

## Muslim Youth in Canada?: Collective Identities, Attitudes of “Otherment” and Canadian Muslim Perspectives on Radicalism

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### Abstract

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This paper is based on a larger MA thesis that explores the collective identities of Muslims in Canada, and how their experiences as a religious minority have shaped their collective identity. It also explores attitudes of ‘otherment’, out-group suspicion and how disenfranchisement among certain individuals may result in a distortion of the Islamic religion. For the purposes of this paper, perceptions of the efforts of the Canadian state to integrate Muslims, the existence of islamophobia among Canadians in general and the potential disenfranchisement and vulnerability of Muslim youth to radicalization are explored. The collaborative role that Muslims must take alongside agents of the Canadian state in order to prevent radicalism (i.e. Canadian police forces) is also examined. The research relies primarily on in-depth interviews with 5 individuals, Muslims of various ages and backgrounds who were born in Canada as second-generation immigrants, who had become Canadian citizens. Their opinions on the role of the Muslim community in preventing radicalism in the Canadian context are explored and contextualized.

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**Keywords:** Muslim youth. Identity Conflict. Immigration. Multiculturalism. Orientalism. Collective Identities.

### 1. Introduction

Islamophobia as an academic discourse is in its infancy, and has largely sprouted as a result of attitudes that have emerged in the post 9/11 context. Although its frequency is difficult to measure, Islamophobia seems most prevalent in Europe and the United States (Kymlicka, 2010). Thus far, Islamophobia does not appear to be as prevalent in Canada as in other Western countries. For example, Dr. Kymlicka, recruited by the Government of Canada in 2010 to compile a report on the successes and failures of Canadian Multiculturalism stated that ‘compared to most other countries, (Europe in this case) the mainstream media in Canada have largely avoided engaging in minority or immigrant bashing (Kymlicka, 2010).

The phenomenon of Islamophobia appears to be (in the views of the informants interviewed in the pursuit of this research) particularly salient in the United States, but due to the profound and far-reaching effects of the American media in other countries, terrorist attacks that have occurred in Europe and Australia-Islamophobia exists to varying degrees in other countries outside of America (Global terrorism Database, 2015). This includes its close ally and neighbor to the North with whom it shares deep economic and cultural ties and remarkable similarities-Canada. Canada and the US share a long undefended border, a similar history as well as close economic, political and cultural similarities (Embassy of the United States, 2014). They benefit mutually from a relationship unique among any two countries on earth and thus Canadians are profoundly influenced by events unfolding in the United States.

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There are however nuanced and subtle differences between Canadians and Americans in their worldviews, their national identity and their approach to the potent issues of national security and their reactions to crises (Canadian Journalism Project, 2015). The research revealed the reality that Islamophobia is present in Canada, yet there may be differences in its prevalence and manifestations when it is compared to the American context. The phenomenon of Islamophobia, how it has shaped the perceptions of Muslims in Canada toward their non-Islamic counterparts, its impact in disenfranchising Muslims, the factors that may make a disenfranchised individual susceptible to radicalism and finally how Muslims in Canada perceive their own role in preventing radicalism are explored.

## **2. Collective Identities and Attitudes of 'Otherment'**

### **2.1 The Canadian Context**

Canada, being proximal to the US has been influenced by the post 9/11 hysteria (Zine, 2004, pp. 111-114) as well as by being an extremely diverse country with Muslims being the fastest growing religious minority in the nation (Statistics Canada, 2014). Although an open and multi-cultural society (Kymlicka, 2010) Canada has faced issues in the integration of Muslims into Society, and Muslims are often a focal point (Nagra, 2013, pp. 603-620) for those who contest the intake of new immigrants to Canada and their failure to integrate (EnviroNics Institute, 2015). This research took place at a time when Canada was recovering from its first terrorist attack of an Islamist motivation, and resulted in the murder of Corporal Nathan Cirillo in October 2014 on Parliament Hill, as he stood guard over a national monument Canada's national security laws have been strengthened since this attack (OHCHR, 2014), and due to its foreign policies being influenced primarily by its alliance with the United States, many fear that Canada may be increasingly targeted by those inspired by the Islamist narrative ("Public Report on the Terrorist," 2014) and who are inspired by anti-Western sentiment that is directed at the United States and its allies, including Canada.

This is partially what has inspired the implementation of new anti-terrorist legislation (which includes the right of elected officials to strip an individual of their Canadian citizenship exogenous of the judicial system)(Clayton &Nadar, 2015) which has been criticized by the Canadian Bar association (Clayton &Nadar, 2015) as well as the UN office of the High Commission of Human rights as being unconstitutional and also as a threat to the Human Rights<sup>4</sup> of Canadians. This occurred in the aftermath of this attack and is indicative of the effect of this terrorist attack on Muslim and non-Muslim relations in Canada, as well as the growing prevalence of Islamophobia in a country so well regarded for its openness and success in multiculturalism (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

Within the context of Multiculturalism, Islamophobia and out-group suspicion, one must examine the current state of affairs with an awareness of the (Lederach, 1995) presence of collective identities in Canada, and how these relate to perceptions of the 'other' (Kriesberg, 2003). Identity conflict is also often characterized by group identification against another-a phenomenon of 'otherment'. Buber (1923) identifies 'otherment' as the progression of objectification and dehumanizing that enables the other to be viewed as an 'it' rather than as a 'thou' (Buber, 1923). 'Otherment' as understood by Buber is also echoed in the discourse of Orientalism, and so this research aligns with the paradigm of 'otherment' and objectification existent in the discourse of Orientalism (and simultaneously Occidentalism), within the framework defined by Edward Said (Said, 1978).

This phenomenon of 'othering'if further exacerbated by other circumstances, such as religious differences, economic inequality, territorial disputes and if it is accompanied by non-compromising identities, collective victim identity, exclusivity and adversarial identities can result in the manifestation of identity conflicts. Group (Kriesberg, 2003) identities can be triggers in identity conflicts when people view one group identity as more important, and incompatible with another identity they espouse. Identity conflict seems a prevalent issue in defining the collective identity with which one aligns oneself, particularly when one collective identity one espouses ( ie. being a Canadian) is seen as incompatible with another one of their identities, in this case, being a Muslim. Such conflicts related to collective identities seem particularly relevant when considering the changes that have been made by Canada's Government under the Conservative leadership of the last 10 years which many view to be 'Americanizing' Canada(Smith, 2012). This is also relevant as Canada, despite all of its efforts to integrate multiculturalism, is in the very infancy stage of defining religious freedoms within a society that aims to be secular.

Kymlicka asserts “that the place of religious diversity within multiculturalism has not yet been adequately debated or explored (Kymlicka, 2010, pg. 10).” This is an issue more likely to rise to the surface as Canada’s religious minorities continue to grow (Kymlicka, 2010).

### 3. The Study Findings

Within the context of a terrorist attack on Parliament Hill, the passing of new legislation granting increased powers to Canada’s intelligence service in surveillance, as well as the minister of immigration to strip an individual of their Canadian citizenship<sup>7</sup>, 5 interviews on the subject were conducted. Over 100 invitations were made for informants to participate in this study of which only 5 agreed. This, combined with the fact that the researcher has a name that is unlikely to be assumed as being the name of a Muslim reveals something significant about collective identity and out-group suspicion among Muslims in Canada. Their experiences with Islamophobia, and a feeling of being ‘othered’ has perhaps resulted in a similar, reactive phenomenon of out-group suspicion and a perception of ‘otherment’, to some degree.

The informants consisted of 2 Shi’i Muslims, 3 Sunni Muslims, 2 males and 3 females ranging in age from 21-47 years of age. Among the 5 informants, 4 reside in the lower Mainland Vancouver area, and one resides in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area). All subjects are Canadian citizens. Within the paragraphs below is illustrated the demographic data of the informants, in as much detail as confidentiality will allow according to the arrangement made between the researcher and their University ethics protocols regarding research on humans, and also based on conversations with informants. The informants described in the following paragraphs will henceforth be referred to as they appear in the section below: Informant, A, B, C, D, E. These were in depth interviews and Informants were each interviewed for at least one hour. All informants are Canadian citizens. Their ethnic background ranged from being of Pakistani, Ethiopian, Fijian as well as 2 being of Indian/Ugandan origin (there was a large Indian community in East Africa, but those residing in Uganda were expelled by the dictator Idi Amin in the 1970s).

Informant A was 38 years old at the time that he was interviewed. He grew up in Canada. He showed very strong political interests and is of the Sunni Islamic sect.

Informant B is a Shi’i male who was 47 years old at the time that he was interviewed for this research study. He has lived in Canada since mid-childhood.

Informant C is a Sunni female who was 21 years old at the time she was interviewed. She grew up in Canada.

Informant D is a Sunni female who was 33 years old at the time she was interviewed. She grew up in Canada.

Informant E is a Shi’i female who was 25 years old at the time she was interviewed. She has resided in Canada since mid-childhood.

Although there were only 5 informants, they showed sufficient diversity to make at least some general, baseline conclusions about Muslims and their experience as a minority group in Canada. There were similarities and differences among informants, and there appeared to be differences in their level of engagement with their own community and with Canadian society at large (i.e. whether or not they appeared to be politically inclined). Thus, they approached the subject from 5 very distinct and unique perspectives and each offered a valuable insight.

Perhaps the starkest difference of opinion was between informant ‘A’ and informant ‘E.’ Besides the age difference and being of different sects, (Sunni and Shi’i respectively) informant A felt strongly that all Muslim women were obligated to practice the tradition of hijab and Informant E felt otherwise. Informant A, and E showed the starkest differences of opinions among all informants, but there were varying levels of agreement among all. Nonetheless, both of these even vastly different informants considered themselves to be nonetheless practicing Muslims. There were very different levels of political awareness expressed among informants about how politics in Canada had an impact on Muslims. For example informants A, and C, displayed a much higher level of engagement with Canadian politics than the other informants, yet they disagreed to the extent to which politics influenced the lives of Muslims. It should also be noted that informants all showed a basic cognizance of politics in Canada, where they vastly differed was how much they initiated bringing this element into the conversation.

Informants brought their experiences of living in the Vancouver and Toronto areas as well as one informant who grew up in Edmonton and who also lived in Quebec for several years and was able to comment on living in those areas. They all had different understandings of their religion, yet all displayed an interpretation that is normative and not of an Islamist nature. When considering the conclusions taken from the interviews, it is important to remember that this study is not definitive and is only an exploratory probe into a complex subject, this research is not intended to be, and should not be interpreted as explanatory.

### **3.1 Unanimous Opinions among Informants**

Respondents were unanimous in their largely positive sentiments about Canada, and expressed gratitude for the advantages awarded to them by being Canadian. There were vast differences among informants in their perceptions of the level to which Islamophobia is a concern, but there was unanimous opinion that it does exist, and that it has regional implications (some areas are more welcoming than others, and Quebec was perceived to be the most unwelcoming). A very significant finding, is that even when the question was not directly presented, all informants felt that the media played a very strong role in propagating Islamophobic stereotypes. One informant actually opened the interview by expressing concern about the impact of 9/11 on Muslim's experience in Canada. Informants were similarly unanimous in their opinion that women who wear hijab have a more difficult time living in Canada, being more likely to experience Islamophobia. There was a unanimous opinion among informants that fear of losing the Muslim identity (to widely varying degrees) is an existing concern among many of Canada's Muslims, but that this has generational and inter-cultural dimensions. An interesting unanimous opinion among informants was their extremely positive perception of Canada's police force. It is significant that informants viewed a distinction between Canada's police force, and its spying agency.

### **3.2 Differences of Opinion**

Informants all agreed that Canada was more welcoming than not, but widely disagreed on the extent to which Canada is welcoming. There was disagreement on whether or not being a Canadian can be incompatible with being a Muslim. This had largely to do with Canada's foreign policies that were seen to be harmful to the global Muslim community, or perceived as too 'Americanized.' Informants did not all agree that education would prevent Islamophobia and out-group suspicion. The informants also did not all agree that Islamophobia would be more likely to exist in rural rather than urban areas.

### **3.3 Anomalies**

Informant 'C' was the only informant to bring up issues of class in relation to being welcomed in Canada. Informant 'A' is the only person who gave a prescriptive answer to the Question 'Do Muslims feel more solidarity with Muslim or non-Muslim Canadians?' in stating that they 'should' feel solidarity with Muslims. Informant A also did not believe that education about Islam would be universally effective in combatting Islamophobia, as he believed some individuals had fixed their opinions before considering the facts. He stated that:

'There are a lot of people that are very educated but they're extremely biased when it comes to certain things. Everyone has their own biases, and for some people that bias is something to do with a race, ethnicity or a religion. And at no point are they willing to back off on that. So even though they are aware, even with all the education there is a certain kind of an ignorance that blankets in certain minds.'

### **3.4 Themes**

Media perpetuating Islamophobia, especially after 9/11 was a significant theme. Canada blindly following American foreign policies, and not taking its own stance was thematic. Praise for the heroic efforts of Canada's RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) force was a strong theme. Canada's openness to alcohol consumption, dating and 'the hyper-sexualization' of Canadian society was commonly seen as being an issue that contributed to identity conflict among Muslim youth. The opinion that fearing a loss of religious identity is more common among immigrants, and the older generation was similarly thematic. Unfavorable attitudes about the current (Conservative) government were a theme, as well as appreciation for Canada's democratic and peaceful values.

Sadness and disappointment regarding Canada's lack of assistance to Muslim civilians suffering due to protracted conflict was very salient (particularly in Syria and Palestine). Disdain for extremist elements of Islam and insistence that this is not the real interpretation of the religion was very strongly emphasized. The idea that misinformation about Islam was a contributing factor to Islamophobia was thematic among informants.

The idea that Muslims needed to be involved in combatting extremist elements within Islam was similarly discussed. The opinion that identity conflict can seriously impact youth, especially if they are experiencing mental health issues was a theme. The opinion that most Canadians are welcoming, open-minded and not prejudiced against Muslims was normative. There was a deep perception among informants that Islamophobia is much more of a concern in the United States than Canada, and several expressed gratitude about living in Canada rather than the US and felt they were much more accepted and safe in Canada than they would be in the US.

#### **4. Canada and Islamophobia**

##### **4.1 Prevalence and Perceived Causes**

Informants largely felt that the media as well as the extremist actions of certain misguided individuals was to blame for the existence of Islamophobia. They felt mostly that misinformation about Islam was a factor in influencing people to develop Islamophobic views and also that the media created a perception that radicalism in Islam is the norm rather than the exception. The older informants discussed the shift they felt in perceptions of them after 9/11 in more detail than their younger counterparts, and remarked on a substantial difference in how they felt others responded to them after 9/11. When asked how they thought the terrorist attack in Ottawa would influence Islamophobic attitudes, they expressed concern that they felt it was a strong possibility that Islamophobia would become more prevalent, and informants perceived in a general sense that Islamophobia seems to be of an increasing prevalence.

This perception is confirmed according to an Angus Reid Poll, which revealed that 46% of Canadians held a negative view of Muslims in 2009, and this rose to 54% in 2013 ("Canadian anti-Muslim sentiment," 2013). This is even more prevalent in Quebec (corresponding to the views of informants that Quebec is a more intolerant region), where 69% of people have a negative view of Islam. In 2013, 32% of Canadian respondents to a study (outside of Quebec) stated that it would be unacceptable for their son or daughter to marry a Muslim, and this number had risen since 2009. "Rejection of the idea of a child marrying into any of the other religions (Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Sikhism) was considerably lower ("Canadian anti-Muslim sentiment," 2013)." Views about the other religions surveyed (Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism) have remained more or less constant between 2009-2013. Reports also exist that online hate speech is being used to propagate Islamophobia in Canada by far-right extremist groups. This is despite "Section 319 of the Criminal Code of Canada (Government of Canada, 1985) [which] forbids the incitement of hatred against 'any section of the public distinguished by color, race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation ("Islamophobia difficult to stop," 2015)." There are thousands of Canadian members of the 'Anti-Islam Alliance' Facebook page, which as of February 2015 has nearly 30,000 members worldwide.

Interestingly, a Gallup poll discovered that Canadians were (less so than Americans) more likely to have negative views of Muslims (agreeing with the statement 'they do not respect our society') than Europeans (Gallup, 2014). However, informants felt largely welcomed and some had not directly experienced instances of Islamophobia. This suggests that Islamophobia in Canada may be much more salient in Canadian society than it actually appears to be, and that just because Canadians are not explicitly acting on Islamophobic attitudes, does not mean that they do not harbor them privately. Acceptance of diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism are values that are emphasized as being pillars of Canadian society ("Canadian Multiculturalism," 2012) and as such Canadians may find themselves very hesitant to express views that could be perceived as contrary to that due to a fear of social judgement. This may contrast with American discourse, as rather than a cultural mosaic- America conversely is often described as a 'melting pot' (Kymlicka, 2010). America's tumultuous history, with its civil war, civil rights movement, its experiences of being attacked in the Second World War (Wohlstetter, 1962) as well as during 9/11 (Zine, 2004) also have shaped the American national identity in distinct ways. America's tremendous military spending and allowance of individuals to purchase firearms are also indicative of a collective desire to protect and defend an individual's own as well as collective 'American' (American Democracy Foundation, 2013) identity.

Conversely Canadians, living in a different context and with a less challenging history may not feel the same level of freedom in openly expressing their nationalist views, especially if they involve a threat of being perceived as intolerant.

An implication of this finding may be that although Americans may be more likely to express the Islamophobic attitudes (based on the perceptions of informants that Americans are more openly hostile and less welcoming) Canadians may be just as much or even more so Islamophobic than their American counterparts. The next election, and whether or not Canadians vote favorably toward bills that may increase scrutiny (Al-Jazeera, 2013) of certain groups may be an indication of just how accepting of Muslims Canadians truly are (Hanniman, 2008). Informant's perceptions of the state of Islamophobia in Canada compared to the United States further indicate that within Canada, there could be a perception that Canadians are more welcoming to Muslims than their counterparts in America:

**Informant E:**

'we choose to live in this country, I don't see why to keep doing that if we don't feel like were being treated fairly, I don't think that ...hmm following along the lines of the Ferguson trial, no I don't think it's like that, I think we have been treated fairly. I don't see any association like that...'

Informant A, when asked about what was an ideal environment for Muslims arriving to the West as refugees remarked that:

'...They need to be in a peaceful environment, they need to be in an environment that's more or less fair. And I tell people this is about as good as it gets for the time being. Go look around the world. Go south of the border, you'll see a different spectrum of extremes. And it's not very easy to survive there, we are much better off than people in the states to be quite honest. Muslims down there have not just been marginalized, but they have been targeted. They have been stigmatized and insulted openly. On the major media outlets and through things like Hollywood and through mainstream politicians. It's harder there to maintain your Islamic identity than it is over here. We're still better off because Canada is generally a peaceful place, it's probably the nicest place for these people to come to.'

Informant C, remarking on how she had not experienced problems in Canada while wearing hijab (expressing her Islamic identity) mentioned others in her family who had been influenced by attacks on Muslims in the US:

'...who took off their headscarves because they were afraid, they'd heard of attacks that happened in the States, where some Muslims had been killed...'

Informants perceived Islamophobia to be less prevalent in Canada than the US, but still viewed it as an issue:

For example Informant A gave an example of Islamophobia, and perceived how he believed the current media coverage of attacks being carried out by ISIS may impact Muslims:

'...a perfect example of that is an email we received just this morning, from a group who is threatening to attack all mosques... they already vandalized one, the sight of a new mosque... They vandalized that sight and they threatened us, they said we're coming after all the other mosques... I wouldn't be surprised if already there are kids that are being taunted, women that are being taunted, before it was like Al Qaeda, it was the hot button, it was like a swear word type of thing. If you want to really insult someone or really, you know put them down, you know-you're probably Al Qaeda. And now it's ISIS is the new Al Qaeda. Yes first it was the Taliban, and Al Qaeda became the new Taliban, and now ISIS became the new Al Qaeda, and who knows where it's going to go next, so these types of incidents do not make like easier for us, living in the West. That's for sure.'

Informant B, when asked how much of a concern Islamophobia is in Canada, stated that:

'I think it's pretty real. Again when we see the prime minister of Canada making statements a couple of years ago I think it was CBC an interview, saying the biggest threat in the country now is Islam, it's like wow, coming from the leader the prime minister, things like that, and events that happen and if you don't do the necessary to disassociate the event by an individual or a group of individuals, and sometimes they support statements or allow statements that, that cycle, can certainly fuel Islamophobia so it's definitely a concern.'

Informants discussed concern about Islamophobia and believed that the media plays a central role in fueling it. For example, Informant E stated that:

'If your inundated with all of this and you hear Muslims did this and this bad thing and you don't know any better then yes, you get bad idea and if you don't know any Muslims you just think ok, they're all bad. But if you know any Muslims, you realize you can't judge a whole community based on one person. And then you would stay away from that stereotype. I think it's the same with any culture, if someone else, say gets arrested you wouldn't think the whole culture is bad, but with Muslims because it keeps happening in the media, you kind of think ok it's all bad. But if you know Muslims and you have normal interactions then you know better. So I can see why general people because of the media would think all Muslims are bad, but people who are more open minded and meet Muslims and talk to them won't think that they're all bad.'

They believed that a lack of awareness and understanding about Islam, as well as the media propagating stereotypes and ignorance served to worsen the issue of Islamophobia. Informants largely felt that the Canadian Muslim community must be more active in increasing awareness about Islam in order to combat the presence of Islamophobia. Most felt that Muslims had to exemplify that they are law abiding citizens, be more vocal in their communities and in the media and to be open to answering questions when others show curiosity about their religion.

## **4.2 Combatting Islamophobia**

### **4.2.1 A Collaborative Effort**

The informants perceived that Muslims in Canada have a strong role to play in dispelling stereotypes and combatting Islamophobia. They expressed sadness and frustration over the actions of radicalized Muslims who have engaged in criminal activity. Informants remarked on efforts they themselves, as well as the Muslim community of Canada are embarking upon in order to inform the non-Muslim Canadian population about their religion. They have held information sessions in mosques, on college campuses and during community events. Some mentioned how members of their local Muslim community had spoken publicly to the media in order to condemn terrorist activities and to show their support for Canadian law enforcement agencies who have brought such criminals to justice.

Informants also remarked on how they perceived Muslims should further integrate themselves into society, become contributing citizens and model to others that they are not a burden on society and that they are law-abiding and peaceful. They believed that the Muslim community must refrain from insularity, embrace Canada as their chosen country and contribute to its society and development. They felt Muslims should be open to responding to questions from non-Muslims about their identity. They largely perceived that this action, would promote a more positive image of Muslims and help to dispel Islamophobia.

Informants largely viewed an opportunity for Muslim Canadians to be involved in combatting the issue of radicalism. They felt that they must promote the message within their own community that such actions are not in line with the faith and that they are misguided. They also perceived an opportunity for Muslims to be involved in steering Muslims who were on the path to becoming radicalized in a more positive direction. They perceived that such an individual may be more likely to be positively influenced by a member of their own religious community, who they may identify with and trust more than another outside influence.

## **5. Radicalism and 'Otherment'**

### **5.1 Risk Factors**

This research seeks to understand Muslim youth in the Canadian context, while situating it in its globally relevant context. As indicated by informant A 'the world has gotten very small.' As the world becomes increasingly globalized, and Canada as a diverse nation draws immigrants with attachments to a multitude of different countries, (Immigration Watch Canada, 2013). It is important to realize that nothing exists in isolation. Informants remarked on how they feel more connection to those sharing their religious views, and collective identity. When situating this research in the context of the globalized world, it is important to realize that Muslims may feel very strongly emotionally impacted by the harm inflicted on Muslims throughout the world. The tremendous suffering experienced by Muslims throughout the world at the hands of America and its allies must not be ignored (Fisk, 2007).

There are many examples of the suffering and indignities committed against Muslim civilian populations (including but by no means limited to those about to follow). In 1993, Canadian peacekeepers photographed themselves with the corpse of a 16 year-old civilian Somali boy, (ShidaneArone) who died after being tortured by 9 Canadian soldiers for several hours. Out of all 9 soldiers involved, 4 were acquitted and the harshest reprimand was one 5 year prison sentence("Torture by Canadian," 1993)According to the cultural information/ travel advisories issued by DFATD (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Development Canada), this incident is still extremely relevant in shaping global Somali perceptions of Canadians (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Development Canada, 2015).

In 1988, American troops in the Persian Gulf shot down an Iranian passenger plane, killing all 290 civilians on board (Washington Post, 2013). Within one 3 week period of July 2014, UNICEF's Gaza Office (United Nations Children's Fund) reported that 230 children were killed (by Israeli Defense Forces) (UNICEF, 2014).Chief of the Gaza UNICEF Office, Ms. Pernille Ironside stated that "We see children killed, injured, mutilated and burnt, in addition to being terrified to their core. The consequences run much deeper than previous flare-ups (UNICEF, 2014, para. 2)." Famous British journalist, and Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk (Fisk, 2007) remarked on the Iraq war in 2006 "I can't help wondering today how many of the innocents slaughtered in Haditha took the opportunity to vote in the Iraqi elections -- before their 'liberators' murdered them (Fisk, 2006)." It is difficult to find definitive numbers on the number of civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003, one widely used source, the Iraq Body Count Project reports more than 100,000 (Iraq Body Count Project, 2011).

It seems at least possible that Muslims living in Canada who connect strongly to their collective Muslim identity may be impacted by such events. For example, when asked about how she and her community were emotionally impacted by the civilian deaths in Syria Informant D (who does not share an ethnic or linguistic background with Syrians, only a religious identity) stated that: I am a little disappointed in what's going on there and that Canada isn't really contributing in any sort of way. We do, or I do wish that Canada would help more. But I do understand that there's various reasons why they're not. You do have to know all the details before you can make a statement like that. You know and it does affect us. You see Muslims dying for no real reason, they're all innocent, and you do get angry about it and it's very unfortunate, so the whole situation, like all the countries the whole Middle East, it's going through a lot of difficult times right now, and it's really sad to see it's got to this state, when you look at the history of why they are this way, it's just unfortunate. And I think there are a lot of extremists there, and they're making it a lot worse. We try to help in various ways, like sending clothes sending money that type of thing. But other than that we kind of feel a little helpless

An excerpt of the interview with informant A is also worth considering here:

Researcher: Do you think, because I'm mostly looking at youth, so youth in any context sort of have a conflict of identity, whether it's religious or ethnic, or what kind of music they want to ascribe to, it's common. So I'm wondering, Muslim youth that are in Canada, may strongly identify with their religion, they may not, but do you think that when they see these things, like Canada siding so much with the United States in peacekeeping operations, that give such vilifying perspectives of Islam in the media, or Stephen Harper's [Canada's Prime Minister] recent visit to Israel, where he gave not much recognition to Palestine, do you think a Muslim youth who is more politically minded, because of course I'm sure there's a lot of people who aren't political at all and don't pay attention to these things, but do you think that a youth who is more politically minded might, I don't know, I guess I'm kind of wondering, might anybody develop some feelings of incompatibility between being a Canadian and being a Muslim?

Informant A: Absolutely, yes. Whenever a country will take a stance that conflicts with one's belief system, a sort of dichotomy is created in the mind. Ok who am I supposed to side with, and that creates-it creates an inner conflict, it creates confusion, and a person starts weighing their interests, what does my interest lie in? And it also leads to a lot of frustration especially when it happens over and over again. People do get frustrated. Researcher: Can you talk anecdotally, about anytime you've seen a person have this sort of inner conflict? Or how they've sort of tried to cope with that sort of stress? Informant A: I think I've gone through many such firsthand experiences. Or dealt with many youth who've gone through such experiences. Simple example, like what you have mentioned.



For some people and they don't even have to be Muslim are very emotional about the Israel/Palestine issue. I have non-Muslim friends who are very emotional about the Israel/Palestine issue.

They, when they see that you're constantly and sort of without any reservations just supporting one side, and you're treating the other side as wrong, or as baseless or they don't deserve any respect they don't deserve any importance, when you see that, the first thing is that it hurts because you're connected to those people, either because you're from that part of the world or you share the same beliefs as them, and so on and so forth. So a conflict is definitely created and a struggle begins inside, and you think do I suppress this, am I supposed to voice my opinion am I supposed to, you know what am I supposed to do? And yes where is my place in this society, if this is what leaders are saying, is that representative of the country? Is that their own statements? Who else are they speaking on behalf of? And yes, am I compatible to this... absolutely the question arises.

When considering identity conflict among Muslim youth in Canada, the effect of the global situation for Muslims must be taken into account, as it seems this has the potential (according to informants) to substantially impact identity conflict and to mobilize those who share a collective identity group. Notice that according to informant D (and this was echoed in other interviews including that of informant A) that this happened in a positive way, such as seeking further knowledge, becoming more politically engaged or sending clothes and supplies to Syrian civilians impacted by the country's conflict. Googling 'muslims in canada sending supplies to syrian refugees' results in several results of instructions provided by Muslim communities across Canada on how to make clothing or food donations to be shipped to Syria (ie. the Um Anas clothing drive in Toronto, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1427691150800381/>).

This finding suggests that Muslims in Canada can be mobilized based on their collective identity as Muslims and based on conflicts that are international rather than domestic that involve members of their shared identity group. This shows that Muslims in Canada related to their collective identity group, not just domestically but internationally, across linguistic, cultural and ethnic lines and that they may take action to assist those of their identity group. It also appears, that this mobilization among those espousing Islam (in its normative, mainstream and moderate forms) is most likely to manifest within positive, legal and non-violent parameters.

For the purposes of this research, with its intention to improve relations between Canada and Muslim youth, the small potential for the plight of Muslims abroad to mobilize individuals espousing Islamism (abnormal, extremist and violent interpretation of Islam) to take illegal and violent actions (ex. as was the case of Saad Khalid, convicted terrorist, and Damian Clairmont ("Damian Clairmont found dead," 2013) dead in Syria after fighting with ISIS) is also recognized and seen as an area that must be addressed. It is noteworthy that Saad Khalid (convicted Toronto 18 terrorist, sentenced at age 23) cited the plight of Muslims abroad as partially what inspired his movement from Islam, into Radicalization and Islamism and eventually the activities that lead to his incarceration ("Toronto 18 plotter," 2013). Showing the plight of Muslims and imploring Western Muslims to take violent action is a tactic used by those seeking to radicalize others over the internet (such as the late American-born Anwar Al-Awlaki, (CNN, 2013) whose online influence has been attributed to the radicalization of hundreds of individuals worldwide, including at least one 9/11 hijacker and Nigerian national [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](#), who attempted to bomb a passenger flight on Christmas Day, 2009 (Barclay, 2010) Among Awlaki's inflammatory statements are:

With the American invasion of Iraq and continued U.S. aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the U.S. and being a Muslim, and I eventually came to the conclusion that jihad against America is binding upon myself just as it is binding on every other Muslim.... To the Muslims in America, I have this to say: How can your conscience allow you to live in peaceful coexistence with a nation that is responsible for the tyranny and crimes committed against your own brothers and sisters (CNN, 2013). Saad Khalid, who has publicly apologized to Canada at large as well as the Canadian Muslim community for contributing to their stigmatization, explicitly attributes his radicalization to the late Awlaki. It appears that he played directly to the identity conflict that many Canadian Muslims experience, and appealed to their sense of collective identity. In the case of those espousing Islamism, rather than Islam (as in the case of Saad Khalid) ("Toronto 18 Plotter," 2013) identity conflict, if paired with extreme isolation, and mental instability (Saad Khalid cited the sudden and traumatic death of his mother and the subsequent extreme isolation and depression he experienced as being root causes of his radicalization)

("The Toronto 18," 2010) may have potential to mobilize Islamists based on their collective identity to take negative actions. This furthers the necessity to successfully integrate Muslim youth into society, and to provide them with effective services (especially in the area of mental health in the opinions of informants) in order to protect them from those who seek to exploit their vulnerabilities and radicalize them. Informants believed that combatting radicalism was not the sole responsibility of Canadian authorities but perceived a responsibility among themselves, in collaboration with law enforcement in combatting and preventing radicalism:

'I think it's both. Actually there is a man in Alberta trying to do this effort, their line is stop the crisis and it's a play on ISIS. It is Muslims trying to prevent young Muslims from going to extremism. So that is something that can be done, these extremists may be more likely to listen if the message is coming from other Muslims.

If a moderate Muslim sits down with them and says you know are you actually reading the Qur'an that isn't what it says, and maybe they would listen, I don't know what their psyche is like, but it may be easier, coming from another Muslim. But I also think it could be policy makers that could get involved, I think lots of sides can help prevent this and we can all work together to prevent this (Informant E).'

Informants perceived Muslims as playing a vital role in preventing radicalism, not only for the public good but in order to help with efforts to dispel Islamophobic beliefs. They perceived also a strong likelihood that radicalized individuals may need mental health support. They also strongly expressed their opinion that there is a need for the media to exercise discretion when reporting on the criminal activity of radicalized Muslims, in order to portray them as misguided individuals, rather than as representatives of the collective Muslim identity in its heterogeneous entirety.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 The Way Forward**

There is no way to make definitive conclusions about the state of collective identities, Islamophobia and out-group suspicion in Canada from this research, given the sample size. What can be taken from the research is a baseline understanding of how collective identities may shape out-group suspicion and the process of otherment between Muslims and non-Muslims in Canada, in some cases, manifesting as Islamophobia. It would also appear, based on the information provided by informants; that Muslims in Canada may harbor negative opinions about Canada on a political level, due to Canada's foreign policies being closely aligned with the US.

There appears to be some level (and in varying levels of severity) of out-group suspicion between Muslims as well as non-Muslims in Canada that comes from among both groups, as indicated by the opinions of informants as well as by the fact that so few people agreed to participate in this study. There also seems to be some lack of understanding and awareness regarding Islam in Canada among non-Muslim Canadians as well as negative stereotypes that are propagated by the media that may potentially serve as barriers to improving understanding, tolerance and awareness about the religion. It would appear based on the interviews that there are collective identities present in Canada, as Muslims do feel some level of solidarity with members of their own group. It is also clear that many Muslims residing in Canada feel a strong sense of collective identity with their fellow Canadians. Mutually exclusive identities seem to be rare in Canada, and Muslims seem to understand themselves most of the time as being just as much Muslim as they are Canadian, and generally feel strongly connected to Canada, their chosen home and feel connected to Canada based on Canada's tolerant and open values, which is what inspired many informants (or their parents) to make Canada their new home.

It seems that although there is existence of out-group suspicion among Muslims in Canada, this has more to do with age, being recent immigrants to Canada, as well as individual experiences (whether or not someone has experienced several instances of Islamophobia). Alienation and marginalization (in the views of informants) are real experiences for some Muslim youth, and this seems to be based on ignorance and racism. It is a significant finding however that all informants spoke of the complexity of the topic under study and recognized a high level of variety among Canadians in their awareness level and tolerance of Muslims in Canada. None of them made generalizations regarding Canadians being racist or Islamophobic.

It seems that class (according to informants) is not a significant indicator of how a person would experience identity conflict in Canada. It seems that the most salient factors in a youth having a negative experience of identity is cultural background, the influence of parents, negative experiences of Islamophobia, viewing Canada's political policies as synonymous with American policies, as well as mental instability.

According to informants, Muslim youth are generally happy with Canada and want to become contributing citizens. Yet, Canada could improve its efforts to integrate and include Muslim youth, and to increase awareness and understanding among Canadians about the Muslim religion. Muslim youth seem to feel that their religion is frequently misunderstood by their non-Muslim peers, even if they are outwardly accepting. It is promising to see that informants have such a positive opinion of Canada's law enforcement agencies and believe that Muslims are generally respected and treated fairly. In order to keep the true spirit of Canada alive, it would appear that Muslims need to be just as engaged in promoting better relations as do Canada's non-Muslims. It is hoped that works akin to this one will continue in the future and will encourage efforts among Muslims as well as non-Muslims in Canada to foster more understanding, tolerance and unity. Efforts such as these may be vital to preserving Canada's multicultural and democratic values.

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