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COVER DESIGN: Aquil Virani

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY: Aquil Virani is an award-winning Ismaili Muslim artist and filmmaker of Indian and French heritage. With financial support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council and the City of Ottawa (among others), Virani's collaborative art projects combine painting, drawing, filmmaking, writing, graphic design, installation, and participatory art processes. In 2022, he served as the first ever national artist-in-residence at the Canadian Museum of Immigration. As curator Celine Le Merlus explains, "his approach, which aims not simply to assert a personal point of view on a pressing social issue, but also to facilitate opportunities for others to express themselves freely – to speak and be heard – is characteristic of all of Aquil's work." Learn more at aquil.ca.

THE COVER DESIGN: Aquil Virani's cover design for this issue suggests the multiplicity of Muslim spaces, communities and identities in Canada. Artistic projects featured in these images are described here with a link to discover more: (1) His commemorative portraits of the Quebec City Mosque Attack were photographed in public spaces and exhibited at the *Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec* before being gifted directly to the families (aquil.ca/january29); (2) A public art project mock-up outside a mosque with a design from the "29 messages à Québec" project (http://aquil.ca/29) that reads "They will not divide us;" (3) A photograph of the Turtle Island landscape, implying that outdoor spaces are deeply meaningful for Muslims too. The land is part of recognizing Allah's Glory and recognizing that Indigenous Muslims – for whom land might hold even deeper resonances – are part of our *Ummah* as well; and (4) A feminist portrait series and audiovisual installation called "CelebrateHer" that featured large-scale painted portraits and micro-videos of 12 publicly-nominated "everyday" women – featured here in blue with an orange background, Kathy Malas (aquil.ca/celebrateher) .

FONTS: Times New Roman, Aptos

Book Review: Producing Islam(s) in Canada: On Knowledge, Positionality and Politics, Amélie Barras, Jennifer A. Selby, and Melanie Adrian, eds. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2022.

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In the edited volume, *Producing Islam(s) in Canada: On Knowledge, Positionality and Politics*, Amélie Barras, Jennifer A. Selby and Melanie Adrian offer a useful and timely compendium of academic research related to Islam and Muslims in the Canadian context. The editors engage scholars and scholarship from various disciplines to chart recent trends and key issues in knowledge production as it pertains to Islam(s) and Muslims, with a specific focus on how this has taken shape in Canada. These three editors approach the subject as scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds; Barras is currently in a law and society program while Selby and Adrian are both trained in anthropology. All three editors research and write at various intersections of law, lived religiosity and politics as influenced by the state. The editors identify themselves as 'white, perceived-Christian, cisgender, settler, tenured women' (p. 10). While it is curious that none of the editors corrected the notion of 'perceived-Christian' by identifying their religious affiliation, as Muslim or otherwise, this decision becomes clearer through the content of the text itself where the examination of the 'insider-outsider' debate on positionality and its connection to researching marginalized communities surfaces.

In the introductory chapter, Barras, Selby, and Adrian outline the specific questions this volume seeks to address. They dissect the process of knowledge through questions such as: "How is knowledge produced? Which methods are most commonly used? Which funding sources enable this production? When has knowledge about Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada been produced most prolifically? How do political contexts influence the directions of research? Who produces different kinds of research or is seen as authorized to do so? And how do these scholars shape the directions knowledge takes and the questions that are posed?" (p.6). This line of inquiry highlights details that surface in the text through the dialogue between and within the chapters. One further question that surfaces for us is, what is the intention of such research? How does it benefit or harm Muslims?

The editors offer a further goal for the text: to reflect on the past while exploring new directions for the study of Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada. They begin with the assumption that Muslims are not only 'increasingly surveilled by the state', but so too by academic research. The editors make their theoretical orientations clear by situating this text in the Orientalist and post-modernist

traditions, which seek to complicate notions of academic research as objective and make plain the ways in which geopolitical ends may be served by academic means. “Knowledge production is central to what we do in the academy. It is political, it is positioned, and it requires examination” (p. 3). The very first lines of this volume make a clear statement about the necessity of this text. The use of the ‘postmodern punctuation’ (s) indicates their approach to considering ‘the breadth and multiplicity of Islam’. Indeed, through the chapters and conversations presented in this book, the editors successfully capture the broad landscape of literature in the study of Canadian Muslims and Islam, while engaging the reader in deeper questions related to how Islam(s) and Muslims are constructed, produced and wielded in the scholarship.

The text is organized into four thematic sections, 1: Examining Knowledge Production on Islam, 2: Charting the Study of Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada, 3: Positioning Selves and 4: Future Trends. Each section offers multiple chapters which approach the central theme from different directions, and with differing conclusions. The underlying approach of the editors uncovers the complex interplay between research, the researcher and those researched.

Section one presents four pieces that examine knowledge production of Islam and Muslims. Amir-Moazami's exploration of the ‘Muslim Question’ in Europe is a curious choice to begin a volume dedicated to the study of Muslim and Islam(s) in Canada. However, Amir-Moazami deftly sets the stage for comparison across European and Canadian contexts, highlighting the geopolitical realities related to securitization and integration of Muslims and the so-called ‘Muslim Question’. By examining the epistemic frameworks that allow researchers to categorize Muslims onto a spectrum of normality-deviance, where normality becomes assimilation, Amir-Moazami identifies academics as often complicit in the construction of the Muslim as the essentialized Other. Hughes’ piece expands this complicity to include funding bodies who determine which research projects will receive financial support. While Hughes stops short of suggesting an explicit ‘agenda’ per se, he clearly demonstrates that knowledge production about Islam in Canada is neither a neutral nor unobstructed academic endeavour.

The second section presents six discussions beginning with a retrospective on qualitative literature from 1997 to 2017 – providing a historical and social context for the research that has been conducted on Islam and Muslims in Canada. The third section on “Positioning selves” highlights the works of Muslim academics and the role of one’s own identity as an insider or outsider. With the focus on future trends, the final section delves into approaches to studying Muslims, and possible directions for future study.

One gripping component of the volume is the absorbing conclusions of each section. In interviews with leading scholars such as Lara Deeb, Anver Emon, Karim H. Karim, Abdie Kazemipur, Jasmin Zine and Katherine Bullock, many larger questions are raised about who is engaging with the scholarship on Muslims and Islam(s) in Canada, how scholars must be cognizant of the politics of representation (i.e. the near-obligatory requirement that certain stereotypes be dispelled in order to address Islamophobia) and the ‘flattening’ of the experiences of Islam and Muslims into bite-sized pieces for digestible consumption by mainstream (read: white, Christian) Canada. These chapters demonstrate how scholarship can contribute to public discourse and opinion on the presence of Muslims in Canada.

The volume offers a scan of key themes and issues present in the research, while examining from a 'meta' lens how research about Muslims has evolved. As mentioned in the text 'the treatment of Canada is marginal and overshadowed by the American experience of being Muslim'; the Canadian context and realities of settler colonialism rooted in Christianity, the presence of violent and mundane Islamophobia and securitization of Muslims, as well as diversity within the Canadian Muslim population are effectively explored with depth and nuance. For example, Sharify-Funk and Sparke's chapter on Sufism and the interview with Karim H. Karim discussing Ismaili Muslims, present narratives of Muslims and Islam(s) that are often left out of mainstream dialogues and the academic study of Islam in Canada. The surprising mixture of authors/perspectives and approaches make what might otherwise be a heavy lift, an engaging and thought-provoking read.

Within these conversations they highlight the diversity of thought and dispel (both in content and in presence of diversity of authorship) the notion of a monolithic Islam and quintessential Muslim figure (or in this case, research subject). With this bird's eye view of the current scholarly landscape, this volume is a necessary read for anyone interested in conducting research with or about Muslims in Canada. As Muslim women engaged in in the academy and researching the experiences of Muslims, we find this a necessary volume which serves as a concise yet thorough introduction to the landscape of academic literature regarding Muslims in Canada.

Article: 'Standing with Each Other': Indigenous-Muslim Relation-Making on Turtle Island

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Abstract

Within the context of the northern part of Turtle Island, the space of relationships between Indigenous and Muslim communities is one intertwined within the history and geopolitical realities of settler-colonialism and immigration. This paper is an exploration of the theme of space, and relationship formation from the perspective of Muslim and Indigenous peoples in Canada who have engaged in building relations over the past two decades. This article is based on a wider qualitative semi-structured interview-based research project, supported by content analyses of existing literature and online resources produced by relevant organizations and initiatives. The research analysis has led me to thematically organize these spaces into four general types of spaces: 1) organization-led spaces of relationship building; 2) spaces of conviviality as pathways to relationship building; 3) relational spaces defined through acts of documentation; and 4) spiritually and emotionally bonded spaces that transcend a secular framework. This analysis led to identifying practices of relational meaning-making that form a preliminary understanding of what characterizes Indigenous-Muslim relations on Turtle Island.

Keywords: Canada, Canadian, Decolonization, First Nations, Gaza, Indigenous, Islam, Muslim, Palestine, Relations, Relationality, Solidarity, Space, Treaty, Treaties, Turtle Island

Introduction

The Assembly of First Nations reports that from coast to coast there are currently over 630 First Nations communities in Canada (AFN, 2024). Today, the northern part of Turtle Island is comprised of over 450 ethnic or cultural groups (Statistics Canada, 2022), as reported in the 2021 census, and the proportion of Canada's population that reported being Muslim has risen from 2.0% in 2001 to 4.9% in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022). This paper is an exploration of the spaces of relationship making between many of these Indigenous and Muslim communities across the northern part of Turtle Island. Space is not a fixed paradigm, but one that "unfolds progressively in time and space" (Elmessiri, 2019, par.7). Within the context of the northern part of Turtle Island, the spaces of relationships between Indigenous and Muslim communities are intertwined with the history and geopolitical realities of settler-colonialism and immigration. In his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes,

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle of geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, and forms, about images and imaginings.

The struggle that Said speaks about is characterized distinctly where, as Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds (2010) write, "colonialism between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries, has produced a profound and extensive rearrangement of physical spaces and peoples." The result is "an enduring and unresolved legacy in the so-called postcolonial present," which, as has been identified in this article by participant members of Indigenous communities, requires Indigenous

peoples who are citizens of a (post)colonial world to define a "new meaning and social demography … [to] be carved and asserted over existing and enduring Indigenous spaces" (Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds 2010, 1). In the process of understanding how physical and conceptual spaces come into being, it becomes imperative to uncover and disrupt Canadian power dynamics over certain spaces within the era of modern treaties (Hunt, Stevenson 2016). For Muslims living on the northern part of Turtle Island, their relations with Indigenous peoples have often been both purposeful and cognizant of these power dynamics. This article is an exploration of developing space and relationship formation from the perspective of Muslim and Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Research Method & Background

Conducting research on two specific communities requires sensitivity and understanding. Focusing on the specificities of conducting research with Indigenous communities including ethical guidelines for such research, as identified by Indigenous communities, has been a priority. Hayward, et.al (2021) have presented meta-research on the various frameworks and guidelines, in which they identify three key themes of "balancing individual and collective rights; upholding culturally-grounded ethical principles; and ensuring community-driven/self-determined research" (403). This project has aimed at upholding these themes. While focussing on the specific theme of space-making, this article is based on a wider, qualitative research project, supported by content analysis of existing literature and online resources produced by relevant organizations and initiatives.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen individuals across Canada, the Northern parts of Turtle Island, many of whom are part of various nonprofit organizations or grassroots groups that have led or participated in projects and initiatives focused on Indigenous-Muslim relationship-building. To access participants, some factors were considered, e.g. whether interviewees are available and willing to be interviewed, and whether they have lived experiences and knowledge about the topic of interest (Whiting 2008). There was a specific aim to attain diverse perspectives, including those involved at the grassroots level, in institution-based initiatives, grant-providing initiatives, youth-based initiatives, and by accessing organizational and community leaders. Gender, age, generational, and religious diversity were also incorporated into the research design.

This study also benefitted from content analysis – a research method which validates the fact that society exists through "…talk, texts, and other modalities of communication…[and] that understanding social phenomena cannot be achieved without understanding how language operates in the social world" (Krippendorff 2018, xii). This method was chosen because it enables a researcher to attain descriptive knowledge to understand the phenomena of study (Assarroudi, et.al 2018), where data isn't viewed simply as physical events, but rather as spaces of experiences and existence "…that are created and disseminated to be seen, read, interpreted, enacted, and reflected upon according to the meanings they have for their recipients" (Krippendorrf, xii). The interpretation of such communication within the context of social uses invites the researcher to understand the "…meanings, contents, intentions, references, communications," and what is created. (Krippendorrf, xii), enabling the summarizing of important information through the narratives and perspectives of the individuals and groups being researched (Neuendorf 2017, 23). For this research, content analysis was conducted on organizational website and literature, articles

published on mainstream news media, personal blogs, and program literature. All content was related to the initiatives, projects, or organizations that interviewees participate in, adding depth to the information provided by interviewees.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and interpret the major ideas, themes, and anomalies that came from this research project (Terry, et.al, 2017). Thematic analysis provides a means of examining the ways that people make meaning out of their experiences and how they construct their social realities through meaning making as informed by their material experiences and contexts (Evans, et.al 2018, 2). Data interrogation also involved moving from describing the data and what people are saying to reflecting on underlying assumptions, ideas, and threading this alongside wider societal contexts (Evans, et.al 2018, 5). This analysis led to identifying practices of relationship meaning-making and building that form a preliminary understanding of what characterizes Indigenous-Muslim relations on Turtle Island.

Considering researcher positionality helps to identify the "relative differences and similarities between the characteristics of the researcher and the participants," to gain insight into what implications this may have in the research process itself (Olukotun, 2021, p.1412). It is also common practice in critical Indigenous research methodologies employing relationality. Positionality has impacts on how research questions are framed and how research projects are designed, how participants are recruited and how data is collected (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014). Exploring the social construction of knowledge and even processes of knowing provides insight into the "social situatedness of both the researcher and the researched" (Mellor 2022, 26). As a researcher of this project, I recognize my own positionality as a Muslim woman on Turtle Island. While I may have certain understandings of Islam and connect more to the narratives of Muslim participants in the research, I must also be cognizant of the fact that I am a non-Indigenous woman who is seeking to understand Indigenous perspectives. Further to this, being aware of the diversity within both communities that exists and how this is manifested within interviewee perspectives is something that I have paid attention to throughout the research project. In my own research work, I brought my own identities as an immigrant from Bangladesh with heritage, cultural and historical influences as internalized and lived by my parents who lived through the impacts of British colonization on their lands and then the brutal war of independence in 1971. The remnants of those factors also include a cultural context of Bangladesh that was brought from the 1970s and 1980s which my parents lived here in Canada, while the Bangladesh (their land back home) they left, continued to change over time. Living the reality of a diaspora and growing up in Canada, understanding the histories of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, and bringing values of truth, justice and community as it pertains to my Islam all play a part in my understanding and living of relationship building between Muslim and Indigenous peoples.

Given my positionality, this article tends to focus on how Muslims are developing spaces of relationship with Indigenous relatives. Muslims on this land are comprised of a diverse blend of individuals that are early settler, immigrant, refugee, and newly arrived student and young professionals, as well as First Nation, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) Muslims and Black Muslims, the latter of which have trace their roots in the Americas well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Munir, 2021 & Quick, 2021 & Quick, 2020). The Muslims who have been part of this research project have expressed a responsibility for Muslim communities to respond and engage in the work of relationship-building with Indigenous communities, and this is further explored as

an Islamic duty. While the perspectives of Indigenous communities articulated below adds further depth and dimension to these perspectives, as a researcher, I acknowledge and recognize that my ability to articulate the nuances and deeper meanings of those perspectives is limited and would most benefit from future Indigenous-led research. That said, I have cited helpful theorists and sources that illuminate certain themes where possible below.

This work is grounded in a recognition that a secular academic framework is inherently limiting for research and writing concerning both Indigenous and Muslim communities. Both traditions embody their own worldviews and frameworks whose richness cannot be comprehensively understood by secular frameworks. As Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck points out, the secular academic framework is "not universal; rather, it is a colonial collector of knowledge as another form of territory. There are stories and experiences that already have their own place, and placing them in the academy is removal, not respect" (Tuck 2018, 156). The belief that academic knowing can inherently contribute towards an improvement of the state of being inherently assumes superiority and a progressive telos. Since at least the 18th century, there has been a penetration of Western colonialism and internalization of Western cultural and epistemological paradigms whereby the West has attempted to consciously and unconsciously, intentionally and unintentionally force its cultural paradigms onto the citizens of the world, in a way that advantages the Western world economically, and politically (Elmessiri, 2006, p.xi) The underlying presumption is that the West has become "...the ultimate point of reference" thereby transforming from a geographical space to becoming its own specificity and space of modern universal and human thought (Elmessiri, 2006, p.xvi). Such a western paradigm is characterized by utilitarianism and rational-materialism, which then informs terminology, methods, and procedures within most human knowledge, sciences, and attitudes (Elmessiri 2006).

Knowledge must stem from the histories of different peoples and beings to build comprehensive social theories. Knowledge frameworks must move away from a materialist center-point, acknowledge transcendental natures of some knowledges, and accept open-ended, flexible paradigms that are not focussed on complete control of reality or knowledge. Finally, knowledge frameworks should not be reductionist or dualistic in nature and they should not necessitate a duality where social and natural sciences are dichotomized (Elmessiri 2019). Linda Tuhiwai Smith who affiliates with the Māori iwi Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou from the east cape of the North Island in New Zealand, Eve Tuck who is Unangax̂ and is an enrolled member of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Alaska, and K. Wayne Yang who writes about decolonization and ghetto colonialism (2018) write in their book *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*: "Settler governments and presidents, universities, schools, extractive infrastructures, the carceral system can seem very total, very permanent;" however, wanting and imagining a different kind of future requires a process of bringing the "conversations that happen at the edges of the scene…out of the footnotes and into the body of the work" (Tuhiwai, Tuck, Wang, 23). In their groundbreaking article *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,* Tuck and Wang (2012), assert that decolonization has no other synonym, rather it is a distinct project which must make direct mention of Indigenous peoples and the struggle for a recognition for sovereignty along with honouring Indigenous knowledge frameworks and individuals and activists who have made significant contributions. The work of decolonization is incommensurable to the goals of social justice, or critical methodologies, or other approaches attempting to decenter settler perspectives (Tuck and Wang, 2012), thus necessitating a novel approach, a drastic change in the order of the world (Fanon 1963)

and an ethic of incommensurability that is most concerned with Indigenous sovereignty (Tuck and Wang, 2012). To this end and bearing these imperatives in mind, this work seeks to understand and learn through the perspectives and processes that encompass the engagement of Indigenous-Muslim relationships on Turtle Island.

Image credit: Memona Hossain

Findings

Much research points to the fact that resilience is crucial to building vibrant and healthy communities (Jackson, et.al 2017; Lerch, et.al 2017; Newman, et.al 2009; Norris et.al, 2007; Rodin, 2018; Zolli et.al, 2013; Urban Resilience Project 2015) and the resilience of communities "…foregrounds the role of communities in responding, recovering, adapting and transforming before, during, and after crises" (Poland et.al, 2021). Socio-ecological resilience is the capacity and ability of an entire ecosystem to survive and withstand external shocks without losing fundamental characteristics of its functions and identity (Wilson 2012; Walker 2004; Magis 2010). Community capacity to engage and build relationships that foster resilience at the grassroots level is driven by the perspectives that enable them to approach one another and develop meaningful spaces for relationships. In looking at Indigenous-Muslim relationships, each community holds certain perspectives that guide the efforts they exert towards these relationships.

Indigenous Perspectives

In looking at the perspectives of Indigenous leaders, community members and organizations, there are three main elements that underpin making relations with Muslim communities. These three elements are: 1) Ensuring the narrative of Indigenous people across Turtle Island are true, authentic, and directly from Indigenous sources; 2) Reciprocally wanting to ensure the narrative of other peoples on Turtle Island are true, authentic, and directly coming from those people

themselves; and 3) A desire to nurture success and community-building within Indigenous communities.

"I've been very passionate about changing the narrative on Indigenous people," explained one Anishinaabe participant who added that according to the settler Canada narrative, the narrative of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island is "dark, oppressive, and colonizing," as though Indigenous people are only defined by their experiences of being colonized and the dark memories of oppression. This individual noted that contemporary narratives must recognize that Indigenous people have a very rich way of looking at the world and interacting with all that is around them, while engaging directly with communities to enable ownership of this narrative. Currently, those applying for citizenship in Canada must write a test, and the preparation manual which has been developed by the Ministry Citizenship and Immigration Canada directs the narrative of the history of Canada. It opens with the Oath of Citizenship to the British monarchy and continues to argue that, "To understand what it means to be Canadian, it is important to know about our three founding peoples – Aboriginal, French and British" (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2021). Connecting this fact to the statistics of newly arrived Canadians, and to the first point raised by this respondent regarding ownership of Indigenous narrative, there remains a gap in how the true, authentic narrative of Indigenous peoples is conveyed to many Canadians. Statistically, one in five Canadians are born outside Canada, and depending on their age of arrival, their exposure to the legacies of colonialism and Canadian history and how immigrants and newcomers perceive Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island is an understudied area (Parkin et.al 2023).

Another Cree respondent shared that, "we don't get to study you [Muslims] and you don't get to study us – the government doesn't want us to do that, we have to take the initiative so we can become friends. I want to *learn* to respect you," he emphasised, as he tried to explain the deep respect and connection that comes from relationships, rather than learning about each other through indirect sources. As Anishinaabe author from Lac Seul First Nation, Patty Krawec writes in the introduction to *Becoming Kin,* about newcomers, Black and Indigenous peoples, "the history we learn in elementary school is rooted in explorers and settlers," wherein "…the very people who created the problem are transformed into the ones who saved us." In other words, Canada becomes positioned as a country of safety and refuge for newcomers and "our collective memory is filled with other stories. Other centers. Sometimes the center is created simply through the act of revolving around it." However, she questions, what if the things that we have been told are *not* in fact who we are? And so, Krawec suggests, that we need to go back to stories of new beginnings of our collective stories together (Krawec, 2022, p. 15-16).

An executive director for an organization that serves Indigenous families and youth indicated that connecting with Muslim communities works well with the objective of nurturing Indigenous peoples to be successful by living in two worlds – that which is connected to the traditional teachings of Indigenous peoples, and that which helps them to be grounded in the current realities. Experiences of shared connections, taking initiative in building one's own narrative, and even the experience of communicating that narrative effectively fosters confidence, growth, and pride amongst Indigenous participants.

Muslim Perspectives

From the perspective of Muslim leaders, community members, and organizations in this study, the approach to building spaces of relationship with Indigenous communities is propelled by a desire to fulfill their purpose and worship of Allah by addressing injustice and experiences of oppression; to develop shared friendship; and a desire to know and understand more about the people of the land on which they reside.

One interviewee, who currently serves as an executive director for an Islamic social services organization shared that "we (Muslims) are a community that is asked to reflect," as he further explained that Muslims are called to be in service of humanity. In this reflection, the interviewee argued that Muslims must focus on the purpose of life and the responsibilities associated with that purpose.

There is also an expressed desire to build meaningful friendships. "There's a shared bond, in terms of both sides as peoples who have experienced oppression," said one Muslim interviewee. "And the friendship that develops from solidarity and deep connection is unique," explained another woman who has been working on relationship-building between Indigenous and Muslim women in Ottawa. The kind of friendship that was described is one where connection and unspoken insights that are shared between communities who have certain lived experiences and spiritual beliefs brings depth.

Another Muslim individual from Manitoba who has been closely involved with Indigenous elders and a healing center in her community shared that Muslims are known "as people who are motivated to stand for justice, not just for ourselves, but for others." She further expressed that Muslims need to be concerned and involved in addressing the injustices of oppression that exist with our communities. Relatedly, an imam echoed this sentiment, stating, "Our faith teaches us to stand firm in justice, to help those who are vulnerable...and we really need to feel the pain of Indigenous communities around us...to be there with empathy and support."

A female Muslim academic from Ottawa succinctly put it,

> When we know this land has been found on injustice – our contribution to justice is to denounce it and to be aware and to make sure we are no longer participating in it. We weren't part of the injustice, but today we live here; from an Islamic perspective, we need to minimize the injustice and be part of those efforts.

This reflective perspective on honouring justice is also tied to a sense of responsibility, where one respondent shared, "We need to look at this principle of historical responsibility and apply it to ourselves and look at any incurred debts that we as Muslims have been incurring at least since 1871." Thus, religious beliefs of authentic brotherhood, citizenship responsibilities of assuming the duties of the land, and being aware of the history of the lands and claiming a duty to right those wrongs by building on restorative justice practises were identified as drivers of relationship building.

As members of the Muslim community have been learning through relationship-building, Indigenous experiences of injustice have often been tied to their belief systems. "Indigenous spirituality has been made illegal at times, (which has) driven underground mechanisms for

preservation of heritage, knowledge and wisdom," commented an interviewee who has been working with Indigenous leaders on developing agreements of brotherhood and sisterhood with Muslim leaders.

One Muslim social services organization leader identified the need to think beyond a binary framework, stating, "It was important to articulate – we oftentimes infer something such as Indigenous and Muslim as separate categories, rather than recognizing there are many Indigenous Muslims. So, the binary framework is unhelpful." He also identifies how both communities have found common areas of narrative connection through a belief in the Creator, shared stories on impacts of dislocation from colonization, valued frameworks that connect spirituality and purification, and shared interest in terms of changing how children's services work.

Finally, the drive to make relations is characterized by Muslims as expressing a recognition of the deep relationships that Indigenous communities hold with the land, and their unique perspectives on treaty-making.

Shared Perspectives

One shared perspective arose on the need for both communities to come together. Members of both communities refer to a desire to develop a space of shared narratives that can then be passed down for generations ahead, recognizing that this work is for their children, and *their* children, and *their* children. "We have to spend our entire life learning to coexist with people around us," said one Muslim woman who has been working with Indigenous youth in various remote communities in Ontario and Quebec. Another Muslim woman who has been working on creating social media platforms to share stories and narratives of Indigenous-Muslim relations said her hope was that the work of relationship-building will enable a future where, "collectively youth in our community will have no hesitation in reaching out and getting to know their Indigenous neighbours." Another Muslim man reflected on the future with a rhetorical question "If your children are going to be here for seven generations forward and my children will be here moving seven generations forward, don't we need to communicate and share?" He further explained the integral need to engage, communicate, and share how to nurture those future relationships.

An Indigenous knowledge keeper spoke about the importance of being liberated from the notion of land ownership and destruction and shared a vision for getting the land back not just for Indigenous peoples, but as an act of restoring justice for all peoples on this land collectively, "I wonder if it's possible to get land back not just for us, but for all people. Let's work towards a common goal (together)," he said, further explaining that the act of coming together helps both communities and opens doors for future relations. Another Anishinaabe woman who serves on the National Advisory Council on Poverty shared that "we just need to be deliberate [about forging relations] and we will see it bear fruit, in ways I can't even think of right now."

A Muslim leader who was part of launching the Muslim Indigenous Connection project (discussed below) reflects:

> the common recognition that both communities have their own share of discrimination, racism, and traumas that they deal with, for different reasons and applied in different ways…directly deal with the Canadian government's role in

> marginalizing both communities. It's something Muslim communities need to be aware of. We don't want to be part of a system that oppresses, subjugates, sitting on stolen lands, treaty lands.

While both Indigenous and Muslim community members have specific perspectives that are guided by their own worldviews, they also share collective lived experiences that are directing their efforts in forging meaningful relationships. Members of both communities envision themselves and the generations that will follow them as sharing space on the land through connective means, hopeful that the work that is done today will contribute to the wellbeing of that future shared space: a space forged despite a violent history and remnants of colonial imprints that are resisted collectively and through that resistance, the relations are deepened.

Analysis

Indigenous and Muslim communities across Turtle Island have been making efforts to build spaces of connection, and shared experiences for over two decades. While other connections existed prior to this, the premise of this research was based on the past twenty years of relationship-building. The research analysis has led me to thematically organize these spaces into four general types of spaces: organization-led spaces of relationship building; spaces of conviviality as pathways to relationship building; relational spaces defined through acts of documentation; and spiritually and emotionally bonded spaces that transcend a secular framework. These spaces are defined by their unique means of communication structures as well as community members' engagement.

Organization-led Spaces of Connective Relationship Building

In their research on co-designing to engage stakeholders and impact social system change to enhance the life experiences of structurally vulnerable communities, Micsinszki et.al, (2022) explore this process as a "dynamic, creative approach…that embraces partnership with community, and focuses on systems change and improving human experience" (as referred to in Moll, et.al, 2020:1). Where historical and systemic trauma exists, a partnered approach is helpful towards a healing pathway of relationship-building. Partnerships require key elements that can increase their potential for success, and Cargo and Mercer (2008) identify these to be: trust and mutual respect; capacity building, empowerment, and ownership; and accountability and sustainability. Rose LeMay who is from Taku River Tlingit First Nation in British Columbia, and is the CEO of Indigenous Reconciliation Group, writes how reconciliation requires structural changes where law, policy, and practice need to change (LeMay 2015). Senge, et.al, 2007 write about how it may be "faster and easier to leave such work [of building frameworks for change] to small groups of experts or to outsource it to consultants or academics" (Senge at.al 2007, 47). However, the cost of faster and easier work is the loss of "collective intelligence embedded in diverse organization…and can result in output for which there is neither deep understanding nor commitment" (Ibid). Thus, a balance must be sought.

My research shows that *both* Indigenous-led and Muslim-led organizations are initiating and leading programs and projects that nurture relationships between both communities. For this research, *organization-led* spaces of connective relationship-building refers to initiatives that have been formally adopted by community organizations. Such organizations include registered non-profit organizations that have staff and volunteers who are committed to advancing organizational objectives and goals that focus on serving certain demographics. This includes aligning

organizational goals and objectives, allocating funding and staff timing as well as developing formalized literature that supports these relations. Therefore, formalized and documented work may enable long-term projects and continuity that is adopted beyond the agenda of a few people taking initiative through personal motivation. It is possible that some of the initiatives identified in other parts of this article can be adopted by organizations as well; however, at this time, only the initiatives identified in this section have been adopted at an organizational level.

Many individuals who are leaders of organizations commented on how the work of developing initiatives and programs that connect to Indigenous-Muslim relationships is directly related to the objectives of their work. "When we started our work, we learned about each other's communities and how they are perceived and got excited about the potential to change perceptions," commented the Executive Director of an Indigenous organization in Edmonton. One Muslim executive director shared that "the collaborative work comes from the framework of a lot of organic work that has been happening for years…but still, it was important to articulate" and clearly develop programming focused on Indigenous-Muslim relationships. Another Muslim woman reflects on when they, as an organization purposefully started to invite an Indigenous elder within their community to partake in the opening prayer for their annual fundraising gala. However, the organization decided to further this work and invited an Indigenous woman, who is the executive director of the First Nations children and family care society in their region as the main speaker at one of their events, to speak about what she does and about Indigenous families and children. Another leader of Muslim organizations spoke to how they used existing platforms and campaign prototypes to introduce Indigenous-focused programming. For example, the Friday prayer sermon, the khutbah, which happens in every masjid has often been utilized as a platform to campaign specific and relevant messaging. The Orange Khutbah campaign was initiated shortly after the mass, unmarked gravesites of Indigenous children across many cities in Canada where residential schools used to be (Cordeiro, 2022). As of September 2021, more than 1300 unmarked graves were found across five former residential school sites (Cecco, et.al, 2021). The announcement of the findings of the graves encouraged imams to focus their sermons on statements of solidarity with Indigenous survivors (Justice for All, 2023). Another Muslim executive director of a social services organization shared how a specific grant was secured to hire an Indigenous staff member to focus on clearly identified initiatives that will help build Indigenous-Muslim relationships and understanding with one another.

The executive director of an Indigenous social services organization commented that "it feeds nicely within our goals and strategic objectives," as she spoke about the work that her organization is doing in building Indigenous-Muslim connections and relationships. She mentioned how the organization acquired grants through which they designed ways to spend time together with Muslim organizations and community members. "We got grants and deliberately started spending time together. We learned we have similar worldviews on kinship, connection to the land, ceremonies have similar intents…," she commented. She also spoke about how it was "us becoming the first story of newcomers to the land," as she described the organization's efforts in doing airport greetings to welcome Syrian newcomers at the airport, singing out loud, drumming, and presenting a gift. She shared how there have been cross-organizational invitations where participants from each community are attending celebrations of others, including Eid celebrations, powwows, drumming circles, and national Indigenous People's Day celebrations.

She then reflected on some of the impacts of these intentional and thoughtful initiatives when she explains: "It has already borne fruit. One of our staff ran into a girl in her neighbourhood. On her scooter, in a hijab. She stopped and asked (the staff) 'are you an Indigenous person? My family came to Canada, and I was really scared and nervous because I didn't know what it was going to be like here, and my parents were scared – and when we arrived, some people came and sang to us and gifted us (at the airport) and that made us happy,' and I felt it would be ok."

Organizations also shared how they focused on connecting specific groups within their communities for projects of building common narratives. For example, the Canadian Prayer Rug project was conceived as a special initiative which brings together the distinct weaving traditions of Indigenous and Muslim women to create one rug that cumulatively holds space for the stories of women on Turtle Island (Clancy, 2016). This project was funded by the Edmonton Heritage Council, and proceeds continue to support community projects through replicas made in collaboration with a fair-trade social enterprise (Clancy, 2016). In this project, "youth from the community interviewed elders and early pioneer (Muslim women) to develop stories of what the Canadian Prayer Rug would look like, (thus) basing that story on our relationship with Indigenous people and working with a Metis designer in an act of borrowing Indigenous arts and honouring the land…" explains one Muslim leader who was behind the project, who was later named a co-historian laureate for the 2022-2024 term in Edmonton. While Edmonton had announced solo historian laureates for six terms (City of Edmonton, 2024), in 2022, the city announced their first co-historian laureates – an Indigenous community leader and a Muslim community leader, identifying it as a "continuation of a pre-existing partnership between the two community leaders," (Murray, 2022).

Another area of growth in relations is amongst youth. The Muslim Indigenous Connection (MIC) project is an initiative primarily focused on Muslim youth, where one imam said, "Why don't we do something for the next generation of Muslims who not only need to learn what Indigenous people have and continue to go through, but also about the legacy of genocide and how to be part of the Truth & Reconciliation work?" The MIC project is a multi-week program where youth commit to learning about the histories of Indigenous peoples, visiting some sites for learning, meeting with elders, as well as speaking to both Muslim and Indigenous community leaders to understand the significance of reconciliation and relationship building. They then engage in a practical project that nurtures the work of reconciliation (Justice for All, 2023). These types of organizational, institutional, and clearly identified projects are building systemic sustainability in the space of Indigenous-Muslim relationship building. Through efforts like connecting organizational objectives with these programs, allocating staffing, grants and specific funding, both Indigenous and Muslim organizations and their leaders are recognizing the need for this work, and mobilizing it actively. They do this by building practices, policies, and long-term visions towards a shared, collective future of Indigenous and Muslim peoples on Turtle Island.

Spaces of Conviviality as a Pathway to Building Relationships

In their article on community and conviviality (2019), Neal et.al, explain how community is a profound space of sociality that nurtures the practice of "being with," where acts of coming together invite diverse peoples to do 'things,' serving as "generative spaces of social interaction and shared practice through and in contexts of urban difference" (Neal et.al, 69). The emotional element to community creates an "experience of belonging on many different scales" (Blokland

2017, 8 and 29). Conviviality is focused on the social relations that happen through shared spaces between different groups, where activities can shape an 'easy sociability' (Watson 2009), thus nurturing 'intercultural togetherness' and supporting shared local belonging, also experienced through neighborly acts and other comforts appropriated through spaces (Peters 2010; Peters and de Haan 2011; Rishbeth and Powell 2013; Neal et al. 2015; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020). Conviviality is understood as the processes and means through which informal life is lived in contexts of difference (Neal et.al 2015).

In her doctoral research, Janice Cindy Gaudet who identifies herself as "a Métis woman from Saskatchewan living in Ottawa, with maternal ancestral roots in Red River," (Gaudet, 2019, p.48) explains that research methodology directs and defines how the research is approached and identifies the Visiting Way methodology where relationality inspires a research methodology that "inspires social values, kinship, an understanding of women's contributions, and self-recognition in relation to the land, history, history, community, and values…further unsettle[ing] historical hierarchies of knowledge and inaccuracies about Indigenous peoples' ways of being, knowing, and doing." (Gaudet, 2019, p.47). Gaudet's identification of Visiting Way resonates with my own research, where themes of visiting and conviviality surfaced through various recollections shared by respondents.

Within the realm of Indigenous-Muslim relationships, such spaces of conviviality have included shared meals, celebration, prayers, and acts of cooking together. One Indigenous man simply said, "As an Indigenous person in Canada, I thought, how come we don't get to know the people coming to this land?" as he recalled the elders of both Indigenous and Muslim communities coming together for dinners and spending hours in human-to-human conversations. "Let's keep on talking and find ways of how to make a better world," he said. Another Muslim woman who spent time living with Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario and Quebec shared that "small stories completely change how I see the world around me. The role of food or rain" and the stories that exist within Indigenous cultures deeply impacted her own worldviews, she shared. A Muslim woman shared her experiences of being invited to attend a powwow in Ottawa. She expressed how sharing joy with other women at the powwow inspired her to develop deeper friendships. She reflected and later wrote about the "clear manifestation of joy, happiness and gratitude to the Creator," that she witnessed, and the depth of connections felt in holding hands with young women who danced "with such elegance, grace and smiles, in the powwow circle" (Mazigh, 2022). Another Muslim woman from Manitoba that was interviewed shared her experiences of spending time with Indigenous communities and being "adopted by members of other nations as part of their communities and families," and how this, for her, "was like getting immigration status." She explained how such deeper relationships that come through spending meaningful time together enable connections as well as hold responsibilities as kinship would. "It doesn't make me First Nation. What it means to me, what I understand from the elders, is that I am now fully welcome here, to raise my family here, but also with that adoption come responsibilities. I am responsible for honouring the laws of this land, and serving the people of this land who are my fellow family members" she shared.

Another Muslim woman spoke about how youth from Indigenous and Muslim communities in Winnipeg have been connecting to better understand the water advisory issues by collectively visiting Shoal Lake in Manitoba. Muslim and Indigenous youth also attend ceremonies together to

understand these issues through sweat lodges and sun dances. "We don't get too much into the politics. We get to the person-to-person, the community-to-community," she said, emphasizing the need for authentic relationship-building as an initial step. She reflected on how understanding the lived experiences of others as well as the implication that such issues have on the lives of Indigenous youth in their community, helped youth to better understand the impact as well as how to engage with youth as friends in solidarity. "We don't speak for each other, that's the colonial way, but we can stand with each other," she shared. Aileen Moreton-Robinson is a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people (Moreton Bay), and she writes about *relationality* and the role it plays in effective research practices. She writes that relationality "provides a network of ideas for perception within which thought, communication and action…is grounded in a holistic conception of the inter-connectedness and inter-substantiation between and among all living things and the earth…[and] with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world we inhabit" (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p.71). Indigenous and Muslim youth visiting Shoal Lake together and participating in ceremony together seem to encompass acts of relationship-building with relationality at their heart.

Both Indigenous and Muslim women spoke about the connection of shared cooking and Indigenous women visiting and making prayer supplications together. "When you bring people together, when they can have a conversation, share a meal, volunteer together, you build relationships, and it is all about relationships," shared one Muslim woman.

Another Muslim woman reflected on her own experiences, why it is important to build relationships that enable an understanding of different worldviews and stories to help further nurture and support the pathways towards relationships. She recalled her own experiences of identifying a perceived issue within an Indigenous community that she visited and immediately trying to fundraise to resolve the issue. When she visited the community leader to discuss this plan, she was surprised to know that the community leader did not feel this was appropriate permission-seeking, or that she was part of the decision-making process. The Muslim woman reflected on her own colonially-informed frame of mind. "In the colonial system, there's focus on efficiency and getting to the point. I've learned that we need to start off slow, humble, and don't even assume…" she said. The practice of conviviality is a crucial aspect to developing relationships that become deep and sustained.

Documented Spaces

The act of thinking about the type of relationships that Indigenous and Muslim people want to foster amongst each other and committing those into words as a mutual understanding through acts of documentation is another way the space of Indigenous-Muslim relations have been developed. In my research, this has happened in two distinct ways: drawing an agreement of brother-and sister-hood between Indigenous and Muslim communities, and Muslim communities creating land acknowledgements that are authentic to their worldviews.

Anishinaabe-Ashkenazi researcher and theatre-worker Jilly Carter who is cross-appointed to the Centre for Indigenous Studies and Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance studies at the University of Toronto writes,

> As a nation built on the Doctrines of Discovery, Extinguishment and Terra Nullius, Canada is, understandably, a precocious and forgetful entity. Her very existence, as an internationally recognized sovereign state, relies upon that forgetting—upon her refusal to acknowledge that there are stories that precede her recent genesis, stories that inhabit and reverberate throughout "deep time" and upon a rigorous and methodical campaign to sanitize the present moment of Indigenous presence and eventually to erase all traces of Indigeneity from living memory. (Carter, 2018, 242)

Indigenous peoples have been reclaiming cognitive spaces and academic erasures, developing authentic land acknowledgements, and writing treaties of brother/sisterhood. Supporting such acts of re-scripting and documenting resultant spaces may be another place of relationship-building for non-Indigenous peoples. As Carter writes, "our first task is multi-faceted: it requires an active embrace of new knowledge and a recovery of what has been forgotten. As non-Indigenous peoples invest time and energy in re-educating themselves, in listening to and learning about the lands upon which they live and the Indigenous peoples who continue to steward these lands, they must also invest equal portions of time and energy in remembering themselves" (Carter, 2018, p.246). Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg writer, musician and academic, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) writes, "theory is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice within each family, community and generation of people…it is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational" (Simpson 2014, 7). Creating such realities on the ground is an act of rebellion against erasure.

Drawing from the teachings of Islam's core principles, it can be seen "...that Muslims are taught to see themselves as part of the human family over which no human can be superior. No human has the right to subdue or harm the other. Peace thus is a concept nurtured into the hearts of the believers" (Bashir 2018, 225). From this perspective, treaties are designed to be "...one of the most significant sources of peace and peace keeping[;] they deserved unprecedented attention and were empowered by Islamic international law to the point of sacredness" (Bashir 2018, 225). Mohammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani is a 9th century Islamic scholar and jurist who has produced extensive works in the field of Muslim international law and treatise, and the application of Islamic ethics in "Islamic Law of Nations." More recently, Khaled Ramadan Bashir (2018) presents and discusses al-Shaybani's works, showing his works on Islamic thinking and international law and ethics and how this relates to contemporary dialogues. Bashir writes how *mowada'ah*, translated as 'peace agreement' or 'accord of harmony' was a significant focal point in al-Shaybani's works (Bashir 2018, 216). As found in his thesis on the formative years of the Islamic state in the Umayyad Period, Mohamed Hosny M. Gaber researches the principles of Islamic international law and writes, "the principle of good faith has, from earliest times, been regarded not only as a matter of common concern to the whole community of states, but also as a matter of legal duty between the parties to the treaty," (Gaber 1962, 97). Early scholars of Islam including al-Farabi, al-Mawardi, Nizam al-Mulk, al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Qayyim have all studied and written about treaty-making and its jurisprudence within Islam (Rahman, 237). Verses from the Qur'an that relate to relationship and treaty-making have been referenced by scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah:

> Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing. O, you who have believed to obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result
>
> Quran, 4: 58-59 as translated from The Noble Quran, 2016: Ibn Taymiyyah, 2000

Ibn Taymiyyah identifies two critical elements to relationship building: trust (*amanah*) and ustice (*adalah*) (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2000), and these elements are studied in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who enacted several treaties and covenants during his life. Such examples help address the needs of society (Muhaimin, 2014). Scholars like Ibn al-Qayyim took from the examples of the Prophet and teachings from the Qur'an to later write that the basis of all Islamic legal systems (sharia) are:

> …a system based on the welfare of the individual in the community both In his everyday life and in his anticipation of the life hereafter. It is all Justice, all compassion, all benefits, and all wisdom; thus any principles Which become unjust, uncompassionate, corrupt and futile is not part of The shariah; however, by false interpretation.

In my research, I found that Muslim groups have been developing land acknowledgement statements that are connected to such Islamic worldviews to nurture reflection and authentic commitment to the work of relationship-building. Land acknowledgments may "provide an awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights, and to recognize privilege" (Favrholdt, 2022) for newcomer and settler inhabitants. However, there needs to be meaning behind those statements and actual commitment to implementing calls to action will inform true relationship-building, writes journalist Penny Smoke, of Cree and Saulteaux decent from Treaty 4 (Smoke, 2019). Land acknowledgements " remind(s) us we are accountable to these relationships and to remind us every day, for example in school systems, of the accountability that everybody has to listen to the concerns of the community and how we can align to our [Indigenous] community," explains Karyn Recollet an urban Cree woman and assistant professor at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto in a news article (Recollet, article by Ramna 2017).

One Muslim interviewee who has served in various senior leadership positions within Muslim social justice-based organizations shared that, "...land acknowledgement at the first stage is to verbally say [the acknowledgement], but the second part is to act." Another Muslim man who was interviewed has been involved in developing meaningful land acknowledgements for the Muslim community. He explains that "...a secular state apparatus begins with a land acknowledgement, and they often omit the most important things, which is the Creator. But we as Muslims, we share a core belief," and as a result, land acknowledgments should not "feel formulaic or mechanical," but rather sacred. He continues that within the Islamic tradition, "we believe that nothing good begins without the intention." In this line of thinking, a book of *dua* Islamic prayers was developed in connection to the land acknowledgement process (IFSSA, 2021).

In 2010, Elder Dave Courchene Jr. of the Anishinaabe Nation, Eagle Clan, in Sagkeeng, Manitoba Lodge International Centre for Indigenous Education and Wellness met with several leaders of the Muslim community to collectively develop and document a "Statement of Understanding" titled *Kii zhay otti zi win and Ukhuwa: An agreement of the Spirit of Friendship, Kindness, Brotherhood/Sisterhood, Sharing and Gentleness*. The agreement reads that it is to "act as a gateway to furthering a relationship of knowing each other and supporting each other in the sharing of each other's unique contributions to Canadian society, for the common good of all," (Nasir 2010, par.3). I spoke with two people who were part of this agreement development process, and they reflected on its significance. "I was part of that process (of drafting the agreement); it was a sharing of worldviews that happened," explained one woman. She then recollected the response of an imam who spoke after Elder Dave Courchene: "…he said 'thank you our brother. First of all, we want to apologize on behalf of our community [that] it has taken us so long to meet. We should have come to you sooner and paid respect to you. This is your homeland. Secondly, we have the same belief. The seven sacred laws. We have our own way of articulating, but the foundation is the same. Thirdly, I want to thank you for reminding us to follow the book of nature, we have that understanding that we have to follow the book of nature, and as Muslims we have neglected to do that.'…" She then reflected on the impact this had for her and connecting at the human level. Another man who was part developing the agreement reminisced on its essence and spoke about the "dream" that was borne of it to really embody the concept of treaty-building within the Muslim community here on Turtle Island, and how "each Muslim individually and collectively shares in a moral obligation asserted by the Islamic moral code to rectify injustice." He shared what he had learned from his Indigenous friends about the essence of treaties as an ongoing mutual relationship, and that agreement is considered to be alive with a spirit of its own for both parties to come together to reflect and grow with it. He passionately explained how the work of the agreement started with many hopes and that the need to continue to bring this agreement to life and fruition is a duty.

In these findings, the notion of documenting spaces where relationships exist, there is a coming alive of histories, of belief systems, of lived experiences, and all of these seem to tie to a higher power, which both communities recognize as a Creator. These spaces don't only exist on paper, nor are they sterile documentation. Rather, they embody and acknowledge the erasures and blank spaces between words that are felt by both communities, thus becoming sacred documented spaces that both communities showed an invested interest in upholding.

Spiritual & Emotional Connections Beyond Secular Narratives

In their work on spirituality and community development, Chile & Simpson (2004) identify that the promotion of fairness and social justice is crucial for connecting the individual to community development. As people search for meaning in their lives, spirituality becomes embedded within all cultures within every geographical community (Fabry 1980), thus informing their ethical framework. Regardless of the particularities of the kind of spirituality, community development relies on a "respectful and sustainable regard for communities and the environment" (Chile & Garett, 2004, p. 318). The University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development team has developed a free multilingual online community toolbox which includes a 46-chapter resource outlining frameworks for supporting the work of community and systemic change. In the chapter on spirituality and community building, community psychologist Bill Berkowitz, defines spirituality as "...the qualities that inspire us to do what is right and good - for ourselves and others"

(Berkowitz in Community Toolbox, n.d., ch.28, par.3). Spiritual assets include compassion, appreciation, being charitable towards others, forgiveness, and solidarity in seeking justice, and as community members become more cognizant of the "needs, beliefs, and emotions of others...when they feel common bonds [with others] and are motivated to maintain them..." it nurtures collective community building.

For Indigenous and Muslim communities coming together, there is a theme of the spiritual and emotionally supportive space that forms through the relationships. In that space is the gently compassionate space of solidarity through acts of 'showing up.' These spaces have included members of both communities either connecting back to pre-existing relationships, or in those moments of difficulty, where pre-existing relationships do not exist, those communities make it a priority to find ways to connect. Those acts of solidarity take place after acts of hatred or violence have been endured, expressing empathy through difficult experiences, sharing narratives during moments of pain, sharing in moments of joy through celebration, and upholding and validating spiritual connections that transcend the boundaries of the secular framework. This can be in the form of attending public vigils, public demonstrations such as protests or demonstrations against injustices, finding ways to bring one's own practices of grief, such as prayer or jingle dances, or participating as speakers on platforms of the other community, and creating spaces of education that brings both causes to the forefront. Connecting through core spiritual values and building relationships through emotional connection, and perhaps even a recognition of how oppression and injustice can evoke emotional connections, seem to bring the two communities together in a unique way.

Facing the impacts of Islamophobia seems to be one such space where experiences of injustice and oppression awaken a point of emotional connection. When speaking about the aftermath of 9/11 and the impact on Muslim communities, one Muslim woman who has been active in forming relationships with Indigenous communities across Turtle Island expressed that... "one of the first communities that reached out to the Muslim community was an Indigenous leader from the community" to check on how the Muslims were doing and how they could support them. Another imam spoke about the vigils that took place in the wake of the 2021 London, Ontario truck attack on a Muslim family which took the lives of four people and how significant it was when Indigenous faith leaders attended the vigil. Another Edmonton-based Muslim Palestinian community leader shared a photo of an Indigenous woman wearing a Palestinian sash around her neck at a vigil that took place in the wake of the finding of unmarked graves. As she wore the sash, she spoke about how the children suffering in Palestine are "our babies too." The community leader spoke about how "shared experiences of colonization is a space of pain that connects." As journalist and the Northwest Bureau Chief, Luna Reyna, who carries Little Shell Chippewa and Mexican heritage recently wrote in connection to the genocide in Gaza since October 2023,

> At this moment in time, we can't talk about Land Back without talking about Palestine. Indigenous people from all over Turtle Island and abroad are sharing, "Land Back also includes Free Palestine." Indigenous customs, traditions and tribal identities are complex and unique but one thing many acknowledge is the correlation of a violent settler colonial state displacing Native Palestinians from their homelands to the history of the violent settler colonialism in the Americas that resulted in the genocide of so many and

> the scattered reservations some Indigenous nations have been allotted today.
> Reyna, 2023, par.9

The violence of settler colonialism that passes through the globe must be recognized and true relationship building and calling for truth and justice must not only see the connections between these injustices, but also rise up against injustices together wherever they are seen.

For both communities, those spiritual, emotional points of connection speak to a natural removal of the secularism barrier. Both Indigenous and Muslim women spoke of a connection that removes secular boundaries and judgement, which enables an unburdened relationship. "I didn't feel a single ounce of judgement...[it] was a moment of joy and friendship but most of all, it is a way I connect with my Indigenous brothers and sisters and learn from their values and beliefs" (Mazigh 2022) shared one Muslim woman who also wrote about her experiences of being with Indigenous women. An Indigenous woman chuckled as she compared her interactions with Muslims as opposed to white people, stating, "when I engage with white people, they always say they are afraid of doing something wrong or mis-stepping. But there was none of that fear when it came to meeting with Muslim people. There was nothing but excitement and passion to do, learn, and grow more." The burdens of a violent colonial past do not carry with Muslim communities, as they do with white communities, and therefore a precautious approach to relationship building is not present in the same way.

Every Muslim member in this study consistently commented on the realization of shared narratives that arise when the boundaries of secularism are transcended in a relationship, thus providing opportunities to learn from and connect with the essence of their own understandings of Islamic principles. This further opened emotional connections and reinforced the desire to connect with Indigenous communities. One Muslim interviewee who is an academic shares about her first experiences in meeting people from Indigenous communities in a university classroom in Kamloops. She shared that, "We live in a society where religion and spirituality is being eliminated because we live in a secular society...bringing religion back in the public sphere has been resisted. Going to the Indigenous communities and seeing how spirituality is present at any phase of their life is important...bringing the unseen world to the physical world is a notion I'm conscious of as a Muslim..." Part of the shared experiences between the groups are in bringing narratives of resistance to the societal imposing of a secular worldview which forces both communities to eliminate an essential part of their being when participating in the public sphere. Another Muslim woman who spent a total of nearly 4 years living in various Indigenous communities in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Peawanuck, Ontario, and Kangirsuk, Quebec, shared that verses in the Qur'an ask us to reflect on cosmos, on day and night and "...we're supposed to read these as verses, signs to reflect on the Creator." She noted that learning to relate to nature through her experiences of living in Indigenous communities enabled her to gain a deeper understanding of certain verses of the Qur'an. One Muslim man who has been involved with the Orange khutbah campaigns shared how "trust is at the core of the relationship" with Indigenous peoples and this has "direct implications on our spirituality. It is about how we treat the Earth, our connection to the Earth, and the land is all connected." He further explained that this all connected to social justice issues in defining the non-tangible aspects of the spaces that define Indigenous-Muslim relations. What came across for both communities is how social injustice, experiences of oppression, and relationship building through meaningful ways invite a spiritual component – one that is absent in

the secular paradigm that both communities are living under. It is within those crevices that Indigenous-Muslim relations form spiritual depth within their acts of relationship-building.

Imagining a future for Indigenous-Muslim relationship building

In my concluding question for interviewees, I asked them about their thoughts on the future of Indigenous-Muslim relations on Turtle Island. Indigenous perspectives on this question reflected purposeful work, along with a sense of wonder. One Indigenous interviewee shared, "We're a nation that welcomes newcomers all the time, and I never want us to not be that nation. But I would like us to do better when it comes to those relations and be more deliberate." Another Indigenous woman said, "If we were more deliberate then you would see a change in how policies and legislations [were enacted.]" Another Indigenous man wondered "…if its possible to get the land back not just for us – but for all people…let's come together so we can help open the doors to other relationships with other people" as he saw this work as building future pathways.

Muslim perspectives on future relationship building work were centered on learning Islam in greater depth to have a foundation from which to build deeper relationships with Indigenous people and develop purposeful work towards restoration and healing. Several reflected on the importance and need for "…showing up and being active – [and recognizing that] grassroots relationships are very important…" while another commented that "Muslims, through whatever circles they're in, need to build one-on-one relationships with Indigenous peoples in their communities." Finally, there were some words and terms that repeatedly came up from several interviewees, on the topic of thinking about the future of Indigenous-Muslim relationships. These include being brave and building relationships deliberately; looking internally; and thinking about individual as well as institutional commitments.

Collectively, respondents expressed a need to continue to build relationships and how decolonization of the land and mental construct are shared values that both Indigenous and Muslim communities can work together towards, as well as how this work needs to be more deliberate and proactively developed by both communities.

Conclusion

This research explores the concept of space and how this is defined and developed with regards to the relationships between Indigenous and Muslim communities on the northern part of Turtle Island, often referred to as Canada. The concept of space takes on different dimensions and in the context of this research, that space has manifested itself as organizationally-led spaces where initiatives are developed and executed and objectives and visions for those organizations have been brought into alignment. There have also been spaces where person-to-person and community-to-community relationality are given life, where the sense of conviviality and community spring forth through shared experiences such as sharing meals or participating in experiences such as sweat lodges. The concept of space has also been found as documented spaces that take important values from both communities when it comes to treaties, or agreements. Such documentation is neither sterile nor static, but rather, is living and centered on shared practises and commitments. I have also explored where the emotional and spiritual spaces of connection take place and are nurtured by excluding secular societal frameworks, giving an opportunity for concepts of spiritually-informed justice and resistance to be defined through both community's adherence to their belief

systems. Finally, it is clear that both communities imagine a future for their relationship-building and both express a desire to continue to forge relationships for reasons that are often similar or particular to their own community's needs.

This research has shown that the space that defines the relationship between Indigenous and Muslim communities is informed by many aspects and this includes the lived histories of both communities and how this informs their perception of relationship-making; the belief systems of each community and how it drives their worldviews and systems of values that they bring into spaces of relationship-making; the physical spaces that both communities live within and how much each is within the physical vicinity of each other and how this has enabled them to meet one another; and finally the shaping of these relationships through shared experiences of relationality. These spaces continue to be carved out through meaningful work and efforts throughout Turtle Island, and participants express their desire to continue to participate in such spaces.

The area of study to learn about the relationships between Indigenous and Muslim communities is vast. There are many more Indigenous and Muslim communities that are connecting and developing relationships and this study serves only as a conversation starter about them in the hopes that this dynamic will be explored in greater depth. Additionally, a more in-depth study that focuses over how such relationships evolve over generations and how they are inherited by children and grandchildren will provide insight into the depth of how these endure through the relationships they forge. Finally, comparative studies of Indigenous-Muslim relationships on other lands may also provide insight on where there are similarities, where there are other unique spaces of connection as well as how these spaces can cross geo-political boundaries and resist the boundaries of separation and segregation between peoples that have been imposed through colonial projects and define a post-colonial existence.

As we look at the genocide of Palestinians continuing today (at the time of writing), we see these connections and themes continuing. In late 2023, I had a conversation with Nick Estes, a member of the lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Professor of American Indian Studies, as well as co-founder of the Red Nation Movement, and Indigenous Solidarity with Palestine Project and he commented,

> We bandy about terms such as natural allies and I don't actually think that Palestinians and Indigenous People in North America are necessarily natural allies. It is something that has to be taught because we are indoctrinated in a system that sees our struggles as separate. I think organically we can see those connections, but we have to draw them out through a process of deprogramming of what has been indoctrinated within us because Indigenous people have undergone an extremely violent and genocidal indoctrination process. The evidence of Indigenous people allying in moments that weren't necessarily politically and socially beneficial to us with Palestinians demonstrates that we still continue this long line of resistance, that we still have these embers that can heat up and bursts into flames in moments of rupture that we are seeing now. I think that is something incredibly important for me to recover this history of Indigenous solidarity with Palestinians that go back to the Red Power Movement. (2023)

This space of solidarity amidst the heightening of the genocide in Gaza since October 2023 was not a part of this research, as it occurred after the research took place. However, its implications require further investigation and may provide deeper insight into the space of Indigenous-Muslim relationships.

This research helps to build further insight and understanding on how meaningful relationships are developed on Turtle Island through Indigenous communities who bring a rich worldview and carry an ethos of relationality that is embedded in a deep historical tradition, and Muslims who have arrived to this land for the past several generations with their own set of histories, trying to build a presence here with Islamic consciousness. The relationships between them can teach us about our past, our present, and our future as people who share the space and experiences of Turtle Island.

I am grateful to the participants of this study who shared their insights, their perspectives and their experiences so generously, and gave me of their time to meet and learn from them. Their openness and insights are what has enabled the basis of this research.

Glossary of Terminologies Used

It is beneficial to identify terms used in this article to clarify their use and context and to situate readers within the discourses that inform this study.

Faith, Religion, & Spirituality

These terms may sometimes be used interchangeably and inconsistently in existing literature (Zinnbauer, et.al, 1997). For this project, some nuances appeared, including how individuals employ these terms in their own lives. For example, while Indigenous peoples interviewed for this study did not always identify themselves as belonging to a specific religion, whereas Muslim participants in this project clearly and distinctly identified as adhering to the religion of Islam. Oftentimes, the concept of having faith in a Creator and shared spiritual experiences were discussed amongst members of both groups. While variances were not clarified with interviewees, the consistent element that can be taken about these terms is Muslims identifying with Islam as a religion and both groups identifying a shared reference point of believing in a Creator.

Indigenous Peoples

For the purposes of this project, Indigenous peoples have been taken to mean those who identify within one of three groups which is the First Nations, the Métis, who are the descendants of First Nations peoples and the European settlers who came to Canada; and the Inuit, who are the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic (Vowel 2017). As it relates to the Indigenous people interviewed for this project, they all self-identified and shared which Nation and land they belong to.

Muslim

In her 1990 article entitled, "What does it mean to be a Muslim today?" Riffat Hassan articulates that, "to be a Muslim today – or any day- is to live in accordance with the will and pleasure of Allah" (302). She continues to explain that "being a Muslim is dependent essentially only upon one belief: belief in Allah, [the] universal creator and sustainer who sends revelation for guidance of humanity... Believing in Allah and Allah's revelation to and through the Prophet Muhammad,

preserved in the Qur'an…" (Ibid). Muslims may have multiple intersecting identities, along with being Muslim, such as being Indigenous or Black, being immigrant, being female, etc. Additionally, as with any other group, Muslims are not a homogeneous group, and there is a diverse range of how people interpret and practise Islam. For the purposes of this research, the Muslim people who were interviewed self-identified as being Muslim and were involved in various capacities of community-based relationship-building between Muslim and Indigenous communities.

Turtle Island

The University of British Columbia, with a steering committee of Indigenous education leaders and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, writes that:

> *Turtle Island is the name the Lenape, Iroquois, Anishinaabe, and other Woodland Nations gave to North America. The name comes from the story about Sky Woman, who fell to Earth through a hole in the sky. The earth at this time was covered with water. The animals saw her predicament and tried to help her. Muskrat swam to the bottom of the ocean to collect dirt to create land. Turtle offered to carry this dirt on his back, and the collected dirt grew into the land we call North America. The term Turtle Island is now used today for North America by many Indigenous people, Indigenous rights activists, and environmental activists.*
>
> (Wilson, 2018, Introduction section)

In the context of this research, all the individuals who identified as Indigenous referenced or used the term Turtle Island which led to its inclusion in this article.

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Article: Persuaded by the Qur'an: Converting to Islam in Canada

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Abstract

The study examines the conversion experiences of Canadian Muslim converts, employing a qualitative, multi-method approach. This approach integrates a comprehensive literature review, survey, semi-structured interview, and secondary media analysis. Conducted in Anglo-dominant Canadian regions, primarily Alberta and Ontario, the research collected data from 58 participants, with in-depth interviews conducted for 21 individuals. Findings reveal that while numerous factors influence the conversion journey, engagement with the Qur'an plays a central role. Although converts report support from family, friends, and local mosques, they also encounter many challenges while integrating into their new community. The findings emphasize the need for Canadian Muslim organizations to implement targeted educational and community programs that assist converts in their integration process, fostering smoother transitions between their pre-conversion backgrounds and new religious communities.

Keywords: Canada, Canadian Muslim converts, conversion, conversion challenges, convert integration, Islam, Muslims, Qur'an, religious conversion, religious motivation, religion, reversion

Introduction

Canadian Muslim converts/reverts are the fastest growing convert population in Canada and are shaping the religious landscape and challenging assumptions about Canadian and Canadian Muslim identity (Stewart 2022). Conversion is a complex phenomenon that affects individuals in all aspects of life. Muslim converts change their beliefs, attitudes, habits, clothing, behaviours, and even their names in some cases – all aspects which Islam, as a comprehensive way of life (*deen),* touches. Changing their religion not only involves switching personal beliefs and practices, but it also means altering the community they grow in and strive to belong to. Dealing with many transformations in their inner and outer worlds is challenging. Thus, it requires facilitating mechanisms in the Muslim community to reduce the burden on converts by providing channels to learn their new religion of Islam, get them connected with their new communities, and walk with them through their journey. This article is based on a study rooted in an activist ethos; in other words, it is aimed at understanding motivations of Canadian converts coming to Islam, to capture

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their everyday life experiences, to explore where they struggle most in their conversion, and to understand how Muslim organizations can contribute to combatting their challenges while helping them integrate in Muslim communities.

Methodology

Conversion studies have adopted different methodologies depending on the inquiring discipline, with the majority including autobiographical or narrative aspects. In the past, questionnaire surveys, the participant-observer technique, and interviews were among the methods used to investigate the main motives and natures of conversion (Köse 1994).

In this study, understanding conversion motivations is only one part of the overall picture brought into focus; thus, a qualitative multi-method approach was used to explore the main issues, trends, and emerging concepts requiring attention. The research approach combined four methods: 1) a literature review, 2) a survey, 3) a semi-structured interview process which used thematic analysis, and 4) a secondary media analysis. These approaches were chosen to gain a holistic picture as well as to identify the needs of convert Muslims on personal and social levels.

The literature review explores religious conversion mainly from psychology of religion resources, allowing for observation of prominent 'journey of conversion' research, and identifies gaps in the research. The interview phase was conducted using a semi-structured framework and involved a preliminary survey as well. Some of the survey questions are adapted from Köse (1994)'s work while others are prepared based on our own research questions, scaffolded out of the foundational literature. Interviews permitted us to hear convert stories, experiences, and challenges in their own words. Lastly, secondary media analysis involved examining select social media sources to provide insight regarding online groups that accommodate convert individuals with alternative platforms such as Facebook groups and Instagram pages. On both Facebook and Instagram, the key terms 'Canadian Muslim convert', 'Canadian Muslim revert', 'Muslim Reverts in Canada', and 'Muslim Converts in Canada' were searched and the most followed groups/pages were used for the secondary media analysis.

Setting and Participants

The sample for the survey was initially sourced in Alberta and Ontario between January and March 2023. These provinces were chosen due to the density of their Muslim populations and because this study focuses on Anglo-dominant regions of Canada. However, the later recruitment process was extended to other Anglo provinces to include more participants and increase the diversity of the sample. During recruitment, Canadian Muslim organizations and leaders, social media groups and pages, online convert groups, and snow balling methods were used. Various demographics were prioritized including socio-economic background, education and racial/ethnic identity, and the age of participants was limited to over 18.

The participants were required to fill out a survey before the interview, consisting of 34 questions in four sections: 1) demographic data; 2) scaled or yes/no questions on previous religious background, the moment of conversion, and descriptions of their identity; 3) open qualitative questions about childhood religiosity, challenges they might face as new Muslims, and their sense

of belonging; and finally, 4) participants were asked to join the interview stage of the study. Open-ended questions at the survey stage were used to let participants articulate their experiences without being directed and to enable a better development of their story (Snook et al. 2019). Those who wanted to proceed were then scheduled for an online, individual, semi-structured interview, lasting around 60-75 minutes. Content analysis method was used upon transcription of the recorded material to find key statements and emerging themes which were coded and analyzed.

A total of 58 eligible participants completed the survey with four responses being eliminated due to ineligibility. Twenty-one of these survey participants also attended the interviews. Twenty of them were Muslim converts and one person was in the process of converting to Islam. The names of the individuals were coded with the letter C and numbers (C1, C2…) to keep their identities anonymous.

The average age of the group was 35 with the youngest person at 19 and the oldest at 61. Most of the participants were female (46) while 12 were male. Individuals who joined the research were from diverse schooling backgrounds: 39 went to public school and 8 to Catholic, with the remainder spread across Public and Catholic (3), Public and Christian (2), Public, Catholic and Cultural (1), Jewish (2), alternative (1), French (1) and homeschooling (1). Participants' education levels were diverse as well, most of them having finished high school and proceeding with higher education. Table 1 shows their highest education level completed.

Highest Education	Number of Participants
Middle school	1
High school	12
College	16
Bachelors	17
Masters	9
Doctorate	1
Doctor of medicine	1
Postgrad diploma	1
Total	58

Table 1. Highest level of education that participants reported completing.

Forty participants were born in Canada, while 18 were born outside. Four people were born in the US, with two each in Israel and Japan. One person each was born in these countries: China, Ethiopia, France, Guatemala, India, Lebanon, Mexico, New Zealand, and Scotland. Eleven people had lived their entire lives in their current municipalities. 16 participants stated that they lived more than 15 years in the same municipality while 15 lived between 5 to 10 years, and three from 10-15 years. Thirteen people lived in their current municipality less than five years. Fifty-two subjects listed Canadian citizenship while three had permanent residency, one had a work visa, one a student visa and one was a temporary foreign worker.

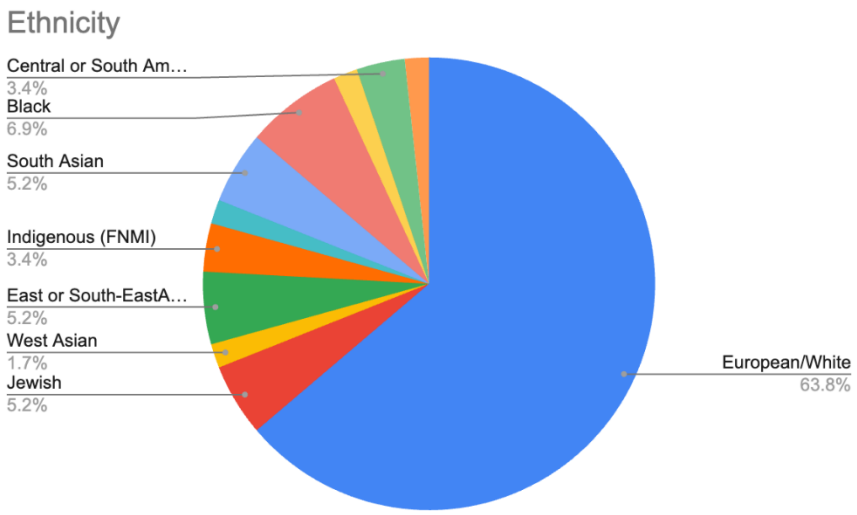

Figure 1. Ethnic background of the participants.

Thirty-seven participants come from a white/European background. The rest of the participants presented diverse ethnic backgrounds. Three people stated that they were ethnically Jewish; however, while two of them had a white/Jewish background, one had an Arab Jewish background. Three participants featured Central or South American background, three as South Asian, and three as East or South-East Asian. There was one Arab, one Ashkenazi, one European-Dutch-Canadian. Four Black participants joined the study; one was Black-European, and one Black-Indigenous-Central Asian. Two Indigenous people participated, one of them with a mixed background with Eastern-Mediterranean.

Employment status among the participants also varied; however, half of the sample had full time employment (28). Figure 2 presents the employment status of other participants in the sample.

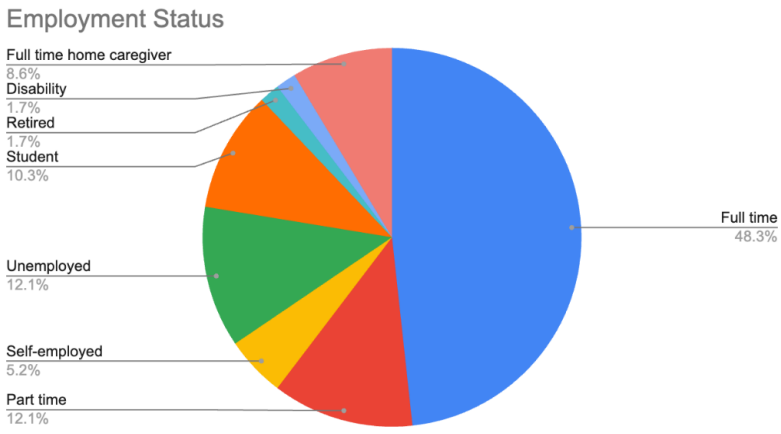

Figure 2. Employment status of the participants.

Converts were mostly from the middle class. Six of them reported being from the lower class and seven reported being from upper middle class. Twenty-eight respondents were married, 16 of them were single, six divorced, three separated, three engaged, one in a relationship, and one a widow. Twenty-two participants did not have children. Five participants had one child while the others had two or more. A discussion of the findings related to these participants will follow the literature review below.

Literature Review

Conversion Studies

Religious conversion is a complex phenomenon at the intersection of various disciplines in academia such as psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, history and theology. In psychology, researchers tend to investigate cognitive and emotional motives/processes in conversion as well as changes in attitudes, behaviours, and overall personality. Conversely, the switch in the belief system itself has typically invited theologians to focus on religious motives that navigated people to convert, rather than on personal factors. Sociologists refer to religious conversion as 'commitment' and 'recruitment', thus focusing on the mechanisms of how people 'commit' to a certain path (Rambo 1982, 157). The diversity of disciplines dealing with conversion complicates finding agreement on a definition (Pitt 1991). Many definitions are suggested depending on the inquiring discipline, and these definitions further evolve through new studies. As this research primarily engaged with literature in the field of the Psychology of Religion, it will be prioritized in explicating different theoretical frames for understanding conversion that informed the design of this particular research study.

Explorations of why people incline towards conversion abound in social psychology, while most conversion definitions underline the profound transformation one experiences in their journey. For example, McGuire (2008) defined religious conversion as

> a transformation of one's self concurrent with a transformation of one's basic meaning system (...) It often changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. Conversions also transform the way the individual perceives the rest of the society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world (as cited in Iqbal et al. 2019, 427).

Similarly, Heirich (1977) emphasized the deep impact that conversion has on one's life: 'the process of changing a sense of root reality' or 'a conscious shift in one's sense of grounding' (cited in Lofland 2017, 160). Travisano (1970) differentiates 'conversion' from 'alternation' regarding impact in identity. According to him, conversion causes a radical reformation of the identity, which also impacts meaning and life. However, alternation refers to switching the worldview or identity, carrying milder intensity (cited in Greil and Rudy 1984, 308).

Beside this type of transformation thesis, many psychology theories explain conversion as being related to certain psychological experiences such as needing balance, comfort, healing, or an object with which they can attach. For instance, Heider's 1958 *balance theory* claimed that if a person's cognitive consistency loses its balance, the person seeks to refurbish the balance since it causes an unpleasant psychological state (Pitt 1991). Starbuck (1899, as cited in Polutzian 2014, 212) argued

that prior to conversion, there is usually an unpleasant state where depression, anxiety, guilt, purposelessness, unhappiness, and doubt overwhelm the individual. Depending on the intensity of those feelings, the person can seek a solution. If the conversion helps solving these issues, the person feels a relief and the negative emotions are replaced with tranquility, joy, happiness, and feeling like a new person or 'born again'. Starbuck argued that this transformation could mean giving up to one's 'old self' and embracing the 'new self' that brings peace, completeness, and wholeness, bringing together such theories.

As a sociologist, Heirich (1973) distilled the classical perspectives into three primary categories: 1) Religious conversion as a fantasy solution to stress; 2) Religious conversion as the culmination of earlier socialization; and 3) Religious conversation as encapsulation. Freud's religious conversion views fell under the category of 'religious conversion fantasy solution to stress' (4-6), as he thought the conversion process was like infant relations with mother and father. According to this view, other scholars following a similar line of thinking argued that religious beliefs and rituals give fulfillment to vulnerable human beings to deal with emotional stress, grief, fear and guilt (Rambo 1999). Flower (1927, as cited in Heirich 1973, 4). They have also claimed that sheltered children had a higher tendency to convert to other religions. Greely's 1972 comfort theory' suggests that religious experiences comfort both individuals and social groups during stressful times (as cited in Heirich 1973, 4).

The second category in Heirich's categorization claims that religious conversion is learnt through socialization with others. Proponents of this view have highlighted some relevant observations including that most religious converts coming from religious households. The last category, religious conversion through encapsulation, refers to the person's conversion process through embracing the identity of people around them via close interaction. Heirich offered Ruth Wallace's study on conversion to Catholicism to demonstrate this phenomenon. According to this study's findings, it was more likely for inquirers to convert if they built strong bonds with devout Catholics (Heirich 1973).

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) indicate that although several conversion typologies are made, usually one factor emerges as a distinctive feature from converts' descriptions of their conversion stories. They call those features motifs, and they observe six of them: *intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist,* and *coercive.* These motifs varied in five major dimensions, which they listed as the 'degree of social pressure on the convert, the temporal length of the conversion process, the level of affective arousal the convert experiences, the affective content of the convert's experience, and the belief-participation sequence' (376) (Snook et al. 2021) (Table 2).

		Conversion Motifs					
		1. Intellectual	2. Mystical	3. Experimental	4. Affectional	5. Revivalist	6. Coercive
Major Variations	1. Degree of Social Pressure	low or none	none or little	low	medium	high	high
	2. Temporal Duration	medium	short	long	long	short	long
	3. Level of Affective Arousal	medium	high	low	medium	high	high
	4. Affective Content	illumination	awe, love, fear	curiosity	affection	love (& fear)	fear (& love)
	5. Belief-Participation Sequence	belief-participation	belief-participation	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief

Table 2. Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) conversion motifs.

The intellectual motif (or self-conversion) refers to the person's personal journey in seeking 'new grounds of being' by intensive reading, hearing lectures, or other channels to learn about other ideologies or alternative lifestyles. There is no external pressure in this conversion, and it can take weeks to months (Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 376). In this motif, the convert is an 'active seeker' of religious alternatives before committing to one (Snook et al. 2021).

Mystical conversion is presented in Saul of Tarsus' story, who is led by an experience involving sounds and visions. This conversion is a prototype since it happens as a sudden surge of intuition. It was expressed as being 'born again' due to the dramatic change the convert goes through in a short time (Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 377). This motif involves short temporal duration, and the high affective arousal and feelings of awe, love and fear. Belief is followed by participation and the social pressure is either very low or does not exist. As Snook et al (2021) put it, "The agent of change is decidedly external" (483). Meanwhile the experimental conversion is a newer concept which refers to the exploration of religious alternatives prior to conversion. The convert-to-be is invited to religious practices and communities to explore the traditions and see if that fits their spiritual and religious needs. The degree of social pressure seems very low in this motif as well, resembling a 'try it out' concept for experimenting with options freely.

The affectional motif emphasizes the emotional connection in conversion where the potential convert feels loved, cared for, and embraced by the religious group. In this model, the cognitive aspect is superseded by affection in contrast to the intellectual motif. An interpersonal bond is critical for a potential convert to proceed with conversion (Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 379-380; Snook et al. 2021). Lofland and Stark (1965) expresses the significance of this bond as 'coming to accept the opinions of one's friends' (871). Revivalist motif on the other hand refers to induce new beliefs and practices through emotional stimulation with music or preaching which seems to decrease throughout the years compared to other conversion motifs. In this motif, the degree of social pressure and affective arousal that converts experience are high and usually participation precedes belief.

The coercive motif refers to forced conversion through harsh methods such as brainwashing, deprivation of survival needs, fear and torture. Lofland and Skonovd and others have indicated

that this type of conversion is not common (Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 379-383; Snook et al. 2021; Rambo 1993, 14). Although these motifs seem to refer to different types of conversions, a person can go through multiple types of conversion motifs simultaneously or experience several of them in their conversion process (Köse 1994, 112).

In a different category of psychological theorizing on conversion, Richardson (1985) observed two main paradigms emerging among conversion theories: *classic paradigms* and *contemporary paradigms*. The classical paradigm focuses on sudden and unexpected nature of conversion where the individual tendencies are significant, and the convert is a passive agent:

> …[William] James described the typical convert as being in possession of a temperamental disposition that was labeled the "sick soul." Some of the characteristics of this disposition are religious melancholy, a discordant personality or divided self, a sense of lost meaning, dread, and emotional alienation, a preoccupation with one's own limitations and sinfulness, as well as with the evil inherent in the world (cited in Granqvist 2003, 174).

Richardson was critical of James for neglecting other ordinary types of conversion. Contrary to classical paradigms, contemporary paradigms reject the generalizations of prototypes and suggest each conversion experience is unique, and further, that each convert is unique. That said, contemporary paradigms tend to miss the social predispositions or situational factors in religious conversion. Granqvist (2003) reviewed Richardson's paradigms and concluded that Richardson's portrayal of the classical paradigms is unjust to both Starbuck and James since they both acknowledged other types of religiosities and conversions. For instance, James mentioned 'volitional' conversions where the conversion experience is gradual and smooth, and the person is an active decision maker rather than being an object in the experience.

Rambo suggests, instead, a *Stage Model*, featuring seven stages to explain the process of religious conversion: *context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment,* and *consequences*. Still, Rambo emphasizes that conversion does not always follow that sequence, and the individual can alternate between stages. According to this model the 'context' itself is not a stage, but rather a background or atmosphere where the conversion takes place, and it will affect other stages as well. This background includes all personal, social, cultural, and religious aspects. The crisis stage refers to issues that one faces prior to conversion such as illness, a near death experience, a mystical experience, or other personally intense situations. That tension leads a person to try and resolve it. The need for resolution represents the 'quest' stage in this model. Even though a quest is a continuous journey in people's lives, it strengthens during crises as they search for solutions (Rambo 1993, 16-20). Another significant factor in that stage is looking for 'meaning'.

Encounter refers to the potential convert connecting with an advocate of the new alternative (religion). Encounter has a wide spectrum of possible experiences, from the potential convert's rejection to complete acceptance. During this stage, the advocate can change strategies according to reactions from the potential convert. In Interaction, the exchange between the convert candidate and the advocate increases. Commitment refers to the stage where the potential convert makes the decision to convert and change their life by embracing a new religion. This stage can be publicized, such as with baptism or a public *shahada*, a momentous event for the new adherent. The last stage in Rambo's model is the Consequences. That stage includes the impact and experiences following

the conversion. Even though Rambo called this last stage 'consequences', the convert experiences consequences of considering, exploring and 'negotiating' the new possibilities throughout all the stages. At the same time, in the final stage, certain consequences are more significant than others. In the end, a convert can feel positive effects of conversion such as a new meaning and goal in life, or they can experience reverse effects such as feeling betrayed (or manipulated, abused, etc.) (Rambo 1993, 20-170).

Although stage models suggest an explanation for religious conversion, Rambo notes that conversion models should not be rigid. They should help to investigate, but not limit conversion to defined terms and stages (Pitt 1991). Post-conversion transformation can take time, from days to years, depending on individuals' experiences; however, 'distinctive change' is the main feature of religious conversion (Paloutzian 2005, 331). According to Rambo (1993) in most cases, conversion offers a solution to issues the person experiences and can initiate a more confident and meaningful life. As Rambo (1993) states,

> Through conversion, an individual may gain some sense of ultimate worth, and may participate in a community of faith that connects him or her to both a rich past and an ordered and exciting present which generates a vision of the future that mobilizes energy and inspires confidence. Affiliating with a group and subscribing to a philosophy may offer nurture, guidance, a focus for loyalty, and a framework for action. Involvement in mythic, ritual, and symbolic systems gives life order and meaning. Sharing those systems with likeminded people makes it possible to connect with other human beings on deeper intellectual and emotional levels (2).

More recent studies in the field have focused on different aspects of motivation behind religious conversion. Stark and Smith (2010) argue that while poverty may correlate with higher conversion rates, the underlying issue for many converts is not primarily material hardship but rather a profound sense of spiritual deprivation (15). Snook et al. (2021) lists the main motivations for conversion as sociocultural standards and forces, psychological motivations such as seeking for meaning, personality elements, life events and crises (482). According to Snook et al. (2019) a stressful period or crisis had been observed in around 80% of conversions in previous studies.

Conversion studies also seem to evolve parallel to contemporary discourse in psychology. For instance, few studies focused on the changes in character traits after the conversion (Strong et al. 2021; Bleidorn et al. 2024). According to Strong el at. (2021)'s research, increased honesty and humility has been observed among new converts. Granqvist (2003) investigates the possible effects of 'attachment styles' in conversion. *Attachment theory* contributes to the understanding of socio-emotional development of human beings by looking at infant-caregiver attachment styles such as insecure/avoidant, secure, and insecure/ambivalent. Two hypotheses are generated from the attachment theory to explain religious behaviour. The first one is the *compensation hypothesis,* which claims that people who had an insecure attachment with their caregiver have a deeper need to develop a 'compensatory attachment relationship' to gain the security they lack. In a religious context, God is the 'surrogate attachment figure' that the individual builds a relationship with while seeking that security. The c*orrespondence hypothesis* claims that people who had secure attachments can build a corresponding relationship with God and can socialize effectively to embrace the religious or non-religious principles of the attachment figure. People who have secure

bonds with caregivers are shown to have a more loving God image. Those with insecure caregiver bonds seem to perceive God as more distant and controlling. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick's meta-analysis of 1500 cases also shows that *sudden* conversions seem to be closely related with *insecure* attachment, whereas individuals who have secure attachments experience gradual religious changes. Attachment theory also offers an explanation for why conversions mostly happen during adolescence or early adulthood related to the switch in attachment figures during these developmental stages. Young adults start seeking attachment in peers (or sometimes life partners) instead of their parents or caregivers. According to this theory, God is perceived as an attachment figure that people resort to if they have confusion in their attachment (174-180). Of course, the limitations of such a model for understanding conversion through the lens of narrative and rhetorical persuasion abound and will be elaborated on below.

There is some indication in existing literature as well that early studies on religious conversion primarily concentrated on the 'moment' or 'specific event' that precipitates a sudden shift in an individual's faith. Paloutzian (2014) notes the conversion of Paul in Christian history (211), while that of Islam's second caliph Umar ibn al-Khattâb is also considered a remarkable example of both the intensity and depth possible in life-changing spiritual experiences. This type of conversion is called 'conversion experience', which Paloutzian calls 'true conversion', 'gold standard' and 'prototype' (211). Traditional conversion research investigated the supernatural factors in the conversion, where the effects of conversion in the individual would be permanent and the individual is more of a 'receiver'. However, contemporary theories approach the individual as 'an active participant' in the conversion, searching for self-identity, meaning, and personhood in their social setting (Snook et al. 2019). Another change in definitions is observed in the convert's character. Initial definitions focused on the change in religious tradition; however, later definitions included individuals' increasing devotion in their own religious tradition or changing their subgroups, such as denominations and sects (Paloutzian 2014).

Conversion to Islam in General and in Canada

Conversion to Islam specifically has been studied in a parallel fashion as general religious conversion studies in the West. Experts in psychology of religion and sociology investigate features of conversion similar to other religions such as motivations, stages, and motifs of conversion to Islam. Although many studies are conducted from a Western perspective, this topic has not been studied from the Islamic psychology perspective yet a Islamic psychology is a relatively new discipline. It refers to approaching psychological concepts from an Islamic perspective and tends to derive its methods and sources from the Qur'an and *sunnah* as well as classical sources of Islam such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, al-Razi and al-Balkhi (York Al-Karam 2018). Although certain concepts such as mental health and the human mind are explored, no study focuses on 'conversion to Islam' in this field yet except Al-Qwidi (2002)'s doctoral dissertation which represents an attempt to combine a Western approach to conversion to Islam along with Islamic literature to explore British Muslim converts' experiences (85-86).

Research on Islamic conversion is conducted in various contexts such as the US, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Sweden. Although Islamophobia rose in the Western hemisphere significantly following 9/11, curiosity and awareness regarding Islam were also amplified, leading

to a significant increase in conversions to the religion. Muslim converts were either treated with sympathy and curiosity or suspicion and anger (Mitchell and Rane 2021).

Researchers who explored the conversion experiences of Muslim converts (Kose 1999; Suleiman 2013; Sultán 1999; Jansen 2006; van Nieuwkerk 2006; Woodlock 2010) have suggested similar points as those made by King (2013): namely that

> …whilst conversion to Islam is a simple procedure involving recitation of the shahāda, it is a process that occurs over time, is dynamic, multifaceted and complex, and differs from person to person according to specific contexts and power relations of the individuals and groups involved (King 2013, 455).

Although converting to Islam seems to be a multidimensional phenomenon, some generalized frameworks are suggested. For instance, Allievi suggested a typology where the *rational* conversions are differentiated from *relational* ones. In rational conversion, the convert is driven by intellectual or spiritual appeals to Islam and its content. Relational conversion is done through close relationships with Muslims such as 'marriage, meeting immigrants, or travelling'. Rational and relational conversions can occur together in many cases. Studies on Muslim converts show that even if the initial interest in Islam starts as a relational factor through romantic relationships or friendships, converts state that Islamic teachings and practices as essential motivations for conversion. Islam, when understood as a religion with structure, simplicity, and strong community, seems to have an impact in conversions (Mitchell and Rane 2021).

Casey observes three structures in Muslim converts' narratives of their conversion stories: *awakening*, *continuity*, and *return*. In awakening stories, the convert describes their conversion as an intense personal transformation. The continuity stories refer to conversions where the subject underlines the continuity in their belief (for instance, believing in God) and disbelief (e.g. for Christians, trinity). Return stories involve converts' narrations of 'coming home', mostly referring to a return to the original religion (of Abraham), or natural state (fitrah) (Casey 2019, 753).

Boz (2011) examined the experiences of Muslim converts in Australia, revealing that many found a sense of purpose through prayer and a feeling of belonging within the global Islamic community (ummah). These conversions brought both personal and social changes (p. 141). Additionally, critiques of prior beliefs and Western societal norms were prominent motivations for conversion, especially among women. Female converts highlighted their appreciation for the representations of femininity and gender roles within Islam, as noted by Mitchell and Rane (2021).

Migration is a potential factor affecting conversion to Islam in recent years. Pedziwiatr (2017)'s study showed how more than 2000 Poles converted to Islam between 2014 and 2016 after migrating to the UK and encountering British Muslims. The study results indicate that migration and religious change are interrelated. Although conversions increased due to more migrations than ever in our times, the first example of this type of conversion can be traced back to the founding years of Islam when the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622CE (221-225).

Numerous studies examine the experiences of converts in the West, often highlighting the impact of racial identity on these journeys. For instance, Moosavi (2015) observes that white converts' experiences in Western contexts is complicated. Although certain privileges exist for white converts both in their own culture and in the Muslim community, still, many challenges await them in their journey. They state that being a white Muslim in an environment of born Muslims can be overwhelming due to stares (1925). They also feel as if the Muslim community treats them unlike a 'proper Muslim' or as 'less religious,' noting that even their greetings are sometimes not taken seriously (Shestopalets 2021, 108).

Conversion to Islam can be challenging in Western contexts, particularly for women due to existing gendered Islamophobia (Perry 2014; Sentse 2012). According to Shestopalets's study (2021), hijab is the number one deterrent from conversion to Islam. Although the same study shows positive attachment to hijab among converts, it is perceived as a huge commitment with many consequences. Ukrainian women in that study experienced both positive and negative effects. The hijab helped them to be recognized as 'true believers' in the Muslim community; however, they were marginalized in their own culture (115).

White converts are also perceived as being more susceptible to extremism and radicalization, which was difficult for new Muslims in the Western context (Mitchell and Rane 2021). Moosavi's research on white converts showed that they are sometimes treated as 'enemy' spies by their Muslim community members. Thus, in Muslim-dominant spaces in the West, white Muslims feel more 'discrimination' than 'privilege' and generally feel 'marginalized' instead of 'normal' (Moosavi 2015, 1930). Mitchell and Rane (2021) add though that white converts' experiences are not always negative, since converts also serve as a connection between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, thus contributing to initiating inter-faith dialogue and tolerance.

The experiences of Black Muslim converts in the West have been the focus of various studies. In the U.S. context, a 2017 PEW study revealed that 49% of Black American Muslims are converts. While Islam is gaining popularity among African Americans, Black converts often face unique challenges. Sherman Jackson (2005, as cited in Casey 2022, 406) argues that the U.S. Muslim immigrant community fails to embody the "colorblind Islam" it preaches, leading Black Muslim converts to experience discrimination and a lack of support from immigrant Muslims. Casey's (2022) qualitative research involving 39 Black Muslim converts further demonstrates that they frequently encounter racial prejudice and exclusion within immigrant Muslim communities. Many respondents reported that their racial identity as Black Americans influenced their experiences, including the devaluation of their knowledge of the faith (419).

Studies regarding Canadian Muslim converts of all backgrounds are scarce and mostly focus on investigating the mechanisms that lead new converts to extremism. Suljic and Wilner's 2021 study, "From Conversion to Violent Extremism: Empirical Analysis of Three Canadian Muslim Converts to Islam" was limited to three white converts' stories. It showed that converts who joined radicalized groups suffered from social alienation, seemingly making them feel victimized in personal and political dimensions. Jones and Dawson (2021)'s work, "Re-Examining the Explanations of Convert Radicalization in Salafi-Jihadist Terrorism with Evidence from Canada" reviewed 25 extremist converts' biographies and facts about them to investigate the process and

motivations in their radicalization. They suggested that post-conversion period disappointments are common among those who are radicalized (1).

Sentse (2012)'s master's thesis on "Women in Canada Converting to Islam: A Narrative Inquiry" is an exception to this framing showing that social bonds and having access to reading materials regarding Islam played a significant role in women's conversion in Canada. They also had to develop strong support mechanisms through social networks to overcome Islamophobia and damaging stereotypes (76-79).

Flower and Birkett (2014) also conducted a study on 24 Canadian converts called "(Mis)Understanding Muslim Converts in Canada: A Critical Discussion of Muslim Converts in the Contexts of Security and Society" which explored the stages in conversion process in order to avoid demonizing the convert population as potential terrorists due to their religious choice. This study was funded by a grant from the Canadian Network on Terrorism, Security, and Society (TSAS) and aimed to provide research-based data to national security authorities for a better understanding of the conversion process to Islam in the Canadian context in their policy development. However, the fact that the project was funded by TSAS made the recruitment process difficult for the researchers due to converts' questions regarding if they were being perceived as a threat to national security simply for participating.[2](Daigle 2015).

Guzik's 2018 work, "Information Sharing as Embodied Practice in a Context of Conversion to Islam" used a mixed methodology that focused on research participants' nonwritten expressions and information exchange through spoken words, clothing items, and creative products. Research showed that converts emphasized the significance of the sources such as academic publications, websites, traditional sources, and online sources in their learning experience. Moreover, they stated how wearing certain clothing, attending worship places, classes and conferences impacted their learning and articulating their religion. The research indicated that all these interactions were not one-sided learning/using sources; however, it involved converts creating materials while trying to crystalize their identity and communicate.

According to the above literature review, conversion is a complex process with many aspects to consider for a comprehensive explanation. Most psychological research understandably tends to focus on psychological motives driving a person to convert to a new religion. Psychological factors definitely matter; however, these theories sometimes seem to underestimate the significance of other motivating factors of conversion that come from the religion itself such as its teachings, scriptures or other factors. Our study aims to investigate possible explanations and attractions to conversion to Islam while keeping in mind all possible factors to avoid determinism and the reduction of religious conversion to primarily psychological refuge. Although several studies exist on Western Muslim converts, ones targeting Canadian Muslim converts' experiences and struggles are limited. We think their perspectives on this matter are crucial; thus, their views on possible

[2] This research indirectly affected our recruitment process as well. Some converts that were contacted during our recruitment process projected their reaction to this previous study towards our research group. They thought we were not being transparent in our intentions and might be investigating extremists/potential extremists in our research. Later, the trust was built through lengthy conversations with these individuals; however, they stated their frustration regarding the bias towards them. Being perceived as susceptible to being manipulated into extremism makes them hesitant about getting involved in any research even if the research purports to help them.

solutions and expectations from the community and relevant organizations will be voiced to help initiate future projects.

Survey Results

Religious Identity/Background and Practice

As mentioned, parts of this study's survey explored how participants identify themselves as Muslims and their affiliation with religious centres and the Muslim community. It also aimed to get a glimpse of their religious background to understand their journey of coming to Islam. Although conversion is a unique experience for each person, conversion studies explored above show certain common features such as motivations, challenges, and patterns during the process. Our study aimed to observe patterns and similarities with previous conversion studies and explore significant factors should be addressed in the Canadian context, if any.

Most of the participants identified themselves as Muslims. Only two participants answered 'No' as they were still in the process of conversion and had not yet taken their shahadah. Most of the participants stated that they follow a Sunni path. One participant was Shia, three were Sufi, and seven participants stated they did not trend towards any sect.

Most converts came from Christian households (40/54) with some of them having different beliefs in the same household (one participant stated having a mixed environment with Baha'i, agnosticism and different sects of Christianity). Three people were raised in Judaism (one mixed with atheism). Other participants' household religious beliefs are presented in Figure 3, while the religious beliefs that participants held prior to their conversion are presented in Figure 4.

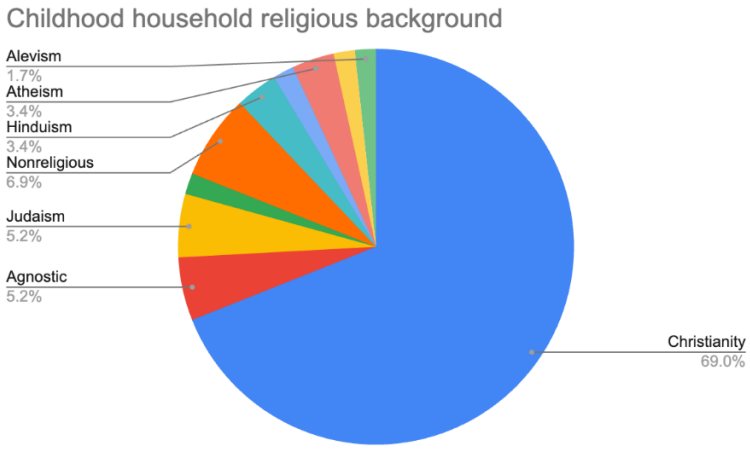

Figure 3. Childhood religious upbringing.

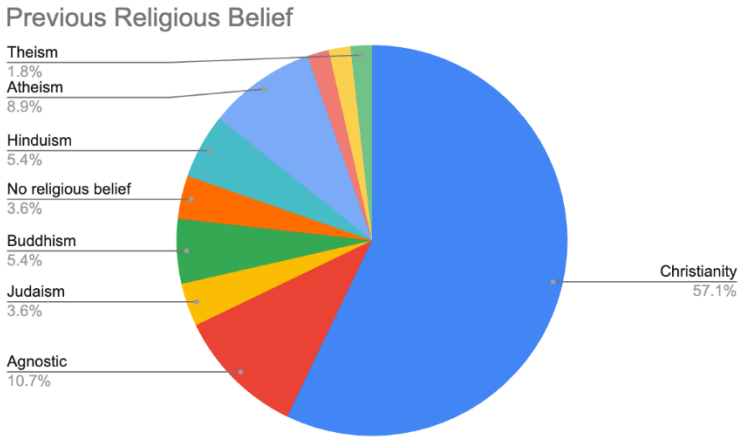

Figure 4. Participants' own religious beliefs prior to their conversion.

Previous research on religiosity suggests that parents' religious involvement has influence on their children. This is particularly significant when both parents share the same belief (Pew Report 2020; Batson arid Ventis, 1982 46, cited in Kose 1994, 60). In our study, 31 participants kept the same religion that they had in their childhood household until they converted to Islam. Others trended mostly towards agnosticism or atheism.

Participants' preferences regarding how to be referred to varied; most preferred the 'convert' label (16), others preferred 'revert' (12), 'just Muslim' (12), did not have a preference (2) or they preferred different combinations of those terms ('convert, revert':4; 'convert, just Muslim':4; 'convert, revert, Just Muslim':2; 'revert, just Muslim':2). This was different than Boz's 2012 study of Australian converts who preferred 'revert'. Boz argued the participants favoured this term due to its religious significance that all people are born with fitrah, as believers (130). 'Revert' has the meaning of returning to one's original creation. However, participants in our study preferred 'convert' which is more of a universal or factual term to define their transformation. Some argued that 'revert' could only be understood by those who are familiar with Islamic terminology. Otherwise, revert is also commonly used for those enlightened in their own religion, or getting more religious in their belief/practice, even if born into it.

Thirty-two participants had a Muslim spouse/partner while 15 of them had a non-Muslim one. Even though most participants (50) indicated that they had a mosque close to their home, only 25% of them stated going to the mosque at least weekly basis. Others visited the mosque either less than weekly (19), monthly (9) or rarely (7). One individual with a disability pointed out that mosques are not accessible, thus preventing her attendance. Another participant mentioned that she used to visit a mosque very often; however, the pandemic forced her to discontinue due to health concerns. Two people in the process of becoming Muslims said they had never visited a mosque to date. Thirty-three of the individuals were connected with a religious community while 22 lacked such a resource

Most of the respondents socialized with other Muslims, and almost half of them socialized with other Muslims on a daily basis, while others either socialized with them sometimes (10) or rarely

(11). A good number of participants have religious learning circles such has halaqas (23); however, others did not have such circles (26). Four individuals mentioned they went to halaqas before; however, they stopped going due to different reasons such as COVID-19 concerns. Two participants said they just started attending halaqas recently. Those who attended halaqas varied in frequency. Overall, more than half of them attended halaqas either monthly or less frequently. Only eight participants stated attending halaqas weekly. Most respondents attended halaqas that took place in mosques and Islamic centres (31) while the rest attended either at home, school, or online.

Participants were asked how many of their family members were Muslim, and if so, whether they had become Muslim before or after the participant's conversion. Thirty-seven of the respondents did not have a Muslim family member. Six people stated that their children are born/or became Muslim. Three people stated three of their family members converted to Islam following their conversion. One person said four of her family members converted to Islam upon her converting to Islam. Others had either a sister, parents, or wife convert to Islam after their own conversion.

Most converts seem to keep at least a few Muslim friends as company. Only a small percentage of them (3.8%) seem to not have any Muslim friends yet.

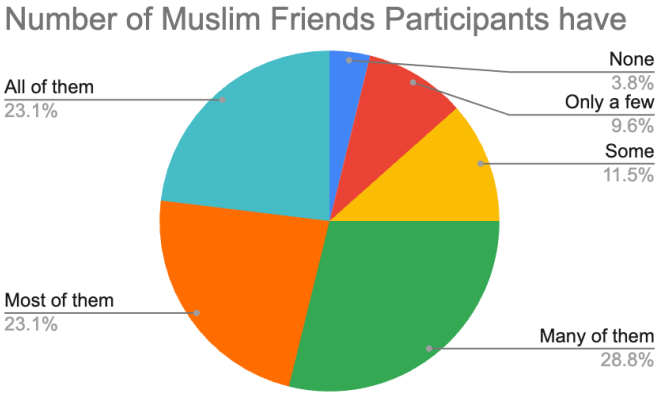

Figure 5. Number of Muslim friends that participants have.

Conversion is a challenging process; thus, converts need plenty of support. When participants were asked about who they resort to, their answers varied. The majority of converts (32) relied on mosques, which is noteworthy given the obstacles to attendance demonstrated above. Seven of them mentioned support from a local *imam* and 25 of them said they were helped by the mosque community. Second on the list for key supports was a spouse. Nineteen people mentioned getting help from their spouse when they converted. Muslim friends (6) and online sources (3) were also among the helpful sources mentioned. Nine participants stated that they could not get any support following their conversion. However, two of them said they connected to the Muslim communities later. One individual mentioned getting help from a co-worker and another person stated getting help from an overseas *da'i* (preacher) online with whom she kept in touch for thirteen years following her shahadah.

Participants were asked about what type of support they were provided (if they had any) following their conversion. Most participants stated getting spiritual support (44), followed by emotional support (28), financial support (9), counseling (6), marital (5) and housing (1). One participant mentioned being helped with books and Qur'an while another mentioned getting support for socialization needs.

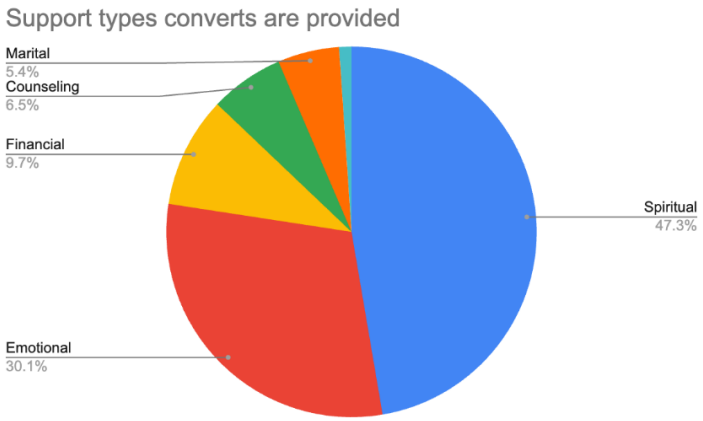

Figure 6. Support types that converts are provided following their conversion.

Regarding the source of basic Islamic knowledge that the converts received, they mostly stated a few common sources. The majority of them expressed learning by themselves without any help (34); twenty-eight of them mentioned having help from others in person. Nineteen people indicated receiving help online either from other people (15) or by themselves through different platforms such as Google, Reddit, Youtube and others (4). One person used research and lectures as resources, and another one went to *aqaid* classes at the mosque. One person mentioned going to the public library for further Islamic research.

Open Questions

Ten open-ended questions and one multiple choice question were asked to participants in the third section of the survey. Some of the items in the survey explored their childhood home experience, their adolescence period, and their childhood religious environment. Others involved changes and challenges after conversion/reversion.

Respondents were asked to describe their childhood and home life. Half of the participants described that overall aspect as 'good', a 'loving' environment. Some participants had mixed experiences; thus, their description of childhood was noteworthy. One participant (C1) described her childhood as a mix with 'volatile, abusive, traumatic' events on one hand while she still remembers 'some sweet times with other family members. She forgave the family members who were abusive towards her and recovered from the post-traumatic effects through therapy. Two of the participants described their home life as 'okay' despite the challenges they went through:

> *C 20: It was okay. Mother was a gambling addict and had an affair which destroyed the marriage, growing up with divorced parents was hard, and we always struggled with money. Dad had depression and lost everything in the divorce, I think my parents' mental*

health contributed to my issues today. To this day I get so anxious when the topic of money or gambling comes up.

C33: It was okay. I had an abusive father but a loving mother.

Twenty participants reported negative experiences in their childhood such as 'traumatic', 'dysfunctional family', 'no close ties among family members', 'unstable', 'chaotic', 'toxic', 'abusive' and 'lonely'. One participant described the home life as a 'warzone'. Nine participants described their childhood and homelife as 'normal', 'average' or 'decent'.

One of the survey questions explored their households' childhood/adolescent years in terms of religiosity: "Were your parents or guardians religious people? Were your childhood years and adolescence overall in a religious household?" Half of the participants were from non-religious households and twenty-two of them were raised in religious families. Some participants described their childhood household as 'somewhat religious,' since there were different factors. For instance, one participant (C21) said that the parents were initially religious Jehovah's Witnesses; however, later they got divorced and became non-religious.

Most converts in the survey did not get involved in political movements and only a few joined political activities in their youth. However, twenty participants volunteered in various fields such as helping the homeless and seniors, protecting youth, nature and animals, working in anti-racism and developing awareness about AIDS. Most participants went through a stage where they experimented with unhealthy/risky behaviour during their youth. Six tried drugs, and others used alcohol or did other risky behaviours such as sexual promiscuity. One respondent said:

C 20: Yes, I tried clubbing/drinking when I turned 18 for fun and it did not suit me at all. I also got into online sex work at 18 where I met my Muslim partner, who gently guided me away from that life. The alcohol ended shortly after I met my partner (a few months) and sex work stopped after a year.

Converts reported going through several difficulties in their life including personal, social, psychological and financial struggles. Majority of them struggled in their relationships with their families either during or after their conversion. However, in some cases the difficulties persisted while others seemed to get better through the years.

C 42: I lost my few friends, which was actually a good thing. But my relationship with my father used to be very close because we bonded over cigarettes and rock music and now he has pulled away from me and thinks I'm too conservative, it makes me very sad.

C 19: I think the biggest challenge has been with my family, they haven't fully accepted me as a Muslim but progress has definitely been made.

C 1: It was hard to tell my family so I waited a year to tell my mother and prayed in bed in her home for a year before telling her. Unfortunately, because of her experience with [other religious groups] she was scared of me becoming Muslim – first, she was scared I would be hurt in community and second, [members of her former religion] have fear of

> *Muslims because of some violent persection of them globally. I was very sensitive to her feelings and concerns, so I took my time. I used to have to lie and say I was going to the bar to drink when actually, I would attend halaqat at the masajid. I'd rip off my hijab on the way home so she wouldn't see it… My dad always supported me more than anyone. I still struggle with getting them to understand the haram and especially around celebrations. For a long time [another family member] continued to criticize my hijab even after years [of my wearing it]but she has finally stopped.*

Some participants lost their friends or struggled continuing their friendships as before (5).

> *C 36: My best friend got very upset when I began to question the concept of trinity. She told me that we couldn't talk about religion anymore unless her pastor was present. We didn't see each other again.*

> *C3: Biggest issue for a while was whether or not I could have non-Muslim friends.*

While converts have challenges helping their family and friends accept the changes they made in their lives, many converts reported having issues of fitting in with their new community (12). Some felt 'isolated' (4) and 'lonely', and others felt they were 'not belonging' to the Muslim community. They felt alienated to both worlds during their transition - from their old environment since they changed their religion and lifestyle, and from their Muslim environment, since it is something new and different than what they were used to.

> *C24: It was hard to find other reverts to connect with. I would say I still feel this a bit, that you are not Muslim enough sometimes to be accepted by other Muslims, and you are no longer who you used to be, so you are not fully accepted always by people from your past or the groups you belonged to before becoming Muslim. Reverts tend to end up in this weird in between place.*

> *C20: I didn't fit in with the traditional mosque scene- what was once open and welcoming became pressuring and chastising. I no longer attend that mosque, but I want to try going to another one. I felt so much pressure from the Muslim community, I felt if I didn't follow sunnah I was sinning, if I listened to music it was haram, if I wore pants it's haram. This made me so depressed but now that I've been Muslim for awhile, now I just listen to what the Qur'an and how I feel God views me.*

> *C38: Sisters make comments ALL the time about my clothing, life choices, everything related to Islam, it's like constant teasing and bullying. They'll make comments about things I do and don't do that's part of Islam. They teasingly make comments about things all the time. I haven't yet told my parents and other relatives because I'm too scared and I already know their opinions.*

One convert expressed his frustration regarding the discrimination towards converts who are from a white/European background.

C27: When I first converted, the Muslim community was very welcoming. However, Muslims do not interact with your non-Muslim community, and your non-Muslim community does not want to even approach a mosque. So, you are caught between two worlds. When I married another convert whose family was against her conversion, you start to see why mosques nor Muslim communities are not designed to help with this problem. After my divorce and entrance into graduate school, you start to see why converts mostly don't last long in the Muslim community. There is a lot of fear, anger and resentment in the Muslim community towards white people, in general. This is understandable to a degree, but they have turned Islam into an ethnic identity for non-whites. Thus, converting to Islam as a white person comes with a complete rejection of one's identity and culture. These challenges have persisted up until this day…. For converts like myself, who had a supportive family, this does not matter as much. But for average Westerners, this sentiment makes it almost possible to last in a Muslim community for any length of time. Now our kids are referred to as "half-breeds" by children the same age as them.

Some of them struggled regarding their new identity. Changing their attitudes, habits and practices makes them question their identity:

C54: I changed my identity as a person, and this was traumatic.

C55: at a certain point I felt that I lost my identity trying to fit in …it was hard to catch up with the new culture…new religion…

'Wearing hijab' (C1, C11, C14, C25, C26, C34, C47, C48) or 'modest clothes' (C33) seems to be another hurdle. The hijab can be a barrier in integration into Western societies and even act as a symbol of 'clash of civilizations' (Boz 2011, 138). Some of the participants in our study struggled practicing it on a personal level while some struggled with reactions from their social environment.

C11: ...I got stares and rude comments…

C14: My college professor told me to drop my course because I was wearing hijab for "safety reasons" and because it goes against "dress code." Strangers were hostile and made disgusting comments.

C34: …when you wear hijab the community acts like they are entitled to your body and have the right to comment on all of your actions…

C26: …I was turned down from a couple of jobs I was very qualified for which looked very much because I wear hijab.

Some participants had financial issues (C26, 28, C33, C35, C43) and some of them struggled finding jobs or struggled with their Muslim presence at work (C25, C26, C28, C35, C43).

Converts were also asked about reactions to their conversion from their social environment and if their relationships were affected. The most common reactions were not very positive (19), some reactions were neutral, such as shock, surprise, and confusion; however, twelve converts said they

were supported right away. Some converts reported first reactions being negative but then getting repaired over time.

> *C8: Yes, my parents were shocked. My mum even said once that I'm not her son anymore.*
>
> *C13: My parents kicked us out. My sister and a few friends converted as well.*
>
> *C14: Non-Muslim family told me I was a disgrace to the family and a shame to white people.*
> *C28: I lost all my friends from before I converted. Some of my family thought I was joining a terrorist group and others thought it would just be a phase.*
>
> *C47: My mother and 2 of my Jewish friends know. My mother is deeply distraught and in denial about it and becomes furious at any indication of it. The only thing she tolerates is my wearing a sweater and hoodie as hijab because she knows I won't leave the house without it. I have tried to repair my relationship with my mother as Allah and His messenger (pbuh)tell us the status of the mother. It has taken an emotional toll on her, may Allah guide her.*

Most participants (78%) frequently make their life decisions based on their Islamic beliefs, while 20% only sometimes do. One participant did not think that religious belief should be involved in which school to attend or where to work; thus, she said she does not base her decisions on religion. One male convert (C57) said: 'my wife dominates life decisions unfortunately'. One participant who is in the process of becoming Muslim (C 58) said he never makes life decisions based on Islamic belief.

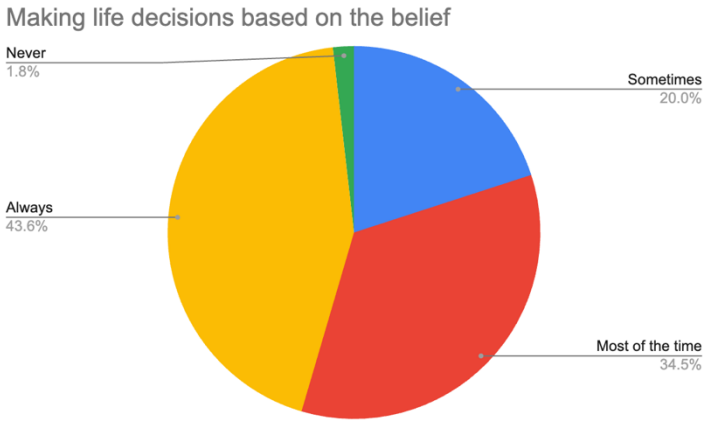

Figure 7. Participants' making life decisions based on religious belief

Converting to Islam requires some adjustments such as dietary changes, dress code and certain praying practices. Most participants (49) made changes in their life after their conversion except in a few instances, including the potential two converts. One of the potential converts mentioned new routines such as memorizing verses from Qur'an and having Islamic lessons, visiting mosques regularly. Meanwhile the other potential convert did not mention any significant changes, other

than searching to gain more information about Islam. The changes of most participants involve wearing modest clothing, eating halal, stopping the use of intoxicants, avoiding free-mixing, and changing their name. Regarding the name change, some participants only used it in Muslim circles (C56). Some of them heard that Islam does not require changing the name if it does not have a bad meaning, so they kept theirs (C1, C7, C47). Changing the name might be influenced by the desire to embrace their new identity. Most participants did not find these changes difficult; however, in some cases either family relations or other social interactions made the transition challenging.

> *C7: I have kept my name after finding out that it does not have any negative meaning to it, but my lifestyle changes dramatically. I stopped using all types of intoxicants, avoided gazing at the opposite gender, stopped listening to music, and tried to live an overall virtuous life. The change was not difficult per se, but there was a lot of effort needed to stay persistent in prayer and not letting others put me down.*

> *C42: Stopped drinking and smoking, stopped playing guitar and listening to music, started wearing hijab, praying, eating halal. Eventually Allah cured my depression alhamdulillah!*

Converts were asked to define a 'practising Muslim' profile to investigate their perceptions regarding this term. They refer to a practicing Muslim as a person who follows the five pillars of Islam, prays five times a day, acts according to Islamic rules and values (e.g. no backbiting, being empathetic to others), maintains a good heart, avoids *haram* (that which is prohibited in Islam), and gains Islamic knowledge to the best of their ability. They were then asked if they would describe themselves as 'practicing Muslims' according to their definition. One person criticized the common definitions:

> *C24: This is tricky. I tend not to categorize people into practicing or not practicing. People's practices are between them and Allah. I would say there are always ups and downs in people's lives. I think I am practicing the religion as best as I can.*

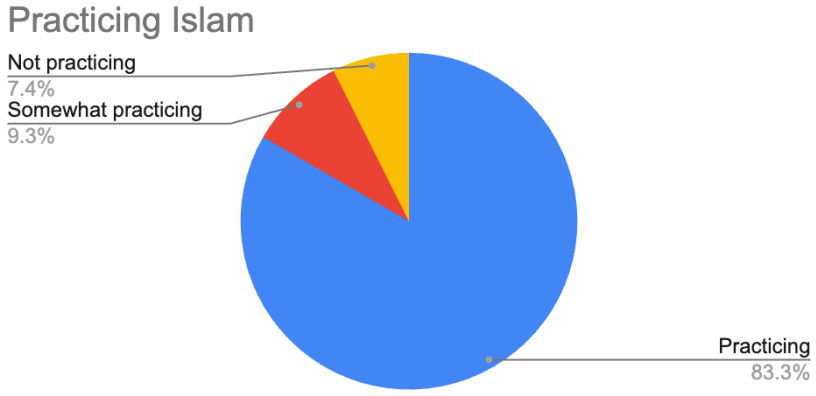

Figure 8. Being a practicing Muslim according to participants' self-perceptions.

Participants referred to Muslim society in Canada while answering several survey questions. One of the survey questions asked directly about their perception regarding Muslim society and if they found a 'comfortable place' in it. Converts' experiences varied: nineteen people stated that they found a comfortable space, while nineteen said they had not.

C1: To some degree. I have made spaces I am comfortable in but always tend to be the organizer in them and never the participant out of the wajib I feel I have to do so with the skills and knowledge Allah has given me. I definitely advocate and work for our communities. Our communities can be very siloed, fractured, and lacking knowledge-based action. I pray we can be more cohesive in future and raise the Ummah with 'izza. Ameen

Some criticized the Muslim community for being "tight-knit", "self-benefitting", "judgemental", "unwelcoming", "being corrupted by mainstream ideologies", "uneducated". Others seem to blame themselves for "not being able to fit in". Some converts do wish to be part of the fabric; however, they could not find that connection yet due to reasons such as "being physically far from the community" and feeling intimidated due to cultural barriers. Two of those are in the process of being Muslim.

C4: Holidays can be lonely.

C52: Most Muslims here have their friends circle according to their nationality (Pakistani, Sudanese, Libyan, Palestinian, Jordanian, Gulf.. etc). During Eid gathering, activities at our masjid, I feel barriers between them and myself.

Those who found comfortable spaces in the community described it as "welcoming", "accepting", and "accommodating Muslims' needs". Some said the Muslim society differs from region to region and others said its size matters, with smaller communities being warmer in general. Some of them self-criticized for not feeling the belonging yet.

C42: Because I am an uneducated and unemployed single mother with a troubled past I do not think I will ever truly fit in with a community of virtuous and successful people. I don't even relate to other converts, because they are so much more successful than me. I'm not jealous [sic]. It's more like insecurity. It's truly a miracle that someone as lost as me ever found Islam.

Converts were also asked what would increase their feeling of belonging if they could not make this bond yet. They suggested for the community to be "less judgemental," facilitating marriages of young people, initiating interactions with converts' families, becoming more informed about cultural differences/sensitivities, being more welcoming for women, and organizing more events and meetings for converts.

C13: The day my girls can get married as easily as the daughters for non-converts.

C27: ... It would be a lot easier if converts were simply encouraged to form their own sub-communities in the same way that Muslim sub-communities have already done so for generations. It is one thing to move to the West bringing on your own cultural particulars along with being a Muslim. That's fine. But to then turn around to the converts from that country and say "you guys shouldn't form your own sub-communites, this will divide the Ummah" , it's incredibly hypocritical. You can have a sub-community while still being part of the greater Muslim Ummah. Born Muslims simply aren't interested in improving the

relationship with our non-Muslim families. If they want them to come to the mosque, our non-Muslim families are simply terrified of entering a mosque. Thus, the best solution is to let converts collectivize and marry each other in the same manner that other Muslim sub-communities have done in the West.

C28: I just want to be accepted and seen as a Muslim and not a convert. The Sahaba were also converts, yet nobody kept referring to them as that. I have left a previous way of living and have accepted an Islamic way of life, and I am so grateful and blessed for it.

All in all, participants used the open-ended survey questions to expound on their personal narratives of conversion, their identities and senses of belonging, as well as offer some insights in how communities could properly support converts.

Interview Results

Twenty-one people were interviewed for this research. One of them was in the process of converting; thus, the survey questions were modified for her to capture a potential convert's journey during that critical time period: making a decision/commitment. A chaplain, Imam Yasin Dwyer[3], was also interviewed to explore converts' experiences from a community leader who is a convert as well. He was asked about his observations and insights regarding conversion motivations, converts' current experiences, struggles, and possible solutions to their challenges in the Canadian context.

Interviewees came from different religious backgrounds such as Christian (8), Hindu (2), Jewish (2), agnostic (2), atheist (2), Alevi (1), Rastafarian (1), Pagan (1), and theist (1). Conversion periods of the converts varied; however, half of them took shahadah within the first year of getting interested in Islam.

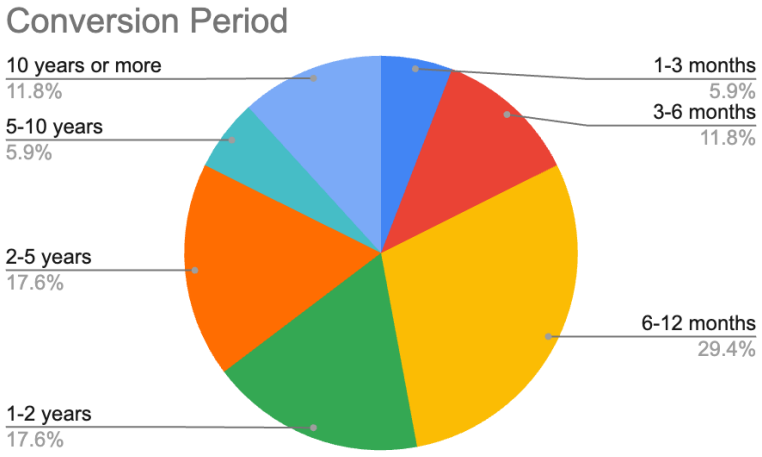

Figure 9. Period from the time the convert is interested in Islam until conversion.

[3] His consent was taken for his name to be mentioned along his quotes.

Motivations

As we have established, conversion to Islam is a multi-faceted phenomenon involving different motivations, processes, time periods and challenges in each person. Snook et al. (2021) indicated that sociocultural factors and personal drives are significant in conversion such as seeking meaning or going through a life crisis (482). In our sample, motivations from personal factors included people seeking 1) a new religion to explain existential questions, and 2) a solution for their life struggles by finding a new meaning/path/comfort. Sociocultural motivations involved dissatisfaction with a current religious community, culture, and the world. In our study, converts were driven to consider Islam as a result of dissatisfaction with a current belief system, disappointment about the community/lack of belonging, suffering from life events (moral injury, feeling purposeless/hopeless/needing direction/personal growth, burn-out, hitting rock-bottom), exposure to Islam (on the internet, positive or negative interactions with Muslim people/community, marriage, reading Qur'an), need for community, personal miracle experiences, and injustice in the world.

		Motivational Factors	M	F	All
Personal Factors	Spiritual	Dissatisfaction with religious belief	3	6	9
		Personal spiritual experience	1	2	3
		Fitrah/Instinct for tawheed	1	4	5
		Disappointment about community	6	5	11
	Psychological	Moral injury	1	1	2
		Feeling purposeless/needing direction	2	1	3
		Feeling burn-out	1	1	2
		Emotional suffering	2	9	11
	Intellectual	Philosophical depression		1	1
	Life crisis	Hitting rock-bottom		2	2
		Losing someone/traumatic break-up		3	3
Social Factors		Muslim spouse/partner	2	5	7
		Muslim friends	4	2	5
		Muslim people in community	3	2	5
		Injustice in the world		1	1
		Moving to a new place with more Muslim population	1	4	5

		Need for a community	2	1	3
Learning Islam in contexts other than social interactions		Internet content about Islam	5	4	9
		Reading Qur'an	6	14	20

Table 3. Motivational Factors in Conversion in research sample.

As one interviewee explained, their psychological state before conversion and the changes they noticed afterwards fortified their decision,

> *C42: I felt very meaningless. I mean, worthless, really. Because I felt like life is pointless. If there's no objective reason for existence, then nothing we do matters. And it was sort of like a, like a* ***philosophical depression****, almost like not having the answers made me feel very hollow, and sort of just meaningless*

Dissatisfaction with previous religious beliefs involved either some aspects about the religious belief itself, or people in those particular religious communities. Doctrinal objections included 'not being rational/inconsistencies', 'mixed answers', 'no explanation or too much work on understanding certain concepts (e.g. trinity, idol worshipping, sabbath), 'intermediary/middle man/priest needed', 'religious scripture is not protected', 'no structure', 'no accountability', 'no answers for the purpose of life (paganism)', 'not universal, ethnic religion (Judaism)'. For those who did not have a religion, 'lack of community', 'not having the comfort when losing someone', 'lack of guidance', 'being alone in difficult times', 'no answers for the purpose of life' were among the main critiques.

> *C50: I was thinking about, you know, like, it would be nice to have, like, a faith system where I do believe that things I do, while on earth matter, and like what a comfort that would be and especially like, when you're losing someone, like finding peace in that was really appealing. Yeah, and just like, you know, when life is difficult, having like, a formalized path that you can follow, and people that you can consult for, for, for guidance, and for Yeah, for help. And yeah, all that was appealing, and, and the idea of community and all of those things.*

Interviewees were also driven towards new religious beliefs due to their disappointment regarding their prior religious community. Most converts did not feel like they belonged to their community (14). However, even those who felt included were displeased by aspects such as 'people not being as devout as Muslims', 'hatred against other religious communities' and 'wrongdoings in the community'.

> *C2: some of the negative experiences I've had, and some of the negative things I'd seen from my friends, and, families in particular, I saw some, I guess, negative things come out of people who were very, very overly religious.*

Witnessing some of the wrongdoings in the community 'morally injured' some converts (C2, C3, C4). Some of these people were 'supposedly exemplary', or who say their religion was about

'love'; however, making hateful comments regarding other faiths caused deep disappointment. Not being able to say or change anything caused a rift and drove them to consider other options.

Two converts had unique spiritual experiences leading them to convert on the spot. They both shared their experiences:

> *C27: I went to the mosque, you know, I started asking questions to this brother, this older Uncle, you know, who was with the ..... Jamaat and, you know, he asked me why I wanted to convert to Islam. And I said, No, well, in my opinion, there's no way that a human being could write this book. It's just impossible. And so why are you what are you waiting for? You already have all the qualities of a Muslim that I said, Well, I just thought I would think about it for a little bit longer. And so how about this will give you this room to yourself, and why don't you just sit down and just think about it for you know, 5-10 minutes right. Okay, so he gave me this room to myself. And then I was sitting down trying to pray or meditate or whatever, and all of a sudden, my jaw started shaking like, you know, 100 times a minute, like someone's just grabbing my jaw just shaking it. I just was like, supernatural, like I just, and then finally, like, I picked up a Qu'ran from the bookshelf, an English translation of the Qur'an, and started reading it, and the shaking stopped. And it was a very, you know, very powerful like, you know, like, personal event that happened to me that's after that I ended up taking my Shahada at that mosque…*

> *C35: I was seeing friends of ours who were Muslim. And they just said to me, you know, why don't you read Surah al Nisa? Because I opened up to them about what had happened during my marriage. And they're like, Yeah, I think this thing would really be a value for you should read it. And I read the surah and converted on the spot, because it had like, all the answers to what had gone wrong in my family.*

Psychological challenges seem to significantly influence conversions. Eleven interviewees had emotionally difficult times. They described their psychological state as "not stable", "not well", "anxious and depressed", "shuttered", "lost", "hopeless, unwell, meaningless", "desperate", and "severely depressed/suicidal".

> *C1: ... I was suicidal basically I was like I need to find a way out of this. I was just so much pain .... I was like sitting on my couch just like wanting to end my life and I literally thought to myself* ***I'm just gonna do one last thing*** *and I thought to myself I'm gonna go to the store and find a Qur'an and I'm gonna read it. I know it sounds crazy and it came out of nowhere. I hadn't thought about Islam in years subhanallah and I walked to the store and it's a used bookstore ..... they had this Qur'an, this copy and it has like translation and transliteration in it so I bought it it and it's like I couldn't stop reading I read until 4:30 in the morning and then I just kept reading it all like within a few days.*

Among those psychologically challenged interviewees, five of them also had difficult childhood experiences prior to their conversion, describing their childhood as "chaotic", "dysfunctional", "not happy, parents were dissatisfied", "traumatic, with sexual assault". People's childhood struggles might be carried through their adulthood since those experiences likely left deep mental health scars. Attachment theories could be applied here as well; however, our study did not investigate

participants' attachment types with their parents or caregivers. Thus, it is not possible to conclude if seeking a new attachment could be a conversion motivator. In any case, it appears that it could, at best, be one of multiple converging factors.

Three interviewees (C27, C32, C42) felt purposeless, lost, and needing a direction or new path. C27 said he was worried his life was not going anywhere with no real job, no marriage. He needed meaning and a direction. Three converts experienced life crises that changed their way of thinking. C32 stated that she lost many things in her life (husband, money and more) but losing the custody of her children felt like **rock-bottom**. She realized she was not doing things right and started searching. Two interviewees (C4, C50) worked in the healthcare sector and felt burnout from the Covid-19 Pandemic. They both faced other losses significantly impacting their conversion. C2 said she went through a traumatic break-up that put her in an emotionally bad situation.

In our sample, many converts were initially introduced to Islam through interactions with others as an example of relational conversion, either by a significant other (7), friends (5) or people in the Muslim community (5). Although they were initially introduced to Islam by certain people, most of them started their own rational conversion journey after and their conversion followed different paths, confirming Mitchell and Rane (2021)'s findings.

Sentre (2016) states that the conversions would not happen if people were spiritually content where they were. Thus, meeting someone from another religion can be a factor for consideration; however, it cannot be the whole reason since it requires changing the core elements defining a person's identity. In our study, those who converted after meeting a Muslim partner or marrying a Muslim spouse emphasized that their conversion did not happen simply because of their relationship. They did not deny the significance of being introduced to Islam by a loved one; however, they expressed their frustration at their conversion experience being reduced to this solitary factor. Only one person (C44) said she did not realize she was dissatisfied about certain things in her religion till she was introduced to Islam through her husband. In her case, no psychological factors nor seeking alternative religions/paths existed before meeting her husband. However, all other cases featured other contextual motivating factors such as psychological challenges, a need for meaning, or a solution/remedy for a conflict or certain struggles (religious or otherwise).

> *C24: So usually, when people ask, like, what's your story, it's very, like, I don't want to explain it fully, because I don't want people to think that I'm Muslim because I wanted to get married to a Muslim man. But initially, he actually introduced the religion to me, I didn't really know anything about Islam.*
>
> *C4: When I meet new people, and they find out that my partner is Muslim. Then, the thing I always get, the first thing is Oh, did you convert because of him? I find it so tasteless, because my partner very much was like, You need to go on your own faith journey, I'm not a scholar, or a teacher. He had bought me all these books and stuff. He's like, you kind of need to find this on your own. It's like, completely separate to me your faith. ……. And what I have in my heart is like, yeah, like, you know, there's no coercion in religion. It's like very much like what I have is for me, I did my Shahada because I did it for myself. Yeah. And I find I guess that's one thing that I, it's like, I should be patient with people. But*

> *I find it's just an annoyance when I hear that thing, because it's just like, it takes the beauty of my faith, that kind of is just seems like, yeah, it's like, I'm pretending. Oh, I just don't like that. I've never gotten it with anyone who is practicing Muslims. never gotten it from that, but it's always just from, like, colleagues and things like that when I tell them*

Among the interviewees who were introduced to Islam through a friend, the first interactions were not necessarily positive. C57 had a Muslim neighbour whom he wanted to convert to his prior religion. However, that interaction caused years of curiosity and searching about Islam. C7 tried to put down the Muslim person he met with his questions about Islam. C45 wanted to convince his friend who freshly converted to Islam to leave the religion; however, his friend's questions made him research Islam. In all these cases a curiosity was initiated.

> *C45: So, he (Muslim friend) just asked me…now you're born in a Hindu family. So you're following Hinduism. So, with the same mentality that if you have, if you would have born in a Christian family, you would have been a Christian, So at the end of the day, all we do is acting like a sheep just following what our ancestors are following not asking questions, what do you want or are you actually convinced?….he also said, like, if you're gonna buy a smartphone, you're gonna ask so much questions about, you know, what is the smartphone doing what what features it has, and you know, ask, see reviews of other people and compare it with different phones. So when you're buying a phone, doing all this research, why can't you do the research for your purpose of your life?*

Moving to a new place with more Muslim population C24, C42, C50 had an influence in some interviewee's conversion by initiating interactions with Muslims and getting more familiar with their practices.

All converts in our study were convinced after reading the Qur'an. Some of them emphasized 'a good copy of Qur'an' since it really mattered for them. C43 ordered a Qur'an, and after seeing that it included Bible stories, she thought she ordered the wrong book and had to make another order to confirm. She right away converted after reading Qur'an, stating they could not find any 'fault' in it. C4 stated if she did not find the last Qur'an translation she had, she might not have converted as she did not feel comfortable with other translations. Thus, in her journey to conversion, the Qur'an was central, as she converted only after finding a clear translation that she could understand. Similarly, C1 and C27 stated that reading Qur'an was the turning point for them. Once they started reading, they could not stop. They both mentioned cancelling their work and reading in isolation.

> *C1:…they had this Qur'an, this copy and it has like translation and transliteration in it so I bought it …I couldn't stop reading. I read until 4:30 in the morning and then I just kept reading. Like, within a few days I stopped working full-time I went down to like three days a week because I became obsessed. I converted my painting studio into what I called the prayer room where* ***I would like to sit and read the Qur'an.*** *I like bought a little rug and I would make sujood and I would like to talk to God and I just felt like this book is talking to me. I knew like this is what I was waiting for, you know. So, it was a very short period between when I got really interested in Islam and when I converted [to] it…*

C35: …when I left him (my husband), I was seeing friends of ours who were Muslim. And they just said to me, you know, why don't you read the Nisa[4]? Because I opened up to them about what had happened during my marriage. And they're like, Yeah, I think this thing would really be a value for you, you should read it. And ***I read Suratul Nisa and converted on the spot****, because it had like, all the answers to what had gone wrong in my family. And my community that I saw growing up in my marriage, like all of it was all clearly spelled out. And still true, like, you know, over 1000 years later after it was written…Yeah. So, I cancelled work the next day. And I just like sat at home and kept reading.…I'd just read Qur'an alone in my room. Like I was, I was willing to lose everything for it.*

C42: …. I had a very racist friend, and read sort of racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic all of the phobias and he was trying to make me hate Muslims. And he was saying a bunch of really harsh things including, you know, insulting the Prophet peace be upon him, and insulting Muslims as people. And I was like, you know, I don't want to just take this guy's word for it, because I've been seeing how sort of, you know, from my view, like normal or whatever, that just how human Muslims were, and I didn't want to like, my eyes were opening and I didn't want this guy to shut my eyes again. And so I was like, I'm just going to read the Qur'an. And I went to the public library, because I wanted to know, like, what is the book that they follow. And then once I read the Qur'an, I just couldn't judge anyone anymore. And I also… it was sort of at that same time was when I was also questioning paganism and having a lot of doubts. And it sort of it was like the last straw, the thing that really made me leave paganism, but I wasn't ready sort of, to become Muslim yet, but it sort of ***reading the Qur'an put me on that journey towards coming to Islam. And so it became, I realized how sacred it was.***

All of the converts highlighted the significant role that reading the Qur'an played in their conversion experiences. While initial exposure to Islam may have come through various sources, such as friends or loved ones, they consistently pointed to reading the Qur'an as the pivotal tipping point in their spiritual journey. For instance, C37 stated that it was only after engaging with the Qur'an that he seriously considered conversion, as it helped clarify key aspects of the faith, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding.

Islamic internet content also seemed to be a substantial motivational factor for those who first met Islam online, and those who were intimidated by directly asking Muslims. Moreover, for converts who became acquainted with Islam during the COVID-19 pandemic, internet content was crucial not only as a source of knowledge, but it also compensated the need for Muslim friends and community. Many converts used the internet during their conversion process; C10 said 'internet saves lives!' regarding her conversion. Our study suggests the term 'digital conversion' for these types of conversions where the first and most interactions with and learning about Islam are digital. Although converts learning about Islam and connecting online is not new, it likely became more widespread during the pandemic period. 'Converts and the internet' initially did not have a positive connotation in people's minds due to media and studies regarding the high risk of radicalization (Suljic and Wilner, 2021, 121); however, online platforms evidently benefitted converts in the beginning. More comprehensive conclusions require further studies in this subject.

[4] The fourth chapter in Qur'an, which famously talks about women and other topics such as family law, inheritance rights, marriage, divorce.

Conversion Motifs

The most common motifs in our study were intellectual (16), affectional (12) and mystical (3). In eight interviewees' experiences, both intellectual and affectional motifs seemed to be present (C3, C 57, C2, C4, C11, C32, C34, C44). C27 had a mystical motif with his transcendental experience of jaw shaking prior to conversion. This is still different than a traditional mystical experience such as a 'Pauline experience' or Caliph Omar's conversion, as C27 was already interested in Islam and considering converting when the event occurred. C1 and C12 had mystical experiences which were not as overtly transcendental; however, they felt a supernatural being (they both characterized this being as Allah Himself) guiding them towards *tawheed* (oneness of God) in their life journey. They both believed the core elements of Islam regarding God, years before their conversion or before knowing anything about Islam.

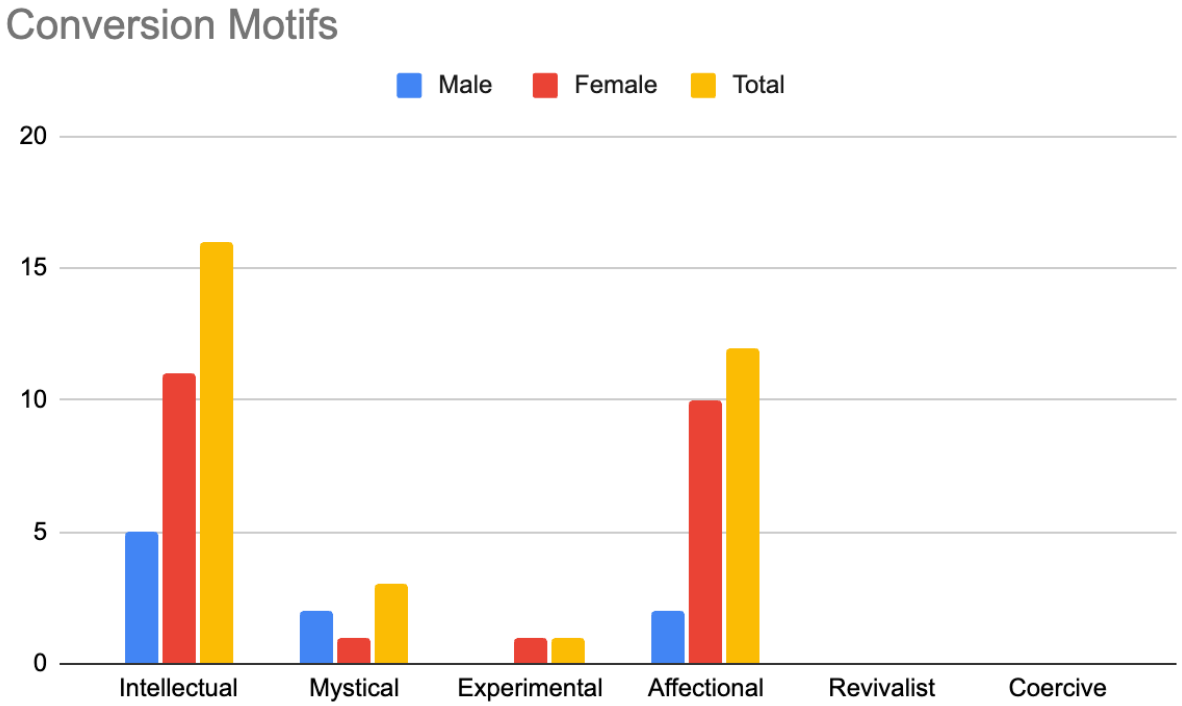

Figure 10. Conversion motifs

In the intellectual motif, experiences differ depending on whether or not converts were already searching about Islam with genuine consideration to convert or not. Those who did not initially consider it had a moment where they felt they found the truth **upon reading the Qur'an**. They describe the moment of realization 'that it is the truth' as sort of freezing and not knowing what to do. They all mentioned having some self-conversation. 'Facing the truth' in their term, scared them either due to their internalized biases against Islam or concern about how their life might be affected personally or socially.

> *C45: I was surprised see about, in every way Islam made sense to me. So, at one point, I couldn't hide myself that, oh, my God, I know what the truth. Now I cannot hide myself. Right? So, because when you know, in your heart that, okay, you actually found the truth,*

you cannot lie to yourself that, oh, I'm not yet convinced, right? So I know that I'm gonna face God. And I can lie to you, I can lie to my friends, I can't lie to God because he knows what my inner intention is. So at that point, I was not able to fool myself.

C44: …everything I found was a shock to me. And, you know, I started trying to, you know, just cling to my, my heritage, my beliefs I was raised in, but, you know, I was starting to find information that on an intellectual level couldn't be denied. So it started kind of this, you know, kind of this struggle between the heart and the mind with me.

C42: I was like, well, why would God allow people to go that far astray? Like, why? Why didn't God send us someone to correct this? And I was like, wait a second. He did, though. He did correct us. He did correct the Christians. He did say, that's not the truth. He did warn us not to follow that. And then I was like, okay, I kind of have to be Muslim now. Like, it just, I couldn't resist it anymore.

C43[5]*: I know this is like real translation of the* ***Qur'an, English translation****. And then I started to read. And I found this is like not a Bible story, but this is the book. And then I, I read and I found about what he says about Jesus.* ***And I agree with this and I, in my mind, I got converted with it****, and I will try to find fault with it, and I couldn't find fault with it. And then I started to understand, like, those I don't want to convert to Islam because I feel they are bad people. But I cannot help.*

C32 explored various religious traditions, including Mormonism and Rastafarianism, prior to her conversion to Islam. Her initial attempts at conversion could be categorized as 'experimental,' as she engaged in these faiths to discern their relevance to her spiritual journey. A pivotal moment in her transition occurred when she encountered the story of Prophet Ibrahim in **the Qur'an**, which profoundly resonated with her and fostered a deep sense of connection. Upon converting to Islam, her husband advised her to pursue further knowledge before making a firm commitment:

C32: And by the time I did take the shahada, … husband told me you can't just jump into Islam, you need to learn it. You should take some classes, I don't want to hear your Shahada. I want you to think about this.

Conversion types regarding the narratives of our sample also varied. Most Christian (and one Jewish) converts' experiences were felt as a continuation (C2, C3, C10, C12, C24, C27, C57). The conversion did not change the belief system dramatically, yet it corrected the faulty elements (God is one, Jesus is a man, religious leaders, e.g. Rabbis cannot initiate religious rules, etc.). For these converts, engaging with the **Qur'an** provided access to a 'true version' of familiar prophetic narratives, clarifying aspects that had previously caused confusion in their beliefs. For example, C3 conveyed a sense of relief from the cognitive dissonance experienced when trying to reconcile the concept of the Trinity. Similarly, Canadian scholar and Muslim convert Dr. Ingrid Mattson's expression emphasizes the impact of Quran in her conversion: "It was the Qur'an that gave me back faith in God…I recognized the God of the Qur'an as the God I had always known but had forgotten and neglected." (Defrusne 2013).

[5] The story of how C43 encountered the Qur'an is mentioned in the previous section.

Some converts in our study described their conversion as a returning experience where they believed they reverted back to humans' original 'fitrah', natural created state of believing in one God (C1, C12, C35, C37, C44). For the rest, it was an awakening or enlightenment to learn about Islam, different than 'coming home' or 'continuing on a certain path' (C4, C7, C32, C39, C43, C45, C50).

Converts were asked to describe what they felt after they took their shahada. The most common feeling was 'fear'. They were mostly afraid how their family and friendship relations or their personal life might be affected. In short, they noted: C44 'natural sadness, grief'; C3 'nervous scared mixed emotions', C32 'excited', C1 'calmness' (her words: "I literally felt something was pouring over me"); C10 'worry'; C37 'freeing', C42 'excited, relieved, found guard'; C57' nervous, did not want to disappoint the daughter', C39 'full of emotions, fulfilling'; C2 'terrifying' (because shahada was taken at an Islamic conference in front of a big audience); C11, 'a weight lifted off'; C4 'happy'; C43 'fear' (she converted in China and was worried about her safety); C12 'fear'; C27 'happy, peaceful, a bit worried'; C 24 ;excited, lighter, happy, scared'.

Interviewees did not mind sharing their conversion story except for a few. C45 said he would only share with those seriously interested and C4 said that she would share her story if she feels the person could understand. Most of them stated that their conversion story was fairly simple and not particularly interesting, despite this study evidencing the opposite.

> *C10: I posted it once and for all because I am not repeating this again. It's nice people are asking me and I'm like, it's a long story. Like, it's not like it's something happened, because then people have like, an event in their life and boom, but for me, it was just like, learning, questioning, it was a long process. So, it's not even like… I don't find it's interesting.*

Overall, the review of conversion motivations and motifs seems to highlight the significance of engagement with the Qur'an in converts' journeys. Unfortunately, the role of scripture in the narratives of conversion is often underrepresented in existing studies with few exceptions. Mitchell and Rane (2021) also identified the Qur'an as a significant motivating factor in their research; however, their conclusion emphasized the complex nature of motivations both 'rational' and 'relational', without tempting to explain the high percentage of participants' indicating the motivational role of Qur'an in their conversion. Numerous motivational factors are identified as primary contributors to an individual's decision to embrace Islam in other studies as well, such as the influence of a Muslim partner or spouse. While it is essential to recognize the interplay of various motivational elements in the conversion process, it appears reductive to attribute a fundamental shift in one's faith and lifestyle solely to these relational or psycho-material dynamics. A comprehensive understanding of conversion must also consider the individual's engagement with the actual core teachings and messages of the faith system they are adopting. Many converts in our study emphasized that their intellectual satisfaction with the Qur'an and Islamic principles were the pivotal factors in their monumental decision to change their belief system and ways of life; thus, the profound impact of the Qur'an seem to serve as the primary catalyst for faith transformation.

Convert Recommendations for Muslim Communities

New converts have to make many adjustments and adaptations to embrace a new identity, such as getting used to new practices and managing lifestyle changes. Without proper support mechanisms, going through all these transformations is challenging. Interviewees were asked for their suggestions to Muslim organizations towards making converts' transitions easier with support for their journey.

Some converts suggested creating convert groups in religious spaces while two subjects thought no real benefit exists from separating them from born Muslims. C7 thought converts should right away mix with born Muslims to better integrate. Among those who suggested convert groups, some thought it should be led by senior converts for better connection and understanding. Others thought as long as the group leader speaks English well and recognizes their challenges, being a born or convert Muslim would not matter. C32 had extensive experience with convert groups. She said if the groups are run without organizational backing, it might go sideways. She gave an example of a lady opening her house and providing converts with Islamic material, clothing and other needs, allowing them to socialize in her place. However, some converts abused the lady's good intentions, leading to the group's closure.

Regarding convert groups, some emphasized the importance of educational activities such as teaching Islamic 'basics' (C2, C7, C12, C24, C42). Most converts were initially intimidated attending a mosque. C24 said she would be extremely nervous and cry prior to mosque visits. Some of this fear came from not knowing about Islam and shyness to start asking simple questions. Thus, they suggested some basics courses such as 'How to visit a mosque'. They advised video tutorials being made and shared on mosque web sites. Beside educational groups, halaqa groups were also considered valuable. Two converts (C10, C12) specified that those groups should be segregated for giving more comfortable environments to converts. C43 said the educational services should be free for converts. Some interviewees suggested activities for converts to socialize with others not necessarily for Islamic learning or practice. Sports or other activities should be organized just for socializing purposes.

Many converts mentioned that the first warm welcome the community gave them was not followed up on later. The community gets so excited meeting new converts in initially welcoming them but then leaves them alone. Some converts suggested 'mentorship' programs where a convert is connected with (or assigned to) a community member (C1, C7, C10, C39, C44, C50). This person walks them through their journey, socializing regularly, and checking on them.

C24 shared her experience of trying to reach a mosque at the beginning of her conversion. She could not get a response from a mosque for a few months when she was interested in Islam. Later, when she decided to get divorced from her husband, she tried to reach to imams/staff members of the mosques to learn about her rights and she could not reach anyone, including on online platforms. C50 also suggested that mosques' online presence and accessibility could be improved.

Psychological support seemed crucial for converts during their conversion and afterwards. Most converts go through difficulties in their families, and parents or spouse do not welcome the news, possibly pushing them away which also cuts them off from other supports. Some converts

suggested mental health (C24, C37, C57) and marriage counselling services should be offered for converts (C57).

C27 suggested subcommunities could be a solution to many issues that converts struggle with. For instance, most converts struggle fitting in Muslim community since many mosques, and centres are populated with certain ethnicities. According to C27, subcommunities can help bring converts who have a similar background to make it easy to relate and find their own ways to function in their community. Moreover, it could make easier for the non-Muslim families of converts to interact with their Muslim family members in their own space without feeling alienated. Imam Dwyer also said:

> *Converts are often at the mercy of the wider Muslim community. The type or style of teaching, or with the adoption of a particular legal school (madhhab), you're basically at the mercy of your community or teacher. There's very little that converts can do about that. Canadian Muslim converts are still navigating their way through this, we're still a relatively young community. So we learn the best way that we can. There may be some wisdom in the creation of Muslim convert sub-communities, which could address the growing pains that Muslim converts experience.*
>
> *So for converts, we need to allow them to take ownership of the religion and to accept it on their own terms. I'm not speaking about compromising those things that are known by necessity to be a part of Islam, rather, I'm talking about recognizing that converts have to be Muslim on their own terms, without it being filtered through someone else's cultural reality.*

He thinks sub-communities would be beneficial to reduce the fear some converts have at the beginning since a lot of potential fear factors such as needing to wear a specific type of cultural (rather than religious) clothing that some converts are intimidated by. He believes converts who unknowingly adopt such cultural practices thinking they are essential to Islam might experience alienation, dislocation, and lack of confidence since they put away their habits and adopt a culture which is coming from a Muslim majority country. He thinks we have to give time to Canadian converts to grow and figure things out, not pull them into some culture that they do not belong. He gave an example from the Christmas party conflict. Some born Muslims react negatively towards converts' attending that yearly family gathering. Imam Dwyer said he joins his family's Christmas dinner with three conditions; 1. The food including turkey will be halal, 2. There will not be any alcohol, 3. He will make the prayer with Surah alFatiha since this surah is universal and even a non-Muslim can hear and feel that prayer.

Some converts suggested convert matrimony services should be offered (C1, C43), C4 suggested Community days/Open houses to be organized more often, so those who feels intimidated to visit mosques will feel less pressure. C45 also suggested such events where the convert people can easily come with their non-Muslim families. C11 suggested childcare for convert mothers with children to be able to still come to mosques or religious centers so they are not disconnected. She also suggested online activities for those groups who are challenged to attend the activities in person. C1, C45 suggested financial support for converts and C1 specified that financial support should be available/accessible on mosque websites. She also added convert Muslim women should be offered Hajj and Umrah packages for free given the financial marginalization they may

experience with familial disownment and so women converts in particular do not feel rushed to marry to be able to perform these rites.

C3 thought that while helping converts, community members should consider 'revert burn out' which he referred to as reverts trying to do everything at the same time. That can be an exhausting period for them. Moreover, he said people should know about where converts/revert come from and should consider possibilities they are not familiar with. Some converts might have addiction problems or other issues. It is essential to consider those possibilities while trying to help them. C44 also emphasized the importance of knowing where converts come from. She suggested trained people can educate imams about converts and how to approach them. She said Muslim community members keep telling converts how lucky they are while many converts go through crippling experiences before, during, and after their conversion. She said it is like weddings, 'yes, it is a happy event but there is also sadness'.

Social Media Content Results

Many converts mentioned using the internet during their interviews. The internet can be a source for gaining Islamic knowledge as well as a platform for socializing for converts. However, it is a vast space to cover in research; thus, we chose two of the main social media platforms Facebook and Instagram to offer preliminary insights into the ways Canadian converts use these tools. Further research is undoubtedly needed. On both Facebook and Instagram, we searched by key terms 'Canadian Muslim convert', 'Canadian Muslim revert', 'Muslim Reverts in Canada', and 'Muslim Converts in Canada.' On Instagram, pages were limited regarding converts. Four Facebook groups and one Facebook page were relevant to our research, and their basic profile information is summarized in Table 4. Most Instagram pages were personal accounts of convert/revert individuals in Canada. Thus, highly populated city names in Canada such as 'Toronto' and 'Ottawa', along with the words 'Convert', 'Revert' were searched as well. We included three Instagram pages that intended to serve converts in Canada and the profile information of those groups and pages are summarized in Table 5.

	Facebook				
	Muslim Convert Wellness Caravan in London (Group)	**Converted Muslims in Montreal (Group)**	**Ottawa Muslim converts (Group)**	**Reverts-converts of Canada (Page)**	**Canadian Reverts to Islam (Group)**
Follower Count	1375	1600	41	1500	2800
Activity status	Not active	Active	Active	Not active	Active
Content	Convert focused events and posts	General Islamic posts/ networking/halal products	General Islamic posts/Convert supporting other converts/Making discussions	General Islamic content/Quotes	Mix shares of Islamic posts/rconvert messages
Last activity	July 6th 2022	May 8th 2023	May 2nd 2023	May 17th 2022	April 29th 2023

Table 4. Four Canadian convert groups' and one convert page's profile information on Facebook (Data accessed May 9th, 2023)

Online convert groups on Facebook have different sizes. Some administrators of these groups have stricter policies for adding members, including requiring a message explaining their intention of joining prior to accepting members, while others accept everyone. During research, membership to these groups and some other international convert groups was obtained by informing the admins about the research project and sharing the information with group participants. Large groups have their pros and cons. They are more inclusive of converts as well as other newly practicing Muslims, or all Muslims and even non-Muslims are welcomed. They share a lot of Islamic content, events, Muslim business information, educational events, online learning opportunities, and so on. The space is also used as a source to get help for those who are new in Canada or Islam to get connected to the community. For instance, **Canadian Reverts to Islam** group had converts post self-introductions and give them the opportunity to ask for help finding Muslim friends or other supports. However, populating the group with various people from different backgrounds and intentions seems to make them lose focus on converts. Our interaction with members indicates some female converts think many born Muslim men join to these groups to look for potential wives based on their experiences. Some Islamic content reflects only certain ethnicities' or sects' opinion/practice of Islam and some of these pages have shares of unclarified information such as accusations of Muslim scholars/leaders for leading Muslim communities astray.

Small groups on the other hand seem to have closer bond and by extension less risk of incidents. Ottawa Muslim Converts is an example of a small convert group where the majority of the members are converts and they have posts either about learning about Islam, or senior converts' (who converted to Islam long time ago) sharing their experience with new converts and exchanging their knowledge in their own terms. For instance, before Ramadan, senior converts shared their tips with those who would be fasting for the first time in terms of what foods to prepare or what to

eat/drink to make fasting easier. This group is an example to Imam Dwyer's suggestions for Canadian Muslims trying to find their own way of practicing Islam where they can create a space, can be themselves, and can learn religion together without being limited by the outlooks and cultures of dominant ethnic Muslims.

	Instagram		
	Ottawarevertsociety	**Toronto reverts**	**Torontomuslimrevertresources**
Follower Count	1837	129	1061
Activity status	Active	Not active	Not active
Content	Basics for new converts/Frequently asked questions	General Islamic knowledge	A convert's sharing experiences/Tips/Verses from Qur'an
Last activity	March 24th 2023	January 1st 2023	November 16th 2022

Table 5. Profile information of Canadian convert pages on Instagram
(Data accessed May 9th, 2023)

Two Instagram pages selected for this study, both focused on Toronto Muslim converts, but were inactive at the time of research, meaning there were no recent posts. However, the pages remained publicly accessible, allowing users to view past content and engage via comments. Despite their inactivity, these pages were still valuable for analysis, as their earlier posts provided insights into the topics of interest to the convert community. Personal pages of convert Muslims seemed to be more popular. It might be related to how Instagram functions given that the platform is more about visuals and does not as easily accommodate group needs for discussion or if group activities are to be organized. **Torontomuslimrevertresources** page was founded by a convert and announced the intentions of the page's share content at the top as:

> 1. Convert related advice, tips, personal experience, insight or even just opening up a dialogue about a particular topic.
> 2. Islamic Lifestyle related content - general, day to day, with reflections on living life as a young Muslim female in the West.
> 3. Islamic Reminders - from Qur'an, Hadith or Islamic books/lectures.

Ottawarevertsociety has the biggest following among the pages surveyed. However, different than large Facebook groups, this Instagram page's shares are consistent with its purpose and focus on converts' benefits. It is again probably due to differing functions of the social platforms. Shares on Instagram can be done only by account holders versus on Facebook where settings allow others to be a contributor. This page has brief reminders, information and questions to engage people in short discussions. Their shares have around 100 likes or so. It is not as active but it serves to help beginners in learning practical information about Islamic basics and share tips.

Toronto reverts page was created specifically for women even though the name does not indicate that. It aimed to help reverts and anyone looking to learn more about Islam. It said: 'you will find fashion, inspiring videos, Islamic quotes, tips and events taking place in the GTA.'. This page was also initiated by a revert and the intentions of these page owners demonstrate what converts/reverts needed for themselves in their journey. They want to provide those sources for others since they went through the same path.

Social media platforms can provide a source for Canadian Muslim converts to gain and share Islamic knowledge and information about social supports they may need. They share their experiences, tips, and insights; educational materials, links, and videos; sources for halal products and business; event posters; and finally, they socialize and help each other in these platforms. In bigger groups, some challenges cannot be avoided such as getting distracted from the main purpose. However, with a growing Canadian convert population, more diversity and focused support groups can be expected in future. Social media platforms also constitute a space where converts can build their own Canadian Muslim identity together, through interactions with others but on their own terms. This might also serve as an alternative or temporary solution for those converts who could not find a comfortable space in the community and feels like a 'guest' in religious gatherings until they find a Muslim circle where they feel comfortable. However, more studies are needed to generalize these findings and confirm that comparative element.

Conclusion

Canadian converts embody a complex group reflecting the diverse fabric of the country in which they are found. Although converts of white European background are more numerous, our study suggests that people from different ethnicities and religions convert to Islam for varying reasons. Understanding conversion to Islam requires accounting for one's intellectual, spiritual, and psychological states before the conversion as well as social factors surrounding them.

According to our study, converts felt that their previous religious beliefs were unsatisfying or inadequate in some way, either because of the doctrines and practices themselves or because of the wrongdoings or practices of people in those communities. For the previously non-religious, the lack of community, guidance, and answers for the purpose of life were major shortcomings inspiring their search which led them to Islam.

Many converts were in difficult psychological states prior to their conversion - a noteworthy motivational factor. Emotional challenges either triggered by life crises or existential struggles led some individuals to investigate Islam, something which was often later understood as part of religious experience or supernatural guidance. Similarly, negative childhood experiences appeared in 35% of the converts. These findings confirmed the previous studies. Interactions with Muslims and having a Muslim spouse or partner were significant motivational factors in considering Islam as a religion.

That said, the most critical motivational factor seems to have been the Qur'an itself. Although all interviewees had different personal or social influences in their conversion process, the Qur'an seemed to be the most significant motivational factor in *committing* to convert. A similar result is

found regarding the significance of the Qur'an as a motivation in conversion to Islam in a national survey on Australian Muslim converts (Mitchel and Rane 2021, 423).

Most converts tried to practice their religion to their best ability, and they generally identified themselves as practicing Muslims. They tended to have connections with mosques, halaqa groups and some religious communities, while others were not yet connected to the community or had disconnected for several reasons. Most converts had at least a few Muslim friends that they can interact with.

Among the conversion motifs that Lofland and Skonovd categorized, intellectual and affectional ones were observed as dominant; however, experimental and mystical motifs were also present. Notably, revivalist and coercive motives were completely absent.

Overall, Muslim converts in Canada shared similar struggles with other Muslim converts in the West generally. They felt stuck between two different worlds – their families and the Muslim community – and felt inadequate for either. Their conversion was not welcomed by family in most cases. Sometimes family members accepted with time; however, occasionally a parent, sibling, or other relative ended up shunning the convert after a period. They lost their previous identity and belonging.

Joining the Muslim community was not an easy experience either. According to the survey and interview responses, converts feel that the Muslim community does not know how to approach them and sometimes pushed them away with inappropriate or ill-delivered questions and comments. Wearing hijab for Muslim convert women is an example of where both worlds made matters quite challenging. Some converts thought that after starting to wear hijab, community members felt entitled to advise and try to control the converts' behaviour, imposing constant suggestions of 'appropriateness' without being asked. Converts' own families did not welcome hijab and gave them a difficult time in many cases. They lost jobs or were barred from otherwise qualified positions.

Some converts struggled emotionally and spiritually while others struggled financially or socially during their transition period. Nevertheless, many converts received notable support from immediate family, local imams, the Muslim community and friends. Most converts received spiritual support from either mosques or the Muslim community, while many received emotional support from family, friends or community. Financial or marital support was generally less available.

Some converts, particularly women, occasionally experienced abuse. Marriage was a potential case where such abuse can occur. Converts did not know the community yet and might be approached by unfavourable people. Not knowing their rights can put them in difficult situations. Converts felt lonely in these cases since their own family was not part of the Muslim community like other ethnic Muslim communities which can make them potential prey. Women can experience other disadvantages as well such as not getting access to learning materials/ activities. Most activities for women are held during the day, making it difficult to attend for working women while men's activities are mostly at night.

Converts use the internet at every stage of their conversion - before, during and after their shahada. It offers them a source of knowledge and an alternative space for socializing. Many converts used the internet to fill their curiosity about Islam at the outset. When they consider Islam as a new religion for themselves, some of them research through online platforms or ask their questions to religious authorities or other people online. After conversion, some continue their online learning and socializing for different reasons. For instance, some of them feel that they do not fit into their local religious communities; thus, they stay in touch with other Muslims online. Accessibility can also be a motivating factor. According to this study, although not all online Canadian Muslim convert groups or pages were functional and consistent, they could provide a space for Canadian Muslim converts to share their experiences and support each other in an alternative platform. However, that does not mean the physical community should be replaced with online ones. As our study suggests, the local Muslim community is a significant source for spiritual and emotional support. Imam Dwyer emphasizes the importance of in-person gatherings. He says online meetings simply cannot replace them: "We are encouraged to pray together in Islam, there is more reward praying together. We have to be together; we have to eat and travel together. We have to help converts to develop a rhythm and help them to connect to a wider community rhythm."

Converts expect Muslim organizations to take responsibility in organizing different activities to help their needs for learning Islam and integrating into the community. The fresh converts need 'basic' information regarding Islam, such as coming to the mosque. Generally, converts find the classes or sources advanced for beginners. Convert groups and mentorship programs should be initiated where the converts are connected with members of the community, where they walk them through their journey. Mental health support or marriage counselling should also be provided for them since many of them go through challenges in those areas. Financial support applications should be as easily accessible as clicking a button on a mosque's website, and female Muslims should be supported if they want to attend Hajj/Umrah. Converts also need their families to be involved in community events to connect these disparate worlds they have to maintain.

Canadian Muslim converts are still building their own identity. They need to be aided gently and sympathetically by the Muslim community by letting them take their time in processing the teachings of Islam at their own pace. Community organizations are expected to provide resources and initiate dialogue mechanisms and trainings where the community learns how to approach converts while helping them to adjust themselves to the changes in their own life and be part of the wider Ummah.

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