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**Adrift in Uncharted Waters: A Case Study of a Muslim Family Involved with Child
Protection Services in Ontario**

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social Work

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

This dissertation sought to understand how Muslims experience mandated child protection services in Ontario within the Canadian (and specifically, Ontarian) socio-political context. Ongoing experiences of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia within systems that intersect with child welfare, including schools and the criminal justice system, have compounding effects on Muslim families who are singled out politically and socially. Drawing from trends in child welfare literature, policy initiatives, and practices that consider the system's impacts upon racialized peoples, this research contributes to the discourse by highlighting religious diversity as an under-investigated source of discrimination. Set against systemic challenges inherent in the child protection system, the study explores religious social and self-identities as analytically distinct sites of marginalization.

The project draws on critical theories – critical race theory and risk theory – to examine intersections of Islamophobia with other aspects of marginalization that foster the construction of Muslims as “risky.” Southern theory highlights the credibility of alternative thinking, explicitly Islamic thinking, on child safety and protection. Anti-oppressive practice, the current and progressive approach to child welfare with diverse clients, is used as a lens to assess current child welfare services to Muslims in Ontario.

Employing a qualitative, single case study design consistent with the conceptual framework of critical realism, I gathered data from interviews with a Muslim family whose children had been apprehended and placed in the foster care system, as well as individual interviews with three workers and four foster parents who have worked with Muslim families. To understand the child welfare system's oppression of Muslim clients, this research develops the complex and intertwined relationship between religious status and other aspects of social

identity. Within the intersections of being Muslim, Arab, and recent refugee; the family that participated in this study faced multiple axes of marginalization. While each marginalizing set of experiences posed specific challenges, religion is particularly significant because of its far-reaching implications about Islamic beliefs and practices. Anchored in its origin as a state-centred, hegemonic, secular system, child welfare as it currently stands in Ontario has been unable to adapt and develop ways in which Muslim families and communities can provide religiously appropriate care and safety for their children.

Juxtaposing an Islamic understanding of care and protection for children to the current system in Ontario, this research points to the need for significant changes in policy and praxis that are necessary to keep Muslim children safe in their homes and communities. Major changes require commitment from the child welfare community at all levels, the academic community involved in child welfare research, and the Muslim community. These entities must collaborate to understand and respond to the unique experience and needs of Muslims interacting with the child welfare system in Ontario.

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Which of the blessings of your Lord do you deny? (Qur'an Chapter 55 verse 13).

All praise and gratitude to God Most High Who grants to whomever among His servants what He Wills. Without His Help, dreams are unfulfilled, abilities remain untapped, and life ceases to exist. This dissertation process is a blessing that brought people from various spheres of the Canadian reality together in a beautiful effort of cooperation, learning and sharing.

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cannot be named. Their assistance was instrumental in getting my project started by connecting me to the participants. A much appreciated thank you to my participants. This work is made possible by their gracious sharing under difficult circumstances.

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Dedication

Dedicated to Ahmad and his family,
whose courage to tell their story made the work possible.

And

To my beloved grandchildren, may you never know separation from family.

List of Acronyms

ABR:	Anti-Black racism
ACP:	Alternate Care Program
AFCARS:	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System
AOP:	Anti-Oppressive Practice
CMF:	Canadian Muslim Forum
CNI:	Child Neglect Instrument
CAS:	Children's Aid Societies
CCMW:	Canadian Council of Muslim Women
CIS:	Canadian Incidence Study
CJPME	Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East
CNI:	Child Neglect Instrument
CPIN:	Child Protection Information Network
CPW:	Child Protection Worker (S)
CR:	Critical Realism
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
CRT:	Critical Race Theory
CYFSA:	Child, Youth and Family Services Act
DR:	Differential Response
EISR:	Environics Institute for Survey Research
ESC:	Eligibility Spectrum Coding
GTA:	Greater Toronto Area
ISNA:	Islamic Society of North America

LAC:	Looking After Children
MCCSS	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
MPI:	Multiple Participant Interview
MRCSSI:	Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration
MSS:	Muslim Social Services
NCCM:	National Council of Canadian Muslims
OACAS:	Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society
OCPTM:	Ontario Child Protection Tools Manual
OHRC:	Ontario Human Rights Commission
OVOV	One Voice One Vision: <i>Changing the Child Welfare System for African Canadians</i>
RAM:	Risk Assessment Model
SOS:	Signs of Safety
UK:	United Kingdom
US:	United States
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO:	World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted international standards for the rights of the child in 1990. The standards indicate that nation-states ensure the rights of children are protected “without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or their parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (UNCRC Article 2). By 2005, 192 countries including Canada became state parties by ratifying the convention, leaving the United States and Somalia as the two exceptions (Veneman, 2009). Before the UNCRC, individual nations and states had systems in place to safeguard children. UNCRC posited that the convention “paved the way for the consolidation of child protection as a holistic concept, offering children the right to be safeguarded against a broad spectrum of violence, exploitation, abuse, discrimination and neglect” (Veneman, 2009, p. 3). Protection and provision of rights of the child were established with best interest as a central concept (Veneman, 2009; Wall, 2016).

Although 192 countries ratified the convention, there is a wide variation in the manner and degree to which nation-states manage the international standards. Western liberal democracies have advanced child protection through organizations with a mandate to protect children from a wide range of harm, including those set out by the UNCRC. However, the Western child protection model is an intervention system of last response when protective and universal services fail (Pecora et al., 2017). The model is designed to intervene when families encounter difficulties in maintaining safety for children, but the interventions are not always helpful for families.

All child protection agencies¹ in the West have the mandate of protecting children. Nevertheless, factors such as philosophical orientation, rural or urban jurisdiction, political and public attitudes, and funding impact child protection practices (Cameron et al., 2001). For example, Cameron et al. (2001) suggest that neoliberal policies have shifted the system to being more punitive with a diminished capacity to support families. Hence, child welfare services in the West are often perceived as oppressive to families and communities. The literature suggests that Western child protection systems are mandated to keep children safe by monitoring for child abuse and neglect and when necessary, removing children from their homes and placing them in foster care (Pecora et al., 2017).

This approach impacts all families receiving services and has a compounded effect on marginalized groups. A trend present in the literature highlights the racialization of child welfare service recipients in many Western countries (Arruabarrena et al., 2017; Cénat, et al; 2021; Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clark, 2012; 2018; Dettlaff et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021; Trocmé et al., 2004). Further, there is a growing body of child welfare literature that focuses on the disparity in service provisions and outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities (Alaggia & Maiter, 2012; Barn, 2007; Bennett et al., 2005; Bostock, 2002; Chand, 2008; Earner, 2007; Maiter et al., 2009; Pecora et al., 2017; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013). The literature suggests that ethnic minorities and marginalized groups encounter many difficulties when receiving protection

¹ Alternatively referred to as child welfare agencies/organisations in international child welfare literature. The subtle difference in approaches between “protection” and “welfare” is elaborated in the section that defines concepts in this chapter.

services and that child welfare interactions have negative consequences for marginalized groups (Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clark, 2012; Trocmé et al., 2004).

While there is a robust body of literature on minoritized groups that focus on racial and ethnic minority, that are predominately but not solely immigrant, we know very little about the effects and consequences for religiously diverse service users.² Issues particular to immigrants – a population with a high percentage of Muslims – highlight concerns such as a lack of attention to identifying service needs and understanding particular problems faced by immigrant families (Earner 2007). Multiple axes of oppression for new immigrants include poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and persistent struggles with language and cultural norms (Maiter et al., 2009). Moreover, refugees affected by pre-existing trauma (LeBrun et al., 2015) are a significant segment of the Muslim community. Since religion shapes many aspects of Muslims' everyday lives (diet, dress, hygiene routines, praying, relationships), research on experiences of Muslim families and children is necessary and would be particularly helpful for out-of-home placements. Research on Muslim families will necessarily include barriers faced by minoritized/immigrant populations but with the added dimension of religion in an anti-Muslim atmosphere.

Efforts against racial disparities in child welfare are starting to move forward in Canada, as evidenced by the *One Vision One Voice: Changing the Child Welfare System for African Canadians* (OVOV) initiative (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society, n. d.). Launched in 2015 and led by the African Canadian community, the project is funded by the Ministry of

² There is extensive literature on the experiences of First Nations Peoples in the child welfare literature that is reflected in other liberal democracies, for example, Canada and Australia.

Children, Community and Social Services. OVOV addresses overrepresentation and disparity in the African Canadian community and has resources, practice suggestions, and an implementation toolkit to support work with African Canadians (OVOV, retrieved January 2022).

Although some focus on religious minorities is present in the literature, there is a gap in research on religiously diverse service users in Ontario. Muslim families involved with the child welfare system face barriers of minoritized/immigrant populations in a societal culture of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments. The literature reflects that Muslims in the West are fearful of discrimination by child welfare professionals (Crabtree et al., 2017). According to Craig Harper, diversity manager from London Children's Aid Society, "most Muslims have a paralyzing fear of CAS" (personal communication, January 6, 2014). This assessment mirrors my practice experience and my community involvement with Muslim families receiving child protection services. My quest to understand Muslim families' experiences is based on the premise that religion is central to the everyday lives of Muslims and on my experiences as a Muslim woman in the child welfare system in Ontario.

The Research - Child Welfare in Ontario

There is a significant body of research that details the challenges of minority clients receiving child welfare services. For example, poverty, race, ethnicity, immigration and refugee status, and structural barriers to service delivery for immigrants and refugees are topics addressed in the literature (Bywaters et al., 2018; Chand, 2008; Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Earner, 2007; LeBrun et al., 2015; Maiter et al., 2009; Stokes & Schmidt, 2011). While the literature examines complex issues of race, ethnicity, migration status, and social class, there is little written on religious diversity. Studies on the impact of religious diversity (Jivraj & Herman, 2009; Stahl, 2019) written from a legal perspective brilliantly point to the legal aspects of faith groups

involved with child welfare services. Schreiber & Culbertson (2014) suggest that religion has a role in developing connectedness and belonging in youth; Crabtree et al. (2017) point out that Muslims in a minority context fear discrimination by child welfare professionals. However, ways in which discrimination based on faith manifests need further understanding.

Muslims and Islamic communities in the West are experiencing an escalation of anti-Muslim sentiments and a rise in Islamophobia (Allen, 2010; Geddes, 2013; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Kundani, 2014; Razack, 2008; Sharify-Funk, 2013; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014; Zine, 2001, 2006). In the Canadian context, Arat-Koc (2005) suggests, “following September 11, the definition and boundaries of Canadian national identity and belonging were reconfigured” (p. 33). The reconfiguration produced a socio-political atmosphere that defined Muslims as unquestionably “the other.” Grounding the framework for my research in the socio-cultural context for Muslims, I examine the added layer of religion for Muslim clients when they encounter child welfare professionals in Ontario.

The Ontario Association of Children’s Aids Societies (OACAS) provides child welfare agencies in Ontario with information on emerging trends, best practice, service tools, and child welfare education and regulations (OACAS, 2018). As part of the organization’s effort, the Ontario Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable prepared a discussion paper for OACAS in response to the realization that “training alone could not overcome the systemic oppression that continues to lead to the over-representation of racialized and marginalized populations within the child welfare system” (p. 4). By reflecting on the anti-oppression framework within child welfare, this study has the potential to develop critical strategies and build agency capacity to improve services for Muslims. One concrete way to start this process is to consider Muslims as a marginalized group and include Muslim voices in the discussions at the Roundtable level.

Child protection workers are aided in decision-making by the Ontario Child Protection Tools Manual, which consists of Risk Assessment tools using a standardized approach (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2007). Risk Assessment Models (RAM) place child safety as paramount in determining intervention strategies used in practice. However, it makes little reference to the family and community context of the child. With limited knowledge of Islam's collective approaches and principles central to family functioning and community engagement, it is difficult for child protection workers to understand best practice when engaged with Muslims. Bunge (2014) points out that religious communities could play a positive role in child protection, while Al-Krenawi & Graham (2000) suggest social workers should have a sound understanding of their clients' spiritual and religious positions, such that they can integrate the latter into service provision. This study examines aspects of Muslim family functioning and highlights gaps in knowledge that lead to inadequate and problematic service provisions.

Research Questions

Situated in the above context, the central research question explored is: How do Muslims experience their involvement with child welfare services in Ontario?

The following sub-questions will further inform and shape the study.

- 1) How does religious identification and practices impact Muslims' experiences with child welfare services in Ontario?
- 2) What systemic challenges exist for Muslims receiving child welfare services in Ontario?
- 3) How can we enhance service provisions for Muslims who receive child welfare services in Ontario?

In chapter five, I discuss the case study design that I used to answer the above research questions. The diversity of the Muslim population in Ontario reflects a microcosm of diversity in race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and social background of Muslims. A single case study seems inadequate to understand nuances of family situations and other points of difference between Muslims. However, documents and interviews with foster parents and workers (Muslims and non-Muslims) expanded the data, enabling comparisons. I was thus able to complete an in-depth analysis of the family's experiences with their child welfare intervention and service provision. Given the limited research with this specific population in child welfare, this case study shines a light on the complex ways that religion interfaces with child welfare and suggests strategies that are useful for child protection with Muslim communities.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the knowledge of child welfare practice by considering religious diversity, an aspect of identity that requires attention to better serve those marginalized because of their religious beliefs and practices. Understanding the nuances of Muslims' child welfare experiences will uncover useful information for child welfare policy and practice and address the gap in the literature for Muslims and other faith groups. The study highlights the complexity that lies at the intersection of faith and child welfare and is useful to deepen our understanding of how faith assists in safety and protection for people in faith communities. This research departs from previous studies by bringing into conversation two divergent bodies of literature: Western child welfare practices and Islamic practices of child safety are both considered in the context of child protection work. Drawing from attention to the distinctive aspect of Islam, the research is useful to consider how the child welfare system manages faith groups. Further, this study brings

religious diversity into focus and highlights concerns that can serve as a reference point in understanding other religious minority groups (e.g., Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists).

Through the lens of critical realism, the study examines how layered, yet invisible mechanisms maintain oppression for Muslim service users. I hope the study will spark a process for Muslim communities to educate and organize around preventative work and provide a framework for the child welfare community of researchers and professionals in the development and implementation of services to Muslim clients.

Clarifying Concepts

Language is neither transparent nor universal, it is often grounded in specific contexts, where meanings require interpretation or explanation. This is particularly significant where words used in everyday language need specific definitions in the research context. Starting with definitions and conceptualizations assists us in a shared understanding of the way such words are used in this work. In the frame of reference for this study, the meaning of culture and religion, Islam and the West, and child welfare and child protection are significant. In this section, I describe and define the use of the mentioned concepts as they pertain to this project.

Religion and Culture

Asad (1993) suggests that a universal definition of religion is impossible and cannot be confined as it emerges in culturally discursive processes, while Marranci (2008) notes that Islam should be studied as a living religion through observations of Muslims. Faced with the significant dilemma of variability and overlap between religion and culture, I find it useful to define in a small way the paradoxical challenges that the concepts of religion and culture present in my research.

Frequently used together, sometimes even interchangeably, culture and religion provide a frame of reference based on shared communal beliefs and values. Both concepts convey meanings concerning the organization of social, legal, and moral interactions for life in global, national, and regional communities. It can become precarious to untangle the complicated matrix of religion and culture, especially when cultural practices are attributed to religion and vice versa. For example, Saroglou and Cohen (2011) enumerate several possibilities of connectedness between religion and culture including religion being a part of culture, as constituting culture, as transcending culture, as being influenced by culture, as shaping culture, and as interacting with culture to influence cognitions. Struggles with the definition of religion are particularly problematic when considering human rights laws designed to protect religious freedoms; it remains undefined in international law (Gunn, 2003).

Here, I propose working conceptualizations of religion and culture as it relates to this research project. Constructed from the Arabic word “deen” used in the *Qur'an*, religion is a way of living.³ According to Kassis' (1983) *Concordance of the Qur'an*, included among the root understandings of *deen* are: “practising a religion”, “indebtedness”, and “receiving rewards and punishments” (p. 381). Religion is a divinely stipulated set of laws that guides towards a particular way of moral and virtuous living. This conceptualization informs my research and includes the belief that Islam is more in line with personal and community faith and practice, rather than an ideology or ruling system.

³ The Qur'an is divine scripture revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the archangel Gabriel. It is protected in Arabic script and memorised by many Muslims in an oral tradition that dates to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

Culture has no equivalence in *Concordance of the Qur'an* (Abd-Allah, 2006), but Islamic parallels to culture are captured in *al-urf* (custom) and *al-adah* (habit). In traditional Muslim societies, what was customary and used by local populations was acceptable when it did not contradict overarching Islamic teachings. Historian and traditional Islamic scholar, Abd-Allah (2006) describes relationships between local customs and Islam, stating: "Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal-clear river. Its waters (Islam) are pure, sweet, and life-giving but having no color of their own, reflect the bedrock (indigenous culture) over which they flow" (p. 2).

Drawing from Abd-Allah's (2006) definition of culture, one can appreciate the complex interrelation between culture and religion. His analogy allows for the interaction and evolution between culture and religion, which can be seen in the diversity among Muslims' practice of Islam. For example, Islam, as it is practiced in Indonesia, is different from how it is practiced in Senegal, though both cultures share common religious traits. Abd-Allah's discourse also includes the idea that culture reflects religion, yet religion is independent of culture in that it is considered Divine and at the level of revelation from God. While the Quran is sacred, interpretations of the Quran are not. Hence religious teachings derived from revelation are products of human interpretation and do reflect something of the culture from which the religious teachings, interpretations, and rulings emanate. This is one way to differentiate the two concepts given the post-modern anti-religious and particularly anti-Islamic political atmosphere where religion takes the blame for social problems not sanctioned by religion.

That culture and religion should be differentiated appear necessary to Muslims. I spoke to Muslim child protection workers about my work and a central theme voiced by the workers suggests that cultural practices often get confused with religious practice; therefore, clarity

around what is religious versus what is cultural is necessary. The difference in importance between religion and culture is observed when, for instance, there is a violation of religious principles (e.g., a Muslim child given pork while in care) versus personal preferences (e.g., such as not having samosas for dinner). The trend of making a point about this differentiation is also present in young Muslims. I presented for three years in a row on “Muslims in child welfare” to a group of university students, and on all three occasions, Muslim students wanted to clarify differences between culture and religion. In some cases, students emphasized that although they are Muslims, their culture is not particularly reflective of Islam.

Furthermore, this distinction surfaces in literature, for example, in speaking of strategies to improve working relationships with second-generation Muslims in Denmark, Dalgaard (2016) suggests “separating Islam as a religion from cultural traditions” (p. 66) to better serve Muslims. Although she did not define religion or culture, she noted that this separation is made frequently by all her 29 study participants. The distinction between religion and culture in the complex social context of Muslims, although not clear but often overlapping, appears to be present in Muslims’ consciousness. Despite Ahmad’s struggles to articulate the difference between culture and religion, he attested to it as something palpable.⁴

⁴ Ahmad is the main participant around whom this case study is built. He met the eligibility criteria for the study and consented to participate. Details of Ahmad, the family circumstances, and the information he provided through interviews and documents are presented in chapter six.

Islam and the West

“Islam and the West” are often portrayed as binary and mutually exclusive, but within the global context this is problematic. Islam is a religion practiced by Muslims living in most of the world’s countries, while the West is a geographic region frequently referring to liberal democratic countries in Europe and North America. However, as global interaction has integrated our world, millions of Muslims live in the West and Western culture has a distinct presence in many Muslim majority countries, to the extent that one can find a McDonald’s restaurant within a three-minute walk from the *Kaaba* in the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.⁵ As highlighted in the discussion on religion and culture, Islam accepts and engages with local and indigenous culture. I use “the West” and variations such as “Western” to include Europe and North America reflecting liberal democratic countries considered the North. Islam, Islamic traditions, and Muslim refer to general Muslim populations regardless of geographic locations or differences in traditions.

Child Welfare and Child Protection

In child welfare, the difference in terminology that includes words such as “child welfare” and “child protection” can present a challenge for unfamiliar readers. Cameron et al. (2001) suggest that child protection systems in England, Canada, and the United States are generally regulated by the state on a model of individual rights and responsibilities and with a

⁵ *Kaaba* translates as cube (or cubic structure) is the first House of worship established by Prophet Abraham, according to the Quran and Muslim traditions. It is in the centre of the Mosque in Mecca, and it is one of Islam’s holiest mosques and visited by Muslims from all over the world.

focus on protecting children in their homes. In such a model, “The child protection mandate is conferred on a stand-alone authority with minimal formal involvement by other service sectors or the broader community” (Cameron & Freymond, 2006, p. 5). Services are reserved for families that cannot meet the bar of care and protection within the family. On the other hand, in France, Sweden, and the Netherlands, child welfare services reflect an orientation of shared responsibility and communal support rather than risk or harm as the reason for intervention. This child welfare or family services system, reflective of communal and shared responsibility, provides services to support families even when risk or harm may not be present (Cameron & Freymond, 2006). However, neoliberal influences and risk ideology have penetrated both system types, obscuring differences. I use the terms interchangeably to reflect the usage in the local context where there is little distinction between child welfare or child protection services.

Positionality

Situating myself in this research project and in keeping with qualitative research methodologies, I follow Hamzeh & Oliver’s (2010) discussion and reflect on my theoretical, ideological, and political influences. I also reflect on my social positioning, including race, gender, immigration status, language, beliefs, and personal biases. As suggested by Berger (2015), I use my social location to make clear my ethical, political, and personal commitments and acknowledge the impact of my knowledge, biases, and awareness on the research.

My interest in studying Muslim families receiving child welfare services developed over many years of experience with the child welfare system in Ontario. I was a foster parent for 12 years and a front-line worker for over ten years within the child welfare system. I am also an active member of the Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I have engaged in this research process with the awareness that my personal biases are sometimes invisible to me

yet serve as a compass to determine my choices. Guided by religious beliefs and practice, my religious identification is not a private matter; as a woman who wears the *hijab*, I am easily identified as “Muslim” by whomever I encounter.⁶ Arguably, being Muslim is the most salient personal trait – even more apparent than race or gender – which marginalizes me and by which I identify. Like other belief systems, it provides a sense of belonging and balance, which, coupled with other aspects of my identity, impacts my perceptions and realities.

I am a Guyanese-born woman of Indian descent. My parents were born in Guyana as were two of my grandparents; the other two arrived in Guyana as indentured servants from India. I migrated to Canada in 1982 and has since lived in Canada. Colored by nostalgia, my recollections of childhood in Guyana center around an open society where Hindus, Muslims, and Christians coexisted in peaceful support of each other. As a Muslim child, I recall the fun and treats of Phagwa and Diwali (both Hindu religious) celebrations and looking forward to treats at Christmas and the glorious long weekend of Easter, when everyone celebrated by flying kites to symbolize the ascension of Jesus (peace be upon him). In addition to religious diversity, we learnt that Guyana was the “land of six peoples,” including four ethnic groups with small populations. The two dominant groups were people of African heritage, referred to as “blacks,” and people of Indian descent called “coolies.”

The country’s divide was along race, primarily between the blacks and coolies, whose battle for political leadership was supported by the British colonialists with their strategy to

⁶ *Hijab* is the head cover worn by some Muslim women when they engage with the public and enter shared spaces. It is a religious practice that is shaped by culture; therefore, one can find a variety of ways in which it is worn.

divide and conquer. However, this did not determine how folks interacted, and despite political unrest in Guyana at the time, I grew with a sense of identity and belonging that anchored me. I was Muslim because my parents were Muslim. However, being Muslim at the time was not the same for me as it is now. My father could be referred to as a “cultural Muslim” that is, he was born into a Muslim family and maintained Islamic beliefs but did not engage much in religious practices. My mother was more inclined to religion and would read us stories from the Qur’an and encourage us to fast in Ramadan. But this did not prevent us from being free to go to Sunday school (Church) and services at the village Temple (Hindu). When I was 18 years old, I developed an interest in Islam and started to practice the prescribed pillars.

The idea of “looking after children” has always been a part of my journey. I remember caring for younger siblings, cousins, and neighbours’ children. It is an Islamic practice to care for children, all children. Guyana’s culture allowed for this type of informal caregiving by family, friends, and neighbours. In Guyana, caretakers were grandmas, aunties, big sisters, neighbours, and friends. Children were cared for by people who were part of their family and community. There was no formal child protection system, but children were taken care of and looked after.

In 1991, my sister died leaving behind three boys: a nine-year-old, a four-year-old and a three-year-old. She was the only remaining sibling in Guyana. None of us, her eight siblings, were able to take the boys; immigration policies made this impossible. A neighbour’s family raised my three nephews. As part of my coping with my sister’s death and what this meant for my nephews, I responded to an advertisement in the local newspaper to become a foster parent. Thus, began my journey with child welfare.

I served as a foster parent for 12 years while completing my social work education and subsequently worked as a child protection worker for over ten years. Fostering for CAS

Hamilton in the Alternate Care Program (ACP), a program that arranged for respite services for families, was an encouraging experience. My involvement with this program exposed me to the positive possibilities for child welfare; I felt that I could contribute to the well-being of children and families. Unfortunately, by 1996 the program was no longer offered due to the Conservative government's budget cuts under Mike Harris' "Common Sense Revolution" in Ontario.

Although my role as a foster parent started with the ACP, I frequently fostered children removed from their family homes through apprehension providing emergency services for short-term placements.⁷ Over the years, the agency would occasionally request information on Muslim families and placement for Muslim children. It became evident that the society faced challenges, such as lack of information, placement options, and resources in their service provisions for Muslim families and children. I met many social workers as I continued to provide foster care and had encountered a worker who left a lasting impact on my faith in the system. She had no pre-judgments based on my religion and made it clear that she appreciated my services.

However, the more common experience was somewhat unnerving. Workers seemed unsure of how to interact with me, and I believe it stemmed from my Muslim appearance. I felt "othered" even though I was not a client but rather a part of the service team. The outward manifestation of my religious practice had much to do with this marginalization. Despite the agency's thorough screening of foster parents, some workers appeared concerned and reluctant

⁷ Apprehension is the removal of a child from their parents' home and placing him or her in an agency approved foster home. This is done through the authority of child protection services when they assess a serious or immediate risk of harm to the child.

to leave children in my care. I believe that such attitudes of discomfort reflected the judgment/stereotype attached to my attire and ethnicity.

An additional worry emerged when I was asked to care for children apprehended from their parents' homes. I was disturbed by the limited contact that the children had with their families and the reluctance of workers to arrange phone calls and family visits. I started thinking about challenges children in care and their parents might experience. It became evident that families with non-Canadian backgrounds, especially those who were not native English speakers, faced more complicated situations with the potential for increased negative consequences.

After completing my Master of Social Work, I obtained employment as a child protection worker. Again, being Muslim seemed to be a challenge. Based on the Anglo-American, authoritarian, patriarchal models, the work environment provided limited support for my cultural differences as a worker and my alternative approaches to clients. There appeared to be one way of doing the job, by using the power and authority inherent in the system. This served as the governing principle for interacting with clients and my inability to perform competently was attributed to my gentle personality and assumed level of trust for clients. Embedded in Western principles of power, my different approach, which could have improved working relationships with families was disregarded.

Despite a discouraging start, I continued as a child protection worker for over ten years. Worries about the system and its ability to successfully intervene in the lives of minority clients in general, and Muslims in particular, continued to fester. During this time, I wrestled with personal concerns about services burdening already oppressed and disadvantaged groups. Although I attempted to serve clients fairly and with sensitivity, many constraints seemed to control my child protection interactions (e.g., supervisory style, agency culture, government-

mandated timelines, and court requirements). Besides, Muslim clients were either grateful to have me as a worker or considered me a “spy” from within their community. The complications from such situations were numerous; Morrel (2007) describes the relational dynamics of working with clients of the same ethnic origin and ensuing tensions that commonly arose between families, foster parents, and social work management. Like Morrell, my experiences were compounded because of my ties to the community.

My child welfare experience provided a space where I had the opportunity to interact with Muslim clients in a supportive community role. Here too, it became apparent that there were misunderstandings between the child welfare system (represented by child protection workers) and Muslim clients. Many Muslims expressed being mistreated because of their religion. In some cases, Muslim clients articulated concerns that their religious and cultural practices and beliefs were unfairly or unjustly targeted as child welfare concerns.

My identity as a Muslim woman has impacted my thinking about child welfare. As a child welfare professional, I am concerned about the safety and well-being of all children, including Muslims, who need the support of child welfare services. As a Muslim, I seek to understand the experiences that challenge a very vulnerable segment of my community (poor, racialized, new immigrants and refugees with language and cultural barriers). I believe that a thorough understanding of the experiences of Muslims who receive child protection services is necessary to improve service experiences and outcomes of child welfare interventions for Muslim families. This belief strengthened my desire to work towards a possible solution and so I left my position as a protection worker to pursue research.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters, including this introduction. In chapter two, I introduce my theoretical framework with which I engage in the research. In chapter three, I review child welfare literature in the West with a focus on the United States, Canada, and England to frame general trends with racialized and marginalized groups before turning to child welfare in Ontario. In chapter four, I present demographic information on Muslims in the Canadian context and argue that they are stigmatized in particular ways that lead to Islamophobia and racism, which impacts their child welfare experiences. Chapter five outlines my research paradigm and details the methodology and methods used to develop the case study. In chapter six, I present key findings that emerged from the primary research participant and interviews from three workers and four foster parents who worked with Muslim clients. In chapter seven, I discuss the findings in relation to the literature and evaluate the complex consequences of not paying attention to religious differences. In chapter eight, I present conclusions and recommendations for child protection work with the Muslim community based on my synthesis of the literature I reviewed and my findings from the study.

I included brief reflection sections at the end of chapters two through seven, where I grapple with experiences that surface for me as a Muslim, a woman, and a researcher during the process. These reflections document my engagement with what I have learnt, what challenged my positioning and preconceived thoughts and what kept me grounded in the process. The reflection pieces also centered me on the intent of my research. Through thinking about and writing these reflections, I re-examine my ethical, religious, and political commitments and the responsibilities to my community that accompany this new learning.

Language Usage

This research, done through the Faculty of Social Work, is not a project on Islamic theology; the anticipated audience is child welfare professionals. To provide context for non-Muslims, I present information that is necessary (not extensive), to understand Muslims' lives. Given the unfamiliar terminology in sections with reviews and analysis of Islamic contents, I attempt to keep Arabic terms/phrases to a minimum but find it necessary at times. I use Thomas Cleary's (2004) translations for Quranic verses where relevant. Unless specified otherwise, any foreign word or term is a transliteration of Arabic which is translated the first time it appears in a section. I also added footnotes to expand on meanings and definitions that I thought would be too cumbersome for the body of the paper, but essential to the understanding of the content. Readers may note that when mentioning Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be with him), I used parenthesis to acknowledge a prayer for peace and blessings. It is an Islamic practice that when the Prophet is mentioned (in written or oral discourse) one sends a prayer for peace and blessings for him.

The specific language and terminology in the child welfare field present challenges. With different ways of expressing similar ideas, a reader not familiar with the child welfare literature may find it confusing and challenging. For example, child welfare agencies may appear interchangeably with child protection agencies and children's aid society (CAS). Then there are words such as apprehension and placement, which have specific meanings in a child welfare setting. I am mindful of this and to simplify, added explanatory footnotes. Additionally, researchers refer to groups in different ways (e.g., Indigenous or First Nation, African Canadian or Black), when using specific researchers, I honour their use of language and mimic it.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

Child welfare and child protection literature is replete with challenges faced by racialized clients receiving services. The literature shows that oppressive structures and systemic racism have resulted in children of colour being over-represented in the system (Cénat, et al. 2021; Clarke, et al. 2018; Dettlaff & Boyde, 2020; Lee, 2016; Mohamud et al. 2021) and in foster care (e.g., Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clark, 2012; Trocmé et al., 2004). Similarly, immigrants experience systemic challenges including poverty, language barriers, and isolation that impact their engagement with child protection services (Brohpy et al., 2003; Earner, 2007; Laverne et al., 2008; Maiter et al., 2009). An intriguing yet underdeveloped area in the literature is the outcome of religion/religious practices on child welfare service users' experiences.

Muslims are part of the racialized, newly immigrant population facing systemic barriers and discrimination. They also have the unique and added dimension of religious marginalization, which requires further attention to ensure appropriate service provision. Muslim families who come to the attention of mandated child welfare services in the unfriendly, socio-political context that views their belief system as backward and oppressive, especially to women and children (Bullock, & Jafri, 2000; Dhimi, & Sheikh 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Razack, 2007; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014), suffer consequences. While racial and ethnic prejudices are being recognised, religious marginalization is not. Facing racist attitudes that stem from differences tied to their religion, directly influences the service religious minorities receive.

This chapter frames a comprehensive theoretical approach to examine Muslim clients' involvement in the child welfare system. By emphasising the historical, political, and societal landscape that forms the context of child protection with Muslims in Ontario, I develop an understanding of Muslim families' involvement with mandated child protection services through

a multi-perspective framework. I use neoliberalism to frame the macro environment of governmental control and power as it relates to religious minorities through legislation and child welfare policies. At the organizational level, I argue that although Anti-oppression Practice (AOP) is the main support for progressive child welfare practice, it lacks the capacity to improve services for Muslims. On the individual level, clients are managed through risk thinking with practices that focus on levels of risk to determine interventions. Since Muslims are already constructed as risky, risk theory highlights the compounding effect for Muslims. To further the understanding of Muslims as a distinct religious group, I rely on critical race theory and intersectionality. The addition of Southern theory allows for the introduction and argument that epistemological knowledge grounded in religion and traditions should be viewed as legitimate ways to raise, protect, and care for children. This approach fosters an analysis of systemic and individual aspects of child protection work with Muslims and supports adding religion as a factor to better determine particularities of service provision for Muslims. I conclude the chapter with my reflections in the Stories of the Self section.

An Islamic Prism for Theoretical Perspectives

The Qur'an reads: "O humankind! We (God) created you from a male and a female and We (God) made you races and tribes for you to get to know each other. The most noble of you in the sight of God are those who are most conscientious" (C.49, V 13). I refer to this verse as the diversity verse. Here we are told that diversity in humanity is the basis for interaction, which leads to knowledge and appreciation of human diversity. Seeking, acquiring, and sharing knowledge of God, of oneself, and of others are essential to increase conscientiousness of one's position with God and His creation. Since the purpose of human creation is to serve God and all

of humanity is equal before Him, diversity is a biological fact that need not impact spirituality or one's connection with God.

Further, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with him) is reported to have said, "There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab nor is there superiority of a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is the white superior over the black nor is the black superior over the white - except by piety" (Bukhari, 1987).⁸ The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with him) also encouraged Muslims to focus on each other as believers – brothers and sisters – rather than on differences. Among his companions were Romans, Persians, and Africans with differences in social positions; some being slaves while others were the richest of the Arabs, yet their community was grounded in the love of God. Fully aware of the transience of this world, their focus was on uplifting each other in struggles towards the eradication of ignorance manifested as nepotism and tribalism.

My reference for social justice and anti-oppression started evolving when I became interested in my faith (at the age of 19) and began to learn about Islam beyond ritualistic practices. I developed an understanding of the expectations of Muslims' relational interactions and responsibilities to others grounded on Ahadith such as the following narration: Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with him) said to his companions, "it is your duty to

⁸ Imam al-Bukhari is a ninth century Islamic scholar whose book *Sahih al-Bukhari* documents Prophet Muhammad's (peace and blessings be with him) words, actions, or habits and is regarded as one of the greatest sources of his prophetic influence in history. Although all of my hadith references are contained in his collection, they are knowledge I obtained from oral transmission with teachers who have access to al-Bukhari's work in the original Arabic text.

help your brother whether he is oppressed or is the oppressor.” His companions responded, “Messenger of God, it is understandable that we help our brother when he is oppressed but how can we help him when he oppresses? The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be with him) responded “to prevent him from oppressing others is to help him when he is an oppressor” (Bukhari, 1987). Mentioned in the hadith is the approach of an active role in addressing issues of oppression regardless of one’s relationship to the oppressor.

One significant aspect of social justice work is premised on the relocation and redistribution of resources. Islam encourages Muslims to share resources. Numerous Ahadith speak to the Prophet’s (peace and blessings of God be with him) and his companions’ (may Allah be pleased with them) generosity and care for their community. Further, two of the pillars of the faith are centred on disbursement. *Zakah* (an annual 2.5 % of one’s wealth) is obligatory on all Muslims and given to specific groups of “needy” persons including the poor, the orphaned, the student, and the traveller. During *Ramadan*, Muslims are again required to give to the poor and needy a specified amount, while charity is encouraged as a continuous practise through the year. *Ramadan* also serves as an experience for those with ample food supply to experience hunger, thus simulating an experience that encourages empathy. Given that poverty is an issue for newcomers and the levels of marginalization and oppression Muslims experience, these themes of addressing oppression and paying attention to systemic barriers that prevent access to benefits and supports are relevant to an assessment of Muslim clients in child welfare.

Neoliberalism

Based on the economic politics of Adam Smith, neoliberalism is a broad-based theory applied to sectors of society that usually speaks to the eradication of government intervention in economic matters. Used to refer to market-oriented reform, neoliberal policies include reducing

state influence through privatization, austerity measures, deregulation, and the dismantling of the concept of public good (Harvey, 2010). Neoliberalism has an array of nuanced explanations and applications. Its narratives include policies aimed at improving society through individual and societal advancements (Harvey, 2010; Ong, 2006). Neoliberalism moves towards creating efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations; an agenda that undermines concerns for individuals and families. The argument that government provision of services is ineffective and detrimental to family and community support the neoliberal agenda to withdraw supports and focus on control (Luxton, 2010). This is particularly salient in child welfare, where, as previously suggested, services are often provided to marginalized families and communities.

According to Ferguson (1997), child welfare systems have become bureaucratic with “good practice now dictated by following procedures, accountability and the new managerialism” (p. 222). While accountability and managerialism are great for the business world, it has implications for individuals who receive services from social service agencies. With an established welfare state, Canada’s success with neoliberalism largely depends on accepting that individuals and families are responsible for themselves (Luxton, 2010). Nevertheless, the state apparatus, with its centralized power, is more concerned with security and prevention. Many child welfare scholars have noted an established and pronounced relationship between structural barriers and child welfare involvement. For example, Bywaters et al. (2016) examined the relationship between poverty, abuse, and neglect and concluded that families in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to experience child protection interventions. With a focus on reduced public spending for social programs that serve the most disenfranchised, and the conflating of poverty and neglect, those most at risk are likely to be singled out by the system.

The consequences of neoliberalism for child welfare in Ontario became evident when

Harris's conservative government implemented cutbacks in social programs in 1994. One of the first programs removed from child welfare was the alternate care program (discussed in chapter one), leaving already struggling families without the essential respite to care for their special-needs children. Aside from programs like the ACP being cut completely, new assessment models focusing on accountability and evidence resulting in standardized service delivery emerged. In the interest of saving time and money, new ways of working including the Risk Assessment Model (RAM) to complete assessments were introduced to improve efficiency. Current agency protocols require child welfare agencies to collect information on performance indicators set by the government based on the belief that standardized outcomes will indicate improvement in service provision (Koster & Damiani-Taraba, 2016). However, there is much concern about adhering to standards without considering the impact of structural barriers. Koster and Damiani-Taraba (2016) and Dumbrill (2009) point out that child protection standards often exclude service users' voices, which I imagine is important where differences can marginalize groups through state governance.

Neoliberalism and Religion

Entering political and civic spheres under neoliberal governance, religious diversity has emerged as one way to regulate religious communities. Using neoliberalism as an analytical tool for religious minorities, Burchardt (2018) argues moving beyond the use of religious diversity as a descriptive tool to examine the use of power in the categorization. Using Michael Foucault's⁹ notion of governmentality, Burchardt (2018) suggests that "we should explore how religious

⁹ Foucault is a French philosopher who theorises about power and knowledge and how they are used as forms of social control.

diversity is itself turned into an epistemic and administrative category through which states observe societies, render populations legible and contribute to configuring their cultural identities” (p. 436). As such, power, and control both as legal and political forms of oppression can surface for religious minorities. Connecting multiculturalism to neoliberalism in the case of Canada, Burchardt (2018) suggests that religious diversity qualifies citizenship by focusing on policies and legislations. I address this idea of citizenship, civil participation, and control of Muslims as a religiously diverse group in more detail in chapter four through an examination of legislation and social engagement. Here, I focus on Muslims as clients in the child welfare system.

As with most service recipients, Muslims who receive child welfare services experience the system as oppressive. On the one hand, they are likely poor, new to Canada, with language and cultural barriers, and with little support from government programs as many of the agencies that offered services for newcomers have been closed or have drastically reduced their programming. On the other hand, government agencies with a mandate to control and manage risky populations are increasingly funded. For example, the government’s anti-radicalization budget allows for targeting and criminalizing of Muslims.

As an economic vision with strategies of cutbacks, neoliberalism has thwarted child welfare agencies’ capacity to create better results for families. Instead, it created a false efficacy with rigid patterns of operation tied to efficiency while neglecting compassion and humanity. Working more efficiently meant less time with families, making judgments with little knowledge on details of client circumstances and no capacity to offer support services. It also fostered a more punitive system that has cast child welfare as a state agency with powers of control rather than one of services.

Anti-Oppressive Framework

Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) emerged within critical social work, social justice, and anti-discriminatory approaches to marginalized populations (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

Iterations of AOP focus on diversity and inclusion within social work (Brown, 2019; Wilson & Beresford, 2000). Using AOP, I examine oppression at personal and structural levels by considering the historical and political contexts that are central to power, control, and marginalization (Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002; Mullaly & West, 2018) and exploitation, violence, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism based on second-class citizenship (Mullaly, 2010).

AOP concentrates on equal, non-oppressive social relations dedicated to the principles of social justice (Campbell, 2003; Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002, 2010). Social justice is a complex term focusing on creating just and equitable access through the redistribution of resources and opportunities. It considers relational perspectives, post-colonial, and post-modern views (Swift & Callahan 2009). Accordingly, AOP provides a schema to analyze the use of power and dominance in disempowered and marginalized groups to improve equity. AOP models of practice conceptualize an emancipatory framework for promoting inclusion and equity while attempting to eliminate oppressions (Campbell, 2003, Dominelli 2002; Mullaly, 2010).

To engage in AOP is to work towards creating changes and reducing various forms of oppression with the intent to assist the oppressed and effect changes to oppressive systems (Dominelli, 2002, Mullaly, 2002, 2010; Mullaly & West, 2018). Anti-oppressive practice brings into focus cultural oppression. Cultural oppression, distinct from personal oppressions, creates space to examine group disadvantages focusing on intersectionality and centers the individual experiences based on multiple forms of oppression (Brown, 2019; Mullaly, 2010; Mullaly &

West, 2018). Anti-oppressive practise includes a micro and macro analysis where change at the individual and the organizational level are necessary (Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; Mullaly, 2010).

Adapting AOP in child welfare has its challenges. Dumbrill (2003) suggests the historical origins of child welfare, with efforts of the privileged in society to control those viewed as threats, creates problems for AOP. In child welfare, oppression cannot be alleviated by anti-oppressive practices. One argument for this is that clients have no power to articulate how they are best served. As Dumbrill (2003) suggests, “transformation lies in remedies formulated by service users” (p. 10), but service users’ voices are excluded in the child welfare system. Further, Strier (2007) identifies the lack of AOP’s emancipating values because of the use of dominant research methodologies, and excluding ‘subjects’ from research, as impediments to establishing AOP’s goals. As it currently exists, the system itself is oppressive and service users’ voices are not being explored, let alone listened to.

Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Society (OACAS) provides child welfare agencies in Ontario with information on emerging trends, best practice, service tools, and child welfare education and regulations (OACAS, 2018). As part of the organization’s effort, the Ontario Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable prepared a discussion paper for OACAS in response to the realization that “training alone could not overcome the systemic oppression that continues to lead to the over-representation of racialized and marginalized populations within the child welfare system” (p. 5). A forum to develop strategies and build agency capacity was undertaken to advocate for the inclusion of anti-oppression principles in policy and practice.

However, AOP practice in child welfare has yet to consider Muslims as an identified marginalized group. I contacted the Roundtable to attend meetings to improve my understanding of their work and how it might be applied to the Muslim population. I was informed that since

they “don’t target specific groups like the ones [I am] currently studying” (personal communication, 12, March 2018), I would not benefit from attending a meeting. Instead, they would prefer to connect me with one of their group members to discuss further outside of the meetings.¹⁰ As an important policy priority of OACAS, AOP has failed to identify religion as a potential dimension for discrimination or at the least has not been able to fully conceptualize religion as different from other forms of oppression. This exclusion is also evident in the failure to collect information about Muslim families involved in child protection services.

The definition of anti-oppression taken from the Roundtable included an analysis based on aspects of identity such as “race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, age, class, occupation, and social service usage” can “result in systemic inequalities for particular groups” (The Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable, 2009, p. 6). Despite the analysis of the benefits of using an anti-oppression model, I found the definition adopted by OACAS is too narrow, thereby undermining the possible advantages of using an AOP model. Noticeably absent are factors such as ethnicity, language barriers, religion, immigration status, and length of time in Canada, all of which can considerably impact child welfare experiences. Although inclusion may not make a big difference in adapting practices, statistics can substantiate arguments of differential treatment and outcomes for Muslims.

The Ontario Child Protection Standards, a service delivery tool used to promote high quality service delivery that is responsive to children and families receiving child protection services from Children’s Aids Societies (CAS) across the province (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2016), also highlights concerns for Ontario’s diverse population and a commitment to an anti-oppression approach. Part of the mandatory training designed for

¹⁰ Further attempts to connect were not responded to from the Roundtable.

new workers includes a two-day module on anti-oppressive practice. After training, AOP is an optional way to work – one that competes with tasks that have ministry mandated timelines – as incentive for priority, thereby undermining the benefits of a declared AOP approach.¹¹

Additionally, individual workers cannot make systemic changes that require policymakers' commitments at the provincial and individual agency level.

Given the scope of AOP, an examination of Muslims receiving services at the personal and group level with culture and religion included in the analysis of structural barriers may improve service provisions for Muslims. However, a critical analysis of AOP in child welfare will return us to the point that cultural oppression is only but a small part of the overall experience of child welfare recipients. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect a deeper level of systematic changes, but workers can play a role in individual clients' interactions. Muslim families' ability to engage with service provision is further undermined, as evident when one closely reviews the child protection standards that are the bedrock of practice.

AOP promotes social workers' awareness of their social location and reflexive use of self in achieving social transformation (Dominelli, 2002). This means that child welfare workers should consider their position of power, biases, and their limited knowledge of their Muslim clients' religion and culture. When a Euro-centric educated, white social worker turns her "expert" gaze at a newcomer Muslim who cannot understand why her child is safer in a crib (cage) than on her bed, then that worker needs to engage in reflexive practices. Further, understanding of their privilege and power creates an awareness of how oppression is maintained

¹¹ Adherence to timelines is a core component for evaluating workers' performance; it is frequently addressed in supervision and sometimes appears on annual performance appraisals.

through everyday practice (Fook, 2002; Mandell, 2007). In child welfare practice, critical awareness is key to working with mandated clients especially relating to race, culture, religion, and gender due to the considerable power they wield when assessing from a Euro-western ideology. Workers need this critical awareness as service recipients are mandated to receive services, which is restrictive for clients. Another reason for the use of critically reflexive work can build strength and solidarity within oppressed groups (Mullaly, 2010).

To engage in AOP practice is to create change and reduce various forms of oppression with the intent to assist the oppressed and transform oppressive systems (Dominelli, 2002, Mullaly, 2002; 2010; Mullaly & West; 2018). Anti-oppressive practice brings into focus cultural oppression. Cultural oppression, distinct from personal oppressions, creates space to examine group disadvantages while focusing on intersectionality to center individual experiences based on multiple forms of oppression (Brown; 2019; Mullaly, 2010; Mullaly & West, 2018). Anti-oppressive practice includes micro and macro analysis where shift at the individual (client), the practitioner (social worker), and the organizational levels are necessary (Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; Mullaly, 2010).

The effectiveness of AOP within the context of the layered involvement of child welfare is contested. The many years of engaging with AOP has undoubtedly seen a change in the language of child welfare when discussion centre around progressive work but actual change is challenging to determine or estimate. First Nations and Black communities are included in statistics such as the Canadian Incidence Studies Report; the availability of statistics is grounding the work of these communities. However, changes in practice that translate to benefits for clients are not clear. Nevertheless, given the scope of anti-oppression, an examination of Muslims receiving services at the personal and group level with culture and religion included in the

analysis of structural barriers may, at the least, illustrate the need to consider Muslims as a group that requires attention within the much-highlighted model of AOP in child welfare.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is an analysis of discrimination based on race that stems from American civil rights, critical legal studies, and radical feminism. CRT proliferated beyond law and legal studies with specific subsidiaries (such as AsianCrit, FemCrit, TribalCrit, and LatCrit), which expand on the differential impact of laws and institutions on marginalized groups (Yosso, 2005).¹² Several disciplines, including psychology, cultural studies, and political science, use CRT to interrogate racism as it manifests in various spheres of society (Crenshaw, 2010). Bodies of CRT literature in fields such as education are growing, and CRT entered social work literature to critique cultural competency (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). CRT is gradually entering the child welfare field, which primarily employs social workers for client contact positions (Gourdine, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Further, Gourdine (2019) uses CRT to demonstrate the consequences of racism on equity in child welfare services in the US, and Clarke et al. (2018) uses CRT as an analytical tool in their work on the African Canadian community.

CRT theorists suggest that race is a social construct used to maintain power imbalances that contribute to further oppression of already marginalized groups (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Tenets of CRT include evaluating race as central to the allocation of privilege. Race is constructed as an essentializing strategy that dismiss histories and voices of

¹² The subsidiaries mentioned are derived to move beyond the Black/White binary (which limits discussions on race) by placing layers such as culture and language as aspects for consideration.

racialized peoples, and adopting differential racialization processes to benefit dominant groups, and maintain the status quo (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The goal of CRT is to deconstruct race in the context of white supremacy and create systemic transformation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT facilitates a nuanced approach that enables analysis of power, privilege, and impacts of imbalances on minority communities within society. Aspects of CRT consider inner dimensions of power and authority within minority communities via intersectionality and anti-essentialism (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, the category of “Muslim” as it is often used in the West gives way to essentialism where preconceived ideas guided by common stereotypes discount various lived realities of Muslims. However, diversity leads to a complex and varied group with different economic, political, religious, and cultural experiences with unpredictable effects when multiple axes of marginalization are present. When the entire *Ummah* is seen and treated as the same, there is no scope to access individual differences and strengths.¹³

Crenshaw (1989, 1991) developed the theory of intersectionality, which is used as an analytical tool to examine oppression. Intersectionality considers aspects of identity, race, gender, and class while considering historical, social, and political contexts in which the multiple biological and social categories of personal identities operate to create an axis of differentiation. Crenshaw’s arguments illustrate the ease with which historical and current dialogues in feminist

¹³ *Ummah* translates as “community” but the Qur’anic concept of *Ummah* is different than a community with geographic or ancestral ties. It is the word that best describes Muslims as a meta-community with connections to Islam and is most likely the space where universality of Islam is applicable.

and civil rights communities accept the dominant framework of discrimination and hinder the development of an adequate theory and praxis to address problems of intersectionality. Drawing upon intersectionality for Muslims, the added dimension of religion enters the analysis.

Religious identification is often a seat for systemic political and economic oppression (Adams, & Joshi, 2007). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) pose a valid question regarding the inclusion of Muslims and Jews in CRT. Adding Muslim identity to the discussion of race seems inevitable, as racism can exist in situations where the reality or concept of race is not present (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). In the case of Muslim women, Kundani (2014) suggests that wearing the *hijab* “has come to serve as a twenty-first-century racial signifier” (p. 58). Further, Zebiri (2008) highlights the notion that racism based on colour is less acceptable whereas cultural racism that emphasizes “otherness” is acceptable.

“Othering” of Muslims almost seems customary in daily interactions within society and has roots in our systems designed to protect citizens. For example, the effects of increased surveillance and negative perceptions trickle into our judicial system, where we see a judge refusing to hear the case of a woman wearing a *hijab* (Valiante, 2018). When considering the impact of racism based on skin colour with Zebiri’s (2008) observation that cultural racism is acceptable, one can imagine the impact on Muslims. Keeping in mind Aylward’s (1999) argument that in the Canadian context the history of racism is ignored, sometimes erased, I use CRT as a theoretical frame that challenges the way racism and Islamophobia manifest in child welfare practices and to frame Muslims’ experiences by considering the historic and political contexts of racism and Islamophobia in Canada. At the structural level, CRT provides an analytical space to examine law and policy within the historical context of child welfare that

potentially maintains the marginalization of Muslims. Here we can consider policies and institutional practices.

The concept of a child's best interest was born in the West in 1924 when the Geneva Declaration underlined the role of adults in protecting children. The UNCRC developed international standards to encourage nation-states towards both protection and provision of rights with the idea of "best interest" as a central concept (Wall, 2016). The rights of the child are established as part of a growing body of legal and academic discourses.¹⁴ Note that best interest is shaped by many factors, including the sociopolitical, historical, and geographical contexts. Similarly, childhood is not simply a biological fact but also has historical and cultural constructions and in some cases by status, for example, marital status (Wall, 2016). Evaluating the child's best interest is therefore complex and best interest cannot be considered as neutral with a universal consensus.

Within child welfare in Ontario, best interest, described as the paramount purpose of the Child Youth and Family Services Act (2017), (CYFSA) is "to promote the best interests, protection, and well-being of children" (part one: purpose and interpretation). The best interest is usually determined by child protection workers working within their agencies' mandate and using culturally biased, Eurocentric risk assessment tools that are very predictive. The determinations made from the assessments are presented as facts before a judge for court-

¹⁴ Childhood Studies is a growing academic discipline that examines a wide range of childhood issues in various forms of the manifestation of childhood. For example, depiction of children in children literature, children rights, children, and poverty, and childism, a parallel concept to feminism.

involved cases. At the worker level, personal worldview, institutional practices, and ministry guidelines come into play. In the framework for practice, child welfare scholars have highlighted concerns of cultural differences being seen as “inferior” and “pathological” (Barn, 2007; Dumbrill, 2003). Racialized families receiving child welfare services already experience an increased likelihood of court involvement (Brophy et al., 2003; Hunt et al., 1999), a situation that surfaced for Ahmad (participant). Using CRT to understand the experiences of child welfare interventions that are hinged on intersecting identities of Muslims, intervention strategies and services can be tailored to be more comprehensive and inclusive.

Risk Theory

With origins in Beck’s *Theory of Risk Society of Modernity* (1992), Risk theory posits risk as a social control mechanism with a specific method of analysis on risk in the context of modern society. According to Beck (1992), the concept of risk – a measure of uncertainty about the seriousness, frequency, and impact of unfavourable events – is an essential feature of modern society. Structured as a preventative tool to mitigate risks and manage society Beck (1992), argues that by using rational scientific ways to mitigate risks and achieve predictable security, government and organizations can make “politically reflexive” (p. 183) decisions that maintain control in uncertain social conditions.¹⁵

¹⁵ Political reflexivity is a concept in political theory that refers to organisations and governments engaging in reflexivity a way to recognise and alter their presence in the social structure. It assists in analysis of subjectivity and power in government and politics. For further details see: Christodoulidis E.A. (1998) Theories of Political Reflexivity. In: *Law and Reflexive Politics*. Law and Philosophy Library, vol 35. Springer, Dordrecht.

Risk theory features prominently in economic and political thoughts where the rapidly globalizing world shares meta-risks such as climate change and terrorism (Beck, 2002). Beck (2002) further contextualizes risk as an inherent control mechanism that presumes decision-making which entails “calculating the incalculable, colonizing the future” (p. 40). Calculated based on past events, risks and actions taken to mitigate future risks to control the future is computed through actuarial methods. Beck views risk as a new organizing principle (displacing class) for liberal democratic states (Swift & Callahan, 2009).

Grounded in capitalism, risk-oriented thinking is based on the principle of full employment, eradication of government intervention by deregulation, privatization, and the dismantling of the concept of “public good” or “community” (Parton, 1998). Responsibility, prudence, and self-sufficiency are expected of citizens (Rose, 2000; Parton, 1998) while the state maintains control. Rationalized and calculated interventions aim to create a system where the state establishes governance of conduct through steering and regulating but not providing resources and services (Rose, 2000). Additionally, government bodies use fear in the populace to retract privacy rules and open the doors for intrusive actions by state actors with power and authority (Swift & Callahan, 2009).

Risk has become a governing principle used in social welfare (Houston, 2015; Swift, 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2009; Turnell et al., 2013). Despite the argument that risk-thinking rests on the unlikely premise of applying scientific methods to the study of people in society through deductive analysis, Houston and Griffiths (2000) show that within social services the practice became accepted, and many fields adopted risk assessments. For example, risk assessment is posited as a tool to enhance the predictive ability and planning for medical and adaptive needs of clients (Johnson, 2011; Rothwell, 2008). However, there are challenges to transporting a political

model centred on neo-liberal policies to social work and welfare. Worries that risk assessments may replace expertise and relational engagement (Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006; Gillingham & Humphreys, 2010; Parton, 2008), and workers feeling disconnected from service users, their work, the decision-making processes, and the outcomes for their clients became concerning (Parton, 2008).

Risk assessment is a dominant practice in child welfare (Swift, 2011). It was introduced in Ontario in the early 1990s when child welfare scholars were engaged in developing tools to standardize practice. Johnson et al. (2015) conclude the validity in risk assessment tools and the actuarial model provide a tool for field practice that “is capable of accurate assessment of risk” (p. 83). However, the literature points overwhelmingly to the challenges encountered in using assessment tools designed to standardize practice. Trocmé (1996) developed the Child Neglect Instrument (CNI) as a tool to measure neglect, which he argues is present before risk. Nonetheless, it is a standardized, expert-based tool similar to risk assessment tools that were later determined to be problematic.

Child welfare scholars (e.g., Houston, 2015; Parton, 1998; 2016) have identified challenges with the use of risk assessments in child welfare practice. Further, Swift and Callahan (2009) raised concerns “not only about the way social work in this [risk] context is carried out, but about ethical contradictions faced by contemporary social workers and other human service professionals asked to assess for risk.” (p. 12-13). Further, Trocmé et al. (2014) analyze data from the Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) and report concerns about shifting emphasis from family support and prevention towards a protection model creating a dichotomy within the system.

In risk thinking, risks identified create groups with boundaries that label some as risky and fragment individuals from their identities (Swift & Callahan, 2009). Consider the impact of risk for Muslim families in the context of Rose's (2000) suggestion that the excluded are not only cast out but subject to "strategies of control" (p. 330). Inextricably linked to Muslims and grounded in dominant political and cultural narratives of othering, "risk" creates a double jeopardy for Muslims. Razak (2008) points to the construction of Muslim men as terrorists and the unprecedented surveillance powers that accompany this construction. The risky Muslim is reinforced in the media (Sharify-Funk, 2009) and manifested in Canadian society resulting in a particular perception of Muslims, one that leaves Muslims on the margin, constructed as deviants and misfits (Bullock, & Jafri, 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). Risk and associated technologies aim to produce "normal" by socially sanctioning deviants (Swift & Callahan, 2009).

Risk analysis tools are predictive with a one-size-fits-all assessment strategy that does not consider cultural or religious differences, while in reality family functioning varies. Yet, the risk assessment tool is the primary tool to determine levels of involvement with families. Continued use of such tools causes systemic concerns leaving practice largely unresponsive to cultures that did not share a Western perspective of the nuclear family and individualism. Additionally, many of the assessment tools require a decision on the part of the worker, so the worker becomes the expert who determines risks. Muslim children may appear shy, even fearful, and may be reluctant to undress in the presence of strangers. This shyness is because of respect and privacy, not fear, yet such explanations are not readily apparent or considered by professionals. Risk models focus on the ability of professionals to detect risks in family homes; workers are charged

with the responsibility of determining families past risky behaviours and making predictions for future problems and are expected to do so within mandated timelines.

According to Beck (2002), predicting the future is indeed colonizing it. To prevent “future colonization,” service delivery should include families in planning, honouring their knowledge, and understanding their value system; this requires work at the system level. Protocols for family and community involvement when diverse clients encounter the system should be clear and mandated so that cultural and religious differences are not constructed as risks but understood within the clients’ perspective. However, ensuring that clients understand the concerns from child protection is equally essential. This way of working will slow decisions down and therefore require considerations for timelines mandated by the ministry and individual agencies.

Further, risk analysis ignores the relational aspects of working with families, focuses less on support, and frequently leaves workers alienated from their work with families (Featherstone et al., 2018). The relational aspect of child protection work is vital to families and communities. In chapter four, I expand on the community as an essential aspect of how Muslims organize their family and social lives. A service system that focuses on individual responsibility and narrows on perceptions of risk management work with individuals negates the collective community capacity. Giving credit to alternative parenting styles, engagement with the community, and accessing religion as a means of protection rather than risk will have a definite impact on Muslims receiving services.

Developing a model of practice that considers the needs and values of Muslims will require assessment strategies that show more faith in families and a questioning of the system where social and political powers work against them. As discussed, using risk thinking with

Muslim families and other diverse groups has its challenges, challenges that are compounded by the socio-political context in general and agency culture. Simultaneously, government control of the risky subject and cutbacks on supports also impact work with Muslim families.

Southern Theory

Southern theory examines the domination of Northern bias in knowledge production in the social sciences (Connell, 2007). Like other postcolonial perspectives (e.g., Razack, 2008; Said, 1978) the lack of consideration for alternative knowledge systems and frameworks are highlighted by drawing attention to power and hegemony. Southern theory focuses on the production of knowledge in the context of neoliberal globalization and offers a critique on the Northern bias of mainstream social science, which is ubiquitous, colonial, and imperialistic. This theory points out that little or no consideration is given to worldviews, paradigms, or methods different from Western Eurocentric culture; anything different is weak and irrelevant (Connell, 2007). In highlighting the global politics of knowledge, Connell (2007) argues that applying theoretical formulations from European countries to southern postcolonial countries reifies the intellectual generation of knowledge (and makes it exclusive to or at least centred in) to the Global North.

Connell (2007) considers knowledge from the South or peripheral societies to be “either ignored, excluded or pressed into service as a ‘data mine’ for metropolitan theory – as examples of ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’ or ‘pre-modern’” (p. 45–48). As such, Europe and North America dominate social theory and present a world viewed from a particular perspective of Eurocentricity, limiting discourses and narratives. Connell concludes that the North ought to learn from the South in knowledge production. Since Indigenous knowledge goes far beyond the academic setting, the data fields that are ignored are the ones with the most Indigenous

knowledge. In Guyana, for example, the aboriginals are excluded from academic knowledge production, but they produce and pass on knowledge of their culture and practices. This is evident, particularly in the feminine domain of childbearing and rearing. The oral traditions of the great mothers in such Indigenous settings are considered old wives' tales, and this type of Indigenous, inter-generational knowledge that belongs to the people who embody it is often dismissed. Similarly, in the West, traditional parental practices and traditions can be framed as child protection concerns. The expectation for children to participate in families by contributing to family functioning is not always understood. In child welfare services, the term "parentification" implies a forced reliance on a child to take on roles, usually caregiving, for others in the family.

How might child welfare scholars and practitioners learn from a comparison between the different systems and build solutions that bridge services and restore power and self-determination to those accessing services? Southern theory in child welfare will center Islamic discourses on child protection concerns in two ways. First, it will highlight concerns that, when given consideration, Islamic knowledge can offer solutions. For example, in Islamic practice, sexual activities outside of marriage, alcohol and drug use are *haram* (prohibited) but constitute individual freedoms in the Western view. In contemplating such topics, arduous questions are raised about the differences in knowledge paradigms, particularly in areas of religious prohibitions and individual freedoms. Second, aside from the theorizing of knowledge, what might implications be for child welfare practice? Being service users or providers who occupy the margins in any social service agency carries risks. Considering the power knowledge relationship in child welfare, both power and knowledge (that is legitimized) belong to the worker. But clients' knowledge is embedded in their worldview and will benefit them in multiple

ways. The inclusion of their knowledge will give legitimacy to practices and enhance social inclusion because they are no longer seen as “other” but as a group with a contribution to make when it comes to the safety and protection of their children.

Seeking knowledge is considered a sacred duty for Muslims; the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said, “Seeking knowledge is compulsory on both male and female.” Since the prophetic era, knowledge production, generation, and dissemination have evolved into various disciplines in Islamic sciences with documented chains of transmission. Welch (2012) outlines the rich history of Islamic knowledge centers across medieval times and geography, including centers of higher education in Baghdad, Cairo, Alexandria, South Asia, and the Arab world, indicating the broad reach of knowledge in the Islamic context. The hegemonic nature of Western knowledge and the de-legitimization of Islamic law create a situation where Islamic knowledge is discounted and only exists in the margins of discourses. Southern theory adds a useful analytical tool given the context of this study and Ahmad’s (participant) reliance on Islamic values in his role as a father.

Process and Conclusion

The child welfare system in Ontario is a complex system with some degree of centralization at the ministry level and autonomy at the agency level. As detailed in chapter three, the system is viewed as oppressive, sometimes punitive, to marginalized clients. The child welfare literature discusses marginalization using many aspects of client identity, including race. However, there is little on religious diversity in general. The omission of the Muslim population from discourse and research has left a void in theory, policy, and practice relevant for Muslims who receive child welfare services in Ontario. While this research considers the experiences of a Muslim family, it focuses on a frameworks to understand a complex system with an equally

complex segment of the population. Each theoretical framework used has specific explanatory and analytical purposes applied to understand the process of child welfare in Ontario for Muslim families. To critically examine the available literature and analyze what is central to answering my research questions, I use risk theory, CRT, Southern theory, and neoliberalism alongside AOP. The literature reviewed and the participants' stories are filtered through a critical perspective that examines ways in which Muslims involved in child welfare are marginalized by the system, how they function as families, and how they receive and experience services.

The use of anti-oppression practices is obvious, as it appears to be the most significant way in which critical thinking is entering into child welfare. Its use will, at the least, illustrate the loopholes of its application and show that despite its' prevalence in child welfare literature and policies and mandates in Ontario's child welfare system, child welfare services continue to be oppressive. As iterated, it is a model that in many ways, limits examination of child welfare to the responsibility of workers. While providing some training for workers may enhance their interactions with clients, it does very little to address the systemic barriers. CRT and intersectionality highlight another aspect of the problems that surfaces in child welfare service provision to minoritized clients. With a concentration on the intersection of race and other aspects of identity such as newly migrant, religiously different, and culturally different, we see the Muslim client at a point of multiple axes of marginalization. Oppression and privilege are not absolute and fixed, and as the case for the Muslim client is examined through the intersectional lens, acknowledging workers' constraints when working within rigid organizational structures. Neoliberalism and risk theory show two sides of impact for marginalized clients. On the one hand, the austerity of neoliberalism leaves families with little support and on the other hand, risk theory perceives clients in ways that criminalize them.

An anti-oppression model that includes the centring of marginal knowledge (Southern theory) while maintaining focus on the multiple intersections of religious, racial, and ethnic minority (intersectionality) within the modern risk society allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexities of Muslims who need child welfare services. Triangulating CRT, Southern theory, and Risk theory with an anti-oppressive framework, I focus on specific issues that concern Muslims. Using CRT, I focus on Muslims within the dominant political discourse and explore axes of oppression. Risk theory spotlights an evaluation of Muslims as “risky” within the child welfare system. Southern theory explores and applies Islamic knowledge, thereby centring Muslims’ understanding of child protection and safety. Putting these together, I adapt and formulate a social justice perspective that can be applied to develop new and different methods where the emphasis is on collaborative solutions rooted in compassion and humanity using family and community support to create safety and protection.

Stories of the Self – What is My Theory?

“Most areas of intellectual life have discovered the virtues of speculation and have embraced them wildly. In academia, speculation is usually dignified as theory.”

Michael Crichton

Perhaps the position of a Muslim researcher in a Western research paradigm is a paradoxical one. In the doctoral program, we are frequently told that a “theoretical perspective” is necessary and provides a good tool for framing social work research. There are many to choose from. One can easily get lost in the array of theories and theoretical perspectives in social work literature. At the beginning of my search for theories that fit, I felt like I was traversing a swamp with scary things hidden in wait to pounce on unsuspecting intruders. I felt unable to navigate the swamp. The map to avoid danger and stay safe seemed like it was written

in a foreign language. The codes were inaccessible. Now, do I stop? Turn back? If I continue, will I be devoured? Will I lose my identity and become one of the minions that keep the swamp alive?

And what of people who are more grounded in an alternative paradigm that cannot fit with the Western construction of “acceptable” theories? I feel like I have the imposter syndrome. Not in the same way as my PhD colleagues, for many of them, imposter syndrome is a sense of inadequacy despite their success as students and emerging scholars. For me, imposter syndrome has a unique significance. I feel more like an imposter because there is not much that is familiar to me; so little reflects my identity in the secular hegemonic spaces and ideas.

I don’t have the luxury of thinking fully from an Islamic perspective because the dominant secular perspectives prevail in academia. And this feels like a structural barrier. My “theories” springing from Divine revelation and grounded in theology are rarely welcomed in this space. Sometimes I seem to be speaking a “foreign language” in a voice that cannot be heard. And sometimes I hear a foreign language and cannot understand it. Can I be heard and understood? Do I belong?

It seems to me that I have more in common with other systems or frameworks of looking at the world. I find comfort in the First Nations’ perspectives of connectedness, collectiveness, community, and caring. This is familiar. This familiarity brings on another anxiety. In attempting to conform, am I misrepresenting my participant? This man whose life was turned upside-down by his experiences yet was willing to participate in the research. Will I find space for his voice that speaks for both of us with clarity and conviction?

The struggles I encountered to find a participant was only resolved when I belonged. I belonged, not in academia, not as a child welfare professional, nor as a researcher. I belonged

to the family's world. I heard their voices, their heartbreaking pain of separation, their tragic stories of oppression, their disturbing concerns of injustice. And then I hear their voice of hope, and of trust and reliance on Allah (God). And somehow, they trusted me with their story. How do I filter it through paradigms and frameworks that don't seem to fit? How do I retell their story in their voice? Can I convey their trauma and their hope in Allah?

Chapter 3: Literature Review

International child welfare literature is complex in its evolution, content, and context. With an extensive body of literature that includes multiple perspectives for understanding the functions of the system, some Western states regulate the system on a model of family responsibility where children are protected in their homes. A family service system includes a shared responsibility by family and state where risk or harm to a child is not a requirement for services. Such a system is more common in France, Sweden, and the Netherlands (Cameron & Freymond, 2006). A similar system of community caring emerged in Indigenous communities around the world where extended family and community are integral to care and protection of children in their families (Cameron & Freymond, 2006). Comparable classifications of the system have been made by other scholars, for example, several authors contributed to “*Child Protection Systems: International trends and orientations*,” a volume edited by Gilbert, Parton and Skivenes (2011) which outlines societal responses to child welfare issues in ten countries and noted varying approaches.

In contrast, child protection services emerging within the neoliberal context are more punitive than supportive (Parton, 2016). While offering little support for families, such approaches adopt a strong censoring attitude that is reserved for those unable to meet a minimum threshold for adequate care and protection within the family. This approach is common in England, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clarke, 2011, 2012; Cross, 2008; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Gosine & Pon, 2011) as neoliberal governance expands austerity measures. Literature suggests neoliberal policies of governance are essentially against social welfare, except for short-term and emergency interventions, and is accompanied by censoring and management of the state (Mullaly, 2010). Further, it is well

documented in the literature that racialized families are more likely to be targeted for interventions in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada (Barn, 2007; Clarke, 2012; Clarke et al. 2018; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020).

My literature review critically appraises and evaluates literature relevant to protecting children, and more specifically to shed light on my research questions set out in chapter one. Racialization, as well as other vectors of marginalization, is relevant to Ahmad's experiences as is the specific context of Ontario. Also relevant is literature on Islamic concepts of safety and protection that has informed Ahmad and Elnaz's interactions with their children. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section appraises the literature on racialized and minoritized clients and communities involved with child protection services and is primarily focused on the United Kingdom and North America. I included a review and examination of the literature on child welfare with racialized and minoritized clients in Ontario in this section. In the second section, I focus on child protection and safety in Islam and within Muslim minorities in the West.

Minoritized Communities and Clients - a Challenge to the System

There is much information dating back over 50 years in child welfare literature on challenges faced by racialized and minoritized clients receiving child welfare services (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020). For example, the racialization of the system is well-documented in several Western countries including the United States, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand (Cénat, et al., 2020; Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clarke, 2012, 2018; Cross, 2008; Dettlaff & Boyde, 2020; Gosine & Pon, 2011). Chand (2008) reviewed several documents from a government initiative in the UK dealing with reforms and concludes that more must be done to address the needs of ethnic minorities and immigrants. In the United States, Black children are overrepresented despite national attention; disproportionality is also evident for other minority groups, including

Native American and Latinx children (Dettlaff & Boyd 2020).¹⁶ In Canada, Indigenous children are highly overrepresented (Blackstock et al., 2020) with an estimated 52.2 % of children in care being Indigenous (Census Canada, 2016). Further, children of African descent constitute 41 % of the children in care in the Toronto area, while they are a mere 8 % of the population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Advocates and professionals believe that the overrepresentation extends across the province (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2017). These troubling statistics reflect worries that the system is not only unable to meet the needs of minoritized populations but targeting them at disproportional rates. Further, evidence of racialization within the system is well documented (e.g., Chand & Thoburn, 2006; Clark, 2012; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Trocmé et al., 2004).

Although these concerns are noted by scholars, disproportionality and disparity of racialized clients is a continuous trend that remains evident over the years (Cénat et al., 2020; Cénat et al., 2021 Clarke, 2018; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Harris, 2014). Disproportionality is used to understand differences in the percentage of racial groups in the general population when compared to the percentage of the groups in the child welfare system. While disparity refers to the unequal treatment of groups at all stages of involvement including intake, court and in care situations, thereby leading to poorer outcomes.

At the structural level, Barn (2007) suggests the necessity to understand the socio-political context and the impact of race on service provision, while Clark (2012) considered literature on disproportionality in several Western countries and demonstrated the continued

¹⁶ Latinx is an American neologism that indicates the gender-neutral form of referring to people of Latin descent and is being used by contemporary scholars in their discourses on child welfare.

racialization of child welfare services. General themes of criminalization of racialized and minoritized populations are also apparent. Like multicultural policies that ignore the historical and socio-political contexts of racism, child welfare policies and practices adopt assimilation/integration practices while ignoring power issues (Barn, 2007). As such, the voices and experiences of minorities are discounted, and minority culture and religion are used as means to label and alienate clients.

Ten years after Barn, Davidson et al. (2017) suggest that policy approaches to address racialization and systemic barriers continue to be biased and focused on “troubled” people. Building on a previous project in England, Davidson et al. (2017) completed a four-nation comparative empirical study in the UK to examine the complexity of inequalities in child welfare using perspectives from other disciplines, including psychology, political theory, and moral philosophy. They advanced the idea that a significant distance exists between societal and political decisions and child welfare work with individuals and families and submit that the disconnect is a possible explanation for inequalities not being effectively addressed. Another likely explanation is a gap between expectations to meet the needs of the disadvantaged in society, and the political decisions that are inevitable in neoliberal-leaning states.

Fuelled by neoliberal policies that champion shrinking government intervention, poor families including First Nations peoples, immigrant, and racialized families are often left to struggle on their own. The general theme of poverty governance is concerned with managing the poor to become subordinate and disciplined subjects (Soss et al., 2011), and as Barn (2007) points out, the sociopolitical context and race are salient elements in child welfare practice. As a result, interventions are punitive and directed at management of struggling families rather than providing reasonable assistance to them (Parton, 2016). While paying little attention to structural

barriers that emerge from poor socioeconomic factors, the system remains unhelpful and adversarial to marginalized groups. Bywaters et al. (2018) discuss austerity policies on the emphasis of individual responsibilities for parents in poor neighbourhoods in England, and Woodward (2021) examine similar issues in the United States, further emphasizing structural barriers including poverty.

Austerity measures diminished support, but the other darker side of the story has its root in colonization. For example, state abuse is evident in Canada's treatment of First Nations families (Bennet et al., 2005). This historical fact manifested again as reports of separation and detention of young children taken from their parents at the country's southern border made headline news in the United States. Detaining children is not new; the United States federal government has the capacity and facilities to detain children (Heidbrink, 2018). While sanctioning state abuse, as in the case of Canada's First Nations history and the US continued practice of separating children from their parents, child welfare continues to focus its 'protection' efforts on mostly poor and racialized families. State abuse leads to the perpetuation of inequalities; this observation provides a substantial argument to critically analyze the role of the state as indicated, rather than on parents' deficit in protecting children.

Racialization in Child Welfare

Racialization, generally referring to the process that labels groups because of biological, and more recently, other group attributes such as religion, and nationality being constructed on the premise of white superiority (Dei, 2008). Race is used as a political tool to differentiate between people and manage privilege by essentializing groups and discounting voices of racialized peoples (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Discourses on race and racialization are at the forefront of academic, public, and professional dialogues. To consider

possible reasons and explanations for racialization in child welfare, I turn to Barn, a British child welfare scholar whose work on race, ethnicity, and migrant families in child welfare is significant. She states: “To understand child welfare policy and practise with regards to minority ethnic children in Western industrialized societies, it is crucial to examine the socio-political context and the salience of race as a factor in nation-building” (2007, p. 1342). Further, Dettlaff and Boyd, (2020) writing more recently and from an American context argue “that internal and external causes of disproportional involvement originate from a common underlying factor: structural and institutional racism that is both within child welfare systems and part of society at large.” (p. 253). These arguments suggest that racism and racialization of groups have a considerable impact on how such groups experience child welfare services: an argument substantiated by the disparity and disproportionality literature. Of note is the fact that little has changed, and trends continue to reflect the problem of racialization in child welfare.

The literature on First Nations and Indigenous peoples in Canada provides another way to explore the socio-political context of racialization in child welfare. The Indian Act of 1951 permitted provincial laws to be applied to First Nations people on reserves, resulting in the “sixties scoop” where a large number of Indigenous children were removed from their families and placed in residential schools (Bennett et al., 2005; Trocmé, et al., 2004). The experiences of Indigenous peoples provide an example of racist policies with unintended and intended results thereby contributing to an overrepresentation of this group. Indigenous children continue to be overrepresented in the child welfare system with little improvement on conditions or outcomes for Canada’s First Nations peoples (Blackstock et al. 2020; Blackstock, 2016).

A concerning problem for Indigenous communities also emerged because of the “assimilation policies” in education that made it impossible for Indigenous communities to keep

their language and culture. Inequalities perpetuated due to lack of funding for housing, health care, and education and assimilation policies forced First Nations communities to adopt Euro-centric standards. This reinforced oppression has been a subject addressed by many scholars over several years. For example, Bennett et al., (2005) and Trocmé, et al., (2004) shared concerns about this almost 20 years ago. Yet the situation continues; the spending policies on Indigenous child welfare services exacerbated inequities for children and families (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013; Blackstock; 2020). More recently, Blackstock et. al, (2020) examine how structural and systemic barriers trigger overrepresentation of out-of-home care for Indigenous families in Canada and Australia.

From her important research into Canada's First Nation Communities, scholar, and activist for First Nations Children, Cindy Blackstock has an established record of research and advocacy on prevalent issues in First Nation Communities. She is from a First Nation community and is an authority on Indigenous peoples within child welfare in Canada. Blackstock (2016; 2020) suggests that despite policy modifications, not much has changed for First Nations families. As a result of failures at both federal and provincial levels, circumstances have largely remained the same. Blackstock discussed the Canadian government's shortcomings:

The disconnect between the directive and provincial child welfare laws on the one hand, and the actual needs of First Nations families on the other, resulted in profound service inequities, particularly in the range of services intended to keep children safely at home (i.e., prevention services and least disruptive measures). The lack of prevention services meant that social workers had limited resources to stabilize family situations and prevent First Nations children from coming into child welfare care. (Blackstock, 2016, p. 291)

Other child welfare scholars agree that the possibly half-hearted attempts of the federal government's spending policies failed and exacerbated the situation for Indigenous children and families (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Turning to another racialized community, we see that despite years of research, trends of marginalization and racialization have not changed for African communities.

Documenting concerns for African communities in the literature are abundant and longstanding. To begin in the US, Chibnall et al. (2003) prepared a document for the United States Department of Health and Human Services outlining concerns before 1995. Yet, over twenty years later, Lee (2016) discusses several detrimental effects of the ongoing racialization of Black families in the United States. She uses an ethnographic study that included interviews with judges, attorneys, child welfare workers and parents and highlighted concerns that child welfare's role legitimizes and reinforces stereotypes of Black women and families by blaming and labelling them in particular ways. She affirms the consequences of the racialization of Black families and draws a parallel between patterns in child welfare and criminal justice (incarceration) that perpetuates distrust in Black communities. She states:

I see the child welfare system both as a part of the process of racialization, having a role in recreating racial categories and the meanings associated with them, and as a racial project that recreates inequalities. (p. 277)

Examining the issue of race, Lee (2016) also argues that there are striking parallels between the criminal justice system and child welfare. She notes that the child welfare system itself reinforces an ongoing process of racialization that perpetuates stereotypes, disrupts parental care, and justifies state supervision. With this role of reproducing racism, the system has moved away

from supporting families and instead reinforces stereotypes and biased views of racialized populations.

Turning to the African Canadian population, we see similar concerns of systemic racism. Clarke's (2012) research on Afro-Caribbean service users in Toronto is an example of a Canadian study that engaged the community to explore these users' experiences. She identified a similar worry to Lee (2016) pointing to race as a factor that affects service provision and poverty, low income, lack of support, and misinformation or little information of CAS services as barriers faced by service users. Clarke and her colleagues (2018) developed a framework for service delivery to African communities that is grounded in anti-Black racism (ABR). This theoretical grounding allowed for analysis similar to Lee's (2016) discussion by connecting state politics, as Clarke et al. (2018) state:

We believe that ABR is that pervasive, overarching climate of attitudes, beliefs, institutional practices, and policies that are embedded in Canada's White supremacist history and culture, that denigrate people of African descent, and is manifested in various forms of structural violence and racialized inequities in multiple social systems, including child welfare. (p. 44)

Clark and her colleagues (2018) analysis gives a much-needed theoretical context for discussions and research on how racialization occurs within different processes of child welfare interventions. They also make an argument for critically analyzing the role of the state in putting children at risk and reconsidering the parental deficit model.

Cénat, et. al (2021) discuss overrepresentation as a "key concern" of the child welfare system in the US, some European countries and Canada. They attribute this to sociodemographic factors including race, suggesting that racial discrimination is closely linked to

overrepresentation. They argue that it is difficult to separate biased child welfare practices from structural factors, including race and socioeconomic status and being Black and suggest that families will continue to experience disadvantages because racial disparity is present at all levels of decision-making processes and within other systems connected to child welfare.¹⁷ This is important to consider, given the multiple systems that were triggered in Ahmad's family's experiences with the system.

Another recent Canadian study by Mohamud et al., (2021) also points to disparity for Black families. Using Critical Race Theory and Anti-Black racism, they highlight structural barriers within various systems including schools, law enforcement and the criminal justice system while identifying links to immigration policies and income disparities. At the same time, we have scholars like Dettlaff and his colleagues suggesting that there is a need to abolish the child welfare system because it is grounded in racism (Dettlaff et al. 2020). These scholars represent some strong voices contributing to the discussion on racism as inherent in child welfare practice in North America. The focus on race and racism in the system has now gained momentum; I think this is related to the social and political voices garnering attention for racism in the larger community. Dumbrill (2006) talks about a pendulum effect that manifests in response to political and social issues, usually these are connected to issues related to child deaths and other protection concerns that receive media attention and become part of popular discourse.

¹⁷ When considering scholars work that reflect their community, I stick to their terminology, Cénat, et al. Uses the word Black while Clarke uses African Canadian Communities. The same method is applied with Indigenous/First Nations communities.

So far, I discussed racialization as it pertains to two groups that suffer specific consequences of child welfare involvement because of their identity as First Nations and Black communities. Turning to other groups, I look at clients who are racialized with other intersections of identity including immigrants and refugees.

At the Intersection of Ethnic Minorities, Immigrants, and Refugees

Ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees have much in common and are usually grouped on the (sometimes inaccurate) presumption that being new to their host countries has a particular set of challenges. Along with racialization, immigrants and refugees must contend with the added element of newness to their host countries, which brings with it a specific set of challenges. In some cases, the literature refers to both groups as “newcomers,” and in other cases “minorities,” thereby grouping a diverse set of people with little to tie them together. Chand (2008) establishes this issue with the change and variance in terminology in child welfare literature, making it difficult to pinpoint a clearer definition to describe minoritized clients.

I acknowledge the above difficulty and struggle with the problem yet my working definition of ‘minoritized’ clients includes immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Of note is that there is an intersection of religion and culture in all the groups that experience discrimination based on perceived differences. Therefore, in this context, minoritized is the umbrella term that includes differences that are usually compounded and intersectional. While my discussion illustrates the research on racialization is longstanding and ample, there seems to be less focus on ethnic and religious minorities and refugee and immigrant groups. Nevertheless, there are overarching similarities with racialized groups for immigrants’ and refugees’ experiences in their interactions with child welfare services. Intersectionality can be used as a strategy to understand and describe different groups while considering umbrella factors such as

systemic racism. Drawing upon previous evidence that suggested minority families experience particular forms of disadvantage, Chand (2008) appraises government documents used as the basis for reforms in England and Wales. He highlighted the pathologizing of minority clients through cultural deficit, a perspective used “to intervene unnecessarily with minority ethnic families in child welfare matters” (p. 14). Chand’s reference to ethnic minority includes the three groups I identified above and is a starting point to reflect on the concerns for a broader conceptualization of “minority.”

Beyond representation, the literature suggests that minority children are treated differently as they move through the system. Keddell and Hyslop (2019) conducted a study where they examined the role of practitioners’ risk perceptions in ethnic minority families. They examine the complexity of inequalities that surface by considering the risk-bias debate which focuses on a higher risk of specific groups. This also includes those at the intersection of race or ethnicity and immigration status because of risk factors such as poverty and discrimination. On the debate’s bias side, Keddell and Hyslop (2019) argue that minority families are subjected to criminalization and unwanted state interventions and practitioners’ prejudice towards future harm may be skewed because of a bias based on an assumed relationship between ethnicity and risk. Although the study focuses on practitioners, Keddell and Hyslop (2019) suggest that differential treatment is only a small aspect of problems for racialized and minority groups. The intersection of immigrant or refugee status and race sets service recipients up for unique challenges in the system.

Multiple axes of oppression exist for new immigrants, including poverty, unemployment, and underemployment due to unrecognized academic credentials, (Lavergne et al., 2008). The link between poverty and immigration is clear and the literature highlights poverty as a common

factor for immigrants and refugees. The decline of new immigrants' economic comfort is another reality that impacts socioeconomic status and adds to the likelihood of immigrants and refugees living in poverty. Refugees face even harsher economic realities as they receive minimal government support and frequently find themselves dependent on a variety of organized religious communities and private social groups. Child protection is clearly linked to poverty and poverty dynamics impact the health and well-being of children and families. For example, Strohschein and Gauthier (2018) contend that "that poverty dynamics matter in different ways to child mental health" (p. 245).

Another source of stress for new immigrants and refugees is associated with social isolation. Maiter et al. (2009) note themes of financial difficulties, language challenges, struggles to provide for the family, and a sense of betrayal and hopelessness was reported by all the participants in their study that explored experiences of minority immigrant families receiving child welfare services. Expanding beyond financial and economic worries, Maiter et al. (2009) added layers of loneliness and isolation for immigrants and refugees. Despite such concerns having been identified and expressed, service responses are still not catching up to the changing demographic of child welfare service recipients, including those who are immigrants and refugees (Earner, 2007). Thus, the voices and experiences of minorities continue to be discounted, and minority culture and religion are used to label and alienate them. Dumbrill (2003) suggests that cultural differences are viewed as inferior and something that needs to be controlled within the system. The control is to align people to some form of acceptability. Barn (2007) highlights the idea that immigrants adhere to cultural patterns and beliefs often regarded as different and pathological. These views impact racialized and minoritized clients in their interactions with courts and placements when children are apprehended.

Placement and Court Involvement

Out-of-home placements are usually the most controversial and disruptive part of child welfare interventions. Foster care provides temporary and troubling experiences for children and their families. Frequently done through apprehension, which necessarily includes court involvement, the consequences for racialized clients become even more contentious. Like general child protection involvement, the literature reveals an overrepresentation of minoritized children in care. The number of Indigenous children in care in Canada is estimated at over 52.2 % while Indigenous children make up around 7.7% of the Canadian population (Census Canada 2016). Similarly, in the United States, data from the *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System*, (AFCARS) puts the percentage of African American children in care at 23% while the population is 14% (US Children's Bureau, 2020). The implications of these worrying statistics require attention on the in-care struggles for minority clients; an experience that the Ahmad family endured.

Waniganayake et al. (2019) conducted an exploratory study on maintaining cultural placements in Australia. During their study, they consulted with foster parents and caseworkers who were integrated into the cultural and linguistic diversities of the population they served. Their key findings included desirability for cultural matching, challenges defining cultural matching, and struggles with matched and unmatched placements. They stated that:

This research found evidence affirming the desirability of cultural maintenance in foster care placements. The [foster] carers and caseworkers interviewed believed that culturally matching the child, the carer and/or caseworker was helpful in nurturing children's sense of belonging and identity in relation to their cultural heritage. (p. 373)

It is important to point out that their study was limited to care providers and children; the biological families were not included. Nevertheless, the information is significant and substantiated by other studies that explore concerns for placement in intercultural settings. For example, Anderson and Linares (2012) conducted a study examining the impact of cultural dissimilarity between foster families and biological families based on ethnic background, country of birth, and language in the New York City child protection services. They found that placing children in culturally mismatched settings has health consequences and reported:

For depressive symptoms and loneliness and social dissatisfaction outcomes, dissimilar ethnicity between biological and foster parent surfaces as detrimental perhaps because they create in the displaced child a lack of belongingness which reduced the child's ethnic identity and social connectedness to the foster home. (p. 599)

Similarly, Degener et al. (2020) looked at transcultural placements for adolescents in the Netherlands and found that the youths experienced ambivalence, distanced themselves from their ethnic origins and told stories of wanting to have a sense of belonging to their origins. This is hardly surprising given the disruptive nature of child placement where children often lose regular contact with family and community.

As mentioned, the apprehension and child placement process include court involvement, which is intimidating, and often racial and minority clients are unprepared for the process. In the US, there is a failure to provide adequate legal representation for client Sankaran (2017). Sankaran (2017) argues that inadequate legal representation undermines justice, impedes parental cooperation, harms children, and wastes public funds. This is true given the fact that parents involved in such proceedings are powerless and disadvantaged in many ways including poverty, while the state has “a vast array of resources to prosecute a child welfare case, including

trained lawyers and caseworkers, access to records about the family, and the availability of investigatory tools” (Sankaran, 2017, p. 12).

Centred on legal case examples, Sankaran’s (2017) arguments highlight systematic oppression in general, while Jivarji and Herman (2009) examined judges’ decisions about minorities. To understand how differential treatment towards minorities unfolds in courts for English child welfare cases, Jivarji and Herman (2009) examined judicial decisions, focusing on children’s religious and cultural diversity. Drawing from various theoretical and analytical sources to make their case, they reveal remarkable insights into the court system in England. They focus on an analysis of Christian normativity in judicial deployments and found that judges reflect orientalist, racist and Christian prejudices to Muslims, Jews, and Sikhs. Further, Hawkes (1999) noted that court cases are the most contentious and minoritized cases are more likely to end up in court. As can be seen from Jivarji and Herman’s (2009) work, prejudices against religious minorities are present. Brophy et al. (2003) also suggest minoritized clients are viewed as more pathological when compared to other families with the same or similar proceedings. The obvious implication here is that minoritized clients are singled out as different implicitly. In the following section, I pivot to examine child welfare in the specific context of Ontario.

General Overview of Child Welfare in Ontario

The focus of my research requires a closer investigation and understanding of child welfare in Ontario to properly assess the experiences of Muslims. In this section, I provide the background through a review of welfare practice in Ontario starting with a brief historical overview before moving to the current child welfare practice. I reference sections of relevant documents from the child welfare community, Ministry of Children, Community and Social

Services (MCCSS), and Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society (OACAS) to highlight the system's responses to the changing demographics in Ontario.

The first Society established in Ontario with a child protection mandate was the Toronto Children's Aid Society (CAS) in 1891 (Albert & Herbert, 2020). Subsequently, other regions in the province established similar agencies. There are currently fifty-one CASs, including thirteen Indigenous, two Catholic and one Jewish agency (MCCSS, retrieved, January 2021). Apart from these, there is an organization in Toronto called Muslim Children's Aid and Support Services. Established in 2004, the stated vision of the organization on their web page is "To be an overarching child protection and support agency for Muslims in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) by empowering Muslim communities to improve their familial, social, and cultural well-being."¹⁸ CASs are affiliated through OACAS, an association that provides advocacy and government relations, public education, training, information and knowledge management, and event planning (OACAS, 2018). Although agencies function independently with initiatives that reflect organizational culture and priorities, the system reflects Eurocentric roots (Cameron et al., 2001).

To ensure that the mandate is maintained, agencies are responsible for investigating allegations of abuse. As such, a child protection worker has the right to enter a home without a warrant, and should it be deemed that the child is unsafe, he or she can be removed without the parents' or caregivers' consent. Although a legal principle, the "best interest of the child"

¹⁸ This organization does not have a child welfare mandate but works in collaboration with Toronto CAS. Details of the organisation's mission and vision is available on their website:

<https://muslimchildrensaid.com/>

becomes controversial in child welfare practice when the context of a child's well-being is viewed within the limits and lens of a modern Western framework, one that prioritizes state intervention over family and community care. Best interest of the child yields intervention strategies that reflect individualism and consider the child as the client. As a result, investigations are designed to assess child safety in terms of immediate risks and undermine consideration of family disruption.

Initially proclaimed in 1985 under the MCCSS, the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA, formerly CFSA) has been periodically revised and updated. As currently set out in the Act, section 35 describes Children's Aid Societies' functions, which include investigations of allegations and protection of children when required. Making references to the *Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, this Act governs legislation for child protection services. The preamble of the Act on systemic racism and principles of inclusion states the following:

Services provided to children and families should respect their diversity and the principle of inclusion, consistent with the *Human Rights Code* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Awareness of systemic biases and racism and the need to address these barriers should inform the delivery of all services for children and families. (Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, Part two.1)

The Act clearly recognizes and articulates that both community support and preventative services are necessary for marginalized communities. Preventative measures are indeed linked to human rights and freedom, and a focus on addressing systemic racism is explicit in the Act. Yet, as reflected in the literature review and my fieldwork, service users continue to experience racism and there is an appalling lack of community resources.

As part of the revision of the Act in 2015, MCCSS engaged a diverse group of stakeholders including service providers and recipients to provide input. The group proposed several considerations that reflected all the stakeholders' concerns. Three relevant considerations as stated in the report outline their recommendations:

Prevention and Support Focus: Families, youth and service providers alike reflected a common belief that the CYFSA should emphasize prevention and support, before resorting to more intensive intervention- or protection- based approaches.

Access to Services and Supports: Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of equitable access to high-quality, culturally appropriate, and community-based services.

Diversity (e.g., Ethnic, Racial, Linguistic, Religious, Cultural or Gender Identities) and Vulnerable Groups: Participants noted that the CYFSA does not reflect the diversity of Ontario, and that this creates barriers for children and youth to remain connected to their racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic identities. Participants also suggested that certain child and youth populations require specific attention and additional support due to historical or social issues and that their experiences should be better reflected in the CYFSA (Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017; Part one, Purpose and Interpretation).

Notably, diversity in the above document includes religious diversity; religion is rarely mentioned outrightly in government documents. The amended Act does not mention religion when considering diversity. Again, preventative, and supportive services are recommended by the group before more intrusive measures. It remains unclear where and how these recommendations are implemented or what progress has been made because of them.

The current iteration of the Act came into effect in 2018 and was once more amended in 2019. In the latter version, the Act outlines its main purpose as “to promote the best interest, protection, and well-being of children,” and other purposes provide guidelines on how services should be delivered. Of particular interest is paragraph 3:

Services to children and young persons should be provided in a manner that,

- i. respects a child's or young person's need for continuity of care and for stable relationships within a family and cultural environment,

- ii. takes into account physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs and differences among children and young persons,
- iii. takes into account a child's or young person's race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, disability, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression,
- iv. takes into account a child's or young person's cultural and linguistic needs,
- v. provides early assessment, planning and decision-making to achieve permanent plans for children and young persons in accordance with their best interests, and
- vi. includes the participation of a child or young person, the child's or young person's parents and relatives and the members of the child's or young person's extended family and community, where appropriate. (Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017; Part one Other Purposes 3.)

Theoretically, the Act is concerned with the inclusion of Canada's diverse populations. As seen in ii, the Act specifies that the child's physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, and developmental needs are to be considered. In this section, the Act clearly outlines multiple intersections of identity, but religion is omitted. The Act speaks to spirituality; however, spirituality cannot be equated to religion as secular spirituality is a personal quest that does not contain the institutional and organized practices and beliefs of formal religion. For Muslims, religion is transcendental, formally documented, and a means to practical guidance for everyday life. So, like other religions, spirituality is but a small component of the whole.

Further development in 2020 saw the Ontario government release "strategies to redesign" the province's child welfare system. The new initiative's goal and scope are based on five strategic pillars focused on early interventions and permanency (Child Welfare Redesign, 2020).

Working in partnership with the child welfare, residential and community-based services sectors to build a coordinated range of services that strengthen families, focusing on community-based prevention and early intervention services. These will be high quality, culturally appropriate and truly responsive to the needs of children, youth and families. (Child Welfare Redesign, 2020; Vision, Goals and Outcome)

The language and contents are similar to earlier iterations of previous versions. It appears inclusive and considers community and preventative methods in service delivery. It would be interesting to see how this new initiative advances the child protection system in Ontario in ways

that address systemic barriers and change outcomes for racialized/marginalized service recipients.

The notion that risks can be assessed and controlled became a cornerstone of child welfare, and this knowledge remained within the domain of the professionals tasked with objectively “assessing risks” to which children are exposed. This was done with the intent of conforming to a Western standard of child safety using the Risk Assessment Model (RAM). RAM is an investigation model mainly based on workers’ assessment (with supervisory consults) and is a predictive assessment method focusing on past and current concerns to mitigate future risks that can impede children and families from non-dominant family structures (Barry, 2007).

Workers are aided in decision-making by the Ontario Child Protection Tools Manual, which consists of RAM tools using a standardized approach. RAM places child safety as paramount in determining intervention strategies and makes little reference to the family and community context of the child. In contrast, there are existing cultural and religious paradigms that do not give supremacy to the child’s rights as a stand-alone concept but consider the child’s needs within the broader context of family and community. The best interest of the child is thus reflected within the context of family and community. Promoting the best interest of children as enshrined in law is therefore very culture-bound, as it is premised on the model of social control exercised by government agents in professional services to people identified as others. Othering is frequently used as a premise for labelling groups as undesirable and requiring them to change to meet societal standards even when it goes against their core cultural/religious beliefs and practices. Limited by mandated approaches of RAM tools and Eligibility Spectrum Coding (ESC), a numerical/alphabetical rating system used to determine levels of risks and in turn intervention strategies with families, erase the relational aspects of client engagement. The

application of tools such as RAM and ESC require workers as agents of the state (with mandated power) to complete assessments in an allegedly objective way with strict regulations on timelines that inhibit actual collaborative work with families.

The child welfare language in Ontario appears to be evolving. For example, there is a move away from the “transformation” to “modernizing,” which appears to be the new catchphrase in documents and training material. Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) is a 5-year project funded by the government as part of the accountability framework to modernize the system. The initiative is intended to allow CASs to share information across the province and to better monitor case files compliance and agency spending (MCCSS, retrieved March 18, 2020). This project is a directive under the CYFSA and requires Children’s Aid Societies to collect and report identity-based data for children and families. In keeping with the CYFSA’s purpose of promoting best interest, the directive states, “wherever possible, services to children and their families should be provided in a manner that respects cultural, religious and regional differences” (MCCSS, retrieved March 18, 2020). Interestingly, religious difference is mentioned here, but race is not, I believe this demonstrates a superficial understanding of intersecting oppressions and disconnected ideas about addressing more complex needs. I speculate that the politics behind this discursive shift to modernize the system is to maintain appearances that the ministry and OACAS are considering equity and diversity issues at the leadership level and expecting CAS organizations to follow in the modernizing efforts. Two recent developments supposedly aimed at improving practices in the field are the establishment of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) and the privacy legislation, Part X, of the newly amended CYFSA.

Part X of the CYFSA was launched in January 2020 and sets out rules for collecting, using, disclosing, and protecting service user information. Information is collected by a standardized tool with tick boxes where clients respond to questions about their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship and immigration status, and religion. There is no clinical report attached to the information and no way to add clarifying notes. This is an intrusive practise with populations facing systemic racism because it requires them to disclose information that may cause them harm. For example, disclosing information about immigration status can result in legal troubles or discontinuation of government assistance. Further, some of the questions asked to gather information lack cultural sensitivity and may evoke discomfort. For example, questions about gender at birth and sexual preferences are harmful to people who want to remain private about their sexuality.

OACAS is “The provincial clearinghouse for Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario on information regarding emerging trends, child welfare best practices, service tools, child welfare education, regulations/legislation, and knowledge inquiries.” (OACAS, 2020). The information collected by OACAS is used to prepare education and training for the province’s frontline employees and support staff with families in their communities (OACAS, 2020). As stated here, OACAS is concerned with training for direct client contact. The new worker training is mandatory for child protection workers and consists of training modules that supplement social workers’ education and train them as child protection workers with skills to use the tools required for completing assessments.

Grounded in an anti-oppressive framework, OACAS works toward equity and anti-oppression and provides training designed for child welfare workers specifically addressing marginalization and institutionally oppressive practices (OACAS, 2020). It is hoped that this step

changes the outcomes for families and specifically address the overrepresentation of marginalized peoples in contact with CAS. OACAS's ambitious program outline includes assessing the interplay of social structures and institutions on individuals not belonging to the dominant group with the intent to transform everyday practices. Yet, few practical changes focused on embedded racism within the system and workers are expected to do more with the same tools. For example, the use of standardized tools for investigations and assessments continues to be the bedrock of practice when engaging clients therefore limiting workers to a one-size-fits-all approach.

Different Models Similar Outcomes for Children and Families

Like most public institutions, child welfare agencies respond to political and social pressures in tandem with public opinions, a phenomenon dubbed as the pendulum effect (Dumbrill, 2006). In the early 1980s, the least intrusive measures directed at family preservations were the preferred models of engagement and best interest included considerations of the child's attachment to the family (Cameron et al., 2001). Neo-conservative politics that surfaced in the 1990s shifted emphasis to individual responsibility, and risk assessments became the primary tools for child welfare interventions (Cameron et al., 2001).

In attempts to consider practice issues, a collaborative system based on differential response (DR) emerged.¹⁹ The idea behind DR is to use a tailored response to assess details of intake referral and information specific to the family. Different from risk assessments, DR tends to focus on underlying causes of child welfare involvement and ways of strengthening family functioning (Fuller et al., 2015). Factors assessed to determine if DR is appropriate for any

¹⁹ DR is also termed alternative response/multiple systems response in the child welfare literature.

family include the severity of abuse, history of child welfare involvement, and motivation of parents to cooperate (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2006). The primary goals of this type of assessment are not verification of protection concerns; instead, it is based on an accessible service delivery model (Cameron & Freymond, 2015) that is linked to the availability of resources, creating partnerships, and co-locating with community services.

The Ontario Transformation Agenda was launched in Ontario in 2006 with a child welfare mandate of helping families and engaging communities. It resulted in more training for workers with agencies making attempts to change the way they serviced clients. However, the implementation of alternative models depends on individual agencies' commitment, budgets, and culture. While few agencies sustained community involvement and were present in neighbourhoods, others quickly returned to meeting ministry requirements within defined timelines.

I was a front-line worker when DR was introduced and remember the training well. An initiative undertaken by the agency to work better with communities led to a co-locate at the Kiwanis club and two local schools. This initiative was met with optimism by many workers, and I opted to be a half-time community worker at the Kiwanis club (no full-time worker was assigned). This position lasted less than six months because of a lack of commitment to the process. The agency was unable to sustain a model of service delivery that had a preventative aspect and partnering with community and quickly returned to the protection model.

Signs of Safety (SOS), another collaborative approach developed by Edwards and Turnell (1997) seeks to include all stakeholders in child protection work with a strength-based focus on keeping children safe by engaging family and community. In this method, planning allows for comprehensive risk assessments by expanding beyond risk to consider strengths and safety done

through “mapping” as the main formal procedure. SOS is a brief solution-focused method and interviewing approaches include scaling for safety. Mapping, a way to document past harm and consider future danger, is linked to traditional risk assessments. Although the model incorporates family and community, there is a level of paternalism residing with professional knowledge and at times mute the voices of children and families (Turnell and Edwards, 1997). Like other alternative approaches, SOS needs organizational commitment since it requires time to engage families and communities.

Kinship and customary care are natural options for placement of children common in many non-Western cultures and religions, including Islamic systems; but these are relatively new to child welfare (Testa, 2017). Kinship and customary care approaches are positioned as progressive attempts to serve Black, Indigenous, and other minority communities. However, it is also a response to the rapid increase in placement requirements in recent years due to increasing apprehensions (Danzy & Jackson, 2018). Reconciling informal kinship with the legal aspects of formal care has its challenges and differences include perceptions that kinship placement populations are an uneasy fit for traditional child welfare (Danzy & Jackson, 2018).

Looking After Children (LAC) is an approach premised on the idea that children in care are entitled to the care any responsible parent would provide to ensure all a child’s needs are met (Kufeldt et al., 2000). Recall that CASs in Ontario are independent under the OACAS umbrella. Each agency functions within the parameters set out in its mandate and variations exists in actual ways of operating.

While the response to improve child welfare provision may seem positive, they do not address underlying issues that contribute to the systemic barriers faced by minoritized clients. The argument that child welfare has been unresponsive to racialized and marginalized clients in

Ontario has been clearly presented above by scholars such as Blackstock (2009; 2016) Cénat et al. (2020; 2021) and Clarke et al. (2018). Considering the focus of this research is Muslims experiences in Ontario, and the Ahmad family's adhere to Islamic beliefs and practices, it is important to appraise child protection and safety within an Islamic framework.

Protection and Safety of Children in Islam

One can observe a coherent and straightforward outline of parental responsibilities and community involvement that offers protection and safety for children in Islam's legal discourse (Almihdar, 2008; Furber, 2013; Ibrahim, 2015; Nyazee, 2003). The method of keeping children safe described below dates to the early Muslim community. Considering what may be applicable from the Islamic system of protection and safety of children in the current project, I discuss child protection from an Islamic perspective. As Muslim communities began to spread and later become part of a diaspora, some of the practices were replaced with cultural norms. However, as is demonstrated in the following section, the idea of keeping children safe and the roles of extended family and community remain critically important in Islam.

Quranic messages and Prophetic examples of child safety and protection established in the prophetic era formed a basis of caring for children that were passed on to subsequent generations. In early Islamic history, one can find explicit directives of parental duty from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* that were modelled by the Prophet (peace and blessings be with him) and orally transmitted to subsequent generations. The parent-child relationship is mentioned in close association with belief in God because of the considerable responsibilities placed on parents to care for and protect children. Divine advice contained in the Qur'an to the Prophet (peace and blessings be with him) established that not committing *shirk*²⁰ and not killing one's children (c

²⁰ *Shirk* is associating partners with God and is considered the only cardinal sin in Islam.

60, v12) as among the list of items for believers to observe in their adherence to the Divine order. Further, verses such as "killing them [your children] is a great sin" (c17, v 31) and "when the infant girl (who was) buried alive is asked for what crime was she killed? " (c 81, v 8) are all addresses from God aimed at instructing the believers to be mindful of their duty to children.

Muslims consider the Prophet a living example of the Qur'an who provided a link between the text and the lived experience and this is underscored by the sense of the Divine in all created beings. Prophetic examples of the treatment of children demonstrate kindness, gentleness love and mercy as central themes of negotiating relationships and there are many narrations of the Prophet's behaviour to this effect. His relationship with his daughters exemplified great courtesy, love, and respect. To illustrate with an example, when the youngest of the Prophet's daughter visited him (peace and blessings be with him), he would stand up to greet her and seat her where he was sitting even when in meetings with notable men. Concerning the Prophet's relationship with children in general, Ay (2010) argues that the most remarkable example of his humanity was in his interaction with children.

The Islamic narrative of protection of children identifies a communal responsibility, the blessings of caring for and maintaining orphans are linked to proximity to God and the Prophet (peace and blessings be with him). Further, *Sharia* includes a legal system of protection and safeguard for children developed by jurists dating back to the medieval period that outlines the safety and protection of children in Islam. In his article "*Islamic Law and the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child)*", Nyazee (2003) suggests "Perhaps, no legal system in history has been as strong on the protection of the family and children as Islamic law" (p. 66).

Sharia aims to ensure and enhance welfare (in both this life and the hereafter) and considers objectives that are necessary to establish coherence and order.²¹ Child protection issues fall under the third objective of *Sharia*, the requirement to preserve posterity. Protecting lineage and maintaining families are associated with divine duties and provide a path to seeking God. Not only is the preservation of family considered important, but also the existing generation is obligated to leave the world in better order for generations to come. This concept is set out methodologically in a manner of priorities starting with harm reduction taking precedence over obtaining good (Furber, 2013).

Ibrahim (2015) considers the legal equivalent concept of best interests of the child from a historic perspective and offers conceptualization by pre-modern Muslim jurists. He observed that the best interest of the child “established the centrality of the child’s welfare in pre-modern juristic discourse,” (p. 859). Jurists consider both *hadanah* “custody” (which indicates nurturing and care) and *wilayah* “guardianship” (which pertains to protection, education, discipline, and acculturation) when making decisions for the care and well-being of children (Almihdar, 2008; Ibrahim, 2015). Custody and guardianship rights are subject to several conditions to secure the best interest of the child. The conditions of custodians and guardians are carefully considered and include legal capacity, trustworthiness, and the ability to provide care (Almihdar 2008).

Through the centuries, jurists in various geographical regions and cultural contexts have used Islamic principles derived from *Sharia* to set expectations for the protection of children (Almihdar, 2008; Olowu, 2008). There is a body of scholarship from law and international rights

²¹ For an explanation of *shariah*, it’s relevance and implementation see section seven in chapter four.

that focus on protecting children in Islam. A legal outline with moral codes that encourage parents to protect children and ensure physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being is established in Islamic law (Almihdar, 2008; Islam, 2015). Of note here is that spiritual well-being is essential and tied to one's eternal life, something understood by Muslims as imperative and surfaces in educating and encouraging children towards a connection with God. Islamic perspectives also stress the importance of compassion towards children as highlighted by many (e.g., Almihdar, 2008; Hashemi, 2007; Islam, 2015; Ibrahim, 2015; Olowu, 2008; Saeidi, et al., 2014). It is therefore an erroneous belief that Muslim values and practices are likely to be an explanation for mistreatment of children.

As we have seen, Islam's legal system for protection and guardianship meets international standards and many Muslim majority countries have ratified the CRC. So, there is no contradiction between the West and Muslims; shared concerns for the protection, care and safety of children are similar. However, while the language in CRC and legal systems suggest that rights and freedom are guaranteed, in Islamic law freedom is inalienable and is a gift from God but the legal language links rights and responsibility. Freedom is understood within the context of rights and the holder of rights has a responsibility towards the source of rights. Therefore, the responsibility to care for children is from God and accountability for the responsibility is imminent.

Since the rights of the child are articulated in tandem with their responsibilities, expectations for children are common and viewed as an essential component of family dynamics. Mutual responsibility is highlighted as exemplified by the prayer, "My Lord, have mercy on them [my parents] as they nurtured me when I was small" (c.17 v.24), a prayer acknowledging parental care for children. Islamic law as detailed by scholars (Almihar, 2008; Giladi, 1992,

2014; Hashemi, 2007; Islam, 2015; Ishaque & Khan, 2015; Saeide et al., 2014) is a useful mechanism for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Within Muslim communities, immediate family, extended family, and the community should ideally come together to be “the village” that raises the child.

Child Protection in Muslim Communities

While the foregoing section lays out the ideal and theoretical foundation for protecting children in Islam, there are lapses in practices in Muslim countries and communities. In attempts to bridge the gap between Muslim ways of understanding child safety and protection, Hutchinson et al. (2014) report on a roundtable methodology research that brought together various stakeholders to discuss child protection in Islamic contexts. They noted that “Despite clear guidance from the Qur’an and *Sunnah* about the principles of child protection in Muslim communities, local customs and socio-political contexts can challenge application” (p. 395). Therefore, profound differences exist among Muslim countries and between Muslim communities worldwide in terms of recognizing, defining, and responding to different types of abuses. Stories of Islamic rules condoning harmful practices are a part of the common narrative, particularly where many cultural customs are viewed as “religious practice.”

Using Saudi Arabia (SA) as a specific example of a Muslim country, we note that SA signed on to the CRC with a reservation that if a conflict exists between a Convention article and Islamic law, Islamic law takes precedence (Almihdar, 2008; Almuneef & Al-Eissa 2011). The literature on child protection issues suggests an increasing awareness of child maltreatment and protection concerns (Almuneef et al. 2014). Although previously considered a rare problem, due to compounded factors of children’s vulnerabilities to sexual abuse, the impunity of perpetrators and taboos on issues of sexuality, maltreatment as a social issue has only surfaced within the last

decade (Almuneef & Al-Eissa, 2011). The most common forms of abuse are those of neglect and physical abuse, with varying levels of physical injuries reported. Serious physical and sexual abuse cases are reported to law enforcement officials and can be prosecuted in court based on general by-laws (Almuneef & Al-Eissa, 2011). The legislative parliament (*Shura* Council) is engaged in reviewing the Child Rights and Protection Act, an act aimed at the protection of child rights following the CRC (Almuneef & Al-Eissa, 2011). While this example highlights a particular country, there seems to be general trends in moving towards the West for defining and addressing child protection issues.

Child abuse for Muslims in the West reveals similar worries to those that surfaced with Muslims internationally. In November 2010, five Asian (Muslim) men were jailed for a series of sex offences related to the “grooming” and abuse of young girls in England. Police reports and intelligence indicated that offenders were not prosecuted, and that child abuse takes place on a vast scale (Tufail, 2015). Although Tufail (2015) makes convincing arguments that support the racialization of the reporting and policing around this incident, what is clear is that it did occur. Closer to home in Ontario, a teacher at an Islamic school in northeast Scarborough faced accusations of child abuse for molesting a young boy (Doucette, 2018). The increasing number of young Muslims in Ontario seeking help from a helpline for sexual abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, and other issues has prompted officials to extend the helpline’s operation hours (Ghonaim, 2018). Aside from cases that receive media attention, I am aware of abuse of Muslim children in the community. In my child protection role, I have had cases involving Muslim children whose families did not protect them.

I make this point to demonstrate that despite the clear guidance on child safety and protection, Muslims like other communities, sometimes end up in situations where abuse and

neglect occur. When this happens, communities need to respond as these issues require attention for all concerned. For Muslims in the West, the context of migration and differences in the sociopolitical climate impact how Muslims experience the system. To understand the needs of Muslims in the West involved in child protection services, O’Leary et al. (2020) acknowledge some contested positions between Western protection and Muslim communities that “creates complexities for social workers intervening in Muslim communities where the basis of their intervention is primarily informed by a non-Muslim paradigm or occurs in secular legal contexts” (p. 1201). Such complexity was indeed noticed in Ahmad’s case. The family was singled out because they adhered to Islamic guidelines and although in my view the case did not meet the criteria for verification of child abuse, they faced harsh consequences. They were censored for attempts to maintain their obligations to impart religious and spiritual guidance, an equally if not more important, provision for their children.

Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on racialized and minoritized populations in the West and in Muslim majority countries, concerns that stand out and overlap are related to structural barriers including poverty. A unique characteristic in the West is the racialization of the system, which is reflected in Ontario. Despite efforts made by MCCSS, OACAS and individual child welfare agencies in Ontario, there are still concerns of disproportionality, disparity, and racialization. Although the CYFSA’s reform emphasizes diversity and inclusion, policies and practice remain centred in Eurocentric ways of working. This reflects two problems; the endemic nature of racism in Canada and the way child welfare is organised to disregard structural barriers.

At the intersection of newness to Canada (immigration/refugee), child welfare and Islam – three major marginalizing factors, each with a subset of its separate intersections – stands the

Muslim client. Both culturally and religiously different in a system where different cultures are considered inferior (Dumbrill 2003), along with being assessed by workers whose understanding of Islam is minimal present significant challenges for the Muslim client. Providing services for Muslims is certainly a complex matrix of variables that includes how service providers view Muslims and how Muslims experience the system. In chapter four, I focus on Muslims in the Canadian context to present a fuller understanding of intersections of marginalization for the Muslim population in Canada.

Stories of the Self – How “Being Muslim” Shows up in Child Welfare

“I ask myself how I can exist in two such different worlds in one day.”

Paulo Coelho

Two very different worlds indeed! Child welfare and Islam. Where do these worlds intersect? Who resides in the intersection and how do they manage to keep their balance? It must be connected to and engaged with the welfare of children. Child welfare is self-evident and reflects a concern with the welfare of children from a beneficent perspective. Islam, on the other hand, is not so self-evident although it is a major world religion. It means different things to different people. One popular construction of Islam in the West is that it is synonymous with terrorism. In this construction, Islam is bent on the destruction of liberal democracies and cares little about the welfare of children. However, there are other ways to understand Islam and explore how it brings moral and ethical conduct to the forefront in the welfare of children.

The Prophet Muhammad (upon him Peace and Blessings), the example which Muslims strive to emulate, strongly encouraged caring for the orphans and needy children. Referring to the Prophetic way, an example was left for us in the Prophet’s care of Ali, his young cousin who lived with him. The story of Ali in the home of the Prophet is a story of love, patience, preference

of the child to himself, and nurturing care. Love and care were so established and secured that the child experienced joy in his presence. Then, we Muslims know of the narration where the Prophet told his companions that the closest people to him in the next world would be the orphans, so take care of them and the poor and needy.

Inspired by my world of Islam, I entered the world of child welfare as a foster mother. While fostering, I experienced the child welfare system from the perspective of a Muslim. I soon learnt that being a foster parent was different from my previous ways of caring for children. Children placed in my home because of apprehensions were distressed, in tears, and not wanting to be in my home. As I recall, these encounters were complicated, disheartening, and traumatic for the children.

I remember two young brothers, age eight and four, placed in my home. They were afraid and heartbroken. They didn't know why they had to leave their home and when they were going back. The older one stood by the window for three days. Crying, sobbing, pleading. Looking out onto the street. Asking when his mother will come to pick him up. The younger one stood next to his brother. Perplexed, confused and afraid. Timidly attempting to console his older brother. I could not even offer these children a phone call to their parents; that was against the rules, not allowed. As a mother, it was easy to put myself in their parents' position. Words fail to convey feelings. How are their parents surviving without knowing where their children are or who is caring for them? More importantly, how does this align with my perspective? How does it reflect the Prophetic model?

Regardless of the worry and concerns surrounding my fostering experiences, I continued in child welfare, as a child protection worker. As a Muslim and an immigrant, I experienced the child welfare system differently. In the office, the Anglo-American, authoritarian, patriarchal

work environment had little support for my religious and cultural differences. The one way of “doing the job” was by using the power and authority inherent in the system, an ‘essential tool’ for interacting with clients. Being in the field was no different, despite my “power” as a child protection worker.

Various complaints, such as difficulties understanding my accent, my inability to speak English, and my lack of knowledge about Canada and Canadian laws, were frequently brought to my supervisor’s attention with clients often requesting a worker change. In one incident, a 14-year-old client – with great self-awareness and insight – called my supervisor to request another worker, because he considered himself racist and hated Muslims. I was removed from the case partly because of his request, but mostly because the group home supervisor had concerns for my safety. Apparently, the youth had been explicit about what he would do to me. In this and many other instances, the power so often associated with the child protection worker gave way because of my Muslim identity. The young man’s response was not an isolated incident; his behavior seemed socially acceptable and reinforced – his request was met.

As I continued this child welfare journey in the academic realm, I encountered the two worlds of Islam and child welfare most profoundly. While there is a prolific body of literature on the protection and safety of children in Islam and in child welfare – these exist as separate, disconnected, distant from each other with minimal points of conversions and intersections. Yet, central to both is the concern for children’s well-being. Being a Muslim and working in child welfare continues to be a place of liminality. A place where I am marginalized because I am a Muslim. Nevertheless, living in these two different worlds is inspiring and I hope that the conversation will continue at many levels for people in either world concerned with justly caring for children.

Chapter 4: Overview of Islam and Muslims in the Canadian Context

Like all major religions, Islam is complex and exists in social, geographical, and political climates that produce iterations of “being Muslim.” In the global and Canadian context, diversity within Islam is a reality reflected by different practices, beliefs, and groups. The Canadian Muslim population is a microcosm of race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and religious affiliations found within the larger global Muslim community. Further, Canadian Muslims are diverse when considering religious beliefs and practices, social and economic circumstances, and education and professionalism. As a result, the Muslim population must be understood as a diverse group while acknowledging commonalities shared by the larger group that impact their sense of being and belonging to the Muslim community.

Despite differences, Muslims share a common stigmatized identity (Moghissi, et al., 2009), an identity marked by stereotypes of Muslim men as terrorists, and Muslim women as oppressed (Razack, 2008). As part of these attributed identities, Muslims, particularly those who can be easily identified, are impacted by Islamophobic trends. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the Muslim diaspora in the Canadian context with the intent to demystify Muslims and Islam. I discuss group diversity and the shared identity of Canadian Muslims and reflect on stereotypes and stigma faced by Muslims regularly in various contexts of social interactions. I also introduce briefly Muslim (Islamic) ideals on the function of family and the protection of children. This lays the groundwork in part for engaging with the intersectionality of being a Muslim and receiving child welfare services.

As outlined in the literature review, there are multiple and complex reasons for child protection services to intervene with families. Knowledge and understanding of marginalized groups become essential for compassionate and helpful services to such groups. This research is

not a study of Islam, but rather an exploration of equitable service provisions for Muslims receiving child welfare services from the state institutions with the power to remove children from their families. It is anticipated that the information provided in this chapter is helpful to understanding and building on service provisions that protect Muslim children and families and accommodate their rights to practice their faith in Canada.

I start this chapter by focusing on Islamic ideals in family and community to establish prerequisite information inherent in Muslim communities for child protection professional. It is crucial for child welfare professionals to grasp basic concepts of Islam when engaging with Muslim communities. The second section of the chapter focuses on Muslims in the Canadian context by exploring their engagement with their Canadian identities and the context of Islamophobia as a factor that affects and challenges Muslims globally and locally. In the final part, I reflect briefly on my story as a Muslim Canadian in the “*Stories of the Self*” section.

Islamic Ideals of Family and Community

My conceptualization of “Muslim” for this research project includes anyone who self-identifies as a Muslim regardless of ethnic or racial identity, sect, or degree of adherence to Islam. The reason for keeping with the Prophetic tradition of an inclusive *Ummah* is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with him).²² He advised that since no one knows the heart of another person, anyone who identifies as a Muslim is

²² *Ummah* translates as “community” but the Quranic concept of *Ummah* is different than a community with geographic or ancestral ties. It is the word that best describes Muslims as a meta-community with connections to Islam and is most likely the space where universality of Islam is applicable.

accepted as such. The Prophet (peace and blessings be with him) is reported to have chided one of his companions who did not accept someone else's verbal affirmation of belief in God based on suspicion of the person's sincerity. Given this Prophetic example, a person is regarded as a Muslim if they say so. Nevertheless, the commonality of Islamic beliefs and practices does not imply homogeneity, instead it recognises diversity.

Diversity is interwoven and generally celebrated in Islamic history. Over the centuries, Muslims maintained their cultural, regional, and ethnic practices, culminating in today's diversity throughout the Muslim world. In considering the impact of religion on individual adherents, the theological content of any faith regulates, in some measure, the social behaviour of a believer (Kazemipur, 2014). Moghissi et al. (2009), note that religion cannot determine all aspects of one's life and that ethnic, regional, and class divisions have pronounced impacts, particularly at a familial level. Muslims share a common stigmatized identity (Moghissi et al., 2009), an identity marked by stereotypes of Muslim men as terrorists and Muslim women as oppressed (Razack, 2008).

Despite the diversity, Muslims share a set of fundamental beliefs known as *Arkaan al-Eemaan* ("the Articles of Faith"). It includes belief in one God, His Prophets, His Angels, divinely revealed scriptures, accountability to God, and the existence of life after death. The beliefs are grounded in five established pillars that manifest as practices; they are:

1. *Shahada* is testifying to the oneness of God and the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with him). It is pronounced on one's acceptance of Islam and is repeated daily as part of the ritual prayer (*salah*).
2. *Salah* translates as "to communication" and refers to the five obligatory daily ritual prayers of Muslims.

3. *Zakah*, which translates as purification is the obligation on Muslims to give at least 2.5 % of their wealth annually primarily to care for those in need.
4. *Sawm* is fasting that is prescribed for Muslims during the 9th lunar month of Ramadan.
5. *Hajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca, is an obligation on Muslims who can afford to and has the physical capacity to perform this rite at least once in their lifetime.

Although there is a consensus on these tenets of faith, historical differences among Muslims in the legal interpretations of the Qur'an is evident. However, the *Shahada*, testifying to the oneness of God and the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace and blessings be with him) is a unifying factor. It is pronounced on one's acceptance of Islam and is repeated daily as part of the ritual prayer (*salah*). *Sunni* Islam is known as the largest credal school of thought, which comprises the majority of Muslims (85 to 90 % of the Muslim population).²³ *Shia* Islam comprises most of the remaining with three principal groups which include the *Ithna 'Ashariyya*, *Ismailis* and *Zaids*. There are other minorities in Canada such as the *Ahmadiyyas* and the *Alawis*. There are also sub-movements (e.g., *Salafism*)²⁴ and spiritual practices (e.g., *Sufism*)²⁵ that

²³ There are four distinctive legalistic Schools found within Sunni Islam; *Hanafi*, *Shafi'i* *Maliki* and *Hanbali*.

²⁴ *Salafism* (or *Wahabism*) is a conservative revivalist movement in Sunni Islam that advocates literal interpretation of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* on an individual basis with no strict requirement to adhere to *madhhab*.

²⁵ *Sufism* is an ancient traditional practice that can be described as Islamic mysticism. Sufi practices focus on inner (or esoteric) dimensions of connection to God through love and constant awareness of the Divine.

further inform and establish habits among the Muslim population. All these methodologies influence the everyday practices of contemporary Muslims to varying degrees.

As iterated earlier, Muslim individuals and communities are heterogeneous and there are copious ways in which Islam is manifested in nations, communities, families, and individuals. In general, families and communities serve as a space of safety and belonging where everyone has a chance to participate in life based on Divine wisdom. From Islamic law and practice, the definition of family, with roles for all family members, is developed based on the previously mentioned system and sources which includes revelation. This section sets forth a relevant ideal that pertains to Muslim families and communities by examining community collectivism, family structures and functioning, and protection of children in Islam.

Family Structure and Functioning in Islam

Muslims consider family as a cohesive social unit, inclusive of extended family members that are integral to maintaining strong communities (Dhami, & Sheikh, 2000). Family life centers on mutual responsibilities that are aimed at equity, the cornerstone of all social relationships (Qutb, 2000). A collective approach to the family with clear purposes and goals, the first being worship of God followed by preservation of family are inherent in Islam. One of the functions of *Sharia*²⁶ is the protection of progeny; further, there is an obligation to conserve resources and preserve the environment for future generations (Furber, 2013). Family interactions and the basis of family life are grounded in this thinking of God-consciousness and like all other aspects of one's existence in Islam, are primarily connected to the belief of and service to God.

Islam encourages *nikah* (marriage) as an act of worship that sets the stage for benefits in this world and the afterlife as well. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be with

²⁶ The concept of Sharia is elaborate in detail in the second section of this chapter.

him) is reported to have said, “Marriage is half of faith.” Regarding the purpose of marriage, a Qur’anic verse reads “And among the signs of God, is having created mates for you from yourself that you may feel at home with them, creating love and compassion between you. Surely there are signs in that for people who reflect” (c. 30 v. 21). Family is therefore established through *nikah*, an agreement between a mature man and woman freely consenting to marriage (Dhami, & Sheikh, 2000; Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001) and is the only legitimate avenue for procreation.

Frequently used in Arabic to refer to the family the word *Usra* implies immediate family, while *Aa’ila*, refers to immediate as well as extended family and *aal* and *ahl* refers to kin, relatives and in a sense go beyond the usual circle of extended family. Kinship ties of parents, siblings and other relatives as defined by the Qur’an and *Sunnah* include the extended family and determine two levels of relationships in a Muslim family using the definitions of *usra*, *aa’ila* and *ahl*. The first consists of the immediate family of husband, wife, children, and grandparents, while the second is of relatives on both sides of the family.

At birth, a child is considered in the state of *fitra*, a state of purity and likened to saints in their rank with God. It is often translated as the original human nature with innate goodness. This is not like the psychological concept of *tabula rasa*; it is more linked to sinlessness rather than lack of mental content as Muslims hold the position that there is a primordial connection between God and humans before existence in this world. Linked to this connection is an inherent awareness of right and wrong, moral and immoral. *Tifl*, the Arabic word for baby/child implies a child before the age of puberty as in the Islamic tradition “childhood” ends with the onset of puberty (Almihdar, 2008).

Puberty is the time when a child enters the transitional stage of preparation for adult responsibilities. By this time in an individual's life span, education imparted would have built a consciousness that places God and accountability to Him at the centre. From this centre, the individual and the family that nurtured them, integrate into the larger community connected to local mosques, communities and the global *Ummah*. The global *Ummah* is inclusive that allows for more local or sub-*ummahs* such as specific local mosques, Islamic school communities, Muslim advocacy groups, and *tarikas*.²⁷

Muslim Communities and Collectivism

Although ways of understanding family arrangements in Islam is frequently viewed as “traditional” when compared to a more modern, secular frame, the roles outlined above are not mutually exclusive. Individual responsibility is part of the collective as noted by Musah (2011) “individualism and collectivism are interrelated entities, both of which are needed and inseparable.” (p. 71). The collectivist approach to family and community in Islam is central to the practice of faith for Muslims in the West. However, the nuanced understanding of collectivism is not limited to a single process or activity. Musah (2011) describes the process of collectively as:

Continuing deliberate process whereby each individual in a society realizes as a matter of habit that is developed by the intrinsic forces, his contributory role, being always aware what he is obliged to do and what he has been prohibited to do and moreover what

²⁷ *Tarikas* are *Sufi* orders or schools with a special focus on spirituality, mystical thinking, and connection to the role of the spiritual leader. *Sufism* is usually defined as a mystical or interpretive understanding of Islam and is practiced in both Sunni and Shi'ite schools.

reward he will get if he does one thing and what punishment, he will invite if he abstains from doing or does the other thing. (p. 73)

The duality of individualism and collectivism serves families and communities where Muslims in the West create their sense of belonging as part of society.

Imams, elders, and religious authority figures have a role in these communities. They are generally respected, and mosque congregations can be close-knit groups or pockets of close-knit groups where individuals find their space. Imams and religious figures have a responsibility to the congregation, a responsibility to ensure people can meet their needs. Their assistance and guidance are often sought in medical challenges, financial difficulties, police involvement with families, difficulties at places of employment, issues with children in school and CAS involvement. In their roles as religious moderators Imams and other community leaders ensure individuals and families are integrated in their communities.

Islamic ideals of family and community are manifested in the thriving and diverse Muslim communities in Ontario. Besides local Mosques, organizations including the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM),²⁸ Islamic Society of North America (ISNA),²⁹ Islamic

²⁸ NCCM is an independent, non-profit organization that focuses on human rights and civil liberties, challenges discrimination and Islamophobia, builds understanding, and advocates for the public concerns of Canadian Muslims. For details see: <https://www.nccm.ca>

²⁹ ISNA is a non-profit organization in Canada that offers many programs and services to the Canadian community at large with a focus on to the betterment of the Muslim community and society at large. They foster the development of the Muslim community, interfaith relations, civic engagement, and better understanding of Islam. For details see: <https://isna.net>

Relief,³⁰ Muslim Resource Centre for Support and Integration (MRCSSI),³¹ Noor Centre,³² and The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)³³ were established to serve Muslims in integration and participation. I have included links to these organizations as resources. Some focus on community engagement (programs and partnership that engages civil society to promote inter-community understanding), while others locate religious obligations (for example the collection and disbursement of *Zakah* funds) as central. These organizations and groups reflect the complexity and variances in Islamic ideals but are committed to working within Islamic parameters to support Muslim individuals and families in Canada. The preceding section

³⁰ Islamic Relief is a charitable organisation guided by values and teachings of the Qur'an and the prophetic example (Sunnah) in providing services to the poor and vulnerable worldwide. Details can be found at: <https://www.islamicreliefcanada.org>

³¹ MRCSSI is a social services agency grounded in a Culturally Integrative Model which works to address the unique role played by the context of migration, integration, culture and value/belief systems in considerations for the collectivist cultural norms. For details on this social service agency see: <https://mrcssi.com>

³² Noor Centre in Toronto is a centre for Islamic practice and celebrating Islamic culture following the Islamic principle of respecting religious diversity. They promote the diversity of Islam in the Muslim community. For more information see: <https://noorculturecentre.ca>

³³ CCMW is an organisation with a focus on affirming Muslim Women's identity in Canada following the Islamic principles of rights and freedoms in a pluralistic society. For details on this organisation see: <https://www.ccmw.com>

discusses aspects of Islam and Muslims with a view of advancing a different, more compassionate imagination of Muslims rather than stereotyping and vilifying them.

Muslims in the Canadian Context

Historically, Muslims have been a part of Canadian society as early as the 19th century. By the 20th century, a wave of Muslim immigrants from various parts of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Africa, South America, and the Caribbean arrived and settled in Canada, thus increasing the Muslim population (Milo, 2015). More recent migration patterns include immigrants and refugees arriving from war-torn countries including Bosnia, Albania, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria (Milo, 2015).

Pew Research Centre (2015) projects a 35 % growth of the world's population in the coming decades, with Muslims expected to increase by 73% by 2050, placing them at 31.4% of the global population. The 2011 census estimated the Canadian Muslim population at just over one million. Canada's Muslim population has increased beyond projections as over 31,000 Syrian refugees arrived between 2015 and 2016 (Government of Canada, 2021). According to Statistics Canada (2011), approximately half of the Canadian Muslim population reside in Ontario. Figure 1 provides information on the progression of the Canadian Muslim population starting between 1971 and 2011.³⁴ It should be noted that the demographic trend indicates an increase in children and women, with the number of men being significantly less. This demographic translates to more single-parent households with a woman as the head of the home, which increases the chance of child protection intervention based on poverty.

³⁴ Statistic Canada collects demographic information for religious groups and affiliations every 10 years

Figure 1*Summary of the Muslim Population in Ontario*

	Muslim Population - Total	Non-Immigrants	Immigrants	Before 1971	1971 to 1980	1981 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2005	2006 to 2011	Non-permanent residents	2001 to 2011
Canada	1,053,945	294,710	720,125	8,720	44,900	68,230	210,680	184,840	202,745	39,110	387,590
Ontario	581,950	163,630	403,380	5,570	24,990	42,425	133,960	102,315	94,120	14,954	196,440
Ontario											
Women	513,390	146,125	351,395	3,465	21,930	31,480	103,140	50,855	89,395	101,990	191,385
Men	293,830	83,065	202,600	3,290	12,545	22,555	67,130	51,465	51,465	45,615	97,080
Under 15 years	158,980	115,875	40,295	0	0	0	3,705	15,470	21,120	2,810	36,590

Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2011

The diverse Canadian population negotiates their identities in different ways. Below, I review how Canadian multicultural policies shaped the way for cultural and religious inclusion, how Muslims balance their faith with being Canadian and important concepts that surface in their participation in Canadian society.

Civic Participation: Religion and Integration

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced multiculturalism as an official Canadian policy in 1971. By 1985, Canada's Multicultural Act included policies that outlined promoting full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all citizens regardless of their ethnic origins, racial identity, or religious affiliations (Government of Canada, 1985). The Multicultural Act sets the stage for Canada's policies on immigration and resettlement of immigrants and is

used to portray Canada as a pluralistic society with a focus on minority rights. There are various ways that multiculturalism gives expression to Canadian culture. For example, Dewing and Leman (2006) suggest that as a sociological fact, multiculturalism is descriptive (e.g., religious and cultural differences), and as a political ideology, it is more prescriptive.

The scholarship on Canadian multiculturalism does not reflect a unifying policy, ideology, or intellectual discourse; it is polarising. On one hand, Bannerji (2000) and Bissoondath (1994) argue that Canadian multiculturalism is dangerous and damaging to many minority groups since it is based on tolerance rather than acceptance; it is therefore unable to protect minority cultures. On the other hand, Adams (2008) contends that Canada's multiculturalism is successful at managing diversity. Others (Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Fleras & Elliott, 1992; Kymlicka, 1998, 2007) have written extensively about various aspects of multiculturalism. For example, Kymlicka (2007) points to the success of the policy arguing that multiculturalism promotes the integration of ethnic groups in comparison to countries that did not adopt the policy while Fleras (2009) suggests that the policy fostered the illusion of change and inclusion but did not disrupt patterns of marginalization. Further, Price (2012) argues that multiculturalism policies are based on an exclusionary, colonial past. Although the current narrative in politics is welcoming to immigrants, it is clear barriers for immigrants (and the cultural other) as citizens exist in our pluralistic society. The nation-building strategy is unclear on proposed supports for religious organizations or faith-based groups (Price, 2012).

Religious minorities continue to be marginalized and sometimes victimized. In 2011, the Canadian (Conservative) government implemented a policy that required Canadians to remove all kinds of face-covering when taking the citizenship oath reflecting Price's comment that "the multicultural Canadian is wary of the head-scarf wearing other who threatens Canadian

multiculturalism” (p. 2). A point substantiated by the number of Canadians in favour of banning the headscarf (Adams, 2007). The pluralistic Canadian narrative has a bleaker side in its relations to specific groups. Sharify-Funk (2011) discusses Bill 94’s ongoing tensions around visible cultural differences, “particularly in relation to Islam” (p. 137).³⁵ Within the atmosphere of renewed security, Sharify-Funk draws attention to “profound questions concerning identity, belonging, cultural boundaries and the challenges of community-building in a time of renewed security” (p. 35). Whether intentional or otherwise, the Bill cultivates social exclusion with barriers to civic participation for Muslim women. The masking of pluralist citizenship, with exclusionary models of identity discussed by Sajoo (2016) creates tensions for many Muslims with being Muslim in Canada and being Canadian. When translated to the lived experiences for Muslims, multicultural policies impact their sense of self and identity within the Canadian polity.

The Canadian Muslim Identity

Iterations of a Canadian Muslim identity might link Muslims to their nationality, ancestry, ethnicity or converts to Islam.³⁶ However, aspects of the individual as well as group identity are shaped by being Muslims in the West. Previously considered ethnic minorities,

³⁵ Bill 94, the first piece of legislation in North America that bans face-coverings from public and government buildings in the name of public security, which effectively denies essential services for Muslim women who wear hijab. For implications of this Bill, see: Sharify-Funk (2010) “Governing the Face Veil: Quebec’s Bill 94 and the Transnational Politics of Women’s Identity”: <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ijcs/2011-n43-ijcs0122/1009458ar/>

³⁶ According to a TSAS report, the increase of the growth rate in Islam can be attributed to birth rates and migration but there is an increase in non-Muslim Canadians converting to Islam. For more details check: <https://www.tsas.ca/publications/misunderstanding-muslim-converts-in-canada/>

Muslims are now a distinct religious group (Nash, 2012). Religious identity is increasingly being noted as a salient identity marker among Muslims, particularly in the aftermath of September 11 (Nash, 2012; Peek, 2005; Sadek, 2017; Verkuyten, & Yildiz, 2007). The evolution of identity is a complicated process, as Bhabha (2004) puts it “identity is never as an a priori, nor a finished product” (p. 51). Development of identification for Muslims based on attitudes of intolerance, being “Muslim” appears to be both an a priori and a finished product and can be easily understood considering the literature on perceptions of Muslims (e.g., Nash 2012; Razack, 2007; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014).

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2005) (OHRC) identifies characteristics that include name, dress, language, place of origin, beliefs, and practices as traits used to judge others as abnormal. Such identity markers (e.g., names on the no-fly list and *hijab*) have always been problematic for the Muslim community but continue to surface. For example, the conservative Anti-Terror Bill – with its economic action plan of close to 300 million dollars (Government of Canada, 2015) – allocated to law enforcement agencies to assist in the fight against terrorism, puts Muslim minorities in the negative spotlight with increased surveillance and sets parameters for negative identity characteristics. Further, focus by state actors on extremism and radicalization as explanations for terrorism compounds exclusionary practices for Muslims (Sajoo, 2016).

Arat-Koc (2005) argues, “following September 11, the definition and boundaries of Canadian national identity and belonging were reconfigured” (p. 33). The reconfiguration produced a socio-political atmosphere that defined Muslim identity as unquestionably not “the West.” Canadian Muslim women are excluded from the construction of Canadian (Bullock & Jafri, 2000). Canadian woman’s first world identity viewed as progressive, modern, and

liberated, contrasts to Muslim women usually identified as immigrants from third world.

Practices associated with Islam are seen as an importation of backward practices (Bullock & Jafri, 2000) with the result of reinforcing the Orientalist paradigm as un-Canadian (Bullock & Jafri, 2000). The question of Canadian identity involves social interaction and engagement with others, unsettling interactions that impact identity formation and security in one's identity.

Frequently believed to be unwilling to integrate, Canadian Muslims continue to be a significant part of the fabric of Canadian society (Kazemipur, 2014; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). Muslims' connectedness to Canada is comparatively greater than the national average (Environics Institute for Survey Research, (EISR) 2018). Muslims appear to be universally satisfied with the country's direction and report pride because they value freedom and democracy, multiculturalism and diversity and laws guaranteeing equality and human rights (EISR, 2018). Negative experiences with discrimination do not appear to impact Muslims' optimism and sense of connection with Canada and Canadian values (EISR, 2018). In terms of voter turn-out, EISR reports a high level of participation in last fall's federal election. However, Muslims' positive outlook and attitudes do not seem enough to impact their political and economic reality.

With comparable or higher education to immigrants from other religious minority groups, the economic integration of Muslims is below average (Kazempuir, 2014). Kazemipur (2014) suggests that levels of education, foreign credentials, work experience, language skills, or field of study cannot explain the economic reality of Muslims. The most relevant factor he proposes is the lower level of returns for education and experiences. Although the research reflects Muslim participation and civic engagement it also points to a particular form of discrimination based on religious identification. Part of the systemic problem of negative perceptions of Muslims comes

with a misunderstanding of Islam, what it means and how it functions in a minority context.

Discussed below is *Sharia*, a term that signals worries of extremism for many Canadians with a very different significance to Muslims.

Sharia

Despite Islam's worldwide diversity, accepted aspects serve as an aggregate common denominator (An-Na'im, 1990; 2008). According to Crabtree et al. (2016), Islam provides "a unifying characteristic" (p. 40). Beyer and Ramji (2013) affirm that regardless of ancillary differences, "a great many of the Muslims shared a standard conception of what exactly constitutes Islam" (p. 16). One such concept is *Sharia*. But what does *Sharia* mean to Muslims? Within the *Sunni* and *Shi'ite* legalistic schools of thought the conceptualization of *Sharia* is different. My explanation that follows with regards to *Sharia* reflects my basic, ordinary way of understanding *Sharia*.

From an Islamic perspective, *Sharia* translates as a "path or way to life giving water" (Afsaruddin, 2017; Rashid, 2012). *Sharia* is a comprehensive system of law and governance derived from scholarly methodological interpretations of the Qur'an and Prophetic texts, *Sunnah* with secondary considerations for *Ijma'*³⁷ and *Qiyas*.³⁸ *Sharia* "connotes a connection to the Divine through a set of unchanging beliefs and principles that orders life in accordance with

³⁷ *Ijma'* is the consensus of juristic opinions of qualified scholars on any given matter. The idea is that if most qualified scholars agree on something, then it is likely correct.

³⁸ *Qiyas* is a method of deductive reasoning using analogies to compare teachings from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* in addressing issues that surface as contexts changes. Both *Ijma'* and *Qiyas* are scarcely mentioned in much of the Western literature that speaks of *Sharia*.

God's will" (Feldman, 2008, para. 8). In presenting the work of Imam Al-Shatibi (a fourteenth-century *Sunni* Islamic scholar) Al-Raysuni (2006) expounds on the objectives of *Sharia*. He notes Imam Al-Shatibi clarifies that inherent in *Sharia* are considerations for attaining good, welfare, advantages, and benefits while preventing evil, loss, and injury to all of God's creation (Al-Raysuni, 2006; Attia, 2007).

Further, the classification of priorities delineated includes protection and freedom of faith, life, posterity (lineage and family), property (economic assets), and intellect/reason (Al-Raysuni, 2006; An-Na'im 1990; Attia, 2007). Thus, inalienable freedoms and rights like those articulated by Charters of Rights and Freedoms, are inherent in *Sharia* and bestowed by God on all humanity. Traditionally, *Ulema* working independent of the state, focused on different aspects of the *Sharia* while political power was the sultan's domain.³⁹

In actual meaning and practice, *Sharia* helps Muslims to navigate personal life including, the management of moral, spiritual, and ethical obligations in interactions with God-consciousness. Generally, Muslims are more familiar with *fiqh* than *Sharia*.⁴⁰ *Fiqh*, a system of Islamic jurisprudence, is required knowledge that instructs believers on personal practices, while *Sharia* is more concerned with a comprehensive system that includes public laws. My personal experiences reflect An-Na'im's (1990) argument that classical *Sharia* is inaccessible, even to

³⁹ *Ulema* refers to a group of Islamic scholars of high caliber with specialist knowledge in *Sharia* and theology.

⁴⁰ *Fiqh* translates as true or deep understanding. The technical meaning is in reference to Islamic law and jurisprudence as derived from the *Sharia* in matters of practice for worship and personal life.

educated Muslims. The distinctions and relationships between the two are not essential to this research with its focus on child protection rather than theology.⁴¹

An-Na'im (1990) affirms that public law of *Sharia* "has not been applied for many generations in most parts of the Muslim world" (p. 185) as drastic reconfigurations of Islamic states after colonization renders it impossible for Muslim states (politically) or societies (socially, religiously, culturally) to return to pre-colonial structures (An-Na'im, 1990). Therefore, it is inaccurate to consider *Sharia* as being enforced by the state in Islamic history (An-Na'im, 2008). Further, scholarship on minority *fiqh* outlines principles – including abiding by state laws – as a necessary condition for Muslims living as minorities outside Muslim lands. Further, Saunders (2012) reports, "when Muslims move to the West their interest in religion-based law declines" (p. 97). However, in the West, *Sharia* is used as a common symbol to increase fear and moral panic, garnering support for anti-Islamic audiences (Zine, 2018). This contributed to the trajectory of Islamophobia in Canada, which is of significant worry for all concerned with social justice.

Islamophobic Trends

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a highly acclaimed work on Western hegemony in its view of Eastern nations, has influenced academic areas including cultural and post-colonial studies. "Orientalism" is understood in the patronizing nature of Western attitudes towards the East (as reflected in art, history, and culture), where Muslims are often depicted as "exotic," "barbaric," and "uncivilized" with little regard for their cultural, religious and racial

⁴¹ Thalib, P. (2018). Distinction of Characteristics Sharia and Fiqh on Islamic Law. *Yuridika*, 33(3), 439-452 provides detailed information for interested readers.

differences.⁴² Said considers Orientalism as a powerful European ideological creation, a way for writers, philosophers and colonial administrators to deal with the ‘otherness’ of Eastern culture, customs, and beliefs while Huntington (1993; 2000) suggests conflict between civilizations to be the most salient conflict phenomena in the modern world.

Arguing from different perspectives, both Said, and Huntington attend to relationships between Islam and the West – however, while Said considers Western hegemony as the cause, Huntington characterizes Islam as the problem and argues that Islam is inherently opposed to Western societies. Sharify-Funk (2013) suggests that clash theory portrays Islam and the West as “Irreconcilable entities locked into ideological and sometimes actual warfare for decades if not centuries” (p. 444). If Muslims residing in Western liberal democracies are seen as “other” and treated as a “threat”, Islamophobia will continue to thrive.

The term “Islamophobia” was coined in France in 1925 (Allen, 2010) and became popular in the West through the Runnymede Report in 1997 (Trust, 1997). The report outlined Islamophobia as prejudices based on a distortion of Muslims and Islam with inherent assumptions including notions that Islam is inferior to the West, monolithic and static, patriarchal, and sexist, separate and “other” and an aggressive enemy (Trust, 1997). The term is still in a phase of emerging definition and includes global, political, historical, and racial dimensions (Allen, 2010).

⁴² These are common descriptive terminology used in Said’s work and picked up later by other scholars, e.g., Shereen Razak. They have entered the discourse as common words when discussing Muslims as others.

Despite a vast body of research and literature on Islamophobia, staunch opponents of Islam such as Richard Dawkins⁴³ and Sam Harris⁴⁴ (among others) call into question the legitimacy of the word, and by extension the existence of Islamophobia. Some headlines from Harris including, “Muslim extremism is not extreme among Muslims,” and “Islam is all fringe and no center” (Khan, 2015) illustrate Harris’s position quite clearly. Along the same lines, Dawkins argues that racism against a religion cannot exist, and that Islamophobia deflects legitimate criticism of Islam (Zempi, & Chakraborti, 2014). Such contentions are common in right and alt-right circles; they reinforce the dominant narratives of the “othered” Muslims.

The unquestionable consequences of Islamophobia on Muslims are real and can be deadly. Consider the example of the Christchurch shooting. This attack carried out by a single gunman on two Mosques in a quiet town in New Zealand resulted in 51 deaths and injuries to 49 – men, women, and children ranging from three years old to 71 years old – gathered at the Mosques for the Friday congregational prayer (Al-Jazeera, 2019). This event highlighted the process and the social anxiety that played out in one individual who may not have had the power to engage in any “exclusionary” practices but was so steeped in the ideology that he took matters into his own hands.

⁴³ Richard Dawkins is a widely celebrated atheist who criticizes creationism and religion very aggressively in his writing and speaking engagements. His 2006 best seller *The God Delusion* reflects his anti-religious perspectives.

⁴⁴ Sam Harris, also an influential atheist, is an anti-religion author and philosopher whose writing reflects his contempt for Islam considering it an impediment to modernity.

Aside from the obvious impact of death and physical injuries, social anxiety created by Islamophobia (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008) and its expressions outlined by Zempi and Chackrabarti (2008) is another worrying aspect. Like internalized racism, it affects Muslims on a psychological level due to overwhelming pressures of surveillance, hate crimes, and institutional discrimination. Muslims' self-awareness and self-conception are being affected in many ways as evidenced by emerging literature on the psychological impact of Islamophobia (Nadal, et al., 2012; Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Islamophobia is evident in many Western democracies. The Trump administration's travel ban, not totally but effectively a ban on Muslims has further escalated anti-Muslim sentiments. The rhetoric around the ban incites hate and is being translated to violence against Muslims since they are positioned as a threat to national security. Muslim citizens in other Western countries seem to be in similar situations. For example, Ahmad (2017) discusses a report on Islamophobia in Europe identifying 27 European countries where Islamophobia is on the rise. Additionally, national governments in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, openly refuse to accept Muslim refugees whom they portrayed as threats to public safety (Osiewicz, 2017). Further, Sajoo (2016) contends that while targeting militants is necessary, it is often coupled with intentional alienation of Muslim citizens within liberal democracies. Media plays a significant role in the proliferation of Islamophobia. The politicization of Islamophobia is obvious and easily demonstrated by The Trump administration's travel bans.⁴⁵ Language around

⁴⁵ On January 27, 2018, President Trump signed an executive order banning entry for citizens from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen (for 90 days) and publicly defended it as a means to protect America from terrorists.

the ban incites hate and is being translated to violence against Muslims since they are positioned as a threat to national security. Further, Sajoo (2016) contends that targeting militants is necessary but often coupled with the intentional alienation of Muslim citizens within liberal democracies. Public media, including radio, television, and other electronic social media avenues are the source of spreading a particular construction of Muslims.

Usually linked to negative images and narratives of terrorism and violence, Muslims are presented as risky (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). While the media do not determine peoples' thoughts (Bullock & Jafri, 2000), it certainly shapes public perceptions. Increasingly, research shows a negative representation of Muslims in mainstream media (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Poole & Richardson, 2006). There is much examination of the impact of media across the West, particularly in the UK, the US, and public media in some European countries, which favour anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric (Osiewicz, 2017). Nash's (2012) observation that the media has turned Muslims "individually and collectively into oddities or deviants from the norm of modern civilization" (p. 9), speaks to an inescapable identity constructed around antagonism for Muslims. The media's far-reaching audience as an agent for public discussion is complemented by global accessibility to social media. Internet and social media have central roles in daily life globally, and according to Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez (2016), religion in cyber-space has a strong and rapidly increasing presence. Whatever information is online is accessible on the internet can sway opinions based on "a new paradigm of power relations" (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016, p. 23). Social media is used with impunity by right and far-right ideologues to frame Islam as the antithesis to the West and call for action against Muslims. For example, in April 2018, an online manifesto was circulated declaring April 3, 2018, as *Punish a Muslim day*, this manifesto originated in the UK but was widely circulated (Joseph

2018). It outlined a points system that rewarded escalating levels of abuse against Muslims.

Unfortunately, such occurrences are more common than one might imagine and frequently constructed on the narrative of dangerous differences, including gender discourses stereotyping Muslim women as oppressed.

Gendered inequality and oppression are frequently at the centre of Islamophobic arguments. Afshar (2008) highlights that since the events of 9/11 “Muslim women find themselves at the heart of hatred and are targeted both in the media and in the public domain at large” (p. 119). In the global political arena, women like Ayaan Hirsi Ali⁴⁶ and Anni Cyrus⁴⁷ speak to their experiences of liberation from Islam in a very compelling way, giving legitimacy to their arguments that support the dominant narrative of Islam as inherently oppressive, particularly to women. They lend credence to the exclusion of Muslim women’s identities because their stories fit the dominant narrative. Positioned as legitimate voices of Muslims who have escaped Islam and are liberated by Western democracies, they are portrayed as models for Muslim women in need of liberation. Their voices are the ones that validate western feminism; however, the majority of Muslim women are excluded from such discourses. The gendered roles

⁴⁶ Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-born (Muslim) activist and politician whose opinions are controversial. She is widely accepted in the West as an authority on Islam, possibly because of her indigenous knowledge. Her main contention is that Islam is incompatible with Western democratic values, particularly as it pertains to women.

⁴⁷ Anni Cyrus is an Iranian-born (Muslim) woman, living in America. She rejects Islam and uses her personal experiences in Iran to discredit Islam, Allah, and the Prophet with vicious and aggressive language.

of Muslim women are often contentious and used in the media, law, and academia to portray stereotypes (Bullock, & Jafri, 2000; Dhami, & Sheikh 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Razack, 2007; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014).

Islamophobia in Canada

The Canadian socio-political atmosphere appears different from the past conservative leadership under Prime Minister Trudeau's Liberal government, but little has changed. Razack (2008) made a compelling case that perception of Muslims and the ways they are treated show assignment of permanent lower status, putting Muslims outside the bounds of citizenship while creating fear among Canadians. A climate of fear limits the fundamental rights of people identified as threats. Unprecedented powers of surveillance on Muslim populations are common (Razack 2008).

Muslim Canadians experience Islamophobia as a process with exclusionary practices. Although the stories shared are critical, they can be easily dismissed as one-time events with little impact on the general Muslim population. To what extent does the general Muslim Canadian population experience Islamophobia? Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) in partnership with the Canadian Muslim Forum (CMF), contracted Environics Institute for Survey Research (EISR) research associates to conduct a Canada-wide survey on multiculturalism and Islamophobia in Canada and concluded that Islamophobia is relevant to Muslims' experiences and prevalent in Canadians' attitudes.

Consider the case of Hassan Diab whose story reflects both the power of surveillance and media shaping of the narrative. An innocent man: educated, with economic means, suffered imprisonment for three years in a foreign country. Diab, a Canadian citizen and a sociology professor at Carleton University, was fired and extradited to France a day after the Supreme

Court dismissed his case under suspicion of terrorism. Leaving behind a pregnant wife and an infant child, Diab experienced our government's inaction as little was done to secure his release (Mazigh, 2018).

The negative representation of Muslims in Canada has impacts for Canadian Muslims. Sharify-Funk (2009) speaks of ways in which media did not simply reflect Muslim realities, "but also helped to shape them" (p. 73). Media reporting contributed to polarizing the Muslim community and undermining the civility of public dialogue (Sharify-Funk, 2009). Bans on the *niqab* (face veil), and *burkas* (complete cover) in public spaces and some professional settings are becoming a common theme in countries such as Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Taken as a symbol of Islam's backwardness and oppression of women *niqab*, *burkas*, and *hijab* represent gendered discrimination, religious fundamentalism, and self-segregation (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). Bill 94, introduced to the National Assembly in Quebec, allows for the refusal of services to women who wear the *niqab*. Women are also required to remove the *niqab* to work in the public sector.

Authored in Quebec two years after the release of the Bouchard-Taylor Report on Cultural and Religious Accommodations, Bill 94 is the first piece of legislation in North America that bans face coverings from public and government buildings.⁴⁸ In the name of "public security, communication, and identification," the bill enshrines the denial of essential services to women who wear the *niqab* (Olwan, 2010). Although subsequently struck down, the

⁴⁸ The Bouchard Taylor report reflects findings from a Commission set up by the Quebec Government to examine public discontent with the accommodation of religious and cultural practices.

Bill had consequences on Muslim women who cover their faces. It demonstrates acceptability in discrimination towards Muslim women. Further, Bill 62, (the religious neutrality law) tabled by Justice Minister Stephanie Vallee in 2015, was passed in Quebec and came into effect in October 2017. The new law bans wearing face coverings when giving or receiving services from the state including, public educational institutions, health institutions, and public transportation (Solyom, 2017).

Manifestations of Islamophobia in Canada are common and sometimes have disastrous effects. In the past few years, there have been several Islamophobic incidents at Mosques throughout the country.⁴⁹ Some of these incidents have led to deaths, for example, in January 2017, six Muslim men (fathers and husbands) were killed in a murderous rampage in a Quebec Mosque, one of the many Mosques targeted multiple times before the incident. In another incident occurring in September 2020, a man was stabbed and killed at the International Muslim Organisation (IMO) in Etobicoke. And in June 2021, a man rammed his pickup truck into a Muslim family at a pedestrian crossing in the streets of London Ontario. In this horrific incident four family members, over three generations were killed.

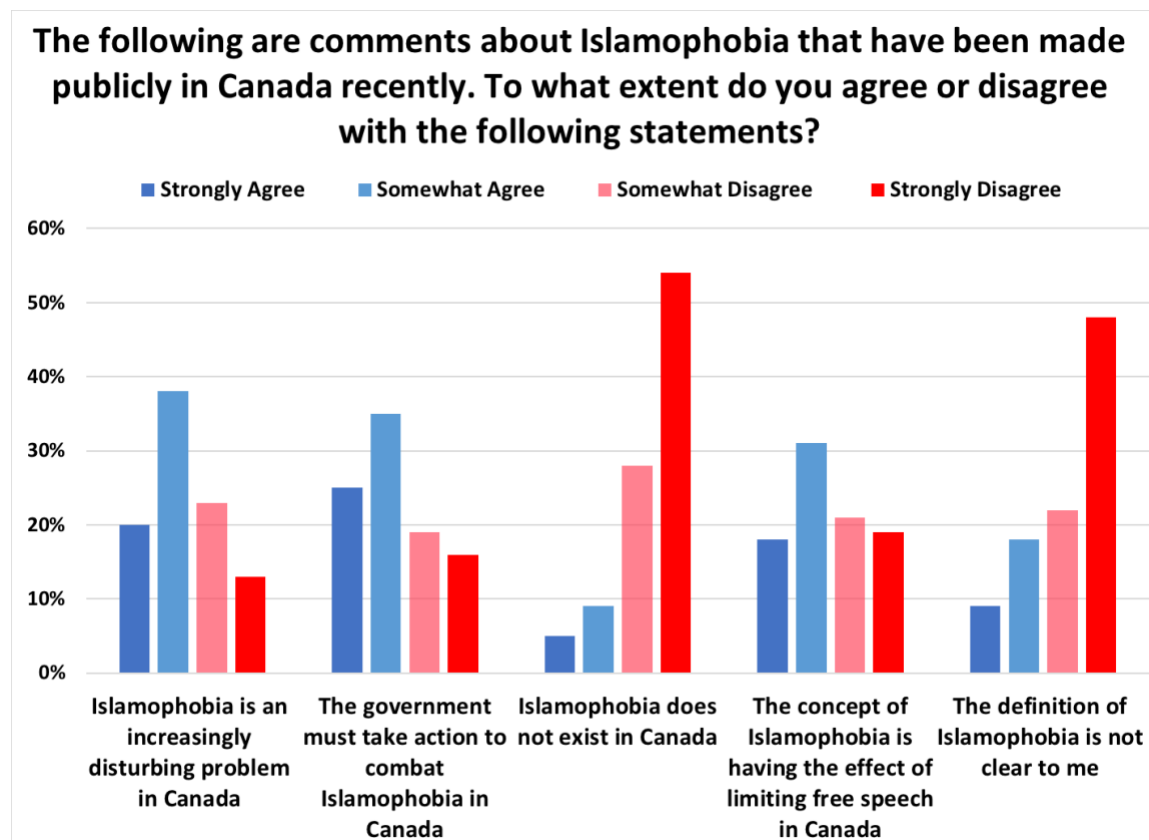
However, attempts to address Islamophobia meet resistance. When Liberal MP, Iqra Khalid introduced a motion M-103 aimed at combating racism with a request that the government condemns Islamophobia, former Minister of Justice, Irwin Colter argued that the motion would have broader support if it did not contain the word Islamophobia (Pedwell, 2017).

⁴⁹ Mariam Katawazi details some such incidents and their consequences in a CTV news article that can be accessed here: <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/how-many-deaths-need-to-happen-canada-has-a-troubling-anti-muslim-hate-problem-1.5475865>

The backlash that Ms. Khalid, the Muslim community, and anyone who supported her motion experienced reflected grave intolerance for Muslims. Heritage Minister Melanie Joly’s support “was met by expetive-laced condemnation on social media from outraged Canadians” (Pedwell, 2017). The specific situations mentioned above indicate an overall culture as highlighted by CJPME’s research. Figure 2 shows survey results on Canadians’ knowledge and attitudes around Islamophobia.

Figure 2

CJPME Survey on Islamophobia



Open access – Credit CJPME <https://www.cjpme.org/islamophobia>

The survey concluded that not only is Islamophobia present but also “confirms that religious discrimination – especially Islamophobia – stands as an ongoing challenge to Canada’s multicultural society” (CJPME, 2018). The above demonstrates that negative

conceptualizations among Canadians, even those who do not intentionally discriminate accept or at the least are not surprised by stereotypes of Muslims.

Nevertheless, Canadians with Islamophobic leanings consider it a positive belief not connected with racism or xenophobia (Raj, 2016) instead, they see themselves as defending human rights and promoting democracy by attending to Islam's incompatibility with western society (Carr, 2006). To the extent that Islamophobia is present and pervasive in Canada, it is a foregone conclusion that those working in child protection need to reflect on the lens with which they view Muslims. In the London incident, one of the victims was a fourteen-year-old girl. One can ask the question, who is responsible for this act of child abuse and how would such incidents be prevented?

Conclusion

This chapter addressed areas of Muslim representation to demystify Islam and assist a Western child protection audience with the roots of unconscious (and sometimes conscious) biases that may affect their engagement with Muslim clients. A focus on the socio-political system gives ample evidence that Islamophobia is a systemic challenge in the political apparatus, pervasive in the media, and has seeped into the consciousness of many Canadians. At the same time, the political understanding of self and other shape experiences of Islamophobia for Canadian Muslims.

Sadek, (2017) speaks about subjectivity within the cultural context and suggests that both the collective and individual Muslim identities are at risk of collapsing due to the internalizing of various aspects of Islamophobia. She further argues that such a collapse that is mediated by shame can cause foreclosure or idealizing Muslim identities. Constructing an enduring Muslim identity where shame and fear are present, and intersections of race, ethnicity, age, and gender

add to negative self-concept for Muslims. Shame is part of the child welfare experience, with clients already marginalized and with Islamophobia on the rise (Minsky, 2017). Islamophobia shapes the child welfare encounter for Muslims in similar ways that racism manifests itself.

Like internalized racism, Islamophobia affects Muslims on a psychological level due to overwhelming pressures of surveillance, hate crimes, and institutional discrimination (Amer & Bagasra, 2013; Nadal et al., 2012). The Canadian Muslim community is experiencing a shift in the generation, with an increasing and struggling youth population. While some argue that Muslim youths tend to assimilate and take on the identity of their new home and value learning and participation (Moghissi et al., 2009; Saunders, 2012), they also experience Islamophobia. Parents and students report racism and Islamophobia, for example, stones being thrown at girls wearing hijab and parents being requested to change their children's names (Zine 2001).

Added to their own experiences, young Muslims absorb the pervasive negative image frequently associated with religious/political plots to dominate the West. They are in the precarious position of fighting the battle of Islamophobia while negotiating their identity as Muslims. Although their religious identification sets a frame of reference that has a mitigating effect on youths and assists them in challenging social pressures to maintain their religious identities (Zine, 2001), they are also categorized as radicalized youths, which is a growing worry for Muslim communities. Centering Muslims and Islamic practices in this research serve to illuminate the child welfare field, consisting of organizations entrenched in systemic barriers and professionals that are mostly western educated.

Stories of the Self – On Being a Muslim Canadian

I am a Muslim who lives in Ontario. I have lived in Ontario for over 38 years. Does that make me a Canadian Muslim? A Muslim Canadian? These questions may seem insignificant, a

matter of semantics but they do matter to me. Sometimes just as something to ruminate on; this ongoing process of contemplation frames my sense of belonging. At other times they become salient, even urgent. It is strange how this happens – depending on the space I occupy at the time and with whom I share that space.

Is this just me? Or do other Muslims feel the same? These may be questions I cannot answer. What I know though is that once identified by others as Muslims, we share a sense of warm fellowship, and the same monster haunts us. I know this because it is the story I hear over and over. I hear it from my children and their children. I hear it from my elders, from my sisters and brothers. I hear it at home and at the Mosque communities. Sometimes I can even see it in the quick glances and barely audible salaams of other Muslims whom I do not know. It is as if we must ignore each other, to disassociate, to keep a low profile, so we can go unnoticed.

I see my community, my family, and myself in the grasp of this ‘monstrous’ thing. It is growing, gaining strength, potency, power. Once you are identified as Muslim, it is easy to be singled out. I remember the experience of my daughter when she was in grade 5. I remember her saying how uncomfortable she felt in her classroom when her teacher talked about the terrorist bombing in Oklahoma before confirmation that Timothy Mcveigh was responsible for the attack. Is it possible to extricate oneself from the grasp of Islamophobia?

Yes, Islamophobia has been in our public schools since 1995. The 9/11 attack has been a pivotal incident that seems to fan the flames of hatred that inform Islamophobia. During the 9/11 attacks, I recall the horror with which I watched the Twin Towers go down. I was in a classroom at the University of Toronto, and someone came in to call us all to the auditorium to see “history happening.” Apprehension steps in. God, please don’t let it be Muslims! But it is. What will this mean for us Muslims who live in Canada? I remember leaving class early that day and hoping

for invisibility as I made my way through Union Station in downtown Toronto. I worried about the safety of my children; will they make it home safely? What consequences might this have for the Muslim community?

Remembering this, I reflect on the dismembering of Muslims from Canadian society. We are “others.” It does not matter that we are tax-paying, civic-minded, educated professionals contributing to our local community and the Canadian collective. We are “others.” And with this comes a dislocation from being Canadian. I am reminded of Du Bois’s deliberation in “Strivings of the Negro People.” He speaks of an unasked question – “how does it feel to be the problem?” I experience this often. People seem suspicious, nervous, uncomfortable, unwilling to engage. Maybe it is merely my presence that suggests danger and terrorism or evokes fear and anger.

Imagine someone looking like me showing up at the home of a Canadian client to insert myself as the “family service worker” from CAS. The client is already nervous and uncomfortable with a worker coming to their home. Now the added dimension of this person who is “not one of us” is here. After they have processed their feelings, briefly the questions and unsavory comments start. You are not Canadian, why are you here? What do you know about Canada and Canadian law? You can’t tell me what to do! I want a new worker! Sadly, it does not end there. Sometimes they call my supervisors with complaints.

My professionalism, civic-mindedness, language skills, and compassion are all hidden under my hijab. From my clients and my supervisors. I recollect an incident with a particular supervisor who was not at all surprised that a client called with a complaint that she could not understand my accent as she, the former occasionally had trouble herself. Discrimination and marginalization don’t end with education and professionalism.

Nevertheless, as a child protection worker, I have power. However, my Muslim identity tempers the power of being a child welfare worker. I wonder: What might a Muslim client feel in this double jeopardy of being a Muslim and a CAS client? Two positions of relative powerlessness. For some of us, and in certain instances, the monster is bigger, more terrifying, and ever-present. And the consequences can be devastating. I heard many stories from the community where child protection services “caused” devastation when they intervened.

How do we change this situation? I believe that the change is in finding connections, commonalities, and ways of communicating. In other words, sharing knowledge and valuing good practices regardless of their origins. Hence my interest in this research. I write with the hope that I can highlight commonalities and inform child protection professionals on Muslims. Doing this requires an understanding of Islam, Muslims in Canada, and their experiences of marginalization.

Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology used in this project. My experiences with the child welfare system have shaped a particular understanding of how Muslims experience the system. This research serves to expand my understanding of Muslims' engagement with the child welfare system by adding perspectives of a service user, something quite different than my experiences of a protection worker or foster parent. These insights will assist in answering questions related to the importance and relevance of the faith of Muslim clients engaged with the state-run child welfare system. This will be undertaken by attempting to uncover how the structure of child welfare interacts with conditions of being Muslim and what these interactions convey to us about requirements to consider faith within child welfare services. I adopt a case study approach using Critical Realism (CR), which is a paradigm that offers a pragmatic approach to the research. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first addresses the use and usefulness of CR as a paradigm to highlight religious practice as a significant factor for Muslims receiving child welfare services. The second section discusses the case study research design; included are details of recruitment, population and sample size, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations as a methodology that aligns with the aim of the study. The final section reflects my experience with some aspects of the research process.

Research Framework and Paradigm

My research aims to build on how Ontario's child welfare service provisions are experienced by Muslim clients. In chapter one, I proposed that fear is a common theme for families involved with child welfare services. This may be further amplified for Muslim families because Islamic communities in the West are experiencing an escalation of anti-Muslim sentiments and a rise in Islamophobia (Kundani, 2014; Razack, 2008; Sharify-Funk, 2013;

Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). For this project, I draw on CR to consider human knowledge as part of a reality that exists within a broader context as well as within organisations (Fletcher, 2017) providing an alternative to a purely positivist or a constructionist approach when considering the intersection of where child welfare services meet the Muslim client.

As a possible alternative to positivism and constructionism/interpretivism, CR posits reality to exist beyond the apparent, discernible, or experienced (Bhaskar, 1998; Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Danermark et al., 2002). It considers the natural and social worlds as external to and independent of our perceptions, thoughts, and understandings about them (Bhaskar, 1975; Bergin et al., 2008; Danermark et al., 2002). Additionally, CR is a good fit for a case study and for the purpose of my work; that is to provide data that untangle other dimensions while giving structure to the case study methodology.

Acknowledging the social world's complexity, CR provides a link between epistemology and ontology. It helps researchers examine links and explanations between social events in a multi-layered approach (Bhaskar, 1998; Fletcher, 2017; Lennox & Jurdi-Hage, 2017). CR considers the context and emerging accounts of the social world that are separate and independent from what can be known or experienced (Scott, 2005). This model is additionally useful as a reflexive philosophical stance that informs an account of social science and empirical investigations (Fletcher, 2017) and links the direct experiences of receiving child welfare services to the sociopolitical context.

Epistemologically, CR proposes two dimensions to knowledge; transitive and intransitive (Bhaskar, 1998; Benton & Craib, 2001; Williams, 2003). On one hand, the transitive objects of knowledge are personal, created by humans, and subjected to human activity resulting in changing reality. On the other hand, intransitive knowledge includes structures and processes in

the world of human existence, not necessarily independent of a researcher's perceptions but enduring and unchanging (Benton & Craib, 2001; Bhaskar, 1998; Cruickshank, 2012; Lennox & Jurdi-Hage, 2017). This framework works with a positivist idea that there is a reality, while acknowledging the value-laden or social construction of reality and allows for epistemological flexibility. This fits well with my epistemological views, as it allows me to center Islam thereby maintaining the influence of Islam on methodology and interpretation (Musah, (2011).

Ontologically, CR explains the existence of reality as layered, structured, and evolving into three domains: the *empirical*, the *actual*, and the *real* (Benton & Craib, 2001; Lennox, & Jurdi-Hage, 2017; Wilson & McCormack, 2006). At the *empirical* level, events or objects can be measured empirically but are facilitated through human experience and interpretation (Benton & Craib, 2001; Bhaskar, 1998; Fletcher, 2017; Lennox, & Jurdi-Hage, 2017;). Social ideas, decisions, and causal meanings occur at the *empirical* level.

At the *actual* level, events occur regardless of whether they are observed or not; that is, there is no filter of human thoughts or interpretations (Fletcher, 2017). However, such events have been triggered by *causal mechanisms*, that are activated by the *real*. The *real* is where structures or mechanisms with inherent properties and objects with the power causes events, which can be then observed at the *empirical* level (Benton & Carib, 2001; Wilson & McCormack, 2006). Roberts (2014) points out that causal mechanisms are examined in the social world through real open contexts where they interact with one another in contingent, sometimes random ways providing a more qualitative approach to causality and exploration at the *real* domain.

Reflecting on the *real*, Fleetwood (2014) suggests that the *real* acknowledges many things as real but additionally that things can be real in different ways. Of particular interest to

this project is the *socially real* which includes social structures like class, gender, and race; and the *ideally real* which refers to conceptual entities like language, texts, ideas, beliefs, and language (Fleetwood, 2014). Muslims' child welfare experiences should be understood within the context of the *socially real*, which is what they experience; and the *ideally real* which is their conceptualization and beliefs.

In an organizational context, the *real* also referred to as the “deep” level by Fleetwood (2014) consists of entities that confer power such as structures, institutions, and conventions (Fleetwood, 2014). The latter can in turn activate the *actual*. In the context of child welfare, we can consider the system as the *real*. Organisations, CAS structures, mechanisms, and powers can essentially affect the actual by activating the links that drive the events at the empirical level. Child welfare involvement for Muslims includes actions and decisions of "the system." These constitute ministry mandates, organizational policies, and professional practice.

Figure 3

Critical Realism in Context: Underlining the Real, Actual and Empirical Levels of Social Realities Connected to Child Welfare in Ontario.

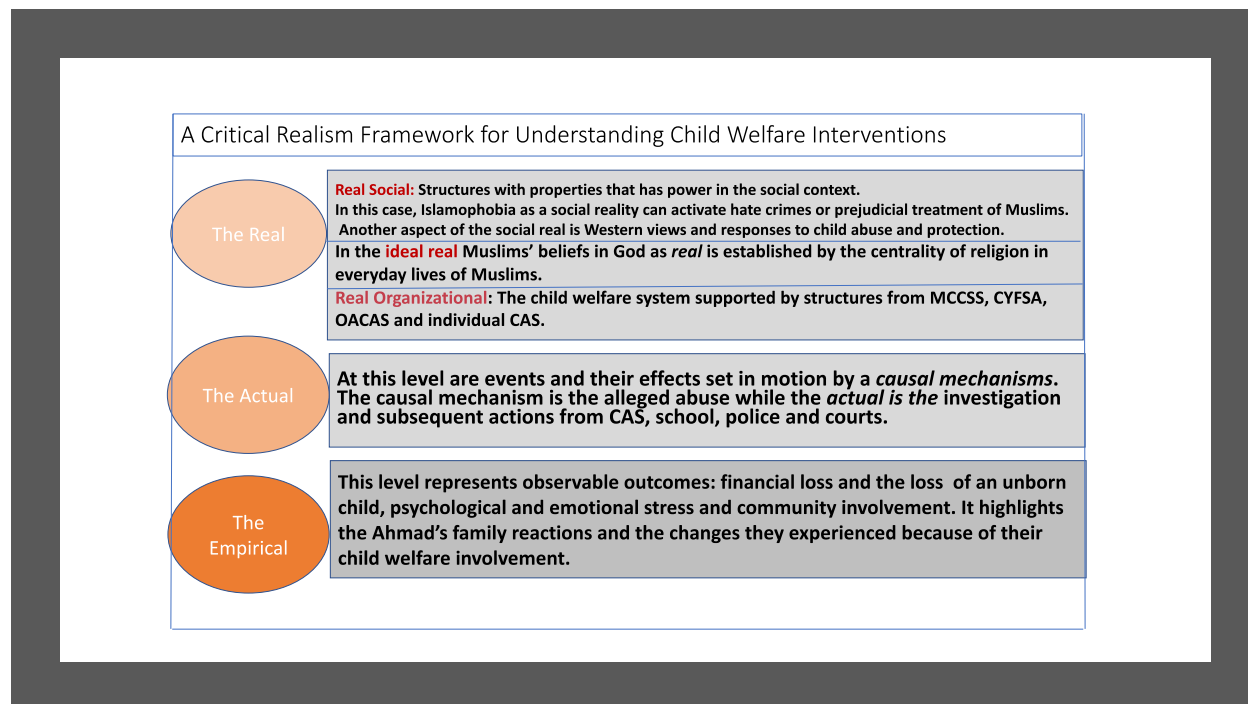


Figure three depicts the layers of the *real*, *actual*, and *empirical* in a child welfare organizational setting. Muslims' theology is the *ideal real* and from this, a *social real*, Islamophobia surfaces. The aspect of the *ideal real* allows me to think within my understanding that revelation from God and therefore God Himself is real. This is also true for Ahmad and the other Muslims who participated in the project.

At the organizational level, the child welfare system itself with inherent power activated other systems (police, school, and the court system), all of which then became involved with the family. The *empirical* domain highlighted in figure four consists of the actual experiences of Muslims in the system after the investigation (activation) occurred, the direct impact of child welfare experiences has an observable component that can be understood, in this case it

manifested as a series of financial losses and psychological and emotional stresses. There is a complex interplay between the empirical, the actual, and the real; a point to note is that reality is not static, but rather emergent and transformative. For example, it is noted that one of the empirical outcomes for the Ahmad family is the loss of an unborn child; this event is significant and resulted in the actual need for psychiatric treatment for Elnaz (Ahmad's wife).

The advantages of organizing this research around a CR framework are clear. As a pragmatic paradigm with a multi-layered approach, analysis on Muslim experiences in child welfare is considered from actual experiences but also child welfare organizational structures and societal context. CR provides a structure for my case study method and allows a stepping back to consider the underlying mechanisms, which may have resulted in the ways Muslims experience the system. Additionally, CR uses retroduction, a method of analysis that requires the researcher to consider observed patterns or regularities through constantly examining the deeper levels of structures (Dobson, 2005). This process also will help to uncover if Muslims' participation in the state-run system is due to the system and structures within, or the Muslim family in the western context, or rather some unexpected interactions between the two.

Further, CR is compatible with a case study design with a multilayered approach to analysis that includes multiple data sources. According to Stake (1995), although qualitative case studies may be seen as relativist, the value of interpretation can vary and there are practical (although not infallible) ways of determining best explanations. Stake (1995) argues, "personal civility or political ideology may call for respecting every view, the rules of case study research does not" (p. 103). This is particularly important to me, as according to my Islamic belief, there is a limit to moral relativity. I feel that this limit is in some ways reflected in the child welfare system as well, as it is designed to respond to behaviours considered universally unacceptable.

As such, a case study methodology fits with the CR paradigm where the subjective creation of meaning is recognized, yet the idea of reality is present. I previously discussed the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims receiving child welfare services and the necessity to consider its consequences. CR considers layers of real in our social context, the intricate relationships among the layers, and the interpretations ascribed to experiences.

Since I believe that while both child abuse (which is the cause of involvement for my case study) and Islamophobia are subjective experiences grounded in realities and actual events, I plan to use CR as an overarching paradigm to guide my research. CR considers human knowledge as “only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality” (Fletcher, 2017 p. 182) thus tying my epistemological perspective, which is grounded in religion, to my academic and research interest, a perspective shared by Ahmad.

Research Design

Within a CR framework, I use a case study research design as this fit with CR paradigm to examine complex entities within their contexts in a comprehensive manner. The process of researching the challenges Muslims face when receiving child welfare services goes beyond the phenomenon of child welfare involvement as it also includes the context of Islamophobia and racism. Based on my review of racialized and marginalized clients receiving child welfare services that informed my initial proposition, research question, and theoretical lens, a case study approach is appropriate. It is thus useful in addressing the "how" of Muslim interactions with child welfare services. It also provides the tools to consider the "why" of Muslim experiences by focusing on context.

The case study is an established method with a comprehensive research strategy to understand a social situation in context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009).

Accepted as a flexible method, it provides a detailed understanding of a phenomenon within its context and accommodates integrating multiple data sources to provide a full and complex understanding of real-life situations (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Pearson et al., 2015). Case studies incorporate various sources of information such as interviews, documents, field notes, and observations.

I used a qualitative a single case holistic case study design to structure the project. I defined the family as the case and the "unit of analysis," which is considered a primarily qualitative study that relies on narratives and descriptions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). In a holistic case design, the research process (from design to implementation to analysis) is aimed at understanding the experiences of Muslims in the broader "whole" of child welfare services. This allowed for a research method that facilitated an understanding where the focus on Muslims receiving services is placed in the overall context of child protection services. As part of the general case study process, I followed Stake's (1995) suggestion to document, and record as diligently and accurately as possible, while at the same time considering meanings. I remained ever vigilant of my views and experiences of "being Muslim" while being led by the data in an iterative, circular, and reflexive process (Chenail, 2011).

In keeping with a holistic case study design, I obtained information from textual sources (e.g., policies, legislation, family involvement documents, field notes, and observations) and from interviews. I collected qualitative data from workers, foster parents, and the family. This method of multiple participant interviews (MPI) is recommended to understand relationships and interactions from varying viewpoints of those with different social roles (Vogl et al., 2019). Further, with the various levels of reality outlined in CR, the workers' and foster parents' interviews provided a deeper dive into the organizational aspect of child welfare involvement

while interviews with Ahmad yielded the experiential reality. From the interviews, I provide thick in-depth descriptions that explore and explain Muslims' experiences in child welfare and the CYFSA and OACAS material, further explored the layered organizational setting of child welfare system. Stake (2010) considers a detailed description of the case as essential; this detailed re-representation of the case is presented in chapter six.

Advisory Committee

As part of my research design, I included a consulting committee to provide overall consultation for the case study. This committee comprised of three Muslim professionals from various backgrounds who have or have had contact with child welfare services. One of the committee members worked for a child welfare agency in Ontario. Although this person agreed to be on the advisory board, reluctance to do so manifested early on and so was unavailable beyond the initial stage of the project. The second is a parent with lived experience. And the third is a Muslim scholar who works (at the time of contact) with a recognized Muslim community agency. I selected committee members because of their knowledge and experiences with Muslims and Muslim communities in Ontario. The committee provided feedback on the conceptualization of the project, the research questions, and the findings. More importantly, the committee was particularly helpful in the recruitment process and provided a viable lead to access the main participant.

Participant Recruitment and Case Identification

The fundamental focus of sampling in qualitative research is to identify specific cases that explicate the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). The recommended procedure for sampling in case study research is purposive sampling

and includes the technique of critical case selection (Flick, 2009; Yin 2014).⁵⁰ This sampling method allows researchers to rely on their judgment when deciding whom to recruit for research. Because of the participant criteria I have established, this method allowed me to screen for the suitability of participants for the research.

My postulation that Muslims experience child welfare in unique ways based on their identification required me to select cases that reflected visible Islamic adherence. For this reason, criteria for case selection included Muslims clearly identifiable and outwardly practicing (wearing a beard, headcover), involved with community, and had a child or children removed from their care with an open CAS file. My belief, supported by the literature (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008) and the political climate where Muslims who are identifiable by dress – wearing a beard, head cover – are more likely to observe and absorb Islamophobia all led me to opt for this sampling method. This allowed me to select a case that exhibited these phenomena with intensity; a strategy of purposeful sampling as suggested by Erlandson et al. (1993).

I initially intended to have two cases identified through two different CAS that had at the beginning indicated their willingness to facilitate the research. Unfortunately, recruitment for participants proved difficult. I approached nine agencies with my research proposal, but none agreed to recruit clients from their agency. One agency agreed to participate, but specified access to workers and foster parents only. After encountering these agencies' restrictions, I changed

⁵⁰ Also referred to as judgmental, subjective, or selective sampling and is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in research.

strategy and attempted to recruit through the community. However, this proved to be equally tricky and despite many outreaches, no one was willing to participate.

The unanticipated challenges in recruitment although a setback did not prevent me from continuing the research using the case study approach with one case; a family recruited with the assistance of my advisory committee. My academic committee agreed that although one case study would not allow for comparison, the contextual information from child welfare policy, including documents and the supplemental interviews from the workers and foster parents would make a robust case. As a result, this had the potential to be a significant contribution to the existing gap on religious minorities in child welfare knowledge.

The family that agreed to participate in the research is a Muslim refugee family. The parents have three children, the family is attached to the Muslim community and the mother wears the *hijab*. Interviews were conducted with the father; the mother did not agree to be interviewed because it was difficult for her to talk about her experiences. I also interviewed four foster parents and two workers from the agency that agreed to participate and one worker who responded from the community. Three of the four foster parents and one of the workers interviewed were Muslims. Although ethnic diversity was mentioned by three of the foster parents and the worker no one specified any branch of Islam.

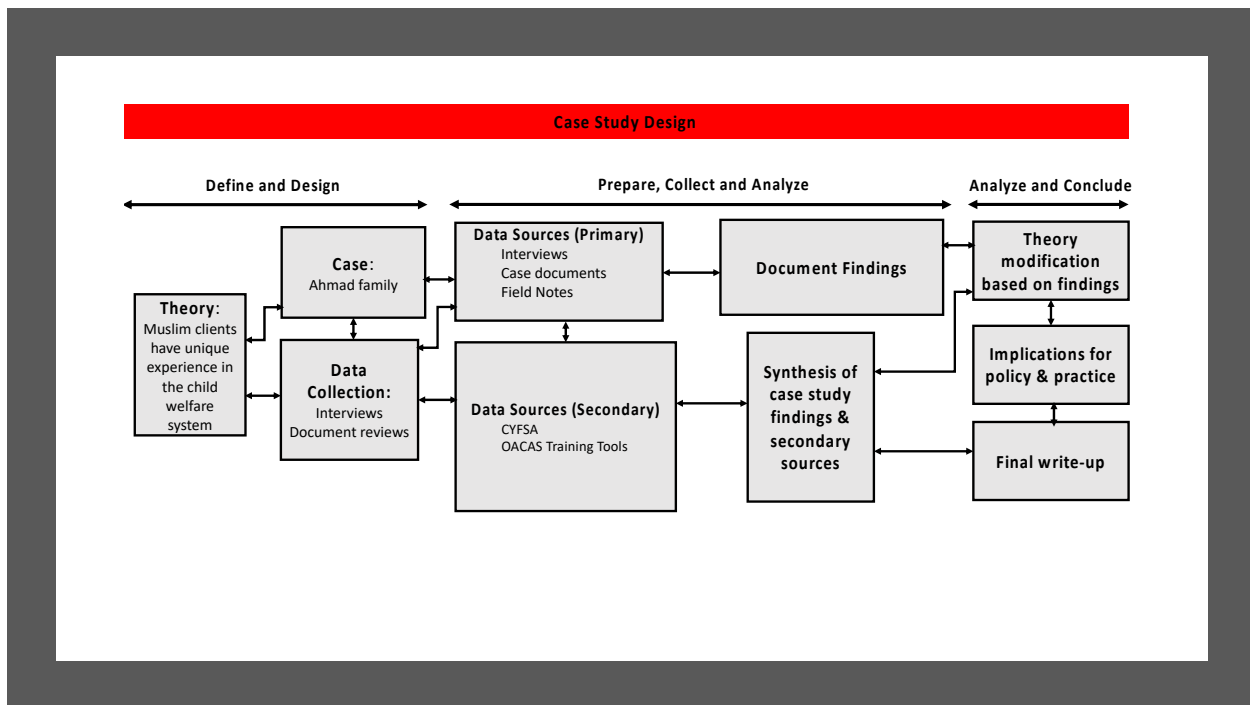
Data Collection

The strategy of collecting information from multiple sources is recommended by Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) as a requisite for a case study research design. I engaged in a pre-data phase of inquiry and information collection starting one year before the data collection. This process involved outreach to several CAS agencies and community groups. During this phase, I documented conversations and used the information from my notes to follow up with prospective

partners. I retained documentation of conversations and email communications to use as field information. I also explored religious accommodation as outlined in various child welfare policies, including child protection manuals, the CYFSA, Eligibility Spectrum (ES), and Ontario Child Protection Standards.

Figure 4

A Phase-Oriented Outline of the Case Study



Note. From Yin, R. K. (2014, p. 57). *Case Study research: Design and methods* (5th Ed) London, UK; Sage.

I used in-depth semi-structured interviews for all participants. Given the sensitive nature of the information I was seeking, I conducted face-to-face interviews in the family's home. The family was encouraged to share the story of their child welfare involvement; they also shared many society documents that I considered primary sources of information as outlined in table four above. I used a flexible interview schedule starting with broader conversations about the family constitution (immediate and extended), roles, and expectations of family members,

Islamic practices, and connections to the community. This was done primarily to build rapport (while being aware of cultural/religious sensitivity) before moving on to the more specific and sensitive child welfare involvement issues.

My approach to the child welfare involvement discussion was framed in a general way requesting the participant to talk about his child welfare involvement using probing initial and follow-up questions to flush out details around initial contact, concerns identified, follow up with the concerns, supports, and ongoing case management. My interview with the family included primary and follow-up questions and probes to clarify or follow on with thoughts presented (attached as appendix 1).

A supplemental source of primary data was obtained from interviews with three workers and four foster parents all of whom worked with Muslim families. I interviewed the foster parents in their homes, two workers at the agency where they worked and the third worker via zoom (due to Covid 19 pandemic restrictions). The interview protocols with workers (attached as appendix 2) and foster parents (attached as appendix 3) followed similar patterns with the first questions being about general child welfare experiences; for example, length of time and area of practice, followed by questions that focused on their work with Muslims. All interviews were approximately one hour long using a semi-structured approach that allowed for follow-up questions and clarifications. All interviews were also audio-recorded and stored in my password-protected devices (computer and external drive).

Data Management and Analysis

Qualitative research data analysis protocols consider data management and analysis as an ongoing and iterative process (Erlandson, et al., 1993). I started documentation and collection of information prior to conducting the interviews. I also documented conversations with CAS

representatives and community contacts in this initial stage and organized email communications. Once the interviews started, I kept field notes, observations and all documents provided by the family. I recorded the interviews and subsequently transcribed them. This process facilitated a comprehensive overview of the data obtained from interviews. Before coding, I assigned pseudonyms for all participants. The foster parents' and workers' pseudonyms reflected their religious identity.

I apply retroduction, an analytical process used in CR research that requires researchers to look at the observable phenomena and look back at what is true (or must be true) to identify generative/causal mechanisms (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017). In my qualitative case study framed by CR, the causal mechanism (the event that precipitates the ensuing phenomenon), is the CAS investigation, which set in motion the family's experiences. Using this method, I examined the information from the interviews within the context of prevailing child welfare legislation and policies. The supplementary data consisting of relevant legislations and policies were used to contextualize my interview data, as the latter constitute the foundations for child welfare practice in Ontario.

I adapted aspects of the six-phase thematic coding for qualitative interviews suggested by Braun and Clark (2012) to code all interviews and the documents provided by the father. The first phase recommends "familiarizing self with data," and to do so I listened to each audio recording repeatedly and transcribed the interviews. Starting with transcripts that were several pages long, I broke them into segments for easy management before initiating the process of "line-by-line" coding. This is a technique used to scrutinize textual lines of interviews to maintain focus on the text.

The second step, "generating initial codes," is considered the start of the systemic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012). Staying close to the data, I used extracts and early descriptive codes to summarize and describe the participants' meanings. I also engaged in interpretive coding at this stage, as can be seen in the examples outlined below where "it's not just in our culture, this is an Islam rule" is coded as "differences between Islam and culture" and "it doesn't happen" as "denying allegations." When the interviews were fully coded, both diversity and patterns of similarity were evident within the collated codes.

Data Extracts	Early Descriptive Codes
So, I was having like two jobs and my wife was <i>stressed</i> about her back pain and that stuff she has a bad disc. We have <i>rules in our house</i> . We don't say like we are, we don't accept other , others because it is the right to do what they want to do, but also we have <i>rules in our house</i> like a sleeping over. We don't have sleep over just in our closest friends like people we know, we know their families. We know what <i>kids in safe side</i> . That's the thing and we don't have, how you say that go <i>hang out girls with boys</i> , through like the relationship before that's an <i>Islam rule</i> . It's <i>not just in our culture, this is a Islam rule</i> .	<i>Stress</i> <i>House Rules</i> <i>Accept others</i> <i>House Rules</i> <i>Example of House Rule</i> <i>Importance of Kids safety</i> <i>Example of Islam Rule</i> <i>Islam has Rules</i> <i>Difference between Islam and Culture</i>
<i>Without no idea</i> I went for the court, I found (worker) she was initial worker and she was talking with me about hiring a lawyer or go for legal aid to attend another court. <i>They just joined in</i> and they put the kids in CAS. Okay, <i>why did you abuse your daughter with you're in using weapon, threatening, assault causing bodily harm</i> . Well, like they say there's a belt. Okay, I went for the court and say, listen, everything you're talking about, it doesn't happen .	<i>No information</i> <i>Multiple systems</i> <i>Alleged abuse</i> <i>Denying allegations</i>

In the third stage of data analysis, I proceeded with searching for themes as suggested by Braun and Clark (2012) as step three. This allowed me to develop a conceptual framework based on the recurrent themes. In "searching for themes," I focused on how the emerging themes

captured the data concerning my research questions. The process of defining, refining, and naming themes (expressed as steps three and four by Braun and Clark (2012) was completed with constant referral to and cross-checking with the interviews and my research questions. After this process was completed, my academic advisors reviewed the emerging themes. Their insights and suggestions were critical in step five, "rewriting of the themes."

Specific Themes

Identity: Ways in which the father identified himself and family; includes his ethnicity, race and practices. In this category, the father talks about the positives of his identity.

Pressures of cultural differences: How the father talked about the impact of cultural differences on his experiences with child protection workers and other professionals.

Islam has Rules: Tensions and challenges experienced by the father that he attributed to religious differences.

Information gaps: Information that the father did not have because of his newness to Canada.

Collapsed Theme

The Impact of Identity, Culture, and Religion on Interventions and Service Provision

Complications surfaced for the family because of their newness to Canada, which brings with it the language, cultural and religious differences that are not merely "different" but posited as inferior. This theme consists of categories grouped because of these differences. Information gaps are added in this theme because "gaps" were based on the family's unawareness of child welfare policies and processes.

After rethinking and rewriting the themes from all interviews, I compiled a list of the findings from these interviews in a document that highlighted these themes. By doing so, similarities and differences in the interviews of the participants became evident.

Understanding the content of essential documents that are used in child welfare practice is useful and facilitates triangulation of data thereby presenting the opportunity to assess how the participants' data aligns with child welfare policies and practice. I used document analysis, a process used for reviewing and evaluating data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to obtain an understanding and deepen the analysis. O'Leary (2014) suggests creating a list of relevant

documents based on knowledge of what is required, as such my list includes specific parts of the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)⁵¹ that considers awareness of diversity in children and families, and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society (OACAS) Eligibility Spectrum⁵² section that addresses the need for protection based on physical harm.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence in the process that the researcher undertakes to establish that the data is ethically and judiciously managed based on an interpretive analysis approach and the researcher's role in creating instruments (Creswell, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Regardless of research paradigm and method, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are the recommended standards to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Schwandt et al., 2007). To establish trustworthiness, I used the concept of credibility to audit my research and findings. This was done through an extended engagement with the main participant as suggested by (Macnee & McCabe, 2008; Padgett, 2017). I also maintained a prolonged engagement with the family. I had several telephone conversations with the father before and after the interviews. The subsequent conversations were used to clarify and revisit the father's data to ensure an accurate representation of what he communicated but also as a strategy to make sure I was true to his perspectives while taking his feedback. This process of

⁵¹ A copy of the CYFSA can be obtained at <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14>

The section of interest for this study is found in the preamble that states the purposes of the Act.

⁵² The Eligibility Spectrum can be found at: <http://www.oacas.org/publications-and-campaigns/professional-resources/eligibility-spectrum/>

'member check' as recommended by Candela (2019) allows for an ongoing process of reflection on the data.

I kept detailed field notes of my process and frequently consulted both with my academic advisors and community advisory team. An example of this is having my academic committee provide directions on if/how to pivot when the recruitment process became challenging. In terms of confirmability, I again reviewed with my community advisory committee and had a qualitative researcher colleague code one set of interviews for comparison to ensure that the interpretations of the data were accurate. Additionally, I used thick descriptions to ensure participants' voices are present.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategy used in qualitative case studies that draw on information from various sources and methods of collection in the study of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 2012). In my findings and analysis, I obtained data from interviews with the father, workers, foster parents, and CAS documents provided by the father. During the research's active process, I documented field notes for each interview session, which I frequently consulted during the data analysis process. Additionally, I referred to legislation and policies essential to child welfare services applicable to religion and religious diversity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a strategy used as a quality control approach in qualitative research (Berger, 2015). Dowling (2006) suggests different frames for practicing reflexivity that emphasize goals (e.g., epistemological reflexivity, critical reflexivity, and feminist reflexivity). I used epistemological reflexivity, which encourages the researcher to reflect on their assumptions and capacity to influence and be influenced by the research process (Dowling, 2006). I also used

reflexivity from a critical perspective, which allowed me to move beyond internal and relational engagement with the research questions and data to focus on analyzing structural issues (political and social) through the entire research process, as suggested by Dowling (2006).

My reflexive process included keeping a journal where I documented my feelings, judgments, and reasonings during the process. I used my journaling to engage with my Muslimness and the Ahmad's family's explanations of their experiences to provide reflexive discussions and explications as concluding thoughts to chapters two through seven. In these sections, I move beyond stating my positionality as a Muslim woman engaging with a Muslim family for the purpose of research. I cognize similarities and differences with the Ahmad family and myself that brought into conscious awareness the family's experiences as new Canadians of Arab descent to be very different from my experience. I also consider the vast difference between being a foster parent and worker to that of a client receiving services. It became clear that Ahmad and his family responded to me as a person of influence (Mitchell et. al, 2018) but what became clearer is that they responded to me as a Muslim, within a faith community where commonality brings with it trust. This trust was necessary for their story to be told given the trauma they faced in with child welfare interventions.

Ethical Considerations

Careful considerations of ethical issues are essential in any research. Basic ethical principles suggest the inclusion of respect for persons where an emphasis on participants' autonomy is carefully considered; beneficence, which considers the obligation to maximize benefits and minimize harm; and justice, which focuses on equal treatment for participants (Aselage et al., 2009; Lepore et al., 2017). It is essential to ensure that ethical principles are adhered to when researching a vulnerable population (Flewitt, 2005).

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

All participants were initially made to understand the purpose of the project and fully agreed to participate. Participation was voluntary and participants consented without being pressured or manipulated in any way. Signed consents were obtained from all participants using consent forms. I assisted the father to understand the purpose of the study, his option to withdraw if needed, and the benefits and risks of being part of the research. I read the consent to participate (attached as appendix 4) to him before each interview. The workers and foster mothers were also informed of the study's purpose and asked to read and confirm their consent (attached as appendix 5 and 6).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

One risk identified in research with human participants is confidentiality and limiting access to their information thereby securing participants' information. I stored the audio recording, transcripts, and related documentation in my password-protected device to protect personal information. Anything that was printed was secured in my office in drawers not accessible to others. Soft or electronic information is stored safely on my laptop, which is always password protected. Copies of the electronic information are saved on an external storage device and stored along with hardcopy information in a secured cabinet. Transcripts and all other hardcopy documents will be shredded five years after the completion of this research, and likewise all electronic documents would be permanently deleted from the laptop and external storage devices.

Maintaining confidentiality is particularly problematic in research that requires interviews with family members (Kirk, 2007). I addressed this with the families' assistance and participation; interviews were conducted in their home for safety and privacy. To ensure

anonymity, I used pseudonyms for everyone referred to in the data, omitted identifying details, and changed identifying information in findings and reports of the research as suggested by the Tri-Council statement on ethical research conduct (Tri-Council, 2010).

Compensation

The practice of compensation (e.g., paying) research participants is common (Bentley & Thatcher, 2004; Grady, 2005). Concerns in the literature include the worry that monetary compensation may cause participants to overlook risks and impair judgment (Paul, 1997). However, Grady (2005) concludes that compensation does not necessarily have harmful effects. I compensated the father \$100.00 for the interviews and foster families \$40.00 each as a gesture of appreciation. Wilfrid Laurier University's research ethics board advised against compensating workers.

Emotional and Social Harm to Participants

Child welfare research is difficult for service recipients, as they must recall and describe stressful situations. In considering the risk of emotional and social harm, I fully supported the mother's decision. She did not want to participate verbally; however, upon her request, I consented to her being present for the interviews. The ethical consideration involved in the decision to include the mother was sanctioned by the father as neither of us wanted to minimize the mother's engagement. Further, Islamic etiquette required that the father and I not be alone in the room. Both parents were relieved that this etiquette was observed.

I remained cognizant of the parents' anxiety throughout the interviews and adjusted to minimize discomfort. For example, I allowed for prolonged breaks and followed their lead on when and how the father would talk. I also provided information of a Muslim social service agency to access counselling if required. The family had already been receiving services from

that agency, with which they were familiar and had found helpful. They acknowledged that they would prefer to obtain services with the same agency if needed.

Benefits to Participants

This research has the potential to enhance child welfare practices when engaging Muslim clients and has two significant benefits. First, sharing information could result in personal satisfaction and benefit to participants. Drury et al. (2007) suggest that participants may receive therapeutic benefits from engaging in conversations. Telling their story can help them gain insight and is inherently helpful (Harper & Cole, 2012). In marginalized populations, this can be incredibly powerful as it in some ways formally legitimizes their experiences.

Second, the research has benefits to participants at the family and community levels. Benoit et al. (2005) highlight the benefits of community-based academic research and state that such research is beneficial both to the academic community and marginalized communities. Given the relative absence of research on Muslims in child welfare, the Muslim community will benefit from the research, and potentially future services can be improved based on findings. The father acknowledged both these benefits; he expressed that the interviews were an excellent way to share his experience and hope that it would prevent other Muslim families from having similar experiences, saying that “I will do whatever, so a Muslim family don’t have to go through this thing.”

Third, the foster parents and workers iterated that the study is also of benefit. For the workers, their investment in the research was that their participation may possibly move practice in ways that considers the importance of faith. Similarly, the Christian foster mother expressed the need for a better understanding of Muslims, as she is sometimes required to care for Muslim children. The Muslim foster mothers understood the utility of the research in an additional

manner; they highlight the need for community involvement where Muslim children are being brought into care.

Power Dynamic and the Role of the Researcher

Another crucial ethical consideration for research is the power dynamic and its possible impact on participants. Being identified as a "child welfare person" added to the power the family attributed to me. I explained that I am not a CAS employee, and the research is to understand the Muslim experience. My identity and visibility as a Muslim helped establish a co-constructive environment. I conducted the interviews in the father's home and observed Islamic etiquettes which provided a level of comfort when the father struggled with sharing his story.

Further, relationships between a researcher and participants are crucial since this impact the researcher's interpretations of findings. Pike (1994) describes etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspectives. This binary positioning is however problematic for researchers from marginalized communities Beals et al. (2020). As a researcher in this project, I see myself as what Beals et al. (2020) refer to as "the edge, or margin, between multiple worlds and perspectives" (p. 593). As an etic researcher, I never had the experience of receiving services from child welfare. From the emic perspective, I am a Muslim. My experiences as a child protection worker and a foster parent gave me the "insider" perspectives.

Concerning researcher integrity, I upheld integrity throughout the process of the research. My axiology and the fundamental values I bring to the research stem from my (religious) Islam's epistemological roots. My incentive for this research is primarily rooted in the Prophetic advice "help your brother if he is oppressed or oppresses." Therefore, this research is worthy of my time because it is a Divine duty, and as such, my first accountability is to God. Ethical guidelines, my professional obligations as a social worker under the OACAS, Wilfrid Laurier University's ethics

board, and my academic advisors collectively assisted me to focus on all aspects of ethics during the research.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the conceptual framework, methodology, and techniques used in the research process to develop the case study. The conceptual framework, critical realism, and a single case, qualitative case study design was employed to investigate the general objective of understanding in-depth the complexities of Muslim child welfare recipients. Critical realism presented an alternative to pure constructionism and positivism; it set a middle ground that fits well with the flexibility of a case study approach. Using a qualitative case study allowed me to incorporate information from a variety of sources including interviews as outlined. I interviewed Ahmad, the primary participant and seven other people involved with Muslim families receiving child welfare services. While I was able to access information that is publicly available easily, the project emerged within a context of reluctance from child welfare agencies.

Within the context of resistance from child welfare agencies as described in the participant recruitment, the process of participant recruitment became a source of struggle that resulted in considerable delays. The following section is a reflection on my experiences in the field, as I, a Muslim woman researcher experienced the process. The next chapter focuses on the results of the qualitative interviews of all participants and analysis of the findings that emerged.

Stories of the Self – Roadblocks and Red Tape

“Dear Government... I'm going to have a serious talk with you if I ever find anyone to talk to.”

Stieg Larsson

I entered this research project with a clear focus and much passion. From the project's conceptualization, I encountered enthusiasm from others: professors, advisors, mentors, and

colleagues in the field as well. It is a "great idea," they said. This is "much-needed work," others commented. Child welfare agencies were no less enthusiastic; people were willing to share the "good work" they were doing with Muslim families. Agencies invited me to connect when I was ready for data collection because of the project's merits and anticipated usefulness. After all, folks in the field appreciate the suffocating apprehension for people, particularly disadvantaged people, when they come up against the powerful government institution of child welfare. Literature attests to this and child welfare professionals and public opinions do too.

Reflecting on my encounters in the field, I cannot fathom all the roadblocks and red tape I experienced. To me, it was a simple matter. I wanted to be able to speak to ways in which Muslim clients encounter child welfare intervention. I had worked through the research ethics board requirements, which were very thorough. So, I should be able to connect with an agency or two. Those agencies that I had been talking to since working on my comprehensive paper; those agencies that I had worked at prior; and those agencies that invited me to return when I was ready for data collection.

However, this did not happen. I met with rejection after rejection. Many unanswered messages. Explanations and excuses: We have our own research. We cannot breach client confidentiality by giving out information. We are unable to contact past clients. We cannot ask workers to take time off their work. Sorry, we are unable to help you – but good luck with your research! It is a great idea! Is it luck that I need? What is the message here? Agencies seemed shrouded in secrecy. Unyielding. The resistance reflected a very guarded approach, which made me feel like I wanted to intrude. It is as if the system needs to be protected. But from whom and for what reasons? Research is supposed to create that refreshing knowledge which can identify opportunities and inform services. Is this about child welfare being resistant to change?

I realized that to move forward, I needed to look at this differently if I wanted to continue with the project. So off I go back to ethics to get clearance for community recruitment. Oh, the Muslim community! My community will be helpful. Families are sufficiently angry with CAS and would want to talk. Within the Muslim community, the reluctance was similar, but the reasons for the reluctance were different and made evident. Again, silence! Failed attempts. No responses to flyers, posts, or announcements. Wait, there were two responses.

One man called within minutes of hearing the announcement at the Friday prayer. I screened to ensure the recruitment criterion that an apprehension of a child had occurred. No apprehension occurred, but he was removed from his home and wanted to talk about his experience. We made an appointment, which he cancelled within an hour and never responded to subsequent calls. I connected with a Muslim worker who was willing and happy to participate but wanted to check with management at her agency for permission. The worker felt that "management was reluctant," and she would not talk without approval.

Muslims were worried about the personal consequences of talking about child welfare. I can fully understand and appreciate the case of the Muslim worker. Divided loyalties. She needed her job and could not risk speaking with me. I am not sure of the man's reasons to withdraw, but his initial willingness to talk was quickly reduced to silence and invisibility. Likewise, my communications with Mosques and Muslim organizations ended in "No one will talk to you; they are afraid." CAS has the power to intimidate and evoke fear.

However, the Ahmad family did talk to me. Ahmad did and while he talked, Elnaz his wife sat next to him and listened intently. Sometimes she interjected – to him in Arabic and he conveyed what she said. My worry is, did I do justice to their story? By telling it the way I did, did I confirm stereotypes of Muslim men and women? He talking, she silent or silenced. As a

Muslim woman, I value my privacy and there are circles that I would speak up in and circles that I remain silent. Not because I must, mostly because I feel that I won't be heard. I wonder if this is the case with Elnaz and if so, what is it about me that could not provide the safety that a faith community does in relationships with each other. Did Elnaz see me more as a child welfare person than a Muslim?

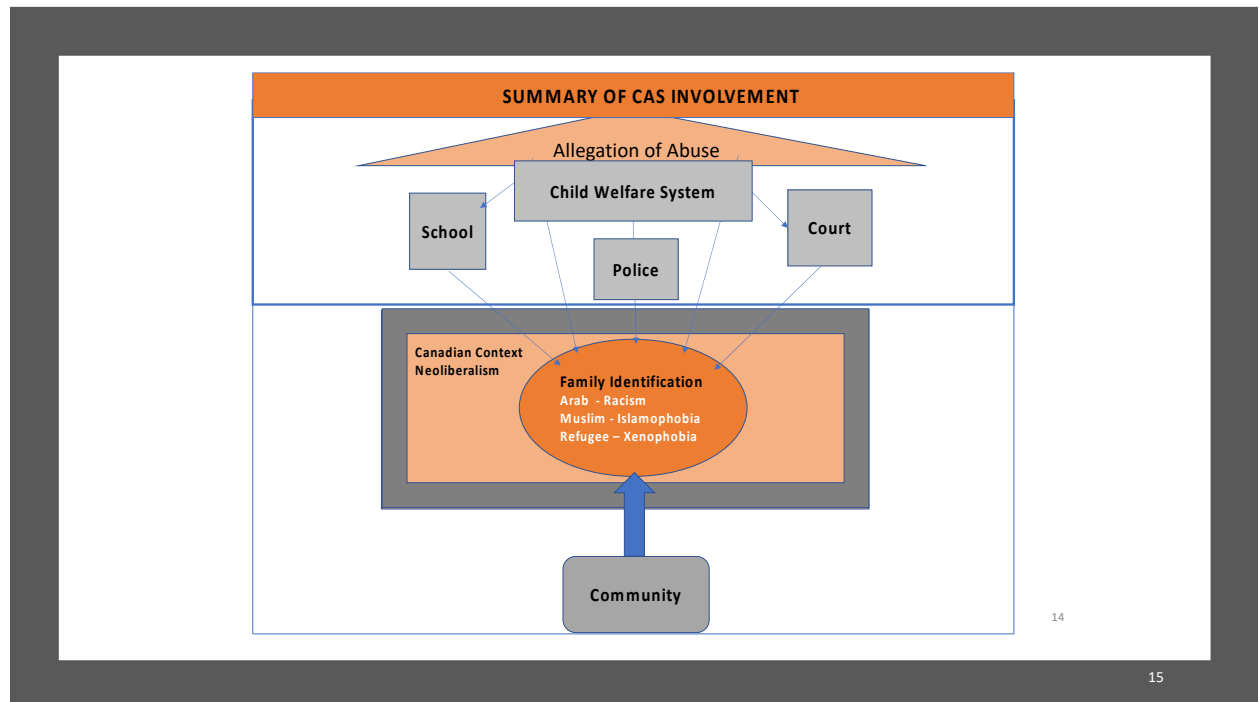
Chapter 6: Findings

Situated in the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two, I suggest that Muslims in the Canadian context have unique and troubling experiences because of their intersecting identities. The well documented opinion that Muslims are frequently viewed as others, is detailed in chapter three, where I also examine the extensive yet frequently unrecognised diversity in Muslim populations including race, ethnicity, geographic origins, and religious/theological differences. My underlying assumption is that the visible practice of Islam contributes to negative experiences in the public domain and therefore, by extension in child welfare services. This prompted research questions that sought to understand religion as a significant aspect in Muslims' experience with child welfare interventions in Ontario. The intent behind the questions is to understand the challenges in child welfare and explore opportunities that can be used to develop relevant practices that are attentive to the needs of Muslim clients.

In this chapter, I elaborate on findings from Ahmad, the main participant. In addition, three protection workers and four foster mothers involved in working with Muslim families were interviewed and contributed to the understanding of Muslims' experiences. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I focus on a detailed description of the Ahmad family. I then move to findings developed through thematic analysis of the data from the interviews with the father, child welfare documents he shared, and observations I made while in the family home. The perspectives and thoughts expressed in the findings were shaped by my identity as a researcher, a (former) child protection worker, and a Muslim woman. The second section presents a similar analysis of data collected in interviews with four foster caregivers and three child protection workers who have worked with Muslim children and families. The findings are followed by personal reflections on the process of interviewing the family.

Section 1: The Case of the Ahmad Family

Depicted in figure five is the Ahmad family's experiences of child welfare involvement and interventions. The children were removed from their home, and subsequently the police, school, and court systems were all involved in the family's case. Illustrated in the diagram is the complex convergence of interventions experienced by the family. CAS is the canopy over the family, which spawned events, interactions, and engagements with the school, police, and court in addition to CAS. Done on a vertical axis, the illustration symbolizes pressures applied upon the family from these different sources. What unfolded for the family was involvement and interactions from four very powerful government institutions, one being CAS, of which they had no prior knowledge because they were recent refugees. Within the Canadian context, the family's involvement was certainly impacted by neoliberalism, racism, and Islamophobia. However, eventually they did receive some degree of support from their local community resource centre.

Figure 5

The Ahmad's Family Child Welfare in Context

Before addressing the findings in detail, I provide a family profile as accurately as I can, while being aware of the necessity to maintain confidentiality. When a specific attribute is encompassing enough to mask a particular identity marker, I use words that may seem revealing. For example, Arab may seem specific, but there is a vast diversity in Arab populations, so it is not telling. Relevant to the case are the documents provided by the father and summarized after the family profile. The interviews were conducted in the family home, where Islamic values were noticeable. For example, the mother wore a *hijab*; shoes were removed at the door; decorations reflected Islamic spirituality; and Islamic hospitality was practiced. Additionally, in all my interactions (phone calls, interviews), the father consistently referred to me as “sister,” an Islamic practice to show respect.

The Ahmad Family Profile***Pseudonyms for the family:***

The father – **Ahmad**

The mother – **Elnaz**

The oldest child – **Wardah**

The middle child – **Abbas**

The youngest child – **Sidra**

The case in this study is a Muslim family who moved to Canada in 2015 under refugee status from a war-torn country. After a short stay in another province, the family moved to Ontario on the advice received from some Muslim community contacts. Ahmad attested that the move was inspired by the racism they experienced in the first city as well as wanting to be part of a visibly active Muslim community. He reported that his wife Elnaz, endured threats because she wore the hijab. As a result, they decided to move so she would not have to change her attire. They relocated to the town recommended as a “city with many cultures” where they can continue to practice Islam.

The family is a nuclear one consisting of the parents and three children with an approximate three-year gap in age between each child. They have no extended family in the vicinity where they resided and were relatively new to the community at the time of CAS intervention. Intending to make the city their home, the parents bought a house. Ahmad was employed and in the process of upgrading his education.

At the time of apprehension, all three children were removed from the home; the sisters were placed together in one home and the brother in a separate one. The cause of removal as communicated by the agency to the parents was physical abuse (details are withheld to protect the family’s identity). Both parents were implicated in the physical abuse. Consequently, both parents have pending assault charges that they are contesting in criminal court. CAS returned the two younger children to the parents’ care after a short period; one teenage child stayed in CAS care for approximately ten months. During this time, her placement was changed four times until she was returned to her parents’ care by a court order.

This family provided eight documents; included were three court orders, a service agreement, three items of correspondence with lawyers and other professionals and a family meeting plan. Ahmad cited a community agency as useful in many ways and the parents attended several programs conducted by this community agency.

I had one telephone interview and two face-to-face interviews with Ahmad, and multiple follow-up phone calls to clarify interview contents. Elnaz refused to be interviewed; she felt it was too painful to engage in any conversations about CAS. However, she remained in the room

and would ask questions directed to Ahmad in Arabic, and on occasions, he translated her comments to me.

As outlined in the profile, Ahmad provided data for the study through three semi-structured interviews and several follow-up calls where we discussed information to clarify meaning, understanding and further elaboration. Ahmad would subsequently translate these comments to me. Wardah was not introduced to me or visible during interviews; Abbas was at home for one interview and Sidra was there for all the interviews. The two younger children's presence allowed me to observe interactions with their parents and each other, which I documented in my field notes. Ahmad provided several documents that were part of the case management documentation, most of them dealing with court directions and progress made by the family.

CAS Documentation

Due to confidentiality, I will not list the title of documents; instead, I will refer to them as D1, D2, ...D7. For the same reason, I refrain from citing dates, as this information is critical in assessing timelines for family reunification. The following is an undated timeline:

D1..... Within five days of apprehension.

D2..... Within eight months of apprehension.

D3..... Within eleven months of apprehension.

D4..... Within a month of apprehension.

D5..... Within a month of apprehension.

D6..... Within nine months of apprehension.

D7..... Within eleven months of apprehension.

D8..... Within a month of apprehension.

Summarizing the information on the documents, it is clear that:

1. CAS verified⁵³ protection concerns for Wardah, and a no-contact order was in place for her in the initial stages of involvement.
2. Physical abuse by both parents (choking, hit with a belt) (p. 2, D4)
3. Abbas denied any abuse.
4. Sidra acknowledged being “hit” by her father.
5. Challenges – The teenage child’s statement indicated physical abuse; parents deny any abuse (p. 2, D4).

Further information from the documents is as follows:

- A. All the children were apprehended and placed in care under a Temporary Order. This occurred at the first hearing, usually within five days of apprehension.
- B. The Society granted access to Wardah at their discretion (D1) and approximately nine months later, access was changed to unsupervised and in the family home; this change was outlined in D2
- C. According to the information in D4, dated a month later than the protection application, CAS organized supervised access at the CAS premises three times weekly. CAS documentation noted:
 - Visits going okay
 - Children asking to go home
 - (Abbas) and (Sidra) - Working on returning home
 - Being in care was challenging for the children
 - The children were lovely and polite
 - The girls supported and cared for each other

⁵³ The verification decision made by workers in consultation with supervisors after an investigation is based on the probability that reported protection concerns are more likely to have occurred than not. Options include verified (reported concerns happened), not verified, and inconclusive. The Eligibility Spectrum tool, to assist workers in accurate and consistent decisions about levels of CAS involvement and services to families can be accessed here:

<http://www.oacas.org/publications-and-campaigns/professional-resources/eligibility-spectrum/>

- (Wardah) Struggled with separation from her family, felt responsible, and had regular teenage struggles (D4)⁵⁴

D6, a legal correspondence dated nine months after the apprehension indicated that the family responded to CAS rules as outlined:

Given the extensive efforts undertaken by both parents to engage with counselling resources, as well as the enormous emotional, physical and financial costs this incident has had on the entire family, it would be my position that the lessons have been learnt and further restrictions would not serve the public interest in any respect – instead it would only serve to harm this family further still. It is requested that the parents further ongoing cooperation with CAS and [community organisation] is henceforth sufficient. (D6)

The impact of CAS involvement on the father's daily life, including his job and education, was evident as highlighted in D8 (dated approximately one month after apprehension); "it is crucial that Ahmad attend scheduled meetings at the agency," which took place during the father's working and school hours.

Further, eight goals with a timeframe of six months were set out for reunification of the two younger children in a working agreement with the society. This agreement listed tasks that were to be accomplished by the parents, but they had no information on how the society would support them in completing the tasks such as counselling and parenting classes. Instead, the document stated that "the Society may be required to seek a Court Order for intervention should the risk factors indicate this level of intervention" (D7). Within a short period, CAS started their work to return the two younger children and developed a family reunification plan. Likewise, the plan indicated areas for the parents to work on but seemed to provide little programming to address their concerns. The family was eventually linked to a community resource that provided

⁵⁴ It is unclear from the document what regular teenage struggles were implied but separation from her family and feeling responsible for that separation is clearly not regular teenage struggles.

related services (D4, D3, D7). Power differentials were evident in the tone and wording of the documents. For instance, as noted above, a service agreement listed eight goals for the family but did not indicate resources for the family to assist them in successfully achieving these goals.

The following section focuses on the family experiences related by Ahmad highlighting themes that reveal significant challenges for the family. Struggles were associated with the family's religious and cultural identities and their newness to Canada which resulted in compounded marginalization due to intersections of religious struggles, cultural and racial differences, and refugee status. The data also highlighted Ahmad's commitment to his family, his faith, and his reliance on the community to address concerns raised by the CAS. I could see him, a grown man struggling to maintain his composure many times, especially when talking to his wife in Arabic, and then fighting back his own tears as he attempted to console her and share her perspectives to the narrative.

Emerging Themes from Interviews with Ahmad

The Ahmad family experienced child welfare service as intrusive, disruptive, and damaging to their family functioning. Having moved to Canada, the family's knowledge of CAS was non-existent; they did not understand the implications of the alleged abuse or CAS involvement. They were overwhelmed and unsure of how to manage and navigate the systems depicted in the middle layer of figure four (school, police, and court) that became a part of their CAS encounter. Aligned with the critical realism method of viewing layers, I explore what surfaced for the family because of their newness to Canada, along with language, cultural, and religious differences. They were therefore not merely "different" but positioned as and experienced being inferior based on the differences. Additionally, the family's social positioning indicated in the centre of figure four, dominated their experiences. The *real* in CR of

neoliberalism, racism, and Islamophobia, within the social structures of the Canadian context and child welfare practice set the stage for a nuanced understanding the family's experience.

Findings emerging from interviews with Ahmad demonstrated several implications and repercussions for the family members that ultimately led to devastating consequences, which they endured. The themes that emerged from the narratives also indicated significant struggles for Ahmad with identity, culture, and religion; factors that had a considerable role in the family's mostly negative interactions with CAS. Nevertheless, Ahmad felt that these very factors brought him strength and although he experienced marginalization based on "being different," he spoke with pride about his identity and religion. One important point to consider about identity is that is it defined in relation to other groups and for marginalized populations leads to diminished power.

The first theme I address is the family's impressions of how differences in language, culture, religion, and race/ethnicity collide with and shape the services they received. The second examines the emotional and economic consequences of child welfare involvement on Ahmad and his family. The third theme reveals strategies the family applied to assist them in coping with the ordeal of their child welfare involvement. The word "identity" is used frequently by Ahmad with dual meanings; one in a sense of subjective/self-identity, the way he sees himself. Being othered, his identity as a socially constructed prescriptive identity is experienced in his interactions with professionals reflecting Western norms of Muslims being othered.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Chapter 4 address the subject of Muslims being "othered" in the Canadian context with details from prominent scholars examining this issue. See for example: Razak's (2008). *Casting out the eviction of Muslims from Western law and politics*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press.

Manifestations of Challenges Attributed to the Family's Diverse Background

This theme focuses on Ahmad's story about the challenges he faced in the multiple systems that were triggered by the alleged abuse. At this level, the family experienced the *actual* in CR terms, that was triggered by the alleged abuse. The causal mechanism, the alleged abuse occurred, set in motion the apprehension, and a series of events including criminal charges. The family experienced the apprehension and subsequent interventions from CAS, school, and police the *actual*, as events that were layered onto their ideal and social *real*, intermingled with the powerful real of the systems. Ahmad's experiences of racism and discrimination is examined as he presented it, being 'like from third world, not accepted.' I explored the complications that emerged for Ahmad of the basis of his difference in worldview and ways in which this surfaced. I consider how religion, culture, and ethnicity impacted the family's experiences with different systems including child welfare the CAS investigation and subsequent involvement entailed. For clarity, I first present the Ahmad family's worldview and his understanding of the impact of his identity, followed by the emerging behaviours in the children that resulted in CAS interventions. Next, I expound the interactions with CAS including in-care placement, school, police, and court, weaving in Ahmad's narrative of difficulties he encountered. I then focus on evolving gender concerns and conclude with ideas on identity as a factor that impacted the child welfare engagements as presented by Ahmad.

The Ahmad Family's Worldview

Ahmad identified as Muslim man of Arab descent; the convergence of which shaped the framework within which he understood himself and his family. Being Arab emerged in his narratives about ancestry, lineage, and experiences with Islamophobia. His connection with

ancestry is reflected in his comment, “Arabs may be connected with their 16th grandpa.”⁵⁶ He belonged to a large extended family and maintained relationships with “third and fourth cousins.” In his worldview, there are specific responsibilities for each family member that are considered sacrosanct. His role as a child is one of service and respect, and filial piety is understood as an important manifestation of religious practice. Recalling his childhood, Ahmad said, “I served my father. Here, [referring to the Canadian context] this [serving parents] is a human slave thing,” reflecting his acknowledgement of contradictory connotations in the Canadian context. He astutely linked the notion of service to parents as alien to Western individualism where children are “paid for chores and don’t learn responsibility.”

Having to “serve” one’s parents reflects Ahmad’s commitment to filial piety, a notion that is considered a strong virtue in Islam. Therefore, it is not surprising that he expressed happiness with being able to serve his father and conversely was perplexed at the inversion of the parent-child relationship in Canada. He understands service to parents as a child’s responsibility and abiding by their instructions as deference to their wisdom instead of limitation of the child’s freedom. He spoke positively of his parents, saying:

How my parents raised me in Islam, you have to follow them with blind eyes. To be honest, I believe in that because parents, they give you, limits, and guidance on life. They see the risk as the youngest kids we don’t see it as a teenager, we cannot see because we have a blurred world.

⁵⁶ This is a reference to the Arab practice of maintaining information and connection to one’s genealogy through the tradition of oral chains. The passing of information and stories about families from one generation to the next is a practice that connects people with their ancestry. Ahmad’s comment points to an appreciation of family history and of the reverence and respect for aged family members.

The role of parenting as he understood it, is setting limits and guidance which he wanted to do for his children. In keeping with Islamic tradition, Ahmad sees himself as a provider for and protector of his family. To this end, he exerted significant efforts to secure a home and finances. Linked to his role as provider, which he takes seriously, he had “taken two jobs” and was happy that he could fulfil his daughter’s requests, he stated:

I was taking Wardah to the best stores in [name of city] like Zara, Gap or something like that; they have more because I work hard to provide for my kids.... I bought her a phone and she have what she needs. I take care of us and just make Wardah safe because I see my future, she can do something I didn't do, maybe a dream.”

Ahmad’s enthusiastic anticipation for his children to have educational opportunities and a good life in Canada became readily apparent. His concern for his children’s present comfort and future safety and success was frequently verbalized as his duty. Indeed, he referred to seeing his “future” in his daughter because she would have chances to accomplish “something” he could not achieve in his home country. Therefore, his sense of duty encompassed his dream of a brighter future for his children.

Ahmad’s vision for a brighter future, however, did not negate cultural and religious traditions. He relied on his worldview to engage with his family and raise the children. His desire to retain religion as central in their lives was powerful enough to dictate his choice of location to settle. They settled in an area where they could engage in their cultural/religious obligations and be part of a community, Ahmad said:

There's a city called [name of the city]. You find lots of halal food and [the city] has many cultures in it so you can live, **you don't have to change** [Ahmad’s emphasis]. So, we came here, we moved here. We were living at the townhouse, and we were in our community.

One might ponder the intensity of the father’s need to find a place where “you don’t have to change.” This desire was sufficient for the family to relocate, no easy task in a new country and with few resources. The move indicated Ahmad’s commitment to maintain and cultivate their

“way of life” by establishing his family in an area where he could have a community, find halal food, and practice his faith. He seemed happy to be in his community; nevertheless, his encounter with child welfare in this preferred city had devastating consequences on his vision.

Ahmad’s sense of religion and culture allowed him to differentiate between the two, making the point that they are not the same. In his understanding, religious norms are sacred, and one is “accountable to Allah for religion.” He prioritized religion in his everyday life in terms of practices and rules he wanted to preserve in his children. In talking about religious rules, he said:

But we have rules in our house like sleeping over. We don't have sleep over just in our closest friends like people we know, we know their families. We know our kids are on a safe side. It's not just in our culture, this is Islam rules.

Although Ahmad iterated that “you don’t have to change” he observed behaviours in his teenage daughter that signalled to him she was indeed changing and concerns with her behaviours were a constant worry.

Emerging Behaviours of the Children

Ahmad maintained that his wish to guide and protect his children included setting limits for them so that their behaviours remain acceptable Islamically. He did this within limits as he mentioned not expecting Wardah to wear *hijab* but felt that he should be able to have rules which included guidelines around the use of technology. Wardah’s phone use became excessive according to Ahmad; she was “attached to the Snapchat. She wants to spend all the time; she wants to bring her iPad to school. She wants to stay up till 1.00 am with her phone.” Ahmad’s motivation in attempting to set limits were rooted in the rationale that the excessive phone use will negatively impact Wardah’s sleep and thereby have significant consequences for her performance at school.

Ahmad felt it necessary to emphasize that his rules were aimed not at “control” but rather, to ensure safety. Again, he felt he had to defend his intent because he is different culturally and religiously. Maybe this difference is also reflected in the father’s pronounced worries about his daughter “sleeping over.” He did not want her to be involved in mixed-gender sleepovers. He saw this as not only a Muslim problem saying, “But as Muslim family and also **some Canadian family** [Ahmad’s emphasis] have no relationship before marriage and no sleepover.” The father is attempting to normalize expectations for his child by pointing out that some Canadian families also have expectations of teenagers not engaging in sexual activities, a prospect that weighed very heavily on him.

The complexity of managing Wardah’s behaviours that were unfolding for her in the new country was challenging for Ahmad. He felt that Wardah was struggling with typical teenage issues that presented these challenges. He explained that “like all teenagers, she wanted independence which is fair.” However, asserting her teenage desires resulted in breaking rules; Ahmad saw this as a threat to her Muslim identity and contrasted this with Abbas’s reactions, as not succumbing to peer pressure. Ahmad stated:

My son Abbas is, he has a relationship with people, but he still has his own culture. He feels proud because his identity is as a leader. Wardah, she's fallen. She can say, okay, if they ask her anything or they say, do you like the black? [She will say] I like black. If you come to her and say, do you like red, [she would say] yeah, I like red. She's flipped.

Wardah’s struggle and being influenced by friends highlight the complexity and flux of the adolescent identity which is further compounded by being in a new country. Nevertheless, Ahmad worried that lack of assertiveness and not maintaining values caused Wardah to “flip” because friends easily influenced her. Ahmad linked Abbas’s holding on to culture as pride in his Muslim identity while his comment on “Wardah, she’s fallen” indicates a sense of loss for Wardah’s capacity to maintain Islamic values. Here, the discerning Western reader may point to

the morally loaded and gendered comment used by Ahmad to describe Wardah.⁵⁷ While this may be one way to interpret his comment, the way he said it and the way I interpreted it is simply a fall from religious adherence, something concerning to any religious parent regardless of the gender of the child. My interpretation may be lacking the perspective of gendered discussions that surface in progressive discourse and instead points to prejudices that expose a failure to regard religion in the same way that gender is in such discourses. Since my work is grounded in a critical perspective from Razak, who claims that gender is used to further stereotypes of Muslim men as oppressors of women, I maintain that a Western gendered interpretation in this instance would be contrary to Ahmad's intended meaning.

Ahmad's interpretation of Wardah's behaviours included explanations such as, "she was influenced by friends. It's so normal for her to be influenced by friends because she was at that age, you know, certain age they like trouble." Yet, his flexibility was demonstrated when he asserted that he does not ask her to wear hijab that it is her choice to make. However, as Wardah's efforts to fit in with Canadian peers evolved, her parents viewed her choices as threats to the historically, religiously, and socially acceptable roles for her as a Muslim young woman. Consequently, the complexity of multi-generational struggles in a new and sometimes harsh environment surfaces as a point of conflict between Wardah and her parents. Although Ahmad

⁵⁷ The use of the word "fallen" by Ahmad was a cause for much intellectually stimulating conversations from some readers of my work about the possibility of gender issues at play, while other readers did not point to it as significant. I like some readers, was unaware of the connotations of the term and I believe that Ahmad used it as described, to indicate diversion from practice.

ascribed “fallen” and “loss of identity” to Wardah’s emerging teenage independence, his worries that she will lose aspects of her identity and be changed in some fundamental way remained a worry. And as a result, she will eventually lose her Islamic beliefs and practices. For someone who believes that life beyond the earthly realm is real and everlasting, “fallen” implies a sense of hopelessness for eternity.

Ahmad felt repercussions of cultural differences that reflected Canadian culture as hegemonic, he observed differences in his daughter and perceived her undergoing a “change of culture” brought on by her “wanting to fit in.” While he acknowledged the importance for her to have friends, he noted that she was impacted negatively, saying:

She was about thirteen and she was influenced by friends. It’s so normal for her to be influenced by friends because you know, certain age they like friends like that... But if you see she was mad and anxious and different, and she started saying the bad stuff and that's the first time I think I was really mad. We like our kids to have the old culture and take the good thing from the Canadian culture, working from the Muslim and Arabic culture. Working together to make their own culture but not picking the bad thing from here and the bad thing from here made a bad culture. We try to guide as a parent when we see something to correct.

This corresponds to normative thinking about Islam culturally with flexibility to adapt aspects of cultures from host societies that align with Islamic values. As evident by the comment above, the father was open to the “good” from Canadian culture and desired to guide his daughter to take the good; but not at the expense of the “old culture.” His being upset was not because his daughter had suddenly embraced newfound freedom but by the way she was changing, saying that she was “becoming mad, and anxious, and different.”

Ahmad did not mention any behavioural issues with Abbas and Sidra. Instead, he described Abbas as “having a strong personality and pride in his identity.” There could be other explanations, such as the child’s age or the complex gender realities in Muslim families with streamlined expectations for males and females. However, Ahmad attributed Abbas’s strength in

identity to being able to have “good relationships with others” while “he still has his culture and religion.” With his son being seen as strong and able to manage the culture shift and his daughter as being influenced in a concerning way, the question of a possible different framing and expectations of masculine and feminine identities surfaced. Ahmad did not express discrepancies in expectations for his son or daughter; he wanted them both to do well. I am therefore inclined to believe that the differences in feelings expressed about his son and daughter had more to do with their behaviours, which may be connected to their developmental stages rather than differences in his expectations. Nevertheless, gender appeared as a theme in Ahmad’s perceptions of how the family was treated in their encounter with CAS.

Complications of CAS Interventions - School, Police and Court Experiences

Figure five illustrates the complex nature of CAS interactions that also included other state-sanctioned systems and became involved as part of the investigation process triggered by the child abuse allegation. The family encountered frustrations and confusion in their attempts to navigate the complications that arose from CAS, school, police, and court. Each system as a stand-alone was overwhelming; when combined, expectations and directions became murky, enabling the processes to become incomprehensible. In this theme, I examine Ahmad’s story about the overpowering ways in which the systems interacted to complicate the troubling and ongoing process for the family.

CAS verified protection concerns of physical abuse of Wardah by both parents and registered Ahmad on the child abuse registry, it is not clear why Elnaz was not registered as the allegation was that she choked Wardah. Yet, Ahmad maintained that at no point did he or Elnaz hit Wardah; he felt that she was being coached on what to say and do. He stated that “anybody could put a mark on her hand, she could do it herself.” Both parents continued to deny the

allegations (D4); and it is noteworthy to point out that shortly after the apprehension, Wardah wanted unrestricted access to her family.

As highlighted through the interviews with Ahmad, the family's involvement with CAS included interactions with four systems. The father's impression that school, police, and CAS acted together to take his children through a prejudiced, discriminatory, and illegal "operation" and no one provided him with clarity. He commented:

They just joined in, and they put the kids in CAS. Okay, why? You abuse your daughter with you're using a weapon, threatening, assault causing bodily harm. Well, like they say there's a belt. Okay, I went for the court and say, listen, everything you're talking about, it doesn't happen. You have to make sure before you start this process.

Ahmad continued to deny allegations of abuse. He contended the report and indicated that the unwarranted actions taken before a proper investigation had crushing and grievous consequences for the family. Ahmad's experience of the investigation became bothersome, as he was "not being believed." He found it incredulous that the CAS and other professionals took Sidra's word over his and Abbas's. He could not understand how they could believe a five-year-old over a ten-year-old. He explained:

The police said, listen you threatened. Did I threaten my kids? Maybe in our culture, it's not threatening, and the kids, they understand it. They asked my little daughter and "your dad slap you" and she said "yes, my dad slap me." That's it. That's our culture, which is how you play with your kids. They didn't the totally understand the difference. Abbas said we never hit him. Why did no one believe him?

In another interview, he said, "When our kids, we played with them, we put them in our lap, we squeeze them, that's our culture, how you play with kids." Ahmad contested the credibility that his young child would give an accurate account, one taken over his own narration and that of his older child.

Ahmad expected that "here in Canada" people have the right to a "proper investigation" before officials "come through the house and take the kids." A proper investigation, he felt

would have considered his narrative of the events and then make attempts to reconcile the differences in the children's disclosures. The children told contradictory stories; the middle child said nothing happened, but the younger child said her dad slapped her; Ahmad had this to say:

They judge us with [the words of] five years old. What she's believed Santa Claus, he came from the fireplace, and she still believe in tooth fairy, and they put us in this position, instead of helping the family. I'm very open for them to keep asking me, ask the kids individually go through a process. **You don't just attack the family and take them away instead of protecting the family** [My emphasis]. You're going to destroy the life because you take fast action, fast. And you judge before.

As he stated, Ahmad was open to having the necessary interviews so that a full understanding of the situation was obtained before significant and consequential actions were taken by “those in authority.” He cringed at “the authorities” taking the word of a child – who is not legally responsible, neither in Islam nor Canadian law – as the most reliable source of information. During the interviews with Ahmad, Sidra was present and frequently sat with him. In his desire to make clear for me what he was talking about, he showed me the game they played; a game that cemented the narrative of Ahmad as a “child abuser” which resulted in him sustaining criminal charges.

School and Police Involvement. Ahmad experienced the school's part in the CAS process as oppressive, contending that the school had a negative perception of the family's differences manifested by experiences of marginalization. He held that Wardah was “judged” at school based on the differences. In one incident, he went for a meeting to determine placement for Wardah and encountered racism from the teacher; he stated:

She [teacher] mentioned but no, no, no, Wardah is a newcomer... she doesn't understand. I said, don't be like that. So, I was mad from that, she [teacher] makes Wardah look stupid and I believe in my daughter, when [the teacher] see that I believe in my daughter why you don't say, okay, let's do that.

The teacher's assessment and recommendations for school placement became the foundation for further harmful experiences for the family. Ahmad felt betrayed by the way the school handled an incident when the police came to the school. As described above, Ahmad had concerns about Wardah's behaviours and had taken her phone before she left for school as a consequence for her excessive use of technology. He went to the school to take lunch for the children and encountered a scene confusing to him; he said:

I see there's a police car, four, three cars and they came to the school, which is unusual. When I first enter, I see the secretary going for the police, and said this is the father. I said, "can I see kids?" They took the food; I didn't see the kids. They said they will tell the kids this is from your dad.

In talking about this incident, Ahmad's care for his children became obvious in a powerful way. He was aware that his daughter was upset because of the limits on her phone, and he wanted to do something pleasant for her to convey that he wanted to atone and reconcile their differences over her phone privileges. He brought food to the school hoping to spend some time with her but was not allowed to see her. However, it was not his daughter who rejected him; rather school officials intercepted and his opportunity of letting his daughter know that he was apologetic regarding their earlier argument was lost.

Ahmad left the school and returned home where he encountered officers but did not know why they were there and was unaware of the seriousness of the situation unfolding; he said:

And they have to come for what? The first idea that came to my mind, I think okay they [the children] play with their phones. They may share something; you know on Facebook or something because people hear that. I came here, [to the house] I found the guys here.... I find that I was facing a charge of child abuse.

Ahmad voiced confusion when confronted by police officers who informed him that he was facing child abuse charges. He said, "it was surprising ...I was so confused when he came to my house."

Both Ahmad and Elnaz spent the night in jail. This was a harrowing experience, and they did not know the whereabouts of their children. The following day they attempted to locate the children but found the process disorienting. In the unfamiliar landscape of CAS and police, they were desperate to find their children, Ahmad went to the police station thinking that he would get his children but was told that they were with the CAS; He said:

I went to the police station, I supposed to be taking my kids today. They said your kids are with CAS. [Ahmad said to the police] But the officer said we can take the kids today. See if he's not here, this is his number call [but they did not call him]. When you promise something, you have to be able to give.

Ahmad provided the number of the police officer who told him to go for the children at the police station. He asked to speak to the said officer who was not there and could not be contacted. The father felt dismissed, and no one attempted to assist him. He expected some assistance because the police “are working for the government, not with their own house,” meaning that a public servant in Canada should be able to assist people. The parents were left with broken promises, which created the impression that school, police, and CAS all colluded to take their children. No one provided him with any clarity or information about what was happening.

Ahmad’s arrival at CAS was no easy task. In addition to dealing with all the confusion, fear, and terror of not knowing where his children were, these were further compounded by frustrations and confusion to navigate “the systems;” the directions were murky, and the processes suffocating. As illustrated by the following quote, they had no idea what CAS is, where their children were, how they were doing and when they could see them.

So, he [the police officer] came, he said, I'm sorry, but your kids moved to the CAS for care protection. I said what is CAS? We didn't know. Your kids are with CAS. They went to CAS, I went for children, and so I went for the children just to find the door closed, this was Saturday.

Ahmad regarded the police and child welfare professionals' treatment of him and Elnaz to be as if "we are like criminals." With specific reference to the police, he stated:

And when they took us to the police station, they treat us as criminal people, even the rope for the shoes, they take it out, they take the belt, you know, I know it's a safety thing, but let's do the investigation, as a human rights investigation. I studied human rights. If you are not guilty, they take a room, they bring investigator there, and they do the investigation. You don't take him, put you in jail.

Requests to remove his shoelaces and belt felt out of line for the father. He again referenced that no investigation was done, and his rights were violated; he felt helpless and had no idea of the unfolding of events, saying:

It's not fair to come through the people's house, take them for the police and take their kids? They should start off came first collect the information, okay. You have the kids in the house, you ask them for information, make sure everything is like as the kids say because they are kids.

Further, the family's interactions with professionals were marked with worry and mistrust because here again, they experienced being stereotyped with discriminatory language, assumptions, accusations, and judgments. Ahmad felt attacked as he pointed out "You don't just attack the family and take them away instead of protecting the family."

When asked about the apprehension, Ahmad started the conversation with, "I was laughing [in disbelief] because I didn't understand the situation, laughing when he told me your daughter said stuff, I don't believe because I didn't do nothing." Further complicated by the lack of information, Ahmad mentioned:

There it was so blank, no information. They don't give us any information. They didn't say you are being charged- just come with us, you have to come with us, and we could not make the police officer talk. You have to come, and you will not know... **can you tell me please what's happening?**

Although the police were already involved and interviewed the father, his pleas for information yielded only instructions. The instructions made no sense to him because he had no idea of the

gravity of the situation and the system's power. In an incident with the police, the father was concerned that he had no authority or power to soften the arrest of his pregnant wife, who was fasting at the time. He was also concerned that the police were questioning his manager without his knowledge. He said, "They talked with my manager. I said, did they have any authority?" He experienced this as another instance of powerlessness that eventually caused him to lose his job.

Removal of the children from their home was a mysterious and confusing process for the parents. Their understanding of the problem, next steps, or how to access information was severely limited. For example, Ahmad stated that he received a call on Sunday about court proceedings on Monday and "without no idea I went to court." His struggle to find the courthouse was only the beginning of another terrifying process that heightened his sense of powerlessness.

Court and Legal Process. The family experienced powerlessness in their new, supposedly safer environment, and an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness was dominant in the father's narratives. Furthermore, his horror of having to "go to court" was amplified by his prior experiences with the "government system" from his country of origin, where a visit from government officials had severe consequences for one's safety. Unfortunately, as the father reported, "we were traumatized again." When he arrived at the court and went through "their search" he found his worker. At that point, she gave him instructions; He said:

And she was talking with me about hiring a lawyer or to go for legal aid to attend another court. But did we sit down with my daughter first? She's told her I do that [referring to the allegations]? This was not true. And that wasn't serious enough to talk with her about? This is what we have. You have to attend court and bring a lawyer.

Evidently Ahmad expected to see Wardah, sit with her, and talk about the accusations. His understanding was that he was going to court to see and talk with his daughter and to find out what she was saying in the worker's presence. His expectations and anticipations were seriously

sidelined by formalities that he did not understand. Instead of seeing his children, hearing about them, being reassured of their safety, his worker told him he needed a lawyer. In court, the father was made aware of the abuse charges; he said; “I find that I was facing a charge of child abuse.” Not only did they not know where their children were, but they did not know when they would see them. This is alarming for any family and given the context of this family who sought refuge in Canada from war, the significance must have amplified their confusion.

Another confusing aspect of the process for Ahmad was that he was placed on the child abuse registry without being declared guilty by the court. He said:

The court it doesn't say you are guilty yet... They registered me with a child abuse register...right away without proof. I didn't plead guilty, and the judge didn't say you are guilty yet. The charges will be dropped off because my daughter, she came back to them and she said, no.

Ahmad understood the implication of being placed on the child abuse registry and talked about his future ambition to work as a social worker being curtailed. Further, he worried about the possibility of future employment with both criminal and child abuse records. He felt that the criminal charges would eventually be dropped because his daughter subsequently changed her story; but he remained distraught about being registered as child abuser. In subsequent conversations with Ahmad, he said that CAS supported removing his name from the registry by providing a letter; however, unless they admit to making a mistake, the registration cannot be expunged without engaging a lawyer, which Ahmad could not afford.

Worries about Placement. One of the most devastating outcomes for any family involved with CAS is the possibility of having a child or children removed from their care. Child protective services can remove children from their homes when an assessment that there is an imminent risk of harm is made. In such cases, parents are primarily viewed as a risk or threat to their children's safety and protection. With the risk-oriented child welfare practice in Canada,

there is little focus on the risks caused to families and communities by the state (Dumbrill, 2012). In the case of Ahmad, the removal of the children from their home seemed prejudiced and caused anguish for the entire family.

The CAS now has protocols to have family visits and phone calls arranged so that parents can see and stay in touch with their children while the children are in care. In cases of apprehension, it is critical to initiate visits and calls in a safe way to maintain family ties. This did not happen, and according to Ahmad's recollection, it was two weeks before he could see Wardah even though he was told that he had access to visits. He said:

I haven't seen my kids yet...Cool, that we have access visits to young. They were so blank, no information. They don't give us any. Where are our kids? I know you'll protect them; we totally understand that, but they still have parents.

This quote moved the narrative from anger and being upset to submissive acceptance. At this stage, the father expressed understanding and accepted the crippling situation; he did not know where his children were but was told that CAS will "protect them." The separation from their children left Ahmad and Elnaz feeling that their parental rights were suspended; they experienced it as emotionally painful. The father found it necessary to pronounce "we still have emotion; we still worry about our kids."

Moreover, when he did see them, he became concerned about their well-being, stating "We start access visits. They look dirty. They look as if they are losing their parents." In this case, the family had three children removed and placed in different foster homes. Abbas and Sidra were allowed home visits but in the father's words "only this two? I have three children." He was not aware of what was happening with Wardah. The absence of adequate information became problematic and contributed further to experiences of oppression, conflict, and confusion for Ahmad and his family.

Another set of worries based on religion emerged within the placement of the children.

Again, Islam has rules about what can be consumed and eating *halal* is important to the family;

but this was not considered, nor was the father consulted. He stated:

So why not ask me about information with my daughter? She has to wear [proper clothes] she has to drink, eat halal food. My daughter, she came to me and she doesn't eat halal foods. She eats the chicken from McDonald's. **I don't believe that's happened!** Because I didn't see it, like as a family we don't eat it. We follow the rules.

It was easy to see the incredulity with which the father viewed food consumption that is not halal. Maintaining a *halal* diet is a fundamental practice for Muslims, and it requires constant vigilance in Canadian society, where obtaining halal food is not always easy. The father had taken necessary precautions to ensure his family consumed *halal* food, to the extent as stated before, being one of the parameters for relocating. Eating halal changed quickly once his daughter was in foster care. One saving grace in the foster system for Ahmad was the Christian foster mother who relates to him around the needs of his children:

The lady that our kids live with, they live with her; she was wanting to bring them *halal* food. She was calling me. She told me, listen I want to find out about *halal* food, can you tell me.

In expressing this, Ahmad perceived the phone call from the foster mother as somehow giving legitimacy to his request and commented on the importance of her call in creating a sense of recognition for his religious beliefs.

In Islam, rules for morality and good conduct revealed by God are sacralised. Even when Muslims cannot abide by the rules, they acknowledge the sanctity of the rules. In this family's case following of the rules of Islam was evident. In my field notes documentation and observations of the parents, I recorded that they prayed and fasted, and that *Adhan* sounded in the home to signal prayer time. These and the father's concern over not eating halal and Elnaz fasting while pregnant all indicated a strict adherence to Islamic guidelines. Ahmad's wishes that

Wardah maintains a minimum level of moral values based on religion were negated. While in care, there were occasions where she “was allowed to do whatever.” She attended her graduation ceremony dressed inappropriately. Ahmad said:

When you make my daughter, wear clothes that's not in her age and she put the makeup, that's not in her age without asking. When you take her for graduation day and you make her wear clothes that's not allowed in our community, not allowed our religion.

Aside from the religious and community implications, the father felt he had to “pretend” to like something that appalled him, saying, “I have to smile and said, whoa, that's nice. No. When I feel it's not nice.” He wanted his daughter to maintain her religious practices regarding dressing modestly, while she was in care. Ahmad deemed her inappropriate appearance when in the community to reflect his failure as a parent.

Emerging Gender Dynamics. As identified above, roles related to gender differences are a part of the established social organization in the traditions of Muslim communities, making this both a social *real* and an *ideal* real when considering the CR framework. Gender differences surfaced for the family in interactions with child welfare and other professionals. Elnaz’s identity as a Muslim is apparent because she wears the *hijab*. Ahmad indicated she experienced different struggles and referred to an incident where they were threatened because she was out in public with her hijab. He said,

We just land there, and people try to threaten us because my wife, she just wants to wear her hijab... so we were scared, trauma again because we came from a part that like, we live with traumatized because of the war.

Being threatened and the fear of being threatened based on one’s religious identity in a place where the parents’ anticipated safety was a traumatic experience. Elnaz is not fluent in English; this added an extra layer of “deviation” from the norm of Canadian culture and negatively impacted how professionals in the case viewed her. As a newcomer Muslim woman who does

not speak English, the mother's identity certainly influenced service providers' perceptions of her. It is easy to imagine her being viewed within the stereotype of "backward" and "uneducated" because she cannot speak English but also as "oppressed" because of her *hijab*; this is all common in the Islamophobia literature outlined in chapter four.

One of Elnaz's experiences with the police demonstrates a clash between what she expected as a Muslim woman and what happened with the police. Ahmad reported that she was home alone when the police arrived and could not understand what was going on. When Ahmad spoke to the police, they were taking Elnaz to the police station: He said to them:

You are not allowed to take my wife; she's a Muslim girl. She cannot go with you. It is not right for her, she is fasting. Can you tell me please what's happening? They said, you see when you come. They will take my wife, without the female police officer.

Ahmad's hope that consideration for their religious identity in interactions with professionals is seen in his pleading that Elnaz is fasting, and she is "a Muslim." His request that his wife be assigned a female officer is based on Islamic stipulations on gender interactions, which require females to have female professionals particularly in one-on-one interactions. His concern that Elnaz will be with strange men, would be "a bad situation for her." He mentioned that his wife was fasting (as it was Ramadan) and was concerned that she would not be able to complete the fast if in custody. This experience with the police can be easily seen from their perspective as a confirmation that Muslim women cannot speak for themselves and are indeed oppressed; but Ahmad was once more seeing his role as the protector of Elnaz.

Further, Ahmad observed that the police insinuated archaic beliefs about gender interactions among Muslims in questioning him about not allowing his daughter to interact with boys. Here is what he had to say:

He [police officer] said, okay, **but do you allow your daughter to play with boys?** [Ahmad's emphasis] She's, my daughter. She went to school. The school is not just for

girls. There are girls and boys. How she deals with them that's above to me. That's the thing, we don't have, how you say that, go hang out girls with boys, through like the relationship before that's an Islam rule."

Once again, Ahmad felt that his religion was under scrutiny, and he was judged unfairly even when it was evident that his daughter was allowed reasonable gender interactions that transpire at school and in the neighbourhoods. However, he was clear that he wanted his daughter to maintain "Islamic rules" and maintain the *adab* (courtesy) of gender interaction. Based on the frequency and intensity with which it was mentioned, setting, and maintaining limits to gender interaction was important to the father.

Expectations for "dressing appropriately" is another example of how gender emerged as an area of conflict experienced by the father. His daughter does not wear a hijab and the parents accept this; they do not expect her to do so. However, they wanted some level of what they understood to be "decent and moral" and felt that this changed while she was in care:

My daughter, she doesn't wear a *hijab*. That doesn't mean I am sorry about that. But that doesn't mean [she should] communicate and look as 20 years old when she is 14 years old. Sorry about that but she going to look like a witch. She's not my daughter. You know what, she looked like a girl. She came from the street. She makes her hair and makeup, what she wears is wrong.

Although the mother wears her *hijab*, the daughter did not, this reflected flexibility in expectations from both parents. However, the father had a strong reaction to how his daughter was dressed on one occasion while she was in care. He felt that her hair, makeup, and clothes were inappropriate because she no longer appeared as modest; a concept central to Islam's depiction of believers (both men and women).

The emphasis on modesty and shyness is connected to the Prophet (peace and blessings be with him) and is an honoured tradition for Muslims, around which Ahmad experienced harassment. He felt that this preservation of modesty went by the wayside when his daughter was

in care, and it was an incident that angered him. However, he had to “pretend” that his daughter looked nice even though he saw a worrying transformation with inappropriate, even unacceptable clothes and makeup. In Ahmad’s worldview, this immodest dress renders his daughter unsafe and objectifies her, he could not reconcile safety and protection to include this degree of immodesty.

Religious Adherence as a Disadvantaging Difference

Using CR to position the interactions we see Ahmad’s world through the open context where interactions of the *real* context in the organizational setting interacting with the *real* in his social and ideal sphere to manifest an engagement with CAS that was overpowering for the Ahmad family. Ahmad struggled to understand how being in Canada changed so quickly from a situation of hope to one of utter hopelessness. He was working two jobs and attending school to “Canadianize” his credentials. He bought a home and built a new life in the community; but child welfare intervention interrupted his settlement. When asked about the impact on his life, he said:

This thing turns my life 360 degree because I was just a newcomer here. When I came to this country to be safe for me and for my family, but that actually make me lose my family and put me in really bad final situation. That makes hope disappear, gives me a really bad feeling.

This quote highlights the degree of the ordeal faced by the family. In reflecting on the encounter with CAS, Ahmad understood many of his experiences in the context of the systems because of their adherence to Islam and expressed concerns that what they experienced were racism and Islamophobia. As mentioned earlier, questioning his religion evoked feelings of resentment, and had implications for him that could easily be missed; the following quote sheds light on how this questioning about religion was perceived:

You were not supposed to be asking me what's my Religion? You are here to ask me about what's happened between me and my kids. The policeman said no, it's from the perspective that I would like to understand how you deal with your kids. I say okay. Is there a different way people deal with this? Jewish people, deal different? Christian people? Dealing with kids it's not about religion, it's about humanity and behaviour. The policeman asks me about my religion. Believe it's between me and my God. We are not terrorism, we are human in our meeting, when we meet each other, we say salaam for peace, we are a peaceful religion. Don't put me in a position that when you see me, you see a terrorist.

This comment from Ahmad reflects a dual awareness of Islam. On the one hand, he experienced religion as a source of strength, connection to family and community, and a link to higher purposes that guide his personal life. On the other hand, being Muslim exposed him to incidents of Islamophobia occurring through the pervasive stereotyping of Muslims; perceptions of the professionals that Islam is backward, and thereby connecting his actions to this view of Islam. Comparing Islam to other religions, Ahmad said that he should not have been asked about religion but rather about behaviours and humanity. But practicing Islam is sometimes experienced as being sub-human, terrorist. Ahmad implied that the intent of the line of questioning is because he is a Muslim, and his religion was being singled out as a likely cause for the alleged abuse. His response to the question of religion indicated an internalized feeling of being perceived as a terrorist and therefore responded in a manner to ensure that he conveyed being Muslim does not equal being a terrorist.

Mixed in with Islamophobia, xenophobia also surfaced for the father. With regards to police officers, he commented:

You guys look as almost for a Muslim family as third-world people, as if they are dangerous. I'm here; I'm in Canada so ask me what happened. Don't ask me what your religion! You don't want [to be treated like] an alien. I see, I now know they are racist.

The father's statement clearly expresses the idea that he perceived the police as treating him as "less than" in a different way, a way in which the intersection of his faith and his refugee status

combined to make him feel like an “alien.” He returned to being asked about religion many times; his anger and hopelessness surfaced, and thus he concluded that “they are racist.”

Differentiating between religion and culture, Ahmad linked religious practices to sacredness stemming from his belief and an “accountability to Allah.” While Ahmad prioritized certain religious rules for his family life, ironically these very ‘rules’ evoked discrimination against the family. For example, his responsibility to guide his children through setting limits was singled out as unacceptable despite Ahmad’s constant referring to his religious teachings as a positive force in the family’s life. It is significant to note that this idea was reflected by all other Muslim participants included a foster mother who made the distinction of being Muslim and following the Quran but being culturally different because of her country of origin. Nevertheless, the interconnectedness of Ahmad’s identity as Arab, Muslim and refugee as illustrated in figure five had a compounded effect on what he experienced as the collusion of child welfare, school, police, and the legal system that resulted in significant economic and emotional hardships.

The Economic and Psychological Consequences of Child Welfare Interventions

The removal of the children from the family home and subsequent interactions with CAS challenged the parents on many levels and reproduced negative consequences for the family. The *actual* outcomes for the family, what is considered empirical and measurable surfaced through economic, psychological, and emotional repercussions. I discuss the economic consequences for the family in the first section and the emotional and psychological impact of CAS involvement in the second section. This theme reveals substantial losses that resulted in severe, harsh, tragic, and traumatic consequences.

The Economic Consequences of Child Welfare Involvement

In child welfare literature, poverty is believed to be a factor and of particular concern for immigrant and refugee populations (Lavergne, et al. 2008). In the findings of this study, the family was managing their resettlement surprisingly well given their recent arrival in Canada as refugees; however, CAS involvement resulted in creating a situation of poverty for the family. An area of great impact with significant implications for the family was the financial loss they suffered.

Ahmad lost his jobs at the onset of the investigation because his companies (he had two jobs) required “a clean criminal record.” Aside from the loss of his job, he felt a sense of betrayal that “they” reported to his manager that he was involved with the police. As he said:

They talked to my manager, and they don't want criminal people to work there I lose my two jobs because it's a strict company. They say if you are involved with any criminal charge, we cannot make you work with us.

Ahmad's concept of himself as the father is linked to providing for his family; towards this end, he worked two jobs. The loss of his jobs meant that he did not have the means to meet the financial needs of his family. He felt trapped “sitting at home” when he needed finances, which he had made every effort to secure.

The child welfare involvement also resulted in the loss of Ahmad's potential to earn more through his efforts to advance his career. Ahmad was attending school and pursuing a career in social services. Being registered with the child abuse registry, he reported cost him his future career, he said:

They registered me with a child abuse registry...right away. You judge me; you put me in this thing, so I lose my career. I lose like \$50,000 that I use for study because if I want to get hired now, they [prospective employer] can look for child abuse in the ministry. They are going to find me listed there. Who's going to hire me for the social worker career?

It became evident that Ahmad's worries over the financial situation that escalated with the child welfare involvement included the actual (loss of money spent to study), and potential (from his anticipated career); additionally, he also lost finances by having to spend incredible amounts of money on his "case." He talked about the money that he had to put out for lawyers' fees, saying:

I went for the consultation with the lawyer he charged me like \$500.00 to talk. I don't have that money, he said, "your situation is so bad, you have to find the loan. If you want to hire me, I need \$25,000 for you, \$25,000 to find the lawyer for your wife. You and your wife are facing a criminal charge. So, the first day we use, duty counsellor, and we have tried to apply for legal aid. They say if you have a house, you have to lien in your house. So, lien in my house, then I must renew my mortgage. If I put the lien in it, it cannot renew the mortgage.

As outlined by Ahmad, he had to come up with \$50,000 for lawyers' fees. Alternative sources of legal representation (legal aid) were unavailable to him because he owned a house. He felt trapped. It is no easy task for a refugee to have secured a home for his family within a few short years, but now he was faced with the prospect of losing it. The financial aftermath of the apprehension placed the father in this impossible situation, as he puts it "so either losing the house or losing the kids."

Ahmad talked about "wanting to provide" for his family and "working hard with two jobs and school to make a better future" but this "one thing" changed all that forever. His migration to Canada under refugee status meant he had no financial assets upon arrival. He established himself in a relatively short time, only to be thrown into financial ruin. The ramification of losses described resulted in psychological and emotional challenges for the family.

Psychological Impact of Child Welfare Interventions

The child welfare literature indicates that psychological impact of child welfare interventions for minoritized populations (Barn, 2007). Ahmad's interactions as narrated suggest similar consequences that left lasting and profound consequences for the family. The layers of

adversities described above in the narration of the family's child welfare interactions resulted in several psychological concerns for all family members. The responsibility of attending numerous appointments (CAS, court, police) was a struggle that exhausted Elnaz physically and emotionally. According to Ahmad, CAS kept them busy "running around" which they did in the hope that all these efforts would result in getting their children back. The constant and depressing busyness took a toll on his wife's health and the stress became too much. After she attended the first court hearing, an unbearable, traumatic, and tragic loss resulted.

Like my wife, she went for court, and she just got out and she lose the baby because she has a disc problem in her spine. It's hard work to go because she is pregnant. It's so difficult for her to travel by car and sit down at the chair for long time. After that court, she lost the baby, we went through all those things.

This devastating loss for the family occurred in the Muslim month of Ramadan, a sacred time when they were focused on their religious obligation of fasting. In the state's attempt to "protect" the children, the unanticipated outcome of losing a child occurred. In having to "prove" that she is a concerned, committed mother, she lost her unborn baby and thereby suffered psychologically.

The loss of an unborn child is a crushing experience for any woman. Elnaz's exceptional circumstance of a young mother with little social support and language struggles, amplified the experienced the "loss" of her three children as it impacted resources and supports available to her. In this quote, Ahmad described his wife as "close" to her children; he struggled to convey the closeness between the mother and her children, but it was evident. In my field notes, I documented Elnaz's interactions with the two children in the home during interviews as one of loving ease and responsive interactions. This observation was supported by society documents which indicated "extensive efforts taken by the parents," "the children are lovely, polite,

engaging” and “the girls support each other.” These observations suggest the parent’s commitments to their children who were well cared for in their home.

Ahmad indicated that the entire family experienced an immense amount of stress. To begin, the cumulative experiences of stresses he described resulted in the loss of their unborn child and the subsequent psychiatric concerns for Elnaz. With regards to the loss of their unborn child, Ahmad, was most concerned about Elnaz, he said: “I can’t believe this thing happened! My wife, she’s lost the baby and she went for psychiatry. You know all those things and she’s on medication now.”

Elnaz’s exhausting experiences of being arrested and jailed, appearing at court, having her children removed, and losing her unborn child, resulted in so much stress for Elnaz that she required hospitalization and psychiatric treatment. Ahmad expressed disbelief at the events saying, “I can’t believe these things happened.” It is difficult to imagine the state of mind of this young woman who does not speak English and experiencing the trauma of these events after she escaped the trauma of war with her family intact.

Putting together multiple stressors led to a “big stress with too much trouble” for both Ahmad and Elnaz. He said:

Yes, that’s some stress, because of stress like all those, my wife lost baby and for me...
[long pause] So, one day I was driving, I am thinking tomorrow I have court. I passed the red light. And had a car accident. That's one example of what's happening.

When asked about the stresses he experienced, Ahmad referred to Elnaz’s miscarriage but did not dwell on it; it seemed too overwhelming for him to talk about. This was a difficult part of the interview as Elnaz was beside him and crying. As iterated in the above quote with regards to personal stress, Ahmad’s daily activities including his driving were impacted. His preoccupation with the overwhelming situation of CAS compromised his safety.

The continuous state of anxiety and worry for the children heightened stress for both parents; they consistently struggled to comprehend why the children were removed from their home. In the father's words: "They steal our kids. We want to get them back at any cost even with time and all money. But we want our kids."

With the removal of the children, the parents also experienced a disruption in their parenting responsibility which they felt they were doing well including setting proper limits within their religious and cultural contexts. Both Ahmad and Elnaz experienced loss of parental authority that resulted in emotional and spiritual repercussions. In Islam, parental rights and responsibilities have a divine connotation and parents are highly regarded; this was elaborated earlier in the section addressing identity where Ahmad made references to his parents and grandparents. He saw himself as a "good parent," following the tradition of "taking care" and "providing" and he spoke of his family with much love. The parents' concern about their children was reflected in interviews, fieldnotes and society documents, all of which pointed to positive parenting skills as noted before. For example, Ahmad was involved in his children's education and invested in their academic success. In attempts to be a responsible parent and exercise his rights to seek a "good education," he attended a school meeting to have some input on high school selection for Wardah because he valued education.

Ahmad felt that his responsibilities as a father were taken away when he set limits for his children and maintained parental obligations. He considered it his responsibility to set "rules" and have expectations of his children. He talked about expectations of Wardah, saying:

We have rules in our house, we try to guide. As parent, when we see something, when we our kids ask us about something, the first thing we see to is them. CAS talking about risk, risk, risk but on the same hand the kids have to listen sometimes because they have to try to understand like from my perspective.

He felt that the concerns of CAS and their “risk talk” were in no way balanced by any sensitivity to his religious and cultural beliefs, choices, and preferences. Some limits set for his children conflicted with the “Canadian norm.” He was therefore viewed as an incapable parent and lost his Islamic right to protect his children despite his efforts to secure a good future for them.

Ahmad commented that “all the talk about risks” interrupted the children’s capacity to listen and hear what he and Elnaz were saying, especially in the case of Wardah. He tried to set consequences for her behaviour by taking her phone, but this backfired, he said:

Wardah said, “You cannot take that,” [her phone] I said no, this is mine. I paid for this. Anytime I feel like you are not in a safe situation, because you are underage, I am responsible. I am responsible to make sure you are safe because you are a child, my child.

Ahmad identified and attempted to manage behaviours that were unacceptable because of his sense of responsibility. These very behaviours were managed in similar ways by foster parents when Wardah was in care. And it was while she was in care, another significant incident occurred; she fled from the foster home and called her father to pick her up. Ahmad felt helpless about this, but knew he had to follow the rules, or he would make “things worst.” Here is his account of this incident:

There’s a condition we don’t see each other 200 meters distance, so she came to my house. She called me and she said, “hi dad” I was very surprised. I don’t know what to say. I asked what’s up, what’s happened? I feel as parents, I feel there is something wrong. She said dad I’m running from the CAS; I want to come to my home.

This sequence of events put the father in the position where he had to tell his daughter she could not go home. So not only was his parental right usurped but also his responsibility to protect his daughter, his ideal *real* was dismissed and organizational *real* took over. The significance of this Ahmad having to call CAS when his daughter called on him for help cannot be overstated. To protect himself from further charges, he had to restrain his paternal responsibility as a Muslim father to protect his daughter, even after she pleaded with him to go home. She on the other

hand, interpreted it as her father did not want her to go home, which is the very thing he was fighting for. In response to her question “You said you don't want me to be at home?” he responded:

I want you but I know the rules. “If you came home, they going to take you away so stay there. I will call the CAS. They are going to come. So, she started crying and you know, yelling... I called the worker, I said listen, my daughter blah, blah, blah and she left at school, and she came home. The worker was looking for her because the volunteer driver didn't find her at school. So, this turned, like a war, the school and CAS, they lost the kid. So, I told them she's here and they came, and they took her.

Fortunately, Ahmad understood the implications of the no contact order and called the worker. His daughter did not want to return to the foster home. Naturally, this incident was troubling in multiple ways. First, Wardah was alone outside at night, calling her father to come get her, but he could not because “of rules.” Second, her running as he put it “so this turned like a war, the school and the CAS they lost the kid, so I told them she is here, and they came and took her.” Third, it became clear and concerning for the father that while CAS took Wardah’s words to be true and removed her and the other children from the home when the complaint was about her, CAS did not use the same rationale when she ran away from care; this was something she had never done before while at home. The double standards and paradoxes were incomprehensible for the father to the extent that he said to Wardah, “you're looking [to come home], you ask them to protect you, so you run from them? She (Wardah) said, “but I don't need them to protect, they raise me bad.” Nevertheless, her words and accusations did not seem to matter on this occasion.

The loss of parenting responsibility was magnified by losing connection with the children while they were in care. This was particularly frightening for Ahmad and his family. While he could not see the children, he was somewhat comforted that Abbas was in a Muslim home but worried that Wardah was not and that he could do nothing about it. He said:

When I know my daughter, she was with a different family like they are not Muslim and my son who's was with Muslim. I was very upset. You know I have to isolate my emotion because I know my son is with a Muslim family [but my daughter is not].

This was difficult for Ahmad; the children were removed on Wardah's disclosures which her father consistently contested. He worried that she would "say other things about religion and culture" that would be misinterpreted; and also indicate things "about us, me and her mother" that are not true. Furthermore, the loss of connection reflected on Wardah's graduation, an anticipated event for the family. As referenced earlier, Ahmad was attending meetings to select high school placement and thinking about her graduation. However, they were unable to attend her graduation because of restraining orders; instead, on the same day, they were in court while "CAS and foster people go see her graduate, we have no rights."

In child protection work, the focus on protecting the child centers the child as the client and parents are seen as the "perpetrator." This focus on the parents as the cause of harm sometimes serves as blinders for workers and could have devastating consequences for the family. However, these unintended consequences are not at the forefront of assessments and decisions although they have disturbing impact on families. Nevertheless, Ahmad and Elnaz seemed to have coped with the turmoil of CAS interventions impressively. They did not lose their home; CAS returned the children to their care, and they worked towards re-establishing the ruptured relationships with their children. The following theme examines how the family were able to cope with their struggles.

Coping Strategies and Hope in Community

As with most families who experience CAS involvement, Ahmad endured much disruption and had to develop coping strategies to manage the resulting turmoil and chaos. This theme emerged from conversations and prompts that asked about what would have made the

experience better and advice he may have for other Muslim families who are faced with child welfare interventions. The following themes emerged from his responses about ways in which he coped and what he thought might be helpful for Muslim families. Ahmad talked about prevention, reliance on faith, and compliance at the individual level. To address concerns from CAS and alleviate challenges, the father sought help and was very active in his participation in the programs offered and those that were recommended. He also elaborated relying on the community for support, as depicted in figure four.

Reliance on Community

In his encounters with CAS, Ahmad needed to construct and develop ways to cope with experiences elaborated in earlier themes. Considering the family's lack of understanding of the system, their religious differences, cultural identity, and the outcome of their involvement, strategies to manage this difficult situation became necessary. The father turned to "his community," which he understood to be inclusive of diversity, but consistently referred to it as the "Muslim community." Regarding the support he received from the Muslim community organization he said:

Look in your community you're going to find a lot of help; if I passed the message on - your communities will help in identifying the services that is going to help you. We've got all of those like you need your family and community. And you need to be patient.

Stressing the need for family and community, Ahmad also referred to the fact that his community identified and provided services. He was able to access services for himself and his family that CAS expected him to participate in but could not provide; he stated:

So, we attend from the [name of organization], we attend the Muslim group; like the Canadian programs but by the Muslim. So, it is like families during the program and also one-on-one counselling and family therapeutic counselling. All those things we've got the appropriate program to see that. We won't get without [name of organization].

Without the support and programs from this organization, Ahmad felt that he would not have “made progress” required in the CAS’s plan (D4). For example, the family was expected to engage in services, but their only access to programs was through the community agency. A staff member from this agency served in the capacity as a support person to Ahmad, assisting him with navigating the systems, and attending meetings with him at CAS. Besides this assistance from the community organization, the father also accessed informal help from the community. This happened when CAS could not place his daughter in a Muslim home; he accessed the community commenting in this regard, “I totally got a sister from our community or neighbourhood; she accepted my daughter in her home; accepts for her [to be] a caregiver.”

CAS placed Abbas in a Muslim home, and Ahmad was grateful for that; he wished that there was a Muslim home for his daughter. Nevertheless, he understood that given her behaviours there would be concerns for a Muslim home. Whatever he found unacceptable about her behaviours would be crossing lines in another Muslim home because of rules. He reiterated that “community was connected to rules” and felt that his children were “different in their community.” Ahmad noted this difference is “safety” because “no one will let her [Wardah] eat haram food or wear indecent clothes if she is in a Muslim community home; she will go to Mosque and fast and pray with the family.” While Ahmad and his family appreciated the support and relief from the community, he acknowledged challenges in community involvement.

In addition, Ahmad also experienced feelings of guilt and being judged, which resulted in his withdrawal from some community interactions. As he expressed, “I want to be away from community because the community, that's we are like related, it's not so easy thing.” He was concerned about the implications for his family, saying “It was the first time for my daughter says that [accusations] especially with a Muslim daughter; this lying is not acceptable in our

community.” His “guilt” and worry of being stigmatized resulted in him distancing himself from the community when he actually needed the support. He also reported that some community members viewed Wardah as a “problem causer” because her behaviour was unacceptable as a Muslim child and people were also worried about “her lies.” He said:

You will be punished by your community, that's like a mental torture. You don't want to be pushed out from your community. You are still a Muslim. You need your community; you are related to your community. Wardah tried the CAS; she went there, and she run from it. She is more comfortable with community.

Being away from the community was also mandated for Ahmad and Elnaz. D4 states that “The family will not attend the [Jami]⁵⁸ Mosque until the non-association order is lifted;” presumably, this would have been the Mosque that Wardah would attend during her stay in care. The impact for the father is that he could not attend that Mosque, which kept him from observing his daily and Friday prayers there. Despite community stigma and censoring which he described as “mental torture,” he continued to reiterate that community support was essential to his success. The community provided a sense of belonging as expressed by the father in the words, “related to your community” and this was indeed critical to the family. Nevertheless, Ahmad was comfortable with the community agency indicating this in his words, “because I feel those people, they will help us. Why not? Especially like from our community perspective.” It became evident that implications for CAS involvement included community counteractions. Ahmad relied on community support but could not access it through the particular Mosque outlined in D4.

⁵⁸ The actual name of the Mosque cannot be stated for confidentiality reasons, Jami is used to mean a main Mosque in a city or locality.

Closely linked to his reliance on the community was Ahmad's reliance on his faith. Faith-based communities accept their faith as a source of strength, and it is common to find believers relying on their faith in times of crisis. Within the Islamic framework, a crisis in one's life serves as a way to reconnect with and cultivate a strong relationship with Allah (God). Ahmad's family relied on and was comforted, supported and guided by their faith. As he said; "But I say In Sha Allah (God Willing), Allah will protect." He talked about his reliance on God saying; "Allah will protect, even if you [can't do] anything, He can protect you. We follow. You don't protect it by yourself." This reflects a mindset connected to "tawakkul" an Islamic concept that requires trust in God's plans despite the circumstances in which one finds oneself. Ahmad mentioned one incident where his reliance on God manifested in Divine help; his lawyer had called for prepayment of fees, and he was worried because of his depleted finances. He said:

I told him I don't have the money and he said you have to find it because court is in two days. I don't have it. Where can I find it? I said God will help. I put my trust that He has the power. The lawyer called back the next day and said you don't have to go to court; the crown is sick with corona virus and the courthouse is closed.

He used this incident to indicate that when he was most helpless and had explored all alternatives for assistance with no luck, saying "where can I find it?" Allah's decree came into existence and he no longer needed the money immediately.

Moreover, the father referred to his religious teachings as a source of managing everything that was occurring, which was commonplace for him. For example, he said:

We still have everything. Muslim belief like Islam says he's not the powerful whose is angry, the powerful is he whose control himself and that's what control anger is. So, that's what they try to teach now.... I say, listen, my messenger Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam teach these things before 1400 years so we are people having these things.

This reference to "anger control" is well-known to Muslims and Ahmad felt that he knew this from an Islamic perspective; he actually lived by it. But now he is subjected to "anger

management” and had to attend classes to “learn new things.” CAS construed Ahmad’s stance with his daughter differently from the usual parent-teen conflict that sometimes results in heated exchanges. Instead, they treated him as a man with an anger control problem. However, this was not evident in any other aspect of his life, including his interactions with Elnaz, the other children, school, work or in the community.

Compliance with CAS Processes

To resolve situations in which the family found themselves, Ahmad and Elnaz did what was required, even when it made no sense. Their compliance with CAS directives was striking and is best illustrated by Ahmad’s handling of Wardah’s “running from the foster home.” She left the foster home and called her father to pick her up. She was crying and asking him if he did not want her home anymore. He had to resist the idea of rescuing his daughter and tell her not to go to the house although he desperately wanted to “take her out of the cold and dark.” He explained this situation in the following way:

So, there's a court condition and CAS condition I have no right. I told her you are not allowed in my house. I can't come to meet you either. I will have to call your worker. I called her worker to handle [the situation] and told Wardah please stay at the park. It's just there and she'll run from them again, she run from them. I won't be able to take her.

This incident was harrowing for the parents. First, they did not know where she was. And subsequently, they could not pick her up from a public park even though she was crying and begging to go home. Instead, they had to convince her to stay where she was until her worker arrived. They wanted their child home and she wanted to be home; but they complied with CAS conditions and the court order despite feeling like “we called CAS on our own kid.”

Society documents (D6) also mentioned the family’s compliance; the efforts made by the family to comply and their cooperation with CAS requirements were laid out in D6, as discussed in section one. As indicated in this document, the parents embarked on the agreements with

unfaltering diligence. Their commitment to working for the children's return was not surprising, as their level of care, parenting, and protection for the children appeared stable and engaged.

Aside from his coping strategies, Ahmad had definite ideas on ways to improve services that he felt would be more successful. The following theme examines Ahmad's opinions on what would constitute better ways to work with Muslim families.

Helpful and Hoped-For Considerations

In conversations with Ahmad about what he found helpful and what may be important for Muslim families, he suggested some strategies that would have made his encounter easier and at the same time be of benefit to Muslim families. Among the proposed ideas Ahmad shared, prevention, education, cultural matching, and training emerged as ways "to improve the work of CAS."

Preventative Measures. The concept of prevention to improve outcomes for families surfaced. Ahmad said that "the first thing is to prevent." He believed that the apprehension where such "force in this country" came to bear on his family could have been prevented. He talked about community organizations and CAS coming together to educate and provide information to prevent "taking kids can happen before." The father talked about CAS engaging in prevention, stating:

Similar to how we protect from actual illness using preventative methods, CAS can engage in prevention, stating that: "Corona now if you put kind of mask and wash your hand with sanitizer, you will be let's say 90% protected from the disease or the virus. So, it's kind of, we wait until the harm happened and we said okay, but we have harm protection so why you don't [CAS] use the harm protection before we start.

Using the analogy of Coronavirus and "harm protection," Ahmad expressed an idea that is central in working with minority communities where people are not aware of "expectations."

To this end, he talked about education, saying that “People need to be aware of this thing.” As elaborated earlier, he believed that his lack of knowledge was the main reason CAS removed his children; he felt that had he known about CAS he could have avoided “all the trouble” of CAS involvement and felt that better links between the Muslim community and CAS would have been made a difference. He said:

If the CAS want to do something good, let them teach the newcomers. When they teach them what, how they raise them kids in a Canadian cultural because you know, many of back home people when they came, they are dealing with war. They deal with, you know, traumatize.

His ideas included someone from the CAS to go to newcomers’ communities and “there and give orientation for the newcomers and tell them what the right. Like a cross-cultural learning centre.” Although these are good suggestions, it reflects a contradiction. Ahmad conceded to the point that Canadian culture is somehow the standard, something that he resisted in talking about religion and identity.

Religious Matching. Ahmad also expressed concerns that the magnitude of misunderstandings he experienced with the CAS workers and other professionals would have been dramatically less if he was assigned a Muslim worker. He reasoned that a Muslim worker “understand and they have they have a way, they will know why we have rules, they will respect our rules.” He felt that Muslim workers will not be so difficult in their “judging since they know and feel Islam is being judged unfairly.” His concerns were also expressed by his repeated statement that “people don’t understand this culture” and if workers are to engage with Muslim family they should be “like the diplomat, when he goes to a Muslim country, he does not shake the hand of a woman because he understands the culture.” He pointed to education and training as a means to improve work with Muslims saying, “if you don’t have Muslim workers and you send others, they should read and learn before they make big mistake and put families in trouble.”

Figure 5 provides a visual of the complications of CAS interventions and the complications that emerged for the family. As depicted, the Canadian context as experienced by Ahmad included racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia. This section highlighted findings through the perspectives of Ahmad. In the following section, I examine the perspectives of workers and foster mothers working with Muslim families. I interviewed three workers and four foster mothers to understand similarities and differences experienced by clients to add a layer of complexity to the findings.

Section 2: Perspectives of Workers and Foster Mothers on Engagement with Muslims

Child Welfare agencies are highly complex, hierarchical organizations informed by structures and guidelines described in chapter four. The implementation of policies and best practices evolve differently around agency culture and impacts service provisions in many ways. For example, scholars (Bosk, 2018; Regehr, et.al 2010) note variations in responses being connected to the individual workers' experiences, social identity, training, and supervision received. Likewise, similar arguments of differences in social identity, training, and support could be made for foster parents.

To understand experiences of working with Muslim families, I interviewed three child protection workers and four foster mothers who all had recent experiences working with Muslim families. In this section, I examine data documented from these interviews. Below are brief profiles of these workers and foster mothers, using the pseudonyms assigned to them.

Summary of Workers and Foster Mothers

Worker #1

Susan is a young Caucasian worker with an educational background in social services and a master's degree in social work. She is a fully trained child protection worker who has worked in intake services for over 10 years. She has worked with Muslim families over the years but

has not worked for extended periods with any given family. She advised that her knowledge of Muslim/Islam is limited and based on various media sources.

Worker # 2

Carol is a Caucasian worker with a master's degree in social work. She has worked at CAS for over 12 years as an ongoing service worker. Her interest in working with Muslim clients is connected to her personal experiences of having close contact with Muslims and has travelled to and within Muslim countries. She states that her knowledge of Islam and Muslim culture is an asset to her work with Muslim families.

Worker # 3

Maryam is a Muslim worker with a master's degree in social work. She has worked at two CASs for a total of 11 years. She described one agency as "predominantly white, not diverse" and the other as "very diverse." Maryam has served Muslim clients in her capacity as an ongoing service worker. She talked about her experiences of always having to speak on behalf of "all Muslims."

Foster parent #1

Huda identifies as a practicing Muslim and has fostered for CAS for many years. Her initial contact with CAS occurred when CAS removed her Muslim neighbour's children and she requested that they be placed with her. She articulated a strong commitment to fostering for Muslim families.

Foster parent #2

Sophia is a Muslim woman who has been fostering for several years and reports to have fostered about 28 children. She is not visibly identified as a Muslim but maintains dietary practices and attends the community mosque.

Foster parent # 3

Elmira is also a Muslim woman who has been fostering for many years and has had experiences with Muslim children. She reported a strong connection to area Mosques. She does not wear hijab but is "strict" about maintaining a Muslim diet.

Foster parent #4

Eleanor is a Christian woman who reports fostering for quite a while and has fostered over 40 children. She lives alone in a smaller house with her dog. Her experiences with Muslim children have been through two recent placements.

Emerging Themes from Workers and Foster Parents

Data provided by workers and foster mothers constructed a narrative of service provision challenges to the Muslim community. Workers providing services to Muslim clients within their particular agencies presented different opinions in some respects; however, there was considerable overlap in data provided through the interviews. In alignment with CR, this allowed for a perspective from the organizational aspect of child welfare, as workers talked about policies. It also included multiple perspective interviewing that added a dimension to the

layering of reality to add a perspective of the complex ways in which child welfare is experienced when the *ideal real*, the *social real* and the *organizational real* all interact at the actual level after the apprehension.

These interviews solicited information from the workers and foster mothers about their experiences working with Muslim families. Workers discussed challenges they experienced in their interactions with Muslim clients, policies that impede best practice, policies that guide engagement with Muslim families, and protocols that required engagement with the community. Foster parents were asked about their general experience in fostering and then specifically about experiences in caring for Muslim children. They spoke of challenges they encountered including experiences with families and supports they felt that would help Muslim children in care. Themes extracted from the data produced by workers and foster parents yielded two major categories. The first presented the workers perspectives on struggles for Muslim families receiving child welfare services, while the second accounted for foster parents and workers experiences with Muslim clients, including agency policies and practices.

Struggles Observed in Work with Muslim Families

As outlined in the literature discussed in chapter three, minoritized clients receiving CAS services experience several obstacles including isolation, language barriers, financial struggles, and hopelessness. (Maiter et al., 2009). The workers and foster parents provided insights into the understanding of Muslim families' struggles. In this theme, I present challenges identified by workers and foster parents which included placement difficulties, language barriers, isolation experienced by families, and lack of awareness of the child welfare system.

The lack of awareness of Muslim clients about the child welfare system resulted in difficulties for them in navigating the system. All three workers reported observing challenges

for Muslims related to gaps in their knowledge and awareness. For example, Susan commented, “an overall challenge is if they are newcomer Muslim, not knowing about Child Welfare is a struggle.” Adding to this, Carol remarked:

So, whatever they were doing back home was perfectly acceptable and it's supported. And then they come here, it's totally different. They don't understand why we're not okay with that right? I think engaging families when they first come, especially parents and how that could look different may mitigate some of that.

This statement, by a non-Muslim worker pinpoints embedded racism suggesting that abuse is acceptable in Muslim countries and that in Canada, the requirement is to parent in a more civilized way. The point of the problem for Carol is that “**they** don't understand why **we** are not okay with that,” clearly this makes ‘we’ not just different but superior and ‘they’ have to learn to confirm. This observation stated differently by Maryam, the Muslim worker, she said: “The clients may be new to the country and don't understand our systems, especially in the area of child protection,” putting the issue more at a systemic level rather than a difference between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ From the workers’ perspective, being unfamiliar with the system is an area where Muslim families struggle. Similarly, foster parents discussed the implications of families’ lack of knowledge and awareness negatively affecting Muslim clients.

One of the ways in which workers and foster parents observed the manifestation of this “lack of knowledge” by Muslims was a general unawareness of their rights, which significantly contributed to their struggles. According to Elmira:

Many Muslims don't know their rights. But there are going to be workers who are not at that standard, who are not going to tell the parents what their rights are. So, you have to know what your rights are with your children.

While Huda talked about Muslims “not knowing their rights,” she suggested that this lack of knowledge keeps Muslims from requesting Muslim homes and/or meeting with foster parents who have their children in care; she said:

The foster parents and the biological parent need to gather and explain a little bit the kid's primary needs, but parents don't know. If you [parents] don't voice your rights, they will not be heard and if you don't know you cannot voice."

What is being expressed here implies that Muslims are unaware of 'their rights' but it is workers' responsibilities to advise clients of their rights and provide options such as a chance to meet with foster parents. Given that Ahmad had never heard of the system before, and the way the apprehension happened, he would be afraid to make any requests, instead he followed "what they say" to have his children returned. It is therefore more of a systems failure that parents are unaware of options, possibilities, and having a voice when they are involved with CAS.

Another way in which the lack of knowledge became evident for foster parents and workers is that Muslim clients were not aware of the laws and this puts them at a disadvantage in asserting their needs. According to Sophia "they don't know the law." Not knowing what is acceptable and what's not in Canada was frequently repeated and considered significant. Huda gave the example of a mother who hit her child and the child was "taken;" this was mentioned in the context of her perspective as an immigrant; "we didn't know it's not like we cannot do this." A point to note here is that lack of knowledge about the system leaves clients in a situation where they cannot challenge the workers. In the case that Huda described, it was a "little slap" used as a restraint rather than punishment. Huda also felt that Muslim families were becoming involved in child welfare for "small reasons" that can be easily solved if they knew the rules. Foster parents and workers expressed thoughts on better ways to serve Muslims through education and awareness, something that would avoid apprehensions for small reasons. Ahmad's story reflects similar concerns. He encountered several intense incidents because he did not know, as he said, "we are newcomers, if you don't tell us we don't know." Ahmad succinctly described the

problem; child protection workers need to inform clients of their rights and standards should be not only explained by but also facilitated by workers and foster parents.

Workers identified “language barriers,” as adding layers of complications for families and workers. CASs have policies for using interpreters and translators to assist workers in communicating with clients; however, workers attested that those policies were not always clear and straightforward, or easy to access. For example, some agencies have service provider contracts with reputable interpretation services, while others have an ad-hoc policy whereby use of translators or interpreters require prior approval by supervisors. Additionally, using translators or interpreters can delay or further complicate investigations. Susan expressed concerns about having an interpreter make a first phone call to a Muslim family, she said:

Making a phone call to a Muslim family that doesn't speak English, having an interpreter call them; that's traumatic to have somebody that doesn't do our job. Can't answer any questions that they have. It's just this person from Children's Aid is coming in.

Susan's awareness of the complications of using an interpreter, a service not always readily available is important to highlight. Additionally, funding is not always through CAS. Therefore, the process becomes delayed. Susan explains her experiences working with interpreters, saying:

If there is a language barrier where I need an interpreter, that, to me provides a little bit of disconnect from the family. So, you know, you're trying to be as engaging and as possible, but there's a person in the middle of translating what you're saying to the family.

Not only does that “person in the middle” impede engagement but often incorrect information is conveyed, and nuances are missed. Carol talked about the difficulties of finding an interpreter who is aware and knowledgeable of the child welfare context and Susan pointed out that making a phone call to a family that does not speak English could be traumatic to the family because:

If they're a newcomer and only heard that Children Aid takes away kids, how would you be able to communicate? They are afraid. Meanings get lost in translation but also that piece of engagement and empathy I feel like it lost there.”

This perception of a loss of “engagement and empathy” is most likely felt by the client as well and placing it in the context of an already strained relationship presents a complex situation. Maryam’s experience with interpreters at one agency was relatively better; co-workers were available to make calls for each other, as their worker pool is diverse. She said:

After all, the agency is also very diverse. At times, workers, myself included, we've been asked, like can you speak to this family and let them know I'm coming by on this day. So that's been helpful too, where we have workers who might potentially speak the language of the family, when there's a worker of the same background, ethnicity, language, sometimes workers, and that family gets assigned together.

While in general this may be a good strategy, it can also have a negative effect. Reflecting on the notion of “smaller close-knit communities,” a worker with the same background may be considered as a member of the community and confidentiality and privacy become a concern.

The foster mothers interviewed also suggested that language is a barrier to proper understanding and communication for Muslims and can be a “real struggle.” Limited English language skill is one area that is restrictive and according to Elmira, “half of those kids don't even speak English. We're talking about refugee kids when they just moved in.” In discussing limited language skills, foster parents talked about a connected idea of “culture shock” that further alienate families. However, foster parents also identified specific concerns with the use of interpreters. Elmira was very concerned that interpreters who are not aware of the “sensitivity of the work” could do more harm as she stated, “I think you need people who understand and respect...privacy and sensitivity.” While Sophia stated that she thinks interpreters will need special training that prepares them to understand “CAS rules,” Huda and Elanor did not comment on the use of translators beyond “they are useful.”

Turning to the concern of isolation, workers identified it as another struggle for Muslim families. According to Maryam, “isolation is a challenge that a Muslim family may be

experiencing as a newcomer – since they are mostly refugee, they have no family to assist with settlement.” The effects of isolation result in a lack of support experienced by families as reflected by Carol as well; she said, “yes, they are new to Canada and have no family.” Susan explained her struggles in working with Muslim families saying, “What I’ve struggled with sometimes in Muslim families is that sometimes they’re very isolated, no family and friends. And this can be very fearful for families.”

The foster parents interviewed did not speak of isolation as a concern for families the same way workers did; however, the three Muslim foster mothers did talk about “newness to Canada.” For example, Huda talked about an occasion when she had having children from Somalia because the mother had nobody in Canada, saying, “as Muslims, we don’t have support.” Further, Elmira said, “you know, being here is a big culture shock.” This idea was also identified by Ahmad saying, “Newcomers have nothing when they came. We’re new family just in this country, with no-one.” The above discussion examined challenges for Muslim families regardless of whether their children were placed in foster homes or not. The following sub-theme addresses specific challenges that surface in out-of-home placements for Muslim children.

Placement Challenges

The lack of placement options for Muslim families that accommodate their needs is a primary concern identified by workers and foster parents; an idea that was troublesome for Ahmad as described previously. There is a consensus among the participants that the best placement for a Muslim child is a Muslim home because the consequences of out-of-home placement are significant. However, placing a Muslim child in a Muslim home is difficult since there are not many Muslim foster homes. For Carol, this is frustrating as she states:

I think the lack of foster homes is a definite barrier and a struggle and something that frustrates me. I wish we could place all children in culturally sensitive homes. We haven't been able to do that with Muslim children, so that's a problem.

The unavailability of Muslim homes is a struggle for workers in general. But the bigger piece of this puzzle is its effects on Muslim families and children. Susan provided an example, saying:

I think the child's wishes are really important. Right! So, I think that's important because she (the child being placed) kept saying, **I really want a Muslim home** [my emphasis]. At the time there were no Muslim homes available in the city, and the child did not want to be placed outside the city.

According to Susan, placements outside the city their parents live in, so as to obtain a cultural/religious match for children, seemed too frequent an occurrence. However, moving outside the city has other implications as well; Susan mentioned “when we've got them in Islamic home; they've started a new school and they travel two hours for access. There are a lot of limitations.” It is easy to understand the complications of having school disruptions for a child who was removed from their family. They are losing all that is familiar. All three workers felt that while in care, Muslim children's religious and cultural are not being met. To avoid alienation from culture and religion, Susan suggested “So we should be considering foster homes and having more Muslim families so that we can place Muslim children with Muslim families.” The lack of Muslim foster homes is a complicated matter, and it is sometimes attributed to the communities' lack of engagement with CAS, which in and of itself has many possible explanations.

Huda explained that she wanted to care for Muslim children but was unable to reserve her home because of CAS policy. She narrated an incident when she wanted to care for a Muslim baby, but was told that she had to take another baby instead:

The worker told me, take him I said, no, I don't want that baby. I don't want a Michael. I came for Michael. The baby with the Muslim name. The mother named him Michael and then they said, no, you can only take this baby or nothing else.

This situation was troubling for Huda but what is more striking is that a Muslim woman had to give up a child to be raised in a non-Muslim home. This is indicative of struggles Muslims encounter regarding “what you can do for your community.”

Workers noted several positives in placing children in Muslim homes and observed that the accommodations of such placement had better outcomes. For example, regarding one case that Carol had where one sibling was placed in a Muslim home and another in a non-Muslim home, she commented:

I was worried about taking children in [sic] a non-Muslim foster home because foster families may not be aware of things like “praying five times a day.” Holidays, how they celebrate holidays, what's important you know. Even for the females covering the head and going into the mosque and what that looks like and why that's important.

Carol's concerns reflected difficulties in a placement option for children not exposed to their usual cultural and religious environments.

Many observations expressed by foster parents while children were in care shed light on Muslim children “placement” experiences. Again, similar to workers, foster mothers felt that the most significant worry was that Muslim children wanted to be in Muslim homes. Although Eleanor talked about her efforts to meet the cultural and religious needs of the children placed in her home, she felt she did not have the necessary knowledge and awareness of religious and cultural needs to assist the placed child. Eleanor said:

I would think she was not as comfortable because I am not Muslim. I think that made her feel out of place. She was here at least three weeks before she felt comfortable to tell me about little container that she wanted to rinse herself when she was in the bathroom.

Further, Eleanor realized that the child preferred a Muslim home, saying that the child did not seem happy in her care. The child told Eleanor “I like you and I like being here, but I want to be with a Muslim family.” More specific worries for placement in a non-Muslim home surfaced as

both the workers and foster parents expressed concerns that dietary needs/restrictions are not easily accommodated in non-Muslim placements. Susan indicated that “culturally there are different foods, they're just different religious practices. There's the loss of those cultures and values.” Maryam, the Muslim worker outlined concerns for a teenager she had removed under a temporary care agreement:

Due to lack of a foster family, Muslim foster families, she went to a white family. Halal meat, which is easily accessible within the region they were residing in, they did not get. No, they did not. They would cook bacon and she see foster mom and dad eating meat food, and she eats it.

Eating halal is a serious matter for Muslims that follow dietary restrictions. Recall Ahmad's distress when he found out that his daughter was given McDonald's. Elmira, a Muslim foster mother added a layer to dietary restrictions saying, “there's cross-contamination. If they're frying that bacon on the same pan that they're frying the children's eggs.” Besides, speaking to a specific situation about another experience, she stated:

The child went to an Islamic home, which was great. And they actually, the two boys that lived in the home of a biological son and the foster child became really good friends and it was really such a nice situation. The two remained friends after placement.

However, concerns around the specifics of diet, hygiene, and dress seem to be pointing to a different level of concern, one that has to do with identity and belonging. Eleanor's observation that the child she had did not smile much; but when she came back from family visits and visits with a Muslim friend with whom she went for a meal, she “looked happier and was smiling when she returned.” This could be because the child was happy to see her family and friends and could be extended benefits of matched placements. In describing a “matched” placement, Eleanor commented, “That's a good thing. It's like everybody wrapping their arms around the child.” Huda observed that when a Muslim child is placed in her home, it is easier on the child as he “knows what we are doing and he and my son could do everything together, they became like

brothers.” In these examples, a sense of belonging surfaced for the placed child and provided a small degree of comfort for their families.

Suggestions for Improving Work with Muslims

Support for those engaged in child welfare provision is essential for effective work with diverse and marginalized populations, especially when working cross-culturally. Workers and foster parents identified several approaches that they felt would have positive impacts on Muslim families. In this theme, I examine ideas suggested by workers and foster mothers to improve interactions with Muslim clients. Among the strategies discussed were training, hiring practices, and community alliances.

To enhance a more supportive engagement with Muslim clients, foster parents and workers spoke of the necessity for training to equip them with a better understanding of Muslim families’ needs. Workers suggested that the training they received did not adequately prepare them to engage with Muslim clients successfully. They reported not having training designed to instruct them on the cultural/religious sensitivity with Muslims. Maryam, who worked in an area with a high Muslim population stated:

While I was there for eight years; over the eight years, I wasn't aware of any training that specifically looked at working with Muslim families. This was not a part of the mandatory “new worker” training; nor did the agency offer any agency specific training.

Maryam worked at that agency about five years ago and it is one of the agencies I approached about this project. Their responses to several emails and phone calls were respectful but all unhelpful.

Despite the lack of training, workers had specific ideas on how appropriate understandings of cultural and religious customs could improve their work. Carol suggested that

using basic Islamic etiquettes such as “how to greet Muslims like saying assalamu alaikum” could benefit the relationship. She said:

We need some very basic things to help workers gain acceptance with their clients. To make them feel at ease and kind of ask them; ask them questions taking shoes off in their home. Making sure that when they visit here [the agency] that we have things for them, like the water for toileting and that kind of thing.

Carol’s comments indicate a significant shortfall on basic etiquette for home and access visits at the agency and points to a superficial understanding. On this point, Susan said, “media is where you get a lot of information, and it is information that is sometimes not accurate.” The inaccurate portrayal of Muslims in the media reinforces stereotypes that are damaging.

Foster parents agreed that training for both foster parents and workers would “go a long way” to develop understanding and improve relationships with Muslim clients. However, they felt that such training is not easily available. According to Elmira, there is training for working with diverse groups, but not based on religion. She said:

Training for different religious groups No. Not that I can think of. I've been to training for caring for African American children. I think they haven't had anything like that in [name of city]. But we don't have very many Muslim kids that come into care.

For Eleanor, this was more of a challenge; she felt that she did not know much about Muslim children and families. However, she found the community organisation quite helpful, saying, “They came to visit and brought a Quran, and I didn’t realize there were so many things that overlapped with Christianity; this was surprising and comforting and made it easier.” Her account suggested that training can happen at an interpersonal level and certainly not limited to the formal sense of the word.

To accommodate Muslims, workers discussed the concept of “cultural matching” between workers and clients. There was the common belief that matching families with a similar cultural background would make a difference. According to Maryam,

Having a Muslim worker work with a Muslim family will have similar benefits to cultural matching in placement. They will understand to do small things like remove shoes, not book appointments over prayer time, be respectful to gender differences. All of this may seem small, but they help the working relationship.

Along the same line, Carol said:

You know if we had the opportunity to have Muslim workers that would know the culture and know how to respect families as much as we can; going into the work, will be better for families. They will be understood better.”

To fulfil this requirement, agencies would be required to hire Muslim workers. The idea of having a pool of diverse workers also surfaced in a suggestion by Susan. She felt that a diverse team where cultural matching may be available could be an effective way to better support clients. She remembers a time when an agency she worked at had a diversity team; it worked well as it provided specialized services to families. She said:

I think that we should have a diversity team again; we used to have one a while back. I think that is very helpful and that's a good piece too because we do have a large Muslim community in [jurisdiction] and we must service them appropriately.

Carol also mentioned a diversity team a “couple of years back but it got dismantled.” This is an indication of the cycling through of efforts and initiatives to meet the needs of clients that is based on the political climate. Foster parents shared their thoughts; while Sophia talked about having workers at the agency who speak different languages, Elmira expressed a different point, she said:

Yeah, but even [a minoritized worker] from the agency wouldn't work because the parent would feel like the person's not on their side. I don't know, it's very difficult. In a perfect world it would be best if they have a multicultural CAS. This will help newcomers and Muslims because they don't understand. It's a very big culture shock. And CAS has a bad reputation. Families don't trust them.

Her insight into challenges suggests that likely, the underlying problem with CAS and Muslim families would not be easily solved. As a minoritized worker, my experiences align with her thoughts. A wide range of sustained efforts to build trust and support dignified work is

necessary. There are similarities between Ahmad's thoughts and those of the workers and foster parents as reflected in their comments. For example, his suggestion that "workers need to learn the culture," "a Muslim worker" and "multi-cultural agency;" also surfaced in the other participants' narratives. So too, the fathers' vision of preventative measures was reflected by the other participants.

Foster parents felt that the placement of Muslim children in non-Muslim homes should be prevented. Elmira was resolute about the need for preventative practices being considered with work in the Muslim communities, saying "before you cross the line and bring them into care." Although she appreciated the challenges posed by this suggestion, she felt that it is necessary. Her concerns are highlighted in the quote below:

Once you reach CAS, you've already crossed that line where you're already in the system, whether you like it or not. They may come to your house and just close the file. But that file is still at CAS. Once you've crossed that CAS line, you're already in the system, it all has to come beforehand. It's your communities, like your multicultural communities, your mosques, you're like, we have an Islamic school, there should be posters up there.

While she recognises that CAS involvement is irreversible, her language indicates some degree of responsibility from the community to act regarding preventative measures. The Muslim foster parents suggested that it is vital for the Muslim community to have someone to advocate in the community and on its behalf. With regards to the community, ideas seem to return to the Mosques being responsible for educating and advocating. For example, Huda said, "teach newcomers about Canadian rules on parenting to help before contact with CAS." The foster mothers also suggested that advocacy is essential when there is contact with CAS. This was expressed by Elmira; "someone from the community who knows about CAS and speaks the language of the family" should be involved and accompany them to meetings and courts because this is incredibly stressful. As we can see, there are common threads between the themes from

Ahmad's interviews and those of the workers and foster parents regarding struggles faced by Muslim families. In the next section, I consider the content of the interviews in the larger context of child welfare services in Ontario.

Barriers to Engaging with Muslim Clients

In examining the perspectives of workers and foster parents, a layer of organizational *real* from the CR framing of this research emerges in the form of policies that serve as constraints and restrict or at the very least contain the work that they do. This theme examines workers and foster parents' perceptions of barriers in their work with Muslim families. Despite their different levels of knowledge and comfort with Islam and Muslims, all three workers shared similar perspectives on how identity affects Muslim families. Central to their discussions are challenges experienced by families because of differences in identity, culture, and religion that create "gaps in information and knowledge" about Muslim families. There were instances when Maryam, the Muslim worker, had different insights; for example, she understood the intricacies of facing Islamophobia because as she said, "I get that [stereotype and assumptions based on religion] as a worker too." The non-Muslim workers also had some awareness of how cultural and religious differences impacted their work with Muslim clients.

The differences between Canadian culture and Islamic practices were highlighted by all seven participants as a significant struggle for families. Starting with workers, Susan explained an overarching "sense of perception" that Muslim families do not fit the "Canadian culture," saying:

I can see the challenges with how maybe as a Canadian society, we perceive things to be; you know, one way the Canadian culture, then maybe a Muslim family does not perceive it to be their culture in that way.

The underlying implication here is that Muslim families are different culturally and with this difference comes difficulties for the families, challenges in providing services for the workers, and complications for foster parents. The consequential matter of “not knowing” is built upon by Carol, who labelled it as “ignorance,” she stated:

A challenge I have with working with Muslim families is that their beliefs and values and culture doesn't necessarily stem up with our beliefs and values and cultures at the agency or with the Canadian system. I struggle with the cultural piece and this can put my work with Muslims at a disadvantage. My ignorance can put families at risk.

Reflecting on her personal “lack of knowledge” she worried that this can put families at risk through her lack of knowledge.

There were other instances where both Carol and Susan gave examples about how their lack of familiarity with Muslims culture caused strain and complications in their work with Muslim families. For example, Susan was concerned about being intrusive with Muslim families with a request to see their child undressed, which is protocol in some cases; and Carol was concerned in a different situation stating:

I just had a Muslim family last month I believe it was part of our process of seeing that there's food in the home....the mother that I was speaking to finally showed me everything but she had spoken about “in our culture, we never go without food.” So that was probably insulting to her for me to say can I see that you have food in your home.

Regardless, she has to use the risk assessment and it is part of her job to ensure that she has addressed the intake referral concerns. She talked of her struggles with the paradox of being sensitive when using risk assessment, which is sometimes culturally inappropriate:

But yeah, I think there are lots of ways in which our own Canadian values influence the way we work with them [Muslim clients]. And that can hinder sometimes depending on how you look at it when we do assessments, the risk assessment.

Similarly, Carol discussed the challenges of working with domestic violence situations where “our job is to meet people individually” and this being considered improper etiquette in Islam

because of “the gender piece.” While Carol stated this as improper etiquette, it is not merely a matter of etiquette, it is a strong tradition aimed at establishing boundaries and maintaining safety in gender relations.

Further, all three workers noted Muslim clients general lack of understanding of Canadian culture and standards as evident in disciplinary practices that are considered child abuse in Canada. Maryam, Carol, and Susan articulated that Muslim client lack understanding and awareness of Canadian systems. Maryam is particularly troubled about the culture difference that surfaces. She said:

Muslims don't understand our systems. So, whether that's criminal, child protection, health care, ... but also like culturally what's acceptable here, especially in the area of child protection that isn't over there [country of origin]. There is a big cultural difference.

Between the workers' ignorance about Islam and Muslim clients' confusion around Canadian child protection concerns, managing cultural differences became even more difficult.

Identity. Workers acknowledged that Muslims are viewed within the framework of the current discourse on Islamophobia. However, understanding the concept of Islamophobia and its impact varied across workers. The Muslim worker was concerned about the impact of Islamophobia on clients because she experienced it herself. She stated:

There was a family that they were going to assign me to and the minute the family heard my name all I know is a bunch of racial slurs came out of this individual's mouth and my supervisor had decided no, we're not going to assign this family to you.

Based on her experience as a worker within the system, the reaction from clients and on occasion that of her colleagues, she believed that families are affected by Islamophobia in very significant ways. She said:

So, in terms of with families and Islamophobia. Yes. It will rise. You'll see it more. Why? Well, because it's in the media 24 seven is why and that is where we get, the stereotypes. And it will show up for clients in more serious ways because as a worker, I experience it.

Maryam also noted a difference between religion and culture; she was clear about religious identification leading to a more complex situation especially when it is visible. She stated that “having to educate workers that religion is one thing, culture is another, is always a challenge.”

Another perspective from Carol reflected the possibility that Islamophobia is a “real thing,” but not at the agency. The hesitance and enunciation with which she said the word indicated that she had a vague concept of what Islamophobia might be. She said:

Do I think it's a real thing here? I don't know and I wouldn't say it was Islamic-phobia from child protection and my colleagues. I don't know that it's necessarily Islamic-phobia or if it's, I don't know because I think we work in a place where people are open and accepting.

She believed that her workplace, which I take to include people and structures, is open and accepting reflecting a lack of insight and critical understanding. Her perspective does not align with the Ahmad's narrative; his experiences with professionals highlighted rigid, uncompromising, and problematic interactions based on what he termed as “racist and Islamophobic,” nor does it align with Maryam's (Muslim worker) experience of the system.

The Muslim foster parents also highlighted differences between Canadian and Islamic cultures as a major struggle, which sets up a barrier based on cultural differences. They had insight on rather minute differences that created significant challenges. They talked about Muslim parents being generally unaware of what is acceptable in Canada and that Muslims' parenting methods and skills are deemed as unacceptable. Muslim foster mothers gave examples of children saying things like “my father is going to kill me” (Huda), and “I'll give you something to cry about” (Elmira). As further outlined by Sophia, parents are not abusive; but rather lack knowledge of what is acceptable. She said:

People from our culture, back home. Like to smack their kids upside the head it's a norm it's nothing. They're not sitting there beating the crap out of their children but something

like that here would be viewed as abuse and people don't know that.

"Smack their kids upside the head" and "beating the crap out of their children" fall on opposite ends of the spectrum of physical abuse and Sophia made the distinction. The outcomes of parental interactions underlined as inappropriate in Canada and readily reported to CAS by schools, are routine in countries of origin. This is evident in Ahmad's story; he denied any physical abuse and in the society's document D4, it mentions that "family denies accusation" yet he was charged and had a restraining order placed on him.

In talking about being in a different country with rules that do not always make sense to newcomers, Huda stated that "This is different in this country. Kids have rights here." The implication is not that children do not have a right in other places; rather that there are different expectations for children. In Islam, parents have the responsibility to provide guidance and that guidance includes setting limits resulting in what Sophia describes as:

Even first-generation families are challenged to try to hold on to kids, because they want them in their culture; but the kids are growing up in Canada. It's very different. So, you're going to have a lot of clashes there.

This reveals a clash between the old and new culture. In their attempts to "hold on" to their children by setting limits, Muslims are struggling to conform to "Canadian norms." The Muslim foster parents talked about the difference between religion and culture in terms of "Quranic law" as well. The Muslim foster mothers and worker referenced this by drawing attention to the different ethnicity and linking culture with ethnicity. For example, Maryam said:

You have to follow the Quran. It's all like how to deal they take the Qur'an and put it into every day, knowledge, and stuff like that. You follow the rules. Culture is another thing, it is about where you live, where you come from.

Like Maryam, the three Muslim foster mothers were keen to express differences between religion and culture and made subtle distinctions about these differences. Elmira stated that religion is connected to “God and the Quran, but my culture is more about being Bosnian.”

Although not a Muslim, Eleanor had good insights into how faith operated for the Muslim children in her care. She felt that Islam was a grounding for children regardless of whether they practiced their faith or not. She reported that:

They clung to their faith. They loved their religion. That meant something to them. Even the teenager, she wouldn't go pray, or go to the mosque and do anything. But it meant something to her. But when, when you're culturally displaced on top of being displaced from your family, that's hard.

“Love” for religion and “clinging” to it indicates the strength that faith brings. For a child who is struggling, it remains an aspect of their identity that connects them to family and community and provides a sense of belonging.

With regards to being singled out as a Muslim, Elmira talked about Islamophobia from a child in her care who commented about Muslims in the following way: “Towelheads, they're not going to be allowed to do that.⁵⁹ They're going to go to jail, they have to take all that off.” Elmira expressed concerns and worry about how this translated for Muslim families and children. Specifically, she expressed concerns regarding the way professionals may view young girls wearing the hijab. She said:

So, to a teacher or a CAS worker, they automatically, see red flags. Hijab on young girls seems wrong, it should be their choice if they want to wear it or not. That's where we get the bad rap of forcing our girls to do this and this is how Islamophobia is.

⁵⁹ Towelheads is an offensive and derogatory reference to people who wear head coverings including keffiyeh, hijab and turbans.

Noticeably, Elmira talked about the impact on teachers and CAS workers “seeing red flag,” but also reflected on the idea that “hijab on young girls” is wrong and concluded that it is a possible cause for Islamophobia. Contemplating this response, I imagine that there is an internalization of Islamophobia followed by self-blaming.

Huda introduced another dimension to religion. She talked about her intention for fostering being based on her desire to help Muslim children, “no matter if they are from Somalia, Palestine or Pakistan, they are Muslims.” Her strongest motivation was that Muslim children be placed in Muslim homes to maintain their Islam. She talked about making changes to her “application” so that she could take a Muslim child in. Additionally, her reason was to maintain Islamic integrity for Muslim children and to have her “intention with Allah” which is her way to express sincerity in what she does purely for God’s sake. She said:

Last Ramadan we had [Omar] Okay. He is fasting, my son fasting, we go together, going for Taraweeh prayers at the Mosque. I can take him but if he was Canadian, I cannot take him.

Huda believes that there are cultural differences between Canadians and Muslims, one that she finds challenging to accommodate in her home. As she struggles to accommodate non-Muslim children’s culture in her home, she reflects on how difference may play out with the dynamic of a Muslim child in a non-Muslim home. She worried for example, that Muslim children in care have little chance to go for prayers or observe the fasting of Ramadan and to be part of their community.

Community. It became apparent that workers and foster mothers felt that both religion and culture are grounded in community and that the Muslim community has an immense role in assisting Muslims who have come into contact with CAS. However, working relationships with communities and community organizations varied. While two of the workers reported good

working relationships with community partners and reported that their agency had relevant protocols, the other did not. However, workers found that the primary source of strength for Muslim families stemmed from both faith and community. Susan said:

I think their faith is, has always been personally important to me. I think that's, a real strength and it brings families together. I love the way they really try to hold on to that culture and bring that culture in and make that for them to be proud of.

The idea of close-knit communities supported by a formal organization where people can have cultural and religious needs considered and prioritized seems to allow for connections that build relationships. Nevertheless, workers experienced challenges that are directly related to the close-knit nature of Muslim communities. Carol stated: "I really love the close-knit communities, right, but on the other side I've also learned how that can be damaging." Susan shared similar sentiments, but described it as "kind of like a double-edged sword because they're isolated already, there's not a lot of privacy." Concerns regarding a lack of privacy refer to the fact that people are known to each other in small, interrelated communities and word gets around easily, especially that which is disconcerting or stigmatizing. This concept of the double-edged sword highlights complex community interrelations where some community members and groups would support families that encounter CAS while there is a possibility that others may censor or ascribe stigma to these families. In this regard, we saw Ahmad engaged in self-censorship as well, which is a way that Muslims communities hold themselves accountable.

Workers felt that community relationships could be enhanced by the government investing in smaller community agencies that serve marginalized clients. They also talked about Mosque communities as a separate entity and noted a lack of community involvement via Mosques even though Maryam viewed this as the minimum community involvement. She said:

If [the agency] has to get the Mosque involved at the most, they'll make the effort to reach out. I know at the previous agency; I had tried to get in touch with a Mosque for one month and unfortunately never heard back."

In many cases the Mosque is more than a place of worship; it is also a place of community where programs for youths, children, seniors, and families receive services. In the absence of a formal Muslim social service organization in an area, the mosque is the point of contact where information and access to the community are available. Carol also said that she is unaware of any working relationships with Mosques and would not know about connections or protocols for collaborating with Mosques. There seems to be a twofold resistance for Mosque communities; one to CASs negative reputation and another may be that Mosques are viewed by Muslims as places of prayer and ritual practices, rather than social service organizations. Further, keeping Mosques independent of state is a consideration likely to impact what Mosques are willing to do.

All foster mothers agreed that the Muslim community was supportive in their work with Muslim families; however, there is a distinction between Huda's comments on the Mosques, which she thought could take an active role when Muslim children are in care. Eleanor found a Muslim community organization particularly helpful in terms of offering support. She reported "not knowing anything" about Islam before she had Muslim children placed in her care. The community agency connected with her and someone from the centre visited her home to offer support while she had Muslim children in care. She said:

I took them to the center for meetings there and they gave me a copy of the Qur'an and talked to me about their faith so that I had a clearer understanding of it. This is something I would recommend for all foster parents caring for Muslim children because their faith is important.

Eleanor viewed the Muslim community as a meaningful source of support for Muslim families. With the community's assistance, she ensured sibling visits for the children in her care. While community support contributes to helping Muslim families, concerns were expressed

about complex ways that community involvement unfolds. For example, Elmira expressed, “community can be like a two-sided sword if you take a child in, and the Muslim community knows, it can get dangerous especially with cultures who don't know the system yet.” This speaks to concerns that could surface because of the small close-knit communities. Interestingly, that the metaphor of “double-edged sword” was used by a worker and a foster mother and Ahmad also communicated similar challenges with community involvement.

Elmira talked about “support from Mosques in my area” and specifically, “ethnic, like the Albanian people Mosque.”⁶⁰ She iterated that Mosques are helpful when approached, saying:

The main Mosque in [name of city], they have a list of Muslim foster parents; if God forbid like a Muslim family was going through troubles that the mosque could ask for specific families and then not a lot goes into care thank God so.

She shared information about the Mosque having several foster parents that are available for the community; however, this availability of foster homes did not seem to fit with Muslim children being placed in the care of non-Muslim homes. Conversely, Huda spoke at length about the lack of support for foster children and the repercussions of this:

And I went to the Mosque, I beg them to do a big brother program or any program to help provide service for him. To talk about Islam or to tell him I'm here for you. They are Muslims, nothing available. [Child] ends up on the street, he is still on the street homeless.

Concerns about the lack of involvement with the Mosques and them not being responsive to the community's needs also included imams being unable to address the affairs of Muslim families in the child welfare context. This is not surprising since imams' training and expertise are primarily to lead congregations in prayers and fulfil roles of officiating marriages, funerals and other religious rites. Sophia talked about the many imams who are themselves new to the country

⁶⁰ The actual ethnicity has been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

and therefore have limited knowledge and understanding about the applicable Canadian laws relevant to families involved with CAS.

Shaping the Engagement – Agency Policies and Practices. Working within the organizational structures and parameters of any given child welfare agency shapes practice with clients. With Muslim clients, this shaping of the work happens at different levels and stages. Agency culture, policies, and supervisory styles all impact the ways in which work is being done.

Agency Culture. Engaging with Muslims is shaped through agency culture, policies, and guidelines (assessment tools, agency mandates, legislation, documentation requirements). Training, supervisory styles, legal processes, and relationships with community professionals also contribute to the “shaping” of child welfare engagement. In this theme, I examine workers’ perceptions expressed about their work with Muslim families within the agency structure.

Agency culture can support workers; but it can also stifle workers’ creativity and desire to problem-solve with and for their clients. Workers identified several challenges in doing their job which are linked to aspects of the organizational structures, culture, and policies. These directly impact their engagement. This idea that agencies have different ways of working came through clearly with Maryam, who presented a comparative assessment of the two agencies where she was employed and reported distinctly different organizational cultures and values between the two. She reported that at one of the agencies, she was the only Muslim within a “white-dominated culture.”

I can just speak about my experiences within that agency and during that time and I always emphasized, it was very much white-dominated out of roughly 300 employees there were maybe 30 people of colour. While I was there for eight years and the only Muslim worker for a number of those. The culture there did not support non-whites even as workers.

Maryam gave an example of experiencing racism when she was called by the name of another minority worker. Even though she felt that “dressing differently” made her stand out, she said; “I guess, once you are brown you are brown.” She felt that services to minorities were not evolved or even supported by policies, giving the example of not being able to access an interpreter.

Comparing this to the other agency where she was employed, she said:

I know we have interpreters and it's easy to access. You don't have to go through a supervisor or anything. You just pick up the phone and call the service provider and say, I need an interpreter at this place who knows this language.

Although all agencies are under the umbrella of OACAS with the same mandate, specific organizational policies differ and the differences between the two agencies that Maryam talked about are evident. As highlighted by this example, agency culture does play a role in services to clients. Many ideas surfaced on how the agency culture can either support or impede engagement with families. Another aspect of agency culture surfaced in workers' perceptions of the way they were supervised.

Supervisory Styles. Workers who experienced a strong agency support in the form of supervision felt that they could work better with Muslim families because they were backed by their team and supervisors. This was more apparent when they made small concessions to accommodate the needs of clients. Carol talked about the cohesiveness of her team, which serves as a source of strength. Her supervisor makes herself available to “run things by” and can also do the same with fellow team members. She said: “we can run things by each other, debrief, and support each other.” Having the opportunity to debrief with the team and supervisors cannot be overstated; it allows workers to check in and consult with colleagues who may be more aware of some matters relevant to Muslim clients.

Beyond their direct supervisors, workers felt that “a director’s support also goes a long way.” “Having a director too, open and engaging and accepting and looking to think outside the box is good.” This support flows down to workers and makes it easier for workers to confidently engage with Muslim clients differently without being worried about the consequences. Susan talked about being able to “bend the rules” in client engagement. This comes from the confidence that “my supervisor has my back.” Further, she believed that if she had a problem following a policy with a client, she would be able to discuss this with her supervisor, saying:

Like my supervisor, she’s great. I think if I did have an issue, I could go to her and say, my work with this family might need to be done but how do we do it in a way that is different than our traditional way. And I think that’s the good thing about general intake is that you have that opportunity to be flexible in our work.

But it is not always the case that supervisors are supportive.

Maryam’s story with one supervisor (at the “white-dominated” agency) was different. She talked about an instance where she went to discuss a troubling matter, she encountered for a child on her caseload, who had turned 16:

I was worried because as a worker, you kind of has an idea of potentially what can happen down the road. And that was my fear. And I remember speaking to my supervisor and I was told, “she’s 16 years old. There’s nothing you can do”, “So you need to back off.” And unfortunately, I did, that’s one of my biggest regrets.

The power differential between the supervisor and worker in this example is obvious. Comparing this narrative to the support Susan and Carol acknowledged, one wonders if Maryam’s marginalized identity on a white dominated agency contributed to her interactions with supervisors. When told, “There is nothing you can do. So, you need to back off.” Maryam’s sense is that she was viewed as “not objective” when she advocated for Muslim clients. Her reflection on her current supervisor is more optimistic She said:

I was blessed with a really good supervisor, and I did not know about this until later on; but there was a family that was going to be assign me to and the minute the family heard

my name all I know is a bunch of racial slurs came out of one individual's mouth and my supervisor had decided no, we're not going to assign to Maryam.

As illustrated by workers' stories, supervisory styles significantly impact their work and in Maryam's case it was tied into agency culture as well. Her negative experiences were all at the "white dominated" agency which she left since it was a challenge not only for her work with clients, but for herself as a Muslim worker in the agency.

Policies/Mandates. In addition to supervisory support, workers indicated how agency rules and policies impacted their work. Workers pointed out two policies; Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) and the privacy legislation of the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) Part X. CPIN, a 5-year project funded by the government as part of the accountability framework plan is intended to allow CASs to share information across the province. Part X of the CYFSA was launched in January 2020 and sets out rules for collecting, using, disclosing, and protecting service users through a standardized tool (tick box). This tool essentially captures client responses to questions about their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship and immigration status, and religion.

Though workers felt that Part X is a positive thing, some concerns around it surfaced in terms of how it will be implemented. For example, Susan said it might prevent "people from looking into other people's files," her concern here centered around finding information in other workers files when on coverage. Maryam talked about providing informal consultation to her team regarding Muslim clients as somewhat of an expert, a support that would be no longer available to the more challenging cases. Workers are aware that Part X is particularly challenging for clients who experience language barriers and work with interpreters and community resources because of the limits on how and with whom information will be shared.

CPIN, the centralization of information on clients is a government initiative intended to modernize child protection work. CPIN allows workers to access a provincial-wide client information system in Ontario. Workers voiced concerns regarding the impact of this to their work. Susan sees the positive aspect of the centralization of information and thought that collecting identity-based data “is amazing because all cultures are included.” But she also identified some concerns with data gathering. Speaking on this she said:

So, some of the questions just give you a few ideas is: what is your citizenship? What was your sex at birth? What is your current gender identity? What is your sexual orientation? So that's a few that when I work with Muslim families, it feels like it's so intrusive.

Susan linked the “discomfort” that she perceives Muslim families feel with the fact that “some things may go against what people believe.” Further, Carol also talked about concerns with some questions.

She shared information about this discomfort saying:

It's probably more uncomfortable for them [Muslim clients] when we start asking about sexual preferences and gender identity and that kind of thing. They consider these private issues. Why are you asking me that? And why is it relevant to you and CAS?

Aside from viewing the questions as intrusive, workers felt that it could put clients at risk for disclosing information that could be used against them. For example, Susan said that one of the questions asks, “what is your citizenship”? She felt that many newcomers will view with suspicion and not want to answer questions about their legal status. She said:

They might be worried about feeling like they can't answer these honestly because they don't know what the, you know, impact of answering these honestly could be for our system because we're just a system of the government to them.

This worry indicated an understanding of the possible implications for clients. Maryam's contention with the CPIN is that the tool is not well-developed. She felt a tick box way of

identifying a person is inadequate because crucial information is omitted. The example she gave is as follows:

So, an individual, for example, who may identify as Palestinian, there is not an option for that. Okay. So, I think you would either have to click on other. Right. But for an individual who is Muslim and who identifies as Palestinian when there's so many of them that do fall into both of these categories where would this individual ... like, how is it that the government does not recognize that there are people who fall into two or more categories?

Her concern highlights the challenge to capture intersecting identities, all of which may expose people to oppression in different ways. This issue was also hinted at by Susan, who commented that a section for comments or narratives would be helpful.

Maryam brought up a policy issue not related to CPIN or the privacy legislation, one that she felt impacted her as a worker and her clients. She wanted to do something different than what the policy dictated. Similarly, Carol spoke of one case where she advocated for a child to remain in care because the child received needed services while in care. However, these services would not be available if the child was returned home or to that of kin. She explained that children in care receive services such as counselling and extracurricular activities that are not available to families when children are in their own homes or placed with kin. Surprisingly, kin placement which is suggested as an alternative to that done on an ad-hoc basis (Ringel et al., 2018) was not mentioned beyond this reference. While I did not anticipate the discussion about kinship with Ahmad, I thought it would be central in placement options suggested by workers.

Although Ahmad was not specifically asked about policies, he spoke to the very policy mentioned by Carol. The society returned his daughter but cut all her services that were in place while she was in care simply “because she came home.” He struggled to understand this logic from “the protecting people,” and felt that since she was identified as needing services while in care, she would still need these same services while at home. Foster mothers did not speak

directly about policies. Huda's narration of wanting to have a Muslim child and being told that she cannot "reserve" her home for Muslim children only is a policy of that agency.

The findings from the seven participants considered as secondary sources revealed several parallels to Ahmad's story. Understood in the context of child welfare in Ontario, the findings are synthesized in the following section.

Triangulation of Findings

This chapter presents findings from the interviews with Ahmad, and from the three workers and four foster parents who have experience working with Muslim families. The interviews with all participants advance a full and nuanced understanding of challenges experienced because of being different from the dominant Canadian culture and highlights religious difference as significant. From the themes highlighted, it is evident that the participants all expressed concerns on how "being Muslim" is constructed and how this construction then directs service provision for Muslims.

As indicated, religion and cultural differences shaped experiences of Muslim service recipients. In this case study, Ahmad made special and repeated references to his identity. He articulated his identity of being Arab and Muslim as central to his experiences. His discourse on Islamophobia, being disrespected, criminalized, and misunderstood all stem from the fact that he was "different." As a result of this difference, he encountered barriers including "lack of information" and "not knowing expectations." Similar themes emerged in findings from the other participants. The non-Muslim participants acknowledged that their knowledge gap of Islam and Muslims as newcomers was problematic for them as well because they did not have adequate and accurate information in this regard to support their work.

Community influences also emerged throughout all the interviews. Community assistance was integral to the family's ability to recover and is significant to them coping with their child welfare intervention. The strong sense of community care and belonging was evident in Ahmad being able to approach community members and an organisation for assistance. Additionally, all participants expressed a worry that community involvement may also have repercussions. Nevertheless, all participants agreed that community is indeed a source of support. The workers that engaged with a community agency found it helpful in their case management work.

Another finding common across interviews was the placement of Muslim children in non-Muslim homes. Although such placements are common, this poses serious implications for meeting the requirements set out by the CYFSA to ensure "continuity of care and for stable relationships within a family and cultural environment." All interviewees suggested that Muslim children are not experiencing this "continuity in care" and highlight concerns, including placement disruptions when placement of Muslim children in non-Muslim homes does occur. All participants additionally highlighted concerns about placements. A Muslim foster mother acknowledged her primary reason for fostering as a commitment to having Muslim homes as options for Muslim children due to "many problems because of religion."

Specific to workers was the reality of constraints in their work environment. From their interviews, the public rhetoric of "anti-oppression practice" in child welfare is not easily or evenly anchored in actual practice. They talked about the impact and relevance of agency culture and the support from supervisory staff, including managers. They also cited instances of complications regarding how to implement "anti-racist" practice in their work due to systemic barriers and policies that inhibit collaborative work with clients. This was discussed earlier.

Ahmad's story revealed some concerns that were also touched upon by foster parents and workers, as mentioned. But the gist of his story revealed a layer of complexity that is probably only accessible to a client. His conversations on how he experienced confusion and conflict; although present to some degree in other interviews, was not elaborated upon. He was very specific on how experiences criminalized him and left him feeling powerless, misunderstood and disrespected. Although focused on CAS interactions, the experience resulted in his involvement with the police, the court system, and the school. Therefore, his engagement became complicated with multiple systems interacting in ways that he found difficult to cope with.

Further, he described in great details the personal losses he endured because of child welfare involvement. It is not easy to imagine the breadth and depth of his losses. In my years of being a foster parent and front-line worker, I was often worried about families. I was aware of their feelings of powerlessness, but I thought of clients in the context of what they may ultimately lose (beyond the removal of their child). This family's story tells a harrowing tale of many losses; one that I did not anticipate, nor had I encountered it in the literature, but will be fully addressed in the discussion. However, there are glimmers of hope in the community and in the family's courage and determination to withstand the disruption resulting from involvement with the child welfare system.

In chapter four, I examined child welfare practices in Ontario through sources such as the Ministry of Youth, Community and Social Services (MYCCS), the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society (OACAS) that highlighted work being done in Ontario to address diversity. I described the absence of religious considerations and identified that when mentioned, religion is considered as spirituality.

However, religion is different. The Islamic paradigm sets out guidance for all aspects of daily living with many prescriptive practices not critical to spirituality.

Consideration of religion in the traditional sense of the word is apparent in a superficial manner in the documents perused in the literature review. For example, the CYFSA as discussed earlier, iterated considering “physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs and differences among children and young persons” then proceeds to consider “race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, disability, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression” (CFYSA). Words used to imply religious diversity in both these instances are “spirituality” and “creed.”

Nevertheless, much has been communicated and discussed through the OACAS on working with diverse clients. Initiatives to be inclusively grounded in anti-racism/anti-oppressive framework dates back over ten years, with projects such as the Anti-Oppression Round Table and anti-oppression training for new workers. Yet, as borne out by Ahmad’s experiences, little attention to religious diversity is considered even in the new training aimed at de-centring of child welfare processes from an institutional oppressive practice (OACAS, 2020).

Conclusion

This case was built primarily on a Muslim family’s experience with CAS with the intent to understand how the family experienced service provisions in the context of the current socio-political context in Canada. Four significant themes emerged from interviews with the father and subsequent analysis: “impact of identity, culture, and religion on service provision,” “experiences of conflict and confusion in service delivery,” “economic and emotional consequences of CAS involvement,” and “coping with CAS.” Two of the stated themes, “experiences of conflict and confusion in service delivery” and “economic and emotional

consequences of CAS involvement;” were unique to the father’s story. Neither workers nor foster parents did not speak of such possibilities with the families that they encountered. Ahmad gave detailed accounts of immense struggles and losses that the family experienced in their interactions with CAS.

When analyzed within the context of the CYFSA, initiatives from the MYCCA, and policies and practice, it became clear that despite a well-articulated commitment to working with a diverse population at the three levels, religion is not well integrated. This case study points to a predominantly negative experience for the family that included significant concerns of racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. In the following chapter I will examine the findings within the previously outlined theoretical framework and the literature that focuses on disparity for marginalized clients in child welfare.

Being in the family home and listening to narratives of the many struggles that the family endured evoked multiple emotions for me as well. I thought of my own family and the general concepts of family; the connection and bond between parents and children; and the effects of severing (even if temporarily) these bonds. I also thought of myself as “another child welfare person” entering the family’s home and lives to collect “data” and wondered what this meant for the family. Below is my reflection on what the process meant for me.

Stories of the Self – A Believer is the Reflection of Another Believer

“Family is not an important thing. It’s everything.”

Michael J. Fox

Here I am in this research process that has brought me face to face with a family who shares my religious beliefs. A belief that sets us apart from the people around us. It sets us apart from colleagues and neighbours. It sets us apart in the wider society where we interface with public institutions like schools, hospitals, courthouses, even when using public transportation. It

sets us apart in ways that leave us feeling misunderstood, marginalized, rejected, feared, and always an outsider and “othered.”

But I am engaging in these conversations as a researcher and Ahmad is a participant. Though we may have similar beliefs, and values, in this situation I hold power. On the other hand, he has had his power stripped. As a Muslim parent, the effort he made to protect his child from harm appeared controlling and abusive by the “child protection people,” people similar to me, formerly associated with the child welfare system; those people who took his children out of his home to a place unknown. He fled war with his family, and they remained a family. But here, where he was promised refuge and safety, his children were taken from his home. His pregnant wife was taken to prison. He did not know why; could not understand the charges against him and his wife. But he was still willing to talk to another one of those “child protection people.”

I am sure that the family was only open to me as a researcher because I am a Muslim. We reflect each other and are equal before God; this is our Islamic belief. Yet, they had no reason to trust anyone who is part of this system that traumatized them as much as - maybe even more – than the war they had fled. They had enough trauma from child welfare. Yet they agreed to meet with me despite my association with child welfare. When I thanked him for consenting to being interviewed, Ahmad’s words reflected a Prophetic custom. He asserted that he would do anything he could, so another Muslim family does not experience the pain, grief, anger, and loss he and his wife endured. His wife was unable to talk. She sat through all the interviews and listened to her husband tell their story. And she cried. Was I exploiting their pain for a PhD?

Somehow their pain became mine. As a Muslim and a former child protection worker, I had borne my own, but nothing like this. For the first time, I could appreciate vicarious trauma. During my time as a child protection worker when other (mainly white, younger, middle class)

workers spoke of vicarious trauma, I would secretly seethe. Really! You talk about trauma? What about the people whose trauma is ‘actual’ not vicarious? But the stories told in the interviews were excruciating to hear and painful to process. So now I know “vicarious trauma” is a real thing.

Aside from the distress of listening to Ahmad’s story, I am anxious about having crossed the line between being Muslim and being a researcher. How will I manage a problem when research ethics and Islamic ethics are at odds? Protecting the rights and dignity of participants is my duty as a researcher. If I act on my values and instinct as a Muslim, then it is incumbent on me to assist, but how? Is this relationship a primary researcher participant or is Ahmad my brother in faith?

Somehow Ahmad was able to centre this horrible experience in his religion and draw strength for himself and his family. He referred to “Allah’s control over everything” to make sense of the experience. His unshakable faith in God’s absolute power and God’s control steadied him. Oh, he felt his share of anger, of guilt, of frustration, and of shame. But he found courage in small triumphs that he held on to. His child ran away from care – and came back to him. For him, this showed that he was a good parent and that she wanted to be with her family. Family meant everything to him. His faith helped him to survive the disruption that threatened to destroy his family. It made him an Elnaz strong in the face of what they considered to be as dire a situation as the war they left behind.

Chapter 7: Connecting the Dots – Discussion of Findings

This study focused on the experiences of Muslims with child welfare services in Ontario. Specifically, I sought to understand how religion impacted service provision and what adjustments could be made to tailor services for Muslims. I include first-hand perspectives of a family whose child welfare involvement resulted in the removal of their children, additional insights from three caseworkers and four foster parents and child welfare documents to consider the topic. When I speak of ‘Muslims,’ I am not suggesting that there is one monolithic Muslim group, nor that all Muslim experiences in child welfare are the same; rather, I refer to common threads that surfaced. In this work, commonalities in Muslim perceptions were evident, whether they were caseworkers, foster parents or the client, Ahmad. However, it is a unique case study with specific allegations that resulted in child welfare intervention; therefore, case management and community involvement are case-specific. In this chapter, I examine and interpret my findings in the context of theories previously discussed. As I argue in chapter three, child welfare is entrenched in neoliberalism, which influences and, in some cases, inform the principles that are aligned with neoliberal policies where shrinking government support has reduced supportive services to families. Socially constructed as “risky,” Muslim individuals, families, and communities inevitably become targets treated with suspect. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) reports that racial profiling is insidious and often directed at First Nations, Muslims, Arabs, West Asian and Black people (OHRC, 2017). The report also highlights concerns with racial profiling in the child welfare sector where systemic racism is embedded, and racialized and Indigenous people are subjected to surveillance and likely to experience prolonged involvement with child welfare. It is within this context of a complex social context that the study of Ahmad, an Arab Muslim father became involved with child welfare services.

Using a CR framework to further my thinking on how child welfare services are experienced by Muslim families, I situate the real, actual, and empirical of the family's experiences in the context of organizational mandates and policies. At the real level, the family's Islamic orientation and the system's failure to account for religion as impactful requires consideration. The child abuse allegation, the causal mechanism, set in motion actual events that triggered the involvement of multiple systems resulting in apprehension by the child welfare organization, the criminal justice system, family court and school. At the empirical level, the family suffered in tangible ways; loss of money and capacity to work, removal of their children from home and community, loss of an unborn child and stress and mental health complications that resulted in psychiatric treatment. My analysis included data from multiple participant interviews and organizational documents while relying on my reflective deliberations to search for explanations on the family's experiences.

As outlined in the findings of my study, the family's experiences reflected dilemmas faced by minoritized clients and new immigrants that are well-established in the academic literature on child welfare in the West. Similarities between challenges outlined by Blackstock (2016; 2020) on Indigenous Canadians and Clarke (2012; 2018) and Cénat et al. (2020; 2021) on African Canadian struggles with child welfare pinpoint marginalized communities' struggles with services. This consistency reflects a failure of policy to address service provisions in an optimal way for minority communities. This became clear in my literature review where I encountered research older than ten years addressing similar issues that have persisted to date. Considering similar experiences of Indigenous and African Canadians highlights a deep systemic problem with the child welfare system, a problem that cannot be fixed with superficial policy changes. In attempting to understand the relationship between religion and the system, the

situation is equally stark. Ahmad and his family experienced their religious beliefs and practices, things sacred to them, being treated with suspicion.

Consistent with the child welfare literature, this study points to problems for racialized and marginalized populations, including refugee families. On the one hand, this study aligns with findings that refugee families are at a disadvantage for systemic reasons such as their newness to Canada, unfamiliarity with expectations, lack of support, and language barriers, and cultural differences. On the other, the study departs from previous works that address cultural differences and religious differences indistinguishably. My research highlighted that being Muslim revealed different, sometimes new dilemmas specific to religious adherence. The findings of this study suggest that Muslim clients a dual ramification of faith. First, a particular form of discrimination based on Islamophobia where they experience being singled out as backward and dangerous. Second, as a believer whose ontological reality place him as a slave of Allah, a soul connected to family, community, and faith in existence after this earthly life. This dimension of disruption goes beyond the exterior forms of discrimination by fragmenting the core of Muslim practice. Combined, the two aspects paint a bleak picture for child welfare services for Muslims leaving the religious needs of families undetected and disregarded leaving a gap in practice. I placed the findings from my research within the context of child welfare scholars who speak to a failure of the system to develop practice and strategies that advance work with marginalized populations. Using my theoretical framing, I focus my analysis on major findings of my study within child welfare literature, documents specific to practice in Ontario including the Child Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA), and organizational policies and practices discussed in the preceding chapters. In the first section, I draw from the literature to frame and contextualize my findings of Muslims' experiences in child welfare considering Ahmad's positional intersections.

Through my multi-theoretical approach, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT), and intersectionality, to understand Ahmad's experiences. I focus on the element of risk that resulted in him being singled out by child welfare as a likely risk to his Muslim identity. In the second section, I examine the presence and relevance of structural barriers alongside Anti-oppression practices to address challenges for Ahmad and the Muslim community. In the third section, I consider the theoretical constraints and examine the possibilities that a more robust theoretical approach is necessary to unpack and address Muslim clients' experiences of child welfare services in Ontario.

Cultures at a Crossroad

This study shows that while race, newness to Canada, and language barriers contributed to the negative experiences of the Ahmad family, religious beliefs and practices triggered feelings of marginalization and oppression. In using the theoretical approaches outlined in chapter two, we see that despite an espoused anti-oppression framework for child welfare practices, Ahmad felt adrift in uncharted waters; attacked, betrayed, facing the possibility of losing his family. Being othered led to manifestations of oppression that surfaced in two ways; one linked to Islamophobia with similar discrimination experienced by other groups and one that is specific to Ahmad's religion. The following discussion highlights discrimination linked to Islamophobia that is connected to other aspects of Ahmad's identity. Ahmad's experiences within the context of the literature highlight multiple themes that are common for marginalized clients and examining themes for specific connections to Ahmad's religion.

The Added Impact of Religious Marginalization

Ahmad experienced similar feelings of betrayal, hopelessness, and alienation, supporting established literature on minoritized clients' experiences as negative. Themes of language

struggle, a sense of betrayal and hopelessness are discussed by Laverne et al. (2008) and Maiter et al. (2009), while Le Burn et al. (2015), noted challenges related to migration and resettlement processes – including adapting and acculturation to be substantial. Themes of criminalization, surveillance and judgement in relation to minority populations (e.g., Fine & Mandel; 2003; Keddell & Hyslop 2019; Merritt, 2021) are also common in the literature and these were prominent threads in Ahmad's story. To address such trends, I deepened my analysis by assessing Ahmad's story and the information provided by the other participants in my study through CRT (intersectionality) within a CR framework focusing on levels of social interaction and found that Muslims are viewed in a particularly negative fashion.

A major theme of my review of literature about Muslims in the Canadian context indicates stereotyping of Muslims as normal, even acceptable. In my study, the stereotyping of Muslims became evident as the participants, regardless of their position in the child welfare system (clients, foster parents, or workers) communicated instances of stereotyping that had significant consequences. Within the child welfare literature, stereotyping is used to make conclusions about groups. This is consistent more specifically with research on marginalized ethnic and racialized populations. Keddell and Hyslop (2019) discuss risk assessments hinged on stereotypes that assume relationships between ethnicity and a propensity to harm resulting in more frequent and intense interventions for ethnic minorities. Dumbrill (2003, 2010) illustrates the targeting of families in the margins of society suggesting that cultural differences are considered inferior to mainstream Canadian norms. These studies support my findings and set the stage for the addition of another aspect of intersectionality, the impact of religious differences for Muslims.

Highlighting the impact of adherence to religion for Muslims, I found attitudes of superiority coupled with moral judgement in service provisions to Muslims. To illustrate this point, Ahmad's rules for his teenage daughter, based on his religious practice did not allow for sleepovers. His faithfulness established by religious practice was portrayed negatively. He was viewed within the context of the dominant, oppressive male wanting to control his daughter, robbing her of her autonomy and individualism which is her right here in Canada. However, disallowing sleepovers was supported by the CAS in the female-led, Christian foster home where she was placed after her apprehension.

To combat harmful stereotyping, child welfare organizations and researchers often focus on education for workers, and in some cases, clients. In my research, all participants identified a lack of training that integrates Islamic knowledge and Muslim voices. Ahmad suggested that having a Muslim family to talk to who "went through this thing" would have helped to guide him. Foster parents stressed the need for advocacy, and workers unanimously agreed that advocacy for families is necessary but frequently lay beyond their scope of work. Consistent with my findings, Johnson et al. (2009) propose that diversity education does not address the rigid notions of culture, nor does it challenge stereotypes stemming from professionals' underlying biases. Nor do Canadian universities provide adequate training for ethnocultural diversity, as Cénat, et al. (2020) points out. CAS caseworkers report inadequate training on ethnocultural diversity during their post-secondary education with religious diversity barely being mentioned.

Training that fails to address Islamic beliefs, values and practices cannot address issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Nor can these issues be managed without the inclusion of Muslim voices, an idea pointed out by Dumbrill (2010). Although the specific idea of service

users' union suggested by Dumbrill (2010) was not articulated by participants in my research, participants suggested programs that certainly reflect a similar need for support established in the literature. An analysis of incidents such as these using the multiple perspective theory framework I suggest, would call into question the moral judgment, and validates Ahmad's knowledge through the perspective of southern theory.

Turning our attention to child placement, the teenage daughter, Wardah was moved several times in a short period. Her first placement was marked by running away. Ironically, she ran back to her home but because of a court order restraining her proximity to her parents, she could not be allowed in her home. What might this tell us about her state of mind? She wanted to be home, foster care was not working for her, but her parents could not take her in. Her discomfort with placement options was further highlighted by several moves within a short time, demonstrating a struggle to find a place where she could settle thereby adding layers to her displacement from family, culture, and religion. Conversely, Abbas was placed in a Muslim home, and he adjusted to placement more easily and naturally formed a connection with the biological child in the home.⁶¹ When considered within the context of the literature, my findings concur that placements with religious similarities work better to meet the needs of Muslim children.

My research findings confirm concerns with the placement of children in culturally and religiously different homes. Degener et al. (2020) found that Dutch youths in transcultural

⁶¹ Abbas was placed in a religiously matched, but ethnically and to some extent, culturally different home. Despite cultural differences between his Eastern European foster placement and his Arab family, he adjusted well because of the religious similarity.

placements experienced ambivalence and distanced themselves from their cultural origins, yet they told stories of wanting a sense of belonging to their origins resulting in internal conflict and trauma. Furthermore, Hyde and Kammerer (2009) iterate that trauma from out-of-home placement is significantly reduced when the caregivers are familiar and known to the child. Therefore, this ordeal can be improved by ensuring that the child has some continuity of contact with family, as well as familiar home routines. This is in line with kinship care, a model used to place children in family and community. In my experience as a foster mother, I was asked to care for Muslim children brought into care for short periods and the anecdotal report from the children's workers indicated that the parents were relieved that their children were placed in Muslim homes.

My findings are consistent with Degener et al. (2020) and Hyde and Kammerer (2009), reflecting the principle that keeping children in their home is a preferred and more appropriate solution than out-of-home placement. According to my research, the parents were not supported to keep their children; instead, the children were apprehended and only afforded support such as counsellors and psychologists while in care. Ahmad noted the lack of support commenting, "how come when they [CAS] sent her [his daughter] home all services were stopped? No more counselling and other things." In the situation presented by this case study, the Society's concerns were enough to remove the children but services to maintain their return home was not available. The disruption caused by the apprehension and the resulting aftermath could have been avoided; I, therefore, agree with Ringel et. al (2019), that the best outcome is to support families so that children can remain in their home and Dumbrill (2010) who similarly argues that foster homes are supported but there is no support to assist families to keep children home.

My findings indicate differences between CASs relationship with biological families and foster families. For Ahmad, this difference posited foster parents as more capable and knowledgeable. Similar perspectives were shared by the other participants; they agreed that Islamic knowledge is considered insignificant, even inferior, and problematic. For example, Ahmad's belief that as a parent he is allowed to set limits for technology use was the very reason for the disagreement between him and his daughter that led to CAS involvement. His knowledge and parenting skills were dismissed and instead, he was understood through the lens of the male Muslim stereotype. This is in line with Dumbrill's (2010) argument that while service providers' knowledge and perspectives on parental expectations are developed, clients' knowledge of their ways to keep children safe is rarely tapped into through research.

To address the lack of clients' knowledge and perspectives and include marginal knowledge, Ahmad and other participants expressed that CASs should consider hiring practices where workers reflect the populations they serve. This finding supports Waniganayake et al.'s (2019) recommendation in maintaining cultural matching with caseworkers. Dumbrill (2010) and Waniganayake et al. (2019) spoke mostly of cultural similarities, but my findings suggest that having caseworkers from similar religious backgrounds will ultimately help Muslim clients maintain connections with religion and community.

While religious identity does not exist in isolation from other social identities, it is a factor to be considered because of its significance to identity, particularly for Muslims given the rise in Islamophobia. Gilligan (2009) examined religion and child abuse through questionnaires collected from professionals in the field. He concluded that although there is a general awareness of the importance of religion, practice has not changed to accommodate religious diversity. While religion is frequently conflated with culture in the literature, Gilligan (2009) argues that

religion is important. The findings of my research strongly support the need to examine religion as distinct, particularly among Muslims, for whom religion is the basis for stigma and vilification.

So far, my discussion of the findings from this study is consistent with and supported by the literature on marginalized clients and it also fits with my practice experiences. What I did not anticipate but certainly could not overlook, were ways in which the child welfare system itself creates problems that increase risks factors for families. For example, the literature reveals that clients experience loneliness due to their immigration, language barriers, and cultural differences (e.g., LeBurn et al. 2015; Lavergene et al. 2008). In my research, feelings of loneliness were not a pre-existing condition related to any factor such as newness to Canada, language barrier or Muslim identity. Instead, loneliness and isolation developed after CAS intervention with the family. Similarly, literature on socio-economic factors usually indicates that low socio-economic status is a pre-existing circumstance linked to increased risks (Bywaters et al. 2016; Pelton, 2015). However, Ahmad fared well financially before CAS intervention but lost his financial stability shortly thereafter.⁶² Further, the literature on mental health points to poor mental health as a factor that precipitates referrals (e.g., Fong, 2018), and caregiver mental health as a reason for intervention (e.g., King et al. 2018). Again, in my research, Elnaz's mental health seemed to be triggered and exacerbated by child welfare involvement. Undoubtedly, she would have experienced some stress given the journey the family took to get to Canada; however, she

⁶² Ahmad was fired from his jobs because of criminal charges and his record in the child abuse registry. He was also unable to obtain legal aid because he owned his home and paying legal fees resulted in him having to take a lien against his home.

seemed to have coped well until CAS became involved and subsequently required psychiatric care to manage the loss of her children.

These surprising findings troubled me, particularly given my understanding of CAS involvement as a child protection worker. I had first-hand knowledge of the harm that results for children and had thought about placement from both the perspectives of a foster parent and protection worker. It is undeniable that child welfare interventions result in trauma, but I had positioned this as “the lesser of two evils,” a way to remove children from harmful situations. Despite my extensive history and critical approach to child welfare, I never imagined that child welfare interventions had this hidden consequence that, when activated, creates situations for families that amplify their interactions with the system. Further, my literature review, bounded by experiences of marginalized groups, fit the narrative of child welfare work that the poor, the mentally unwell, and the culturally different are contributing factors that disadvantage families and put them at risk for child welfare involvement. However, I had failed to consider the impact of child welfare involvement as *actually* contributing to poverty and mental health challenges and what this might mean for clients where cultural and religious differences are present.

Returning to the literature to understand my startling finding that CAS intervention causes tangible harm to families beyond stress and stigma, I realized it is an area of little research. Kenny and Barrington (2018) studied the impact of social networks and stigma on women whose children were removed from their care because of drug use. They concluded that the women were severely disadvantaged in many ways after their children were removed from their homes. Using a specific population, Kenny and Barrington (2018) suggest that a better understanding of the phenomenon will assist in improving services. A second study by Broadhurst and Mason (2017) examined consequences for birth mothers following court removal

of their children and conclude that “states reinforce parents’ exclusion, where the full gamut of challenges these parents face is poorly understood.” (p. 41).

Placing my findings in the context of Kenny and Barrington’s (2018) and Broadhurst and Mason’s (2017) studies, I agree that the unintended and hidden consequences of child welfare involvement need to be better understood. While they look at two specific situations in general populations, I believe that this issue needs to be researched in terms of minoritized clients more thoroughly. In my research, Ahmad and his family endured three painful aspects of child welfare involvement that left them more vulnerable. Left to deal with the consequences of their experiences without any assistance from child welfare, the family was much more vulnerable. It is the escalated mental health, loss of finances, and possible community alienation, that the risks for CAS intervention increased for Ahmad and his family. And now, there is the risk of previous involvement, a factor used in assessing for interventions, a way in which the system reproduces its oppressive processes and adds reasons for continued surveillance. The processes that result in material and social loss for clients require further research and understanding.

The Distinct Aspect of Religion: An Ontological Perspective

I started this research with the assumption that Islamophobia and racism are at the root of Muslims’ experiences. However, an additional area with significant impact surfaced in my research. Religion itself became a distinctive aspect of oppression that is connected to the ontology of believers. As outlined in the CR framework in chapter five, theology (as manifested by beliefs and practice) constitutes an ideal real that is Divinely ordained and therefore is the source of the highest power. It is therefore the central source of informing an ontological perspective for Muslims. How does this manifest in Muslims’ experiences as they receive child welfare services? Ahmad and Huda (Muslim foster mother) both brought up Islam as an essential

and inherent in their experiences. To grapple with this angle of exploration, I returned to the literature to consider what this might mean and how it connected with Ahmad's family experiences.

The basis of an Islamic discussion is that Muslims are personally responsible for their actions (An-Na'im, 1990). Between the believer and God, there is a relationship of obedience, acceptance, and compliance to the Divinely ordained laws. Detailed in the section on the Islamic safety and protection of children, we see both parents and children have rights and responsibilities. Islam sets a legal outline with moral codes that encourages a relationship with parents to protect children and ensure physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being is established under Islamic law (Almihdar, 2008; Islam, 2015). Of note here is that spiritual/religious neglect, an aspect not considered in Western child protection, is a part of the Islamic discourse on protection and safety of children.

An Islamic model based on Quranic teachings and the Ahadith includes instructions and encouragement for a child to learn and practice their faith. Among the directions, it is an emphatic obligation for parents to attend to anything detrimental to the child's overall well-being. In essence, added to the physical care and attention provided to children, child protection in Islam is linked to discipline and continued guidance; it therefore requires active parenting. Following this tradition of setting limits for children, Ahmad took Wardah's cell phone when she was texting friends at 2.00 am and this was viewed as "the big problem." Further, while in care, the children ate and dressed in ways that were not consistent with the family guidelines, resulting in a total disregard of their religious beliefs and practices.

According to O'Leary et. al (2020), child welfare should engage with Muslim communities in ways that respect their faith.

Islamic child protection practices have their basis in scriptural sources of the Sharia, as opposed to socio-cultural traditions. This makes them powerful because of the religious legitimacy associated with child rights in Islam. These rights are God-given and must be upheld regardless of cultural norms. Failure to do so is tantamount to sin, depending on the nature of the negligence judicial penalty. (p. 2003)

Considering the weight of sin in a belief system where life after death is a significant focus (Chittick, 2008), one can imagine the implications for Ahmad. For him to follow the Western rules that determined how he should parent, he had to relinquish his God-given responsibility of nurturing the religious/spiritual dimension of his children's well-being.

The findings of this study show that while Ahmad and Elnaz were committed to the return of their children to their home, they had to submit to a Western construction of protection and safety. When Ahmad expressed concerns about his daughter's inappropriate dress, he is seen as the backward controlling father but for Ahmad, it is his responsibility to save his daughter from eternal consequences. As a person in collective with a community, Prophet, and God, he was stripped of being able to act in ways that secured his and his family's faith.

The separation of the children from family and community to allegedly create safety disrupted their faith and caused what could be considered religious injury. Being placed in a non-Muslim home Wardah and Sidra were unsupported in their practices; the disconnect from family and community resulted in Wardah, the older sister running away. The removal of the children from their parent's home and their experiences with the criminal justice system mirrored a stripping of religion and faith that go far beyond exterior forms of discrimination and the need for religious accommodation. The implication of child welfare involvement for Ahmad and Elnaz was a disruption in the very core aspect of their being. They were sanctioned for

maintaining their relationship with God as they saw fit and through this process possibly endangered their own salvation and that of their children. In their existential experience, Ahmad and his family are overlapped by competing claims. On the one hand, Islamophobia tells them they are barbaric and dangerous. On the other hand, as servants of God, their actions can result in eternal salvation or damnation. Considering this, religion as separate from culture, ethnicity and race has a specific and different analytical potential.

As outlined in the above discussion, the way child welfare was experienced by the family suggests the system as it currently exists and operates is unable to meet the needs of racialized clients with complex intersectional identities. Ahmad experienced being singled out based on race, culture, religion, and refugee status. Using terms such as “being treated as alien” and “they think because we come from third world country,” Ahmad grouped his race (being Arab), culture and religion along with his refugee status to conclude, “they [child welfare and police] are racist.” Such complexity cannot be contemplated without a robust theoretical framework. In the following section, I turn my attention to examining ways that systemic barriers present challenges for Muslim clients.

Systemic Challenges in Child Welfare

Experts in the Canadian child welfare system draw attention to systemic barriers for Indigenous and African Canadian populations. My study reflects similar structural barriers as discussed by Clarke et al. (2018) that impact services for African Canadians. The researchers contend that language in CYFSA is lacking in the acknowledgement of distinct concerns for African Canadians. In reviewing parts of the CYFSA, my conclusions are similar to Clarke et al. (2018). In the case of Muslims, there is no recognition of unique concerns that should be considered despite ongoing efforts of inclusivity in child welfare policies.

For example, a review of the Act by stakeholders in 2015 indicates that the CYFSA does not reflect the diversity of Ontario thereby creating barriers for youth to retain connections with their racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity. Further, the 2019 amendment of the Act highlighting service provisions to children and youth stipulates the needs of children stating a service provider:

- i. respects a child's or young person's need for continuity of care and for stable relationships within a family and cultural environment,
- ii. takes into account physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and developmental needs and differences among children and young persons,
- iii. takes into account a child's or young person's race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, disability, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression,
- iv. takes into account a child's or young person's cultural and linguistic needs,
- v. provides early assessment, planning and decision-making to achieve permanent plans for children and young persons in accordance with their best interests, and
- vi. includes the participation of a child or young person, the child's or young person's parents and relatives and the members of the child's or young person's extended family and community, where appropriate. (Child Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 p. 3)

As can be seen in the above iteration, there is a consideration for spiritual needs but as extensive as the inclusion criteria are, religion is not mentioned. At this point, I would like to note that while there are similarities between religion and spirituality, spirituality is usually an individual practice that is used to enhance peace while religion is an organized set of beliefs and practices shared by a community or group.

This erasure of religion from the Act itself and other documents that support the work culture of CAS has little consideration for people whose lives are organized around religion and reflect systemic exclusion at the highest level of policy and directives. While there is a Catholic CAS (CCAS) and a Jewish agency that signals the inclusion of religion, it is unclear how religion informs the practices. I cannot speak to the Jewish agency but having worked in Hamilton and being in the position to engage with the CCAS, the main difference is in client identification. Similar mandates and tools are used in both CAS. The major point of difference between the CCAS and the CAS seemed more legalistic and resulted in agencies transferring clients who identified as Catholic to the Catholic agency or vice versa. Regardless of the mandate of these organizations, to be a child protection agency in Ontario is to be aligned with the Ministry's vision and to use the standardized tools approved for CAS, leaving little room for a different way to practice child welfare.

As outlined above, religion is not considered in the higher levels of the child welfare hierarchy. At the individual organizational level, the findings of my research indicate reluctance by CAS to engage with religious communities. My findings align with Gilligan (2009), suggesting significant reluctance from agencies to respond to an initiative related to child abuse and faith. Gilligan (2009) states "that approaches are frequently dependent on the specific responses and attitudes of individuals and groups or their particular interpretations of policies and values rather than on formal agency policies."⁶³ (p. 95). Agencies that I approached had

⁶³ Gilligan's study conducted through The British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCA) invited 1,000 professionals to respond to questioners and yielded 17 responses.

different reasons to withhold access to participants, with management providing explanations such as my research did not fit with organizational mandates and policies. Obviously, one agency interpreted its policies in a way that allowed access to workers and foster parents but not clients or agency documents.

In addition to the agency-specific ways of interpreting policies and mandates, my findings reflect similar variations in individual approaches to child welfare provision within given organizations. For example, Ahmad indicated some workers were better at considering his needs as a Muslim and spoke of the distinct difference it made to him. Similarly, foster parents spoke about support from the agency being filtered through the individual worker that manages their homes. Huda (Muslim foster mother) made a point of highlighting the difference between workers who were accommodating of her requests and those that were more “by the book.”

Another aspect of policy issue that surfaced in my study is gaps and exclusions in work with Muslims. With no statistical information being collected by the Canadian Incidence Studies (CIS) report, challenges to argue the issue of lack of representation surfaced. Although it is now a requirement that agencies collect identity-related information, it is unclear how the information is used and what differences it makes for the families. As I outlined in chapter three, during my research, I contacted the Anti-oppression Round Table with a request to attend a meeting but was told that the Round Table does not look at the Muslim population and thus I was not invited to any meeting.

Further, the OACAS does not have a tangible training module for working with Muslims, clearly showing that Muslim communities are yet to be considered in any significant way by the child welfare system in Ontario. This problem of excluding marginalized groups is noted by Clarke et al. (2018); they highlight concerns about the lack of publicly accessible race-based data

for African Canadians. They also argue that the One Voice One Vision (OVOV) initiative faced challenges due to OACAS's limited capacity to require CASs to follow recommended training.

In Ontario, community involvement is frequently articulated in government responses to improve child protective services.⁶⁴ The emerging language and contents of initiatives appear inclusive, yet Blackstock (2016) argues that the Canadian government has failed to support services that keep children in their First Nations communities; her findings are consistent with Lee (2020), Clark (2012; 2018) and Cénat, et al. (2020; 2021) African American and African Canadian communities respectively. These scholars suggest that the lack of funding for minoritized communities is a central problem. The findings of my research reflect child welfare policy and practice of underfunding for community organizations and initiatives for Muslim communities in similar ways that Blackstock and Clarke suggest for Indigenous and African Canadian communities. Blackstock (2016) and Clarke et al. (2018) cite funding approaches that maintain the alienation of marginalized communities. They argue that the trend of underfunding for culturally relevant and appropriate services has resulted in no mechanisms or access to resources through communities that can focus on stabilizing families. These key concepts indicate funding being funnelled to services that are based on practices without regard for barriers that communities face and extend power through funding to practices that are punitive

⁶⁴ Details of the province's approach to community inclusivity in child welfare practice is outlined in chapter three under 'collaborative approaches' through discussions of iterations of the Child Youth and Family Services Act and other transformation agenda including Ontario's government 2020 Child Welfare Redesign Strategies.

and impose Western hegemony. My research extends these recommendations for practice with the Muslim Community as well.

Lack of funding for preventative practices and community agencies has made it easy to follow the usual protection agenda, thereby bypassing issues that require a financial commitment to community child welfare. The dominance of the protection mandate cannot be overstated and attempts to engage in community work often fail. In my child protection experience, I had volunteered to participate in a community initiative that lasted for six months before it was dissolved because of funding. This is one of the many failed attempts to engage with communities. However, the findings of my research, indicate some positive aspects of community involvement. The organization that was instrumental in getting Ahmad the assistance he needed was only able to do so because they had an established working relationship with CAS.

In my findings, Ahmad found assistance from this community organization that assisted him to meet the CAS demands. This was a fortunate coincidence because most CASs do not have a community organization that families can turn to. Maryam (society worker) made this point in her conversation about the lack of resources for Muslim families. My findings support the idea that both the underfunding for community initiatives and exclusion of service users creates a system where minority communities lack resources to engage in preventative measures. I argue that partnering with settlement organizations and other community agencies where CAS share information and educate families around child protection concerns is necessary; however, there is little funding for such programs.

As argued by Blackstock (2016) and Clarke et.al (2018), beyond resources, fundamental differences that set communities apart should be considered. Hutchison et el. (2014) and O’Leary

et al. (2020) focus on working with Muslim communities in the west and consider community harmony as essential. They highlight the benefits of community involvement in securing counselling and remedial services for families, acquiring appropriate placement of the children and working on family reunification. My findings concur with Hutchinson et al. (2014) and O’Leary et. al (2020). Ahmad, the workers and foster parents agreed that community supports are essential and work to improve outcomes for Muslim families and as previously mentioned requires financial resources.

However, a different aspect of community involvement surfaced in my research. Ahmad raised the issue of stigma and judgement that emerges from the community, while workers identified the close-knit nature of smaller communities as a challenge, particularly to confidentiality.⁶⁵ Their anxiety about inadvertently disclosing information particularly when using translators, emerged. Ahmad and Elmira (Muslim foster mother) used the phrase “double-edged sword” to describe community involvement. Despite these concerns, my findings suggest that community has a constructive role, nonetheless one that requires considerable development.

The findings of my study suggest that one of the most fundamental aspects of a marginalized community’s role in CAS is the placement of children within their community. All

⁶⁵ Stigma and judgement are commonly precipitated by child welfare involvement in other communities and segments of populations. For example, Kenny and Barrington (2018) discuss stigma and suffering experienced by women who use drugs. See Kenny, K. S., & Barrington, C. (2018). “People just don’t look at you the same way”: Public stigma, private suffering and unmet social support needs among mothers who use drugs in the aftermath of child removal. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 86, 209-216.

participants agreed that placement can be enhanced by ‘matching’ and should be seriously considered. Cultural matching for Muslim children in care requires Muslim communities to participate in the care of children through fostering. This is seemingly a simple solution but there are factors that thwart such efforts. First, literature proposes that Muslims have an inherent fear for CAS (Crabtree et al. 2016). In my experience with Muslim communities, fear is indeed a factor in reluctance to foster. This is borne out in my research as Muslim foster parents and a Muslim worker whom I attempted to recruit for this research reluctantly refrained from participation in the study because of their “fear of CAS.” The second and probably more significant issue surfaced in the findings of this study with regards to Muslims engaging in fostering identifies policy complications. Huda, a Muslim foster parent described her involvement with fostering as motivated by a desire to serve Muslim families. She was happy to foster Muslim children and willing to identify her home as one for Muslim children, but agency policies did not allow to hold space for Muslim children.

Considering that Degener et al. (2020) and Hyde and Kammerer (2009) discuss the pitfalls of out-of-home placements when cultural and community ties are severed, this idea of matched placement should be considered. An added factor for Muslims as expressed by Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. (2021) is that Muslim children in the system are negatively impacted by their religious identity. To uphold the CYFSA’s intent to inclusivity which acknowledges the need for continuity of care and retention of relationships with family and community, the child welfare community must move beyond positive articulations and address limitations in policy and narrow policy implementations. In the following section, I pivot towards conceptualizing the child welfare experiences of Muslims from a theoretical approach to examine elements relevant for practice with Muslims in Ontario.

Evaluating the Canadian Context for Child Protection with Muslims

The child welfare experiences of Ahmad are linked to the larger Canadian context. As he understood before arriving in Canada, it was a welcoming place for refugees and the government sponsorship provided him with the opportunity. However, the city he landed in was not quite as welcoming and his wife soon experienced racism/Islamophobia because she wore the *hijab*. But this should not have been a problem because Canada's multicultural policy sets the groundwork for immigration policies and promotes equitable participation for its diverse citizens. The following discussion highlights the current Canadian context and its impact on Ahmad and his family.

The scholarship on Canadian multiculturalism can often appear contradictory, as it incorporates a wide spectrum of viewpoints, such as integration (Kymlicka, 2007), illusory (Fleras, 2009), and grounded in an exclusionary, colonial past (Price, 2012). Multicultural policies remain unclear on the management of faith-based and religious communities, and as Price (2012) suggests, the scarf-wearing "other" threatens Canadian multiculturalism. Face-veils and hijabs, as visible aspects of Muslim women's attire, are often associated with stereotyping Muslim women as uneducated and oppressed (Bullock, & Jafri, 2000; Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). In addition to the inherent limitations of multiculturalism, Canadian Muslims are often defined as a threat to liberal democracy (Sharify-Funk 2013). Nash (2012) and Sadek (2017) demonstrated that as a religious group with a negative identity marker, Muslims are vilified with the rise in Islamophobia.

Impact of Islamophobia. In *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*, Razak (2008) makes a compelling case that perception and treatment of Muslims indicate an assignment of permanent lower-class status which 'others' them and puts them

outside the bounds of citizenship. This ‘othering’ of Muslims is evident in Canadian politics too since Canada has witnessed an official divide between secularism and religion. Initiatives such as Bill 94⁶⁶ and Bill 62,⁶⁷ have explicitly singled out Muslims in ways that culture, ethnicity, race and or immigration status alone do not. Another example unfolded in 2013 when the Quebec government made public its ‘Charter of Secularism’ plan, which was a general ban of religious symbols for employees in the state sector; rather, it is largely recognized as a ban on face-veils exclusively worn by Muslim women (Burchardt, 2018).⁶⁸

Although my research questions did not consider gender, gender stereotypes surfaced as a significant issue. To begin, the otherness of Muslims surfaced in two main ways. First, Elnaz, experienced micro-aggressions that were reflected in the hostile and derogatory attitudes which Ahmad referred to as “because she is Muslim.” She fit the profile of the “oppressed Muslim

⁶⁶ Bill 94, the first piece of legislation in North America that bans face-coverings from public and government buildings in the name of public security, which effectively denies essential services for Muslim women who wear hijab. For implications of this Bill, see: Sharify-Funk (2010) “Governing the Face Veil: Quebec’s Bill 94 and the Transnational Politics of Women’s Identity”: <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ijcs/2011-n43-ijcs0122/1009458ar/>

⁶⁷ Bill 62, the religious neutrality law that “fosters adherence to State religious neutrality,” and provides a framework for religious accommodations. For details, see: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-62-41-1.html>

⁶⁸ There is a difference between Quebec and English Canada at the policy making level that surfaces in the ‘notwithstanding clause’ (section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms) clause being invoked in Quebec but not in English Canada.

woman” and was treated as such by child welfare professionals. Viewed as powerless within the home yet charged with physical abuse of her teenage daughter, Elnaz was both the oppressed woman and the barbaric Muslim. This finding is corroborated by Bullock and Jafri’s (2000) arguments that Muslim women continue to be regarded within stereotypes where identities are constructed to reinforce their un-belonging to Canada.

Second, Ahmad was accused of ‘forcing’ his daughter to wear *hijab*, reinforcing the stereotype of an aggressive and oppressive Muslim male. Meanwhile, he firmly held to the fact that he did not impose on his daughter to wear hijab, because it is ‘her choice.’ Further, Ahmad identified himself as the protector and provider honouring what he considered his Islamic obligation for males (Doi, 2005; Qutb, 2000);⁶⁹ but this study reflects that he was judged negatively by professionals and his Islamic ways of providing protection and safety were specifically targeted. As previously discussed, some views on Islam constructed around ideas of Islam as an antithesis to democracy allow Islamophobia to be perceived as upholding democracy and human rights (Raj 2016). These findings align with Canadian Muslims often being defined through clash theory as a threat to liberal democracy (Sharify-Funk 2013). Or as Nash (2012) and Sadek (2017) argue, Muslims are viewed with a negative identity marker and experience xenophobia linked to Islamophobia.

⁶⁹ Gender role in Islam has boundaries but it is not a static understanding. There are discussions on the fluidity and limits to gender role and application of gendered practices in the west. See for example: Samani, S. (2016). Between texts and contexts: Contemporary Muslim gender roles. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 27(3), 319-332.

The foregoing findings of my research were supported by other non-Muslim participants who similarly noted that stereotypes of Muslim men and women were part of the lens through which Muslims are viewed in child welfare. For example, Carol (a worker participant) reported stereotyping of Muslim women and men by other professionals seeping into case management. She noted that the attitude did not change even after she called attention to the behaviour of colleagues who treated the Muslim woman in a shared case as powerless and dependent on the husband. The woman in Carol's narrative continued to be viewed as the antithesis of first world identity while Ahmad was deemed as controlling because he attempted to uphold traditional values, clearly judged as not suited to Canadian individualism or the neoliberal context of child welfare.

The Neoliberal Context of Child Welfare

The social and political aspects of fear and control over Muslims are fuelled by Islamophobia with funds directed at programs aimed at surveillance and creating images of Muslims as "risky."⁷⁰ My findings are in line with the theoretical explanations of neoliberalism as a control and management strategy using fear, power, and control to manage Ahmad into becoming a "responsible citizen." The findings of my study suggest that the neoliberal context is as much a challenge to workers as it is to families and complying with the managerial aspects of child welfare impacts workers' services to families. It is difficult to articulate the findings

⁷⁰ The Anti-Terrorism Act (Bill C 51) enacted after the events of September 11, 2001, makes controversial changes to security and privacy in Canada by amending the criminal code and placing travel restrictions mainly on Muslims linking them to terrorism. The Act is available at: <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/astat/sc-2015-c-20/latest/sc-2015-c-20.html>

without the context of the neoliberal policies that include government control through managerial approaches and risk management (Parton, 2008). These aspects of neoliberalism present a conundrum in child welfare practice. Research on the impact of governmental control over service provisions has left practitioners “increasingly embroiled in bureaucracy and subjected to managerial constraints aimed at rationing resources and assessing/managing risk, rather than meeting need.” (Rogowski 2015, p. 97). Complying with the managerial aspects of child welfare impacts service provisions in ways that suggest inhumane interrelations that stripped Ahmad and his family of their dignity. He stated regarding the way he was treated, “we are still humans.”

In the findings of my study, the three workers expressed similar concerns about constraints and functional tasks that impact their work with clients. A specific example of managerial control cited by workers is the new Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)⁷¹ which worried workers. Maryam, the Muslim worker felt that to manage this new process, she will be unable to consult as she would with colleagues in an informal way to support and provide insight; a practise colleagues depended on in their work with Muslim clients. This sentiment was also shared by the other two workers who expressed worries about other aspects of case management including coverage. While Susan spoke of using text messages to connect with clients, she feels they are no longer allowed because of the restrictions of the PIPEDA.

⁷¹ PIPEDA is an Act that addresses issues of accountability, consent, limits, disclosures, and safety of personal information. More information on this legislation can be found at: <https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/privacy-topics/privacy-laws-in-canada/the-personal-information-protection-and-electronic-documents-act-pipeda/>

An additional finding connected to the constraints of work mentioned by all three workers is a disconnect from their work when managing cases “by the book.” Having to follow rigid rules at the very minimum, removes workers’ discretion in complex and nuanced situations and stifles workers’ desire to circumvent barriers to access resources on behalf of clients. Using prescribed assessment documents and having little ability to assist families with supportive options impeded workers’ relationality. In line with the literature, this finding shows that neoliberal management with templates for risk assessments and other services may replace expertise and relational engagement (Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006; Gillingham & Humphreys, 2010; Parton, 2008), leaving workers disconnected from service users. However, relationality was attached to other barriers such as language and cultural differences as well.

Turning towards the effects of neoliberal policies on families in child welfare, the cut to supportive programs leaves families with a system that is policing. My study highlighted a lack of support and an increased scrutiny for marginalized communities and families. Ahmad iterated that services were not available, but demands were made on Elnaz and him to complete counselling services and parenting classes as a condition before CAS considered reunification of the children. As Rogowski (2015) suggests, the purpose of control and management is aimed at changing the behaviours of segments of society. This control and management created experiences filled with fear and loss of control for the Ahmad family.

During my years of practice, I observed an example of this that impacted supportive programs in Ontario; this occurred in 1994 when the Harris government funding cuts resulted in

the termination of programs geared to support families.⁷² Support for families was replaced by control and management which is exactly how Ahmad experienced the system. In the context of Britain, Parton (2016) speaks of a government's directive and supervisory role in the neoliberal state that sees government as "supervisory and disciplinary" with changes "premised on social and political rationales as they are on economic imperatives" (p. 7). In the management of marginalized populations, fear and power are effective strategies to exercise control and maintain authority. As an economic vision with strategies of cutbacks to social programs, neoliberalism has thwarted child welfare agencies' capacity to serve families through the vision currently articulated by the CYFSA. The movement to critically examine and acknowledge power to improve services for child welfare clients is grounded in anti-oppression practice (AOP) which has been the trend for several years.

Anti-Oppression in Ontario's Child Welfare System

The AOP literature examines social relations and principles of social justice to analyze power and dominance in disempowered groups (Campbell, 2003; Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002, 2010). Grappling with issues of power and oppression, AOP is considered a way to ultimately change the structure and delivery of social services as a governmental responsibility (Sakimato, & Pinter, 2005), a proposition that requires work at the ministry level. AOP appears to be a high priority for the OACAS and CAS organizations and is the principal approach highlight critical thinking and practice with marginalized clients. Many CASs are attempting to

⁷² The Alternate Care program, a program dedicated to providing respite services for families with special needs so that their families can maintain in-home care for them was terminated at the CAS organisation that I was involved with at that time.

move towards working with AOP principles with varying degrees of success. However, in discussing AOP Dumbrill (2012) notes:

Indeed, Canada stands on guard to ensure that CASs focus on the risks caused to children that arise from the failings of parents, and away from the risks caused to children, parents and communities that arise from the failings of the state. We have to change this and deal with broader social issues if we are to follow the AO road. (p. 6)

The quote highlights the very nature of child protection work, a focus on failing parents and lack of governmental responsibilities. With such a framework for child protection services, the risk is constructed as individual leaving systemic barriers unaddressed.

Dumbrill's (2012) analysis of slow and pendulum-like patterns of change suggests a sluggish approach to understanding barriers for oppressed groups. The ineffectiveness of AOP for First Nations and African Canadian communities discussed by Blackstock (2009) and Clarke et.al (2018). Concerning religious communities, AOP and OACAS have failed to fully conceptualize religion as a dimension for oppression and consider how it may be different from other vectors of oppression and marginalization for child welfare clients. For example, how would the ministry restructure service in ways that Muslims have improved access to resources and education? Ahmad iterated that a community-based newcomer program would be helpful, but these are the types of programs not funded. AOP manifests in child welfare as a tool for workers rather than a consideration at the policy where systemic barriers can be tackled.

My anecdotal belief as a foster parent and worker, that AOP is inadequate to address religion as a significant factor in oppression and marginalization of Muslim clients is borne out in this research. Workers in my study identified several challenges in their practice that stem from organizational processes including policies and mandates. Although workers interviewed in

this case worked with Muslims, completed the anti-oppression training, and volunteered for the study based on their interest in working with minority clients, it became clear that insights were at best shallow, particularly concerning the nature, manifestations, and effects of Islamophobia. Further, their practice did or could not properly consider meeting the religious needs of their clients because of systemic barriers such as organizations ensuring that they have Muslim homes to place children. The failure of AOP practices to include religion as a potential intersection area presents a paradox for religious accommodations in child welfare practice.

To elaborate on different ways of including communities, Clarke et al. (2018) argues that anti-Black racism is a necessary framework given Canada's white supremacist history. Parallel to their reasoning, my research indicates the need for child welfare services to use a broad yet precise framework with Muslims. I propose a framework grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality as analytical tools to untangle complexities in the context of eurocentrism in child welfare. This will advance an analysis that deconstructs power and privilege thereby focusing on the multiple identities of Muslims. While race is at the centre of CRT, intersectionality considers how compounding aspects of identity within historical, social, and political contexts are necessary to appreciate Muslims' religious identity. Gholami, (2021) suggests "Islamophobia comprises racial *and* religious dimensions which must be at least partially disentangled and examined in their own right" (p. 319). As outlined earlier, culture and religion are also often conflated but believers have specific beliefs, values and practices that are important to their well-being.

Theorizing Challenges for Work with Muslim Service Recipients

Intersectionality and CRT bring to the forefront issues crucial to understanding the complexity of Muslim clients' experiences. AOP is seen by child welfare as necessary as a

practice framework with initiatives such as training and equity are included in an AOP practice framework. Conceptualizing Muslims in child welfare through AOP, CRT and intersectionality is important and may challenge the normative idea that links Muslims to terrorism; however, centring on Islamic literature and practice is essential to address issues about Muslims. The scholarship on Muslim approaches to the safety and protection of their children is substantial, yet it is rarely drawn upon and remains in the periphery of western child welfare research. The prevailing associations with being “Islamic” dismiss Islamic knowledge as illiberal and presents challenges for AOP to orient critical work in inclusive ways for Muslims. Child welfare should necessarily consider Islamic beliefs, values, and ways of protecting Muslim children.

Understanding child welfare through the lens of Islamic methodology requires integrating scholarship written from an Islamic framework to understand child protection issues in Muslim communities. Literature on Islamic safety and protection was discussed in detail in chapter four; however, there is limited crossover into child protection in the western context. Connecting the discourse of child protection in the western context to Islamic ways of ensuring safety rests on an inclusive academic and theoretical foundation. One effort to address Muslims in minority situations is by O’Leary et al. (2020) who identified three important themes for child protection in the Islamic context:

- (1) child protection as integral to Islamic teaching
- (ii) there are new models for dialogue and knowledge sharing on Islamic teaching on child protection and
- (iii) there is a focus on the application of an ‘Islamic’ lens in Muslim minority contexts. (p. 1202)

Writing for the Western context, O’Leary et al. (2020) make these important points that suggest a focus on an Islamic lens in Muslim minority communities. The authors of this research are associated to universities in Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Malaysia.

Dialogue and focus on an Islamic lens are not yet a part of child welfare discourse in Ontario but need to be considered in research that informs policy and practice. The themes express “the need to engage with Muslim communities in ways that respect their faith” (p. 2002). While necessary, engaging communities is only a step towards valuing community knowledge within the Eurocentric Western paradigm where Western knowledge is considered legitimate and Islamic knowledge is not.

The idea that Islamic knowledge is considered “less than” or inappropriate surfaced frequently in this research. Ahmad observed that he was not allowed to set limits that he needed to set as a Muslim and as a father while the other participants acknowledged the unacceptability of ‘religious’ and ‘cultural’ practices different from ‘Canadian norms.’ Herein lies the challenge for Muslim communities; to reclaim the authenticity of Islamic scholarship in child safety and protection and to center Islamic practices. Conversely, there is a challenge for the dominant society learning to know and respect alternative frameworks as legitimate. Within the limits of neoliberalism, the construction of Muslims as “risky other” and AOP’s limited focus on religious diversity, experiences of Muslim clients are mostly missing from child welfare discussions. Therefore, a more robust framework and centring Islamic scholarship is a necessary component in the examination of Muslim child welfare services.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter makes it clear that Muslims must accept child welfare services as it is government mandated. Further, it captures ways in which Muslims, resist,

comply, and acquiesce to child welfare services in Ontario. Muslims are at risk of harassment and threats as reviled Canadian ‘other’ in the current Islamophobic undercurrents in society. Clarke et al. (2018) and Blackstock (2009) both agree that AOP does not meet the needs of their respective communities; instead, specific ways of understanding the communities within a framework of how they understand themselves is relevant. Similarly, understanding the role of Islamophobia, a reality that can manifest in events such as the brutal killing of three generations of one family,⁷³ requires a framework that considers specific ways that Muslims experience themselves in Canada. This will create a more robust analytical lens to further research and practice. The two bodies of scholarship are both concerned with ensuring the safety of children and it may serve Muslim communities to draw from their traditions in managing child welfare concerns that surface. From an academic and research standpoint, there is a responsibility to build on what is available in understanding how Muslim minorities in the West can benefit from their own legacy to maintain the care of their children. However, two significant challenges will present barriers. One is the view of Muslims as less than, even barbaric. In the presence of this mindset, why would anything that Muslims have to offer have value? The second is the child welfare system itself is set up to reflect and reproduce western hegemony, therefore accepting new ways of caring for children will undermine the protection mandate that brings people in line with what is acceptable in the West.

The historic and sociopolitical context rooted in colonization, neoliberalism, and secularism has influenced how child welfare evolved. Religion is rarely discussed and is

⁷³ This is in reference to the incident that occurred in London, Ontario on June 6, 2021, leaving a nine-year-old boy without a family.

frequently conflated with “culture,” which serves as a catch-all category for racially diverse and immigrant populations. In this chapter, I examined challenges and opportunities for child protection services with Muslim families in Ontario through a critique of the absence of religion in academic discussions and practice.

Stories of the Self – Reflections on Colonialism in Canada

“It is not our differences that divide us, it is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

Audre Lorde

It is with a heavy heart that I contemplate the current socio-political context of Canada. With the number of unmarked graves well above a thousand in Saskatchewan and British Colombia and possibly more to come in other provinces. I wonder why? How? Why were the children ripped away from their families, placed in the torturous situations of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and erased without so much as an acknowledgement to their families?

They had their way of life before the colonizers disembarked on Turtle Island. They had a way of life that celebrated nature, connections, honouring the past, living in the present, and preserving the future. They loved and cared for their children. What about any of this needed to be civilized? They seemed much more civilized than those seeking to civilize them. This is not about differences, not about ‘civilizing’ people and more about domination through institutionalized religion. It was about power and control. It was about usurping land for personal material benefits. It is about power and control. The residential schools were a means for the state to forcibly separate children from their families and communities. The child protection system was complicit and instrumental in removing children from their families.

Imagine a Canada where the last residential school was operational until 1996! This was not what my children were learning in school though. They didn't even hear of the 60's scoops. But that was a long time ago, right? Not so long when I translate it to a historic chronology parallel to my life. By 1996 I had already lived in Canada for 14 years. My youngest child was already over six years old. And although I was an involved, inquisitive person engaging with my children's schools and attending university, I was unaware of the scope and depth of impact residential schools had on First Nations Communities, except as a footnote about the sixties scoop. And as child welfare scholars examining First Nations' experiences of the system will tell you, the millennial scoop continues to surface in child welfare outcomes for First Nations families. Oh Canada, whose native Land are you?

Oh Canada – open and welcoming to immigrants. You declared multiculturalism under the Trudeau government since 1971 with policies promoting equitable participation by 1985 yet the original owners and keepers of the land were being oppressed. Culture erasure, cultural genocide, ongoing geocide, while you looked so good to the world! This multiculturalism that you espouse and are admired for globally is rooted in exclusionary, colonizing processes that caused you to ignore First Nations plights. Maybe it is easier to ignore the disastrous outcomes and consequences of things that we are ashamed of. As if it is not enough that you have oppressed and murdered the hosts who generously shared their lands and home with you, you are now turning on the guests you happily invited through your generous immigration policies. Immigrants are welcome, they can settle in your beautiful space; refugees are welcome too, you sponsor them and assist them with settling. How Canadian eh!

The new wave of Islamophobia has taken a personal toll. I know the London Muslim community. I have spent time in the Mosque and admired the mural painted by 15-year-old

Yumna Salman before she was the victim of the Islamophobic attack that left three generations of one family killed in London Ontario. Recently, I received an email from an old Christian friend asking the question: How does a 20-year-old ever have that much hate inside him that he would murder a family he does not even know? Based on their religion? I cannot find a suitable answer. Perhaps because they are different? Because he feels they pose a threat? Because racism and xenophobia are alive and well in our Canada? Maybe he felt he was standing on guard for Thee, Oh Canada.

I cannot help but wonder whether Ahmad's story would be the same if the differences were not so many, so pronounced, so undesirable, so unCanadian? My instinctive answer is a loud resounding no. The instinct is likely more akin to epistemic knowledge. Is this how colonization continues? You can be here, but you can't be who you are. Ahmad was welcomed but his welcome only lasted until he "was caught" adhering to traditional values and religious practices. His race and ethnicity didn't help. Ahmad felt that his children were taken without just cause. And what is more, while in care his daughter was subjected to similar rules that he was punished for by being arrested, having his children removed, being placed on the child abuse registry, losing his jobs and his unborn child. Oh Canada – 'Land of hope for all who toil?'

Chapter 8 Conclusion, Recommendations, and Contributions

Situated in the neoliberal secular context, child welfare services consist of state interventions where subjects receiving services are profiled in ways that justify state interventions. Child welfare as currently practiced in Ontario is rooted in risk analysis and the bar for intervention includes a potential for risk, making room for future prediction of risks and profiling of groups. Reflected by ample child welfare literature, the experiences of minoritized/racialized subjects reveal child welfare intervention as a powerful and controlling system that is not designed to take into consideration clients' perspectives on family dynamics and child safety. While there is ample literature on experiences of cultural, ethnic, and racial minorities, the literature on religious minorities is now starting to emerge. For Muslim populations, already constructed as "risky" in the current socio-political environment, involvement with child welfare services adds a layer of complexity that needs to be understood by child welfare agencies and the academic community addressing child welfare issues.

This chapter summarises my research. I examined the experience of a Muslim, refugee family who became involved with the child welfare system, a system that they did not know existed until their initial investigation with child welfare services. In the overview of the project, I outline the process and highlight relevant points that surfaced through the examination of my research questions. I then focus on the contribution of the research, make recommendations based on the findings and comment on the limitations and strengths of the research. To conclude this chapter, I include my final reflection, challenges and motivations that surfaced in completing this work.

Development of the Project

This research project considered Muslims' experiences with child welfare involvement in Ontario. I concentrated on three primary areas of inquiry. The first explored how religious identification and practices impacted Muslims' experiences in child welfare services. The second considered systemic challenges including racism and xenophobia faced by the family in child welfare, school, and the criminal justice system. The third explored ways that service provision for Muslims can be improved. As part of the process to understand Muslims' experiences it was necessary to set up all elements of the research in ways that reflected the unique aspects of the research topic.

To begin, the use of my theoretical framework captures the complexity of concepts and supports a coherent account of the experiences of Muslims' involvement with child welfare in Ontario. As such, it is critical to understand how child welfare is practiced and how it is influenced by larger societal and political factors. I consider neoliberalism as a fundamental societal factor because of its impact on child welfare. It is a significant factor that has shaped the more protective mandates that moved child welfare further from family-centred approaches. In new managerial practice, social conduct is managed through intervention on those individuals, identified as "risky" which in turn limits supportive practice and resources. While Muslims continue to be profiled as risky, child welfare involvement presents a situation of double jeopardy.

To understand the context of Muslims in Ontario, I investigated the relationships between neoliberalism and the complex global phenomenon of Islamophobia in the lives of Muslims. While neoliberal austerity measures reduce spending for social programs, Islamophobia impacts Muslims' experiences in the political and social realms. In chapter four I examined Muslims in

the Canadian context and provided a background on Islam and Muslims' presence in Canada to bridge the gap, challenge stereotypes, and present crucial ideas for child protection services to Muslims in Canada. As shown in the literature, anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is the critical approach used in child welfare to advance work with minoritized clients.

The critical perspective of AOP is part of ongoing discussions and shapes "progressive" and "inclusive" practise. To advance a balanced approach and examine how critical perspectives may change or balance out neoliberal approaches, I used AOP to expand a theoretical model that adequately considers progressive work that focused on marginalized clients. The principal discovery from my study with regards to AOP indicated that training cannot foster or sustain truly anti-oppressive practices, as the structural aspects of oppression that are problematic cannot be addressed through workers regardless of how trained they are. Instead, training provides a form of sensitivity and understanding of clients, but the organizational constraints remain intact.

I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality to further the discussion of religion as a separate variable from culture and ethnicity. Differences between culture and religion are particularly salient for people who believe; using intersectionality highlighted Ahmad's race, refugee status (and the complications that accompany that) and his religion. While the literature addresses race and the struggles of new immigrants, intersectionality provides an analytical tool to understanding religion as distinct. As an analytically distinct consideration from culture, religion occupies an epistemological space for Muslims, of both revelation that is unquestionable, and lived experiences reflecting revelation within varying contexts. From revelation, Islam and Islamic theology inform a way of life that is connected to eternity and central to the global *ummah*. Leaving the factor of religion or conflating it with culture, therefore, misses the important experiential aspect of relating to the social world as a

believer, in this case, a Muslim. In addition to consideration of religion as a part of the intersectional dimension that brings requirements to the believers' lives, CRT and intersectionality uncovered challenges experienced by Muslims in the current Canadian context. CRT and intersectionality focused attention on the experiential level of Muslims in Canada and facilitated an understanding of Islamophobia as a significant, often unifying factor in Muslims' experiences.

Another dimension surfaced in the complex issues of Muslims receiving child welfare services. A clear perspective on essential considerations for religious minority clients in Western child protection systems is not fully discussed in the literature. While it is evident that scholars in the field recognize religious identification as important, there is little information on how it impacts services or what policies are in place to accommodate religious differences. Turning to the literature on race and culture provided an ample starting point to examine experiences of other forms of marginalization that lead to oppression. To understand how Muslims cared for and protected children, I drew on Islamic literature that expanded on the care and protection of children. From the traditional standpoint, Muslims have established ways of parenting and child management but contemporary literature reflects a move towards more Westernized models of child protection. Therefore, I included southern theory to center Islamic knowledge and scholarship. Applying the lens of southern theory allowed the legitimacy of Islamic ways of protection and safety to be positioned as a viable option. For example, a different perspective emerged in understanding Ahmad's limits for his daughter.

As a suitable research paradigm, with a framework to accommodate a reasonable dimension of compatibility with Islam, critical realism (CR) emerged as a good option for my study. From a religious standpoint, the construction of reality has both the revelation and rational

aspects that are synthesized to provide the “middle way,” an expression often used to describe Islam in Muslim spheres, therefore it sat well with my underpinning epistemology. CR links epistemology to ontology to construct a multi-layered approach for both contexts and emerging accounts of the social world. Through CR, I was able to link how child welfare involvement resulted in actions such as apprehension, criminal charges, registration as a child abuser, and the loss suffered by the family to the actual context of Islamophobia and neoliberal practices.

Compatible with the framework of CR, I used a case study approach to answer the research questions. This approach allowed for qualitative interviews from Ahmad, a Muslim refugee man of Arab heritage receiving child welfare services in Ontario. Qualitative interviews with four foster mothers and three workers having recent experiences with Muslim families were part of the data. Ahmad also provided documents of his involvement that gave insight and added a dimension to the story that was missing due to inaccessible CAS records. Additionally, I reviewed materials pertinent to the inclusion of diversity on child welfare developments in Ontario, including the Child Youth and Family Services Act, (CYFSA) Child Welfare Redesign Strategies (MCCSS), and Ontario Association of Children’s Aids Societies (OACAS) anti-oppression initiatives including One Voice One Vision (OV OV).

Given the lack of research on the impacts of religious identity, I draw on experiences of minoritized groups and conclude that similar barriers exist for Muslim clients, but the added dimension of religion is significant. Ahmad expressed this by distinguishing a “cultural thing” and a “religious” thing by saying that religion is “heavy,” meaning that the consequences and impact of religious neglect are significant. This surfaced in many ways including the level of concern for the diet and dress of his children while in care and was also a point for concern for a Christian foster mother who could not meet the religious needs of the children in her care.

Further, Islamophobia and stereotypes of Muslims result in oppression based on religion which requires a different lens to examine the problem. I argue that an inclusive approach for work with Muslims requires examination of the impact of Islamophobia, understanding of religious beliefs and practices, and centring Islamic knowledge on child safety and protection.

Contributions to the Field of Child Welfare

Religion impacts the lives of believers. For devout Muslims, religion is understood as a way of life with practices that govern everyday living including food, dress, hygiene practices and behaviour in interactions with others. In rearing children, safety and protection is a parental responsibility that includes the provision of guidance towards a religious and moral understanding of their world that puts God, instead of the individual at the centre of all relationships. When Ahmad insists on no “sleepover,” it was from this sense of providing guidance for his daughter and setting the expectation that as a Muslim she abides by religious regulations. With the way Islam is viewed in the West, this rule was taken in the context of a controlling father wanting to curb the individual freedom of his teenage daughter and in his eyes, this happened because he was a Muslim. He rightfully made the point that the rule in the foster home was the same as his rule, but it was acceptable and encouraged as a safety measure in the foster home.

This dissertation brings attention to the critical matter of religion in child welfare. While there is a growing awareness of the need to understand Muslims in providing social services, a grasp of child welfare service provision is essential to preserve families. The research is an initial step to highlighting concerns for Muslim clients involved in child welfare in Ontario. Building on the work of scholars examining challenges for minoritized clients, this project advances two significant contributions in conceptualizing child welfare services for minoritized clients and

makes a strong argument that consideration for religion is essential to improving service provision for religious minority communities.

First, this research used a comprehensive approach to develop the first empirical study on Muslims in Ontario through service users' and service providers' perspectives. The study provides an initial understanding of challenges for Muslim clients but also workers and foster parents working with Muslim clients. While the father spoke of an oppressive system of which he knew nothing before his involvement, workers acknowledge systemic restrictions and limited knowledge, and foster parents highlighted placement challenges. From the responses of all participants, it became clear that there is a gap in approaches to service provision for Muslims. The gap is manifested in several ways, for example, the children were not able to maintain religious practices and contact with their community while in care, the no contact order prohibited Ahmad from being at the same Mosque.

Although focused on Muslims, the project promoted an understanding of religion as separate from race, culture, and other vectors of identity. The focus on religion highlighted gaps in the literature where considerations for religion as a separate and unique aspect of identity are minimal. This lack of consideration is also reflected in practice as there is little support for religious accommodations. Through this study, it became clear that religious practices, values, and beliefs are instrumental in parenting practices and should be well understood when services to religious communities become necessary. While my case study examined a Muslim family, other religious communities may have specific needs that can be examined through similar studies.

Second, the research builds on theoretical aspects that can expand ways of engaging with Muslim populations through an approach that highlights the socio-political context with

Islamophobia as a significant reality for Canadian Muslims. Following the arguments that there is a necessity to extend theoretical frameworks for specific populations set out by Blackstone and Clarke on Indigenous and African Canadian communities, this work highlights similar needs to address the growing Muslim community. Theoretically, the comprehensive framework allowed for a thorough analysis of the experiences of Muslims and highlighted gaps in anti-oppressive practices that are designed to improve service delivery for minoritized clients. Through this multi-theoretical analysis, deep-rooted structural barriers intrinsic to child welfare practice as it pertains to Muslims are exposed.

To overcome some of the challenges described in the study, I argued for the introduction of Islamic ways of safety and protection to be considered. By so doing, I initiated a conversation between western child welfare literature and the literature on Islamic protection of children. In academic circles, this is an important consideration that can be used to further a decolonizing agenda in child welfare theorizing. Religion should be understood within the context of child welfare, to bring to the surface religious beliefs and practices in a holistic approach for clients whose religious beliefs are central in their lives. Therefore, considering Islamic literature on the protection of children will focus on the strengths of Muslim families with a possibility of mitigating some of the biases and stereotypes around Islam and Muslim men as oppressive to women and children.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

Despite a carefully planned approach to my project, unanticipated challenges and circumstances shaped many aspects of the work and set limitations. The first and most significant challenge surfaced around organizational resistance to engage with the project. This created a situation that severely impaired the participant recruitment process and resulted in a

shift to seeking participants through community resources. I contacted many Mosques, and multi-cultural agencies that served Muslim clients, and organizations working with child welfare clients in the Muslim community. While Mosque communities attested to the importance of the work, but no participants stepped forward to tell their child welfare story. The plan to complete a comparative case study by examining two cases from different CASs had to be adapted. In so doing, the study did not offer the comparison aspect of two separate experiences. Further, the case itself was limited to Ahmad providing information, the perspectives of the children and society workers involved in this particular case were not available. However, it should be noted that society workers and foster parents provided data on their experiences in work with other Muslim families.

Ahmad was interviewed three times and contacted for clarification through a member-check process but was the only family member that was interviewed. I had not sought ethics approval for the children but hoped to interview Elnaz along with Ahmad. She was open to her husband telling their story, but her English skills were limited, I offered to use an interpreter which she refused. Through Ahmad, she conveyed that it was too difficult to talk about the process and she would rather he did it on behalf of the family. However, she was present and listening to all interviews and would speak to Ahmad in Arabic reminding him of details.

The data gathered through qualitative interviews with Ahmad and the other participants present the limitation of self-reported data and cannot be independently verified except through the society documents provided by Ahmad. In my original conception of the research, I imagined examining cases through case files including case notes and other CAS documentation but without access to this data, the only documents available were provided by Ahmad and did not include affidavits or case notes. With the reliance on interviews from Ahmad, foster parents and

workers, there is the possibility of selective memory and attribution which could result in bias and exaggeration. Cultural and personal biases are inevitable and not only a concern for the participants and for me as well.

My positionality as a Muslim, a former child protection worker, and a former foster parent surfaced as strengths for interpreting the data and identifying mechanisms that helped to explain the complexity of child welfare for Muslims. I was able to appreciate from a “lived experience” perspective for all of the participants interviewed. The trust that existed between Ahmad and I allowed for a deep dive into the family circumstances and my connection with the Muslim community allowed me to move forward with the research despite child welfare agencies’ restrictions to access. Through my reflexive process, I managed internalized experiences and biases. I remained vigilant to bring into awareness such biases through my journal and field notes which I later used to reflect on my feelings through the process and have included them in part through the stories of self-reflection at the end of chapters two through seven.

Implications and Recommendations

As discussed in my literature review, scholars have been identifying issues present in child welfare that are anchored in structural barriers. Dettlaff et al. (2020) suggest that the child welfare system needs to be dismantled because of its roots in racism and colonization. The upEnd movement suggests a shift in child protection with the ultimate abolition of the system which as it currently exists, is based on racist policies (Dettlaff et al. 2020). The arguments of this movement are sound stating the separation of families is rooted in racism. Their proposed alternative is calling for the active support of community with resources. I agree with both these arguments, as does Ahmad.

But while this may be an option, it seems to be a long way off. In the meantime, racialized and other minoritized families that come into contact with the system require services that produce better outcomes. Barring the total dismantling of the child welfare system, I suggest a rethinking of the system through a decolonizing approach that does not necessarily reject the system but centers on the concerns and worldviews of others it serves. In the case of Muslims, an approach that includes Muslim communities and Islamic scholarship should be drawn upon to secure better outcomes for Muslim families. My recommendations are:

1. Structurally transformative policies at various levels of the child welfare hierarchy that are developed through the inclusion of Muslim voices.
2. A community model approach to child welfare that is funded by the ministry and led by Muslim communities.

Structurally Transformative Policies

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), OACAS and child welfare agencies are concerned with diversity and have made efforts to be inclusive for other groups. An initiative that demonstrates this commitment is reflected in the Child Welfare Redesign Strategy focusing on enhancing prevention and early intervention. However, merely professing strategies while practice remains unchanged is common as can be seen by the evolving of language that speaks to accommodating diversity. Yet, religious diversity seems to fall through the cracks and there is a lack of inclusion for religious communities at the practice level. One way to address this is through structurally transformative policies that must start with inclusion and engagement, old concepts that keep resurfacing in child welfare literature. However, inclusion and engagement must be considered through theoretical lenses that lead to an analysis of structural barriers such as racism and xenophobia.

Inclusion. Inclusion of Muslims in child welfare policies should occur at three levels. First, a representation of Muslim voices at the anti-oppression roundtable and on CAS boards is necessary to contribute to transformation. Both Blackstock (2016, 2020) and Clarke (2018) expressed the need for transformative policies to integrate the Indigenous and African Canadian communities, similarly inclusive policies for Muslims cannot be created unless there is an integration of a Muslims' frame for child safety and protection. To integrate Muslim voices, there needs to be representation at the governing levels of CASs, MCCSS and Anti-oppression round tables to bring attention to issues surfacing for Muslim families and may well develop into statistical information being collected.

This approach of inclusion, taken by MCCSS in the revision of the CYFSA in 2015 included stakeholders' concerns around access to support and services and attention to the vulnerable, yet scholars continue to argue that needs of communities are not being met. Therefore, there needs to be a substantial way to support transformation such that it is sustained and impactful. In 2018, the Three Voices in Child Welfare Conference, held at McMaster University encouraged a gathering of child welfare service users, service providers, academic researchers and traditional knowledge keepers to share in discussions (Three Voices in Child Welfare, 2018).⁷⁴ What stood out for me from this conference is the need for academics and researchers to work with communities and child welfare agencies collaboratively to work towards a system that is better able to serve marginalized populations. This is an alternative that

⁷⁴ Service users and service providers were broadly defined. Service users included kinship and community members affected by child welfare services while service providers also included community and all levels of child welfare employees including management.

is being discussed and if implemented could have benefits of inclusion and transformation, but my hope is balanced with skepticism based on my experiences as an academic and a member of the Muslim community attempting to work with the service providers.

Agency Policies. Picking up the thread from the above discussion, child welfare agencies should encourage research, particularly those done by or on marginalized communities, instead of locking out research. I recommend that agencies develop policies that allow and encourage work with academic communities to expand the knowledge base of child welfare practice. Such an approach, where any researcher represented by a particular group with access to agencies will build trust, enhance transparency, and keep the system more accountable. Such an approach will have the added benefit of understanding how Muslim minorities in the West can benefit from their own legacy to maintain care and protection of their children.

Further, I recommend the presence of Muslim workers on the front-line and in management, particularly in regions with high Muslim populations. This will enhance the concept of “matching” where clients are assigned to workers similar in religious background. The benefits of the similarity of religious background overriding ethnic/cultural differences are based on the sacredness of religion for the *Ummah*. As a global Muslim community living in Canada, religion is a matter of life beyond life, with eternal consequences even when it is difficult to maintain Islamic practices at a personal level.

Based on the literature and findings of my research, agency policies can be adapted to ensure that families are experiencing the least possible disruption. Where there is a need to place a child in out-of-home care, the first consideration should be kinship care which includes members of the community. I recommend that agencies review policies and adapt their current policies, to ensure that when a kinship placement is not available, Muslim children should be

placed in Muslim homes. To accommodate this, agencies should reserve Muslim foster homes for placing Muslim children. While it is noted in my findings that small communities have risks pertaining to maintaining confidentiality, this risk can be mitigated with proper consultations and processes with families.

Another crucial policy revision I recommend is in maintaining in-home care that supports all families to keep their children in their homes. While in care, children have access to many services including psychologists that are never available while they are in their homes. Further, there is no financial assistance to address poverty or extend a helping hand with families struggling. Funds invested in recruiting and maintaining foster homes can be diverted to support families. Is more economically prudent and socially just to extend services to maintain families in their homes where possible and such a way forward would be transformative.

Community Development Programs

In the neoliberal context of child welfare, I recommend that CASs serving Muslim clients develop a community child welfare program that reviews the intersections of Muslims' identity such as religious, racial, and ethnic differences and newness to Canada. A community development program that supports Muslim families should include partners that address gaps in services including education and prevention approaches to enhance child welfare service provision. As part of the community development program, inclusion and engagement with Muslim communities should be fostered through involving faith-based centers, settlement, and integration services, and ethnocultural organizations as partners in the work. To develop and sustain effective community development programs for Muslim communities, the inclusion of key stakeholders' voices is essential. Families, front-line workers, and community groups, including Mosques, should work collaboratively in a multi-service community model,

particularly around child removal, for children to maintain contact with home and community. To be sustainable, support and financial commitment from the government for the smaller faith-based, settlement and ethnocultural organizations and reallocation of CAS funds towards preventative practices is necessary. Three ideas to manage community-based projects include preventative practices and education for families and for workers.

Preventative practices. I recommend a focus on prevention as a high priority for any community program developed. CAS can partner with organizations to create spaces, offer education on parental expectations, child welfare concerns, and legal processes. To enhance prevention, CAS can also work in collaboration with Mosques to raise awareness of child protection concerns that can result in child welfare interventions. Another aspect of preventative practice that is recommended is “in-home” support for families on the threshold of involvement. I believe that such an approach would have given the intake workers in Ahmad’s case the space and time to investigate more thoroughly and observe the family in their home before apprehension; providing in-home services can serve as a preventative measure to reduce child removal. For preventative measures to be successful, education for families, foster families and workers are important considerations.

Education for Families and workers. Preventative programs require education for clients and CAS personnel. Commonly, new immigrants and refugee families have little knowledge of child protective services. Using ethnocultural, settlement, and faith-based organizations alongside CAS to raise awareness of child safety and protection as it appears in the Canadian context is essential. Such organizations reach more isolated and needy families but have little funds and capacity to support programming. CASs can work with these organizations to start educational programs for parents in a neutral environment. While knowledge of the

system is a problem for parents and families, workers are similarly undereducated about Muslim families and often operate on their preconceived notions.

I recommend OACAS include in its new worker training a module on working with Muslim clients. The training should include an understanding of Islam as a religion with ways in which child protection and safety are inherent in an Islamic framework. Islamophobia as a socio-political phenomenon that is palpable for Muslims should be taught using critical theories, (southern theory is used in my research for this purpose) that expose alternatives to caring for children. Similar training is also necessary for foster families that are requested to care for Muslim children. Additionally, an orientation on community resources, for example, where to find halal foods along with information on how to accommodate prayers and other rituals associated with daily living, will prepare foster parents better to accommodate Muslim children in care in non-Muslim homes. A note for consideration here is that, like Ahmad, I strongly disagree with placing Muslim children in non-Muslim homes. This recommendation is based on the way the system is currently and should be eliminated early on in a transformation agenda for Muslims involved in child welfare.

Opportunities for Future Research

The intertwining of religion with culture, race, and ethnicity in child welfare literature poses many challenges. During this study, I identified areas for future research to deepen the understanding of religion as a factor to consider for service provision emerged. First, I found that the area of religion and child welfare needs to be explored more fully. The system as it stands does not consider religious diversity. Recall that there are three faith-based agencies (two Catholic, one Jewish) in Ontario. In my experience working in a city with one faith-based agency and one that was not, the commonly shared understanding by workers and management of the

two agencies was primarily a legal issue. A study of the way the three faith-based agencies serve their faith communities would add a fundamental and far-reaching understanding of child welfare service provision for faith-based groups in Ontario.

As a single case explanatory study, this research lays the groundwork for future studies to build theory by addressing a comparative examination of cases where religion is a significant factor in clients' lives. With attention to Muslims, studies that examine multiple cases with Muslims from diverse ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds can further the work on improving services. The same idea can be applied to other faith communities to understand how child welfare interventions impact peoples' sense of their religious beliefs and practices. As we saw with this case, Ahmad experienced oppressive forces of not only the child welfare system but the criminal justice system and the school system.

Third, research aimed at understanding the aftermath of child welfare interventions on families, particularly for minoritized clients at the intersection of newness to Canada and religious differences is crucial. Ahmad's family fared much better before child welfare intervention than they did subsequently. My study aligns with Kenny and Barrington (2018) and Broadhurst and Mason (2017) to underline the need for further research on the consequences of child protection involvement on families. Fourth, with a focus on religion, future opportunities for similar studies could include comparisons of experiences within and between different religious groups to expand the picture of ways in which religious communities engage, resist and interact with child protection services.

Stories of the Self: Final Reflections

It always seems impossible until it is done.
Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela spoke of great things like political orders, but smaller things like this research project seemed impossible too. There were many times along the way I wanted to quit. I concluded that despite ample research and transformation agendas, the system stubbornly resists change. Instead, it is entrenched in a particular way that continues to criminalize and oppress certain segments of the population. I struggled with the fact that my interventions into the lives of families to protect children from harm ended up causing greater harm. This experience caused me continuously to re-evaluate the usefulness of this project. Then, there were the personal reasons; my age, my faith, and my skin colour set me apart from my colleagues. Nevertheless, despite personal and family challenges, I could not in good conscious abort the research after data collection. The thought of once again victimizing Ahmad kept me moving forward even though at a snail's pace.

The research provided an opportunity to reflect on the usual conceptual friction between religion and the secular academy. While the field of social work started as a charitable endeavour rooted in Christianity, it has evolved in ways that seem to marginalize religion for me as a Muslim and I heard similar stories from my Christian colleagues. In child welfare, the problem is more pronounced. The academic literature and policy initiatives barely register religion as significant to clients. In my final reflections, I contemplate my connections with child welfare, the PhD process, and my life as I adapted through the eight years that I took to complete my dissertation.

Connections with Child Welfare in Ontario

My connection with child welfare started with the role of fostering when I responded to an advertisement in a local newspaper suggesting that foster homes for children were in demand. I thought to myself that this would be a good opportunity to open our home to “less fortunate”

children. After all, what could be better than protecting children? In Islam, we are taught that children are like *walis* (friends of God), a sacred trust and a source of nearness to the Prophet (PBUH) in this world and the hereafter.

The middle-aged British social worker that was assigned to conduct a home study verifying the suitability of my family to fostering conducted her assessment and opened our home with a suggestion that I request to be an alternate care provider which meant that I would be working with children with exceptional needs. I was happy to do this and when I asked about fostering Muslim children, she reported that to be a possibility and assured me that the agency will need coverage assistance for many children. My family and I settled into fostering through the alternate care program and began to care for children with autism, Downs syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, and other complicated, sometimes unnamed childhood developmental challenges. There was congruence between what I was doing and what I believed in, and this felt good. The families we worked with were happy to have CAS involvement and became extended parts of our own family. However, a different darker side to fostering surfaced with requests for coverage resulting in the placement of children needing foster homes because there were assessed as “in need of protection.”

I had no intention of working as a child protection worker (CPW); over ten years of fostering had given me insight into how challenging the work could be. After a long and intensive job search with no prospects of employment, I applied for a child protection position and was immediately invited for an interview. Within a year as a child protection worker, I felt negatively impacted by the work and could not reconcile much of what was required of me with how I thought about protecting children. I also noticed disturbing patterns that reflected systemic problems where poor and racialized families were treated more harshly. I recall an incident as a

new worker accompanying a more experienced worker on a physical abuse investigation. She barely did an assessment, reporting to the father, a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, that there may have been a mistake. I did not agree with the way the assessment was done, but as a new and racialized worker I did not have the power to change anything, nor could I not speak up. I noticed a similar difference in approach in my community work later. Educated, middle-class families had better outcomes (cases were closed earlier and without apprehension) than poor, new immigrants who struggled with English.

Another difference I observed was clients' and coworkers' perceptions of me. I experienced incidents where clients complained about my inability to speak English and my lack of knowledge about Canada in racist and derogatory ways. In one memorable incident, my 14-year-old client – with great self-awareness and insight – called my supervisor to request another worker, because he considered himself “racist.” I was removed from the case partly because of his request, but mostly because of the group home supervisor's call to the agency with concerns for my safety.

However, the most troubling thing for me was that I no longer felt like I was protecting children, instead, I was removing them from their families. I was the ‘instructing worker’ in court cases and the ‘children service worker’ who attended foster homes to visit placed children. Furthermore, the work did not align with my beliefs about children and family any longer. Many of the ways with which we were dealing with families seemed harsh and restrictive. I found the court process particularly intimidating (for myself and the families). As an instructing worker on one court case, I had a difficult time when the organization's management teams had recommended a crown ward no access application. The argument was that this is in the best interest of the children as it is the best option for permanency. Access to family stood in the way

of adoption. This case was difficult because the mother had been a crown ward, adopted, and abused by her adoptive father. The imbalance in legal representation for her, with a legal aid lawyer who was no match for the team of Society lawyers, impacted the way she was represented in the court. Her history of living in the care of CAS and all its ugly dimensions never surfaced.

Gradually, case by case, I lost my ability to feel whole while I continued the work; I began to worry, and concern grew into anxiety that agitated my soul. Working as a child protection worker, I had time to care for families and children. The emphasis was on meeting deadlines and assessing risks in ways that took away the relationality of interactions. As much as the agency culture perpetuated the culture of ‘saving children,’ I knew that I was not saving children. What is more, I realized that I, as part of the system was implicated in perpetuating the inequities and continued state colonizing of folks deemed risky. Ten years and two organizations later, I resigned from the agency with no plan in mind, except that I wanted no involvement with child protection. But that was the end of phase two of my involvement.

Reflecting on my Academic Experience

I started my PhD at Wilfrid Laurier University in 2014, entering another phase of my child welfare journey. I had no compelling reason to do a PhD. Well past the age of thinking about advancement in career, or material and economic benefits that a PhD would afford me, I wandered into the program. A PhD was not my life-long dream, but I appreciate and cherish opportunities for education; like caring for children, education is connected to my religion. A prophetic hadith encourages every Muslim (male and female) to seek knowledge from “the cradle to the grave.” The chance to be in school again, doing a PhD was the opportunity to live another Islamic advice.

With excitement and anticipation for new learning, I immersed myself in thought-provoking ideas. From Freire to Foucault, and in between – I enjoyed the learning and started to think of my past and my positionality in new and different ways. Struggling with Freire’s concept of “humanizing” the oppressor and the oppressed such that they can both be liberated, I engaged in the parallel process of reflecting on a similar concept in Islam: a prophetic narrative that recommends one to assist both the oppressed and the oppressor, to help the oppressor one must assist him to stop his oppression.

In one class we were encouraged to ‘invite’ thinkers and writers to our table. But I could see no one that would fit in at my Muslim, immigrant table. Then I found Frantz Omar Fanon also known as Ibrahim Frantz Fanon. That he was an immigrant from the French West Indies caught my attention and that he was Muslim sustained it. I gained hope from his work that western academia may have room for those that do not quite fit the profile of a desirable student. With the encouragement of my advisor and committee, I finished my comprehensive paper that examined the marginalization of Muslims in child welfare and moved into the research aspect of the dissertation.

The Research Process

Reflection and reflexivity are useful skills and served me well during the research process. I decided on a case-study approach to understand the experiences of Muslims receiving services from child welfare organizations in Ontario. As part of the case study, the qualitative interviews appealed to me to engage with reflexivity in the process. What I was learning about research suggested that I focus on personal knowledge and awareness of my social position to practice reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Understanding my identity as a Muslim woman and how it

shaped my research project allowed me to make further links between my religious/spiritual self and my academic endeavours.

Reflexivity is a commonly used process in social work education, engaging in socially just work and qualitative research. It is considered one way to establish trustworthiness and ensure rigour and is viewed as a challenging and important aspect of research. From an academic standpoint, reflection and reflexivity were new ideas to me but in my personal life, they were not. In Islam, constant monitoring of the *nafs* (ego) towards moral and ethical choices in everyday life and an awareness that one is accountable to God are important.

This research project presented the opportunity of merging my personal and scholarly reflexive practices and allowed for a more substantial approach to reflexivity. While I appreciate my daily musings on accountability, I developed a more rigorous method of documenting which allowed me to review my experiences as thoughts and ideas developed. One of the insights that emerged from this journal caused me to think constantly about the concept of insider/outsider in research.

Within the child welfare community, I could be considered an insider as I had over 20 years of experience with fostering and front-line protection work. I understood the nature and complexities of providing child protection services and found myself identifying with the conversations from both foster parents and workers. Yet at one level, I was a definite outsider; this feeling emerged through the reluctance of CAS organizations to engage in the study. Despite the years of experience, I was an outside researcher, and the gatekeeping became evident. As a result, the affair of obtaining participants for the study proved difficult even after I changed strategy and approached what I considered my community to recruit.

Recruiting through the Muslim community was an equally alienating process, though for a different reason. Fear for anything to do with child protection was a reason to abstain regardless of their positions in the Mosque, their personal experiences as clients, foster parents, or workers in the child welfare system. This seemed natural for clients but why would Muslim foster parents and workers be afraid? Eventually, I was able to recruit Ahmad through a community agency; he was so jaded by the system that he would not have agreed to speak to anyone doing research associated with child protection unless it was a Muslim. Being the insider in this instance allowed me access and I believe that because of my religious background, Ahmad welcomed me in his home and spoke with little reservations about his experiences.

The conversations we had were difficult for Ahmad and in some ways difficult for me as well. This young man no older than my son, fled from war with his family to ensure their safety and as he puts it “I lost my family now.” The transcription and data analysis processes were difficult and immersing myself in the story, I got lost. Objectivity seemed impossible; subjectivity intertwined. I hope that the inter-subjectivity that arose from the interaction led to a collective action between Ahmad and I, this dissertation. But on many fronts, I acted alone and had to wrestle with aspects of our shared belief without input from Ahmad, leading to ethical dilemmas.

Ethical Challenges

The space between ethics from the research perspective and my Muslim epistemological position presented another fertile space to ponder how I blend my academic responsibilities and my internal moral and ethical standards. Although it was not an easy process, the least of my worries in this area was the usual scramble to obtain ethics approval. My first struggle emerged after my interview with Ahmad. I heard of his loss of jobs and the financial strain that the family

faced. I know of my duty as a Muslim to provide help, yet I felt paralyzed to assist, fearing I may cross some research ethics protocol. How could I reconcile this? I know of Zakat funds available, but was I allowed to do this? The intersection of academic research ethics and Islamic morality is a tricky place to be.

After hearing Ahmad's story, I was convinced that he should not have been registered in the child abuse registry, but could I advise him to seek to have it expunged? In the end, the scales tipped in the balance of academic caution and the "impartial researcher" won out. I refrained from saying anything to him because I felt it may cause problems for the community agency that was working with the CAS to assist the family and possibly for him. But I wonder when researching marginalized populations should the researcher not be a change agent? This brings up another conundrum; how do I stay true to my research and navigate community sanctity? At what point would my intention to support my community intersect with speaking my truth about the situations of real abuse in the community?

Situational Circumstances

Within the duration of my program life continued to happen. Over the eight years, I experienced many significant events that impacted my ability to continue the work and often thought of just letting it go. In my darkest moments, I was ready to quit. Even as I write this final chapter, I worry that I may not be able to complete the final pieces and put the work together because of the way things are emerging for me and those who support me in this work. I keep in focus the unwavering courage of Ahmad as he navigated complex systems to keep going through the trying times.

Like most people my age, life is not straightforward; there are competing goals and unanticipated events that disrupt – the smooth, finish in four years – PhD. At the time I started

the program, I had a two-year-old grandson. He fit easily into my life because there were many aunts and uncles to go around. A year after I had two granddaughters born within two weeks of each other and, by 2019, I had eight grandchildren. I became busy once again with children and my priority shifted. As much as I wanted to finish the PhD, I could not pass up the opportunity to spend time with the babies. I began to take time off when I could to assist the new parents and enjoy my grandchildren, a decision I am forever grateful I had the luxury to make.

Among the joy and renewal of births, I experienced many deaths in my family and was significantly impacted by two. My sister diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease deteriorated quickly. In 2018, I made three trips to Edmonton to spend time with her. Naturally watching her in her state of helplessness took more than time away from my work. It triggered questioning the idea of spending time on something that seems trivial. After all, I did not intend to work in academia and there is no economic or worldly benefit to continue. In October of 2018, I sat with her and observed her in the in-betweenness of life and death. She left us on December 26, 2018. The second, my sister-in-law and dear friend died on her 63rd birthday suddenly from a massive heart attack. Again, doubts about continuing to write surfaced. What was the point? Meanwhile, more challenges surfaced in the global crisis of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Impact of the Global Pandemic

Pivoting in the role of a researcher to work through the ever-extending global pandemic is characterized by loss of space, personal agency, physical abilities, and resources. Contemplating the many ways that the new reality impacted my work, I recall the disturbing normlessness of the situation. Much of my work took place in the PhD room at the Faculty of Social Work at WLU; this space and the comraderies that it allowed were gone and informal conversations about my research with like-minded colleagues were severely missed. Further,

access to the coffee shop I wrote at when in Hamilton was also closed. The sense of community provided by both these spaces was gone and the isolation of writing the dissertation took on a new intensity.

During the data analysis and writing process, I had my brush with Covid 19. My partner and I both contracted the virus. Although we were among the lucky ones that did not require hospitalization, recovery was slow. The tiredness and fatigue I experienced were accompanied by diminished ability and desire to focus on academic work. Deadlines seemed unimportant, motivation was nil, as not just priorities but the world seemed to have shifted. Somehow, I was able to finish my data analysis and start writing only to be interrupted again by the death of my uncle and aunt; both succumbed to Covid 19. Managing through the circumstances that came with Covid 19 meant more delays each bringing a renewed lack of motivation.

Somewhere along the line, my amazing advisors, two women supporting me through the research and the ups and downs of my own life, experienced significant challenges. I am not at liberty to share their stories but the faith, dignity, and acceptance with which they maneuvered their personal struggles while keeping me motivated is admired and appreciated. They showed me strength where I saw none, repeatedly pointing out the importance of the work. From their examples, I got to learn much more than how and what to write in the academic space. They showed me ways to keep going in the face of life-altering complications through the grace with which they faced their challenges.

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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for Family

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

Introduction

My name is Bibi Baksh, I am a doctoral Candidate at the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario. The Ethics Review Board of the University has approved my research. I am interested in understanding the experiences of Muslim families that receive child welfare services in Ontario. I am conducting interviews with Muslim families and protection workers who have served Muslim clients in child welfare organizations. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You can contact my academic advisor, Dr. Nancy Freymond by email nfreymond@wlu.ca or via phone: at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at gathering detailed accounts about Muslim families' interactions and experiences with the child welfare system in Ontario. I am focusing on the experiences of families when child welfare intervention has resulted in a child being removed from the home. Interviews with family members involved with the family will provide valuable insight into the collective experience of the Muslim family and add to the information gathered from the immediate family and workers. The information will be used to add to the literature on minority experiences in child welfare and it is hope that it may shape policy and practice to better serve Muslims.

The interview will be between 60 to 90 minutes long and I will be asking some questions to get us started. Please feel free to share anything that I have not asked about and you feel is important. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You will have access to the interviews after they have been transcribed and can adjust anything that you feel necessary to represent your views more clearly.

I am interested to learn about different aspects of your family including your practice of Islam and how this manifest in your life. So I will ask about different questions. You can give any information you feel is important even if I have not asked.

I would like to first understand what Islam means to you.

Let's talk about your family.

Probe:

1. Family size and functioning:

- Members of immediate and extended family
- Roles (caregiver, provider, decision maker)
- Islamic practices

2. I would like to know about your history here in Canada. ***Tell me about your Migration process.***

- When and under what circumstances did you come to Canada?
- What (people, organizations, personal skills) helped you through your settlement?
- How has your family settled?

Child Welfare Involvement

3. Child welfare is involved with you because they worry about the safety of your child/children.

Can you tell me about your child welfare involvement?

Probe:

- When did you become involved with CAS? (Who reported)
- What were the concerns identified?
- Did your worker adequately explain your situation?
- How did you understand the concerns? (Were concerns Justified)
- Tell me about that first meeting?
- Tell me about the reactions of your family and community.
- Talk about your feelings around CAS involvement.

Ongoing Case management:

- Can you tell me about your follow up with the concerns?
- What supports did you have outside the agency?
- How did the workers help you to manage the Society's concerns?

Workers' understanding of your religious/cultural needs

4. I would like to find out how you feel your workers work with you and your family. ***We can talk about the ways in which workers met or ignored your cultural and religious needs.***

Probe:

- How would you describe your relationship with your workers?
- What are your thoughts on your workers' ability to take into account your cultural/religious needs? (Prayer time, gender interaction, interaction with your children).
- Do you have ideas on how you could be better served?

System Barriers

5. There are some things/rules about child welfare that your workers cannot change or could not know about that might be helpful to you. For example, what you knew about child welfare and their intervention before they became involved. *Can we talk about some of the things were difficult for you in receiving services?*

Probe:

- What did you know of child protection services before your family became involved?
- What options were presented to you for your child placement?
- Are there ways in which you would rather have your involvement managed?
- Were there any barriers or obstacles to you receiving service? Describe.
- Is there anything you would like to add or tell me about?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me, your information has been very helpful and I will be in touch to review the information you provide before I write or talk about it.

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol Society Worker

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

Introduction

My name is Bibi Baksh, I am a doctoral Candidate at the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario. The Ethics Review Board of the University has approved my research. I am interested in understanding the experiences of Muslim families that receive child welfare services in Ontario. I am conducting interviews with Muslim families and protection workers who have served Muslim clients in child welfare organizations. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You can contact my academic advisor, Dr. Nancy Freymond by email nfreymond@wlu.ca or via phone: at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at gathering detailed accounts about Muslim families' interactions and experiences with the child welfare system in Ontario. I am focusing on the experiences of families when child welfare intervention has resulted in a child being removed from the home. Interviews with family members involved with the family will provide valuable insight into the collective experience of the Muslim family and add to the information gathered from the immediate family and workers. The information will be used to add to the literature on minority experiences in child welfare and it is hope that it may shape policy and practice to better serve Muslims.

The interview will be between 60 to 90 minutes long and I will be asking some questions to get us started. Please feel free to share anything that I have not asked about and you feel is important. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You will have access to the interviews after they have been transcribed and can adjust anything that you feel necessary to represent your views more clearly.

I am interested to learn about different aspects of workers' involvement with Muslim families receiving services and your experiences with Muslim families can provide insight. Part of this is linked to your training as a worker.

1. *Can we talk about your educational and child welfare background?*

Probe:

- Educational background.
- Specialized training
- Length of time and capacity (i.e. intake, ongoing, children services) employed as a CPW.
- Relate a bit about mandate of your agency and how it contributes to your service provisions to clients.

Worker Client relationship

Cross-cultural work can present a number of challenges, particularly when there are language barriers and significant cultural differences. Such differences can sometimes result in more challenges for both the worker and the family and may warrant special considerations.

2. *What particular challenges did you experience with the families you worked with?*

Probe:

- Talk about your experience working with Muslim Families (how many, what were the families like to work with).

- What were some of the challenges particular to working with this group?
- What strengths have you observed Muslim clients to use?

On-Going Case Management

File management is a difficult process that starts at intake and can sometimes move to a number of different workers.

3. *Can we talk a bit about your case management?*

Probe:

- How are you supported in your assessments, and decision-making processes?
(Are there any specific reasons why you were assigned Muslim families).
- Are there documents from your agency that guide your work in engaging with Muslim clients?
- Did you receive any special training (intercultural, anti-oppression) that prepared you for the work?

Systemic Limits

There is literature that suggests systemic barriers are part of the child welfare system that impacts workers interaction with families. I am interested in finding out about systemic constraints to your work with Muslim families.

Probe:

- In what ways do your supervisors support you in your work with Muslims?
- What specialized services are available to you and your Muslim clients? (Language, community)

- Is there a protocol for community involvement with Muslim families? (What community? Ethnic? Mosque?)
- Have you encountered policy in child welfare documents (e.g. Eligibility spectrum, Child Protection Manual) that impede best practice with Muslims?
- What recommendations at the systemic levels can you suggest that will facilitate working with Muslim clients?

Is there anything else that you would like to address? Thank you for taking the time to speak with me, your information has been very helpful in providing insights about your work with Muslim families. I will be in touch to review the information you provide before I write or talk about it.

Appendix 3: Interview Protocol: Foster Parent

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

Introduction

My name is Bibi Baksh, I am a doctoral Candidate at the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario. The Ethics Review Board of the University has approved my research. I am interested in understanding the experiences of Muslim families that receive child welfare services in Ontario. I am conducting interviews with Muslim families and protection workers who have served Muslim clients in child welfare organizations. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You can contact my academic advisor, Dr. Nancy Freymond by email nfreymond@wlu.ca or via phone: at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at gathering detailed accounts about Muslim families' interactions and experiences with the child welfare system in Ontario. I am focusing on the experiences of families when child welfare intervention has resulted in a child being removed from the home. Interviews with family members involved with the family will provide valuable insight into the collective experience of the Muslim family and add to the information gathered from the immediate family and workers. The information will be used to add to the literature on minority experiences in child welfare and it is hope that it may shape policy and practice to better serve Muslims.

The interview will be between 60 to 90 minutes long and I will be asking some questions to get us started. Please feel free to share anything that I have not asked about and you feel is important. Your participation is voluntary, and the interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. You will have access to the interviews after they have been transcribed and can adjust anything that you feel necessary to represent your views more clearly.

Background

1. *Can we talk a little about your foster care services in general?*

Probe:

- How long have you been fostering?
- How many children have been placed in your care? Duration?
- What has the experience been like?

2. I would like to learn about your experiences with Muslim children/youth in care. Probe:

- How is your experience in caring for Muslim Children?
- What specific challenges do you encounter when providing care for Muslim children?
- What are your experiences with families of origin with Muslim clients?
- What supports do you think might help you in provision of care for Muslim children/youth?

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Statement for Parent/Primary Caregiver

Parent/caregiver Participant Identification Number: _____

*Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection
Services in Ontario*

Principal Investigator: Bibi Baksh

Research Advisors: Dr. Nancy Freymond

REB Tracking # 6226

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by PhD (candidate) Bibi Baksh from the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Nancy Freymond, Faculty Advisor at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at understanding the experiences of Muslim clients receiving child welfare services in Ontario. It is being conducted in a case study format with the aim of creating a detailed examination of the complexity of child welfare service provision at the systemic and interpersonal levels to Muslims in Ontario. The examination will include experiences of Muslim families receiving services and their community support as well child welfare service providers' experiences on working with Muslim families.

Procedures.

This study will consist of personal interviews asking questions about your general family history, including migration as well as composition and family dynamics. I intend to interview any

family identified by you (parent/primary caregiver) as a part of the family and any community persons that you the family feel is relevant to your story. I will like to have three interviews with you so you can share your stories, each interview will be about 60 to 90 minutes.

The interviews will be audio recorded (with your permission) to ensure accuracy of your responses. The interviews will be transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review and edit any information provided.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All precautions will be taken to protect your privacy, anonymity and the confidentiality of information you provide during the research. Your name and other information that pertains to you will be anonymized. A participant identification number will be assigned to your information to replace your name at the data collection and analysis stage. In the final report, all participants' codes will be replaced with pseudonyms in order to increase confidentiality. Your name, code, pseudonym, and contact information will be matched and safely stored separately on a password protected computer.

All information, including the audio recording, gathered from you will be safely stored. Soft or electronic information will be stored safely on my personal laptop which is always password protected. Copies of the electronic information will be saved on an external storage device and stored along with hardcopy information in the secured cabinet. Audio recordings will be permanently discarded after the material has been fully transcribed. Transcripts and all other hard copy documents will be shredded after two years and all electronic documents would be permanently deleted from the laptop and the external storage device. All information gathered from you will be destroyed after two years of the study. However, due to the nature of the research the possibility exist that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed.

Every effort will be made to ensure that workers are not aware of which family is being interviewed but it they may be aware because of the limited number of Muslim families any given worker may serve.

Protecting your privacy with other family members is also important and I will not reveal the information to any other participants but there is a possibility that your identity may be revealed through your unique story. Another limit to confidentiality is if you make a disclosure or express an intention to harm yourself or another person, or if you report a situation in which a child is at risk of or is being neglected or abused.

Potential Benefits and Risks of the study

Risks

Research dealing with child welfare involvement is sensitive in nature and has the potential to raise anxiety, cause distress, and possible reliving unpleasant experiences. During the interview you are free to stop and take breaks for whatever reason (including prayer) and to skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering. Should you experience any difficulty I will work with you to manage the process and will provide information for counselling services either from the local Mosque or community services based on your preferences. A further worry can arise from concerns that your community will become aware of your child welfare involvement. I will not be engaged with anyone from your local community and am not a member of any Mosques. Further, you may experience some anxiety that your participation may negatively impact the services you receive from your worker or that it may in some way harm your relationship with your worker. The person who contacted you has signed a confidentiality agreement to not disclose your identity to any other person in the agency. I will also take steps to

keep your information anonymous by deleting all identifying information and replacing them with pseudonyms.

Benefits

This research has the potential to enhance child welfare practices with Muslim clients. Sharing your information could result in personal satisfaction to you knowing that you have participated in research that has the potential to impact policy and practice towards improving child welfare services for Muslims. You could also benefit from telling your story as it highlights your personal experiences with the child welfare system.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to decline participation. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you do so, you can choose to leave your data, or have it withdrawn from the study and destroyed. With your permission, part of your interviews may be quoted in the final report of the study. You have the right to vet your quotes or to decline their inclusion in the final report.

Compensation

As a thank you for participating in this study you will receive \$50.00 to compensate for your time. If you choose to withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this gift for taking the time to answer our questions.

Feedback and Dissemination of Findings

This research requires findings of the study be submitted in the form of a dissertation report to the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. Additionally, the finding of the study will be presented at conferences and published as journal articles. A copy of a summary report will be submitted to the children's aid society where you received services.

You will receive a copy of the summary report upon request.

Contact information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you are encouraged to may contact me. I can be reached at baks1040@mylaurier.ca or by telephone at 905-518-9137. If you desire to discuss matters concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board, Jayne Kalmar, PhD, chair, university research ethics board, Wilfrid Laurier university, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or rebchair @wlu.

Agreement to participate

I, _____ have read the consent information (or have had someone read and explain the consent information to me) regarding the study titled:

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of two Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

I understand that my role in the study is to provide the researcher with information regarding my experiences or understanding the experiences of Muslims involved in child welfare services.

I understand that interview(s) with me will be audio recorded. I agree that quotes from my data be used in the dissemination of the findings of the study. I also understand that by signing this form, I do not waive any of my rights. All concerns I have regarding the study have been satisfactorily addressed and that I have been given a copy of this form. I hereby agree to participate in the study.

Please check the following boxes where applicable:

I agree to have my interview audio recorded []

I will like a copy of the transcript []

I agree that my voice may be quoted in the final report []

I will like to vet voice quotes selected from my data []

I will like a copy of the research report []

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent to Contact Family Members

Since the project is intended to understand supports from family members, the principal investigator would like to connect to family members that you have identified as part of your support network.

I agree that the principal investigator contact family members identified by me to participate in the study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Statement for Society Workers

Protection worker Participant Identification Number: _____

*Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study Muslim families involved with Child Protection
Services in Ontario*

Principal Investigator: Bibi Baksh

Research Advisors: Dr. Nancy Freymond

REB Tracking # 6226

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by PhD (candidate) Bibi Baksh from the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact

Dr. Nancy Freymond, Faculty Advisor at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at gathering detailed accounts about Muslim families' interactions and experiences with the child welfare system in Ontario. I am focusing on the experiences of families when child welfare intervention has resulted in a child being removed from the home. Interviews with family members involved with the family will provide valuable insight into the collective experience of the Muslim family and add to the information gathered from the immediate family and workers. The information will be used to add to the literature on minority experiences in child welfare and it is hope that it may shape policy and practice to better serve Muslims.

Procedures:

This study will consist of personal interviews asking questions about your involvement and work with Muslim families. I will likely have two interviews for about 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded (with your permission) to ensure accuracy of your responses. The interviews will be transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review and edit any information provided.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All precautions will be taken to protect your privacy, anonymity and the confidentiality of information you provide during the research. Your name and other information that pertains to you will be anonymized. A participant identification number will be assigned to your information to replace your name at the data collection and analysis stage. In the final report, all participants codes will be replaced with pseudonyms in order to increase confidentiality. Your name, code, pseudonym, and contact information will be matched and safely stored separately on a password protected computer.

However, due to the nature of the research the possibility exist that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed, as it is likely that others who know your work may identify you.

All information, including the audio recording, gathered from you will be safely stored. Audio recordings will be permanently discarded after the material has been fully transcribed.

Transcripts and all other hard copy documents will be shredded after two years and all electronic documents would be permanently deleted from the laptop and the external storage device.

Soft or electronic information will be stored safely on my personal laptop which is always password protected. Copies of the electronic information will be saved on an external storage device and stored along with hardcopy information in the secured cabinet. All information

gathered from you will be destroyed after two years of the study.

Potential Benefits and Risks of the study

Risks

You are at little risk of harm from the study. It may be likely that you encounter some stress in terms of sharing information about clients. The information shared will not be released to anyone. Further, you may experience some anxiety that your participation may negatively impact your working relationship with Muslim families. I will also take steps to keep your information anonymous by deleting all identifying information and replacing them with pseudonyms.

Benefits

The research has the potential to enhance child welfare practices with Muslim clients. You will be participating in a research project that is crucial to advancing child welfare practices with a marginalised group. You may derive personal satisfaction by sharing your experiences, knowledge and practice skills, in a research project that has the potential to impact policy and practice in child welfare.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to decline participation. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you do so, your data will be withdrawn from the study and destroyed. With your permission, part of your interviews may be quoted in the final report of the study. You have the right to vet your quotes or to decline their inclusion in the final report.

Compensation

In appreciation for your time you will receive a thank you card.

Feedback and Dissemination of Findings

This research requires findings of the study be submitted in the form of a dissertation report to the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. A copy of a summary report will be submitted to the children's aid society where you provide services. Additionally, the finding of the study will be presented at conferences and published as journal articles. You will receive a copy of the summary report upon request.

Contact information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you are encouraged to may contact me. I can be reached at baks1040@mylaurier.ca or by telephone at 905-518-9137.

If you desire to discuss matters concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board, Jayne Kalmar, PhD, chair, university research ethics board, Wilfrid Laurier university, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or rebchair@wlu.ca

Agreement to participate

I, _____ have read the consent information (or have had someone read and explain the consent information to me) regarding the study titled:

Involvement with Child Protection Services in Ontario: A tale of two Muslim families

I understand that my role in the study is to provide the researcher with information regarding my experiences or understanding the experiences of Muslims involved in child welfare services.

I understand that interview(s) with me will be audio recorded. I agree that quotes from my data be used in the dissemination of the findings of the study. I also understand that by signing this form, I do not waive any of my rights. I affirm that all concerns I have about the study have been satisfactorily addressed. I have been given a copy of this form. I hereby agree to participate in

the study.

Please check the following boxes where applicable:

I agree to have my interview audio recorded []

I will like a copy of the transcript []

I agree that my voice may be quoted in the final report []

I will like to vet voice quotes selected from my data []

I will like a copy of the research report []

Participant's signature : _____ Date: _____

Investigator's signature : _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your Participation!

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Statement for Foster Caregiver

Foster Parent Participant Identification Number: _____

*Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection
Services in Ontario*

Principal Investigator: Bibi Baksh

Research Advisors: Dr. Nancy Freymond

REB Tracking # 6226

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by PhD (candidate) Bibi Baksh from the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Nancy Freymond, Faculty Advisor at 519-884-0710 x 5266.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at understanding the experiences of Muslim clients receiving child welfare services in Ontario. It is being conducted in a case study format with the aim of creating a detailed examination of the complexity of child welfare service provision at the systemic and interpersonal levels to Muslims in Ontario. The examination will include experiences of Muslim families receiving services and their community support as well child welfare service providers' experiences on working with Muslim families.

Procedures.

This study will consist of personal interviews asking questions about your experiences providing foster care experiences for Muslim children. I will like to speak with you for between 60 to 90 minutes about your experiences caring for Muslim children.

The interviews will be audio recorded (with your permission) to ensure accuracy of your responses. The interviews will be transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review and edit any information provided.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All precautions will be taken to protect your privacy, anonymity and the confidentiality of information you provide during the research. Your name and other information that pertains to you will be anonymized. A participant identification number will be assigned) to your information to replace your name at the data collection and analysis stage. In the final report, all participants' codes will be replaced with pseudonyms in order to increase confidentiality. Your name, code, pseudonym, and contact information will be safely stored separately on a password protected computer.

All information, including the audio recording, gathered from you will be safely stored. Soft or electronic information will be stored safely on my personal laptop which is always password protected. Copies of the electronic information will be saved on an external storage device and stored along with hardcopy information in the secured cabinet. Audio recordings will be permanently discarded after the material has been fully transcribed. Transcripts and all other hard copy documents will be shredded after two years and all electronic documents would be permanently deleted from the laptop and the external storage device. All information gathered from you will be destroyed after two years of the study. However, due to the nature of the research the possibility exist that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed.

Every effort will be made to ensure that workers are not aware of which family is being interviewed but it they may be aware because of the limited number of Muslim families any given worker may serve.

Protecting your privacy with other family members is also important and I will not reveal the information to any other participants but there is a possibility that your identity may be revealed through your unique story.

Another limit to confidentiality is if you make a disclosure or express an intention to harm yourself or another person, or if you report a situation in which a child is at risk of or is being neglected or abused.

Potential Benefits and Risks of the study

Risks

Research dealing with child welfare involvement is sensitive in nature and has the potential to raise anxiety, cause distress, and possible reliving unpleasant experiences. During the interview you are free to stop and take breaks for whatever reason (including prayer) and to skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering. Should you experience any difficulty I will work with you to manage the process and will provide information for counselling services either from the local Mosque or community services based on your preferences. A further worry can arise from concerns that your community will become aware of your child welfare involvement. I will not be engaged with anyone from your local community and am not a member of any Mosques. Further, you may experience some anxiety that your participation may negatively impact the relationship with your workers. The person who contacted you has signed a confidentiality agreement to not disclose your identity to any other person in the agency. I will

also take steps to keep your information anonymous by deleting all identifying information and replacing them with pseudonyms.

Benefits

This research has the potential to enhance child welfare practices with Muslim clients. Sharing your information could result in personal satisfaction to you knowing that you have participated in research that has the potential to impact policy and practice towards improving child welfare services for Muslims. You could also benefit from telling your story as it highlights your personal experiences with the child welfare system.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to decline participation. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you do so, you can choose to leave your data or have it withdrawn from the study and destroyed. With your permission, part of your interviews may be quoted in the final report of the study. You have the right to vet your quotes or to decline their inclusion in the final report.

Compensation

As a thank you for participating in this study you will receive \$25.00 to compensate for your time. If you choose to withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still receive this gift for taking the time to answer our questions.

Feedback and Dissemination of Findings

This research requires findings of the study be submitted in the form of a dissertation report to the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University. Additionally, the finding of the study will be presented at conferences and published as journal articles. A copy of

a summary report will be submitted to the children's aid society where you received services (You will receive a copy of the summary report upon request).

Contact information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you are encouraged to may contact me. I can be reached at baks1040@mylaurier.ca or by telephone at 905-518-9137. If you desire to discuss matters concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board, Jayne Kalmar, PhD, chair, university research ethics board, Wilfrid Laurier university, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or rebchair@wlu.ca.

Agreement to participate

I, _____ have read the consent information (or have had someone read and explain the consent information to me) regarding the study titled:

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of two Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

I understand that my role in the study is to provide the researcher with information regarding my experiences or understanding the experiences of Muslims involved in child welfare services.

I understand that interview(s) with me will be audio recorded. I agree that quotes from my data be used in the dissemination of the findings of the study. I also understand that by signing this form, I do not waive any of my rights. All concerns I have regarding the study have been satisfactorily addressed and that I have been given a copy of this form. I hereby agree to participate in the study.

Please check the following boxes where applicable:

I agree to have my interview audio recorded []

I will like a copy of the transcript []

I agree that my voice may be quoted in the final report []

I will like to vet voice quotes selected from my data []

I will like a copy of the research report []

Participants' Signature : _____ Date: _____

Investigators' Signature : _____ Date: _____

Consent to Contact Family Members

Since the project is intended to understand supports from family members, the principal investigator (Bibi Baksh) would like to connect to family members that you have identified as part of your support network.

I agree that the principal investigator contact family members identified by me to participate in the study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your Participation!

Appendix 7: Community Recruitment Flyer

Adrift in uncharted waters: A case study of Muslim families involved with Child Protection Services in Ontario

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PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the experiences of Muslim families that receive child welfare services

Muslim Families involved with Children's Aid Societies'

Involvement with child welfare services can be a difficult process for Muslim families as the experience is complicated because of cultural differences and religious practices

Help us give a voice to your story by sharing your experiences!

If you are a Muslim family who has had a child or children removed from your care within the last two years and reside in Ontario, you are invited to participate.

As a participant in this study, you would participate in face-to-face interview with a Muslim Child Welfare Researcher. Your participation will be confidential to protect and honour your story.

Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and would take approximately 3 hours of your time over two sessions.

By participating in this study, you will help us to understand the need of Muslim communities, develop good practice and policy for work with them, and further research in child welfare with Muslims.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive \$ 50.00

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Principal Investigator: Bibi Baksh

Contact: 906 518 9137 bbaksh@wlu.ca

This study is supervised by: Dr. Nancy Freymond

Contact: nfreymond@wlu.ca

The Study has been approved by Wilfrid Laurier University: REB 6226

