

On Multiculturalism's Margins:  
Oral History and Afghan Former Refugees in Early Twenty-first Century Winnipeg

By

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## Abstract

Oral historians have long claimed that oral history enables people to present their experiences in an authentic way, lauding the potential of oral history to ‘democratize history’ and assist interviewees, particularly those who are marginalized, to ‘find their voices’. However, stories not only look backward at the past but also locate the individual in the present. As first demonstrated by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Western societies have a long history of Othering non-Western cultures and people. While significant scholarly attention has been paid to this Othering, the responses of orientalised individuals (particularly those living in the West) have received substantially less attention. This thesis focuses on the multi-session life story oral history interviews that I conducted with five Afghan-Canadians between 2012 and 2015, most of whom came to Canada as refugees. These interviews were conducted during the Harper era, when celebrated Canadian notions of multiculturalism, freedom, and equality existed alongside Orientalist discourses about immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Afghans. News stories and government policies and legislation highlighted the dangers that these groups posed to the Canadian public, ‘Canadian’ values, and women. Drawing on the theoretical work of notable oral historians including Mary Chamberlain and Alessandro Portelli, I consider the ways in which the narrators talked about themselves and their lives in light of these discourses. I argue that by first reflecting common Canadian narratives on these topics, the interviewees established their Canadian-ness and staked a claim within the national fold. Once they demonstrated themselves to be ‘good’ Canadians, Muslims, and refugees, they were able to nuance and sometimes outright challenge the widespread understandings of these issues reflected in Canadian discourses. This strategy, consciously or unconsciously undertaken, allowed them to deepen their connections to the country while also speaking back against the discourses that placed them on its fringes.

## Acknowledgments

This research took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which exists on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Métis Nations. Our water comes from the shores of Shoal Lake First Nations 39 and 40, in Treaty 3 territory. Shoal Lake 40 has been without clean, drinkable water since 1997. Our electricity comes from generating stations on rivers in Treaty Areas 1, 3, and 5. Terms of the Northern Flood Agreement with five Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba remain unfulfilled.

First, my deepest gratitude to each of the people who agreed to be interviewed for this project and who were so generous with their time and their lives. It was truly a privilege and a joy to spend time with each of you and to listen to your stories.

I owe a significant debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Alexander Freund. Thank you for introducing oral history to me. Your guidance and insight have been invaluable, and your faith in me strengthened my faith in myself. I am also grateful to the staff and faculty of the History Departments at the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba, especially Sylvie Winslow for the administrative assistance and her vast knowledge of university workings, and Kent Davies at the Oral History Centre for the technical support and assistance with recording and preserving these interviews. I am particularly appreciative for the time and thoughtful comments from my examining committee, Drs. Jennifer Dueck, Hans Werner, and Lori Wilkinson.

I am extremely grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), The Winnipeg Foundation, the C. D. Howe Foundation Fellowship at the Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture (University of Manitoba), the Tri-Council Master's Supplement (University of Manitoba), the Robert Painchaud Memorial Scholarship (University of Winnipeg), and the Burns Entrance Scholarship (University of Manitoba) for their assistance in funding my studies and research. This financial support has made a world of difference.

My family and friends have been incredibly supportive over the long course of my graduate studies. My dear friend, Kathryn Boschmann, for your listening ear and helpful suggestions, for pointing me towards useful sources, and for the cheers and commiseration. Many thanks to my parents, Curt and Patty Penner, and my in-laws, Rock Findlater and Rhonda Findlater, for the many delicious meals, babysitting, and cheerleading. The Winnipeg Quaker meeting has provided so much tangible support in the form of meals and spending time with Henry to free up my time to write. I am very glad to belong to this community. Lastly, and especially, no one has helped more than my father-in-law, Rock Findlater. Your countless hours with Henry have opened windows of writing opportunity for me that are so hard to come by while taking care of a baby. I hope that you found as much joy in Henry as he finds in your company.

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## **Introduction**

### **Telling the Past in the Present**

Several years ago, in 2012, I began interviewing two people from Afghanistan who had resettled in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I did this with little aim, other than to first write a class paper and then as part of my work as a research assistant and project manager for Dr. Alexander Freund's oral history project focused on refugees.<sup>1</sup> I was not sure what I was looking for, but their stories and experiences fascinated me, as did the oral approach to history and the life story technique, both of which I was just learning. I continued to conduct multi-session life story oral history interviews with these and several other Afghans until 2015. Over the course of these interviews, now archived at the University of Winnipeg's Oral History Centre, the narrators told stories about their lives in Afghanistan, interim countries, and Canada, about their families, their experiences, and themselves.

Oral historians have long claimed that oral history enables people to present their experiences in an authentic way, lauding the potential of oral history to 'democratize history' and assist interviewees, particularly those who are marginalized, to 'find their voices'.<sup>2</sup> However, stories are not simply uncomplicated presentations of past experiences. They not only look backward at the past but also locate the individual in the present. According to British oral historian Mary Chamberlain, narrative structures and meanings are shared, public, and

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<sup>1</sup> These interviews were conducted as part of a larger project on the history of refugees in Manitoba headed by Alexander Freund at the University of Winnipeg and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC; 2011-2014) and Manitoba Heritage grants (2013-2016). The intent of this project was to create archival sources. I worked on this project as an interviewer and the project manager.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority. Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9; Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 120; Hilary Chance and Lillian Petroff, "The Future of Our Past: The Changing Face of Oral Testimony at the Multicultural History Society of Ontario," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 23 (2003): 34. On the other hand, prominent oral historian Alessandro Portelli writes that the idea of oral history as giving voice to the voiceless is "nonsense." Rather than 'giving voice,' he describes oral history as amplifying the voices of its narrators. Alessandro Portelli, "Afterword," in *Oral History Off the Record: An Ethnography of Practice*, eds. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 273.

inextricably embedded in culture, and the extent to which interviewees conform or fail to conform to these public narratives offer a key mechanism through which identity is secured.<sup>3</sup> Stories reveal the present meaning given to past events, and their plots and themes reflect the cultural narratives to which the individuals are exposed and which they use to make sense of and act within their lives.<sup>4</sup> If, as Chamberlain argues, narratives about the self can “offer real insights into cultural priorities and values” and that “to recognize a cultural narrative within a life story offers a deeper understanding of an informant’s location within history,”<sup>5</sup> what can be learned from these interviews about Canadian priorities and values and the lives of the narrators within that context?

Since the communist *coup d’état* and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s, and after peaking at 6.2 million people or some 60 percent of the world’s refugee population, Afghanistan remains one of top global producers of refugees.<sup>6</sup> While most Afghan refugees accepted by Canada have arrived in the post-9/11 period, small numbers have been coming since the early 1980s. Canada’s military involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 and increasing Western fears around Islamist radicalism have created strong public discourses<sup>7</sup> about

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 393-6.

<sup>4</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory;” Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, David Pellauer, and Paul Ricoeur, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-5).

<sup>5</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 404.

<sup>6</sup> William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 71; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017*, (Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, June 25, 2018), 3, <https://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>. In 2017, Afghanistan remained the second highest producer of refugees in the world, growing by five percent over the previous year to 2.6 million. The return of some 60,500 Afghans returning to Afghanistan was nearly cancelled out by another 59,000 leaving the country. The majority of these Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan (1,392,600) with significant populations in Iran (951,100), Germany (104,400), and Austria (26,900). Another 1.8 million Afghans remained internally displaced in 2017. See pages 14, 29, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Discourse is defined by Lynn Theismeyer as “publicly accessible language and other forms of expression that circulate widely and consistently throughout a society. They include straightforward uses of language in exchanges of information as well as forms that comment on, analyse, entertain, or criticise other forms and their social contexts, for example literary and artistic expression, scholarly work, and legal and editorial decisions.” This

Afghanistan, Islam, and fundamentalism which operate alongside celebrated Canadian narratives about multiculturalism.<sup>8</sup> Notably, these interviews were told during the Harper era in Canada, when it seemed as though multiculturalism was being rolled back and a more narrow definition of Canadian identity being offered by the government, often at the expense of Muslims and (brown) refugees. At the same time, news stories highlighted the dangers that Muslims, immigrants, refugees, and Afghans posed to the Canadian public and ‘Canadian’ values of freedom and equality, shaping and reflecting public conversations about who qualified as a Canadian.

While the particularities of this setting are unique, the broader context is nothing new. Western societies have a long history of Othering non-Western cultures and people from those cultures, even when they live in the West, as demonstrated initially by Edward Said in his seminal work, *Orientalism*.<sup>9</sup> But although much has been written about this Othering since then, we know considerably less about how Othered people have responded, particularly those living

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definition informs my thesis. Lynn Thiesmeyer, “Introduction: Silencing in Discourse,” in *Discourse and Silencing: Representation and the Language of Displacement*, ed. Lynn Thiesmeyer, vol. 5 (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003): 1.

<sup>8</sup> Sedef Arat-Koc, “The Disciplinary Boundaries of Canadian Identity after September 11: Civilizational Identity, Multiculturalism, and the Challenge of Anti-Imperialist Feminism,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 32-49; Harald Bauder, “Dialectics of Humanitarian Immigration and National Identity in Canadian Public Discourse,” *Refuge* 25, no. 1 (2008): 84-93; Paul Bramadat, “Beyond the Trojan Horse: Religion, Immigration, and Canadian Public Discourse,” *Canadian Issues* (Spring 2005): 78-81; Melanie Butler, “Canadian Women and the (Re)production of Women in Afghanistan,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2009): 217-234; May Chazan et al., “Introduction: Labours, Lands, Bodies,” in *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada*, eds. May Chazan et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011); Victoria M. Esses, Stelian Medianu, and Andrea S. Lawson, “Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees,” *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (2013): 518-536; Augie Fleras, *Racisms in a Multicultural Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2014); Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani, “Arab Canadians as Targeted Transnationals,” in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani, 1-12 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013); Mahmood Mamdani, “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 766-775; Alexander Moens and Martin Collacott, eds., *Immigration Policy and the Terrorist Threat in Canada and the United States* (Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 2008); Sam Mullins, “‘Global Jihad’: The Canadian Experience,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 5 (2013): 734-776; Christopher Olsen et al., “‘Other’ Troubles: Deconstructing Perceptions and Changing Responses to Refugees in Canada,” *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health* 18 (2016): 58-66.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).



in Western societies themselves.<sup>10</sup> In light of the ways that Canadian notions of multiculturalism, freedom, and equality exist alongside Orientalist perceptions of Muslims and Afghans, how do the Afghan/Afghan-Canadian narrators talk about themselves and their lives? The interviews represent individual responses to these collective narratives. In this thesis, I consider the ways in which the narrators interacted with these mainstream discourses that pushed them to Canada's margins, if not outside of the national body altogether. I argue that in first reflecting common Canadian positions on immigrants, refugees, Muslims, Afghanistan, and life in Canada, the interviewees established their Canadian-ness and staked a claim within the national fold. Once they had demonstrated themselves to be 'good' Canadians, Muslims, and refugees, they were able to nuance and sometimes outright challenge the widespread understandings of these issues reflected in Canadian discourses. This strategy, which may have been consciously or unconsciously undertaken, provided a way for them to exist as Othered Canadians and to deepen their connection to the country while also speaking back against the discourses that place them on its fringes.

### **Methodology and Research Approaches**

A nearly complete void in research on Afghans in Canada and an absence of archival sources made oral history a particularly useful method to address these questions. Rather than a simple re-telling of the past, oral history is "an event in itself"<sup>11</sup> in which the interviewer and interviewee work together to understand the life of the interviewee and to construct a meaningful story about it.<sup>12</sup> The interviews that form the basis of my analysis here were conducted using the

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<sup>10</sup> Several chapters of *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians* – particularly those contained in Part 3 Voices and Resistance – do address how Arab Canadians have responded to these Othering Discourses.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Uchronic Dreams: Working Class Memory and Possible Worlds," in *The Myths We Live By*, eds. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 143.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, 2nd ed. (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2010), 3.

two-phase life story approach developed by Alexander von Plato<sup>13</sup> and adapted by Freund. In this approach, interviewees are invited to tell their life stories as extensively as they choose, without being directed or hindered by the interviewer's questions. In a second phase, the interviewer attempts to flesh out the story by asking follow-up questions and those about topics left unaddressed in the first phase. This creates an overarching life story as well as many anecdotes about particular events and experiences. These stories are influenced to varying degrees by the interview environment and interpersonal dynamics with the interviewer as well as by broader public narratives around the events and experiences under discussion. The stories shared are inherently subjective and, as demonstrated by notable Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli, subjectivity in fact enriches oral history interviews as historical sources, as it leads scholars to consider memory, self-presentation, and the meaning ascribed to events and memories.<sup>14</sup>

Scholarly work on narrative and identity, memory theory, and oral history help me address these questions. The act of telling stories is inherently social and not only reflects the relationship between the teller and listener, but also reveals the relationship of the teller to the society about (and in) which they are telling stories. Scholar of language and linguistics Anna de Fina writes that storytelling “both obeys and creates social rules, understandings, and roles [...] that dictate how narratives should be constructed, by whom and to whom they should be told, what is tellable, and how.”<sup>15</sup> Similarities and repetitions in life stories, such as the parallels in how the narrators talk about Canada, Afghanistan, Muslims, and about women in Canada and Afghanistan, do not only or always reflect shared experiences, but also or rather reveal collective

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<sup>13</sup> Alexander von Plato, “Interview Guidelines,” trans. Christoph Thonfeld, ed. Alexander Freund, *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 29 (2009): 1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Anna De Fina, *Identity in Narrative: A Study in Immigrant Discourse* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003), 5.

understandings and interpretations.<sup>16</sup> Identifying elements of stability and variability in stories demonstrate the negotiation and articulation of identity by a particular group at a specific moment in time.<sup>17</sup> It is with this understanding that I examine the life histories.

The five oral history life story interviews that comprise the heart of this thesis total some 37 hours of audio recordings over 25 sessions. These interviews, all of which I conducted myself, are now archived at the University of Winnipeg's Oral History Centre. They were conducted based on the ethical obligation to do no harm and to give back to the interviewee,<sup>18</sup> and with the overarching notion that interviewers and interviewees share authority in an oral history interview.<sup>19</sup> Prior to commencing each interview, I reviewed the consent form and release agreement with the narrators. Recorded oral consent was obtained at the beginning of each session, and signed consent at the end of the multi-session interviews.<sup>20</sup> Once the interviews were complete and transcribed, the interviewees had the option to review and edit their transcripts and to remove sections that they felt uncomfortable having archived. Several made use of this option while others left their transcripts un-reviewed or untouched. For those

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<sup>16</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, eds. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> De Fina, *Identity in Narrative*, 181.

<sup>18</sup> These ethical obligations are drawn from my training by Alexander Freund, who himself draws on the work done by anthropologist Rob Borofsky. See Rob Borofsky, *Yanomami: The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn from It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*; Steven High, "Sharing Authority in the Writing of Canadian History: The Case of Oral History," in *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, eds. Michael Dawson and Christopher Dummitt (London: Institute for Study of the Americas, 2009); Steven High, "Sharing Authority: An Introduction," *Journal for Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 12-34.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Freund's larger project on refugees in Manitoba, of which these interviews are a part, included a total of eleven interviews with Afghans. I conducted the interviews with eight of these individuals and oversaw the three interviews done in Persian/Dari by trained Afghan community members (including one done by Bashir Ahmad, who is also one of the narrators examined in this thesis). However, consent forms have not yet been signed for three of the English-language interviews that I conducted and so they are not yet available in the archives. Nevertheless, although they are excluded from my analysis here, I learned from these interviews as well as from the English translations of the Persian/Dari-language interviews.

who made significant changes to their transcripts, their audio recordings were edited to reflect any deletions.

The people interviewed for this project will be introduced in much greater depth in the following chapters. For now, it will suffice to say that Salma Shaakir (pseudonym), Bashir Ahmad, Idrees Bahadur (pseudonym), Zahra Rezaie, and Noor Jan (pseudonym) ranged in age at the time of their interviews from twenty years old to mid-sixties. They came from different ethnic groups, different political stripes, and different parts of Afghanistan. They included men and women, young and old, from rural and urban areas, who had varying degrees of knowledge of and interest in their own backgrounds and Afghanistan's history. Some came almost directly from Afghanistan to Canada, while others spent years in an interim country. The journey out of Afghanistan posed few challenges for some; for others it was an epic journey. They arrived in Canada between 1982 and 2008, representing different eras in Afghanistan's complicated recent history, different waves of migration, and were, correspondingly, thrust into differing social, economic, and political climates in Canada. Their stories were as varied as their motivations in sharing them.

Despite this diversity, all of the narrators had refugee experience and all lived as refugees outside of Afghanistan, for varying lengths of time and in diverse countries, prior to arriving in Canada. Salma and Zahra came to Canada as privately sponsored refugees, Salma by Canadian friends she originally met in Afghanistan and Zahra's family by a wealthy doctor unknown to them.<sup>21</sup> Idrees arrived as a federally sponsored refugee. Noor was uncertain of her family's immigration status but believed they arrived as immigrants rather than refugees. However, her family stayed at Welcome Place after arriving in Winnipeg, indicating that they, in fact, also

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<sup>21</sup> It seems possible that this might be Dr. Ezzat Ibrahim, who sponsored many Afghan refugees to come to Winnipeg, but Zahra did not have these details.

arrived as federally sponsored refugees.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Bashir came on a student visa. He had fled Afghanistan earlier as a refugee but returned to the country years later.

The narrators seemed quite comfortable sharing their life stories with me, though several expressed some reticence around the idea of other people (particularly other Afghans) hearing or reading their stories. The fact that I, a Mennonite woman from southeastern Manitoba, was an outsider to Afghanistan and knew very little about the country prior to beginning these interviews appeared to make them feel more comfortable and able to share their stories without worrying that I might catch any factual inaccuracies or particularly slanted versions of events, or have preconceived ideas about the events, people, and groups to which they referred. My lack of investment in a particular understanding of the country and its conflict contributed to an easy flow during the interviews, though my general unfamiliarity with the region and its issues also hindered my ability to ask useful questions or tie people and events together.

The interviews themselves, conducted between February 2012 and April 2015, took place over three to eight sessions per person, and ranged in length from four and a half to ten and a half hours per person, averaging nearly seven and a half hours. Outside of the interview sessions, I spent many hours visiting with most of these individuals off the record. Nearly all of the sessions took place at the University of Winnipeg, first in Dr. Freund's office in Bryce Hall and later in the Oral History Centre's interview room. The interview with Salma took place in her home where she fed me tea, Afghan cookies, and *tut*, dried mulberries.

Finding Afghans/Afghan-Canadians to participate in this research proved challenging. The community in Winnipeg is fairly small and lacks a centralized organization, and there is

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<sup>22</sup> Welcome Place Residence is a temporary residential program in Winnipeg, MB, which provides self-contained and furnished apartments with access to on-site life skills and settlement support for refugees. Welcome Place is run by Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. (MIIC), which offers a wide range of services to refugee newcomers in their settlement and integration into Canadian society.

some hesitancy to discuss often difficult pasts. The first two were the easiest to find. Like me, Zahra was a student at the University of Winnipeg and had taken some history classes; a conversation between her and Dr. Freund at a student-staff mixer led him to suggest that I approach Zahra about the project. After hearing that I was looking to speak with people from Afghanistan, I was put in touch with Idrees by a friend who was also a friend and past co-worker of Idrees. Noor, another University of Winnipeg student, contacted me after passing one of my posters in a hallway on her way to the school's prayer room. While living in Burnaby, BC, in 2013, Bashir read a *Winnipeg Free Press* article highlighting the project involving my interviews with Afghan refugees.<sup>23</sup> Upon returning to Winnipeg the following year, he contacted me at the University of Winnipeg. In early 2014, I sent an email to a number of Islamic and NGO organizations in the city briefly describing my research and asking that they pass my contact information on to any Afghan members they felt might be interested; I met Salma's daughter this way and she put me in touch with her mother. Other than with Noor, I have maintained some degree of contact with all of these people since our interviews and I am pleased to call them friends, though these relationships do create some anxiety as I analyze their interviews and sometimes draw different conclusions than those they may draw themselves.

## Literature Review

Canadian immigration policy is well-researched, and a number of these works include sections on refugee groups, either in a very broad sense or more specific to particular groups.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Carol Sanders, "Afghans' Oral History Sets the Record Straight," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 29 November 2013, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/afghans-oral-history-sets-the-record-straight-233804291.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Keeping 'Em Out: Gender, Race, and Class Biases in Canadian Immigration Policy," in *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada*, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag et al., 69-82 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Marlene Epp et al., eds., *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Dirk Hoerder, *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* (Montreal-Queen's University Press, 1999); Ninette Kelley and Michael J. Trebilcock, *Making of a Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at our Gates: Canadian Immigration and*

Other immigration policy scholarship more explicitly focuses on refugees,<sup>25</sup> sometimes contrasting Canadian policy with that of other countries.<sup>26</sup> Like the academic research done on policy, Canadian immigration history offers a rich body of work, with many immigrant and ethnic groups well-documented in the historiography. While groups from European countries are particularly represented,<sup>27</sup> there has also been research done on well-established Asian groups that began arriving in Canada in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>28</sup> However,

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*Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007); Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Barrington Walker, ed., *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2008); Reginald Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991); Reginald Whitaker, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Publishers, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Howard Adelman and C. Michael Lanphier, *Refuge or Asylum? A Choice for Canada* (North York: York Lanes Press, 1990); Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977); Gerald E. Dirks, *World Refugees: The Canadian Response* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1988); David Matas and Ilana Simon, *Closing the Doors: The Failure of Refugee Protection* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> Howard Adelman, ed., *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Australia and Canada Compared*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Howard Adelman, *Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, 1991); Irene Bloemraad, *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson, *Invisible Immigrants: The English in Canada since 1945* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016); Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Ryan Eyford, *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016); Alexander Freund, "Contesting the Meanings of Migration: German Women's Immigration to Canada in the 1950s," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2010): 1-26; Alexander Freund, ed., *Beyond the Nation? Immigrants' Local Lives in Transnational Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Franca Iacovetta, *The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1997); Mark G. McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). This list is far from comprehensive.

<sup>28</sup> Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Hugh J. M. Johnston and Tara Singh Bains, *The Four Quarters of the Night: The Life-Journey of an Emigrant Sikh* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Lisa Rose Mar, "Beyond being Others: Chinese Canadians as National History," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly* 156/157 (Winter 2007/Spring 2008): 13-34; Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); Timothy J. Stanley, "'By the Side of Other Canadians': The Locally Born and the Invention of Chinese Canadians," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly* 156/157 (Winter 2007/Spring 2008): 109-139; Pamela Sugiman, "'Life is Sweet': Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (December 2006): 186-218; Jordan Stanger-Ross, *Staying Italian: Urban Change and Ethnic Life in Postwar Toronto and Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jordan Stanger-Ross and Pamela Sugiman, eds., *Witness to Loss: Race, Culpability, and Memory in the Dispossession of Japanese Canadians* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017). Other studies look at early black migrants and slaves in

even this large body of work offers relatively little on the relatively recent immigrant groups from places such as Asia, the Middle East, and Africa<sup>29</sup> and those who settle in smaller metropolises or rural environments,<sup>30</sup> though the last few years have seen increasing attention paid to these groups and places.

Historical work on refugees in Canada extends back to American loyalists fleeing the Revolution and fugitives fleeing slavery.<sup>31</sup> Other nineteenth century refugees include Irish

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Canada. For example, see Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Baha Abu-Laban, *An Olive Branch on the Family Tree: The Arabs in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1980); Harold B. Barclay, "The Lebanese Muslim Family," in *The Canadian Family*, ed. Karigoudar Ishwaran, 92-104 (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976); Anita Beltran Chen, *From Sunbelt to Snowbelt: Filipinos in Canada* (Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, 1998); Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, *Pinay on the Prairies: Filipino Women and Transnational Identities* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013); Norman Buchignani, "South Asian Canadians and the Ethnic Mosaic: An Overview," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 1 (1979): 48-68; Roland Sintos Coloma et al., eds., *Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Paul Eid, *Being Arab: Ethnic and Religious Identity Building among Second Generation Youth in Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Jenna Hennebray and Bessma Momani, eds., *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013); Zuhair Kashmeri, *The Gulf Within: Canadian Arabs, Racism and the Gulf War* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1991); Alison R. Marshall, *Bayanihan and Belonging: Filipinos and Religion in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Atsuko Karin Matsuoka and John Sorensen, *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in the African Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Samuel Noh et al., *Korean Immigrants in Canada: Perspectives on Migration, Integration, and the Family* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Sean Mills, *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016); Louise Elizabeth Sweet, "Reconstructing Lebanese Village Society in a Canadian City," in *Arabic-Speaking Communities in North American Cities*, ed. Barbara Aswad, 39-52 (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies and Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1974).

<sup>30</sup> Ashgar Fathi, "The Arab Moslem Community in the Prairie City," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 5, no. 1 (1976): 409-426; Harold B. Barclay, "An Arab Community in the Canadian Northwest: A Preliminary Discussion of the Lebanese Community in Lac La Biche, Alberta," *Anthropologica* 10, no. 2 (January 1968): 143-173; Harold B. Barclay, "A Lebanese Community in Lac La Biche, Alberta," in *Minority Canadians*, ed. Jean Leonard Elliot, 66-83 (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1971); Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Baukje Miedema and Evangelia Tastsoglou, "'But Where Are You From, Originally?' Immigrant Women and Integration in the Maritimes," *Atlantis* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 82-91; Haideh Moghissi et al., *Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010); Hans Werner, *Imagined Homes: Soviet German Immigrants in Two Cities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2007). Note that the Barclay articles are written from an anthropological perspective, but include valuable historical information.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Boston: JP Jewett and Company, 1856) (perhaps a precursor to an oral history, the front matter of the book says that these are the narratives of fugitive slaves in Canada, related by themselves); Janice Potter-MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Carolyn



immigrants escaping famine.<sup>32</sup> Research focused on the early twentieth century looks at Armenians fleeing genocide<sup>33</sup> and Mennonites escaping the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> The largest body of work on refugees in Canada focuses on the Second World War and post-war refugees,<sup>35</sup> while attention has been paid also to those who arrived during the Cold War period.<sup>36</sup> Groups arriving in the late twentieth century include American war resisters<sup>37</sup> and Southeast Asian ‘boat people’ of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Historical work done on refugee groups from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and much of Latin America – those that have come to Canada largely since the 1980s – is

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Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Mark McGowan, *Death or Canada: The Irish Migration to Toronto, 1847* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, *Like Our Mountains: A History of Armenians in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Irving M. Abella and Harold Martin Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000); Abella and Troper, “The Line must be drawn somewhere: Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939,” *Canadian Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (1979): 178-209; Karl Aun, *The Political Refugees: A History of the Estonians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); Milda Danys, *DP: Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Wsevolod Isajiw et al., eds., *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons after World War II* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992); Ben Lappin, *The Redeemed Children: The Story of the Rescue of War Orphans by the Jewish Community of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963); Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Laura Madokoro, “‘Slotting’ Chinese Families and Refugees, 1947-1967,” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (March 2012): 25-56; Lynda Mannik, *Photography, Memory, and Refugee Identity: The Voyage of the SS Walnut, 1948* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013); Lynne Taylor, *Polish Orphans of Tengeru: The Dramatic Story of their Long Journey to Canada, 1941-49* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Franca Iacovetta, “Freedom Lovers, Sex Deviates, and Damaged Women: Iron Curtain Refugee Discourses in Cold War Canada,” in *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War*, ed. Richard Cavell, 77-107 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006); Robert H. Keyserlingk, *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada* (North York: York Lanes Press, 1993); Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Alan Haig-Brown, *Hell No, We Won't Go: Vietnam Draft Resisters in Canada* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Morton Beiser, *Strangers at the Gate: The ‘Boat People’s’ First Ten Years in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Louis-Jacques Dorais, “From Refugees to Transmigrants: The Vietnamese in Canada,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, eds. Wann W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, 170-193 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Janet McLellan, *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario: Resettlement, Religion, and Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Daphne Winland, “Revisiting a Case Study of Hmong Refugees and Ontario Mennonites,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 24 (2006): 169-176.

notably lacking.<sup>39</sup> Further, paralleling the broader immigration historiography, the work done on refugees reveals an emphasis on Canada's largest urban centres, with relatively little scholarship looking at those settling in rural areas, smaller metropolises, or western Canada outside of Vancouver. Despite this scholarship, in relation to the much larger body of work available on immigration and ethnic groups the historical work on refugees in Canada has been small and perhaps even "actively forgotten" within the field.<sup>40</sup>

A lack of archival sources documenting the experiences of refugees in Canada further compounds the lacuna in historical work done on the topic. Oral history is increasingly used to fill this gap.<sup>41</sup> Significant in the study of refugees in Canada is the *Montreal Life Stories* project (2007-2013) at Concordia University's Centre for Oral History, which recorded life stories of more than five hundred Montrealers with diverse refugee backgrounds.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, University of Winnipeg's Alexander Freund's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded (2011-2014) research on refugee groups in Manitoba has created an archive of oral histories with a variety of groups, including post-Second World War German and Jewish

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<sup>39</sup> Maria Cristina Garcia, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Laura Madokoro, "Unwanted Refugees: Chinese Migration and the Making of a Global Humanitarian Agenda, 1949-1989" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2012); Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas, ON: Artemis Enterprises, 2000); Francis Peddie, *Young, Well-Educated, and Adaptable: Chilean Exiles in Ontario and Quebec, 1973-2010* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 47. Alexander Freund elaborates on the idea of refugees as actively forgotten within the field of history in "Central American Refugees in Winnipeg: Stories of Home, Violence, and Displacement" (presentation, *Borderlands and Transnationalism: New Perspectives on Immigration to Canada and the United States*, York University, Toronto, ON, October 19-20, 2012), 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Ivaylo Grouev, *Bullets on the Water: Refugee Stories* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Elizabeth McLuhan, ed., *Safe Haven: The Refugee Experience of Five Families* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1995); Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner, *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015); Joanna C. Scott, *Indochina's Refugees: Oral Histories from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1989). Omidvar and Wagner's book includes two stories of Afghan refugees who resettled in Canada.

<sup>42</sup> Montreal Life Stories (website), Concordia University, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, 2012, accessed June 27, 2016. <http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/>. For scholarship using these sources, see Steven High, ed., *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015); Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

refugees, Salvadoran refugees, Afghan refugees (including those highlighted here), and ethnic Karen refugees from Burma/Myanmar, among others. These interviews offer the ability for researchers to learn more about the lives and experiences of these largely undocumented groups, and scholarship using these sources is forthcoming. While it is relatively uncommon for historical studies to include personal experiences of refugees other than as a means of adding human interest and colour, these oral history projects conducted with refugee groups place individual lives in broader historical contexts and use the stories told by refugees as the foundation, not merely the colour, of the history presented.

If refugees in general are under-represented in Canadian historical literature, *Afghan* refugees in particular are especially absent. The war in Afghanistan, which started in the late 1970s and continues until today, resulted in massive numbers of people internally and externally dislocated, and Afghanistan has consistently remained one of the top producers of refugees in the world since then. In the early 2000s, Canada collaborated with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) to resettle nearly the entire population of Afghans living in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, *en masse*, in Canada.<sup>43</sup> Despite this, there is a void in Canadian historical work done on Afghan refugees. Even Ninette Kelley and Michael J. Trebilcock's fairly comprehensive survey of immigration and refugee policy in Canada, updated in 2010, contains only a passing reference to Afghans. One paragraph mentions that the widespread Afghan refugee crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s did not result in the

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<sup>43</sup> More than 2,700 Afghans were resettled in Canada through this program. This is detailed at greater length in the following chapter. See Aaron Erlich, "Afghan Refugees and Transit Migrants in Tajikistan," in *Tajikistan: From Refugee Sender to Labor Exporter*, Migration Policy Institute, July 2006, accessed June 27, 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tajikistan-refugee-sender-labor-exporter/>; Jack Redden, "Canada offers new lease of life to Afghan refugees in Central Asia," UNHCR (website), November 4, 2004, accessed June 27, 2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/418a39a34.html>; Jack Redden, "Hundreds of Afghans in Tajikistan accepted for resettlement in Canada," UNHCR (website), November 18, 2004, accessed June 27, 2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/419ca0f14.html>; Vivian Tan, "Canadian Programme Gives Hope to Afghan Refugees in Central Asia," UNHCR (website), June 14, 2006, accessed June 27, 2016, <https://www.unhcr.org/449003564.html>. Surprisingly, I have been unable to find academic scholarship about this unique program.

introduction of a special measure in Canada to accept an increased number of Afghans, though this had been the case with some other extended conflicts.<sup>44</sup> The book later notes the significant impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York on Canadian immigration policy and an increased fear around terrorism, especially coming from al-Qaeda, the Afghan fundamentalist group that claimed responsibility for the attacks. The massive number of refugees fleeing the country from whence the attackers originated and where Canadian troops were posted from 2001 until 2014 (with a handful remaining), the increasing numbers accepted to Canada in the post-9/11 context, and the impact of policy changes on their acceptance to Canada do not warrant a mention.

Moving outside of the field of history to the social sciences reveals more research done on refugee groups within Canada. Like the historical scholarship, most of this work has focused on the largest immigrant- and refugee-receiving cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, with little attention paid to the Canadian west or the Maritimes and to rural areas or smaller metropolises.<sup>45</sup> Migration studies, according to anthropologist Ashley Carruthers, are frequently driven by the need to understand issues of discrimination, marginalization, and identity-formation – in other words, the consequences of migration for the host nation.<sup>46</sup> In Canada, as more broadly, social and political scientists who study refugee movements tend to focus on them

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<sup>44</sup> Kelley and Trebilcock, *Making of a Mosaic*, 400.

<sup>45</sup> Dalia Abdelhady, *The Lebanese Diaspora: The Arab Immigrant Experience in Montreal, New York, and Paris* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Dalia Abdelhady, "Representing the Homeland: Lebanese Diasporic Notions of Home and Return in a Global Context," *Cultural Dynamics* 20, no. 1 (2008): 53-72; Yatta Kanu, "Educational Needs and Barriers for African Refugee Students in Manitoba," *Canadian Journal of Education* 31, no. 4 (2008): 915-940; Karen Magro, *Building Bridges to Social Inclusion: Researching the Experiences and Challenges of the Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Prairie Metropolis Working Paper Series WP01-09, 2009); Joseph H. Michalski, "The Challenges of Resettlement among Male, Government-Assisted Iraqi Refugees in Canada," *Journal of Social Work Research and Evaluation* 2, no. 2 (2001): 207-226.

<sup>46</sup> Ashley Carruthers, "National Multiculturalism, Transnational Identities," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013): 225.

as a problem that requires solving, through national and international policy<sup>47</sup> and resettlement issues around education, integration, healthcare, housing, discrimination, and employment.<sup>48</sup>

This body of work includes a limited amount of research done on Afghan refugees in Canada.<sup>49</sup>

As with social scientific work done on most refugee groups in Canada, and paralleling the work

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<sup>47</sup> Adelman, ed., *Immigration and Refugee Policy*; Christopher G. Anderson, "Restricting Rights, Losing Control: The Politics of Control over Asylum Seekers in Liberal-Democratic States – Lessons from the Canadian Case, 1951-1989," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 4 (2010): 937-959; Dawn Chatty and Philip Marfleet, "Conceptual Problems in Forced Migration," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 1-13; Francois Crepeau et al., eds., *Forced Migration and Global Processes: A View from Forced Migration Studies* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006); Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Allison Penner with Matthew Renaud and Alexander Freund, "The History of Refugees in Manitoba: A Comprehensive Literature Review" (unpublished manuscript, May 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Omar Alghabra, "Arab? Muslim? Canadian? A Question of Identity," in *The Arab Diaspora in the Americas: Latin America, the United States, and Canada*, ed. Darcy A. Zabel, 183-190 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Beiser, *Strangers at the Gate*; Kwok B. Chan and Doreen Marie Indra, eds., *Uprooting, Loss, and Adaptation: The Resettlement of Indochinese Refugees in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Public Health Association, 1987); Michael Farrell, "Responding to Housing Instability among Newcomers," *Canadian Diversity* (2005): 99-122; Grace-Edward Galabuzi, "Factors Affecting the Social Economic Status of Canadian Immigrants in the New Millennium," *Canadian Issues* (Spring 2005): 53-57; Parvin Ghorayshi, "Diversity and Interculturalism: Learning from Winnipeg's Inner City," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 19, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 89-104; Nazilla Khanlou et al., "Newcomer Youth Self-Esteem: A Community-Based Mixed Methods Study of Afghan, Columbian, Sudanese and Tamil Youth in Toronto, Canada," in *Refuge and Resilience: Promoting Resilience and Mental Health among Resettled Refugees and Forced Migrants*, eds. Laura Simich and Lisa Francesca Andermann, 109-130 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014); Krista Koch, *Capacity-building for Peace and Development: The Afghan Diaspora in Toronto*, Toronto: Afghan Women's Organization/University for Peace, 2006; Marie McAndrew and Mahsa Bakshaei, "The Difficult Integration of Muslims into Québec since 9/11," *International Journal* 67, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 931-949; Brian Ray and Valerie Preston, "Geographies of Discrimination: Variations in Perceived Discomfort and Discrimination in Canada's Gateway Cities," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 7 (2009): 228-249; Kareem D. Sadiq, "Race, Ethnicity and Immigration in the Workplace: Visible Minority Experiences and Workplace Diversity Initiatives," *Canadian Issues* (Spring 2005): 61-66; Rula Sharkawi, "Being Arab: Growing Up Canadian," in *The Arab Diaspora in the Americas: Latin America, the United States, and Canada*, ed. Darcy A. Zabel, 211-230 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Jan Stewart, *Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for Educators* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Lori Wilkinson, "Factors Influencing the Academic Success of Refugee Youth in Canada," *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 173-193; Lori Wilkinson et al., "The School-to-Work Transitions of Newcomer Youth in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 29-44; Lori Wilkinson and Joseph Garcea, *The Economic Integration of Refugees in Canada: A Mixed Record?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017). See also Penner with Renaud and Freund, "History of Refugees."

<sup>49</sup> Parin Dossa, "Creating Politicized Spaces: Afghan Immigrant Women's Stories of Migration and Displacement," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 23, no. 1 (2008): 10-21; Julie Stack and Yoshitaka Iwasaki, "The Role of Leisure Pursuits in Adaptation Processes among Afghan Refugees who have Immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada," *Leisure Studies* 28, no. 3 (2009): 239-259; Shiva Nourpanah, "A Study of the Cultural Imaginary of Afghan Refugees Resettled in Nova Scotia" (Master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 2010); Christina W. O'Bryan, "Gender, Mobility and Self: Afghan Women in Vancouver, British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2014); Zenobia Jamal, "Renegotiating Identities and Re-imagining Lives: Exploring the Migration Experiences of Afghan Women" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2008).

done on Afghan refugees outside of Canada,<sup>50</sup> the focus is on policy and integration and resettlement issues, largely directed towards policy makers and stakeholders.

While social scientific studies of refugees commonly address issues of resettlement and challenges to integration in a new country, historical studies tend to focus on experiences of war, flight, and immigration, though Freund notes that the frequently messy journeys of refugees seldom fit comfortably within historical frameworks that remain often nationally-bounded.<sup>51</sup> Both of these approaches are frequently temporally limited to a specific period within the lives of the individuals being studied, and exclude the often significant parts of their lives prior to becoming refugees and once they are no longer considered such.

In light of this dearth of historical and other research done on refugees, the extremely truncated historical work done of Afghan refugees specifically, and the tendency to focus on immigration experiences, the interviews that comprise this study are a particularly useful source. In this thesis, I do not look closely at the refugee journeys taken by the narrators, their temporary experiences as refugees in neighbouring countries, or their paths to resettlement in Winnipeg. Rather, I locate their backgrounds in Afghanistan amidst its larger history and then spend much of this thesis considering their relationships to larger Canadian society, after their resettlements have been long concluded. The stories shared by these narrators will help fill the gap in our

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<sup>50</sup> Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi et al., "Marriage and Family Formation of the Second-Generation Afghans in Iran: Insights from a Qualitative Study," *International Migration Review* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 828-860; Zeenatkhanu Kanji and Brenda Cameron, "Exploring the Experiences of Resilience in Muslim Afghan Refugee Children," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 5, no. 1 (2010): 22-40; Patricia A. Omidian, *Ageing and Family in an Afghan Refugee Community: Transitions and Transformations* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996); Patricia A. Omidian, "Life Out of Context: Recording Afghan Refugees' Stories," in *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee Identity, Gender and Culture Change*, ed. L. A. Kamino and R. M. Krulfeld, 151-178 (Basle: Gordon and Breach, 1994); Carolyn S. Walker, "Global Backlash of Afghan Refugees: When is Enough, Enough?" *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 535-541; Daniel Lanmgenkamp, "The Victory of Expediency: Afghan Refugees and Pakistan in the 1990s," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 27, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2003): 229-254.

<sup>51</sup> Freund, "Central American Refugees," 1-2.

knowledge about the lived experiences of Afghans and especially the ways in which they exist within Canada in the early twentieth century.

## **Organization**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first considers the background of the interviewees' lives and the context of the interviews themselves. I introduce the narrators and trace their lives in Afghanistan alongside the country's history, examining where and how their lives fit into a broader situation and outlining their trajectories until leaving Afghanistan. This background shaped their understandings of the world and therefore has a significant impact on understanding the stories they told. I also contemplate my role in the interview process, the various audiences for the interviews, and other factors that influenced what was shared.

In the second chapter, I examine the role of multiculturalism in Canadian society before looking at the broader public discourses around Afghanistan, Muslims, immigration, and refugees circulating in Canada at the times of the interviews. These include legislative and policy changes and news media stories about Muslims, Afghan-Canadians, immigrants, and refugees; I briefly touch on film and television representations and the use of social media though these do not form a focus here. These discourses, which were overwhelmingly negative and/or highly polarized, formed the milieu in which the narrators shared their stories.

Next, in the third chapter I delve into the interviews, attending to the ways that the narrators talked about Canada, Afghanistan, and Islam in light of the issues discussed in the previous chapter. I describe the many ways in which their stories paralleled or reflected mainstream Canadian discourses, and then consider the ways in which they challenged those discourses.

Finally, in the fourth chapter I examine the ways that women are presented in their stories. The idea that, in Canada, women have the freedom unavailable to them in Afghanistan is a recurrent theme both in Canadian discourses as well as throughout the interviews. The narrators appeared less willing to challenge this perspective than the Canadian discourses around Afghanistan, Muslims, and refugees discussed in the third chapter. I consider the ways in which the interviewees reflected but also added nuance to this notion.

Two notes on terminology are in order before proceeding. Historically, describing a person as ‘Afghan’ was synonymous with describing them as Pashtun, a particular (and dominant) ethnic group in Afghanistan. One narrator, Idrees, firmly referred to himself as Afghanistani in order to differentiate himself from Pashtuns. More recently, the term ‘Afghan’ has been used in the national sense to denote a person from Afghanistan, regardless of ethnicity, largely due to the customs of the world outside of Afghanistan. Within the country and in its diaspora communities, however, the term remains sharply contested and charged as an ethnic demarcation among some groups.<sup>52</sup> I use ‘Afghan’ throughout to indicate someone whose background is from Afghanistan, not as an indicator of ethnicity.

Finally, the term ‘refugee’ itself bears some scrutiny. Refugees in the modern sense began to appear alongside the advent of modern nation-states, and, as noted by Israeli sociologist Ben Herzog, the term remains centered on the primacy of the idea of a world divided into national states separated by boundaries.<sup>53</sup> The legal category of refugee was formally institutionalized with the creation of the United Nations’ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951. This convention defines a refugee as anyone who “as a result of events

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Herzog, “Between Nationalism and Humanitarianism: The Glocal Discourse on Refugees,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 2 (April 2009): 188.



occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to 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 [sic] 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.”<sup>54</sup> The definition was amended with a protocol in 1967 which removed the pre-1951 and geographically European requirements of the term.<sup>55</sup> Despite this formal definition, in popular culture ‘refugee’ is often used more loosely to refer to people who have been displaced from their homes and who lack the protection of their governments, whether or not they fit the Convention definition and regardless of their legal statuses.<sup>56</sup> Throughout this work, I use the term in this looser sense, with the narrators all fulfilling the legal requirements of a refugee at some point in their lives, but with consideration to the non-legal perception of refugees common in Canadian discourses, as addressed in the second chapter.

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<sup>54</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (Geneva: UNHCR Communications and Public Information Service, 2010), 14. Social scientist and geographer Jennifer Hyndman notes that although the Convention was drafted in 1951, it only came into effect in 1954. Further, not all nations are party to the Convention. See Hyndman, “Refugees,” in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, edited by Derek Gregory et al., 628-30 (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 628.

<sup>55</sup> Winston Langley, “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,” in *Encyclopedia of Human Rights Issues since 1945*, 73-4 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 74; Hyndman, “Refugees,” 629; Irawan Jati and Emily Sunderland, “Playing with Words: The Securitization Construction of ‘Refugee’ in ASEAN Politics,” *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional* 6, no. 2 (October 2017): 248; Matthew J. Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum: Liberal Democracy and the Response to Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6. The Protocol was adopted on December 16, 1966 and came into effect the following year. Hyndman also points out that the Convention originally intentionally limited the scope of the definition so as to “distribute the European refugee burden without any binding obligation to reciprocate by way of the establishment of rights for, or the provision of assistance to, non-European refugees,” and that it remains coded as Eurocentric despite the removal of temporal and spatial qualifications (628-9). In response to the perceived inadequacies of the Convention definition and Protocol, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) created a binding regional policy in 1969 entitled the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and ten Latin American countries created the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees in 1984. These broadened the definition of refugee and included provisions around violence associated with colonialism and situations of generalized violence such as natural disasters or plague.

<sup>56</sup> Hyndman, “Refugees,” 628; Bernadette Ludwig, “‘Wiping the Refugee Dust from My Feet’: Advantages and Burdens of Refugee Status and the Refugee Label,” *International Migration* 54, no. 1 (February 2016): 6.

Refugees themselves sometimes find the term fraught and may identify as such when doing so allows them to align with a particular cause or results in protection, resettlement, and access to important benefits and assistance, but reject the label when it provides no benefit, reinforces uncomfortable stereotypes, or is accompanied by social stigma or painful reminder of past hardships.<sup>57</sup> Further, ‘refugee’ is a temporally bounded aspect of identity. In a legal sense, refugees cease to be so once they have become permanent residents or citizens of a new country or are able to return safely to their own countries. However, the informal perception of certain individuals or groups as refugees may persist once their legal statuses as such ceases.<sup>58</sup> The narrators here did not identify themselves as refugees at the time of our interviews, despite their earlier refugee experiences.

Where do I fit into this narrative? I admit to some unease around writing on this topic. I am not a refugee, or an immigrant of any kind, though my ancestors were and I live as a settler on Treaty 1 territory in Canada. I am not Muslim. I am not veiled. I have not lived as an obvious outsider to my local or national communities, and I have never experienced war or dislocation. I have never been targeted by government policies due to my faith, race, or immigration status. These are not my stories. Nevertheless, the interviews are what Portelli describes as “an ‘experiment in equality’ in which two individuals, separated by class, age, gender, ethnicity, education, or power endeavor to speak to each other as if all of these inequalities were suspended, and human beings could talk to one another as in a utopian world of equality and difference.”<sup>59</sup> As I study the interviews and draw conclusions from them, following Portelli I am mindful that the narrators do not need me to give them voice. They already have and make use of

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<sup>57</sup> Ludwig, “Wiping the Dust,” 6-7, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ludwig, “Wiping the Dust,” 14.

<sup>59</sup> Portelli, “Afterword,” 273. See also the chapter titled “Research as an Experiment in Equality” (29-44) in Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*.

their voices. Rather, my contribution is to amplify their voices and bring their stories to a broader public discourse.<sup>60</sup> Further, the stories shared during our sessions are not their lives, either; they are a particular version told at a particular moment in time. It is my work to pull these stories together and weave another. While writing anything involves a degree of authorial intention and analysis, I hope that my narrators do not find my interpretations of their lives at too great odds with how they understand their own lives.

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<sup>60</sup> Portelli, "Afterword," 276.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Life before Canada: Introducing the Narrators**

Oral history practice features a strong emphasis on the particularity and individuality of the narrators. These are not the anonymous participants in a social science survey, but specific people whose lives are grounded in particular, historically contextualized experiences. Their experiences are not extrapolated to be representative of those of a larger group of people, but are firmly rooted in the context of their own lives. It is necessary, therefore, to get to know the narrators and understand that context. This thesis looks at Canadian discourses of multiculturalism, Islam, refugees and immigrants, and Afghanistan and the ways in which the interviewees interacted with these discourses, using them to highlight their own Canadian-ness but also nuancing or even challenging them. Their approaches to all of these issues are informed by their experiences and backgrounds – personal and family, as well as the collective background of the society in which they (and/or their families) were raised.

In writing this chapter, I introduce the narrators as well as provide a brief look at Afghanistan's history alongside the lives of the interviewees, historicizing their backgrounds and experiences in their home country. The history of any place is complicated, the history of Afghanistan overwhelmingly so. I have tried to present events that help clarify the lives and experiences of my narrators and explain the broader context of issues that impacted on their lives. While each interview followed its own narrative arc, I have used the information shared in the sessions as well as other academic work on Afghanistan to weave a largely chronological narrative that provides a basic primer on Afghanistan's recent, tumultuous history while also positioning the interviewees within that larger picture. Their stories correspond to varying degrees with the events in Afghanistan I describe here. In any case, life for the narrators went on, sometimes shaped by broader events, sometimes defined by them, and sometimes scarcely

impacted by them at all. After introducing the interviewees and providing some background to their lives, I consider the interview sessions themselves and the intended audiences.

By examining Afghanistan's history at some length, I am following an unfortunate pattern of speaking about refugees common in the social sciences and policy planning. Looking at Afghanistan and then moving on to the experiences of the narrators in Canada minimizes, if not erases, the often significant time that many spent in interim countries, between Afghanistan and Canada.<sup>1</sup> Their experiences in these other countries – India, Iran, Tajikistan, and Pakistan – are important and had a massive impact on how they understand themselves and the world, but with limited space I am choosing to focus on the places they share in common: their starting and end points.

### **Introduction to the Narrators and a Brief, Recent History of Afghanistan**

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as it is currently known, is a mountainous, landlocked country in south-central Asia, bordered by Iran to the west and south, Pakistan to the east and south, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China to the north. The borders separating these countries are relatively arbitrary, at least in an ethnic sense, and divide the traditional lands of the dozens of ethnic groups. Divided into 34 provinces, the country covers about 647,500 km<sup>2</sup> (250,001 square miles), making it only slightly smaller than the province of Manitoba, which covers some 649,950 km<sup>2</sup>. The capital city of Kabul is home to about 3,984,343 people,<sup>2</sup> while Afghanistan's population was estimated to be some 29,700,000 in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Freund, "Transnationalizing Home in Winnipeg: Refugees' Stories of the Places Between the 'Here-and-There,'" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 61-3.

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2017-18* (August 2018), 5, Table 2.2 Settled Population by Province, 2017-18, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/1500/4722/1396>. In 2004, the city covered about 275 square kilometres making it about half the physical size of Winnipeg. With little room to expand due to the surrounding mountains, the city has become increasingly cramped.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I. The CIA World Fact Book places the estimate higher, at 34,940,837 as of July 2018. See "Afghanistan," World Fact Book, Central Intelligence Agency (website), accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>.

However, as the most recent comprehensive census was conducted in 1979, this number and all other statistics cited are estimates, at best, and at times the various estimates do not align.<sup>4</sup>

Of its dozens of ethnic groups, Afghanistan's largest groups are Pashtuns (40-45 percent; they have dominated the country since the eighteenth century), Tajiks (30-35 percent), Hazaras (10 percent; they are the largest Shi'a group in the Sunni-dominated country), and Uzbeks (8 percent). Many of the ethnic groups are further divided into large tribes and family groups.<sup>5</sup> Afghanistan has two official languages, Pashto and Dari (Persian), though many more are widely spoken. Approximately 85-90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim and 10-15 percent Shi'a, with negligible populations of other religions.<sup>6</sup> Far from being a homogenous, unified nation, the cleavages in Afghan society are many – ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, tribal, racial, political, geographic, and religious – and the local is prioritized over the national.<sup>7</sup>

The oldest of the interviewees, Salma Shaakir was born into a “higher middle class” family in Kabul in 1951.<sup>8</sup> Her mother, a Tajik from the north, was significantly younger than and unhappily married to Salma's Pashtun father, a government employee, and was the last of his six wives. Their seven children joined an already large family. Salma had an extremely happy childhood, marred only by her father's frequent absences.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2017,” custom data acquired via website, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Lansford, “Afghanistan, Ethnic Groups,” in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 14. The chapter entitled “Villages and Compunds” in Tamin Ansary's autobiography provides a vivid description of the ways in which extended family groups comprise social life in Afghanistan. See Tamin Ansary, *West of Kabul, East of New York* (New York: Picador, 2002), 15-31.

<sup>6</sup> “Afghanistan,” World Fact Book. See also William Maley and Susanne Schmeidl, “The Case of the Afghan Refugee Population: Finding Durable Solutions in Contested Transitions,” in *Protracted Displacement in Asia: No Place to Call Home*, ed. Howard Adelman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 132; Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 12, 14, 16. Interestingly, Afghanistan's government-published statistical yearbooks do not include references to religion.

<sup>7</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, 12, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Salma Shaakir (pseudonym), interview with Allison L. Penner, oral history digital audio interview, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014, Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB.

At the time of Salma's birth, King Mohammed Zahir Shah (r. 1933-1973) governed a sharply divided Afghanistan. Largely urban progressives adopted numerous modernizing changes relatively easily and urban centres offered lifestyles that would not seem foreign in a European city at the time, while religious and conservative traditionalists fought to preserve their understanding of Afghan culture. Only some eight percent of Afghans were literate, and school enrollment in Afghanistan hovered around 4.5 percent of school aged children, nearly all located in Kabul.<sup>9</sup> The 1950s ushered in an era of development, evidenced by updated road infrastructure, a modernized army, and a rapid increase in the number of educated young Afghans over the next several decades. Despite receiving relatively little money for such improvements through taxation, Afghanistan was able to manipulate the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States in such a way as to pay for most of its development through foreign aid, grants, and loans.<sup>10</sup> These changes were generally modest and most apparent in Kabul, and were adopted almost exclusively by an urban elite already ready for change.<sup>11</sup>

Growing up in Kabul and, for a period, Herat, Salma's family occupied a relatively privileged place in Afghan society, with her father well-connected within the government. Despite the frequent absences of her father, Salma emphasized: "The *extremely* positive thing is that he was *very* liberal. In the way of treating his children equally: girls and the boys. [...] But what is always very vivid in my mind is his encouragement for education. He wanted all of us to be educated. [...] And if we were doing well, then we showed our report card because we knew that he would be so happy, so we kept the report cards and showed them to him. And then our

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<sup>9</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> Tamin Ansary, *Game Without Rules: The Often Interrupted History of Afghanistan* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 147-54, 165-7; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 205-10.

<sup>11</sup> Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 170; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 200, 202.

prize was -- not money, no gift, nothing. [...] The prize was just to lift us, hold us in his arms and give us a ride in his arms around the big room!”<sup>12</sup>

Salma was young when the government ended mandatory veiling of women in 1959, with relatively little protest against it and most women outside of the major cities continuing to veil.<sup>13</sup> She reminisced: “And that’s when my mother, she was so happy to throw away the thing, and then they started to wear the scarf, a little scarf. Nothing like a *burqa*, but very nice.”<sup>14</sup> Salma recalled with pleasure her own exposure to everything Afghan society had to offer:

The whole country was, if I may say that – some people may not agree, but that’s my belief and my thoughts and my memories – the most peaceful country that you could think of. You could *never* hear about fighting, gunfire? No. I’m *sure* there were crimes, but as a kid I don’t even remember. No fighting, no shooting, *nothing*; no guns, no tanks on the -- Nothing, nothing, nothing! *Beautiful* childhood. I feel *sorry* for the generation that – now they are probably 37 or 38 years old – that they were born at the beginning of the civil war and to date; I feel so sorry because they didn’t see anything. *We* saw the blossoming country; the, yes, developing, but progressing slowly but surely. That was then the King Zahir’s time: the best. [...] The celebrations, and oh, the girls! And I was part of Girl Scouts, and oh my God, these -- During the Independence time,<sup>15</sup> three days of celebration of independence, and the marching of the girls, and the teams, and playing *basketball*, playing volleyball. My sister was playing, she was in the volleyball team, and she was doing *so* well. Going to the movies<sup>16</sup> and -- Good, good times. [...] Extremely good friends we had. They associated with lots of *advanced, liberal* families, and *fashionable*.

One thing I could see that: Iran. Those years, Iranian literature and culture: it was *so* rich, *so* rich. And I was in *love* with it. I was in love with the literature. Since I started

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<sup>12</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 3, March 9, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 201-2; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 155-7. When King Amanullah instituted mandatory *unveiling* of women in the 1920s, conservative Afghans rose in protest and the policy was soon discarded, along with King Amanullah. Salma notes that this unveiling of Afghan women in 1959 is referred to as *hazadi*, which means ‘freedom.’ Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014. For more on the history of veiling in Muslim societies, see Homa Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds and On Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women,” *Resources for Feminist Research* 22 no. 3/4 (1993): 5-18, ProQuest Literature Online.

<sup>14</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> These independence celebrations began to take place following 1963, with the introduction of a parliamentary system, and included a late-summer festival known as *Jeshyn-i-Istiqal* (“Festival of Independence”). *Jeshyn* featured sporting events, fireworks, musical concerts, art exhibitions, and trade expos. Duke Ellington played at the festival one year. See Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 166-7.

<sup>16</sup> While this seemed very normal to Salma as a child, in fact Kabul only had half a dozen movie theatres in the early 1960s, with none elsewhere in the country. Half of the theatres showed American and European films, while the others offered Bollywood. See Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 158.



to learn how to read and write, I was reading lots of books and magazines. And all magazines were from Iran. [...]

We were free to spread our wings, in other words, if I can put it that way. Both my parents, my father *and* my mother, they could do as much as they could, based on the environment, based on the society, based on what was available. But what *was* there, we were not deprived of.<sup>17</sup>

The family photographs Salma showed me in her condominium after our interviews reinforced her rosy childhood stories, revealing 1960s-style beehive hairdos, miniskirts and knee socks, and picnics in beautiful parks.

Following high school, Salma met and married a distant relative before attending Kabul University. Their marriage was unarranged, which, she noted, was not always the case during that time. Salma recalled their courtship and relationship fondly, visibly savouring her memories as she shared them: “First sight, we loved each other.”<sup>18</sup> He taught her to drive their first car, a white Volkswagen Beetle, and Salma reflects that the more time she spent with him, “I loved him more and more.”<sup>19</sup> Planning to start a family, Salma changed her career focus from journalism to education for the better work schedule. She was among the first generation of Afghan women to attend Kabul University, which had become coeducational less than a decade prior to her attendance in the late 1960s. Around the same time, Afghan women began working as teachers, nurses, doctors, and flight attendants, as well as in offices, radio, factories, and government.<sup>20</sup>

Afghanistan’s universities in the 1960s and 1970s were hotbeds of fomenting social revolution. Even the small number of university graduates found it difficult to obtain employment, as the government had limited capacity to incorporate graduates and the underdeveloped private sector offered few options. Kabul University, Salma’s alma mater, developed

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<sup>17</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 3, March 9, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 156-8.

a significant population of radical, disaffected young people who were exposed to new ideas and opportunities but found little outlet for these in Afghanistan. Secret societies grew, with opposing groups of communists and Islamists working toward an overthrow of the political, economic, and social status quo.<sup>21</sup> These included the communist party People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which formed in 1965 and soon split into several competing factions, as well as the Muslim Youth Organization, which became a formal party in 1973 and was renamed *Jamiat-i-Islami* ("Islamic Society"). With relatively small numbers, neither the communist nor the Islamist groups built up any political support base outside of Kabul.<sup>22</sup>

Having little interest in politics and an increasingly busy personal life following the birth of her first daughter in 1970, Salma paid scant attention to these movements at the university. She graduated from the Faculty of Education in 1973 and began working as a high school teacher at a vocational girls' school. Her second daughter was born the following year. While working at this school, Salma became friends with several Canadians from Winnipeg's Red River Community College who arrived in Afghanistan on a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) project in about 1976. These relationships would soon prove invaluable.

In 1973, the same year that Salma graduated from university, PDPA assisted Mohammed Daoud Khan to overthrow his cousin the king, Zahir Shah, in a largely bloodless military coup aimed at 'modernization.'<sup>23</sup> Salma remembered this as "a welcome change," though noted that "later on I'd regret it, a few years later, big time. But people wanted change, no matter what cost, without knowing that 'Okay, we want the change but what kind of change?' But at the

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<sup>21</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 212-3; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 175-6.

<sup>22</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 213-4; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 171-2, 174-6. Ansary highlights the small size of these groups, noting that in 1967, shortly before splitting, PDPA had some 35 members (175).

<sup>23</sup> Tom Lansford, "People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 358-60; Lucy Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution* (London: Bactria Press, 2011), XIX.

beginning, the change of government was *very* much welcome and embraced by the public. *Big time*, big time. People were dancing in the streets. Because this President Daoud, he used to be in the government many, many years, and everybody thought he is extremely pro-democracy, pro-human rights, especially women's rights."<sup>24</sup> Allying himself with urban, leftist elites already working for Afghanistan's government, Daoud abolished the monarchy, declared himself president, and ushered in a period of modernizing progress with very little space for religious and tribal leaders. He soon sidelined his leftist and communist supporters as well. Outside of a small circle of urban elites, these changes had little impact on much of the country.<sup>25</sup>

Salma's life changed alongside that of the country on 26 April 1978, when Daoud, his family, and some two thousand bodyguards were assassinated in a military coup called the Saur Revolution, led by a group of Afghan communists, with junior military officers assisting PDPA.<sup>26</sup> Her beloved husband, who had a career in the military, burned to death when his tank was fired on. It is not clear from the interviews on which side of the coup he was fighting. Later that year, Salma left to teach in another country where she and her daughters spent the next two years.

The communist coup of 1978 fanned the already significant flames of division. Led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, the now-ruling communists moved quickly to eliminate all opponents, including other branches of communists, the old military establishment, the clergy, and rural landowners. A wildly unpopular land reform, along with the avowed atheism of the communists and the removal of all religious references and symbols from state affairs, their unfamiliar

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<sup>24</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, XIX; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 214-6; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 176-7.

<sup>26</sup> Tom Lansford, "Saur Revolution (1978-1979)," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 410-1; Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, XIX; William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 25-6; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 225; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 177-8. 'Saur' refers to the name of the month in which the coup occurred.

Marxist rhetoric, an emphasis on a growing equality for women, and the abolition of marriage payments, created a rallying point around which traditionalists gathered. Broad, armed resistance took hold, particularly in the countryside, while the army began dissolving as the higher ranks were purged and the lower ranks deserted in increasing numbers.<sup>27</sup> In response, Taraki's regime made widespread arrests and his secret police force used torture and murder as a means of consolidating power.<sup>28</sup>

In the face of growing anti-reform sentiments and mutiny against the brutality of the regime, on 5 December 1978 Taraki signed a Twenty-Year Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union, significantly expanding Soviet aid to his regime.<sup>29</sup> Even so, when Taraki requested assistance from the Soviet Union to quell the uprisings, he was unable to persuade them to intervene. In September 1979, Taraki was overthrown and later murdered on orders from his protégé and successor, Hafizullah Amin.<sup>30</sup>

As Taraki's associates fled to the Soviet Union for refuge, the relationship between Amin and the Soviet Union deteriorated rapidly.<sup>31</sup> Amin increasingly used terror tactics to suppress his real and perceived enemies, factionalism was on the rise, and the anti-communist movement that had been born under Taraki grew rapidly. With the revolts intensifying, Amin's rule proved even shorter-lived than Taraki's. Unwilling to see the fall of a member of the Soviet bloc and concerned about the impact of a potential Islamic fundamentalist regime on Muslims in Soviet

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<sup>27</sup> Tom Lansford, "Taraki, Nur Muhammad," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 447-8; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 225, 230; Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 180-4.

<sup>28</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 28; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 227-33.

<sup>29</sup> Tom Lansford, "Russia (Soviet Union), Relations with Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 399-401. The full name of the treaty is The Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Co-operation between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, December 5, 1978. Lansford provides the full text of the treaty (in English), and lists his source for it as *Current Digest of the Soviet Union* 30, no. 49 (January 3, 1979).

<sup>30</sup> Amin had previously been the principal of Kabul University's Teachers' College, where Salma attended school. Ansary, *Game Without Rules*, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 31-2.

Central Asia (especially following the recent Iranian Revolution), on 27 December 1979 Soviet tanks rolled into the country and assassinated Amin, justifying the action by pointing to the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1978. They then installed what was widely understood to be a puppet government headed by Babrak Karmal.<sup>32</sup> By the end of the year, 600,000 Afghan refugees had fled the country, with about two thirds in Pakistan and most of the rest in Iran; millions more would soon follow suit.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time as these huge numbers of people were escaping the country, others were returning to it after having fled the conflict earlier. Salma was one of these, returning in 1980. Like others, perhaps she expected the situation to have improved, with a seemingly stable neighbour propping up the government. When she first arrived, it was, according to Salma, “not too bad. I don’t know when you say ‘too bad,’ what specific areas of society you could test. Maybe some areas were okay, some not bad. And of course, there was lots of opposition towards the government of the day, and there were lots of arrests and maybe in some case... Were there trials? I don’t know. From what I hear, people were killed without being tried, or stuff like that.”<sup>34</sup> Despite this, “life seemed to be normal” and “if you were living in the city it was just business as usual when I came back.”<sup>35</sup>

However, Salma soon realized that life in Afghanistan was not returning to normal and appeared unlikely to improve in the near future: “What I saw, it was just enough for me to say that it’s not good; it’s getting ready for a storm. It’s a calm before a storm.”<sup>36</sup> Giving the genuine excuse that she needed to accompany her mother to New Delhi, India for medical treatments,

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<sup>32</sup> Bruce J. DeHart, “Soviet Invasion and Occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989),” in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18th-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21st Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 425; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 34-6; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 233-4.

<sup>33</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 71; Maley and Schmeidl, “Case of the Afghan Refugee Population,” 133.

<sup>34</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Salma obtained a visa to leave the country. Outside of immediate family, they told no one they were leaving “because you were afraid of being arrested. Because you were not allowed to leave the country, and it was happening so much that the government was scared that all its propaganda -- saying that people are not happy and they are leaving the country.”<sup>37</sup> From India, Salma and her two young daughters applied to immigrate with the High Commission of Canada, in what she describes as “actually a smooth process,” and contacted their friends from Red River College to ask for assistance.<sup>38</sup> With their help and sponsorship, after almost a year in India, Salma and her daughters immigrated to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada in October 1982. She believed they were the first Afghan family in the city.

The same year that Salma arrived in Winnipeg, Bashir Ahmad was born in Maladan, a small village near Herat, Afghanistan, to a wealthy and influential but largely uneducated *Herati* Pashtun family. The Afghanistan into which Bashir was born bore little resemblance to that of Salma’s childhood. Resistance of the *mujahedin*, as they were known, to the communist, Soviet-backed government had grown rapidly, becoming more centralized rather than localized and focusing on expelling the Soviets from the country. Leaders drew on a cultural history of expelling infidel invaders as a means of finding some unity between disparate factions as well as on rhetoric of parallels between defending the country and defending Islam, though each pursued their own, localized agendas and were often at significant odds with one another.<sup>39</sup> Further, each localized group received support from a variety of external funders, each of whom likewise had some interest in swaying the direction Afghanistan would take.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 235; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> While Pakistan was perhaps most clearly involved in providing support to the Afghan resistance, they also received various forms of support – financial, medical, training, and moral – from additional international channels including countries such as Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland,

In order to deal with this growing problem, the Prime Minister's Office made use of the recently-established department known as *Khedamat-e Entalaat-e Dawlati*, or KhAD ("State Information Service"). Established in 1980 and headed by Dr. Mohammad Najibullah Ahmadzai until 1985, KhAD was explicitly modelled on the Soviet KGB and focused on "the enemy within" – the *mujahedin*.<sup>41</sup> Afghan men were forcibly conscripted to join the fight against the *mujahedin*, and the communist Afghan government provided somewhat unenthusiastic assistance to the Soviets in the fight, with many troops simply deserting or defecting to the *mujahedin*.<sup>42</sup>

The many people targeted by the communist government included Bashir's paternal grandfather, a wealthy 'feudal' landowner who also assisted *mujahedin* groups, as well as his father and paternal uncles. When Bashir was one year old, his immediate and paternal family fled to Iran on foot. The communist government, which years earlier had seized their land and reallocated it to local people as part of a larger land redistribution plan, now bombarded their village. In Iran, Bashir's family stayed for some time in the village of Torbat before moving to the city of Mashhad, which had a large Afghan refugee population. His two older brothers, still children themselves, worked in construction and painting, eventually moving to Tehran for better employment opportunities, and his mother and sister shelled pistachios for export. Bashir's father, a man unaccustomed to labour due to his privileged standing in society, continued not to work.<sup>43</sup> He did, however, put considerable effort into finding a school willing to accept Bashir

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Italy, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as from private funders. See Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 76, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 97-8.

<sup>42</sup> Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 46.

<sup>43</sup> About his father, Bashir said, "My father never actually worked. He was the son of a landlord, my grandfather, so during his youth he didn't have to work. He had access to money; they had a lot of land, a lot of cultivation. They were the overlords in the village. And I have heard the stories that they sometimes treated some people brutally. They had people who worked for them. And once he was conscripted to be a soldier, but my grandfather had connections and paid money, and he didn't have to even do that. Once he got into a fight with a police officer and he actually injured the police officer, but he could get away with that, because my grandfather had

under the table and was eventually successful, despite the fact that most Iranian schools would not accept Afghan students, although Bashir was unable to sit for any exams or reveal his Afghan identity.<sup>44</sup> He described an experience when, in grade five, he and his classmates wrote a standardized exam called *Tiz hooshan*; the students who did the best on this exam were sent to a special school for the most promising students. Bashir recalled:

So everybody took that exam including myself; it was five pages I think. And then a few days later [the teacher] came in and he wanted to announce the names of those who had done well. So he gave the names of five to ten people, but my name was not there. I knew what was going on. A few students asked, “Oh, why is Bashir not there?” He said, “Unfortunately he did not do that well, so his name is not on there.” And after the class was over he told me: “I want to talk to you.” So we went to a room and then he said, “I’m feeling very, very terrible.”

And I said, “Why, sir?”

And he said, “Because you actually got the highest mark there, but I *can’t* send you to that exam because you’re not registered.”

And I said, “Oh, it’s okay; don’t worry,” but deep in my heart I was feeling very bad.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these setbacks, Bashir did remarkably well in school and developed a passion for reading and learning, devouring any book within reach.

In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev replaced Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary in the USSR. Gorbachev removed Karmal from his position as General Secretary in May 1986 and replaced him with Najibullah, former leader of the notorious KhAD. In an effort to reconcile with the *mujahedin*, Najibullah attempted to re-brand and reorganize PDPA, renaming the party *Hizb-i-watan* (“Homeland Party”) and adding more clerics to the government. Additionally, he

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connections. So when we went to Iran, he didn’t want to work. My older brothers started working. And he always sat down, and I sat with him, and he told me stories, such *great* stories [...] I was very young; I was a kid. I was very sure by then that Afghans are superior nation on earth, and among them, Pashtuns are superior in Afghanistan, and among *Pashtuns*, my family is one of the top, highest ranks. [Both laugh]” See Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, oral history digital audio interview, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014, Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>44</sup> Just prior to leaving Iran, Bashir told his friends that he is Afghan. While one revealed that he suspected as much, “the others had big, open-wide eyes. They said, ‘Are you sure?’ One of them said, ‘Are you sure you’re Afghan? But Afghans are all thieves, and they kill people.’” See Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 4, November 17, 2014.



proposed forming a coalition government that offered key posts for resistance leaders. The resistance firmly refused to compromise and began making considerable gains. With financial as well as diplomatic costs of the occupation exorbitantly high, in February 1988 Gorbachev announced that the USSR would soon begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup>

In April 1988 the Geneva Accords were signed, a series of negotiations arbitrated by the United Nations between delegates from the Kabul regime and the government of Pakistan, with other interested parties such as the USSR, USA, and Iran acting as offstage players. Members of the Afghan resistance were not included in negotiations. An attempt to create an interim government in late 1988 failed miserably, and in January 1989 Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan. Over the course of the Soviet Union's military occupation of Afghanistan, from 1979 until 1989, some 14,500 Soviets and one million Afghans were killed, with the rural population particularly vulnerable.<sup>47</sup> Following the Soviet withdrawal, refugees soon began to return, though not in large numbers as Najibullah's communist regime still headed the country. As of January 1990, one year after the Soviets left, some 6.2 million refugees remained outside of the country, with the vast majority in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.<sup>48</sup> With a pre-war population of approximately 15.5 million, these numbers are staggering.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> DeHart, "Soviet Invasion and Occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989)," 428; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 105-8; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 238-9.

<sup>47</sup> Lansford, "Russia (Soviet Union), Relations with Afghanistan," 400; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 126, 136-42, 150-1, 154. Lischer places the number of Afghans killed at approximately 1.25 million. See Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 46; see also 47.

<sup>48</sup> Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 46-7; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 71. Maley and Schmeidl note that this number comprised some 60 percent of the world's refugee population at the time. See Maley and Schmeidl, "Case of the Afghan Refugee Population," 131.

<sup>49</sup> The last comprehensive census of Afghanistan was conducted in 1979 but never completed due to the Soviet invasion. However, preliminary results indicated a population of 15.5 million (the census indicated a settled population of some 13,307,000 and estimated the number of nomadic people to reach this number). See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, custom data acquired via website, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>; *World Population Review*, Afghanistan Population, April 1, 2019, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/afghanistan/>. Lischer gives the population as 16 million. See Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 46.

The ongoing war had a great impact on Afghanistan's civil society. Agriculture took a significant hit in the 1980s, with output in 1987 only a third of what it had been a decade prior. This was largely due to deliberate attacks intended to prevent the resistance from accessing food. With the irrigation system in shambles, many Afghan farmers turned to the easier-to-produce poppy crops, leading to an increase in narcotics production.<sup>50</sup> Inflation meant that prices increased by 980 percent during the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> The conflict also impacted women in a specific way: women participating in the resistance were persecuted; women in Pakistani refugee camps found themselves in a stifling, extremely conservative society; and women who had lost their male relatives and providers felt very strongly the impact of losing the breadwinner in a society with clearly-defined traditional gender roles.<sup>52</sup> Displacement, both internal and external, negatively impacted the ability of younger Afghans to learn the skills needed for daily life in the country, circumscribing their abilities to function in typical or traditional economic roles. Scholar of politics, diplomacy, and migration William Maley notes that "it is often easier to teach unskilled youths to fight than to farm," as was the case with this desperate young generation with nothing left to lose.<sup>53</sup> The war also saw significant shifts in the perception of ethnicity in Afghanistan. The growing political participation of previously subordinate ethnic groups and an "increasingly politicized ethnic consciousness" amongst groups such as Tajiks and Hazaras meant they were unwilling to accept the inferior social, political, and often economic positions they previously held.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 156.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 154-5; see also 61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 158-9.

This is the society into which Idrees Bahadur was born in 1988, shortly before the Soviet withdrawal. Proud Tajiks<sup>55</sup> and middle class, Idrees's family came from the Panjshir Valley in northern Afghanistan, though they lived in Kabul with his paternal grandparents and an uncle. His father had the opportunity to attend university in Moscow on scholarships, but was unable to attend because his own father would not allow it. However, Idrees's father was able to take some university classes in Afghanistan before leaving school due to war and family obligations. He later drove a long-distance bus between Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, and was conscripted into the Afghan army as a driver for a Russian general in the 1980s. Idrees's mother was a housewife who never received any formal education. Idrees, the only son and oldest child, was followed by five sisters.

Conflict and warfare marked the years after Idrees's birth. With the withdrawal of the Soviets in early 1989, Najibullah's communist government lacked the ability to enforce order, though they continued to receive military and economic aid from the Soviet Union. At the same time, resistance forces were receiving aid from the United States and other countries.<sup>56</sup> In 1991, Najibullah refused to resign in order to allow the formation of an interim government prior to elections, a demand of the Americans. In response, America and the USSR both ceased to deliver "lethal and material supplies" to the regime in Afghanistan, effective 1 January 1992.<sup>57</sup> Divested of these resources, Najibullah attempted to consolidate his position by manipulating ethnic divisions in Afghanistan. This had the opposite effect, however, as opposition forces collaborated against Najibullah and his position became increasingly tenuous.<sup>58</sup> These years

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<sup>55</sup> Idrees describes his family and background as Tajik or Persian, seeing the two as synonymous.

<sup>56</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 240-1.

<sup>57</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 187-8. Of course, the USSR dissolved at the end of 1991, making it no longer an option for support to the Afghanistan government.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 186-8.

were also marked by a growing indifference in the rest of the world to Afghanistan's crisis as other significant international events took precedence in the global consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

In April 1992, Najibullah finally agreed to resign, clearing the way for a UN power-sharing plan. Later that month, leaders of nearly all the major resistance parties signed the Peshawar Accord, a power-sharing agreement.<sup>60</sup> By August 1992, Burhanuddin Rabbani had taken over as president on a temporary basis, supported by a number of major *mujahedin* groups.

The same year that Najibullah lost his position, Zahra Rezaie was born in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Ethnically Hazara and religiously Shia, the relatively subordinate position of both groups in Afghanistan had fairly little impact on Zahra, growing up as she did in an area with a large population of Shia Hazaras. Her family were farmers and, in her memory, were influential in the area and not poor.

The ousting of Najibullah's communist government in 1992 created a power vacuum in which the various *mujahedin* factions, previously though tenuously united against a common enemy, now jostled for power. Regional commanders and 'strongmen' reassessed their own plans and best interests, and found little that interested them in the UN plan. These regime members began reaching out to various *mujahedin* resistance groups, resulting in the creation of new parties and military groups each aimed at furthering their own positions, with ethnicity and religion playing an increased role and each group pursuing their own military and political goals.<sup>61</sup> While this many-headed hydra had proved invaluable in the fight against the Soviets, it

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 191-2, 197-8.

<sup>61</sup> Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 47; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 188-9; Hiram A. Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," in *Immigration and Asylum: From 1900 to Present*, ed. Matthew J. Gibney and Randall Hansen (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 2.

also created a society that could not govern itself once the Soviets left and opened the door to increased interference from neighbouring states.<sup>62</sup>

Rampaging *mujahedin* forces and increasing civilian casualties marked 1993.<sup>63</sup> UN special missions to Afghanistan were unable to negotiate effectively between the factions and a number of *mujahedin* groups struggled to gain control of the capital from 1993 until 1995, dividing the city into sections controlled by various militias. Estimates of the casualties in Kabul alone numbered from 3,500 killed in one year to more than 50,000 over a period of several years, with large swaths of Kabul reduced to rubble.<sup>64</sup> Idrees lived in Kabul during this period and recalled his uncle's wedding:

See, it was my uncle's wedding, I remember that. I think it was 1995. So my dad asked my uncle, two of my uncles, to go and... Because in Afghanistan, if you have a wedding, you can rent these singers and drum players and players to come and play for you, play music for you. So my dad sends his two brothers to go and rent a guy to come and play music. So they go, and then Hazaras catch them at the -- Where did they used to control? They used to control eastern Kabul. So they go, and then the Hazaras catch them; Hazara militia guys catch them. They beat them up pretty hard. They disappeared for five days. The wedding was over, everything; it was bad, everybody was worried. They came and then they were *swollen* like *crazy*. Because Hazara militia guys caught them, and then they said they locked them up in a container, in a huge container, in summertime, hot, and then they would come and beat them up with a chain.<sup>65</sup>

Although repatriation had increased following Najibullah's resignation, with about 1.4 million Afghans returning between April 1992 and late 1993, the fighting between *mujahedin* factions caused repatriation essentially to halt, with new refugees fleeing the country and hundreds of thousands more internally displaced.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 6-7, 249-51, 255.

<sup>63</sup> Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 47; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 198-200.

<sup>64</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 198-200, 204-5; Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 2; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 6-7, 249-51.

<sup>65</sup> Idrees Bahadur (pseudonym), interview with Allison L. Penner, oral history digital audio interview, 5 of 6, February 5, 2013, Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>66</sup> Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 1-2; Syed Sikander Mehdi, "Pakistan and Refugees," in *Immigration and Asylum: From 1900 to Present*, eds. Matthew J. Gibney and Randall Hansen (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 464; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 195, 208.

The final interviewee, Noor Jan, was born in 1993 to an ethnically Pashtun family in Kabul during this period of wrestling for power, though she has no memories of it as she moved with her immediate and much of her maternal family to Peshawar, Pakistan later that year. Noor's family is highly educated: her mother was a mathematician and teacher, and her father, an engineer. Her maternal grandfather was the first in his tribe to become educated, having attended school in Australia, and also the first to send his daughters to school alongside their brothers. Of the circumstances surrounding her birth, Noor shared that "war was prevalent [...]. So when I was born, because there were a lot of rockets and bombs going off everywhere, my family decided it's probably time to move on to another country, or some safer place."<sup>67</sup> Her grandfather remained behind in Afghanistan when the rest of the family moved to Peshawar, to be with his daughter who was still in university. Shortly after, he was kidnapped by his son's friends, a group of people Noor described as "Panjshirs."<sup>68</sup> Noor mused, "And they wanted – what did they want? [...] They wanted money perhaps, or... *Perhaps* money; what else could they want? Yeah, probably money."<sup>69</sup> After several weeks, and refusing to acquiesce to his kidnappers, her grandfather eventually was released unharmed and made his way to Peshawar to join the family.

One of the many groups fighting for power at this time would become the most notorious, at least in the West. The Taliban<sup>70</sup> were (and, largely, still are) comprised of ethnic Pashtuns living on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, with its leadership having close ties with

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<sup>67</sup> Noor Jan (pseudonym), interview with Allison L. Penner, oral history digital audio interview, 1 of 4, May 6, 2013, Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB. Noor stated that this conflict was "between the Taliban and other groups – not sure who, but other groups." In fact, the Taliban were not yet operating in Afghanistan in 1993; they arrived in 1994.

<sup>68</sup> This implies that they might have been Tajiks from the Panjshir region, likely associated with leader Ahmad Shah Massoud (the personal hero of another interviewee, Idrees). At this time, Afghanistan was in chaos and largely divided amongst various *mujahedin* groups, with fighting between groups common.

<sup>69</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, May 27, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Or, as they are officially called in Pashto, *Da Afghanistano da Talibano Islami Tahrik* – the "Islamic Movement of Taliban." The word *Taliban* means "students" (or "student," for the singular Talib) in Pashto.

religious groups in Pakistan. Many members were orphans and most were refugees who had lived in camps in Pakistan and attended radical madrassas offering free education, room, and board. While they justified their actions by drawing on a particular version of Islam, the group was also strongly ethnocentric, seeing non-Pashtuns as enemies. In November 1994, they captured Kandahar and began spreading their influence.<sup>71</sup> The Taliban originally sought to bring order to the chaos and lawlessness that marked the mid-1990s while also reforming the country into a pure Islamic state, and appealed to many people (especially southern Pashtuns) for these reasons.<sup>72</sup>

After capturing Herat in 1995 and Jalalabad and Sarobi in September 1996, the Taliban finally took Kabul on 26-7 September 1996, castrating and murdering former president Najibullah in the process, and assumed governance of Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup> Like so many others, Idrees and his family fled Kabul the night of the Taliban takeover of the city. He recalled the harried flight from the city:

When we left Kabul city in 1996, the night that the Taliban were taking over everywhere, we left with civilians, government officials, diplomats, and everyone. Everybody was basically moving to the north because the Taliban were taking over every city, one after another. So we moved to my dad's birthplace, which is called Panjshir Province, and we moved there and that was the Northern Alliance stronghold: Panjshir Province. [...]

During the day there was intense fighting going on, I think in the south of the city, between government forces and the Taliban. And we were aware that something is going to happen in two or three hours, or four hours. And I remember there was intense fighting going on, and I think it was six or seven pm. The city was in a bad situation, fighting was getting closer. It was getting closer and closer to our residence area, to our place. And we realized that the government is going to collapse, the central government was going to collapse and the Taliban were going to take over. And we had that kind of sense; we knew that is going to happen. So my dad said, "We *better* get out."

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<sup>71</sup> Daniel E. Spector and Jerry D. Morelock, "Taliban," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 439; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 203-4; Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, XIX; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 7, 258.

<sup>72</sup> Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 2; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 255-7.

<sup>73</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 207, 217-8; Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, XIX, XX; Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 2.

So by the time we were on the way, we were among tanks, artillery machines, heavy weapons -- everybody is escaping the city, everybody is running away from Kabul, moving to the north. Because the Taliban were chasing, and the government forces, civilians -- everybody was moving to the north, everyone. And we had to drive... It was a *very* dangerous night, I remember that. Because the Taliban were firing from back, and the government that later on created the Northern Alliance, they were fighting, they were moving and fighting at the same time, so we... Sometimes we had to stop and get out of the car and find the shelter, and then again run away; sit in the car and run away. So it was a -- it was a bad, bad, bad night, because it was very dangerous.<sup>74</sup>

Idrees and much of his extended family made this journey crammed into two small cars.

Though it seems the other *mujahedin* forces could have joined together to expel the Taliban from the country, their own in-fighting and determination to undermine one another prevented a united front.<sup>75</sup> By the end of 1996, Afghanistan had 273,840 internally displaced persons (IDPs);<sup>76</sup> Iran hosted 1,414,659 Afghan refugees and Pakistan 1,200,000, nearly all of whom were assisted by UNHCR. Another 18,607 Afghan refugees resided in India, with the Russian Federation hosting a further 20,425.<sup>77</sup> Despite the conflict, 140,390 refugees voluntarily repatriated back to Afghanistan from Pakistan in 1996, with another 14,537 repatriating from Iran.<sup>78</sup>

Panjshir Valley remained outside of Taliban control, as Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Massoud had forces dynamite large rocks to block the path to the isolated valley. Idrees's father left the valley after two months in an arduous attempt to reach Mazar-i-Sharif. The rest of the

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<sup>74</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 259.

<sup>76</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Populations of Concern to UNHCR: A Statistical Overview, (1996), accessed December 13, 2013, 20, Table 2 Refugees and others of concern to UNHCR by country or territory of asylum/present residence 1996, <https://www.unhcr.org/3bfa328c4.html>.

<sup>77</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Populations of Concern," 42-56, Table 8 Origin of refugees by country or territory of asylum, end 1996, sorted by country or territory of asylum (100 persons and over). Countries with between 1,000 and 3,500 Afghan refugees include Kazakhstan (3,500), Turkmenistan (3,100), Uzbekistan (2,823), Ukraine (2,500), France (1,277), Sweden (1,239), Turkey (1,448), and Tajikistan (1,161). Countries with between 100 and 999 Afghan refugees include Lebanon (550), Bulgaria (542), Switzerland (457), Norway (370), Belgium (224), Slovakia (191), Saudi Arabia (151), and Kyrgyzstan (105). See also 16-24.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Populations of Concern," 31-4, Table 4 Voluntary repatriation of refugees during 1996 (50 persons and over). Of these, 101,150 from Pakistan and 8,367 from Iran were UNHCR-assisted.



family remained for another two months, hearing nothing from him for five months. Faced with the harsh winter, a lack of schooling, and the fear that the Taliban would take Panjshir Valley and slaughter the people there, Idrees and his family joined the trickle of people returning to Kabul over the mountains in early 1997. Upon returning, they finally received a letter informing them that Idrees's father had made it to neighbouring Tajikistan, which was nearing the end of its own civil war. In December 1998, Idrees's father sent word that he had made a way for the family to join him in Tajikistan. Accompanied by a paternal uncle, they drove to Pakistan, whose border with Afghanistan was open, and then flew into Tajikistan.

Small parts of Afghanistan remained outside of the Taliban's grip and resistance groups continued to fight.<sup>79</sup> Several of these groups joined forces under Massoud to establish the *Jabha-i Muttahed-e Islami Milli bara-i Nejat-e Afghanistan*, commonly called the Northern Alliance in the West.<sup>80</sup> Significant fighting took place in and around the unofficial capital of the opposition, Zahra's hometown of Mazar-i-Sharif, in 1997. After suffering heavy losses, the Taliban returned in August 1998 and took the city with a vengeance, slaughtering massive numbers of the city's Hazara residents. They soon controlled the entire country, with the exception of Massoud's stronghold in the northeast Panjshir region. This sparked another wave of refugees fleeing the country, with most settling in Iran and Pakistan.<sup>81</sup>

This period of intense fighting in Mazar greatly impacted Zahra, living on the outskirts of the city. In fact, her experience of this conflict was the first story shared during Zahra's interview, despite her young age at the time (which she estimated to be four or five years old):

The war had gotten *really*, really, I guess nasty. During the day, I'd sit and there would be bullets like shooting back and forth, like through the... The walls were very thick, but

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<sup>79</sup> Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 228-30; Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 2.

<sup>80</sup> Chuck Fahrer, "Northern Alliance," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 324-5.

<sup>81</sup> Ruiz, "Afghanistan and Refugees," 2; Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 239-40; Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 260.

still, we couldn't really trust sitting outside and just playing as kids as we did earlier on when we were younger. So we had to stay indoors at all times, especially women and children, because of the -- being lost, rape, and all of the dangers that comes with being a female in a country ruled by men, and men with guns. [...]

I remember the day very clearly, because the night before we went to bed and my dad said, "We're going to have to pack tomorrow because we have to leave." So the night before we packed and went to bed. The next morning my dad came and said... He took us to my auntie's house where her family got ready with her kids, and packed, with food, clothing, and everything. I remember clearly that all the men had to go, and all the children and women were left behind, and the elderly. I remember a point where my dad knelt down and was like, "I'll be back. I -- I -- I'll be back, I'll see you later." But, um -- sorry, this is really hard. [Crying] Um, where he was like, "I'll be back, I'll see you later." But [pause] I guess he never came back.

So as we were leaving through the back of the house, through the trenches that were built weeks on before. Like they were built, they were dug out for people running away, for especially women and children. And as we were running, my cousin, who was my closest friend... Like we were all running and there were so many kids screaming, and there were bullets going back and forth. Like you're crouched down and you're on the dirt, and it's spring. There's mud everywhere, it's raining; it's just *filthy*. So you're just trying to not get hit by a bullet, trying to not slip and be stepped on by many other people. [...] And a rocket hit somewhere here, and my cousin was so close to the scene that the shrapnel hit her; like most of it hit her on the side of the body, on her kidneys. And we couldn't obviously move her because it was -- it was so, so busy, and there was no way of picking her up. Like my auntie had eight kids that were with her, her kids and her grandkids obviously, and other kids with her, and her daughters; her sons -- her older sons were away trying to, you know, contribute to the war that's going on, to do something productive, right? And as she fell, she couldn't -- she couldn't pick her up. She sat there crying, trying to [pause] soothe her pain, trying to keep her alive, right? Even though she *knew* she couldn't. [...] And [pause] so we -- we all -- we all basically sat there *watching her die*. We couldn't really do anything about the fact that this is going on, right? We couldn't *pick her up*; we couldn't move her; there was no hospital, there was no -- there was no medical aid, there was *nothing*.

So [pause] hours later she passed away.<sup>82</sup>

During this period of intense fighting and mass flight, Zahra and another young cousin became separated from their family. They passed a nearby fortress, Qala-i-Jangi,<sup>83</sup> and eventually were

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<sup>82</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, oral history digital audio interview, 1 of 8, February 7, 2012, Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>83</sup> The Qala-i-Jangi fortress would later become notorious as the location of a tragic battle (sometimes referred to as a massacre) between Northern Alliance soldiers, assisted by British and American forces, and their Taliban prisoners. From 25 November until 1 December 2001, the uprising by Taliban prisoners resulted in a fierce and deadly battle that resulted in the first American casualty in Operation Enduring Freedom as well as the deaths of some forty to fifty coalition soldiers and anywhere from two hundred to five hundred Taliban soldiers. With media personnel embedded with the coalition troops, graphic footage of the battle circulated broadly in the West. See Larry

taken in by neighbours who recognized them. The two children spent about a week hiding in the basement of that home, along with dozens more people, while the Taliban searched the area for men.

Once the fighting subsided, the neighbour sent word to Zahra's family that she and her cousin were safe. Zahra described being picked up by a relative:

It was early in the morning, and the sun was just rising. I remember this because of the sun. And this was like a couple -- a day after the first day of spring.<sup>84</sup> And there, in central Asia, when it's spring, everything is blossoming; literally. Like there's flowers, the trees are green and it's *so pretty*. And my uncle came with his truck, and he just hugged me like there was *nothing*, there's no tomorrow -- He was just so happy to see me. We were *so* excited to go home. Because we had been away for such a long time from our family and we didn't *know* what our fates were going to be like.

So as we were driving home there were a lot of people, like in the back of the truck; there was like people sitting there and there was two coffins. I was just sitting there, just like, "What's with the coffin?" And my uncle stopped the car, like halfway through, just because something happened to the truck. And I asked my cousin, I was like, "Whose bodies are these?" And he just turned around; he's like, "Nobody, it's okay. You don't *have* to know." But I asked one of my uncle's friends, and he was like, "I'm sorry; it's your dad and your cousin." And I was, I was just so shocked; it was like -- [whispers:] oh my God, oh my God. Like I couldn't -- I couldn't breathe. [Crying] [...] I got out of the truck and was like, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe."<sup>85</sup>

Zahra learned later that her father was shot in the head while fighting the Taliban outside of the Qala-i-Jangi fortress.

With no way to support her family due to Taliban restrictions on women working, Zahra's mother decided to leave the country and join other relatives in Iran, where other relatives already lived. The family spent about a year selling possessions outside of the Blue Mosque and sorting out paperwork. Zahra's seven-year-old brother found work at a mechanic shop, and

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Simpson, "Qala-i-Jangi, Battle of (2001)," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 373-5.

<sup>84</sup> That puts the date of this story in late March, though the year is unclear. It could be in the initial Taliban onslaught of Mazar in 1997, or it might be the following year, when they actually took the city, though neither event occurred in or around March. Based on Zahra's age, it is more likely that this occurred in 1997.

<sup>85</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 8, February 7, 2012.

eventually they raised enough money to hire a smuggler. They bought plane tickets to Kabul, where they met the smuggler. The city shocked Zahra:

Throughout the windows we could see just rubble; there was no greenery anymore. Everything natural, like trees and flowers and everything else, was basically *butchered* and cut down, and all you could see was smoke and dirt and -- basically that, nothing else. [...]

Before we even got to the downtown, as we were in the airport... Before the war it was very – it was a very nice international airport. And as soon as we got in, it was just -- There was holes in the runway; there was animals everywhere. It was just like as if, all of sudden, they took the city and *pushed* it a hundred years back. [...] It was just so weird, a mix of modern and, you know... It had become backwards some way. There was a donkey in an airport that shouldn't have been in the airport, there were chickens everywhere. I'm like, "What is a chicken doing in an airport?"<sup>86</sup>

The family took a bus toward the border with Iran, eventually crossing the border on foot in staggered waves with other refugees, trying not to be seen by Iranian officials. Once across, they took a bus to the city of Mashhad, a popular destination for Afghan refugees.

While Idrees and Zahra's families fled the Taliban, Bashir's family decided to return to Afghanistan upon the Taliban taking power. While hindsight might now make this decision seem a surprising one, Bashir noted that "by then, everybody was so tired of civil war and these warlords that they thought, 'Maybe these Taliban will bring peace and maybe they will turn out to be good people.' And there were rumours that they were working for the former king of Afghanistan [...]. So the news was received *not* with sadness, that the Taliban had taken over Herat."<sup>87</sup> Further, life was difficult in Iran. Bashir and his sisters were not legally able to attend school, and his older brothers struggled to find manual labour work to support the family.

Optimism notwithstanding, Afghanistan proved a reality check. Bashir recalled the return to Herat: "I had kind of a very glorious or good idea of Afghanistan. But I was a kid. And as

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<sup>86</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 8, February 9, 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014. The idea that the Taliban might bring order to a lawless, chaotic Afghanistan was initially reflected in Western media as well. For example, see John Ward Anderson, "Afghans Say City is Calmer Under Militants," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1995, A23.

soon as I crossed the border I knew what things were like. So like first thing at the border, on the Iranian side it was all green and nice and paved roads; on the Afghan side: no paved roads and no green things, no plants, no trees. And there was a big, round field on the Afghan side of the border; it was all dirt.”<sup>88</sup> Even the Taliban were not as expected. While Bashir initially felt comfortable around Talib soldiers, even critiquing their strategy and defeat in Mazar-i-Sharif to their faces while crossing the border back into Afghanistan, he stated that “it didn’t take me long. It took me a few days until I realized that I should be *very* careful with these people.”<sup>89</sup>

Life in Afghanistan did not measure up to the image that Bashir had in his mind. Their home village of Maladan just outside of Herat had been largely destroyed and the land unproductive due to the ruined irrigation system. His family settled in Herat instead. Even in a large urban centre, Bashir struggled particularly with the lack of reading material available:

My brain didn’t have enough to eat, didn’t have enough to get. Like there were no journals, no books. I went and found some bookstores, but they only had some religious books, some very old stories that didn’t interest me. I didn’t have internet; I didn’t know what internet was back then. I didn’t have a computer. I only had a series of six books, named *Harvard Physics Project*; that was high school physics.<sup>90</sup> And I read through every sentence of that many times. And then my older brother, Nasir – he’s probably seven or eight years older than me, or more or less – he had hundreds of books. He was interested in philosophy and literature, and when he was working in Iran he always spent a lot of money buying those books. He had a room full of books. So I went to his room – because I *didn’t* have physics books and I had to read something – and I took his books; I started reading those. And I had a lot of time. It was during Taliban: not much to do outside of home. So that’s how I got to know Kafka, Jean Paul Sartre, Camus, Tolstoy – lots of these people; Nietzsche -- I couldn’t read Nietzsche but I knew he was a big guy; I just couldn’t stand reading his books. [Laughs]<sup>91</sup>

Life in Afghanistan continued under the Taliban. At the end of grade eleven, circa 1999, Bashir began taking English classes at one of the private Afghan-run English language centres

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<sup>88</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 4, November 17, 2014.

<sup>89</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Harvard Project Physics was an American project based at Harvard University which produced a national secondary school physics curriculum. The project took place from 1962 to 1972, and the materials were used in American classrooms in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>91</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 4, November 17, 2014.

popular in Afghanistan. Eventually he started teaching English classes himself. He later also began learning German during his university studies, as a plan to leave the country and study in Germany. In the meanwhile, the Taliban touched nearly all aspects of life. Bashir recalled university professors dragged from their classrooms in the middle of lectures. Following a failed Hazara uprising in Herat circa 1999, he found Hazara corpses hanging by their feet from traffic lights on his walk home from school. Bashir became increasingly disillusioned with religion, but one day agreed to attend mosque with his grandfather, brother, and a guest. After prayers ended, Taliban surrounded the mosque, tied the hands of everyone using their own turbans (culturally, a massive insult), loaded them onto buses, and brought them outside of the city. Several hours later, the Taliban realized they had made a mistake and allowed everyone to leave. While spending hours walking back to the city, Bashir resolved never to go to Friday prayers again.

Like Bashir's family, Noor's family also returned to Afghanistan – albeit temporarily – during the Taliban's reign, circa 1998. She did not know why they returned at this time. Noor was young and details of this trip remain hazy, though “it was really normal” and any conflict or unusual aspects of life under the Taliban did not stand out.<sup>92</sup> They stayed for two months before returning to Pakistan.

Life in Afghanistan took a dramatic turn following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York City. Although responsibility for the attacks was claimed by al Qaeda, not the Taliban, the refusal of the Taliban to turn over members of al Qaeda to American forces placed a target on their own backs.<sup>93</sup> Bashir had just finished his first semester of a medical degree at the

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<sup>92</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, May 13, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Harry Raymond Hueston, “Al Qaeda,” in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18th-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21st Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017), 32; Spector and Morelock, “Taliban,” 439. See also Hueston, “Al Qaeda,” 30-3.

University of Herat when the American military dropped the first bombs on Afghanistan in October 2001. A witness to these events, Bashir recalled:

I came home one day and my brother was listening to Radio BBC – everybody listened to BBC at the time – and he said, “There was attacks in the US.” And I said, “Wow, that’s interesting. Let’s listen to what’s going on.” Because we thought the US, they are the good power, the superpower that is not evil like the Soviet Union. And they are *very* good, very efficient at whatever they do. They said these towers had been hit and they are saying that the Taliban are responsible, or they are hosting the person who is responsible for it. And my brother said, “I think this is the end of the Taliban.” Before that, nobody thought that -- We thought the Taliban would be there forever. We didn’t think that there was any chance they would go away. [...]

And after I think a few weeks, then the attacks started. And it was all interesting for me because I really wanted change; I hated that stagnant situation under Taliban. And then my cousin had a receiver, like a satellite receiver. Actually I went to his house; he could watch the channels from Europe and US, Al Jazeera also. And it showed the Bonn Conference,<sup>94</sup> which was the political process for forming the Afghan government that was supposed to replace the Taliban.

The attacks started. And when the attacks started, the night they started, we were all [...] sitting in one room. And then we were all gathered around the radio, the big radio. BBC Persian said that the attacks were *just* started, and then we heard *boom!* And then we went on the roof and saw that little mushroom cloud of the cruise missile on Herat Airport. And then after that every night there was bombings. We were having fun actually; we went on the roof and watched the cruise missiles, like the explosions and the B-52s and the jets. And one day actually I saw a jet -- I think it was right above my head, and I saw when the missile detached, and it went to the other side and hit the military base on the north of the city. And there were jokes going around that these pilots think: “When we go there, people should be scared but they’re not; they actually come to watch us.” [Both laugh] So they’re thinking, “What kind of a species are these people?” But we were confident that Americans have such superior technology that they wouldn’t kill civilians; they would *just* hit military convoys.<sup>95</sup>

The belief in the accuracy of American weapons quickly proved overly optimistic. However, by the end of 2001, the Taliban had been ousted from power.

Bashir was the only interviewee remaining in Afghanistan on 9/11, an important turning point in Canada’s relationship with Afghanistan though varying in significance in the lives of

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<sup>94</sup> After the Taliban government was toppled in Afghanistan, in December 2001 the German city of Bonn hosted a conference of Afghan leaders to choose the leader of an Afghan Interim Authority and to work on formulating a new political structure for Afghanistan. This conference, widely known as the Bonn Conference, selected Western-backed Hamid Karzai as the interim leader; Karzai was subsequently elected president in 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 4, November 17, 2014.

these individuals. Within the first several years following the collapse of the Taliban, some four million Afghans repatriated, largely voluntarily.<sup>96</sup> These narrators were not among them. Salma, the only one already in Canada, was working for the Province of Manitoba in Winnipeg, where she had lived for nearly two decades already and where she raised her two now-adult daughters. Noor, Zahra, and Idrees were living as refugees in countries surrounding Afghanistan. Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar, where Noor lived, was flooded with Afghan refugees due to its proximity to Afghanistan. Noor was attending elementary school and starting to learn English from her maternal grandfather. It would be nearly three more years until she was informed by her mother that they were leaving for Canada that very day. Zahra, also an elementary school-aged refugee, lived in low-income subsidized housing in Mashhad, Iran. Her mother had already completed their application to move to Canada, though their planned October departure was delayed significantly by the events of September 11. It took another two years before they reached Winnipeg. Idrees lived in a predominantly Afghan neighbourhood in Dushanbe, the capital city of Afghanistan's northern neighbour, Tajikistan, where his family ran a store selling household goods and where he attended a middle school for Afghan Tajik students set up by Tajik leader Massoud.<sup>97</sup>

In Afghanistan's first democratic election, held in 2004, Bashir campaigned on Hamid Karzai's behalf ("How did the Americans find this perfect person?") but became bitterly disillusioned with Karzai's corruption and incompetence ("How could the Americans find such

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<sup>96</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> This was the only Dari- (or Persian-) language school in Tajikistan. Rayhan Demytrie, "Afghans seek refuge in Tajikistan," *BBC News*, October 9, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8273334.stm>. The school was called Ariana School, and it was closed circa July 2001; Idrees said that it closed because there were now several Dari-language schools open. He noted that although Persian or Tajik people from Afghanistan share a language with the Tajiks of Tajikistan, Afghans use an Arabic script, while the people of Tajikistan write using the Cyrillic alphabet. Idrees attended school with Massoud's son; Massoud himself was assassinated two days prior to 9/11, on 9 September 2001.



an *incapable* person like that?”).<sup>98</sup> While continuing his medical studies, in 2003 Bashir got a job with a French non-governmental organization (NGO) called *Médecins du Monde*, and then as a translator for Catholic Relief Services in 2005. It was at this job that the ability to access the internet changed the direction of Bashir’s life. After coming across some textbooks at university that had been donated through the University of Manitoba’s Books with Wings program, he decided to look up the school in order to thank them for the donation. The professor with whom Bashir made contact, Dr. Richard Gordon, encouraged him to attend the University of Manitoba to study physics, a lifelong dream of Bashir’s who repeated in his interviews: “If I *don’t* do a degree in Physics, I feel my life has been in vain.”<sup>99</sup> Dr. Gordon arranged funding in order for him to do so and, following Bashir’s arrival in the autumn of 2008, hosted him as a boarder for some seven months until Bashir found his own apartment.

Bashir was the last of the interviewees to arrive in Winnipeg. Zahra’s family had arrived on a cold night in late 2003, having been privately sponsored by a wealthy doctor unknown to the family. Noor’s family arrived a short while later, in May 2004, seemingly as federally sponsored refugees, and Idrees’s in December 2005, part of a mass resettlement program that saw nearly the entire population of Afghan refugees in Tajikistan moved to Canada.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 4, November 17, 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Only small numbers of Afghans chose to flee to Tajikistan in the 1990s, most of whom were associated with Najibullah’s fallen administrations (including Idrees’s uncle, who was trained as a psychologist and who worked as an interrogator during Najib’s regime, questioning people who committed crimes). Though Tajikistan was “seen as safer than Pakistan, less socially restrictive than Iran, and a more culturally familiar place,” in comparison to Pakistan and Iran the country is extremely poor, with about half the country’s citizens and almost all of its Afghan refugees living in chronic poverty. See Edward Lemon, “Tajikistan: Afghan Refugees Find Security, But Seek a Quick Escape,” *Eurasianet*, January 11, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62689>. In 2001 Tajik police began enforcing a 2000 government decree prohibited refugees from settling in Tajikistan’s capital of Dushanbe, forcing them to rural areas where employment opportunities are rare; rural areas were not prepared to accommodate the refugees and the order was eventually halted. However, refugees arriving post-2000 were still prohibited from settling in fifteen of Tajikistan’s largest cities. As Canada had an official policy of accepting up to 7,500 refugees annually, in 2004 representatives from UNHCR collaborated with Canadian immigration officials to create a program designed to resettle Afghan refugees living in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, all of which had relatively small populations of Afghans. The acceptance rate was high, though some were excluded based

Surprisingly, despite the relatively small population of Afghans in Winnipeg,<sup>101</sup> none of these narrators know each other. This may reflect what nearly all of the interviewees emphasized: that the Afghan community in Winnipeg is fragmented, with the ethnic, religious, class, geographic, and political fractures that marked Afghanistan reflected in this new home, and with little effort by most Afghans to seek out other Afghans with whom to socialize.

### **The Interview Sessions and the Audiences**

Although our interviews were as diverse as the narrators themselves, some consistencies came through. All of the interviewees spoke English fluently and comfortably, with all of them except Zahra having learned or started to learn the language prior to coming to Canada. They also represented a fairly well-educated cohort: Salma had a Bachelor of Education degree. Bashir had a Bachelor of Science degree and Noor was in the process of obtaining the same; Bashir also had a medical degree from the University of Herat. Zahra was pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree, while Idrees just started his own B.A. during the course of our interviews. They were all engaged in their numerous communities in Winnipeg, participated varyingly in sports, school activities, and volunteering, and all were actively employed (other than recently retired Salma) in positions that brought them into contact with a broad segment of the public.

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on past involvement in security services or because of other security concerns. This included Idrees's uncle, who remains in Tajikistan. By 2005, some 720 Afghan refugees from Tajikistan had been resettled in Canada and the United States, with smaller number coming from Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Over the next two years, more than 2,700 Afghan refugees arrived in Canada through the accelerated resettlement programmes in Central Asia. The resettlement programs had a significant impact in countries with relatively small Afghan refugee populations. See Erlich, "Tajikistan;" "Tajikistan: Afghan Refugees Told to Leave Dushanbe," *IRIN News*, May 23, 2001, <http://www.reliefweb.int/IRIN/asia/countrystories/tajikistan/20010523.phtml>; Redden, "Canada Offers New Lease;" Tan, "Canadian Programme."

<sup>101</sup> The 2016 Winnipeg Census lists 605 immigrants born in Afghanistan; this does not capture those from Afghanistan who were born in refugee camps or elsewhere before settling in Winnipeg ("Immigrants by selected places of birth"). It lists a further 60 "recent immigrants" as having been born in Afghanistan ("Recent immigrants by selected places of birth"). Under "Ethnic Origin Population," it lists 1,010 people in Winnipeg as having Afghan origins. See Statistics Canada, "Census Profile, 2016 Census: Winnipeg, City," November 29, 2017, last modified April 3, 2019, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=4611040&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&Data=Count&SearchText=4611040&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=3>.

The relationships between the narrators and I played an important role in these stories. Objective detachment was not an aim in my approach to our interviews. I follow many oral historians in insisting that an objective history does not exist. Acknowledging the subjectivity of oral history allows us to better understand social history, because it is this subjectivity that invests events and their recollections with meaning.<sup>102</sup> With this in mind, I tried to remain aware of the subjectivities the narrators and I brought to our interviews and the ways that these may have impacted the sessions. I liked all of the interviewees almost immediately upon meeting them, and I wanted them to like me. In my mind, we developed a warm rapport very quickly. I genuinely enjoyed talking with each of them. I wanted to draw out as much information from them as possible, and I also wanted to protect them from other listeners who might misinterpret what they were saying (as though I understood it and them perfectly). I spent time (sometimes many hours) before and after the interviews visiting with each of them, chatting about our lives, and have kept in touch, to varying degrees, with four of the five narrators.

Despite these congenial relationships, many other factors likely influenced what was shared. Our differences in power, religion, gender (for some), race, age, class, speech and language, ethnicity, mannerisms, immigration status, culture, ideology, and life experience, as well as the physical space and location of the interviews, may have shaped our perceptions of the interview and impacted on what was shared, how it was talked about, and how they and I interpreted it. Quoting one of his own interviewees, Portelli writes that “there’s gonna always be

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<sup>102</sup> Valerie Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’ Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” *Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 58; Luisa Passerini, “Work, Ideology, and Consensus under Italian Fascism,” *History Workshop* 8 (Autumn 1979): 84; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 2; Alessandro Portelli, “The Peculiarities of Oral History,” *History Workshop* 12 (Autumn 1981): 99-100; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 188. The rejection of a notion of objective history is not only the purview of oral historians. For example, historian and philosopher Robin George Collingwood similarly argues as much in *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 137-8.

a line” in interviews that needs to be spoken across.<sup>103</sup> In hindsight, I can see that at times I assumed too much that our friendships would enable the narrators to speak freely, and I underestimated the impact of the above factors in shaping our interviews. Although the warmth and connection in our interviews was genuine, there were things that I withheld as I got to know them. For example, I did not talk about my recent divorce, feeling uncertain if that might colour how they would see me. I can only assume that the narrators made these same calculated decisions in their interviews. However, I do not believe that I am overestimating the strength of the relationships that developed. In closing his interview, Bashir said: “Through this project I got to know you and I think you are a great person. We became friends and we will continue to be friends. I think that’s a great added advantage of me participating in this project.”<sup>104</sup> Indeed, this has been a great benefit for me as well.

Oral historian Valerie Yow writes that the fact of oral history as being recorded means that both the interviewer and interviewee will speak with the presence of audiences beyond the immediate in mind.<sup>105</sup> The responses to my questions asking each interviewee why they agreed to participate reveal an eye to these different audiences. Some responses focused specifically on me and what I asked from them, demonstrating the most immediate level of audience within an oral history interview.<sup>106</sup> Other stated motivations demonstrated the anticipation of a future audience, and/or a need to articulate their lives in a way that was consistent with and

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<sup>103</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 37. See also 38-39. Portelli is quoting Julia Cowens, a black woman from Kentucky, who was referencing her inability to speak freely with a white man.

<sup>104</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 4, April 14, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Yow, ““Do I Like Them Too Much?”” 76-7.

<sup>106</sup> For example, Zahra stated: “I have the information; why not help someone out?” See Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012. Likewise, Salma desired to be helpful: “First of all, to help someone. You were working on this project. I didn’t know you, but as soon as I -- I first thought you are a university student. And then you clarified it; you said no, you’re done and it’s just a project after that. If I can help a little bit a student with a project, why not?” See Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014. Idrees offered similar motivations: “If it’s something that can help a student for whatever reason, I just can’t say no; I want to help that student and also share my story.” See Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

recognizable to a community or ideology with which they identified.<sup>107</sup> This other audience was, varyingly, the Canadian public, their fellow Afghan compatriots, other members of the same ethnic group, future descendants, and likely a host of others. The multiplicity of these audiences had an indelible impact on the stories shared. At times the narrators spoke to me, specifically and personally, and at other times they spoke over my shoulder to a future listener.

## Conclusion

The narrators and the stories they shared in their interviews cannot be separated from the background in which they and their families grew up, from the broader issues affecting Afghanistan, from their experiences in interim countries (unaddressed here), their lives since coming to Canada, and all of the factors that played into our sessions together, including my role in the interviews and the audiences to which they were directed. Understanding this context is essential to making sense of their stories. In the next chapter, I look at another significant factor that influenced these interviews: Canada and its discourses of multiculturalism alongside those about immigrants, refugees, Afghans, and Muslims which featured prominently in government

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<sup>107</sup> See also Yow, ““Do I Like Them Too Much?”” 76-7. Idrees revealed his desire to have his ideas about ethnic conflict in Afghanistan known more broadly: “I always, always, always wanted to be interviewed by someone in a more academic environment, so I can at least tell the stories that I have and share the knowledge that I have, especially about the ethnicity and all that. And I want this to be heard. It doesn’t matter by one person or two people, as long as it’s heard by someone.” See Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012. Noor implicitly pointed to her faith community in her response: “I’m not worried about [needing to tell my story and be known]. Like, ‘No, you don’t have to know about my life.’ Because my life is with my God, you know; it’s written down. But the fact that -- you know, because they are stories and they should be passed down sometimes. And you never know what happens in the future. So I’m just -- I’m always thinking about it.” See Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, May 13, 2013. Bashir’s answer highlighted his own historical interest in the preservation of stories and information: “You are reaching out to Afghan refugees whose stories will most probably get lost. Their children will remember *some* of their stories, but with very little detail and vague, and they mix things. But if you can write that down, I mean... I always have been interested in history. I *love* historical records because they can give me an idea of what things were like back then; they tell you that things were not always like what they are now. People’s perceptions were different, their judgments, their standards, everything was different. And it’s just so interesting to be able to feel or have a look into what other people’s conditions were. So I think that is a great thing, and I’m happy to be part of that.” See Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 4, April 14, 2015. Zahra noted another motivation in describing how being asked to be interviewed impacted on her personally: “It made it feel interesting; it made me feel like it was interesting to others, that *you* would want to record it.” See Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012.

legislative and policy changes, news stories, and public debates at the time in which our interviews took place.

## Chapter 2

### **“Canada’s not a melting pot but at the same time you have to adjust yourself to this environment”: Multiculturalism and the Canadian Context of Interviews**

Oral history life story interviews take place in a particular place, at a specific historical moment. Rather than being incidental, this context is integral to the interviews themselves. The interviews used in this thesis took place between 2012 and 2015, in the final years of Stephen Harper’s tenure as prime minister of Canada and during a time of vigorous public conversations about what it meant to be Canadian and who qualified as such. Fears around Islam as well as immigrants and refugees who might hold seemingly ‘un-Canadian’ values shaped public conversations. While multiculturalism retained its importance as Canada’s social paradigm, sociologist Jasmin Zine notes that not all modalities of cultural practice are accepted or encouraged, and questions about the limits of accommodation ruled public debate.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I examine the place of multiculturalism within Canada and the uses to which it has been put, including criticisms of the policy, particularly in the post-9/11 period. Next, I review legislative and citizenship changes in response to new fears around terrorism and immigration in Canada. Finally, I consider the role of the media in shaping public perceptions before turning my attention to prominent and widespread news stories about Muslims, refugees and immigrants, and Afghans. The discourses created by all of these aspects of Canadian public life had an impact on what the narrators shared in their life stories and the ways in which they presented themselves and their families. In order to make sense of the interviews, it is essential to first understand this context before turning an eye to the interviews again in the following chapters.

#### **Multiculturalism in Canada**

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<sup>1</sup> Jasmin Zine, “Unsettling the Nation: Gender, Race, and Muslim Cultural Politics in Canada,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 9, no. 1 (2009): 152.

Multiculturalism has been a defining benchmark of Canadian identity for the past half-century, since Pierre Elliott Trudeau introduced the concept with all-party approval as official policy in 1971. Irish sociologist Benedict Anderson writes that a nation needs to imagine some unifying principle that encourages citizens to sacrifice their own individual interests for ‘the common good.’<sup>2</sup> In Canada, valuing difference is held up as one such unifying principle. Within the Constitution Act (1982), Article 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) directs that “[t]he Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians,” creating a legal imperative to safeguard and foster multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup> Multiculturalism was given statutory standing in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), which states that “The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism.”<sup>4</sup>

The adoption of multiculturalism opened up space for minorities outside of the British, French, and First Nations communities to pursue at least symbolic recognition, and, at times, identity-based claims.<sup>5</sup> Multiculturalism centres the acceptance of cultural diversity as a defining characteristic of Canadian society, and suggests that relationships between groups and between

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>. See also Denise Helly, “Are Muslims Discriminated Against in Canada Since September 2001?” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2004): 33.

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Multiculturalism Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. 24 (4th Supp.), accessed December 10, 2018, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/page-1.html>. See also Helly, “Are Muslims Discriminated Against,” 24.

<sup>5</sup> Yasmeen Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines of Human and Citizen: The Liminal State of Arab Canadians,” in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Henneby and Bessma Momani (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 72.



individuals are based on equality and respect.<sup>6</sup> As many scholars have noted, however, the term itself is not straightforward. Multiculturalism takes multiple forms in Canada, and may be understood varyingly as a demographic fact,<sup>7</sup> an ideology, and official policy supported legislatively and constitutionally.<sup>8</sup> Despite this ambiguity, with an increasing emphasis on multiculturalism from the 1970s through the 1990s, Canadians easily acknowledge their country as inherently multicultural, their own opinions on the validity of such a policy notwithstanding.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of which political party holds power, Canada proffers an enduring self-representation of warmth and welcome. Multiculturalism, in Canada, is a given.<sup>10</sup>

Despite widespread national and international acclaim, multiculturalism is not a neutral or simply benevolent policy in Canada. Sociologist Lori G. Beaman warns that when talk of multiculturalism is deployed, it must be “critically evaluated to determine who is using it for

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<sup>6</sup> Bonifacio, *Pinay on the Prairies*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> In 2009, 84 percent of new immigrants to Canada came from places other than Europe. The same year, there were more than 6.2 million foreign-born residents living in the country, representing more than two hundred countries. See Statistics Canada. “Figure 2: Region of Birth of Recent Immigrants to Canada, 1971 to 2006,” last modified November 20, 2009, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/figures/c2-eng.cfm>. See also Elke Winter and Ivana Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation in the Mainstream Press: A Case of Re-ethnicization?” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 1 (2017): 58.

<sup>8</sup> Lori G. Beaman, “Religious Diversity in the Public Sphere: The Canadian Case,” *Religions* 8, no. 12 Special Issue: Religious Diversity in a Pluralistic Society (2017): page 4 of 18, Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute; Augie Fleras, *The Media Gaze: Representations of Diversities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 143-4; Kalyani Thuraijah, “The Jagged Edges of Multiculturalism in Canada and the Suspect Canadian,” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 12 (2017): 134; Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 58.

<sup>9</sup> Eve Haque, “Homegrown, Muslim and Other: Tolerance, Secularism and the Limits of Multiculturalism,” *Social Identities* 16, no. 1 (January 2010): 81; Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press and Women’s Press, 2000), 8-9. A 2007 Ipsos-Reid survey found that 84 percent of Canadians agreed that “Canada’s multicultural makeup is one of the best things about this country,” while a 2008 Strategic Counsel survey found that 61 percent believe that multiculturalism “strengthens national identity.” Surveys compiled in Stuart Soroka and Sarah Robertson, “2.1.1 Figures 1 and 2,” *A Literature Review of Public Opinion Research on Canadian Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Immigration, 2006-2009* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, March 2010): 3, accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/research-stats/2012-por-multi-imm-eng.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Trevor Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer and Denials of Racism,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2018): 68.

what purposes.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Bengali-Canadian sociologist and philosopher Himani Bannerji and numerous other scholars remind us that official multiculturalism serves a political purpose, and arrived in a period of rapid immigration from the developing world, separatist tensions within Francophone Canada, and increasing land claim struggles by numerous First Nations. The concerns and demands of these groups were those endemic to migration and colonialism and were not, then or now, primarily cultural. Within this context, multiculturalism provided a means of diffusing, benching, or negating the demands of the various groups. It suggested that immigrants wanted the same cultural life as they had in their countries of origin, frozen as they were into traditional cultures. Multiculturalism allowed these groups to be ethnicized and culturalized and their concerns and demands to be reduced to merely cultural, which could be accommodated without addressing the underlying social, economic, or political issues.<sup>12</sup> While encouraging somewhat superficial celebrations of culture – folkloric fêtes of exotic music, food, rituals, and festivals – multiculturalism often disguises significant and ongoing inequalities, including “ghettoized labour markets, racialized security policies, discrimination, and negative media representations.”<sup>13</sup> Sociologist Sunera Thobani writes that immigrants are able to publicly perform/exhibit their cultural foreign-ness so long as they “reconfirm national superiority by attesting to its tolerance.”<sup>14</sup> According to education scholar Trevor Gulliver, discourses representing Canada as warmly multicultural and “as a redeemer of immigrant others deny and

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<sup>11</sup> Beaman, “Religious Diversity,” page 4 of 18. Note that while multiculturalism has, in the past, received broad acclaim (at least from Western countries), in recent years it has faced increasing criticism as a national policy.

<sup>12</sup> Bannerji, *The Dark Side*, 8-9, 37-8, 42-9, 97. See also Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 72; Rachad Antonius et al., “Multiculturalism and Discrimination in Canada and Quebec: The Case of Arabs and Muslims,” in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 91-2; Thurairajah, “Jagged Edges,” 136. Antonius et al. further note that multiculturalism is incompatible with the existence of groups that define themselves as separate nations, as do First Nations and some Québécois (91-2).

<sup>13</sup> Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani, “Arab Canadians,” 1-2. See also Bonifacio, *Pinay on the Prairies*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 171.

downplay racism and the silencing of voices that speak with the experience of being racialized, being excluded, and being hurt by those exclusions.”<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Gulliver continues, multiculturalism can serve to gaslight those whose experiences fall outside of this self-styled warm inclusion. This type of national myth of multiculturalism and tolerance can, in fact, make it “much more difficult for minority groups to challenge remaining inequalities, to take unified action and to gain credibility and support among the (white) dominant group.”<sup>16</sup>

Implicit in Canadian conceptions of diversity and multiculturalism is the notion that an undefined ‘we’ courteously tolerate ‘them,’ while never interrogating the history of assumed national practices and values. By failing to do so, writes cultural studies scholar Sharday Mosurinjohn, ‘Canadian’ culture and values are presented as ahistorical.<sup>17</sup> However, Canada is a construction based on particular representations and ideas around history, language, and cultural signifiers, tied to particular concepts of the nation. According to Bannerji, all of these representations and ideas are encompassed in a particular notion of whiteness and provide Canadians with an imagined community around which to rally and from which non-white (and especially non-white women) Canadians are excluded.<sup>18</sup> Although they live in Canada, are subject to its laws, contribute to its economy, and participate in its society, a barrage of labels – people of colour, immigrants, refugees, newcomers, illegal aliens, visible minorities, EAL speakers, Muslims, ‘Indians’ – identify them as something other than simply undifferentiated ‘Canadians.’<sup>19</sup> Multiculturalism, continues Bannerji, in its discursive sense, rests on an uncomfortable duality in which these Outsider Canadians provide an essential backdrop of

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<sup>15</sup> Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 68.

<sup>16</sup> Teun van Dijk, “Discourse and the Denial of Racism,” *Discourse & Society* 3, no. 1 (1992): 96. See also Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 72.

<sup>17</sup> Sharday Mosurinjohn, “Popular Journalism, Religious Morality, and the Canadian Imaginary: Queers and Immigrants as Threats to the Public Sphere,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 246.

<sup>18</sup> Bannerji, *The Dark Side*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

Canada's multicultural ideology and yet find themselves outside of the mainstream precisely because of their 'difference.'<sup>20</sup> Thobani argues that multiculturalism is often used as 'evidence' that Canada is not racist. Further, it only came into being once white privilege had been firmly established, and its policies serve to shore up rather than dismantle the systemic racism and white privilege that permeate the country and its history.<sup>21</sup> Other critics point to multiculturalism's failure with regard to the First Nations in Canada, its limits as to what is considered tolerable, and its more recent shift from being used as a way to define 'us' (tolerant, welcoming) as a way to define 'them' (backwards, uncivilized).<sup>22</sup>

Following the 9/11 attacks in New York City, rural Pennsylvania, and on the Pentagon, Canada aligned itself unequivocally with its American neighbour and meanings of multiculturalism, citizenship, and belonging took on a new potency.<sup>23</sup> Like the Bush administration to the south, Jean Chrétien's Liberal government implemented anti-terrorism measures within Canada and sent Canadian troops into Afghanistan. The next prime minister, Paul Martin, maintained this support of the USA and the deployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan, and the Conservative government under Stephen Harper exhibited even stronger

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 169-171; see also Bonifacio, *Pinay on the Prairies*, 75; Thurairajah, "Jagged Edges," 137.

<sup>22</sup> Gulliver, "Canada the Redeemer," 72-3; Beaman, "Religious Diversity," page 4-5 of 18; Bannerji, *The Dark Side*; Minelle Mahtani, "Mixed Metaphors: Positioning 'Mixed Race' Identity," in *Situating 'Race' and Racisms in Space, Time, and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars*, eds. Jo-Anne Lee and John S. Lutz, 77-93 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 81; Thurairajah, "Jagged Edges," 137.

<sup>23</sup> While these ideas took on a new potency post 9/11, scholars have noted that some of the associated changes were, in fact, in progress prior to that date. For example, Canadian political scientist Stephen Clarkson notes that although it might have appeared that Canada fast-tracked legislation around border security shortly after the events of 9/11, Canada had been pressuring the United States to collaboratively reform and tighten border security for years, since the Clinton administration. See Stephen Clarkson, "The View From the Attic: Toward a Gated Continental Community?" in *The Rebordering of North America: Integration and Exclusion in a New Security Context*, eds. Peter Andreas and Thomas J. Biersteker, 68-89 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 81. Michel Carpentier argues that steps taken to align with the United States following the 9/11 attacks were not solely an effort to appease a stronger neighbour, but were initiated by Canada and carefully calculated to ensure Canada's economic security. See Michel Lawrence Carpentier, "Canada and 9/11: Border Security in a New Era" (Master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2007), 2.

backing, increasing Canadian deployment to Afghanistan where they served as part of a US-led operation rather than as part of a NATO mission.<sup>24</sup> By modifying its foreign policy and anti-terrorism measures in response to the attacks, Thobani contends that Canada took on al Qaeda and the Taliban as its own enemies, a process that morphed into an institutionalized distrust of Muslim (and particularly Afghan) immigrants and refugees.<sup>25</sup> Creating a strong bond between the shared interests and identities of Canada and the United States, Thobani continues, suppressed public conversations about the causes behind and responses to the 9/11 attacks. Participation in and support for the war in Afghanistan became seen as the only way to defend and preserve Canada and the values for which it stood.<sup>26</sup>

Though sometimes referred to as “the day the world changed,”<sup>27</sup> 9/11 did not bring about an entirely new context with regard to perceptions of Islam and multiculturalism. Significant international events involving Muslim antagonists (including the 1979-81 Iranian hostage crisis; the 1991 Gulf War; the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993; the 1998 bombings at US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi; and the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen) and their subsequent media coverage already demonstrated a strong Othering of Muslims. Philosopher Ibrahim Kalin argues that 9/11 simply brought to the surface issues of Islamophobia and questions about Muslim/West relationships.<sup>28</sup> However, other scholars note that although the securitization of borders, regulatory discussions around managing global migration, and surveillance campaigns of Muslim/Arab-Canadians by the RCMP and CSIS had been in progress prior to 9/11, the post-9/11 era is distinctive due to the increasingly integrated economies of

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<sup>24</sup> Clarkson, “View from the Attic,” 72; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 218-20.

<sup>25</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 218-20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Zainab Amery, “The Securitization and Racialization of Arabs in Canada’s Immigration and Citizenship Policies,” in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Hennebray and Bessma Momani (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Islamophobia and the Limits of Multiculturalism,” in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, eds. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4-5.

Canada and the USA and a changing racial and religious composition of the populations moving from poorer economies to richer ones. New, too, is an increased willingness to accept policies that circumscribe human rights, the more overt and publicly accepted racialization of Muslim/Arab communities, and more frequent media portrayals of Muslims, increasingly stereotyped and linked to violence.<sup>29</sup>

The twenty-first century has seen a steady erosion of the values of multiculturalism and diversity in Canadian society, as in other Western countries. Zine notes that despite an increasing percentage of Canadians being ‘visible minorities,’ white, Eurocentric, and Christian norms remain hegemonic. As visible minorities gain numbers and political influence, whiteness becomes (or feels itself) more vulnerable and multiculturalism increasingly disruptive.<sup>30</sup> Beaman writes that this perceived increase in diversity in Canada is, in fact, a matter of degree, with foreign-born comprising 16.1 percent of the population in 1871, 20.6 percent in 2011, and 21.9 percent in 2016.<sup>31</sup> However, the percentage of those identifying as Christian has decreased. With a vastly different demography in the twenty-first century than that at the inception of the policy in 1971, sociologist Kalyani Thurairajah claims that an understanding of multiculturalism has evolved alongside the ethnic and cultural makeup of Canada.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 77; Amery, “Securitization and Racialization,” 34, 46; Mahmoud Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims in Western Societies,” in *Re-Imagining the Other: Culture, Media, and Western-Muslim Intersections*, eds. Mahmoud Eid and Karim H. Karim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 104-5.

<sup>30</sup> Zine, “Unsettling the Nation,” 151.

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Canada, “150 Years of Immigration in Canada,” June 29, 2016, last modified May 17, 2018, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm#def2>; Statistics Canada, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity: Key Results from the 2016 Census,” October 25, 2017, last modified November 1, 2017, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm>. See also Beaman, “Religious Diversity,” page 2-3 of 18.

<sup>32</sup> Thurairajah, “Jagged Edges,” 136. While the percentage of immigrants has increased only slightly since the late nineteenth century, the religious composition of those immigrants has changed dramatically. Prior to 1971, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist immigrants combined totalled only some 2.9 percent of the total, but they comprised 33.0 percent of the immigrants arriving between 2001 and 2011. See Statistics Canada, “Religions in Canada,” *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada*, 2011 National Household Survey (2013, last modified July 25, 2018), accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.pdf>.

While for much of its history as official policy multiculturalism was largely abstract, the post-9/11 era and its attention to terrorism and radical Islam, combined with a rise in Muslim, Middle Eastern, and south Asian immigration, has seen multiculturalism increasingly perceived as a threat to core Canadian values. Many Canadians began asking to what extent multiculturalism requires reasonable accommodation of new and potentially illiberal immigrant groups.<sup>33</sup> According to Zine, the rhetoric of multiculturalism gone awry arises when public attention is fixed on a sensationalized negative issue involving a racially or religiously marginalized group. Multiculturalism and its accommodation of these groups are perceived by some to be a ‘slippery slope’ that inevitably corrodes the dominant national culture and its liberal, tolerant values. Multiculturalism is felt to breed alienation and division, and there is a growing sense that immigrant societies do not hold the desired identification with the nation-state to which they have immigrated.<sup>34</sup> Concerns around social cohesion, the development of national identity, and ongoing attachment of immigrants to their original homelands continue to emerge in public, academic, and political debates.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Raymond B. Blake, “A New Canadian Dynamism? From Multiculturalism and Diversity to History and Core Values,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 26, no. 1 (May 2013): 81-2. For example, in 2007 Quebec Premier Jean Charest appointed a Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (commonly called the Bouchard-Taylor Commission) to explore reasonable accommodation and make recommendations that would ensure that such accommodations would uphold Quebec’s core egalitarian and democratic values. See Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation*, Final Report, Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (Gouvernement du Québec, 2008), accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.mce.gouv.qc.ca/publications/CCPARDC/rapport-final-integral-en.pdf>. Canada is not alone in these questions. Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and other Western countries are similarly struggling to find a balance between multiculturalism and integration or acculturation.

<sup>34</sup> Zine, “Unsettling the Nation,” 156-7. For example, a 2008 Environics survey found that 60 percent of Canadians thought too many immigrants were not adapting to Canadian society, while a 2006 Leger Poll found some 46 percent of respondents felt that immigrants were not integrating well or at all. Surveys compiled in Soroka and Robertson, “2.1.3 Figures 15 and 17,” *A literature review*.

<sup>35</sup> Hennebry and Momani, “Arab Canadians,” 1-2; Thurairajah, “Jagged Edges,” 134-5. For example, Thurairajah’s study of Toronto’s second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil community finds that there is “no consensus about how multiculturalism should be defined or how it is implemented in Canada” (134). While the Tamil-Canadians understood multiculturalism as a way to politically engage with their homeland and maintain dual identities, other Canadians perceived these as a disloyalty to Canada.

Critics of multiculturalism therefore approach the issue from opposite sides, with some condemning the policy's obfuscation of deep social inequalities and its use to contain diversity within tidy boundaries, while others decrying the policy for failing to do exactly this.<sup>36</sup> Despite these criticisms from both ends of the spectrum, multiculturalism remains an important component of Canada's self-imaginary. As a conceptual apparatus originally imposed from above rather than demanded from below, multiculturalism, argues Bannerji, offers a useful discourse to manage public and social spaces and relations, providing a Canadian conceptual self that enfolds difference into a larger imagined and unified community without lessening the overall cultural and political dominance of white European-Canadians.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of these growing anti-immigrant sentiments, and despite the retreat of other Western countries from multicultural policies, the perception of Canada as tolerantly multicultural remains popular, as it affords Canadians the opportunity to define themselves and their values as inherently *not-racist*, *not-oppressive*, because they identify with a country that is, by (self-)definition, tolerant of various forms of diversity.<sup>38</sup> In the twenty-first century, and despite its criticisms, the majority of

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<sup>36</sup> Thobani, "Unsettling the Nation," 156-7; see also Bannerji, *The Dark Side*, 44-5; Blake, "New Canadian Dynamism," 83; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 148-55.

<sup>37</sup> Bannerji, *The Dark Side*, 37-8, 42-9; See also Beaman, "Religious Diversity," page 4-5 of 18; Hennebry and Momani, "Arab Canadians," 1-2. In her analysis of multiculturalism as imposed from above, Bannerji leaves out an important aspect of the development of the policy. In the 1960s, Canada's federal government under Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson focused on bilingualism in the country as a means of addressing the rising French secessionist movement. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established in 1963 and its results were published between 1965 and 1970, coinciding with the Official Languages Act in 1969, which officially established Canada as bilingual. However, activism from members of other ethnic groups (notably Ukrainian-Canadian linguist Jaroslav Rudnyckyj, who had served on the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism) emphasized the contributions of other groups to Canada and lent their backing to the pursuit of multiculturalism rather than strictly bilingualism by the Canadian government under Pierre Elliot Trudeau in the early 1970s. In this sense, multiculturalism arose from below. See Julia Lalonde, "The Roots of Multiculturalism – Ukrainian-Canadian Involvement in the Multiculturalism Discussion of the 1960s as an Example of the Position of the 'Third Force,'" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2006): 49-53, 55-56. While recognizing this history, I refer to multiculturalism as imposed from above because of the ways in which the federal government recognized the potential of multiculturalism to neatly contain diverse groups and their demands, adopted it, and then deployed it to do so.

<sup>38</sup> Mosurinjohn, "Popular Journalism," 246. Mosurinjohn points to the work of scholars such as Sherene Razack, Sunera Thobani, Terrie Goldie, and Gary Kinsmen, among others, who have described in detail the ways in



Canadians continue to insist on multiculturalism as a fundamental aspect of their national identity.

This identification as multicultural notwithstanding, Canada has not always welcomed newcomers with open arms. While immigrants and refugees have long been perceived as economic burdens on Canadians and a drain on the nation's resources, *Muslim* immigrants are perceived to additionally pose a serious threat to the nation and to the values and way of life it holds dear.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that the current debates raging around multiculturalism and reasonable accommodation are, in essence, debates about/attacks on Muslims and Islam.<sup>40</sup> This was especially notable during the Harper era. Representing the Conservative Party of Canada, Stephen Harper served as Canada's prime minister from 2006 until 2015. Throughout his tenure, Harper presented and promoted a vision of Canada that focused on its connections to the British monarchy and empire and emphasized its military history and the contributions of predominantly white settlers, while reducing the emphasis on women, First Nations, and minority immigrants.<sup>41</sup> While the Harper administration promoted immigration to Canada, it focused on economic immigrants while reducing the number and proportion of family class immigrants and refugees.<sup>42</sup> Like the Liberal and Conservative governments that preceded them, writes political scientist Erin Tolley, the Harper Conservatives emphasized integration and diversity within a Canadian framework, and made calculated

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which ethnicized and racialized foreigners and queer people have faced discipline in Canada despite its officially tolerant policies. See also Thurairajah, "Jagged Edges," 134.

<sup>39</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 27-8.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Collapse of Tolerance," *The Guardian*, September 17, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/sep/17/thecollapseoftolerance> See also Abu-Laban, "On the Borderlines," 81-2; Kalin, "Islamophobia," 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Avigail Eisenberg, "Identity Politics: Conservative Style," *Labour 73*, Forum: History Under Harper (Spring 2014): 231; Yasmeeen Abu-Laban, "Transforming Citizenship: Power, Policy and Identity," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 5.

<sup>42</sup> Erin Tolley, "Political Players or Partisan Pawns? Immigrants, Minorities, and Conservatives in Canada," in *The Blueprint: Conservative Parties and Their Impact on Canadian Politics*, eds. J.P. Lewis and Joanna Everitt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017): 107-8. While these tended to alienate minorities, other actions appealed, such as eliminating the right of landing fee.

decisions intended to build and strengthen their voting base.<sup>43</sup> Under Harper, the federal administration demonstrated a tendency to conflate refugees with security risks.<sup>44</sup> This, combined with increasing fears around the threat to Canadian society posed by Islamic fundamentalism, created a fraught environment for both Muslims and those who came to Canada as refugees. As demonstrated in Edward Said's landmark work *Orientalism* (1978), negative stereotypes of Muslims have a long history in Western democracies. With increasing immigration from Muslim-majority countries and occasional but well-publicized terrorist attacks by certain Muslim groups, these negative perceptions remain persistent in the West.<sup>45</sup>

Thobani writes that "state citizenship does not guarantee national belonging for those already teetering on the borders of inclusion."<sup>46</sup> This is particularly true for Muslims in the West, who find themselves cast as subaltern citizens or outright enemies due to Orientalist fears that take the form of racial and religious profiling, xenophobic state policies, and changes to citizenship laws since 9/11. Some of these policies and changes will be examined later in this chapter. Comprising some 3.2 percent of Canada's population in 2011, Muslims have come to represent the 'anti-citizen,' according to Zine.<sup>47</sup> Dutch discourse analysis scholar Teun van Dijk highlights the tendency toward positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in the construction of group identity. He identifies an "ideological square" comprised of four tactics: emphasizing positive things about Us; emphasizing negative things about Them; de-emphasizing

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<sup>43</sup> Tolley, "Political Players," 110-11. Tolley lists some of their overt efforts to win over certain minority groups, such as redress for the Chinese head tax, a federal apology for rejecting Sikhs aboard the *Komagata Maru* in 1914, an inquiry into the 1985 Air India bombing, federal recognition of the Armenian genocide, national commemoration of the Ukrainian famine and genocide of the 1930s, and the loosening of visa requirements for Polish and Czech visitors, among others. She notes that this type of electioneering was not unique to the Harper government, nor was their blatant linkage between political goals and policy agendas. Rather, what was notable was the frankness with which the Harper government pursued their ends and pandered to their varying supportive demographics, including minorities (122).

<sup>44</sup> Abu-Laban, "Transforming Citizenship," 3; Tolley, "Political Players," 108.

<sup>45</sup> Said, *Orientalism*. See also Timothy B. Gravelle, "Friends, Neighbours, Townspeople and Parties: Explaining Canadian Attitudes toward Muslims," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (2018): 644-5.

<sup>46</sup> Zine, "Unsettling the Nation," 148.

<sup>47</sup> Statistics Canada, "Religions in Canada;" Zine, "Unsettling the Nation," 148.

negative things about Us; and de-emphasizing positive things about Them.<sup>48</sup> All of these may be seen in narratives around Muslims in Canada, particularly those who came as immigrants and refugees. After being cast as Others, these enemies are seen to not only threaten Canadians, but also ‘Canadian society,’ highlighting the ideological aspects of the ‘war on terror.’ The conflict is perceived as existential rather than simply a matter of physical security.<sup>49</sup> Thobani asserts that by casting supposedly fanatical Muslims as the greatest threat to the nation, Canada is able to position itself as “terrorized by the irrational hatred of the murderous and misogynist stranger,” its own involvement in American-led invasions and occupations notwithstanding.<sup>50</sup> After being recast as a threat, the actual citizenship of Muslims becomes irrelevant, because they are not ‘true’ Canadians even if they are legal ones.<sup>51</sup>

How this disregard for the actual citizenship of Muslim immigrants is experienced by Muslim immigrants is revealed in Idrees Bahadur’s third session. Responding to my question asking whether people identify him as a refugee, Idrees, an ethnic Tajik who arrived in Canada as a teen, considered the idea:

IDREES BAHADUR: Maybe not as refugee, but foreigner for sure. [...] A lot of my friends, probably I told you in last interview too that they joke around with me; they call me brown kid. And yeah, they call me foreigner. I guess that’s a thinking in society that maybe it’s hard to change. You know.

ALLISON PENNER: Do you wish you could change that?

IDREES BAHADUR: I wish; I wish, but I *don’t* think you can change it. [...] [But] actually it does not bother me. Because that’s the fact, so what can I do? I came from a foreign

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<sup>48</sup> Teun van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (unpublished, 2000), 43-4, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Ideology%20and%20discourse.pdf>. Van Dijk further notes the fundamental importance of the position held by the group relative to its Others. In this instance, while the same type of ideological squares potentially may be formed by Muslims and Afghans within Canada, the position of these groups relative to Canadian society mean that their perceptions of other Canadians will not have as significant an impact on the broader perceptions of those groups. See also Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 71-2, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Nandita Sharma, “White Nationalism, Illegality and Imperialism: Border Controls as Ideology,” in *(En)gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*, eds. Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 122-3.

<sup>50</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 221-2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 242.

country, and I always tell them I'm a Canadian citizen; what can you do, guys? It doesn't really bother me because this is the fact, so if this is the fact I should accept it. If they say I'm a foreigner, well yeah, I came from a foreign country; what can I do? Right? A lot of people get offended by that, like: "Oh, you're being racist" or whatever. But I don't. It's my personal view. If they call me foreigner, yes, I am a foreigner. If they call me brown, yes, I am brown. What can I do? You know? Can I change that fact?<sup>52</sup>

This exchange also reveals the overlap between citizenship and race, with brown skin being seen as foreign to 'true' Canadians. Reflecting on the difference between the legal citizenship status of marginalized groups in the West and an actual sense of belonging and being *perceived* to have the rights of those belonging to the nation-state, Zine wonders: "Who has the right to imagine the nation as a community to which they have unqualified belonging?"<sup>53</sup> Evidently, despite his legal citizenship, Idrees did not yet have that right.

### **Legislative, Citizenship, and Immigration Policy Changes**

Following 9/11, Canadian immigration policy and border controls underwent a rapid overhaul. Sociologist Nandita Sharma claims that this both reflected and helped crystalize the widespread public belief that 'terrorists' were/are able to enter Canada because of supposedly 'lax' border, immigration, and refugee policies.<sup>54</sup> Canada was accused of "having porous borders and a flawed refugee determinant system, of being soft on terrorism and thus providing a haven for terrorists."<sup>55</sup> Responding to international pressure, Canada became increasingly open to suspending or lessening civil liberties and due process in the name of security. According to anthropologist/sociologist Zainab Amery, these changes have been largely supported by the Canadian public.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 6, June 26, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Zine, "Unsettling the Nation," 149.

<sup>54</sup> Sharma, "White Nationalism," 134-5.

<sup>55</sup> Amery, "Securitization and Racialization," 35.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

In November 2001, under Jean Chrétien's Liberal government, Canada passed the Anti-terrorism Act (previously called Bill C-36), which allows the preventative detention of Canadian citizens.<sup>57</sup> Following closely on the heels of the Anti-terrorism Act, in December 2001 Canada and the USA signed a 'Smart Border Declaration' which harmonized entry visa requirements (and, in Canada, toughened them) and intelligence activities between the two countries.<sup>58</sup> Shortly thereafter, in January 2002 a unanimous decision by the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that failed refugee claimants could be deported if they were considered a 'serious risk to national security,' even if they faced torture or death following deportation. Further, the ruling declared that there was no requirement to reveal to the claimant the information used to make that decision or demonstrate how that person constituted a threat to Canadian security.<sup>59</sup> In June 2002, the Immigration Act (1977) received a facelift with the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). The changes allowed for indefinite detention based on secret evidence, increased sentences for those convicted of smuggling people into the country, prevented individuals convicted of 'serious' crimes from making refugee or immigration claims, created inadmissibility clauses for those whose claims are deemed misrepresentative, created permanent resident cards, and made it easier to revoke the citizenship status of people who gained citizenship through naturalization, including if the person is deemed to be a threat to

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<sup>57</sup> Anti-terrorism Act, S.C. 2001, c. 41, assented to December 18, 2001, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-11.7/page-1.html>. See also Amery, "Securitization and Racialization," 35.

<sup>58</sup> US and Canada Smart Border Declaration, December 12, 2001, accessed April 26, 2019. <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7543>. Carpentier argues that the Smart Border Declaration was initially and primarily driven by Canada in an effort to maintain open borders with an important trading partner. See Carpentier, "Canada and 9/11," 1-2. See also Sharma, "White Nationalism," 134-5. Sharma notes that these new measures have led to the racialization of travelers "perceived to be Muslim," with many targeted for additional screening. See also Helly, "Are Muslims Discriminated Against," 40-1.

<sup>59</sup> *Suresh v. Canada (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)*, [2002] 1 SCR 3, 2002 SCC 1, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://canlii.ca/t/51wf>. See also Sharma, "White Nationalism," 135.

national security (though there is no definition on what this entails).<sup>60</sup> Later that year, in December 2002 Canada and the USA signed the so-called Safe Third Country Agreement, which requires refugees to make their claims in the first of the two countries they reach and thereby prevents anyone from applying for asylum at the border of one country if they first traveled through the other. The Agreement took effect in December 2004.<sup>61</sup>

The tightened restrictions on immigration following 9/11 had a direct impact on Zahra Rezaie's family, living as refugees in Iran at the time. Zahra, an ethnic Hazara, recalled:

I think we were supposed to come October of 2001, but 9/11 happened in September, and our files... Like just because we were from Afghanistan... Our files were here and everything was set [...]. So we were just on the line to just get our passports and everything fixed. And as soon as the World Trade Centers were hit, our files went like *whoosh*, back of the line. All the way to the back of the line. No one was supposed to travel, our files were... My mom had to be re-interviewed... [...] And so our files got pushed back and everything got pushed back, and she had to be re-interviewed; we had to go back to Tehran *again*. We had to take more pictures, more... They had to have more evidence that we weren't *terrorists* and that we weren't going to blow up any buildings and blah blah blah, this and this and that. And they had to make *sure* that my dad was really dead and we weren't some little terrorists, going to go around to kill people in North America.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the administrative delays following 9/11, Zahra and her family now had to contend with the perception that anyone from Afghanistan may pose a threat to Canada – even young children and those who lost loved ones to the Taliban, without any connection to al Qaeda.

In addition to the legislative and policy changes dealing with immigration and border security, other new legislation dealt with citizenship. Significant alterations to the Canadian

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<sup>60</sup> Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, S.C. 2001, c. 27, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-2.5/index.html>. See also Amery, "Securitization and Racialization," 35; Sharma, "White Nationalism," 126, 135-6.

<sup>61</sup> Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America for Cooperation in the Examination of Refugee Status Claims From Nationals of Third Countries, US-Can. bilateral treaty (December 5, 2002), accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/policies-operational-instructions-agreements/agreements/safe-third-country-agreement/final-text.html>. This Agreement is typically referred to as the Safe Third Country Agreement. See also Amery, "Securitization and Racialization," 35; Sharma, "White Nationalism," 136.

<sup>62</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 8, February 9, 2012.

Citizenship Act (1977) came about in 2009 and 2014, under Stephen Harper's Conservative government. As of 2009, citizenship is limited to the first generation of Canadians born outside of Canada (Bill C-37); the second generation no longer qualifies for Canadian citizenship.<sup>63</sup> The 2014 changes, encompassed in the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act (also known as Bill C-24), include residency restrictions requiring applicants to physically reside within Canada for a set period before qualifying for citizenship as well as requiring those applying for citizenship to demonstrate "knowledge of Canada and of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship."<sup>64</sup> A more controversial change allows the revocation of citizenship for individuals holding dual citizenship (whether by birthright or naturalization) if they have been convicted of certain crimes including treason and terrorism or have engaged in actions contrary to Canada's best interests. Underlying the changes is a desire to ensure that citizens demonstrate loyalty to Canada and Canadian values, though critics charge that the Acts create a second class of Canadian citizenship for those holding dual citizenships.<sup>65</sup> Other changes instituted between 2009 and 2014 include a more difficult citizenship test, an increasingly militarized citizenship ceremony, and stronger official language requirements for citizenship applicants.<sup>66</sup>

Complementing these legislative changes, in November 2009 the Harper government published an updated citizenship study guide, *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities*

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<sup>63</sup> Bill C-37, An Act to Amend the Citizenship Act, 2nd Sess, 39th Parl, 2008, accessed April 2019, [https://www.parl.ca/Content/Bills/392/Government/C-37/C-37\\_4/C-37\\_4.PDF](https://www.parl.ca/Content/Bills/392/Government/C-37/C-37_4/C-37_4.PDF).

<sup>64</sup> An Act to amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, S.C. 2014, c. 22, accessed February 25, 2019, [https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2014\\_22/page-1.html](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2014_22/page-1.html). The Act notes that it may be referred to as the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act. See also Sonia D'Angelo, "To What World Am I Being Released To?": Canadian National News Discourse and the Anticipated Repatriation of Omar Khadr," *Social Identities* 22, no. 6 (November 2016): 636-7; Paul Nesbitt-Larking and James W. McAuley, "Securitisation Through Re-enchantment: The Strategic Uses of Myth and Memory," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 3 (2017): 326-7; Winter and Previsic, "Citizenship Revocation," 59.

<sup>65</sup> Bill C-37, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act. See also D'Angelo, "To What World," 636-7; Nesbitt-Larking and McAuley, "Securitisation Through Re-enchantment," 326-7; Winter and Previsic, "Citizenship Revocation," 59.

<sup>66</sup> Winter and Previsic, "Citizenship Revocation," 58; Tolley, "Political Players," 109; Abu-Laban, "Transforming Citizenship," 3-4. Tolley and Abu-Laban both note that the stricter language requirements and more difficult citizenship test resulted in increased failure rates.

*of Citizenship*. The new guide is notable in its shift from an emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism to that of integration and adherence to a set of core Canadian values. It also demonstrates a stronger pride in Canada's military, and makes several references to Canada as a Christian society.<sup>67</sup> Historian Raymond Blake writes that, according to the new guide, "newcomer integration will be defined in their loyalty to and identification with Canadian values and norms."<sup>68</sup>

Critics found much to decry in the study guide, as well as in the slightly modified 2012 update. Gulliver charges that racism in Canada is minimized and placed firmly in the past; any racism that exists is presented as individual rather than systemic. Negative values and behaviours are framed belonging to immigrant Others, some of whom, the guide suggests, lack the commitment to equality, democracy, and the liberal, multicultural perspective so valued by Canadians.<sup>69</sup> For example, one section in the 2012 version of *Discover Canada*, entitled 'Becoming Canadian,' states that "Some Canadians immigrate [sic] from places where they have experienced warfare or conflict. Such experiences do not justify bringing to Canada violent, extreme or hateful prejudices. In becoming Canadian, newcomers are expected to embrace democratic principles such as the rule of law."<sup>70</sup> Building on Beenash Jafri's analysis, Gulliver finds that, by "presenting Canada as a liberal democracy while reproducing the racist discourses that saturate the 'war on terror,'" the guide's insistence on Canada as multicultural "creates the

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<sup>67</sup> Blake, "New Canadian Dynamism," 84, 90-1, 94, 97-8; Gulliver, "Canada the Redeemer," 70; Tolley, "Political Players," 109. Not everyone who has studied Canada's citizenship guides draws the same conclusions. Blake, for example, disagrees that the 2009 *Discover Canada* guide represents a definitive shift. Rather, he argues that the promotion of core Canadian values aimed at strengthening social cohesion has long existed in Canada's citizenship study guides, and the difference is only one of degree (84, 98). For an analysis of Canadian citizenship guides since 1947, see Nora Sobel, "A Typology of the Changing Narrative of Canadian Citizens Through Time," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 11-39.

<sup>68</sup> Blake, "New Canadian Dynamism," 99.

<sup>69</sup> Gulliver, "Canada the Redeemer," 68, 71, 77-8.

<sup>70</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, study guide (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012), 12, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/discover.pdf>.



space for the Islamophobic aspects of the ‘war on terror by pre-emptively denying that a discourse could be both Canadian and racist.’”<sup>71</sup>

Idrees would have read this guide in preparation for his citizenship test, though he did not mention it in our interview. However, traces of the guide showed up in his story. For example, Idrees mentioned several times that the problem in Afghanistan is one of diversity. I asked why he thought that diversity does not work in Afghanistan when he had pointed out that Canada was an ethnically diverse society as well and yet, in his view, did not share Afghanistan’s difficulties in this regard. Idrees responded: “You can live in peace in a very diverse society; let’s say in Canada. Why? Because rule of law is in place; everybody’s guided by law and nobody is allowed to break the law. Now, in a country like Afghanistan, unfortunately there are politicians who want, I would say, ethnic superiority over others; they do not want to respect other people’s rights. You know. And they always, always attack other people, and try to snatch their rights and freedom.”<sup>72</sup> The phrase “rule of law” as a founding principle in Canada shows up five times in the 2009 study guide and six times in the 2012 version. Idrees’s criticism of non-functional diversity in Afghanistan cannot be applied to Canada because he has learned from the study guide, which emphasizes adherence to shared values, that being Canadian includes cherishing diversity.

The 2009 and 2012 versions of *Discover Canada* also included reference to “barbaric cultural practices,” qualified by the guide as “spousal abuse, ‘honour killings’, female genital

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<sup>71</sup> Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 70. Gulliver points toward Beenash Jafri’s analysis for these ideas; I have been able to access this source but he cites it as Beenash Jafri, “National Identity, Transnational Whiteness and the Canadian Citizenship Guide,” *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 8 (2012): 1-15. In *People’s Citizenship Guide: A Response to Conservative Canada*, historians Adele Perry and Elylt Jones argue that the guide reveals the state’s failure to ensure full equality for all Canadians, centering their narrative around First Nations, minorities, and women and emphasizing the country’s history of colonialism (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2011). See also Abu-Laban, “Transforming Citizenship,” 5.

<sup>72</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

“mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence.”<sup>73</sup> Few Canadians, regardless of their religion or background, would accept such practices, and the guide was criticized roundly for implying that gender-based violence is somehow the purview of non-Westerners/Muslims while simultaneously failing to acknowledge the violence faced by many women in Canada.<sup>74</sup> The phrase received substantial media attention, and would come into play again in several years’ time (and, in fact, the 2012 version of the study guide is the one currently available on the Government of Canada’s website and it still includes the phrase).<sup>75</sup>

Drawing on the language of their new citizenship guide, in 2014 the Harper government introduced the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act. Including amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code, it received royal assent in June 2015. The Act includes provisions that make people inadmissible for immigration to Canada on the grounds of polygamy, and criminalizes forced marriage and marriage for those under the age of sixteen.<sup>76</sup> Polygamy and underage marriage were already illegal in Canada. Although no existing laws dealt with forced marriage specifically, it was already addressed under child protection, immigration and refugee, and criminal law, raising the

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<sup>73</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, study guide (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009), 9, [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2010/cic/Ci1-11-2009-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/cic/Ci1-11-2009-eng.pdf); Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Discover Canada* (2012), 9.

<sup>74</sup> Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 58. In both versions of *Discover Canada*, this citation is found under the heading of ‘The Equality of Women and Men’ on page 9.

<sup>75</sup> Gulliver notes that when the new citizenship guide was released, then-Immigration critic for (and later leader of) the Liberal party, Justin Trudeau, stated that he felt uncomfortable about the wording and tone of that phrase, though he later clarified that “all violence against women is barbaric.” See Meagan Fitzpatrick, “Trudeau Retracts ‘Barbaric’ Remarks,” *CBC News*, March 15, 2011, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-retracts-barbaric-remarks-1.985386>). However, the guide remains, despite Trudeau’s majority government. See Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 78.

<sup>76</sup> Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, S.C. 2015, c. 29, accessed January 5, 2019, [https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2015\\_29/page-1.html](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2015_29/page-1.html); see also Kent W. Roach, “Vandalizing the Criminal Code with Irrational and Arbitrary Restrictions on Provocation,” *Criminal Law Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2015).

question of the necessity of the Act.<sup>77</sup> Despite being intended to protect girls, women, and Canadian values at one swoop, those opposed raised concerns that the Act would institutionalize barriers to minority groups reporting crimes and highlighted the particular impact criminalizing polygamy has on vulnerable women and children. Scholar of law and immigration Megan Gaucher further notes that polygamy is not exclusive to immigrant groups, and points to the colonial history of the term ‘barbaric’ as a way of separating the (civilized) West from the (uncivilized) non-Western world.<sup>78</sup>

Each of these legislative and policy changes resulted in, to varying degrees, significant coverage and vigorous debate within news media. Some of the most ongoing and contested debates followed the government’s *niqab* ban during citizenship ceremonies, put in place on 12 December 2011. According to Tolley, the Conservatives wanted to make inroads into Quebec. With little political backing from Canadian Muslims and therefore little concern about alienating them, the *niqab* ban may have appeared an obvious flashpoint for rallying support in Quebec, where Islam and *niqabs* were particularly unpopular.<sup>79</sup> The ensuing media storm revealed sharply demarcated perspectives, from both Muslim and non-Muslim groups and individuals. Those in support of the ban cited ‘Canadian’ values and gender equality, while those opposed referenced the rights of women to wear the clothing of their choice and the freedom of religion guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>80</sup> Immigration Minister Jason

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<sup>77</sup> Karlee Anne Sapoznik Evans, “Forced Marriage in Canada: To Criminalize or Not to Criminalize?” *Canadian Journal of Human Rights* 6, no. 1 (2017): 54. Evans notes that in 2017 the Senate introduced an amendment to the Act that removed the mention of “barbaric cultural practices.”

<sup>78</sup> Megan Gaucher, “Monogamous Canadian Citizenship, Constructing Foreignness and the Limits of Harm Discourse,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (September 2016): 519, 523-6, 529. Gravelle further notes that the federal Liberals, in fact, initially supported the substance if not the wording of the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, though the NDP opposed it. See Gravelle, “Friends, Neighbours,” 650.

<sup>79</sup> Tolley, “Political Players,” 112.

<sup>80</sup> Jasmine Thomas, “Only if She Shows Her Face: Canadian Media Portrayals of the Niqab Ban during Citizenship Ceremonies,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 194, 198; Sabah Rahmath et al., “Asserting Citizenship: Muslim Women's Experiences with the Hijab in Canada,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 58

Kenney defended the ban, stating that “[i]f you don’t like it, if you feel uncomfortable, then maybe you chose the wrong country in the first place.”<sup>81</sup> News stories sometimes framed the *niqab* ban in connection with government efforts to reduce “bogus refugees” and “residency fraud.”<sup>82</sup> Sociologist Jasmine Thomas argues that framing women who wear the *niqab* with ‘problematic’ immigrants reinforces the notion that veiled women fall outside of Canadian norms, and illustrates how multiculturalism in Canada extends only to cultural practices seen to be in alignment with white European-Canadian values and expectations of minority groups.<sup>83</sup>

In 2013, following the approval of her citizenship application, Pakistani immigrant Zunera Ishaq mounted a challenge to the *niqab* ban in order to take her citizenship oath while wearing a *niqab*. As the case wound its way through the courts, media attention kept the issue in the forefront of the nation’s mind. In early 2015, a federal judge ruled that the *niqab* ban during citizenship ceremonies was unlawful; Prime Minister Harper responded by stating to the press that this was “not how we do things here.”<sup>84</sup> Coupled with their Supreme Court appeal of the

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(September-October 2016): 35; Beaman, “Religious Diversity,” page 10 of 18. The ban itself was not an actual law or edict, but rather a policy guideline. Further, since 2011 only two of approximately 700,000 new Canadians refused to take the citizenship oath due to their objections to the *niqab* ban. See Michael Posner, “The Canadian Selfie of 2015,” *Queen's Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2016): 8-9, 13; Shaun Fluker, “The Niqab, the Oath of Citizenship, and the Blurry Line between Law and Policy,” The University of Calgary Faculty of Law (blog), September 25, 2015, accessed December 28, 2018, [http://ablawg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Blog\\_SF\\_Niqab\\_Sept2015.pdf](http://ablawg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Blog_SF_Niqab_Sept2015.pdf). See also Andy Blatchford, “Burqa Ban at Canadian Citizenship Ceremonies Prompts Debate Amongst Muslims,” *Global News*, December 12, 2011, <https://globalnews.ca/news/188581/burka-ban-at-canadian-citizenship-ceremonies-prompts-debate-amongst-muslims-6/>; “Face Veils Banned for Citizenship Oaths,” *CBC News*, December 12, 2011, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/face-veils-banned-for-citizenship-oaths-1.1048750>.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Dunn, “Kenney Defends Burka Ban,” *The Peterborough Examiner*, December 13, 2011: A1, retrieved from *Press Reader* <https://www.pressreader.com/canada/the-peterborough-examiner/20111213>.

<sup>82</sup> For a reference to “residency fraud,” see Jason Kenney, “Jason Kenney on Banning Niqabs, Burkas During Citizenship Oath,” *National Post*, December 12, 2011, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/jason-kenney-on-banning-niqabs-burkas-during-citizenship-oath>. For a reference to “bogus” refugees, see Tamara Baluja, “Tories Unveil Bill to Thwart ‘Bogus’ Refugees,” *Globe and Mail*, February 16, 2012, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/tories-unveil-bill-to-thwart-bogus-refugees/article546604/>.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, “Only If She,” 188, 195.

<sup>84</sup> Steven Chase, “Niqabs ‘rooted in a culture that is anti-women,’ Harper says,” *Globe and Mail*, March 10, 2015, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/niqabs-rooted-in-a-culture-that-is-anti-women-harper-says/article23395242/>. See also Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 58; Beaman, “Religious Diversity,” page 10 of 18. The federal government under Steven Harper’s Conservatives challenged the court ruling that

*niqab* ban verdict, the federal Conservatives announced that, if re-elected, they would establish an RCMP-run ‘barbaric cultural practices hotline’ through which Canadians could inform on those suspected of engaging in practices such as forced marriages, genital mutilations (other than, presumably, male circumcision), and honour killings.<sup>85</sup>

Debates around immigration policies, refugees, security, and citizenship became increasingly inflamed and, at times, overtly racist over the course of the 2015 federal election campaign. The war in Syria and resultant refugee crisis led to heated debates about how many refugees Canada should accept and what they should receive after arriving. During a televised federal election leaders’ debate on 17 September 2015, Harper used the term “old stock Canadians” while defending his government’s decision to reduce or deny health care to certain groups of so-called “bogus” refugee claimants, those from designated ‘safe countries,’ and privately sponsored refugees.<sup>86</sup> The comment set off a media frenzy. The bitterly divisive *niqab*

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supported Ishaq’s right to wear a *niqab* while taking her citizenship oath; this Supreme Court appeal was dropped following the election of Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government in late 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Beaman, “Religious Diversity,” page 10 of 18; Posner, “Canadian Selfie,” 10; Gulliver, “Canada the Redeemer,” 68, 78; Gravelle, “Friends, Neighbours,” 650. See also Eric Andrew-Gee, “Conservatives Vow to Establish ‘Barbaric Cultural Practices’ Tip Line,” *Globe and Mail*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/conservatives-vow-to-establish-barbaric-cultural-practices-tip-line/article26640072/>; John Barber, “Canada’s Conservatives Vow to Create ‘Barbaric Cultural Practices’ Hotline,” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/02/canada-conservatives-barbaric-cultural-practices-hotline>; Lucas Powers, “Conservatives Pledge Funds, Tip Line to Combat ‘Barbaric Cultural Practices,’” *CBC News*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-election-2015-barbaric-cultural-practices-law-1.3254118>.

<sup>86</sup> Cathy Gulli, “Harper Says Only Bogus Refugees are Denied Health Care. He’s Wrong,” *Macleans*, September 25, 2015, <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/harper-says-only-bogus-refugees-are-denied-health-care-hes-wrong/>. Gulli provides the content of Harper’s comment as follows: “We have not taken health care away from immigrants and refugees. On the contrary, the only time we’ve removed it is where we had clearly bogus refugees who have been refused and turned down. We do not offer them a better health care plan that the ordinary Canadian can receive. That is not something that new and existing and old-stock Canadians agree with.” The “bogus refugee” debates had been taking place within Canadian media for several years prior to the 2015 election. The cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program, first implemented by the Harper Conservatives in 2012, were subject to a legal challenge and in July 2014 a judge ruled against the federal government. The government then filed an appeal and introduced new temporary measures in November 2014. The appeal was dropped in December 2015, following the Liberal victory in the federal election. See also Jacob Schroeder’s untitled assessment of the claim in *FactsCan*, October 4, 2015, <http://factscan.ca/stephen-harper-health-care-from-immigrants-and-refugees/>; Tu Thanh Ha, “Intentional or Not, Harper’s Words Draw a Line between Us and Others,” *CBC News*, September 18, 2015, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/intentional-or-a-slip-old-stock-canadians-is-always-a-message-to-the->

case and the associated hotline, combined with these types of inflammatory comments and subsequent public debates, gained such prominence that many scholars draw a connection between these issues and the Harper Conservatives losing the election to Justin Trudeau's Liberals, as well as to Quebec's plummeting support for Thomas Mulcair's New Democratic Party.<sup>87</sup>

### **Impact of Media**

The *niqab* debates demonstrate the impact of Canada's news media in shaping Canadian perceptions of immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Afghans. Media representations of these groups developed alongside state policies, and served to further conflate notions of security, citizenship, and religion.<sup>88</sup> According to social anthropologist Augie Fleras, the media play a substantial role in "framing who we think we are, what we think about, the nature of our experiences, how we relate to others, and how they relate to us."<sup>89</sup> Sociologist Rachad Antonius concurs, arguing that stories and the ways in which they are framed are rarely, if ever, neutral. Rather, these representations are a fundamental component of the processes through which power is negotiated and wielded.<sup>90</sup> And while narratives are the handicraft of culture, philosophers and political scientists Constance DeVereaux and Martin Griffin contend, the inverse is equally true – narratives create cultures.<sup>91</sup> Sites of news production and consumption are not immutable or inevitable, writes human geographer Minelle Mahtani, but rather operate

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others/article26424488/; "Stephen Harper Explains 'Old-Stock Canadians' Comment," *CBC News*, September 18, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-election-2015-harper-debate-1.3233785/>.

<sup>87</sup> Rahmath et al., "Asserting Citizenship," 36; Posner, "Canadian Selfie," 7; Gravelle, "Friends, Neighbours," 650; Gulliver, "Canada the Redeemer," 68; Tolley, "Political Players," 122-3.

<sup>88</sup> Hennebry and Momani, "Arab Canadians," 4.

<sup>89</sup> Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 2. See also Thomas, "Only If She," 188-9.

<sup>90</sup> Rachad Antonius, "A Mediated Relationship: Media Representations of Arabs and Muslims as a Political Process," in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>91</sup> Constance DeVereaux and Martin Griffin, *Narrative, Identity, and the Map of Cultural Policy: Once Upon a Time in a Globalized World* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 1.

dependently and are continuously influenced by one another.<sup>92</sup> Examining stories about Muslims, Afghans, immigrants, and refugees reveals the extent to which the media both influences and reflects widely held beliefs and ideological underpinnings.

As Benedict Anderson and others have explored, news media play a significant role in constructing a national self-imaginary and contribute to the formulation of shared values and customs.<sup>93</sup> Fleras argues that “[n]ews frames not only select, highlight, and interconnect snippets of reality to promote a particular interpretation but also normalize what stories will appear, how issues will be framed, the context in which events will appear, and the selection of approved images. Their agenda-setting functions secure a framework for organizing the news narrative, mainly by advancing a preferred reading about how the world works, what is and isn’t acceptable, and who gets what and why.”<sup>94</sup> In this way, follows sociologist Sonia D’Angelo, news media provides its consumers with national values, and further exalts those values and delineates them from those held by individuals and groups perceived to fall outside of the nation.<sup>95</sup> By disseminating ideas about what is seen as familiar and what is foreign, news media not only relay information, but also educate Canadians about various minority groups and demark those who are ‘mainstream’ and those who are ‘different.’<sup>96</sup>

Within Canadian news media, Canada’s immigration and refugee systems are often depicted as dysfunctional and susceptible to abuse. Fleras’s research finds that stories describe crises of sudden surges of immigration and refugee flows, rather than offering a

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<sup>92</sup> Minelle Mahtani, “The Racialized Geographies of News Consumption and Production: Contaminated Memories and Racialized Silences,” *GeoJournal* 74, no. 3 (2009): 258, 263.

<sup>93</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. See also D’Angelo, “To What World,” 625; Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 111; Mahtani, “Racialized Geographies,” 258; Mosurinjohn, “Popular Journalism,” 248; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 222-3.

<sup>94</sup> Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 143.

<sup>95</sup> D’Angelo, “To What World,” 625.

<sup>96</sup> Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 60. See also Minelle Mahtani, “Representing Minorities: Canadian Media and Minority Identities,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 99-133.

contextualization of the larger factors contributing to the mass movement of people, including ethnic conflict, human rights violations, environmental destruction, and global inequality, and particularly the contributions of neoliberal policies and globalization to these factors. Excluded from the coverage is the fact that most immigrants and refugees arrive in the country through legal channels and contribute to the nation's economy.<sup>97</sup> Individual immigrants and refugees are likewise framed as 'good' or 'bad' within Canadian news media, with 'good' ones providing positive contributions to the country and 'bad' ones jumping the queue, costing money, or creating social problems.<sup>98</sup> 'Good' refugees are those who flee repressive regimes, especially those with negative reputations in Western countries or perceived as Islamist. Accepting (some of) these 'deserving' refugees, argues Fleras, allows Canada to maintain a self-perception as benevolent, progressive, and morally superior to the nations from which the refugees flee.<sup>99</sup>

Beyond shaping perceptions of immigrants, refugees, and the processes through which Canada accepts them, the news media serve as a significant source of information about Muslims and Islam for Canadians. In fact, communications scholar Mahmoud Eid argues that it is the most influential source.<sup>100</sup> The vast majority of the knowledge and representations of Islam and Muslim culture received by Westerners is transmitted via mass media, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and films. When taken together, the cumulative depictions of Islam reveal an interpretation that reflects a general Western understanding of the faith and culture, heavily mediated by the interests of those with the power to shape media.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 144-5, 147.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>100</sup> Eid, "Perceptions about Muslims," 99-100.

<sup>101</sup> Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Medias and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 44-9; Jeremy D. Kowalski, "'Framing' the Toronto 18: Government Experts, Corporate Media, and the Orientalizing of the Other," in *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians*, eds. Jenna Hennebry and Bessma Momani (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 151.



Though there are exceptions, the dominant depictions of Muslims and Arabs in Western mainstream media are overwhelmingly negative, described by Said as “a limited series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world.”<sup>102</sup> Islam is often positioned in direct opposition to values assumed to represent Canada, including secularism, democracy, liberalism, freedom, and equality, particularly between the genders. In contrast to this construction of a liberated, tolerant West, Muslims are positioned as somehow out of place in Western societies and Islam is frequently connected to themes and images of backwardness, fundamentalism, irrationalism, gender inequality, and ignorance at best, and terrorism, violence, domestic abuse, and dogmatic fanaticism at worst.<sup>103</sup> Fleras contends that Muslims, alongside some other faith-based minorities, are presented as problem people, stuck in the past or creating problems through apparently costly or challenging demands. As such, they are constructed varyingly as a nuisance to be contained, a problem requiring a solution, or a serious threat to security and culture.<sup>104</sup> Despite their dynamic and widely diverse practices and cultural identities, Muslims are presented as a largely homogenous group whose values and norms fall outside of those of Canada.<sup>105</sup> Further, as demonstrated by communications scholar Jenna Hennebry and political scientist Bessma Momani, their loyalty to Canada is frequently questioned, both explicitly as well as

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<sup>102</sup> Said, *Covering Islam*, 26. See also Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 99-100; Ghazi-Walid Falah, “The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States,” in *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*, eds. Ghazi-Walid Falah and Caroline Nagel, (New York and London: Guildford Press, 2005), 301, 303; Kowalski, “‘Framing’ the Toronto 18,” 151. In *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), Jack Shaheen documented more than 900 examples of stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in film and television. In *Islam: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2002), Karen Armstrong traces the roots of negative imagery of Muslims to the medieval Christian Crusades (179-80).

<sup>103</sup> Anne Aly, “Media Hegemony, Activism and Identity: Muslim Women Representing Muslim Women,” in *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Gender, Race and Religion*, eds. Tanja Dreher and Christina Ho (New Castle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 20, 30; Alireza Ashgharzadeh, “Islamic Fundamentalism, Globalization, and Migration: New Challenges for Canada,” in *Calculated Kindness: Global Restructuring, Immigration and Settlement in Canada*, ed. Rose Baaba Folsom (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2004), 130; Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 188-9; Helly, “Are Muslims Discriminated Against,” 39; Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>104</sup> Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 177-8.

<sup>105</sup> Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 100, 102; Thomas, “Only If She,” 189, 195, 198; Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 60-1.

implicitly, with their migration status or perceived transnationalism referenced as evidence of their weak attachment to Canada.<sup>106</sup>

Additionally, argue Fleras and political scientist Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Islam has become racialized in the Canadian press as well as in popular depictions, conflated with and sometimes used as a euphemism for people of Middle Eastern or Arab descent.<sup>107</sup> Framing the ‘war on terror’ as an act of solidarity in the West cast the enemy as non-Western and contributed to creating the category of ‘Muslim’ as racialized as well as tied to religion and politics. This racialization means that people of colour who ‘look like Muslims’ (read: have black or brown skin) are seen as part of the threat regardless of their actual religion or legal status, claims Thobani, with nationals feeling themselves threatened by ‘Muslim’ citizens and immigrants/refugees alike.<sup>108</sup>

Over the past several decades, scholars have noted that media coverage of events in predominantly Muslim countries (such as wars and unrest in Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Iraq, and more recently, Syria) has frequently relied on Orientalist archetypes that emphasize a gulf and incompatibility between Islam and other religions as well as between Islam and Western societies, while also lacking any historical political or socio-economic context for the violence. These conflicts tend to receive more coverage than those which take place outside of predominantly Muslim countries.

Anthropologist Denise Helly’s study notes that coverage tends to emphasize the religion of the

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<sup>106</sup> Hennebry and Momani, “Arab Canadians,” 2, 4. Hennebry and Momani point out that activities such as frequent international travel are perceived as suspicious when undertaken by Muslims, while they are understood as evidence of an open-minded global citizen for other (read: white) Canadians.

<sup>107</sup> Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 70; Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 189. This point is made in the body of Edward Said’s academic works on the Middle East and the West. For an overview of these works, see Yasmeen Abu-Laban, “Humanizing the Oriental: Edward Said and Western Scholarly Discourse,” in *Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace: The Influence of Edward Said*, eds. Naseer Aruri and Mohammad A. Shuraydi, 74-85 (New York: Interlink Publishing, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 234-5, 246; see also Sharma, “White Nationalism,” 123.

aggressors in a way that is not demonstrated anywhere close to the same extent in conflicts involving non-Muslim actors.<sup>109</sup>

Media serve not only to circulate images of wars in Muslim-majority countries, they also reveal the relationship between those wars and Canada, bringing the conflicts home in a tangible way. Over the course of late 2001 until 2014, approximately 40,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces served in Afghanistan; 158 of these individuals were killed.<sup>110</sup> When the first died in April 2002, Canadian media broadcast the repatriation ceremony and, unlike the United States, continued to do so throughout the war. This provided Canadians with ongoing, visceral reminders of the war and the dangers posed in Afghanistan, by Afghans. In 2007, the federal government officially renamed a stretch of Highway 401 along Lake Ontario the ‘Highway of Heroes,’ as the remains of Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan made their way along the route from Canadian Forces Base Trenton to the coroner’s office in Toronto. The name had been in unofficial use since 2002, and news media frequently depicted stories of Canadians standing along the route, waving flags, laying flowers, and holding banners to honour the deceased soldiers.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Helly, “Are Muslims Discriminated Against,” 35-6. Kalin agrees with Helly’s assessment here. He points to a 2007 World Economic Forum survey conducted in 24 countries, the results of which revealed that Western media coverage of Muslim-majority countries focused on violence and conflict ten times as often as it featured culture, economics, education, or religion. Further, while Muslims tended to be presented in terms of militant and extremist activities, Christians and Jews were generally presented in discussions of religious activities. See Kalin, “Islamophobia,” 14.

<sup>110</sup> *The Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, Canadian Armed Forces, 2014): Introduction.

<sup>111</sup> Tracey Raney, “Patriotisms of the People: Understanding the ‘Highway of Heroes’ as a Canadian National Landmark,” in *Landscapes and Landmarks of Canada: Real, Imagined, (Re)viewed*, eds. Maeve Conrick et al., 47-61 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2017), 47, 55. See also Melissa Juergensen, “Portion of 401 to Become ‘Highway of Heroes,’” *Globe and Mail*, August 24, 2007, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/portion-of-401-to-become-highway-of-heroes/article692673/>; Dan Lamothe, “Canada’s Highway of Heroes: The Patriotic Tradition Lives on After Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/03/11/canadas-highway-of-heroes-the-patriotic-tradition-lives-on-after-afghanistan/?utm\\_term=.41ad93baeab1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/03/11/canadas-highway-of-heroes-the-patriotic-tradition-lives-on-after-afghanistan/?utm_term=.41ad93baeab1). The route inspired Canadian rock band The Trews to release “Highway of Heroes” in 2010. See The Trews, “Highway of Heroes,” online music video, YouTube, May 14, 2010, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrkgV5bl7kQ>.

These media representations of Muslims not only presented a negative spin on conflicts in Muslim-majority countries, they also focused on the danger that Muslim immigrants posed to Canada. Sociologist Abdie Kazemipur argues that a transformation in Canadian thinking followed the events of 9/11, in which Islamic violence was no longer perceived to be firmly the purview of international affairs but was connected directly to local life.<sup>112</sup> Muslims, especially Afghan Muslims, became the enemy within. Canadian individuals, communities, and lawmakers set about to mitigate this perceived threat and shore up their defenses against attacks, both physical and existential, at home. For example, in 2007, citizens of the small Quebec town of Hérouxville created a controversial code of conduct implicitly directed towards (a fear of) Muslim immigrants which included equality between the genders. Among other things, it admonished that “killing women in public beatings or burning them alive are not part of our standards.”<sup>113</sup> Neither of these events has ever taken place in Hérouxville. In fact, the town has no immigrant population whatsoever.

One of the most prominent and ongoing news stories followed the case of Omar Khadr, a young Canadian brought by his father to Afghanistan where he was severely wounded in a July 2002 firefight with American forces that saw an American soldier killed. Although only fifteen years old at the time, Khadr was charged with the soldier’s murder and imprisoned in the USA’s detention and torture facility at Guantanamo Bay for ten years before being sent back to Canada following a controversial plea deal. He served nearly three more years in Canadian facilities before being released on bail in May 2015. Although many news stories demonstrated a fairly

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<sup>112</sup> Abdie Kazemipur, *The Image of Muslims in Canadian Parliamentary Debates, 1994-2016: Some Preliminary Results* (London, ON: Pathways to Prosperity, 2017), 1.

<sup>113</sup> “Hérouxville Town Charter,” Hérouxville Town Charter (website), last updated April 16, 2010 (original 2007 post date unlisted), accessed February 24, 2019, <http://herouxville-quebec.blogspot.com/2007/03/about-beautiful-herouxville-quebec.html>. See also Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 183; see also Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 81-2; Tu Thanh Ha, “Quebec Town Defends Code of Conduct for Minorities,” *Globe and Mail*, October 25, 2007, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/quebec-town-defends-conduct-code-for-minorities/article18148075/>.

nuanced or even supportive stance toward Khadr, a fair share of media discussions revealed a condemnation of Khadr as a terrorist belonging to a violent pre-modern culture, resulting in his being an essential stranger to his home country of Canada and unworthy of/unentitled to the benefits of his Canadian citizenship.<sup>114</sup>

While much of the coverage of Khadr's case depicted him as inherently dangerous, rather than a mistreated child soldier, coverage of cases involving Muslim women often highlighted the ways in which they were victimized by their own religion and culture. Scholar of languages, literatures, and linguistics Eve Haque argues that the widespread coverage of the 2007 murder of Pakistani-Canadian teenager Aqsa Parvez by her father in what was routinely referred to as an honour killing (due to her refusal to wear a *hijab*) not only provided information to its Canadian audience but also "mediate[d] the imagination, construction and sensibilities that underpin the ways in which individuals simultaneously imagine their national community."<sup>115</sup> Parvez's murder, framed as an honour killing endemic to exotic, dangerous cultures, and the subsequent murder trials received much more media attention than stories about homegrown domestic violence. In these ways, the coverage reinforced a narrative about the dangers of Islam

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<sup>114</sup> D' Angelo, "To What World," 626-7, 631. See also "Toews Stands Firm: Omar Khadr is a Terrorist, Not a Child Soldier," *CTV News*, October 21, 2012, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/toews-stands-firm-omar-khadr-is-a-terrorist-not-a-child-soldier-1.1004300>; Douglas Stallard, "Letter to the Editor: We Owe Khadr Nothing," *National Post*, March 30, 2012, ProQuest; Colin Perkel, "Khadr called 'Manipulative' in Military Report to be Used by Ottawa," *Globe and Mail*, July 28, 2012, A5, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/khadr-called-manipulative-in-military-report-to-be-used-by-ottawa/article4444390/>; Michelle Shephard, "Survey Finds Divided Views of Khadr," *Toronto Star*, April 24, 2008, [https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2008/04/24/survey\\_finds\\_divided\\_views\\_of\\_khadr.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2008/04/24/survey_finds_divided_views_of_khadr.html); David Akin, "Canada Doesn't Want Khadr Back: Poll," *Toronto Sun*, August 22, 2012, <https://torontosun.com/2012/08/22/canada-doesnt-want-khadr-back-poll/wcm/2dbf987d-383c-49d5-9321-32484464c580>.

<sup>115</sup> Haque, "Homegrown, Muslim and Other," 85. See also Ann Hui, "Confronting the 'Honour Killing' Taboo," *Globe and Mail*, July 12, 2010, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/confronting-the-honour-killing-taboo/article1387273/>; Omar El Akkad and Dakshana Bascarmurty, "Aqsa's Slaying and the Clash between Religion and Culture," *Globe and Mail*, December 13, 2007), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/aqsas-slaying-and-the-clash-between-religion-and-culture/article699531/>; Bob Mitchell and Noor Javed, "'I Killed My Daughter... With My Hands,'" *The Star*, June 16, 2010, [https://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2010/06/16/i\\_killed\\_my\\_daughter\\_\\_with\\_my\\_hands.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2010/06/16/i_killed_my_daughter__with_my_hands.html).

(especially to women) and invited readers/listeners to share in a national imaginary of Canada as a tolerant, secular nation where such acts are vehemently out of place.<sup>116</sup>

This was further evidenced in coverage of the Shafia family murders, which saw three daughters and the childless first wife in a polygamous Afghan-origin family murdered by the girls' parents and older brother in Kingston, Ontario, on 30 June 2009. In highly publicized trials, in January 2012 (the same month I began conducting interviews with Zahra and Idrees) the parents and brother were convicted of first degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder under the guise of honour killings. Coverage of the Shafia trials circumscribed many of the issues at play in the murders and positioned the remaining issues as evidence of Islamic barbarity and incompatibility with Canadian values. These trials were also used as evidence to support federal government efforts to close Canadian borders (at least, to immigrants and refugees of Muslim backgrounds) and to deny requests for religio-cultural accommodations of certain immigrant groups.<sup>117</sup>

Unprompted by my questions, Zahra spoke directly to the coverage of the Shafia murders and trials in her third session. She expressed frustration with the way that the media has used the case to represent Islam and attempted to explain what is meant by '*jihad*' in the religion:

And the rest of the world is blaming Islam and ethnic people and their religion, because of their different actions, like the Shafia family. *Because* of their religion, their case became so popular. You look at down the street, some [non-Muslim] guy kills his entire family, gets away with it; no one does anything. [...] The Shafia case became so popular and people asked me often when they find out that I'm Muslim, or that my religion that I believe in is Islam and that I am from Afghanistan. They think, oh, that my entire my family, that my entire being is truly that way. But in reality I'm not a very believing Muslim. I don't practice it regularly. Oh, I might go and have a drink with my friends and

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<sup>116</sup> Eid, "Perceptions about Muslims," 104; Haque, "Homegrown, Muslim and Other," 85.

<sup>117</sup> Mosurinjohn, "Popular Journalism," 252. See also Michael Friscolanti, "Inside the Shafia Killings that Shocked a Nation," *Macleans*, March 3, 2016, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/inside-the-shafia-killings-that-shocked-a-nation/>; Christine Blatchford, "It's No Accident that Victims were All Female," *Globe and Mail*, July 24, 2009, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A204305219/CPI?u=winn62981&sid=CPI&xid=a4d05f9e>; Sheema Khan, "The Shame of Honour Crimes," *Globe and Mail*, June 21, 2010, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-shame-of-honour-crimes/article1387126/>.

at the bar, but I'm not going to go and say, "Oh, *jihad* says I must kill that person because he took my drink." [Laughs] No, there are different *jihads*: there's *jihad* of pen, *jihad* of tongue, and *jihad* of sword. And *jihad* of sword you're not supposed to use unless absolutely, *positively* necessary. And people are taking -- like Western societies are taking it so literal that they're saying, the media -- I blame the media, muahahaha [laughs] -- that it's saying that it is because of *jihad* that this is all happening. [...]

The case became very popular because of its ethnicity and religion. You look at other cases, like other... There's so many homicides in Winnipeg; there was [just] the third of the year. And all you hear is "the third homicide" and nothing else; you hear *nothing* about it. Because this was the first case -- This was an Islamic case, and this was this and this and this and this. It became so popular. And the media and the government, I think, are *consciously* trying to *degrade* the religion and the people. Because of a war that *you* caused in a country that I lived in? Because of a war that was *convenient* to *your* country, to your people? Because you had a rivalry against the USSR? I had to suffer for it? I still suffer for it.<sup>118</sup>

Research supports Zahra's perception of negative media attention on cases involving Muslims. According to Fleras, media coverage of so-called honour killings (in Canada and elsewhere in 'Muslim countries') and stoning deaths of Muslim women (in Middle Eastern countries) reinforce notions of Muslim women as victims of a violent religion and Muslim men as ruthless, religiously fanatical tyrants.<sup>119</sup> Anthropologist and sociologist Dana Olwan's study of honour killings in Canadian media demonstrates that prior to 9/11, the term 'honour killings' was applied mainly to events outside of Canada and bolstered the notion of a cultural and civilizational incompatibility between the so-called Muslim world and the West. Following 9/11, media narratives of honour killings serve a different purpose in Canada and contribute to nation-building narratives of multiculturalism, immigration, integration, assimilation, and belonging. Within these narratives, new immigrants and racial minorities in particular are linked with crime and deviancy, which gendered and sexual violence are both "essentialized and culturalized."<sup>120</sup> In stories of the murders of Parvez and the Shafia women/girls, narratives frequently highlighted

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<sup>118</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Fleras, *The Media Gaze*, 188-9.

<sup>120</sup> Dana M. Olwan, "Gendered Violence, Cultural Otherness, and Honour Crimes in Canadian National Logics," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 38, no. 4 (2013): 539; see also 535-6, 538.

the desire of the women/girls to live ‘normal’ Canadian lives, while Islam was consistently depicted as incompatible with life in a modern Canada. Causes for the murders circulated in the media centered on the refusal of the teenaged girls to wear the *hijab* and their desire to wear Western clothing, and largely excluded any discussions of family conflict based on the more universal teenaged desire for autonomy, domestic violence issues, or that the crimes were in any way a result of the Canadian context in which they occurred.<sup>121</sup>

While many of the media stories around Afghan women highlighted the dangers that Islamic fundamentalism posed to women even in the West, others described the dangers faced by women in Afghanistan. In August 2010, *Time* magazine ran a cover story that featured a beautiful young Afghan woman, a scarf draped lightly over her hair and her nose glaringly missing. The caption read: “What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan.” The accompanying story, by Aryn Baker, recounted the tragic story of Bibi Aisha, whose face was mutilated by the Taliban and her husband after she ran away to escape abuse, described the challenges for Afghan women as the government attempted to negotiate with the Taliban, and worried over what would happen should Western forces leave the country.<sup>122</sup> This story gained widespread circulation and helped further shape Canadian views on Afghanistan, Afghans, and Muslims with regard to women.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 540; Zine, “Unsettling the Nation,” 154-5.

<sup>122</sup> Aryn Baker, “Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban,” *Time* 176, no. 6 (August 9, 2010), accessed August 23, 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2007407,00.html>. Note that RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) discredits the details provided in the *Time* story. They claim to have encountered (and photographed) this particular woman prior to Western journalists and argue that her injuries, while horrific, were the work of common domestic abuse and not connected to the Taliban. See Abdulhadi Hairan, “Is *Time*’s Aisha Story Fake?” RAWA News (website), August 29, 2010, accessed August 23, 2019, <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/08/29/is-time-s-aisha-story-fake.html>.

<sup>123</sup> For an analysis of this image and other *Time* magazine cover stories featuring another Afghan woman, Sharbat Gula, see Shahnaz Khan, “The Two Faces of Afghan Women: Oppressed and Exotic,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 44 (May-June 2014): 101-109.



Outside of the Afghan-related media stories detailed here, a vast number more helped create a general climate of fear and suspicion of Muslims in Western countries. Terrorist attacks claimed by Islamist groups in the years following 9/11 include the Bali night club bombings (2002); the assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh and the Madrid train bombings (2004); the London transit bombings (2005); the Boston Marathon bombing (2013); the ramming attack on two Canadian soldiers and the shooting at Canada's Parliament Hill (2014); the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris (2015); and the multi-site attacks in Paris, including at a football stadium and the Bataclan theatre (2015). In addition, a plethora of deadly incidents occurring in non-Western countries hardly registered with Western media or consciousness.

Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the impact of social media on these public conversations, it appears that this impact was significant. Social media brought these discourses to Canadians who may not have closely followed news media or government legislation changes, with varied and polarized/polarizing opinions being disseminated as fact and shared or tweeted repeatedly. For example, based on an erroneous 2004 letter to the editor printed in the *Toronto Star*,<sup>124</sup> a widely-shared infographic claimed that refugees receive more government financial assistance than do retired Canadian pensioners, sparking outrage among many Canadians. This infographic and others like it would resurface frequently over the following decade (and remain in current circulation on social media), despite numerous corrections by the federal government, various news outlets, and refugee-supporting organizations.<sup>125</sup> Likewise, during the controversial *niqab* ban during citizenship ceremonies,

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<sup>124</sup> Thomas McCabe, "Letter to the Editor: Pay Pensioners Same as Refugees?" *Toronto Star*, March 12, 2004, A23, ProQuest. This original letter to the editor itself drew on information in an unclearly worded section of an article about Somali refugee resettlement in Hamilton, ON. See Nicholas Keung, "New Refugee Plan Eyes Small Cities," *Toronto Star*, March 11, 2004, A01, ProQuest. Versions of this claim eventually spread to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

<sup>125</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Do government-assisted refugees get more income support and benefits than Canadian pensioners do?", last updated March 11, 2019, accessed March 29, 2019,

Harper's comment on 10 March 2015 that the *niqab* is "rooted in a culture that is anti-women" sparked the viral hashtag #DressCodePM, with women sarcastically asking Harper for approval of their head coverings or clothing choices.<sup>126</sup> His subsequent comment about "old stock Canadians" while discussing cutting health care benefits for certain refugee groups similarly trended on Twitter, with the hashtag #OldStockCanadians being tweeted and re-tweeted some 15,000 times within a week.<sup>127</sup> A cursory look at social media reveals how invested everyday Canadians were in these emotionally charged debates. However, I have limited my media analysis here largely to news media.

Beyond news media, Amery argues that numerous current television shows (and those that ran in the post-9/11 period but are no longer on the air) position Muslims or Arabs in negative roles, frequently connected to terrorism and extremism. These shows, such as *24* (2001-2010), *Homeland* (2011-2018), *NCIS* (2003-present), *The Unit* (2006-2009), and *The West Wing* (1999-2006), as well as Hollywood movies such as *American Sniper* (2014), *Buried* (2010), *The Hurt Locker* (2010), *Iron Man* (2008), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *The Marine* (2006), *Syriana* (2005), *Traitor* (2008), *Unthinkable* (2010), and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) further

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<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=105&top=11>; Canadian Council for Refugees, "Refugees and Income Assistance – Rebutting the Chain Email ('Pensioners' Myth)," (website), last modified July 2013, accessed March 29, 2019, <https://ccrweb.ca/en/pensioners-myth>; Kathy English, "A Mistake that Traveled Around the World and Back Again: Public Editor," *Toronto Star*, December 11, 2015, <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/12/11/a-mistake-that-travelled-around-the-world-and-back-again-public-editor.html>; Anna Mehler Paperny, "No, Canada Doesn't Spend More on Refugees than on Pensioners," *Global News*, November 19, 2015, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2349786/no-canada-doesnt-spend-more-on-refugees-than-pensioners/>; Sonja Puzic, "Fact Check: Do Refugees Get More Help than Canadian Pensioners?" *CTV News*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/fact-check-do-refugees-get-more-financial-help-than-canadian-pensioners-1.2670735>.

<sup>126</sup> Within a week of Harper's 10 March 2015 comments, the hashtag #DressCodePM was tweeted and re-tweeted some 19,000 times on Twitter. "#DressCodePM" search, Keyhole: Social Media Hashtag Analytics website, custom data acquired via website, April 2, 2019, <https://keyhole.co>. See also Chase, "Niqabs;" Sonja Puzic, "#DressCodePM: Twitter Responds to Harper's Niqab Comment," *CTV News*, March 11, 2015, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/dresscodepm-twitter-responds-to-harper-s-niqab-comment-1.2274401>. Dalia Thamin examines the relationship between media representations of minorities and hashtag activism, including this example. See Dalia Thamin, "#DressCodePM and Re-framing the Niqab: News Sources, Hashtag Activism, and Media Representation" (Master's thesis, Queen's University, 2016).

<sup>127</sup> "#OldStockCanadians" search, Keyhole: Social Media Hashtag Analytics website, custom data acquired via website, April 2, 2019, <https://keyhole.co>.

contribute to the idea that Muslims and those who ‘look’ like them present an ongoing threat to Western society.<sup>128</sup>

All of this is important because depicting Muslims in this manner further ingrains the Othering of Muslims within Canadian society, according to Eid, and creates a more narrow understanding of collective belonging.<sup>129</sup> When the mainstream media reinforces a divisive ‘us’ versus ‘them’ binary, the persistently negative representations of Muslims aggravates relations between Muslims and other Canadians.<sup>130</sup> Further, as noted by Kalin, irresponsible media coverage can lead to Islamophobic acts and feelings, which appear on the rise in Canada.<sup>131</sup> A 2015 Angus Reid Institute poll showed that 44 percent of surveyed Canadians held a negative view of Muslims, the highest percentage of any religious group included in the survey.<sup>132</sup> Over the course that these interviews were conducted, from 2012 until 2015, the number of police-reported hate crimes targeting Muslims increased 253 percent, according to Statistics Canada, with a large increase in crimes targeting Arabs and West Asians (groups frequently associated with Islam) as well.<sup>133</sup> Canada recorded 2,073 police-reported hate crimes in 2017, an all-time

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<sup>128</sup> Amery, “Securitization and Racialization,” 46. As demonstrated by Jack Shaheen (*Reel Bad Arabs*, 2001), these portrayals were already commonplace prior to 9/11. However, Eid notes that, following 9/11, these portrayals increased in number and amplified the connection to terrorism. See Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 104-5.

<sup>129</sup> Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 111.

<sup>130</sup> Thomas, “Only If She,” 189, 195, 198; Winter and Previsic, “Citizenship Revocation,” 60-1.

<sup>131</sup> Kalin, “Islamophobia,” 10-11.

<sup>132</sup> Angus Reid Institute, “Religion and faith in Canada today: strong belief, ambivalence and rejection define our views,” March 26, 2015, 25, accessed March 16, 2019, [http://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25\\_Faith.pdf](http://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25_Faith.pdf). This is reflected in other surveys as well. A 2016 survey released by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration found that only 43 percent of respondents held a positive view of Muslims. See Levon Sevunts, “Majority of Canadians have Negative Views of Muslims: Survey,” *Radio Canada International*, March 21, 2016, <http://www.rcinet.ca/en/2016/03/21/majority-of-canadians-have-negative-views-of-muslims-survey/>. Going back in time slightly, a 2009 Angus-Reid survey found that 52 percent of respondents held a generally unfavourable opinion of Islam, while only 28 percent of respondents had a generally favourable opinion. Surveys compiled in “2.1.4 Figure 23” of Soroka and Robertson, *A literature review*.

<sup>133</sup> Statistics Canada, “Police-Reported Hate Crime, 2017,” November 29, 2018, Table 1: Police-reported hate crimes, by detailed motivation, Canada, 2015, 2016, and 2017, accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181129/t001a-eng.htm>. See also Amy Minsky, “Hate Crimes Against Muslims in Canada Increase 253% Over Four Year,” *Global News*, June 13, 2017,

high and 47 percent higher than the previous year. Much of this increase was a result of growing incidents targeting Muslim, Jewish, and Black populations, with Muslim-targeted crimes rising 151 percent over 2016.<sup>134</sup>

Stories about Islam have so permeated Canadian mainstream media that Islamic terms such as ‘*niqab*’ and ‘*sharia*’ have become part of the national vocabulary. However, as Abu-Laban asserts, broad familiarity with several Islamic terms is far from a widespread understanding of the religion or its adherents. Many people involved in creating media content are unfamiliar with Islam and therefore unable to adequately convey nuance or even accuracy in many cases.<sup>135</sup> Further, Kalin argues, Westerners tend to lack a basic degree of knowledge required to contextualize the often sensational news stories and cannot differentiate between normative Islam and that which falls far outside the mainstream.<sup>136</sup> However, the homogenized, negative representation of Islam cannot be blamed entirely on ignorance, either. Antonius argues that the dominant discourse reflects political interests in the Middle East and Muslim-majority countries.<sup>137</sup> In either case, within a media stream saturated with negative representations of Islam, these factors combine to produce a situation in which an increasing number of stories referencing Islam and Muslims do not lead to an enhanced understanding.

## Conclusion

Each of these discourses combined to create a master narrative about Islam, immigrants and refugees, and Afghans in Canada. The negative connotations about these groups apparent in

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<https://globalnews.ca/news/3523535/hate-crimes-canada-muslim/>; Jesse Ferreras, “In Canada, Jews Face More Hate Crimes, While Muslims Face More Violent Ones: StatsCan,” *Global News*, November 30, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4714114/canada-jews-muslims-hate-crime/>.

<sup>134</sup> Statistics Canada, “Infographic: Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2017,” November 29, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2018051-eng.htm>. See also John Rieti, “Hate Crimes Reached All-Time High in 2017, Statistics Canada Says,” *CBC News*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/statistics-canada-2017-hate-crime-numbers-1.4925399>.

<sup>135</sup> Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 82-4.

<sup>136</sup> Kalin, “Islamophobia,” 15-6.

<sup>137</sup> Antonius, “Media Representations,” 125-6.

government legislation and media stories shaped the context in which my interviews with the narrators took place and had an indelible impact on the stories they shared. Anthropologist Jeremy Kowalski describes the significant “cumulative impact of conflating Islam, Muslims, and Arabs into a monolithic entity, combined with the popularized belief that these groups are predisposed to violent behaviour,” contending that the entirety of news media and government actions have formed ‘Muslims’ into a homogenous, monolithic whole in the consciousness of Canadians, situated on the margins of society.<sup>138</sup> Hennebry and Momani refer to this construction as a Canadian *homo islamicus*, a sort of universal, dangerous caricature of a Muslim.<sup>139</sup> For Muslims in Canada and those racialized as such, multiculturalism has not succeeded in creating an environment where they are viewed as one group among many, with the rights inherent to all Canadians. In the decades since Canada adopted multiculturalism as official policy, Abu-Laban writes that, for Muslims (and, I would argue, particularly for Afghan-Canadians), “it is not multiculturalism’s promised recognition that has emerged but, rather, misrecognition.”<sup>140</sup> In the following chapter, I examine the ways in which the narrators respond to these discourses and negotiate their own self-representations in light of them.

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<sup>138</sup> Kowalski, “‘Framing’ the Toronto 18,” 139-40.

<sup>139</sup> Hennebry and Momani, “Arab Canadians,” 9-10.

<sup>140</sup> Abu-Laban, “On the Borderlines,” 83-4.

### Chapter 3 Being (an Othered) Canadian: The Narrators Respond

The commonly circulated discourses about Afghans, Islam, and Muslim-majority countries discussed in the previous chapter did not pass unnoticed by the interviewees. Though they were rarely directly referenced, they permeated our sessions together. In fact, these discourses seemed so ever-present that, although I did not ask about them, the narrators spent a great deal of time responding to them indirectly, shaping their life stories around their edges. The interviewees shared their stories, not simply as a recounting of the past, but with an eye to the past-present relationship. According to the Popular Memory Group, memories and narratives matter less as ‘the past’ – which is “dead, gone or only *subsumed* in the present” – than the living presence they have at the time of their recollection.<sup>1</sup> In our third session, while thinking about the ways that his opinions differ from those held by his relatives in Afghanistan, Idrees Bahadur reflected on the ways they are each shaped by their environment and culture: “After you make a dough, you cannot separate those things from that dough. You cannot separate water; you cannot separate salt; you cannot separate sugar. It’s a dough.”<sup>2</sup> Like that dough, these stories cannot be easily untangled from the effects of dominant Canadian narratives.

In the previous chapter, I looked at the ways that Afghans, Muslims, and refugees were conceptualized as Others in Canada at the time of our interviews. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which narrators responded to the discourses that placed them on the fringes, if not outside, of Canadian values and society as well as how they positioned themselves in relation to those Othering discourses. I argue that, although they conformed to these mainstream narratives to a large extent, they also found ways of challenging them. This was facilitated significantly by

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<sup>1</sup> Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory – Theory, Politics, Method,” in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 6, June 26, 2012.

the extended sessions, which created a space in which alternative perspectives could be voiced. I first examine the ways in which the interviewees reflected Canadian discourses before considering the ways in which they complicated them. By determinedly maintaining and putting forward their own Canadian-ness, the narrators were able to remain within the national fold while presenting challenges to Canadian discourses on Muslims, Afghan, refugees, and immigrants. The interviews conducted with Afghan-Canadians in the 2010s reveal both personal experiences as well as how Muslims, Afghans, and refugees were conceptualized in Canada at that historical moment.

### **Narrative, Performance, and Identity**

Sociologist Sunera Thobani asserts that national subjects embody the characteristics of the nation and personify its ethics, values, and civilizational mores.<sup>3</sup> In Canada, these characteristics include being rational, responsible, tolerant, compassionate, caring, law-abiding, egalitarian, and committed to diversity, equality, and multiculturalism, and are used to distinguish those who belong from those who do not.<sup>4</sup> Although there are a wide range of perspectives and mores in Canada, ranging from conservatism to liberalism and beyond the extremes of both, these are the fairly universal Canadian values I refer to throughout this chapter and the next. According to Thobani, people who fail to appropriately demonstrate these qualities are perceived as Others who threaten the nation and its true citizens. These Others, lacking in Canadian qualities and values, remain outside of social citizenship, despite their legal status, and are perceived as culturally (and, often, racially) inferior to ‘true’ Canadians. They are positioned as outsiders who want (but are not entitled to or deserving of) what the nationals have, posing a

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<sup>3</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 3-4. Thobani notes that despite this relative position of privilege, national subjects may still be disparaged as classed, gendered, or sexed subjects.

<sup>4</sup> D’Angelo, “‘To What World,’” 624, 629; Sharma, “White Nationalism,” 134; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 3-4.

menace to the nation's security while also making unreasonable demands upon the nation-state and wasting its finite resources.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on a long practice of constructing the self in relation to an Other, Thobani continues, narratives of Canadian nationhood inflate differences between citizens and outsiders while overstating the commonalities within the two groups. When citizens do not live up to idealized expectations, their flaws are perceived as anomalies, while the shortcomings of outsiders are seen as demonstrative of the essential failures of their community, culture, and race, not just of them as individuals.<sup>6</sup> As members of a group perceived to be outsiders, the narrators used our interviews as a means of demonstrating the ways in which they do, in fact, belong within the Canadian circle.

In many ways, the stories shared by the narrators aligned closely with the broader narratives circulating in Canada discussed in the previous chapter. This is not incidental. Public discourses are significant and influential, providing constructive components of identity for individuals as well as groups.<sup>7</sup> Psychologist Carol Fleisher Feldman writes that narratives, especially national narratives, have a prescriptive shade in that they “can tell us not just who we are, and were, but who we should be.”<sup>8</sup> These narratives form part of what we react to, continues Feldman, regardless of whether or not we want to adopt them as our own. Individuals belonging to national groups share group-defining stories which are distinctive and patterned, with all members able to tell these stories in a similar fashion. Expressing their life stories in ways that

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<sup>5</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 4. See also Rita Dhamoon and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, “Dangerous (Internal) Foreigners and Nation-Building: The Case of Canada,” *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 2 (March 2009): 163–183.

<sup>6</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 5-6, 20. Sharma notes that this practice of defining ‘the Canadian nation’ “in opposition to its racialized Others” has been the practice since the 1867 *British North America Act*, in which citizens were identified as male British subjects, and has continued in various forms since the founding of the nation. See Sharma, “White Nationalism, Illegality and Imperialism,” 130.

<sup>7</sup> DeVereaux and Griffin, *Narrative, Identity, and the Map*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Fleisher Feldman, “Narratives of National Identity as Group Narratives,” in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, eds. Jens Brockmeier and Donal A. Carbaugh (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2001), 141.



align with these group narratives allows individuals to identify themselves with that group. The narratives also facilitate interpretation of events and individual experiences, as they provide a shared context and framework for meaning.<sup>9</sup> Identity, asserts British oral historian Mary Chamberlain, is safeguarded and acknowledged through the extent that personal narratives conform to broader social narratives.<sup>10</sup> The interviewees demonstrate their own belonging to Canada by sharing their life stories in accordance with these national and social narratives.

These broader Canadian discourses had an impact on the stories told by the narrators because life stories are both personal *and* social. Chamberlain states that the ways in which people react to situations, the ways they relate their experiences, and their judgments, omissions, and actions depend on their enculturation, on the stories, genres, conventions, and language available in their culture. These building blocks of narratives manufacture and safeguard shared representations that enable people to locate themselves and others in relation to a group. Such schemas are revealed in narrative patterns that highlight shared actions, values, or judgements, with the ways that individuals present themselves revealing as much about their culture, environment, and values as about their actual experiences.<sup>11</sup> The interviewees, like all individuals, were continuously revising themselves in response to their experiences, the contexts in which they found themselves, and their audiences, carefully selecting from the available narrative compositions.

Sociologist Jasmin Zine, a Muslim Canadian with Pakistani heritage, recalls learning that she could “‘perform’ national identity through my ways of talking, acting, dressing and behaving

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 396.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 393-4, 399. See also Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*; De Fina, *Identity in Narrative*, 184-5; Teun van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 69-71.

that allowed me limited acceptance within the dominant society.”<sup>12</sup> For Zine, gaining this social currency allowed her to

‘pass’ as an assimilated foreigner who had disavowed my ethnic and religious identity in favour of performing Canadianness (read: ‘the good immigrant’). But despite my efforts, I found I could never really own or claim national identity; I could only ‘borrow’ it from its rightful owners (i.e. white, Anglo-Canadians) so long as I acted in ways that conformed to the status quo culture. When stepping outside of the bounds of the master narrative of Canadianness, one risks the dissolution of ties to the imagined community (Anderson 1983). National identity then remains ‘borrowed’ from those who are the keepers of the meanings and myths of nation-building.<sup>13</sup>

This leaves Western Muslims, she argues, in the position of constantly navigating between acceptance and exile, with their “acceptability for nationhood [...] decided by fellow citizens who regard themselves as more entitled than we to imagining the nation and deciding who has a right to belong to it.”<sup>14</sup> The precariousness of this position is heightened by being, not only a Muslim in the West, but also an immigrant/refugee. Like Zine, the interviewees ‘performed’ Canadian-ness as well. Idrees openly acknowledged that he curates his responses and behaviour: “I know how to act when I’m in Canada and I know how to act when I’m in Afghanistan.”<sup>15</sup>

Suggesting that life stories follow certain patterns or genres implies that there is something dis-genuine about the stories or the tellers, as if the performance detracts from the authenticity. Although it is true that stories cannot be understood outside of the culture and

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<sup>12</sup> Zine, “Unsettling the Nation,” 148.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 6, June 26, 2012. While Afghans/Muslims/refugees currently occupy a place of suspicion in Canadian society, the interviewees are not the only demographic to have used interviews to shape public perception of their community. Lisa Rose Mar’s examination of the Chinese community in late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Vancouver reveals that, in the face of exclusion and discrimination, the community actively curated the information provided to sociologist researchers from the University of Chicago who were looking to assess integration. The Chinese interviewees collectively and intentionally disguised their transnationality and emphasized their desire to assimilate, while describing negative trends in the community as a result of discrimination. In doing so, the Chinese community not only responded to public discourses but actively shaped them. See Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada’s Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010): 8, 91. Mar further notes that this original study, which had been so manipulated by the interviewees, assisted in developing the Chicago School of Sociology, a massively influential approach to immigration, integration, and race (89, 108).

context in which they arise, this is not the same as seeing life stories as somehow predetermined.<sup>16</sup> Oral historians such as Chamberlain, Alessandro Portelli, and Lynn Abrams have highlighted certain repetitions of style, type, and theme common to personal narratives. These instances of repetition not only reflect similar or shared experiences, but also shared interpretations, priorities, morals, or outlooks.<sup>17</sup> When personal stories appear to follow patterns, Chamberlain cautions that this “is not to say that informants perform an act of ventriloquism throughout their lives; the voice is theirs, but it also holds within it the shared meanings of languages and cultural narratives and the range of relationships, recounting, and challenges that contributed to a memory at any one time and a representation of the self at any one time.”<sup>18</sup> This, she argues and following Portelli, is a strength of narratives, as this revisioning provides insight into the cultural values and priorities at play as well as a better understanding of where that individual fits into history.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, scholar of language and linguistics Anna De Fina argues that narratives represent the intersection of individual experiences and representations and the construction of societal roles and ideologies, and that analyzing personal narratives provides insight into social representations and ideologies as well as individual experiences.<sup>20</sup>

Analyzing the interviews with an eye to the ways they exhibit these patterns reveals the ways that they demonstrate their understanding of and compatibility with Canadian interpretations and values. This is *not* to say that everything the interviewees said or did was simply a performance and therefore somehow untrue to their actual characters or thoughts.

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<sup>16</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 396. Other scholars note that attempting to define what is or is not “authentic” is generally a fruitless, often damaging endeavour. See Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” 26-28; Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 398; Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 115-121.

<sup>18</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 404.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> De Fina, *Identity in Narrative*, 7. See also Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 2.

Historian Greg Dening argues that performances are a natural means of human communication.<sup>21</sup> Rather, performing Canadian-ness means that they ensured that the things they said and the images they created aligned well with Canadian values and positions. They may have genuinely held these opinions. Unlike other Canadians, however, they were, or felt, expected to voice their acceptability, as their identities as Muslim and Afghan immigrants/refugees precluded it from being taken as a given.

### **Paralleling Canadian Discourses, Emphasizing Canadian-ness**

A significant way in which the interviewees demonstrated their Canadian-ness may be seen in the ways they were able to repeat broadly circulated narratives about the ways in which multiculturalism has benefited Canada and the ways in which people from a variety of backgrounds (ostensibly) have an equal opportunity to achieve their potential. For example, although he is the least invested in being seen as a 'good' Canadian, given his plans to return to Afghanistan, thirty-two year old Bashir Ahmad from Herat described a shift in his perception of various Afghan ethnic and minority groups since coming to Canada:

I never wanted to believe in ethnicity or religious differences and those things, *but* when you are in an environment where that is the norm it *does* affect you. So when I came here and I saw people of ethnicities that are being looked down upon in Afghanistan, I see them doing *so* well and I thought, "Wow, how *wrong* we have been." Like I thought people, if they're given the opportunity, they can grow *so* much. And it doesn't matter where they were born or who their parents were or whatever their background was; people in general *have* that potential, all of them. And this is something that I kind of *knew*, but I got the evidence here in Canada. In Afghanistan or in other countries in that area, there are minorities who never advance. They don't look good, they don't behave good -- that's because they have never *had* the opportunity to advance. And here, when given the opportunities, you see that they do very well. [...]

I love it how people here in Canada can, if they choose to, they can reach their potential; they can reach almost their full potential. And in my lifetime I want to see that happen in Afghanistan, *for everyone* who chooses that, regardless of their gender or their ethnicity or their religious views or whatever. [...]

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<sup>21</sup> Greg Dening, *Performances* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 121-2.

I *hope* I can contribute to making Afghanistan a place more like Canada, in that people can just live their lives, be who they are.<sup>22</sup>

The narrators further demonstrated themselves to be good Canadians by emphasizing the compatibility of themselves and their families with Canadian values and society. Not only are they assimilated, they stressed the ease with which they adapted to life in Canada. When asked whether there were aspects of Canadian culture or society that she found different or strange, sixty-three year old Salma Shaakir, who arrived in Winnipeg in 1982, insisted that she did not: “I didn’t find it shocking or, you know, culture shock; *not at all*. Not at all. People were asking, ‘Oh, was there a culture shock?’ I’d say, ‘What? No. Why?’ *Yes*, if I was raised in a remote village or a little town and came right -- Yes, it is possible to see that. I didn’t. I came from a family that was used to that type of life. Well, of course, certain differences are here. But as I said, *my* time as a youth was so much similar to here; not as to the so much of freedom, but considering the conditions or circumstances in Afghanistan.”<sup>23</sup> Idrees, who arrived in Canada in 2003 at the age of seventeen after spending some five years in Tajikistan, likewise emphasized the ease with which his family integrated: “We didn’t find it really that hard to adapt in Canadian society; we actually found it very friendly and a very, very loving society. You know: nice people, nice city. Obviously the weather’s a little bit cold; [Penner laughs] we obviously got used to that too. Other than that we didn’t face any problems, so we’re actually happy about it and we really appreciate it. But I don’t remember any *specific* hard time where we struggled to adapt to Canadian society.”<sup>24</sup> This insisted ease in assimilation highlighted just how compatible the narrators and their families were with Canada.

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<sup>22</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

However emphatically the narrators iterated themselves as ‘good’ Canadians, it is not enough to be good Canadians who hold Canadian values. Since they are clearly marked as ‘foreign,’ the interviewees also shaped their interviews in response to Canadian discourses around immigrants and refugees which were particularly prevalent at the time of their tellings. They are not, they insisted, those ‘bad’ immigrants/refugees, the ones who arrive here illegally, jump the queue, or are ungrateful for all the money Canada spent to assist them. Though they came as refugees,<sup>25</sup> they are the ‘good’ ones that Canada wants and from whom the country benefits. Idrees was the most explicit as he emphasized that his family never schemed to get into Canada; they came through legal channels and at the behest of Canada, meeting the country’s stringent requirements. In fact, he brought this up less than two minutes into his first session, unprompted by my questions:

And we didn’t plan to come to Canada, we never planned for it. [...] We had to go through three interviews. They wanted to make sure they’re choosing the right families with *clear* history in terms of war crimes and crimes against humanity: not being involved in wars and everything. So obviously we had to go through intense interviews with the Canadian agent [...] And obviously it was a government-sponsored program; we didn’t pay for a human smuggler to smuggle us to Canada. Basically we came through legal tunnels, by the help of federal government of Canada. [...] So we were helped for a year, and after that we were settled down in Canada, and now I’m a Canadian citizen. I have my citizenship, I work, and I’m planning to go to school.<sup>26</sup>

Chamberlain writes that life stories may “follow an order that conforms to the narrative priorities, rather than one that charts a chronological life course.”<sup>27</sup> For Idrees, demonstrating himself and his family to be good refugees and acceptable to Canadians took priority, and he repeated these sentiments recurrently in his initial interviews, regardless of the topic at hand.

Not only are Idrees and his family good refugees that came to Canada through all the proper channels, he emphasized their gratitude for the federal assistance they received after

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<sup>25</sup> Other than Bashir, who arrived on a student visa and who has since become a permanent resident.

<sup>26</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain, “Narrative Theory,” 396.

arriving. This assistance, in Idrees's perspective, was completely adequate to get a refugee family on their feet and self-sufficient in short while:

If you come through federal sponsorship, the type of program that we used to come to Canada: probably this is the *best* program that you can use to come to Canada. [...] So if you have a government – federal government – behind you, and they are responsible for everything, *you* wouldn't find yourself in a place where you feel that you're carrying a burden on your shoulders and you cannot adjust. That's why adjustment was not really hard for us; we adjusted very easily. They wouldn't make you feel that this society is so hard to adjust to. *We* adjusted so easily. Because there's a lot of help out there for you.<sup>28</sup>

Idrees used every opportunity to highlight their gratitude, even in response to questions that appeared to have little to do with the topic, such as this answer to my invitation to tell me about his family: "We're a family of eight; I have five sisters, no brother. And we all went to school here; we graduated from high school. And we love being here; so basically we're *very*, *very* lucky to be in Canada, and we appreciate it. We appreciate Canadian people, Canadian government, for helping us, and basically we think we are *lucky* enough to be in this country."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this repeated, emphatic determination to highlight his family's gratitude toward and compatibility with Canada is the thread that runs through Idrees's early sessions.

Prevalent in broader Canadian conversations about refugees at the time of the interviews was a notion of refugees as drains on society, who want to take advantage of Canada's social systems, avoiding work and being supported by the government (and hence by Canadian taxpayers). The interviewees were quick to describe their families as hard workers and contributors to Canada, reflecting the Western neoliberal idea that hard work equals success and that Canada is a land of opportunity for those willing to work hard. This is most explicitly evidenced in Salma's interview. She recalled her own desire not to rely on her sponsors for long, becoming independent shortly after arriving in Canada: "In the back of my mind, of course, was

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<sup>28</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 6 of 6, August 27, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012.

the thought that I cannot be a burden forever; I have to start working and be self-supportive. But in a way it was good, because I entered into the workforce and worked hard.”<sup>30</sup> When talking about buying her first home six years after arriving in Winnipeg, Salma later again described herself as successful due to hard work: “Of course, always hard working; the only way that you could improve your life is by hard working and good planning, and then that’s what we did: kept working.”<sup>31</sup> It is not only Salma herself who is a hard worker. She described the process of sponsoring a number of her family members to move to Winnipeg, and stressed that they are also contributing members of society: “And that’s what we did, we took the full [financial] responsibility [for them]. But they all came, and right away just everybody started working right away, as soon as they could. [...] And all good citizens, all very hard-working citizens. And I’m proud to say that, that every single member of my family, they’re all working. So very good contributors to society.”<sup>32</sup> For Salma, it was important to emphasize the ways she and her family are *not* like those refugees criticized so roundly in the media for relying on the financial support of Canadian taxpayers.

If the interviewees demonstrated a desire to be seen as good Canadians and good refugees, their efforts to be seen as good Muslims were even more pronounced. Scholars note that, especially following 9/11, Western Muslims are often obligated to ‘prove’ themselves to be ‘good’ Muslims, often by vehemently condemning other, less Westernized Muslims and by highlighting their connections to Canadian values and the Canadian nation.<sup>33</sup> Thobani describes what is meant by a good Muslim: they are “the assimilated ones; they berate other Muslims for

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<sup>30</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 3, March 9, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> D’Angelo, “‘To What World,’” 625, 631; Mamdani, “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim,” 766-775. As discussed in the second chapter, these processes were already in place prior to 9/11, but heightened and made more visibly apparent thereafter. See Amery, “Securitization and Racialization,” 34; Eid, “Perceptions about Muslims,” 104-5; Kalin, “Islamophobia,” 4-5.



their cultural backwardness by wearing the headscarf, the chador, or the veil. [...] They acquiesce to American imperial interests, vociferously defend these, and know their proper place as supplicants to the west. They are appropriately grateful for having been allowed to partake in its civilizational project, and they want to aid the west in its quest to liberate their co-religionists, especially the women, around the world.”<sup>34</sup> Though we rarely spoke about these things explicitly, the interviewees exhibited many of these characteristics repeatedly over the course of their sessions.

Obliquely responding to prominent discourses connecting Muslims with fundamentalism and violence, the interviewees carefully avoided any suggestion of either in their own families. In fact, when asked during our second session about the role of religion in his family’s life, the question seems to appear so fraught to Idrees that he did not answer it. Perhaps perceiving an implication that religiosity may correlate with extremism, he carefully emphasized the values his family shares with Canadians instead:

We always believed in living in peace and harmony, regardless of whatever people follow, whatever people think. And we never disrespected other people’s beliefs and religion. And we think no matter who you are, what religion you follow, you can still live in peace and harmony. And Canada’s a good example of that: so many religions, so many skin colours, so many languages, so many races are living in peace and harmony. [...] We were always moderate people, very, very, very moderate. We believe in co-existence and in giving love, regardless of somebody’s religion, race, or colour, or whatever.<sup>35</sup>

The youngest interviewee, Noor Jan, who arrived in Winnipeg in 2004 at almost eleven years old after spending nearly her whole life in Pakistan, revealed this same caution to differentiate between religious beliefs and fundamentalism as she spoke lovingly about her grandfather and then quickly qualified her description of him: “I wouldn’t say he’s extreme, but

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<sup>34</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 237. However, she continues: “Unfortunately for the good Muslims (women and men), no matter how deep their gratitude to the nation, no matter how ardent their embrace of western civilizational norms, the new anti-terrorism measures continue to make them as equally suspect as the bad Muslims” (237-8).

<sup>35</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

he's -- he's religious. He has memorized parts of the Qur'an and he has a clean heart. So, you know, that's the kind of people you want in this world. So some people, when you tell them he's religious, they think extremism. Then I have to explain, 'No, he's not.' So -- I know you wouldn't, but I still want to explain it because it's being recorded."<sup>36</sup> Noor made sure to clarify the difference between religiosity and extremism, knowing that it could not be taken as a given. Her caution slipped at one point, as Noor laughingly described a challenging relationship with two brothers: "Ugh, I don't like the older ones sometimes. [Penner laughs] When we were younger they would always hit us and I hated that. [Laughs] They were just playing around."<sup>37</sup> However, she caught herself and immediately followed this with something that would make her family more acceptable in Canada: "Then when we got here, they just stopped hitting us; we were done. We were done with the hitting."<sup>38</sup> Noor understood that even a childhood story about fighting siblings takes on a much different tone in a Canadian context primed to see gendered oppression and domestic violence in stories about Afghans and Muslims. She and Idrees both ensured that their answers to my questions underscored their own acceptability in Canada by demarcating themselves and their families from any hint of violence or fundamentalism.

Further delineating themselves from the stories about un-integrated, fundamentalist, or violent Muslims and Afghans circulating in mainstream Canadian discourses, the interviewees insisted on the integration of Muslim immigrants and refugees into their new Canadian home, criticizing those who do not assimilate. Twenty-year old Zahra Rezaie, who arrived in Canada in 2003 after living as a refugee in Iran, spoke passionately on the topic and (unusual amongst the narrators) explicitly referenced a news story that received a great deal of media attention. She recalled, following the 2009 Shafia family murders (when three Afghan-Canadian teenaged girls

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<sup>36</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, May 27, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, May 13, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

and a first wife were killed by the girls' father and older brother, with the assistance of their mother, in what was frequently referred to as 'honour killings') in Kingston, ON,<sup>39</sup> being asked by friends what would happen in her own family if she chose to date. Zahra used the opportunity to differentiate her family from the extreme views that led to the Shafia murders, but also to insist on the integration of newcomers to Canadian mores:

And people ask me, like if I was dating someone – going back to the Shafia family – if I was dating someone, what would my mom or my brothers do? My mom would be disappointed, but not to the point that she would find a place to kill me. And people ask me, “Oh, so you’re dating this guy. What if your mom finds out?” I’m like, “I worry. I worry that she’ll be very disappointed in me, that I am doing this.” But she should have accepted the fact that once she’s moved from an Islamic republic to a non-religious republic like Canada, she should have understood that our ways of life will no longer ever be the same. [...] Now, here, I have a total different way of thinking too. And I tell them that once she accepted coming to Canada, she should have also accepted that we will change; we will follow the Western ways of life. And that’s what the Shafia family should have done. Their girls were, I think, born here. They were grown up here; they’ve been here for *thirty years* probably! They *should* have *understood* -- The father and the mother should have understood that *this is* the way they were grown up. If you wanted to have them live the way you lived, you should have just stayed in Afghanistan. Or in Iran, or wherever else you were. You can’t expect someone to follow the way you want them to follow; you can’t have them on a leash like a dog.<sup>40</sup>

Inherent in the question is the implication that it is possible that her own family might respond poorly or even violently in such a situation, simply due to the fact that they share a cultural and religious background with the Shafias. Rather than interrogating that implication, Zahra’s response accepts and validates the question. Her answer emphasized her own Canadian-ness, insisting that immigrants must take on the values of their new home rather than clinging to their old (read: less progressive) culture.

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<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the Shafia family murders, see Olwan, “Gendered Violence.” Examples of media stories about the murders may be found in the previous chapter.

<sup>40</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012. In fact, all of the Shafia children were born prior to their arrival in Canada. The eldest were born in Afghanistan and the others in the various countries in which the family resided (Pakistan, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates) prior to their arrival in Canada in 2007, only two years before the murders occurred.

Like Zahra, in his fourth session Idrees also insisted that an undefined “we,” including (or *especially*) his father, need to adapt to their new society, and he criticized those who do not:

[My father’s] mind is based on old traditional cultural ways, which I do not approve of myself. I would approve some of it, but not all of it. Because, as I said, it does not have any place in today’s society, and we have to get ourselves ready to live in this society. If we cannot adjust to this society, then *what* are we doing here? Nobody’s stopping us; why don’t we go back to our own countries? If you want to live here, okay: Canada’s not a melting pot but at the same time you have to adjust yourself to this environment so you can live openly. You cannot be as conservative, to make life miserable for yourselves and for your kids, that’s what I am trying to say.<sup>41</sup>

Idrees understood well that Canada’s tolerance for diversity has its limits. Indeed, if many of the broader discourses circulating in Canada about multiculturalism, Muslims, and immigrants/refugees could be boiled down to one phrase, it might be exactly what Idrees stated here: “Canada’s not a melting pot but at the same time you have to adjust yourself to this environment.” As a good Muslim, he separated himself from the unassimilated, conservative views held by his father and others, reaffirming his adherence to Canadian mores.

Further demonstrating themselves as good Muslims, the interviewees wanted to aid Canada and the West in providing the same liberation they have received to their co-religionists and compatriots, especially women. However, rather than focusing on military efforts, they advocated liberation through Western-style education and other charitable endeavours. Salma talked enthusiastically about the organization with which she and her eldest daughter volunteer:

My daughter did go back [to Afghanistan], last year, and she went because of the projects that we are sponsoring, just to see with her own eyes, the projects, if they are working. And she came back even one hundred percent more enthusiastic about it, saying that: “Yes, they are working.” The orphanage that we sponsor – or our organization, not us, but we try to raise awareness and send it through our headquarters – it’s a wonderful organization. Even since I went there, *lots* of big changes, huge. Especially for women and girls. So it’s good to hear that, and she saw that, the schools and the pride in the people she came across. *Lots* of now wonderful Afghan women, they are working hard.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 6, September 25, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

Although she was not involved in these types of activities at the time of our sessions, these are the sorts of things that Zahra would like to be involved with in Afghanistan one day:

Politically, when I look at it, I'm like: I want to go to help achieve something, to achieve a goal or build something. In the state that I'm in right now, I can't do anything. I can go and *look*, but I can't *persuade* anyone to build a school; I can't *fund* anything, I can't build a hospital. Those are some of the things that I *would* like to do when I go back. It's hard, and it would be expensive, but the ability to do that would be wonderful. [...]

I've daydreamed about teaching there for years now. And I was at work the other day, at the Red River Ex, and there was this platoon of soldiers from Shilo<sup>43</sup> that were, you know, talking to people and giving them information. And this guy had gone to Afghanistan and served, and he came back and he was telling me about it. I was like, "Oh, I know; I know how it feels. I know; I've been there." And we were talking about it and he said, "Change will come." And I said, "Change will only come with education. And with education, there needs to be people that will stick out *their* neck and teach those people." And it takes [whispers:] balls to go to a country like that and teach. Oh no, it's not Japan; it's not a peaceful place. [Penner laughs] So we need our own people to go in there and show them how it's done. [...] And it goes back to teaching them, to holding the light.<sup>44</sup>

Both Salma and Zahra believed that this education should come from Afghans, rather than from Westerners, with Zahra further noting that offering education with a Western approach does not work well in Afghanistan, a country with notoriously proud inhabitants. However, she also revealed hints of a Western paternalism that (especially rural) Afghans need to be taught how to perform very basic life skills: "A lot of people go there thinking that they can educate these people to the point of becoming great people. But you have to start very low; you have to teach them how to maybe -- things like how to read a map. Or how to read a book, or how to -- A lot of people know how to sew. But how to clean yourself, or how to stay clean, and blah blah blah. Very, very *simple* things."<sup>45</sup> Human geographer Mohammad Qadeer described a paternalistic view of the developing world as needing from the West care and guidance, rather than civilizing,

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<sup>43</sup> The community of Shilo, Manitoba, is the location of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Shilo, a military base.

<sup>44</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 6 of 8, December 20, 2012.

as the “new orientalism.”<sup>46</sup> While not entirely buying into the notion that Westerners should be the ones delivering this badly-needed education, for Zahra and Salma, education offered a means of liberating Afghans and they both desired to assist in these efforts.

Beyond demonstrating their own acceptability by being ‘good’ Canadians, refugees, and Muslims, the ways in which the interviewees spoke about Afghanistan also frequently aligned with how it is presented in Canadian discourses – that is to say, negatively and with a focus on violence, gendered oppression, and conflict – especially in their earlier sessions.<sup>47</sup> According to Mahtani, “[n]egative representations of the homeland in the host country may play a crucial role in the ways that the diasporic subject positions him/ herself in relation to these discourses, and the way he/ she (re)presents him/herself in his/her day-to-day lives. Memories of the homeland may well be altered, shaped and sculpted through particularly pervasive patterns of racist programming in Canadian media and have an influence on the portrayal of the self in the social landscape.”<sup>48</sup> With Canadian discourses vocally celebrating multiculturalism while also presenting negative images of Afghanistan and, often, Islam, the interviewees faced an awkward dance of expressing pride in their heritage while also minimizing their identification with it.

The interviewees recognized that Afghanistan was still a deeply troubled place, and some of the first stories shared by each are those that focused on violence and loss. Zahra recalled the violent deaths of her cousin and father at the hands of the Taliban. Idrees described young friends dying in a rocket attack. Salma referenced losing her husband in the April 1978 coup. Noor noted that her family left Afghanistan when she was a baby because of the violence; it is the only mention of any conflict in her interview. Bashir recalled his family’s flight from Herat

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<sup>46</sup> Mohammad A. Qadeer, “Paternalism or Enlightenment: The Purpose of Third World Studies,” *Third World Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1981): 693.

<sup>47</sup> The exception here is Noor, who carefully edited her interviews and transcripts during the review process.

<sup>48</sup> Mahtani, “Racialized Geographies,” 262.

to Iran to escape the conflict when he was an infant, crossing a dangerous river by donkey. The narrators may have expected that I was looking for these sorts of dramatic stories, based on their experiences with what others have wanted to know about their lives and Afghanistan. Zahra noted that people tend to want to hear about tragedy and violence: “[A]nyone else that curiosity has struck them [...] would want to know: ‘Oh, you almost got shot in the head, man!’ ‘Oh my God, you actually ran away from the Taliban!’ ‘Oh my God, you are from Afghanistan? No way!’ *That’s* the extent that a lot of people would want to know.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, at the end of her final session Salma seemed almost apologetic at the lack of violence and excitement in her life story: “I guess I told you the first session that it’s not a hugely dramatic story; it’s not a dramatic story. I don’t know, maybe some will see it as a dramatic story. And by dramatic, I mean in terms of being tortured or being in the jail or being underground or being -- no. It wasn’t part of my life.”<sup>50</sup> Regardless of motivations, these initial violent stories of flight and personal loss reinforced Canadian perceptions of life in Afghanistan.

In his first session, Idrees turned a critical eye toward Afghanistan and his experiences there. He reflected, “As far as I remember about Afghanistan: when I was a child, I haven’t seen anything but war. I haven’t seen anything but fighting and a lot of hatred among our own people. [...] And all I remember about my childhood is fighting, poor quality of life -- basically sad stories of seeing people die around me and living in war, watching rockets landing, hitting our neighbours’ house, my friends dying -- basically sad stories.”<sup>51</sup> When asked about positive memories, Idrees responded:

Unfortunately, being in Afghanistan, it doesn’t give you good memories. As someone being from Afghanistan, I *don’t* have *any* good memory from my own country to tell you unfortunately, because we were living in a war situation, as I said. The life quality was

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<sup>49</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012.

poor, and you'd go to bed: you don't know if you'll wake up the next morning, if you're going to be alive or dead. You can hear bullets around you; you can hear loud explosions, people dying and people suffering from not having at least food to eat, not having drinking water – like basic necessities of life. And it's kind of sad and heartbreaking for someone like me to see my own people going through that kind of situation.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, in Zahra's interview Afghanistan was somewhere that she is fortunate to have escaped: "I joke about not having a lot of luck, but in reality I am *very* lucky. I joke about not winning the lottery but that's quite -- getting out of a country like Afghanistan with my life, with my limbs intact and my entire family with me – mostly. [...] I'm *very* lucky to have my family, my friends, and I don't know where I would have been if my mother wasn't there or... I could have been married; I most likely would have had three kids, four kids by now maybe. Or I might even be lying dead in some grave."<sup>53</sup> Even Bashir, who maintained the strongest ties with Afghanistan, found little in the country to recommend it: "Afghanistan right now, I miss *some* parts outside the city that are green, where I went with my friends for picnicking sometimes. Other than that, I don't miss much in Afghanistan. It's *not* a great place. It's ugly, the cities especially. It's dirty. People *are* sometimes well-behaved; sometimes they aren't. Certainly they are less well-behaved than Canadians."<sup>54</sup>

### **Complicating Canadian Discourses**

Despite repeatedly and emphatically aligning themselves and their families with 'Canadian' values and highlighting the ways in which they are 'good' rather than 'bad' Muslims, Afghans, and refugees/immigrants, the interviewees did not simply let common Canadian discourses on these topics stand unopposed. They challenged these discourses in three main ways: countering stereotypical perceptions of Muslims; highlighting the ways in which Canada is

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<sup>52</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012. As the interview sessions progress, it is evident that Idrees's memories of Afghanistan are much more complex than he indicates here. For example, he recalls idyllic riverside picnics with friends and family.

<sup>53</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.



not always as ideal as it is presented; and presenting varied and complicated stories about Afghanistan and its inhabitants. In general, these more complicated perspectives came out in the later interview sessions, after the narrators became comfortable with the process and we had developed a stronger relationship and rapport. Oral historian Henry Greenspan has highlighted how sustained conversations allow for deeper engagement with the past beyond established testimonies.<sup>55</sup> For the interviewees, our ongoing conversations over the course of drawn-out sessions revealed new complexities and points of tension within their narratives.

The discourses discussed in the previous chapter had real impacts on interactions between the narrators and other Canadians, and they recalled encountering individuals who held negative opinions on Afghans and Muslims. Although they put considerable effort into presenting themselves as good Canadians with acceptable values and opinions, the interviewees were unwilling to let the negative representation of Muslims and Afghans common in Canada pass unchallenged in their interactions with other Canadians. For Zahra, reactions from people learning that she is Afghan had been frustrating. She expressed a wish to sever the perceived connection between Islam, Afghanistan, and violent extremism, noting that “when they find out that I’m from Afghanistan, they’re like, ‘Ohhh.’ And you can see the wheels turning, the light bulbs going on. And you’re like, ‘Don’t do that. Don’t think like that.’ And I try to explain to them that it’s not true that all Muslims are crazy jihadists.”<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to Zahra’s indignation, Bashir seemed to delight in upending these assumptions and the representations created through public narratives about Afghans and the war in Afghanistan. When asked how people respond upon learning that he is from Afghanistan, Bashir amusedly shared the following:

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<sup>55</sup> Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, 1-7, 217-19.

<sup>56</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012.

[Laughs] That's an interesting part of my experience. Actually I used that when I was new here, just to give people kind of a surprise or a little shock. [Laughs] I told them, "Hey, I am from Afghanistan." People were: "Wow, you're from Afghanistan." By the time I arrived here Afghanistan *was* in the news; a lot of Canadians knew Kandahar, even some of its districts. So yeah, people mostly were kind of surprised to see that I'm from Afghanistan but I do not have a big beard, I do not have a few guns. [Laughs] I don't have a few bombs attached to myself. [Laughs] And I spoke and I was social and I could joke.

The most interesting reaction I got was, I think, a couple months ago. At my other job we had an AGM – annual general meeting – at the Ukrainian [Labour] Temple on Salter [sic].<sup>57</sup> And the lady who was working there, an older lady... So we were talking in the kitchen actually for half an hour, and then I don't know what happened that I said, "Yeah, I come from Afghanistan." She went for almost a minute like, "Oh, wow, oh..." [Laughs] She continued that for a minute and couldn't say anything. And I had to calm her down and say, "No, I'm from Afghanistan, that's all. It's nothing too weird." [Penner laughs] And then she couldn't say anything after that [laughs] for a few minutes. So I liked *that*.

And I like it that I kind of... A lot of people who I met at CancerCare or in the university, I was the first Afghan they had met. So I kind of represented Afghanistan and I knew that I kind of gave them a *positive* view of the country. Because they saw that I could deal with them, talk with them, be social, et cetera. Be a normal person -- mostly. [Laughs]<sup>58</sup>

Regardless of their approach to the topic, these are conversations that all of the interviewees had over and over in their personal lives. Being Muslim and Afghan in Canada necessitated it and required them to demonstrate repeatedly their own humanity.

While the interviewees were quick to praise Canada and their lives here, the extended interviews allowed more nuanced perspectives to rise up. Challenging Canadians' perceptions of themselves and of their country was risky for the narrators, as they hazarded marking themselves as irredeemable outsiders, and their criticisms only went so far, with challenges typically presented as individual rather than societal. And yet, in the extended sessions, Canada was not simply a benevolent wonderland. The interviewees were grateful for everything Canada offered them, yes, but couched within their acclamations of the country were pointed references to the ways life here has been difficult.

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<sup>57</sup> Ukrainian Labour Temple, 595 Pritchard Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

<sup>58</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

The interviewees noted that the reality of life in Winnipeg did not match the expectations they had of Canada prior to arrival. When asked about her initial impressions, Salma responded: “I think I was maybe mostly numb. I was overwhelmed with the big change and the reality. I guess before we entered, it was maybe a little bit of a dream. But the reality was harsher than I thought. I didn’t come to a house ready for me, or a job waiting for me, a well-paid job, or a car. So the reality of immigrating to a new country and starting from zero, that was tough. It was tough.”<sup>59</sup> For Bashir, it was not only his own circumstances that proved more constrained than estimated; life for Canadians as a whole diverged from his expectations:

When I first came here, I did not get much of a culture shock; I got more of a money shock. I thought every Canadian has at least a few hundred thousand dollars in their bank accounts. [Both laugh] Then I realized that not only they don’t have that money, but most of them are in debt: for mortgage, for car, house, whatever. I was shocked. And then I had to spend some time realizing that people here are like people everywhere: they get sick, they get tired, they get hungry, they can be stupid. And I like to put it in one sentence: that people here are as stupid as people in Afghanistan. [Both laugh] Which is not the best way of saying it; you could say it in a more polite way: People here are as smart as people in Afghanistan. But I like to just say it that way. [Both laugh]<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Salma and Bashir, Noor arrived as a young child, with less than a day’s notice in advance of her departure and little time to build expectations. Even so, the country differed from what she had been led to think of it from the stories of others:

I was deceived. My cousin, one of them, told me that Canada – and America in general, she said both of them – she said that if you go there, it’s a *beautiful* place. You know, they make it up; it’s not true. [Laughs] “You go there, they give you matching clothes for every day, matching lipstick,” this and that, okay. [...]

Well, we kind of hear things like that, you know. They say *kharij*.<sup>61</sup> When they say *kharij*, they mean things like Europe, America, and Canada. They say it’s a good place; *kharij* is a good place to go to. They didn’t say *why* it was good. They didn’t say, “Cause you could find a job there, because you can build a family there.” They would just say it’s a good place. So for us, a good place is

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<sup>59</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> *Kharij* means ‘abroad’ and is usually used to refer to places in the West.

probably a perfect place. [Laughs] But it's not, and I was kind of deceived that way.<sup>62</sup>

Like many people who arrive in the country as refugees and immigrants, the practical aspects of relocating proved overwhelming. In particular, the interviewees stressed financial hardships and their difficulties in supporting themselves and their families. For Salma and Bashir, these challenges were immediate upon arrival. Salma struggled to provide for herself and her family in Winnipeg, initially working two jobs, from 8am until 9pm: "Physically it was not hard, but mentally it was hard because of my two daughters. Because at night I would go [home], and they were tired; they were already ready to go to bed. So I was just leaving them alone. That kind of breaks my heart. I wish I could have helped that, but I couldn't. And then I would then cook food until late night, and make sure that there was enough food in the fridge so when they came from school the next day around 3:30 or four, then they had food. But they were by themselves. So I think, looking back, those were a little bit tough years."<sup>63</sup> For Bashir, student visa restrictions around work caused economic challenges, limiting his own income and restricting his ability to send money back to his family in Afghanistan:

*But [life here is] not as rosy as one might think. Student life can be difficult; at times you don't have money -- actually most of the time I didn't have much money, because I couldn't work. Anything you study, especially physics, is difficult. You need your time for it. And I did not have a permit to work off-campus; after I got a permit I could only work twenty hours [per week] off-campus, and it was hard to get a part-time job with the times that would work for me. So most of the time I did not have a job, so I borrowed money from my friends back home.*<sup>64</sup>

For most of the narrators, these financial pressures lessened after several years in the country. However, for Zahra they became more pronounced as responsibility for her family's finances fell on her young shoulders several years after arriving. She described a summer during

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<sup>62</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, May 27, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

high school when her mother and younger brothers went to Afghanistan for a visit. Her older brother lost his job and Zahra spent the summer working three jobs: “I would constantly be working. I had to pay the rent, the hydro -- like everything. Everything just literally fell on my shoulders, so it was like, ‘Holy shit.’ I understand that it’s hard; living in Canada isn’t an easy thing, because of the money and all. But it was just *hard*.”<sup>65</sup>

Outside of the financial hardships seemingly endemic to immigration, at times the interviewees were startled by their experiences in Winnipeg. For Zahra, much of her criticisms of negative experiences in Winnipeg relied on the notion that the sorts of troubling things she described should not be happening *in Canada*. They are seen as un-Canadian. For example, after her family moved into a home through Manitoba Housing, Zahra noted that their euphoria soon gave way to disgust at the cockroaches and dirt: “For a country like Canada, it was disgraceful. It was nasty. We thought St. Vital was a nicer area than it is in downtown; because they had shown us a lot of houses in downtown and it just looked terrible and *bad*. Like it looked like it had been through a war, even though Canada hasn’t seen a war ever.”<sup>66</sup> Zahra later described being approached late at night by an inebriated neighbour and pushed up against her car parked outside of her home: “It was scary because I had never thought that such a thing, such an assault would have occurred in an area like St. Vital, or Canada in general.”<sup>67</sup> By describing these situations as exceptional in Canada, Zahra was still able to reinforce and align herself with Canadian conceptions of the country as a peaceful, orderly place while also pointing to the ways in which Canada does not always live up to its own self-representations.

Their own difficult experiences notwithstanding, the interviewees also challenged the idea of Canada as inherently superior to Afghanistan, a notion that they encountered regularly.

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<sup>65</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

When describing his interview with an employee from the Canadian embassy in Pakistan, Bashir recalled: “She was insisting that I wouldn’t come back if I would go to Canada, and I said, ‘Well, I eventually want to work in Afghanistan, and my future plans are all in Afghanistan. I want to get an education in Canada, but eventually I *will* be back in Afghanistan.’ [...] At one point I think she told me that ‘Canada is a better country than Afghanistan, so what’s your reason that you say you will be coming back?’ And I said, ‘For *you* Canada is better, but for me Afghanistan is better than Canada.’ [Laughs]<sup>68</sup> Later, Bashir shared that many people ask about his family and whether they want to come to Canada as well: “I tell them that, ‘Yeah, my family, my parents are back in Afghanistan.’ I asked them if they wanted to come here and they said, ‘No, what can we do there? We will have to sit in an apartment probably. But here we know so many people, so we do better here.’”<sup>69</sup> Numerous Canadians Bashir encountered expected that he and his family would prefer to live in Canada; this, he insisted, is not the case. Selecting Afghanistan over Canada when given a choice undermines a Canadian sense of superiority and calls into question the unremittingly negative images of Afghanistan circulating in Canada.

Similarly unable to let the assumption of Canada’s superiority rest unchallenged, Idrees struggled to sort out his feelings about Canada and Afghanistan. After our second session, Idrees returned to Afghanistan for an extended visit for the first time in some fourteen years, with the rest of our sessions taking place after his return. He found the adjustment difficult:

When I came back, I was *so* depressed. To be honest with you, I did not want to come back. [...] It *is* dangerous but, to be honest with you, I enjoyed my time being in Afghanistan more than being in Canada. In Canada I don’t do anything: work, home, and now I’m going to start school. So there’s *nothing* -- I don’t find anything exciting to do in Canada. Maybe I’m wrong. A lot of people my age, they love being here, they enjoy themselves. But not me, not me. I have been living in Canada for eight years: to be honest with you, I haven’t found *anything* very interesting that attracts me to do. [...]

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<sup>68</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, December 12, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

And you go there, you see *so* many people – extended family. Like *you* will not have enough time to see them, because there's *so* many of them. You will be able to make a new friend every day. You get to see new people every single day. And I think that's really good. You go out: it's *so* congested, *so* many people. And I love seeing people, because in Canada: not enough people in Winnipeg city. [Penner laughs] Especially summertime, you go to streets, it's like all you see is parked cars and trees. [...] You just feel so depressed. Especially after I came back from Afghanistan, I had a really rough time in Canada, adjusting back to the society and to my way of living. Although I was used to this living since, you know, I have been living in Canada for so long. But again, I went to Afghanistan, came back, was so depressed. I didn't want to be here. Oh my God, it was really hard to adjust.<sup>70</sup>

This marked a significant departure from Idrees's earlier stories about life in Afghanistan and his lack of positive memories, but also served to undermine the idea of Afghanistan as a strictly violent, difficult place and Canada as naturally more desirable.

It is not only life in Canada where the interviewees found flaws. After a few sessions, several narrators also directed some reproach toward the Western-led 'war on terror' in Afghanistan, though, for the most part, these criticisms remained subtle. When asked for his perspective on Canada's military involvement (a topic he never brought up himself), Idrees used the opportunity to demonstrate his support for Canadian troops while inserting a tentative complaint:

Well, as a Canadian citizen, I do support Canadian troops and I *really* appreciate their help and effort in bringing peace and stabilizing Afghanistan. But at the same time, my only, um, only – I should say complaint, or maybe not happy about: how the Canadian government is supporting a corrupt government. And I'm pretty sure the Canadian government knows that this government – I mean Afghan government – is *not* capable enough of handling the situation. And I'm sure they can do something about it. I'm now, at the same time, not sure why they're not *doing* something about it. [...] Other than that, I appreciate Canada's help and effort and our taxpayers' money in Afghanistan. They have put their blood and money in that country, in order to stabilize it, and we should appreciate that.<sup>71</sup>

Having lived in Afghanistan during much of the war that followed the 9/11 attacks, Bashir humorously described the misguided efforts to win over Afghans, gently countering the

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<sup>70</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 6, June 26, 2012.

<sup>71</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

image of sacrificial nobility often linked to military service prevalent in Canada by pointing to an undeniably ridiculous approach (though he ties it to the United States rather than Canada):

One of the things that I *first* noticed about how stupid it is and what they're doing: the US started dropping food from airplanes, and they dropped it somewhere in the desert. So kids who were shepherds, they collected that food and brought it to the market and they sold it. People wanted to see what that is, American food, so let's buy it. And I actually bought one too. It was, I think, canned beans. And I almost threw up when I ate it. [Laughs] So I thought, "Why are they so stupid? You throw canned beans into the desert; what do you want to achieve with that?" So I thought maybe they should think more.

Or they threw leaflets, propaganda leaflets. I don't know what they wanted to achieve with that. I expected them to be better thought [out], but the people who had written them or those who had translated them hadn't really thought about what they were saying. [...] I don't remember the exact words; I just remember that the translations were *so* bad, so poor. I don't remember the exact words but the idea was that the Taliban are bad, the US is here to free Afghanistan and rebuild it, and those things.<sup>72</sup>

Bashir never outright condemned the war in Afghanistan. However, talking about his experiences of it from the viewpoint of someone on the receiving end necessarily created a different perspective, one in which Western forces appeared clumsily misguided rather than heroic.

Zahra spoke of the war in a less humorous manner. In the following exchange, while countering the idea that all Muslims are to blame for the violent acts of individuals, Zahra obliquely alluded to the events of 11 March 2012, when United States Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bales left his base during the night and massacred sixteen sleeping Afghans (including nine children and three women) in two villages in the Panwai district of Kandahar Province:<sup>73</sup>

That makes me very upset, when people are like, "Oh, all Muslims are psychopath terrorists."

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<sup>72</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 4, April 14, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> "Sergeant Charged in Afghan Massacre; 17 Killed; Accused Suffers from Amnesia, Lawyer Says," *National Post*, March 23, 2012, A10, ProQuest; "Bales Gets Life Sentence for Afghan Massacre," *CBC News*, August 23, 2013, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/bales-gets-life-sentence-for-afghan-massacre-1.1406010>. For an examination of the events with consideration to the differing portrayals of acts of violence against Afghan citizens when they are committed by Taliban soldiers versus American soldiers, see Harmonie Toros and Luca Mavelli, "Collective Evil and Individual Pathology: The Depoliticization of Violence against Afghan Civilians," *International Politics* 51, no. 4 (July 2014): 508-524.



I'm like, "Mm, I'm pretty sure you just killed sixteen sleeping people; what does that make you?"

They're like, "Oh, you destroyed three thousand people in -- blah blah blah!"<sup>74</sup>

I'm like, "That wasn't me; I was eleven."

They're like, "No, you did it; *you, you!*"

I'm like, "So, if I say you killed all those African Americans in, I don't know, the South, should I say it was *you*? 'Cause you're a white, Caucasian person with blue eyes, blond hair?"

They're like, "Oh, that was different; that's different."

I'm like, "No, it's not any *different*; it's not any different. That's an act of terrorism as well as anything else. Do you understand what terrorism itself means?"<sup>75</sup>

Zahra criticized both the ignorance inherent in the notion that all Muslims share responsibility for acts such as 9/11 as well as the idea that all NATO soldiers in Afghanistan act completely honourably. In another instance, Zahra referred to the Panwai massacre more explicitly: "I'm thankful that the NATO is there, but there are things that just *frustrate* the people. Like back in March when those people had been murdered in the dead of night, they have a *right* to say, 'What the fuck are you up to? I thought you were here to protect me, not slaughter my entire family.' [...] And it's already brushed under the rug."<sup>76</sup>

In the following session, her criticisms became broader, aimed at the war itself rather than the actions of individual soldiers: "Osama bin Laden first was recruited by the CIA; he was trained by the CIA -- the people that hunted him down and killed him. This is all their own fault. Like they say 'war on terror' -- why did you create it in the beginning? They should blame themselves for their own mistakes that *they* first started. If it wasn't their *hatred* towards the Soviet Union, this would've never happened. I would have never had to lose my dad or -- I

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<sup>74</sup> This is a reference to the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, rural Pennsylvania, and on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001; some 2,995 people were killed in the attacks.

<sup>75</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012. This is one of only a few instances where the actions of Western coalition soldiers received condemnation in Western media. More than a year after this interview, on August 23, 2013, Bales was sentenced to life in prison without parole, having pled guilty in a plea deal that removed the death penalty as an option.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

would have never had to have been here. [Voice breaks] Sorry.”<sup>77</sup> Like Bashir, Zahra did not specifically implicate Canada in the war and its horrors. In each reference, she laid the blame at the feet of the United States. However, support for the war offered an easy means of further deepening the narrators’ alliance with Canada, and yet they did not take it.

Beyond challenging Canadian perspectives of itself as a universally desirable place and of its military actions as inherently noble, the narrators also complicated common views on Afghanistan itself. When asked about the perception of Afghanistan in Canada, Bashir reflected: “It’s not a happy image. It’s like a place on Mars that’s got no vegetation, no cities, and things like that. People mostly *don’t* really know Afghanistan. Afghanistan, they knew about it because it was on the news, because it was that bad place where people got killed.”<sup>78</sup> While the interviewees did parallel Canadian perspectives on Afghanistan as a place of violence and gendered oppression, this is not where their stories about the country ended. Afghanistan, in the interviews, was spoken of in highly varied and complicated manners. It represented a place of great trauma and violence, yes, but it was also the location of happy childhood memories, somewhere marked by conflict and war and terror, a place where women once had rights equal to men, a land of oppression and of tribal and ethnic strife. It was a backwards country, a beautiful culture, a longed-for home, a foreign land. It was dirty, dusty, ugly, and green, blossoming, vibrant. It was a place that was once progressing and modern and a place that has always been tribal, feudal, and traditional. The narrators attempted to convey some of this complexity in the stories they share about Afghanistan.

In contrast to the images of Afghanistan circulated in Canadian media, the interviewees described an earlier Afghanistan, from about the 1920s through the 1970s, as a place of

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<sup>77</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

<sup>78</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

advancement and culture, at least in the urban centres.<sup>79</sup> Though this period predates her own birth, Zahra expounded Afghanistan's history:

In the '60s, '70s, Afghanistan was like Europe; it was another European country. I look at pictures of '50s, '60s, '70s, and it's *beautiful*: beautiful markets, and gardens, and people from all over the world go visit there. And now they just see it as a war-torn country. It's as if the country has gone backwards instead of going forwards. I remember talking to someone from Afghanistan; they said Afghanistan had had its first underground train station before Iran even had thought of it, or Pakistan, or India. It was like Europe in the '60s and '70s, like another London. Not another London. But similar to a European country.

But it's as if like the Taliban came, it was like [makes whooshing sound], went back to like 1900s where everyone was a farmer. And my parents, my grandmother especially was like, "This is not how I remembered it." My grandfather was like, "This is not how I remembered Afghanistan." There was no *burqas* when he was growing up; women had freedom, they had the ability to wear whatever they wanted, especially in the bigger cities like Kabul and Mazar. Because it was a bigger city and a lot more visitors came. And it was a more [makes quotations marks with fingers] "civilized" city. And it was odd to them, because they grew up in – or they lived in – the times where life was good for them. And when they realized what the *true* plans of the Taliban were, they were *shocked*. And the way their people, their friends and families were executed was just *crazy*.<sup>80</sup>

Zahra demonstrated a Canadian understanding of the conflict by pointing to the arrival of the Taliban as the point where everything changed and regressed. In fact, the earlier conflict between the Soviets and the *mujahedin* as well as the civil war after departure of the Soviets left large swaths of the country in shambles even prior to the arrival of the Taliban. Nonetheless, Zahra insisted that Afghanistan's war-torn state of the last several decades is just as foreign and shocking to the country's people as it would be to any Canadian, rather than any sort of natural state.

Likewise, though she also had no firsthand experience of it herself, Noor recalled a more open Afghanistan prior to her own generation: "Because Afghanistan was kind of a free country, you know, before; even during the Russian times. My mom was saying that she didn't used to

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<sup>79</sup> Idrees is the exception here, as he is highly critical of the king in power during much of this period, Zahir Shah.

<sup>80</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 8, June 25, 2012.

wear a *hijab* when she was younger. They didn't, even when they went to class. [...] They didn't used to. You know, just really normal people. Even in the news, you would see just normal people. Just like here, you'd see the [female] news [anchors]. Maybe they were a *little* more covered, but not..."<sup>81</sup> The Afghanistan described by Noor was a free, perhaps even advanced, place with 'normal' people. Significantly, both Zahra and Noor pointed to the fact that women were not required to veil as evidence of the 'normalcy' of the country. Veiling and the construction of women in the interviews will be examined in the following chapter.

It was not only in references to the more distant past where the interviewees attempted to present Afghanistan and its denizens as normal and relatable. Even in recollections of intense personal hardship, humour and humanity infused their stories. For example, the Taliban era was described by Bashir as a time of terror, when his university professors were dragged from their classrooms by Talib soldiers and Hazara corpses swung from lamp posts in Herat. And yet, Bashir shared incredibly humorous memories from the same time. In one, he described pranking a friend by calling him and pretending to be a Talib who received information that the friend was in possession of movies (forbidden under the Taliban and punishable by death), bringing their friend to tears before finally revealing: "'Oh, no, no, I am joking. [Laughs] I'm your friend.'"<sup>82</sup>

This human face the narrators brought to stories about Afghanistan extended even to the Taliban, at least to some degree. While not expressing any outright support for the group, Noor considered why people join the movement:

[People who join the Taliban are] the only ones who can't understand. Or they could understand, but they may not have a choice. You know? Maybe the Talibans offered them something and they feel that -- They may have nothing else left. So. That's the sad side. There is poverty. What the Talibans probably want is you to go and fight for them. And in the process you might die. So nobody wants to do that unless they absolutely have

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<sup>81</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, May 27, 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 4, April 14, 2015.

to. And probably those Taliban, their leaders themselves, they don't let their children do it. They make other people do it. Of course not; who wants their child to go to war?<sup>83</sup>

Despite the loss of her beloved father at the hands of the group, Zahra similarly attempted to explain why someone might join the Taliban post-9/11:

When [President Bush] said, "This is a crusade against the Muslims" -- [...] These stories [about the Crusades and other Christian invasions] are so encoded into the culture that when they heard it was another 'crusade' by Bush, they were so frightened. They were like, "Oh my God, they are gonna come and slaughter our families, rape our women and kill our families and just take everything we have." It stirred up such a deep emotion in the societies in the central part of the world, like Middle East and some parts of Asia, that people started to take their own actions. I'm not saying that I support the actions of the Taliban, but when you look back at it and its depth and its history, it's so intertwined in the twenty-first century that everything -- You don't really know what is really what you see.<sup>84</sup>

Although discourses about the Taliban are uniformly negative in Canada, the interviewees extended to the group the same humanizing brush that they apply to other Afghans, to an extent. In doing so, they historicized the conflict and pointed to concrete causes rather than accepting the perception of the aggressors as simply inherently evil.

The media and government discourses circulating in Canada discussed in the previous chapter tend to elide any diversity among Afghanistan's inhabitants. Drawing on the information presented in these discourses, Canadians may be likely to likely to picture a fairly homogenous group of people when thinking of Afghans – an Afghanized version of the *homo islamicus* described in the previous chapter. Bolivian scholar of literature and cultural studies Javier Sanjinés highlights a tendency among writers and journalists to depict (particularly foreign and historical) societies as homogenous, especially in discussions of 'national culture.'<sup>85</sup> However, Bashir emphasized the religious variety among Afghanistan's inhabitants:

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<sup>83</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, May 27, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Javier Sanjinés, "The Nation: An Imagined Community?" *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March 2007):

In general, people [in Canada] do not have a detailed view of that part of the world. So names and countries are associated with Islam, and the funny thing is that there is sometimes a stereotypical view of the country and people there; like whoever comes from that part of the world is a fanatic Muslim, something like that. And people I talk to, I explain to them that, “Hey, in that country we’ve got people with different ideas, like you have here. So we’ve got fanatics, that’s right, but mostly they’re a small percentage. We also have people who are traditionally Muslim, which is like traditional Christians here, which means they mind their own business; they don’t care about what you do. And we also have communists, we have atheists. Afghanistan is where I got to know these ideas. And Afghanistan is where my *deep belief*, deep religious beliefs, started to be shaken – *not* in Iran, but in Afghanistan.”<sup>86</sup>

Afghans, Bashir insisted, are as diverse a group as any, and he was explicit in his desire to make Canadians understand that Afghans are no different than the people found in Canada. Further, according to Bashir, Afghanistan is not only a place filled with religious fundamentalists; it is also a place where beliefs can be challenged and reconsidered.

Underscoring all of these counters to Canadian perceptions of Afghanistan was a strong desire to be seen as real people, individuals with lives as rich and complex as anyone. In his final session, when asked how he would describe Afghanistan and how it came to be what it is to someone unfamiliar with the country, Bashir reflected:

I would just tell them that people in that country have been suffering. As far as I know, that suffering started before I was born and it continues throughout my life and it still continues. That suffering has had different forms: economic, emotional, physical. Being killed and maimed, losing family members, being under pressure, seeing the hunger of your family members. *But* overall, the people in Afghanistan are like people everywhere – on average. They’d just love to have a better, peaceful life; they would love to have jobs; they would love to be able to provide for themselves and their family members, have fun here and there. And they lie, like other people; they cheat when they can. Normal things. They’re not perfect, like other people. At the same time, they’re not demons like some think. Yeah, that’s what I would tell.<sup>87</sup>

Though not all of the narrators were as explicit in this desire as Bashir, an attempt to demonstrate their own humanity and that of their compatriots threaded through each interview. The fact that

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<sup>86</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 4, April 14, 2015.

the interviewees put so much effort into humanizing Afghans speaks to how prevalent and deeply ingrained discourses to the contrary are in Canada.

The exclusion of race from this discussion of the discourses circulating about Muslims, Afghans, and immigrants may seem like a glaring omission, though it follows a long Canadian tradition. In her history of legal racism in early twentieth century Canada, legal historian Constance Backhouse argues that a sense of “racelessness” persists in Canadian thought and national mythology, despite “remarkable evidence to the contrary.”<sup>88</sup> This racism permeates Canadian institutions, law, popular culture, and intellectual theory, while questions of racism in the country are generally met, in the words of historian, poet, and writer Dionne Brand, with “a stupefying innocence.”<sup>89</sup>

In our interview sessions, Salma and Noor did not mention racism at all. In fact, Salma noted that her white appearance means that most people do not assume she is from Afghanistan, and it never came up in my interview with Noor. Bashir laughed off my question about discrimination, saying that he gets asked that by left-leaning people, and stated that he has not really encountered any discrimination in Canada: “The reason *might* be that I experienced such *bad* discrimination, such *direct* discrimination in Iran as a child that anything here is so mild for me. And the other thing is maybe because I am a guy, and maybe when people talk to me they know that I may fire back if they discriminate against me. So maybe they’re not showing that that much.”<sup>90</sup> Likewise, Idrees insisted that he has not experienced any discrimination, other than

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<sup>88</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>89</sup> Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994), 178, quoted in Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 14-5.

<sup>90</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015. However, Bashir immediately followed this up by recalling an instance when his flight to visit family in Afghanistan included a layover in London. Upon seeing his Afghanistan passport, the airline staff in Toronto informed Bashir that he would not be allowed on the plane, even removing his luggage from the flight. He was told that he did not have a visa to go to London, and he insisted that he was not going to London, only transferring in the airport on his way to Afghanistan, which did not

jokes from friends that he insisted are “just jokes.”<sup>91</sup> Zahra talked about a high school teacher that she felt was racist, especially after giving a blonde white classmate the lead female role in the school’s production of *Aladdin*. Like Salma, she does not appear stereotypically Afghan, and she noted that people tend to assume she is Chinese or Hawaiian. It is unclear to me whether racism and discrimination came up so infrequently in our sessions because it was not a reality in the lives of the narrators, because they were following the Canadian tendency to avoid acknowledging it, or simply because I did not position it as a topic of discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout their interviews, the narrators revealed the fine balance they navigate in everyday life. “Canadian” values and perspectives can hardly be distilled into a singular essence, but an examination of overarching public, social narratives, as evidenced by government legislation, national ideas of multiculturalism, and stories disseminated in the media, among a multitude of other factors, reveals some commonalities and an idea of Canada’s self-conceptualization. If the values lauded by Canada include tolerance, rationality, egalitarianism, and a commitment to (especially gender) equality, diversity, and multiculturalism, the interviewees stressed the ways in which they share the same values. Many of their stories served to highlight their own belonging in Canada and closely mirrored broader public discourses on national identity, immigrants and refugees, Muslims, and Afghanistan. Though we did not often talk about these discourses directly, traces of them are evident in their stories and narrative choices, like animal tracks left behind in the snow.

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require a visa. Bashir became upset and asked if this treatment was because he is from Afghanistan. He was eventually allowed on the flight. This event would have taken place circa 2009-2013.

<sup>91</sup> ““Oh, you’re going back to Afghanistan, don’t bring any Taliban with you!’ You know, it’s just joking around, and I know. They apologize after that, but I allow them to... If that’s a joke they feel comfortable with me, they’re allowed to joke around with me; it’s okay. I feel comfortable totally. Because they’re my best friends and I know they don’t mean it; it’s okay. They joke, they joke; you know. Or they say like, ‘Don’t get killed by the Taliban.’ It’s jokes like that.” Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.



The initial adherences to these discourses expressed in these stories were not simply performances. Feelings and stories and perspectives can be both true *and* serve to shore up self-representations that demonstrate compatibility with Canadian society. And yet, as the extended sessions continued and our relationships deepened, more nuances arose in how the interviewees talked about these fraught topics. These more nuanced perspectives were possible because the narrators had first established their own Canadian-ness before countering common Canadian discourses on Muslims and Afghans, life in Canada, and Afghanistan. While this approach enabled them to make these challenges without marking themselves too strongly as Outsiders, the fact that they needed to take it also demonstrates the tenuousness of their social position in Canada.

**Chapter 4**  
**“When we moved to Canada there was obviously freedom”<sup>1</sup>:**  
**Muslim/Afghan Women in Canadian Discourses and Narrator Stories**

Some of the most prevalent and persistent Canadian discourses relating to Afghanistan and Islam involve women and their position in the country and religion. Egyptian-American scholar of Islam Leila Ahmed writes that “[m]ost American women who ‘know’ that Muslim women in particular are oppressed, know it simply because it is one of those ‘facts’ lying around in this culture.”<sup>2</sup> The same is true in Canada. Stories about honour killings, debates around veiling, and widespread use of imagery involving shrouded Afghan women reinforce the notion that, unlike the freedom attainable by women in Canada, Afghan and (especially non-Western) Muslim women are subjugated by their violent, misogynistic religion and culture. In the previous chapter, I examined the ways in which the narrators established themselves to be good Canadians, good refugees/immigrants, and good Muslims while reflecting Canadian perspectives about Afghanistan, demonstrating their own compatibility with Canada, before challenging Canadian ideas about itself, Afghanistan, and Muslims. Although Canadian discourses about women in Afghanistan and Islam are similarly overwhelmingly negative, the narrators demonstrate less of a willingness to challenge widely held Canadian views on the topic of women and their positions in Canada, Afghanistan, and Islam, and their stories more closely aligned with Canadian narratives. Why were they willing to provide counters to the orientalist discussions of Afghanistan, Islam, and Canada in the previous chapter, and yet largely adhered to commonly circulated Canadian ideas about women in Afghanistan and Islam?

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<sup>1</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 8 of 8, December 23, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Leila Ahmed, “Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 522.

Chamberlain writes that identity may be secured or lost by the extent to which someone is able to conform to and repeat public narratives.<sup>3</sup> Sharing stories that conformed to widespread Canadian ideas about women in Canada, Afghanistan, and Islam may have been a way in which the narrators were able to strengthen their connection to their new homeland. It may be also that their tenuous social position, due to their immigration status and religion, prevented them from mounting any sort of challenge to such a prevalent and deeply held discourse. Further, it could be that my identity as a white, educated, non-Muslim and likely seemingly Christian Canadian woman shaped the ways in which the interviewees spoke about women. Perhaps they saw gender equality as a common ground that would allow us (as interviewer and interviewees) to explain and translate stories coming out of very different cultural experiences. In all likelihood, these explanations probably factored in to the ways in which the narrators spoke about women. In this instance, however, it appears that this simplest, most obvious answer may be the truth: they did not challenge these narratives because they agree with them.

While the narrators largely agreed with and did not challenge common Canadian perspectives on the position of women in Afghanistan and the Islam they inherited in Afghanistan, at times they seemed uncomfortable with the overarching simplistic story of oppression that they encountered in Canada. They understand the diversity of beliefs around women in Islam, but their audience may only see the stereotype. They understand that women in Afghanistan have not always simply been subjugated by a misogynistic society, but their audience may not know that longer history. There is a bigger story, and while they reached the same conclusion – Canada *does* offer more freedom and opportunity for women than does Afghanistan – the journey by which they reached that conclusion is infinitely more complicated. I argue that their close alignment with common Canadian discourses on women in Afghanistan

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<sup>3</sup> Chamberlain, "Narrative Theory," 393-6.

and Islam serves to further demonstrate their own compatibility with and belonging to Canada and Canadian values while distancing themselves from the Othering of Muslims, Afghans, immigrants, and refugees prevalent in Canadian society (as discussed in the second chapter). However, while their stories fit into a broader narrative of Canada as a bastion of equality and freedom for women, the narrators add nuance to their discussions of women in order to demonstrate the actual complexity of what is often presented as a very simplistic narrative and to subtly undermine the necessity of Western countries militarily intervening on behalf of Afghanistan's women.

My intention here is not to look at particular experiences of women in Canada or Afghanistan, or about gendered experiences of forced migration, or the position of women in Islam. Further, it is not the veracity or validity of these sentiments that are up for analysis here. Is Canada a bastion of women's rights and freedoms? Undoubtedly, for a great many people, it is, though the Canadian insistence on itself as such can obscure the realities of many women that fall outside of this narrative, as demonstrated by Olwan.<sup>4</sup> Nor am I arguing that Islamic societies are particularly oppressive to women. Some of them have been and continue to be, and scholars have highlighted the efforts of many Muslim women, like many of their non-Muslim counterparts, in dismantling the misogyny and androcentrism of their own cultures and

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<sup>4</sup> Referring specifically to the Harper era, Olwan argues that while the bodies of dead Muslim women killed by Muslim men are used to strengthen national narratives around belonging and exclusion, the dangers and oppression faced by other racialized women in Canada pass almost unnoticed. She points to the example of the federal de-funding of First Nations women's associations, including the 2010 de-funding of Sisters of Spirit, an organization that works to end violence against First Nations women) while simultaneously committing over \$2.8 million dollars to projects targeting 'honour'-related violence as an example. In doing so, Olwan claims that the Canadian government uses the deaths of Muslim women to "script visions of gender equality to which the Canadian state, under the Harper regime, neither adheres to, nor financially or politically endorses." See Olwan, "Gendered Violence," 545-6, 548-9. Further, in their analysis of Zunera Ishaq's legal struggle to wear her *niqab* during her citizenship ceremony, Jonnette Watson Hamilton and Jennifer Koshan demonstrate that despite the value given to freedom of religion in Canada, not all religious choices made by women in Canada have been granted the same degree of legal protection. See Hamilton and Koshan, "The Role of Choice in Women's Freedom of Religion Claims in Canada," *Religious Studies and Theology* 36, no. 2 (2017): 171-86.

communities.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I look at the uses to which *rhetoric* around the oppression of women in Islam broadly and Afghanistan in particular has been put in Canada, and the ways in which the narrators interact with those ideas.

In this chapter, I briefly examine a history of Islamic veiling as perceived by the West and the uses to which rhetoric about veiled and oppressed Muslim women has been put in Western societies, particularly the ways this was reflected in Canadian public narratives about Afghanistan and Islam. I then analyze the representations of gender and women in the interview sessions, highlighting the many ways in which these narratives aligned closely with those circulating in Canada. Next, I reflect on the fairly subtle ways that they nuanced or added to these discourses. Finally, I consider what purpose these nuances served in interviews that largely support Canadian understandings about the position of women in Afghanistan.

These interviews took place in a specific context, and the conversations around women in Islam and Afghanistan circulating at the time had an indelible – if implicit rather than explicit – impact on the stories shared. The first, with Zahra Rezaie, a young ethnic Hazara woman from Mazar-i-Sharif, and followed quickly with Idrees Bahadur, a young ethnic Tajik from Kabul, started one month after the Canadian government banned *niqabs* during citizenship ceremonies on 11 December 2011, a highly controversial decision resulting in widespread media coverage and public debate, and during heated political and popular culture debates on Islam, refugees,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, see Margot Badran, “Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 6-28; Margot Badran, “Locating Feminisms: The Collapse of Secular and Religious Discourses in the Mashriq,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality* 50 (2001): 41-57; miriam cooke [sic], “The Muslimwoman,” *Contemporary Islam* 1, no. 2 (2007): 139-154; Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Bypassing Islamism and Feminism: Women’s Resistance and Rebellion in Post-revolutionary Iran,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 128 (December 2010): 209-228; Ayca Tomac, “Debating ‘Islamic Feminism’: Between Turkish Secular Feminist and North American Academic Critiques” (Master’s thesis, Queen’s University, 2011); Amsa Lamrabet, “Muslim Women’s Veil, Between the Colonial Ideology and Traditionalist Islamic Ideology: A Decolonized Vision,” Amsa Lamrabet (website), no date, accessed August 21, 2019, <http://www.asma-lamrabet.com/articles/muslim-women-s-veil-between-the-colonial-ideology-and-traditionalist-islamic-ideology-a-decolonized-vision/>. See also Liz Bucar and Amanda Randone, “This Woman is Giving Voice to Muslims in the #MeToo Movement,” *Teen Vogue*, June 26, 2018, accessed August 21, 2019.

and Canadian values, as discussed in the second chapter. Scholar of communications studies Yasmin Jiwani argues that the resulting media maelstrom reinforced an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ binary, with the veil held up as a tangible symbol of the difference between Canadian culture and Islam and hence of the incompatibility of Islam with Canadian liberalism and equality.<sup>6</sup> Further, they occurred only a few short years after the so-called honour killings of Aqsa Parvez and the Shafia women and girls (with media emphasis on the desire of the girls to wear Western clothing) and in the midst of the ongoing related criminal trials, and after vigorous and frequently Islamophobic public debates about the place of *sharia* law in Canada following a request for faith-based arbitration for Muslims in Ontario.<sup>7</sup> All of these public and highly polarizing conversations impacted Canadian perceptions of the place of women in Islam and Afghanistan.

### **Veiling and Western Perceptions of the Oppression of Women in Islam and Afghanistan**

In her second session, Noor Jan, a young ethnic Pashtun woman who lived as a refugee in Pakistan before coming to Canada, shared a humorous story about traveling to the Islamabad airport as a child in the early 2000s to see off a relative who married an Afghan-Canadian man: “Then she left. We see her in the airport; she takes her *hijab* and stuff off and she goes. [Laughs] I’m like, ‘Okay!’ [Laughs] A modern -- just a modern lady, I guess; yeah. [...] Every step she got closer, her *hijab* got smaller, smaller, and then eventually she took it off. [Penner laughs]

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<sup>6</sup> Yasmin Jiwani, “Doubling Discourses and the Veiled Other,” in *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Sherene Razak, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2010), 62-83; Thomas, “Only if She,” 189.

<sup>7</sup> Zine notes that faith-based arbitration had been available since 1991, with rabbinical courts for Jewish people and culturally-based healing circles available to First Nations people. When Muslims requested a similar opportunity to use *fiqh* (an Islamic jurisprudence system) in civil matters, public debates focused on the possibility of women being stoned to death and other extreme practices, based on their perceived acceptability in *sharia* law. The debates became so heated that, in 2003, Premier Dalton McGuinty ended all faith-based arbitration in the province. See Zine, “Unsettling the Nation,” 152-53; Sherene H. Razack, “The ‘Sharia Law Debate’ in Ontario: The Modernity/ Premodernity Distinction in Legal Efforts to Protect Women from Culture,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2007): 3-32; James Sturcke, “Sharia Law in Canada, Almost,” *The Guardian*, February 8, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2008/feb/08/sharialawincanadaalmost>; Colin Freeze and Karen Howlett, “McGuinty Government Rules Out Use of Sharia Law,” *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 2005, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/mcguinty-government-rules-out-use-of-sharia-law/article18247682/>.

We're like, 'Oh, nice curly hair.' [Both laugh] And then she left."<sup>8</sup> In this story, Noor's relative gradually uncovered her hair as she got closer to leaving for Canada, and removed her *hijab* entirely as the final step in her journey. The anecdote uses veiling/unveiling as a way of tangibly demarcating between life in Pakistan (the 'Orient') and Canada (the 'Occident').

In the West, the veil has come to act as a stand-in for the perceived repressiveness and oppressiveness of Islam and the subordinate position of women within the religion, if not for the inferiority of Muslim cultures in general, and its sight immediately and visibly demarcates an Islamic otherness.<sup>9</sup> Australian scholar and Member of Parliament Anne Aly contends that the veil is perceived to threaten the basic Western values of democracy, liberalism, state secularism, and equality, and stands as a symbol of the threat posed by Islam.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, philosopher Alia Al-Saji writes that, in Western thought, "Muslim families, men, and women are defined relative to the veil – and to its associated connotations of seclusion, oppression, invisibility, and lack of subjectivity."<sup>11</sup> This construction of Islam as incompatible with progress and Muslim women as veiled and hence oppressed emerged in Western discourses in the nineteenth century, to a large extent coinciding with the establishment of European colonial powers in predominantly Muslim countries. Veiled Muslim women are positioned as the antithesis of freedom, with both the

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<sup>8</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, May 13, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds," par. 5. Hoodfar argues that although the meaning of the veil has remained static for Westerners since the nineteenth century, in Muslim cultures its function, meaning, and significance has varied immensely. She further notes that an implication of persistent colonial and racist reactions to and representations of Muslim communities is that they must struggle to protect their identities. This struggle and the entrenchment of some cultural or religious practices actually make it more difficult for Muslim women to express frustration about aspects of their communities or to question the use of veiling themselves (par. 6).

<sup>10</sup> Aly, "Media Hegemony," 20.

<sup>11</sup> Alia Al-Saji, "Muslim Women and the Rhetoric of Freedom," in *Constructing the Nation: A Race and Nationalism Reader*, eds. Mariana Ortega and Linda Martin Alcoff (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 71.

perceived freedom (and hence superiority) of Western women and society and the oppression of Muslim women being naturalized.<sup>12</sup>

This is particularly noticeable in Western narratives around Afghanistan, according to American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, where the ultimate image of Taliban oppression is that of Afghan women forced to wear the *burqa*.<sup>13</sup> The issue of women's oppression under Taliban rule began circulating in Western discourses in 1996, when the Taliban took control of (most of) Afghanistan, though initially it did not trigger military mobilization.<sup>14</sup> The plight of Afghan women under Taliban rule received a boost in public awareness in March 1999, when Jay and Mavis Leno collaborated with the Feminist Majority Foundation to host a celebrity-studded event as part of their "Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan" campaign.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, popular magazines,<sup>16</sup> prominent newspapers,<sup>17</sup> and feminist journals<sup>18</sup> ran articles

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 67, 69, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 785.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Saji, "Muslim Women," 72; Yasmin Jiwani, "Helpless Maidens and Chivalrous Knights: Afghan Women in the Canadian Press," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 731-2. There were some Western media references to the oppression of Afghan women earlier than this, including during the early communist years as well as during the period of civil unrest following the withdrawal of Soviet forces. See Carol Anne Douglas, "Afghan Women: Books or Veils?" *Off Our Backs* 10, no. 4 (April 1980): 3. See also "Back to the Veil," *Off Our Backs* 22, no. 6 (June 1992): 3. However, the topic gained increased attention following Afghanistan's takeover by the Taliban.

<sup>15</sup> Feminist Majority Foundation, "Campaign for Afghan Women & Girls," (website), no date, accessed March 3, 2019, <http://www.feminist.org/afghan/index.asp>. It appears as though the Feminist Majority Foundation's "Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan" campaign launched two years prior to this event, in 1997. See also Julie Moffett, "Afghanistan: U.S. Celebrities Protest Taliban's Rules Against Women," *RadioFreeEurope*, April 9, 1999, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1090972.html>; Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 339-40; Jiwani, "Helpless Maidens," 732.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Fields-Meyer, "Speaking Out," *People*, November 16, 1998, <https://people.com/archive/speaking-out-vol-50-no-18/>.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Crossette, "Afghan Women Demanding End to their Repression by Militants," *New York Times*, April 6, 1998, 1, ProQuest; Marlise Simons, "Cry of Muslim Women for Equal Rights is Rising," *New York Times*, March 9, 1998, 1, ProQuest; Sharon Waxman, "A Cause Unveiled: Hollywood Women Have Made the Plight of Afghan Women Their Own – Sight Unseen," *Washington Post*, March 30, 1999, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>18</sup> "Afghanistan: U.N. Denies Aid," *Off Our Backs* 28, no. 5 (May 1998): 3, JSTOR; Genevieve Howe, "Fighting Gender Apartheid Under the Taliban," *Sojourner* 24, no. 5 (1999): 9, 16, Lesbian Herstory Archives; Noreen Shanahan, "Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan," *Siren Magazine* (February-March 2000): 22-23, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives; "Stop the Taliban; a Day for Our Daughters; Thanks to Unsung Heroes," *Hera* (May-June 1998), Lesbian Herstory Archives.



highlighting their oppression. According to Canadian-Iranian sociocultural anthropologist Homa Hoodfar, “[w]henver unfolding events confirm western stereotypes about Muslim women, researchers and journalists rush to spread the news of Muslim women’s oppression.”<sup>19</sup>

Stories about Afghan women rose sharply in frequency and prominence following the events of 9/11. In a great many of these stories, Jiwani notes, Afghan women are presented as victims through no fault other than having been born women, while any reference to the Taliban can scarcely evade an almost mantra-like mention of their suppression of women’s rights.<sup>20</sup> Life under the Taliban was (and is) certainly not easy for women. Girls were forbidden from attending school and women from university; women were not allowed to work in paid employment, had to wear *burqas* (a full-body covering with a mesh opening for vision), and required a male relative (a *mahram*) to accompany them outside of the home.<sup>21</sup> Largely ignored in the media coverage that followed 9/11 was the fact that Taliban regulations most impacted largely urban women, with little changing for rural women, and that the oppression of many women was scarcely more severe under the Taliban than it had been in the years prior to their takeover. In fact, mandatory veiling had been instituted under US- and Saudi-backed *mujahedin* following their expulsion of the Soviet-backed communist regime, though this background did not make it into widespread Canadian consciousness.<sup>22</sup> The focus on the Taliban and their

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<sup>19</sup> Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds,” par. 50; see also Dana L. Cloud, “‘To Veil the Threat of Terror’: Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (August 2004): 294.

<sup>20</sup> Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 735-6. This type of gendered justification of the ‘war on terror’ is evidenced in American First Lady Laura Bush’s highly publicized radio address from 17 November 2001, in which she contrasted the “blessings of American life” with the inhumanity of “the terrorists and the Taliban” (linked together in her speech and frequently thereafter in Western media), whose “central goal” is the “brutal oppression of women.” See Charity Wallace, “Radio Address by Mrs. Laura W. Bush, Crawford, TX, November 17, 2001,” George W. Bush Presidential Center, accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/articles/2013/02/radio-address-by-mrs-laura-w-bush-crawford-tx-november-17-2001.html>. See also Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving,” 784.

<sup>21</sup> Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics,” 340.

<sup>22</sup> Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 732-3; Sonali Kolhatkar, “The Impact of U.S. Intervention on Afghan Women’s Rights,” *Berkeley Women’s Law Journal* 17 (2002): 17. This had, in fact, been reported in the press in the

particular forms of oppression obscures any previous Western involvement in Afghanistan and the impact of that involvement on its women.<sup>23</sup>

### **Gender in the Interviews – Reflecting Canadian Perspectives**

The interviewees demonstrated, for the most part, ways of speaking about Muslim and Afghan women that have become common in Canada and other Western countries. Reflecting these narratives, they repeatedly decried the abject position of women in Afghanistan and emphasized the ways in which life in Canada is better for women. The stories they shared about women, while reflecting their genuinely-held beliefs that life for women in Afghanistan is especially fraught and that Canada offers a great deal more freedom and opportunity, also served to shore up their compatibility with Canadian positions and values.

Of the narrators, Zahra and Salma Shaakir, a senior woman who immigrated to Canada from Kabul in 1982, were the most loudly insistent on women's rights, repeatedly introducing the topic in their sessions and speaking at length about their commitment to women's rights and the position of women in Canada versus Afghanistan. They both set up life for women in Afghanistan as a foil against which life for women in Canada demonstrated their own belonging to Canada and support for its purported values. For example, when recalling her (first and only) return visit to Afghanistan several years prior to the interview, Salma described her discomfort:

I did go back to Afghanistan a few years ago. I didn't feel at home, believe it or not. I didn't feel at home. Because the people that I used to know, they were not there. The architecture that I was used to was not there; it was influenced by Pakistan or India, and people's homes were that kind of style. [...] And even the way I had to go outside to... So *that* was a shock to me actually. Because I had to wear that long coat, I had to cover, and mostly I had to make sure I was -- I had to be with a male. And it was like, that year

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early 1990s with the takeover of Afghanistan by *mujahedin* militia forces; however, it does not appear to have made a lasting impression at that time. See Steve Coll and William Branigan, "Afghanistan's Capital Falls to Muslim Rebels," *Washington Post*, April 26, 1992, A1; "Afghanistan: Back to the Veil," *Off Our Backs* 22, no. 6 (June 1992): 3.

<sup>23</sup> Jiwani, "Helpless Maidens," 735-6; Ann Russo, "The Feminist Majority Foundation's Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid: The Intersections of Feminism and Imperialism in the United States," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 558-9.

– which is quite a few years ago actually; eight, nine years ago – it was lots of males. Even now actually -- Last night, yesterday they were showing a little bit on BBC,<sup>24</sup> showing the Kabul streets, and they said that you can hardly see a woman. You *do* certain times; when the schools are out, you see the girls. But mostly it's lots of -- It's like men-dominated; you see lots of men. It's just uncomfortable -- Because when I was going there were just as many women as men. But now maybe most women stay home, or some that they go to their school, so certain times of the day, but on every hour of the day you see lots of men around. So I -- I didn't relate. It seems that I went to a different country, *that's* the feeling I had. And I didn't feel secured, I didn't relate. My generation, they were *all* gone. So anything that could connect me wasn't there. So I didn't feel connected. And I couldn't wait to get back home, which is here. For me, home sweet home is here.<sup>25</sup>

While many aspects of the country felt foreign to Salma after so many years away, it was the invisibility of women in society that made it evident to her that she no longer belonged in Afghanistan.

Like Salma, discussions of the position of women in Afghanistan also revealed Zahra's alignment with Canada. Having arrived in Canada at about twelve years old, she was passionately committed to the values of democracy, equality, and education. This did not flag throughout her sessions. Zahra reflected Canadian narratives in her insistence on the country as a place where women have choices, which may not have been available to her in Afghanistan, and spoke at length on this issue. After talking ardently about the reputation of Islam in Canada and the lack of education in Afghanistan, she returned to the topic of the rights afforded to her as a Canadian:

I am so grateful that we did move to Canada. Even though it has its own problems, it has its own setbacks; it's so much more *problematic* in so many different ways. But I am *so* grateful, because I am having an education. I *have* the ability to have a voice, to be able to say no to something, to have the ability to stand up and be like, "Hey, buddy! You just hit me. And I'm going to get you back." Not as in that literal sense, but able to have -- yeah, a voice. And the freedom to do what *I* want. If I'm not wearing a scarf, it's because I'm free, because I don't *have* to wear it.<sup>26</sup> [...]

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<sup>24</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation

<sup>25</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 3, April 3, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Zahra emphasizes that, in Canada, she can choose for herself what she wants, including whether or not to cover her hair. Though it was standard when she lived as a refugee in Iran, Zahra stopped wearing a scarf when she

If I lived in a country like Afghanistan and Iran, I would have never had a good education. I would have never had a liberal mindset, to be able to look at the two different, or three different problems and say, “How is this affecting *me*? How is *this* all affecting each other?” How to solve a problem: as a political problem, as a historical problem, as a religious problem -- I can, now that I’ve *had* a high school education and I’m getting a university education, I have learned to be able to say how these things are working, to me or to my family, or to society in general; to be able to have a view on it.

And now that I have this ability, I don’t have to get married when I’m sixteen. [...] I don’t *have* to get married at that age; I can wait ‘til -- whatever age I want to get married. [...] Now that I am in Canada and I am educated – somewhat – I can say no to it. But in Afghanistan or in Iran, I wouldn’t have had the *ability* to say no. If it came to the fact that it was money and we didn’t have any of it, I would have been the first to go. So now that I am here, I have some rights; I have the right to say no to that.<sup>27</sup>

Zahra referenced many of the narratives circulating: Afghanistan as a place where girls cannot obtain an education, unlike Canada; Canada as a place of rights and the ability to make choices, where violence against women has consequences, where women are free to not cover themselves; Afghanistan as a place where girls are forced into underage marriage. Afghanistan was held up as a negative mirror in which Canada’s reflection shines, and Zahra used the conversation to further emphasize her own belonging.

In addition to reflecting Canadian narratives of the country as a place of choice and freedom for women not available to them in Afghanistan, like many Canadians Zahra also insisted on the adaptation of newcomers to Canadian culture, especially around the issue of women, sexuality, and domestic abuse. She discussed two Afghan families with whom her own family lived in Iran. Both of these families (headed by widowed sisters) came to Canada as refugees, and Zahra described the extreme lengths to which they went in disguising the fact that

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came to Canada and started school. While she states that she did not receive any comments from (presumably non-Muslim) Canadians that made her want to take it off (and, in fact, points out that her more seemingly East Asian appearance precludes many Canadians from assuming she is Muslim), in a later session Zahra describes being questioned over not veiling by members of the local Muslim community: “But it’s my choice. And in Islam, you *have* a choice of whether you want to wear it or not. And in the Qur’an it says you cover your bosom, not your hair. [...] And that is one thing that I find *very, very* extreme. I am a very big believer of Islam, but there are things that just cross the line, that I *do not*, do not believe. And even if I’m stoned to death, I’d be like, ‘Nope. Nope. That is *not what the Qur’an says*, okay?’” See Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 7 of 8, April 25, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, February 14, 2012.

a daughter from each family were not virgins when they were married to Afghan men. She reflected:

I don't know how to explain it, but they should have accepted the fact that these things will happen. Not that every kid will do it. Some will do it; they should be able to accept that. And if you don't accept it, doesn't matter where you are in the world, it will still happen. And you will still agonize over it, or whatever else you're going to do about it. But even in other communities, like other Muslim communities, other cultural communities, they should all accept the fact that they're no longer in their own country. If you're going to hit a woman: you're not in your country. You're not in Mexico, you're not in Saudi Arabia, you're not in China, you -- doesn't matter where you are, you're *not there*; you're in Canada. You have to physically, emotionally understand that you're *not* living in your country and there's no laws that accept you, a man, hitting a woman because she didn't cook you breakfast. [...] Every one of these people have to accept it.<sup>28</sup>

In Zahra's conceptualization, violence against women is something that happens elsewhere, in Muslim communities, in other parts of the world, Afghanistan and other similarly 'backward' countries, not in Canada. When it *does* happen in Canada, it is due to the influences of those other places and cultures being carried over to the new homeland. Anthropologist and sociologist Dana Olwan argues that a focusing on the need of new immigrants to adopt Canadian values "makes gendered violence appear exceptional, placing it squarely in the daily practices of Canada's cultural others [...] without questioning the cultural bias of gendered violence in Canadian society at large."<sup>29</sup> Zahra echoed this idea in her vehement rejection of such violence against women and her insistence on Canada as a place where it is unacceptable.

Reflecting the prevalence of the veiled-Muslim-women-as-oppressed discourse, the interviewees pointed to their rejection of the veil as a way of reiterating their Canadian-ness. (Noor, as the only veiled narrator, is the outlier here.) When asked about the role of religion in her family, Salma was careful to qualify her answer: "Um, well we are -- I was born Muslim, and I am Muslim. But *definitely* a *very* liberal family. [...] I was not raised and brought up as a strict

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Olwan, "Gendered Violence," 546.

Muslim. My mother never wore a *hijab* and we never wore *hijab*, or these days you see a *burqa*. You could see it on the street, if you'd go, some women still wearing it, but *not* my family, no."<sup>30</sup> When asked how living in Canada has changed him, Bashir Ahmad, who arrived in Canada in 2008 to study physics, immediately introduced the issue of women: "My view towards women has changed. I was kind of a strict person. I *may* still be a strict -- I *am* still strict, considering Canadian standards. But it has changed a *lot*. [...] Then, I thought women should cover their hair. But now I think if they choose, they shouldn't; if they choose not to, they shouldn't. And now I *see* that, like... That's changed. It's not easy to describe."<sup>31</sup> Although his mother does cover her hair, Idrees carefully emphasized his family's Western-compatible values when describing his mother as a "typical Canadian woman" who "wears the scarf but is a very open-minded person," as if being veiled carries the corollary of being close-minded.<sup>32</sup> He later described his sisters as unveiled and able to wear short-sleeved clothing, and said that he would not mind if a future wife wore sleeveless clothes. The focus on the veil as a way of demonstrating their solidarity with Western values is not incidental. By pointing to women's clothing, and their rejection of veiling, the interviewees confirmed the liberalness and moderateness of themselves and their families.

Traces of mainstream Canadian discourses may also be seen in perceptions of education as unavailable to girls in Afghanistan. For example, Idrees initially mentioned oppression and lack of opportunities for his younger sisters and other women as a primary reason why his family left Afghanistan. In fact, this is how he began our very first session together:

So I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1988. And I was in Afghanistan until 1998. We left Afghanistan in 1998 and we went to a small country in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan called Tajikistan. So we went there because of war. The Taliban were there;

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<sup>30</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 6, September 25, 2012.

the life situation was not really good. And we *had* to leave the country. Well, my dad left the country before we did; he left the country in 1996. So he went there, and then we lived there for two more years, and then we left Afghanistan. The life situation in Afghanistan at that time was *really* bad: obviously the Taliban were in power, girls weren't allowed to go to school, and basically life was miserable. Because we couldn't do *anything*. They were in power, and my sisters couldn't go to school, and women were not allowed to go out; they had to -- like a man had to be with them to go out. So basically we couldn't... It was an *unbearable* situation for us.<sup>33</sup>

In this session, Idrees clearly implied that the lack of schooling available to and low position of women and girls in Afghanistan was a significant factor in their decision to leave, highlighting the importance of education and equal opportunity for girls in his family.

Like Idrees, Zahra introduced the topic of girls' education early on in her interview, with the issue of education and women and girls' rights in Canada versus Afghanistan the first she shared after finishing her life story in our third session. Zahra – who later laughingly described herself as “a little bit of a feminist, just a little bit”<sup>34</sup> – reminisced about her high school graduation and the rush to find a dress: “So we went to the graduation. It was -- it was good; it was a good memory, nothing that I would ever trade back for. When I look back at it, it's a memory that... It's something, an action I guess, that I would have never been able to experience if I was in Afghanistan. I would never have been able to go to school. By grade twelve, I probably would have been married and had two kids of my own. And look at me; I cannot be a mother. [Laughs]”<sup>35</sup> Canada offered Zahra the ability to attain an education and avoid the domestic fate of so many of her compatriots, and she was effusively grateful.

Bashir was the only interviewee with a home and his immediate family still in Afghanistan and who planned to return to Afghanistan to live one day, although he received his Canadian permanent resident card in early 2015. While he still held himself as somewhat

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<sup>33</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 1 of 6, February 16, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 8 of 8, December 23, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 8, 1February 14, 2012.

separate from mainstream Canadian views, even Bashir talked about women in a way that is common in the country. After sharing that his perspective on women covering their hair has changed since living in Canada, he elaborated on his evolving perspective:

I now have truly realized that women and men have the same potential essentially. And we can have very good women scientists and technicians and researchers and writers and musicians and dancers and everything. We just need to create that environment where everybody's welcome to grow. [...]

Now these ideas are big ideas. I tend not to talk about things that I cannot do. *But* these big ideas *are* in my mind and they'll be, and when *I* have a say in Afghanistan they'll sure be there. Like I love it how people here in Canada can, if they choose to, they can reach their potential; they can reach almost their full potential. And in my lifetime I want to see that happen in Afghanistan, *for everyone* who chooses that, regardless of their gender or their ethnicity or their religious views or whatever.<sup>36</sup>

Although he did not buy into Western notions of Afghanistan as backward or barbaric, or of Afghan women as inherently oppressed, Bashir still saw Western values on gender and equality as able to bring something beneficial to the country. In the same interview, he described how he put these changes into action in his own life:

What I do in reality is I encouraged and supported my sisters to go to university, and they go to university. One of them is studying, the other graduated. And I help them; if they want to study here, I'll help them. I help them financially. I tell them, "Get a job, but do not pressure yourself. Make sure you build your skills as much as you want to." So I think in terms of family I have been doing a good job; they are happy with that. I give them the freedom to... Unfortunately in Afghanistan it's the *men* who should give women the freedom. This is something I do not like, because I could be born a woman and I *wouldn't want* somebody else to be in charge of *my* freedom. I wouldn't be thankful -- I *wouldn't want* to be thankful to someone for my freedom, because I think everybody is born with freedom.<sup>37</sup>

While his new perspective on women appeared closely aligned with Canadian mores, Bashir reflected a very different focus than that typical in Canada:

But even back then, whenever I thought about the future of Afghanistan I thought that women are half of the population; you can't keep them at home and not want them to work. I like efficiency and I knew that is inefficient. So I *knew* that if *I* have a *say* in the

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<sup>36</sup> Bashir Ahmad, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 4, February 6, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



country, I say women should have the education, they should be able to work, they should be able to do sports and go out.

But now that I am here, I can see that actually we can have a *lot* more opportunities with women in Afghanistan. Like in terms of sports: if Afghanistan wants to do well in sports, it's hard for men's teams to do well in a short period of time, because other men's teams in other parts of the world are so established. But if you invest in women's soccer in Afghanistan, they'll be able to beat Canada in two years. That can be a great investment, and that raises Afghanistan's name and reputation a lot in the world. That's just one example.<sup>38</sup>

Although Bashir was convinced of the essential equality between men and women, the language in which he couched his changing perceptions is different than that of mainstream Canada, which focuses on rights and equality. Bashir focused instead on efficiency and raising Afghanistan's reputation on the international stage.

### **Gender in the Interviews – Nuancing Canadian Perspectives**

Although the interviewees largely agreed with and mirrored Canadian narratives around gender, and used their agreement on the position of women in Canada and Afghanistan to reiterate their own acceptability to Canada, at times they appeared uncomfortable with the discourses that emphasize the abjectness of Afghan and Muslim women. They did not oppose or contradict these discourses directly, however, and they did not appear to reject the notion that Canada offers more than Afghanistan in terms of opportunity or rights for women, nor with the idea that women are oppressed in Afghanistan. For the most part, they agreed that those are true. They simply painted a broader picture, largely agreeing with the Canadian narratives but adding a bit more nuance. They complicated Canadian perceptions on the place of women in Islamic ideology (though not as it was practiced in their experiences in Afghanistan), unsettled the notion of Afghanistan as a place where education is unattainable for women (though their examples

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

remained mainly historical, not contemporary), described arranged marriage as a positive, and blurred the boundaries between their experiences of gender in Afghanistan and Canada.

Zahra situated herself as able to see a longer Islamic history and understand women's historically more equitable position within it as due to her Canadian education. This enabled her to reject what she perceived to be a less knowledgeable but widely held position among many Muslims and Canadians alike about women in Islam, that women occupy an inherently subordinate position within Islam. Zahra complicated this position by noting that, in fact, many progressive ideas around gender grew out of the religion:

Book-wise, when you actually read it, the fundamentals of Islam is equality between man and a woman [...] The idea for a divorce, the reason everyone in North America or in Europe or everywhere in the world has divorce is because it came from Islam. The reason women can have their own companies and their own wealth and their own things is because it came from Islam. The reason little baby girls aren't killed in the Middle East is because *it came from Islam*. The reason a lot of women are not traded over camels: it came from Islam. There are so many things, so many *good* things that came from Islam for women that Europe has adopted, or Asia, or North America, or South America has adopted.<sup>39</sup>

However, as she continued, Zahra marked a rift between this more egalitarian, historical version of Islam and the version with which she grew up. She expressed frustration that Islam has moved away from these fairly equitable roots to a more patriarchal position with regard to gender:

"I want to be the ultimate ruler because I'm a man and I'm stronger than you." Why are you a Muslim then? Why are you even preaching something about or talking about this religion? Because this religion talks about: "Do not be cruel to the women of your family or to women in general." In the *jihad*, when you read it there are the *jihads* of pen, tongue, and sword. It says, of the sword, it says, "If it comes to the *jihad* of sword, do not harm women and children, and do not harm nature." Well, I've seen *so many*, so many women and children being murdered, in *cold blood*. And this stuff is in the name of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

Zahra varyingly accused and defended Islam on its record with regard to women, unable to reconcile what she believed to be a progressive, enlightened religion with the violent

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<sup>39</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 8 of 8, December 23, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

misogynistic religion she inherited and experienced in Afghanistan. Still, she was unable to simply let the idea of Islam as inherently oppressive toward women stand unqualified. Islam, she insisted, is not simply a cruel religion that degrades women, and yet she stated that she would not have learned about this history had it not been for her exposure to Western education, after fleeing Afghanistan and its seemingly religiously-motivated violence and gendered oppression.

Like Zahra, Salma's staunch support for women's rights remained unchanging throughout her interview. However, she too complicated Western perceptions of Afghanistan and noted that ideas such as the equal rights of women are not simply Western conceptions. In the Afghanistan of her childhood and youth, during the 1950s until the 1970s, women were advancing. She tied this back historically to King Amanullah (r. 1919–1929): "During his time, *lots* of women, they were sent to Europe to study abroad, to France. Even when I was a young, young woman I remember some of those women, *bright* women: they were Minister, for example, of Women's Affairs, and they were directors, and *extremely highly* educated and bright women. And the movement of women, they were leading the women's movement."<sup>41</sup> According to Salma, women's rights are not entirely foreign to Afghanistan, since Amanullah advocated for them nearly a hundred years ago, and they were advancing again from the mid-twentieth century until the 1970s. Afghanistan, then, is not simply the misogynistic, violent country it is often presented as in the West. However, she carefully differentiated her memories from today's Afghanistan. Although she grew up in a time when the country did offer opportunities for women, Salma remained firmly opposed to what she perceived to be the harsh position of women in Afghan society under the Taliban and since their removal, and she disassociated herself from the country because of it. In this way, she was able to nuance Western

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<sup>41</sup> Salma Shaakir, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 3, March 26, 2014.

misconceptions of Afghanistan as inherently anti-women while also reinforcing her own Canadian principles.

While much less explicit than Zahra or Salma in discussing women, Noor presented a perspective not often heard in Canadian discourses, subtly questioning the notion that women from Afghanistan and Muslim women are somehow inherently tyrannized by their religion and culture. As someone who wears a *hijab*, Noor did not present veiling as a symbol of oppression or unveiling as a symbol of freedom. She spoke relatively little of women or their place in Afghan or Pakistani society, but her own family background would prohibit her from believing that women could not receive an education in Afghanistan. However, Noor is most explicit when discussing marriage – a fraught subject in Canada, where arranged and teenaged marriages carry strongly negative connotations. Although initially uncertain whether to bring up her recent marriage during our sessions, Noor’s perspective on it provides a foil to widely held perceptions of (especially veiled) Muslim women and arranged marriages.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly after graduating from high school, Noor was summoned to Pakistan to join her visiting mother; upon arriving she learned that the purpose of the visit was to arrange her marriage to a distant Afghan relative she had never met. Despite her young age and meeting her future husband only shortly before their nuptials, Noor appeared thrilled with the marriage that was arranged for her and the process through which it took place. She cheerfully shared: “My mom did it for me. I’m so glad I didn’t have to look for anyone; it would be really difficult. [...] I feel sorry for my friends; they have to look for them themselves. [In my situation:] they agree, my family agrees, so... We’re good together; we like each other. So it’s like an awesome thing

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<sup>42</sup> Although she was initially hesitant to talk about her marriage, Noor left in all mentions of it in her interview transcripts, though she made use of the opportunity to extensively edit them in other ways.

that happened. [Laughs]”<sup>43</sup> Noor presented her marriage as the fulfilment of her own interests rather than something imposed on her:

All my life I guess my mom knew what I wanted. All my life I wanted... Like I wanted to go back. I didn't say I was going to marry there, but I'd say, "Mom, I want to go back;" you know, "I want to go back home." [...] I was very interested in just being married into my own -- you know, back into Afghanistan. I'm not interested in going out marrying. Besides, it's not part of, as my mom says, our relatives, or the whole tribe; they don't really marry outside. [...]

When I was a month old, we went to [my mom's province in Afghanistan] once. So I did go there, and that's why I felt so connected to there, you know? It's like, "Mom, I've got to go there one day." And then she's like, "Okay, I've got to get this girl married there." [Both laugh] She didn't tell me that, but she's like, "Ah, this girl's too interested there."<sup>44</sup>

Although it was arranged prior to her arrival in Pakistan, Noor insisted that the marriage would not have taken place if she had not agreed to it because "nothing forceful is accepted in Islam."<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Zahra and Salma's stories, this more woman-friendly interpretation did not remain solidly in the past of either Afghanistan or Islam, but was reflected in her own current life and in her identity as a veiled Muslim Afghan-Canadian woman in an arranged teenaged marriage.

A final way in which the narrators nuanced Canadian conversations around women in Afghanistan and Islam was by highlighting the ways in which the boundaries between 'here' and 'there' are not as clear as have been implied. Life in Canada, while significantly better for women on the whole, still contained traces of their pasts. Their lives were not sharply demarcated between Canada and Afghanistan. Like all immigrants, they brought their culture with them, and it had an impact on the lives of women in their new homelands as well.

For Zahra, the traces of her Afghan culture in Canada had not been entirely positive with regard to her status as a woman. In her final session, even fiercely independent Zahra

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<sup>43</sup> Noor Jan, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 4, May 13, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

acknowledged that her life as a woman in Canada is not as free from restrictions as she may have presented:

I was told that I was a second-class citizen my entire life because I was a girl -- in my own family even! How my mother raised us. I have three brothers, and in *their* mind -- I don't know if they're lazy or not but... Or the way that they believe that a woman should do all the cleaning and the cooking. No! I work, I go to school. You work, you go to school. Why do I have to come home and cook and clean? You've got two hands and two feet, you've got eyes, you're capable of doing it. Why don't you get up and do it? Why don't you pick up my plate as well and go wash it? I cooked. There has to be *equality* in those countries between a man and a woman, and it's *frustrating* because it's not. And for generations and generations they have been told that a woman is a second- or third-class citizen. Your horse or your animal comes before first before a woman. [...] When my mom says, "Oh, go wash the dishes," or when I come home and my brothers are just laying around, she's like, "Can you wash the dishes?" I'm like, "No! There are three people right here; why can't they wash the dishes?" And it grinds my gears! [Laughs]<sup>46</sup>

Despite living in Canada and holding liberal, Western values, Zahra's life was still circumscribed by the cultural mores held by her family. It was not only in Afghanistan where she faced constraints due to her gender; this also happened in Canada. However, she placed the blame on her Afghan family, and others like them from "those countries," and the values they bring to Canada. In doing so, she simultaneously aligned her own principles as those which are Western-compatible and acknowledged that life in Canada does not always reflect these values.

The greatest blurring of the lines between stereotypical Canadian and Afghan perspectives on the topic of women and the most significant range of variation over the course of our sessions was revealed in Idrees's interview. Early on, he drew strong connections between his family and Canadian perspectives on women – recall his statement that the inability for his sisters to get an education contributed to his family's decision to leave Afghanistan. In his second session, Idrees again aligned himself and his family with a sort of Western liberalism when asked if marrying someone from his own background is important to him:

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<sup>46</sup> Zahra Rezaie, interview with Allison L. Penner, 8 of 8, December 23, 2013.

IDREES BAHADUR: I always say my way of thinking, even my religion, is humanism. If I find somebody who really matches me, I do not care who she is, what colour she is, what language she speaks. I don't care. As long as someone who's human and who can match me in most possible ways, you know. I don't really care about that kind of stuff, and I don't really think about it.

ALLISON PENNER: Do you think that it would matter to your family?

IDREES BAHADUR: No. No. Honestly, no. If I find somebody I like and I think she would live with me happily and we can really get along together, so why not? I don't care who she is, what colour she has; my family's okay with that.<sup>47</sup>

In the same session, Idrees talked about his sisters, most of who had graduated from high school but were not yet employed: "They don't work yet. They *want* to; we have told them they can work if they want to, but they can't decide where they want to work so they have to spend a lot of time thinking. They're still thinking so, you obviously can't force them -- We wouldn't force them. If they want to work, they can do it, but at the moment they say: 'Oh, we're still thinking what we want to do.' So we're just going to give them that time."<sup>48</sup> Idrees gave the impression of his sisters as young women with all options open to them, limited only by their own indecision.

This shifted as the interview progressed. By his third and fourth sessions, in the midst of some frustration with his father who had been unhappy about Idrees's choice of a girlfriend (a long-distance relationship with a highly Westernized Afghan-British woman), Idrees angrily criticized the restrictive culture in which he grew up. Despite his general reticence around talking about the women in his family, he threw in an offhand comment referencing his sisters:

"Restriction is more on girls, on females. They have so much restriction, even around their own house. Their brothers and their dads: they're basically the kings. They make the law and everyone has to follow it. [...] Even though I don't have many options too, but come on, I live in Canada. I can see that strength in myself. I'm just talking about myself, *not* about my sisters,

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<sup>47</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

and I do not want to talk about them.”<sup>49</sup> Idrees vented that his dad is not nearly as modern as he likes to appear, and described the ways in which his father’s stated values did not match up with reality in his family:

Although he claims to be a very modern thinker – so-called ‘thinker’ – and he thinks, “Oh, it’s okay for girls to go to school. They should go and study and all that; they should be allowed to choose their own husbands; they should be allowed to do basic things in life” – for example, going to school, going outside, choosing a boy for themselves and all that. But it seems he does not *mean* it. He *says* that, but his... The base of his thinking is based on what he was brought up in -- I mean on the culture that his family believed in. It’s based on the culture that says having a boyfriend is *bad*; sometimes going to school for girls is *bad*; and for girls, working is bad -- stuff like that. When I go with him to his friends’ house, when he starts lecturing about things, he seems to be a very modern type of person who has no interest in old traditional and old cultural ways. He starts giving advice to his friends: “Let your girls go to school; let them do this, do that. The culture we have, it’s based on the past. It has no place in today’s society, so let’s be a bit modern.” This and that. But when it comes to himself, and when it comes to his own kids, *he* actually does not believe that. Well, *maybe* I would agree with him for *my* sisters to not have a boyfriend, but at the same time I would agree more if they would go to school. He seems to be not [pause] happy about my sisters going to school.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to the stories shared earlier, Idrees revealed a different aspect of his family life, one in which his sisters faced numerous restrictions based on their gender and which are generally considered unacceptable in Canada. However, Idrees placed these ideas on his father and highlighted the rift in perspectives between his father and himself.

Although it might appear that this different perspective from Idrees was indicative of a moment of personal frustration only, this change in representation holds throughout the remainder of his sessions. In his sixth and final interview, Idrees talked about an aunt who worked in Afghanistan’s Department of Justice in the early 1990s but whose husband, a civil engineer, would not let her work any longer because *he* was unable to find a job and he did not want people to say that she supports him. Idrees talked about the ways that these cultural practices and values remain after arriving in Canada: “And they carry that culture here. Maybe

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<sup>49</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 3 of 6, June 26, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 4 of 6, September 25, 2012.



the next generation will be a little bit different than us. My dad will never change; he thinks the same way. He thinks he's modern. He's not a very religious guy. My sisters don't wear scarves or long skirts; they wear pants and short-sleeved stuff. He's not religious; he doesn't care about that. But somehow the basis of his mind is still stuck or has some sort of connection with the conservative society of Afghanistan."<sup>51</sup> Despite his critical perception of the position, at this point Idrees stopped drawing a sharp distinction between it and his own views. "Maybe the next generation will be a little bit different than *us*," he said. Regardless of how well he had integrated in Canada, Idrees acknowledged his own internal foreignness and positioned it as an undesirable trait that would hopefully be left behind by the next generation.

Later in our final session, Idrees acknowledged that it is not only his father who brings 'traditional' values from his homeland, it is also himself:

I'm not against Western values and culture; I want to have my *own* way of life. I don't think it's wrong. I definitely respect Western values and culture. I'm not saying it's *wrong*. It's absolutely *right* for people who have *grown* in this culture and who live in this culture. I'm not saying it's wrong for me; it's just hard for me to digest it. I just want to live with something that I grew up with, that I was fed. Now, I'm not a very conservative type. I don't care if my wife goes and works; I don't care if my wife drives; I don't care if my wife wears a sleeveless dress. But at the same time, I want to find somebody who can *live* with me.<sup>52</sup>

In his initial interview sessions, Idrees drew a clearly defined line between the equitable values with regard to women held by his own family, closely aligned with Canadian positions on the issue, and the position of women in Afghanistan at the time when they left. As his sessions progressed, Idrees blurred these boundaries considerably, revealing the ways in which traces of Afghanistan traveled with his family to Canada and continue to shape the lives of all members of the family here.

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<sup>51</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 6 of 6, August 27, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

The narrators repeatedly and emphatically insisted that life in Afghanistan poses severe challenges for women and that Canada offers them freedom and choice. And yet, they also included stories that, while not contradicting this idea, certainly added gradations to it. What purpose did these nuances serve in their interviews? One function may represent the desire of the interviewees to humanize Afghans and to historicize the conflict. Public narratives about Afghanistan and its people tend to homogenize the group and elide any contextualization for the conflict there and the rise of fundamentalist groups such as the Taliban, as discussed in the previous two chapters. Nuancing Canadian perceptions of women in Afghanistan enabled the narrators to agree with the conclusion that life is difficult for women in Afghanistan while providing more contextualization and underscoring the complex humanity of the people of/from Afghanistan.

Another answer may lie in an understanding of the uses to which Canadian narratives of oppressed Afghan women have been put. Earlier in this chapter, I noted that ideas of veiled and therefore oppressed Muslim women harken back to the days of Western colonialism in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority countries. Since that time, writes Ahmed, rhetoric of the oppression of women has been used widely to morally justify the project of colonizing, undermining, or otherwise eradicating Muslim cultures and societies, including through Western invasions of and prolonged wars in predominantly Muslim countries.<sup>53</sup> Recall, for example, the *Time* magazine cover story featuring a nose-less Bibi Aisha with the caption, “What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan.” Essential in this discourse, contends Al-Saji, is the “representation of

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<sup>53</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 150-1, 167. See also Khan, “The Two Faces,” 102. Hoodfar notes that scholars have traced the Western idea of veiled and oppressed Muslim women, finding some 60,000 books published in the West between 1800 and 1950 on the Arab Orient alone. Corresponding with the period of Western colonialism in the Middle East, these books depict Muslims and Arabs as a backward people in need of civilizing, a role the colonizers were more than happy to take on. See Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds,” par. 20.

the colonized society as essentially inferior *because* it oppresses women – hence the purported aim of liberating or saving these women, an aim that can only be achieved by destroying their culture” and replacing it with Western (read: enlightened and civilized) culture.<sup>54</sup> This subjugation of Muslim women creates not only an opportunity but also a moral imperative for Western countries to intervene militarily in order to bring ‘freedom’ to these women, especially when it coincides with Western interests to invade another country. Such a justification takes for granted that Muslim women are inherently oppressed (after all, some of them are veiled) and that Western values and culture are universally desirable.<sup>55</sup>

The heightened Western mobilization of images of veiled Afghan women following 9/11 contributed to securing public and governmental support for the ‘rescue’ mission intended to liberate Afghans (especially women) from Taliban tyranny, constructing the Western viewers/readers and their countries as paternalistic saviours while obscuring any less benevolent motives for or causes of the war.<sup>56</sup> Rhetoric of oppressed Afghan women even caused renowned anti-war figures, such as British-American author Christopher Hitchens, and many typically anti-war feminists to lend their uneasy support to the invasion, bringing together strange bedfellows of conservatives, liberals, radicals, celebrities, and grassroots activists.<sup>57</sup> Despite the

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Saji, “Muslim Women,” 73; see also Cloud, “To Veil the Threat,” 289.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Saji, “Muslim Women,” 65-66; Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 731-2; Falah, “Visual Representation,” 301, 317.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Saji, “Muslim Women,” 72, see also 65; Alison Kekewich, “‘Unveiling’ Canadian Aid and Military Interventions in Afghanistan: Politicized Representations of Afghan Women” (Master’s thesis, Dalhousie University, 2010), 5, 15; Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 731-3; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 229. For example, the respective studies of post-9/11 imagery and stories about Afghan women in the *Globe and Mail* and *Time* magazine by Jiwani and American communications scholar Dana Cloud both argue that imagery of victimized Afghan women circulated in Western media helped to garner widespread support for the war in Afghanistan. See Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 733-4; Cloud, “To Veil the Threat,” 286-7, 290.

<sup>57</sup> Cloud, “To Veil the Threat,” 296; Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics,” 340; Sherene H. Razack, “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004): 134. Arat-Koc writes that “[a]fter September 11, feminism as critical thought, like all other forms of dissent, was suppressed while feminism was deployed as a potential ally in the new imperialism. The only respectable belonging for feminists in a nation reconfigured along civilizational lives is one that confirms women’s superior position in ‘the West’ and expresses

overwhelming difficulties created by war and the ways in which women are particularly vulnerable to its deprivations and brutality, the war in Afghanistan was constructed as for the good of its citizens and especially its women. Questioning the significant reduction of Western humanitarian aid to the country – the impact of which was born most heavily by women and children – as a response to Taliban policies resulted in dissenters being labeled as opposed to women’s interests. One might wonder, as do anthropologists Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, why the “conditions of war, militarization, starvation [were] considered to be less injurious to women than the lack of education, employment, and, most notably, in the media campaign, Western dress styles.”<sup>58</sup>

The mobilization of the oppression of Afghan women for political and military purposes was particularly evident in Canada. Images of veiled (and therefore oppressed) Afghan women enabled Canada to present its military intervention in Afghanistan as evidence of its own noble benevolence, as a custodian of human rights, fighting for the freedom of women. In 2007, then-governor general Michaëlle Jean visited Afghanistan for International Women’s Day, stating: “Of course, we, the rest of the women around the world, took too long to hear the cries of our Afghan sisters, but I am here to tell them that they are no longer alone. And neither are the people of Afghanistan.”<sup>59</sup> This is echoed by former chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier,

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gratitude for this” (“Disciplinary Boundaries,” 45). Feminists who opposed the war could face a high price. Arat-Koc details the consequences faced by Sunera Thobani, then president of the National Action Committee on Women, following her speech at a women’s conference in Ottawa in October 2001. In her address, Thobani urged fellow feminists to consider the impacts of war on Afghanistan’s women and to oppose American militarism in the region. Thobani faced personal attacks and a smear campaign, and the RCMP opened an investigation of her to determine whether her comments constituted a hate crime against the American people. See Arat-Koc, “Disciplinary Boundaries,” 32-3.

<sup>58</sup> Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics,” 345; see also 346.

<sup>59</sup> Joe Friesen, “Jean Makes Surprise Visit to Afghanistan,” *Globe and Mail*, March 9, 2007, A13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Governor General Visiting Afghanistan,” *CBC News*, March 8, 2007, accessed February 10, 2019, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/governor-general-visiting-afghanistan-1.655568>. See also Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 739-40. For a transcript of Jean’s speech in Afghanistan, see The Governor General of Canada, “Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean – Speech on the Occasion of International Women’s Day,”

who assured Canadians, “We are in Afghanistan to help Afghans. [...] We’re not there to build an empire, we’re not there to occupy a country. We’re there to help Afghan men, women and children rebuild their families.”<sup>60</sup> This self-construction of Canada as free and benevolent is further evidenced in media stories about Afghan women. When the voices and perspectives of actual Afghan women are included, they tend to be those of unveiled, educated, and often Western-born women. Jiwani contends that this tendency, combined with the practice of ‘allowing’ Afghan women to speak where they presumably would be silenced in Afghanistan, underscores Canadian self-representation as a place of equality and progress and helps to seal a Canadian sense of superiority.<sup>61</sup>

Herein rests another reason why the narrators may have nuanced Canadian perspectives on women in Afghanistan, despite their own agreement with such positions. While omitting any

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March 8, 2007, accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.gg.ca/en/media/news/2007/her-excellency-right-honourable-michaelle-jean-speech-occasion-international-womens-day>.

<sup>60</sup> Michael den Tandt, “PM Eyes Afghan Sojourn,” *Globe and Mail*, February 25, 2006), A1, A7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 739-40. When public support began to flag, retired Canadian Major-General Lewis MacKenzie appealed again to the oppression of women, stating that pollsters should ask the public the following questions: “‘Do you support denying all Afghan women the right to visit a doctor, as there are no female doctors permitted by the Taliban and male doctors are not allowed to inspect female patients?’ ‘Do you support the government’s right to execute women by blowing out their brains in front of thousands of cheering onlookers in a football stadium because the victims were seen in the company of men other than their husbands?’” See Lewis MacKenzie, “Remember the Taliban, and Stay the Course,” *Globe and Mail*, October 10, 2006, A15, Canadian Major Dailies. See also Jiwani, “Helpless Maidens,” 733-4.

<sup>61</sup> Yasmin Jiwani, “Orientalizing War Talk: Representations of the Gendered Muslim Body Post 9/11,” in *Situating Race in Time, Space and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars*, eds. Jo-Anne Lee and John Sutton Lutz (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005), 196. The creation of Canadian identity through representations of oppressed Afghan women and the rebranding of a combat mission as a ‘peacekeeping’ or ‘rescue’ mission has been further assisted by publications from NGOs such as liberal, feminist organization Canadian Women 4 Women in Afghanistan (CW4WA), founded in 1998, which has endorsed Canadian military efforts in Afghanistan by similarly appealing to the plight of women and girls in the country. See Butler, “Canadian Women,” 220. The cover story of a 2007 newsletter summarizes a speech made by Afghanistan’s Minister of Education, Mohammed Haneef Atmar, as: “Canada is a great nation for protecting its people, and protecting basic human rights; Canada is one of Afghanistan’s greatest allies; Afghans appreciate the generosity and aid from Canada”. See CW4WAfghan, *Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan Newsletter* 53 (2007):1; quoted in Butler, “Canadian Women,” 225-6. I have been unable to locate the original as the online archives go back only until 2008. Written for a Canadian audience, such interpretations help constitute Canadians’ understandings of themselves. Kekewich charges CW4WA and other similar organizations with participating in “Orientalist feminism” (“‘Unveiling’ Canadian Aid,” 4). Shahnaz Khan and Ann Russo describe the work of Western women and the Feminist Majority Foundation as colonial feminism and imperialist feminism, respectively. See Khan, “The Two Faces,” 102, 108; Russo, “Feminist Majority Foundation’s Campaign,” 564.

historicization of the conflict in Afghanistan and the oppression of women there, the simplistic viewpoints circulating in Canadian discourses suggest that the solution for oppressed Afghan women is ‘rescue’ via military intervention followed by the deliverance of Western values. Afghans, in the narrators’ more nuanced stories, have been able to achieve advancements for women in the past, and therefore have the capability to do so again, without the need for rescue by the West. Islam has not always been/is not always a force for the oppression of women, and does not pose a danger from which they must be saved. By gradating the discourses of oppressed women, they gently reject Canada’s self-representation as necessarily free and inherently superior and of Afghanistan as requiring Western forces to bring such freedom to its women.

### **Conclusion**

Looking at gender in these interviews illuminates the broader public discourses around Afghan and Muslim women at play in Canada during the time that they took place and the ways in which these discourses played out in the lives of the interviewees. Such an exercise points to the ways in which Canada conceptualizes itself as free in relation to the un-freedom of Afghan women, drawing on a long history of Western perceptions of veiled Muslim women. It also reveals the ways in which the narrators interacted with, reflected, and nuanced these conversations and highlights a challenge the narrators encountered in light of them. The interviewees both wanted to assimilate and articulate their own belonging in Canadian society, *and* they were not content with the overwhelmingly negative, stereotyped depictions of Afghan and Muslim women they saw in Canada. For the most part, this discontent remained below the surface of their stories. Although they largely agreed with the idea that women *do* face considerable hardships in Afghanistan, the subtle nuances that peppered their stories about women removes the orientalist lens which naturalizes the abject position of women in

Afghanistan and implies a need for Western military assistance to deliver freedom to said women.

## Conclusion

While much has been written looking at the ways in which Muslims and Afghans are orientalized by the West, considerably less scholarship has focused on the ways in which these groups return this orientaling gaze. Even less addressed is how Afghans living in the West have responded to being Othered by the societies in which they live. This dearth, combined with a lack of research around Afghan (former) refugees in Western countries in general, and Canada specifically, make this research particularly significant, and make oral history an especially useful means of addressing the questions contained herein. The stories shared by the interviewees reveal fascinating details about the lives and experiences of individual people, all of who spent part of their lives as refugees and identity in some way with a country in which Canada had military involvement from 2001 until 2014, including during the course of nearly all these interviews. Oral history offers the chance to access multiple layers of information. We learn about the lives and experiences of the narrators, but we also learn about Canada in the 2010s.

In addition to the significant challenges in sharing their life stories with a person from a completely different cultural, religious, and ethnic background, someone without any experience of war or dislocation, in a language that is not their first, and the challenges around creating a coherent narrative from a sometimes fragmented past, the historical context in which the narrators told their stories further circumscribed their abilities to share. The interviews took place in a country and culture which ostensibly celebrates and promotes multiculturalism, but at a time in which immigrants, refugees, Afghans, and Muslims were increasingly feared and politicized, with polarizing public rhetoric around what makes a Canadian and who qualifies as such. At the same time, legislative and policy changes seemed to reinforce the idea that certain groups of



people pose a significant threat to Canada's security and Canadian values. The cumulative impact of these discourses situated the interviewees – as Muslims, refugees/immigrants, and Afghans – precariously on the edges of Canadian society.

These discourses remained largely un-discussed within our sessions, but their presence can be seen in what was shared and the ways the interviewees situated themselves and their families within the stories. The narrators repeatedly drew attention to the many ways that they and their families belonged in Canada. They demonstrated their own commitments to multiculturalism, diversity, equality, and egalitarianism. They mirrored Canadian discourses about immigrants and refugees, Muslims, Afghanistan and women's rights. After firmly and repeatedly positioning themselves within the national circle, the narrators began to introduce stories about these fraught topics that often brought new considerations to the broader public discourses. This strategy, consciously or unconsciously undertaken, enabled them to challenge or nuance the overwhelmingly negative discourses about Muslims, Afghans, and immigrants/refugees circulating while also preserving their position (however tenuous) within the Canadian fold.

While not all topics received the same degree of resistance by the narrators, these steps outside of the national discourses reveal a strong desire to portray a larger, more complex history of Islam, Afghanistan, and migration than that commonly presented in Canada and to humanize the individuals who were the subjects of so much heated public debate. They insisted on themselves, their families, compatriots, and co-religionists as full, complex individuals. In doing so, the narrators removed the orientalizing gaze and look back at the West. Their nuanced, complex stories and perspectives make it impossible to maintain a simplistic or simply negative view of immigration, refugees, Islam, or Afghanistan. Their stories shine a spotlight on these

narratives, preventing us from taking them as natural and pushing us to ask what purposes these mainstream Canadian discourses serve, what are the power dynamics and (mis)conceptions on which they rely, and what motives might underlie the dominant presentations of these issues.

Although I have focused on similarities between the interviews in this thesis, it must be emphasized again that the narrators are all very different people with wildly different perspectives. While there are commonalities in their interviews with regard to discourses about Canada, Afghanistan, Islam, and women, there are also great divergences on many topics. Further, the degree to which their stories conformed to or mirrored Canadian discourses may have been influenced by the degree to which they saw their futures as Canadian. I hope that I have been able to preserve their individuality while also pointing to the patterns that emerged when looking at their interviews collectively.

In many ways, these interviewees are not representative of the larger Afghan or refugee communities in Winnipeg or Canada. This cohort was highly educated, spoke English fluently, came from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, could and did interact with broader society. They existed in ways which allowed them to both plausibly claim a space within the national fold as well as challenge widely held beliefs without too significantly lessening their own place within it. How would Afghans, Muslims, and refugees without these same degrees of privilege speak about the same discourses? Would they feel as able to challenge Canadian discourses? Would they even more vehemently adhere to the mainstream Canadian narratives, or would they perhaps be less aware of them? The interviews conducted for the same project but excluded from this study might offer some answers, but further research would provide a larger base from which to draw upon and may provide perspectives not included here.

Despite the fine balance navigated by the narrators, their stories and feelings were not simply calculated decisions designed to create the desired impression in a listener. Their complicated and sometimes contradictory stories reveal their efforts to understand their own lives and perspectives. In some ways, they related very much to their new society, and in others they found themselves at a great distance from it. Humans have both a tendency and a need to categorize, to see the world in binaries in order to make sense of it. Are you a Canadian or an outsider? Do you belong here or there? Do you agree with us (and disagree with our enemies) or disagree with us (and agree with our enemies)? But, as these interviews demonstrate, people do not exist in tidy boxes, ready for easy sorting. Instead of either/or, the narrators are often both/and. Migration causes fractured lives, fractured memories, multiple (sometimes competing) affiliations. These are difficult for anyone to make sense of, never mind individuals whose migration was forced, never mind trying to make sense of it to another person, in a place where multiple aspects of the teller's identity have been politicized and Othered.

Oral history offers a unique opportunity to see this complexity and the multiple (and sometimes contradictory or competing) but genuine pieces of identity. The heartfelt but complicated multiplicity described above is exemplified in the following excerpt from Idrees's second session, in which he affirmed his legal and social Canadian-ness but held it next to his Afghan-ness. He expressed deep love, especially for his new home in Canada, but at the same time recognized the real possibility that he may one day be mistreated for who he is, though he hesitated to even suggest it. I leave this thesis with his earnest words:

As a Canadian citizen I *do* feel responsibility for Canada. And I want to be honest to this country, with all my heart. And I *am* being honest with this country. Because I live in this country, I eat in this country, I hang out in this country, I go to school in this country, and I feel more -- I don't know, psychologically I find myself very close to Canada. And at the same time, I kind of feel... I have feelings for my native country, too. So I do have feelings -- 50/50, I would say; 50

percent for Canada, 50 percent for my own country. So that's how I would describe my feelings for these two countries. See, like on my passport it says nationality: Canadian, but says birthplace: Kabul. So I cannot just ignore that part. Because even it says that on my Canadian passport.

So no, even if I'm mistreated... I haven't been mistreated yet in Canada, but just for instance, even if I'm mistreated – I know I will *not* be mistreated but I'm just giving you an example – I will still love this country. I have *feelings* for Canada, I *love* this country. I love... You know... I just can't describe my feelings, because... I can put it in a way like when you love a girl, you have feelings for her? *That's* how I have feelings for Canada. Or same thing like for a girl, she has feelings for a boy: that's how I would describe my feelings for Canada. *And* for my native land, you know. I have feelings for Canada. I just love it in a different way. [...] I think my love relationship with Canada will last forever, until I die probably.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Idrees Bahadur, interview with Allison L. Penner, 2 of 6, February 23, 2012.

## **Appendix**

### **Interviewee Reference List**

#### **Ahmad, Bashir**

Bashir Ahmad was born circa 1982 in Maladan, a small village near Herat, Afghanistan. His family is ethnically Pashtun but speak Dari. Bashir's paternal grandfather, a wealthy 'feudal' landowner who provided assistance to the *mujahedin* groups, was targeted by the communist government. When Bashir was one year old his immediate and paternal family fled to Iran where they lived initially in the village of Torbat before moving to Mashhad and later Karaj. In 1997, Bashir's family moved back to Herat. He began learning English circa 1999 (and German circa 2006) and graduated from high school in 2000. In 2001 Bashir started medical school at the University of Herat; he graduated seven years later. In 2003 he started working as an English teacher with *Médecins du Monde* and as a translator with the NGO Catholic Relief Services in 2005. After making contact with Dr. Richard Gordon from the University of Manitoba, Dr. Gordon assisted Bashir in obtaining a scholarship to study physics at the school. He arrived in 2008 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Physics in 2012. In 2013 Bashir moved to Burnaby, BC, and returned to Winnipeg in 2014. At the time of our interviews, he was working for SAFE Workers of Tomorrow and as a neighbourhood immigrant settlement worker at William Whyte Residents Association. Bashir obtained his Permanent Resident card in 2015.

#### **Bahadur, Idrees (pseudonym)**

Idrees Bahadur was born in 1988 into an ethnic Tajik family. His father drove a bus and was conscripted into the Afghan army in the 1980s, while his mother was a housewife. Idrees lived with his parents and five younger sisters in the capital city of Kabul until late September, 1996, when his family fled north to Panjshir Valley as the Taliban captured the city. His father left for Tajikistan four months later, and the rest of the family returned to Kabul several months after that. They all joined Idrees's father in Tajikistan two years later, in 1998, where they ran a shop. In 2003, the family applied to immigrate to Canada as part of a mass resettlement programme. They were approved in early 2005 and arrived in Winnipeg in December, settling in the neighbourhood of Charleswood. Idrees's father attended Red River College to improve his English and then found employment as a Handi-Transit driver; his mother is a housewife. Idrees attended Charleswood Junior High for grade nine, and then graduated from Shaftesbury High School. Following high school, he worked for McDonald's for three and a half years and later found employment as a home care aide for Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. In February 2012 Idrees, his mother, and youngest sister returned to Afghanistan for a visit, their first time since leaving in 1998. In September 2012 Idrees began attending the University of Winnipeg.

#### **Jan, Noor (pseudonym)**

Noor Jan was born in June 1993 in Kabul, Afghanistan, to a well-educated ethnic Pashtun family. Shortly after Noor's birth, her immediate and maternal family moved to Pakistan to escape the civil war in Afghanistan, settling in Peshawar. Noor attended both public and private schools; she also took English classes and learned English from her grandfather. In 2004, when she was almost eleven years old, Noor moved to Winnipeg with her mother and four siblings. She only learned that they were leaving on the day their flight left Pakistan. After staying at Welcome Place for several months (which indicates they came as government-sponsored

refugees), the family moved into an apartment near Health Sciences Centre. Noor attended a number of schools in Winnipeg, including Victoria-Albert School, Pinkham School, Earl Grey School, and Hugh John MacDonald Middle School, graduating from Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute in 2011. In September 2011 Noor joined her mother and younger sister on a visit to Pakistan, where she married a distant relative still living in Afghanistan. After returning to Winnipeg, Noor began studying biochemistry at the University of Winnipeg and started the process of sponsoring her new husband. At the time of our interviews, Noor Jan worked at a halal grocery store in Winnipeg, had a summer job doing medical research at the University of Manitoba, and volunteered at Health Sciences Centre. She wears a *hijab*.

### **Rezaie, Zahra**

Zahra Rezaie, an ethnic Hazara, was born in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, in 1992. She has three brothers and is the second oldest child. When Zahra was four or five, her father and several other relatives were killed by the Taliban. After selling the family's possessions in order to raise money, Zahra's mother hired someone to smuggle them over the border into Iran, where they lived in Mashhad. The family lived in poverty and all of the children assisted their mother in menial jobs to earn money. After approximately three years in Iran, Zahra's mother began to apply to immigrate to other countries. Their paperwork was completed in 2001 and the family planned to move to Canada; their departure was delayed by the 9/11 attacks in September 2001. The Rezaies were eventually sponsored by a wealthy doctor in Winnipeg, and arrived in Winnipeg in October 2003. After staying at Welcome House for two months and a hotel for another month, they moved into their own housing, living in several places before finding a longer-term home through Manitoba Housing in the neighbourhood of St. Vital in 2006. Zahra attended Golden Gate Bridge School, St. George School, and Glenlawn Collegiate. At the time of our interviews, Rezaie was working on an undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in Education at the University of Winnipeg and worked in retail.

### **Shaakir, Salma (pseudonym)**

Salma Shaakir was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1951, to an ethnically Pashtun father and possibly Tajik mother. Her mother was the last of her father's six wives, and Salma had six full siblings and numerous half-siblings. Her father worked for the government and had close associations with other influential people; economically and socially, Salma had a fairly privileged childhood. In 1969 she happily married a distant relative and gave birth to her daughters in 1970 and 1974. In 1973 she graduated from the Faculty of Education at Kabul University and began working as a high school teacher, where she made friends with several people from Red River Community College in Winnipeg who were in Afghanistan on a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) project. On April 26, 1978, Salma's husband was killed in the coup which saw the Afghan communists take power in the country. She moved to a nearby country and returned to Afghanistan in 1980. In 1981 she went to New Delhi, India and asked her CIDA friends for help sponsoring her to move to Canada. With their help, Salma and her daughters moved to Winnipeg in October 1982. After living with a sponsor, Salma and her children lived in West Broadway and Osborne Village before buying a home in St. James. She was involved briefly in an unsuccessful attempt to create an Afghan association in Winnipeg in the 1980s. At the time of our interviews, Salma lived in Osborne Village and was retiring from her long-time job as a financial officer for the Province of Manitoba. Salma is actively involved in an organization that assists women and girls in Afghanistan.

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