view religion and humanity from a unique perspective, and to build a clearly analysed pathway to action.

There are some neutral comments to this question of faith vs culture. For example, another group member who belongs to the Shia sect responds,

> we can preserve both our faith and culture. And take these events as an opportunity to reflect our religious values and culture.

She later shares a YouTube link, and emphasises that women should watch it.

> How a Muslim should participate with their inter-faith brothers, to be more MUSLIM 🕋 https://youtu.be/ARqq1ZBSpLs

It seems from the chat that some women wanted to preserve both, and yet identify both as separate categories (see the 'Arabic speakers as authentic Muslims' discussion in the previous part of this chapter for an insight into some of the pressures on Pakistani culture). Saher responds to this question by describing her own experiences of growing up as a minority.

> All communities have fears of losing their faith or identify… don't get upset when Kiwis get fearful each time you build a mosque. It's the same resistance that you are exhibiting by participating in the parade.

Saher also asks a few critical questions to group members - to which she never receives a reply. She copies and pastes her messages twice to invoke a response, but she did not receive posts in return. Her questions are directed to Rukhsar. Her questions are below:

> if you had some Pakistani Christians here should Pakistani Association not go to Xmas celebrations? You had one Pakistani Hindu here who has always attended Eid functions and yet for her own celebrations she had to go to

> other groups from other countries to celebrate. Tomorrow [in future] you may have Pakistani Sikhs, Hindus. Christians who may come here.

Like Saher, most women who participate in the discussion are in favour of representing the Pakistani community by participating in the parade, however, out of sixty-five women only ten arrived at the parade. This suggests that many women who are silently observing the chat share the decision to not participate in the parade. It seems likely from the discussion that if it had been a Pakistani cultural celebration, many women would have attended without even being part of the discussion. The group administrator responds to the faith vs culture question by using the Pakistani flag as an example. The Pakistani flag has two colours, green and white. Green represents Muslims, and white represents all other religious minorities. She posts:

> We are celebrating the white part in our flag, I am certain our kids will appreciate when they will practically see us demonstrating Muslims are humans as well!

Although everyone was communicating their point of view clearly, the discussion did not progress to a conclusion. Many women participating in the discussion were working and had other chores to do. The debate was getting interesting, but it was long. Many times, it seemed that the chat would end, yet it continued. Rehmat again jumps into the discussion and wants to express her point:

> We need to understand a couple of things about our attitude towards NZ. 1. Do we belong here or not? 2. How do we see the future of children here? Will they for ever be outsiders? 3. Can we distinguish between IMAN & Culture? I will go down with Iman, but culture is my prerogative. When I go to the parade I participate in 'a culture' - it doesn't affect my belief. Hon. PM wearing a dupatta neither becomes a Muslim [n]or a Pakistani. Although far right extremists call that she is a Muslim and a communist. I HOPE we do not behave like the extremists.

Many women in the group 'like' her post but Ajwa expresses an opinion which is quite the opposite:

> Jacinda came to console/condole the community by wearing head scarf and everyone appreciated it. That chapter is closed. We can also send some flowers for their Festivals. What I see [is] a group of confused people heading towards secularism/atheism. Faith is a very sensitive issue. Either yes or no. No in-between path Allah has created. May Allah give everyone wisdom to differentiate between right and wrong. It is a *Momins* [believer's] duty to dislike from your heart/ tongue / action if something wrong is seen or felt. I have done same.

Ajwa tries to draw a hard-line between being religious and secular when she writes that 'no in-between path Allah has created.' Although she and Rehmat have been living in the same community for years they still they have contradictory opinions in understanding faith and culture.

Although many active group participants express their views that the Pakistani Association is cultural first and religious later, the number and length of the messages from women who thought otherwise make Reda write the following comment:

> Clearly, some of us think that PKN is a religious organization! Faith is not a sensitive issue, it is a personal issue! And please keep it personal! Here we are not challenging anyone's faith!

Rehmat again clarifies her own views by labelling the Pakistani Association a cultural association.

> Pakistani association is cultural and other [name deleted due to confidentiality] is a religious organisation. We need to clarify our perception. We need to be logical and keep our sentiments close to our chests.

No one agrees on the status of the Pakistani Association and what it should be. Every year the committee members decide their agenda, based on their own views. I have heard that if a committee consists of people having different views, the committee meetings run for hours, and it becomes almost impossible to decide on events and initiatives. However, like-minded people can run an association smoothly, without paying too much attention to outside criticism. Much the same happened here. Despite the criticism, the Association continues to make the parade initiative possible, if not popular.

Understanding the Santa Claus Parade

The question of whether the Pakistani Association was a cultural or religious organisation also impacts upon women's understandings of whether Christmas or a Santa Claus Parade is a religious or cultural event. For some women it is religious, for some it is cultural, and for others, it is neither or both. All women refer to the 'Santa Parade,' even when they talked about it being a Christmas parade. A few women also relate this to the 'holiday season.' One of the group members mentions this:

> To my understanding, most of the kiwis are atheists and Christmas is just like a seasonal celebration. *Hidayath* [straight path] is from Allah Pak.

And other women posts:

> Exactly this is a holiday season... most of the people celebrate holidays, not Christmas!

A few women consider it a fun activity. See the following comment of one of the group members:

> All I saw was a parade and kids having fun lol😂

And Tehreem adds to her comment by writing, *"exactly let's take it positive and fun-filled activity."*

Ajwa, as it has become clear, is not in agreement with Tehreem and the other members. It is a fun outing for some, but for Ajwa there are other ways to have fun and to integrate and to pay back Aotearoa NZ society and Jacinda Ardern for their support. She says that *"everything is not meant for fun. They bear some consequences. We should see both the positive and negative side before participating."* Ajwa has made her point clear since the beginning that Christmas holds a religious significance and tag, and hence a Santa Parade is a religious festival.

Rukhsar shares similar feelings. She says:

> Christians celebrate at Christmas what they believe to be the "day of the birth of God's Son" or what they call "God Incarnate." Thus, it is not only a celebration of another religion, it is also a celebration that is based on a belief that is totally against the teachings of Islam. From the Islamic point of view, the belief in the "Son of God" or "God in the flesh" is blasphemy and kufr [denial of God's Oneness]. By participation in Christmas, it is possible that slowly one may lose his or her consciousness of this basic point of difference.
>
> Muslims must be very careful in this matter. The greatest danger is for our next generation, who may slowly lose their Islamic faith in Tawhid [oneness of ALLAH] and may start believing in Jesus as "more than a prophet and servant of Allah."

Fazila considers a Santa Claus Parade neither a religious nor a cultural event. Instead, she sees it as an act of consumerism. While making her stance clear on the Santa Parade, she challenges many views of those women who think that there could be other ways of building cultural integration.

> I am not very keen to go, because it is consumerism not really religion. But I feel I must say this. We are happy when they have Azan [call for Muslim prayer] across the country. Do people become Muslims if they hear Azan

> with us. If we appreciate that then we should acknowledge them as well. We appreciate the Sikhs celebrating Aftari [breaking of fasts] with us, but when it comes to reciprocate, we start thinking of confusion. Please don't mind my saying this. What we want from others we don't want to do for others.

The chat had become an unsolvable puzzle for the participants, and I assume this was true for the reader, but it cleared up some mysteries and broke some stereotypes. All women who participated in the chat were well informed about their decisions, had the knowledge to support their views, and could argue for hours. Their contradictory arguments showed that they were not a homogenous group, and that they understood that there were differences.

Diversity and Inclusion within the Group

The group comprised women from different age brackets, socio-economic status and immigration experiences. Some women had been living in Aotearoa NZ for over 20 years, and others for only two to three years. The debate was stressful for everyone. It could be the reason that many women did not write their comments online. Women who actively participated in the discussion were also mindful that they might have hurt others' feelings in some way. Several times they expressed how they wanted to present their own views, and that they respected others' opinions.

Fazila reminds herself and the group about difference and patience. See her messages below, where she tries to diffuse the heat of the arguments, and highlights how, despite their differences, they are united. She also reminds the group about being tolerant. In her own view:

> We should all agree that we disagree. Allah has made us as diverse groups. We have diverse opinions. Let's try to lower the heat here guys. Muslim is to be patient. I think some people think that the symbolic gestures will internalise. Others don't think like that. Greetings, wishing someone Merry

Christmas doesn't necessarily define us as Christians but that's my view, or some who may agree with me. Others think differently. And that's fine too.

We all make choices to show respect. These may be different for each one of us. These choices can be different. We are supposed to be patient and tolerant of one another. We should at least exhibit that patience here amongst ourselves.

Let's please not classify one as better Muslims than the other. We aren't perfect in our ways. None of us. So please don't pass judgement on one another. Each one of us I would like to believe is thinking as a good Muslim.

Asia, who is on the executive committee, mentions that we should be tolerant of each other: *"agree, acceptance and inclusion start from here."* Similarly, Reda adds "*we need to remember that we are a diverse community and different people have different opinions too!"*

Another group member shares this:

We have and will always have a diverse range of opinion on beliefs, values and culture. I can see two completely different set of thoughts here. Let's respect each other.

Fiza writes:

However, we should be open minded and listen both sides too. As we all know there's always a positive and negative aspects of everything. May Allah keep you all blessed. Love you all😘

Similarly, Saher posts:

Guys relax no one is forcing anyone to do anything. Let this not be a pint [point] of contention and move on please. Thanks

Another woman adds: *"please no one take it personal. If we tend to don't think in a same way, it does not mean we are enemies."* She added that "*109% agreed, unity is the beauty of our community."*

Rukhsar is also mindful of this diversity, but her tone is different from others. She wants to make sure that people who have different opinions should know whether that is right or wrong. She considers her own point of view as authentic and right. This could be because of her studies, and her husband, who is known as a religious man in the community.

> You're right no one can change anyone's mind set except Allah... but *haram* [not permissible] is *haram* whether anyone accept it or not. Stay blessed everyone.

Women are mindful of the diversity among them, a view which emerges powerfully and supports the mixed cultural backgrounds of Aotearoa NZ's migrant Muslim population. However, the above comments also show the intensity and heat of the debate, and the need for women to remind themselves and each other that they are not the same. As one member says: "*we were different women, we have different beliefs, ideologies, personalities and yet we live here as a community."* One of the group members submitted a concluding story:

> Once upon a time there was a grp of intelligent, intellectual, capable & wise women. Most notably they were honourable ladies. The town they lived in was having a festival. As mothers they wondered whether they should participate in the festival. Some felt that integration could be beneficial, whereas others felt that integration could pose risks. Both views were entirely valid. As mothers their main concern was the children. They justifiably wanted to protect their children yet rightly allow them to experience life. It was a difficult dilemma that these learned ladies were presented with, so difficult that it created a rift. But the almighty was watching these ladies & he knew that their intentions were honourable. So,

he bestowed benevolence upon them to mend the rift & then they lived happily ever after.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the differences in women's understanding and practice of Islam by narrating two events: a Muslim Wedding and a Santa Parade. While these topics may seem socially benign and unthreatening within mainstream Aotearoa NZ culture, they foreground many cultural fracture-lines for Muslim women and across the varying strands of Muslim immigrant cultures. Both chapter sections – the Muslim wedding and the Santa Parade - highlight how women are continuously indulging in dialogues with themselves, their fellow Muslims, and religious texts to (re)define their religiosity. Their viewpoints on clothing, music, dance, parenting approaches, and perspectives on Aotearoa NZ culture are not only different but contradictory at times. A pattern of *continuous comparing* can be seen in their ways of refining and defining their Muslimness. A few women are trying to find ways of integrating into the wider Aotearoa NZ society, while for others integration has a different meaning: a collapse of their own values, under the pressure of majority views. Women's concerns about their children and how their progeny should be raised in Aotearoa NZ society, all show them wanting to be good Muslim mothers.

The first part, *Muslim wedding*, explores the differences among Muslim women of different ethnicities. Observing Muslim women at women-only celebrations is an entirely different experience from the everyday. Topics and behaviours emerge within the contexts that remain under forms of cultural embargo at broader social events. Here, for instance, the all-important matter of 'appropriate' dress here is not only a matter of piety, modesty and religiosity, it is also about cultural identity: honouring the occasion by the wearing of culturally-coded or 'national' dress - as well as the more familiar matters of affordability (how to 'look one's best' on one's budget); manageability (what is demanded by the season, climate, time of day, or activities associated with the event); personal taste ('what suits me?') and the politics of fashion and ethnicity. Among Muslim women, as with all women, clothes also provide a basis for affiliation

with social groupings and ranking, representing any number of assessments and judgements about each other.

The debates arising during participation in the chat group in the second part of the chapter, *Santa Parade*, highlight that there is no one solution to the issues raised; but endless questions, and varying opinions. The Pakistani Muslim women in the study are from various ethnic, cultural, educational and socio-economic groups, and from Muslim religious sects including both Shia and Sunni.

As in previous chapters, this chapter further highlights that Muslim women from different cultures, practise Islam differently. Furthermore, Muslim women from one country, who share one larger national culture, speak the same language, and have similar socio-economic status, can still display differences in their ways of understanding and practising Islam. There are different opinions, even among women of the same religious sect.

All of these versions of what constitutes truth, reality and beliefs indicate cultural adaptation and confusion - within 'the mainstream' of the faith - with many of the same issues under debate that the Muslim women in this research are canvassing. The pressures are greater, however, for those adapting to both a new culture, as well as traditional perspectives which are becoming fragmented and variable over time. By highlighting this complexity, this chapter helps to break apart widely held stereotypes which label Muslim women as a homogenous group. The complexities and difference that are evident in their understandings provide a platform to understand how women practise their everyday religiosity in relation to their past and present, influenced by and reacting to their fellow Muslims from the same or different cultures - and how those comparisons lay the foundations of being a 'good' Muslim woman.

The next chapter explores the concept of *halal*/*haram* with a focus on how the concepts are culturally constituted, and how women practise them in their everyday lives in Aotearoa NZ.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF HALAL/HARAM

This chapter explores the concepts of *halal*/*haram* among Muslim women through their everyday food practices, especially around pork meat and alcohol. The concepts of *halal* and *haram* live at the heart of the everyday religiosity of the women and are not only practised as dietary Islamic laws but also have social and cultural dimensions attached to their practice. Similar to clothing, Muslim women are prejudiced in their food practices: mainly due to observance of restrictions on consuming alcohol, or pork and pig-related products - and many other foods that they do not consider *halal*. Their practices can stereotype them as unsocial, unfriendly, orthodox and conservative, since they chose not to mix and mingle at food tables with their fellow non-Muslims.

The chapter shows that the concepts are in fact not static, monolithic or fixed but are fluid, complex, and subjectively (re)defined on a regular basis. The chapter also identifies the gap between religious proscriptions of the concepts, and women's understanding of these, by providing insights into cultural ways of treating pigs. The concepts are rarely debated or discussed in Muslim majority contexts, however, they become issues for Muslims living in minority contexts. Thus, it can be said that these issues are particular to the phenomenon of migration. When living in a non-Muslim context, women have to negotiate and renegotiate the concept on an everyday basis within their families, amongst co-workers, with neighbours, and with non-Muslim and Muslim friends.

I begin the chapter by providing references from the Quran about the Islamic ruling of the concepts. As mentioned previously my study is not a study of theology, but I find it important to mention the verses from the Quran, in order to illustrate the context. The Quran does not delineate any boundaries on how pigs as animals might be treated, but Muslims from different cultures have developed different understandings around pigs: as an animal, as a cartoon character, and as a lived 'world' of associated artefacts, practices and beliefs which show a

cultural extension of a religious proscription. I show this by giving my own understanding of pigs, as a Pakistani-Punjabi Muslim, and then exploring it in the women's lived experiences.

After discussing culturally constructed stories that surround pigs, which show complexity, reflexivity and change, I explore the concepts of *halal/haram* through everyday dietary practices. Muslim women's experiences of prejudice and being discriminated against in the context of food are apparent in their narratives presented in this chapter. Their stories also highlight that many non-Muslims have only a superficial understanding of these concepts, mainly understood in essentialist terms that ignore the inherent complexity and multiplicity.

Referring to the concepts of *halal/haram* as an everyday event is an unavoidable practice in the lives of the migrant Muslim women that I encountered. They are then two of the newly developed, embodied reflective dispositions of women. The cultural stories around the perception of pigs and these two concepts show a change in women's understanding before and after migration, showing a change in their habitus. The change in habitus can be best analysed using the notion of *comparing:* in that women always refer to the ways that in the past, before migration, they always thought of pigs in a different way from how they think about them now. Not only do women compare changes in their perception, they also draw comparisons between Islamic teachings and their cultural practices. They also compare their ways of retaining and confirming *halal/haram* practices with other Muslim women from different cultures. Thus, the concepts of *halal/haram* provide a useful site from which to analyse women's practices of these concepts in the migration context.

Concepts of Halal/Haram in the Quran

In this chapter the terms *halal*/*haram* are frequently used. Both *halal* and *haram* are Arabic words. The word *halal* literally means permissible or allowed and considered as lawful (Abd-Latif et al., 2014; Abu-Hussain et al., 2016; Al-Jallad, 2008; Yener, 2015). The opposite of *halal* is *haram*, which means unlawful, prohibited or forbidden (Al-Jallad, 2008; Ali et al., 2017; Regenstein et al., 2003). In the Quran, there are a few things that are *haram*, meaning that Muslims must not consume or do these things.

The following four verses from the Quran makes it clear that the consumption of certain food/animal meat is *haram*, not permissible.

> He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful Al-Quran, n.d., Surah Al-Baqarah: 173).

> Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah , and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through divining arrows. That is grave disobedience. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so, fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (Al-Quran, n.d., Surah Al-Ma'idah: 3).

> [Allah, addressing Muhammad (PBUPH)] says, “I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a dead animal or blood spilled out or the flesh of swine - for indeed, it is impure - or it be [that slaughtered in] disobedience, dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], then indeed, your Lord is Forgiving and Merciful (Al-Quran, n.d., Surah Al-An'am: 145).

> Allah has forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine; also, any animal over which the name of any other than Allah has been pronounced. But whoever eats of them under compelling necessity - neither desiring it nor exceeding the limit of absolute necessity - surely for such action Allah is Much Forgiving, Most Merciful (Al-Quran, n.d., Surah Al-Nahl: 115).

The above four verses state that the consumption of pig meat is forbidden. Deriving from these verses, many Muslims treat the pig as an impure animal. This impurity was not restricted to pig meat alone but to the pig itself, which is considered as unclean and dirty by many participants. In the 'cultural construction' section of this chapter I will analyse how a pig has different connotations: as an animal, as a cartoon character, as a pet, as a toy, as a meat (pork), in a zoo, or in any other form. However, this understanding of pigs is also starkly different among Muslims belonging to different cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds.

Women's Understanding and Practice of Halal/Haram

Here I give an outline of the understanding of these concepts by women participants of my study, in light of the above verses from the Quran. The following are some of the standard explanations of these concepts:

Consuming pork including bacon, ham, pork sausages, (also owning pigs) is *haram*. Almost all of my participants say that they have never consumed these, except for one woman from Iran. She later told me that she "was a 'kind' of Muslim, but she does not bother about her faith."

Any edible products that use pork in any processed form are considered *haram*. Most of my participants avoid buying such products but there are a small number of women who do buy such products.

Any products that have rennet from an animal source are also considered *haram*. The majority of participants say that they do not buy such products unless the label states the source of rennet, which can be from a vegetable or *halal* source.

Chicken and beef are only *halal* when they are processed/prepared/killed using *halal* slaughtering methods. *Halal* slaughtering method means: the butcher should be Muslim, the blood from the vein needs to drain and there should be Allah's name. Many participants only eat chicken and beef that is *halal* certified. However, a number of women, particularly from Arabic speaking backgrounds, and a few Pakistani women say they eat chicken and beef from anywhere in Aotearoa NZ because they think that more than 90% of meat is exported from Aotearoa NZ to Muslim countries, so that they are slaughtered under *halal* certification.

The majority of the participants consider sea food as *halal*. However, many women had lived the majority of their lives in inland plains areas, far from the sea, and did not like prawns, squid, crabs, and mussels.

Foods that contain gelatine (from an unknown or non-*halal* source) are considered *haram* by many of my participants. Many participants email food companies to ask for the source of the gelatine used in their products. However, there many women who say that they do not bother about such issues. Most of these women are from Jordan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia. I observed many Muslim children consuming marshmallows, jellybeans, jellies and ice-creams that were not from *halal* sources.

Some participants avoid *halal* meat cooked in the same pots as pork or non-*halal* meat in different restaurants. For example, once at a restaurant one participant asked them which pots they used, to cook chicken and pork. On getting an answer, she ordered sea food, because the pots for sea food were handled separately.

Many participants do not buy fish and chips from shops that use the same oil for frying other meat (chicken, beef or pork) too. Several participants told me that they asked about it at the shops before buying fish and chips.

The majority of my participants do not buy KFC and McDonald's chicken burgers. But there are many who do eat them. Again, participants who consume burgers, assume that 90% of meat is *halal* in Aotearoa NZ. Some said that they eat from KFC because they are sure they use *halal* certified chicken.

Alcoholic drinks including wine, beer, spirits, are forbidden. All of my participants agree. There are some who say they had tasted a sip or two, but just to taste, not to get intoxicated. Only five women I met during the course of study drink alcohol, and three of them are open about it. Two of them have only shared this among their circle of close friends. There is one woman who tried alcohol a couple of times to experience how full intoxication felt, but she decided it was not her 'thing.' However, all these women said that they do not regularly socialise with their ethnic communities, but they did have friends who were Muslims.

Any food that uses alcohol as an ingredient is considered *haram* too. Although some women argue that alcohol evaporates in the process of cooking, many people believe that not all of it evaporates. Many women do not consume food that has alcohol, but a small number of women are not concerned. They also say that if the food does not make them intoxicated, then it is fine to eat. The majority of women have not ever been to bars, where alcohol is served.

Besides food, some women are cautious about buying products like handwash, soaps, toothpastes, make ups, perfumes, creams and moisturizers, nail polishes, make-up brushes, that use *haram* ingredients. I will discuss this later in this chapter under the heading of *Cultural Construction of Pigs*.

Although *haram* means forbidden, and the Quran has used this to forbid consumption of various foods, many participants also use this word to demonstrate their own understanding of permissible and not permissible, in various other matters apart from food. For example, one participant says that removing pubic hair with a metal tool is *haram*. Another says, shaking hands with men is *haram*. Similarly, another woman mentions that it is *haram* to eat from restaurants which serve alcohol. One participant says that the income of taxi drivers is *haram* because they transport drunk passengers. Their understanding is, that if drinking was *haram*, so too must any

work associated with that be considered *haram*. Some say that buying anything on interest is *haram*. Yet there are other participants who say that *halal/ haram* are not only applicable to food but to inner self and behaviour. One participant says, “what if a person eats halal but his/her source of earning is *haram*? Or a person who eats halal and then speaks lies all the time?” Thus, the term is widely used in everyday language and my participants have many interpretations of the term.

The term *halal* is also used in a number of ways, to convey light humour or a joke. For example, one participant says that her husband told their daughter that every expensive item is *haram*. Her husband is a funny man. When I asked about this, he replied in a funny way: “well expensive things are *haram* for us (family)” and we had a good laugh. Just to mention however, he was not serious, and her ten year old daughter knew that her father was making it up. Everybody knew, but it was just his expression and use of the term.

From the above points, I have tried to contextualise the understanding and use of the concepts of *halal* and *haram* and how they have become a social and cultural construction of the religious ruling.

In the following section, I will show this cultural understanding through the example of pigs by narrating Muslim women’s stories around pigs, based on their respective cultures. I will also present my own understanding of pigs as a Punjabi-Pakistani-Muslim, and then will discuss my participants' experiences and stories about pigs, before and after coming to Aotearoa NZ which shows a change in their understanding; relying on the technique of *comparison*.

Cultural Construction of the Concept

It is clear that the consumption of pork is clearly forbidden in the Quran, but there are no guidelines or references on how to treat the pig as an animal. The majority of Muslims who live in Muslim majority countries do not have to discuss pigs in their everyday discussions, because pigs are not part of their everyday lives. Generally, a pig is never seen as a pet, a farm animal, or in the form of meat at the supermarkets. However, in the Aotearoa NZ context, pigs and pork

are one of the most talked about topics among my participants. The pig appears repeatedly in our conversations, whether it was pig meat; pork, ham or bacon, or any other product that contains pork, such as sausages, lard in foodstuffs, the pig as a cartoon character like Peppa Pig, pigs as pets, pigs at farms and zoos, or pig-shaped toys.

There is no other animal which provokes the same level of ambiguity as the pig (Neo, 2012), and there is a degree of “animal-linked racialization” (Elder et al., 1998) for the pig. For example, Stibbe (2003) identifies 62 negative uses of the words ‘pig,’ ‘hog,’ and ‘swine,’ such as ‘filthy pig,’ ‘misogynist swine,’ ‘hog the limelight,’ and 'fascist pig.’ Although in some cultures, the pig is considered sacred, for example among the Tsembaga tribe in the New Guinean Highlands (Rappaport, 1968), it is considered an abominable creature in many of the Muslim cultures (Neo, 2012). Nonetheless, Neo (2012) highlights the construction of ‘pig’ and the pig industry in Malaysia, which are rooted in cultural and religious antiquity. The author details that there are contrasting articulations of the pig and broader societal discourses around livelihoods, nationhood and religion which can be studied through the pig.

For many of my participants, embracing the pig as part of Aotearoa NZ culture, is uncomfortable. This is because most of my participants migrated from Muslim majority countries where they were raised in an environment where the pig as an animal was stereotyped as being impure, filthy, lazy, and unclean. These stereotypes are now questioned by the younger generation; particularly those who live overseas in non-Muslim countries. In this chapter, I will document the stories about pigs from participants who migrated from Pakistan, Malaysia and Sri-Lanka[47].

In general, my conversations with participants on the subject of pigs, had mixed responses. A number of participants showed discomfort when they talked about pork. They would use face expressions and body language to show ‘disgust,’ but they did participate in the discussion. There were many women who had no issues talking about pigs or pork. They talked about it openly. There were also some women who hesitated to use the word ‘pig.’

[47] I selected these participants because they had fascinating narratives related to pigs, and they exhibited a strong eagerness to engage in extensive discussions about their experiences.

My Understanding of the Pig

Before sharing the stories of my research participants around pigs, I will first reflect on my own perception of pigs.

I grew up in a Punjabi household where I learned not to say the word 'pig' as it was considered impure even to say it. If one does, his or her tongue becomes impure for forty days and one's prayers will not be accepted during this time. I did not ever believe that it could be true, but nor did I question it, either. This was something that everybody said, and everybody knew. I heard my mother calling a pig with another name in the Punjabi language: '*bahr-la*'. *Bahr-la* means a creature that lives outside. It is common to refer to a pig by saying *Bahr-la* which is just a term to avoid the word *Soo-ar*, or *Soor*, an Urdu word for pig. It is also frequently used in a swearing or pejorative way (Neo, 2012). It becomes a swearing word if referred to a person; *Soor ki aulad* meaning 'child of a pig' - similar to *son of a bitch* in English.

So, for me 'pig' was impure and dirty. I had heard that a pig eats its own faeces, it is a lazy animal, and it has no boundaries when it comes to sex. These perceptions are just stored in my memory, and I do not even remember how I knew about these things. While living in Pakistan, no one had any questions around pigs or pork, its meat. It is rooted in religion, but is more of a shared cultural norm in Pakistan. I know some Pakistani Christians and Hindu families in Aotearoa NZ who have never eaten pork. I met one of our Hindu Pakistani friends in a supermarket and he was inquiring about *halal* meat from a supermarket staff member. I asked him later why he needed *halal* and he said he only bought *halal* meat and he never consumed pork either, *"it just feels disgusting"* he said. These deep-rooted cultural narratives are so entrenched in our daily lives that we often forget to question them. This is the case for pigs in Pakistan.

The first time I saw pigs wandering late night around my hostel and on roads was in Islamabad. Seeing them from a distance, I tried to notice if they looked dirty, but I had never been so close. They looked like a united family having a tour in the dark. However, I did not ever think of them as cute. That was not how I was brought up.

After I came to Aotearoa, NZ, I learnt that considering pig to be impure is also prevalent in other Pakistani ethnic groups. One of my friends who is doing PhD in Aotearoa NZ told me that the Pathan, an ethnic tribal group in Pakistan also called Pashtun or Pakhtun, had similar stereotypes for pigs. In Pashtun culture *"speaking the word Pig makes one's tongue impure and that his prayers were not heeded for forty days."* Similarly, after meeting with Aila who was from Malaysia, and Earm who was from Sri-Lanka, I learned that different Muslim cultures have their own stereotypes concerning the pig.

Stories of Pigs

The following stories of pigs will help to understand the uneasiness that many Muslims have around pigs. These anecdotes serve four important purposes. Firstly, they elaborate the deep-rooted cultural differences in understanding and practice among Muslim women. Secondly, these stories tease out the differences in their everyday interactions with Muslims and non-Muslims in Aotearoa NZ. Thirdly, the narratives show the complexity surrounding pigs and that the perception and understanding of pigs is not limited to just eating. Finally, the anecdotes reinforce with readers that the phrase 'Muslim women' is not a fixed category, rather an ongoing process of defining and refining their identity; and also gives us cause to reflect on mundane interactions. All the stories of pigs offer thoughtful sites from which to observe Comparing Habitus. Women constantly compare their practices to the contexts in which they were raised, and they also reflect that if they had not had the exposure to life in non-Muslim contexts, they would not ever reflect upon or question their beliefs.

Peppa Pig – A Pig without a Nose

Peppa Pig is a British TV show for pre-schoolers. It is about a family of pigs; Mummy Pig, Daddy Pig, little brother George, and Peppa who is the elder sister. This nuclear family lives in a house on the top of a hill and interact with other members in their village - all of whom are animals, and all of whom have little quirky and quite endearing aspects to their personalities.

The family is often shown engaged in everyday activities like going to school, having picnics, holidays and visiting family and friends. All the adult animals have jobs, so that little ones are shown the division of labour and the importance of reliance on one another within a community. Peppa herself, is a sweet little girl who is nice, kind and sometimes gets into little scrapes, but not often.

It was a favourite show of my daughter, and this was when I came to know that it was very popular among many children in the wider community. However, it is not an easy choice for many Muslim parents to let their children watch this show without challenging their own understanding around pigs. This uneasiness of parents comes from one of the Islamic rulings which prohibits consumption of pork, as described earlier. In an extension to this ruling, many Muslims perceive the pig as an impure and unclean animal, as noted above, deeply rooted in cultural interpretations of Islam.

One of the most interesting observations I made during my field work was noticing the pink coloured fluffy soft toy which was one of the most favourite toys of the daughter of one of my participants. I did not bother to think what animal shape the toy was until I noticed it was Peppa Pig. The child was watching Peppa Pig on TV while holding the pink toy and pretending that actually, she was 'holding Peppa.' She was moving Peppa in and out, just as Peppa was moving on the screen. Taking a closer look, I still could not clearly see if she was holding a Peppa pig toy or a random toy and pretending it was Peppa. I became curious and asked my participant, Erum, "was she pretending that she was holding Peppa Pig?" Erum burst into laughter and said, "yes it was once the cute little pig and still is, but with no nose."

Figure 1: Pig soft toy with no nose

Erum's daughters are big fans of Peppa Pig cartoons and once they saw the toy at the Warehouse and begged their mother to buy it and my participant could not say no to them. She says,

> *I actually thought about it [if I am going to buy this and what my husband and visitors would think of me and my daughters] and then I thought it was just a toy. We were not going to eat it. I was only concerned about my girls' happiness. But it was when my mama visited and found this at our home. It was discomfiting for my mama. You know Muslims don't consider a pig as a good animal. One day when I came home after doing groceries, I saw Peppa's nose was gone. Just like she had tucked it inside. My mama removed the nose and sewed it back nicely. The same toy was now not bothering to mama and my girls were happy too as my mama made up a nice story of a pig with no nose. We laughed how pig had gone through surgery by my Mama.*

Both Erum's daughters were born in Aotearoa NZ. Erum arrived from Sri-Lanka eight years ago. Although Erum is from Sri-Lanka, she had spent her formative years in Italy. Erum's parents are traditional Muslims, but she is allowed to choose and follow Islam the way she wishes. Erum's mother pays frequent visits to Erum's and her length of stay varies between three and eight months. This means her mother is familiar with Aotearoa NZ culture. She also has lived a large part of her life in Italy, so western culture is not an entirely different world for her. Still, she was not comfortable seeing a pig in her granddaughter's collection. Erum's mother did not ask Erum why she let her daughters play with a pig toy or watch a cartoon about pigs, she just did what she felt was right.

As a researcher, I am aware that some Muslim families struggle in deciding if their kids should watch Peppa Pig, but I never realised that handling Peppa Pig toys could be an issue and that some Muslim families had to negotiate this. Erum says that she does not explain the story behind this toy to all visitors and some people do not even notice it. She says:

[…] it might feel cruel to some people and maybe they thought it barbaric, and that Muslims were so wild that they did not even spare these toys from cruelty, but for me it was important that my mother was happy and comfortable, and my girls were happy. I do not have any issues with a pig at all. He is a poor animal and poorer for Muslims.

Erum was brought up in a country where Muslims were in the minority and now her children are also growing as a Muslim minority. However, Erum's orientation towards a pig was different as a child, from that of her own children. Erum did not ever have a pig as a toy, nor did she want one, because she had not been exposed to the idea that she *could* have a pig as a toy. Erum knew that her mother did not approve of her act of buying the toy pig and her mother had shown her disapproval with her act of resistance, changing Peppa Pig's face.

Erum's story provides a fascinating insight into the tangibility of everyday negotiations around Muslimness and Aotearoa NZ culture, and also manifests generational differences in attitudes towards exposure to other cultures. Erum's story also provides me with a basis to deliberately bring 'pigs' into my observations and conversations with my participants as a potential site with which to unveil the *utmost ordinary*. I was curious about how pig and pork as everyday parts of Aotearoa NZ culture is dealt with by other Muslim women. For example, Zaeen is not bothered by buying pig-faced toys for her children, but her father-in-law does not like it. Unlike Erum's mother, whose actions were indirect, his attitude is confronting and strict.

Pig Toys "Chuck them in the Bin"

Zaeen's children had pig toys that their grandfather noticed. He spoke with Zaeen firmly, asking "*what are these toys doing in your home?"* Zaeen has three children, all in primary school. Zaeen told me that one afternoon when her children were in school her father-in-law stood before her holding a few little pig toys and asked 'what were they?'

Uncle asked me "What was it?" He knew what the toys were, but he wanted me to talk about the toys. I said, these are toys uncle and he asked which

toys? I reluctantly had to name the toys, and Uncle asked me "was this what you are teaching to your kids?" I was quiet, you know we don't argue with our elders. I could have said to uncle that these were just toys, and it was not haram to let kids play with these toys. But I didn't argue. Then uncle asked me to chuck those away, and I did [nodding her face] yes, I literally chucked those toys in the bin.

Zaeen works in early childcare and is a concerned mother for her children. Her children attend online Quran classes and learn about Muslim culture and Islam at home. Zaeen's husband says that he himself was challenged in his understanding of pigs after coming to Aotearoa NZ. He is a vet and he said pigs are the only animal he did not handle while practising in Pakistan. He wants to learn more about pigs. While he is keen to learn, he told me that one of his friends who was also a vet by profession and from Pakistan, refused a job in Palmerston North, because he would have had to handle pigs. But Zaeen and her husband are both reflective in their current perceptions around pigs. They allow their children to watch Peppa Pig and play with pig toys. However, Zaeen's father-in-law thought his son's family was not keeping Islamic values.

Later in my discussions with Zaeen, she reflects that she might not have challenged her perceptions around her religion, which she realised came from her culture, if she had not arrived in a new country. She said after coming to Aotearoa NZ, she started learning about Islam more logically, which she had not done while living in Pakistan. Zaeen constantly compares her past and present Muslim practices and is becoming vocal over time on cultural and religious differences. Zaeen's and Erum's stories reveal that they challenge their pre-existing perceptions around pigs after direct experience, but for many other women this is not a matter of consideration or reflection at all. Women's ways of dealing with this issue can be remarkably different.

Peppa is Rude to Daddy Pig

On a number of occasions, I had discussions with women around Peppa Pig, which showed great variation among them. Once I deliberately brought this topic into an online discussion with a group of friends and some of the comments show that women just consider this as a normal TV show, without religious or cultural dimensions.

> *I like it, haven't watched a whole lot but the ones I saw were really funny.*
>
> *I think mummy pig and daddy pig have great attitudes that parents could learn from. It has appropriate humour and great language/pronunciation. I don't like Peppa. She is quite rude to her father, sometimes mean to her brother and in general, a little obnoxious. The other characters otherwise appear nice.*
>
> *We intentionally don't have a TV and don't watch cartoons Hina, I don't believe it's healthy for children in general. But once in a motel I watched Peppa on the TV, maybe for five minutes before my son got bored. [I] did not notice anything particular to be honest, except perhaps that Peppa was rude.*
>
> *I haven't thought much about it. I think it's cute and it shows a regular family. Am I missing something?*

The women who participate in the online discussion are from Pakistan, Fiji, Denmark and Azerbaijan. Their discussion critiques some of the characters. Unlike Erum's mother and Zaeen's father-in-law, no one from the group stereotypes Peppa Pig. It was only Aaila, from Malaysia, who said she likes Peppa pig but 'talking about a pig is offensive to many Muslims.' Aaila shares how her perception of pigs has changed after living in a non-Muslim context where pigs are part of everyday life.

Praying in a Pig T-shirt

Aaila shares an unease about an occasion when her mother saw her offering prayer while wearing a t-shirt with an image of different cuts of pig's meat and an outline of a pig. Aaila said her 'hubby' bought that t-shirt from an opportunity shop and that neither she nor her husband noticed that the outline was pig-shaped and that the cuts of were pork. Aaila said she would not have bothered however, even if she had known. "*It was a beautiful t-shirt, that's all I saw*." Adding light humour to the conversation, she said,

> *I was not going to eat the meat from my t-shirt; however, it was difficult for my mother to see me wearing that t-shirt and praying in that. I could see from her face and her tone that it was a shock and a disbelief in me and maybe in my faith.*

Aaila also shares another story when her friend gave her daughter a story book. It was about pigs and her little girl loved it. Aaila's daughter did not tell Aaila about the book as Aaila's friend told her "[...] *your mum might be angry to see the book so do not show her your present.*"

Can I Please Feed the Pigs, Mama?

Aaila said that like many other Malaysians she also used to understand pigs as an inferior and dirty animal, and it was *haram* to even talk about it. However, a small incident changed the way she thinks, "an ordinary zoo visit and our daughter's innocent questions were enough for us to reconsider our traditional understanding of pigs as an animal."

She said that they went to a zoo, and they bought some food from the ticketing counter to feed the animals.

> *We fed almost each animal there except pigs. My daughter asked if she could feed pigs and we were like, hmmm, no […] and she asked a lot of questions which we knew were difficult to answer and we felt we were not*

> *logical in answering those and finally we said yes to our daughter, we can feed pigs too. Deep inside, we were thinking that pigs were also animals like many others. We did feed pigs there, and we became more vocal to talk about such issues within our family.*

It was an interesting discussion with Aaila. She says that every Muslim believer should logically ask questions. Before following anything, they should ask what the purpose of their practice is and that they should search for authentic references. What I found more interesting however about Aaila was that she has a dog, and she did not tell any Muslim friends in the community. I have known Aaila for many years, and she had not told me about the dog until I saw the dog myself, sitting in her car, when they visited me. Aaila says,

> *Sometimes we do not have limits. We do things that Islam does not ask us to do. It is kind of abusing your religion really. We give wrong messages to non-Muslims and then they think that we are conservative people, and that Islam is an orthodox religion. It is all about misinterpretation and misrepresentation.*

Aaila and Zaeen's families and even Erum's family are at a similar point: rediscovering their belief and questioning the deep-rooted cultural norms within which they were raised. This kind of self-questioning is not an easy thing to do. It is challenging and causes discomfort among the Muslim community. Such Muslims are also stereotyped by the larger ethnic and/or Muslim community as being a 'modern' or 'open-minded' Muslims. Aaila does not want to be stereotyped so she has not ever told anyone that she has a dog. Erum too once said that she hides pig toys when she has a large gathering at her house.

Bone China Crockery and Cosmetics

Aaila said she has always liked bone china crockery, due to its elegance and lightness, and never thought about there being any *halal* dimension of the crockery until her friend brought it to her attention. She told me:

I remember one of my friends told me that she never bought bone china crockery. She said, bone china crockery is made up with processing bones and one can never know which animal bones were used in the process so she wanted to stay away from any such thing that creates doubts to her faith. I was like, really? Bone china crockery? Even bones when used in the chemical process of making would change its form, and composition. But this was how people think.

I was also a huge fan of bone china mugs but never thought why it was called bone china. After Aaila left, I googled bone china and found out that in some bone china crockery, animal bones were one of the materials used. For a minute, I found this disgusting, thinking what if human bones were also used in creating bone china crockery, but I was not ready to get rid of my bone china mugs collection, hence I did not give it any further thought. This discussion, although different, resonates with my participants' views on similar issues such as: *halal* make-up, *halal* lipsticks, nail colours and *halal* fragrances. The only difference is make-up is a consumable product while crockery is re-useable and long-lived.

A few of my participants avoid perfumes that have alcohol in them. However, many others say that as long as they are not drinking, it is okay for them to use perfumes. During one such discussion one of my participants who is financially very well off, raises the issue of *halal* lipstick. She says that make up products use animal fats. Giving the example of lipsticks, she says that since these are applied to lips, there is a chance of it going into the mouth. She said she orders *halal* lipsticks, but they are expensive. This led to discussion on *halal* business and industry and affordability. However, some of my participants are cautious about the use of *halal* products in cosmetics.

Coming back to the pig and its perception among Muslims, Aaila, Zaeen and Erum's stories show cultural aspects of Islamic rulings that prohibit consumption of pork. In the Quran, eating pork is clearly forbidden and is only allowed if one is starving to death and there is nothing else available to eat. However, how Muslims follow this rule depends on their upbringing, culture, exposure to

other Muslim cultures, and education. Aaila, Zaeen and Erum were all raised in a cultural context where pigs had a stigma attached. However, after coming to Aotearoa NZ they start comparing and questioning the perception of pigs, both as an animal and in the form of toys and images on clothes and other items. One of the participants says that she understands that the Quran only forbids the consumption of pork, but our cultural ways of treating and perceiving pigs as dirty and impure help to maintain the Quranic ruling.

> *[…] if we start treating pigs as a normal animal, one day our kids would forget that this is forbidden, impure and dirty. I have a fear that they might start consuming its meat. It is good that we culturally share some stereotypes around pigs that help us to maintain a distance and keeping pig at a bay from other animals.*

Using the above narratives, I have discussed cultural perceptions of pigs among my research participants from different cultures. Different women have their own understanding of pigs. For some, it is just an ordinary animal like other animals, but for others it is *haram*, which means it should not be touched, or played with. There are also other women who question the cultural perception of pigs and in the process, explore their beliefs in a logical way. The above stories revolve around pigs as an animal.

Below, I show how this perception and adherence to the Islamic ruling of *halal*, and what is permissible, play out in the quotidian lives of my participants. I have already shown above how Muslim women understand *halal/haram*. The upcoming section will focus on how their perceptions play out in their everyday lived experiences.

Halal/Haram Food Negotiations

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, that standardised agreed definitions of *halal/haram*, the preferences of my participants, their understandings and practices of *halal/haram* are different. Women from Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE are more flexible when it comes to buying halal food, except for pig's meat in any form. For example, one of my participants from

Jordan said that Aotearoa NZ exports meat to Muslim countries, and she had heard that 90% of meat in Aotearoa NZ is *halal* and hence she did not bother about *halal* labels on meat in this country. In contrast, participants from Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Denmark, and England are more committed to buying *halal* certified products only, but this is a generic observation. Among Pakistani women, many women are stricter in following *halal* food practices while others are flexible, and a few did not bother at all. This was similar for other cultures.

Reading the 'List of Ingredients'

My participants have experienced that people judge them on food choices. Women shared their stories of being criticised for their food choices by non-Muslim New Zealanders as well as Muslims. Barie, one of the participants says,

> *It is a test of our faith; this is how I take this challenge [of sticking to halal]. There is no one who can control what I consume, I can drink and eat anything, but this is a matter between me and Allah. I am answerable to him and that is the only thought that keeps telling me eat halal only. The things that Allah allows us to eat. It is easy to buy stuff from supermarkets without seeing ingredients. Reading ingredients is an exhaustive task and it looks weird standing in the middle of shelves and looking at ingredients. Once, I was reading ingredients and did not notice a woman standing behind me, she said excuse me in a very disrespectful way and as she grabbed her thing from the isle, she said 'f word.'*

Barie says it was very unexpected and that she was frightened by the woman's response, but she ignored her. She says she would always ignore such people, knowing that they do not have enough knowledge or maybe are less educated. *"I generally do not respond to such comments. I feel like it is wasting my energy. I only explain my beliefs where I feel that the other person has genuine intention to know."* She said she has trained herself to ignore such incidents, but sometimes it takes her a while to let such things go.

Halal Table

Another participant, Naela shares her experience of being pre-judged concerning food. She says that due to her hijab people think she would only mingle with Muslims. Once she was participating in a conference to represent her office. The conference organisers, after knowing her food preference, arranged for her to be seated at a table with other Muslims whom she had never met, and they were not from her field. She said,

> *[…] at that table we were all looking at each other, so we were like…. what the…[hell] I wanted to sit with people within my field and do networking and that was true for everyone sitting at the table. I did not know what conference organisers thought about all of us. During the whole conference we had to sit on that halal table [laughs].*

Naela's experience sheds light on pre-conceived ideas about Muslims as stereotyped and homogenised (Abu-Lughod's, 1998, 1999; Hoodfar, 1992; Tarlo, 2005). Naela says that she is appreciative of the consideration shown by the conference organizers with their idea of a '*halal* table,' however they did not need to make us sit together. Maybe one food table was a good idea with *halal* food so everyone can go and grab *halal* food, but it was quite odd and 'over the top thinking.' Naela said, she made some good friendships with other Muslims at her table, but she would have liked it more if she had had an opportunity to socialise with people from similar professions, rather than from her faith. Naela later gave her feedback to the conference organizers which they really appreciated. Naela's story of pre-conceived assumptions reminded me of another conversation with Reenul.

"Oh, You also Eat Halal"

Reenul is not a hijab wearing Muslim woman, but she has also been stereotyped based on her food choices, due to her outer appearance. She shares her experience of conversation with a property manager. Reenul says,

My property agent did not know that I was Muslim because we never talked about religion. Mostly it was work related. That day, I was talking about a friend of mine and the agent said that he knew my friend. He told me that she is Muslim. I said, yes and I too am a Muslim. He looked at me with surprise and said she eats halal. I said, so do I. Then he said, she covers her head but why don't you? I told her that it is my personal choice, and some Muslim women wear head cover and some not. He said, I thought the ones who cover their head are practising Muslims only.

My participant's dress is an important factor in making her agent understand about her religious practice of eating. She suggests that she was misunderstood as not being a practising Muslim at many other occasions because she does not cover her head. Reenul is very loud and passionate when sharing her experiences and she also emphasises that she offers regular prayers and also observes fasting. Reenul says that she has learned from her experiences to not miss any opportunity to talk about her beliefs and culture. She says it is easy for people to misinterpret and hence she had learned to proactively engage in discussion before others misjudge her. However, Reenul says that many people in Aotearoa NZ do not know about Muslims and other faiths.

[…] the people in New Zealand are either ignorant or they do not want to know about others. Many people either are busy with their own lives, less travelled or self-indulgent.

The following remark about *"everything was halal including the bacon"* justifies Reenul's assumptions about non-Muslims in Aotearoa NZ.

"Everything was Halal including the Bacon"

Eba once inquired about *halal* options at a restaurant. She said the *"waiter returned after a few minutes consultation with the chef and said that everything was halal including the bacon."*

[…] it is not hard to avoid haram food, however very hard to explain what halal is. The concept is simple but yet complex to explain. I once asked in a restaurant if they serve halal food and the waiter came back after asking from the manager and said yes everything is halal here including all meats. I looked at the menu and the first dishes were of bacon, and he said yes, bacon is halal. I understood that they knew nothing of what I was asking, so then I ordered the vegetarian option.

For many of the participants it is difficult to even walk through the meat section in the supermarkets since they wish to avoid seeing and smelling pork. Many Muslim women did not eat in restaurants where pork was also served. Many find it difficult to explain to their children why Muslims do not eat pork. There are also many women who have accepted the above challenges as a part of their everyday lives, and they do not bother themselves about these. They do not eat pork, but they also do not bother to check ingredient lists.

Chicken, Beef and Lamb can be Halal or Haram

Another participant, Sania had a similar experience at a restaurant. She says that the waitress said that the meat was *halal*. On asking a few questions Sania found out that in the restaurant the manager's understanding was that all meat was *halal* except pork. The manager and the chef did not know that chicken can be *halal* or not *halal*. The way of slaughtering an animal is the main principle of *halal*. Sania says,

It is always challenging, and people here do not know about the halal process, so if we go out, we order vegetarian and sea food or if we are craving for meat we go to Turkish or Indian.

Naela also shares a similar pattern of dining out as Sania. Naela says, when she arrived in Aotearoa NZ, she was more into asking restaurant managers and even explaining to them about *halal*. As time passed however, she realises that it did not matter much and sometimes it becomes embarrassing for her:

I noticed the manager laughing in the kitchen. Then I thought it is better to eat vegetarian. But some vegetarian dishes use alcohol. So still I ask. I was a person who used to dine out quite often back home but here it is quite less now.

It is challenging not only to find *halal* food at restaurants but also to explain about *halal*. Sania's story resembles many of my other participants' experiences in which people thought chicken and beef were *halal*. One participant says *"people understand kosher better and sometimes I ask for Kosher instead of asking for halal."*

Halal Certification

Women have different ideas about whether they should buy *halal* certified food. There is a lot of anger and confusion among Muslim women about *halal* certification. One of my participants says that *halal* certification is an economic industry, and she finds that *halal* certification is all about politics and money.

We know that New Zealand's meat is 97% halal so why bother for halal labels then? Halal issuing authorities fight like cats and dogs and they make us fools. Tegel brand became halal for a year and then Turks [brand] becomes halal another year. Again, then we get to know that Tegel also have halal certification but not from FIANZ but NZMA [both are halal certificate issuing authorities in NZ]. I am just sick of it. It looks like our only purpose of life is finding about halal meat.

I found that this frustration, confusion and anger about *halal* certification amongst women could also be observed on many social media platforms.

Different food industries need to renew their *halal* certification after a certain period of time. This means that a product that is *halal*-certified once, cannot be then *halal* if the company's certification is not renewed. This not only creates confusion among my participants but also

makes it difficult, repeatedly asking if the company is *halal*. It is a common practice among women to share forwarded messages when a company gets *halal* certification or if the company has an expired licence.

Halal Meat Practices

Buying *halal* meat also has associated challenges. In cities with smaller Muslim populations, it is challenging to find *halal* meat options, due to the unavailability of *halal* meat dairies. I lived in Palmerston North, which despite being small city, had a decent sized Muslim population and thus *halal* meat was easily available. In Nelson we had to call the meat shop at least one day prior for the butcher to cut *halal* meat first thing in the morning, before using the same machines for pork and non-*halal* meat. In Nelson some Muslims also obtained meat from Christchurch or Wellington. The participants just wanted to make sure they were not buying meat which had any contamination from other non-*halal* meat. In Tauranga there is availability of *halal* meat at Aussie butchers, but many Muslims buy their meat from Hamilton and Auckland. They think that there are chances of contamination if they buy from the Aussie butcher. Azzan comments about the availability of *halal* meat in Tauranga:

> *More than halal availability itself, it is a matter of access. People who go to Hamilton often they buy it from Hamilton. People who go to Auckland often they get it from Auckland. And their perception of halal has developed from their ability to travel. People like us [not frequent travellers to Hamilton and Auckland] just buy from local butcher shops.*

Azzan's tone in making the above comment is taunting and complaining but she merges her *halal* perception with ability for easy access. She suggests that it is easy for frequent travellers to gain a 'secure' *halal* perception, particular to their circumstances.

In July 2001, a Hastings Muslim planned to sue a pizza company. His claim was the company had contaminated his vegetarian pizza (which he ordered) with bacon. He said that in order to purify the sin of eating swine flesh, he and his family must go on pilgrimage to Mecca (NZ Herald,

2001a). The incident attracted media coverage and created embarrassment for Muslim organisations, in particular to FIANZ, who publicly issued a statement refuting the claim. Several letters by certain learned Muslims have also been published by the local newspapers rejecting such claims as nothing to do with Islamic religion (NZ Herald, 2001b).

Although many Muslims find the above case as 'going over the top' or 'illogical,' many participants share that they feel nauseous, sick, or impure – as if they have committed a sin - when they eat meat mistakenly that is not *halal*. One of the participants who ate a caesar salad containing ham said she did not know how to vomit it out. She said she felt that she had committed a great sin. Many other participants share similar experiences.

While my participants differ about what is *halal* in food, most of the participants avoid pork and alcohol due to religious reasons and submission to the divine command (Harris, 1985). All women said that eating pig meat is forbidden in Islam and is only allowed in cases where one's life was at threat due to hunger. The majority of Muslims thus try to stay away from it. However, Sayadabdi (2019) highlights that the Iranian diaspora in Aotearoa NZ rarely base their reasons for this avoidance on religious grounds, and rarely use the term *halal/haram,* in order to give preference to their Iranian cultural identity rather than their religious (Islamic) one. Even when his study participants used the term *halal/haram* to refer to certain products and avoid others, its use was immediately followed by some sort of justification that would be not religious; for example, taste, texture, healthiness.

Passing Halal/Haram Concepts onto the Children

The one major challenge around *halal* food is to provide logical answers to the younger generation. Many of my participants struggle with it. Many women say it is difficult and sometimes heart-breaking for them to stop their children from eating at McDonald's, KFC and other such places. One of my participants who is a scientist, shares her conversation with her nine-year old son. My participant shared this dialoge in a whatsapp message.

> Musa: […] mummy why we don't eat pork?

Mummy: because it's not *halal* Musa

Musa: but what if we slaughter it the way we kill sheep and chicken

Mummy: even then Musa, because Allah has prohibited us from eating it. We don't eat it because Allah does not want us to eat it. I can also tell you some scientific facts as well that can explain why it's not good to eat pork. For example, the pig is the only animal that eats its own poo.

Musa: yikes, seriously? Can you not stop it?

Mummy: no, it's in their nature. People tried to stop them by immediately cleaning their poos but then they saw pigs licking each other's bottoms.

Musa: disgusting!

Mummy: guess what, pig has the shortest food retention time in their guts [her son was familiar with how the digestive system works] which means whatever they eat has very small processing time. Naturally, when we eat something, it has germs attached to it, the longer the digestion the less are the germs. The germs become a part of a pig's muscles and if someone eats pig meat it become a part of their body.

Musa: I feel sick mum

Mummy: pigs are intermediate hosts for many parasites and those parasites complete their lifecycle in areas where humans are in close contact with pigs.

Another participant tells her daughter that she is allergic to pork. She says, however, when her daughter grew a bit older, the daughter asked her to tell her the truth: was she really allergic to pork? Below is their conversation that my participant shared:

> *Nora: Tell me the truth, am I allergic to pork?*
>
> *Mummy: I did tell you that when you were little and your brain could not understand why you cannot eat pork. No, you are not allergic to pork but we don't eat it.*
>
> *Nora: Why cannot we eat it then?*
>
> *Mummy: Because it is in the Quran that we do not eat its meat. It is not a clean animal.*
>
> *Nora: Why not, pigs are so cute.*
>
> *Mummy: well, would you like to eat cute pig then?*
>
> *Nora: No I would never eat such a cute animal, rather I will keep it as a pet.*
>
> *Mummy: Okay [feeling bizarre] Keep it as a pet when you grow up but remember we don't eat it. That's it.*

Nora's mum said that she needs to find logical answers to educate her girl. She said that she did not ever question her parents' practices in the way that her girl does now.

> *May be for us the whole environment was different. This generation is growing in a different environment. We do different things in homes, and they see different things outside. I feel sorry for our generation sometimes but at the same time I want to raise my girl in an informed way so when she reaches an independent age, she would be able to make informed choices.*

Many of the participants say that the real challenge is telling their teenage children to stay away from alcohol. Like discussions of the pig and its meat, drinking alcohol remains one of the most talked about topics for the women. Their concerns are mostly related to their children and sometimes to their husbands. There is a shared understanding that drinking alcohol is part of Aotearoa NZ culture but Muslims cannot fit into that culture.

Again, there is a great variation among my participants on how to deal with drinking. For some women, going to restaurants that serve alcohol is *haram*. For others, eating with someone who is drinking is also considered *haram*. For others again, going to a supermarket and passing through the alcohol section makes them discomfited. Some believe that drinking alcohol until it gets to the stage of losing consciousness is *haram*. Many women say that they do not feel part of Aotearoa NZ culture when it comes to socialising with their work colleagues. All of my participants have their own challenges and concerns around alcohol use. One of the common points that my participants make is that people do not understand that 'no drinking' means no drinking of any form or type.

'Not Even Beer?'

One of my participants said that she moved house and was talking to her new neighbour, a middle-aged man. He asked her about her weekend, to which she replied that she was cooking as she had few visitors at her place. She told him that they had good get-togethers, ate food and talked over food. According to her, he commented *"Yes I remember you had visitors as I heard loud laughter, may be too much drink eh?"* She says:

> *I paused for a moment because I could not make sense of what he was talking. Then I said, oh no, we don't drink. We are Muslims. He said, oh so what you mean you do not drink? I said alcohol is not allowed in our religion. He said, so you drink wine. I said no. He named all those drinks which perhaps I was hearing for the first time, and I kept nodding my head ..no…no... and he lastly asked 'so not even beer? I did not know it would be*

> *hard for drinkers to understand that no alcohol means no alcohol at all. I then explained to him that we do not use wine in cooking and baking. I realised it was a surprise for him, but he listened very attentively. Later, we became good friends. We always speak a couple of minutes every time we see each other out of the house and sometimes he would smile on the weekend and joke, I don't understand how you can laugh out that loud without having a drink.*

Another participant shares a similar story of others not knowing about drinking. She says my work colleagues often meet on the weekends and go to dine out. She adds that:

> *I always go with them and they know that I do not drink. But they ask me every time if I want a drink? I always opt for coffee or soda and they would ask maybe try a little. Despite knowing my religious limitations they are unable to understand that no drinking means no drinking. Or maybe they tease or test me? Or maybe they think of me like Sabila [who is an occasional drinker]. She works in our office but in a different team. She gives a confused image of Muslims and I have to pay the price.*

Many working women shared their struggles around drinking. One says that her colleagues understand her non-drinking practice, as conservativeness.

> *No matter how I try, my colleagues think of me as conservative, and non-social. This is because I do not go out for a drink with them. I tried a couple of times but as soon as they start drinking, they laugh at weird things, not funny at all. In the beginning I laughed with them but then I felt I am a fool. I could not laugh at random and conservations were not funny either. And most funny thing, next day they forget half of the things they were laughing at. I felt a total idiot. Hence, I told this to everyone and stopped socialising with them on drinking.*

Another participant shares a similar story and says, "*I still go out with them at dinner but I leave straight after dinner.*" She says that she had lived in other countries but in Aotearoa NZ she found out that people drink to get drunk, not to socialise, as is the case in other countries.

Bring Your Own

Another women says that she has explicitly yet politely told her colleagues about her culture. She says that using the word culture is more appropriate to convey her message than using a religious explanation. She explained that this was because of the negative connotations attached towards Islam and Muslims in the 'western' world. This is similar to what Sayadabdi (2019) notes: that his participants gave non-religious justifications for their avoidance of eating pig meat. In the words of my research participant:

> *I have told my work mates that my way of socialising is different. I will invite you at my home, you are welcome to bring your families, partners but just to make clear that there will be no alcohol. One of my colleagues asked what if I bring my own. I told him, it is fine with me, but my husband will be very uncomfortable with this as he doesn't drink. Now everybody knows if they are coming to my house there won't be drinks. I invite them at least once in two to three months. I cook, sometimes they help me in cooking. We eat together and sit for hours. We laugh, make jokes. It doesn't seem that they miss drinking desperately.*

Another participant also shares a similar story and she says she allows her visitors to bring their own drink and she and her husband do not have any issue with this. Their only concern is that they did not want their children to see it. However, she adds that their children are still very young so maybe they will re-think 'bring your own drink' policy in future when the children grow up.

Work that Involves Dealing with Alcohol

For many participants, drinking is not just associated with drinking or not drinking alcohol. Many other things associated with drinking are also matters of concern to them. The discussions around this topic include: what if a person is working in a supermarket that had alcohol for sale in it, or driving a taxi or Uber and carrying drunk passengers? All the participants have their own viewpoints about how to handle such situations. One participant says,

> *I asked my husband if he should not work in [that] supermarket anymore or he should have clearly told his manager that he would not do any work in which he had to carry alcohol. My husband said that it was not possible. I told him that it was better to starve than earning money which was not halal.*

Similarly, another participant says that all men who were taxi/Uber drivers earn *haram* money. This is because taxi drivers mostly earn their income over the weekends, due to carrying drunk passengers. So, in a way these taxi drivers are 'facilitating' drinking culture by transporting people from and to pubs. Hence this is *haram*.

One of the participants who works in a restaurant where she has to serve alcohol to customers says,

> *[…] whenever any customer ordered drink, I felt like I was doing sin but then it is in Islam that earning money with your hands is like praying. So, I keep telling myself that I am doing my work honestly but then I never hold an alcohol bottle or glass with my right hand.*

In Muslim practice, the right hand is considered superior and purer than the left hand. The majority of Muslims consider that one should eat with his/her right hand. Thus, in order to lessen her guilt, she has developed a strategy of not touching alcohol glasses or bottles with her right hand.

Another woman experienced embarrassing remarks from her colleague. She said that her colleague knew for years that she never drank but one day he said to her,

> *[…] you can try some today, your husband isn't watching you and we don't tell him. I said yes, but my God is watching.*

The above experiences highlight different scenarios where my participants have had to deal with alcohol. The use of alcohol is not just limited to its intake but involves a lot of other spheres where my research participants have to negotiate their understanding in their changed environment. There are a number of occasions when my participants have felt offended by the remarks of others.

One woman says that her manager once cracked a joke that *"if Muslims get drunk, how would they make bombs."* I was offended but I did not say anything because as my manager finished her comment, she said "*it was just a joke*."

Many participants say that drinking is part of Aotearoa NZ culture and that Muslims should be respectful of it. They say it is not *haram* to attend gatherings where alcohol is served. One woman says,

> *No one is forcing you to drink. There is no harm in going to restaurants and eating with your friends who drink. You tell them that you don't drink but you just eat. I don't understand why Muslims make a fuss of everything. They should be more focused on their inner modesty and cleansing of heart rather spending time on such matters.*

My participants who drink alcohol are comfortable in telling me about it. Indeed, I went to bars with them many times. One participant says,

> *[…] it is my personal choice. I know Allah won't like it, but he will forgive me. I only drink when I am upset.*

The other woman says that she does not get along with many Muslims in the community because she drinks alcohol and her way of life is a bit different from theirs. She practises Islam at her own pace and understanding. She observes fasting in Ramadan and is very helpful in carrying out volunteer work at the Masjid. She is also socially inclined and offers her assistance to anyone who asks.

There is an unspoken, but conscious bias, against women who drink. They are not invited to private social gatherings within Muslim communities. If a woman does invite them, she has to explain to other women many times why she made the invitation. This woman would pass remarks like 'we should not judge people, only God knows what was in their hearts' and then all the others would agree, because no one wants to waste their other righteous deeds just to pass a judgement on another person. However, many other women in the community would stay away from women who drink.

Besides Muslim women's internal prejudices and judgements against each other, many women share that they feel judged by non-Muslim New Zealanders because they do not drink. The above comments show they are considered anti-social, conservative, and that they are under men's control. Many women go beyond their comfort zones to prove that they can be social, even if they do not drink.

Conclusion

Using the pig as a case study to explore the cultural construction of Islamic dietary concepts of *halal/haram*, I have shown how Muslim women challenge the existed socio-cultural beliefs attached to pigs, not only as live animals but as a cartoon character, in the form of toys and pig pictures on clothes and in books. I argue that that in order to understand the concepts of *halal/haram*, it is important to know the socio-historical-cultural contexts in which the concept lives. The stories show that women's perceptions changed after moving to Aotearoa NZ, which they accepted would not have happened had they remained living in their home countries. The change in perceptions shows a continuous process of comparison, providing a platform to

analyse how their Comparing Habitus evolves after migration and how it continuously develops, bringing change.

The chapter also shows that women face challenges when practising the concept of *halal* in their everyday lives. They not only have to find logical answers to convince their children but also to justify themselves to their co-workers and other people who have no understanding of or orientation to the concept, since not many people know what *halal* actually is. Thus, dealing with the concepts on an everyday basis produces an everyday struggle, a process of reflection and negotiation which is complex, fluid, and ever-changing. The concepts of *halal* and *haram,* understood as dichotomous and static, but they are actually subjective, negotiable, and changing, depending upon the space in which they are encountered, and its temporality. Here again, *comparing* happens at every step and level, depending on how religiously or culturally inclined the women is.

Thus, the pig is an ideal site as a case study to explore the concept of *halal/haram*, and to see the workings of Comparing Habitus where women's dispositions are changing every day. The fields of *halal* and *haram* have no stability and not only change virtually, but also locally and physically, e.g., *halal* certification isn't a matter of one-time '*halal proofing.'* The great amount of diversity in understanding and practice of the concepts also highlights that the concepts are in states of *becoming*.

In the next chapter I will conclude the main arguments arising from the ethnographic Chapters Five to Eight. I will also discuss how Comparing Habitus remains a key strategy in my participants' experiences of negotiating and renegotiating their lives in new contexts, as well as being an analytical tool with which to understand their everyday practices.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

> The chat [conversation in the private chat group] makes me sinful and guilty.
> A bad mother, a bad wife and a bad Muslim[48] (Anonymous).

This thesis proposes an alternative framework - Comparing Habitus - with which to analyse the everyday lived experiences of immigrant Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ.

I began this research with the aim of contributing an understanding of how Muslim women practise their religiosity within a dichotomy of contexts:

> a non-Muslim, non-culturally aware Western context where the women are understood through stereotypes of oppression, conservatism, and fear/terrorism that homogenise them into a single static, monolithic category; and,
>
> within an increasingly diverse, multicultural and multiculturally-aware context where exposure to Muslims from different cultural backgrounds enables respondents to reflect on their embedded cultural and religious practices.

I find that Aotearoa NZ Muslim women's everyday lives are situated in the above-mentioned dichotomous contexts; meaning that they have to deal simultaneously with perceptions from non-Muslim cultures of being a homogenous group, and the pressures of confronting heterogeneity and multiplicity within the multicultural/multi-ethnic Muslim cultures which are present in a migrant society.

Using classic ethnographic methods, with some context-responsive adaptations (see Chapter Four) this research provides insights into the everyday lived practices of Muslim women. Through case studies of head-covering practices, clothing selections, participation in a Santa Claus Parade discussion and the concepts and observation of *halal/haram*, my study shows that Muslim

[48] This excerpt is from the member of the private chat group where the Santa Parade discussion happened. She sent this message in response to some forwarded messages and discussion on *ideal Muslim women* as per some scholars, mainly Dr Israr Ahmed, whose interpretation of Islam is rooted in patriarchy.

women's lives are not static, fixed and monolithic, but rather diverse, fluid and complex. Their everyday experiences are constantly (re)shaping, which shows the many processes of *becoming* a good Muslim woman, through an ever-shifting habitus of comparisons: one which I call here the Comparing Habitus.

I argue that women's Comparing Habitus develops and changes across multi-dimensions. It is linear, non-linear, upward, downward, inward, outward, and on multiple levels: individual, family, community, relational (interactions with Muslims and non-Muslims); generational (comparisons of when they were young and the younger generation now); ethnic, cultural, national, and global. It considers multiple aspects of comparisons such as gender, and contexts such as temporal, geographical, political, and historical. Together, these cause immigrant Muslim women to (re)negotiate and (re)explore different aspects of their Muslimness.

These multidimensional and multilevel forms of Comparing Habitus act as *fields* in which the rules of 'the games' are constantly changing. 'The fish in water' analogy is no longer relevant in its specification of one, unitary kind of habitus, in attempting to understand the everyday practices of Muslim women. This is because not even a mundane act such as buying an outfit or preparing food is merely a 'taken-for-granted' action. Rather, it is a process of continuous, reflexive, negotiation.

Thus, the study concludes that in Aotearoa NZ, Muslim women undergo a continuous state of *becoming,* a subjectively defined process built around a multiplicity of types of Comparing Habitus, situated within unstable *fields* and ever-changing *dispositions*.

In Chapters One to Four, I have outlined an overall view of my research, including an examination of prior literature and gaps within it, followed by a description of the research context, and an overview of the classic methodology, and how far it proved necessary to adapt its application, in confronting this complex research field.

In Chapter Five, ***Aotearoa Muslim women and their head-covering choices***, I explored immigrant Muslim women's head-covering practices, documenting their narratives of wearing, not wearing

or occasionally wearing a headcover, before and after emigrating to Aotearoa NZ. I have shown that head-covering is a social, cultural, and religious issue, with head-coverings worn for multiple underlying reasons, but it is not, and maybe can never be, a fixed *disposition*. I argue that head-covering is not a permanent disposition in women's lives; that is, Muslim women are not simply and always, either *hijabi* or *non-hijabi*. For many women, moving into a new and multicultural Muslim *field* has made the issue of head-covering a conscious decision - they have had to decide whether to cover their heads. To make a decision around head-covering, women constantly compare themselves to what they have thought or done in the past, and to other women, both from their own cultural background and from different cultures. Thus, the chapter shows that the head-covering choice is a strategy embedded in the lives of my participants; a process of *becoming* a good Muslim woman, and part of an unfinished journey.

I show, through the narratives surrounding head-covering, that the practice provides a useful context for observing women's Comparing Habitus at work, in various ways. They compare themselves with others of varying kinds, and within many settings, to decide what to do: how and when to wear a head-covering in a new *field*; how to negotiate their relationship with it; how to socialise with men, and how to practise their understanding of Islam. A comparison process accompanies their negotiations - comparing their present self to their past self; comparing their perception of themselves to what others have thought, and comparing their actual self to their ideal 'good Muslim woman' - in order to become a 'good' Muslim. The chapter shows that Muslim women's very *disposition* - in relation to head-covering - remains in a state of *becoming*, depending on the conditions of the field.

In Chapter Six, ***Clothing beyond Head-covering***, I have explored Muslim women's negotiations in creating, or making, a 'proper' Muslim outfit, with or without a headcover. I focus on their overall clothing practices, and on the struggles, challenges, and creativity of women in managing what they consider to be a proper Muslim outfit in Aotearoa NZ. Through their engagement with clothing practices, they perform and express their modesty, negotiate relationships with their husbands and sometimes their sons, and challenge stereotypes around Muslim women. Many participants use accessories, such as jewellery, shoes, perfumes, and make-up to be feminine,

and yet a modest Muslim, while others deliberately avoid these to keep their modesty. As with head-coverings, overall clothing practices also highlight how there is no universal way or universal thinking about what constitutes an appropriate Muslim dress.

I further argue in this chapter, that creating a modest outfit in a non-Islamic society, such as Aotearoa NZ, is not simply a matter of choice, or universally defined modesty standards, or a one-off act of buying a dress. Rather, expressions of modesty are continuous, complex, reflective and carefully-thought-through acts, based on their ability to *compare*: their past and present contexts; their initial years in Aotearoa NZ; the length of time it has taken to settle in the new context; their exposure within their new country to other Muslim cultures, and their understanding and interpretation of the Quran in the contemporary world. Given all of these layers of negotiation, an appropriate Muslim dress is not a permanent *disposition.* Rather, it is an ever-changing one.

Muslim women's dress choices, with or without use of a head-covering, provide a unique way to analyse their Comparing Habitus. Their involvement with clothes while altering, layering, or fashioning with accessories, provides an insight into their everyday clothing practices which simply cannot be understood, using a binary lens of 'modesty and fashion,' and/or 'modern versus traditional'.

In Chapter Seven, ***Multiple ways of being Muslim(s) women***, I highlight the multiplicities of comparisons among Muslim women belonging to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds through two events: a Muslim wedding, and a community Santa Claus Parade. While these topics may seem socially benign and unthreatening within mainstream Aotearoa NZ culture, they foreground numerous cultural fracture-lines for Muslim women across the varying strands of Muslim immigrant cultures. Through these two examples, I show how Muslim women continuously undertake dialogues with themselves, their fellow Muslims, and religious guidance texts, to (re)define their religiosity through acts of *Comparison*. Their viewpoints around clothing, music, dance, parenting approaches, and Aotearoa NZ culture not only differ but are at times

contradictory, so that once again a pattern of continuous *comparing* can be drawn from their ways of refining and defining their Muslimness.

The wedding event portrays that the issue of 'appropriate' dress is not only a matter of piety, modesty and religiosity. It is also very clearly about cultural identity: honouring the occasion by the wearing of culturally-coded or 'national' dress, as well as the more familiar matters of affordability (how to 'look one's best' on a budget), manageability (what is demanded by the season, climate, time of day, or activities associated with the event), personal taste ('what suits me?') and the politics of fashion and ethnicity.

Diversity and cultural variation are also reflected within a single national group. The example of the Santa Claus Parade highlights the point that Muslim women from one country, who share a national culture, speak the same language, and have similar socio-economic status, can still display differences in their ways of understanding and practising Islam.

In Chapter Eight, ***Exploring the Concepts of Halal/Haram through Pork and Alcohol***, I explore the Muslim concepts of what is *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (prohibited or forbidden) through examples of the pig - whether as through the eating of pork, or the pig as a child's toy or TV cartoon character - and alcohol. I argue that although these concepts are 'deep issues' in relation to the everyday religiosity of Muslim women, and practised as dietary Islamic laws, they also have social and cultural dimensions that attach to their practice. Using pigs/pork as a case study to explore the cultural construction of the Islamic dietary concept of *halal*, I show how Muslim women negotiate their beliefs associated with pigs, not only as a live animal but also as a cartoon character, in the form of a toy or a picture on children's clothes and story-books.

I argue that that in order to understand the concepts of *halal/haram*, it is important to know the socio-historical-cultural contexts in which the concepts prevail. The stories show that women's perceptions change after moving to Aotearoa NZ, in ways they would not have done, had they been living in their home countries. The change in perceptions shows a continuous process of *comparison*, providing a platform from which to analyse how a Comparing Habitus evolves after migration and how it continuously develops in producing change.

I further argue that the concept of *halal/haram* is an ideal site in which to see the working of Comparing Habitus, through which women's dispositions are changing every day. The *fields* of *halal/haram* have no stability, changing virtually, in global cultural fields, but also locally, where encounters are direct and physical. For example, the perception around pork and alcohol changes as women interact with different cultures. The great amount of diversity in understanding and practice of the key concepts that we see under pressure highlights how far these concepts are in a state of *becoming*.

I emphasised earlier in this thesis that there have been many studies conducted in Aotearoa NZ on Muslims (Dobson, 2011; Kolig, 2010; Kolig & Shepard, 2006; Shepard, 2006; Spoonley & Bedford, 2012; Spoonley & Peace, 2012), however, studies that focus on Muslim women immigrants are few. The existing studies on Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ have been conducted to understand identity construction, and the challenges and discrimination they face, especially related to the workplace, where clothing and head-covering practices can be problematic, and their psychological wellbeing can be impacted (for example Boulanouar, 2006; Dobson, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Jasperse, 2009; Joudi, 2002; Kolig, 2006, 2010).

There is hardly any research in the Aotearoa NZ context that explores the everyday experiences of immigrant Muslim women belonging to different cultural backgrounds, by employing the frameworks of *habitus*, *becoming* and *everyday*. Although Soltani's (2018, 2021) research on Muslim women's practices looks at identity construction through the hijab, fashion, workplace challenges and leisure (shopping malls and swimming), that work has not explored everyday, mundane acts such as shopping, altering and layering clothes to achieve modest clothing, nor the multiple undestandings of *halal/haram* and diversity of perceptions within different Muslim groups, based on their cultural backgrounds.

I argue, that to understand the lives of Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ, it is important to first break the stereotypical perceptions that homogenise them into one monolithic, static, fixed and oppressed group. Then it becomes possible to explore the diversity within the group. This is

crucial to understanding how the challenges of living in a non-Muslim country shape their experiences differently.

This study highlights that there is a wide variety of opinion, even among the relatively small group of my research participants. Muslim women's narratives not only challenge the homogenous perception that surrounds them but also offer in-depth analyses about their *disposition* of *being* and becoming 'good' Muslim women, in comparison to Muslim women from other cultures. They also show how living as a minority in a Western and non-Muslim context impacts on shaping their 'good' Muslim experiences.

Aotearoa NZ is in itself different in many ways from other parts of the world, due to an absence until very recently of a history of terrorism, in which terrorists claimed an ideology rooted in Islamic interpretation. Suddenly and irruptively, it became one of the countries in which Muslims were victimised by the worst kind of far-right terrorist ideologies, that is, the Christchurch Mosque attacks (albeit these attacks being perpetrated by a non-New Zealand citizen, who had selected the site for this very purpose of its 'low-risk' unpreparedness.)

The literature on Muslim women produced after the Christchurch massacre tends to highlight the challenges faced by Muslim women, particularly *Hijabi* women's experiences of discrimination (Ash, Tuffin & Kahu, 2019). This is important in highlighting how 'high-visibility' Muslim women (those wearing a headcover) experience prejudice, however, my study elaborates how not all Muslim women in Aotearoa NZ wear a headcover (see Chapter Five of this thesis). The everyday experiences of *non-hijabi* Muslim women are also important in obtaining a holistic picture of Aotearoa NZ Muslim women. My study explores the differences in opinions about and practices of head-covering, as well as the overall clothing of Muslim women. I argue that Muslim women should not be studied through the head-covering practice alone. It is not only limiting to study Muslim women solely through the headcover, but it is also a way of homogenising them as an over-simplified group, with static values, and a monolithic ethos that is slow to change.

Aotearoa NZ Muslim women come from different Muslim cultural, social, historical, ethnic, national, educational, and familial backgrounds, and they have many different understandings of Islam, each shaped by both their home-country origins, and their new immigrant environment. Thus, as a foundational statement, my study contributes to Aotearoa NZ literature on Muslim women by providing insights into the everyday lived experiences of Muslim women through the inclusion of my own *disposition* as a Pakistani-Punjabi-New Zealander Muslim anthropologist, who oscillated between insider/outsider throughout the duration of the research. This inclusion of autobiographical dimensions within one Muslim woman's everyday experiences highlights the sorts of diversity, difference and multiplicity found among the other research participants. Their lives, like my own, demonstrate that comparisons remain Aotearoa NZ Muslim women's key strategy in negotiating the differences we/they encounter.

Moving beyond the Aotearoa NZ context, the research offers the opportunity to gain critical insights into lived experiences of religiosity across the contemporary world. International studies on Muslim women have mostly researched women belonging to one ethnicity, one cultural group, one sect, or one movement (Giuliani & Tabliabue, 2015; Khurshid & Shah, 2019; Nagel & Staeheli, 2009; Shalabi, Mitchell, & Andersson, 2015; Ternikar, 2009; Watt, 2012). There is also a trend towards identifying potential participants through mosques. Such modes of recruitment for research potentially further homogenize the findings, and in turn, present a more harmonious, unchanging, non-adaptive or undynamic picture of Muslim women's lives.

It is one markedly unsuitable to understanding the experiences of migrant Muslim women - most of whom enter non-majority Muslin societies, where they are both confronted full-on by the non-Muslim practices and values of the new 'home' country, and the even more de-stabilising 'variant' practices of fellow Muslims from ethnicities and nations other than their own.

The literature on Muslim women also divides them into binaries of modern or traditional, both of which are shown as permanent *dispositions* in their lives. However, the narratives in my study show that Muslim women's *dispositions* are changing continuously, so that they are *making* and *remaking* themselves, according to the environments in which they are living. This is true, not

only in terms of their clothing *dispositions,* whether seeking modesty and/or fashion, but also in their opinions and practices in relation to *halal/haram*. Also, their views regarding raising their children, and even their relationships with their husbands or their world-views of living as a minority, are placed under pressure in the new context.

Throughout the study it has became apparent that their changing *dispositions* are impacted by the *fields* they are forming within - which are themselves never stable. Women's negotiation of religiosity in the context of migration, as a newly formed, unfamiliar *field,* shows that their *Habitus* has kept on being shaped, on various levels, and in many degrees of multi-leveled comparison. There is thus a need for further study of Muslim women in relation to their living environment, to see how their primary *dispositions* become influenced and questioned by the challenges of secondary and ever evolving *dispositions*.

My key contribution to theory, as result of this research, is to extend Bourdieu's theory of *Habitus* by adding a new lens of Comparing Habitus*,* which I argue is crucial to understanding a contemporary life which is continuously changing, confronting multiple opportunities, and offering numerous possibilities for comparison, through different experiences of 'direct-encounter' exchange with cultural difference, and through both ongoing contact with 'old home country' media, and 'new home country' visions of themselves, in news or social-media participation.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Bourdieu's central concept of habitus has proven to need adaptation and 'flexing' when confronting, simultaneously, three central pressures of a twenty-first century reality: migration, the confrontation of two powerful and long-contesting socio-religiously-founded world views, and the complexities of migration into a context where a minority suddenly encounters not only the lived detail of what had been thought a long-known rival view, but unsuspected variations within its own field of practice and belief.

Bourdieu's theorisation, now with decades of application sedimented into a 'classic' methodological status, were in fact evolved from fieldwork in 1960s France and in colonial-French cultures with the aim being to categorise and strand-out into predictability the

‘dispositions’ and ‘tastes’ across all levels of French culture and society. It was, in the manner of all 'structuralist' endeavours of its day, to provide stable, even measurable, certainties. ‘Import’ those techniques and the theorisations abstracted from their practice, into the more fluid, contesting and mutable socio-cultural realities of twenty-first century global mobility - especially in the context of a rapidly de-colonialising society such as Aoteroa NZ, where, perversely, so many ‘mainstream’ socio-cultural influences are still ‘imported’ from a wider Anglophone world - and you encounter the sorts of problems worked through in this study.

In the case of my study participants, migration to an unfamiliar and often contradictory field, means that the sites of comparison expand, even adding layers of cross-cultural, cross-religious-practice, that are also cross-social and cross-national. The availability of and skills in using, accessing, understanding, and discussing different religious schools of thought and observing different cultures makes comparison a more complex process for these women. I show this complexity in the discussion of the Santa Parade, where Muslim women from similar cultural backgrounds have entirely different worldviews.

Despite the difficulties that this research has raised, I argue that Comparing Habitus is not only hyper-reflexive in itself, but also provides positive ways to deal with that hyper-reflexivity. It reveals that the processing of these experiences, while always complex and challenging, is by no means always or inevitably an account of suffering, or disjuncture, or loss, as in the case of *cleft habitus*. It can also act as a positive strategy to *become* more meaningful, logical, and clear in one’s own practice.

Thus, this study is an important contribution to the anthropology of migration. It perceives and demonstrates the comparative relationship between the personal, cultural, social, and religious levels of migration, in terms of their interconnectedness and inter-subjectiveness. As the world becomes increasingly global, it becomes limiting to study migrants binarily, as some ‘them’ intruding upon an ‘us,’ viewed through the lens of differences held to be permanent, and threatening. In dealing with the everyday religiosity of Muslim women, a focus solely through home and host country - still the predominant practice in the research literature (Chapter Two)

- provides little hope. I argue that migrant lives remain instead in a complex process of *becoming*, in ways that are multidimensional. Personal experiences can lead in any direction - and that is, in itself, a message of adaptability, and growth.

In conclusion, this version of the Comparing Habitus provides some answers to questions of difference, multiplicity, reflexivity, inter-subjectivity and inter-relationalities - issues that arise from the many mundane experiences of my research participants. I argue that the lives of Muslim women immigrants are complex and in a constant process of transformation, and that the changing of the *fields* they experience affects the transformation of their sense of self. The women are constantly negotiating personal, familial, community and cultural spaces, justifying their beliefs, norms and culture, both to themselves and to others.

Through Comparing Habitus immigrant Muslim women are continuously in the process of *becoming* within fields of multiplicity, inter-subjectivity and inter-relationality, which are ever-changing, overlapping and intersecting with each other.

Comparing Habitus - A Poem

Now and then

Today and yesterday

Here and there

I and she

We and them

This and that

Present and the past

Were the key words

In the conversations of women

That seem like a dichotomy

Between spaces, places and people

But actually

They were beyond the binaries

Lived experiences

And strategies to make sense of

Their lives

Their faith

Their own selves

Tools of comparison

Never ending

Unfinished dispositions

Shaping and reshaping

Their decisions

Of becoming

A good Muslim women

In their own virtual fields

Of subjectivity

And instability

Developing their Comparing Habitus

To analyse their own experiences

And to reflect on them

To make sense of their worlds

To find the meaning

To deal with the changes

Of the contemporary world

Of becomingness

The disjunctures of migration and religion

In, between and among selves and others

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