

# **“Nisa Homes” Interpersonal and Structural Violence against Displaced Muslim Women**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the experiences of diverse Muslim women and what it means to resist marginality every day. One-on-one interviews with women who stayed at a Muslim shelter also reveal experiences of gendered Islamophobia as marginalized visible Muslims. Drawing from the everyday analytic, we can see women's resourcefulness and resistance to interpersonal and structural violence. In this study, I centre the voices of participants resisting oppression against them as racialized and poor Muslim women. Participants understand their suffering is a direct outcome of the systems that economically, politically, and socially isolate to marginalize them. Women also describe the solidarity and self-healing in sharing their experiences with other shelter stayers. The themes developed in this work show the intersections and multifaceted violence faced by women fighting for asylum, seeking refuge, and struggling for safety.

**Keywords:** Muslim women; everyday analytic; multifaceted violence; Islam as a resource

To my first and forever teachers, my parents, Rahima and Bari. I am thankful to be your daughter and grateful for your endless support, prayers, and wisdom.

تو زندگی من هستی

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

"How do you like being told you are Lazy, Untrustworthy, System-abuser, Poor, Tragic?" Zara

"I thought it was \$710? Is it \$760? Yeah, how can you pay rent? How can you eat? How can you survive? There is no way." Hila

"There are places where history is not written in concrete, where each face reads a story, where new tongues sing together in a universal concert." May

"If all we can have is the sky and the air and the people who make for us a home inside of their hearts, then I am all at once the richest and luckiest and happiest person in the world." Farah

"Last night we experienced the true meaning of the world; there was joy not in lavishness or glamour or abundance but in the light and genuineness and tenderness beaming from the community that celebrated me." Sara

"Leave us modest women alone." Zoyah

"Someday I will find what I am are looking for. Or maybe not. Maybe we will find something much greater than that." Amina

"In a society that can be bottomlessly shallow, hijab is not backwards, shallow, or oppressive. It's actually quite innovative, and dare I say, revolutionary." Ellham

"If you truly care about the safety of Muslim women – stop perpetuating systems and violence which result in their death." Nour

"A deep, dark history of pain. Now can you imagine a life of isolation?" Wajma

"Mourn what we lost, and hold dear all things once they return to us." Taha

"The more I learn about this brilliant religion the more I grow in awe" Sami

"I don't think Allah would believe I have ANY obligation. Don't tell me I don't need to speak ill of the dead." Shabnam

"Anytime someone applies their own frame of reference to someone else's reality. They will not consider the possibility of harm." Freshta

“And so much hidden that when you show the reality with pictures also people still won’t believe you. The problem is I don’t have pictures but not that I believe it matters.” Leila

“It’s one thing to acknowledge privilege and suffering and another to empathize.” Sadaf

These are statements shared by participants of this qualitative study—diverse Muslim women facing gender-based violence fighting to live free of oppression. They experience structural and interpersonal violence, and the harm imposed is daily. These women do not wait for others to speak for them; they already raise their voices on every stage they access. The participants are also women making meagre wages, homeless and living in absolute poverty. I label participants as “displaced women”: living as poor refugees, asylum-seekers, and new immigrants facing intersecting forms of violence. However, Muslim women do not all share the same stories and struggles. Some women left safe homes expecting love and family to experience abuse and violence through intimate relationships. While at a Muslim shelter, participants reflect on their connections to one another and differences in personal ties to Islamic identity. Freshta’s statement about “frame of references” implicates the connections I make without de-contextualizing, de-politicizing, and perpetuating additional harm. By listening to stories of struggles, we intrinsically connect them to our own lives. Like millions of others directly affected by imperialism, it forced my family to put devastation on display to access the most basic rights: to get documentation as a refugee; the right to live free from violence; the right to aid from poverty; the right to exist—all in efforts to secure a safe place to be. Stories of struggles are consistently usurped to manufacture liberal justifications for military interventions and imperialist aggression—all of it against people’s volition. In this thesis, I amplify Muslim women’s voices, activism, leadership, and investigations.

Meaningful storytelling cultivates spaces for the voices of people often sidelined and silenced. In this study, the disclosures of experiences of suffering are not about inciting basic compassion. I do not want to commodify, glorify, or exalt participants’ experiences and stories. Instead, participants’ narratives and voices reveal the oppression imposed and their commitment to forging their future. I asked participants to share their stories to facilitate action and to reveal how violence exists by design. Additionally, I hope to understand better the conditions and intersections of structural

and interpersonal violence. Oppression occurs on an interpersonal level and has a class, structural, and intersectional base—capitalism and imperialism necessities domination and subjugation (Smith, 2020; McMaster, 2019). The socio-political reality of the poor, racialized, and other marginalized people lament the political order and vast inequities. For the Canadian settler-state, de-politicizing equality and false reconciliatory rhetoric are governance tactics of colonization to the rejection of Indigenous sovereignty and rights. Racialized and gender-based oppression is a part of a larger system of dispossession and violence against people rooted in capitalism. The lie that “change does not take place overnight” is helpful to foster class society, the status quo, and our economic basis of capitalism. Instead, I measure complacency by focusing on lived realities and highlighting the women engaged in critically interrogating and interrupting oppression every day. This study aims to listen to Muslim women fighting against normalized gendered violence and deprived material conditions.

## **1.1. Qualitative objectives and research questions**

My focus in this thesis is storytelling, which I rely on to document and share the lives of these women. This qualitative study includes Muslim women who are poor, immigrants, racialized, refugees, and non-status asylum-seekers. Each woman’s story reveals the extent to which patriarchal gender relations and norms function in Canadian society against marginalized persons. Gender-based violence occurs irrespective of culture, religion, class, educational background, ethnicity, and age (Barnes, 2001). However, there is considerable variation in definitions of violence in academic and other writing as symbolic, interpersonal, and structural. Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

Interpersonal violence, including acts of neglect, occurs with a known perpetrator using their power to control one or more victims (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 1). Interpersonal violence includes different types of abuse and neglect, including partner and family or relative violence. Intimate partner violence can include physical, psychological, and sexual violence and other forms of controlling behaviour against a

current or former intimate partner. This definition includes dating relationships and focuses on the condition of the controlling behaviour by the perpetrator. In this study, women describe how experiences of gender-based violence, including psychological or spiritual, emotional, physical, financial, and sexual abuse, affect them. I use abuse and violence interchangeably on the basis of participants connecting how abuse has different manifestations and becomes violence. Participants also describe how structural violence and gendered Islamophobia manifests for them every day as poor, racialized, and marginalized Muslim women. Their excerpts highlight the insufficient government assistance which deprives people of basic amenities and housing. Multifaceted violence captures interpersonal and structural violence that interact to reinforce the subordination of women in economic, social, and political life. Participants detailed many types of oppression and suffering, and some women did not want their experiences included in my write-up, so they were not re-victimized. Other women said they participated because of a need to tell their story and against the violence of silence. I recognize participants as poor, racialized, or disabled based on their self-identification and lived experiences.

To honour my participants means to respect their diverse voices and experiences. One of my objectives is to embody best practices when researching Muslim asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrant women with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Participants include Muslim women who observe the Islamic headscarf or hijab and Muslim women who do not. The research objectives that guided my study are: How do I hear and respect the voices of these asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrant Muslim women? How do I incorporate Muslim epistemologies into my research? How do I hold my position of privilege accountable throughout the research process? Finally, how to ensure my praxis and research decisions respect the heterogeneity of these Muslim women?

The link that connects my research objectives and questions is a commitment to give survivors a chance to be heard. I identify the everyday struggles of women by analyzing their experiences and how they act to increase their power to where it matters for transformation. What are the experiences of former and current asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrant women at the Muslim shelter “Nisa Homes”? I ask how these Muslim women understand and respond to their experiences of structural and interpersonal violence? How does the Islamic faith shape Muslim women’s responses to

the violence imposed every day? I apply the everyday analytic to expose the forces shaping these women's lives, including racism, sexism, heteronormativity, capitalism, and xenophobia.

Everyday struggles of poverty, disability, exclusion, and displacement inform participants' resistance to interpersonal and structural violence. However, women are more than their experiences of violence and suffering. I do not pathologize participants' realities in the confines of violence and victimization. In such paternalistic confines, we view Muslim women as passive subjects who are 'in need,' seen and at most tolerated but labelled as pitiful and worthless. To portray people as needy and expectant of someone kind (usually white) for rescue discredits their resilience, fight to overcome violence, and right to feel joy.

I navigate their diverse voices by understanding my role to bridge the links and recognize differences instead of as a representative or spokesperson for the women. To meet this objective, I highlight how Muslim women take up their power to resist oppression and affect their material well-being. Therefore, I place Muslim women at the centre of my collaborative research process to highlight their everyday life-saving resourcefulness and resistance. I rely on their statements and experiences to expose the compounding political, social, and economic problems these participants face. I aim to draw attention to injustices and sufferings, not bolster oppressive systems and perpetrators.

According to Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006), "starting where you are" in social research lends multiple benefits to your research (p. 9). As a Muslim woman, I have privileged trust and access to the Muslim women staying at the shelter. I established rapport with a few participants through previous volunteer work at the shelter, leading to snowball sampling and additional participants. In this thesis, I explore issues pertinent to diverse refugees and immigrant survivors of gender-based violence who stayed at the Muslim shelter, "Nisa Homes". In the first chapter, I introduce the research questions and provide a literature review of the structural and interpersonal violence levied against poor, racialized Muslim women. In chapter two, I outline the methodology and method used to conduct this study, one-on-one-semi, and unstructured qualitative interviews. I recognize the topic is sensitive and raises ethical issues addressed as a part of the methodological framework. In chapter three, I highlight

the everyday implications of gender-based and structural violence. This chapter illustrates the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence that Muslim women seeking help encounter. Participants' experiences are exacerbated and linked by their class position, systemic racism, and interpersonal violence. In chapter four, I highlight the absolute necessity of Muslim shelters, Islam as a resource, and the bounds of "Nisa Homes." In chapter five, I consider the limits and aims of my study and the implications of participants' stories. The main research question of this thesis, one posed by Zine (2004), is how to construct the spaces so Muslim women can articulate an understanding of their subjectivities through discourses they have authorized? In analyzing their own experiences, women make known the role of their Islamic faith and their resilience. First, however, I present a conceptual framework and literature review to guide and contextualize the concepts I employ in this work.

## **1.2. Why Muslim women at Nisa shelter?**

People know little about me, little stories here and there. People do not know what I am going through, other than Allah.

We do not need to give women a voice. They each have a voice. To amplify their voices, I chose this group of Muslim women whose struggles we rarely consider. The issues pertinent to Muslim refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrant women remain uninvestigated in the scholarly literature. Also overlooked is the everyday impact of marginality and interconnected violence against Muslim women. Furthermore, women's continuing resistance against multifaceted violence is not often studied or recognized. I highlight women's resourcefulness in confronting interpersonal and structural violence as poor refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants without adequate resources or support. In this research, I unpack how these Muslim women resist violence and marginalization in their everyday lives. Participants relate to each other and discuss distinct vulnerabilities that expose the intersections of being poor, without status, racialized, and marginalized Muslim women.

In Canada, "Nisa Homes" is the first and only Muslim shelter for Muslim women and children, supported by the National Zakat Foundation. The registered non-profit charity has seven homes across Canada, often sheltering asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants experiencing violence, poverty, and homelessness. "Nisa Homes" operates from a trauma-focused approach that is religiously and culturally responsive.

The non-profit embraces feminist theories to tackle violence against women at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, racialization, religion, and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Nisa policy requires at least two call takers present during the intake assessment. If there are outstanding requests for shelter, staff determine who is in greater need of immediate protection.<sup>2</sup> According to their website, children make up 50% of those who seek shelter at Nisa.<sup>3</sup> While transiently resourceful, the shelter is temporary and limited to three months. Temporary shelter is not housing and does not address the likelihood of women facing homelessness and experiencing abuse after Nisa. Thus, the shelter provides only transient and temporary safety in a monitored shared living space with limited crisis intervention and counselling. The shelter temporarily alleviates displaced women's increased vulnerabilities; however, that is insufficient to truly support women. It is possible to house every unhoused person, end poverty and homelessness, and make it possible for all oppressed people to be safe (Poudel & Smyth, 2002).

"Nisa Homes" is my primary field site as it is a place for Muslim women who must navigate life normalized routine interpersonal abuse, structural violence, and related dispossession. For instance, some abusers confined women to their homes, and others forced them to return to countries where they sponsored them. Abusers forced women to get distant relatives to send them money, only to have it stolen and squandered, typical of financial abuse for migrant women. Some participants endured months, and others survived years of interpersonal violence, causing immediate injuries and often imposing long-term consequences for women's health. Participants' stories capture how these Muslim women resist, organize, and support each other through dispossession, abuse, and ongoing violence. For example, some leave and rent rooms together to maintain their solidarity with other Muslim women.

At the Muslim shelter, before a new arrival, shelter workers wash the sheets and write the new woman's name on tape to stick above the newly emptied shelf space in one of the two fridges. Women already living at "Nisa Homes" are curious and prepared

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<sup>1</sup> Nisa Homes. (n.d.). *About Us*. Retrieved 2019, from <https://nisahomes.com/about-us/>.

<sup>2</sup> Caseworkers must search for other shelters for anyone who has called and lives in immediate need and danger. According to the current Vancouver shelter's manager, they receive on average ten calls a week. However, she reports the increasing gravity of the physical, emotional, and mental abuse from abusers, unfortunately, worsened by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> Nisa Homes. (n.d.). *About Us*. Retrieved 2019, from <https://nisahomes.com/about-us/>.

to welcome the newest person transitioning to the Muslim shelter. Those who speak different languages, like Farsi, Hindi, and Arabic, hope the new arrival speaks their language. Others hope the new woman does not snore too loudly. There is no information about the new arrival, including why she is coming to the shelter. At the weekly meeting, "residents" are told to be respectful and friendly but not judge, pry, or force people to share their trauma and stories. The caseworkers and manager decide if any rearranging needs to happen between upstairs and downstairs so that families can stay together in one room. Usually, single women take one of the four beds in the two rooms downstairs. Soon the manager hopes to build more beds to shelter more women if the owner agrees to put up another wall to separate the large office space. For a time, the playroom for children, which has no outlets, heater, and lighting aside from a lamp powered by an extension cord, also became a temporary bedroom with two small beds. The laundry room is the second storage room, holding some former and current women's lifelong possessions; otherwise, two beds could fit there.

In my first week volunteering, I helped by assembling a large cabinet and a bunk bed in the downstairs single women's room. Whoever slept on the top bed could only half-crouch up before hitting their head on the low ceiling in the already tiny space. Getting down from the top bunk is also tricky because, at 5'1, I could not bend my knees to climb down and had to maneuver and shimmy off the top bunk. The large cabinet doors I installed were impossible to open in the playroom and temporary bedroom. The bunk bed in the shared room looked like a hazard. I wondered what it would feel like to be the person with the most confined and worst bed at the shelter for just three months. This thesis is a compilation of direct outcomes from the economic, political, and social systems which marginalize these women. Participants are not just "contributors," nor "respondents," but women who entrusted me with their stories. Aside from women telling their stories, it is essential to detail their resilience against ongoing inequities and injustices. Many do not even realize temporary respite because of the deficient social support accessible for those marginalized by society. These women face increased barriers to legal and social programs, income assistance, and medical attention because they are poor, racialized, asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants. Muslim women speak about the struggle for a life and home "after-refugee," "after-survival," "after-victim," and "after-scarcity."

### **1.3. Structural violence, abuse, and gendered Islamophobia**

Swift et al. (2004) explain that there can be no social analysis without social literacy, a process that can lead to dismantling harmful social structures. They argue that the building blocks of social grammar include recognizing the symptoms, commodification, social costs, and structures of society (Swift et al., 2004). Through social literacy, people can identify the critical stakeholders who benefit from the status quo and those who suffer. This knowledge allows people to recognize the causes of individual suffering, be critical of common-sense assumptions, and analyze human social histories. We must consider the importance of challenging beliefs and ideas rather than stopping at confirmation of biases. People with diverse histories and experiences can come to a common narrative, with goals of justice based on shared circumstances. However, those with more influence also have the privilege of determining the dominating narratives and specific histories. A time-tested answer to this problem is to look not just at the narrative but at how power structures are constructed by capital, resources, infrastructure, and so on. Opportunists and imperialists use these structures to exploit specific groups much more, based on ranks such as gender, sexuality, race, among others. Then, the point here is for the oppressed and self-identifying allies to come together through this kind of critique, not separate and de-politicize. Instead, we can root these critiques in the everyday experiences of violence and anti-capitalism if the goal is for people's material conditions to improve.

Social inequality is “the unequal distribution of resources” and “the consequent unequal distribution of power” (Naiman, 2012, p.64). This inequality results from the “increased complexity of the division of labour and growth” in society to create a never-ending hierarchy of power (Naiman, 2012, p.64). At the source of all exploitation is the material gain of power, wealth, and status, amid other things. “Getting ahead,” Kivel (2017) writes, is the mantra of capitalistic motivations and the neoliberal capitalist economy. Our capitalist economy is a globalizing system, defined by Sarwat Jahan and Ahmed Saber Mahmud (2015) as privatizing to designate and force individuals to seek control over properties and act upon their supposed individual interests. The primary concerns of the global capitalist economy are privatization, capital, and profits. The four tenets of our economic base include privatization, decentralization, individualization, and the elevation of market interests over public interests (Naiman, 2012; Kivel, 2017). Such

a business philosophy generates powerful influences that shape cultural norms, class divisions, gendered inequities, and beliefs (Scott, 2012). Capitalist culture refers to a set of social practices, norms, values, and patterns of behaviour in a capitalist society (Robbins, 2019, p. 13). Thus, the ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism are also cultural beliefs that foster patterns of inequity and inequality. For example, one extension of our social structures and cultural myth is the idea of a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. In other words, those who deserve it will get ahead, which are also constructions meant to be internalized by the poor to feel inferior, shameful, and guilty for their oppression. The oppressors are uplifted through the same structure while internalizing oppression leads to fatalism and infantilizes the victims.

Social structures refer to how our society maintains predictable relationships by organizing and assigning people to social groups. These structures constrain people in specific ways, perpetuating advantages and disadvantages through linked systems or institutions. We base social inequity or oppression on social group and position, signifying differences in access to goods and services with cultural beliefs justifying hierarchies, arrangements, and differences in rewards. Structural and systemic violence operates through social structures, such as schools, policies, institutions, and laws (Taylor, 2013). This violence based on racial, gendered, class, sex, and related inequities ranks categories of people into hierarchies to maintain their social, economic, and political marginalization (Farmer, 2004). Galtung (1969, p. 170) argued that "[s]tructural violence is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters" with hidden systems and harms in the everyday lives of the poor and marginal. Antony and Samuelson (2012) note that some people have a wider range of choices than others, and social inequalities can limit the options for some people in society. I rely on Farmer's definition of structural violence as suffering embedded in social structures, institutions, and patterned inequality of access.

Violence may be indirect and direct "assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth, or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what give violence its power and meaning" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 1). James Gilligan describes structural violence as "the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society, as contrasted with the relatively lower death rates experienced by those who are above them" (1997, p.89). Structural violence represents the systemic ways in which certain social groups do not

have equal access to goods and services that enable the fulfilment of basic human needs. For example, economic inequality, poverty, and income inequality are all outcomes of structural violence. Inequity or oppression denies opportunities, rights, materials, and services because of unequal ownership and distribution (Taylor, 2013; Rhodes, 2011). Antony and Samuelson (2012), explain that inequity follows historical relations of domination to uphold all forms of imperialism, capitalism, and colonialism. Often, we do not consider structural factors such as "exploitative and unjust social, political, and economic systems," which impose unequal life opportunities and everyday violence (Gilman, 1983, p. 8). Instead, those invoking a traditionalist perspective blame social problems on individuals (Antony and Samuelson, 2012).

The difficulties of certain social groups are because of a lack of power so that even the legal system works against them. Oppression emerging from the legal structure may go unnoticed and be viewed as normal because of the institutionalization of systemic violence (Rhodes et al., 2011). Thus, structural violence may operate through formal structures like the legal systems or take an informal approach via normalized inequities, like limited access to education or health care. Miller (2009) explains that those in power – the political and economic elites – create anti-poor and racist laws, normalize these inequities, and define acceptable behaviour. Some social groups are more structurally vulnerable to criminalization, marginalization, and victimization. Structures compound against women experiencing interpersonal violence through deprived government assistance and criminalizing immigration and asylum-seeking. The convergence of imposed conditions produces violence (structural and direct) and perpetuates oppression against people relegated as marginal and regularly dehumanized (Boyd et al., 2018). Galtung (2004) refers to the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms that make structural violence seem acceptable or inevitable as cultural narratives of violence. These schemas are interrelated and mutually reinforcing written and unwritten rules, laws, and policies in capitalist society.

One outcome of structural violence is the persistence of absolute and relative poverty. The province of B.C. and the federal government use the Market Basked Measure (MBM) to measure the basic standard of living by calculating the cost "of a basket of basic needs in a particular location for a particular type of household" (Petit and Tedds, 2020, p. x). Under the Employment and Assistance Act (EAA) and Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act (EAPWDA), the B.C.

government administers assistance, benefits, and programs in the province. The financial aid is so minimal that recipients must rely on food banks and charities to meet basic needs (Petit and Tedds, 2020). The factor of people requiring immediate and negligible aid forces people to rent unsafe spaces (Petit and Tedds, 2020). This repressive assistance system provides no financial stability or security for poor people, especially non-status, refugee, and immigrant women who encounter violence at home (Petit and Tedds, 2020). The punitive asset threshold is one example of the arbitrary and discriminatory requirements of the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (Petit and Tedds, 2020). In this study, women interviewed are food insecure, lack essentials, and are homeless because of multifaceted violence. In addition, participants describe daily barriers as non-English speakers, as racialized and poor women living in a shelter. I consider how gendered Islamophobia, interpersonal violence, and other converging structural violence compounds against them.

Moreover, structural violence is how the state recognizes ways of being and enables ways of being. Liberal subjectivity is equality to the white, cis-gender, upper-class male as the subject to which we are being held, and others are being held equal. This conceptualization is doing racialization work differently for those affected by racism. Like other systems of violence, colonialism constantly strives to de-historicize, de-politicize, and de-contextualize. In Canada, colonial violence, including genocide, was foundational and related to the larger European conquest of the Americas (Thobani, 2007, p. 42). Thobani (2007a) used Benedict Anderson's idea of nations as communities of imagination to explain how white colonizers and settlers are (re)inscribed as the 'true' inhabitants through the ongoing subordination of Indigenous Peoples and racialized immigrants (p. 7). The Canadian settler state's economic, legal, and political structures preserve the colonizer's dominance and sovereignty over First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and stolen land (Camfield, 2019). Additionally, multiculturalism policies and sermons of tolerance also construe, conceal, and perpetuate systemic racism and discrimination (Perry, 2015). Globally, racialization creates the disposability of othered bodies and identities, anyone outside the white 'race,' subjugated by imperialist domination, colonialism, and capitalism. The settler-colonial narrative of progress legitimizes violence against those dispossessed and oppressed, including Indigenous, Black, disabled, and other marginalized groups (Camfield, 2019; Claxton et al., 2021). Consequently, the co-optation of people and their struggles avoids any material change

to class, sex, racial and other inequities to uphold capitalism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and related forms of oppression (Claxton et al., 2021).

Wynter (2003) states Man "over-represents itself as if it were the human itself" (p. 260). At present, the 'human' experience is synonymous with the knowledge of the Western Bourgeois at the direct rejection of 'other' humans and experiences humanness, specifically, the "New Poor" (Wynter, 2003, p. 261). Wynter (2003) highlights the struggle between the exclusive and overrepresented white Western bourgeois Ethnoclass man vs. Human struggle (p. 260). In her article, Wynter reveals the rise of modern western racism locating its genealogy in a more significant genealogy of renaissances humanism and the Enlightenment era. Relying on Dubois's colour line, she demonstrates that race is the "organizing principle" of Eurocentric contemporary social ordering and humanness or degree of humanness (Wynter, 2003, p. 300). According to Wynter, race has become the "most effective tool of domination in the last 500 years" (Wynter, 2003, p. 263). Throughout her essay, Wynter seeks to highlight continuities across continents and civilizations. She shows that Man and his various disciples are actively engaged in remaining at the top of the hierarchical ordering of humanness. The elevation of a Western exclusionary and hierarchal definition of the human is purposeful and ongoing to exploit and subjugate all the 'subhuman' peoples to the direct benefit of Man. Moreover, the social ideals that all women must live up to be perceived and valued as a 'woman' include white, middle-class, heterosexual, thin, blonde, and 'the fairer' sex. These markers are used as legitimations of systemic exclusions, social relations, and practices embedded in the hegemonic culture. Universalizing people is about speaking over as many as possible and to grow power. At the same time, an invisibilization of oppression is practiced through universalizing to label people as voiceless. This invisibilization leans into the socialization of practicing a code of silence, which often leads to more violence and compliance. For example, social workers, neighbours, and others who claim to speak for them label Muslim women as self-victimizing, while every aspect of their life is precarious.

Generalized universalities disregard change, diversity, and different human societies, cultures, realities, and geography over time (Oluo, 2018; Claxton, 2021). Even Samuel Huntington (1993), author of the book *The Clash of Civilization?*, states that "the very notion that there could be a "universal civilization" is a Western idea, directly at odds with the particularism of most Asian Societies and their emphasis on what

distinguishes one people from another" (as cited in Mayer, 1994, p. 311). For participants, the othering process is tied to racialization, sexism, and the casting of diverse women into the role of the 'other.' It is a reductive process wherein a person is labelled and left socially isolated for constructed, perceived, and ascribed difference. Jiwani (2005), for example, highlights the "endemic and pervasive" nature of racism and how it targets marginalized racialized refugee and immigrant women (p. 853). Every day, the intersections of race, gender, and status intersect to oppress many participants in this study. Jiwani argues racism is "systematic, institutional, and daily violence" maintained as a function of white supremacy (Jiwani, 2005, p. 847). At best, racialization is approached in the academic world (and socially) as the purview of minority special interest groups and seen as relevant only at the level of interpersonal activism. At worst, it is avoided as a difficult issue. Racialization is part of the "broader process" whereby "categories of the population are constructed, differentiated, interiorized" and socially and politically excluded (Mirchandani and Chan, 2001, p. 13). Racism, the "product of racial attitudes and beliefs that endure through social life," is a "socially constructed phenomenon" (Chan & Chunn, 2014, p. 7).

The meanings and importance of race differ from place to place and change over time. Racial meaning systems, constructions, subjective experiences, legal and systemic factors determine the construction of race, which impact and are affected by the day-to-day subjective bodily experience of what it means to live racialized. This framework of subjectivity reveals the flaw of a "race-less" vision to race as well as a biological essentialist approach. Human experience cannot just be understood through a lens of universality and is related to the need to problematize notions of equality as generally conceived in a western liberal philosophical tradition. The Islamophobic gaze interprets Muslims as a homogenous outsider community. Muslims are not a monolith – they are a diverse social group with complex communities. No one story can encapsulate the heterogeneity of this group of Muslim women. It is essential to acknowledge all the stories that eventually make up Muslim and other women's oppression, specifically in our capitalist colonial society.

Still, the characterization of race as a social construct should not take away from its actual, lived, and detrimental effects. Racial prejudice will represent itself at the individual and systematic levels (Chan & Chunn, 2014, p. 7). The racism that is "structural, unconscious, indirect, and covert" is obscure and unaddressed (Chan &

Chunn, 2014, p. 7). The substance of anti-Muslim and Islamophobia differs from country to country as it intertwines with government policies (Bloul, 2008; Helly, 2004). However, trends and manifestations of Islamophobic sentiments and policies across Western nations have overriding similarities, including the gendered expressions of hostility (Bloul, 2008). Muslim women wearing hijab, cast as oppressed and subjugated victims abroad, are re-cast as the rejecters of liberal values in so-titled liberal societies (Thobani, 2007b).

Definitions of Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia seek to recognize the psychological, sociological, and political aspects (Hanniman, 2008). The issue with the term is that several scholars deploy Islamophobia without explicitly defining the term (Bleich, 2011, p. 1583). The first time Islamophobia is mentioned academically can be traced to 1997 in the Runnymede Trust report originating in the United Kingdom (Bloul, 2008). Islamophobia, based initially on a xenophobia framework, shifted into a racialization framework. Simply put, Islamophobia is understood as anti-Muslim racism. This form of racialization is linked to colonization and colonial logic. Many argue Islamophobia cannot be racism because Muslims do not make up a racial group. However, the concept of dividing groups of people based on racial characteristics is an illegitimate task based on pseudoscience, and the fact remains that Muslims are racialized. Participants shared novel experiences of overt and hidden Islamophobia based on negative stereotypes of Muslim women as self-afflicted victims. In her work, Zine (2002) defines Islamophobia as "a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination" (cited in Hanniman, 2008, p. 273). For this study, Islamophobia is understood as "...unfounded hostility towards Islam... [and] the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs" (cited in Bloul, 2008, p. 10). Jasmine Zine first coined the term gendered Islamophobia in 2004 to discuss the representation of Muslim women's bodies as signifiers of modernity. Zine (2006) defines gendered Islamophobia as "specific forms of ethno-religious and racialized discrimination levelled at Muslim women that proceed from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform individual and systemic forms of oppression" (p. 10). The paradox of gendered Islamophobia is that Muslim women are supposedly in need of saving from themselves.

Razack (2007) argues feminism is "easily annexed to the project of empire" (p. 7). Tropes about gender inequality inherent to Muslims originate in orientalist discourses supporting Western militaries in the global south and social intervention to assimilate immigrants (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Razack, 2007). This racism is tied to colonial feminism, and it based racialization on essentialist cultural differences (Pon, 2009, p. 64). In Canada, a particular "vertical mosaic," or racial hierarchy exists, in which we privilege some over others (Jiwani, 2005, p. 870). Through this racial hierarchy lens, essentializing discourse collapses complex identities into a singular identity and existence (Shelby, 2016, p. 73). The logic of colonial Orientalism rests on the perception that 'they are not like us' and thus warrant differential treatment (Nagra & Maurutto, 2016, p. 172). Visible Muslim women relegated to the 'other' are often most marginalized from the wider community (Khan, 1998, p. 472). The term "colonial feminism" was first used by Leila Ahmed to describe Muslim women living under colonial rule at the turn of the century in Egypt. The focus on unveiling the women and the colonists disregarded women's efforts towards self-education (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 33). This essential scholarship is the discourse of dominance that envisions Muslim women as a singular and monolithic oppressed subject waiting for liberation (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 30). Colonial feminism relies on the idea of international 'sisterhood' that is not only naïve but rooted in imperialism (Tyagi, 2014, p. 49). This white feminism relies on colonial logic and white supremacy to promote essentialist frameworks about 'othered' women (Zine, 2006, p. 11). By this same logic, they claim all women share their concerns and perspectives, and thus, they can speak for all of them. The September 11 attacks only emboldened claims made by a clash of culture enthusiasts (Razack, 2007, p. 8).

Separately from economic power, women also lack discursive power, especially in a capitalist culture where patriarchal conventions are socially ingrained. Feminist theorists locate sex discrimination at all levels of social structure, suggesting that historically, women became subordinate to men because of their educational, legal, economic, political, and cultural position (Brym, Roberts, & Strohschein, 2019). Feminist theories draw attention to the inequalities between men and women to assert that patriarchy – the system of male domination in society that determines people's opportunities in life – is instrumental to class position, the violence imposed in women's lives, and their everyday material conditions (Brym, Roberts, & Strohschein, 2019). Structural violence intensifies suffering and exposure to other forms of violence. The

organization of gender relations subjugates women to patriarchal oppression. Muslim women experience interpersonal violence, poverty, and racism and face its associated stigma, discrimination, harassment, and related abuse. For these participants, gendered Islamophobia and the material deprivation of poverty are symptoms of structural violence existing in anti-violence language, shelter policies, and other ways to legitimize discrimination against them. The consequences of poverty, homelessness and dispossession, criminalization, unemployment, and exploitation limit their freedom. This limiting of choice results when women can only stay with abusers or seek temporary shelter and possibly apply for insufficient government support (Mosher, 2009; Farmer, 2004).

Patricia Hill Collins first introduced the matrix of domination as the four interacting levels through which power travels, including structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal (Johnson, 2005). Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), an analytical tool, aspires to move away from the overrepresentation of gender in the intersectionality approach. The federal institute Status of Women Canada formalized GBA+ to highlight the high rates of poverty, homelessness, and related inequities for racialized women, non-binary, transgender, and others marginalized by society. Intersectionality is a multi-axis framework that can account for the many dimensions of identity and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of its parts (i.e., ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, age, language). The intersectional analysis considers how different facets of Muslim identity impact women simultaneously (Riley, 2011, p. 6). To fully understand the conditions of a marginalized group, one must investigate the interlocking factors that contribute to marginality. To answer the research questions listed in section 1.1, I will use the theoretical frameworks of intersectional feminism and the everyday analytic. Participants devalued position is structural through racialization, precarious status, migration, gendered violence, and class. This devaluation normalizes violence and dispossession experienced by women within and outside of their homes (Smith, 2020; McMaster, 2019). There is just temporary relief at the Muslim shelter, allowing them to maintain their connections to Islamic practice and identity. Muslim women interrupt through daily attempts to experience joy, heal, and struggle against oppression and improve their conditions.

## 1.4. The everyday analytic

In this section, I provide a scholarly review of the everyday analytic and the transformative power of listening to Muslim women about their lived realities. Specific political moments create intensifications of gendered and racialized violence at the local, national, and international levels to reveal the urgency and necessity of new frameworks of analysis. The study of the sociologies of everyday or the study of everyday life is an "attempt to capture and recognize the mundane, the routines in (and of) social relations and practices" (Neal and Murji, 2015, p. 811). The framework centres ordinary life and practice to highlight the structures present in everyday life, capturing agency, perception, and meaningfulness. Liebelt and Werbner (2018) explain the 'everyday' refers to that which is "familiar, taken-for-granted, naturalized, commonsensical, unreflective, embodied" (p. 5). Fadil and Fernando (2015) asked, "what is not the everyday?" (p. 98). According to Schielke (2015), the everyday is an "attribute, a qualifier" of "all things and situations mediated by human interaction that can be every day [and] can also be exceptional and extraordinary" (p. 3). Likewise, any anthropological theory that tells us nothing about what it is like to live under the conditions it describes is not a very meaningful framework.

Fadil and Fernando (2015) identify two central tensions inherent in the everyday framework, anthropology of Islam and anthropology itself (p. 61). The first is to capture the heterogeneity of lived experiences and the shared struggles of the group being contextualized. The other inherent tension they identify is the importance of accounting for power structures and negotiation of normativity without disregarding the individual. Again, these tensions are not unique to the everyday site of analysis. Inspecting the day-to-day operation, violation, and negotiation of various normativities reveals the "grand schemes" as well as the realities or the "actual path" taken (Schielke, 2015). The every day is a space of contradiction wherein power/oppression operates and is interrogable. (Fadil and Fernando, 2015, p. 66; Liebelt and Werbner, 2018). In this way, the 'everyday' uses lived experience to capture 'macro' and 'micro' conditions that shape daily life. The everyday analytic and its usage as a useful framework of analysis of Muslim women remains in its ability to capture everyday life on the margin. Focusing on 'resistance,' it is about an interplay of everyday struggles and structural oppression that permeate daily

life. The concept of agency is relative and situational. The everyday analytic is about how individuals respond to structures that are not exclusively subversive or resistant.

We do not consider the realities of structural and interpersonal violence against women for their embedded everyday social, economic, and political implications. Instead, our cultural essentialist assumptions perpetuate certain understandings of experience, bodies, and forms of violence. Society is a "matrix of interlocking social relations happening in space and time. At its core is the labour of social reproduction and production... Activities [that] are central [to] what humans have to do to meet our needs" (Camfield, 2017, p.42). Thorne observed that gender and roles are ingrained social constructs and that the only boundaries within these social constructs are in those that hold value, such as femininity and masculinity. Gender is not pre-defined, natural, or biological but socialized and nurtured. We construct gender on social-cultural expectations to privilege that which is considered 'masculine' over 'feminine.' Gender has become the system of inequality, the coordinator of violence, resulting in the perpetual victim-blaming of women. When anyone commits a violent offence against a woman, the implication is that she was complicit or an equal contributor (Walby et al., 2014, p. 191). Engendered discrimination can permeate different aspects of a woman's life; wage discrepancies, violence, and role expectations are not conferred of equal consequence and are a fraction of the myriad examples available for scrutiny. Walby, Towers, Francis urged, "It is wrong to argue that sociologists should refrain from examining direct violence" and that previous theorizations either discount women or regard gender as a control variable to rate violence and inequality (Walby, Towers, & Francis, 2014, p. 187). The authors examine the absence of gender-based violence in mainstream media, crime trends/statistics, and sociological theory. I centre participants' resourcefulness for transformation and resistance as racialized, ostracized poor Muslim women.

Das (2010) focuses on the manifestation of power, inequality, and violence by examining how structural violence impedes the everyday endeavour for love, happiness, and the good life (p. 398). The impact of structural violence manifests ordinarily and is "incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships" (Das, 2007, p. 75). This rupture is apparent in Rajan's (2011) engagement with Muslim women in Gujarat and how public space is designated male space and private space as female space. Multifaceted violence imposes the hostility of "state, poverty, [targeted] violence, and

communalized politics and [inequitable] public spaces, and increasingly belligerent community structures" (Rajana, 2011, p. 223). Through experiences of violence and abuse, women shared a critical consciousness towards their struggles and aims of justice. The everyday analytic reveals daily interventions and engagements across family, community, markets, and the state of using scripture toward survival and access.

Muslim women hold different meanings to "their understandings of Islam" and "daily practices of their lives" guided by subjective interpretation (Khan, 1998, pp. 491–492). There are ambiguities and different understandings of Islam as a symbolic versus personal way of life and social transformation. To suggest a uniform role of religion is to ignore the various social, political, material, and historical contexts that dictate Muslim women's lives. Despite, or because of, multiple analytical purposes, the 'everyday' can achieve its aim of capturing visible and invisible forces (Schielke, 2015). These 'schemes' include much more than the role of Islam to encompass life in a political economy and other structures. These broader socio-economic conditions unfold into and rupture daily life in cultural and materialistic dimensions. Essentially, an examination of the 'everyday' of the Muslim woman is about capturing the complexities of life experience without disregarding the visible and invisible structures that shape her every day. According to Deeb (2015), 'everyday Islam' acknowledges how subjectively and inconsistently people legitimize parts of Islam to manage their lives. The 'everyday' analytic is distinct from 'everyday Islam,' the 'everyday' shapes Islam and Islam shapes the 'everyday' for Muslim women. Schielke (2009) uses the experiences and daily practices of Muslims living in a northern Egyptian fishing village during Ramadan to reveal the 'ordinary' Muslims. Abu-Lughod (1999) re-valored the humanities of Muslim Bedouin women by highlighting their use of poems to express vulnerabilities not permissible according to social rules regarding morality. Schielke recognizes Ramadan as a "holy month" for piety and a time of socialization to violate strict moral norms without anguish (pp. 26-27). For example, Debevec (2012) considers personal commitments to regular prayers and imagining piety for later life as a part of everyday Islamic identity formation (p. 35).

The colonial way of classifying different modes of Muslims as Islamist, fundamentalist, modernist, Sufi, anti-Sufi is a hollow inquiry and not a concern in this study. This purification system seeks to homogenize what Muslims consider the central claims of the faith rather than capture the multitude of emotional engagements and

critical interventions (Magnus, 2005, p. 155 or p. 241). In this way, the everyday transcends categories such as 'fundamentalism' and 'tradition' to reveal the diversity of observations. These interests, priorities, and beliefs are neither static nor predetermined. Schielke (2010) argued ethnographies about the religious lives of Muslims overrepresent and privilege Islam as the "supreme guideline of all fields of life" (p. 2). Evidently, there has been an overrepresentation of scripturalist interventions as the determining factor that shapes the complex lives of diverse Muslim women. This overrepresentation stems from a pre-occupation with Islamist and Islamic revivalist movements. The issue is not 'too much' Islam in the anthropology of Islam as Schielke claims but a testing of the significance of Islam as a part of people's lives and the unhelpful pre-occupation to define it universally. Thus, the 'everyday' recognizes the lived reality through interactions, non-interactions, and complex contentions that pervade scripture. It seems more appropriate to refer to this frame as an inspection of 'everyday,' rather than 'everyday religiosity' or even 'everyday Islam,' given the desire to write against the over-determination of Islam in daily life.

The key is to avoid any pre-occupation with what Islam is or ought to be in the lives of Muslim women. Individual women's convictions and sensibilities are critical yet not definitive but constantly interpreted. Once again, the 'everyday' complicates the role of beliefs and practices to consider the political, social, and other structures that shape experiences. Fadil and Fernando (2015) argue that the everyday has problematically become the normative frame seeking to revitalize the idea that resistance to religious norms is the true exercise of agency. Although, the 'everyday' can often become engulfed in the unhelpful task of testing religiosity or writing against it. I argue the everyday analytic pervades notions of agency or lack thereof to situate people in their context regardless of the role of Islam. The salience of the 'everyday' is the ability to cut across an over-preoccupation with agency, religious or otherwise. My goal is not to erase the role of Islam in the daily lives of Muslim women but to contextualize it fully amongst other philosophies, traditions, and conditions of life. Thus, the role of their religion in the 'everyday' is not over-deterministic. Instead, an interplay of religious and other non-religious sensibilities, politics, education, and structural elements impart the lived experiences of Muslim women. Through the everyday analytic, it is the "struggle, ambivalence, incoherence, and failure must receive attention in the study" (Osella and Soares, 2010, p. 11). Mittermaier (2012) states it is the "experience of contingency and

vulnerability that mark much of everyday life" (p. 260). Religious identity encompasses self-hood, identity, belonging, and normative values about correct practice. Significant is the presence and indulgence of doubt as critical tensions embedded in everyday lives. Yet, it is neither possible nor necessary to outline what it means to live an 'authentic' or 'correct' Muslim life, given the diverse followers of the faiths that fall under Islam and Islamic practice.

Muslim women aware of the unsolicited moral impositions against them identify what it means to live stigmatized and marginalized within society. According to Treacher (2003), Muslim women who identify as feminists reclaim their diverse religious traditions and beliefs from patriarchal forces to conceptualize Islam as a source of empowerment. I explore the complex role of their religion to cope and recover from violence and Islam as a resource to resist patriarchy or multiple forms of oppression. For example, some participants are constantly aware of the role of Muslim women in representing Islam because the hijab makes them visibly Muslim. For many, Muslim women symbolize Islam, using religion for control and imposing strict gender roles upon them. Some participants identify as 'visible' representatives of their faith, while others reject these impositions on their identities and bodies. Participants reject the idea of being a spokesperson for the Islam they practice because, for them, religion is about balancing yourself to different communities, environments, and a subjective interpretation of faith. However, some women accept distinct roles and highlight the responsibility of embodying the supplication, love, and peace Islam preaches for them. These participants call this visibility an everyday responsibility to counter and correct errors about their faith. Women also describe religious coping like reading Quran, prayer, and religious belief as self-healing rituals against violence or other hardships (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003). To confide and believe in Allah or God is to use religion as a primary source to cope and heal, a common method to overcome difficult experiences across faiths and cultures (Ai, Peterson & Huang, 2003; Bhui, King, Dein & O'Connor, 2008; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008;). According to Hassouneh-Phillips (2003), abusers may also use religion to frame and excuse violence as a form of ordained and justified suffering against women. Participants in this study spoke about the need to reclaim their Islamic beliefs from perpetrators driven to continue their abuse. Women describe this pervasion and spiritual abuse and juxtapose it to non-Muslims targeting them for remaining Muslim and wearing hijab, implying they support patriarchal violence.

In other words, women are victim-blamed to condemn them for their religious beliefs. Outside experiences of gender-based violence, Islamic faith, and practice are ways to build strength against poverty and everyday life. Finally, participants consider their distinct realities without minimizing each other's experiences and complex connections to the many sects, traditions, and forms identified as Islam.

The 'everyday analytic' is an attempt to pay attention to the lived experience of these women with changing relations to Islam. Liebelt and Werbner (2018) argue to insert 'gender' into 'everyday Islam' and to think of the 'everyday' as a useful analytical category in relation and not in contrast to Islamic piety. Gendering everyday Islam challenges definitions of women as essentially marginal and submissive to Islam. According to Liebelt and Werbner (2018), every lifestyle choice of a Muslim woman can become a testimonial of Islam regardless of her intentions and understandings. Liebelt and Werbner recognize the process of women "becoming knowledgeable, self-reflective," and gaining "critical literacy" to engage with texts, traditions and to "effect changes in their everyday lives within, rather than in contrast to an Islamic framework" (p. 7). This accessing of authority requires an expanded definition of Islamic authority. Islamic authority is more than scriptural – encompassing oral knowledge and other practices. People cannot escape the complexities and ambiguities of everyday life regardless of which set of doctrines and norms they ascribe and endorse. Through the everyday analytic, ambiguities and negotiations are discernible.

The visibility of difference and visible markers of Muslim identity highlight the role of the body as an interpreted subject. Mirza (2013) uses narratives and storytelling to capture how professional Muslim women intervene and respond to the politicization of their bodies, experiences, and realities. For Mirza, we invigorate discursive power by positioning migrant women by class, gender and as racialized subjects of discourse. In other words, intersectional 'othering' lives on and within the body of transnational migrant women. Other 'subtle' markers of difference, such as dress, diet, mannerism, and speech, are also hyper-visible national and cultural identifiers. We use these markers as everyday legitimations of systemic exclusions, social relations, and practices that are embedded in the dominant normative culture of violence. Mirza's work expands the conventional trilogy of class, race, and gender domination, to include other embodied differences like transnational space, place and location, age, and profession. Despite recognizing the Muslim woman's body is a gendered, classed, racialized subject of

discourse Mirza recalls transnational professional women's expression of their faith as a private source of inner strength – contrasting it from "more outwardly collective masculine expressions of Muslimness" (p. 10). This gendering of collective outward and private expressions is normalized and based on false binary formations. This gendered structuring of everyday life must be questioned for conceptions reinforcing the binary opposition of a male public and female domestic sphere. According to Mohammad (2013), Muslimness is normalized through the development of new spatialities, and young women are at the forefront of utilizing Islam as a resource to advance their gendered interests within and outside the Muslim community. These spatialities range from prayer rooms in school spaces and workplaces to major supermarket chains carrying halal meals and culturally informed diets (p. 1806). Alba (2005) uses an 'everyday' analysis to recognize the balancing acts undertaken by immigrants between self-presentation and social representation (p. 22). For these immigrants relating to multiple identities, the struggle to articulate self-hood includes negotiating a flexible identity that encompasses both societies. The 'everyday' sears the mundane into our collective consciousness to reveal latent and manifest roles of identity. It is more complex than narratives focused on hiding or minimizing the difference to 'fit in.' This analytic reveals intersections between the Muslim woman's body and spaces to dispense the dialectic, temporal, and spatiality of lived experience.

## **Chapter 2. Methodology and Methods**

In this chapter, I explain my research decisions: the selection of participants, the method used, and data management. According to LeCompte and Schensul, “[a] paradigm constitutes a way of looking at the world; interpreting what is seen; and deciding which of the things seen by researchers are real, valid, and important to document” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 21). I present the interplay of the method employed and the methodological aspects of this study, and how they affect the research conclusions. I also discuss ethical obligations as an ‘insider’ and conducting credible qualitative research. Qualitative research focuses on a particular phenomenon and provides insight into a group of people under study (Labuschagne, 2003, p. 100). The research purpose will most definitely influence the nature and design of the study. The exploratory framework examines an under-researched group or phenomenon, and descriptive research focuses on detailed thick descriptions of social reality (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 13). The benefits of using an exploratory framework include permitting a great deal of flexibility to shape the research around the participants’ responses.

### **2.1. Purpose and positionality**

Common sense assumptions are personal opinions, biases, or information that we gather from our social environment (Sears and Cairns, 2005, p. 2). Given that I chose the topic and devised the research questions, my positionality as a Muslim woman and a former refugee affected my research process in constructive ways. These women took part in a study because many have shared experiences and stories that often go unheard. I aim to highlight Muslim women’s diverse experiences of gender-based and structural violence to emphasize the need for more attention to normalized injustices. I hope to contribute to research with poor, racialized asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrant women, informing policies for anti-violence against women. The focus on survivors is based on a vision to realize a more just and free society.

From personal experience, I can empathize with participants describing what it means to be poor, a refugee, and experiencing gendered violence. However, the informal supports, including family and friends, helped prevent our family from experiencing homelessness. Several of my participants living separately from their

families and support networks are not so privileged. In 2017, after presenting my undergraduate honours thesis on Muslim women's experiences of gendered Islamophobia for a student symposium, an audience member criticized my use of the term for stifling all academic criticism about Islam. Bigotry and hatred are easily justified if we frame it as a matter of academic debate. In my view, the term "anti-Muslim sentiment" separates the violence from oppressive systems to an interpersonal issue.

I consider how micro-aggressions differ from the regular gendered implications for my mother as a racialized and visible hijab-wearing Muslim woman. To understand gendered Islamophobia, it is crucial to understand the colonial anti-veiling discourses targeting the dress of Muslim women (Khan, 2002; Zine, 2006; Thobani, 2007). For example, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer told my mom while she waited to pick me up that she is "allowed" to remove her "headscarf" since she is living here. When she told me about this incident, she called the officer a "gusty self-identifying liberator," who was disturbed and lacked an understanding of the hijab and a symbol of her faith.

More recently, after describing my thesis, a fellow graduate student explains her negative views about Islam and Muslims remain because most, unlike me, cannot stand against "hate, violence, and extremism." To my discomfort, the peer asked why these monolith people she called Muslims are so unwilling to challenge "rampant backward practices" and whether Islam fosters "sexism, homophobia, social injustice, and oppression." I asked if she was familiar with Islamophobia and whether injustice pervades religious identity, belief, and practice. The peer explained other groups and religions take a stronger stance. Thus, the onus is on Muslim people, crediting me as an "already progressive Muslim" to challenge or disprove distortions. For her, legitimate fears about Muslim's "purposes and intentions" explain their social, economic, and political marginalization. The peer described the threat of "Muslim nations," filled with "backward" Muslim people who do not denounce and end female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, and abuse. Her promotion of Islamophobia reveals the normalization of the othering process and how Muslims are positioned to seek acceptance from colonizers, imperialists, the enlightened, and white saviours. Finally, my peers' comments frustrated me as I work and study in a university that offers more slogans than any semblance of justice and equity for poor, disabled, racialized, and other marginalized students. The situation also made me think about the repeated phrase that bigotry, prejudice, hate, and Islamophobia are best resisted and countered

by education. The unspoken and overt charge remains for those experiencing oppression to verify their values, cultural beliefs, and practices are not backward, oppressive, and anti-woman.

## 2.2. Interviews and the participants

Wajma: Which app you use?

Interviewer: Just voice recorder.

Oh okay.

How come?

Nothing. I know your phone is nicer and I need to get a new phone. I have to save a little bit of money and get a better phone. Right.?

Yeah.

For sure I deserve it. Right? Especially for someone at my old my age. I believe everyone deserve nice things too. A fancy phone can be something to get through some of these weekly RESIDENT house meetings [laughing]

You 100% do. Do you want to talk about the house meetings?

I think maybe having it sometimes is better! [laughs] I don't know once a week it's fine. But sometimes it's too much... you're having it with your, the manager... with the the caseworker. Sometimes it gets too much and there is nothing really to talk about... It's just bugging. Yeah, because sometimes you were here and sometimes you can wait one hour because the interview just holds you back... you have to wait for it, or you have been rushing... but actually the interview doesn't start until another an hour or one hour and a half sometimes...so... that's why I say that.

After signing the “resident contract,” Wajma must attend weekly “house meetings” and sessions with a caseworker. Wajma had previously shared how unheard she felt at the shelter. At first, I was unsure if I should ask Wajma about the house meeting because she had also just shared the significance of saving and buying herself a gift. I decided to focus on the concerns at Nisa and ask her directly about the weekly housing meetings. Wajma reveals that rigid shelter policies operate without consideration for the difference in needs. “Nisa Homes” maintains they centre the needs

of the women seeking safety, and thus to disregard their concerns counter their mission statement. I followed up by asking about what it means to treat herself with a gift. Meaning making is a constant process where the responsive interviewer recognizes their role in producing specific interactions (Holestin and Gubrium, 1995). According to Holestine and Gubrium (1995), an active interviewer facilitates in-depth understanding over breadth of understanding. Firstly, the researcher must select participants based on the expansiveness of their knowledge about the topic. Second, the researcher should listen carefully and intently to responses throughout the interview. Finally, ask additional questions based on responses to a point wherein the researcher understands the question from the participant's viewpoint (Holestin and Gubrium, 1995). During the interviews, I re-framed questions to suit the experience and knowledge of the specific participant. I probed for facts and feelings and asked follow-up questions to clarify participant responses. This approach allows participants the greatest opportunity to provide input and shape the research questions.

As a volunteer, I met diverse women and heard their different stories. I have tried to honour these women with distinct needs and voices. I conducted 21 qualitative interviews with shelter stayers and women who work at the Muslim shelter. I met many women struggling to secure housing and live on insufficient government assistance while they managed their escape from interpersonal violence. Some participants know each other and the stories in this thesis, and some also maintain friendships. I used in-depth unstructured and semi-structured interviews to learn about the experiences and understandings of these Muslim women staying at the shelter. This method of open-ended questions allows for latitude and sensitivity, especially when discussing painful topics. The one-on-one interviews compiled an account of Muslim women's everyday experiences and the significance of a Muslim shelter (see Appendix A for a copy of the interview schedule). I also interviewed five shelter workers: two caseworkers, the shelter manager, hired counsellor, and the national manager. The workers' interviews were about their approach and the role of crisis intervention in meeting the needs of different women staying at the shelter.

Some participants were referred to Nisa by police, non-profit organizations, or other shelters. Other women called the Muslim shelter themselves after a google search. Six of the sixteen women stayed at another non-Muslim shelter, and some experienced gendered Islamophobia and discrimination. Many women came to the shelter as a last

resort after being forced to live in their cars, couch surf, spend the night at a Tim Hortons or a mosque. There exist different vulnerabilities and needs between the participants who stayed at Nisa. The differences range from the ongoing risk of homelessness to securing protection to remain in the country and women with more social and informal support. Unfortunately, many continue to face indirect and direct violence from the abuser(s). Many women have relied on insufficient assistance their entire lives, so a few consider relocation as a solution to vulnerabilities. Two women have moved to different provinces hoping to secure housing and employment only to return to Nisa.

Participants' other differences relate to their legal status, class position, and visible identity as racialized and Muslim women. Asylum-seekers and unprotected refugees' risk of deportation/dispossession set them apart from voluntary immigrants. An asylum-seeker is a person seeking international protection because of persecution, crossing one or multiple borders to make their asylum claim, which is not yet legally determined (Makarenko, 2010; Canada in the Making, n.d.). In contrast, voluntary immigrants choose to emigrate to a different country sometimes for reasons such as work, study, and sometimes through spousal or familial sponsorship. Cortes (2004) distinguishes economic migrants/immigrants from refugees by their ability to return to their country of origin and recognizes that economic migrants may not seek permanent stay (p. 465).

In Canada, a legally recognized refugee is an internationally protected person under the 1951 UN Convention relating to the status and rights of refugees by their host countries or the country they sought refuge in. Many leave their homes in search of a secure home or better life; a person who is both fleeing gender-based interpersonal violence and larger government or communal persecution is distinguished in Canadian law. On July 28th, 1951, the United Nations (UN) implemented a Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which came into force in 1954 (CCR, n.d.). This convention is the primary international instrument that defines who may claim refugee status and specifies how refugees are to be treated legally: the social rights and supports they are entitled to from host countries; and host countries' obligations to them (UNHCR, n.d.). Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as a person who:

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHR, 1951)

Initially refusing to join the 1951 Refugee Convention, Canada agreed to this agreement (CCR, n.d.). The new Immigration Act created four new classes of immigrants: (1) the independent class, who applied for status on their own accord; (2) the humanitarian class, who met the UN definition of refugee and also included persecuted and displaced persons who did not meet the UN definition for refugee; (3) the family class refugees, who already had immediate family in Canada; and (4) the assisted relative class, who had distant relatives in Canada who were willing to sponsor them (Makarenko, 2010). Since 2002 refugee laws have remained "concurrent powers" and are enshrined in The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). Thus, in Canada, federal and provincial governments have authority over refugees' policies and legislation (Markarenko, 2010). A common conceptualization of refugees is persons who flee their homeland due to conflict and fear of persecution from authorities (Goodwin-Gill, 2008; Makarenko, 2010). For example, the Government of Canada states that "Refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of widespread persecution, and who are unable to return home. Many refugees come from war-torn countries and have seen unthinkable horrors" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2012). In practice, refugees are distinguished "on a case-to-case basis" intended to evaluate their motivations and imminent need. The process remains very disconnected and without regard to the harsh realities and experiences of those trying to be accepted as refugees and recognized claimants. Participants that are protected refugees acted upon referrals to countries of asylum from agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Red Cross (IRC). For these interviews, I focus on seeking asylum and refugee protection, how they navigate the legal process and their lives since trying to attain status. These five illuminate the experiences of female refugees and emphasize a need for comprehensive gender-specific refugee policies. Likewise, participants currently or previously with precarious status explain how their class and gendered position kept them perpetually victimized. Interview participants who stayed at Nisa include naturalized citizens, recent

martial sponsored immigrants with permanent residency and one woman on a work visa, asylum-seekers at risk of deportation, and legally protected refugees.

The final sample of sixteen shelter stayers and five shelter workers includes Muslim women from diverse cultural backgrounds, personalities, ages, and walks of life. Nine of the sixteen shelter stayers had just left a household with an abusive spouse before coming to the women's transition shelter. Nine women are also single mothers with the major priority of securing stability and safety for their children. I previously knew six participants from volunteering, and I directly approached them to be interviewed. I recruited others through a snowball method via caseworkers at the shelter acting as gatekeepers. Participants are unemployed or work at menial and low-wage jobs for survival and do not have opportunities to upgrade their level of education and develop more career skills. Many are indebted to repay their families for the financial costs to travel, stay, or return to Canada. Other women are in different forms of debt and do not receive child support. At the time of interviews, eight participants were still living at the shelter, and the other eight lived in shared accommodations or basements. Participants range in age from 24 to 65, and all identify as Muslim. They belong to diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities, including Pakistani, Indian, Egyptian, Yemeni, North African, Nepalis, Iranian, Arab, and Afghan. Not by design, the shelter stayers interviewed have lived in at least one other country where they have been the ethnic and or religious minority before coming to Canada. Twelve shelter stayers have always worn a hijab or the Islamic headscarf. Hijab is a part of their identities—constantly evolving and adapting identities in the social context of being Muslim in British Columbia. Participants are not a monolith group, and during their interviews, women reiterated they only speak to their experiences. Women differentiate gender-based violence by the form, prevalence of violence, and unlivable conditions. Further, participants detailed personal experiences of abuse, including physical violence, confinement, financial and emotional abuse, rape, sexual assault, and other violence while living with perpetrators. Recently sponsored immigrants and unprotected refugee women feared loss or delays in their legal status if they reported their partner in the same asylum case. The impact on survivors varies greatly, especially those having experienced multiple or different kinds of victimization.

Women on temporary work and study visas fear not having their visas renewed and facing deportation to a 'home' country they no longer know. This fear is constant,

life-threatening and adds to the pressure of finding a job to maybe secure safety from deportation. At the time of their interviews, Shabnam and Hila were protected refugees safe from deportation. Amara and Freshta were at risk of deportation, and both had no experiences of gender-based violence. Amara successfully prevented her two “illegal” and unprotected granddaughters from being deported and Freshta in Canada on an expired work permit. Amara, a US citizen, did not expect her daughter to leave and relinquish her grandchildren to bring back to America. Amara was the fierce grandma at the shelter who repeatedly sat outside multiple immigration offices, pleading an asylum case for herself and two unprotected grandchildren left in her care. Freshta, who speaks several languages but not English, came to Canada on the now-expired visa and must find full-time income to stay. Freshta is also a fluent French speaker who expected difficulty finding a job but did not know it would be impossible without English fluency. Amina arrived with her family on a student visa before applying for refugee status because of intimate partner violence. Shabnam is a refugee and artist trying to learn English with the limited resources accessible and struggles to make ends meet on deprived income assistance. Hila is a long-time feminist activist in her home country. At her interview, she was a refugee claimant seeking safety from arrest for her political views and criticisms. Wajma and Zoyah, both on assistance, are open to moving out of the Muslim shelter together and finding a place to live. Wajma struggles to live on BC disability income assistance every day after two workplace injuries and financial and emotional abuse from her ex-husband and immigration sponsor. Zoyah speaks four different languages but always struggled to learn English and was confined to the home. At Nisa, Zara found out she has permanent residency and has decided to leave the country to find support with her family. She struggles to live alone after leaving an abusive partner and barely survives on income assistance. At the interview, Taha was pregnant and remained at the Muslim shelter until her delivery date after facing housing discrimination as a person on income assistance and being pregnant. Sami wears a niqab and described experiencing gendered Islamophobia almost daily. As new immigrants privately sponsored by abusive partners, Nour, May, Ellham, Farah, and Leila describe how they tried to isolate, confine, and use the fear of being in a new place against them.

## 2.3. Ethics, transcription, and analysis

I began this project with a desire to honour my participant's voices and stories. I took care to produce a final thesis that is an accurate and fair representation of those involved. To minimize their experiences is inconsistent with my research goal of honouring participants. To insulate women to their negative and traumatic experiences also exalts and commodifies their suffering. Guided by feminist ethnography, participants maintain sole authorship and stewardship over their perceptions and experiences. I center participants' voices but do not represent their possibly changing views and struggles. Dossa draws on the work of Das and Kleiman (2001) and Kleinman et al. (1997) to argue social suffering is a multi-faceted phenomenon which requires we "listen so that the women who speak are recognized as engaged participants [read: not victims] working through but also going beyond social created suffering" (p. 17).

I started this research firm in my pride, believing participants' stories would not significantly affect me. During their interviews, disclosures led to various emotions, followed by my attempts to offer comfort and proportional response. I reminded myself to distinguish aspects of the separate roles I assumed at the shelter helped in the write-up. It is challenging to listen to stories and not offer material aid to participants. I gave women \$20 gift cards and brought them food to express my gratitude for their time. Starting this project, I was aware of the sensitivity of the data, stories, and experiences to be shared. I also knew that there would be differences between the participants, which enabled me to remain open to the idea that the research could take me in multiple directions. I stayed open-minded and worded the questions to elicit genuine responses, which allowed their opinions to emerge on the principles of voluntariness and credible data. I guaranteed participants absolute confidentiality and anonymity to protect them so they could take part. My positionality limits me as an outsider to the specific experiences of my participants. My relatively young age affects the fieldwork and participants' interactions with me as a novice researcher. Most participants perceived my age positively, as they could relate to me at some level as someone to listen, record, and transcribe their experiences. Participants asked me questions about the project that I tried to answer clearly and honestly. Women asked what type of research this was and questioned the purpose of my study. I mitigate risks against women by reminding them they could withdraw before, during, and after their interview.

Reflexivity is a tool that encourages researchers to explore the beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions that inform their knowledge base and guide their research practices. Being reflexive means knowing how values, preconceptions, and social location influences knowledge production. We enhance credibility by being reflexive throughout the process—reflected through their actions and role in the research, both what they know and how they know it (Doucet, 2018). I recognize the questions and codes I developed into themes prioritize specific raw data over other meaningful data. Situating myself to the research has allowed me to acknowledge my conceptual assumptions as a researcher. Although it is not possible to remain completely neutral, keeping biases in check is imperative to the authenticity of the research process. I recognize my experiences affect my conceptualization of investigated issues, relationships and interactions with participants, analysis and interpretation of findings, and the final write-up and dissemination of my thesis. After some consideration, I decided not to employ a specific theory at the outset of my research and instead investigated the topic inductively to generate themes. Once again, the advantage of adhering to such an exploratory framework is that it encourages the collection of participant-led data. The broad, open-ended questions elicited rich-thick data and further collaborative questions based on participants' responses. From these open-ended questions, the interview data developed naturally and organically. I noted preconceived notions and focused on themes that emerged from the raw data. I also did not want to re-traumatize women trying to bring attention to their experiences. I let participants guide their interviews, so they could tell the parts of their stories they could right now and for this project.

Self-reflecting helped me accept discrepancies, write against marginality, incorporate Muslim epistemologies, and honour participants. As a member of the community that I am researching, I have the trust of and access to this population and insider knowledge to guide my exploration. I understand Muslim women's distinct insecurity that their concerns propel further Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment. My experiences indicate a tentative 'insider' status and a level of connection with the participants. I understand the cultural norms that can influence the participation of group members in research, namely maintaining the privacy and valuing their community (Graham, Bradshaw & Trew, 2008). Before the interviews, I read participants' rights in the research study, my responsibilities, and the contact information to raise questions,

concerns, or complaints about how they are treated (see Appendix B for informed consent form). I stripped the raw data of identifying information to protect identities and considered what detail to provide about participants. Participants self-selected pseudonyms to facilitate the retention of their authority over their experiences and stories. I also consulted the participants to control how much information and detail they felt comfortable disclosing in the write-up. The audio recording took weeks to transcribe and verify, and I deleted records after verification. Rather than verbatim transcription, which is deemed unnecessary and time-consuming, I represented filler words with three dots unless it meant a loss of meaning. I conducted 4 of these interviews in Farsi and Dari to accommodate the specific participants. During transcription, I translated these interviews into English for coding and analysis. I deleted the audio recordings from my personal computer, and I will destroy transcriptions two years after completing the study (see informed consent form).

Charmaz (2003) identifies six characteristics of grounded theory that set it apart from other approaches to research (p. 497):

1. Grounded theory involves some level of analysis in each phase of research, including data collection.
2. The analytic process holds that codes, and thus themes, emerge from the data. This is an alternative to using a hypothesis to develop codes and then testing for those in the data.
3. The researcher develops “middle range theories” during analysis to explain what they see in their raw data.
4. To create these middle-range theories, researchers rely on memo-making or analytical notes, including thoughts, reflection, and analytical commentary on the data.
5. In grounded theory, researchers rely on sampling for theory construction rather than for the representativeness of a population. Thus, purposive sampling is used instead of random samples.
6. Lastly, because the analytic process stresses that codes emerge from the data, the literature review is conducted after the data has been analyzed to ensure that the literature does not influence the researcher on a topic (Charmaz, 2003, p. 497).

Once the transcripts were complete, the coding and analysis process developed. I coded transcripts with the NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software program to help me connect categories and themes linked across participants' transcripts. I used an

inductive and iterative coding process to develop codes and themes from interview data using grounded theory techniques. In addition, the techniques of grounded theory informed my entire research process. First, the current sample was purposive. Second, the present study used an inductive and iterative coding process. The initial coding round in grounded theory is line-by-line coding, which allows the researcher to stay close to the data and build their themes “from the ground up” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 506). In doing so, the researcher can closely “study the emerging data” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 505). Immersing oneself in the data allows for greater awareness of explicit and implicit meanings and messages. After coding line by line, the second coding round verified the codes to conceptualize and move from specific codes to larger, more analytically focused categories. These categories allowed for a more conceptual and analytical look at the codes that had emerged from line coding (Charmaz, 2003, p. 507). I made written memos along the way and included reflections on coding and analysis. I used these memos in establishing the emerging themes. I identified more themes than I could explore and discuss within the parameters of this study. After classifying overarching themes, I re-examined transcripts, codes, and categories to identify excerpts that exemplify each chapter’s themes. The two following chapters explore several themes developed and are titled: Unpacking Prism and Choice and “Nisa Homes,” the Muslim shelter.

## Chapter 3. Unpacking Prism and Choice

Prisms of choice systematically ignore gendered victims of multifaceted violence living in a capitalist society without social and economic resources. Poverty constrains choice as women try to keep themselves and their children safe from multifaceted violence. The attempt to separate experiences of gender-based violence from their class oppression negates the connections between class position, systemic racism, and interpersonal violence (Kaltman and Goodman, 2007). The remedies offered at temporary shelters include campaigns of ‘financial literacy,’ to patronize the poor to open saving accounts and learn to ‘budget’ deprived government assistance (Petit and Tedds, 2020). In this chapter, I attempt to describe the everyday conditions of being a poor, racialized, visible Muslim woman who combat structural and gender-based oppression. I will explain some of the structural and gender-based violence women face and how insufficient government assistance perpetuates this oppression. In addition, the hostile government assistance process creates stigma and discrimination against racialized Muslim women already experiencing violence and scarcity. Finally, I will explain why it is essential to highlight the daily harms of violence (Galtung, 1969).

Material deprivation and its gradations compound, due to systems of power, perpetuating a lack of access to the basic and additional needs of material security, joy, and comfort for these women (Galtung, 1969; Farmer 2010; Miller 2009; Brym, Roberts, & Strohschein, 2019). In addition, living in a state of deprivation of material security means they lack access to anything that could lead them out of deprivation and dispossession. According to Petit and Tedds (2020), working-age adults, especially singles, experience the highest levels and most entrenched poverty compared to seniors and children. Many assumptions about poor people and myths about poverty in Canada uphold the lies of meritocracy and the belief that a good work ethic is all you need to escape poverty (2011, March 1. The Vancouver Sun). If all a person needs to adopt is the right work ethic to escape poverty, what explains the working poor? The other false myths about poverty focus on hunger and material deprivation as the only form of oppression (Gustafson, 2009; Gustafson, 2011). Our cultural beliefs and the capitalist system rank categories of people based on social class to enforce their subjugation. I draw out the connection of poverty and precarious existence for these women as exacerbating experiences of abuse and violence.

In chapter one, I discussed the illusionary Canadian self-image rooted in false discourses of equality, multiculturalism, or tolerance. The oppression is authorized as concern over the “Muslim-woman” to legitimize dominance over her and ascribe inferiority. Absent in the essentialist cultural frame is any attempt to listen to women living multifaceted violence. Because of the systemic "isms" in our society, the job of resisting has often fallen to marginalized people. This unfair labor burden and history of resistance have also generated stereotypes of marginalized peoples as always "oppositional." This threat of stereotype – or the fear of reaffirming a stereotype about ourselves – can lead to marginalized peoples feeling unable to speak up against discriminatory language or actions. Nadal et al. (2012) argue that subtle and covert displays of bias are commonplace in the social experiences of racialized groups, women, and sexual minorities (p. 15). Racial micro-aggression captures manifestations of hostility that may be unintentional and unconscious to some degree (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 16; Poolokasingham et al., 2014, p. 195). Poolokasingham et al. (2014) found racialized South Asian students endure distinct micro-aggressions, including perceptions such as being too culturally oriented and assumptions that they have ties to terrorism (p. 200). Each micro-aggression separately may not translate into significant harm for the target; however, daily and consistent manifestations have severe implications for mental health (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 15). Muslim women experience Islamophobia differently than Muslim men because of systems of patriarchy through which racialization, class and other oppression intersect (Jiwani, 2005, p. 847). However, it is not as simple as “the sum of being a Muslim plus being a woman” (Riley, 2011, p. 6). Muslim women who experience discrimination do so in the interaction of legal and social status, gender, racialized, and cultural affiliations. (Karim, 2009; Ruby, 2006; Zine, 2006). Given their visibility, Muslim women who wear the hijab are more likely to face exclusion and discrimination than their male counterparts (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 145). Understanding the social experience of hijab-wearing Muslim women in Canada involves understanding their experiences with discrimination, harassment, and anti-Muslim hostility in public spaces.

The 'Muslimwoman's' body is held captive to contradictory and conflicting meanings imposed upon it (Zine, 2006, p. 1). The Islamophobic gaze does not recognize gendered, ethno-racial, ideological, or lived experiences that define people— instead constructing Muslims as both the same and entirely different from Westerners (Pablo,

2007). Coupled with government security policies that have mainly affected Muslim communities locally and internationally, this gaze has fuelled cultural racism towards Islam and Muslims (Naber, 2008). The rhetoric of a culture war situates Islam as a pre-modern, tribal, non-democratic entity that is not compatible with western principles as it pertains to freedom, civility, and equality (Razack, 2005, p. 12). The prevailing view that Muslim women are helplessly self-oppressed by patriarchal religion is the underlying supposition of colonial feminism (McGinty, 2006; Zine, 2006). Thobani (2007b) highlights a renewed 'alliance' between white feminism and colonial violence had been exacerbated by the global war on terror. Colonial feminism manifests distinctly for Muslim women living in settler societies and the so-called 'third world.' For the civilizing Islamophobic, Western people must bring non-Western people, especially perpetually pre-modern Muslim people, into modernity. The bodies of Muslim women are the arenas to achieve this racist purpose. Mohanty (1988) emphasized the insufficiency of essentializing epistemological frameworks, which created the "third world woman" to stick her in time, space, and history.

Gender-based violence does not only occur to women of a particular age, race, and level of education or socioeconomic status. Interpersonal violence includes different types of abuse and neglect, including partner and family or relative violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 1). Participants' experiences of violence differ and include threats, physical, verbal, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse. Previous violence is separate from racism, poverty, and the processing of grieving multiple losses. The effects differ for women, often based on how well they are mentally coping and suffering homelessness or food insecurity. Other women describe a life-long healing process and the legacy of surviving the violence against them. Access to aid from anti-violence against women shelters, non-profits and other organizations is often contingent on information exploitation. Some participants describe how they are blamed for their destitution in failing to measure against the imagined undeserving victims. Their request for aid or shelter often leads to minimizations, racism, and poor women bashing. Violence does not rely on the victim's complicity despite narratives that try to silence certain survivors. Under perversions of the role of women in Islam, abusers may rationalize violence against women as a religious duty they should endure as a test prescribed by Allah. Muslim women also describe abusers who are indifferent, manipulative, apologetic, and in some cases how fear is a daily experience for them.

The fear and risk of further violence may be a part of why it is difficult for women to leave abusive relationships (Mosher, 2009; Walby et al., 2014). Amina did not think of herself as a victim and still struggles with the label; she knows herself as a strong woman raised to be independent and believed she was helping a struggling partner. Amina is one of many participants to separate her experiences of emotional abuse “as not as bad as” other forms of abuse.

So, what actually brought me to “Nisa Homes” transition House is that I didn't realize that I was in a really abusive relationship with my husband. This bullshit like “you have to change and fulfill all my rights as my wife” until I started to well... document myself and read. And like really analyze whatever or like what both rights are and what we have to respect and I understood it actually not all my rights were respected...in the sense of my person was always blamed... today I am only trying to figure out a way to settle by myself and with my son. I actually... take time to also learn from the violations I've lived and many of the situations I lived. It is like getting out of an illusion... the perfect image, marriage and having a child and you have to like deconstruct it... and re-build it with a new vision as a single mother. It's a good thing I rooted so I'm not like really triggered by the emotions. I feel like just talking about it is me moving on. (Amina)

She recognized the impacts of years of verbal abuse during a conversation with a doctor and strategized an escape plan. After having lived in complete isolation and abuse that escalated to the point of daily degradation, Amina “knew that to have a better life it meant leaving.” The question she received and asked herself, why did she stay? She stayed because of fear, a dream of a new life in Canada and the illusion of infinite commitment despite the violence, cheating, and while not realizing it to be abuse. For Muslim women, to be discredited becomes a part of the superimposed moral stigma of being infantilized for being a victim of gender-based violence. To be discredited means caseworkers, friends, families, and abusers distort their stories to deliberate them as perpetual victims requiring guidance and protection. Victim-blaming intertwines racist attitudes and infantilizes women to perpetrate harm. The compounding trauma of victim-blaming partner violence survivors and the factor of gendered Islamophobia enhances feelings of self-blame, especially from anti-violence workers. In chapter four, I discuss how women engage Islam source of strength to counter gender-based violence and gendered Islamophobia. These women strongly oppose attempts to scapegoat their religious-cultural identity as causal to experiences of gender-based violence. The ways that Muslim women articulate their identity when caught between racist tropes and patriarchal forces are central to the question of agency. Islam is not an instinctive

repressor of women, and Islamic identity is not the cause of experiences of gender-based violence. This oppression targets women for being poor, religious, and racialized to the point where women must rationalize their identities, practices, and beliefs. Women who experienced this racism from other shelter stayers feared the loss of shelter if they complained. Thus, while temporary shelters may be accessible, Muslim women's personal safety – being secure from further subjugation, racism, abuse, or oppression – cannot be guaranteed. One caseworker at the Muslim shelter described the covert and overt discrimination Muslim women have faced.

We have women who told us that they try to go to other transition homes and they were like horrifying...from bigotry from workers, other people sheltering... especially when it comes to trying to share the area like, you know their bedrooms.... They had a very negative experiences because like there were like negative kind of attitudes toward Muslim women, Islam, and the hijab and so on top of like experiencing abuse... and on the top of like, you know, being in a place that you cannot even connect to the workers there. They're kind of like... they had to face like, you know, kind of different kind of bullying from, you know, women there as well... So that also for them felt like very like threatening and just like overwhelming...

In her 2004 paper examining legal initiatives in Norway against forced marriage, Sherene Razack asks: how might we develop an anti-racist response to the problem of violence against Muslim women? Some may ask Muslims to be “more transparent” and “welcoming” to counter negative perceptions against them and their communities. The onus is therefore placed on Muslim communities and individuals to explain why Islam is not radical or brutal, and why it is that people of the Islam faith are just as deserving of equality (Jiwani, 2005, p. 853). Every day, Muslim women use their critical voices against minimizations of their challenges, insights, and resistance. The house manager revealed the requests from other anti-violence against women providers to take every Muslim woman who calls them. The attention to move every Muslim woman to Nisa sets a problematic and unrealistic precedent for the one Muslim shelter.

### **3.1. Poverty and experiences of abuse**

My ex informed my lawyer that he would be willing to pay my rent... like... if I am willing to stay there... and if I wasn't there, he would close the lease... then during that period of time... I got a job really close to my house... where I was living... and it was easy access and transportation to my place of work...so immediately I was just like okay I'll just go back to the house... he had a resistant order on him... I

thought let me go to the house and start working there but... after a month he was like okay I'll pay the rent only for October and not remaining months... and that has put me in trouble and... "Nisa Homes" did try to help me with the housing... but I really believed like he might pay out of his own heart or... because he was the one who told my lawyer... okay if she is continuing to live at the [Nisa] shelter, I'll pay... and now he's saying get out... I'm currently at that house but he wants me to leave because maybe he thought I would forgive him... I don't know what steps to take because unfortunately... my job... people are not satisfied with my work or job as well... customer service and I was told I was not good enough for customer service and they had issues with me unfortunately... the job is also no more... what can I do... I don't know. (Sara)

Participants describe the everyday conditions of being poor, racialized, visibly Muslim women who combat multiple forms of structural and gender-based oppression. Violence is the prism through which everything is refracted. For Sara, the restraining order is the legal route to stop one perpetrator and end abuse. Still, the precarity and insecurity of trying to secure safety persist, as it does for other women who are homeless. These women are still exposed to violence or threats of it. For instance, the restraining order does not protect Sara from her ex-husband. She remains dependent on his income to pay the rent; therefore, he continues to exercise power over her.

Violence is individualized instead of situated within the broader socio-political economy, which leads to deprivation and vulnerability. Experiences of destitution included already being on income assistance and facing unsustainable debt, housing, and food insecurity. Despite being on government assistance, these women cannot have their basic needs met and live every day materially deprived. For participants, lack of English language proficiency, little formal education, no job experience, and inadequate assistance are some of the barriers to employment and housing security. Poverty may be one factor causing violence in the home, but it also greatly impacts women's ability, options, and resources to permanent safety.

Women's long-term economic stability and safety is determined by their financial status, savings, and asset accumulation. Fewer resources equal fewer 'choices' to get and stay safe while poor and surviving gender-based violence. In this study, women have no relatives nor support here and have no choice but to live on government assistance, food banks, and shelters. Most participants already lived in precarious conditions with their abusers or households already relying on social assistance as their only income. Only three women spoke about leaving financially stable conditions to face

homeless and poor after leaving abusive partners. Leaving is a planned process for some and sometimes a sudden decision from the daily fear of violence. Some participants said they work multiple, unsafe, and temporary jobs to save up while on assistance to leave abusive partners. Women also face unsustainable debt, which perpetuates their housing and food insecurity.

Gender-based violence does not occur in a classless society despite so-called advocacy that persistently disregards these homeless, poor, refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, non-status, racialized, and disabled women (Gilmartin & Miggie, 2016). Wajma survives on depleted disability assistance and cannot afford the physical therapy she needs to help her cope with the multiple unhealed workplace injuries she has sustained over the years. She is not the only woman who lives in chronic pain and describes a “powerlessness and isolation that is fed to you”. Nour, who also participated in this study, had no options but to stay at multiple Nisa shelters across the country, trying to find stable employment as a refugee claimant and survivor of interpersonal violence. Sami spoke about “small, reachable goals” because, despite hardship, her resilience is about this daily “mapping of life” beyond scarcity. The other avenue for financial help for Muslim participants is the Nisa Zakat assistance and other charities or non-profit aid. Many participants appreciate the free Islamic counselling and therapy while at the Muslim shelter. However, Nisa provides single women with one bed, a locker, and limited space to store their belongings in the shared garage. One might have a roof over their head but must live in a controlled setting with marked fridge space.

Currently, every form of financial assistance under income assistance and related government programs is insufficient (Sarlo, 2003; Sarlo 2020; Petit and Tedds, 2020). Inadequate assistance means reliance on food banks, access to expired and unhealthy foods, frequent moves and returning to shelters (Nason-Clerk et al., 2014). In fact, for these participants, to live on government assistance means unsafe spaces that need significant repairs or have mould (Petit and Tedds, 2020). The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) is the BC government ministry in charge of income assistance, hardship assistance, and disability assistance. In 2020, Income Assistance (IA) and its related programs covered 155, 970 households, 205,195 persons, and 41, 532 children (Petit and Tedds, 2020). The government programs do not alleviate financial insecurity, income poverty rates, the depth and cycle of poverty, homelessness, and suffering. In British Columbia, the disjointed income assistance

program encompasses Temporary Assistance (TA), Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB), and employment and assistance for disabled people, designed Persons with Disabilities (PWD). Under each program, people must meet specific eligibility criteria and conditions to determine if the applicant is legally able and expected to work (ETW) (Petit and Tedds, 2020). The assistance is split between a portion for shelter rent and funds for essentials; however, if a recipient is homeless, they will not receive the shelter portion (Petit and Tedds, 2020; Sarlo, 2003; Sarlo 2020). People will be eligible for TA based on a system that determines if recipients are Expected to Work (ETW) and must regularly prove they are searching for work to continue qualifying for assistance. The work-search designation of “expected to work” and eligibility rules make it more difficult to access, especially for people in need of immediate and ongoing assistance (Petit and Tedds, 2020). For the other two categories (PPMB) and (PWD) of the temporary assistance program, recipients do not have to search for work if they have medical or other qualifying reasons, such as being a single parent with a young child (Petit and Tedds, 2020). For every form of IA and TA, a person must have no other financial resources they can access to support themselves (Petit and Tedds, 2020). For example, all participants live without a secure additional income, meaning they cannot always afford necessities such as groceries, medications, therapies, nutrients, and clothing. Asylum-seekers and unprotected refugees may only access reduced hardship assistance, which is also inadequate for essential needs.

For participants, living financially insecure, homeless, and experiencing poverty means constantly having their material existence in question. For instance, the requirement that people provide evidence that they have been actively searching for work to receive governmental support. These programs place permanent tropes on immigrant women as lazy and dependent. At the same time, the assistance locates and segments them in low-paid work by which they cannot meaningfully escape from poverty. Governments can eradicate poverty and meet the needs of all people living homeless and poor (Gustafson, 2009). Yet, homeless people face constant threats of violence against their bodies, seizures of their belongings, and live terrorized and criminalized (Yunus, 2007; Sarlo, 2020; Gustafson, 2009; Gustafson, 2011). Consequently, when women faced with multifaceted violence describe their desire for justice, they are not seeking an embodied sense of our current legal system of ‘justice’, but rather, ‘real justice’ against all oppressive structures. Women’s decisions to report

violence and perpetrators are not the subject or focus of this study. However, some participants discussed not having enough evidence to secure peace bonds and other possible legal protection. Others did not want to involve the police out of concern for the perpetrator, fear of the criminal justice system, and sometimes fear retaliation.

While some women are fortunate enough to have extended family or friends willing to help and support them to leave an abusive relationship, many are not so lucky. Those who do manage to leave by seeking the help of their family or friends nonetheless assert that their decision to leave was traumatic, for they feared retaliation from their abusers. Other women reiterate the reality of homelessness as a reason they stay, and some consider moving back with perpetrators. The decision to move into Nisa shelter then maintain their escape is incredibly difficult and traumatic. Taha's fear was based on repeated threats and the terror "that he will escalate because he never thought I would leave for a shelter even when I said I would." Similarly, Wajma weighed the constant abuse against the fear that she would later return to worse conditions. For participants, the decision to leave is connected to the fear that attempting to escape is impossible because they lack resources for safety and safe, affordable housing. Instead, both Wajma and Taha fear regularly living homeless and exacerbating abuse. Wajma explains what it meant to live abused with no place to turn to and eventually find temporary shelter at a transition home:

Actually I was in a hospital for like the entire day, almost all night and then at the end of that day I came to this shelter with such migraines and anxiety and I'm really thankful to be here...I mean there is....its [domestic violence] anywhere even in your home there is things that it's going to disturb you sometime... but here too... but overall it's like it's still, you know, you can have peace and at the end of the day you have a roof over your head....You have a warm place and you can make some food. It's... it's good. Because I was done with the drama and constant abuse with my husband, and I couldn't take it anymore. I was like suffering every day, every day. There was fights and argument and there were times I would feel safer to sleep in my car. When I came here. Everybody was so nice to me and everything. Yeah...I had like an introduction to the rules... like where to sleep and like not to touch like food with anybody's name on it. And then they were... I had like food you can eat this or yeah (Wajma)

Wajma describes what it means to lose your sense of safety, space, and control in your home. She wondered if "this place" [Nisa] had not been here, where would she have gone and how long could have slept in her car. At first, Wajma, like Amina,

struggled to label her experiences as abuse because she had not experienced physical violence and used to others minimizing her emotional and financial abuse.

Undoubtedly, women's experiences of interpersonal violence are tied to their realities of abject, absolute, and imposed poverty. Poverty is stratified which means there are different degrees of poverty (Poudel & Smyth, 2002; Sarlo, 2003; Gustafson, 2009; Taylor, 2013). Some poor people never have and are not likely to experience homelessness unless forced out of low-income, subsidized housing or denied income assistance. In this study, women make ends meet by donation and occasionally seek aid from family, friends, and other supports. The current assistance programs available remain insufficient in alleviating long-term poverty and is unlikely to assist anyone in achieving even a low-income status. While they live materially deprived, women's mental well-being is directly connected to their material well-being.

### **3.1.1. "How long has the abuse been happening, how violent was the abuser, what form of abuse was more prevalent?"**

Police said because this is not a criminal case and only a domestic violence case... this is not a criminal case... like if he use to hit me and blood was produced then it will become a criminal case... (laughs) at that time I was so worried about these terms and even emergency number non-emergency number... I don't know what these things are and everything... I came to know about this knowledge in transition houses... to meet the people and sit with the case worker and everything... I know about my position and what power women have here. (Farah)

For some women, like Farah, reporting and seeking justice is impossible because emotional abuse and neglect are not criminal, formally under-charged and rarely investigated. Relatedly, gender-based violence remains one of many patriarchal societies' hidden and accepted social problems. These so-called 'hidden' victims also spoke about the difficulty of bearing no physical scars of their abuse as evidence. As Sara explains, not being believed perpetuates further isolation and anxiety.

My ex was intelligent guy... very calm natured person but nobody knows what he does inside the house... nobody was aware... and I am begging someone to have shelter myself telling that it is very difficult for me...to know... to believe that he is... a violent and abusive person as well... so for others to believe it is even more difficult so I was just thinking whether on that day when I was going for that party... not party just lunch... at their home... I was thinking whether what am I doing I'm

going to somebody's house... whom my partner has closer... but when I went there... they were so supportive and also, they told me we have criminal lawyer if you need reference... with their help... they were so helpful... from that I understood that people here are very helpful and definitely they aren't thinking negatively on me... or discrediting and not believing me... because DV is very hidden and financial abuse is always present (Sara)

For Sara, charging her perpetrator was also essential for some sense of justice and possible restitution after being financially abused. She also speaks to the fear of not being believed as a victim of gender-based violence and struggling to trust again. The system measures to rate violence and only seeks verifiable abuse and an ideal victim. Specific verifiable victims are ideal for the legal system to rate and debate about measuring the violence while discounting harm. The intersection of interpersonal violence and poverty does not mean those with more financial resources do not experience violence, but their risk factors may be lessened through access to resources. The ideal victim construction constantly measures victims' genuineness, often overlooking ongoing violence, framing barriers to escaping multifaceted violence, and the social structure embedded in their victimhood. Moreover, the frame of oppression as 'barriers' to overcome ignores how systems are designed to reinforce themselves.

"How long has the abuse been happening, how violent was the abuser, what form of abuse was more prevalent?" This question in the "Nisa Homes" intake assessment form under question 9 is labelled as "additional information" to record if applicable. The abuse may be ongoing but viewed as an individual 'choice' of 'escape' and reduced to a matter of when to leave. The prism of choice ignores the other 'choice' for these women: poverty and potentially homelessness. There is little choice in life-changing decisions that expose one to further harm for any person. Instead, we blame choices and minimize the inequities that shape the pursuit of safety and sanctuary. Next, violence is measured to discount it by our legal system and, lastly, every abuse and violence does not make justice and reparations possible for poor women. This standard intake question/oppression test insulates to rate violence often based on legal constructions and ignores how/which violence remains. Realizing justice for poor women in this prism is self-fought, self-achieved, and systemically denied.

Anti-violence against women services, including Nisa, title themselves a temporary "haven," yet still promote the idea that lifestyle "choices" lead one to be poor any longer. During the intake assessment, women are asked to self-report if they have

previously been homeless and how they plan to not be after three months at the Muslim shelter. The oppression test misses the everyday suffering like scarcity, precarious support, and homelessness. The combination of gender-based oppression and material deprivation is central in how survivors become homeless and live at the shelter after leaving. Many who sought refuge at Nisa are likely transitioning out to shared accommodation. Other women previously lived at other shelters or shared rooms, and others moved into another women's shelter. Sara and Ellham returned to the Muslim shelter a second time. On their second stay at the Muslim shelter, they met and later lived together in a basement suite. The determination to provide refuge at Nisa depends on a woman needing refuge, space at the shelter, and others currently needing safety. Other participants who do not want to be identified for returning to their abuser's home said it was the better option after living in absolute poverty and potentially being homeless again. For Nour, who lived in her car for two weeks and travelled two days to shelter at Nisa, the fear of homeless and abuse are related in that it is "every day and [a] constant fear of exposure to violence." Nour informed her family that even if she lost her income and other social supports, ending up homeless again is safer than living with her abuser again. Any organization that seeks to normalize inequities instead of highlighting the structural violence leaves intact and produces further oppression.

May and Ellham share terrifying stories of being forced into taking a trip to visit relatives and then abandoned and told to remain in their former home after moving to Canada. Both women came to Canada under private sponsorship to reunite with their husbands, who they married overseas. Instead, both women faced multiple forms of abuse. They each contacted the Muslim shelter after being forced out of Canada to previous homes and told not to return (National Manager, Yasmine Yousuffe). Ellham felt her husband knew she would decide to act and ask for a divorce one day, so he forcibly removed her from the country before she could. For May, she was only able to re-enter Canada with the support of her family back home. Amina and Leila also had their immigration papers stolen by their abuser and told they would be deported out of Canada. Other women had no knowledge and information about their legal status. They lived in the fear that they could be deported if they were to separate from their abusers, who so happened to be their immigration sponsors. Mosher (2009) examined the state's complicity in the violence against immigrant women coming to Canada. Muslim women

are regularly threatened to remain controlled by abusers telling them they have precarious status and could be deported by their partners at any point.

My husband was holding all the financial dominancy to himself, and he was financially very dominant. Like he was keeping everything to himself not sharing any financial information with me. What he is investing. What is he earning and things like that... And he was keeping everything to himself. Like I was.... if I if I want something I would have to ask him... later.... It was not a fairytale story. I would say.... in the end.... but I stick around as a... well due to pressure from both the families I stick around but eventually he left me.... and as I said earlier like he sold the house... I was living when I was visiting my family back in \_\_\_\_\_and this is when there we split up and I had no place to go.... and then I had no place to go...I came back from \_\_\_\_\_ and at airport.... I asked keys back from my neighbor and my keys.... they were not there. They said he sold your house and your house is no more (Ellham)

Before Ellham was physically forced out of the country by her husband, her family pressured her to make things work. He also used finances to gain and maintain control by stealing her money and confined her to the home. Women are denied the right to make their own decisions and expose how multifaceted violence compounds against them physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually (Mosher, 2009; Nason-Clerk et al., 2014).

Like survivors of interpersonal violence, asylum-seekers and refugees experience a similar “oppression-measure” when required to substantiate and prove how they certify for asylum, protection, or aid. Participants who arrived thinking they would be starting their families spoke about the life they lost and leaving behind their supports and loved ones to experience violence. Refugees and asylum-seekers like Amara, Shabnam and Hila, who sought refuge in Canada, said in becoming refugees, they now live poor and faced homelessness if not for Nisa. When I met Shabnam, she had a cast on one arm and warned me that when the cast comes off, she will be moved out and is “too busy and focused on studies for any interviews.” She suggested I interview her before she left the shelter. Shabnam was granted refugee protection under the in-Canada Asylum Program refugee after a family member had broken her arm over her decision to study abroad. She still fears for her life if forcibly returned after fleeing gender-based violence and threats against her. She spoke about her terrifying resettlement experience as a refugee claimant:

I remember. I got off the plane. And I would go everyday lawyer meetings, immigration, welfare... but now more people have helped me... when I came here... I came with the initial cast from the hospital from my home country... it had been past 2 month... my hand colour was blue, bruised... I wanted to change it because 2-3 months... but not anybody helped me... I want to go to hospital, but I thought I can't alone because I'm scared and I can't speak English... I'm thinking I can't speak clearly to doctor to completely say what is the problem and issue with my injury... after 1 month I go by myself to the hospital and he told me what happened... and I said I don't know... I don't speak English. My arm is broken please help me. But that day he was very understanding... I talked to her because just one hand...and she said next time just come to the hospital it is okay if your English is not good. (Shabnam)

Shabnam feared going to the hospital because she felt she could not 'efficiently' communicate her symptoms. Others were fearful of prejudice against them as non-English speakers and visible Muslims. These marginalized women were rightfully concerned about racism and sexism as poor and racialized Muslims, especially those with such experiences. Other women describe high levels of fear as newcomers, especially after incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hostility on the bus, while on a walk, at the clinic, welfare office, and through other spaces and interactions. For Shabnam, the specific threat of deportation is lifted after being granted legal refugee status. However, she must cope with being poor and a racialized refugee trying to recover from gender-based violence, ongoing dispossession, and marginalization. In this study, some women had their immigration papers kept from them, forcibly relocated and in one case told if they separated from their partners, it would lead to their deportation. It is not surprising that some of these women with temporary status or those not told of their legal status fear reporting and engaging the criminal justice system. Their sentiments are rooted in legitimate fear of further persecution, especially after being threatened with deportation and negative experiences with the justice system in their previous home countries. In addition, Muslim women, including asylum-seekers and refugees, face persistent and substantive structural oppression through exclusion in Canadian society (Mosher, 2009). Gender-based violence should hold more significance within the academic field, and more research should be done within the Canadian context. Such studies could sway governmental policy and the law's functionality, thereby increasing fairness in criminal proceedings for victims.

### **3.1.2. Against “shelter hoppers,” discrimination, and being victim blamed**

Violence is not just oppression based on being a victim of abuse, but specifically racialized, non-status, poor, and homeless Muslim women. Women at Nisa must cope with being without safe shelter in three months and everyday gendered violence. Canada’s imperial and racist immigration policies exacerbate gendered violence, structural and institutional forms of oppression. The poor, racialized, refugee and asylum-seeking Muslim women who stay at Nisa are only eligible for reduced hardship assistance, waitlisted to access “affordable” government housing, and thus living in absolute poverty. Other participants face eviction after losing already precarious low-wage employment and fear being homeless again. Therefore, women consider returning to abusive homes because there is no choice in shelter stays and constantly facing homelessness. These women would rather struggle to manage life with abusers. In April 2021, after much deliberation, the province increased this amount for both types of aid by \$175. A person on assistance may now be eligible for \$935 and \$1358 for someone on disability assistance. In response to the recent pandemic, those on assistance and seniors received a temporary \$150 supplement during the province’s state of emergency. Because of their illegal status, which is increasingly criminalized, asylum seekers cannot access government assistance, and refugees must have legal protection to apply for temporary assistance.

The ministry requires everyone on government assistance (expected to work, no employment obligations, recipients with the PPMB designation) and those on hardship assistance to submit monthly “stubs” as a declaration of further need. These monthly “stubs” and declarations of the ongoing need for funds reinforce the construction of recipients as lazy and fraudulent recipients (Petit and Tedds, 2020). In this way, minimal government assistance assumes the criminality of the poor and imposes the stigmas of poverty. For Shabnam, incomplete “stubs” and non-compliance resulted in “sanctions” against her, and she could not access assistance for the month. In addition, several women are in financial debt after taking predatory loans before and while being on assistance to meet basic needs. Others take out loans to be able to escape abusive partners. For being perpetually homeless and poor, women are labelled “shelter hoppers” by shelter workers and blamed for being destitute while trying to maintain their escape. Despite structural vulnerabilities compound against women by family, society,

and perpetrators blame women for leaving and failing to protect their children from poverty. Women are exclusively positioned as blameworthy for failing to feed, house, and care for their children. Women on income assistance speak of what it means to live in poverty in the basement rooms they can afford to rent or, more likely, communal living. Amina is only eligible for reduced hardship government support and working to legally separate herself from her former partner. She has been sheltering at Nisa and other transition shelters since fleeing her abuser.

Most people may find places in second-stage houses, or they find their own places because they are working but thing is that in my situation I'm forced to find another transition house. So I have to call that list again. And if you are not fleeing domestic abuse right now, at the time you are calling you are not an immediate concern. But I'm the shelter hopper because this is my choice. And for me, I'm not eligible for second stage houses, I'm not eligible for BC housing, I'm not eligible for any kind of assistance so my only option is transition houses but I can't anticipate anything. So yeah. It's a circle. (Amina)

Amina also describes the cycle of poverty and inequality, which leads to her lack of long-term security. She names the label of a “shelter hopper” because her family marks her for “selecting” poverty by leaving her abuser. Other participants have moved provinces multiple times to reach more support, safety, stable employment, and escape poverty. Contrary to a system toward material change, shelters offer only a temporary respite in the struggle for freedom from class, race, sex, and related forms of oppression. One restrictive measure to immediate shelter access is prioritizing women currently “fleeing” violence despite the difficulty of finding permanent safety from deprivation and abuse. Transition shelters typically move women who have become homeless into multiple shelters because shelter space is temporary before possibly securing low-income housing.

How can you pay rent? How can you eat? How can you survive? There is no way. If... because there's always also this discussion... for people like if you can really work or not while on disability... I'm trying to get even myself part-time, because...I have like I have arthritis in my shoulder which I can't move and I have like in my foot...it is hard for me when I stand up...my foot you can see it now...but for even people like me and now in this situation where since I left my husband... the disability assistance is still not enough... you have to...end up doing additional begging sometimes and for me because I can only do labor work. That's the only thing I do because I don't have my grade 12. I don't even know if I can... if I have the mind the brain, to study to get my GED and so if someone with disability have hard time standing and walking and carrying and moving it's the only thing... All my life. I lived

here. I'm thinking to try and move even though I've lived all my life here... (Wajma)

Wajma repeatedly moved because disability assistance only covered unstable, low-quality, and unsafe housing. In her interview, Wajma discussed what it means to be titled "system abuser," shamed while living in poverty because of a system that sees Muslim women as self-victimized. Wajma describes the fear, insecurity, and exploitation she has faced due to being a single parent on income assistance.

Or difficult to even get that get your foot in the door if they find out, you know, you're on disability or you're on welfare... it is frustrating because no one wants to give you your place... Another thing with basements are not many people likes kids... So you're on your own to be honest many people once they saw I had her with me, you know what? I think this is really small for you for you and your daughter. They want only student but.... And as soon as they find out that you are on income assistant, they want all the paperwork and generally people don't like us supposed 'freeloaders.' So they want to know how much income assistant going to give the rental portion how much other communities will give so right ...at the moment.... I am with options and they only pay me \$300 so they are like, where is the other three hundred dollars to come from? (Wajma)

Muslim women also reveal how they are subjected to discrimination for being poor and racialized victims of gender-based violence. Being on income assistance is a source of dread, shame, and discrimination. They discuss how shame and guilt is used against them for receiving income assistance. Informally, Nisa policy encourages women not to disclose that they live at a transition shelter so renters will not reject them before finding out their only source of income is government assistance. Participants feel they must find ways to justify that by applying for assistance, they are not 'abusing the system' and in need. Other participants moved back to the Muslim shelter after moving into an unsafe unit and facing homelessness again. Women also reveal overt discrimination by rental rejections for being poor, on disability, other income assistance, and being a victim of interpersonal violence. In other cases, women face invasive questionings about their circumstances, including race/ethnicity, immigration status, relationship, and single-mother status.

Renters maintain the cycle of poverty and violence, criminalizing poor and marginal women when they seek a safe home and security of self. Participants shared experiences of property owners refusing to rent because they are on welfare, pregnant, experiencing violence, and being Muslim. Both Taha and May struggled to find housing,

claiming that many renters revealed that they were unwilling to rent their rooms to women soon to have newborns. The overt discrimination and hostility Taha and May faced led them to try and conceal their pregnancy to secure a place to live. Other racialized women recount calling and visiting rentals only willing to rent to people from specific races and if they speak a particular language. As a volunteer helping with housing searches, I witnessed the overt discrimination and stigma against women who could not find rentals because they received government assistance. In the words of May, “people do not care that refusing to rent to a tenant because of their race, background, disability, gender, age, or lawful source of assistance is illegal, who will sue them?” As poor and racialized women with precarious status, the avenues for justice are not equal, nor do they always wish to fight structural injustice while living interpersonal violence.

These common, widespread, and discriminatory exclusions reveal the extent of poverty stigma and how deprived aid leads to exploitation by property owners. Gender, race, Islamic identity, and cultural practice are among the various known barriers to securing housing (Hilton, Potvin, and Sachdev, 1989; Mirafatab, 2000). After failing to find affordable housing, participants said that they had no choice but to rent from property owners who regularly violated their rights and only accepted cash to avoid taxes. Nour considered reporting her landlord for harassment and discrimination but ultimately did not feel safe involving the police.

She would sleep with the door open, the bedroom beside mine and she would sleep at 9pm everyday so I have to always crawl quietly... I was going crazy it reminded me of living with my ex. There is the outright discrimination where they won't take welfare recipients... because sometimes they will ask if you're on welfare... I always wondered if that was illegal... I went through it myself when I was on welfare. It is not fair. Alhamdulillah I would use my social skills to get people to trust me. I knew she couldn't kick me out like that but I was going to involve the police because I don't know who they would support. I could not spend an hour longer at this house... I took my luggage; I went to the airport, and I slept and spent the night there. I am... I was not feeling good... before I went there, I was living in a house with 10 other girls... in a house... it was overwhelming for me... my room didn't have a door it had a separator... (Nour)

For Nour and other participants, victims of rental discrimination, surveillance, and harassment from property owners is not only a violation of her legal right to housing but retraumatizing as a survivor of gender-based oppression. After experiencing this

harassment, Nour came to the shelter and saved enough money to travel to a province she had extended family and a safe place to stay. Sadaf discusses the exploitation and violence she witnessed her friend at Nisa endure and how helpless she felt as a result.

Like this is terrible in British Columbia's this is the worst place... This is the best place on Earth.... Have you heard that? It's no longer. This is not the best place on Earth. No, this is the worst place for everything and especially rentals... They're just making in the basement suites so much money. look... at \_\_\_\_\_ her windows were broken in winter and I had told her dear I can go with you, but she doesn't want to... because me I can get her a good place.... I can negotiate I can do... but I think she didn't know me because I wasn't here very long.... So, she needs to trust someone and isolates herself. So, she is exploited. She's not even in the good place and the door is broken and that landlord... she's like. My place it seems like cleaner, and we'll see... you know, I haven't moved there yet to see what's the other issues, but it looks okay... (Sadaf)

For Sadaf, to watch a young Muslim woman who experienced gender-based violence like she did to end up exploited and living through the winter in a freezing basement room exposes the unequal systems poor Muslim women may face. One of the sociologist's main tasks is identifying and explaining the connection between people's problems and the embedded social structures (Swift et al., 2004). Structural differences between social groups are not pre-determined, biological, and natural inequities (Galtung, 1969; Framer, 2010; Antony and Samuelson, 2012). The social problems then, such as homelessness, drug use, and gender-based violence, result from social conditions and structures that create oppression. Social structures maintain inequities that have become natural in our societies by viewing the poor as blameworthy for their existence or responsible for their deprivations (Boyd et al., 2018, p. 3). To evaluate post-shelter outcomes based on the false belief that poverty is temporary is to deny ongoing suffering and ignore normalized violence against these women.

### **3.1.3. Gendered Islamophobia and anti-violence against women**

I really get these types of questions a lot, probably more than any other ones. Where are you from? There is often and always another critical implication or the question within another question. They will want to know where is that name from? You cannot be from here; you must be from somewhere else? The othering is for effect and against you. Or there may be a question of the authenticity of myself, my experiences or my intentions seeking whatever scrap and abuse meant for me. Truthfully, I have been formed with more than one culture and have more than one identity. But also, I want to communicate the reality of

the suffering which I am also living by being a Muslim woman and after being victimized and physically attacked. This and my particular experiences inform so much of what I do now, and still trying to improve everything teaches, molds, shapes my identity today. (Sami)

In this section, I examine the othering process which situates Muslim women as outsiders and their management of stigma within and outside anti-violence against women. For Sami, the fear of violence at home differs from the fear that makes her stand next to the wall when waiting for the SkyTrain. The latter fear is rooted in her decision to wear a hijab and worsened after being verbally attacked for wearing it. Sami connected the "outside and inside fear," fearing assault from her ex-husband at home where she did not always wear a hijab and in public where she does. In this study, Muslim women who stayed at other shelters spoke of having service providers questioning the sincerity and importance of their beliefs, experiences, and needs. Participants also reveal the inaccessibility of halal foods at other shelters and the ridicule they endure for raising this diet issue. For the Islamophobic, religion and gendered violence are twisted, and the project is to 'liberate' Muslim women from their religious, familial, and cultural attachments. This false liberation project includes asking Muslim women bigoted questions about their Islamic identity and limiting their practice.

The denial of violence is instrumental in preserving the status quo, the political and material dominance of the colonizer, and the maintenance of a racial hierarchy (Thobani, 2007). The dominant sociopolitical structures in Canadian society privilege the white colonial ideology, laws, and practices (Smith, 2020; McMaster, 2019). Jiwani (2005) refers to the "continuum of violence of racism," which highlights how only physical and overt forms of violent racism are problematized and rarely investigated criminally (p. 869). Different processes of racialization capture the social construction and meanings of race in different historical and social contexts. The paradigms of domination and subordination, which determine how people will experience power and oppression every day, are often normalized and invisible (Smith, 2020). The visibility of the hijab and its adoption as a political system of resistance, specifically anti-colonial resistance by Algerian and Iranian women, connect to using the body as a medium of individual and group resistance (Nasser, 1999). Those bodies in the cultural otherness can be subjected to discursive, epistemic, and physical violence.

The violence of racism and gendered Islamophobia experienced by Muslim women is assimilative in purpose and exacted to push 'othered' women to conform to

this white and so-called liberal society (Jiwani, 2005). Once again, central to Islamophobia and gendered Islamophobia is racist myths against Muslim women based on the frame that Muslim communities are wholly primitive, violent, and anti-democratic. Islam is more than just a religious identity as it is often racialized and contingent on culture, socioeconomic status, geopolitical factors, and religiosity (Ternikar, 2009). Muslim women who can “pass” as non-Muslims do not experience the same types, or amounts, of micro-aggressions as easily identifiable women (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 29). Specifically, white-passing and non-visible Muslims do not face the same realities faced by racialized visible Muslims (Riley, 2011, p. 4). Participants' experiences are complicated by perceptions and interactions of race, gender, representations, and dress style. For Nour, a black and hijab Muslim woman, anti-black racism and gendered Islamophobia is something she has faced her whole life from Muslims and non-Muslims.

It took me a long time to not caring and being proud and the way I am... not caring if they are laser watching me and spitting with their eyes. Before... I had a recent thing... I was waiting for the skytrain.. there was a guy... I was talking on the phone and he pushed me aside... I wasn't even affected emotionally... and he gave me a repulsive look... but it is just unfair to deal with... I refuse to look less self confident... less secure... I don't feel less than other people.. these are some psychological barriers I know all others don't face but many people may relate... For you it might be very different. But you could get away with being Mexican no? All I know is that confidence matters. In general I tell the women here. Some people just want to maybe give you a hard time, you don't let them. You have to remember who you are not care if they hate you for looking poor or looking Muslim or of course both. (Nour)

Nour no longer wants these experiences to affect her emotionally, so when people try and alienate her, she now resists such attempts at racial oppression and hate. By recognizing manifestations of prejudice and discrimination, women amplify each other's voices and different experiences. Muslim women recognize how they are discriminated against and challenge the patriarchy, racism, and violence of poverty. How different bodies occupy space in different ways points to the limits and role of our embodied subjectivities. Nour's interpretation reveals the act of taking responsibility for the histories of violence, injustice, and lack of privilege interacting against her. She works to create new ways of space that do not privilege traditional bodies and cater to whiteness. Other hijab-wearing Muslim women speak of constant fear of being harassed or attacked because of their visible identity. Participants felt the need to constantly highlight that they had not yet been "physically attacked," revealing the tendency to

minimize less overt, verbal, but still harmful micro-aggressions and other forms of hostility and prejudice.

I don't want to call it more than really weird looks from people on the bus which I would not want to take if I could afford my own car... in some places it would be much better there are more people with different clothing or even head scarfs... the most thing I'm going through... I've had it... Now I'm getting better... like I don't gives me attitude and hate because of my scarf. It is actually mentally draining. And honestly... I wear... like I'm not in a position to wear it or not...I've been wearing it for 20 years... since a long time... you might wear it or not. I don't care...I find it extremely bad if I take it off... why should I even be thinking that? But I also do not want to face these attitudes.

On the one hand, Ellham wants to wear her hijab and consider removing it to not get weird looks from people. At the same time, she feels unable to remove it because doing so seems/feels "wrong". She also questions why she must face these mental difficulties even if there is not anyone currently "policing" her. So, women consider the weight from multiple sides, one from the society they live in because it is not acceptable in many cases, and the other from their own cultures which they feel beholden. These Muslim women offer perspectives or analyses consistent with their lived experiences in the face of bigotry and harmful ideas about their realities and lives. The excerpts describe when anti-violence against women advocates claim to offer safety and security to oppress further and embrace Islamophobia. Muslim women's subjectivity is refuted by self-identifying saviours who disguise bigotry as liberation and empowerment. For participants, gendered Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry mean shelter workers try to control and dictate how to cope with gender-based violence. In their efforts to challenge, change and counter silencing narratives, Muslim women identify the only saviours around are themselves. The collective and individual power of anti-Muslim hostility and racism is severe and reminds women of their additional exclusions based on racialization and gendered Islamophobia. Participants' experiences of gendered Islamophobia at a supposed 'inclusive' and safe women's shelter reveal the failure of anti-violence against women in these spaces. For Zoyah, the harassment and gendered Islamophobia she experienced at the first shelter she stayed in before finding space at Nisa was unreported and what brought her to Nisa.

I could not pray even in my room sometimes. I found my hijab used as a towel to clean the bathroom floor and I know who it was but was actually really scared of this person and thankfully Nisa had space for me two weeks later. I was suffering a lot there. I didn't feel they made

any effort to address the situation and believed it must have been by mistake, but I know it was not. I heard their lesson. (Zoyah)

Participants said wearing a hijab attracts attention, and they must find ways to cope with the unwanted attention, harassment, and marginalization. The hostility is also something women experience outside and within supposed “anti-violence against women” organizations. Some younger participants, who are coming of age in a place where they are considered outsiders, still differentiate more blatant and overt racialized violence their immigrant families faced (CCMW, 2008). Each participant shared that the first people they would tell about their negative or strange experiences would be their peers because “when you talk to other hijabis and hear the stuff they’ve experienced, it makes you feel that it is normal” (Zara). Participants spoke of the popularly accepted link between religiosity (Islam or other) and patriarchal attitudes toward women. However, gender roles, contradictions, and double standards are criticized, resisted, and ridiculed by these self-identifying Muslim women.

Those who stayed at other shelters before the Muslim shelter also spoke of the fear and persecution that led to self-policing their religious practice. Participants disclose harassment for praying, refusing to use pans already used to cook pork, and being Muslim women. Sadaf called it “taking up too much Muslim space” by having the call to prayer on their phone and praying five times a day, leading to microaggressions. Muslim women reported not being able to access halal meat and being verbally harassed for fasting during Ramadan. Other participants disclosed increased monitoring, especially if they had children, including having workers asking about their child’s diet and health and complaints about neglect. Sami told me the same woman who complained she was abusing her daughter for making her fast also asked her not to pray in the shared space because it made her uncomfortable. Amina also described how ingrained gendered Islamophobia is when an ‘Islamic’ call to prayer on her phone leads to another woman complaining about how it made non-Muslims feel at the shelter. Amina explained why she did not feel safe to be Muslim and her inability to hide her visible identity. Facing complaints is not comparable to the physical violence other participants disclosed because of being Muslim. May describes her horrific experience where two men attempted to pull off her hijab, explaining how easily Islamophobia transpires and how unsafe she felt. This experience made it necessary for her to seek shelter at Nisa.

See I wear hijab. For a long time now. I had to face a lot of stuff... it happened with me to 2 occasions... and like I was walking back from my daughter's school and they were like two guys and I was wearing hijab like this and they pulled it. So yes, and I've seen a lot of time, like you know, you're working on the roads and some crazy person. He starts, you know yelling at hijabs... I told them that you people are disgusting and they started laughing on my face. So yeah but I was lucky enough that you know, I wear this big bun...this big clip. So when they actually pulled it... my hijab got stuck in the clip. So the hijab didn't fell down but you know, the most of it was like out... So Islamophobia is normal and coming to Nisa after being "reverse kidnapped" and left in my home country when I had PR in Canada it was important I get into Nisa and not any shelter where I don't feel safe to be Muslim.

Each participants' story and voice embody their resistance and resilience to multifaceted violence. For instance, May draws strength from the support accessible and available to her. After being forcibly and what she calls "reverse kidnapped" or left in her home country May is among many participants who sought refuge at the Muslim shelter concerned about limiting their Islamic practice. Free speech fanatics disapprove of the term "Islamophobia" because they feel it inhibits any criticism of Islam. In contrast, some Muslims may also reject the term for construing anti-Muslim prejudice as an illness or phobia of Islam. Freshta said, "I think it's good that people come up and ask if they think Islam is oppressing me instead of just assuming." Taha and other participants reiterated her hijab and "Islam is not a sign of oppression; Islamophobia hides the consequences and operation of woman abuse everywhere." Even after being accosted for "oppressing herself," Taha emphasized other shelter stayers are themselves survivors of abuse, poverty, and oppression. Despite the experiences of Islamophobia, hostility, and difference, the participants welcomed respectful questions and curiosity about their beliefs. Rejecting any notions of the 'universal Muslim woman' requires consideration of the sociocultural context and how to address the pervasive barriers for different women facing multifaceted oppression. Kenny and Smillie (2017) highlight that "if agency of the individual is not considered, then people would be nothing more than inactive bodies with little to no control over their behavior and beliefs" (p. 166). These women labelled and relegated "Other" reject the gender-based constraints thrust upon them. Critical theorists of de-colonial thought, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial studies challenge, deconstruct and unsettle colonial feminism. The task of the post-colonist is to 'insert' the 'absent' colonized subject into the dominant discourse as a means of resisting/undermining the colonizer's authority (Tyagi, 2014). The colonial feminist neglects voice, resourcefulness, and resistance to entrench colonialization, imperialism,

and dispossession (Tyagi, 2014, p, 49; McMaster, 2019). Anti-colonial, anti-racist, and decolonizing theorists provide the theoretical tools to engage colonial situations critically and the different realities and relations it produces. The denial of race-based oppression intends to cast the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle as illegitimate and unnecessary. Anti-colonial theorists write to subvert discourse that distorts experience and realities and inscribe inferiority on colonized people to exercise total control on their bodies and lands. Islamic feminists and activists name the collective coming-to-consciousness of Muslim women and their confrontations against essentialist bigotry.

## Chapter 4. “Nisa Homes” the Muslim Shelter

At that time, it was just fear of attack, so I didn't think much about what “Nisa Homes” is going to be... I didn't know anything... I thought of it as a hostel... some place where... bachelors sit or live... men and women and that kind... I was really nervous but when I went there... they were taking so much care to try and make me comfortable... and they were all ladies first of all! [laughs] that was so convincing and so so comforting for me. It was like... even for a second I didn't feel uncomfortable... the case workers there were so helpful and they treated me so well... definitely it was a weird thing for me... coming from a place from where I'm living and there...and things were definitely not good or easy because I traveled from across the world to Canada to live a new life with my partner and instead all that I went through was abuse and trauma and definitely... (Sara)

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose, practice, and policies of the Muslim shelter titled “Nisa Homes”. Nisa is a temporary shelter for women facing violence, poverty, homelessness, and seeking safety. Participants share the circumstances that led them to the shelter and their experiences at Nisa. By engaging with story, lived experience, the arts, and culture, Nisa embodies how we as individuals and a society can address sexual and gender-based violence, mental health and well-being, anti-racism, and decolonization. At both the prevention and intervention levels, a trauma-informed lens at Nisa means “do no [additional] harm” to survivors of gender-based violence. The non-profit provides shelter and basic amenities and strives to empower women to control their voices, bodies, families, and lives. The shelter also offers halal food to Muslim women who otherwise cannot access it. Other services of the Muslim shelter include a crisis caseworker, counselling, and if they do qualify, possibly minimal financial support through the National Zakat Foundation for Muslim women experiencing abuse and poverty. In their initiative to help women be financially secure after Nisa, an assigned caseworker meets each person weekly. Women and their children can shelter for up to 3 months and sometimes longer depending on their circumstances, needs, and the waitlist. Workers help women recognize the impacts of interpersonal violence, respond with trauma-informed strategies, and refer survivors to available assistance. For Sara, being sheltered in a home without males helped her maintain her escape from an abusive home. Nisa is especially critical for those whose religious practices and beliefs are constantly problematized to restrict and attack them. May said she felt “complete safety,” Ellham spoke of the “trust,” and Sami described “security” at the Muslim shelter where they felt their faith and observance of it is allowed. Like others, May said it is

“even at the Muslim shelter it is dehumanizing to plead” for non-profit aid, charity, and other support to access the essentials of life.

The first woman I met at the Nisa shelter was Amara, a grandmother with US citizenship and a temporary visitor visa in Canada. Amara abruptly became her grandchildren’s legal guardian after they travelled from Norway with their mother to Canada. Their mother – Amara’s daughter – left the children in their grandmother’s care due to her worsening mental health. As a volunteer, I spent a lot of time reading and tutoring Amara’s grandchildren while she tried to secure refugee status for her girls in Canada or America. Amara’s grandchildren were denied a US visa twice while staying at Nisa shelter. They were also denied refugee protection in Canada based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. When I met Amara, she told me the last thing she wanted to do was to travel to the border alone with her grandchildren after both countries had denied them visas. During this time, her elderly husband was very ill, living alone and raising funds for Amara and the grandchildren. Amara had travelled to different government offices in Vancouver, sitting outside the immigration offices waiting for a positive outcome, only to be once again denied visas for her grandchildren. Amara had informed me that if they deported the children to Norway, she would have to go with them because their mother had left them in her care. She was also wondering which deporting nation would pay for her travel expenses to travel with the children since she did not have the financial means to raise that money on her own. After being denied visas one last time, Amara went to the US border worried about her unwell husband, her grandchildren missing school for several months and facing deportation to Norway. In 2019, the officers granted Amara access at the border and gave the children refugee status. Amara had many things to say about the refugee process she encountered in Canada. As a grandmother with two unprotected minors under her charge, she called the system inequitable, confusing, and unjust. Canada denied them protection because the children were citizens of Norway and could return un-persecuted. Moreover, Amara was told to seek refugee protection for the children in the US, where she has citizenship. At this time, under the Trump presidency, asylum seekers and unprotected refugees were escaping America and felt especially persecuted (Pierce et al., 2018). Amara could not understand how Canadian officials told her to risk everything at the American border. Months after they crossed the border with protection, Amara and the girls face timed me and enjoyed school remembering the birthday they spent at Nisa shelter.

Muslim-led services can invoke skepticism and suspicion despite the need for community-based initiatives (Minganti, 2015). Minganti (2015) has a stark warning relevant to Nisa shelter, “to be a women’s shelter by and for Muslim women,” its Muslim profile cannot be dissolved in the face of anti-Muslim bigotry. Although the shelter campaigns prioritize Muslim women, it is willing to accept women who are not Muslims if there is available space and no Muslim women need immediate shelter. “Nisa” is not a faith-based title and is the Arabic word for “woman.” The Vancouver manager prefers the title “Nisa Homes,” as opposed to ‘Islamic shelter,’ “to promote and preserve Nisa as a safe place for women with differing attitudes and changing connections to Islam” (Molokotos-Liederman, 2017). Shelter workers recognize Islam is practiced differently by different groups, and the shelter tries to uplift every tradition and self-identifying Muslim. In other words, Nisa does not operate on any specific Islamic tradition or practice. The many understandings of Islam are respected and celebrated as personal subjective connections.

Muslim women navigate their religiosity every day, but these personal understandings are not being rated here. The agenda of everyday analytic is also mistakenly conflated with writing against Orientalist chronicles. The desire to use the ‘every day to draw attention towards the majority of ‘ordinary Muslims’ and away from the ‘minority extremists’ is an unhelpful dichotomy. In these cases, the ‘ordinary’ Muslim often conceptualized as apolitical is still influenced by public debate about ‘correct’ practice. More importantly, the everyday frame of analysis disregards this dichotomy. Instead, the everyday pervades these categories and examines lived experience in-between the religious and political. The ‘everyday’ complicates generalizations of whether and how these women are religious and politically conscious. These questions are not asked or sought by my application of the everyday analytic. Yet, the everyday analytic is still infused with the political – meaning a Muslim woman lives a political life whether she intends to or not, as we all do. Islamic debates and practices are not unimportant politicized discussions for the everyday. There is a fundamental ambiguity in being subject to particular conditions that render the daily life frame valuable. Participants’ Islamic ways of thinking, knowing, and practicing offer community, strength, and support. I do not seek to analyze the specific claims of Islam nor drag out the differences and similarities between different cultural instances of Islam. Instead, the everyday counters the uni-dimensional Muslim-woman dominant in the political

discourse regarding Islam and Muslims. At the shelter, I witnessed compassion, solidarity, and mutual support among diverse Muslim women. Living at the shelter together, women are leading efforts to legitimize their own and each other's experiences of multifaceted violence. This solidarity exists regardless of whether they could easily communicate or directly relate to one another as asylum-seekers, refugees, immigrants, and abuse survivors.

#### **4.1. Mutual aid and Islam as a resource**

I never had... for almost a month I had this trauma feeling at night and I was not able to sleep. I was not able to eat proper food... even now I have that because of a few reasons... but... at Nisa Home... my first aim was to get a job for myself because that is the only thing that is going to keep me occupied and maybe forget what has happened... for me it was like that...and next main thing they helped me with is income assistance...because at least when you have some money in your pocket... to go out to spend some time and enjoy in the nature and... according to me I like playing sports with women... I like to play sports... when I concentrate on something or doing good I feel good... so for me... like having money... procured by myself is very important... because no one is going to tell you how you are going to get cured until you find your own way.... okay little things also...when I start making biryani I feel good... when I start eating something good at night I sleep better... so "Nisa Homes" the case workers did contribute you know for income assistance...the women I met and found they really helped with that whole process and still I am on assistance...but I want to find a position that I don't have to be on it... (Sara)

Muslim women utilize their religion to counter feelings of isolation and support each other. This spiritual, emotional, and mental resource and identity reinforces women's connections through Islam and solidarity-based mutual aid. Participants also told me about Islamic passages that bring feelings of kindness and grace to their daily life and can help them get through difficulties. For Sara, sharing her struggle and connecting to different women helps her cope with her experiences and feel solidarity. Women also help themselves by critically understanding the interconnectedness and causes of their oppression and being united in their desire to be free from it. Some participants seek to provide each other with mutual support, and others keep their distance to stop or avoid conflict that arises from shared sheltering. The Muslim shelter caseworkers also stress the importance of respecting and honouring boundaries to create trusting relationships.

Mutual aid is based on reciprocal aid principles in the spirit of solidarity and community. This assistance is also a voluntary exchange of resources to prevent homelessness and support people trying to make ends meet. The aid provides those suffering under oppression with direct support and material ways to overcome multifaceted violence. In addition, mutual aid is about providing coordinated care and moves beyond advocacy or educational efforts. Solidarity means honouring boundaries and building trust to foster material change toward equality for one another. The history and grounding principles of mutual aid is to share and provide relief, tied to by freedom fighters DC fighting for Black liberation and the end of all forms of oppression (Marcus, 2005). Political education and building community relations are also the basis of mutual aid and not on hierarchical charity systems often co-opted to reproduce violent systems. The goal is to build community sharing through people's solidarity and not create oppressive structures and systems. There have always been foundations of mutual aid from the Free African Society and Phoenix Society in the early 1700s and 1800s, especially with the Black Panther Party. However, it may not have been called mutual aid. The Free African Society would put their funds together for people in Philadelphia and provide excessive funds to the local communities in need. Community initiatives by the Black Panther Party included the free breakfast program and included medic program and rides for senior citizens across different communities and social groups (Dunbar, 2012).

Countering the isolation of abuse and poverty, women describe the radical love of mutual aid, kindness, time, space, and energy. Their solidarity is grounded in the principle of not triggering, traumatizing, or essentializing suffering and recognizing differences in experiences. Living at the shelter, Farah also said other people regularly accuse her of “making everything about trauma.” She spoke about creating trust-based exchanges with other Muslim women based on a hope of healing and self-development. Farah went on to describe the complete isolation she felt escaping violence and how the opportunity to voice her experiences brought her “out from the trauma.”

If that time I wouldn't have found “Nisa Homes”... maybe I wouldn't be as motivated as I am today... I still lack most of the things... but that home has... kind of brought me out from trauma...according to me it is a place I am thankful for Allah for showing me that way... I don't even think if I had been to another shelter home some other shelter home where there were non-muslims or other kind of people I don't think I would have liked that stay... this was something that Allah gifted me

that day. I was really suffering, in fear of an attack and nobody else was there to help and I have nobody else here in Canada... "Nisa Homes" also motivated me to maintain my decision (Farah)

The prioritization of Muslim women in this gendered and religious shelter is necessary because it may make leaving possible for some participants. Sadaf did not feel safe at a location where her abuser could find her and then felt targeted at the first women's shelter for praying and having the call to prayer on her phone. At the Muslim, shelter women are, at the very least, allowed to practice their faith.

To me it was always.... for us... It was the security for my daughter as I said my...My husband went to my sister's house and looking for me... and he broke the door. So yeah, so this is why just security and having like, you know halal foods, you know having to know the community to be honest... Nisa home provide a home for me where I was... I felt secure... to pray...to like, you know without people pointing finger at you while you are praying kind of thing... (Sadaf)

Sadaf said, "in my case, every boundary had been broken, then again in trying to get help, and I know for others it is the same, so I know it is important to let people come talk to you if they want." Participants spoke about other Muslim women at the shelter that grounded them and offered comfort, recognition, and understanding. These women do not treat each other as helpless on account of being destitute or being permanent victims. Poverty and other manufactured structural violence like gender-based violence are normalized every day (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2010; Antony and Samuelson, 2012; Miller, 2009; Brym, Roberts, & Strohschein, 2019). Women see supporting others as recognizing the suffering and validating work to defy this normalization. In describing their experiences, the charge is to each other's complex struggles, stories, and capacities to resist violence. The Muslim women at Nisa provide one another with the often-denied social respect, inclusion, and dignity.

While living together, many women also start to take on an advocacy role for one another. This advocacy is built on love, respect, and reciprocity to prevent future injury or inequality. The shared emotional connections help bond one another and provide a sense of security. Women also spoke about their responsibility to amplify each other's stories. Participants describe how women with similar and different realities and experiences are good at genuinely listening to what others have to say and sharing advice and resources.

I sometime feel that... that my... kind of opinion I am just telling... can I say that... I think each and every shelter home should have separate lawyer so they can work on the victims or whoever... like... I just want to say that the lawyers are not enough for us... limited hours and I have seen the frustration of me and other residents in the home... even they were... she's an old lady and I felt really bad looking at her frustration... she's an old lady and she's crying and I wanted really to do something for her... get her out of this situation... but I couldn't do anything... I myself am in such a bad situation and I really couldn't do anything for her... so I feel we need better lawyers... for victims especially because we are so... tired of it most of the time... even today early morning when I woke up I was just thinking about the home... where will I be moving... I don't know till now what I'm going to do... so this is my opinion... to feel fully your case is being heard, people don't know if they will be on the street or have support and it could determine a lot (Farah)

Being a constant witness to injustice and her own lived experience taught Farah how "helplessness" is meant to reinforce silence, oppression, and victimization. Farah is among many participants to report the inadequate, limited, and minimal help, including access to legal services and support even at the Muslim shelter. Caseworkers assist women with court preparation, translation, preparing statements, and any community or charity support they could apply to access. As a non-profit that relies on donations, the shelter cannot offer women more than one-hour meetings with a caseworker and connects women with free legal aid. Even the Muslim shelter cannot fully accommodate women despite their best efforts. Women, like Farah, refuse to be silent for themselves and others suffering from related structural violence, oppression, and inequities. Supporting each other also builds their resilience when this exchange, discourse, and mutual aid is practiced based on reciprocity, mutual understanding, and solidarity principles. More specifically, for some survivors to share, tell their stories, listen, or read about other experiences can build their resilience. At Nisa, women recognize different coping mechanisms and healing processes and consider triggers when living together.

For some women, interpersonal abuse is still happening, and for others, the long-term consequences of such violence are often severe, complex, long-lasting, and reparations are rarely accessible. Research supports upholding women's agency and autonomy in life-supporting or sustaining relationships, including survivors and former abusers (Sabban, n.d., p. 27; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003). In some cases, never seeing former abusers is the life-long goal, and for other women, there is the need to establish a safe relationship because of shared children or relations. Participants' self-empowering feminist work is one meaningful way to explain the world around them and make sense

of their lived experiences. Zoyah described an emotional, restorative, and "transformative process of reclaiming her religion."

Being reminded that supplication is the fundamental key that opens the door to happiness can never be too much. Keep asking Allah for anything and everything. He is the Most Generous and the best disposer of strength and overseeing our affairs (Zoyah).

Zoyah spoke about praying five times a day as "a way of organizing your day, and it's a way of really stepping away from things and just being in touch with God and being at peace." Farah described prayer as being "also good for physical movement, relaxing, so it's just about grounding yourself and having that system, this organized way of pausing from your day and grounding yourself." For Zoyah, her abuser would rationalize his violence by claiming her religion supported it. After surviving this spiritual violence and related trauma, reclaiming her, religion became necessary. Shabnam spoke about Islam being a "guide" and "lifestyle,"

Islam is meant to make your life easy and if it's making your life hard then you're not doing it properly. So I think it's about balance and Islam is a religion of moderation, which is something that the prophet of Islam said himself. So it's about balance and it's also about interpretation because God gave us minds for a reason and we're suppose to interpret and balance and question, so it's not about being a sheep and following rules. It's about really accommodating them [principles] and understanding them and then it makes being religious much easier and enjoyable. I think it really helps make your day better and I feel better on days when I pray then when I don't.

Muslim women appreciate interpretative roles and connections to their Islamic identity, depending on their practice and understanding. For Hila, prayer is not the most crucial thing but "really stepping away from things and just being in touch with God and being at peace." In *Politics of Piety* (2005), Mahmood questions the "liberal subject," the liberal formulation of agency that denies pious Muslim women's agency. According to Mahmood (2005), human agency is not rooted in resistance or domination, but rather "[a] capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (p. 27). Per Mahmood's assessment, pious self-making and devout Muslim women's feminism intervention is a specific form of ethical self-formation. Mahmood's ethnographic and theoretical work highlights the failure of feminist thinking regarding piety and self-transformation. Once again, the concept of agency itself is relative and largely situational. The everyday analytic is about how women respond to structures that

view them as exclusively subversive or resistant. There is no such thing as agency without relationality and for Muslim women relationality is embedded within their religion. Islam is one transformative means to counter different forms of abuse and oppression against Muslim women. Participants spoke of their faith as a resource in the struggle against gendered and related oppression.

Minganti (2015) argues feminist struggle is at risk when it dissolves and undermines religious practice and identity as sources of empowerment and inspiration for violence survivors (p. 95). Islamic feminist work challenges generalizing essentialist discourses about Muslim women's bodies and experiences. For any perpetrator, religion and culture might be used to justify their abuse or violence. However, the Muslim women in this study argue Islam does not cause nor condone these assertions. For Muslim women, Islam is a set of beliefs and practices that uplifts and helps them cope with the social and physical suffering they endure. Muslim women shared how Islam means different things to people. However, the faith also does not support their or other women's subjugation nor prescribe the right to abuse. May speaks about the power and strength Islam provided her.

Because I am the only daughter of my parents and he thought that my parents will never send me back alone... but my parents encouraged me to come back and fight for my rights...it was like my tabik in Allah only that like I found a place like "Nisa Homes".. there was not even like for one day that we didn't have food or anything like that... There was not even for one day where you know, me and my daughter we had to like we didn't have a shelter... life was very easy. I was pregnant and this one...Just passed by although it was difficult, but it was like Allah. just held my hand and he took me out of all the difficult things...being pregnant going to the hospital...delivering your baby when you have nobody around.... when I did... when I was in the shelter and I didn't even know that my mom she's going to get the visa or no.... so these things are not at all easy for me, but Allah made everything easy for me.... (May)

Since the Quran is the source of the Shariah of most Muslims, it is essential to explore, at minimum, a few of the teachings of the Quran to shed light on its stance on the concepts of justice and oppression amongst other human rights related to Muslim women. It is important to note that the following verses are a small fraction of the verses that discuss issues such as social justice and oppression amongst other human rights in the Quran. "Nisa Homes" residents cited the Quran and emphasized it is told how God (Allah) in the Quran connects to their relations and understanding of justice, "Allah loves

those who act justly” (Surah Al-Ma“ida: 42). In essence, scripture may provide a framework for the scheme of daily life which “consists of a set of rights and obligations, which...have their origin in the Quran, and every human being who accepts this religion is enjoined to live up to them” (Misbah-Yazdi, 1994, n.p.). Connections based on Islamic identity and Islam as a resource for healing and solidarity are complex and different for women based on their relations to the religion and faith. However, Muslim women express deep, practical, emotional, and intellectual understandings of Islam. Many participants reclaim Islam by outlining how abusers tried to justify and validate violence by arguing corrupt ideas. Women self-identifying as Muslims counter these constructions with their interpretative understandings and beliefs. Wajma describes the rights of women and the rights of Muslim women.

Yes... it is basic... just to know a woman has many rights in... Islam, Allah gave us as women many rights... one of the important... the prophet he had around that time.... one of big responsibility we have to changing the mind of Muslim people about this thing... one of them is the right of women.... before Islam women were considered by men by animals... if a man had a horse, his wife would be less than the horse.... the horse is animal but he considered his horse better than his wife... you understand where we were and what we're been fighting? So we have to know our rights as women and use it to defend ourself... (Wajma)

Wajma also rejects the claim that, as Muslim women, their rights are transient and unimportant by highlighting the role of women in Islam. The insecurity, internalized otherness, and various losses that shape migration instill a need for (re)security and stability through the recreation of familiarity. In other words, the process of ‘making home’ can be tied to a lack of security before and post-migration. The material and emotional (re)creation of home reveal the role of women to recreate spaces of comfort and safety. Mirza (2013) argues women recreate spaces of comfort and safety through reflective re-memory and home/home-making practices to manage and recover from life as an embodied other. The creation of a Muslim home acts as the reminder of and a connection to a broader Muslim community embedded within embodied experiences of Islamic space. For Nour, Islam and the meaning of her dean permeates all aspects of life, her actions as an individual, and her obligations to others as a Muslim woman.

I was not pressured. No, I was not pressured. I don't... the options were in front of me and I chose that arranged marriage of course not expecting it to become as toxic and abusive as it did... but I got myself out... but there are a lot of women out there who experience violence

still daily. Islam is I would say that okay....I'm not very what do you say a very hardcore Muslim that I'm following everything.... But yes, I follow....whatever is there and which is good for me....right and there are some things which are proven scientifically they are good and they're wrong for you. So I try to follow those things. And yeah, I follow those things and I do not bound myself and Islam for me I think is the way of life which differentiate between good and bad...Yeah. It's like a book Islam is like a book with differentiates between good and bad. So what do you say... you just leave the bad things and you follow whatever good is written in there. Right? So for me Islam like a book which tells me like, okay, this is good for you and everybody else do this. So it plays an important role in your life....even though I.... I don't follow everything it says... but still I hold onto my dean. (Nour)

Also, to Nour, Islam is based and oriented around the community and a system of beliefs and practices that are practiced by the community. She said the most important thing is "just practicing your values in all areas of your life, and I think they're transferable and subjective." Women's community and peer groups can exert incredible influence over their behaviour and thinking because of the importance of belonging. According to Dwyer (2000), migrants construct identities that transcend fixed notions of belonging (p. 475). Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that "household and domestic relations are critically gendered, whether through relations of caring and domestic labour, affective relations of belonging, or establishing connections between the individual, household and society" (p. 15). Routine immersion into Islamic practices, music, architecture and calligraphy, and other material objects represents an absorption in diverse Muslim cultures often experienced as a sense of homeliness. Thus, creating or 'making home' invoke various emotional processes for different women. Migrant women 'make home' to have a sense of belonging and not unrelated to creating a meaningful diasporic community to maintain embodied practices of their identities (Dwyer, 2000). In this way, belonging is inherently political and not easily separate from transnationalism and social mobility for self-identifying diaspora women.

Mohammod (2013) considered the residential decision-making of the Pakistani Muslim diaspora shaped by the constructions of 'home' and 'belonging' within British cities. Displaced Muslim women in the diaspora struggle with the precarity of home and belonging in daily life. Their meagre economic circumstances shape imaginations of the future and the glorification of past lives. Once again, belonging is about multiple attachments to people, spaces and prospects that constitute a sense of self. Thus, the creation of homes and the process of narrating one's identity are not unrelated ventures

for Muslim women. The every day is used as an analytical category to illustrate the spatiality of Islam embedded within the everyday practices through notions of identity and belonging.

#### **4.1.1. Understanding myself outside of suffering**

I'm just focused on my job and leave the place [Nisa]...we don't have anything special to learn there... regarding violence learning from other women is helpful for how to think different about the situation...but I'm safe... it is a safe place! I am not in... outside so this is the first important thing... for me it is housing and financial stability... when you have your job, you have your house and self-sufficiency... (Freshta)

Freshta and Amara were the two participants with no personal experiences of interpersonal violence. However, both older women also explicitly identify heightened fears of gendered violence. Other women explain having had their sense of security and safety completely eroded. Participants discussed gender as the normalized and structural violence within daily life, whereby gender imbalances reduce their agency and limit their life choices (Rhodes et al., 2012, p. 224). Moreover, there are not really opportunities for healing because the subsequent violence is often around the corner, causing extremely high levels of toxic stress. The every day is exhausting and can be paralyzing, but it has also created a culture of desensitization. Violence is normal, and violence is expected, which is a huge part of the problem. Women who have been violently attacked also have never accessed any support, and they recognize some of the impacts of this violence. Participants are aware of how the traumatizing experiences they experience lead to increased levels of fear, anxiety, and the need to develop tools to cope and overcome. Thus, there is a constant tension between managing the risk of becoming a victim versus overcoming the label of victimhood. Women recognize the need to overthrow the picture of a permanent state of victimhood and sufferer. In the excerpt above and later in the interview, Freshta highlights the importance of not reducing women to their experiences of violence or oppression. She also recognizes some women, especially those from abusive relationships, could benefit from violence prevention workshops. However, she knows lack of housing and financial security is where and how oppression prevails.

My focus on stories is meant to create the space necessary to allow the voices of these women to be heard and highlight their resilience. There is a distinction between

leaning into ideas of voicelessness and speaking for people and letting people speak for themselves. Muslim women experience multiple forms of violence from the state, the public, their communities, and families (Galtung, 1969; Farmer 2010; Antony and Samuelson, 2012; Miller 2009; Brym, Roberts, & Strohschein, 2019). Some women have been exploited, repeatedly injured, and irreparably because of physical, sexual, or other psychological abuse. Moreover, the harsh realities and conditions women face at the intersection of gendered violence and poverty are not short-term, nor are they easily 'escapable' realities. Some women internalize the pressure to maintain or reclaim honour due to gendered cultural and religious norms (Sirin & Fine, 2008). The oppressed and deprived are constantly being told that they are responsible for their oppression, that they somehow deserve it, and that their suffering is a product of their lesser character. The purpose of this self-denigration is to destroy one's sense of self-esteem and may serve to de-activate and de-spirit them. After recognizing the tolls of chronic stress and abuse, survivors understand the importance of expanding their knowledge of trauma and coping. For Farah, coming to Canada was meant to begin a new life and start a family. The grief and losses endured are overwhelming, but she is proud of herself and her strength to leave.

Sometimes I feel and I am crying like on this because I... I left my own settled world. It was my world and I have.... and when I left the transition. I was feeling I will go back to my home...to my country.... and, again, I will start everything because... I was not aware that I had PR but... I am the type of person who... I will tolerate many things but on self respect I will not tolerate because if I'm not wrong why are you doing wrong things to me... I'm not kind of like the person....Who can ...who can absorb the hit and everything and say nothing. Like I'm not that kind of person. I'm an Alhamdulillah educated and independent woman (Farah).

For Farah, vocalizing the harm caused developed her knowledge and awareness about the trauma she lived. At the same time, she speaks about a need to externalize past trauma and ongoing suffering to counter feelings of guilt, shame, self-blame, and depression. Farah describes a practice of holding the complexities of the new challenges she faces and feeling a sense of dignity for herself for leaving. Farah describes life as much harder now that she has separated, but she finds the good in her days and focuses on it. Like other survivors, she was told by some friends and family members, "Get over it." In this study, women relate to the label of a survivor in different ways; Leila identified as a "daily survivor" of multifaceted oppression, and Sami said the term should

be “surviving” instead of “survivor of violence.” For Taha, as much as she needs to “sit with this history, this reality, this betrayal, and this cruelty today to heal, no progress exists without visualizing to pursue your freedom.” While the despair over one’s social conditions is every day, it is also resisted in their daily fight to improve and overcome such situations.

Ahmed (2004) defines emotion, the flow of emotions, how they impact the way we receive to interpret texts, and how that impacts who we are as subjects in our social world. Ahmed's (2004) conception of subjectivity expands our understanding of traditional political concepts. By bringing her embodied self into the book, Ahmed shows the circulation of different things to show how emotions work and what they do. Ahmed does not do away with "the subject" entirely. Still, she brings it far from the individualized autonomous agential a-priori subject of much political theory canon. For Ahmed, the subject is constantly formed by contingencies, emotion, and interaction with the world. She references memory and the way emotions accumulate over time and imprint upon you so when you encounter something, there is a prior history and memory.

For Ahmed, the idea of the social and psyche is formed by emotions themselves, and it is also not a-priori. Ahmed also brings up the view of the relational subjects and social bodies by referring to the de-centered subjects to understand how intersubjectivity manifests. This de-centralized subject is only “one node, in an affective economy,” the subject is there but is not the pure unmoved agent (Ahmed, 2004). For the subject, it is not just nerves responding to a bigoted sensation or violence that hits your body, and it is not only an autonomic response it is also related to each history with the violence. For Ahmed, it is about seeing the world as “made,” which invokes a certain “agency” for the subject and moves away from a wedged subject. The political project is always creating spaces where agency exists or control or a sense of relational agency. For Ahmed, agency is complex, and she points out one of the ongoing problems of thinking about emotion and passion is the reliance on passivity and reaction. This history of trying to expel emotion from politics and philosophy as non-emotional and dis-embodied as fear of passivity or response. All action is also reaction, but it is a form of agency and thinking about what circulations we can generate. Ahmed reconceptualizes agency but not as a normative ideal or still form of subject but across time that one has experienced. Ahmed considers the way entities (such as signs, objects, words, discourses, or speech) actively shapes material bodies so that the violence of words is also a material form of

violence. The distinction between violence that is discursive and violence that is material and bodily does not hold anymore. Under Ahmed's discussion of hate crimes legislation, she highlights that it is not about how words have inflicted actual violence on the subject or the person but how a group is represented in these words and thus attacked. It is always the fetishized physical violence of the act but never the words and history. Language is the medium of law, and the law itself must work through language in a medium. The law must create an objective representation of something, of some subject, of some crime. The language in the law limits the facts of a given case down to something justiciable to violate the body for "procedural justice." As Ahmed recognizes, only the "surface of the body" is read in a specific way and in that sense, we are all bodies of law and law premises upon legalist distinctions of pre-existing subjects. The intersectional discussion of law recognizes it is not helpful along multiple lines of injustice and nothing that is below the surface of the body. Ahmed considers the subject before the law and how the subject comes within the legal apparatus trying to disclose the nature of a crime committed against them. In most instances, all they can offer is nothing more than an objectification or stripped version of what happened.

Participants who are mothers spoke about a necessity to 'escape' from such an abusive environment since they recognize that the longer their children are exposed to these abuses, the more harm is caused to them both mentally and physically. To prioritize their children means to self-manage an 'escape' and hide the violence within the home.

Now it's like parental responsibility... and the other thing is like now I'm the only parent but I'm both his mom and father. Cause even even if biological father is seeing him. He's not realizing... and from my point of view what he did.. he doesn't acknowledge what what happened.. He's not going to be able to realize it and take responsibility really...and to be like a real father in my opinion. Because it's also like it was an important for me to see that if I stay in that relationship and even if it's improving...even though if he's not changing his behavior, he will be the example for my child so he will grow up and become like him and that's something I will not let that to happen. (Amina)

As one consequence of abuse, Amina internalizes and feels guilty about not leaving sooner when she is blameless in the situation. There would be no need to protect her child if her partner was not abusive. As a mother, Amina framed her own experiences as minimal and unimportant compared to the concern for her children's well-being and security. The legal conditions in her case dictate that the parents should

only communicate through a paper journal which they take turns exchanging at supervised visits. Amina told me her former partner never partook in this family court initiative. The condition became her coping method of self-journaling and recording past and ongoing trauma processing. Connected to Ahmed's conceptions of agency and the cultural politics of emotion from violence, Amina illustrates multiple lines of injustice and how she self manages these emotional injuries. Meanwhile, the so-called justice system provides a few sheets of blank paper after failed family mediation to minimize physical contact with her abuser. This also served to keep the abuser connected with the survivor and facilitate further subtle violence and intimidation through courtrooms, phone calls, zoom/skype, and meetings to exchange the kids. Like other participants, Amina speaks about the limited resources and counselling accessible to help them manage the past trauma and revictimization. In this way, women who have sought protection from the legal system are revictimized and dehumanized with no benefit to their everyday life.

For these Muslim women, their sense of self means envisioning their life and future outside their challenges. The process of ascribing selfhood transforms into a complex political project to assert and reject modes of being and belonging beyond an imagined homeland and forming identity (Ty and Goellnicht, 2004). For these participants, agency exists in caring for themselves and their families. According to Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1999), women express their agency by re-claiming public ritual space, asserting their knowledge and pedagogy, making a Muslim home, greater religiosity and participation, and personalizing their religion. Some women may take a vested interest in getting involved at mosques to study and teach one another and their children scripture and different values based on their interpretations of Islam (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 1999, p. 65). In this way, pious women have long utilized their religion as a source of empowerment and to organize. More specifically, Muslim women utilize sacred spaces to build relationships with other Muslim women, socialize their children, and play the ultimate role in upholding the religious identity of their families. Belonging is a dynamic process usually multilayered, which pervades geography to include social and political belonging. The many ways of belonging or attachments are diverse. Yet, identities can also strengthen when threatened or insecurity is instilled (Antonisch, 2010). According to Mohammad (2013), the global visibility of Islam, rising Islamophobia, and intensifying racial exclusion have reinforced identification with Islam and diverse

Muslim identities (p. 1806). Focusing on transnational migration, they argue the sense of belonging is also shaped by “memory, myth, and art” (Ty and Goellnicht, 2004, p. 2).

Becoming a community member and having the influence of what happens within that community helps build ties and fulfill each other's needs. A recurring theme Zoyah spoke about was the importance of a sense of community and belonging to have a true sense of security. After finding her hijab used to clean the bathroom floor, Zoyah said, "personally, belonging really affected my emotional well-being as I felt more secure and comfortable and noticed that when I didn't feel secure, I was unable to be safe." May also spoke about the support found at Nisa, "I think when I feel belonged, I am more positive and am better able to interact with my surroundings and engage with others." Women listen and learn about others' experiences, struggles, and passions at the shelter.

Muslim women must navigate racialized and gendered politics that try to script how their bodies and experiences are narrated, defined, and regulated. Belonging is a complex and ever-shifting process for these participants, negotiated every day. Belonging is achieved by the recreation of a Muslim home, critical to expressions of subjectivity, identity, and sense of self. Thus, identity narratives of belonging and non-belonging are tangled with the process of making 'home' and should not be reduced either as static or unchanging. The everyday is not separate from the geopolitical – in that the geopolitical intersects with and imparts upon the lived experiences and emotional geographies of home and identity for Muslim women. Media and political discourse concerning Muslims are critical sources of insecurity that impart upon senses of belonging and community. The consistency of being pronounced by (mis)representations impacts Muslim women's everyday contestations of identity and belonging.

#### **4.1.2. Fighting martyrdom and seizing joy**

In this section, I will discuss how participants highlight that they are not just victims but have agency and must find solutions and coping mechanisms. Despite the systems of oppression and inequities that dictate their realities, people resist, celebrate, and demonstrate joy to reveal how fighting for justice and feeling joy must coexist. Every day there exists an ongoing interaction between individual experiences and the social

structures shaping social reality (Lemert, p. 458). How individuals think of themselves and enact that view in their bodily practices is rooted in community with others. This agency is an intersubjective practice harnessed and honed and is central to identity formation. I try to narrativize so as not to freeze individuals in time, not to make signs out of the body, not to make representations out of people. Survivors reveal a constantly moving and non-linear way of thinking about their social world and their interactions with it. Muslim women share their multifaceted experiences to counter misconceptions that claim their realities and struggles. They are grieving multiple losses that may have occurred and are ongoing. Women also speak of resilience, especially when their strength is weaponized against them to reinforce ideas of Muslim women as martyrs to society, Islamic identity, or families. In other words, for participants, resiliency is not just one more way of saying that they should cope with things rather than trying to change them. Instead, participants reflect on the importance of analyzing their experiences as interrelated and connected to dismantle views, ideas, and behaviours conditioned by the system that upholds gendered violence and oppression.

The denial of ongoing violence is instrumental in preserving the status quo and its stakeholders' political and material dominance (Smith, 2020). Colonial and racialized violence is transmuted and upheld through laws, structures, and institutions (Thobani, 2007). The narrative controlled by the settler-colonial state justifies this structural violence, its linked outcomes, and symptoms like gendered Islamophobia. No new understanding of the colonizer is needed to understand the numerous ways the colonizer re-asserts its legitimacy and sovereignty. To counter, the individual's quotidian context/nature/details and subjectivity are the strength of the everyday analytic. The every day analytic is a space of contradiction, interrogation, and social interaction. The focus on daily life also captures how power operates because things are constantly changing and do not exist in isolation. In this way, a Muslim woman is interpreted not to depoliticize but to capture her daily resistance of joy and being. The aim is to amplify subjectivities through observations of different practices, interventions, and struggles. For example, carefreeness provides a freeing consciousness, so women can feel this joy and still critically challenge the material structures underpinning their gender-based violence.

The first time I met Zoyah was when the manager Zainab introduced us and asked if I could travel with her to the bank to help her communicate with the bank teller

through some translation work in order for her to access her bank account. Zoyah and I walked to the bank, and she told me this bank card was the only one she had taken when she left her husband and came to shelter at Nisa. Zoyah, is one of many Muslim women who speaks of a long life of constant and extensive suffering, neglect, and violence. She calls what she experienced total isolation and deprivation because her husband dealt with his depression by regularly abusing her. At the bank, Zoyah asked me if she should withdraw the entire balance in case her husband restricted it later. Zainab had told me Zoyah did not know the total balance and was not sure how much she wanted to withdraw. After learning the total balance and realizing her husband had already transferred some of it, Zoyah opened a new separate savings account. Later Zoyah told me how this was the first time she had any financial freedom and control over her funds. She said withdrawing the entire amount felt wrong since her husband lives with his brother and is also on income assistance.

Amina said what was truly life-saving for her was finding solace in the "part of me that can never be destroyed and that is joy, love and some sense of peace." Sadaf, who is no longer at the shelter, spoke of how time provided the distance to help her heal from her trauma as she continues to battle anyone "who treat[s] you like you are invisible and voiceless but [is] willing to speak against you." As she explains, it is necessary to not only appreciate how much she has overcome but at the same time also "understanding myself outside of my survival and holding onto your hopes for not being poor and not feeling like [their] victim." The shelter offers a temporary and exclusive space against the violence of deprivation and marginalization. However, life at a shelter, including a Muslim shelter, is dehumanizing. Participants discussed battling negative emotions every day, feeling isolated, and the absolute necessity of feeling joy. The fight against martyrdom is against a perpetual state of being victimized and re-victimized for these Muslim women. They speak about life beyond surviving violence, trauma, and other related sufferings. Marginalization reinforces further marginalization. At the centre of survivors' healing processes is a need to confront oppression and recover. In other words, their dreams dream bound in their daily fight to improve their conditions. Women in relatively secure housing explain that they are on the right path to healing while suffering long-term health-related issues because of trauma. These women spoke about what they have learned about the impacts of abuse and how it is a necessary and ongoing process to cope and overcome trauma.

The participants in this study shared their harrowing experiences that reveal continuing personal strength, courage, and resilience during suffering and multiple losses. Participants demonstrate this resilience as they navigate compounding physical and psychological traumas and loss of home and families while being homeless and working to create new networks and supports. Survivors spoke about a need sometimes to engage in cognitive dissonance to manage the daily harm of experiencing violence and inequity. At the same time, women talk about body and mind check-ins to ask themselves how they have been and know the effects and impacts on their body, mind, and healing. Each person sets these personal boundaries to uphold their needs and wishes in every aspect of life. Boundaries apply within and outside the shelter, including material and physical limitations about personal space, belongings, relationships, and privacy. For example, after leaving a violent home, some women no longer have to put others' needs and feelings before their own. For Taha, leaving meant, she was not living everyday emotional and physical abuse. Escaping this constant abuse also meant no longer "being told to mistrust" herself and power. For some participants, re-setting boundaries may jeopardize relationships and setting healthy boundaries is new. Other boundaries concern mental, emotional, sexual, and spiritual boundaries to protect against and resist future abuse. Women recognize themselves as transformers of their everyday lives by identifying the imposed structural and gendered oppression and their desire to uproot it.

There exist personal and challenging decisions to report, leave, and try to find safety for victims of violence. The decision to leave and report are two distinct ones. The decision to not report is tied to the impossibility of reparations and fear of how abusers may use mediation to further victimize them. Yet, even when participants do not want to report, they feel pressured by shelter workers, families, and others. Finally, women are best placed to make life-saving decisions for themselves.

I know it is about being tough now, maybe sometime later... I hope not to punish or harm anyone but get some level of justice. Is that not my right? This is really hard to think about. Because he is also poor. I am alone in trying to feed our family.

Sadaf is angry that getting justice and reparation is far away and entirely dependent on her. Other participants who also seek justice are denied and delayed until they can afford a personal lawyer to try and receive some restitution. Often with little emotional or material support and in the face of additional abuse from the family to

pressure them to stay. After surviving gendered violence, like other participants, Zoyah refused to stay to appease others, including her family.

For my family and support system it is complication... sometimes there are my side... Sometimes it's like, you know people start talking and they get worried...asking how will you provide for yourself... so they start talking and this... becomes a huge issue like the community and that's when it leads to... they tell me that I should compromise and go back to him, but no not happening! Because I gave him chance, one chance... that was...if he was even a little ashamed for what he did to me... I wouldn't be here. I made this decision for myself and my daughter.

Zoyah was unwilling to remain with her abuser to please her family. She also spoke about sexual violence being labeled “too unspeakable to stay unspeakable” and shaming victims into silence and fear. One coping mechanism Zoyah shared after multiple traumas is a daily reflection of her wellbeing and boundary setting. Zoyah asks herself if her established boundaries continue (or do not continue) to maintain her emotional and physical safety. In this way, she refuses imposed martyrdom while trying to recover, establish, and reaffirm boundaries. Relatedly, the difficulty of ‘unbecoming’ the refugee and victim are continuous emotional and material processes for women. For those with precarious immigration statuses at some point since being displaced, the process of unbecoming a refugee has been a terrifying and long experience. Shabnam described the orientation as a quick process/package to ‘prepare’ and ‘set up for success’ in Canada. Moreover, Shabnam spoke of the constant isolation because she felt her experiences were “too triggering,” even within survivor groups. She felt denied the space to voice herself and “release some [any] of the trauma.” At Nisa, she was able to speak with the Islamic counsellor and access further trauma counselling. Shabnam also felt the support of other Muslim women after feeling isolated at the first women’s shelter. Taha stayed with her family until her abuser found out where she was staying. She also felt that her family’s constant interference was revictimizing her.

So the whole family will gather round and start talking about my situation and it was becoming more depressed and it was building anger in me... because everyone has an opinion. I need to be somewhere where nobody has an opinion and instead of thinking for myself and my daughter... I'm thinking about how I would get them quiet and how it affects them and it should be about my life not about what they want me to do... So it was a good thing that I was at a place where me and my daughter we feel secure... (Taha)

Taha spoke about a process of recognition and trusting your voice, bravery and “mapping out your lines of defiance and defence.” While they acknowledge the traumatic experience, a survivor may also be reacting to and experiencing different emotions tied to current conditions. These emotions can include feelings of self and imposed guilt and shame, especially if they are being blamed. Taha also spoke about a “mourning process” of things she lost and believing she could overcome these traumas. For Taha, her relations represent painful connections that she considers complicit in her victimization. At the same time, women telling their family, friends, and acquaintances about being abused is a vital and challenging part of the healing process. Many victims often feel such contradictions which make their recovery process a lot more complicated than it may have originally seemed. Taha accepted she would not receive the support nor acceptance but refused to stay with an abuser to appease her family.

Survivors also spoke about total hopelessness and how they cope and manage feelings of helplessness every day. Lonagan (2014) distinguishes post-traumatic stress disorder from complex post-traumatic stress disorder, often resulting from interpersonal trauma that includes domestic violence, childhood abuse, childhood sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Courtois (2013) studies how survivors who have experienced constant interpersonal trauma regain “the[ir] very core, including their worldview and self-concept” after complex and relational abuse (p.3). The physical, emotional, and psychological processing of trauma can take weeks, months, or, more likely, years (Courtois, 2013).

Yeah I'm doing everything I wasn't allowed to do while I was in that relationship. So just getting outside without any purpose in head and just improvisation time was something just very suspicious and almost censored and like no that's not what I like. But like all those things I don't have to just to anyone where I am going and any kind of abusive control on basic things. It is crazy to think that going to the park and spending time sitting and just staring at the landscape was something I wasn't allowed to do. Because that would trigger like harassment over the phone "Where are you? Who are you with?" [When] I'm just by myself, just like enjoying the time and all that situation would create like a... something in myself would say don't do it. So I would be just frustrated inside because I knew always where it would lead

As a marginalized refugee, newcomer, and ostracized woman, Shabnam resists every day' outsider status' in all spaces, often dialectical and regularly. As a survivor of interpersonal abuse, Shabnam spoke about rebuilding herself outside a victim of trauma.

Moreover, 'traumatized' is not their only identity. They also are women, mothers, artists, writers, and much more. Like anybody, they have had both good and bad experiences in their lives. Rather than having the trauma be their entire focus, they focus on building their self-esteem and encouraging each other to remember some of the different experiences in their lives. Every day as they consider the timeline of their lives and futures, women think about their futures. Who will be there with them? What will they be doing? Is there any work, passion, or job they might like and can pursue? Where might they want to live? Women explain what guides them in imagining realistic futures. The purpose behind rejecting the label of being a martyr even when tied to motherhood is to help them put difficult experiences in perspective and feel joy. Participants rely on memories as members of a diaspora, feelings of gratitude for escaping violence and the freedom from everyday abuse. Muslim women's aspirations to seize and make joy everyday are connected to their fight to reject the permanent and degrading status of victim, martyr and silently oppressed.

To feel carefree and joy is no easy charge as a poor racialized newcomer and survivor of abuse. To be carefree does not mean that one has to be careless or live without any struggle. To be carefree is not to disregard the structures that maintain and dictate everyday challenges. For these participants to be carefree and Muslim is about the non-response to the question, is she pious? Or is she westernized? This narrow lens through which Muslim women are questioned does not capture her reality or that of the women in her family and of so many of the Muslim women around her. The everyday is one means of writing against the weight of these questions rooted in stories of violence and oppression. It challenges attempts to reduce individuals to one piece of their identity even if it is her whole identity. The everyday identifies a whole lifetime of experience and avoids trying to symbolize it. Instead, the everyday framework both embraces and challenges paths of self-actualization and conformity. The everyday recognizes the complex, authentic messiness of everyday life in all its joys and struggles. The everyday encompasses the ritual lives of Muslim women, but it contains more than people's ritualism by complicating narrations of their lives. The everyday is about being carefree and Muslim in daily life to the de-essentialist understanding of the 'Muslim woman'. Everyday life is a revaluation of women's experiences, perceptions, sentiments, and attitudes. Participants spoke about exercising self-compassion every day, especially as they face the violence of poverty and homelessness. The need to self-acknowledge

trauma and suffering is about deciding what serves them versus creating space and making their voice heard. For many survivors, what matters is the hope that they will live free from both abuse and trauma, a visualization essential to their healing process.

Minganti (2015) considers the construction of the multicultural trope the "Muslimwoman" popularly commissioned to keep Muslim women associated with "victims inhabiting shelters rather than capable managers" (p.). In response, Mahmood (2005), McNay (2000) and Moore (1994, 2007) call for a more grounded formulation of selfhood and agency inclusive of desire and subjectivity (as cited in Sehlikoglu, 2017, p. 86). For any feminist, it is necessary to consider people's creative aspects and recognize "that the self can never be wholly determined by culture" (Moore, 2007, p. 57). For the participants, it is their lived experiences that both link and distinguish them. Their stories expose how gendered-based experiences continually endanger them simply because they are poor and racialized women. These women challenge the persistent stigma, shaming, and violence to exist outside these harms and pain. Sami said of the anguish and exhaustion that they experience every day and the associated trauma: "this is very much about hoping you do not break down the whole time". Reclaiming or creating their newly forming dreams exists in the same struggles to resist the oppression imposed. Finding ways to talk about what has happened is helpful and appreciated by many participants who met other women with their own stories. For many, offering and receiving solidarity and support is an integral part of recovering from these experiences.

#### **4.1.3. Why are there cameras in the living room and kitchen?**

The Muslim shelter labels shelter stayers as "residents" or "clients" for their temporary shelter of just three months, which is language meant to motivate, assert agency, and supposedly empower women. However, the terminology is problematic and not unique to this Muslim shelter but remains an issue across non-profit organizations and charities. Women are named residents to signify that if they consider an individual financially stable, the non-profit shelter may collect rent from them. It also labels them residents to invoke the "resident contract," which dictates the responsibilities while a "Nisa Homes" [temporary] resident." The term "non-profit organization" lacks a comprehensive definition, yet, as Cheema Samimi explains, there are key shared characteristics. Non-profit organizations are formal organizations of private entities, which do not distribute profits, are self-governing and voluntary, and work toward a

unified mission and declared public benefit (Samimi, 2010). Today, non-profit organizations work within nearly every facet of society, from environmental advocacy to anti-violence and everything in between. These organizations have developed into a thriving industry. In 2005, there were over one million non-profits in the United States, and as of 2010, non-profits are the seventh-largest economy in the world (National Council of Non-profits, 2010).

The workers and Muslim women staying there trying to balance solidarity, space, and individual agency at the shelter discussed these larger narratives. Corporate and hollow language attempts to provide false agency is overtly disingenuous. This disingenuity pervades while everyday women live in fear of not finding housing/work/safety for themselves and their family after Nisa. All "residents" and "clients" are told to leave after three months of shelter, although there may be exceptions in rare cases. One participant could stay past the 3-month limit because of repeated refusal to rent to someone pregnant. This corporate approach is separate from others who speak of a "Nisa Family" and how they recognize the voices and experiences of "their sisters, mothers, friends". The overemphasis on a "Nisa Family" also concerns appreciating women as individuals with unique concerns, relations, differences, and struggles. Moreover, Nisa requires women to live independently and does not accept women dealing with a significant mental illness or those with substance abuse in the last year. This exclusion is because they do not staff a caseworker 24 hours every day. In addition, the shelter is not fully wheelchair accessible. However, the non-profit offers shelter to disabled women in the lower level of the home. The national manager recognizes their blatant exclusions and hopes the shelter can expand to serve women regardless of illness, disability, and addiction. It is clear "Nisa Homes" has a long way to go to meet the needs of marginalized Muslim women who are trying to escape abuse and homelessness. Participants also spoke about the difficulties, challenges, and conflicts that arose and how they managed these experiences in a supposed 'safe' Muslim shelter.

From volunteering and the interviews, I also heard about Muslim women's grievances while staying at Nisa. They experience interpersonal problems like conflicts with other shelter stayers, concerns about shared items, fire and kitchen safety, and bullying. Other women are concerned about rigid Muslim shelters' practices and policies, including mandating weekly meetings and group activities. One criticism raised by Nour,

Amina, Sami, and other women is the security cameras Nisa installed in the living room, kitchen, and other shared spaces of the shelter. Nour notes that it is invasive and unnecessary to have this surveillance inside a supposed safe shelter, invading their privacy rights. For Sadaf and May, the security cameras are comforting and a tool to solve disputes or allegations of theft at the shelter. Relatedly, some participants appreciate the zero-tolerance policy for anyone who accidentally discloses the shelter address. Others believe being told to get dropped off blocks away makes their everyday commute more difficult.

In chapter two, I discussed the importance of asking each participant about concerns at the Muslim shelter. Many participants said they felt uncomfortable if they seemed ungrateful for complaining and the cameras inside the shelter. To meet their own mission statement, feminist-orientated and trauma-informed practice, Nisa should consider the significance of cameras in the shared spaces. The shelter installed security cameras in the living room, kitchen, and other shared areas, to address women's concerns about theft and disputes. The shelter cannot provide even temporarily safe when conflict arises between women already experiencing multifaceted violence. However, installing cameras based on the assumption that it leads to better security and goodwill between women implies that poor women are pre-determined to steal and be in conflict. Thus, for those feeling targeted by surveillance, Nisa has only modified their exposure to forms of control. The mandatory weekly house meetings are meant to function as a time for everyone to feel supported and openly communicate any issues. For Wajma, people tend to socialize and mingle with those they would generally befriend outside the shelter, women who speak the same language and share similar values. A policy of inclusion does not mean exclusion does not exist, undermining the space's aim.

So that's... I think I think for me like for the Nisa home when they interview people they should be like "hey if you wear hijab or you cover or you pray or you know... you just respect others, you don't judge and say like, oh she came from that country or she... look at how she's wearing or you know... it's... it has to be respected, you know, because for me where I come from there can be a household with father mother and they may have two or three girls. Maybe one wear hijab and then the other one doesn't.... it's really there is no pressure and it's in here too your coming here, everybody has a reason...nobody's like oh, I love it. I want to come to the shelter! You know, it is because they have to and you should respect their reason, whatever they whatever they've decided for themselves. This is one thing like the Nisa should make it

very clear...You're here don't judge, you know, yeah. Yeah not to be judgmental. Yeah. (Wajma)

Participants are grateful there exists even one Muslim shelter that allows them to live there despite only sheltering them for up to 3 months. Despite the inclusive and trauma-informed aspirations which Nisa promotes in its mission statement, there is much room for it to improve in its actual practice. For instance, the rigidity of the rules of the shelter has made it difficult for Shabnam to get some sleep in the shelter since she is not allowed to sleep on the living room couch – something that she had resorted to doing since her roommate's snoring kept her up. The rigidity at Nisa reminded her of the control and forced confinement she had previously faced.

I called 211 and was really scared... then Nisa Home called me to come... he told me with the Arabic translator my English has improved a lot since then... and he tells me this "Nisa Homes" you stay just 3 month... not any longer... you have to get job at the house... they help Muslim women... no smoking which is very difficult for me... just go outside... he told me you stay with 3 people 1 room.. one snore... one cry... someone wants to watch TV... but I stayed here with Egyptian woman who snored so much I couldn't sleep... I couldn't listen to the lawyer because I can't sleep... this was really difficult for me...

If, as Muslim women, it is incorrect to speak, criticize, and resist every oppression, then the Muslim shelter is not meeting its mission statement. Committing to anti-violence against women means centring the needs of Muslim women instead of inspecting, observing, and perpetuating further harm. Participants emphasized their specific concerns and criticisms are not disapproving of the shelter overall but specific actors' actions and organizational bias. Moreover, Nisa should recognize the need for safety for Muslim women from every emotional and physical abuse without re-victimizing them by monitoring. Camfield (2017) argues that alternate structures will solve social problems when "social production [would be] organized to meet human needs rather than to generate even-higher profits" (p. 121).

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

This qualitative study is a critical inquiry of Muslim women's meaning-making around multifaceted violence and the many contradictions within discourses of violence prevention and women's shelters. The structural shape the lived experiences of interpersonal violence as racialized, marginalized, displaced and poor Muslim women. Gender-based violence is tied to the systematic and persistent differences between social groups in the ownership of, or control over, valued resources that result from the organization of societies and their institutions. Structural violence limits the ability of an individual to gain access to essential resources, basic human needs and prevents individuals from reaching their full potential. Inequities contribute to the perpetuation of social problems because it upholds structural violence that targets groups and causes a cycle of vulnerability. When social groups are vulnerable, they are targeted by discrimination or violence and restricted in their ability to exercise agency due to their lack of power and position in a socially constructed hierarchical social order (Rhodes, 2011). In our settler-colonial and racist society, social problems cannot be viewed as static or separate. The attempt to de-link racism and gender-based violence from the formation, maintenance and demands of capitalism and imperialism is to preserve the status quo. In other words, this de-linking naturalizes different hierarchies of domination to preserve them, which helps structure the status quo or positions of subordination and power. The lesson of social sciences is the world in which we live does not exist in some absolute or isolated sense.

In order for equity to be achieved, there needs to be a complete shift within hierarchical systems and institutions to bring about effective change. To me, this is a vital starting point to consider when attempting to address the ongoing perpetuation of a social problem. Equity, separate from equality, is about fairness and treating all people with equal respect and concern for their welfare – it does not necessarily mean treating everyone the same. When examining inequity and why it happens, one should assess the various social groups present, how they are positioned, how society is hierarchized, and how the hierarchy benefits and harms different groups.

Addressing discrimination must be a collective responsibility, not the sole responsibility of that community. In this study, marginalized Muslim women's voices,

needs and experiences differ based on the challenges and structures they confront every day. We should recognize the potential and power of stories in the struggle for equality, equity, and justice. This work begins in empowering women to continue to exercise their agency and speak for themselves about their everyday lives. I also describe how co-optation of people's bodies, experiences, and resistance avoids material change against oppression. The bodies and identities of Muslim women are defined, recounted, and regulated between different social spheres. Various features of patriarchy and related inequities intersect in participants' everyday lives as unhoused Muslim women experience gender-based violence. Women living at the Muslim shelter expose the experiences and resilience of these poor, racialized, and marginalized Muslim women. This research was inspired as a means of engaging Muslim women. The one-on-one in-depth interviews with Muslim women provide a depth of information. Participants' meaning-making of violence highlights the importance of demarcating shared and unique experiences of oppression. I highlight women's agency and the ongoing fight against abuse and structural violence. Women understand their suffering is a direct outcome of the systems that economically, politically, and socially isolate to marginalize them. The resilience of Muslim women endures as solidarity, self-care, and community aid. At Nisa, participants embrace mutual support and feminist-formed solidarity against all forms of oppression. Participants do not interpret and relate to their faith in the same way. These diverse women, several guided by their interpretations of Islamic faith and personal understandings of justice, imagine a society that meets the needs of everyone. There is a need to further analyze the different and specific ways poor, racialized, and marginalized Muslim women experience structural oppression.

However, in this study, some key limitations warrant consideration. The participants' voices and experiences never represented all Muslim women. Given a chance to redo this study, I would hope to stay consistent with the terms and language used throughout the study. Survivors told the parts of their stories they could which made my analysis more difficult. I would also aim to incorporate more diversity of participants and incorporate a focus group to engage collective discussion about Muslim women's experiences in public and private spaces. This report provides a good overview of the issues and needs of these Muslim women. It shows how policy and social programming initiatives could stimulate discussions about the difficulties faced by Muslim women. The homogenization of Muslim identities and the constant harmful

tropes about Islamic identity reinforces stigma and discrimination. Raising awareness about and highlighting the experiences of Muslim men and women may combat the stigma and racism they face. Finally, Muslim women ought to be empowered in their communities and research into communities should be geared towards providing voice rather than silencing women through the constant victim label.

I committed to amplifying their voices and drawing attention to their stories. Breaking the impositions of silence is the power of each participant in this study. Participants allowed me to share their every day and different struggles as they resist multiple forms of violence. Women confront multifaceted violence by ending violence and creating a permanent sanctuary for themselves and their families. For poor racialized Muslim women, resistance is against different oppressions like sexism, racism, and poverty. The role of racism and how we speak about it should understand its significance in social issues that concern inequality, power, and legitimacy. Essentialist exploitation is about rejecting voice, agency, and everyday life. To whitewash Muslim women's experiences of gender-based violence and avoid any racial account of their concerns is to weaponize their violence against them. Racial justice means dismantling white supremacy and challenging its manifestation in supposed anti-violence intervention. The potential remains with anti-violence against women work based on survivors' experiences and understanding of the world they face. There is an obvious need for more community-oriented initiatives and Muslim shelters accessible to Muslim women. Women on income assistance should have the assistance they need to live and support themselves and their families. Instead, government aid has them food insecure, homeless and forced to live in abusive homes. Participants require secure and affordable housing for long-term protection against perpetrators.

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# Appendix A. Interview Schedule

## Research questions

What are the unique struggles and needs of Muslim refugee and immigrant women in Vancouver?

What are the everyday experiences and needs of past and current refugee and immigrant women residents at the Muslim transition shelter Nisa Homes?

How do I hear and respect refugee and immigrant Muslim women's voices?

How do I incorporate Muslim epistemologies into my research?

How do I hold my privilege status accountable during the research process?

Finally, how do I develop research that will respect the heterogeneity of refugee and immigrant Muslim women?

## Interview Questions

### A) Residents

• Please tell me a little about yourself?

- 
- What brought you to the shelter?
    - Define gender-based violence
    - Experiences of homelessness
  - Tell me about Nisa Homes
    - Intake process–prior awareness
  - What role does Nisa Homes being a 'Muslim Home' have for you?
  - What role does Nisa Homes being a 'Muslim Home' have for you?
  - What has your experience been shelter at Nisa Homes?
  - What are your relationships with the other women?
  - How would you describe the case workers?
    - Compared to other shelters you stayed?
  - What services do you think should Nisa Homes be providing to help better meet your needs or other women?
  - Tell me about any concerns you have within the Home?
  - Do you have any questions/concerns?
  - Is there anything you want to discuss?

- 
- What does Islam mean to you?
  - What role does Islam play in your everyday life?
  - I'd like to hear about some pressing issues you think Muslim women are facing?
  - Tell me about your experience living in Vancouver?
  - I'd like to hear about your understanding of Islamophobia in Vancouver?
- Tell me about your experience with the Canadian immigration system?  
(q. dependent upon status – newcomer, type of refugee, permanent resident.)

### B) Case Workers

- Please tell me a little about yourself?
- Tell me about Nisa Homes
- What does Nisa Homes being a 'Muslim Home' mean?
- What is your role as a caseworker at Nisa Homes?
- What is your approach to a new resident?
  - How do you build rapport?

- How do you see your relationship to the residents?
- Describe a circumstance in which you had to intervene as a caseworker at the shelter?
- How does Nisa help address the inequities women sheltering here face?
- Tell me about Nisa Home's relationship with other women's shelters?
- Do you have any questions/concerns?
- Is there anything you want to discuss?

## Appendix B. Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the following study:

Principal Investigator: Nadira Aleaf, Graduate Student, Simon Fraser University.

Supervisor: Dr. Parin Dossa, Professor of Anthropology, Simon Fraser University Chair:  
Dany Lacombe, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Simon Fraser University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants can withdraw at any time without prejudice. Purpose and Goals of this study:

(1) to **showcase the good work Muslims are doing** to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of society;

(2) to **engage the voices of refugee and immigrant Muslim** women living in British Columbia and Ontario to compile an account of the personal, economic and social difficulties they face;

(3) to conduct qualitative **interviews** with the social workers, case workers, lawyers, and counsellors that work with refugee and immigrant Muslim women

You are being asked to participate in an interview. I may re-contact you following the interview for additional information for this study.

Alternately, should you wish to contribute additional responses after the completion of the interview, you may contact me directly at [ ... ].

The benefits of this study are to create a record of the personal and social challenges faced by Muslim women, to allow Muslim women to speak for themselves and draw attention to the lived realities of refugee and immigrant Muslim women.

The risks in participating in this study are no greater than those risks faced in ordinary life. Information regarding resources for free counselling services is available upon request from the researcher.

The data obtained from this study will be held in the strictest confidence. Your absolute confidentiality will be guaranteed.

Your real name will not appear in the results of this study. You will be assigned a pseudonym by which you will be referred to on recordings, in research notes and in the transcripts. If permission is granted for audio recordings, recordings will be transcribed and deleted within 3 days after the initial interview. Anonymized transcripts of the interviews will be kept by the researcher for two years after the completion of the study.

Despite agreeing to participate, you should know that you may withdraw your participation at any time and can register any complaint you have with this research with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics.

For inquiries regarding your rights as a participant in research, the responsibilities of researchers or questions, concerns or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, contact information listed below. Should you have any questions for the principal supervisor of this study, Dr. Dossa's contact information is listed below.

Dr. Jeff Toward Director, Office of Research Ethics Simon Fraser University 8888 University Drive Multi-Tenant Facility Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6 [ ... ] [ ... ]	Dr. Parin Dossa Professor of Anthropology Simon Fraser University 8888 University Drive Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6 [ ... ] [ ... ]
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You may obtain a summary of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting: Nadira Aleaf at [ ... ].