Muslim Youths in British Columbia: The Implications of Multiculturalism for Everyday Life

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Abstract

This thesis explores the implications of multiculturalism for the everyday life of Muslim youths, focusing on the discrepancies between everyday understandings and theoretical critiques of multiculturalism. Ethnographic research was conducted amongst Muslim youths in the lower mainland of B.C. during two events, which aim to change the misconceptions of non-Muslims about Islam: 1) Islam Awareness Week at Simon Fraser University; and, 2) A Journey Into Islam at Az-Zahraa Islamic Center. The comparison between multiculturalism and secularism, both important theoretical stances on the role of religion in society, is used to argue that the participants have internalized and appropriated the multicultural narrative. Lastly, the thesis argues that the events studied not only counter misconceptions but also fulfill the Islamic duty of da’wa.

Keywords: multiculturalism; secularism; Muslim Student Association; Muslim youth; anthropology of religion; anthropology of Islam.
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<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
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<td>B.C.</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
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<td>MSA</td>
<td>Muslim Student Association</td>
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<td>IAW</td>
<td>Islam Awareness Week</td>
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<td>AJII</td>
<td>A Journey Into Islam</td>
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

There are no issues being a Muslim in this society, especially because Canada is all about multiculturalism and being a mosaic. We are all from different places, so it is not a big deal.

(Farha)

Multiculturalism seems to be part of the Canadian national identity, besides hockey, politeness and free healthcare; it is one of those concepts that keeps coming up when Canadians talk about Canada. This was no different during my research, whenever I would speak to the participants about living in Canada, inevitably they would mention multiculturalism, Farha’s quote above is just one of many examples. Multiculturalism is therefore an important aspect of the participant’s lives, and the idea of exploring this topic further has been participant-driven.

Besides the concept of multiculturalism, this thesis focuses on the efforts of Muslim youths to open the discussion with non-Muslims about questions and misconceptions they might have about the Islamic faith. When I began research for this thesis the events that were studied were the only ones of their kind where non-Muslims were invited to learn about Islam and where misconceptions were addressed, but since then more events with similar goals have been organized by groups of different organizational affiliation. The two events this research has focused on are, 1) A Journey Into Islam (2016) at the Az-Zahraa Islamic Center in Richmond B.C., and 2) Islam Awareness Week (Fall 2015) by the Muslim Student Association at Simon Fraser University (SFU MSA)¹ The research consisted of interviews with Muslim youths as well as participant observation during the two events.

¹ In this research the focus has been on the similarity and differences between the events that have been studied. The Az-Zahraa Islamic Center community is a Shia Muslim community, and the MSA is a Sunni Muslim group (although the MSA focus less on belonging to the Sunni tradition, and I was unaware of it until one of the participants told me). This thesis will not go into the religious differences between these two groups, but will only focus on the differences and similarities between the events, and the experiences of everyday life of the organizers.
I initially approached this research with the question: Do Muslim youths who are aware of the misconceptions about Islam have strong(er) Muslim identities? And are Muslim youths who actively try to change misconceptions more vocal about their Muslim identity? I approached this idea initially with the underlying assumption that constantly seeing your faith in the news in a negative way, would impact how one would think of their identity, especially for those who actively try to change the public’s misconceptions.

I began by attempting to situate this question within current anthropological literature on secularism, which is a topic that is frequently debated in current anthropological works. However, soon the realization came that the narrative about secularism is not very strong in Canada\(^2\); the focus is on multiculturalism\(^3\). People’s lived experiences are highly influenced by these narratives, especially when they also become policy, this is exemplified by the well-known example of France banning all religious symbols in public spaces, which determines to what extend one can practice their faith. After realizing that the secular framework would not work for this context, establishing the differences between these two narratives became a large aspect of the thesis, not only exploring secularism and multiculturalism theoretically, but also regarding the everyday lives of the participants being situated in a multicultural society. Whilst conducting the interviews and participant observation I attempted to complicate my understanding of these events and realized different topics were also important, this resulted in the addition of several topics into the research, the most important one being da’wa. Although I believed that the main goal of these events was to change non-Muslims in the West’s perception on Islam it turned out that this was also fulfilling one of the duties Muslims have, which is referred to as da’wa. More information on da’wa is discussed in Chapter 4, but this realization did add another aim to this thesis: distinguishing between changing misconceptions and da’wa and establishing how my two research groups implemented da’wa. This leads to the more general question of

\(^2\) The exception to this is Quebec, where the secularism narrative is present. For more information on secularism in Quebec, see Zubrzycki (2016).

\(^3\) Besides secularism and multiculturalism, a third possible framework that this research could have taken is an Islamic framework, focusing more on the participant’s interpretations of their religion and the state. I chose not to incorporate this framework because this is an anthropological research project which does not focus on religious doctrine. Additionally, many of the recent anthropological contributions on studying Islam have placed it in a secular framework.
how the idea and practice of da’wa is different in a non-Muslim majority society compared to a Muslim-majority society, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.1. Muslim Population in British Columbia

Before giving an overview of the participants in this research and delving into my theoretical framework of analysis, it is important to outline a brief history of when Muslims first arrived in Canada, and to discuss the Muslim population in British Columbia. This will provide a historical context to this research and the communities it focuses on. The first Muslims came to Canada from Syria and Lebanon on trading missions in the late 19th and early 20th century, it was during that time that the first Muslim community formed near Lake La Biche in Alberta. Although Muslims continued to immigrate to Canada before World War II, the post-war period was characterized by an increase in Muslim immigrants, in particular in the 1970s and 1980s (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005). Most of the Muslim immigrants from this time came from South Asia, the Arab world, and Africa, and this migration was the result of political unrest in these regions. Since then, Muslims have migrated to Canada “from almost every part of the Muslim world” (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005:136). The large variety of ethnic backgrounds and countries of origin makes the Muslim communities very diverse, and has resulted in many mosque communities that are multi-lingual and include people from various countries. When the first Muslim immigrants arrived, they all worshipped in mosque communities together. Later, separate mosques for Sunni and Shia Muslims were established, although the mosque communities remained multi-ethnic and multi-lingual (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005).

Zine (2012a) gives more precise numbers on the first migration of Muslims to Canada, and explains that the first Muslim immigrants came from Ottoman Syria in 1882. For the next twenty years, the migrations continued, and by 1901 the Muslim population included 47 members, which grew to 1500 by 1911. Zine (2012a) explains that between 1911 and 1951 the Muslim population remained small, but that after the Second World War Muslims began entering Canada as skilled labourers. In 1996, the Muslim population surpassed the Jewish population in size, and it is now the largest non-Christian religious group in Canada (Zine 2012a).
The Muslim population in British Columbia has rapidly increased in size in the last thirty years, and the Muslim community is the third largest non-Christian religious group (after the Sikh and Buddhist communities) in the province (MacLean 2010). The most recent data about religious populations in B.C. from the 2011 National Household Survey, identified the number of people who identified as Muslims at 79,310 (Statistics Canada). Over half of the Muslim population in B.C. is of Asian ethnicity, primarily Indian and Pakistani, but includes other countries in Asia (MacLean 2010). In the 1970s and 1980s there was an influx of Muslims from East-Africa, who, unlike the Muslims from East-Asia, follow the Shia tradition. During this time, Muslims belonging to the Ahmadiyya movement also started to immigrate into Canada. The Ahmadiyya Muslims originally came from the Punjab province in Pakistan, but had earlier moved to East-Africa before coming to Canada (so called double-diaspora). Also in the 1970s, a particular branch of Shia Muslims, referred to as the Ismailis, came to B.C., mostly from East-Africa (MacLean 2010). The Shia Muslims in B.C. are a diverse population, with members who have immigrated from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan and East-Africa (MacLean 2010).

The previous paragraphs have described the history of Muslims in Canada and the diversity of the Muslim population in British Columbia. The organizations that have been part of this research reflect the diversity of the Muslim population of B.C. The Az-Zahraa community, in which A Journey Into Islam takes place, is a Shia Muslim community that consists of mostly Muslims of East-African origin. The MSA adheres to the Sunni Islam tradition, and includes members from different countries in Asia and Africa. This research did not include any participants that belong to the Ahmadiyya or Ismaili traditions. In the media, Muslims are often portrayed as one homogenous group, but the Muslim population in B.C., as well as the participants in this research, demonstrate the diversity and heterogeneity of the Muslim population.

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4 Although describing the ethnic variety of the Muslim population in B.C. in this section, I have not elaborated on the religious differences between the mentioned communities. MacLean (2010) describes the religious differences of these communities and their history more in-depth.

5 There is also a Shia Muslim student association at SFU, but they are not included in this research.
1.2. Participants

For this research I was fortunate to have the contributions of twelve participants who agreed to be interviewed. Seven of these participants were members of the Muslim Student Association at Simon Fraser University and five were from the organizational committee of A Journey into Islam organized at Az-Zahraa Islamic Center. These specific groups have been chosen because their members are young Muslims who voluntarily participate in organizing initiatives that allow for conversation between Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam. One part of the aforementioned events focuses on changing misconceptions some non-Muslims have about Islam. They are therefore assumed to have an increased awareness of the position of Islam in Canadian society. All participants are between the ages of 19 and 25. This stage in their lives is both crucial for the formation of their identity and exploring their place in society.

Throughout this thesis all names of participants are pseudonyms, which the participants chose for themselves. Of the twelve participants five are male and seven are female. I aimed for a balance between both genders, but since participation was completely voluntary I welcomed everyone who agreed to be interviewed. I met people during the participant observation who volunteered to participate in an interview. Overall, I ended up with more participants from the SFU MSA because of the longer duration of their event, and therefore longer participant observation amongst them.

During this research, I have tried to protect the participants’ confidentiality to the best of my abilities. All fieldnotes and interview transcripts, as well as this thesis, only include the participants’ pseudonyms. One issue that came up during this research is regarding the protection of the identity of the participants towards the other participants. As they all are part of at least one of the two groups, providing anonymity to participants was not feasible. However, the participants were all aware of this, I therefore assumed that the participants have used their own judgement in deciding which debates and internal controversies they want me (and therefore the members of their organizations) to know. I have also used my own judgement to decide if certain answers should be left out of the thesis to protect the privacy of the participants.

The participants were all part of the either the MSA or the A Journey Into Islam organizing committee. All the participants from the MSA were undergraduate students at
SFU, and most of them were taking upper division courses at the time. From the AJII participants, two of them were students and the others in the early stages of finding a job after finishing their BA. Some of the participants from the MSA were international students, but most of the participants were born in Canada. There were a few exceptions of participants who were born in other Western non-Muslim majority countries. All participants had grown up as Muslims, thus this research did not include any (recent) converts.

1.3. Method and Methodology

For this research, two different methods of data collection were used, and although these were mostly separated in time and location the information from both have influenced one another. The first method that was used is interviews. The interviews were the main method of inquiry as the research is trying to understand the personal experience of the participants, as well as their personal interpretations of and reflections on their experience. The second method that was used is participant observation at the events that were researched. Due to the time constraints that a MA program comes with, it was not possible to do participant observation for an extended period of time, therefore the choice was made to only do participant observation at Islam Awareness Week and A Journey Into Islam to understand these better. Participants were either interviewed before (most of the MSA participants) or after (most of the Az-Zahraa participants) and some participants were interviewed before and after (a few participants from the MSA) the participant observation took place.

Interviews during the organization period have been used to gain insights into the ambitions the organizers have for these events and the context in which they place them. My initial intention was to interview all participants before and after, but in many cases, this proved to be impossible. One of the reasons for this was that IAW at SFU took place just before the final exam period. Participant observation during the events was used to understand the dynamics between the organizers and the target audience, with this not being limited to the participants in this research but also other members of these organizations. The interviews after it took place were used to get an understanding of how the organizers view the success of the event, as well as to reflect on potential changes at future occasions. Almost all interviews were conducted at SFU in my office.
without any distraction. For some participants, it was easier not to leave their house, and to cater to them I conducted interviews over Skype with them.

I engaged in participant observation at Islam Awareness Week and A Journey Into Islam. IAW took place at the Academic Quadrangle at SFU, which is a public space. I spent most of the time conversing with the Muslim youths who were a part of the MSA and who were volunteering at the IAW booth. There were a few other students that I spoke with during this week, but before speaking with them I clearly explained that I was conducting research and that the information they give me might be used in this thesis. They all gave me oral consent. During A Journey Into Islam, there were a lot of people and I wanted to experience the event as any other curious member of the public. Therefore, I did not ask any questions related to my main research topic on the evening it took place. However, everything I observed has informed my experience and this was used during the interviews to ask the participants more explicit questions about that evening.

The participants observation of this research included participating in these events, as any other individual belonging to the target audience would. Both AJII and IAW were targeting non-Muslims to participate in them. I did not grow up in a particular faith, and although I know more about Islam than the average non-Muslim, I fit the target audience nicely. Being able to navigate these events as a participant was essential for this research.

1.4. Reflexivity and Limitations

Before continuing to describe the theoretical framework that the thesis is based on, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of this research, in particular the positionality of the researcher. This thesis is based on fieldwork that was conducted over a short period of time, in many cases the interviews were the first and only interaction I had with the participants. Building rapport in such a short period is difficult, and therefore it should be acknowledged that, specifically in being critical about certain topics, the participants might not have felt comfortable enough to address negative experiences or opinions. In addition to this, I also spoke with them as an outsider to their
community and as someone who has extreme (white) privilege. It might be that the participants felt that they could not tell me about struggles or negative occurrences because I am not part of the minority and will never understand their everyday reality. There are many factors that have shaped the conversations between the participants and me; their backgrounds, my background, the setting of the interview (most of them took place at SFU) and perhaps even what happened on the day itself in our lives. It is important to recognize these and understand how this has influenced the ethnographic data.

This research focuses on events that are intended to be experienced by non-Muslims, and this is where I seek to navigate a space as an outsider-looking-in but without silencing the voices of the participants, or speaking for them, or labeling them as ‘others’.

Within anthropological research, there is a lot of focus on the positionality of the researcher, and the need for the researcher to be reflexive about how they take their background and previous understanding with them into the field. It is therefore important to acknowledge that I’m not from Canada, and that I lived most of my life in the Netherlands. I’m also non-religious. The historical, cultural and political differences between Canada and the Netherlands are extensive. Categorizing the Netherlands in terms of multiculturalism and secularism would be a different research topic, but in my lived experience the multicultural narrative is not as strong as in Canada. This has given me the opportunity to look at multiculturalism without being influenced by that narrative. However, I do acknowledge that other parts of my personal background might have influenced how I perceived occurrences that took place during this research.

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Although skin color is not an indication of religion, in this research all participants were people of color. In the introduction of Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada (1998) Sherril Grace et al. write: “White academics researching the lives of people of Colour need to be aware that they may unintentionally contribute to the processes of racialization through which certain groups become inscribed as the subordinate other” (6). I consider this to be an issue in this research, and it is in no way my intention to speak for the participants and to silence their voices. Important scholarship is, and needs to be, done by the Muslim community themselves.
1.5. Theoretical Framework

The quote at the beginning of this chapter by participant Farha exemplifies a participant introducing the topic of multiculturalism to me. This resulted in this topic being explored further in this research, as the participants spoke about it repeatedly during the interviews. However, it is impossible to explore the topic of multiculturalism without placing it in context with secularism. In this thesis I will, therefore, focus on the theoretical debates surrounding multiculturalism in particular in relation to secularism. The practical and everyday consequences of multiculturalism feature prominently throughout this research, however in this section an overview of the theory and theoretical implications of multiculturalism is presented. Secularism will briefly be introduced as a theoretical concept, as it has been an important theoretical debate within this area of studies. Outside of Quebec (where the debate about the secular is quite prominent, see Zubrzycki 2016) there is less focus on secularism in Canada, however, it is important to explore this topic as it is discussed not only in academia but also in the media and everyday life. The participants in this research also referred to secularism at times, which makes it part of the context in which I’m exploring their everyday reality. Additionally, theory about secularism offers a framework to explore multiculturalism theoretically. Theoretical questions regarding multiculturalism and secularism include: how do minorities fit into a secular/multicultural society; how public can religion be in a multicultural society versus a secular society; do people from different religions and/or ethnic background in a multicultural society live together or separately.

Secularism is a heavily used concept (especially in reference to France), but what is it and what does it entail? Secularism theory is a subject that has been popular within anthropological theory recently and has been debated by scholars in the past years. It all started with the work of Charles Taylor Modes of Secularism (1988), but currently the debate revolves mostly around Talal Asad’s writing. Asad is considered one of the most influential scholars within the discipline of the Anthropology of Islam. Of particular note is Asad’s (2003) work, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Modernity, Islam, in which he is in conversation with the previously mentioned article by Charles Taylor. Asad divides his book in three different sections: 1) the secular, 2) secularism, and 3) secularization. The secular refers to society being separated from the religious realm, secularization refers to the process of becoming secular and secularism refers to
a specific worldview in which the secular is central, as well as to a political doctrine that assigns religion to a specific and limited space in society. An important concept in the book is modernity, which he explores in length. Particularly focusing on how modernity has changed the role of religion within societies.

Secularism is not simply an intellectual answer to a question about enduring social peace and toleration. It is an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion. In contrast, the process of mediation enacted in ‘premodern’ societies includes ways in which the state mediates local identities without aiming at transcendence (Asad 2003:5).

In this passage, Asad explains the difference between secular society and what he refers to as ‘pre-modern’ society. He continues to argue that even between different secular countries, there are many differences, and that one should not understand secularism as “a simple matter of the absence of ‘religion’ in the public life of the modern nation-state” (5). Asad then explains that these different secular countries (he uses France, Britain, and the USA as examples) vary in how much access they grant (religious) minorities in participating in the nation-state (6). In understanding the ideas and assumptions that theoretically are important in a secular society, these can be used to further our understandings of the everyday experience of Muslim youths in a multicultural society, particularly in relation to the role of religion in society, and the tolerance towards minorities accessing the state.

In his 2010 article “The Meaning of Secularism,” Charles Taylor divides secularism into three different parts that are based on the French Revolution’s motto “liberty, equality, fraternity,” and he explains that all three are of essence for understanding secularism. Taylor explains that the first assumption underlying secularism is that there should be religious freedom and no one should be forced to be religious or part of a particular religion. The second assumption, he explains, is that there should be equality between people of different religions, and no matter what faith one adheres to people should be treated equally. He also explains that secularism contains the idea that there should not be a religion that enjoys privileged status, or be adopted as the state religion. Lastly, Taylor explains that all religious groups should be heard in determining national political identity and constructing the policies that are put in place to realize those goals. This is what he refers to as ‘fraternity.’ Overall, Taylor’s
analysis of secularist values focuses on the acceptance and equality of all religions within a society. In this article, he explains the various aspects of religion without making an argument about its validity.

However, as exemplified by the French Republic, not all countries have the same notions of secularism and the secular. In the article mentioned in the previous paragraph, Taylor draws on another important scholar in the field of secularism theory, Jose Casanova. Casanova has been publishing on the topic of secularism for many years. In his article “The Secular and Secularisms” (2009) he draws on his large body of previous research about secularism and related concepts. He makes the same distinction that Asad does, dividing the topic into the secular, secularization, and secularism. Casanova explains that secularization is used to discuss the separation of state and church, and specifically the process of separation between the two. He argues that becoming secular is a natural consequence of modernity, and that modernization and secularization go hand-in-hand. He relates this to the concepts on globalization and the societal development that used to focus on being ‘sacred’ but in modern times attempts to be ‘secular’ (2009:1050). Secularism is often brought into context when discussing certain countries, in particular France, and debates about immigration and religious freedom. Secularism is useful for achieving a greater understanding of the position of religion in a country; however, it is often associated with the religions of minority groups and often directly influences the relationship between minority groups and the nation-state. Secularism is associated with banning religion from the public sphere. However, not all societies have implemented secularism as a solution for dealing with minority religions, and therefore secularism cannot provide a full understanding in how minority religions might be treated in other countries. Canada is known for multiculturalism, and this is referred to both nationally as internationally within academia and outside of it. But what is multiculturalism, and how is it different from secularism?

Multiculturalism is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “the belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance” (Cambridge Dictionary 2017). Canada in particular is known for its multiculturalism because it is not only a cultural tradition but it has been made policy through the Multiculturalism Program and the Multiculturalism Act (Duncan 2005). Himani Bannerji in the introduction of her book The Dark Side of the Nation (2000) writes about this policy becoming official under Prime-
Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Bannerji writes that, “[it] appeared in our midst in a period of rapid influx of third world immigrants into Canada, as well as in a moment of growing intensity of the old English-French rivalry” (Bannerji 2000:9). She suggests that it was not only a way of dealing with the immigrants who were arriving but also as a “muting device for francophone national aspirations” (Bannerji 2000:9), and that it was used to find a way to accept the Quebecois as part of the Canadian identity. Bannerji here indicates that the idea of multiculturalism was introduced because there was such a large number of immigrants coming into the country, that other options (e.g. assimilation) were not possible, even if they might have been desired. Although this influx of immigrants happened years back, it still influences the place of minorities in society today, and it therefore influences the social setting of the participants.

Tariq Modood in his book *Multiculturalism* (2007) provides an overview of what multiculturalism entails in different countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and of course, Canada. Modood introduces the topic by claiming that during the 1960s Western societies that experienced an influx of migrants no longer focused on differences between people, but rather focused on the “singular character of the human race” (1). After introducing multiculturalism as a concept that is used to provide a framework for the idea of looking for similarity rather than difference, he continues to discuss several countries where multiculturalism was introduced. He mentions Canada, together with the United States and Australia, as countries that have “a long historical experience of immigration and indeed which have been built up out of immigration” (3). He explains that although these countries have a long history of immigration, before the 1960s many of the migrants came from Europe and they, or at least their children, were required to assimilate into society. Modood explains that as immigration opened up to allow for people from non-European countries, the cultural differences are considered to be greater and this is considered normal and acceptable. This resulted in the idea that assimilation is not appropriate as a policy, as these migrants should be allowed to maintain some of their cultures (3). He continues to discuss ideas around assimilation and integration and writes:

The concern here is with the relatively limited diversity caused by large-scale immigration of people perceived to be ‘different’, who do not simply melt away into the populations they have settled amongst but are ethnically visible and so various multicultural, multiethnic, multifaith urban dynamics come to be and do not seem to be short term only. The ‘difference’ in
question is typically marked by various forms of racism and similar forms of ideologies as the migrants come from societies or groups that have been historically ruled and/or perceived as inferior by the society into which they have settled (5-6).

Modood argues that the second wave of immigration, which consisted of people on non-European heritage, included people who looked different (non-white). Thus, they stood out and formed groups amongst themselves based on background, ethnicity, or religion. The focus, therefore, came to be on difference rather than on similarity, which Modood explains led to racism and discrimination. Similar critiques to multiculturalism have been offered in Himani Bannerji’s book *Dark Side of the Nation* (2000). Bannerji discusses multiculturalism and diversity together, and argues that through both these discourses the difference, or otherness, of people is highlighted. Multiculturalism, in her view, directly implies that people are not the same (as they are diverse), whereby she goes on to construct a power relation between different cultural groups. This not only relates back to the colonial past of not only Canada, but the world in general, but also relates to these power relations still being ingrained in society.

Sherene Razack’s book *Casting Out: The Evictions of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (2008) explores the role of Muslims in Canadian society. Razack argues that in discussions about Muslims there are often three figures introduced: “the Muslim man, the imperilled Muslim woman, and the civilized European, the latter a figure who is seldom explicitly named by who nevertheless anchors the first two figures” (5). Razack continues to explain that Muslims are still indeed seen as the “cultural Other” (5), and that since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 there has been a resurgence of “an old Orientalism” (5). It is argued that this is because of race thinking, which Razack explains as a much broader category than racism, as it includes “any mode of construing and engaging social hierarchies through the lens of descent” (Silverblatt 2005:17-18). Although not directly speaking to the multiculturalism and secularism debate, Razack’s work and race thinking as a concept, further the understanding about Canadian society and the context in which multiculturalism should be placed, which is that Canada is a racialized society and that race thinking is ingrained in the way this society thinks.

Theoretically, the difference between secularism and multiculturalism is focused on the approach taken towards difference. As discussed above, secularism is seen as
aiming for unity and therefore seeks to remove religion from the public sphere. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, aims to deal with the increasing diversity of society. In contrast to secularism, the aim in a multicultural society is to allow for these differences in religion (and other aspects of life/culture) in the public sphere. Both secularism and multiculturalism have been criticized. The main critique about secularism is that it limits religious freedom, by barring certain religious practices from the public sphere (for instance veiling in France). Multiculturalism, on the other hand, highlights difference, which has resulted in the 'othering' of people. Although multiculturalism and secularism are discussed, in this introduction and in the literature in general, as separate, the two are not mutually exclusive. Canadian society does separate state and church, and religion is mostly practiced in the private sphere, but multiculturalism is policy and allows for the differences in religion to be celebrated.

Looking at secularism and multiculturalism will help to understand the everyday lives of the participants better, as it is not only the context that they live in, but also a narrative that they have internalized and reference themselves. By understanding scholarly interpretations and critiques, it becomes possible to relate these experiences to the academic understanding and explore the possible discrepancies between the everyday understanding and the theoretical insights.

1.6. Structure

For this thesis, I chose to move from more ethnographic and descriptive parts of my research towards a more focused analysis of thematic questions and concerns. Chapter 2, A Journey into Islam and Islam Awareness Week, will introduce the events and communities that were studied in depth, through an ethnographic description of my experience during participant observation. At Islam Awareness Week and A Journey Into Islam, there were many activities in which I participated just as any other member of the public could.

Chapter 3, The Everyday Life of Muslim Youths, is analytical and it is where many of the themes that came up during the events and interviews will be further elaborated upon. Whilst the descriptive chapter is based more upon the participant observation, the analytical chapter that follows it is based mostly on the interviews that were conducted.
Chapter 4, Da’wa and Misconceptions, is where the function and effectiveness of these events are discussed. This chapter is based on both observation and interviews, and aims to bring these both together to reach a more in-depth understanding of the reasons why AJII and IAW are organized.

Chapter 5, Conclusion, will give a short overview of the thesis, and includes a discussion of limitations of the research, as well as some ideas for further research. It also includes concluding remarks about the theoretical framework and comments on the general questions that were asked in this research.

1.7. Conclusion

In this introduction, I have outlined the research and the participants, the aim and structure of the thesis, and the theoretical framework in which it is placed. From here onwards, I will use this theoretical framework to analyze the everyday reality of the Muslim youths, which is the context in which these events should be placed. This context is influenced by the negative stereotypes about Muslims that are introduced in the media, and that people whom the participants encounter in society might believe in. Islamophobia is also a part of the everyday reality of the participants, as they encounter people who have internalized the aforementioned negative stereotypes, and allow these to be a part of their interactions with Muslims. The theoretical framework is used to study the aim and effects of the events. All in all, this thesis aims to provide insight into the everyday lives of Muslim youths, and the events that they organize to engage the non-Muslim and Muslim community with Islam. This is placed in the context of multiculturalism, as this is a concept that is prevalent amongst people when talking about Canadian society.
Chapter 2.

Islam Awareness Week & A Journey Into Islam

This chapter focuses on the ethnographic description of the two events that I studied, and the committees that organized them; A Journey into Islam (AJII) organized by the youth committee at the Az-Zahraa Islamic Center and Islam Awareness Week (IAW) organized by the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at Simon Fraser University. To gain a deeper understanding of what happens at these functions, it is important to understand the background of the communities that they take place in. In this chapter the events are described in depth, focusing on occurrences that I found meaningful, or which came up during the interviews that were conducted after. The chapter introduces literature by Edward Said to understand why AJII and IAW focus on certain topics, and why it is that non-Muslims have misconceptions about these particular topics. This chapter will also discuss the limits that multiculturalism places on these gatherings, and argue that multiculturalism and secularism coexist in Canadian society. Although this chapter will predominantly focus on description, the descriptions will be interpreted based on the larger theoretical framework of this thesis. It is important to understand the context, before the next chapter will analyze the participant’s lives (chapter 3) and the function of IAW and AJII (chapter 4).

2.1. A Journey Into Islam Organizational Committee and the Az-Zahraa community

The Az-Zahraa Islamic Center as it is known today, located on No 5 Road in Richmond, B.C. was opened in 2002, but the Shia Muslim Community has been present in the Greater Vancouver Area since the first immigrants arrived in 1967. Just after their arrival, the religious services took place in members’ homes. With immigrants from East Africa, as well as India, Pakistan, and the Middle East it is a diverse community that has continued to grow since the arrival of the founders of the community in 1967 (Az-Zahraa Website). The community of the Az-Zahraa center has existed for a long time, and some of the youths that are part of the AJII organizing committee are the children of those who founded the center, whilst others immigrated to Canada with their parents when they
were younger. The Az-Zahraa community is very diverse, but unlike the MSA does not (as far as I know) include international students.

The AJII organizational committee is in many ways very different from the MSA, especially because they solely come together to organize this annual event. Therefore, I want to focus more on what I have learned about Az-Zahraa as a religious community as a whole, rather than just focusing on the organizing committee. Compared to the MSA, the Az-Zahraa community is a lot larger, but serves comparable functions. I only met a very small part of the community, but learned a lot from observing during AJII as well as talking to the members in the interviews. The building itself says a great deal about the size of the community, as do the many committees they have at the center (youths, seniors, women's, but also for example a community garden committee).

Az-Zahraa is more than just a mosque; it also has a Sunday school and hosts a variety of events for its community, such as sports tournaments. There are many separate committees besides the AJII organizational committee, such as the youth committee, women's committee, and seniors committee. These make it possible for anyone to join a committee if they want to.

2.2. A Journey into Islam

This event took place on January 30, 2016. The location that it is held at is No 5 Road in Richmond, also known as the Highway to Heaven because of the large number of religious places of worship along that road. Before heading to the mosque, the location became a point of stress in my life, as it is not accessible by public transit. As someone who goes everywhere with public transit and does not own a car, this made it difficult for me to attend A Journey Into Islam. The inaccessibility of this event by public transit also influences who attends, as only people who can afford a car can access this area.

The location of the mosque on the outskirts of the city, inaccessible via public transit, is linked to whether or not religion should be visible in the public space. Although it is not only the mosque that is placed at the edge of the city, as there are other houses of faith located on the same street, and as far away from the city center, the placement of the places of worship in the periphery is symbolic for the place of religion in society.
Matthew Engelke (2012), examines the question of where religion fits within modern society, and he writes about “balancing conceptions of publicity and privacy” (155). By placing the religious buildings outside of the city, the religion is pushed to the private sphere, as it will only be visible to people who want to see it. On the other hand, there is also the issue of space for these large buildings that needs to be negotiated, and this also plays a role in where the buildings are located.

During one of the interviews the accessibility issue also came up, as one of the organizing members explained that some of their friends were not able to attend because of the inaccessibility by transit. In the future there might be shuttle buses or similar solutions to this problem. This does lead to the question of who the event is aimed at. Besides stating that the event is for people that are at least 13 years old (Az-Zahraa website), the website doesn't specify for who it is aimed at. However, in the interviews it did come up that the first years rather than focusing on the general public, the members of the mosque were asked to bring a non-Muslim friend. When looking at the accessibility of the mosque, most people who attend the event are people who have a car, and most of them come from Vancouver. Generally, the non-Muslims at AJII were white and often had a connection through one of the members of the mosque. Special invitations were send out to the RCMP and some of the neighbouring religious communities. In one of my interviews it came up that they are trying to include more and strengthen ties with the First Nations community, in particular the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Tsawassen First Nations who are native to the land the mosque is built on.

After overcoming the accessibility issue that I faced, I did make my way to the event on the evening of January 30. The location itself was not difficult to find, it being quite close to the highway exit. Once you get on No 5 Road, you cannot possibly miss the Az-Zahraa mosque, as it is very large. When pulling up onto the property, the size of the mosque is noticeable; it was much bigger than I anticipated. My surprise at the size of the mosque is based on previous mosques that I have visited in Europe. Many of the mosques that I previously visited were not only smaller, but also often less distinguishable as a mosque. Most of them blended in with the other buildings around them, both in size and style. Relating this back to the discussion of Engelke of whether religion belongs in the public or private realm, the European mosques blending in more with their surroundings and being located in the city center versus the Az-Zahraa mosque being placed outside of the city center but being able to stand out is both size
and style, are two distinct ways of achieving a similar result; the religion not being in the public sphere.

When driving onto the parking lot, it is clearly indicated where to park and where the entrance of the mosque is, people are pointed towards the back of the parking lot. When entering the mosque, you are requested to take your shoes off and there is a big closet where you can put your shoes and your coat. These facilities are normally also used during everyday life at the mosque, as the whole center appears to be a no-shoes zone. Not wanting to miss anything, I arrived early at the event and there was no line for registration. I quickly found my name and received an information booklet and a passport type of activity booklet that would guide you by all the different exhibitions. But before the booths opened, there first was a dinner to attend. The dinner took place in the gymnasium of the mosque, and although I’m calling it a mosque, the more accurate title would be Islamic Center as there is also a Sunday school on the top floors of the building, and the gymnasium for sports activities. In the gymnasium there were many round tables, and the ones on the right side of where I entered are for the women, and on the left side for the men. I find a table where no one else is sitting yet, and go to the washroom. In the washroom I noticed a few pairs of slippers near the door, and I was very confused why people left their slippers in the washroom. Later on, it clicked that these were there for everyone to use because the washroom had a tile floor and no one had his or her shoes on. To me this illustrated one of the many things that I learned during this research about everyday life issues that are dealt with on an everyday basis, but that outsiders might not think about. Other issues like this included praying during work or school and buying clothes that fit their Islamic lifestyle, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

During dinner I sat at a table with a few women from a church in downtown Vancouver, the youth programs of the mosque and the church were organizing a few events together and therefore people from the church got invited. All the other people at my dinner table (total approximately 9) besides me where from the mosque. During the dinner we were encouraged to talk about some biases or misconceptions we have about Islam, so that the members of the mosque could share their own opinions about that. During the dinner there were a lot of speeches from the organizational committee, as well as other prominent members of the mosque. It was interesting to hear the conversation between the Christian church members and the mosque members, as they
were indeed talking about some of the misconceptions that they had about Islam. The main topic of their interest was arranged marriages, and they bluntly asked the ladies from the mosque if they would arrange a marriage for their children. The Muslim women from the mosque really appreciated that they asked the question, and they answered in a humorous, yet serious way. They initially started laughing and said that that was way too much work for them and that they rather would have their children to just find someone themselves. After the joke, they did explain that it varied greatly from family to family, and that there were some arranged marriages but that it has become more common to just let your children choose a partner themselves. From their expression and overall demeanour, it was clear that they genuinely appreciated being asked this, somewhat controversial, question. They used humour as a tool, but were also serious when they explained more about it. By using humour, they made the women who asked the question feel more comfortable, and lightened the mood. But by answering seriously after, the information was still conveyed and the misconception was cleared up. As mentioned before, multiculturalism can isolate religious or cultural communities and there might be limited interaction between people of various religious views. The women from the church might not have realized that they had this misconception, or stereotypical idea about the Muslim faith, until they were in this space and they were forced to think about it.

It is obvious that the women from the church meant no harm by asking this question, however it does indicate subconscious opinions that (some) non-Muslims have about Islam, and that there is still this idea of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’ present. Despite Huntington’s work being out-dated and anthropology in particular has moved away from it, the ideas that some people have and that come forward in remarks like the one about arranged marriage is that there still is very much an ‘us versus them’ mentality. This might not result in a ‘Clash of Civilizations’ as Huntington (1993) described with the fault lines between civilizations as “the flash points for crisis and bloodshed” (29), but the idea that there are intrinsic differences between ‘Western civilization and Islamic civilization’ is still present amongst people. In the discussion on multicultural theory in chapter one (section 1.5), one of the critiques that was emphasized is the notion that multiculturalism highlights difference and promotes the separation of different cultures. Stereotypes and misconceptions exist because people have limited encounters with people that are different. The separation is clear in the Lower Mainland of B.C., where certain ethnic
enclaves exist, which result in limited interaction between people from different cultures and religions. Even if the interaction does take place, for example at the workplace, the topics about which misconceptions exist might not be discussed.

The talks during dinner ranged from children reading poetry to a SFU professor (Dr. Amyn Sajoo) speaking on diversity within Islam (the theme of the AJII this year). Dr. Sajoo’s focus was on explaining that there is a lot of diversity within Islam, and that there is not one Muslim but that Muslims are individuals and should not be generalized. This can be tied back to the description of the Muslim population in B.C. and in Canada in section 1.1, and reiterates that many non-Muslims do view the Muslim population as homogenous.

The food during the event was good, and I had engaging conversations with the person next to me. It also became obvious that there is a strong sense of community at this mosque, as the members from the mosque at my table all knew each other and caught up on what was going on with their families (how is your daughter? how is your son? Etc.) and even women from other tables would come over to talk to those sitting at my table.

After we finished our last course, it was time to explore the different exhibitions that were set up. As mentioned before, we got a passport with questions to answer when visiting each of the booths that had a different theme; it was like a scavenger hunt. There were nine booths with the following themes: Museum of Islamic Art, Food and Fasting, Pilgrimage (hajj), The Holy Qur’an, Modesty (hijab), Striving (jihad), Prayers (salaat), Prophets and Twelve Leaders, and Who is Hussain. In addition to the passport that had questions in it, most of these booths also had an extra activity that you could take part in.

I started at the Prophets and Twelve Leaders exhibit. An 8-year-old boy was standing behind this booth, supervised and supported by his family. There was a game that you could play around the influence of Muhammad on the human rights during the time he lived. The boy had practiced a lot and his family was ready to help if he needed it, but they were mostly looking at him very proudly. As someone who has had an interest in different religions, and has taken university courses on them, most of the booths didn’t provide me with any new information. However, I can imagine that they
were very informative to those who have less knowledge about this religion. Below, I will shortly outline what the exhibits were about.

The Museum of Islamic Art exhibit included pieces of Islamic art that were on display, from pottery to calligraphy. The exhibit on Food and Fasting included information about Ramadan and on foods that Muslims are and are not supposed to eat (halal and haram foods). The pilgrimage exhibit was my favourite one, as they had made displays of different aspects of the hajj in miniature. It was very well done and the youths present at this booth had really studied well. The Qur’an exhibit gave information about the Qur’an. The exhibit on Modesty had a quiz to take about the names of different types of head coverings and tried to emphasize that modesty is not only applicable to women. The striving exhibit tried to counter one of the biggest misconceptions that people have about Islam, and that is that Jihad is always violent. This exhibit focused on the different kinds of Jihad, including the inner struggle to live a life without sin. The exhibit about Prayers was also run by 3 younger boys with their family. They might have been brothers or friends. In this exhibit you could win candy by spinning a wheel and then answering a question about prayer. The booth about ‘Who is Hussain’ gave information on Hussain, who is an influential person in the Islamic religion, but who is almost never mentioned.

The topics of the exhibitions are largely influenced by how the media portrays Islam, as this is what influences how people view Islam. When A Journey Into Islam first took place, the theme was specifically on countering misconceptions, and there was a booth that focused on misconceptions. The theme now varies per year, but it is still noticeable that the exhibition topics align with themes that are often portrayed in the media, such as jihad, hijab, and the Qur’an. Edward Said in his book Covering Islam (1997) examines the relationship between how Islam is represented in Western media and the ideas people form about Muslims based on that media representation. Said argues that even in the most objective portrayal of Muslims in the media are influenced by Orientalism, which is a term Said coined in his 1978 book by the same name. He explains Orientalism as the idea that there is an inherent prejudice from the West against people from the Middle East, and that this influences the cultural representations that we form about people from that area of the world, and these representations are in turn perpetuated by the media.
During registration at A Journey Into Islam, you could sign up for a tour around the mosque if you were interested in this. Tours lasted about 20 minutes (although the one I went on had very passionate guides and it ended up taking close to an hour). The tour started near the entryway of the mosque where there is a big mural of the Kaaba, which is the building that Muslim pilgrims circle during the hajj, it is located in Mecca. My tour was given by a couple who were both very involved in the mosque community and very passionate and engaging. Close to the mural we gathered with the whole group, they gave some information and people had the opportunity to ask questions. Not many people asked questions, I did ask the question whether or not they had been on the hajj themselves and the man had been but the woman had not been. After his we were guided to the actual mosque, we sat upstairs were normally the women sit. Here they talked a lot about the use of the mosque and prayer. There was the opportunity to ask questions, which a few people did. I asked when the most people ever come to the mosque and they explained that it is busiest at the end of the Ramadan. The couple knew what they were talking about and explained very clearly. After the tour was over, the event was almost over as well. I introduced myself to the chair of the organizational committee because I had been in contact with him about this research. There was a raffle if you had finished your passport, but I did not win anything. Then I got my shoes and coat and left at around 10:10pm.

2.3. A Journey Into Islam Interpretations

The AJII event was very well organized and was a lot of fun. It was educational but in an accessible way, nothing was made overly complicated or was forced onto you. People were free to walk around and look at topics that were most interesting to them. In this next section, I want to discuss some of the things that surprised me or that I thought were remarkable. First was the size of the Islamic Center that this takes place at. No 5 Road is outside of the city which allows this building to be extremely big. It therefore not only houses a mosque but also a school, and the building includes a gymnasium where the dinner took place. During the event, the whole center is filled with activities related to the event, but it is not hard to imagine that on a regular day it can be filled by many different activities that bring people together. Previously in this chapter I mentioned that there are many different committees that organize activities at this mosque, so there are many opportunities for the members to be part of a group. The Islamic Center and its
members have a strong focus on community and there are many families that join different committees. However, it is important to note that there are also people who only attend during special occasions, or who only come to the mosque to pray. Generally, it is a community that tries to be of service to its community and this area at large.

When sitting down at the table for dinner, the most noticeable occurrence was the group of ladies from the Christian church in downtown Vancouver. They talked about the collaboration between their youth groups and this struck my interest because the night before this event I had attended an event organized by the Muslim Student Association at SFU that was in collaboration with a Christian student group at SFU. These collaborations are interesting as the two religions are often considered opposites, especially in the immigration debates that have been happening as of late (mostly in Europe but in Canada to a certain extend as well). Both Islam and Christianity are major world religions and these events try to highlight the similarities, focusing on for example the role of Jesus and/or Mary in the Qur’an. It was interesting that the women from the Christian church that were sitting at my table did have some misconceptions or judgements about the Islamic religion. During the short time span of this research, I encountered the collaboration between a Muslim and a Christian group twice, and although it is not the focus of this research it was remarkable.

The engagement of the community is remarkable. Especially the large role that children and youth play is obvious when attending the event. Behind many of the booths there are children or youth who come up with the ideas and make the information that is presented at the booths. Not only do they engage the younger generations, but older generations often take up a role of mentor in this process. Besides the intention of welcoming non-Muslims into the mosque, the regular mosque goers also get re-inspired and extra involved around this event, which could be seen as a latent function.

As A Journey Into Islam has been happening for five years now, some of the original organizers are looking to take a step back. During two of the interviews it came up that the participants are looking to take on a smaller role, but that they are trying to realize this by teaching the younger generations what they have learnt in the previous years. But some of the booths also had some younger children who were accompanied by their parents. Here the booth really was a family effort.
Regarding the topics of the booth, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that these are topics that people do have misconceptions about. Although not all participants agreed that the main goal of the event is to change peoples’ misunderstandings (see chapter 4), the topics of the booths, such as jihad, hijab, and halal food/Ramadan, are topics that non-Muslims often have incorrect understandings of, and these are topics people would encounter in the media. Previously in this chapter I mentioned the works *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1997) by Edward Said, as his ideas are useful in understanding the underlying problems of how the media portrays Muslims. It is important to understand that there is not just one media outlet that depicts Muslims as inherently different from people from the West, but that the thinking of Muslims as less civilized, barbaric, etc. is engrained in the cultural memory in the West. This became visible in what exhibitions were present at the event, as they focused on topics that relate to this considered integral difference between Muslims and people from the West, such as Jihad, Ramadan, and the Qur’an. Jihad is often considered to be violent and barbaric, which is related to the portrayal of Muslims in the media. At the exhibitions they tried to complicate the understanding of people by explaining different types of jihad, including jihad that takes place as a process that takes place within and that can be characterized as the inner struggle against sin. Said’s differentiation of three types of Muslims depicted in the media can be linked to the theme of “diversity” that the event had this year, as it tried to show that there is not one (or three) Muslim, and that there is a lot of diversity within the Muslim community. However, the media does not represent the Muslim community and the Islamic faith as diverse. Said’s ideas about the media and Orientalism, in particular the idea that the West has a wrong portrayal of Muslims engrained in their cultural memory, is useful to understand why these misconceptions keep existing. Relating this to the point that was previously made about the limited encounters non-Muslims have with Muslims, one of the critiques of multiculturalism is that it highlights difference, and like mentioned previously in this chapter it can result in the physical separation of people from different cultures (e.g. living in different places in the Lower Mainland of B.C.). It results in the fact that even if non-Muslims and Muslims have interactions, the preconceived notions about Muslims that have been entrenched in this cultural memory of people in the West will be so deep-rooted that they are hard to change by these interactions, but also that once after the interaction someone looks at the media, they will see the misconceptions represented again.
2.4. Muslim Student Association

The Muslim Student Association has been a longstanding presence on the SFU campus. When asking about the origin of Islam Awareness Week, the committee members explained to me that it although there has been an increase in how often and how big this event was organized, the MSA had been present at SFU since its early days. The MSA consists of a number of executive members, who are in charge of organizing the activities and who all have different roles (e.g. president, secretary, etc.) or who are just generally more involved with organizing the events without a specific role. Besides these executive members they heavily rely on volunteers and other members of the MSA to take part in their activities. I will therefore talk about two different things, the community with members from the executive committee but also community of the MSA as a whole.

My very first introduction to the MSA was at one of their executive member meetings. I had contacted them via Facebook and told them about my research and that
I was looking for participants. I was then invited to come to the meeting and introduce my research and myself, and invite the members to participate in interviews. During the meeting it became evident that everyone was quite close with each other. They seemed excited to see each other and to catch up. Throughout my interaction with the MSA, I continuously noticed the strong bonds they have with each other. I’m more familiar with the bonds between the female members of the MSA, as I would sit with them during any events. The female executive members all seemed to have established solid friendships, as I would run into them at random times in the hallway at SFU and they would be together, having fun. They not only interacted with each other as part of the MSA or as part of practicing their religion, they also had an important role in each other’s everyday lives.

However, the MSA is not just the executive board, although those are the members that seem to have formed the closest friendships. The MSA as a whole consists of many more members. Some of which I met during IAW because they volunteered or came by the booth to say hi to their friends, some of which I met during another event, and some who I did not meet at all. It does become clear from what I have heard and seen that the events outside of IAW are visited by many members of the MSA. Every Friday they come together for Jumm’aah at SFU. These Friday prayers are an important aspect for the MSA community as this is the set time that they come together. I was not present at any of these prayers, but the understanding I got throughout my research was that there is quite a big group that attends regularly. The Friday prayer is organized by the MSA, and it is a service that they provided for the larger Muslim community at SFU. In this way the Muslim community is quite broad and encompasses all the Muslims at SFU. The Muslims that attend the MSA events are predominantly Sunni Muslims, as there is a separate Shia committee.

2.5. Islam Awareness Week

Islam Awareness Week (IAW) is organized across the Western world, and takes on many shapes and forms. Sometimes it is organized by one university’s MSA and sometimes various MSAs work together to organize a larger event. The IAW that I focus on for this research is organized by the MSA at Simon Fraser University, and although in the past they have collaborated with other universities, at the moment they focus on having the IAW at this university alone. The MSA organizes an IAW twice a year, once
during the fall semester and once during the spring semester (SFU uses a trimester based system, meaning that there is no IAW during the summer semester). The IAW that I observed at was held from Monday November 16, 2015 till Friday November 20, 2015. The dates of this event are significant as the Friday before the it started was when the shootings happened in Paris. IAW consisted of a booth at near the Interfaith center where members of the MSA were volunteering during school hours, as well as a public lecture on the Friday night.

On Monday I arrived a little early at the area and waited for someone from the MSA to show up. Since I had already interviewed around 5 members, I knew some executive members who organized the event although there were many more volunteers present during this week. On Monday the first person I saw was Layla, whom I had already interviewed. I walked up to her and made some small talk. She mentioned how she was quite nervous about the response they would get during IAW since the Paris shootings had just happened. After our short conversation I helped her set up the booth, putting up some posters and laying out the flyers. The rest of the day I stayed and met a few of the volunteers explaining everyone about my research and getting oral consent to use our discussions for my research. I mainly just observed the various activities they had at the booth; there was trying on the hijab and getting henna done on one side of the booth, and listening to the Quran and spinning the wheel at the other side of the booth, in the middle all the flyers and brochures were displayed. Although the activity surrounding henna is quite different from what was focused on during A Journey Into Islam, the other activities were quite similar; especially the Qur’an and hijab both also had a prominent feature in the A Journey into Islam event. This again relates to what Said (1997) states in his book *Covering Islam*: “In no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the ‘Islam’ in the common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam […]”(1). These topics are covered so much in the Western media, and in such ways, that they do not mean the same as they do for Muslims. It therefore makes sense that both these events would focus on similar topics. During the rest of my fieldwork on day one I observe a few

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7 On Friday November 13, 2015, a series of terrorist attacks took place in Paris, France. It included shootings at a concert and a bombing at a soccer match. 130 people were killed in these attacks.
8 The Interfaith center is a center at SFU which includes a space for worship. It is used by students from different religions to practice their religion. Several religious clubs/associations at SFU rent the space for their members. See https://www.sfu.ca/students/interfaith.html
interactions between the MSA volunteers and people who approach the booth. Most people already seem to know what Islam is about (one person asks how to join the MSA) and the others are interested in the henna.

Day two is a lot less busy than the first day, particularly because there are fewer volunteers present at the booth. At the beginning of the day Layla talks to a few people she knows (fellow Muslims) about the Paris attacks, again expressing their concern. It is obvious that this weighs heavily on their minds. At the IAW booth they also give away free snacks (candy and chips) which has a quote from the Qur’an on it. Next to the IAW booth the MSA is also fundraising for their activities. They do this by selling donuts. Throughout the day (and rest of the week) I notice that the selling of donuts is a lot more popular than the free snacks. This possibly has to do with the fact that the donut selling is a mere transaction where people give money and get a donut, with the free snacks they might feel like they need to talk about Islam with the volunteers, which they might not be interested in. At the end of the day someone from the Peak (SFU’s student newspaper) visit the booth and take a picture of the volunteers with it.

Day three was the most engaging day of the week, as there were a few noteworthy incidents. When I first arrived at the booth it became evident that one of the Christian organizations on campus had also set up a booth next to the IAW. This was not planned, but after they walked by they decided to also set up a booth. Theirs was a lot less full and basically only included a volunteer sitting behind a table, there were no activities or snacks. The Christian booth stayed there the rest of the week but they generated less traffic than the IAW booth. On this day the henna and the donuts were again very popular, and I got henna done and I tried on the hijab. Trying on the hijab was one of the activities that the MSA had at their booth, and it was mostly used as a way to engage people and help open up conversation about Islam and any misconceptions people may hold. Giving people the opportunity to try on the hijab might also normalize it for non-Muslims. When I tried on the hijab, the female MSA members had fun showing me the different ways that it can be worn and how they personally wear it. I tried on several different styles and we took pictures. It would have been interesting to wear the hijab for a longer period and to observe if I had been treated differently. In many parts of the university one can be quite anonymous, and mostly have very limited interactions with people you don’t know very well, it would have been especially interesting to see
what happens when you are wearing hijab and forced to interact with people you are more familiar with and in a smaller, less anonymous, settings.

A controversial incident happened whilst I was getting henna done. The henna takes a while so you sit for about 15-20 minutes, depending on the complexity of the design, and chat with the person who is putting it on you. About halfway through the henna design a girl approached the booth. This is how I described the incident in my fieldnotes:

A student walked up to the booth being very upset about something. She explained that she thought that by including henna at the IAW booth they were not showing the diversity of Islam. Not all Muslims practice henna and not all who use henna are Muslims. This really bothered her and she was quite fierce in her discussion, being and looking angry. I didn’t get in this argument; I just listened and observed how the MSA members handled it. Some of them were quite upset by it and stayed in the background. The more experienced MSA members talked to the girl and calmed her down. Once she was calmer, it was possible for them to have a more rational discussion. The MSA members explain that although they could all see where she is coming from, it is a way to engage the community.
This was the only time during my fieldwork that there was a negative reaction to the booth or any of its activities. Although they ended up having a good conversation about it, and the girl was invited to think with them about having more inclusive activities for next year, it did leave most members feeling a bit down after. When interviewing some of the MSA members after IAW took place, I asked them about this incident. Most of them remembered the incident and agreed that something needed to be done about it. Although the henna was a good way to engage people, those who I interviewed after were of the opinion that a different activity would need to replace the henna. One year later, during November 2016, the IAW takes place at SFU again. Although at this point I was no longer doing fieldwork, I did walk past the booth to see what had happened to the henna. During IAW 2016 there was no henna anymore, but there also was not an activity that had replaced it.

On day four of IAW I start my fieldwork in the morning, and it stays quiet for a long time. Especially in the morning a lot of student come to SFU just for class and they are in a rush. In the afternoon there is always less rush and people stop by more. During the morning there is only one person who really talks to the volunteers at the booth. This person is not asking question about Islam but rather offering support and discussion the common narratives that are happening in the media and in some groups in society. Besides the visit from this person to the booth, the henna is again very popular and there are a lot of girls asking for it. It really depends on the person who is putting henna on them how much they engage with them about Islam. Some girls talk a lot whilst they put
on henna and others just quietly put it on. This is similar to what happens with the booth in general. Some people are more open to talk to people and to call them over to the booth, others not so much. During this day there were a lot of fellow MSA members that came by and said hello.

As I’m about to leave there are two older ladies who approach the booth. They look at the stand. Sophie approached them and engages with them. Offers for them to try on the hijab, which they want to do. They ask questions about Islam and the hijab. They interact with Sophie about the headscarf, which is a topic about which there is a lot of debate. As people often only hear about it in the media or see people wear it on the street, they do not get to try it on or speak to Muslim women about it. This activity gives non-Muslims the opportunity to engage with the hijab, and have a conversation about it, whilst trying it on. Sophie is the only female executive member of the MSA who doesn’t wear the hijab, and during my interview with her we talked about how sometimes people might feel more comfortable approaching her.

I feel that the other members are far more knowledgeable about the religion than I am, although I’m learning I’m not that confident. Because at Islam Awareness Week...Since I’m the only non-hijabi, people from different faiths will come and ask questions and some of them want to debate or they ask questions that I don’t know the answer to.

Here participant Sophie is putting emphasis on the fact that she is a non-hijabi, and that this results in more people wanting to approach her to ask questions about Islam during IAW. She is stating that although she is not the most confident in answering these questions, she does get questions addressed at her because she does not wear the hijab.

The hijab is considered in the west as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women (see Abu-Lughod 2002). Bullock and Jafri (2000) wrote on the misrepresentation of Muslim women in the media and the influence this had on their position in Canadian society. Bullock and Jafri write that although the media does not determine people’s opinion, it does play a significant role in dictating who belongs to the nation, and who is part of “we” and who does not belong. The hijab or veil is a particularly important part of this, as Bullock and Jafri use Said’s work to describe the three different ways in which Muslim women are describes in the media: 1) mysterious woman from the Orient, 2) oppressed woman that needs saving (special focus on the hijab in this depiction), and 3)
dangerous Muslim extremist woman (hijab is a focus in this depiction as well). These
depictions of Muslim women in the media influence how people view the hijab and thus
also women who wear the hijab. Sophie’s explanation illustrates how being a Muslim
woman who does not wear a hijab helps her access those who feel apprehensive about
the hijab because of the way it is portrayed in the media. When participant Layla told me
the story of how she started to wear the hijab she explained that in her family there was
some apprehension towards the females wearing the hijab in Canada, because of the
stereotypes that exist in the media. Layla explained that when her mother wanted to start
wearing the hijab, her father expressed being worried about the misconceptions people
would have towards her. It came up several times in the research, that participants’
parents did not want them to look “too Muslim,” for the women this consisted of
hesitance towards them wearing the hijab, and for the men it was mostly focused on
having a beard. The parents’ concern was focused on their children being too easily
identifiable as Muslims, and possible negative effects they might experience because of
it.

On the last day of IAW, I arrive around 1pm to be able to catch the last part of the
public Jumm’aah. One of the regular activities that the MSA organizes is the Friday
prayer (Jumm’aah) every Friday around 1pm. For IAW, this prayer takes place in the
Atrium so that people can observe what happens during the prayer. This is an attempt to
normalize this prayer, even if it normally does not take place in public, participants have
told me that sometimes they pray in public when there is no other option. Although I do
not belong to a religion, I have always considered prayer to be very personal. This public
prayer made me extremely uncomfortable, as if I was breaking into someone’s personal
space. The notion of religion having been placed in the private sphere has been
discussed previously in this chapter with the work of Matthew Engelke, but it is also
relevant here. Especially in light of being reflexive of my position as the researcher, the
way I view religion has in public has been influenced by where and how I grew up.
Growing up in a place where religion is considered to belong in the private sphere, my
point of view is different than if I had grown up in a place where religion belonged in the
public sphere. I did continue to watch it for the purpose of this research, but I focused
more on the other people that were watching. There were a few students who stood and
watched the prayer, but the majority of people glanced at it while they were walking up
or down the stairs and carried on with their lives. After the public prayer it seemed as if
the booth was the place to talk to each other, so everyone gathered around it and talked to each other. During this time no one approached the booth. It was mostly just MSA members chatting to each other in a relatively large group. After a while everyone who came to the prayer went their own way and only volunteers remained behind the booth. During this time there were still few people who stopped by at the booth, although everyone who passed by did look at the booth to see what it was. I would say that their facial expressions were quite neutral, and I didn’t find anyone who looked offended by the presence of the MSA. This was the last day of the IAW.

2.6. Islam Awareness Week Interpretation

In the section where I reflect on the A Journey Into Islam (earlier in this chapter), the collaboration between the Muslim community and the Christian community was mentioned. During IAW, the Christian community also set up a booth next to the MSA’s booth. This happened after they noticed the booth was there during the beginning of the week (as described above). The last few days of the week the Christian booth was also there, and there was discussion between the MSA volunteers and the students volunteering at the Christian booth. This discussion actually resulted in an event that they organized together. During the interviews I brought up the Christian booth and the participants said they thought it was interesting but that they had good conversations so that it had been fruitful in that way. The most interesting aspect of the sudden involvement and organization of the Christian student group is how they must have perceived the IAW, especially since IAW is a reoccurring event. It is my interpretation that the Christian booth was set up alongside the IAW booth because the Christian student society interpreted the booth and IAW in general, as trying to promote their student group (the MSA) rather than other functions (which will be discussed in chapter 4). It appears that they also wanted to get more members and therefore set up a booth as well. Their booth had a lot less information, and was not decorated nor did it have activities. In the end the two groups ended up organizing an event together that was well-organized and focused on similarities rather than differences.

The most remarkable occurrence was the conflict about the henna. I already went into some depth previously in this chapter, but it is important to mention it in this section too. It is clear that there is a difficult balance between the meaning behind henna and the popularity it had at the booth. Although personally I would say the traffic it
generated at the booth was probably worth the representation issue. None of the activities brought as many people to the booth as the henna one. However, there could be a replacement activity that could attract some people to the booth, but the next year when I walked past the booth there was no replacement activity. The discussion that was brought up because of this conflict was good, as representation of a religion that is very diverse is indeed an issue.

The other activities that one could take part in at IAW, such as trying on the hijab and listening to the Qur’an, were a lot less popular than the henna. During the first day the volunteers actively tried to get students to listen to the Qur’an, but there were few students who wanted this and the situation was similar to people who approach you on the street to sell something. This made the MSA volunteers uncomfortable, and especially later on in the week there were few volunteers who actively tried to engage students with this activity.

2.7. The Limits of Multiculturalism

This thesis began by outlining my theoretical framework, focusing on the literature about secularism and multiculturalism. This section analyzes how secularism and multiculturalism shape the two events, and how secularism and multiculturalism coexist in Canadian society. Secularism is the separation of church and state, and aims to remove religion from the public sphere. Multiculturalism intends to allow people from different cultures to live together. Although in many cases religion and culture cannot be separated from each other, as they are often intertwined (especially in Muslim-majority countries), I would argue that religion and culture are separate for many people in Canada, especially for those who follow the mainstream culture that is based on Judeo-Christian values. Most (white) Canadians separate their faith, or lack thereof, from culture, even if Canadian cultural values are originally based on a specific religion. So, because religion and culture are considered to be isolated from one another in Canada, it is important to question to what extent multiculturalism tolerates religion, and to what extent religion can exist in the public sphere in a multicultural society. To answer these questions, I will analyze the two events that I observed for this thesis research.

Without multiculturalism, certain aspects of these events would be considered problematic, especially in a strictly secular country where religion is often banned from
the public sphere. It follows that events about religion could not exist in the public sphere of a secular country. This is especially relevant for Islam Awareness Week, which takes place in a public university. Due to Canada having a multicultural policy, events like IAW are allowed to take place in public spaces.

However, this same multicultural framework also limits the events in certain ways. This is different for each of the events, because IAW takes place at SFU and is therefore in a public place, whilst AJII takes place in the mosque which is privately owned by the community. The multicultural framework does limit AJII, but less than IAW. This becomes evident when looking at the different activities and information that are provided at the events. At IAW there is an increased focus on aspects that could be considered cultural, in particular the henna activity which does not have strong religious significance (although this can vary from individual to individual), as it is prevalent in various religions and not just used in Islam. At IAW there are limited references to the religious aspects of Islam, although there are brochures available, the casual passer-by lancing at the booth would not encounter the pamphlets. Even at the activities that are more focused on religion, such as trying on the hijab and hearing sound clips from the call for prayer (adhan), there was limited explanation about the religious doctrine behind the practices. At AJII there was more room for these religious aspects, and this became evident by the exhibits that were more focused on explanations based on the Qur’an, such as the exhibits on jihad, prayer, and hijab. At IAW, due to its public placement and focus on cultural rather than religious signifiers of Islam, there is not much room to discuss the concept of jihad and what it means, as this part of the Islamic religion is a contentious topic, and is often considered to be the root of terrorism in the West. Multiculturalism allows for room to discuss certain concepts, especially cultural ones, in public spaces, but it still limits discussions and explanations around more religious based concepts.

It can therefore be said that although multiculturalism is often assumed to be accepting of religion, secularism is also present within this framework. This becomes especially clear when looking at national debates revolving around the niqab and

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9 The debate around the niqab was especially strong during the 2015 national elections, which happened just before Islam Awareness Week took place. The participants referenced this in casual conversation during IAW. Recently this debate has resurfaced because of the passing of Bill 62.
reasonable accommodation. These debates are not only prevalent in Quebec (known for its more secular stance) but also in the rest of Canada. These debates indicate that multiculturalism does have limits in regard to religion, which is also indicated by how the events navigate private and public, and the different concepts that can be discussed. So, even if multiculturalism and secularism are often considered to be separate, they coexist within Canadian society, demonstrated by the backlash against some religious practices. However, it will become clear in the next chapters that the participants focus more on multiculturalism in Canada, as they use the multicultural framework to navigate their own identity as it allows them to claim Canadianness.

The interplay between secularism and multiculturalism, as described above, is a type of productive tension (Eisenlohr 2006). As secularism is widely present in the Western world and attention in media and everyday narrative has been given to it, its existence (as a way of organizing society) inherently shapes multiculturalism and multicultural practices. Eisenlohr writes on the productive tension between secularism and religion in Mauritia, and writes: “I argue that the relationship between secularity and religion should be seen as a productive tension in which the religious crucially shapes secular practices and visions of social life” (2006:396). This is applicable to multiculturalism in Canada, as it is shaped by secularism being a prominent framework in the Western world. The everyday realities of the participants are shaped by both secularism and multiculturalism, even if the narrative focuses on multiculturalism, because of the productive tension between the two.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the events at which participant observation was conducted for this research. They were vastly different except for the fact that they were organized by hard working youth that cares about their community and their religion. The events were different in scope, duration, and perhaps even function. A Journey Into Islam only lasts for one night, but during that night reaches almost 1000 people, it also receives local media attention and the community prepares

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10 Reasonable accommodation refers to making adjustments for people of a certain faith, for more on this topic see Zybrzycki 2013.

11 This is a term that is further used and explained in chapter 3 (section 3.3).
for it all year long. On the other hand, Islam Awareness Week takes place over a full week and is organized twice a year. Although many people pass this booth, their direct contact with people is still a lot smaller than AJII.

The ideas of Edward Said were useful to understand the focus on particular topics during both events. Especially the notion of Orientalism, as introduced by Said, is useful to understand that these events are trying to change ideas that have been passed down through many generations and that are not based on the misrepresentation of Muslims in one media outlet, but rather based on an accumulation of misrepresentations over decades that has shaped underlying ideas about Muslims held by people in the West. This was visible in the events not only by the general theme of the evening being diversity, focusing on explaining how there is variation within the Muslim community in belief, language, culture, etc. but also in the exhibitions that were focused on such as the one on the Qur’an and on hijab, which have a long history of being misrepresented in the media because of those underlying notions of the Muslim as the ‘Other’. Although the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ is often regarded as outdated within anthropology, it became clear that there are still people who have ideas about the intrinsic differences between “Western values” and “Islamic values,” even if these ideas are subconscious and originate from what Said coined “Orientalism”, they might not be aware they have these misconceptions until they are in a situation when it comes up. This was exemplified by the comment about arranged marriages.

Having described the events and reflected on important and surprising occurrences I observed, we can use them to find out more about the people who organize them, as well as the function and effectiveness of them. In chapter 3, I will focus on the participants and their experiences in relation to gender, identity, and multiculturalism. In chapter 4, the focus will be on the previously described events and the question of their function.
Chapter 3.

The Everyday Life of Muslim Youths

Over the course of this research I had the opportunity to talk to participants from different backgrounds, at different stages of their lives, and of different denominations of Islam. They all had in common that they are currently living their lives in Canada, it continued to come up during the research what it meant to be living their lives here, and how they dealt with the everyday. Some of the participants have always lived in Western countries; others came from Muslim-majority countries to Canada recently. Whatever their situation is, in this chapter I will be exploring how their everyday lives are shaped by their identity, gender, multiculturalism, and living in Canada. I will be discussing the identity construction of the Muslim youth here in Canada and their ability to access the Canadian identity (Canadianness) and the relationship between this and their Muslim identity. Furthermore, gender and the hijab will be discussed, based on the relation between hijab and identity construction as well as the fact that Muslim women wearing hijab are much more prone to encountering Islamophobia as they are easily recognized as Muslim. The main theoretical framework of this thesis will be linked to the everyday practical lives of the participants. Lastly, several aspects of the everyday lives of Muslims that might be challenging to practice in a non-Muslim majority country will be discussed, as well as the solutions to these challenges that the participants have found.

3.1. Everyday Islam

In the article “Rediscovering the ‘Everyday’ Muslim” (2015), Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando explain that there seem to be two tensions in anthropology when dealing with the everyday lives of people, in this case Muslims. The first is between the desire, on the one hand, to delineate the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which human beings live and make sense of their lives, and, on the other hand, to underscore the commonalities and shared conditions of seemingly different life-worlds in order to define the human (59). The struggle between giving credit to every individual’s unique experience and drawing conclusions from the research about Muslim youths is present in this research. In certain ways, this is the beauty of anthropology, recognizing both. Fadil and Fernando write: “the second tension is between, on the one hand, the
imperative to identify powerful social structures and norms that mediate individuals and, on the other, the attempts to account for individual creativity, agency, and resistance” (59). In this article Fadil and Fernando recognize that there has been a recent trend within anthropology, and when focusing on Muslims, to focus on the everyday. And although Fadil and Fernando are critical of this trend and agree that there might be issues with approaching the subject in this way, they also recognize that the everyday might be the proper starting place for any ethnography committed to critical defamiliarization precisely by making legible and viable the imaginaries, hopes, and aspirations that guide the everyday conduct of people considered odd, exceptional or extraordinary, without simply rendering them as similar to ‘us’ (83).

Fadil and Fernando also explain that many anthropologists work on everyday Islam to counter the dehumanization and othering of this group (82), which is also my motivation for focusing on this topic. Additionally, I believe that that is also, at least in part, the motivation of the participants for organizing the events that I studied. Especially A Journey Into Islam focused on everyday aspects of Islam, such as the hijab and eating halal. The everyday is also a topic that came up when discussing the lives of the participants in Canada, as they would often reference or explain certain aspects of everyday life by linking this to multiculturalism. By using the concept of the everyday in this thesis, I’m not only hoping to do justice to the topics the participants consider important, but also to discover the implications of multiculturalism on daily life.

3.2. Secularism versus Multiculturalism

As previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, I did not set out to study multiculturalism and secularism. It naturally came up in the conversations with the participants and I felt like it needed to be looked into further. Previously in this thesis, I have given an overview of the literature on multiculturalism and secularism and this section will focus on the ethnographic accounts of the participants on this topic. In general, the participants were all very positive about living in Canada, and its multicultural policy. However, this does not mean that there are no problems and that the participants had never encountered racism or Islamophobia, but they still were all very positive about it and highlighted some of the advantages that living in a non-Muslim majority country has over living in a majority country.
Some of the participants have done extensive traveling or have lived in other Western countries besides Canada. It was interesting that these participants liked to draw comparisons to different countries. The most common (and maybe obvious) comparison was to the United States, and participants who compared Canada to the US always argued that it was better to be a Muslim in Canada than in the US, because of Canadian multiculturalism. Another participant had lived in France previously and explained that there was a significant difference between Canada and Europe.

Being a Muslim in Canada? Canada is obviously better than other places I have lived. It is better than France. So yeah that is one. Practicing Muslim here, yeah there are obviously still issues like recently with the whole debate about the niqab and everything. Politically one can say it is quite tense. I wouldn't say that that is a new thing, because it is not. It has been like that for thousands of years. Practicing Islam here, it is for example there is no-one who can stop me or tell me that oh you can't go to the mosque. Or we are not going to let you. It is not a practice problem but it is the perception.

Here France and Canada are being contrasted, as well as the comparison between not even being able to practice versus how Muslims are perceived. The participant is explaining that in France he perceives there to be a problem with practicing Islam, where he says it is more difficult and there are laws in place that make it harder. He is contrasting that to Canada, where he explains there is nobody to stop him from practicing his religion. In that way he likes it better, but he does state that it is not perfect and that in Canada there are still problems with how Muslims are perceived. Although I did not prompt for this participant to talk about this, neither was I aware that the participant had lived in France; I think it is an interesting to talk about the difference between France as a secular country and Canada as a multicultural country, and the everyday implications that this brings forward. The theoretical differences and important literature on this topic has been discussed in the introduction chapter, in the following section I will be focusing on the everyday implications of multiculturalism versus secularism.

An influential work on the experience of Muslims living in a secular country is the book *The Republic Unsettled* (2014) by Mayanthi Fernando. This book Fernando explores religiosity, French secularism, and how Muslims in France navigate both to create their own ideas about the future of France. In this book Fernando explore secularism in depth, and in her epilogue, she writes:
It is commonplace to hear that secularism offers the best hope for a tolerant world in which we can all live together. As previous chapters have demonstrated, however, secular tolerance is less open to alterity than it imagines itself to be, and in fact it reproduces a series of asymmetries (Fernando 2014:261).

Fernando’s quote voices similar concerns that my participant did when he compared France to Canada, and in particular when comparing the limited freedom to practice one’s religion to practicing one’s religion freely but being aware about people’s misconceptions about your religion. So why did young Muslims perceive Canada as different from France? That would be the concept of multiculturalism, which both has been a part of Canadian society culturally as well as through policy. In Canada, multiculturalism is often spoken of very positively and people express that they are proud of Canadian multiculturalism. The participants mentioned it on various occasions, for example participant Barry talks about diversity:

Canada is a pretty tolerant society, because it was based on these formations that it is a mosaic, you got to welcome everyone and you are not going to force them to change. [..] in Canada they celebrate the diversity and there are so many diverse events and everything.

And Sophie states: “Being a Muslim in Canada is easy because it is multicultural.” In these quotations, both participants expressed that Canada is multicultural and therefore tolerant of difference. They brought this up without me hinting at wanting to discuss multiculturalism, or Canadian diversity, it was rather the participants that wanted to discuss this. Sophie and Barry both used words that belong in this multicultural discourse, such as multiculturalism but also tolerance, diversity, and the mosaic. This narrative is influential within Canadian society and was reproduced by the participants in this research. Nevertheless, it is important to take a more critical stance towards this concept of multiculturalism, because it might be that the experience of the participants is different from what is described as this multiculturalism narrative but they might not be aware of that or comfortable to share it.

In the article “Multiculturalism: Still a Viable Concept for Integration” (2005), Howard Duncan outlines the Canadian multicultural policy and the societal changes that have happened in recent years. In the end, Duncan concludes that multiculturalism can still work in this diverse society, but that there must be a continuous devotion to multiculturalism and that “a society cannot simply declare itself multicultural and expect everything to take care of itself afterward” (14). Duncan brings up an interesting point
when he states that we need to remain dedicated to practicing multiculturalism, for otherwise it will slip away. A question that follows, is whether Canada was ever truly multicultural and although everyone (including my participants) seem to have internalized the multiculturalism discourse, who are the people who are able to access it.

In addition to the critique on multiculturalism outlined in the introduction, the article “The Paradox of Diversity: The Construction of a Multicultural Canada and ‘Women of Color’” by Himani Bannerji (2000) also provides insights into why the multicultural framework might be problematic. In this article Bannerji critically looks at the notions of multiculturalism and diversity and she states:

The core community is synthesized into a national ‘we’, and it decides on the terms of multiculturalism and the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated. This ‘we’ is an essentialized version of a colonial European turned into Canadian and the subject or the agent of Canadian nationalism. It is this essence, extended to the notion of a community, that provides the point of departure for the ideological deployment of diversity. The practice is clearly exclusive, not only of third-world or non-white ethnic immigrants, but also of the aboriginal population (551).

For me, Bannerji here identifies the core issue of multiculturalism as it is imposed on society by those in power and not accessible for everyone. It is an idea that we talk about—a lot—but that when it really comes to putting it in practice still meets resistance from the (white) population itself. This is visible in countless ways but one would be for example the expansion of the Ling Yen Mountain Temple Canada, which coincidentally is one of the neighbours of the Az-Zahraa Islamic Center where part of this research took place. The Buddhist congregation outgrew the temple, and the temple needed to be expanded. This resulted in a decade long (and still ongoing) dispute between the involved parties: the temple and the municipality. Funnily enough this temple is already situated, together with other religious institutions such as the Az-Zahraa mosque, outside of the city center where people who do not want to encounter this do not have to.

But the issue with the Ling Yen Mountain Temple Canada is not the only example of the resistance against multiculturalism. However, often these instances are not recognized as resistance against multiculturalism. One of the examples of this is what is often recognized as “friendly racism” and which includes comments about people of color’s English speaking abilities. Often these comments are covered up as
compliments: “oh but your English is so good!” which indicates the underlying assumptions about who belongs to the English speaking “we” and who does not.

The participants in this research might have repeated multiculturalism discourse to me; this does not mean that they are able to access it. It might have been that the participants repeated to me what they heard in the media, or what they were taught in school, which is that Canada is multicultural and that Canadian society is therefore diverse, tolerant, and a mosaic. It might also be that the participants have internalized the multicultural discourse because this allows them to “be Canadian.” Multiculturalism was introduced in Canada to silence the Quebecois who wanted to have their own nation, and multiculturalism allowed them to be different but still part of Canada. The participants might be internalizing the multicultural discourse because this allows them, although they have a different culture and religion, to still belong to Canada and feel Canadian. The literature, such as the book by Himani Bannerji, suggests that there is a very prominent power relation present in the multicultural discourse, and that certain groups can access multiculturalism more than others.

The rest of this chapter focused on several aspects of the everyday life of the Muslim youths, including identity, gender, and living in Canada, and I will be referring to the multiculturalism discourse, as well as the offered critique by Bannerji, as all these aspects of life are influenced by the participants ability to access Canadianness and Canada’s dedication to multiculturalism.

3.3. Identity

Besides being useful in understanding secularism, Mayanthi Fernando’s book *The Republic Unsettled* (2014), gives insight in the secularity of the French Republic and how this influences the religious minorities in this country, which has been previously discussed in this thesis. Fernando also makes an interesting point about the Frenchness of the Muslims, and how their identity is constructed. In her book she refers to her participants as Muslim French, to indicate that their Muslimness is of integral importance for their identity, but that this does not take away from their Frenchness. The identity construction of Muslim migrants is particularly interesting in non-majority countries. In my research I have tried to find out if the Canadian youth have a similar negotiation of
identity as Fernando describes. Instead of negotiating Frenchness and Muslimness, these youths could be constructing their identity as both Canadian and Muslim.

Whilst Fernando’s research took place over several years, I only had three months to understand the identity construction of the participants. This turned out to be quite a challenge and I could have used more time to understand the participants’ identity construction better. However, this does not mean that the participants have not provided me with interesting information about their identity construction.

Besides the international students who are only planning to reside in Canada for a short period of time, all other participants said they identify themselves as Canadian. Some participants explained that it was difficult to say they were Canadian because they do not see very strong indicators of the Canadian identity. They asked me “What does it mean to be Canadian?” and “I like hockey does that make me Canadian?” with which they tried to convey to me how they view Canada as a very diverse country and that there are many different Canadians who look different and practice different religions, which ties in with their previous comments on how Canada is multicultural and diverse. It becomes clear here that they view multiculturalism as something that is Canadian perhaps in opposition to other markers of nationality such as food. Participant Omar told me after I asked him if he felt Canadian: “Canada is not one ethnic group. It is an exploding pot of different people from different parts of the world.” Nevertheless, they told me that they often do identify themselves as Canadian. Several participants told me about incidents when they did tell someone they were Canadian, that the person questioned their Canadianness by asking for example “but where are you really from?” to indicate that the participant cannot really be from Canada as they are non-white or wear the hijab. Participant Layla recalls some incidents that happened after she started wearing the hijab:

My experiences here are positive. When I started wearing the hijab I did get two encounters that were in my face racist and I thought I would never experience that because just the settings were just so out of the blue. Even at the IAW (Islam Awareness Week) but the majority of my experiences were positive and felt safe to practice my religion here. But now politically I am not so sure about the future. I am not sure what the future really holds. Now there are a lot of people talking about a lot of misconceptions.
For Layla, there was a difference between before she wore the hijab and after. This ties in with that the participants consider Canada to be very multicultural and diverse, they believe that they have as much claim to Canadianness as anyone else. This is similar to the sentiments Fernando puts forward in her book, giving her participants the equal claim to the French identity. Multiculturalism should allow everyone equal access to the Canadian identity, which could be seen as opposing to the French situation Fernando writes about, but from the description of the participants it sounds as if they do encounter problems with this and that this “where are you really from” idea is much more prevalent in Canadian society than is recognized. With the great claims about being multicultural and a cultural mosaic, we should not turn a blind eye to the fact that for many this claim to Canadian identity is often disputed by others. This has not only come up in my research, I have friends that are non-White who endure this in their everyday lives. People who are born in this country and who speak the language fluently are sometimes turned away from accessing this Canadian identity. Whilst on the other hand, myself (not born here, plus slight accent) am sometimes given comments about how people think I am Canadian. I have no desire to access Canadianness, but it is telling about how there is a difference for who it is okay to identify as Canadian, and for who it is not. I will further write on the everyday life experiences with racism and living in a multicultural society in section 3.4.

Besides accessing the Canadian part of the identity, most participants talked a lot about the Muslim part of their identity. For some participants, such as Omar, being Muslim is what defines him.

Being a Muslim means, it is basically an identity for me as a person. Being part of the Muslim ummah, that is one of the thing. Being a Muslim is who I am. That’s what defines me. I would define as a Muslim first and then as a Bangladeshi or whatever nationality. For me it is about identity.

Here Omar explains that being Muslim is his identity and that he also strongly identifies as a part of the Muslim Ummah (which could be seen as the complete community of all Muslims all over the world). For Omar, being a Muslim comes before national identity. Omar also explained to me that he struggled with this identity before. He told me he was taught to tell people he was Muslim even during times when he was not practicing the religion very strictly. This made him uncomfortable, identifying as a Muslim without knowing enough about it, and he told me that this made him look into his faith more and
actually become a practicing Muslim. Even though he was always told that he should identify as a Muslim, he only felt comfortable with it after he became a practicing Muslim. Valentina shared similar sentiments with me, as she also told me being a Muslim is always with her and she cannot separate being a Muslim from any other aspect in life. She explained that she became more religious when she came to Canada.

The most religious I have ever been was when I came here. Because my town is a Muslim town you would think, there it was all about culture. There people mix religion and culture.

Here Valentina explains that when she was living in her home country, the culture and the religion were mixed, and it was therefore more difficult to distinguish between the two. When one is living their lives, and conforming to the culture of the country, this is intertwined with the religion of the country, as culture and religion are inseparable. Other participants, including Sophie, shared this notion of having the opportunity of becoming more religious because she no longer lived in a Muslim (majority) country. Sophie explained that the MSA was the first time she volunteered for an association that is focused on her religion explicitly, as in her home country religion and culture entangled. Sophie also explained to me that she is very patriotic, and that she therefore would identify mostly by her nationality. For her, her nationality implied her religion. However, she lately changed this to identifying as a Muslim first and then as her nationality.

I'm really patriotic and tell them that I'm Pakistani and when people hear that you are from Pakistan, they naturally know that I'm a Muslim. Some people don't even know where Pakistan is so that's a different story. When I came I was, and I am still, very patriotic but now I say that I'm a Muslim first and then I'm a Pakistani.

Understanding the identity of the participants goes beyond focusing on their religion and their national identity. It encapsulates their identities as students, brothers and sisters, and friends. When talking to the participants about these various aspects that make up their identity, they explained that they consider their Muslim identity as their primary identity, and that it is not separate from their other identities, such as being a student. The participants explain that as a student or a friend they still try to act in accordance with their religion, and that, therefore, their Muslim identity always comes first.

In this section on identity, I have looked at two different aspects: accessing Canadianness and being Muslim as the most important aspect of one's identity. I would
argue that they are both equally important, although there are people who might say this is contradictory, as indicated by for example the niqab debate that happened during the last national elections. When reading Mayanthi Fernando’s work, I agreed with her use of Muslim French because her explanation of giving them the opportunity to access that French identity unconditionally is very logical to me. I also expected the situation in Canada to be unlike the French situation, and therefore expected to get a different result because of the contrast between living in a multicultural versus a secular country. It turns out that it is almost as difficult to access the Canadian identity – although there are questions about what this exactly would entail – for my participants, as it would be in French society. Accessing this Canadian identity is important, not only for the participants themselves but also to establish and maintain an equal and diverse society. If some people (white, Christian) are deemed to be more Canadian than others, this takes away from being a diverse country. This relates to the critique by Bannerji that was discussed in the previous section, on that there is only a distinct group of people who can access multiculturalism.

The participants want to access this Canadianness and appreciate multiculturalism. Simultaneously, they also feel like being a Muslim is what defines them, both because Islam is a way of life and most Muslims view their religion as all encompassing in all aspects of their lives. Being a Muslim is at the same time what sets them apart from others, and why they do get questions about where they are from. They should be able to be Muslim, and access the Canadian identity at the same time, which would bring a more inclusive society where everyone is able to access national identity without having to compromise other parts of themselves. This supports critical views of multiculturalism by showing that although it is policy, the everyday experience is different and the question “where are you really from” indicates the actual situation in this multicultural country.

In the introduction of this thesis, several critiques of multiculturalism were discussed. Specifically, it was argued, by discussing the works of both Bannerji and Razack, that multiculturalism perpetuates the Othering of non-white people or people with a non-Christian religion. They argued that with a multicultural discourse the focus is on difference, and that this reinforces ideas and processes of Othering people.
3.4. Gender

When writing about Islam the topic of gender is almost unavoidable. There is a lot of research available about women in Islam in different fields and with a variety of conclusions. One example is Katherine Bullock’s (2012) article on the political engagement of Muslim women in Canada, in which she problematizes the lack of Muslim women in (formal) politics and explores the roles Muslim women play in informal politics and activism. Bullock argues that this is a way of political engagement. Other research on Muslim women in Canada includes Nadia Lewis’ (2008) article in which she researches the identity construction of Muslim women in Toronto. These are just a few sources that focus on women in Canada, but there are many more sources about women and Islam in non-majority countries, as well as in majority countries. As many of my participants are female, the topic of gender naturally came up often, however the male participants also were highly aware of the role that gender plays. One way in which gender plays a role in Muslim organizations, especially the MSA, is that within the organization students tend to socialize with their own gender and limit interactions with the opposite gender. This became clear at the beginning of the research when I introduced myself at an MSA meeting and females sat on one side of the room, and males on the other side. The MSA also organizes activities focused females only, namely Sisters Speak. Looking at women in Islam the one topic that comes up again and again is that of the hijab. Although the Muslim community tries to educate non-Muslims about the fact that hijab, which refers to modesty and should also be practiced by men\(^\text{12}\) (this was part of one of the booths at A Journey Into Islam), in the West we do often talk about the head covering of women in Islam. From my research I learned that wearing the hijab was a very personal choice for many of the participants and that it influenced their lives in many ways.

Tying into the previous section about identity, when speaking about their identity the female participants told me about wearing the hijab.

\(^{12}\) Hijab or modesty for men is a topic that is written about often, although the discussion is taking place amongst scholars of Islam rather than in an academic setting. It includes the lowering of the gaze and not socially associating themselves with females when they are unmarried. However, most discussion on this topic is based on theological analysis of the Qur’an, which I’m not qualified to participate in. An example of this discussion is Pervez 2015 (via whyislam.org).
I wear the hijab so that on its own, Muslim will come first. Because when I put on the hijab I'm representing Islam. I'm not putting on a label of my country or anything else. I am wearing the hijab so when someone sees me, the first thing they know is that this is a Muslim person.

This means that because the participants are wearing the hijab they make sure that everyone sees that they are Muslim and it therefore becomes their primary identity, not only for themselves but also for others as they are recognized as Muslim immediately. The importance of this seems to be based on belonging to a community. Participants explained that they sensed a great deal of belonging when they would see another Muslim at school and they would great each other in Arabic (by saying “as-salamu alaykum”). Wearing the hijab would instantly make them recognizable within this community. Although some participants recognized that not everyone outside of their own community is aware of Muslims and hijab, there are few groups who still wear headcoverings. Layla explains:

But if I were asked here, people automatically know that I'm not Caucasian because of my features, so I have to say and sometimes they are confused about what religion or faith I'm from, even though who else wears a hijab nowadays, except nuns or Orthodox Jews.

The participants liked the idea that no one questions their identity as a Muslim, because the hijab symbolizes it. Besides having a sense of community, it might also be based on not wanting to explain what their religion is and constantly having to wonder what the response to that might be. However, even with not having to tell people they are Muslim, being visibly identifiable as Muslim still brings negative consequences for the participants, which vary in severity but did include one participant being called a terrorist whilst she was walking on the street.

When talking to the participants about the most frequently asked questions they get at their Islam Awareness Weeks, the female participants told me that they often get questions about wearing the hijab and whether they are oppressed. Valentina stated: “There are certain questions that people always have about Islam. It is always the same ones like the hijab. Are you being forced to wear it or are women oppressed in Islam.” This question can be linked to the discussion of the works on Edward Said in chapter 2 of this thesis, where the topics that came up during these events were discussed. Hijab was one of the topics that was present at both AJII and IAW, and this reason for this is reinforced by Valentina’s statement. Besides Said’s concept of Orientalism that was
discussed in chapter 2, and the notion of the ‘clash of civilizations’ that was also
discussed in chapter two, the work of Lila Abu-Lughod is also helpful in understanding
the ideas people have about Islam and oppression. In Abu-Lughod’s (2002) article, she
explores ideas surrounding the burqa and the meanings of veiling in the Arab world. The
first part of the article however, discusses the focus of people in the West on the veiling
of women in the Middle East and the notion that they need to be saved because they are
oppressed. This has been perpetuated by the media, and it is therefore a topic that non-
Muslims have strong opinions about.

The participants told me that during some IAW they get more questions about it
than during others, as the media highly influences what is on the public’s mind. When
there just had been debates about headscarves in the media, the participants would get
more questions about this during IAW.

Another point about women wearing the hijab was brought up by the male
participants. This happened when we talked about what it was like to live in Canada. The
male participants said that they enjoyed living in Canada and that they had limited
Islamophobic experiences, however, several of them attributed this to the fact that they
are not easily recognized as Muslim. Canada being a diverse country with a substantial
population from Hindu countries, these participants attributed the lack of Islamophobic
encounters to the fact that people might think that they are not Muslim but Hindu. The
male participants then explained to me that their sisters (which is how they refer to
Muslim women) had it a lot more difficult as they are more easily recognized as Muslim,
because they wear the hijab. In the media the debates about Muslim women being
oppressed or forced to wear the hijab has made the hijab a symbol for Islam. Whilst a lot
of the participants are of course happy and proud to display their faith in public, it can
also lead to fear.

So, since I have moved here, with Steven Harper, and all the things he
said, and the things that happened in Paris and the ISIS attacks, the
rise of ISIS basically, we have noticed a lot of Islamophobia and that is
has made me scared you know. You hear so many things that have
happened across Canada, in London a lady was pushed onto the train
tracks and all these things, and in B.C. we are lucky because we haven’t
experienced it as much. It has put a sense of fear into me that I have
never experienced before.
Here Sarah explains that Muslim women have been targeted with violence and that because she also wears the hijab, she is more easily identified as a Muslim, and therefore more likely to be a target as well. Sarah explained that in recent years she had been more afraid of this than before, and that even after she moved to Canada Islamophobia had also increased in Canada. The discussion with Sarah on the rise of Islamophobia was the most in-depth discussion of this topic that I had during the research, and Sarah’s explanations of her worries were very valid. This interview also focused a lot less on the idealized notion of multiculturalism.

For the female participants, there are two sides to wearing the hijab, on the one hand it makes them an easier target for Islamophobia, but at the same time they are proud of their religion and they enjoy the fact that the first impression people have of them always includes their Muslim identity as they do see this identity as being the most important. There is a dichotomy present between on the one hand visibly belonging to a community and feeling secure in the fact that your community greets you and will help you when you are in need of help. And on the other hand, visibly belonging to such a community makes one an easy target for racism and Islamophobia. The female participants focused mostly on explaining that they enjoyed being visibly identifiable as Muslim, even tough they are the ones that are often targeted by this racism and Islamophobia. In the introductory chapter, one of the critiques of multiculturalism that was brought forward is the idea that multiculturalism results in minority groups that have strong community ties, but that are still perceived as outsiders. The situation that is described by the participants here fits this critique, although it perhaps also allows us to understand that what is seen as a drawback of multiculturalism by people who study it, this might be different for the people experiencing it. There might be the idea of the ‘Othering’ of people in society, but this might at the same time result in very strong community ties.

3.5. Living in Canada

Multiculturalism is a topic that was often raised when talking about topics related to living in Canada and how the participants deal with the everyday struggles that come with living in a non-Muslim majority country, such as finding ways to eat halal and pray five times a day. This became another recurring theme in my research, what are practical challenges Muslims in this country face when trying to follow their religion. One
aspect of their everyday lives that I often encountered was praying five times a day, not only did the participants schedule the interviews around this but they often talked about the Interfaith center at SFU. The Interfaith center is a place for worshipping that the different religious affiliations at SFU share. Different clubs/associations pay fees towards this so their members can use it. I was first introduced to it when I went to the MSA meeting for the first time. Not only is there a room for prayer at the Interfaith center, but also rooms for the clubs to have meetings. Since many of the participants (though it should be noted that not everyone) are students at SFU, they all had knowledge of the Interfaith center and it became a central point in my research. Not only did the event that the MSA organized take place close to it, I also met all my participants at the Interfaith center since this was the easiest way to find each other on campus. As a result, I often conducted the interviews just after prayer times to make it convenient for the participants. The Interfaith center is related to one of the five pillars of Islam, the prayer that takes five times a day. Whenever one visits Muslim majority countries, you can hear the call for prayer during the times that it should take place, this call for prayer is called adhan. In non-Muslim majority countries, this call for prayer is not heard in the public sphere, away from the mosque (more on religious sound in chapter 4). This results in several practicalities that the Muslims in non-majority countries have to take into account. The first one is, since there is no call for prayer, when does one pray. Participants have shared with me that they use apps on their phone to keep up with this, so although they do not have the call for prayer, they do get a notification on their phone. But of course, this is just a minor difference, the real difference and possible problem arises when you need to pray five times a day and you need to go to work with people who do not. In Muslim majority countries, almost everyone goes and prays during work times, but what happens if you want to pray in the middle of your workday here in Canada. I expected this to be a problem, as I have heard people complaining about people taking breaks to smoke and this being unfair as they work less. However, after talking about this extensively with my participants it turns out that they do not face this problem. Many of the participants are students, and they use the Interfaith center at school, but even at their side-jobs they feel very supported and are given the opportunity to practice their religion.

If you need to pray at the workplace, like in high school I would never ask a teacher to pray, but in the workplace, that was my first questions: "can I get a place to pray?" And I was surprised, one of the cashiers that
knew about Muslims and everything, they were like "oh yeah just go to this place and there is an empty space there". You can go pray there. They really understand and it just takes time to adjust but if you have a will there is going to be a way. (Barry)

That's been so great actually. So, basically, I had an opportunity to work in a retail store and it was a shoe company. So, basically, my manager she was really nice, I didn't expect her to. I always carry a prayer mat with me, in case I need to pray somewhere, outside somewhere like in a parking lot. I asked my manager, we had a small backroom where we could go on break, I had to pray and I asked in the beginning told her that I had to pray five times a day so is it okay if I pray? She was so nice about it, I have been so lucky. [...] She would actually make an effort to remind me to pray. It has been pretty amazing. I told my parents about it and they were just amazed. (Sophie)

Barry and Sophie both explain the support they have received at their jobs, whether that is in retail or in the supermarket, both their managers were willing to accommodate their religious needs. I talked about this with another participant also, who is soon going to have to look for a full-time real job. She explained to me that she is in a field that requires moving fast and working hard and long, often without breaks. When asking her how she was going to navigate this, she stated:

When I was working as an intern, those shifts were more flexible so I was able to go pray on my break, but when I will get to work now, I don't know how it will be. I'm really hoping that I can continue that because it is very important to me. [...] I think it is also voicing that you have to go do something, so like when I'm going to start working I will probably not get breaks so me having the strength and be like "I need 5 minutes guys, I will be right back" and five minutes is nothing it is just like you went to the bathroom. But it is about having the strength to do that and telling your coworkers and finding the space and arranging for it all. (Sarah)

I think these instances illustrated two important aspects of this potential issue. Firstly, it shows that these are topics that the Muslims I talked to were conscious off and that they were and are planning on navigating these themselves in the best way possible. Secondly, it exhibits the willingness of people to find solutions for these issues that they themselves might not be familiar with. The accommodation of praying has become normal, as I got to experience first-hand as a TA with a student who needed to attend Friday prayer during tutorial. The department accommodates religious practice and therefore this student could come in late every week without being penalized for it. Although we have established previously in this chapter that multiculturalism might not
be perfect, this accommodation would could not happen in a strictly secular country, as this is contradictory to that ideology which keeps religion in the private sphere.

The above quotation by Sarah indicates that she is unsure whether she will be able to pray during her working hours once she finds a new job. Recently graduated, her only experience in the job market has been with internships. While approaching the issue with a positive attitude, she told me honestly that she did not know what to expect when it comes to employers accommodating her religious practices. She planned to approach her future employer for time to pray, and was hoping it would not be a problem, as it previously had not been an issue during her time as an intern in the same work field. None of the participants told me of any instances in which they were not able to fully practice their religion due to constraints put on their time, although most of the participants were students, and therefore utilized SFU’s accommodation for religious practice. Since the participants did not discuss this topic further, it is difficult to speculate how they would deal with it if it was not possible to accommodate their religious practices into their daily work routines. I expect most will not have difficulty finding an employer that adheres to the Canadian Human Rights Laws regarding religious accommodation in the workplace. But if they were to encounter a situation in which it was not possible to pray at work they would have to decide to either look for a different job or take further legal steps. The participants all indicated that their religion is very important to them, and I assume that they would want to make necessary arrangements to be able to practice it.

Praying at work is directly connected to the limits and possibilities of multiculturalism that were discussed in the previous chapter (section 2.7), as praying during work or school hours does not conform with secular ideology. If and how this is implemented in other countries in unclear to me, but it is not difficult to imagine that multiculturalism does have its limits in regard to religion in the workplace. Instances were tension around the topic of religion in the workplace often arise are not necessarily

\[13\] Religious accommodation in the workplace is part of Canadian Human Rights Law. Canadian employers are therefore required to adhere to this. SFU has a section about religious accommodation on their website: https://www.sfu.ca/humanrights/guides-protocols/religious-accommodation.html

There is a lot of information to find about religious accommodation, and the laws differ per country.
focused on taking a break to pray, but rather occur around the idea of men and women having limited contact with one another, and therefore not wanting to work together.\footnote{An example of this is the case of a student at York University who asked to be excused from a group project, since his fellow group members were female and he could not meet with them in public because of his religious beliefs. This request was granted by the Dean of Arts at that university.}

Praying five times a day is only one of the aspects of the Islamic faith that inhabitants of non-Muslim majority countries are not used to. The participants also brought up eating halal meat. ‘Halal’ is an Arabic term for what is allowed or passable according to traditional Islamic law, it is the opposite of “haram” which refers to that which is forbidden. In relation to food, halal meat means that the animal is slaughtered in a specific way whilst a specific phrase is being said. Although halal meat has become more widely available in the West, to the point that I have even encountered it in the freezer section of Wal-Mart before, the participants did tell me that they struggled with this.\footnote{For more information on halal food in British Columbia, see Alhabshi (2013).}

Participant Barry compares Vancouver to Toronto:

It is kind of boring because everything closes at nine. All you have here for night time is clubs and drinking and as a Muslim you can’t enjoy that. Especially in B.C. I would say because there is not a large Muslim population compared to somewhere like Toronto. I’ve been there in summer and there are many Muslims. There are a lot of halal restaurants there, it’s like you don’t even feel like you are away from a Muslim country because there is so much there.

Although Barry is also reporting on the difference between social activities that Muslims enjoy in Toronto versus the lack of them in B.C., he also particularly mentions that there are many halal restaurants in Toronto. This is something that he misses in B.C. Other participants also explained that when they first arrived in Canada that they were unaware of the fact that the meat is not halal. In Muslim majority countries all the meat is halal, as there is no market to sell non-halal meat. Participants once again had to adjust. Going out for dinner is also a social activity that a lot of youths engage with. During one of the days that I was doing participant observation I had a great conversation with one of the volunteers. We talked about these everyday life problems, and she told me that she liked going out to eat with her friends. I had heard from others that they sometimes struggled with this as there are not many halal restaurants. However, this student had a different vision as he explained to me that Vancouver was a good place to be. In recent
years Vancouver has seen a rise in the health food industry, including a food industry that is more and more accommodating to vegans and vegetarians. This means that Muslims might not be able to find a halal restaurant to go out to eat, but they will find that most restaurants have dishes that they can eat. To me this really exemplifies how the mindset of the people I have encountered make a difference, they seem to adjust easily and find solutions that can work for them. So, when halal food is not available, they will eat vegetarian food. Although the flexibility of the participants, and the Muslims in this area in general, is commendable, this does exemplify one of the areas in which compromises must be made. Although halal meat is available in some supermarkets, especially in places where there is a large concentration of Muslims, there are still many who have to travel quite some distance to access it. Websites such as BC Muslims give an overview of where find halal butchers in the lower mainland, although some supermarkets will sell halal meat in their freezer section. Participant Barry’s problem of not having access to many halal restaurant, on the other hand, will require the compromise of eating vegetarian when going out for dinner.

During IAW there was also the opportunity to try on the hijab, and this sparked another great discussion about finding what you need and using resources. When trying on the hijab I asked the girls where they normally find their headscarves, this mostly coming from my own ignorance, as I had no idea if there were special stores for this. Again, I was shown how adaptable people can be when needed, and how these women not only find ways to work with their religious needs but also make it fit their student budget. One of the women explained to me that although there were special stores where one could buy headscarves, and that these were mostly situated in Surrey, she always went to clothing stores where they sell scarfs and bought those on sale. She sometimes would get them for as little as 50 cents, which allowed her to buy them in a few colors. These stores in themselves had nothing to do with religion, but the products they sell were used in a way that works for these Muslim women.

Previously in this chapter I highlighted the participants positive opinion of multiculturalism. Despite the social rhetoric and political policies of multiculturalism participants also told me about instances of racism that they had encountered in Canada. Almost all participants shared personal anecdotes about remarks or other expressions of racism that they had experienced, which ranged from taking place in the university, to people making remarks on the bus, and getting called a terrorist when
walking on the street in downtown Vancouver. Although they experienced these individual acts of racism, they remained positive about multiculturalism.

Living in Canada in comparison to living in a Muslim-majority country can provide some challenges, besides the praying, eating halal, and finding suitable hijab scarfs, the participants face many other challenges (e.g. fasting during Ramadan whilst going to school/work) that were not mentioned above. However, in the previous paragraphs I have tried to show that they are very resourceful and find ways to adjust to the society they live in, without abandoning their religious practices.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the everyday life of Muslim youths and linked this to their notions of being Canadian and living in a multicultural society, as well as to academic critiques of multiculturalism. In the introduction of this chapter, the work of Fadil and Fernando (2015) was discussed as a critical engagement with the topic of the everyday Muslim. In this chapter we have been able to witness both similarities between different participants, but also differences. It is important to realize that there is not one everyday Muslim, but that in Canada there are many Muslims living their everyday lives. This chapter has uncovered that the participants do value multiculturalism very much, but that their everyday experiences also reflect the critiques of multiculturalism that have been brought up in the literature. The critique that although the minority communities have strong ties within, they are still viewed as outsiders, which was illustrated by the example of women wearing hijab to be recognizable as Muslim.

Although there are many critiques of multiculturalism within academia (see chapter 1 for a discussion on these), the participants value multiculturalism greatly. The discrepancy between the academic understandings of multiculturalism versus the participants’ understanding might result from the everyday discourse on multiculturalism. Within Canada there is a large focus on multiculturalism and how this is a defining characteristic of the country, in everyday discourse it is mostly talked about positively. In this chapter, it has been discussed that a possible reason for the repeated discourse of multiculturalism by the participants is related to multiculturalism being one of the most important aspects of Canadian identity, and that this relates to the participants accessing Canadian national identity. The participants have internalized the multicultural narrative
as this allows them to access Canadian national identity, because of the focus on diversity and the mosaic. The participants fit into this narrative as they are not ‘white, European, settler Canadians’ but have diverse ethnic and religious roots. This chapter has focused in particular on the critiques that multiculturalism encourages ‘Othering.’ In the academic community, scholars have been critical of multiculturalism, but these critiques have not made it into everyday discourse (yet).
Chapter 4.

Da’wa and Changing Misconceptions

As mentioned before in the introduction of this thesis, I started out thinking that the organizers of the events had intended to change non-Muslims’ misconceptions about Islam. Although I still believe that this is one of the objectives behind organizing the events, there is also a different intention that has come to light, which is da’wa. I believe that the two events are organized with different intentions and negotiate these two goals in a different way. In this chapter I will discuss what da’wa is, how both events try to achieve da’wa and change misconceptions, and the differences between the two events regarding strategies and aims. I will also be discussing some of the personal goals of the participants towards the end of this chapter.

4.1. What is da’wa?

The concept of da’wa first came up during one of my interviews when I asked one of the participants what the main function of the event was. She said the main function was da’wa and she defined it as “inviting people to understand Islam.” There are many different definitions of what da’wa entails, but during the interview it was explained to me in the following manner. One of the participants explained that as part of their religion it is considered a duty to invite people to Islam because you believe that this religion is the ultimate truth and that it brings you good things in life. Therefore, the participants explained that they enjoyed inviting people to the religion as they believe it is the most beautiful and best things that happened to them. Mahmood explains that da’wa means “call, invitations, appeal, or summons” (2005:57). She continues to explain that da’wa is a concept present in the Qur’an, and that it is focused on “God’s call to the prophets and to humanity to believe in the ‘true religion,’ Islam” (57). Mahmood continues to explain that although da’wa is often aimed at non-Muslims, it can be sometimes directed at Muslims to invite them to focus more on their religion (57). The latter is what Mahmood writes about in her book Politics of Piety (2005).

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16 There are different ways of spelling the word da’wa, I have based my spelling on Saba Mahmood’s writing in her book Politics of Piety (2005).
As Zine explains, da’wa is one of the main goals of MSAs: “Islamic education or ‘dawah’ is also a goal of these organizations, which sponsor Islamic study circles as well as forums to introduce non-Muslim students and teachers to Islam” (2000:295). As described above by Mahmood and Zine, the focus of da’wa is to invite non-Muslims to Islam, but it also includes encouraging Muslims to do more with their faith/deepen their faith. The MSA that was studied in this research did organize events that allow their members to deeper their faith, such as lectures and prayers, but these were not included in the scope of this research. Although da’wa is often considered to mean proselytizing, historically it has been more dynamic than this. Da’wa is not only about converting people to Islam, but also about encouraging Muslims to strengthen their faith. As times change, da’wa has changed as well. Rather than viewing it as a static concept that has had the same meaning over time, it should be understood as a dynamic concept.

4.2. A Journey into Islam – Changing Misconceptions

From the two events AJII focuses more on changing misconceptions rather than da’wa, but the participants did have varying opinions about this. However, from learning about how A Journey Into Islam came into being from the initiator, I believe that the main aim of the event is to answer questions and to address misconceptions. One of the participants told me that the idea came up when many of his friends and fellow students had questions about a variety of topics related to his religion. He realized that when his friends have these questions, that there must be others who have these questions too. The event was their response to this, as it would provide a platform for people to ask questions about various topics. This becomes apparent when you attend AJII, as many of the topics addressed in the exhibition are known from being controversial in the media, think for example about the hijab as well as Jihad. Throughout the years there have also been exhibits that particularly focus on changing misconceptions and some years the event was even named changing misconceptions. During the year that this research took place, there was no such exhibit, although there were exhibits on the jihad, hijab, and eating halal. When attending AJII, the feeling that you get from the volunteers is that they want to educate you about their faith rather than convert you. The information is focused on providing basic information about Islam (almost Islam for Dummies style). There was no focus on spiritual knowledge but more on concrete information, e.g. Muslims pray five times a day or the Hajj is a pilgrimage to Mecca. Also,
during the dinner part of the event the focus is mostly on answering questions the non-Muslims have. Whilst I was at dinner one of the questions was if they have arranged marriages for their children, which was answered in a very practical way rather than referring to the spiritual beliefs or even the Qur’an. Although the main goal of AJII is the changing of misconceptions, there are still people invited into the mosque and they learn about Islam. There have been conversions after this event and therefore there is still an underlying sense of da’wa.

4.3. Islam Awareness Week – Da’wa

The other event that was attended during this research did focus more on da’wa, which is not what I expected. Before interviewing people from the organization, I thought that there would be more of a focus on changing misconceptions and making people aware that there are Muslims on campus. There definitely was still a place for this during the event, but everything was a lot more focused on what is in the Qur’an and the more spiritual aspects. This was especially visible in the brochures that were on the table and the pocket-size Qur’ans that were for people to take with them.
There were brochures with titles like “God in Islam” and “What is the Purpose of Life” which are more focused on the spiritual side of the religion. However, when interacting with students who stopped by to get henna the conversation was more in the direction of changing misconceptions or at least answering questions that they have about Islam. Another interesting aspect of this event was that they would invite people to listen to the call for prayer from a mosque. This could be considered a normal sound in many Muslim-majority countries, but it is not something that we hear in the West as often. The call to prayer, which is called adhan, and other religious sounds, are at the center of Isaac Weiner’s (2014) book on religious sounds and American pluralism. Amongst other things, this book does not just focus on Islam and the call to prayer, but this does play a role in it. Weiner introduces a variety of religious communities, amongst whom is the Islamic Organization of North America and their attempt to convert a building into a mosque in Warren, Michigan. Weiner writes that “complaints about religious noise have rarely been ‘just’ about noise” (196). The response to these religious sounds has an historical context, as well as being are rooted in the understanding of individuals about what belongs in their society. This is related to multiculturalism, as it is part of the discussion of what aspects of Islam can be practiced and in what way, in a multicultural society.

As mentioned previously, one of the activities at IAW included that the organizers would ask students who were passing by the stand to listen to the call to prayer, and the student’s response to it. The students who listened to it did not speak Arabic so they were unable to understand what was being said. I cannot be sure as to why they choose this activity for their booth, but the sounds seem to evoke a feeling amongst people which could be related to focusing more on the spiritual aspect of the religion. Also, it could be related to Weiner’s ideas on religious noise in the public space, and might be a way to familiarize students with these sounds. When people have been introduced to it in this way, it is less likely they would have a negative response to it when they hear it outside.

4.4. Personal goals

Although above I have shared a general overview of how I believe these events can be categorized, most of the participants had personal opinions about what the events were trying to accomplish. On the one hand, it is interesting to look at what the
events are doing in terms of changing misconceptions or da'wa, but the personal reflections of the participants are also important. In every interview I asked the participants what, according to them, the function of the event was.

Participant Layla, part of the organizational committee of the IAW, explained that it was to “reach out” to both Muslims and non-Muslims. She explained that it was to “provide presence” of Muslims on campus, to both show Muslims that they are not alone and that there is a community of Muslims on campus, but also to give students the opportunity to encounter Muslims on campus as this is often the first time encountering Muslims. Layla also said that they were “not there to debate or to convince anyone” but “just to provide information and just to lay down the facts.”

Another member of the organizational committee of the IAW, Omar, gave me some insight into how he views the IAW as well. He said that “the function is basically what the name implies: awareness.” He explained that he often had noticed that once people have a Muslim friend who they could ask questions about the misconceptions that they might have, their “perceptions towards Muslims would change.” And so Omar views IAW as both raising awareness and filling that role of friend for people who might not know any other Muslims. For participant Kate, also from the MSA, the function of the IAW is threefold. She explained that combatting misconceptions, explaining what Muslims believe and increasing the presence on campus are all functions of the event. Participant Valentina said that to her the function of IAW is “da'wa, inviting people to understand Islam.” Which relates back to the definition that was offered by Saba Mahmood in the beginning of this chapter, as what Valentina describes as da’wa is identical to how Mahmood describes it. However, it is difficult to know how exactly the participant(s) understand the concept of da’wa, and whether this is something they discuss amongst themselves as the reason for the event.

From the AJII committee participant Zara explained that their event is a means to show people from outside the community who they are, and that the it reflects that they are a warm community that share a faith. She also explained that it is very important to connect with people, not just from their own religious community but also with people around them. Zara also explained that a lot of the volunteers at AJII really resonate with this message, but that it is also a good way to connect with people within the community.
Most of the participant’s views on what the functions of the events are, are in line with what I observed when attending them. Some of them do share more specific views on what is being achieved, as well as that it shows how the events have both changing misconceptions and da’wa as their aims.

4.5. Media

When discussing the function of the event with the participant there was one reoccurring theme added to what the function of the event is, and that is the portrayal of Muslims in the media. Barry, from the MSA, said that the function of IAW is “that Muslims are not what the media portrays.” This is strongly related to the discussing in chapter 2 on the book *Covering Islam* (1997) by Edward Said, in which he argues that the media perpetuates the idea of Orientalism, and that it is therefore internalized by people in the West.

Especially amongst the AJII organizational committee members the portrayal of Muslims in the media was a big issue. In a previous year, AJII was focused on ‘misconceptions in the media’ and all the booths in that year focused on that. Sarah explained that a lot of the time the media dictates their story and that an opportunity for self-representation is missing. For her this event gives them the opportunity to represent themselves “how we really are.” She explained that non-Muslims often do not have any other information than what is coming from the media and that this event changes that. Participant Musa also said that the function of the event is to show people what Islam means to Muslims, and that it is not what the media portrays it to be. Representations of Muslims in the media have been studied with increased frequency in the past years. Not only is it a topic of interest in Canada, but across the Western world there have been studies done on how Muslims are represented in Western media. Diane Watt (2012) researched how a photo of a Muslim woman shaped how knowledge about Muslims is “constructed, circulated, and legitimized via social institutions such as the print media, as well as possible effects” (Watt 2012). Watt concludes that although assuming a simple cause and effect relationship is not nuanced enough, there needs to be more attention to this issue as there is evidence that the media is used to gain information about ourselves and others (Watt 2012). Amir Saeed (2007) suggests that the British media represents Muslims and Islam as an “alien other” and that they are depicted as “Un-British” and “deviant.”
More literature on the topic exists (see Elgamri 2008; Said 2012; Varisco 2005; Kabir 2006) and the topic has been quite extensively covered within anthropology and other fields in the previous years, especially in the years after the September 11 attacks it became a popular topic of study. Although this thesis is not concerned with studying media representations, it is important to discuss it briefly as it was of great concern amongst the participants.

4.6. Responsibility

Previously in this chapter, I have argued that the primary function of A Journey Into Islam is to counter misconceptions, and this has been echoed by the personal opinions of the participants described above. A Journey Into Islam has brought about a few conversions, although it is most likely that those who converted were looking for a mosque to belong to when they attended the event rather than coming as someone who has misconceptions. The event itself does not focus on conversion at all, and I have not witnessed anything that would suggest people to convert.

Regarding countering misconceptions, I had an interesting discussion with one of my participants, Farha, on the function of the event and whether it is the responsibility of the Muslim community to counter these misconceptions. When discussing the function of the event with Farha she explained that the primary function of the event is to “provide an open and safe space to get information” and to visit a mosque. That people are able to ask questions, learn new things, and meet Muslims. When the topic of misconceptions later in the interview came up, the shared her opinion on this topic with me. She explained that within the community the opinions vary about whether or not it is the responsibility of Muslims to counter Islamophobia. She explained that, in her opinion, it was not the responsibility of the Muslim community to do this, and especially not to apologize for things that are not their fault. Farha explained that she feels that it is not “our job to explain to every islamophobe or racist what our faith is about.” This relates to the book chapter by Geneviève Zubrzycki (2013) on Quebec and reasonable accommodation, as it is about the question on adaptation. Who should adapt to who? Although Zubrzycki focuses on Quebec, which has a different cultural and religious tradition, and has recently followed France by focusing much more on secularism rather than multiculturalism, the issue is similar. Participant Farha is questioning why the initiative and the effort needs to be with the Muslim community to accommodate to
people who are opposed to their faith by explaining it to them. On the other hand, the chapter by Zybrzycki focuses on religious accommodation for minorities, such as asking the fathers of children taking a swimming exam to leave because it would make the Muslim women who were taking a swimming class at the same time uncomfortable (216). The main question thus remains, should minorities adapt to explain their faith, or even assimilate, to the majority? Or should the majority accommodate minorities as described in the chapter. This links back to the (theoretical) discussion previously in this thesis (chapter 1 and chapter 3). The answer to it is not simple, as both sides have voiced strong opinions on the topic, and the issue runs deeper than if these events are a way of accommodating the non-Muslims who have wrong opinions about Islam. The cultural and religious traditions of the country, and its different regions, have a large influence on how people perceive one another.

During this part of the interview with Farha, she really expressed almost opposing thoughts to what I had heard so far and it is very interesting that she expressed that the Muslim community itself struggles with this. To me, it is especially visible whenever there are any type of terrorist attacks that what follows is always Muslims and Muslim communities having to condemn these attacks, even when they are located on the other side of the world and there is no connection with the people who carried them out. Since this is a very personal question that I believe every Muslim has the right to decide for themselves how they feel about it. I do think it is worth mentioning and interesting considering this research. Overall, since finishing my fieldwork I have noticed a variety of other events like the ones in this research are being organized in this area. Therefore, I think that many Muslims do feel a certain responsibility, or at least a certain urge to inform other people about Islam.

4.7. Reflections on effects

In this chapter so far, I have laid out the various aims, goals, and strategies, and have shown that these are not homogenous. In this section I want to reflect on the outcomes of these events in terms of achieving the goals they aim for. Firstly, Islam Awareness Week, in this chapter we have so far learned that their aim is to create awareness and a presence on campus, as well as da'wa. In terms of increasing their presence and making people aware that there are Muslims on campus I think it is effective. In particular in attracting new members and promoting themselves amongst
the Muslim community, this event is important for the MSA. Besides recruiting new members during club days, IAW is the only time when the MSA is most approachable as it takes place out in the public sphere and it is easy to talk to the volunteers. If someone is considering joining the MSA this is probably a moment that they would find themselves approaching the booth. In terms of da'wa, I think there are few people who would feel that they are invited to the religion by this booth. There are flyers lying on the table but during my whole fieldwork period no one took a single flyer from the table. The flyers themselves also focus more on changing the misconceptions people might have about Islam, rather than inviting people to it. However, if we think of the goal as raising awareness (like the name implies) the event is successful at showing people that there are Muslims on campus, whether they are Muslims that also want to join or non-Muslims that get a greater sense of awareness about the diversity of SFU.

Previously I identified the aim of A Journey Into Islam as countering misconceptions, and it became apparent that some of the members also put emphasis on countering the picture the media paints of Muslims. In both it is very successful, as there was a lot of information that was very accessible on topics that are often part of these misconceptions in the media. Rather than being in a public space such as IAW, AJII takes place at the mosque and therefore it is more difficult to reach people to invite them to learn this information. The people who attend this event often already know a member of this community, or are at least open to visiting the mosque and learn more about Islam in general. Thinking back to the discussion previously mentioned with participant Farha, it is indeed difficult and maybe not the responsibility of these communities to change misconceptions. In a few interviews the topic of Islamophobia came up in relation to the events and their effectiveness. Since the events both rely on non-Muslims to approach/attend the events, the people who really are very against Muslims will never be reached. They would simply not attend. Some participants did talk to me about how it would be possible to reach these people, and two options were discussed. The first was the presence in a more public space, such as the blindfolded Muslim who gave free hugs in Paris with a sign that said, “I trust you, do you trust me?” Obviously, an action like this also includes a risk of negative response. One participant explained that his personal strategy was to be a nice person. This seems unrelated and useless, but he told me that he often found that people did not know he was a Muslim and started to like him as a friend or co-worker, when they then found out he was a
Muslim he was often the first Muslim they knew in real life, and therefore their perception of Muslims became based on his interactions with people and how much they liked him as a person.

4.8. Da’wa and Multiculturalism

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, da’wa is considered to be part of a Muslim’s religious duty, and encompasses both the encouragement of becoming more pious, as well as the act of pursuing non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Generally, it is placed within the context of a Muslim majority country. In this thesis, da’wa has been placed in a multicultural context and that has influenced how it is executed by the participants.

It is important to consider to what extend changing the misconceptions of non-Muslims is separate from da’wa. Is it possible that in a non-Muslim majority, multicultural country, the spreading of awareness about what Islam is can be considered a form of da’wa? As was discussed in chapter three, many aspects of practicing Islam are different in a non-majority country, included the call for prayer not being heard from the mosque but rather being a notification on your phone. When participants describe Islam Awareness Week as da’wa, it becomes clear that it is interpreted as showing people what Islam is, rather than actively trying to convert them. IAW does give people the opportunity to encounter Muslims and learn more about Islam, but it did nothing (to my knowledge) to convert people. However, it is also possible that within the multicultural context, the idea of converting people is not as accepted. In previous chapters, it has been discussed how within the Canadian context, both multiculturalism and secularism are present in society, thus it is possible that although it is accepted to show what your religion is about, but it might not be acceptable to actively try to convert people. The secularism that is present within Canadian society might prevent Muslims to try to convert people, whilst multiculturalism might provide a framework in which it is accepted to educate the public on what the religion is about.

This can be tied into the previously discussed work by Isaac Weiner (2014) in which religious sounds are discussed. The call for prayer (adhan) which in a Muslim-majority would sound from the mosque, also does not belong within a secular country as it places religion in the public sphere, and is therefore not publicly heard at many, if any
at all, mosques in Canada. Adhan is therefore an example of a religious practice that
does not fall within the scope of multiculturalism, and is therefore not readily accepted in
multicultural or pluralist societies.

The public call for prayer and the changed understanding of da’wa lead us to
discuss the interrelation between multiculturalism and secularism, and when something
is too religious for a secular society to be allowed in public, which is especially the case
for religions that are not part of the Judaeo-Christian traditions that the West adheres to.
This ties into the notion of the productive tension (as discussed in section 2.7) where
multiculturalism and secularism always influence one another, and the practices are
shaped by the tension that exists between the two frameworks. Therefore, it needs to be
understood that secularism and multiculturalism in the Canadian context are not
separate, but rather are both at work at the same time. The events, and the participants,
use the public narrative of multiculturalism that exist in Canadian society as a means to
explain where they fit into this nation, which is necessary because secularism prevents
them from automatically being considered Canadian.

4.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the function of the events that were studied for
this research. I introduced the concept of da’wa as one of the possible functions of these
events, in addition to the function of changing misconceptions that non-Muslims have
which was the function I originally thought these events would have. Based on the
participants’ individual experiences and motivations, it can be concluded that the
functions of these events are personal to the organizers. However, in both cases both
functions came up and it can thus be said that the events both have two functions. On
the other side, the set up of the events, as well as the information provided does lead me
to conclude that the function of IAW is more da’wa and that the AJII event focuses more
on changing misconceptions.

After having established that the function is both da’wa and changing
misconceptions, I want to link this back to the work by Saba Mahmood, as discussed in
the beginning of this chapter, and connect it to the central discussion of this thesis about
multiculturalism. Mahmood’s (2005) work unfolds the practice of da’wa in Egypt. She
also refers to it as piety, and, in particular, focuses on the role of women in this
movement that she refers to as the piety movement (or da’wa movement). In her work, 
da’wa takes place in the mosque and involves encouraging Muslims to live a more pious 
life. It has become clear that da’wa can have different meanings to people. I want to 
suggest that although the two functions (da’wa and changing misconceptions) have 
been treated as two separate functions, in particular based on the description of the 
participants of what da’wa is, it might both fall under the category da’wa but then in a 
different societal setting. Mahmood has shown that da’wa is a Muslim-majority country is 
focused on exploring the faith deeper, and da’wa in a multicultural country might mean to 
invite non-Muslims to understand the religion better, whether the goal is conversion or 
not. Although this is not based on scripture, I would argue that the religion is practiced 
and perceived differently when it is not a majority religion in that country, and some 
aspects might need to be adapted. It is therefore a likely possibility that da’wa in a 
multicultural country looks different from when it is practiced in a Muslim-majority 
country.

Besides exploring the functions of AJII and IAW, this chapter also examined how 
effective they are in what they do. In regard to achieving conversions (da’wa, in the more 
traditional sense) there have been some conversions through both these events, 
although it only happens occasionally. Regarding the changing of misconceptions, I 
have explored this more thoroughly in a previous paragraph, and have included 
alternatives for these events, but it comes down to the population that is reached and 
that will attend. In general, only people who already have a positive opinion and are 
willing to learn more will show up. People who are afraid of Muslims or who have 
negative opinions about Islam will stay away and not attend AJII and IAW. In this chapter 
I also briefly discussed the issue of responsibility which is based on the interview 
responses of participant Farha. She argued that it is not the Muslim community’s 
responsibility to educate people about the misconceptions that they have, and in this 
chapter, I have linked this to the discussion by Zubrzycki (2013) on religious 
accommodation.

Overall, the function of these events is two-fold and although they differ slightly 
their outcomes are largely similar. Both events have been able to reach out to the 
community they are placed in, both reach people in their members’ circles and can 
engage them with the religion, and both events have had some people convert to Islam 
thus also being able to do their part in da’wa.
Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this thesis I explored the everyday realities of Muslim youths in the lower mainland of British Columbia, and placing this in the context of multiculturalism. This was researched by looking at events organized by the Muslim youths that were studied, which focused on engaging non-Muslims with Islam and by doing so changing misconceptions (some) non-Muslims have. Data was gathered by using interviews and participant observation. The idea that multiculturalism was important for the everyday reality of the Muslim youths was brought up by the participants themselves.

In the introduction I outlined my methodology and aims for this thesis, and discussed the theoretical framework in which this research is positioned. It discussed two important concepts that are frequently discussed in the field of anthropology: secularism and multiculturalism. Although the introduction discussed the concept of secularism and important theory around this topic, it did so to distinguish it from multiculturalism as this was done by the participants as well. The introduction further discussed multiculturalism as this was often brought up by the participants as shaping their everyday reality and allowing them to practice their religion. Nevertheless, there are also critiques of multiculturalism which are included in the introduction, and these critiques have been used to further explore the lives of the participants.

The second chapter of this thesis was based on the ethnographic data that was gathered during the events that were studied: A Journey into Islam and Islam Awareness Week. This chapter introduced the two events and the communities that they take place in. Exploring the communities in which they take place, and giving insight into who organizes these events, is important as it allows to understand the reasons behind why they are organized. This chapter largely focused on why certain topics were featured quite prominently at these events, and it relates this to the work of Edward Said. This chapter argues that there is a link between what would fall under Orientalism and how the West perceives Muslims, and the topics that the participants try to discuss and focus on during the events.
The third chapter of the thesis focused on the everyday lives of the Muslim youths that organized the events. It explored various important topics, such as gender and identity. For the section on identity the work of Mayanthi Fernando was of importance. Although Fernando’s research took place in France, her idea of accessing the French identity was important for my understanding of how my participants struggle to access ‘Canadianness.’ The section on gender focused on female participants being more recognizable as Muslim because they wear the hijab. Male participants acknowledged this and argued that the female participants often experience more discrimination/racism/islamophobia because they are more recognizable as Muslim, rather than from any of the other ethnicities that are prevalent in this area. The male participants argued that because of multiculturalism there were many non-white people and that they as Muslim men would be categorized as part of the minority, but not specifically Muslim. The last section of this chapter focused on the ideas of the participants about living in Canada, and how multiculturalism is a positive feature in their lives.

The last body chapter explored the function of the events that were studied. It focused on the questions whether AJII and IAW are countering misconceptions, or if they are fulfilling the Muslim duty of da’wa. The chapter argued that both have characteristics of both these functions, and explored the idea of how da’wa might take a different form in a non-majority Muslim country, and in particular a multicultural country. Saba Mahmood’s work on piety in Egypt was particularly influential in this chapter, as I argued that da’wa in non-Muslim majority countries might have different goals than da’wa in Muslim majority countries. I argued that the events don’t only expose non-Muslims to Islam, but they also serve as a reminder for non-Muslims of their faith.

5.1. Contributions

Although a MA thesis is based on research that is done is a short period of time, and this limits the scope of it, this thesis made several contributions to the anthropological thinking about multiculturalism and the lived experience of Muslim youths in a non-Muslim majority country. Firstly, this thesis focused on Muslim youths organizing activities, in particular activities that they came up with and that resulted from their own ideas. Although there has been done research on Muslim youths previously, it is almost always either focused on education or focused on Muslim youths combined
with other minorities (such as Beyer and Ramji 2013). This thesis purely focused on the Muslim youth, and explored their understanding of their own everyday reality.

The type of events that were studied in this research are becoming more popular. At the time the fieldwork took place the two events studied were the only ones in their type, but recently I have seen similar initiatives in this area. This research is the first to gather ethnographic data at these events by taking part in them and being part of the target audience (non-Muslim). Being part of this target audience and part of the population that this research is aimed at (although I would say my misconceptions about Islam are limited compared to the average no-Muslim) allowed me to understand how these events were supposed to be experienced. I did all the activities that were included, and this gave me insight into the ideas behind the activities and displays that were carefully chosen.

This thesis included a direct comparison between secularism and multiculturalism, not only giving an overview of the theory but also how this manifests itself in the everyday lives of people living in societies that adhere to one or the other. By using secularism to further explore multiculturalism, I have complicated my understanding of the concept of multiculturalism and have explored why this is important for the participants. This thesis has also uncovered that although there are many critiques of multiculturalism, which include the othering of minorities and placing them in specific geographic locations and the power relations that come with this, participants might not be critical of it. In this thesis there has been a discrepancy between what the participants stated, in relation to how multiculturalism influences their everyday realities, and the theoretical critiques that are made. There are many possible reasons for this, but I think that it is most likely the result of a very strong discourse around multiculturalism in Canada. Multiculturalism is often discussed as one of the characteristics of Canada, and it is almost equated with Canadian national identity. For the participants to therefore reflect negatively on this would prevent them from accessing that national identity.

Lastly, this thesis brought forward the idea that multiculturalism influences how one performs the religious duty of da’wa. I argued that da’wa is generally understood as being twofold, the first part being encouraging Muslims to be more pious and follow their religion more closely, and secondly to invite non-Muslims to Islam. I argued that in a
multicultural society da’wa might take the form of the events that were studied, and might not only try to convert people, but would also focus on countering misconceptions.

This research has also added some ideas to complicate the understanding of specific literature. One of the important works that was used in this thesis was the book *The Republic Unsettled* (2014) by Mayanthi Fernando, in which she focuses on the everyday lives of Muslims in France. In this thesis Fernando’s book is used to understand the identity construction of the participants, and although Fernando’s research takes place in a secular setting, it allowed for greater understanding of what the participants are experiencing. This thesis furthers the understanding of the influence of the context (secular or multicultural) on the everyday experience of Muslims in non-majority countries.

Saba Mahmood’s (2005) study on the politics of piety focuses on how her participants in Egypt try to live a pious life, and how they view da’wa as encouraging others to live a pious life as well. Mahmood’s study of piety included da’wa but it was situated in a Muslim-majority country. This thesis adds a new perspective to the discussion because it examined da’wa in a country where Muslims are a minority group. This adds a more in-depth understanding of how da’wa is performed in different settings, rather than assuming it is a static concept or act.

### 5.2. Limitations

There were several limitations to this study, which is unavoidable with a shorter project such as a MA thesis. Some of them were already introduced in the introduction of this thesis, but will reiterated here. Firstly, the time spend in the field was very short, and was also scattered. Rather than spending an extensive period of time with the participants, I interviewed them whenever they were available and did participant observation during the events whenever it fit in with my schedule. Although there were definitely some participants with whom I did have rapport, many of them I only met once or twice. I think this resulted in less openness during the interviews, as this was often the first time I met the participants. Some participants were interviewed twice, and during those interviews it became clear that they were more comfortable discussing my more critical questions.
In addition to the lack of lasting rapport, I was considered an outsider to their groups, and this made it also difficult to discuss topics such as racism and discrimination. This could have been navigated better when there had been more time to get to know the participants better.

5.3. Future research

Some of the topics that were discussed in this thesis can be explored further, but this was impossible because they arose after the fieldwork phase was done. Especially the topic of da’wa in a non-Muslims majority country would be interesting to explore more in-depth. This topic came up when discussion the function of the events, and besides asking questions in the interview on what the participants thought the function of the event was, there were no further questions specifically on the topic. However, the topic of da’wa is more than just these events, and it would be interesting to ask (young) Muslims how they perform this and how they perceive this would be different if they lived in a Muslim majority country. It would also be interesting to ask more specific questions about whether they see changing misconceptions of non-Muslims also as part of this, or if they don’t see that as they religious duty.

It would also be beneficial to further investigate if multiculturalism is perceived as positive by Muslims as it was by the participants in this research. There is a large discrepancy between what the literature writes as critiques of multiculturalism and how the participants spoke of their experiences. This discrepancy could be due to one of the limitations that were discussed in the previous section of this conclusion, me not having enough rapport with the participants, but it could also have several other influences, such as the positive national discourse surrounding multiculturalism. It would be beneficial to analyze this further, and to find some different ethnographic methods to discuss this in a fruitful way.

This thesis briefly touched upon the collaboration between the Muslim youth groups that were studied and Christian youth groups. This would be important to further investigate. Muslims and Christians are often considered to be opposites and these events focus on similarities rather than differences. One possible angle into investigating these events would be took look into if religion being placed in the private sphere and the rise of non-religiosity is are what brings these groups together.
5.4. Final Thoughts

This thesis analyzed the everyday lives of the participants by placing them in a multicultural framework, and contrasting this multicultural framework with a secular framework, concluding that multiculturalism and secularism can co-exist together. As is inevitable, this thesis resulted in more questions than answers, but I have some final thoughts on the topics this thesis researched.

The interviews I conducted uncovered that the participants have a very positive outlook on multiculturalism, and the critiques of multiculturalism that were found in the literature were not repeated by the participants. Rather, the participants have internalized and appropriated the idea of multiculturalism and thus, use it to negotiate their position in society and to validate their belonging. The quote from participant Farha at the very beginning of this thesis indicates this, she puts a lot of focus on the idea that Canada is a “mosaic” and that it is therefore no problem to be a Muslim in Canada. There are people from all over the world in Canada, there is diversity, and therefore, it should not be a problem that they practice their religion. However, throughout the thesis there were some issues raised, in particular, regarding the role of religion within multicultural society, and, if and where there is a boundary between religion and culture that cannot be crossed under multiculturalism.

This research focused on the everyday life of Muslim youths and the implications that multiculturalism has on them. Several aspects of everyday life were discussed, including identity construction, praying at work, and eating halal food. The participants showed great adaptability in how they practice their religion, especially when coming from a Muslim-majority country, they found creative ways of adapting to life in a non-majority country. These innovative ways of adapting their religion included having an app on their phone to know the prayer times and wearing women’s scarves as hijab. It also highlighted some instances in which compromises are being made, for example some participants might choose to eat vegetarian when they go out to eat because halal meat is not widely available in restaurants. This research provoked further questions on adapting to living in a non-Muslim majority country in relation to multiculturalism, and in particular, to understand problems that might arise when one cannot access certain religious practices (which did not come up during this research).
When I discussed what the events meant to the participants, and what they considered to be their function, many personal goals and ideas came up. Some participants felt the events were organized to counter misconceptions, others wanted to show the presence of Muslims on campus, and the concept of da’wa was also brought up. Fulfilling the Islamic duty of inviting others to Islam was an important motivation for participants to help organize these events. I argued that multiculturalism has an influence on how this duty can be fulfilled, and that there might be limits of what religious practices and traditions are accepted within a multicultural society. It was not only discussed in terms of what is possible at the events, but also the shape that the events take. This presents further questions regarding the relationship between the idea of countering misconceptions and da’wa, and how countering misconceptions might be the multicultural adaptation of da’wa.

The research for this thesis is couched in the theoretical framework of multiculturalism and secularism. By adopting this framework, these two outlooks were compared and contrasted, and have given us new insights into what they entail. As mentioned before, the participants completely accepted multiculturalism and did not critique it, nevertheless, critical scholarship of multiculturalism has introduced a variety of concerns around multiculturalism, and some of the experiences of the participants did embody these critiques. In regard to multiculturalism and secularism, this research explored them mostly as separate entities, but it turned out that they were not as separate as they are often considered to be. Even in a multicultural framework, there are limits to the role that religion can play in society, especially in the public sphere. I would argue that often multiculturalism and secularism coexist, however, in Canada the narrative of everyday life and the media merely focuses on multiculturalism. This idea has not been investigated exhaustively in this thesis, and there are many questions remaining around this, such as in how far secularism and multiculturalism coexist, and when religion is considered to be a part of culture. This thesis has argued that the participants responded to the coexistence of multiculturalism and secularism by appropriating multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is used by the participants to allow them to navigate their identity as Canadians.
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