“WHEN YOU WITNESS AN EVIL ACT, YOU SHOULD STOP IT WITH YOUR HAND.”
CITIZENSHIP LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT OF MUSLIM YOUTH ACTIVISTS IN TORONTO, CANADA

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis is about being young, Muslim and politically engaged in contemporary Toronto, Canada. Young Muslims attempting to come to terms with the complex and contradictory promises of Canadian citizenship must confront what it means to “be Canadian”—a national identity marked by historical legacies of oppressions, and shaped by ideals of western liberal democracy. Post-9/11 Canada is marked by intensified suspicion and repression of Muslims and those who “look like” Muslims. This thesis examines how 18 young people, ages 16 to 29, who self-identity as “Muslim” and “activist” learned “to reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970).

Through life history interview methods, this study attempts to capture how the participants had come to their political activism, critical experiences of learning inside and outside of schools that they understood as influential in shaping their political subjectivities and practices, the range of issues of injustice that concerned them, and the various actions they took to address those issues. The young Muslims expressed concern for and acted on access to quality affordable housing, police brutality, gender-based violence, Islamophobia and other forms of hate, and the question of Palestine. Their actions included creating safe spaces, (dis-) engaging formal systems of governance and public authority, providing public education, producing cultural narratives, and
engaging in various forms of direct action. Their voices and stories maintain centrality throughout this work.

This thesis is based on a broad definition of “education” that encompasses formal and non-formal education and informal learning. It is also based on the premise that “all education is citizenship education.” It demonstrates how the young Muslims’ multiple learning experiences in families, neighborhoods, communities, youth subcultures, social movements and school—embedded in histories of war and migration—enable them to name and to take action to transform the concrete situations of oppression that impact them and their communities. Particularly important for the young Muslims were the cultural and political spaces in which they were able to critically and collectively explore and question their lived experiences, identities, and binding solidarities.
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Chapter One:

Being Young, Muslim, And Politically Engaged In Toronto, Canada

When you witness an evil act you must stop it with your hand. If you cannot, then, at least, speak out against it with your tongue. If you cannot, then, at least, hate it with all of your heart. And, that is the weakest of faith.

Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him)\footnote{The phrase “Peace Be Upon Him/Her” follows after naming any of the Prophets, the Prophets’ companions, and Archangels in Islamic tradition.}  
*Kitab Al-Iman*\footnote{Kitab Al-Iman or “The Book of Faith” is a collection of Hadith, teachings (words and deeds) of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).} 1:79

This teaching of Prophet Muhammad may be interpreted as a call upon Muslims to transform concrete situations of oppression (*evil*) using their hands, tongues, *and* hearts. It is a teaching that was shared with me by some of the young people who informed this study.

This study is about being young, Muslim, and politically engaged in contemporary Toronto, Canada. Using a life history approach, I explore how 18 people, ranging between 16 and 29 years of age, who self-identify as “Muslim” and “activist,” learned and enacted their political subjectivities. This exploration is framed by the following questions:

1. How do these youth learn citizenship? More specifically, how do these youth become motivated to engage in activist citizenship?

2. How do these youth enact citizenship? More specifically, how do these youth seek to support the citizenship learning of others?

Through the first question, I hoped to gain insight into key formal and non-formal education and informal learning experiences that contributed to the development of the youth as activists.
Through the second question, I hoped to learn about the political issues that concerned them and the actions that they had taken to address those issues.

Young Muslims attempting to come to terms with the complex and contradictory promises of Canadian citizenship must confront what it means to be Canadian—a national identity that is marked by historical legacies of oppressions, and shaped by ideals of liberalism and neo-liberalism. In particular, neo-liberalism has been accompanied by an un-paralleled assault against oppositional forms of citizenship that critique and resist state socioeconomic policies and practices. Nevertheless, this has not deterred dissent.

The values of Canadian citizenship and citizenship education have been typically articulated in liberal terms. Liberal political thought is based on the notion that “human beings are atomistic and rational agents whose existence and interests are ontologically prior to society” (Dietz, 1989, p. 2). Since the liberal individual subject is characterized as existing on a level playing field, as having rational choice and intentional agency to enable social change, and as having at least some degree of social freedom, such a conception of citizenship is antithetical to critical understanding of oppressions (Boyd, 2004). Because the individual liberal subject is characterized as existing only as an individual in relation to the state, and as such, is only able to interact with the state through his or her individual acts of citizenship, such a notion of citizenship rejects institutions of civil society (including the family and the wider private sphere) as sites of collective agency (Dolby, 2003). Since western liberal democracy is characterized by the secularization of the public sphere, such a notion of citizenship marginalizes religious identities and ways of being (Modood, 2010; Panjwani, 2008; Ramadan, 2004). Conceptions of citizenship that are oppositional to liberal conceptions of citizenship are suppressed through projects of the nation-state such as schooling and policing (Kennelly, 2008).
Into this national landscape enter the 18 young Muslim youth activists. My personal rationale for focusing on Muslim youth is deeply connected to my own search for belonging as a Muslim. Beyond my personal reasons, I chose to focus on young Muslim activists because exploring expressions, understandings, and practices of citizenship by youth who are from communities marked as “suspect” post-9/11 allows us to understand some of the contradictions of belonging and exclusion (Maira, 2009). Focusing on Muslim youth also helps to illuminate cultural and political debates about Muslim cultural politics and youth citizenship in Canada. Although youth from Muslim communities have been the focus of Canadian and international anti-terrorism and security agendas, their voices have hardly been heard. My study reflects the complexity and multiplicity of 18 Muslim youths’ voices. An aim of this thesis is to reflect on what it means to be politically engaged in contemporary Toronto, Canada, where expressing and practicing oppositional forms of citizenship is particularly difficult for Muslims and those who “look like” Muslims.

I locate this thesis in scholarship on citizenship education and Muslim youth. I do this consciously and purposefully. International and comparative research in citizenship education is comprised primarily of large-scale survey studies of school-based citizenship teaching and learning (e.g., Shulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2009, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). These studies are concerned with young people’s political commitments and intent to participate in formal political systems and institutions, and, to some extent, oppositional forms of citizenship. While this approach has provided some insight into factors that appear to meaningfully influence young people’s political commitments, it does not explicitly address the systemic barriers that limit opportunities for substantive inclusion and political participation of socially and economically marginalized young people.
Canadian citizenship education research is comprised primarily of qualitative analyses of official citizenship education curricula (e.g., Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999; Kennelly, 2008; Mitchell, 2003), as well as qualitative studies of how young people make sense of citizenship (e.g., Dillabough & Kennelly, 2008; Peck, 2010). I am concerned about is entering the space of citizenship education so that others might come to understand that young Muslims’ experiences of citizenship and belonging have much to say about schooling, policies, and practices that produce commonsensical notions about what constitutes being Canadian.

In addition, I situate my study in empirical work on Muslim youth in Canada and the United States. The core themes addressed in this research literature are identity, gender, citizenship, and school experiences (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011). My study will also address these themes, and thereby provide points of comparison with the lived experiences and perspectives of other young Muslims. My study will provide insights into home and community experiences, as well. I am particularly interested in the cultural resources and forms of resistance generated within these pedagogical spaces. American Muslim youth studies, in particular, have provided critical insights into young Muslims’ lived experiences of and responses to 9/11, the United States-led international and domestic “War on Terror.” Responses include criticism of United States’ policies and practices, as well as public and political action to educate Americans about Islam and Muslims (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bayoumi, 2008; Cristillo, 2008; Maira, 2004, 2009; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). In comparison to the American research literature, there are relatively few Canadian Muslim youth studies that have explored these themes. While my study also addresses these themes, it does so by exploring how young Muslim activists learn and enact their political subjectivities. Canadian Muslim youth studies have also provided important insights into the formation of Islamic subcultures in public schools (e.g., Memon, 2009; Zine, 2000, 2004, 2008). The social organization of Muslim may be understood as a form of
“formalized resistance” to marginalization of Muslim identity and ways of being in traditionally secular spaces (Zine, 2000, p. 293). My study focuses on ‘out-of-school’ cultural sites of collective agency and power created by and for young Muslims in Canada. It is also noteworthy for this study that a significant body of this research literature is based on insider researcher perspectives—that is, Muslims conducting research in Muslim communities.

Conceptualizing Muslim Youth Citizenship

This study is built around four conceptual frameworks: cultural citizenship, education for liberation and transformation, identity, and agency. This study mobilizes the notion of cultural citizenship, which foregrounds issues of identity and belonging (Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994). Guided by theories of liberatory and transformative education (e.g., Freire, 1970; Kumashiro, 2004; Mezirow, 1990; Schugurensky, 2002), I listen to young people’s life histories for “humanizing” and “dehumanizing” learning experiences within and across diverse social environments, including schools, families, and neighborhoods. I assume that all education is citizenship education. I employ a broad definition of education that encompasses formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning. Citizenship learning is defined as a process that takes place throughout one’s life (“lifelong”) and across various pedagogical settings (“lifewide”) (Schugurensky, 2000).

Crosscutting these frameworks of cultural citizenship and liberatory and transformational are identity and agency. This thesis is based on an understanding of identity as connected to questions of belonging (Anthias, 2008). I examined how participating youth negotiated and mobilized race, gender, class, religion, and other defining identities to forge a sense of belonging within and beyond Canada. Using concepts of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Ibrahim, 2008), and diaspora (Soysal, 1997; Werbner, 2002), I attempt
to provide an integrated analysis of participating youths’ myriad and diverse, binding solidarities, and emotional experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In doing so, this study is an effort to disrupt prevailing essentialist conceptualizations of “Muslim youth.”

Dominant political discourses have constructed young Muslim men as violent and repressive, and co-constructed young Muslim women as silent, passive, subservient, and victimized. Neither young Muslim men nor young Muslim women are constructed in these discourses as fully human or agentic. The Muslim youth who participated in my study complicate this narrative. In particular, I discuss how they challenged exclusionary policies, discourses and practices, using a range of strategies to advocate justice for themselves and for others inside and beyond Canada. I argue that the understandings, expressions and practices of citizenship of the young people who participated in this study are “oppositional” in “resisting and critiquing existing power arrangements,” and “propositional” in “envisioning more egalitarian, transformed social spaces and ways of thinking and acting” (Benmayor, 2009, p. 138).

Design of the Thesis

To address the research questions outlined previously in this chapter, I used semistructured life history interviews (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), which inquired about how the youth had come to their political activism; critical experiences of formal and non-formal education and informal learning that the youth understood as influential in their political subjectivities and practices; the range of issues of injustice that concerned them; and the various actions they took to address those issues. A life history approach enables me to capture young people’s “vernacular accounts” of citizenship (Benmayor, 2009, p. 138), and “dual processes” of “being-made” and “self-making” into citizens (Ong, 1996, p. 737).
Tierney (1993) reminds us that the work of life history and personal narrative is “to challenge the oppressive structures that create the conditions for silencing” (p. 4). I ask readers of this study to seek to understand the life histories of the 18 Muslim youth activists involved in my study as narratives of everyday resistance, or “counter-stories” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), which challenge hegemonic master narratives that silence and distort epistemologies of these young people and their communities.

At the heart of this study are 18 young Muslim activists. For the purposes of my study, I employed relatively open definitions of “Muslim” and “activist.” By “Muslim” I mean individuals who perceive themselves to be “Muslim.” By “activist” I mean individuals who I understood as having a critical analysis of oppressions and being engaged in collective strategies to transform them. I chose to focus on diverse young people, some of whom would be conventionally defined as political activists, and some of who might not be. Some of them were working within “the system,” and many of them were part of groups that centralized and mobilized Muslim and/or other defining social identities and binding solidarities.

A brief survey of the political commitments of the young Muslim activists involved in this study reveals widely ranging issues of concern: accessing high quality and affordable housing; challenging aggressive policing and racial profiling; preventing and ending gender-based violence; stopping Islamophobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination; and, working in solidarity with oppressed peoples in Canada and beyond for their right to self-determination. They use a range of strategies to address their issues of concern, including: creating “safe spaces” in which young people can engage in dialogue, name and analyze oppressions, build community and collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance; working within formal systems of governance and engaging with public authority; providing public education and creating alternative “out-of-school” pedagogical spaces; producing cultural and political
narratives that counter dominant fictions about them and their communities; and/or engaging in various forms direct action such as popular and guerilla theatre, letter-writing, public rallies and demonstrations, and boycotts. One aim of this thesis is to expand notions of being political.

The youth and their families have histories and memories rooted in the Middle East, North and East Africa, South and South East Asia, and Central America. They had migrated to Canada for a myriad of reasons, including education, employment, family reunification, and safety and security. These youth know where they are from and why they are here. They carry the hopes, dreams, and expectations of their families and communities that they will contribute to the making of a just, equitable, and peaceful world for themselves and for others.

**Landscape of the Thesis**

The urban landscape of the study is Toronto—a *global city* (Sassen, 2000, 2002). As critical nodes in the global economic system, global cities concentrate disproportionate corporate economy, simultaneously generating immense wealth and profound inequalities (Sassen, 2000, 2002). As premier destinations for migrants and sites of urban migrant settlement, global cities also concentrate population density and cultural diversity, creating cultural and political spaces for new forms of citizenship and citizenship practices (Sassen, 2000, 2002). As Sassen (2002) observes and will be demonstrated in this thesis, “Citizenship is partly produced by the practices of the excluded” (p. 288). Cities are contested terrain, where both corporate economies and marginalized populations make claims on space, recognition and participation (Sassen, 2000, p. 91). Processes of globalization take on concrete and localized forms in global cities (Sassen, 2000, p. 91). Global cities are, therefore, important sites for studying transnational forms of citizenship and for anticipating national, regional, and global developments (Sassen, 2000, p. 91). These forces of globalization and transnational migration shape the understandings,
practices and expressions of citizenship of young people living in these contemporary urban cores.

In addition to being a global city, Toronto is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, and approximately 50 percent of the city’s population is foreign born. The majority of the estimated 884,000 Muslims in Canada are settled in the Greater Toronto Area\(^3\) (Statistics Canada, 2006). Statistics Canada projects that by 2031 the Muslim population in Toronto alone will grow to 1,087,000. It is, therefore, an important site for the study of Muslim cultural politics. As this thesis will demonstrate, living in Toronto enables localized encounters within and across diverse Muslim communities that might only be possible in this city. These localized encounters and interactions allow for the generation of new Muslim solidarities.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This chapter is organized into 10 chapters. This chapter has introduced the study and its primary concerns. In the pages that follow, I respond to my research questions.

In chapter two, *Conceptualizing and Situating Muslim Youth Citizenship*, I describe the conceptual framework underlying the study, and presents a review of the literature in which it is situated and to which I hope to contribute. The conceptual framework is built around four main components: cultural citizenship, education for liberation and transformation, identity, and agency. The conceptual framework guides my listening of the young Muslim activists’ life stories, particularly for insights into experiences of formal and non-formal education and informal learning that contributed to the development of critical consciousness and desire to effect social change. The review of research literature locates the study in citizenship education and Muslim youth studies.

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\(^3\) The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is the largest urban area in Canada. It is comprised of the central city of Toronto, and four regional municipalities: Durham, Halton, Peel, and York.
In chapter three, *The Political Participation of Muslims in Canada: A Brief History*, I contextualize the young Muslims’ lived experiences and perspectives in a national historical context. I draw primarily from critical interpretations of the Canadian project of nation-building and archival research on the Muslim presence in Canada to provide a partial historical account of the political participation of Muslims in Canada.

Chapter four, *Telling and Re-Telling Resistance: Research Methodology and Design*, I discuss the qualitative research methodology and design of this thesis, and the specifics of semistructured life history interviews that I used to gather the narratives of the 18 young Muslim activists.

In chapters five through to nine, I report findings from my analysis of the life stories that the 18 young Muslim activists shared with me.

In chapter five, *Citizenship as Crossing Symbolic, Physical, and Socioeconomic Borders of Social Housing*, I tell the stories of former and current tenants of Toronto’s social housing communities. These youths’ narratives provide insight into individual and collective efforts to resist social exclusion, to envision and to create better lives for themselves and their neighbors, and to challenge conflation of race, poverty, and social pathology associated with urban low-income neighborhoods.

In chapter six, *Citizenship as Resistance to State Repression and Criminalization*, I relate young people’s stories of their encounters with the police while living their everyday lives, while publicly expressing dissent, or while crossing national borders. These youths’ narratives provide insight into the realities of police brutality and racial profiling in Canada, the impact of such policing practices in their communities, and individual and collective efforts to resist state repression and criminalization.
In chapter seven, *Citizenship as Re-Construction of Gendered Discourses and Practices*, I tell the stories of young Muslim women who are carving out cultural and political spaces for themselves and other young Muslim women to individually and collectively explore what it means to be Muslim women in their families, communities, and wider Canadian society.

In chapter eight, *Citizenship as Critique and Resistance in Spoken Word Poetry and Hip Hop*, I listen to narratives and voices of young poets to understand how two art forms rooted in African traditions of storytelling—contemporary spoken word poetry and Hip Hop—become sites of dialogical processes of teaching and learning counter-hegemonic narratives.

In chapter nine, *Transnational Commitments and Engagements: The Question of Palestine*, I examine young people’s efforts to transform the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through local action in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work. Through their political engagement with “the question of Palestine,” the youth critically explored and questioned the gendered complexities of social movements, the religious nature of the conflict, and the connections between liberation struggles.

Chapter ten, *Transforming Social Spaces, and Ways of Thinking and Acting: Insights from Muslim Youth Citizenship*, concludes the thesis with a summary and discussion of the research findings, contributions, and implications of the study for the theory and practice of citizenship and citizenship education. Finally, I map out some directions for future research.
Chapter Two:
Conceptualizing and Situating Muslim Youth Citizenship

This chapter presents the conceptual framework guiding this study and the review of the research literature in which I situate my questions. The conceptual framework foregrounds issues of identity and belonging, and is built around four components: cultural citizenship, liberatory and transformative education, identity, and agency. I address these components separately for the purposes of coherence despite some overlap, which are noted as they arise. As I build the conceptual framework, I consider how each component can help to explain the citizenship learning and engagement of the young Muslim activists involved in my study.

The review of the literature bridges research in the fields of citizenship education and youth studies. I review large-scale quantitative studies and small-scale qualitative studies of citizenship education conducted internationally, in the United States, and in Canada. I glean this literature for insights into the role of formal and non-formal education and informal learning in the development of young people’s identities and agency. More specifically, I review this literature for insights into the official curricula young people encounter in Canadian schools, and, where possible, for representations of Muslim and other racialized youths’ lived experiences and perspectives of the official curricula. The literature review also encompasses critical ethnographic studies of Muslim youth living in the United States and in Canada before and after 9/11. I search this literature for further insights into young Muslims’ enacted political actions and practices in their homes, communities, and schools.

In this literature review, I place emphasis on citizenship education in public schools because these are the principal state institutions charged with teaching the discourses and practices of “good citizenship” deemed legitimate by the state. Further, citizenship education
research literature has tended to focus on the role of public schooling in the development of young citizens. However, I understand homes and communities as pedagogical spaces where young people can generate cultural resources and strategies for resistance to domination in school and society.

More broadly, I consider how the existing literature informs this study, and how my research can be positioned within the literature. The principal question I ask in this chapter is what role education has in contributing to young people’s capacities and dispositions for effecting social change.

**Part 1: Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is comprised of four components:

1. cultural citizenship,
2. liberatory and transformative education,
3. identity, and
4. agency.

Before I present the conceptual framework, I should reiterate that my study is based on the premise that *all* education *is* citizenship education. It employs a broad definition of education that encompasses formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning. Formal education refers to structured processes of teaching and learning guided by prescribed curricula that take place within a public educational institution or an educational institution accredited by a governing body of the state (Schugurensky, 2000). Non-formal education includes structured processes of teaching and learning guided by prescribed curricula that take place outside of the educational system (Schugurensky, 2000). Informal learning refers to learning that “takes place outside the curricula provided by formal and non-formal educational institutions and programs”
it also includes socialization, as well as self-directed and incidental learning

(Schugurensky, 2000, p. 2). It is a premise of this study that citizenship learning is a process that takes place throughout one’s life (lifelong) and across various pedagogical spaces (lifewide)

(Schugurensky, 2000, p. 2). Through these experiences, people learn possibilities for their social belonging and political participation.

**Cultural Citizenship**

Citizenship has traditionally been conceptualized in civil, political, and social terms. Marshall (1950), in his classic analysis of the historical evolution of British citizenship, identified three interrelated and overlapping elements of citizenship—civil, political, and social. The civil aspects of citizenship, which emerged in 18th century, entitle citizens with individual rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to own property, and equality before the law. The political aspects of citizenship, which arose in the 19th century, entitle citizens the right to vote and the opportunity to participate in political processes. The social aspects of citizenship, which emerged in the 20th century, entitle citizens with access to social benefits and resources such as education, economic security, and welfare state services. Marshall could not foresee the challenges posed by post-Second World War migration flows to the United Kingdom from its former colonies in the southern hemisphere—in the Caribbean, in the Indian Subcontinent, and in Africa—and he did not take into consideration issues of race, racism and racial inequalities, or the ensuing mobilizations for substantive inclusion in British society in his citizenship typology (Banks, 2008). As feminist political scholars have pointed out, Marshall did not take into consideration issues of gender, sexism, and gender inequalities either (Arnot & Dillabough, 2003; Dietz, 1989; Pateman, 1989). Banks (2008) calls for expanding Marshall’s (1950) conceptualization of citizenship to include “cultural citizenship,” because, he argues, it is
congruent with Marshall’s view that “citizenship evolves to reflect historical developments of the times and expanding to increase equality and social justice” (Banks, 2008, p. 130).

Cultural citizenship foregrounds issues of identity and belonging by acknowledging that ability, race, gender, class, religion and other defining identities mediate people’s access to rights and protections (Benmayor, 2009; Flores & Benmayor, 2009; Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994, 1997). Latino studies scholars have worked with the notion of cultural citizenship to explain the mobilization of marginalized immigrant communities in the United States in the struggle for full citizenship rights and protections (Benmayor, 2009; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Rosaldo, 1994, 1997). For example, Rosaldo (1994) defines cultural citizenship as follows:

Cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender or sexual orientation could make certain people less equal or inferior to others. The notion of belonging means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one’s destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions. (p. 402)

For Rosaldo (1994), cultural citizenship carries with it liberatory and transformative possibilities for a just and equitable society in which all citizens, irrespective of social difference, have full membership, and, therefore full access to the rights and protections of citizenship.

Flores and Benmayor (1997) describe cultural citizenship as a

Cultural phenomena—from practices that organize the daily life of individuals, families, and the community, to linguistic and artistic expression—cross the political realm and contribute to the process of affirming and building an emerging Latino identity and political and social consciousness. (p. 6)

For Flores and Benmayor (1997) cultural citizenship as an analytical construct helps to explain how everyday individual and collective cultural forms and practices support identity development and capacity to effect social change.
Benmayor (2009), drawing from Hall and Held (1990), states that cultural citizenship claims made by marginalized peoples “often go beyond those rights already enjoyed by ‘first-class’ citizens.” In the process of making such claims, they argue, people become “‘new citizens’ creating new rights, often not formally recognized by law” (p. 139). These “new citizens,” based on their “defining social identities and binding solidarities,” make “claims for cultural citizenship” that “question, disrupt, and remap national projects, creating new rights and new ways of practicing citizenship itself” (Benmayor, 2009, p. 139). At the centre of the conceptualizations of cultural citizenship presented above are the lived experiences and perspectives of marginalized peoples.

A critique of these related conceptualizations of cultural citizenship is that they do not adequately address the role of the state and civil society in regulating marginalized people’s opportunities for substantive inclusion. For example, Ong (1996) asserts,

While I share Rosaldo’s sentiments, his concept attends to only one side of a set of unequal relationships. It gives the erroneous impression that cultural citizenship can be unilaterally constructed and that immigrant or minority groups can escape the cultural inscription of state power and other forms of regulation that define the different modalities of belonging… Formulated in this manner, Rosaldo’s concept of cultural citizenship indicates subscription to the very liberal principal of universal equality that he seeks to call into question. (p. 738)

Ong (1996) proposes an alternate approach to cultural citizenship, conceptualizing it as follows:

“I consider citizenship to be a cultural process of ‘subject-ification,’ in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control and administration” (p. 737). For Ong (1996), then, cultural citizenship is a “dual process” of “self-making” and “being made,” and this process is mediated by matrices of power connected to the state and civil society. I should point out that in this study
I use an expanded notion of “civil society” that encompasses the family and the wider private sphere.

Analysis focusing on cultural citizenship has become increasingly important since 9/11. Writing with reference to the United States, Maira (2004) writes that “legal citizenship is clearly no longer enough to guarantee protection under the law with the state’s War on Terror, as is clear from the profiling, surveillance, and detention of Muslim Americans who are U.S. citizens” (p. 222). A case can also be made for post-9/11 Canada, where Muslims and those who “look like Muslims” have become the primary targets of erosion of legal rights and civil liberties. Maira (2004) analyzes the citizenship understandings, expressions, and practices of South Asian Muslim immigrant youth living in post-9/11 United States. She acknowledges “the critical possibilities of cultural citizenship to galvanize the struggle for civil and immigrant rights, particularly for young immigrants,” and, at the same time, she understands citizenship as “a limited basis for social transformation, given it is a state-sponsored and also increasingly privatized” (Maira, 2004, p. 222). She recognizes “Cultural citizenship brings with it all the contradictions of liberal multiculturalism and inequities of global capital in which it is embedded, and so it is necessarily politically ambiguous in its emancipatory possibilities” (Maira, 2004, p. 222).

Maira (2004) found that the South Asian Muslim immigrant youth involved in her study expressed and practiced different kinds of cultural citizenship, including both “flexible citizenship” and “dissenting citizenship.” Ong (1999) coined the term “flexible citizenship” to describe how affluent Chinese migrants used their transnational connections to facilitate the flow of political or financial resources across national borders. Maira (2004) uses “flexible citizenship” to explain how the South Asian Muslim immigrant youth in her study understood citizenship—in relation to the country of residence (the United States) and the “home” land
She uses the concept of “dissenting citizenship” to explain the South Asian Muslim immigrant youths’ expressions of citizenship, which, she explains, “is based on a critique and affirmation of human rights and means that they stand together with others outside the borders of the nation” (Maira, 2004, p. 226). This notion of dissenting citizenship complicates questions of national loyalty (to which young Muslim citizens living in western societies have been subjected) by suggesting that transnational commitments and engagements create new opportunities for re-thinking issues of justice and human rights within and across national borders. I return to Maira’s (2004) analysis of flexible and dissenting citizenship in the literature review section of this chapter. Notions of flexible and dissenting citizenship allow me to analyze the ways that the young Muslims involved in my study are mobilizing their solidarities in an effort to transform concrete situations of oppression within and beyond Canada.

I draw from both approaches to cultural citizenship (e.g., Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994) to better understand the range of ways that the young Muslim activists involved in my study are “being made” and “self-making” into citizens.

**Education for Liberation and Transformation**

My study is concerned with understanding how young Muslim activists develop the dispositions and capacities to transform concrete situations of oppression, and therefore I turn to related theories of education for liberation and transformation proposed by Freire (1970), Mezirow (1990), Schugurensky (2002), and Kumashiro (2004).

Freire (1970) argued that the struggle for freedom is intrinsic to the human condition, and that the struggle is necessary because any social interaction contains both the possibility for humanization and dehumanization:
Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (p. 47)

Humanization necessitates critical engagement with concrete situations of oppression in order to transform them. The struggle for particular ways of life occurs at the nexus of humanization and dehumanization. Freire (1970) argued that “education as the practice of freedom” acknowledges people’s lived experiences in and relations with the world (p. 81). He rejected what he called the “banking” approach to education in which students are imagined as empty bank accounts that should remain open to deposits made by the teacher. He claimed that this banking approach results in the dehumanization of both students and teachers (Freire, 1970, pp. 72-79). Instead, Freire advocated what he called the “problem-posing,” dialogical approach to education in which teachers and students engage in mutual processes of teaching and learning based on an ethic of “hope, love, humility, and trust” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). At the heart of this problem-posing approach to education is “dialogue”: “[Dialogue] is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another” (Freire, 1970, p. 89). Such dialogue enables the oppressed to “speak a true word” and to overcome “silencing.” In a problem-posing approach to education, students are challenged to critically explore and question their lived experiences, to identify concrete situations of oppression (dehumanization) along with opportunities for transforming such situations (humanization). This “problem-posing” approach, according to Freire (1970), allows teachers to guide students in a process of “conscientization”—a critical consciousness that serves to humanize both the oppressor and the oppressed through reflection and action. Freire’s (1970) proposal for liberatory education is based on the notion of “praxis”: a cyclical process of reflection and action to produce different consciousness and different action upon the world to transform it. Students who develop critical consciousness can
begin to “read the word” and “read the world,” drawing from their liberatory tools (e.g., critical literacy skills) to deconstruct hegemonic narratives, and to construct their own narratives, becoming “self-defining” and “makers of their own way” (Freire, 1970).

Mezirow (1990) described “transformative learning” as a dialectic between critical reflection and action—a process of “reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that reflects” (p. 6). He proposed that this “perspective transformation” usually occurs in response to an external “disorienting dilemma,” such as a life crisis or transition: “dilemmas of which old ways of knowing cannot make sense become catalysts or ‘trigger events’ that precipitate critical reflection and transformations” (p. 5). Mezirow (1990) suggested that perspective transformation could occur at individual, group, or societal levels. Transformative learning theory has been criticized for over-emphasizing individual transformation and under-emphasizing social transformation (Schugurensky, 2002). This is problematic, because, as Schugurensky (2002) points out, “Individual transformation by itself does not ensure social transformation” (p. 63). Mezirow (1990) proposed his own definition of liberatory and transformative learning: “An organized effort to help the learner challenge presuppositions, explore alternative perspectives, transform old ways of understanding, and act on new perspectives” (p. 6). In contrast to Freire’s (1970) definition of liberatory and transformation education, Mezirow’s (1990) definition does not seem to be as explicitly political.

Building on the above ideas proposed by Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1990), Schugurensky (2002) conceptualizes “learning in and for social action” as a series of “assimilative, expansive, and transformative processes” (p. 60). He cautions against conflating critical reflection and transformative learning, arguing, “Critical reflection is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformative learning to occur” (p. 62). In other words, people’s
consciousness about how they are impacted by concrete situations of oppressions may not necessarily catalyze them to effect personal or social change. Schugurensky (2002) emphasizes the relevance of “context” in helping people to make connections between individual and social transformation: “[A] supportive social environment, a social reality that is susceptible of transformation (i.e., a viable collective project), and a sense of community are important elements in creating the conditions for social transformation” (p. 62). My study is based on the premise that citizenship education and learning takes place within and across multiple social environments. People’s learning experiences are constantly in dialogue with one another (Schugurensky, 2002). Such dialogue can draw people’s attention to “contradictions” among the social, political, and cultural norms of contrasting contexts. Experiencing a personal sense of social belonging (or “community”) and a personal sense of capacity to effect change makes individual and social transformation increasingly possible. The development of critical consciousness is a social process. A primary goal of transformative learning is the development of independent thinkers with the capacity to engage constructively in dialogue, to formulate and substantiate their perspectives, and to engage with diverse (and dissenting) perspectives. These types of situations are expected to promote the development of citizens who can effect personal and social change (Schugurensky, 2002, p. 64).

Social movement learning encompasses both non-formal education and informal learning opportunities. There are two types of opportunities for citizenship learning through social movements: learning by people who are involved in social movements and learning by people who are outside of social movements:

The organization or communicative mandate of all social movements is a necessarily educational concern. And while much of the learning within social movements is informal or incidental in nature, organized or intentional learning also takes place as a direct result of educational activities organized within the movement itself. (Hall, 2006, p. 3)
Thus, social movements offer planned and unplanned non-formal education for those inside and outside the movement. Hall (2006) notes,

Informal learning emerges from and advances social action by contributing to building alternative organizational forms, by making links between the spiritual and the political, by illuminating the power of a small group of committed people, and by showing how expertise can be brought from outside. (p. 8)

Similarly, Freire (2003) contended that a liberatory education would encompass social movements, which generate pedagogies and practices of resistance that are not always possible in schools: “One cannot always deny the possibility of the schools, but we have to recognize that historically there are times when the school environment provides more or fewer opportunities” (p. 363).

Although the above theories provide helpful frameworks for examining the life histories of the young Muslim activists who took part in my study, they do not adequately address issues of identity and belonging. For this reason, I turn to Kumashiro’s (2004) theoretical work on “anti-oppressive” approaches to education.

To begin, Kumashiro (2004) uses the term “Other” to refer to “groups that are traditionally marginalized, denigrated, or violated (i.e., Othered) in society” (p. 34). Kumashiro (2004) provides several examples of the Other in the United States:

Students of color, students from under- or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically ‘masculine,’ and students who are or are perceived to be queer...students with disabilities, students with limited or no English-language proficiency, and students from non-Christian backgrounds. (p. 34)

These groups are “often defined in opposition to groups traditionally favored, normalized, or privileged in society” (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 34). In the Canadian context, these groups are similarly defined as the Other. The young people involved in my study are among the Other,
because of their ways of being and identifying in this world. Kumashiro (2012) explains that forms of oppression include “racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, colonialism, and other ‘isms’” (¶ 3). He draws from feminist, critical, multicultural, queer, postcolonial and others social movements for equity and justice to conceptualize an “anti-oppressive” approach to education that challenges multiple forms of oppression and that questions its own perspectives and practices by continually seeking new insights (Kumashiro, 2012). Kumashiro (2012) explains anti-oppressive education as follows:

Contradictions abound in education. Teaching involves both intended and unintended lessons, and it is often in the unintended, hidden lessons that racism, sexism, and other "isms" find life. Learning involves both a desire for and a resistance to knowledge, and it is often our resistance to uncomfortable ideas that keeps our eyes closed to the "isms." Common sense does not often tell us that oppression plays out in our schools. But the contradictions in education make it impossible to say that oppression is not in some way affecting what and how we teach, despite our best of intentions. What might it mean, then, to teach in ways that challenge oppression? (¶ 1)

Both Kumashiro (2012) and Schugurensky (2002) discuss the significance of “contradictions” in liberatory and transformative education. As discussed previously, learning takes place within and across multiple socio-political contexts, and these diverse learning experiences are constantly in dialogue with one another, and this dialogue can illuminate such contradictions (Schugurensky, 2002). Kumashiro (2012) calls on educators to pay closer attention to such contradictions and to teach against “common sense.” Similarly, Freire (1970) advocates looking for the systems and ideologies, or, as in Kumashiro’s (2012) words, the “isms” that serve to oppress and dehumanize.

These related theories of liberatory and transformative education provide a guiding framework for analyzing the young Muslim activists’ life histories. Within my study, these theories offer insights into key that contributed to the development of the participants’ critical consciousness and to their capacities and dispositions to effect personal and social change.
Identity

I seek to understand how young Muslim activists develop their social identities and binding solidarities, and how they mobilize these to transform concrete situations of oppression within and beyond national borders. Therefore, I examine three related theories of identity construction: intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Ibrahim, 2008), and diaspora (Soysal, 1997; Webner, 2002).

Based on her analysis of the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape Black women’s employment experiences in the United States, Crenshaw (1989) proposed the feminist sociological theory of intersectionality to explain how oppressions intersect on multiple and simultaneous levels, mutually constructing interlocking systems of power, and contributing to systemic social inequality (see also Collins, 2000). Dei and James (1998) point out that, “from context to context, certain forms/systems of domination and oppression, like forms of identities, are more salient and visible than others” (p. 59). In this study, I attempt to complicate the notion of “Muslim youth” by capturing intersections of multiple identities and oppressive relations, and by capturing such contextual and situational variations by examining participating youths’ experiences of citizenship education and learning throughout their lives and across diverse social environments. This consideration of intersectionality is also informed by my understanding that a Muslim may not view her religious identity as an all-encompassing identity, and that her identity as a Muslim may be shifting and contextual, evolving in concert with her other defining identities.

Bhabha (1994), based on his analysis of colonizer/colonized relations in colonial texts, formulated the literary and cultural theory of hybridity to explain the interdependence and mutual construction of colonizer and colonized. He conceptualized hybridity as the process by which new subject-positions emerge from conflict between colonizer and colonized, challenging the
validity of essentialist constructions of subject-positions. Bhabha (1994) theorizes that the space between subject-positions is a locale of the disruption and displacement of colonial narratives and cultures. For Bhabha, this “in-between space” or, as he refers to it, “the third space,” provides a spatial politics of inclusion that “initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (p. 1). For Bhabha (1990), the third space “enables other positions to emerge. It displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211).

Ibrahim (2008) draws an ethnographic sketch of what hybridity looks like in the lives of African youth in Canada:

These youth were not black in Africa; however, once in North America, they fall within ‘the eyes of power’ (Foucault, 1980) where they become black—and where blackness is conceived as a performative category, a form of speech, an attitude and a social location one takes up. (p. 235)

Ibrahim (2008) refers to these youth as “displaced subjects,” located in between multiple cultures, languages and belief systems. They are in the third space: “In the process of understanding and translating the New context, subconsciously, displaced subjects also understand and translate the Old” (p. 242). This is a dynamic process in which the New and the Old interact to enable other positions to emerge. Using the notion of hybridity, I attempt to capture the experiences of the third space in the lives of the young Muslims who took part in my study.

The term diaspora has traditionally referred to “scattered communities” that have experienced expulsion from an ancestral homeland (Werbner, 2002, p. 120), but it may also “denote a social condition entailing a particular form of ‘consciousness’ which is particularly compatible with globalization” (Anthias, 2008 p. 11). Many national diasporas are implicated in the nationalist projects of their home countries, and their political participation in their home
countries is facilitated by advances in global media and communication technologies (Werbner, 2002). However, shared national identification is not the only connection that binds and mobilizes diasporas (Werbner, 2002).

Werbner (2002) articulates the connection that binds diasporas as “co-responsibility” to indicate: that material and cultural goods, and financial and political support flow between diaporic communities (or their home countries); that diasporas do not necessarily have singular concerns or centres; and, that diasporas are usually highly politicized networks (p. 121). The power of contemporary diasporas is in their locations, beyond fixed national boundaries: “as transnational social formations, diasporas challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state, and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood” (p. 120). Related to this, diasporas cannot be managed by a center of power: “Neither the Pakistani or Israeli governents, nor the keepers of the Ka’ba in Mecca, control the Pakistani, Jewish or Muslim diasporas” (Werbner, 2002, p. 123). Werbner (2002) examines the historic development of Pakistani diasporic communities in Britain, which have defined themselves in relation to Pakistan, and redefined themselves as a Muslim diaspora. Pakistani diasporic communities have thereby forged a sense of belonging to their homeland and to the transnational Muslim community. Being a Muslim diasporan entails having “ummah”-consciousness, or a sense of “co-responsibility” towards Muslim communities, particularly towards the impoverished, persecuted, or displaced (Werbner, 2002; see also Soysal, 1997). According to Werbner (2002), Muslim diasporas carve out “diasporic space of critical dissent against corrupt Muslim and Western leaders everywhere: in the Islamic heartland, in Pakistan and in the West” (p. 130). Muslim diasporic communities in western societies draw on multiple citizenships to secure citizenship rights and protections for themselves and their “co-diasporans” (Soysal, 1997; Werbner, 2002). However, it is important to remember, being a Muslim diasporan does not negate the significance of other defining identities
and solidarities (see also Anthias, 2008). The importance of other defining identities becomes evident in the community building efforts of the young Muslims involved in my study.

These concepts developed in contemporary theories of identity—intersectionality, hybridity, and diaspora—guide my analysis of young Muslim activists’ multi-layered identities, solidarities, and emotional experiences of exclusion and inclusion.

Agency

I seek to understand how the young Muslim activists who shared their stories with me develop their social identities and binding solidarities, and how they mobilize these in their efforts to transform concrete situations of oppression that impact them and others. Guided by the question how youth develop the capacity and the disposition to effect personal and social change, I now examine theories of agency and active citizenship (Sears & Hughes, 1996; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Agency refers to the capacity to act in the world. It is exercised within social relations mediated by power. As Grossberg (1996) explains, “Agency involves relations of participation and access, the possibilities of moving into particular sites of activity and power, and of belonging to them in such a way as to be able to enact their powers” (p. 100). Further, the exercise of agency does not inevitably result in desired or likely outcomes, but it always transforms the world in some way and carves out new political and cultural spaces of agency and power (Dolby, 2003).

There are several typologies of citizenship that facilitate understanding of agency as acts of citizenship (e.g., Banks, 2008; Clarke, 1996; McLaughlin, 1992; Walzer, 1994; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Sears and Hughes (1996) propose a spectrum from “elitist” to “activist” as a typology of citizenship. This typology has been instrumental in building the foundation for conceptual and practical approaches to citizenship in Canadian educational contexts. The “good
citizen” in the “elitist” conception is one who is “knowledgeable about mainstream versions of national history as well as the technical details of how public institutions function,” and, “the highest duty of citizenship in this view is to become as informed as possible about public issues and, based on this information, to vote for appropriate representatives at election time” (p. 7).

The “activist” conception assumes significant participation by all citizens and the “good citizen” in this conception is one who participates “actively in community or national affairs. They have a deep commitment to democratic values including equal participation of all citizens in discourse where all voices can be heard and power is relatively equally distributed” (Sears & Hughes, 1996, p. 8). One concern that I have about the “good citizen” in the “activist” conception, as articulated by Sears and Hughes (1996), is that she appears to be acting alone. Another concern is that she does not appear to be employing an oppositional position in national affairs. I remain cautious that conceptions of activist citizenship are “conflated with participation in normative community organizations that are generally not employing oppositional positions to the nation-state” (Kennelly, 2008, p. 17).

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) identify three implicit conceptions of the “good citizen” in their analysis of citizenship education programs in Canada and the United States: “personally responsible,” “participatory,” and “justice-oriented.” They suggest that the “personally responsible” citizen acts responsibly in her community. The “participatory” citizen actively participates in the civic affairs and the social life of her community at local, state, and national levels; and, the “participatory” citizen also develops relationships, common understandings, trust and collective commitments. The “justice-oriented citizen” is expected to be able to critically analyze structures of inequality, consider collective strategies to challenge injustice and, whenever possible, address root causes of social problems. I feel it is important to address the collective dimension of youth citizenship to disrupt liberal notions of agency and political action.
The life histories of the young Muslim activists in my study reveal the collective dimensions of their understandings, expressions, and practices of citizenship.

Ginwright and Cammarota (2006), in their conceptualization of youth agency, borrow Sampson, Morenoff and Earl’s (1999) understanding of “social capital,” which challenges the idea that “social networks as perfunctory, task-specific relations that translate to individual opportunities” (p. xvii), and foregrounds its collective dimensions: “the willingness, trust, and motivations that encourage or prohibit groups to act on behalf of the common good” (p. xvii). Drawing from HoSang, James and Chow-Wang’s (2004) study of youth organizing for public education reform, Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) illustrate the importance of understanding collective dimensions of youth collective action:

Youth groups frequently address issues related to unfair suspension and expulsion policies, armed police officers on campus, unsanitary bathrooms, and inadequate public transportation to and from school… Young people frame these issues through a broader political analysis of power and operate within networks of intergenerational allies, collaborations with other youth groups, and partnerships with larger political organizations. These forms of capital—social, political, and human—are important for effective community mobilizing for young people. (p. xvii)

Lovell’s (2003) notion of “relational agency” is also useful for understanding collective dimensions of youth collective action. Instead of focusing on the role of the individual agent in social change, Lovell (2003) proposes the following:

What is required is the recognition of agency as a function of ensemble performances—often with a very large cast of others. Transformative political agency lies in the interstices of interaction, in collective social movements in formation in specific circumstances, rather than in the fissures of a never-fully-constituted self, or in the always open-ended character of speech and language, although these instabilities of language and the self are indeed among the conditions of possibility of agency. (p. 2)
Lovell, like Sampson et al. (1999), articulates a conception of agency that includes the role of social interactions and relationships in public and political action. Such an account can help explain the ways in which those who lack social and economic power resist oppressive forces that impact them and their communities.

Based on her analysis of Muslim cultural formations in European public spheres, Soysal (1997) observed that identity emerges as a critical discourse of political actions and practice, and is enacted as a symbolic, organizational tool for creating new group solidarities and mobilizing resources within and across national borders. She argues that the recognition of identities as a “human right” facilitates the mobilization of identities across private and public spheres, to “saturate the public with the private,” and to create new dynamics for collective claims-making organizing (Soysal, 1997, p. 518). Such political actions and practices “diversify the spaces of and for politics” (Soysal, 1997, p. 515). Soysal (1997) provides the example of cultural formations among Turkish Muslim immigrant youth groups in Germany:

Muslim immigrant rap groups, such as Berlin-based Islamic Force and Cartel, evoke symbols and employ language that replicates African-American Hip Hop. Participants identify with transnational forms of “resistance,” “brotherhood,” and “assertion of the self” in the “universal message of hip hop. They do not limit their identification to Turkishness or Germanness or to Islam or agency as citizen action to any one national political community. As such, they belong to “diversely spatialized, partially overlapping or non-overlapping collectives.” (p. 521)

The cultural enactments of these Turkish Muslim immigrant youth in Germany “constitute yet another enactment of transnational affiliations and social spaces” (Soysal, 1997, p. 520), suggesting that these youth “appropriate their identity symbols as much from global cultural flows as from the host or home country’s cultural practices” (Soysal, 1997, p. 520). I return to the significance of popular culture, particularly Hip Hop, in Muslim youth citizenship in this study.
Summary: Conceptualizing Muslim Youth Citizenship

This study is built on a conceptual framework that is comprised of four components: cultural citizenship, liberatory and transformative education, identity and belonging, and agency and active citizenship. With the assistance of these theories, I attempt to capture Muslim youths’ key citizenship learning experiences within and beyond schooling that contributed to the development of their defining social identities and binding solidarities, as well as to their capacity and motivation to effect social change.

Using the construct of cultural citizenship, I foreground issues of identity and belonging, and attempt to capture the dual process of self-making and being-made in fields of power including the nation-state and civil society. I also use a broad notion of civil society, which encompasses the family and the wider private sphere. Guided by theories of liberatory and transformative education, I listen to young people’s life histories for humanizing and dehumanizing learning experiences within and across diverse social environments, including schools, families, and neighborhoods. I attempt to capture glimpses into processes of praxis: a cyclical process of reflection and action upon the world to transform it. Other useful markers of transformation, including a life crisis or disorienting dilemma, which may catalyze critical reflection perspective transformation, aid my analysis. Liberatory and transformative education emphasizes the importance of context in helping agents make connections between individual and social transformation. Supportive social environments in which agents feel a sense of belonging or community are critical in creating conditions for social transformation. I would argue that supportive social environments are also anti-oppressive teaching and learning spaces, which challenge common sense and isms that regulate agents’ opportunities for social belonging and political engagement, and draw attention to contradictions in political, social, and cultural norms within and across multiple and diverse social environments.
Conceptualizations of identity and belonging guide my analysis of participating youths’ identities, binding solidarities, and emotional experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Using the concept of *intersectionality*, I attempt to capture intersections of multiple identities and oppressive relations, paying particular attention to contextual and situational variations within participating youths’ lived experiences. The concept of *hybridity* helps to illuminate Muslim youths’ lived experiences of the *third space*, locales of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices. Using the concept of *diaspora*, I attempt to explain participating youths’ transnational commitments and solidarities.

Conceptualizations of agency and active citizenship guide my analysis of the ways young people in my study enact citizenship. *Agency* refers to the capacity of an agent to act in the world. I articulate expressions of agency as *active citizenship*. Because the youth who took part in my study have an activist orientation, I draw from conceptualizations of *activist* citizenship to illustrate their actions. I am particularly interested in how participating youth, through their own activism, attempt to influence the citizenship learning and participation of other agents. I turn again to theories of liberatory and transformative education to explain their actions. Contrary to dominant political discourses, I understand young Muslims as *agents*—with their own goals, perceptions, and purposes. The following chapters demonstrate how the young Muslims involved in this study enacted different ‘kinds’ of activist citizenship to challenge exclusionary policies, discourses and practices, using a range of strategies and tactics to advocate rights and protections for themselves and for others inside and beyond Canada.

**Part 2: Situating Muslim Youth Citizenship**

This second part of the chapter presents a review of the research literature in which I situate my study: citizenship education and Muslim youth studies. This literature review is
organized into four main sections: citizenship education and learning in schools, citizenship education and learning in families and neighborhoods, identity and belonging, and agency and active citizenship. I address these themes separately for the purposes of coherence despite some overlap, which are noted as they arise.

**Citizenship Education and Learning in Schools**

Public schools, as young people’s primary point of contact with the nation-state, are the principal institutions formally charged with imparting a common understanding of citizenship deemed legitimate by the nation-state. A large body of citizenship education research literature is underpinned by liberal notions of citizenship and comprised of large-scale quantitative comparative and international survey research. The primary focus of this research is to better understand the role of public schooling in the development of young people’s political commitments and intent to participate in political life (e.g., Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Hustfeldt, & Niklova, 2002; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001; Shulz, et al., 2009, 2010).

The 1999 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Civic Education Study (CIVED) included a qualitative first phase (conducted in 1996 and 1997) involving 24 national case studies of the discourses and research relating to civic and citizenship education in participating nations. The national case studies provided both a base line from which to assess future developments in the field and as a basis for developing the CIVED quantitative international survey instruments for the second phase of the study (conducted in

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4 CIVED Phase One (national case studies) participating countries include Australia, Belgium (French), Bulgaria, Canada (English), Columbia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States.

5 In CIVED and ICCS, “civic education” focuses on “knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life (such as voting in elections)” (Schulz et al. 2009, p. 22); “citizenship education” focuses on “knowledge and understanding and on opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society. It is concerned with the wider range of ways that citizens use to interact with and shape their communities (including schools) and societies” (Schulz et al. 2009, p. 22).
Nationally representative samples of nearly 90,000 students in the usual grade for 14-year-olds in 28 countries were surveyed on content (e.g., democracy and citizenship, national identity, social cohesion and diversity); knowledge of democratic principles; skills in interpreting political communication; their conceptions of democracy and citizenship; their attitudes related to trust in institutions, their nation, opportunities for immigrants, the status of women; and, their expectations for future civic and political participation (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In 16 countries an additional survey was carried out among between 16- and 18-year-olds (Amadeo et al., 2002).

CIVED results indicated that when students perceived that their schools taught the importance of voting, the proportion of students who said they are likely to vote increased. Schools in which teachers modeled and facilitated an open climate for discussing and debating political issues and inviting students take part in shaping school life were effective in promoting both civic knowledge and intention to engage—a finding consistent with results documented in previous (e.g., Torney, Oppenheim, & Farnen, 1975) and subsequent studies (e.g., Schulz et al., 2009, 2010). In three quarters of the countries surveyed, students who reported having such experiences in their classrooms showed greater civic knowledge, and they were more likely to expect to vote as adults than other students. About one quarter of the students said that they are often encouraged to voice their opinions during discussions in their classrooms, but an equal proportion say that this rarely or never occurs. Teacher responses across many countries confirmed what students themselves said. Teacher-centered methods, such as the use of textbooks, recitation, and worksheets, were dominant in civic-related classrooms in most

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6 CIVED Phase Two (lower secondary students) participating countries include Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

7 CIVED Phase Two (upper secondary students) participating countries include Chile, Columbia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), Israel, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland.
countries, although there were also opportunities for discussion of issues. The effectiveness of an open and participatory climate in promoting civic knowledge and engagement was documented in the subsequent 38-country\(^8\) International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (Shulz et al., 2009, 2010), in which data was gathered from more than 140,000 students and 62,000 teachers in over 5,300 schools.

Using CIVED data collected from 2,811 American ninth graders (approximately 14 years of age), Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld (2007) compared Latino students’ responses with non-Latino students’ responses. In comparison with non-Latino students, Latino students reported more positive attitudes toward immigrants’ rights but had lower average civic knowledge and expected political participation. These differences were apparent even when controlling for language, country of birth, and political discussions with parents. School characteristics that explained a portion of this gap include open classroom climate and time devoted to study of political topics and democratic ideal. These findings suggest that schools can (but often do not) help to lessen participatory inequality that exists for Latino youth in political life: this is consistent with findings reported in Kahne and Sporte (2008) below.

Kahne and Sporte’s (2008) study of 4,057 students (primarily youth from low-income African-American and Latin-American communities) in 52 high schools in Chicago found that specific school-based civic learning opportunities promoted improvements in students’ commitments to and capacities for participation: undertaking service learning projects, following current events, discussing problems in the community and ways to respond, providing students with a classroom in which open dialog about controversial issues is common and where students study topics that matter to them, and exposure to role models. These curricular approaches

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\(^8\) ICCS participating countries include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Columbia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, England, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Thailand.
appear to provide significant benefits for students from groups that generally have less political voice than others, and “classroom civic learning opportunities can more than offset the impact of neighborhood or home contexts that are relatively inattentive to political issues when it comes to the development of commitments to political participation” (Kahne & Sporte, 2008, p. 755). I am concerned about the deficit framing of home-based learning opportunities. I believe that home-based learning opportunities can more than offset the impact of classroom contexts that are relatively inattentive to young people’s realities, and the issues that matter to them and their communities. Home-based learning opportunities can expose young people to counter-stories that help them to resist and to challenge hegemonic narratives that they might encounter in schools and society.

While Kahne and Sporte (2008) saw strong evidence that explicit civic learning opportunities in school were efficacious, they did not see strong evidence that more general academic and social supports in school fostered civic outcomes. Indeed, they suggest that focusing on teacher and peer relationships associated with academics and social development appeared insufficient as a means of fostering commitments to political engagement, perhaps “since academic and social supports have a less direct relationship to the civic and political dimensions of student identities” (pp. 755-756). Although this relationship does not appear to be quantifiably significant, I contend that it should not be underestimated that teacher and peer relationships associated with academics and social development can help young people to forge a sense of belonging to classroom and school communities.

The large-scale international, comparative, and American research in citizenship education draws attention to school and classroom practices that appear to influence young people’s political commitments. Such findings provide a guiding framework for my own analysis
of key formal citizenship learning experiences in the life histories of the young Muslim activists who took part in my study.

Research on official mandated guidelines for civics and social studies curricula, traditional sites for formal citizenship education, provides additional insight into the context in which young people are learning citizenship in Canadian schools. Official curricula reflect provincial and national government priorities and understandings of “good citizenship” or “legitimate citizenship.”

As mentioned previously, Canada participated in the qualitative first phase of CIVED. The related Canadian case study, *Canadian Citizenship Education: The Pluralist Ideal and Citizenship Education for a Post-Modern State* (Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999), found that conceptions of citizenship in the official curricula had gradually moved away from “elitist” ideologies that had reflected the 19th-century concern with “the making of political subjects” (Sears et al., 1999 p. 125). These “political subjects” were “not seen as self-creating” (Sears, et al., 1999, p. 125). They were to “be made by their governors after the image of an easily governed population” (Sears, et al., 1999, p. 125). These official curricula, based on an elitist conception of citizenship, were intended to create passive citizenry. The authors noted that there had been, in official policy and mandated curricula, a shift in school curricula and policy towards “activist citizenship” orientations (e.g., Masemann, 1989; Sears & Hughes, 1996; Sears, et al., 1999).

Sears et al. (1999) argued that conceptions of citizenship in Canadian official curricula had also become more “inclusive” or “pluralist” in recognition of official Canadian multiculturalism and bilingualism, including the development of French immersion and Core French programs. The authors also traced the changing portrayal of First Peoples in these curricula from “savages in need of civilizing influences of western culture” (p. 126) to
“distinctive founding members of the Canadian family” (p. 126) across official curricula, as well as the development of *Native Studies* programs in Canadian public schools that examine the rights of First Peoples and the historical and systemic barriers to their full participation in Canadian society (p. 126). Despite such curricular innovations, Sears et al. (1999) suspected that “the actual practices of citizenship education in the nation’s classrooms closer to older, more conservative models of the past” (pp. 130-131). Their suspicions were based in part on Hodgette’s (1968) study of citizenship education in Canada, which found that students were typically uninterested in civic education, the lack of meaningful benchmarks against which to monitor progress in Canadian citizenship education and little interest in generating them.

In contrast, 10 years later, Sears and Hughes (2006a, b), based on their examination of subsequent scholarship, policy and program development in Canadian citizenship education, argue that citizenship education initiatives across the country had tended towards “indoctrination”—“the push for uncritical, often universal acceptance of ideas and the eschewing of evidence” (p. 4), more than “education”—“the opening up of possibilities through the exploration of alternative understandings, the critical application of evidence and argument and the development of skills and dispositions necessary to act on the possibilities” (p. 4). These findings suggest that contemporary initiatives in Canadian citizenship education initiatives might actually de-legitimate teaching and learning for liberation and transformation. Because public schools are state institutions, it should not come as a surprise that they work to maintain the status quo. As Westheimer and Kahne (2003) summarize, “The narrow and often ideologically conservative conceptions of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects neither arbitrary choices nor pedagogical limitations but rather political choices with political consequences” (p. 1).
Bickmore (2006) examined representations of social conflict in English Language Arts, Health, and Social Sciences curricula, Grades 1 to 10, for three Canadian provinces: Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Ontario. Her analysis revealed that all three sets of official curricula, while attending to some subject matter and skill-building matter expectations that could create space for constructive democratic engagement and peace-building, appeared to emphasize assimilation by silencing or marginalizing critical and dissenting perspectives and by diminishing present injustices as past or virtually resolved. At the same time, Bickmore emphasized that teachers can (and do) exercise agency to reinterpret official curricula in “relatively conservative or relatively transformative ways” (p. 381). I agree that teachers can choose to interpret curricula and provide young people with liberatory and transformative learning opportunities, but only to some extent. There are prevailing conditions that constrain their choices. Kennelly (2008) and Mitchell’s (2003) analyses of official curricula substantiate my beliefs.

Kennelly (2008) examined official secondary-level civics curriculum mandated by Canadian provincial governments of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec in an effort to better understand the context in which “young activists are acting” (p. 95). This analysis was part of Kennelly’s larger ethnographic study of young Canadian activists (ages 16 to 29 years old) in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. In all three sets of curricula, Kennelly found frequent pairing of the term “responsibility” with “rights.” She suggests that this pairing serves “to remind young would-be-citizens that any rights they may be entitled to in Canada come with obligations to the state” (p. 96). Her analysis of the ways “citizenship” is conceptualized in these documents reveals an emphasis on “being responsible, dutiful, ethical, and informed” (p. 98). Kennelly contends that by framing citizenship as a private and individual process the curricula might actually support the reproduction of norms that limit democratic possibilities, rather than expand them.
Kennelly’s findings are consistent with Mitchell’s (2003) study of the evolution of citizenship education in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which concluded that emerging forms of education in each of these countries are deeply neoliberal. Mitchell argues that “educating a child to be a good citizen is no longer synonymous with constituting a well-rounded, nationally-oriented, multicultural self, but rather about attainment of the ‘complex skills’ necessary for individual success in a global economy” (p. 399).

This review of research in official civics and social studies curricula provides insight into Canadian provincial and national government priorities—electoral individualism, social cohesion (assimilation), and global economic competitiveness. However, analyses of official curricula provide only partial insight into the contexts in which young people are learning citizenship. Research in Canadian citizenship education documenting young people’s experiences of official curricula is relatively sparse. In the remainder of this section, I highlight some studies that provide insight into Muslim and other racialized youths’ responses to official curricula that they encountered in Canadian classrooms.

In a critical ethnographic study of over 150 African Canadian students and “drop-outs,” their parents, teachers, and community workers, Dei and James (1998) found that students felt pressure to leave school for pragmatic reasons, but also felt that the system inadequately addressed their needs. The African Canadian youths’ narratives demonstrate their ability to make sense of domination and subordination in Canadian schools and society. For example, Aisha, a Grade 12/OAC (Ontario Academic Credit⁹), said of mandated curricula that she had encountered in history, math and science classrooms:

I would change all the textbooks in not only history [but also] in other subjects like science and math when they attribute everything to the Greeks. You know the

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⁹ The term “Ontario Academic Credit” refers the fifth year of high school (originally known as grade 13) that used to exist in the province of Ontario, Canada.
Pythagorean theorem, which built the pyramids a thousand years before the Greeks were even around. And then in science when you look through the science textbook and it’s like all these white people invented everything, and even one science teacher said, “Every civilization has contributed to science except African.” He actually said that! (p. 100)

Aisha resisted “official knowledge” imparted by classroom teachers and mandated textbooks as inaccurate and racist. She recognized that an anti-oppressive pedagogical intervention in the classroom would require the teacher to re-educate herself, to critically interrogate reading materials, and to include the contributions of peoples of color in all disciplines. These findings suggest that Aisha had been exposed to counter-stories, which enabled to her to resist the “official knowledge” she encountered inside of the classroom. Aisha’s educational and political life histories would likely reveal where and how she had learned these counter-stories. My study therefore goes beyond young people’s classroom-based citizenship learning experiences.

Zine (2000) conducted a critical ethnographic study of 13 student narratives to examine Muslim student subcultures in Ontario public secondary schools. She reported some students’ responses to World Religions courses, in which knowledge of Islam is formally taught. For example, Tahira, who had not taken the course, reported that her peers who had taken the course “totally biased.” Teachers’ “casual” handling of the Holy Quran also angered some: “the way they would casually hold the Quran like it was nothing, whereas it was something to us” (p. 304). Similarly, Sajjad, who had not taken World Religions, reported on some of his peers’ experiences in the course:

There were quite a few Muslims who did take the class and they complained a lot about the teaching also. The course really just gave bits and pieces of Islam, things about Shias and Ismailis. Everything was just mumble jumbled in his head, so that made it even more distorted because his train of thought was very unclear. The sisters were also saying some of his use of Islamic terminology was incorrect, and the texts and stuff like that. (p. 304)
Sajjad reported that the Muslim Students’ Association in his school had organized around this issue and tried to point out inaccuracies in the *World Religions* curriculum, and that the *World Religions* teacher had been “very reasonable” and open to debate and discussion on the matter. Tahira’s and Sajjad’s comments suggest that teachers did not have proficient knowledge of Islam, but were open to learning from Muslim students.

Kennelly (2008) found that the citizenship education experienced in schools by the youth activists involved in her study were deeply classed, racialized, and gendered. For example, Stuart, a member of a First Nations band, reflected on his own experiences of social studies and mandated textbooks:

> Well I just got the impression through these textbooks that Canada is this great thing, it’s like you know, the be all, end all panacea, it will solve all your societal problems, and there was all these different instances of like injustice, where there’d be the Chinese Head Tax, or every other mile there’s a dead Chinaman, having the Sikhs and Punjabs sent back to India, all these, the Japanese internment, all these different racially based injustices. It became really obvious to me, they’re not giving us the straight facts, this isn’t the truth, this is like a euphemized version of his-story. (Kennelly, 2008, p. 119)

Stuart had learned about the absence of Canada’s racist and colonial legacy from social studies curricula through his own critical exploration and questioning of hegemonic master narratives of Canadian history.

Stuart reported that he had been “streamed” into classes with fewer academic expectations, and enrolled in a class about First Nations culture that focused on what he described as “an arts and crafts kind of class, like making drums, rattles, these little trinkets” (Kennelly, 2008, pp. 119-120). Stuart’s experiences of schooling draw attention to ongoing cultural and material domination of First Peoples, and the impact of Canadian histories of racism and colonialism on young people’s contemporary experiences of schooling. More broadly, the young Canadian activists in Kennelly’s study found school-based citizenship education “to have
little to do with their own sense of political priorities, or to offer much in the way of skills
towards social change, skills that they later learned through activist practices” (pp. 216-217).
Kennelly’s findings also underscore the importance of examining youths’ citizenship education
and learning beyond schooling.

Peck (2010) examined the relationship between 26 Grade 12 students’ ethnic identities
and various narratives of Canadian history. In groups, students completed a “picture-selection
task” during which they were asked to make decisions about the historical significance of
particular events and themes in Canadian history. Peck found that students’ ethnic identities
played a central role in determining which narrative they employed and the criteria they used to
select the events for their narratives. In some cases, students “assimilated” to create a “popular”
narrative of Canadian history. In other cases, they selected events for their timeline that reflected
their ethnic identity and/or their perceptions of their location in Canadian history. For example,
Ariana, a First Nations student, selected what Peck (2010) refers to as the “Diverse but
Conflicted Canada” narrative. Ariana argued that the creation of the Indian Residential Schools
was historically significant: “Even though all that happened way back then—all the abuse that
the kids had to suffer and stuff—even though it doesn’t happen anymore—We’re still mixed
in…with a bunch of cultures. Assimilated into a mainstream society” (Peck, 2010, p. 598).
Ariana understood the material impact of residential schooling on the realities of her community
in contemporary Canada. Through this activity, Ariana located herself and her community into
Canadian history, asserting her sense of belonging to the land and her conflicted relationship to a

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10 Peck (2010) describes the “Diverse but Conflicted Canada” historical narrative as follows: “This narrative
recounts the history of multiculturalism in Canada, with an explicit focus on the conflicts and tensions that have
arisen as a result of society and government’s responses to the nation’s changing demography” (p. 595). Further,
Peck (2010) explains, “This narrative provides a template for critiques of societal and systemic racism and
discrimination and traces the origins of contemporary ethnic and cultural tensions” (p. 595). Peck (2010) provides
two other narrative templates: the “Founding of the Nation” narrative and the “Diverse and Harmonious Canada”
narrative.
nation founded on the colonization and genocide of her people. Peck’s (2010) research suggests opportunities for substantively engaging young people in co-construction of counter-stories.

My study will also provide insight into young Muslim activists’ responses to official and unofficial curriculum that they encountered in Canadian classrooms, and how these encounters informed their political commitments and engagements.

**Citizenship Education and Learning in Homes and Neighborhoods**

There is general consensus in the citizenship education research literature that family background is influential in young people’s political commitments and engagements (e.g., Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Schulz et al., 2009, 2010). Within the home environment, young people may experience parental modeling of political engagement; they may experience a home environment in which watching the news, reading the newspaper and discussing political issues with their family members is encouraged.

The CIVID researchers found that home environment factors (e.g., reading the news, watching the news, discussing political issues with parents) and access to educational resources had a substantial impact on civic knowledge in every country represented in the study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001)—findings substantiated by the subsequent ICCS (Schulz et al., 2009, 2010).

The ICCS researchers examined the influence of three aspects of family background as predictors of citizenship outcomes: ethnic and cultural background (indicated by immigrant status and languages spoken at home), socioeconomic background (indicated by parental occupational status, parental educational attainment, and home literacy resources) and home orientation towards political and social issues (indicated by reported parental interest in and discussion about social and political issues) (Schulz et al., 2010, p. 192). On average, across the ICCS countries, students from a non-immigrant background (92% of participants) typically
scored higher (but not significantly higher) than students from an immigrant background on the civic knowledge scale; and, on average, the civic knowledge score of students who spoke a language at home other than the language of the test (13% of participants) was significantly lower than the average score of the other participants (Schulz et al., 2010, pp. 193-196). The lower scores of immigrant youth raise critical questions about the cultural relevance of the test itself, which is based on western liberal notions of citizenship and democracy.

All three aspects of socioeconomic background (parental occupational status, parental educational attainment, and home literacy resources) were moderately associated with civic knowledge—with parental occupational status having the strongest effects.

In all of the ICCS participating countries, students whose parents had higher-status occupations, on average, gained higher civic knowledge scores. Similar results were found for students whose parents had higher educational qualifications and whose homes had larger numbers of books. However, there were considerable differences across countries in the strength of the relationship between socioeconomic background and civic knowledge. In some countries, the influence was quite strong; in others it was relatively weak. Students’ civic knowledge and, to a much larger extent, students’ interest in political and social issues were influenced by home orientations toward political and social issues (parental interest and frequency of discussion with parents about these issues). These effects remained significant even after controlling for the socioeconomic background of students. Approximately 70% of participating students reported that their parents were interested in social and political issues, and these students attained the higher scores on the civic knowledge assessment. Students who reported they spoke relatively frequently with their parents about social and political issues scored higher on the civic knowledge assessment than the students who reported otherwise—49% of participating students reported that they never or hardly ever spoke with their parents about social and political issues.
(Schulz et al., 2010, pp. 202-209). While (as reviewed in the previous section), school-based citizenship learning opportunities can make an important difference, family background—especially socioeconomic status—still powerfully affect young people’s opportunities for full participation in western liberal democracies, which are governed by socially and economically exclusionary policies and practices.

In addition to the significant impact of home and school-based citizenship education and learning opportunities, Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that students were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to civic participation if they reported having experiences of “neighbors dealing with community problems, when they felt adults looked after children, and when they had a general sense that their neighborhood supported young people” (p. 756). In addition, having parents who discussed current events with them contributed to students’ commitment to civic participation. Thus, it appears that when young people witnessed concern for community and current events in their home and neighborhood, and observed efforts address those concerns, they were more likely to express commitment to political engagement.

Kennelly (2008) perceived activist citizenship as “a middle-class phenomenon”—a perception that was supported by her field data documenting the class histories of the 29 activist youth in Canada who participated in her study. She connected some of her participants’ activism in part to their family histories of middle class activism:

Although the ‘good citizen’… is generally not supposed to enter a real of state-challenging activism, sometimes the ‘good citizen’ who becomes engaged in community work via middle class processes of desirable associations ends up moving into more oppositional activist practices (particularly if that person comes from a Left-leaning family sympathetic to such a shift). (p. 218)

Kennelly documented instances in which youth activists reported negotiations between their family and cultural traditions and their practices of activism: “In part because oppositional
activist practices are represented as undesirable within the wider cultural sphere, the means of accessing these subcultures was often tightly associated with one’s family history” (p. 218). She found that family history of activism was more commonly associated with her white middle class participants, and suggested that this association contributed to activist subcultures that remain largely white and middle class. Kennelly found, “While people from other [racialized] histories did find their way into activist subcultures, they did so often with an associated sense of unease and structures of feeling that suggested they did not quite ‘fit’” (p. 218). Building on, yet departing from, Kennelly’s research and analysis, my study will demonstrate how young Muslims found their way into existing activist subcultures, and even built their own activist communities.

Despite the general consensus in citizenship education research literature that home and neighborhood contexts in which young people are growing up influence their political commitments and engagements, very few studies have explored what this education and learning might look like. Thus, my study, through the examination of the life histories of 18 young Muslims provides insight into citizenship education and learning experiences in families, neighborhoods, and schools that contributed to the development of their capacities and dispositions to effect personal and social change.

**Identity and Belonging**

Citizenship education research literature has traditionally reflected concern with young people’s national identifications (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The CIVID assessed young people’s national identifications by eliciting their attitudes toward national government and institutions, and nations (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). They found that the participating upper secondary school students held generally positive attitudes
toward government-related institutions and their nations (Amadeo et al., 2002). However, the upper secondary students indicated less trust in government-related institutions than did the 14-year-old students (Amadeo et al., 2002). The older students also were less likely than the 14-year-olds to agree with positive statements about their country (Amadeo et al., 2002). In general, however, the upper secondary students held positive feelings about their countries (Amadeo et al., 2002). Examination of the international frequencies revealed that about 80% of the students across countries ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with positive statements about the importance of their countries’ flag, their love for their country, and pride in their country’s achievements (Amadeo et al., 2002). Only about 20% of the students indicated that they would prefer to live permanently in another country (Amadeo et al., 2002). The researchers concluded that while upper secondary students can take a critical view of their respective governments, they do not become cynical about their nations (Amadeo et al., 2002).

CIVED researchers, particularly in Phase One national case studies, acknowledged experiences of social exclusion could adversely impact young citizens’ national identification, and therefore addressed problems of discrimination against women and immigrants. Consequently, in addition to ascertaining attitudes toward immigrants, Phase Two assessed young people’s attitudes toward women, especially relating to women’s political and economic rights. While these studies do attempt to articulate a connection between young people’s national identifications and experiences of social inclusion and exclusion by examining participants’ attitudes towards immigrants’ and women’s rights, they do not provide insight into young people’s lived experiences.

Cristillo (2008) reported findings from an opinion survey of Muslim students in New York City public secondary schools. The sample consisted of 633 high school students divided into three cohorts: 323 Muslim students in public schools; a comparison group of 227 non-
Muslim students in public schools; and one cohort of 83 Muslim private school students. The average age of the all students in the three cohorts was 16-years-old. The majority of the Muslim sample identified as Sunni. The survey covered a wide range of topics relating to religiosity, life inside and outside school, self-esteem, and stress. The survey did not inquire directly about Muslim students’ national identifications, but it did inquire about related indicators: level of trust in institutions of political power, and perceptions and experiences of discrimination.

Cristillo (2008) found that Muslim and non-Muslim students placed relatively “high trust” in public schools, the legal system and police/law enforcement, and relatively “low trust” in news media (Muslim students 63% and non-Muslim students 44%) and in elected officials (Muslim students 62% and non-Muslim students 49%) (p. 11). In contrast to non-Muslim students, larger percentages of Muslim students placed “low trust” in institutions of political power: a significant minority of Muslim students (48%) placed “low trust” in the federal government, and a majority of Muslim students (51%) placed a “low trust” in the military (Cristillo, 2008, p. 11). Cristillo (2008) pointed out that many of the Muslim students in the study are of South Asian and Arab ancestry, and were connected to communities and countries targeted by the United States-led “War on Terror”: “These students usually perceive homeland security policies as unfairly targeting Muslims in general and Arab and South Asian Americans in particular” (Cristillo, 2008, p. 11). Cristillo (2008) suggested that mistrust in institutions of political power is reinforced by mistrust in news media, and what the Muslim students perceive as biased coverage of Islam, Muslims, and United States domestic and foreign security and anti-terrorism policies and practices (p. 11).

In addition, Cristillo (2008) assessed young people’s perceptions and experiences of discrimination. A majority (69%) perceived that “mainstream society is suspicious of them,” and almost all (90%) perceived that “discrimination against Muslim Americans has increased since
A significant minority (36%) reported being verbally assaulted at least once or twice (25%) or multiple times (11%) in the past year (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12). Twenty-eight percent reported being randomly stopped and questioned by police, being turned down for a job opportunity (12%), having personal property damaged or destroyed (11%), and being physically assaulted (7%) (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12). Perceptions and experiences of discrimination also impact national identification. The Muslim students’ perceptions and experiences of discrimination are manifestations of the positioning of the Muslim students and their communities as the Other.

Smaller-scale ethnographic studies of Muslim youth living in the United States (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Maira, 2004, 2009) and Canada (e.g., Zine, 2000, 2004) provide insight into the complexities of national identification. Maira (2004) and Abu El-Haj (2007) found that the South Asian Muslim immigrant youth and Palestinian Muslim immigrant youth in their respective studies distinguished between national identity and citizenship, and that they did not define their national identities in terms of their country of residence (United States), but, instead, in terms of their sense of belonging to their homelands (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan or Palestine). Maira (2004) found that the South Asian Muslim immigrant youth in her study identified as Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani, but that they valued their United States citizenship as privileged legal citizenship status because of the rights, opportunities, and resources that it could secure them. In some cases, Maira (2004) found that “religious identity actually prompts youth to think of themselves as belonging to the U.S., or at least identifying with its concerns, if not identifying as ‘American’” (p. 224). For example, Sohail drew from Islamic teachings to address questions of national loyalty: “Islam teaches [us that] whatever country you live in, you should support... See, if I live in America, I have to support America; I cannot go to India” (Maira, 2004, p. 224). Sohail wanted to return to India, but he used Islam to resist the exclusion
he had experienced as a South Asian Muslim immigrant in the United States. Abu El-Haj (2007) found that the Palestinian struggle for justice and liberation shaped the lives of the youth in her study. For example, Lamia, who had recently moved back to the United States after living in the occupied West Bank for 8 years, reported that she had been disciplined after an argument with her teacher over a map that did not include Palestine:

I look at [the map] and asked him, “What happened to Palestine?” he said, “Palestine is not a thing.” So I felt mad… so I told him, “What do you mean it’s not a thing?” he said, “it’s not a thing, so I don’t want to hear anything about it.” I looked behind him and saw a big map on the wall. I said, “Why don’t you point out on the map where it says Palestine?” I thought he was going to say Israel, but he didn’t say Israel. I give him a chance to say something. Just that it exists. Not even a thing! So he ignored me. I said, “You want me to get up there and show you?” He said, “No, forget about it. I said it’s not a thing, and that’s it.” I said, “Look, I came from Palestine, and you’re saying it’s not a thing. Then you need to tell me, where did I come from.” (Abu El-Haj, 2007, p. 286)

Zena, who had spent her entire life in the United States, explained her relationship to Palestine:

“I always say I’m Palestinian no matter what, because that’s where my mom and dad and all our ancestors are from” (Abu El-Haj, 2007, p. 286). Zena and Lamia forged a sense of belonging to Palestine. Maira (2004) and Abu El-Haq (2007) moved beyond dichotomous framing of Muslim and national identities to reveal the complexities of the youths’ multiple and diverse identities and binding solidarities. As first-generation immigrants and Muslims, the young people involved in my study are likely to share similar perceptions and experiences as outlined above.

Zine (2000) examined Muslim student subcultures in Ontario schools, and identified strategies used by Muslim students to resist marginalization. For example, Tahira proposed, “They should become aware that we are here to stay, we are Canadians, and we’re gonna stay here and now this is a religion of Canada because it’s a growing religion and that they should acknowledge it by introducing it” (Zine, 2000, p. 311). Tahira’s claim that Muslims are Canadians and that Islam is a religion of Canada is, as Zine (2000) explains, “imperative in
demystifying the notion of ‘foreignness’” associated with Islam and Muslims (p. 311). Zine’s (2000) findings are significant because they capture the lived experience of Muslim youth as Other in Canada prior to 9/11.

Kennelly (2008) noted ambivalence about Canadian national identification among the racialized youth in her study. Fouzia explained,

Like if people ask me what I am I say I’m Pakistani-Canadian. But I just, it doesn’t, like that’s a very surface, almost like ‘how are you, I’m fine’ type of answer. You know? I think my, the sticky thing with citizenship, and with Canada is everything is really glossed over. Like, I have a huge bone of contention within the multicultural policy and looking at the way Canada manipulates its borders based on what type of people they require within our society. Like, the ability to control and maneuver our demographic and the way that we need more skilled workers in the technology area of society, therefore we’ll open the gates to people from Bangladesh or India who know IT stuff. Or like, you know, before I used to be really fine with like considering yourself as Canadian and being almost proud and like I think it’s all in context and in relation to other things. Like in relation to America? I’m glad I’m in Canada. In relation to the world? Like, I don’t know. But I’m just in Canada. Do I identify as a Canadian? Uh, I don’t know. Like I don’t really know. I think like, I don’t know if I’m answering this correctly. (Kennelly, 2008, p. 121)

Fouzia’s ambivalence about Canadian citizenship was connected to Canada’s historical legacy of race- and class-based exclusions, and to its exploitative immigration and employment policies and practices. Fouzia hyphenated herself as “Pakistani-Canadian” in response to seemingly innocuous questions about her nationality, which re-positioned her as the Other. Fouzia explained that she had never felt a sense of belonging to Canada:

So maybe to be, I think, citizenship equates to like actual acceptance or ground-rooted belonging within where you’re from or where you live. And I’ve never had that sense of complete belonging. Ever. Within my experiences, within my childhood, within anything that I’ve done. Like, I can tell you right from my childhood, like, you know, we are Muslim. We are living in [a] predominately white neighborhood. Things like Eid would come around, it’s an Islamic festival, like Islamic day, Mum would be really wanting to have us energized over this, over this cultural day. So she would put [henna] on our hands. Like, henna. So I remember the next day I went to school and I had henna on my hands and the teacher asked a question. I put up my hand and for the rest of the, that morning,
till the afternoon, I was being taunted about having this disease growing on my hands. And like the principal found me in the washroom bawling my eyes out trying to scrub the henna off my hands. (Kennelly, 2008, p. 122)

Fouzia’s understanding of herself had been shaped by her daily encounters with racism in schooling, part of the unofficial curriculum through which young people incorporate into their understandings of themselves and their role within the nation-state (Kennelly, 2008, p. 122). Kennelly (2008) found that many of the youth involved in her study, including Fouzia, had started school with a feeling of “loyalty” to Canada, but that their experiences within the educational system had “left them ambivalent and uncertain, and with a sense that they do not quite belong ‘here’ but neither do they belong anywhere else” (p. 122).

Dillabough and Kennelly (2008) examined articulations of citizenship of 24 low-income youth (ages 14 to 16) from diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultural and religious identifications, and economically marginalized communities living in inner city Vancouver. They found that the narrative accounts of young Muslim participants, in particular, reflected the rhetoric about “insider” versus “outsider,” which, as Dillabough and Kennelly (2008) point out, “has always played a central role within Canadian myths of nation-building” (p. 503). These young Muslims—marked as “foreign other” by their “brown-skin” and Muslim identification in post-9/11 Canada—reflected on their own struggles for belonging:

JD: I’ve heard people talk about ‘terrorists’…
S: Oh Yeah! [Laughing]
JD: do you get that one?
S: ‘Cause I’m Muslim! They used to bug me about ‘terrorist’ Osama bin Laden that I bombed them and stuff ‘cause I’m Muslim and stuff.
JD: and how did that make you feel?
S: I think it’s funny though ‘cause I’m not really Afghani. (Shareen, age 15)
JD: So, you said ‘terrorist. The people who are doing the suicide bombing’? And you also said [...] that some of the kids in the school say that about you, tease you guys. [...] I’ve heard other kids tell me that story, too. That’s a pretty heavy word, right? [...] H: Yeah. But I don’t see it that way when people call [me], like, oh, a terrorist. [...] JD: [...] How do you see it? H: [...] I’m used to it, so I’ll just say, ah, okay. Thank you. JD: Yeah. You don’t. H: Whatever. I don’t like [fight], back. JD: [...] You don’t want to get back at somebody? H: There’s no point. This guy is going to call me whatever so I’m just going to leave him alone. He thinks he’s cool. [...] If people start making of me, I’ll just go, mmm. Okay. It’s good for you. (Hussein, age 15). (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2008, pp. 503-504)

In this interview segment we can see that the pervasive post-9/11 construction of the Other has had a real impact on the everyday lives of young people within the school.

In my study I investigate how young Muslim activists come to understand themselves in relation to the nation-states and communities with which they affiliate. I draw attention to what participating youths’ identities may mean for being young and Muslim in Canada.

Agency and Active Citizenship

My study is based on the premise that young people are actors in every realm—cultural, political, economic and social. Citizenship in this sense encompasses young people’s everyday acts within and across these realms.

International citizenship education research has tended to focus on young people’s intent to participate in political life. CIVED researchers found that half the upper secondary students across countries expressed an interest in politics, and the degree of interest appeared to be greater among the upper secondary students than among the 14-year-olds (Amadeo et al., 2002). In almost all countries, news broadcasts on television were the most prominent sources of political information. This trend is the same as that found with the 14-year-olds. A majority of upper
secondary students indicated that they planned to vote in national elections. In three-quarters of the countries where comparisons could be made, the older students were more likely than the 14-year-olds to indicate their intentions to vote. Only a minority of students—mostly males—reported that they were likely to engage in protest activities such as spray-painting slogans on walls, blocking traffic, and occupying buildings. This is similar to the findings from the 14-year-olds. However, the 14-year-old students were more likely than the upper secondary students to indicate that they would spray-paint slogans. These studies do not seem to promote oppositional forms of citizenship.

Cristillo (2008) found that 9 out of 10 Muslim students thought that civic and political engagement is important—“activities ranging from doing community service to keeping up on current events, from going to the voting booth to voicing their opinion in print, or by walking with others as in a march” (p. 12). Six in 10 Muslim students reported that they volunteer for community service at least several times a month (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12). About 44% of the Muslim students—compared to 61% of non-Muslim students—participated at least several times a month in some form of recreational program (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12). About one in four Muslim students had written either to an elected official or a newspaper, and a third of the Muslim students compared to one-quarter of the non-Muslim students reports having taken part in a protest rally (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12). The majority (89%) expressed their intent to participate in federal-level electoral processes (Cristillo, 2008, p. 12).

Small-scale ethnographic studies of Muslim, and youth from urban low-income communities of color provides insight into their critiques of situations that limit their opportunities for substantive participation in schools and society, and their actions to assert their interests as individuals and as members of diverse communities.
Maira (2004) found that the South Asian Muslim immigrant youth involved in her study practiced *flexible citizenship* by staying connected to their *home* cultures and communities through South Asian popular culture: “Their identification with India or Pakistan is largely based on transnational popular culture, on Bollywood Films, South Asian television serials, and Hindi music they access through video, DVD, satellite TV, and the Internet” (p. 223). Through these private acts of cultural consumption, the immigrant youth forged a sense of belonging to their *home* countries. She also found that the immigrant youth practiced *dissenting citizenship* by drawing from human rights-based discourses to challenge the post-9/11 United States military campaign in Afghanistan:

Amir: You have to look at it in two ways. It’s not right that ordinary people over there [in Afghanistan], like you and me, just doing their work get killed. They don’t have anything to do with… the attacks in New York, but they’re getting killed. And also the people in New York who got killed, that’s not right either.

Jamila: I feel bad for those people [in Afghanistan]… because they don’t have no proof that they actually did it, but they were all killing these innocent people who had nothing to do with it. (Maira, 2004, p. 226)

These immigrant youth opposed United States domestic and international policies and practices, but also proposed possibilities for a more just world.

Zaal et al. (2007) also found evidence of dissenting citizenship among the young Muslim American women involved in their study. The young women revealed their lived experiences of and responses to the USA-PATRIOT Act\(^\text{11}\) of 2001, and related security measures (e.g., restriction of civil liberties, surveillance, profiling, detention, and deportation). Although still grappling with new realities of living in an increasingly repressive post-9/11 United States, Suha

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\(^{11}\) The USA-PATRIOT Act of 2001 stands for “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act.” The Act gave the United States government sweeping powers of investigation and surveillance to combat “domestic terrorism.” The Act also took away due process rights from non-citizens who could be placed in detention or deported because of suspected participation in “terrorist activity” (Maira, 2004, p. 219).
leveled criticism at the United States government and the PATRIOT Act, which, she argued, violated human rights and contradicted her American ideals of “freedom”:

What America means to me is freedom. If you take away that freedom, it’s not America anymore… It no longer represents what it was. It’s different now… I don’t like the Patriot Act. I’m totally against it…. Having anyone track your moves or… see what you’re doing, who you’re sending man email to. Why? This is my life. No one has the right to intrude in my life. (Maira, 2004, p. 170)

Similarly, Aisha worried about the erosion of civil liberties: “I think that’s wrong… they’re just slowly taking away… all our freedom… Years from now we’re going to look back and we’re not going to be able to say anything” (Maira, 2004, p. 170). In the face of repression, these young Muslim women expressed dissenting citizenship, based on criticism of United States domestic policies. Other young women involved in Zaal et al.’s (2007) study were actively involved in educating others about their faith, culture, or personal life choices. Nasreen explained, “When you speak to a person who’s not Muslim, not Arab…and then you explain it to them, I get such a big relief. Like, ‘Oh, one down’” (Zaal et al., 2007, p. 173). Although Nasreen willingly played the role of educator, Noor was reluctant: “Should I step up and say something, or you know, as one person, what am I going to say against all their voices?” (Zaal et al., 2007, p. 174). Zaal et al.’s (2007) findings are consistent with Maira’s, who pointed out, “The role of the public educator is not a role without pressure or fatigue for young Muslim-Americans” (Maira, 2004, p. 227). These young Muslim Americans expressed and practiced citizenship by developing a critical analysis of 9/11 and the ensuing United States-led “War on Terror,” and by educating the public about Islam and Muslims.

Muslim youth studies conducted prior to 9/11 also document young Muslims’ sense of responsibility for educating others about Islam and Muslims. Zine (2000) found that Muslim students involved in her study “actively participated in ways they felt would rupture many of the
biases and misconceptions people held of Islam” (p. 311). For example, Tahira proposed pedagogical interventions that could promote understanding about Islam and Muslims:

> There is a very negative image of Islam and by doing that, by having seminars or things like that open to everybody, it would open eyes and it wouldn’t be thought of as backwards or women wouldn’t be thought of as second, because they consider that women in Islam are second-class citizens—that misconception would be gone. (Zine, 2000, p. 311)

Zine (2000) also found evidence of collective resistance to assimilation into the dominant secular, Euro-centered Ontario school culture through Muslim Students’ Associations, which mobilize and challenge ideological and institutional structures of schooling that marginalize Muslim students. Amal related that when the Muslim Students’ Association at her school had tried to secure a prayer space for Muslim students, the principal resisted:

> We had an MSA [Muslim Students’ Association] group at my high school and we wanted a place to pray and he [the principal] just refused. He was so adamant in his decision. He said, “no, this is not a place for religion, it’s a place for education.” And we told him it’s obligatory, we have to do this—they had allowed the prayers at school before but he was just adamant that “no, I’m not going to let you do this.” We told him that if we don’t pray *duhur* [afternoon] prayer at school then we’re going to miss it. And he was just so adamant in his decision, so we said, “OK fine, we’re going to take you to court.” Well, we threatened the principal with going to the board and he got a little nervous so, it took about 2 weeks before he said it would be fine, we could have this room to pray in, but we can’t always guarantee that you’ll get it. So we said, “well you’re going to have to guarantee a room—I don’t care if we have to change rooms every day, just so long as we get a room’, and in the end we did get it.” (Zine, 2000, p. 303)

The Muslim Students’ Association collectively organized dissent and other political strategies to secure a prayer space for Muslim students, including the threat of legal action and reporting the principal’s actions to the school board. In addition to demonstrating how students can work together for substantive inclusion in schools, these findings also draw attention to the role of religion in youth resistance to school culture. In my study, I do not focus on Muslim Students’
Associations, but I do consider other sites of collective action among young Muslim activists. Indeed, as I listened to the stories of young Muslim activists in Toronto, it became clear that many sites, beyond the formal political arena, become potential sites of change and transformation, including everyday acts of resistance.

**Summary: Situating Muslim Youth Citizenship**

The review of the literature includes research in the fields of citizenship education and youth studies—large-scale quantitative studies and small-scale qualitative studies conducted internationally, in the United States, and in Canada.

International and comparative citizenship education research literature provide some insight into school and classroom practices that appear to influence young people’s political commitments and engagements—following current events, discussing problems in the community and ways to respond, providing students with a classroom in which open dialogue about controversial issues is encouraged and where students study topics that matter to them, and exposure to civic role models. Survey studies focusing primarily on youth from socially and economically marginalized communities in the United States suggests that such curricular approaches also provide significant benefits for these students. However, these studies do not provide insight into young people’s experiences of such school and classroom practices.

The review of Canadian citizenship education research literature, primarily analyses of official mandated guidelines by Canadian provincial governments for civics and social studies curricula, provides insight into school and classroom contexts in which young people are learning citizenship in contemporary Canada schools. Official curricula reflect provincial and national government priorities and understandings of ‘good’ or ‘legitimate’ citizenship (e.g., elitist versus activist), as well as provincial and national government tensions (e.g., education and
indoctrination, individualism and collectivism, assimilation and integration, and economic justice and economic competitiveness). While my study does not directly investigate official curricula and classroom practice, it does provide some insight into young people’s encounters with official curricula in Canadian classrooms. In my study, I am particularly concerned about the humanizing or dehumanizing nature of these encounters.

The review of large-scale international and American survey studies of citizenship education highlighted the role of the home context in young people’s citizenship learning—young people were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to political participation if they reported experiencing a home environment in which watching the news, reading the newspaper, and discussing political issues and ways to act is encouraged. It also highlighted the role of neighborhood context in young people’s citizenship learning—young people were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to political participation if they reported having experiences of neighbors dealing with community problems, when they felt adults looked after children, and when they had a general sense that their neighborhood supported young people. Despite the general consensus in this literature that home and neighborhood contexts in which young people are growing up influence their political commitments and engagements, very few studies have explored what this learning might look like. My study will provide insight into young Muslims’ experiences of citizenship learning in their homes, communities, and schools. It will show how their myriad and diverse learning experiences influence their political commitments and engagements, and, more specifically, how their experiences spark critical consciousness and motivate them to engage in social change efforts. I will also challenge ‘deficit’ framing of cultural resources generated within homes and communities.

Reflecting a more traditional conceptualization of citizenship as the relationship between the individual and the state, the international and comparative survey studies seem to be
concerned primarily with young people’s national identification and intent to participate in national affairs. While these studies do attempt to articulate a connection between young people’s national identifications and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, they do not provide adequate insight into the perspectives of socially and economically marginalized youth. Further, these studies tend to focus on young people’s intent to participate in electoral processes and, to a small extent, in oppositional forms of citizenship. In contrast, the survey studies focusing primarily on youth from Muslim communities and other socially and economically marginalized communities in the United States address these youths’ experiences of exclusion and inclusion, and their political actions and practices in their homes, communities, and schools. Nevertheless the findings generated by survey studies do not provide insight into the depth and diversity of these young people’s lived experiences and perspectives.

The smaller-scale ethnographic Muslim youth-focused studies reviewed in this chapter provide rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of young Muslims living in contemporary Canada and the United States, particularly how they forge citizenship and belonging in relation to local, national, and global contexts. My study builds on these studies through the voices and stories of young Muslim activists living in Toronto, Canada.

As discussed previously, I employ the notion of cultural citizenship in my analysis of young Muslim activists life stories to foreground issues of identity and belonging, to acknowledge that their opportunities for substantive inclusion in society are often limited by their social location in their societies, and to recognize the everyday cultural productions and practices that enable them to forge citizenship and belonging within and beyond borders. I employ the notion of liberatory and transformative education to better understand the nature of the formal and non-formal education and informal learning experiences that contribute to the young Muslim activists’ understanding, experience, and practice of citizenship and belonging. I use notions of
agency, which take into consideration the role of social interactions and relationships in social change efforts, and thereby support understanding of the collective dimensions of youth collective action.

The following chapters demonstrate how young Muslims enacted different forms of activist citizenship to challenge exclusionary policies, discourses and practices, using a range of strategies to transform concrete situations affecting them and their communities within and beyond Canada.
Chapter Three:
The Political Participation of Muslims in Canada:
A Brief History

The 18 young Muslim people who took part in this study are being-made and are self-making into citizens. It is in their encounters with the nation-state, civil society and in their efforts to resist its impacts that they come to be seen, and see themselves, as young Muslim activists. In this chapter, I attempt to contextualize the lived experiences that are told in subsequent chapters within historical context. Drawing from critical interpretations of the Canadian project of nation-building (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Bear Nicholas, 2006; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004; Thobani, 2007) and research on the Muslim presence in Canada (e.g., Hamdani, 1984, 1999, 2008; Hamdani, Bhatti, & Munawar, 2011; Karim, 2002; Memon, 2009), this chapter offers a partial historical account of the political participation of Muslims in Canada. The historical account foregrounds areas where the lived experiences of Muslim immigrants exemplify broader patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Canada, and where they raise questions about, or contrast with, the construction of the Other in Canada. The historical account also draws attention to critical moments in Canadian and world history that have provoked collective consciousness and political activism among Muslims in Canada. Ultimately, what I hope this chapter reveals are exclusionary aspects of citizenship that define who is (and who is not) “Canadian” and the connections to the concrete situations of oppression that the young Muslim activists involved in my study are working to transform in contemporary Canada.

The historical account is organized into four time periods: mid-19th century to turn of the 20th century, early to mid-20th century, 1960s to 1990s, and 2000s. The chapter begins with a discussion about the Canadian project of nation building and the role of the Other within it.
Can the Other Imagine “Canada”?  

The modern nation-state system privileges political commitment and loyalty to the nation-state. The hyphen in the word “nation-state” is supposed to indicate where a sovereign political entity intersects geographically with a cultural and/or ethnic entity. The creation of the modern nation-system involved the drawing of borders and the dividing of Indigenous peoples by colonial powers, suggesting that nations were more “imagined” than real (Anderson, 1991). Anderson (1991) describes the nation as an “imagined community”: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 224). Thus, “the nation” is a social construct.

Anderson’s (1991) notion of the “imagined community,” Bannerji (2000) argues, “glosses over the divisiveness of class, ‘race,’ and ideology,” and, “does not ask either whose imagination is advanced as the national imaginary or what this has to do with organizing the practical and ideological exclusions and inclusions within national space” (pp. 64-65). After several years of living in Canada with the names “visible minority” and “immigrant,” Bannerji (2000) concludes that, despite her official Canadian citizenship status, she could never be “Canadian”: “The category ‘Canadian’ clearly applied to people who had two things in common: their white skin and their European North American (not Mexican) background” (p. 64). Bannerji (2000) provides a long list of “familiar and naturalized names” that originate in national ideology, that are perpetuated by Canadian nation-state apparatus (including the media, the police, and public schools), and that are given to and used by people of color and women—“visible minorities, immigrants, newcomers, refugees, aliens, illegals, people of color, multicultural communities…immigrant women, women of color, visible minority women, Black/South Asian/Chinese women, ESL (English as a second language) speakers, and many
more” (p. 65). What Bannerji (2000) is describing is the dual process of being made and self-making into the Other. She explains, “And what is the function of many names applied to us? They help us construct ‘Canada’ and to place us in certain roles and niches of the nation; and those who are not ‘Canadians’ cannot directly project ‘Canada’” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 65). This process of Othering defines parameters of inclusion in the Canadian national imaginary.

A critical consideration for contextualizing this study is historical and contemporary Islamophobia—fear of Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia serves to Other Muslims and those who look like Muslims. Islamophobia can be traced as far back in time as the Crusades (Said, 1978, 1997). The image of Muslims was then distorted by stories of noble Crusaders fighting the savage infidels or Mohammedans (Said, 1978, 1997). Kincheloe (2004) observed, “The barbaric images of Islam developed during the Crusades and colonialism lay in wait, ready to be deployed when the political climate needed them, such as during the oil embargo of 1973 or the First Gulf War of 1991” (p. 18). In his seminal work, Orientalism (1978), Said used the term to describe an academic and artistic tradition of hostile views of the East by the West, shaped by the attitudes of the era of European imperialism. Orientalism often implies essentializing and prejudiced outsider interpretations of Eastern cultures and peoples. Said (1978) thereby revealed how the Other was/is constructed, the ways in which domination was/is validated and given meaning and how the West became the subject of the political discourse of savior roughly form the 18th century onward.

The events of 9/11 marked the resurgence of essentialist theses, substantiated by such barbaric images of Islam, and divided the world in conflict between “the Muslim world” and “the West.” Huntington (1993, 1996) drew on the notion of fixed identities to support his “clash of civilizations” thesis, which warns “the West” of potential threats coming from the Other—non-western civilizations, particularly “the Muslim world.” Huntington (1996) asserted “the
West’s” superiority over “the Muslim world”: “The fundamental problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power” (p. 217).

Huntington (1993, 1996) argues that the threat from “the Muslim world” is made real by rapid population growth within it and its close proximity to other civilizations.


Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing. Huntington fails to examine the internal dynamics. (¶ 4)


In partitioning the population of the world into those belonging to “the Islamic world,” “the Western world,” “the Hindu world,” “the Buddhist world,” the divisive power of classificatory priority is implicitly used to place people firmly insight a unique set of rigid boxes. Other divisions (say, between the rich and the poor, between members of different classes and occupations and occupations, between people of different politics, between distinct nationalities and residential locations, between language groups etc.) are all submerged by this allegedly primal way of seeing differences between people. (¶ 5)

Said (2001) and Sen (2006) call for a more complex and nuanced understanding of people’s myriad and diverse identities. This study attempts to disrupt reified constructions of “Islam” and “Muslim” through the lived experiences and perspectives of diverse self-identified young
Muslims, and situating their political activism in Canada, a nation-state with a historical legacy of oppressions, and a contemporary western liberal democracy where Muslim and those who ‘look like Muslims’ are subjected to Islamophobia and marked as the Other.

Before taking a look back into Canadian history, I return to a thought-provoking question posed by Bannerji (2000): “Can I or similar ‘others’ imagine a ‘Canada’ and project it as the national imaginary?” (p. 65). I would argue that the 18 young Muslim activists who are involved in this study are re-imagining “Canada,” and working to transform it into a more just and equitable society.

**Mid-20th Century to the Turn of the 20th Century**

Canadian archival documents indicate that Muslims originating from Scotland first attempted to make the sea voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in the 1830s, 15 years after the onset of economic and agricultural crises in Scotland (Hamdani, 2008). The Hunts\(^\text{12}\) were among the first Muslims to safely make the passage, settling in Glengarry County in Ontario in the 1840s (Hamdani, 2008). The rest of the Scottish Muslim community, including the Loves, settled in Wellington County in Ontario in the 1850s (Hamdani, 2008). These Scottish Muslim settlers arrived before the Canadian confederation was formed, and the new dominion government assumed exclusive jurisdiction over “Indians and their lands” (Bear Nicholas, 1996). These early settlers became implicated in the displacement and dispossession of the First Peoples.

The Scottish Muslim community was counted in the 1871 national census, which estimated 13 Muslims in Canada (Hamdani, 1984, 1999). By 1901 the Muslim community in Canada had expanded to an estimated 47 Muslims, and included migrants from Turkey and Syria.

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\(^{12}\) The Hunt family maintained their Islamic faith for about three decades after settling in Canada (Hamdani, 2008). Hamdani suggests that maintaining and transmitting Islamic faith may have been difficult in isolation from other Muslims.
living in the Prairies (Hamdani, 1984, 1999). By 1911, there were 797 Muslims, most of them Syrian and Turkish migrants, many of whom worked on the construction of the western railways (Hamdani, 1984, 1999).

The Canadian confederation was officially British territory during the late 19th century and early 20th century, and during this period legislation was enacted to limit access to rights and protections associated with British citizenship (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). The 1884 British Columbia anti-Asian race riots resulted in severe restrictions against immigrants from outside of Britain (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). The severe economic depression that followed the race riots forced the migration of many Muslims from British Columbia to California in search of employment opportunities (Hamdani, 1984), suggesting that these Muslims, who were mostly Syrian and Turkish, were racialized. From 1885 to 1923, a Head Tax$^{13}$, increasing from 50 dollars in 1885 to 500 dollars in 1903, was levied as a financial deterrent to Chinese immigrants (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). In 1896 the first immigration act was passed in an effort to limit migration from countries other than Britain (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). Another threat to maintaining Canada’s “British character” was posed by prospective immigrants from the Indian subcontinent (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). As British subjects, Indians could not be openly restricted according to race-based criteria (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). The 1908 Continuous Passage Act imposed the requirement that migrant on their way to Canada could not stop between points of embarkation and destination (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005). This, along with a requirement of 200 dollars (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005), nearly eliminated immigration

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$^{13}$ As of February 1995, all adults migrating to Canada must pay a $975 “Right of Landing Fee” (ROLF) in order to be granted permanent residency status in Canada (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005, p. 4). The National Anti-Racism Council of Canada (2005) argues that the ROLF, or the new Head Tax, “affects disproportionately immigrants from the South because of the differential income and living standards among the have and have-not nations” (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005, p. 4).
from the Indian subcontinent, because there was no direct travel connection between India and Canada that did not involve stops, due to the great distance involved (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005). Immigrants from Asia who did reach Canada prior to 1908 faced disenfranchisement (Joshee, 2004).

Still fearful that that “the character of Canada was being destroyed,” a revised immigration act was introduced in 1910, which included a clause to “prohibit for a stated period, or permanently landing, the landing in Canada, of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or of immigrants of any specific class, occupation, or character” (Joshee, 2004, p. 131). The act used explicitly racial criteria for admission to Canada for the first time because, as William Lyon Mackenzie King (then Member of Parliament for Waterloo North, Ontario) said in a 1908 Canadian parliamentary session, “that Canada should remain a white man’s country is believed to be not only desirable for economic and social reasons, but highly necessary on political and national grounds” (Walker, 1997, p. 255). The 1910 Immigration Act was the country’s unofficial “White Policy” (Joshee, 2004, p. 131).

In 1911, an Order in Council moved to prohibit “any immigrant belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.” Although the Order was never proclaimed, penalties were imposed on railway companies that distributed transportation subsidies to runaway African slaves, and the hiring of agents to actively discourage their immigration to Canada (Walker, 1997). Coupled with specific policies that restricted immigration from Asia, practices that kept runaway African slaves from immigrating to Canada, this legislation worked to keep Canada “White” (Joshee, 2004; Walker, 1997). These discriminatory policies remained virtually unchanged until the 1960s.
Early to Mid-20th Century

From the early to mid-20th century, Canada upheld racialized immigration and citizenship legislation in accordance with its unofficial “White Policy,” but these exclusionary laws were not uncontested.

In January 1914, Gurdit Singh Sandhu, a wealthy businessman from Punjab, India, chartered a Japanese steamship, the Komagata Maru, to carry passengers of Indian origin to Canada in defiance of the 1908 *Continuous Passage Act*, which stated, “immigrants may be prohibited from landing or coming into Canada unless they come from the country of their birth, or citizenship, by a continuous journey and on through tickets purchased before leaving the country of their birth, or citizenship” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008, ¶ 1). The 1908 *Continuous Passage Act* had been created in response to anxieties about “the Indian invasion” or “the Hindu invasion” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008, ¶ 4). It was impossible for a steamship to travel the distance from India to Canada without making stops along the way. While the 1908 Continuous Passage Act was created primarily to restrict entry of immigrants of Indian origin, it also kept out prospective immigrants of African ancestry in Britain and in the Caribbean (Mathieu, 2010). Singh himself stated, “We are British citizens and we consider we have a right to visit any part of the Empire” (Singh, 2007, ¶ 3). Singh asserted his right to freely enter Canada as a British subject. He also articulated the political act as a “test”: “We are determined to make this a test case and if we are refused entry into your country, the matter will not end here” (Singh, 2007, ¶ 3). The Komagata Maru carried 356 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus) from Punjab, India. It sailed from Hong Kong to Shanghai, China, to Yokohama, Japan, and it arrived in Burrard Inlet, British Columbia, on May 23, 1914 (Singh, 2007). The steamship was not allowed to dock. Following a 2-month stalemate, the steamship was escorted out of the harbor by Canadian military on July 23, 1914, and forced to sail back to
India where 19 were killed upon disembarking and others imprisoned by the British (Singh, 2007).

The Canadian federal government imposed the War Measures Act when Britain entered the First World War in August 1914, less than 2 months after the “Komagata Maru Incident.” The War Measures Act required the registration, and, in some cases, the internment of “aliens” of “enemy nationality” (Canada’s Human Rights History, 2011). This included the registration of approximately 80,000 Canadians who were formerly citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as “enemy aliens” (Canada’s Human Rights History, 2011). A total of 8,579 Canadians were interned between 1914 and 1920. Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, Italians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Turks, Serbians, Hungarians, Russians, Jews, and Romanians were among those imprisoned in camps across Canada (Canada’s Human Rights History, 2011). Of the 8,579 internees, only 2,321 could be classified as “prisoners of war”; the rest were civilians (Canada’s Human Rights History, 2011). Turkish Muslims were among those classified as “enemy aliens” and deported (Abu Laban, 1980; Hamdani, 1994).

During the inter-war years, Canada’s de facto “White only” policy continued to be reinforced. In the 1920 Elections Act debates, Hugh Guthrie (then Solicitor General) objected to enfranchisement of non-White immigrants:

So far as I know, citizenship in no country carries with it the right to vote. The right to vote is a conferred right in every case ... This Parliament says upon what terms men shall vote ... No Oriental, whether he be Hindu, Japanese or Chinese, acquires the right to vote simply by the fact of citizenship. (Elections Canada, 2007, pp. 79-80)

The Canadian federal government used the War Measures Act again to intern Canadians of German and Italian origin at the onset of the Second World War (Canada’s Human Rights History, 2011). Jewish Holocaust refugees in Canada were also interned at the request of British

The end of the Second World War left Canada with a low birth rate, industrial growth, and shortage of labor (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). The situation prompted Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to encourage immigration (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). In the most “desirable” category were British subjects from Britain and white dominions; the next were American citizens; the third category consisted of wives and children of men residing in Canada; last priority were people who would farm in Canada (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). This immigration debate began to lay the foundations for the contemporary multiculturalism policy (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). Canada attempted to draw immigrants by positioning itself as a tolerant nation, distinct from Nazi Germany (Joshee, 2004). In a 1947 parliamentary session, E.B. McKay (then Member of Parliament for Saskatchewan) declared, “Let us have done with superior races and preferred nations” (Walker, 1992, p. 11). The passage of the 1947 Citizenship Act brought to the forefront issues of citizenship and cultural diversity (Joshee, 2004). Although the Chinese Immigration Act was also repealed in 1947, Chinese immigration was still restricted, as was the case for other Asians (Joshee, 2004). The British Columbia government granted franchise to residents who were of Chinese and South Asian origin in 1947 (Joshee, 2004). In 1949 it removed all restrictions from Japanese residents, who, up until then had been officially classified as “enemy aliens” (Joshee, 2004).
Two related political actions challenged Canada’s “White Policy.” Various Canadian civil society organizations advocated for the removal of race-based criteria from immigration policies (Joshee, 2004). A Canadian, John Humphrey, drafted the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). Further, Canada’s membership in a multiracial British Commonwealth made it increasingly difficult for Canada to maintain a racially exclusionary policy. In the revised Immigration Act of 1952, the word “race” was replaced with “ethnic group” (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). However the policy remained exclusionary, by retaining the right to prohibit admission on the basis of various criteria including “peculiar customs” and “unsuitability to climate” (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004).

As Thobani (2007) contends,

The Canadian state can be accurately characterized as having been an overt racial dictatorship up until the mid-twentieth century, as it organized the governance of Aboriginal populations through the Indian Act and upheld racialized immigration and citizenship legislation to produce a homogeneous and dominant white majority. (p. 25)

Indeed, up until the mid-20th century, the rate of growth of the Muslim population in Canada was very slow due to exclusionary immigrant and citizenship laws (Hamdani, 1984). According to the 1931 and 1951 national censuses, the Muslim population in Canada numbered 645 and 1,800, respectively (Hamdani, 1984, 1999). The increase was largely due to natural population growth. The Muslim population in Canada included Muslims from the Middle East and Eastern Europe (Hamdani, 1984, 1999). Despite the slow growth of the Muslim population in Canada during this period, there are also noteworthy examples of Muslim institutional development, including the foundation of Canada’s first mosque (Hamdani, 1984, 1999). Al-Rashid Mosque was erected in Edmonton, Alberta in 1938, with the support of local Muslim and Christian communities (Karim, 2002).
**1960s–1990s**

The 1960s were marked by a rise in Quebec separatism and nationalism, growing recognition of the need to address social inequities, and increased attention to issues of national identity (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). From the early 1960s Speeches from the Throne began to focus less on specific legislative priorities and more on core Canadian values: identity and national unity in an effort to describe who are Canadians (Brodie, 2002). The interest in national identity was stimulated in part by preparations for the Canadian centennial in 1967 (Joshee, 2004). The 1960s and 1980s were also a period of increased social movement activity (Joshee, 2004). Although movements in Canada were highly influenced by the civil rights, feminist, and other social movements in the United States, they took on their own distinct character in Canada (Joshee, 2004). Specific measures undertaken to address equality included the adoption of the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, the granting of franchise to “status Indians,” and the development of new immigration regulations that explicitly forbade discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity (Joshee, 2004).

Then Prime Minister John Diefenbaker advocated change to the racially exclusionary immigration policy in accordance with principles of justice and equality underlying the 1960 Bill of Rights Act and the United Nations Charter (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 100). Consequently, the revised 1962 immigration policy established that the main criterion for selection of immigrants would be their “skills” (rather than race-based criteria) assessed through a “points system,” which was officially introduced in 1967 (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 100). Although the immigration policy became less explicitly racist, it is argued that the points system continues to disadvantage prospective immigrants on the basis of race, as well as on the basis of other defining identities (e.g., ability, class, gender, health status) and geographic location (Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Furthermore, immigrants who do gain entry into Canada do not
necessarily have equal access to social, political, and economic opportunities (Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Indigenous and other racialized groups face enormous barriers to equality of employment with other Canadians (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000). It should also be noted that emphasis was on “importing able-bodied adult male labor” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 68).

Immigration from the so-called “Third World” to Canada rose by 40% between 1967 and the mid-1970s, changing “the face” of the population (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004).

In response to the demands of French nationalism in Quebec, state intervention in social policy, and demands of minority groups, the federal government established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963, and the resulting recommendations led to adoption of the Multiculturalism policy in 1971, expanded into the current Multiculturalism Act in 1988 (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004). Multiculturalism in Canada can be understood as “a pattern of social organization,” “a political ideology,” and “a policy” with four main objectives:

As a pattern of social organization, the Canadian mosaic was thought of as complementary to political federalism when the policy of multiculturalism was announced in the early 1970s. As a political ideology, it has provided Canada with an identity, and a national distinction from the United States, where the emphasis has been on the idea as well as the practice of a melting pot, where immigrants and refugees become, culturally and linguistically, fully absorbed into the dominant Anglo American ways of life and worldview. As a policy, multiculturalism implies consensus within the rhetoric of a just society where there is to be unity within diversity. Its objectives are: first, to assist all cultural groups to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada; second, to assist minority groups in overcoming cultural barriers so as to enjoy full participation in Canadian society; third, to promote intergroup relations; and fourth, to provide facilities to minority groups for language learning. (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, pp. 104-105)

Despite “the rhetoric of a just society where there is unity within diversity,” it has been argued that multiculturalism does little more than facilitate assimilation within the dominant ideology
(Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Thobani (2007) describes Canadian multiculturalism as follows:

As in Australia and Britain, the embrace of multiculturalism allowed Canadians to resolve the crisis of whiteness through its reorganization as tolerant, pluralist and racially innocent, uncontaminated by its previous racist history. Because multicultural whiteness claimed to be tolerant of difference, even when besieged by a bewildering global array of diversity it could not re-cast itself as uniquely committed to pluralism and thereby exalt its basic goodness. (p. 154)

From the 1960s through to the early 1990s, all provinces and territories had established their own polices and approaches to multiculturalism (Joshee, 2004). However, with each passing decade, federal and provincial spending on multiculturalism and related programming has decreased (Joshee, 2004.). It has also been argued that multiculturalism perpetuates “illiberal practices,” which, according to Kymlicka (2004), is a fear associated with rapidly growing Muslim population in Canada and other western liberal democracies (Kymlicka, 2004). According to the 1971 national census, the first conducted after the implementation of the “point system,” the Muslim population in Canada numbered 33,370 (Hamdani, 1999, p. 204).

The majority of Muslims in Canada prior to the 1960s were from the Middle East. The Muslim population demographic diversified with Muslim immigrants now arriving from Asia and Africa. Muslims who immigrated to Canada in the late 1960s and in the 1970s had accumulated sufficient “points” to enter the country and to contribute to its expanding economy. Many of these Muslims had assumed “professional” posts in their respective fields. Institutional development continued, and in 1968 Croatian Muslims built the first mosques in Toronto (Karim, 2002).

While Canada’s immigration policy is mainly determined by economic priorities, political instability and social unrest around the world, particularly “the Muslim world,” have influenced migration flows into the country. The 1980s witnessed the arrival of Iranians seeking
refuge from the Iran-Iraq war, the Afghanis from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Lebanese from the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Lebanese Civil War (Hamdani, 1999). In the 1990s Canada became a ‘sanctuary’ for Somalis seeking refuge from the Somali Civil War, and Bosnians from the Yugoslav and Bosnian Wars (Hamdani, 1999).

In addition to the devastating conflicts summarized above, dramatic events such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia, the First Intifada—the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation - the 1988 Rushdie Affair and the First Chechen War (1994-1996) positioned Muslim (and Arab) Canadians as Other within the national imaginary, but also contributed to the development of “ummah-consciousness” (Hamdani et al., 2011). For example, at the onset of the First Gulf War, the Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and his counterpart in the Official Opposition affirmed the status of Muslim and Arab Canadians as “equal citizens in the country” (Karim, 2002, p. 269). Despite these public affirmations by politicians, the federal government determined that it would investigate what it considered to be “legitimate threats” to national security (Karim, 2002, p. 269). It has been argued that the ensuing surveillance and interrogation of members of Arab and Muslim Canadian communities actually exacerbated public suspicion against all Arab and Muslim Canadians, which in some cases even led to verbal and physical assault of Muslim and Arab women and youth (Karim, 2002, p. 272). Karim (2002) describes the impact of these activities on younger Muslims as follows: “The psychological effect of the abuse has been long lasting, especially for the young members of the communities who have considered Canada their only home” (p. 272). However, the erosion of civil liberties also galvanized Muslims to engage in political protest (Karim, 2002). Hamdani et al. (2011) note, “It is partly because of this realization of a sense of marginalization that the community began to
function as a coherent force in national politics and voice demands in the name of the community as a whole.”

By 1996, the Muslim population in Canada had grown to 450,000, establishing it as the largest religious minority group in the country (Hamdani et al., 2011). In 1997, 49 Toronto-based Muslim groups formed a coalition for the purpose of politically mobilizing the now 450,000 strong Muslim Canadians (Karim, 2002). The coalition recognized that organizing Muslim Canadians would be challenging because of their diversity and their “anti-democratic, anti-West and pro-terrorist” image in mainstream Canadian society (Karim, 2002, p. 265). However, the election of several Muslims to leadership positions in Canadian university organizations seemed to promise a future generation of politically engaged young Muslims (Karim, 2002).

It should also be noted that during this period, beginning in the early 1960s, the first Muslim Students’ Associations were established in American and Canadian universities. Memon (2009) explains the formation of Muslim Students’ Associations:

To ensure that new immigrants would not lose attachment to their religious identity and values, some of the young Muslim intellectuals began to organize both socially and politically into networks called the Muslim Students’ Association (MSA). The MSA began to spread to individual university campuses across the United States and Canada and serves students on campus with congregational prayers, study circles, and political activism around issues that were affecting the Muslim world. (p. 134)

The Muslim Students Association from its inception serves as a vehicle to activate and develop a sense of solidarity among Muslim immigrants. Although I do not examine Muslim Students’ Associations as sites of Muslim youth agency and power in this study, it is important to acknowledge that there are now Muslim Students’ Associations at all major universities across Canada, and even in some secondary schools (Karim, 2002). Muslim Students’ Associations may be understood as “formalized resistance” against Eurocentric and secular school cultures.
2000s

9/11 was the defining political event of the new millennium. The series of four terrorist attacks that took place in the United States on September 11, 2001, and subsequent United States-led “War on Terror” seemed to reconstruct the world, in Huntington’s (1993) terms, as divided in conflict between “the West” and “the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc of nations.” Although the terrorist attacks took place in the United States, their aftermath reverberated around the world, and across the border in Canada. Hundreds (if not thousands) of immigrants and refugees were marked as security threats and rounded up for detention and deportation in the United States and Canada in the wake of 9/11 (Maira, 2009; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

It is often claimed that one of the premises defining Canada is the equality of all citizens living under one law. As the Multiculturalism Act states, “All Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, enjoy equal status, are entitled to the same rights, powers and privileges and are subject to the same obligations, duties and liabilities” (Department of Justice Canada, 1985). Canadian Muslims became the primary targets of post-9/11 anti-terrorism and security agendas and the primary victims of erosion of civil liberties and legal rights entitled to all Canadian citizens (Hamdani et al., 2011; Razack, 2008; Siddiqui, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

Siddiqui (2008) summarizes “post-9/11 excesses” committed by Canada in the “War on Terror” and reveals Islamophobic underpinnings of various Canadian social policy debates:

- The 2002 detainment, and subsequent deportation (or “extraordinary rendition”) of Canadian Mehr Arar to his native Syria by the United States government. He was imprisoned and tortured in a Syrian prison for one year.
- The 2002 capture of Canadian child soldier Omar Khadr, then 15-years-old, by United States military in Afghanistan, and his subsequent seven-year-long imprisonment in the United States Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp. A 2009 review
determined that the Canadian federal government had failed Khadr by refusing to acknowledge his juvenile status or his repeated claims of being abused.

• The Canadian complicity in the torture of three Canadians in Syria and Egypt—Abdullah Almaki, Ahmad El Maati, and Muayyed Nureddin.

• The Canadian government’s security certificate cases against five Canadians: Mohamed Harkat, Mahmoud Jaballah, Mohamed Mahjoub, Hassan Almrei, and Adil Charkaoui.

• The 2003 mistaken arrest of 23 Muslim men of South Asian-origin in Toronto as “suspected terrorists,” but against whom not a single terrorism-related charge was laid.

• The 2006 arrest of 18 Toronto-area Muslims on terrorism related charges. Charges had to be dropped against as many as seven of the accused before the trial began due to insufficient evidence.

• The 2005-2006 Sharia law controversy in Ontario.

• The public backlash during the 2007 Ontario election against the conservative party’s proposal to extend public funding to protest, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and other religious schools, along the same lines as already given to Catholic schools.

• The 2007 Canadian federal government’s attempt to ban Muslim women who wear niqab from voting.

• The 2007 banning of Muslim girls who wear hijab from playing soccer and other sports in Quebec.

• The 2007-2008 “reasonable accommodation” debate in Quebec. (pp. 1-2)

On October 15, 2001 the Canadian federal government introduced the Anti-Terrorism Act, in concert with the introduction of similar legislation in the United States—the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act. The Anti-Terrorism Act is part of the Canadian criminal justice system, and it is an expansion of the type of process already present under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act\(^\text{14}\) (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2011). The Anti-Terrorism Act granted the Canadian federal government powers to ambiguously define “terrorism;” to label any individual or organization as “terrorist” with minimal, if any, due process rights; to arrest, detain, and deport individuals “preventatively” with minimal, if any, due process rights; to involve the military more easily to keep domestic order; and, to keep information secret that would

\(^{14}\) The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act entered into force June 20, 2002 (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2005).
previously have been public (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2011). The National Anti-Racism Council of Canada (2011) asserts, “Such provisions in the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act have led to systematic breaches of the human rights of Muslims and Arabs in Canada (p. 12). Canada’s domestic “War on Terror” is comprised of such policies, which serve American interests. As Thobani (2007) explains:

In redefining the scope of its global reach, the United States has claimed for itself the ‘right’ to override the citizenship of Muslims in other states, including Canada. By using its middle power status and its international stature as a more “compassionate” nation, the Canadian nation-state is supporting this expansion of the American Empire and helping hunt down, incarcerate, and destroy the Muslim enemy as an where defined by the United States. (p. 221)

The impact of 9/11, the “War on Terror” and Islamophobic discrimination have been to discipline Muslim communities in Canada (Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

Between September 11, 2001 and November 15, 2001, 115 incidents of hate against Muslims in Canada were documented (Canadian Council of on American-Islamic Relations-Canada, 2004). The incidents included death threats, attacks on mosques, and verbal and physical assault (Canadian Council of on American-Islamic Relations-Canada, 2004). The Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada (2004) conducted a survey on government surveillance in Muslim communities living in Canada. Eight percent of respondents indicated that security officials had personally questioned them; 43% indicated they knew of at least one other Muslim who had been questioned; and, 62% of respondents who had been questioned by security officials indicated they never reported the incident to any organization (Canadian Council of on American-Islamic Relations-Canada, 2004).

Although governmental surveillance in Muslim communities has had its intended impact, creating a sense of fear among Muslims in living their everyday lives, the erosion of legal rights and civil liberties also galvanized Muslims’ collective consciousness and political activism: “The
new-found Muslim political activism came at a juncture when their civil liberties were the most threatened” (Hamdani et al., 2011). Since 9/11, Canada’s Muslims have increasingly asserted their agency and power in government and civil society. The 2004 federal elections were the first opportunity since 9/11 for Canadian Muslims to influence domestic and foreign priorities by exercising the right to vote (Hamdani et al., 2011). Prominent Muslim civil society organizations such as the Canadian Islamic Congress and the Council of American-Islamic Relations-Canada promoted Canadian Muslims’ informed participation in electoral politics (Hamdani et al., 2011).

Two months prior to the elections, the Canadian Islamic Congress published a public report, *Elections 2004: Towards Informed and Committed Voting*, which included each of Canada’s 301 elected parliamentarians’ voting records on 20 domestic and international priorities (Canadian Islamic Congress, 2004). Three weeks prior to the elections, the Council of American-Islamic Relations-Canada published “a wish list for Canadian Muslims” in the *Ottawa Citizen*:

> A wish list for Canadian Muslims might include: a review of the anti-terrorism legislation; more thorough scrutiny of the Public Safety Act and its unprecedented executive power in collecting and sharing information on Canadian citizens; an overhaul of the non-transparent security certificate process; oversight of our security agencies to ensure that racial profiling -- which does exist in Canada -- stops; and the need for increased debate and participation in policies on security and safety. (Saloojee, 2004, ¶6)

A record number of 10 Muslim candidates ran in the 2004 federal elections (Hamdani et al., 2011). Six of these were New Democratic Party candidates, including Monia Mazigh, the wife of Mehr Arar (Hamdani et al., 2011). Three Muslims were elected to Parliament, including the first Muslim woman—Yasmin Ratansi (Hamdani et al., 2011). The Canadian Islamic Congress reported that 80% of the eligible voting Canadian Muslim population cast a ballot (Hamdani et al., 2011). Thus, the 2004 federal elections marked the emergence of “Muslim power in Canada” (Hamdani et al., 2011).

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15 The New Democratic Party (NDP) is a federal socialist political party in Canada.
I now turn my attention to young Canadian Muslims who have been the focus of some high profile post-9/11 international and national security cases and social policy debates summarized previously in this segment of the chapter.

Omar Khadr is a Canadian citizen born in Ottawa, Ontario, on September 19, 1986. He was 15-years-old when he was captured in July 2002 by U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Omar’s capture followed a firefight in which he was seriously wounded (U.S. forces dropped two 500-pound bombs in the house he was in), and in which he was accused of having thrown a grenade that killed a U.S. soldier (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a). Thereafter, he remained in custody of the United States. He was detained and tortured at the Bagram Air Base, one of the largest U.S. military bases in Afghanistan, before he was transferred to the U.S. detention facility in Gauntánamo Bay, Cuba:

At the age of 16, Omar was sent to the U.S. detention facility in Gauntánamo Bay, Cuba and subjected to excessively harsh interrogation methods in violation of international law, including: shackling in painful stress positions for hours on end; beatings by guards; express threats of rendition to third countries for the purpose of torture; solitary confinement for lengthy periods; and confinement in extremely cold cells. While other minors at Gauntánamo were segregated from adult population and ultimately repatriated, Omar has never received any age-appropriate treatment. (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a)

Canada was among the first signatories of an Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007b). In accordance with this protocol, Khadr should have been removed from the conflict zone, rehabilitated, and returned to Canada (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007b). Instead, Omar became “the only child in modern history to be charged with war crimes (Barlow, Neve, &Tasse, 2007).

In November 2004, the U.S. government established military commissions and laid various charges against Omar including “murder in violation of the laws of war” (University of
Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a). However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the military commissions system violated U.S. law and the Geneva Conventions, and therefore dismissed charges against Omar (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a). In February 2007, Omar was recharged under the 2007 Military Commissions Act (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a). However, in June 2007 those new charges were dismissed, because the presiding judge determined that the military commissions did not have authority to try Omar as an “unlawful enemy combatant” based on his prior designation (University of Toronto Faculty of Law, 2007a).

Regarding the military commissions system, Amnesty International (2010) claims, “Despite reforms announced by the Obama administration in 2009, these military trials still fall far short of international human rights standards” (¶ 3). Although charges against Omar were dropped twice, he remained in U.S. custody.

The Canadian federal government chose not to seek extradition or repatriation despite urgings of prominent human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and UNICEF, legal bodies such as the Canadian Bar Association, and several Canadian parliamentarians and academics. In April 2009, the Federal Court of Canada ruled that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms made it obligatory for the Canadian government to immediately demand Omar’s return (Amnesty International, 2010). After a hearing before the Federal Court of Appeal produced the same result, the Canadian government announced it would argue its case before the Supreme Court of Canada (Amnesty International, 2010). In January 2010, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously declared that Omar’s human rights had been violated (Amnesty International, 2010). The Supreme Court of Canada found that the Canadian government “actively participated in a process contrary to Canada’s international human rights obligations and contributed to Mr. Khadr’s ongoing detention” in violation of Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Amnesty International, 2010). However, the Supreme Court of
Canada did not order the Canadian government to seek Omar’s return. Amnesty International interpreted the ruling as follows, “Though the Court opted not to suggest a specific remedy—such as seeking Omar Khadr’s repatriation to Canada from Guantanamo Bay—it is nonetheless clear that the Court expects the government to respond the same way” (Amnesty International, 2010).

The “Toronto 18” refers to a group of 18 Muslim males (17 youth and one adult), who were arrested in a series of counter-terrorism raids on June 2, 2006 in and around the Greater Toronto Area (CBC News, 2011; see also Kassamali, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008). Seven of the 18 had their charges stayed, and 11 are serving sentences ranging from a few years to life in prison (CBC News, 2011). Seven of the 11 pled guilty, and the four who chose to go to trial were all convicted—two by jury in the first case of a Canadian jury delivering a verdict over allegations of terrorism (CBC News, 2011) Among the charged were four minors, legally protected by the Youth Criminal Justice Act (CBC News, 2011). One of the four minors was discharged after a preliminary hearing. Charges were stayed against two of the minors of them in July 2007 (CBC News, 2011). They signed peace bonds, which expired after one year (CBC News, 2011). During that period, the court imposed conditions on them and the Crown could revive the charges if new evidence emerged (CBC News, 2011). Prosecutors did not revive the charges (CBC News, 2011). In signing the peace bonds, the youth did not admit liability (CBC News, 2011). One of minors was convicted in September 2008 of belonging to a terrorist group (CBC News, 2011), and in the following year he was sentenced as an adult to 2.5 years already served. He was the first person convicted under Canada’s Anti-Terrorism Act (CBC News, 2011).

In February 2007, Asmahan Mansour, then 11-years-old, was issued an ultimatum by a referee at an ‘under-12’ soccer tournament near Montreal—remove her hijab or leave the field (CBC News, 2007a, 2007b). When Asmahan refused to remove her hijab, she was ordered to
leave the field and barred from playing soccer (CBC News, 2007a, 2007b). Asmahan’s teammates and coach left the field with her (CBC News, 2007a, 2007b). She responded to their support as follows: “I’m proud my team was there with me and my coach” (CBC News, 2007b). The referee claimed that wearing *hijab* on the field during a game violated the Quebec Soccer Federation’s “safety” regulations by posing a “strangulation” risk (CBC News, 2007b). Asmahan said that she “always wears her headscarf tightly tucked into her jersey,” and had previously played in two games with no problems (CBC News, 2007a). Zine (2009) raised the following question about banning *hijab* in girls’ soccer:

> The question I want to raise here is whether the [Quebec Soccer Federation’s] concern was physical safety (since there have yet to be massive hijab-related fatalities reported on soccer fields!) or whether the question of ‘safety’ is more a cultural rather than corporeal nature. In other words, the fear of strangulation may imply something more metaphorical: being ‘strangled’ by her culture. It seems that the concern for physical danger (which has yet to be proven) masks the real concern over the ‘civilizational danger’ posed by a veiled Muslim woman. (p. 156)

Asmahan, like other Muslim women in post-9/11 Canada, play a critical role in disrupting the national project. Asmahan shared her hopes for her future: “I just hope one day Quebec will change the rules and I’ll be able to play… I’m just hoping that any girl with *hijab* does not go through what I went through” (CBC News, 2007b). Asmahan defied a rule that she believed was discriminatory, and envisioned a transformed society in which she, or “any girl with *hijab*,” could play soccer.

Also noteworthy for this study are the efforts of lesser-known young Canadian Muslims to transform concrete situations of oppression that affect them and their communities. For example, Sumayya Kassamli (2011), a young Canadian Muslim activist, recalled other Muslims’ reactions to her petition to grant members of the “Toronto 18” legal rights entitled to all prisoners in the facility where they were being detained:
One icy evening in December 2007, a friend and I walked through a large Toronto mosque collecting signatures for a petition to grant members of the “Toronto 18”—a group of young Muslim men arrested and imprisoned under allegations of terrorism in June 2006—the legal rights of regular prisoners in the maximum security facility where they were being detained. Many of the men had been kept in solitary confinement since their arrest more than a year prior, and reports of routine humiliation, denial of access to prayer facilities, and targeted discrimination had begun to reach the mainstream media. The petition was put together by an ad hoc coalition of the group’s family members and community organizers, and cautiously abstained from commenting on innocence or guilt, instead requesting solely that they be treated like all other prisoners in the facility. Yet when approaching members of this mosque, many of whom I grew up alongside, I was surprised to be met with significant hesitation. While many signed willingly, grateful for the reminder that the devotional space was not isolated from its socio-political context, others did not. “I’m not sure,” one young woman trailed off. “Let me think about it,” muttered another, visibly uncomfortable with the request. (¶1)

Sumayya petitioned for the for legal rights of the young Muslim men imprisoned under allegations of terrorism within Canadian Muslim communities, and, in doing so, raised critical questions about prisoner’s legal rights, and the “exceptional” treatment of the imprisoned young Muslim men. She also confronted fear within her communities. Sumayya’s narrative provides some insight into what it means to be young, Musim and politically engaged in contemporary Canada. It is among these youths’ stories and within this history that I situate the lived experiences and perspectives of the 18 young Muslim activists involved in my study.

Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to contextualize the lived experiences that are told in subsequent chapters of this study within a national historical of Othering. I offered a partial historical account of the Muslim presence in Canada. The historical account drew attention to where the lived experiences of Muslim immigrants exemplify broader patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Canada, and where they raise questions about, or contrast with, the construction of the Other in Canada. Within the wider context of immigration and colonialism, Indigenous
peoples and immigrants of non-British and non-European ancestry (particularly immigrants from Asia and Africa) were largely excluded from Canadian civic and political life. From the mid-19th century to the turn of the mid-20th century, the vast majority of Muslims in Canada were of Middle Eastern and North African origin. At the onset of the First World War, many of these Muslim immigrants were among thousands of immigrants of non-British ancestry marked as “enemy alien,” detained and deported. Up until the mid-20th century, the Canadian federal government had implemented an unofficial “White policy,” and restricted migration flows from Asia and Africa. This policy did not go uncontested as exemplified in the ‘Komagata Maru Incident’.

The 1960s to the 1990s witnessed rapid change. In the mid-1960s, the immigration policy was revised (in accordance to the ideals of the Bill of Rights and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights), explicitly forbidding discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. As a result, migrations flows from ‘the Third World’ increased. The Muslim population in Canada also began to grow and diversify. In the 1960s, there were early signals of Muslim youth agency and active citizenship in the formation of Muslim Students’ Associations in American and Canadian universities. In the 1990s, Muslims emerged as a distinct group in Canadian civic in political life due in large part to the First Gulf War. During this time, Muslims and Arabs became subject to state surveillance. The 2000s have witnessed the re-emergence of Muslim political consciousness and activism in the Canadian context, in response to post-9/11 international and domestic “War on Terror.”

Ultimately, what I hope this chapter reveals are the exclusionary aspects of citizenship that define who is (and who is not) “Canadian” and the connections to the concrete situations of oppression that the youth in this study are working to transform. As the stories in the following pages suggest, the 18 Muslim youth involved in this study are re-imagining “Canada,” and
attempting to project it as the national imaginary through their efforts to transform concrete situations of oppression that impact them and their communities by resisting domination and creating alternative spaces, they’re also making propositional claims on citizenship and belonging. It is my hope that this study serves as part of the historical record of the Muslim presence and youth activism in Canada.
Chapter Four:
Telling and Re-Telling Resistance:
Research Design and Methodology

This study is guided by the following questions about 18 young Muslim activists living in contemporary Toronto, Canada:

1. How do these youth learn citizenship? More specifically, how do these youth become motivated to engage in activist citizenship?

2. How do these youth enact citizenship? More specifically, how do these youth seek to support the citizenship learning of others?

This chapter begins with a rationale for my qualitative approach to this study. It is followed by a discussion of life history research methodology, a description of the research design and methods, and an overview of participant sampling and selection methods. I then introduce a descriptive summary of the 18 Muslim youth who agreed to participate in the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of limitations of the research methodology and design, and a discussion about my location as researcher and ethical considerations.

A Qualitative Approach

In recognition of the multiplicity and diversity of lived experiences and perspectives represented in this study, and with the intention of capturing how the youth make sense of and give meaning to their lives, I employed a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My rationale for employing a qualitative approach is also connected to “the ways of knowing” represented (or under-represented) in the research literature in which I situate this study: citizenship education and Muslim youth studies. In chapter two I reviewed international, American and Canadian research in citizenship education, including several large-scale
quantitative survey studies of civic and citizenship education (e.g., Amadeo et al., 2002; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Shulz et al., 2009, 2010; Torney-Purta et al., 2001, 2007). These large-scale quantitative survey studies provide insight into the impacts of in-school and out-of-school citizenship learning experiences on students’ civic knowledge, attitudes, and practices, but they do not reveal the complex, multiple, and over-lapping nature of youths’ lived experiences.

A qualitative approach is consistent with previous Canadian citizenship education research. In her review of citizenship education research in comparative and international perspective, Hahn (2010) noted that Canadian researchers have tended to focus on “the thinking of individual learners,” exploring young people’s understandings of citizenship, democracy, social diversity, human rights, and related concepts (p. 8). She observed, “Using a phenomenological approach, with small samples of students, these researchers gained insights into the process of student meaning-making” (p. 8). Similarly, my study advocates that the study of lived experience is inherently important (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2006). However, I attempt to go beyond the focus on thinking of individuals by making connections across participating youths’ lived experiences and perspectives, and by situating them in a broader historical, political and cultural context.

A qualitative approach is also consistent with previous qualitative studies of Muslim youth living in western societies, particularly in Canada and the United States. Taken together, qualitative studies documenting the lived experiences and perspectives of Muslim youth in Canada (e.g., Zine, 2000, 2004, 2006) and in the United States (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bayoumi, 2008; Maira, 2004, 2009; Zaal et al., 2007) have provided insight into what it means to be a young person from Muslim transnational communities living in North America, and, more recently, in a post-9/11 Canada and the United States. I situate my study among these previous studies of Muslim youth living in Canada and the United States, building on and extending
insights to inform understanding about what it means to educate these and other marginalized youth for substantive inclusion in school and society, to challenge and change the terms of inclusion, and to create and recognize alternative spaces for and practices of citizenship.

**Life History Research: “A story is told, a history is made.”**

Life history methodology includes any oral retrospective account of a life—a reconstruction of the past, partial or whole, based on the present understandings of the individual concerned (Goodson & Sikes, 1991; Tierney, 1998, 1999). According to these authors a retrospective account of a life is a “life story.” Tierney (1998), for example, explains, “a life story is a personal narrative whose ontological status as a spoken interaction between two (or more) individuals helps create, define, and, hopefully, change reality” (p. 63). Tierney (1998) alludes to the liberatory and transformative possibilities of this spoken (or “dialogical”) interaction: engaging in the process of life storytelling may enable life storytellers to become “makers of their own way.” Tierney (1998) also likens life story to “fiction” based on “a memory of one person, and then, it is developed between the researcher and the researched,” and he asks, “If it is nothing more than fiction, than what are we to make of it as social science?” (p. 63).

However, broader reality permeates the life story that is told by the researched, and retold by the researcher (Tierney, 1998, 1999). Life history is not merely a retrospective account of a life. When a life story is connected to broader political and cultural contexts it becomes life history (Goodson & Sikes, 1991; Tierney, 1998, 1999). In this study, I attempt to situate the lived experiences and perspectives – the life histories - of the 18 Muslim youth activists who shared their stories with me in a post-9/11 national context.

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16 As stated in Titon (1980, p. 278)
Life history methodology is appropriate for investigating expanded conceptualizations of citizenship, including cultural citizenship and related questions of identity and belonging. As explained in chapter two, cultural citizenship refers to dual processes of self-making and being made as citizens in relation to the state, civil society, and the various communities with which people affiliate (within and beyond national borders) (Ong, 1996). Benmayor (2009) collected the life stories of first-generation Mexican-heritage students in higher education to gain insight into their citizenship practices within university and family cultures. She explained her emphasis on oral history research methods: “Vernacular accounts are key to understanding claims for cultural rights and practices of resistance. They express subjectivity and standpoint, how people envision and position themselves as members of a cultural group of a larger multicultural society” (Benmayor, 2009, p. 138). Oral history research methods carve out spaces in which participants can express their “subjectivities” and “standpoints” in their own terms. Benmayor (2009) also argues, “Cultural citizenship narratives are counter-stories to hegemonic master narratives of nation, immigration, assimilation, and belonging” (p. 138). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define “counter-story” as follows:

We define the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p. 32)

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe four functions of counter-stories:

a) they can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice,

b) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems,
c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and

d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 36)

One related purpose of life history research is to document “silenced lives,” and “to challenge the oppressive structures that create conditions for silencing” (Tierney, 1998, p. 55). Life history is therefore a method that has been used to tell stories of resistance (Tierney, 1999).

Finally, life history is appropriate for my enquiry into citizenship learning—a “lifelong” and “lifewide” process. I understand lifelong and lifewide learning as “a social practice in terms of an empirical and researchable reality” (Schugurensky & Myers, 2003, p. 330). I explore the participants’ perceptions about the formal and non-formal education and informal learning experiences that contributed to their understanding of themselves in relation to the state and the communities with which they affiliate, and of themselves as young people with the capacity to affect personal and social change. Life history recognizes that an individual’s life is comprised of a myriad of learning experiences, and it enables tracing and connecting these experiences for holistic understanding.

**Data Collection**

I conducted 13 one-on-one interviews and two group interviews (as per the convenience and comfort of the participants). I had offered all participants the group interview option with their fellow group members to promote comfort, but with the understanding that they would be revealing their identities and sharing their stories with other participants. One group interview included two participants and the other included three. An advantage of the group interview was that participants could build one another’s responses. Disadvantages of the group interview include my limited facilitation skills (at times I had difficulty managing time efficiently and
probing effectively), as well as the participants’ inadvertent influence on one another’s responses. In comparison with the individual interview participants, the group interview participants did not have the time and space to think broadly about their lives. However, I do not judge the group interviews as unsuccessful. The group interview participants may not have felt comfortable in a one-on-one setting. Even multiple interviews with each of the participants could only provide a small glimpse into their lives. Even one semistructured interview with one participant can reveal remarkable insights (Kvale, 1996).

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was intended to encourage open and reflective elaboration of life stories. I organized the interviews into two main parts: the first part focused on participants’ citizenship learning histories and the second part focused on their activist work at the time of the interview. Prior to the start of each interview, I reminded participants about their rights to refuse to answer any question and to stop the interview at any time. Each interview began with the question, “What are the core elements that make you who you are?” I then proceeded to ask each participant to provide demographic and background information: age range, gender, race and ethnicity, country of birth and origin, migration and settlement history, nationalities, parents’ occupation and education. I asked them to tell me about their schooling history and learning opportunities inside and outside of schools that they felt were critical in their citizenship learning, and history of political engagement. In addition, I asked about their religious beliefs and spiritual approaches to life, as well as hopes and concerns for Muslim youth living in Canada. I inquired about how and why the youth had become politically active, their experiences of citizenship education inside and outside schools, the range of issues that concerned them, and the various actions they took to address those issues.

In the second part of the interview, I inquired about the collective dimensions of their political engagement. More specifically, I was interested in the setting(s) in which their activism
took place, the structure and process of the work, and the non-formal education and informal learning opportunities within the work itself. I met with participants in their homes, schools, mosques, libraries, community centers, and cafes. While some of the interviews proceeded as planned and lasted about 90 minutes, others lasted up to 4 hours. I followed participants’ lead, allowing the discussion to develop as they felt comfortable.

In addition to the semistructured interviews, I also gathered publicly available information that provided important insights into the groups and campaigns within which the youth were practicing citizenship. This information provided additional insight into the mandates, objectives and approaches of the groups and campaigns.

I had received permission from the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board to conduct participant-observations in addition to semistructured interviews and documents analysis. Ultimately, however, I favored semistructured interview over participant-observation. I was already actively involved in one of the young Muslim women’s group featured in this study. The group had taken great pains to protect the political and cultural space they were creating for young Muslim women. As a member of the group, I felt it was necessary to protect it. As an observer, I could comprise the women’s sense of safety within the group. Thus, I conducted one-to-one interviews with three of the core members, and asked each of them about their experiences within the group. I felt that I did not need to conduct participant-observation to obtain that information. I chose not to participate in the other women’s groups as a researcher for the same reasons. I return to ethical issues later in this chapter.

**Data Analysis**

As I completed conducting and transcribing each interview, I read and re-read the transcripts, making notes in margins about content and emerging themes in relation to the two
main research questions guiding this study. The questions I asked of the transcripts were: How did the youth learn citizenship? How did the youth enact citizenship? More specifically, this part of the analysis involved the extraction of particular themes and conceptual categories of analysis from the data, which were situated within and against the conceptual frameworks guiding this study.

First, I coded the interview transcripts to draft participant “profiles,” using the following codes: demographic information (e.g., age range, gender, race and ethnicity, country of birth and origin, migration and settlement history, nationalities, parents’ occupation and education), schooling history and learning experiences inside and outside of schools that participants identified as critical in their citizenship learning, and history of political engagement. I coded for contexts of citizenship learning opportunities, including families, neighborhoods, schools and communities. Further, I coded for types of citizenship learning opportunities, including discussing community problems and ways to respond, engaging with political role models, experiencing an open and inclusive classroom climate, experiencing a sense of belonging to a caring and supportive school community, growing up in politically active families, and living in a neighborhood in which young people are looked after by adults.

Second, I examined interview transcripts for participants’ issues of concern and actions taken to address those issues. I coded participants’ issues of concern: gender issues, social exclusion and inclusion, state repression (vis-à-vis policing), and transnational commitments. I looked for participants’ actions (strategies and tactics) for addressing these concerns: community building, cultural production, protest and demonstrations, authority challenges, research and evaluation, public education, and action coalition building. In particular, I paid attention to the non-formal education and informal citizenship learning opportunities associated with participants’ activist work. In other words, I was interested in understanding how they attempted
to influence the citizenship learning of others. All of this part of the analysis was done manually. First, I wrote directly on transcripts; second, I created related Microsoft Word files organized thematically; finally, I organized excerpts from interviews under those files.

**Participant Selection, Recruitment, and Descriptions**

My purposive sampling strategy was motivated by my interest in expanding understandings of Muslim youth, youth citizenship, and citizenship learning. I established three main parameters for inclusion in this study. I wanted to recruit individuals who self-identify as Muslim, who were between 16 to 29 years old at the time of the study, and who have an activist citizenship orientation and practice. Within these broad parameters, I wanted to ensure representation from diverse self-identified Muslim youth, and, more broadly, to support diverse interpretations and expressions of Islam. Thus, I did not set limiting criteria for religiosity or religious denomination. Furthermore, I wanted to keep with expanding definitions of “youth” within Canada and other western liberal democracies, so the age range of participating youth in this study is broader than the typical late teens and early 20s of classic youth studies (Kennelly, 2008). Finally, I wanted to push back against narrowing boundaries of “good citizenship” or “legitimate citizenship” in Canada and other western liberal democracies (Kennelly, 2008; Mitchell, 2003), so I focused on recruiting participants with activist citizenship orientations. By “activist” I mean individuals who I understood as resisting and critiquing existing oppressions and being engaged in efforts to transform oppressions.

Drawing from personal insights and social networks in the Greater Toronto Area, I identified individuals and collectives involved in activist projects. I approached prospective participants in person (e.g., at conferences, public lectures, social gatherings) and contacted prospective participants via email or phone to inform them about my study and to invite them to
participate. My motivation for recruiting youth engaged in collective work was to provide an additional contextual layer for better understanding participating youths’ activist citizenship orientations and practices. For example, I approached three poets involved in local spoken word scenes to gain further insight into citizenship learning opportunities within local spoken word youth movements.

The first interview I conducted was with Talib and it took place in April 2009. The final interview I conducted took place was with Bilal, Karim, and Zayn, and it took place October 2009. I had initially planned to cap the participant sample at 12 (three participants per group), but I felt compelled to include each of the 18 young Muslim activists whose stories I re-tell in this study. Simply put, I followed my heart.

Table 1 presents some basic background information about each of the participants, including their gender, age range, highest level of education, country of birth & origin, citizenship status, and core elements of self. Of the 18 youth who took part in this study, 12 are young women and 6 are young men. I provide age ranges of participants rather than actual ages as an extra precaution to protect their privacy and confidentiality: mid-teens (14 to 16 years old), late teens (17 to 19 years old), early 20s (20 to 23 years old), mid-20s (24 to 26 years old), and late 20s (27 to 29 years old). Seventeen of the 18 participants had completed some post-secondary education at the time that I interviewed them. Four of these 17 participants had completed some graduate studies. Participants’ academic areas of specialization included the life sciences, social sciences, humanities, or a combination thereof. The youngest participant, in his mid-teens, was completing his secondary education when I interviewed him. Of the 18 youth, 4 were born in Canada. The Canadian-born participants are the first generation in their families born in Canada. Twelve of the 18 youth reported that their families had left their homelands due to war, and 6 of these youth and their families entered Canada as refugees. In the category
“country of origin & citizenship status” I have attempted to demonstrate participants’ migration flows. For example, Bilal was born in Italy, where his parents had received temporary asylum en route from Somalia to Canada. Bilal and his family entered Canada as refugees. Bilal has Canadian citizenship status. The final category, “core elements of self,” is based on participants’ responses to the question I began each interview with, “What are the core elements that make you who you are?” One category I did not include in the summary table is “religious denomination.” All of the youth prioritized being Muslim above being part of any branch of Islam. Two of the 18 youth identified as Shi’a.

In chapters five to nine I discuss the participants’ active (or activist) citizenship practices. I tried to achieve an organizational approach that allows for the richest possible presentation of the stories I heard and the range of activist work the young people described. Chapter five introduces Bilal, Karim and Zayn through their citizenship learning biographies, and presents their citizenship practices within the context of social housing communities. In chapter six I introduce Abdul-Haq, Aisha and Layaal, whose citizenship practices have focused on campaigns to resist police repression and criminalization of their communities. Chapter seven introduces seven women - Nabila, Amina, Asmara, Salsabil, Jamila, Khadijeh, and Zaynab. Their citizenship practices take place within the context of cultural and political spaces that they have created for themselves and other young Muslim women. Chapter eight introduces Maha, Mustafa and Talib who are actively involved in spoken word poetry movements. This chapter is distinct from other chapters in that it is built around a type of citizenship practice (or expression). Aamanee and Maliha are introduced in chapter nine, where I discuss their activism within the context of campus-based Palestinian solidarity work.

Each of these chapters includes brief citizenship learning histories of the participants. The citizenship learning histories include key formal and non-formal education and informal learning
experiences. It should be noted that each participant is referred to by an assigned pseudonym as a measure to protect her/his privacy and confidentiality.

Table 1

*Participant Profile Summaries*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>Country of birth and origin, citizenship Status</th>
<th>Core elements of self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Bilal</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Italy (via Somalia), Canadian</td>
<td>Islam, family, education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Karim</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Somalia, Canadian</td>
<td>Islam, Somali culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zayn</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Sudan (via Eritrea), Canadian</td>
<td>Islam, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Abdul-Haq</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Philippines, Permanent resident in Canada</td>
<td>Early childhood in the Philippines (and migration experience), political music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>Yemen, Permanent resident in Canada</td>
<td>Islam, Yemeni culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Layaal</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Canada (via Lebanon), Canadian</td>
<td>Being human, Muslim, woman, and Lebanese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td>Country of birth and origin, citizenship Status</td>
<td>Core elements of self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Nabila</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Canada (via Trinidad), Canadian</td>
<td>Being Muslim, part of the “two-thirds world,” and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Amina</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia (via Somalia), Canadian</td>
<td>Being female, Black/African and Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Asmara</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Somalia, Canadian</td>
<td>Being female, Black/African and Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salsabil</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Somalia, Canadian</td>
<td>Being female, Black/African and Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jamila</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Palestine, Canadian</td>
<td>Being Palestinian female, and a survivor of trauma (military occupation)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khadijeh</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Mid-20s</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Kuwait (via Palestine), Canadian</td>
<td>Being Palestinian, female and queer with a “fluid” gender identity, early childhood experience as a recent immigrant, and being an avid learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td>Country of birth and origin, citizenship Status</td>
<td>Core elements of self</td>
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**Researcher Position and Ethical Considerations**

I believe that my locations as *insider* and *outsider* in Muslim (youth activist) communities enabled me to negotiate access to Muslim youth activists. It is therefore necessary that I describe some of the locations that I occupy, as well as some of the biographical history that brought me to this study.

I am the Canadian-born daughter of Muslim immigrants from India. I was raised as a Muslim, according to Sunni traditions. I received my primary Islamic education at home from my mother. My mother attended an all Hindu girls’ school and a Christian university in India, and she had been taught to respect diverse faith communities and ways of being. Through stories about the history of the Indian subcontinent, I learned about the coexistence of peoples from diverse faith communities, as well as how religion was and continues to be used as a divisive
force. I recall news reports from family in India about Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1980s and 1990s. Alongside teaching me how to decipher Arabic so that I could recite directly from the *Holy Quran* and having me memorize passages from the *Holy Quran* so that I could perform prayers, my mother also encouraged me to study other religions and to question religious dogma. I have vague memories of reluctantly attending *madrasah* with other neighborhood children and Islamic school on weekends. Eventually, she withdrew me from *madrasah* and Islamic school.

My home-based Islamic education laid the foundation for my future independent explorations of Islam. Through a university-level introductory course in Islam, I formed friendships with other Muslims. I participated in some events organized by the Muslim Students’ Association, but for some inexplicable reason, felt that I did not quite fit in. However, I remained firm in my identity as a Muslim.

9/11 expanded my understanding of Muslim identity from a religious to a political identity. Thinking back on earlier memories of identifying with a Muslim identity, I recall being in an art class when a student ran in to announce the First Gulf War had begun. I remembered receiving news of family and friends returning spiritually rejuvenated from the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, and following news of atrocities committed against Muslims in Chechnya, the Former Yugoslavia, and Palestine. However, 9/11 catalyzed my public and political action as a Muslim in opposition to the “War on Terror.” This public and political action was not in the context of Muslim youth activist communities. It was rather grounded in the context of broader anti-war and anti-occupation movements; in that sense it was political as well as religious. This thesis served as an entry point for me into Muslim youth activist communities, and it was part of my own search for belonging. This study was also born out of a desire to engage in personally meaningful inquiry. The young people who are reflected in this thesis are my community.
I believe that being Muslim, being slightly older, being a doctoral student, and being a researcher powerfully structured my access to potential participants. Kennelly (2008) described how she approached her work with youth activist communities as an insider/outsider: “I approached my research from the tenuous position of being both ‘inside’ some of the youth activist communities that I was researching, and as a slightly older person, doctoral student, researcher, and a necessary ‘outsider’ to these communities” (p. 53). Prior to and during her research, Kennelly (2008) was engaged in youth activist communities “as an activist” (p. 53). For Kennelly (2008), her ongoing involvement in youth activist communities raised a “new issue” for her: “The new issue that was raised for me was where to draw the line between being a ‘researcher’ and being there as the person that I am, as someone who is involved with activist, Lefty queer circles” (p. 53.). Likewise, I was ‘inside’ some Muslim youth activist communities as a Muslim and activist. I was also ‘outside’ of these communities “as a slightly older person, doctoral student, researcher.” Because my research project did not employ an ethnographic approach, unlike Kennelly (2008) I did not face the same issue of “where to draw the line between being a ‘researcher’ and being there as the person that I am.” However, due to my ongoing involvement in Muslim youth activist communities, I had to set limits on my participation in various projects.

Zine (2004) explained how being a Muslim researcher seeking to do research in Islamic schools facilitated her access to school sites and to participants: “Being a Muslim researcher also made gaining access easier, since there was a sense of safety among participants, who felt confident that their views and experiences should not be exploited or sensationalized by a fellow Muslim” (p. 122). In my case, some of the youth did question my political agenda before consenting to participate in my research. In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslims in Canada (as in other western societies) suddenly found themselves the objects of intensified suspicion and state
surveillance (including state infiltration in various Muslim communities with the assistance of Muslims), which has worked at the individual level to internalize suspicion within and among Muslims. Since 9/11, there has also been an emergence of “native informants,” “comprador intellectuals,” or “native-Orientalists”—Muslim “insiders” who have served as instruments for justifying American imperialism (Maira, 2009; Razack, 2008). One of the youth involved in this study, at the end of the interview, informed me that she had conducted a “background check” on me through her personal network, and that she had consented to participate because I had “checked out.” All of the youth, ultimately, expressed their support for me, as well as for this study.

I often found that the interviews created a sense of closeness that was both heartening and overwhelming. I understood the closeness as being created because of the personal details they had just shared with me, but I shared relatively very little myself in return. I took liberties to conceal or alter details that I felt would compromise the privacy and confidentiality of the participant. One participant, Talib, shared some details about some aspects of his life that he was ashamed of, but he encouraged me to re-tell his life story fully because it might help other young people who find themselves in similar circumstances. Many participants remarked that they enjoyed the interview process, and appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their personal histories.

**Summary**

Employing life history research methodology and oral interview methods, I collected and examined the citizenship learning histories of 18 youth activists from Muslim communities living in Toronto, Canada. I inquired about how and why the youth had become politically
active, their experiences of citizenship education inside and outside schools, the range of issues that concerned them, and the various actions they took to address those issues.

The primary data collection method was semistructured interviews. I conducted 13 one-to-one interviews and two group interviews. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. All analysis was done manually, first, writing directly on transcripts; second, creating related Microsoft Word files organized thematically, and, finally, organizing excerpts from interviews under those files. During the write up, I concentrated on writing and interpreting accurately.

The ethics of the study involved taking measures to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participating youth. I used pseudonyms in lieu of participating youths’ given names. I also used age ranges instead of participating youths’ actual ages at the time of their involvement in this study. I have taken the liberty of concealing or altering some details in the interest of protecting the privacy and confidentiality.

In the pages that follow, I introduce each of the 18 young Muslim activists.
Chapter Five:
Citizenship as Crossing Symbolic, Physical, and Socioeconomic Borders of Social Housing

Homes and neighborhoods define “symbolic,” “physical,” and “socioeconomic” borders in which young people begin to learn and practice citizenship (Chisholm, 2001). On a symbolic level, homes and neighborhoods can impact young people’s sense of identity and social belonging (Chisholm, 2001). On a physical level, homes and neighborhoods can impact young people’s health, safety, and overall wellbeing (Chisholm, 2001). On a socioeconomic level, homes and neighborhoods can impact young people’s access to social infrastructure through which they develop their sense of agency and capacity for citizenship (Chisholm, 2001). Thus, housing has a direct impact on the extent to which young people experience social inclusion or exclusion (Chisholm, 2001).

In this chapter, I tell the stories of participants who were living or had lived in Toronto social housing communities. The term “social housing” refers to non-profit or co-operative housing communities with some or all the rents subsidized by public and/or private funds. After introducing Bilal, Karim, and Zayn through their respective citizenship learning histories, I discuss their involvement in neighborhood co-governance and youth tenant advocacy activities sponsored by the social housing provider—Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), a non-profit corporation owned by the City of Toronto and governed by a Board of Directors appointed by City Council. Bilal, Karim, and Zayn engaged with TCHC in an effort to remove some of the barriers that systematically block youth living in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty from accessing rights, opportunities, and resources. These young men’s narratives provide insight into their individual and collective efforts to resist social exclusion, to envision and to create better lives for other youth, and to challenge conflation of race, poverty, and
cultural pathology. This is followed by the stories and voices of other participants who had lived or were living in Toronto social housing. The stories and voices of the young people featured in this chapter reflect their understanding of themselves as precariously positioned in Canadian society because of their housing status.

**Bilal: “You can take the right path or the wrong path.”**

Bilal, a young man in his early 20s was born in Italy, where his mother and father, each originally from different parts of Somalia, had found temporary refuge from war and conflict. However, with no possibility of obtaining Italian citizenship due to racially exclusionary citizenship and immigration policies, they could not forge viable futures for themselves in that country and had to look elsewhere. The family was granted refugee status by the Canadian government and allowed to enter the country. Bilal was 2-months-old when he arrived in Canada. The family lived in a boarding house with other Somali refugees before settling into a Toronto social housing community with a large Somali population.

Bilal received his early political education at home. While he knew little about his father’s past, Bilal knew that his father had completed secondary and post-secondary education in Somalia, and that he had been politically engaged: “A lot of his life was a big secret. It was political. He doesn’t like to talk too much about it. He did finish high school. He went to university.” Bilal said that his father “wanted him to be aware,” so he encouraged Bilal to follow world news. However, his father discouraged discussion about war and conflict in Somalia and in wider East Africa: “We do not talk about that. A large part of my history has a hole in it.” Bilal’s mother had not been able to complete her secondary-level education in Djibouti, but she desired for her children what she could not have. She encouraged them to complete their formal
education. Bilal looked up to his mother as a role model. She was very well known in their neighborhood as a caring adult. She volunteered in local public elementary schools.

Bilal attended inner city Toronto public elementary and secondary schools. He struggled with disciplinary issues during his early years of elementary school, and, as a result he had spent a lot of time in the school principal’s office until a concerned teacher took Bilal aside and had a talk with him:

I had a lot of issues with school. I spent a lot of my time in the office. One of my teachers took me aside, “[Bilal], you need to choose a path. You can take the right path or the wrong path.” It was special for me… Other teachers were telling me to do this or that. He gave me a choice—the power to make my own decisions…

That teacher is now the principal of the same school. I still visit him.

This teacher’s pedagogical and pastoral intervention might be understood as an act of anti-oppressive education, an honest dialogue with the intention of helping Bilal understand his limit-situation, and his options for overcoming it. This dialogue powerfully shaped Bilal’s understanding of himself as an agentic young person with the capacity to effect personal change. He learned that he could make choices that might help keep him out of the school principal’s office, and, more broadly, to navigate the formal educational system. This teacher’s influence on Bilal was so significant that Bilal continued to visit the teacher annually long after completing elementary school.

Bilal credited another elementary school teacher for helping him learn how to express himself by engaging him in culturally relevant art forms, including contemporary spoken word poetry, story telling, and West African and Caribbean folklore, particularly Anansi tales. (I will discuss spoken word poetry in greater detail in chapter eight.) The individualized attention and

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17 The Anansi tales are believed to have originated in the Ashanti people in Ghana. Anansi is a trickster spider-an important character in West African ad Caribbean folklore.
special care given to Bilal by these two elementary school teachers affirmed his sense of self and social belonging in the classroom. In a sense, they equipped him with some critical literacy tools he would need for *reading the word* and *reading the world*.

Bilal faced new difficulties at secondary school, where he felt that, as a young Black/African male student, he was watched vigilantly for signs of unruly behavior and judged more harshly by teachers. Bilal was one of only five Black/African male students in the secondary school, and there was animosity between them and the teachers. After a series of altercations with other students, Bilal transferred to another secondary school: “I fit in better. The population was vibrant and diverse.” Bilal exercised agency by getting out of an oppressive school environment, so that he could complete his formal education. I would argue that Bilal did not “opt out,” rather he was “pushed out” by the school administrators and teachers that did not support him and other Black/African male students. In a safer school and classroom environment, Bilal was able to focus on completing his secondary education and preparing for post-secondary education. When I spoke with Bilal, he was working towards an undergraduate degree in sociology, and planning to go to teacher’s college so that he could support other marginalized children and youth in Toronto public schools.

Bilal received an Islamic education at a local mosque, where he studied the *Holy Quran* with the same teacher from kindergarten through to secondary school: “There was a *shaykh*[^18], who was the overseer of the downtown community. A lot of us studied with him. Generations of us went to him. I stuck it out from kindergarten to high school.” The *shaykh* was another supportive adult presence in Bilal’s life.

Bilal prioritized his Muslim identity above all other identities:

[^18]: The term “shaykh” or “sheikh” is an Arabic honorific for *elder*. 
I am Muslim, Somali and then Canadian. I see myself as Muslim because as a Muslim I don’t see color. I see the religion, which accepts all peoples. After that I see what my parents had to go through as Somalis. Finally, I see myself as a Canadian.

For Bilal, being Muslim enabled him to transcend race, racism and racial inequality; and, being Somali connected him to the histories and the struggles of his parents. Bilal did not explicitly articulate what being Canadian meant to him, yet some of its meanings might be gleaned from his explanation of his efforts to negotiate his social location as a young Black/African male and to make sense of domination and subordination in Canadian society.

Karim: “High school was rough.”

Karim, a young man in his early 20s was born in Somalia, and lived there until he was 4-years-old. With the worsening political situation in Somalia, his parents decided to migrate to Canada. They had heard that for professionals like themselves Canada offered excellent employment opportunities. Since their arrival in Canada in the 1990s, however, they struggled to make ends meet by piecing together various job opportunities: “My mother and father both completed medical school… We found out that the Canadian dream wasn’t true. My parents couldn’t practice. They took odd jobs.” Although Canada brings in skilled labor to fill labor shortages, it does not recognize credentials from other countries, particularly the so-called Third World. Through his parents’ histories of underemployment, Karim gained insight into discriminatory immigration and employment practices that serve to preserve and perpetuate inequalities. While Canada offered Karim and his family relative safety and security, it presented new obstacles to economic stability and social inclusion.
Karim had a keen awareness of his parents’ efforts to build their lives in Canada, but he did not know very much about their history and homeland. Karim’s father discouraged him from asking about Somalia:

In terms of politics, my father says I’m Muslim before anything. Being Somali means nothing. I was never told about my tribal affiliations. Even my grandmother, who is old school, never talked about it. They talk amongst themselves… My parents and grandmother won’t engage questions. I can’t go beyond Muslim and Somali. My father says, “Being Somali means nothing. Forget about that place.” That’s as far as politics went, “You’re Muslim.”

Karim received strong messages about the primacy of his Muslim identity over his Somali identity in his home environment—a teaching affirmed in his Islamic elementary school, which emphasized Muslim identity, above all other identities. For Karim’s father, “being Somali meant nothing,” but as Karim moved from adolescence to adulthood and formed friendships with other youth from Somali diasporic communities in his Toronto neighborhood, he drew on cultural resources circulating among them to forge belonging among Somalis.

Karim and his family lived in different cities in southwestern Ontario before settling into a Toronto social housing community with a large Somali population. In his home and in the neighborhood, Karim felt at ease, surrounded by familiar sights and sounds:

I experience Somali culture and language at home… My neighborhood is largely Somali…When I leave that comfort zone I don’t see it. I assume a different personality. I approach things differently. We all have our own unique blend of mixing our home culture.

Karim situated himself in what I would call the third space, somewhere between “home” and the world beyond the borders of his comfortable Somali neighborhood in Toronto. He alluded to his performance of Canadian identity, and his negotiation of what it means to be a young
Black/African male in wider Canadian society—an issue taken up again later in this section of the chapter.

Karim described his early upbringing as “sheltered.” He attended an Islamic elementary school that was essentially an extension of his home environment. Karim described the school environment as “caring,” “loving,” and, “like family”:

In that school we called our teachers “brothers” and “sisters.” The religion was the most important thing. There was no race or ethnicity. It was like family. The relationships with those teachers went outside the classroom. You would see them at Friday prayers, the mosque.

Within the familial Islamic elementary school environment, Karim developed a sense of himself as a Muslim and as part of a Muslim community in which “there was no race and ethnicity.” He said of his mentor, a teacher at the Islamic school, “He would speak to me like I was a grown man.” This caring adult, by addressing Karim like he was a “grown man,” also helped Karim see himself as *agentic*.

Karim later attended three different public secondary schools, including two in smaller cities in southwestern Ontario and one in inner city Toronto. The transition from an Islamic elementary school to a public secondary school was disorienting for Karim. He said of the first secondary school he attended: “High school was rough. It was in an upscale suburban area. I came from a very humble background. Getting used to that was hard. The houses were crazy, huge!” The first public secondary school was located in a wealthy neighborhood, a sharp contrast to the neighborhood in which Karim had lived and attended elementary school. This transition resulted in his first *disorienting dilemma*, an experience that contributed to his understanding of socioeconomic inequalities in Canadian society. It was also at this public secondary school
where Karim was first confronted with challenging questions about race—in his Islamic elementary school, as he put it, “there was no race or ethnicity”:

Most of the kids were white. There were a thousand students at the school. That’s when I got introduced to race. That support system wasn’t there. The Arab kids identified with the Arabs. There were Arab, Somali and Indo-Pakistani students. There were fewer Somali students… I didn’t identify with the Black guys. Some of the Somali kids did. I was left alone. I was smaller. They would call me, ‘Black guy.’ I got into more fights than Mike Tyson. I had no choice. That’s when I first tapped into an inner aggression. I never had such an attitude. I was a quiet, humble kid. That turned me into something different. Violence was my only way. I thought that if I backed away they would approach me differently. They would try to stick me in lockers. I wouldn’t have that.

Karim had difficulty navigating the secondary school’s social environment, which was comprised of peer groups based on shared ethnic and racial identifications. However, he was rejected and harassed by his Somali peers, partly because he was “smaller” and partly because he “didn’t identify with the Black guys.” This experience of alienation seemed to mark the beginning of his process of becoming Black, which can be traced through his interactions with Black/African peers in his subsequent secondary schools. Karim responded to peer aggression with aggression, because he felt he had no other option.

After completing Grade 9, however, Karim transferred to a second secondary school that was located in his neighborhood. He completed Grades 10 and 11 at this school. The student population was racially and ethnically diverse and many of the youth who lived in his neighborhood attended the same secondary school. He said, “I learned that to be ‘Black,’ I had to wear certain clothes, act a certain way, etc. I would go into environments that would slowly drain my religion.” Karim’s understanding of Black masculinities at that time in his life was drawn primarily from the commercial rap industry, which has been widely criticized by Hip Hop
activists for preserving and perpetuating stereotypes of Black/African youth. (Chapter eight includes a more detailed discussion of Hip Hop.) For Karim, being Black did not align with being Muslim either.

After Grade 11, Karim and his family moved to Toronto. He said of his new neighborhood and third public secondary school, “There were so many Somalis in my neighborhood and high school. I was reintroduced to my culture. I made a lot of friends… I had to re-learn how to speak the language. I was reminded about my religion. It was a happy ending to a bad beginning.” Although Karim seemed to find himself again among new neighbors and classmates who affirmed his Muslim and Somali identities, he felt somewhat uncomfortable around teachers. As a young Black/African male student, he felt that he was watched more vigilantly for signs of unruly behavior and judged more harshly: “The system wasn’t outright racist, but the teachers had a hard time with the Somali students at school. They didn’t like us.” Karim experienced a more insidious form of racism in the secondary school and punishment was swift at one time when he was caught in the middle, trying to break up an altercation between his friend and two other students:

In my last year, there was an altercation between my friend and two white guys. I went from breaking it up to becoming a part of it. I would say it was even, but they acted like the victims. We got suspended… We went back to school to communicate with the administration. The teacher, a white lady, said, ‘How dare you come to school when you’re suspended.’ We just wanted to understand. She said that she was encouraging the young man to press charges… She said, ‘There are so many of you Somalis here. You guys think you’re tough. What can you do to me?’

…. We got in touch with the vice-principal, a Black lady. She saw what was going on. She managed to get us back in and we graduated.
Through this experience, Karim ascertained that Black/African male students are more often than their white counterparts the recipients of school disciplinary action. Yet, by meeting with the vice-principal Karim demonstrated his understanding that he needed to be able to work within the school system. On another occasion, when Karim’s younger brother had been in an altercation with another student, he was taken from his classroom by police and, as Karim said, “shamed” in front of his classmates. Reflecting on these experiences, Karim said: “Things like schools and police remind you that you’re not that Canadian.” Through these interactions with the Canadian state, he had come to understand his social location, as a young Black/African male, in Canadian schools and society.

**Zayn: “I was the Hip Hop head.”**

Zayn, a young man in his mid-20s, was born in Sudan. Displaced by conflict in their homeland Eritrea, his mother and father migrated from Eritrea to Sudan before making the journey to Canada, where they had been granted asylum: “My parents left Eritrea in their teens. They were in high school. They were forced to leave because of war. They were part of a large migration of Eritrean refugees to Toronto.” Zayn was 2-years-old when he arrived in Canada. Zayn and his family lived in inner city Toronto for about 8 years before relocating to a suburb just outside of Toronto. He recalled their first apartment in inner city Toronto: “We lived in a rodent-infested place. I hated that.” His childhood memories of growing up in inner city low-income neighborhoods influenced his decision to return years later to work with other children and youth living in these neighborhoods.

Zayn did not know very much about his parents’ educational and political histories. However, he was keenly aware of his parents’ struggles to build their lives in Canada, and
believed that was part of the reason why they discouraged discussion about Eritrean politics at home:

They went through trying times to get here. When we try to pry, they shut down. I figure because they want to put that behind them. They want to focus on the future and stay optimistic. In terms of politics… They left home when they were young. They have this idealistic view of back home. Back home is a shrine. My parents haven’t gone back. Now they’re very nationalist. They are pro-Eritrea. I play devil’s advocate. It leads to the same thing. They’re right and I’m wrong. Tribal affiliation? Both of my parents are from different tribes. I know nothing about the histories of the tribes.

Although Zayn did not grow up in a home where Eritrean politics were openly discussed, he had some understanding of his parents’ sense of connection to Eritrea and their need to preserve an “idealistic view of back home.”

Zayn had attended two urban and one suburban elementary school. He spoke primarily of his struggle to find his place among peers, forming “alliances” with other racialized students. Zayn mentioned that he “got into a lot of fights” in elementary school. Zayn’s older brother had facilitated his relatively easy transition from elementary to secondary school: “I enjoyed my experience in high school. I had a pass because of my older brother… I didn’t get into a single fight. People had this respect for me.” He was also heavily into Hip Hop culture: “I was ‘the Hip Hop head.’ I always had something in my ear…That just got me through.” Zayn excelled academically. After completing secondary school he pursued a post-secondary education. His older brother and his older brother’s friends helped him navigate university, and to choose his course of study: “I started talking to my older brother and his friends. One mentor told me to do what I like, do what I feel is right.” Zayn’s older brother also offered faith-based perspectives for Zayn’s consideration in choosing a life path: “My brother told me, ‘Whatever you do, make sure
you do it for the *ummah.*” His brother impressed upon him a sense of responsibility towards other Muslims. When I interviewed Zayn he had completed an undergraduate degree in psychology, and was planning to pursue graduate studies in the same field with the hope of working with marginalized children and youth living in Toronto.

Zayn explained what *being Muslim* and *being Canadian*, meant to him:

The concept of identity is a construct. It’s a construct. It changes over time. Only religion is constant. That is my identity. Being Muslim and practicing Islam. As a Muslim you respect the lands that you are in. I will try to understand the political institutions, how things are run, how power is displayed, etc. I want to understand. As a Muslim it is a duty, as the Prophet said, “Give to your brother that which you want for yourself.” That’s how I would give back to the community as a whole. Being Canadian is a construct. It would change if I moved elsewhere.

Zayn framed his relationship to Islam in a way that helps him think through questions about Canadian national identification, and that offers a stability that is not otherwise available through Canadian national identification. For him, Islam and his family were the core elements that defined him.

**Citizenship Learning and Engagement in Housing:**

“*You want for your neighbors what you want for yourself.*”

In their conversations with me Bilal, Karim and Zayn reflected on their experiences working within the context of Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)—the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America. TCHC provides homes to about 164,000 low and moderate-income tenants in 58,500 households (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006). Unlike the citizenship engagements and practices of the other young Muslim activists discussed later in this study, Bilal, Karim, and Zayn carried out their work within a government initiative.
Karim was involved in TCHC’s Tenant Representative System as a tenant representative, and therefore acting in an “official” capacity in TCHC and housing communities. Tenant representatives are involved in budget allocation at both the and city-wide levels, and have the opportunity to influence funding priorities at an annual city-wide participatory budgeting exercise, tenant representatives allocate capital dollars in areas with the highest impact on tenants’ lives (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2006). According to TCHC, the Tenant Representative System aims to enable a collaborative governance structure in which tenant representatives work with each other and with management.

Karim experienced contradictory emotions about his political engagement as a tenant representative in TCHC and housing communities. He described the neighborhood in which he lived with his family as “the armpit of housing.” While walking through the neighborhood one day, he came across a flyer littered on a sidewalk advertising tenant representative elections. Immediately recognizing an opportunity to influence political decisions affecting his neighborhood and to develop capacity for self-governance, he contacted representatives for additional information. Karim ran for a tenant representative position and won. He explained why he wanted to take advantage of such an opportunity: “I wanted life to be different. We seem so forgotten. In my neighborhood, there are drugs everywhere and shootings every so often. I felt like there had to be something to do to help people out.” Karim’s reason for engaging with TCHC seemed to be deeply rooted in a deeply felt affiliation and commitment to his housing community. He imagined an alternative future for himself and his community, free from health and safety risks, and he believed that he might be able to effect positive change for himself and his neighbors as a tenant representative.

Karim spoke eloquently of his goals as tenant representative, “I would like to influence those in positions of authority and give them a different perspective on youth in communities,
social conditions of youth tenants and some of the issues and barriers people from these communities are forced to face.” He felt that he could effect positive change by working with TCHC and by informing management about the needs of some of its most vulnerable tenants—children and youth. In our discussion about his religious beliefs and spiritual approach to life, he shared an adaptation of an Islamic teaching that motivated his work in the housing community: “You want for your brother, what you want for yourself. You want for your neighbor what you want for yourself.”

When he talked about his experiences, however, Karim was ambivalent. He felt that he was being used to some extent by TCHC to give it the appearance that it was committed to its youth tenants: “I’ve been tokenized. I’m a Black immigrant Muslim. They put you in the spotlight to make them look good… I had to speak here and speak there. I got a bulletin board out of it.” The frustration that Karim felt about the actual change he was making in his housing communities was palpable. However, he acknowledged benefits that his involvement in the Tenant Representative System provided, such as opportunities to share youth tenant perspectives with decision-makers across the city and to represent the social housing provider at various public engagements. In his own neighborhood he helped to organize clean-ups and barbeques. Karim suggested that his work as a tenant representative influenced his decision to pursue undergraduate studies in political science and to explore the possibilities of a career in public service. He recognized that some other youth tenants looked up to him: “I sit with them and tell them about my experiences, where I’ve been, who I have met, etc., ‘I was at City Hall today. I met the mayor today.’ Being that connection to the outside world. They are so forgotten. They think so low of themselves.” Karim wanted to get more youth tenants involved in their housing communities and in TCHC, to use opportunities available to them through TCHC while also advocating for their communities and bringing youth tenant issues into corporate headquarters.
and places of decision-makers. In many ways Karim embodied alternative possibilities for youth tenants.

Bilal was involved in youth tenant-focused activities sponsored by TCHC including summer camps, drug abuse prevention programs, and other youth advocacy work. He was committed to helping other youth tenants gain access to valuable recreational and job opportunities that he had not always had by helping them understand “the system”: “The work I’m doing now is to help youth understand the system. We need to know how things work to get what we want.” Frustrated with short-term projects and lack of accountability (on the part of TCHC), Bilal and other youth in his community were seeking funds for sustainable youth programming, particularly funding for a youth mentorship program. Bilal felt that he had to cooperate with TCHC to secure resources for other youth tenants. However, the political, social, and economic distance between TCHC and its tenants also frustrated him:

The Toronto Community Housing Corporation representative to my community is a woman. She does not live in my community. When she first visited the community, it was nighttime. In front of my youth, she asked me to walk her to her car because she didn’t feel safe. How does my mother feel going into our building where there are drug abusers and crack houses? If you feel that way, how do you think we feel? We live through that everyday.

Through this representative’s behavior, particularly the value she seemed to place on her “safety” above that of girls and women living in the neighborhood, Bilal became increasingly aware of the inequalities preserved and perpetuated by TCHC. He recalled another contradiction that reinforced that learning: “When I was 14, I realized there was a big disconnect between TCHC and the tenants. They came at us from a corporate perspective. They’re starting to understand they’re not just responsible for housing but for raising a community.” Bilal called on TCHC to critically examine its responsibility as a social housing provider.
Zayn had assisted with a community-based Hip Hop literacy project for children and youth living in Toronto social housing communities, and was serving as a youth mentor in these communities when I interviewed him. Zayn had spent some of his childhood years living in inner city low-income neighborhoods in Toronto, and had returned to work with children and youth living in Toronto social housing out his personal sense of “loyalty”: “I didn’t grow up in housing, but I am loyal.”

Through his involvement in TCHC as a youth advocate, Zayn (like Karim and Bilal), had noticed contradictions in the Corporation:

I came to understand that by working in TCHC it is business first. Initially, TCHC didn’t provide tenant services. TCHC were just landlords. TCHC saw an opportunity to make more money through the priority neighborhoods. Those who are conducting services are not qualified. They promise a lot, but they are empty promises... Your word is important. If you say you’re going to do something, do it! If you’re not going to do it, say you can’t or you’re not sure that you can. It’s that simple.

Zayn understood the TCHC as a “corporation.” He understood its evolving role from “landlord” to “service-provider” as a “business” move. He also understood “priority neighborhoods” as an income-generating project for the Corporation. Karim took particular issue with TCHC’s “promises” to tenants: “Your word is important. If you say you’re going to do something, do it!” Zayn called for an honest dialogue between TCHC and its tenants. Through participating in meetings with diverse stakeholders, Zayn continued to develop his critical literacy skills, his ability to read the word and read the world: “You learned the skills to gauge yourself in particular settings. You become strategic. I don’t even know if I want these skills. It’s very

19 In 2005, the City of Toronto identified 13 neighborhoods (struggling with a lack of community services and social infrastructure, poverty and underemployment, settlement of newcomers, and higher incidence of youth violence) as “priorities” for funding and social infrastructure expansion.
manipulative. I want to speak candidly and openly assist one another.” For Zayn, working within the context of TCHC posed a dilemma, because it conflicted with his personal beliefs in dialogue based on an ethic of honesty and integrity.

Zayn perceived his work as a youth advocate in TCHC as an opportunity to challenge racist discourses and practices and to ensure that youth tenants remained a priority:

I want to combat preconceived notions and stigma. I sit on a lot of tables. I speak candidly and openly. You see their expressions when I talk…I feel like that is the scenario at every table I sit at. They forget who you are. You can speak. You can articulate yourself. Our presence at the tables is important for our youth. That’s why I do what I do. I try to put youth at the table. It leads the way. We’re dealing with more than Toronto Community Housing Corporation. We’re dealing with systemic racism. That is entrenched in society. It’s disheartening. At the end of the day, you’re still dark-skinned. You don’t look like a coordinator.

Zayn was conscious of how he was perceived by management—a young Black/African man who spoke, to the surprise of TCHC management, “articulately” and who, with “dark skin,” did not “look like a coordinator.” Zayn used his position to bring more youth to “the table.”

Although Bilal, Karim, and Zayn carried out their work within the context of TCHC, I understand their citizenship understandings, expressions, and practices as oppositional. These young men were critical of TCHC’s policies and practices, and self-consciously aware as young Black/African Muslim men of the importance of their presence in TCHC. Bilal, Karim and Zayn were motivated to get involved in TCHC because they believed that learning about its political and organizational structure would help them better understand how to secure resources for their communities. Through their work in TCHC, they learned about how decisions are made and resources allocated and tried to figure out how they could influence TCHC. Bilal, Karim and Zayn met one another through TCHC-related activities. Indeed, I met Karim at a talk he was
giving on his work as a tenant representative in a social housing community. He extended the invitation to participate in this study to Bilal and Zayn. When the young men arrived at the university for the interview, they asked for a place to pray, momentarily transforming a student lounge area into a sacred space. Zayn told me that for him the best part of their weekly meetings was that they prayed together. They created sacred space for themselves and other youth. All of the young men felt that he was fulfilling his obligation as a Muslim to care for the wellbeing of others through his work. These young men had met through their work in TCHC, and formed a community based on their shared experiences as young Black/African Muslim men.

**Citizenship Learning in Housing Communities**

Drawing from the narratives of other participants who had lived in Toronto social housing—Amina, Asmara, Layaal, Mustafa, and Salsabil—I attempt to draw connections across their lived experiences and perspectives as former youth tenants to provide insight into neighborhoods as critical places and spaces of citizenship learning.

**Negotiating Identities: “There is a stigma attached to living in housing.”**

Living in social housing appeared to have impacted the youths’ identities and belonging. All of the youth described a general sense of feeling “forgotten” or “hidden” in social housing. Asmara and her family lived in various low-income neighborhoods, some of which were designated “priority neighborhoods”:

When I was younger it wasn’t “priority.” When I was younger it was the “hood,” the “block.” It wasn’t a “priority neighborhood.” There weren’t any priorities for us. We weren’t prioritized at the time. We were hidden neighborhoods that didn’t receive a lot of support and funding from the government. We were isolated. We had few resources. It was a struggle. Even if you had the best intentions, and you were motivated, and you were following through with action you were hampered
by your neighborhood. You couldn’t get jobs because jobs were not near by. You couldn’t get tutoring, because it just wasn’t available. You have crime. You have substance abuse. All these things come hand in hand with lower-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Police brutality. All these things you witness as a child.

Asmara’s narrative reveals the many ways housing can influence young people’s autonomy and sense of place in society: feeling hidden and isolated, being exposed to crime and police brutality, and, having limited, if any, access to social services and employment opportunities.

Salsabil described her experience as a youth tenant in social housing as a “struggle”: “There is a stigma attached to living in housing… My friends would never come over to my house. They would say, ‘we can’t go to that area. It’s really bad.’ I always felt bad.” Although Salsabil had felt “stigmatized” by peers who did not live in social housing, she experienced a sense of community among other tenants within her neighborhood. Salsabil’s mother, a trauma counselor, had coordinated support services for the women who lived in the neighborhood. Following her mother’s example, Salsabil joined a tenant coalition advocating educational and recreational spaces for neighborhood children and youth.

Salsabil, Amina, Asmara, and Layaal had befriended neighborhood children and youth. Layaal’s family had lived in Toronto social housing for several years while saving up to buy their own home. They were the only Arab family in a predominantly Afro-Caribbean neighborhood: “There were fifteen houses in our court. We would see our neighbors everyday. We were close with our neighbors.” Further, she explained, “All of the neighbors looked out for one another.” Layaal credited her neighbors and her parents for helping her stay safe despite the constant police presence, aggressive policing of Jamaican boys and men, and occasional gun violence. (In chapter six I will discuss further Layaal’s efforts to resist state repression and criminalization of her communities.)
Navigating Health and Safety Risks: “There were a lot of killings in our neighborhood.”

On a physical level, living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated levels of poverty posed real health and safety threats that compromised the youths’ wellbeing and capacities for citizenship. They reported experiences and observations of dangerous activity and state-sanctioned violence: gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, gun violence, and police brutality. Mustafa, who spent his childhood years in a neighborhood reputed to be “dangerous,” recalled the maze-like plan of the neighborhood, which he described as follows: “It was designed for drug dealing with its tight corners. Drug dealing and gang shooting happened all the time… My parents came to make a better life for us, and that wasn’t good for me, so we moved…” Mustafa’s parents, like so many other immigrants, had migrated to Canada with the hope to secure better futures for their families than was possible in their home countries. However, they encountered new health and safety risks in their neighborhood that compromised their young children’s well being. Mustafa’s parents were able to find an alternative housing option, and move their family to a “safer” neighborhood outside of Toronto. (Mustafa’s experiences will be discussed further in chapter eight.) Amina talked about how she had become “used to seeing guns” in her neighborhood. Amina’s mother, who feared that her children “risked their lives every time they walked out of their home,” moved her family out as soon as she could find another viable housing option. Salsabil, who felt stigmatized by her friends because they would not visit her at home, said, “There were a lot of killings in our neighborhood.” A series of violent incidents, including the shooting death of a young man on their doorstep, had forced Salsabil’s mother to seek out alternate housing options. Layaal had been playing in the neighborhood recreation centre when there was a shooting. She recalled hearing the sound of the shots and the subsequent police search. She also witnessed aggressive policing of the Jamaican boys and
young men in her neighborhood, an observation that influenced her perception of police and informed her later work on racial profiling and surveillance in Arab and Muslim communities.

Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil also discussed the specific threats faced by girls and young women living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated levels of poverty—harassment, pressure for early sexual initiation, intimate partner violence, and high risk of sexual assault. At the same time, early sexual initiation brought its own hazards: pregnancy, the risk of sexually transmitted disease, and dropping out of school to care for children. All these hazards have serious long-term implications for the prospects of low-income adolescent girls and young women. Amina, Asmara and Salsabil knew girls and young women who had not been able to avoid these risks, but they had successfully navigated health and safety risks that could have comprised their personal and bodily autonomy. (The stories told by Amina, Asmara and Salsabil are discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.)

**Receiving Social Support: “Some of us made it and some of us fell by the way-side.”**

All of these youth and their families had eventually moved out of Toronto social housing by the time I interviewed them. Asmara, Layaal, and Salsabil, who had lived in social housing for several years, discussed the various supports that helped them to re-imagine lives for themselves within and beyond their neighborhoods. Asmara said of other young Somali women she had grown up with in social housing communities: “Some of us made it and some of us fell by the way-side…It hurts when I see someone I grew up with abusing drugs or running with gangs. What was difference between us? Life chances?” Asmara’s mother had chosen social housing located nearby a mosque, so that Asmara and her siblings could participate in mosque-based programming after school and on weekends. Asmara’s mother had also moved the family to Kenya for 1 year to foster in Asmara and her siblings a connection to their homeland. Through
this experience, Asmara developed a strong sense of transnational belonging that transcending neighborhood boundaries. After her year abroad in Kenya, Asmara enrolled in a full-time Islamic secondary school in a different part of Toronto. This new insight was strengthened by her decision to attend a full-time Islamic secondary school outside of her neighborhood and interacting with other young Muslims from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Salsabil spoke of the significance of religious faith and the mosque in helping her navigate harmful risks that some of her own siblings could not avoid. Salsabil described herself as “God conscious” from an early age. She began visiting the mosque regularly, and studying and practicing Islam. At one point, she had started wearing niqab to separate herself from her social and geographic surroundings. She began focusing on her studies at school. Salsabil also credited academically successful peers with helping her navigate the school system and work towards post-secondary education. She also benefitted from an affirmative action youth employment initiative. Thus, in her neighborhood context, Salsabil chose to work alongside other neighbors who cared about the neighborhood. As part of an employment program targeted at youth in low-income neighborhoods, Salsabil had been able to access gainful employment opportunities: “[A large corporation] was hiring from our community...It was a great opportunity. It was supposed to be a 6-month internship, but I kept getting my contract renewed. I stayed for 2 years. It gave me a hand up. It wasn’t a hand out. It was a hand up.” Although Salsabil had, at times, felt trapped within her neighborhood, various choices and opportunities enabled her to develop skills and confidence for economic and political participation beyond its borders.

Layaal’s parents had taught their children the importance of being “good neighbors” and had encouraged them to befriend neighborhood children. However, they had also established strict rules and guidelines for their children’s conduct outside of the home. For example, while
they were allowed to invite friends to their home, they could not visit their friends at their homes. Thus, different layers of relationships, and access to alternate social environments helped these youth navigate the risks associated with their neighborhoods.

**Summary**

The voices and stories of former and current youth tenants in Toronto social housing communities provided insight into non-formal education and informal learning opportunities within symbolic, physical, and socioeconomic borders of neighborhoods marked by concentrated poverty.

I began by introducing Bilal, Karim, and Zayn. Each of these three young men negotiated issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion and nation as they confronted situations and experiences of subordination and domination in Canadian schools and society. Certain relationships were central to their processes of identity building – including parents or older siblings, religious guides and leaders, and schoolteachers and administrators. Both Karim and Bilal spoke of the “policing” that they had experienced on the streets and in their schools. Each of the young men prioritized their religious identity above racial, ethnic and national identities. Although the young men prioritized their religious identities, all of them recognized how their ethnic and racial identities as young Black men regulated their social belonging and political participation in Canadian schools and society. The young men understood that as African youth living in Canada, their bodies are read as *Black*, and each of the young men negotiated the process of *becoming black* through interactions with peers, teachers, police, and TCHC management.

These young men were motivated to get involved in TCHC because they believed that learning about its political and organizational structure would help them better understand how to
secure resources for their communities. Through their work in TCHC, they learned about how decisions are made and resources allocated and tried to figure out how they could influence TCHC. Bilal, Karim and Zayn met one another through TCHC-related activities. They became friends with one another based on shared lived experience as Muslims Black/African young men growing up in Toronto. They carved out a sacred space for themselves and other Muslim youth involved in TCHC, praying together at their weekly meetings. They worked collectively to challenge racist and classist thinking within TCHC, and to ensure that youth tenants remained a priority.

Living in social housing impacted the youths’ understanding of how they were positioned in Canadian society because of their housing status, and, more specifically, it impacted their social identities and feelings of belonging beyond the social and geographical borders of their neighborhoods. The youth experienced prejudice based on their housing status. At the same time, however, they experienced a sense of community in their neighborhoods through building caring relationships with other tenants, participating in neighborhood activities, and, in some cases, working with other tenants to redress neighborhood problems. Although one of the youth did mention having to live with “rodents” for some period of time, none of the others reported on health and safety issues specific to their homes (e.g., air and water quality, heating and cooling, lead and chemical hazards, and overall building maintenance). Their homes were relatively safe spaces. At the same time, they did discuss the health and safety issues specific to their neighborhood contexts, and reported direct and indirect experiences of interpersonal and state-sanctioned violence. For the most part, however, these youth successfully avoided harmful risks that could comprise their possibilities for substantive inclusion.

Different forms of social capital appeared to assist youth to navigate risks, resist negative portrayals of youth tenants, and to imagine lives for themselves as citizens and community
builders within and beyond the borders of their neighborhoods. Families provided role models, social and academic expectations, spaces for youth and their friends to gather and to discuss issues pertinent to their lives, as well as safety rules and guidelines for navigating harmful risks. In particular, the youth observed that their parents managed to exercise capacity, influence circumstances, and make autonomous decisions for themselves and their families despite social and economic constraints. For some of the youth, mosques provided alternate safe spaces to visit after school and on weekends, opportunities to build relationships with other young Muslims, and to further Islamic knowledge and practice. Schools were contradictory spaces where young people learned about subordination and domination in Canadian society, but also acquired cultural resources necessary to begin to envision and build better lives for themselves and their communities. Other interactions with the state vis-à-vis policing seemed to engender a sense of entrapment rather than safety. Neighborhood community centers and organizations were sites where youth tenants could engage in recreational activities, and work with other tenants to address problems in their neighborhoods.

Finally, young Muslims, like other youth from low socioeconomic home and neighborhood communities, are vulnerable to harmful risks associated with living in neighborhoods with concentrated levels of poverty. As Karim suggested,

Young Muslims face the same issues as youth living in their communities. Gang violence and affiliation, drug abuse, drug dealing, unemployment, high sexual activity, early teenage pregnancies, and introduction into the criminal system are all issues that young Muslims face...At times the environment one lives in and the types of people that one chooses to be around dictate the path in which they navigate.
The voices and stories of former and current youth tenants in Toronto’s social housing communities suggest that contemporary debates about citizenship in Canada must be greater attention to space, place, and local identity.
Chapter Six:
Citizenship as Resistance to State Repression and Criminalization

In this chapter, I explore the kinds of political learning and notions of citizenship and belonging that young Muslims take away from their encounters with police, and, more specifically, from their experiences of proactive policing practices. Proactive policing involves the “police, acting on their own initiative to develop information about crime and strategies for its suppression” (Crank, 1998, pp. 244-245). In other words, proactive policing involves identifying criminals before they engage in criminal activities. Criminalized peoples may be subject to “disproportionate surveillance and stops, disrespectful treatment, excessive force, and fewer police protections” (Brunson & Miller, 2005, p. 531).

I introduce Aisha and discuss her efforts to seek justice for youth victims of police brutality and to create safe spaces for urban youth from low-income communities of color within the context of her campaign against police brutality. Then, I introduce Abdul-Haq and Layaal and discuss their campaign to raise awareness among Muslim and Arab citizens about state surveillance in their communities and the legal rights and civil liberties entitled to all citizens in Canada. These young Muslim activists’ narratives provide insight into their efforts to individually and collectively resist state repression and criminalization of their communities, and to challenge state-sanctioned limitations on their political engagements and practices. Next, I consider other participants’ encounters with police while living their everyday lives, while publicly expressing dissent, or while crossing national borders. Their narratives provide nuanced insights into processes of subject-making by explaining how gender, race and class mediate young people’s interactions with the Canadian state through interactions with the police. In addition, they draw attention to the realities of police brutality and racial profiling in Canada.
Such repressive practices impact not only on the construction of the nation, but also on the way in which criminalized peoples construct and re-construct themselves as trapped by the Othering gaze in the popular national imaginary (Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

**Aisha and the Campaign Against Police Brutality**

**Aisha:** “I thought his death was a wake-up call.”

Aisha, a young woman in her early 20s, was born in Yemen, where she lived and attended school until she was 10-years-old. Her parents had decided to migrate to Canada for better socioeconomic opportunities than had been available to them in Yemen. The family arrived in Canada in the 1990s, settling first in a small southwestern Ontario city, and eventually in an inner city Toronto neighborhood with large newcomer populations. Aisha said that she had adjusted to her new neighborhoods with relative ease: “There were a lot of Arabs in [small southwestern Ontario city], so I didn’t have trouble fitting in... Toronto was easier... It’s so multicultural. I have friends from my own background...” Her mother had originated from Kenya and her father originated from Yemen. Aisha felt close to both parents’ home countries and cultures: “There are Arabs in both of those places. I can’t choose one.” Aisha had Yemeni citizenship and permanent residency in Canada, and planned to write her Canadian citizenship test in the near future. About Canada, she said, “It’s where I live. I’m used to the system. I live in the laws. I obey the laws. I still value my culture and religion. I don’t feel like I fit here.” Aisha explained that she felt a sense of social belonging amidst diverse African, Arab, and Muslim diasporic communities that she did not feel in wider Canadian society. Beyond the comforts of these diasporic communities she felt that sometimes her dark skin and covered hair drew the focus of unwanted attention. For Aisha, Canadian citizenship offered, “Freedom. I can only travel in Canada right now. I can’t go to the States. I can’t go to my home countries... We came here for a better life. That’s the main reason.” As a landed immigrant in Canada, Aisha’s
mobility was limited until she obtained a Canadian passport. However, she understood that legal Canadian citizenship status would enable her to cross national borders relatively easily. Canadian citizenship (and permanent residency status) also afforded the protection of social, economic, and political rights that were not necessarily available in Yemen.

Aisha had attended an inner city public secondary school in Toronto. She did not identify classroom-based citizenship education as significant, but she did discuss her engagement in school-based extra-curricular activities. Aisha had been involved in a pan-African students’ group that emphasized unity among all students of African ancestry. She helped organize the secondary school’s annual Black History Month assembly, which, according to Aisha, was the largest of her school’s assemblies. There, she performed: “I read Maya Angelou’s poem *Phenomenal Woman*. Four of us did a litany... I learned about Maya Angelou because we did that research. I didn’t get that from classes.” The pan-African students’ group also provided Aisha with opportunities for learning about the role of women in the liberation struggle of Black/African peoples in Canada and the United States, affirming her identity as a young Black/African woman and her binding solidarity to African peoples. Although Aisha did not play a leadership role in her secondary school’s Muslim Students’ Association, she volunteered to assist the group with various activities. Aisha related that during that particular time in her life, she practiced Islam, but identified more strongly with her Black/African identity. She had spent a lot of her leisure time watching Black Entertainment Television20.

While she was completing secondary school, her brother was fatally shot by Toronto police. This tremendous loss catalyzed a *life-crisis or disorienting dilemma* for Aisha, and resulted in personal change—a renewal of religious faith and an awakening to what was

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20 Black Entertainment Television or BET is a cable network targeting black/African-American audiences. The programming consists primarily of mainstream rap and R&B music videos and urban-focused movies and series.
happening in the world around her: “I started watching the world. I started watching the news. I never watched the news before. It was BET [Black Entertainment Television] 24/7. I thought his death was a wake-up call… I used to pray, but I started to focus on faith.” Drawing strength and comfort from the belief that “Allah said that people who die innocent are promised heaven,” Aisha resolved to seek justice for her brother and other youth victims of police brutality.

Thus, Aisha and her family navigated between memories of life in Yemen and hopes for life in Canada. However, their early years in Canada were marked by the death of a loved one at the hands of Canadian police, and their difficult pursuit of justice in the Canadian legal system. This tragic injustice powerfully contributed to the development of Aisha’s critical consciousness and religious faith, and impelled her to act for personal and social change.

**The Campaign Against Police Brutality: “We started with education.”**

When a small coalition of community-based organizations monitoring police practices in local communities approached Aisha to ask whether she would like help building a campaign against police brutality, she felt compelled to get involved. Through Aisha’s involvement in campaign building, it becomes possible to see the various non-formal education and informal learning opportunities that the campaign created for young people inside and outside of it.

For Aisha, who had no prior experience in advocacy work, building a campaign against police brutality involved learning about aggressive policing practices in urban low-income communities of color in Canada and the United States (including the history of the Black Panther Party21). She received media training, which involved learning how to write a press release, organize a press conference, communicate with reporters, and create an effective audio clip.

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Also, her work involved creating educational opportunities for other youth: “At the first meeting we had 30 kids from [the neighborhood]. We started with education. We learned about what was going on in our neighborhood.” Thus, the campaign engaged young people in discussion about problems they had witnessed or experienced in their own neighborhoods, and, in this respect, it was personally relevant to the youth. Aisha helped to organize a basketball tournament: “It’s for all the victims. It’s not just focused on one person. We’re going to have performances. Political education. They’re going to play basketball, but we want to educate.” This event can be seen as a pedagogical intervention drawing from young people’s lived cultures and based on a problem-posing, dialogical approach, to commemorate the lives of youth victims of police brutality, to bring together young people from all over the city to play basketball together peacefully, and to provide education about police brutality.

Aisha also worked to create safe spaces in which young people could share their experiences of being policed, build community and collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance. Aisha reported that several youth shared experiences of harassment, false arrests, brutal beatings, and verbal confrontations with the police. Through her involvement in the campaign against police brutality and justice for youth victims, Aisha started to get involved in related initiatives, including a campaign to ban police from public schools serving low-income communities of color. In her words:

How does the system choose which schools get cops? There is police brutality in the streets. Those cops that brutalize kids go into schools. When we had the first basketball tournament a lot of youth were there… One kid said his brother had both arms broken by a cop, who ended up at his school. The kid left the school.

Both schools and police are state institutions, and Aisha raises an important question about the connection between them: how can schools with police be safe and equitable for young people
who have been victims of aggressive policing or worse? As the previous, present, and following chapters demonstrate, the youth involved in this study encountered the state (beyond public schooling) through policing, but also through the judicial system, the immigration system, and the employment system. Such encounters with state institutions constitute subject-making processes that frame young people from urban low-income communities of color as criminal.

After the acquittal of the Toronto police officer in the fatal shooting of her brother, Aisha struggled to come to terms with the ways in which the abusive power of police is supported by legal structures, and impedes the possibilities for realizing justice. Regarding police brutality, Aisha said, “It is a hard issue to fight against. The police have a lot of power. They work with the legal system. The system gave police too much power. They are brutalizing young kids. Police are cleared of any wrongdoing and then put back on the streets.” Aisha exercised agency and autonomy through the campaign against police brutality, but she learned a painful lesson—that she could not necessarily achieve justice within the current political system. Aisha remained committed to raising community awareness about police abuse of power.

**Abdul-Haq, Layaal, and the Know Your Rights Campaign**

**Abdul-Haq: “Music sparked my thinking.”**

Abdul-Haq, a young man in his mid-20s, was born in a major urban centre in South East Asia, where he lived and attended school until he was 9-years-old. His father, an engineer, worked in the Middle East and sent money back to the family, while his mother, a hair stylist, took care of the family. The family, seeking a better quality of life than had been available to them in their home country, migrated to Canada in the 1980s. Abdul-Haq said, “We immigrated here for a better life. It is a better life.” Abdul-Haq identified as “Canadian,” even though he had yet to obtain legal citizenship status.
Abdul-Haq told me that his activist development occurred outside of his family: “My interest in politics developed outside of my family. I was a juvenile delinquent up to Grade 11. In Grade 12 and OAC, I started to do well at school. I developed on my own. [My parents] know I read a lot of books. There are Malcolm X posters all over the walls in my room.”

Abdul-Haq entered the Ontario Catholic school system in Grade 5. His transition into his new school environment had been difficult: “I had trouble adjusting, because I had the FOB [fresh off the boat] thing attached to me. I had a deep accent.” He strategically assumed the role of troublemaker: “I was able to connect with people because I didn’t shy away from causing trouble…I took pride in my ability to fit in, being able to handle different crowds, and being able to negotiate my place in the classroom diplomatically.” Although Abdul-Haq established himself in the social hierarchy among his peers, he remained disengaged in the classroom and wider school community for several years: “I got into a lot of trouble. I was failing classes. Police, juvenile gang shit, fights, getting suspended left and right. I fit the general stereotype of a juvenile delinquent.” A life-altering conflict posed a disorienting dilemma and caused him to re-examine his life choices and their consequences: “Then in the end, I was like, it's not me. That experience made me look in the mirror and see who I was as a person.” Abdul-Haq believed that the image he saw in the mirror did not reflect who he truly was. Through a process of critical self-reflection and action, Abdul-Haq began making healthier life choices to avoid situations that could result in his expulsion from school or his placement in police detention.

While Abdul-Haq was disengaged academically and streamed into courses for English language learners for most of his time in school, he was actively engaged in Hip Hop culture. He started skipping classes to watch “freestyle rap” competitions and he viewed freestyle rap as an art form and space for creative self-expression: “In Grade 11 we would skip class to watch

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“Freestyle rap” refers improvised rap lyrics performed acapella or with instrumental beats.
Freestyle became a source of empowerment for me… Before that it was house parties, basketball.” He started taking academics seriously in Grade 11 when he first heard the political music of the American rap metal band, Rage Against the Machine: “Music sparked my thinking.” He printed out 200 pages of frequently asked questions about their lyrics:

I started looking at Rage Against the Machine lyrics and trying to imitate them. I couldn’t. I could write, “Racism is wrong.” Rage Against the Machine was writing about the FBI, Malcolm X, and Chiapas. Their lyrics were very vague and cryptic, and forced me to look into issues…I started reading books… I read [Frantz Fanon’s] Wretched of the Earth and didn’t get it. I re-read it… I read communist propaganda and speeches by Che Guevara. I realized that wasn’t enough to inform me about what was going in the world.

Through his critical engagement with Rage Against the Machine’s lyrics, Abdul-Haq learned that he needed to develop his literacy skills to express complex ideas in writing. He began to apply himself in academics: “I tried to do better at school for the first time ever, but I was bombing… The teachers criticized the way I wrote my paragraphs. I couldn’t write a paragraph. My sentences weren’t proper.” The lyrical content contributed to the development of Abdul-Haq’s critical consciousness. It expanded his historical, political, and cultural knowledge, and motivated him to pursue independent studies. Two teachers took notice of Abdul-Haq’s growing interest in politics and history and provided caring and personalized support:

Political music got me interested in politics, but my high school teachers, the ones that I grew to trust, had to give me some direction. They didn’t tell me what to think, they just directed me and let me decide for myself… My history teacher got me interested in the writings of George Orwell beyond his Nineteen Eighty-Four and Animal Farm. In Notes on Nationalism Orwell… relates the whole idea of being overly patriotic or nationalistic to hindering the thought process of people… All this really made me wonder about the concept of what it means to be a “citizen”… and how narrow ideas of it could lead to hurting the necessary
functions of democracy. Beyond Orwell, of course, I followed a lot of Chomsky’s ideas about the functions of intellectuals and the media in shaping how a democracy functions.

These teachers supported Abdul-Haq’s growing interest in politics by recommending additional readings. The content of the prescribed readings expanded his understanding of patriotism, nationalism, the role of the citizen, and the role of the state in citizens’ lives.

After completing that academic year, Abdul-Haq took the year off from school to work and help support his family. During that year he also worked to develop his critical literacy skills:

I read about United States intervention in Latin America. I started reading pamphlets like *What Uncle Sam Really Wants* and *Prosperous Few and Restless Many…* I read a lot of books by Chomsky. I read *Rogue States*. The more I read Chomsky, the more I learned how to think. I learned how to articulate myself. I imitated how he wrote. That helped. I returned to complete my final year of high school. I applied what I learned.

He returned to successfully complete advanced level courses required for university admission:

I returned to OAC. I applied what I learned. I remember the first 80% I got. It was a hard essay. It was a comparative paper on *Cry the Beloved Country* and another book. I almost cried. It felt good. I was an underachiever at school. That was a huge confidence boost. That formed my identity today. It helped me when I converted to Islam. 9/11. It helped me look into things.

Abdul-Haq was raised in a Catholic family, and his parents were actively involved in Catholic communities. However, he did not feel an affinity to Catholicism or to any other organized religion: “I used to be hardcore atheist. I was anti-religion.” Abdul-Haq had developed some insight into Islam and Muslims through his study of African-American Muslim minister
and human rights activist Malcolm X (also known by his Muslim name as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabaaz). It was not until he befriended Muslims during his second year at university that his relationship with religion started changing. Intrigued by his new Muslim friends’ religious beliefs and practices, Abdul-Haq started asking questions about Islam:

Islam was on my radar. I was reading Malcolm X. I befriended two traditional Muslim guys. I was fascinated…I asked a lot of questions. They told me to go to Islam Awareness Week. They gave me a copy of the Quran. I kept it on the shelf for 6 or 7 months before I started reading and analyzing it… It really appealed to me. It was not pushed on me… They waited for me to ask questions. I studied it like a subject… It was relevant to what was happening in the world… As time went on I started learning about different ideological orientations. It was the same application of interest like when I started reading Chomsky…

After independent study of the Holy Quran, he decided to become a Muslim. Abdul-Haq said of his early experience as a Muslim:

When I converted I got caught up in the religion thing. The other knowledge became useless. I didn’t know how to put these two worlds together. People were telling me to do this and not that…I started to meet more people who were more balanced in their knowledge about the world. I could use my knowledge from before and start applying it.

Abdul-Haq’s understanding of Islam and what it meant to be Muslim was evolving. After converting to Islam, he began to pay more attention to what was happening in local Muslim communities and he applied his developing analysis of sociopolitical issues to help build a campus-based anti-Islamophobia campaign. He continued to contribute to broader campus-based human rights and equity initiatives. Abdul-Haq completed an undergraduate degree in political science and religious studies. When I interviewed him, he was facilitating a Hip Hop literacy program for children and youth.
Layaal: “My parents made it our religious duty. If a fellow Muslim is being oppressed, then we must speak out against it.”

Layaal, a young woman in her mid-20s, was born, raised, and educated in Toronto. Her mother and father migrated from Lebanon in the mid-1970s primarily for better socioeconomic opportunities than were available to them in Lebanon. Layaal’s father, a cleric, and her mother, a teacher, worked within local Muslim communities.

Layaal grew up surrounded by books. Her father had only been able to complete Grade 5 in Lebanon, but he conveyed his love of learning to his children: “We have three libraries at home—two in Arabic and one in English. Because he was deprived he would read from cover to cover. He is one of the most intelligent individuals I know.” Layaal’s mother completed her post-secondary education in Canada once Layaal’s youngest sibling had entered school: “After she had all of us she went to college to study early childhood education… My mom is my inspiration. She always stressed education.” Layaal’s parents instilled in her a love of learning.

Layaal received her early political and religious education at home. The soundtrack of her childhood included the Lebanese resistance songs that played on the record player at home: “Popular Lebanese singers would sing about Beirut, lamenting what had happened [during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon]. I didn’t realize these were resistance songs until I grew older and started to understand.” Arab and Muslim world politics were also discussed at the dining table: “Dinnertime conversation focused on what is happening in Palestine, Lebanon, Chechnya, and other Muslim countries.” Layaal’s mother and father had been active in the Pan-Arabism and Palestinian solidarity activities as youth in Lebanon, and, as Layaal said, they “brought the struggle with them to Canada,” using their Canadian citizenship rights to lobby the Canadian government to defend the human rights of oppressed peoples within and beyond national borders. Layaal’s mother and father taught their Canadian-born children that it was their
responsibility as Muslims to care for the wellbeing of other Muslims: “My parents made it our religious duty. If a fellow Muslim is being oppressed, then we must speak out against it.” Thus, Layaal received her early Islamic and political education at home. There, she learned about the Muslim world, her location within it, and her responsibility towards other Muslims.

Layaal attended Islamic elementary and secondary schools, where teachings she received at home about her obligations towards other Muslims were further reinforced. She recalled holding fundraising bake sales in elementary school to contribute to crisis appeals in different parts of the Muslim world. The elementary school was attached to a mosque. On Fridays, students would join local community members for congregational prayers:

The *Jumu’ah*\(^{23}\) [Friday] prayers would take place in our gym. We loved Fridays. People would come to pray from the community. I remember at the end of every *khutba* [sermon], “*Allah*, protect the Muslims in all these places….” Depending on what was happening in the Muslim world they would also pray for those countries or peoples—Sudan, Iraq, Chechnya, Palestine, Lebanon, etc.

Attending Friday prayers was part of the mandated curriculum in the Islamic elementary school. Layaal attended an Islamic secondary school for girls. She was actively engaged in the school community as a member of student government.

Layaal said her most significant formal learning experience was when her Grade 11 English teacher dispelled the “Columbus myth,” informing students about the brutal European invasion and colonization of Indigenous lands and the continued oppression of the First Peoples. For Layaal, this new insight stimulated further inquiry into the history of the First Peoples in the Americas and its analogies to the occupation of Palestine, which she had learned about from her parents. Layaal attempted to locate herself in the present oppression of the First Peoples, and, to

\(^{23}\) *Jumu’ah* is a congregational prayer that Muslims hold every Friday just after noon.
make connections between settler-colonialism in the Americas and in Palestine. Thus, Layaal’s encounter with a counter-hegemonic master narrative of the history of the Americas in an English course supported the development of her critical consciousness, activating background knowledge that she had gained at home, elementary school, and the mosque about Palestine, and enabling her to make sense of settler-colonialism in Canada. (In chapter nine I will discuss youth involvement in Palestinian solidarity work in more detail.)

Layaal pursued undergraduate studies in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies, because she wanted to continue developing her Arabic language proficiency and knowledge of the Middle East. Layaal expressed some frustration with women’s studies courses, which she felt focused primarily on the lived experiences and perspectives of white middle-class women in western liberal democracies. When Layaal first entered university she was excited by the possibility of getting involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity activities. She began volunteering in an Arab students’ group involved in Palestinian solidarity work. However, she found herself marginalized by the secularist Arab students, who did not want their group represented by a young Muslim woman who wore hijab. Layaal told me that her activism was motivated by her Islamic faith, but after her experience with the Arab students’ group, she withdrew from campus activism. The following year, Layaal found herself defending Islam and Muslims in the middle of a campus-based event designed to raise awareness about “radical Islam.” She felt compelled to challenge the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim propaganda, so she stood in front of the display with an ally and educated passersby about Islam and Muslims herself. After that experience, Layaal regained the confidence to get involved again and she helped to organize public lectures concerning Middle East politics.

Layaal identified as Lebanese, even though she had never been to her parents’ country of birth:
I usually don’t identify as Canadian. People get mad: “You live here! You haven’t lived anywhere else!” When people look at me they ask where I am from. If I were white they would think that I am Canadian. They ask, “Where are you really from?” I can’t say I’m fully Lebanese. I wasn’t born and raised in Lebanon… I connect with Lebanon: Lebanese traditional dance, food, and music… It is not that I identify as being fully Lebanese or Canadian. I’ve created my own niche with both sides.

Her discomfort with Canadian national identification was related in part to her experiences as a target of racism. As part of a visibly Muslim and Arab immigrant family, Layaal recalled childhood experiences of racism that her parents had explained away: “When we experienced racism, my parents would portray the incidents as isolated… Those were random mean people.” Layaal also recalled that the Islamic elementary school that she attended was vandalized every Halloween with toilet paper and racist graffiti (e.g., “Go home Pakis!”). The schoolteachers avoided discussion about these problems in the classroom. It was not until Layaal started venturing out on her own as a young adult that she began to realize that racism was entrenched in Canadian society and that those racist incidents she had experienced were not unusual or isolated. For this reason, Layaal said, she rejected her Canadian national identity (“I don’t usually identify as Canadian”). At the same time, however, she seemed to understand the contradictions in this rejection—she had never lived in any other country, including Lebanon. Although Layaal felt a profound and powerful connection to Lebanese culture, fostered by her parents, she felt that, because she had not been born and raised in Lebanon she could not claim to be “fully Lebanese” (as she put it). She seemed to locate herself in the third space. In addition to identifying as “Lebanese,” Layaal said that she felt “comfortable” with the “labels”: “Muslim” and “woman.” Primarily, however, she identified as “human.”
The “Know Your Rights” Campaign: “I just realized how much fear there is in Muslim communities.”

As described earlier, Abdul-Haq developed a heightened awareness of and intense opposition to pervasive government surveillance through his independent studies of the writings of Noam Chomsky and George Orwell, among others. He had also been keenly observing post-9/11 policing in local Muslim communities. Layaal too developed a deep mistrust of police, in her case through childhood observations of their treatment of her neighbors: “From an early age I disliked the police… The police harassed the Jamaican boys in the neighborhood constantly… It was clear that the police were on a power trip from the way they dealt them.” After completing her undergraduate degree, Layaal worked as a research assistant on a study investigating racial profiling by border security police at Canadian international airports: “That’s the most hostile environment I have found myself in. I was the one racialized and veiled woman. I was in the airport and working. I was getting these looks.” When she became involved in the “know your rights” campaign, she was already working for a civil society organization that was advocating for the rights and protections of Canadian Arab and Muslim citizens subjected to the post-9/11 security certificate process. Layaal worried about her younger brother, who had been stopped and questioned by police on two occasions while walking from the bus stop to the family home. Abdul Haq worried about his personal connections: “I wonder about my associations: ‘Should I be associated with this guy?’” He worried too about committing and being convicted of “thought crimes”: “The police will ask you what you think of Hamas24 or Hezbollah25… You might be able to make an argument for armed resistance, but that is enough grounds to arrest you.” Both

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24 Hamas is the Palestinian Sunni Muslim political party that has governed the Gaza portion of the Palestinian Territories since June 2007, when it won a majority of seats in Palestinian Parliament in June 2006. Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, and the United States classify Hamas as a terrorist organization.

25 Hezbollah is a Shi’a Muslim militant group and political party based in Lebanon. It emerged in response to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Australia, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States classify Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.
Layaal and Abdul-Haq experienced the local and personal effects of state surveillance and disciplining of Muslim communities.

Both Abdul-Haq and Layaal knew young Muslim men who had been targeted by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service\(^2^6\) (CSIS). Some of these young Muslim men approached Abdul-Haq and Layaal for advice. In response to a slew of reports from Muslim and Arab community members about having been approached by CSIS, and an apparent lack of awareness among these community members about their legal rights and civil liberties, Abdul-Haq and Layaal decided to co-organize a series of “know your rights” workshops. These workshops were designed to raise awareness within Arab and Muslim communities (and other communities under intensified state surveillance, such as the Tamil community) about the activities of CSIS in their communities, to raise awareness about legal rights and civil liberties including their rights to be politically active, to hold different and dissenting values and beliefs, to refuse to speak with the CSIS, and to refuse the CSIS entry into their homes or places of work. The workshops also provided strategies and tactics for speaking with the CSIS, and connected targeted community members to lawyers and human rights activists.

Layaal and Abdul Haq drew from their personal and professional networks to bring together lawyers, human rights activists, and Muslims and Arabs previously targeted by CSIS to speak at the community workshops. Friends helped with outreach and dissemination activities. The first workshop was filled to its 50 people capacity with overflow standing in the aisles. Layaal said that among those in attendance were citizens who had been approached by the CSIS, as well as those who worked for CSIS. Both Abdul-Haq and Layaal said that their most significant learning through their work on the campaign was the pervasiveness of fear within Muslim and Arab communities. Abdul-Haq said, “I realized just how much fear there is in the

\(^{26}\) The Canadian Security Intelligence Service is Canada’s national intelligence agency.
Muslim community when it comes to speaking out... If CSIS is harassing people, then we have a human rights issue that has to be addressed.” Abdul-Haq and Layaal critiqued and resisted the police repression and criminalization of Muslim, Arab, and other communities subjected to state surveillance through their “know your rights” campaign. Through the campaign, they also proposed strategies and tactics for promoting and protecting legal rights and civil liberties. They sought to promote and protect legal rights and civil liberties entitled to all Canadians, and create spaces in which targeted people could discuss their concerns and obtain legal advice and support.

Three Encounters with Police

Other participants’ encounters with police in three different circumstances, which illustrate the different ways policing serves to reinforce the notion of the ‘legitimate’ citizen, as well as to limit certain kinds of citizenship expressions and practices. Next, I consider other participants’ encounters with police while living their everyday lives, while publicly expressing dissent, or while crossing national borders. Their narratives provide nuanced insights into processes of subject-making by explaining how gender, race and class mediate young people’s interactions with the Canadian state through interactions with the police. In addition, they draw attention to the realities of police brutality and racial profiling in Canada. Such repressive practices impact not only on the construction of the nation, but also on the way in which criminalized peoples construct and re-construct themselves as trapped by the Othering gaze in the popular national imaginary (Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

Policing on the Streets: “I was riding my bike around the area and four or five cop cars came out of nowhere.”

One summer day prior to 9/11, when he was 13-years-old, police surrounded Talib while he was riding around on his bicycle in his inner city Toronto neighborhood:
I remember distinctly in the summer of Grade 8, I was riding my bike around the area and four or five cop cars came out of nowhere. A cop said, “Freeze! Don’t move! Let’s see some ID!” I didn’t have ID. I had a library card. I didn’t know what they were talking about... From the way they were treating me, I knew what racism was before Islamophobia. I knew because I was Black there were strikes against me.

Talib was the recipient of racialized and aggressive policing. Through this encounter, Talib learned that his young Black/African male body was marked symbolically as ‘criminal’ in their eyes. He explained that as a young Black/African male living in Canada, he had learned about racism before he had learned about Islamophobia. Talib could have been one of the Black/African boys Layaal had grown up with. From the doorstep of her home, Layaal witnessed police harassment of the Jamaican boys and young men in the neighborhood. Talib could have been Bilal or Karim, both of whom were often recipients of school disciplinary action. Fortunately, Talib had relatively positive interactions with teachers in schools. I will return to Talib’s story in chapter eight.

**Policing at Public Protests: “I’m just a girl! Don’t hit me!”**

During the 2003 anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations in Montreal, police attacked Zaynab and her friends: “When I was at the free trade protest my friend was beaten by police officers... Out of the tear gas the police come running with their batons. My friend got beaten. I ran screaming, ‘I’m just a girl! Don’t hit me!’ ” In this particular instance state sanctioned police violence had been used to quell activist citizenship participation that was oppositional to the state, targeting those who were perceived to have overstepped the bounds of legitimate citizenship. Neo-liberalism has been accompanied by an assault on political activism in direct opposition to state economic policies and practices.
Policing at Borders: “My body says one thing. My passport says something else.”

Amina, Asmara and Salsabil shared their experiences with United States border police while attempting to cross the Canada-United States border to attend the inauguration ceremony of Barak Hussein Obama. They wanted to witness the historic occasion because they felt a connection to then President-Elect Obama. As Asmara explained,

We identified with Barack Obama because his father was African. He could be my younger brother. My younger brother was born in Canada, but our parents came from Africa. Barack Obama may have been born in Hawaii, but his father was from Africa. In Barack Obama I see an opportunity for me, my brothers, and for all the people I grew up with who never thought it was possible. We wanted to mark the occasion with others who shared the same perspectives.

Witnessing Obama’s inauguration was important to the young women because, to them, Obama belonged to African diasporic communities, and represented positive possibilities for youth from African diasporic communities. Recalling that, in the months after 9/11, Asmara and her family had been denied entry into the United States to attend a family member’s wedding, she warned her friends to be prepared that they, too, might be stopped at the border:

I was dreading the border. I kept telling the girls that we should have a back-up plan. “You don’t understand. We’re going to get hassled. We have bus fare to get back, so we don’t ruin the trip for everyone else.” The last time I went was right after 9/11 and I got turned back.

In the days leading up to the inauguration ceremony, the young women and a few of their friends, all Somali-born Canadian citizens and passport holders, boarded a bus heading from Toronto to Washington, DC. When the bus reached the border, all of them were escorted off the bus by the United States border police, taken into an office, fingerprinted, questioned, and even asked if they could identify some men in a series of photos. Amina recalled, “They took the girls
who were born in Somalia into these interrogation rooms where they were shown pictures of fugitives. The officers asked the girls if they knew any of the fugitives.” Asmara feared that she might be related to one of the men in the photographs: “Those men had convictions. I was praying I didn’t know them. I thought to myself, ‘Perhaps they know I know them. It better not be my father or uncles. If it’s someone I know it’ll be a problem. I’ll go to jail.’” Asmara’s fears are demonstrative of the personal impacts of state repression.

Salsabil was not surprised that they had been stopped and questioned, “I knew why we were stopped. Somalia was on the hotlist. My neighbor was in jail for several years after 9/11 for no reason. He was one of those prisoners. [They] didn’t have to have a reason to keep him in prison.” Salsabil understood that she was suspect, because of her country of origin. She described the looks and the questions of the border police, “They looked at us like we were terrorists. ‘Why do you want to go [to the inauguration]? You’re not even Americans.’” While asking why a Canadian citizen might be interested in attending the inauguration of a United States president might seem like a fair question, Salsabil perceived the United States border police’s gaze as a moment of Othering.

This encounter with United States border police caused Amina and Asmara to question what it means to be Canadian:

Amina: I told the officer, “I was born in Somalia, but my passport shows that I’m Canadian. My citizenship is Canadian.” That was the first time I thought to myself, ‘I am Canadian, but being Canadian is not getting me out of this situation. What is the purpose of this passport if it is not going to protect me abroad?’ That was the first time I felt that my rights were stripped from me.

Asmara: I took citizenship as the legal right to live somewhere have the same opportunities. I never accepted being Canadian. I didn’t accept it as my nationality. I don’t look in the mirror and think I’m a Canadian girl. That
experience just solidified that. You’re allowed to be here under these restrictions. I knew that experience solidified that for me. My papers say one thing, but my body says something else.

Amina had believed that official Canadian citizenship entitled her to particular rights and protections, but, through her encounter with United States border police, she started questioning the erosion of legal rights and civil liberties. Asmara distinguished legal citizenship status from national identification. She acknowledged that legal citizenship status in Canada afforded particular cultural, social, economic, and political rights. However, she also resisted national identification as Canadian. As young woman of African ancestry, with darker skin, and covered hair, Asmara believed that she did not look like “a Canadian girl.” For Asmara, her encounters with the United States border police confirmed that she was indeed positioned as an “outsider,” even though she held legal citizenship status in Canada. Despite the difficulties endured at the Canada-United States border, they were eventually allowed to enter the United States. The young women were thankful that they were able to be witness to the historic event. As Salsabil said, “[Obama] addressed the Muslim world…He was talking to the Muslims…I loved that moment. We’re different, but there are a lot of things that bring us together.”

The policing experienced by these three young women at the Canada-United States border, by Talib in his neighborhood, and by Zaynab at the anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations draws attention how some young people are marked as Other by “agents of surveillance and protection,” and the vulnerable place that some youth occupy in Canadian society.
Summary

The accounts that I re-tell in this chapter provide nuanced insight into youth citizen and police interactions, and draw attention to the ways in which the state seeks to regulate young people’s autonomy and capacity for citizenship by sanctioning aggressive policing practices. As suggested here the personal effects of police repression and criminalization are profound.

The fatal shooting of her brother powerfully catalyzed Aisha’s critical consciousness and religious faith, and impelled her to act for personal and social change. Aisha organized a campaign against police brutality with the support of an action coalition comprised of community organizations monitoring police activities in their communities. Through her involvement in the campaign, Aisha learned about police brutality in urban low-income communities of color, and about how state institutions (e.g., police, the judicial system, and schools) operate in relation to one another to support state norms and unjust practices. She also worked to advocate for youth victims of police brutality and to create safe spaces in which young people from low-income communities of color could share their personal and social experiences of aggressive policing strategies, and to receive support.

Abdul-Haq began developing a critical analysis of state surveillance from his independent studies of the writings of authors such as Noam Chomsky and George Orwell. Layaal developed an early mistrust of police based on childhood observations of police harassment of her Jamaican neighbors. Abdul-Haq and Layaal’s campaign to raise awareness among Muslims and Arabs about CSIS activities in their communities and their legal rights and civil liberties was motivated by numerous reports of people from these communities being approached by the CSIS, as well as personal interactions with some targeted Muslim and Arab youth. They sought to promote and protect rights and protections entitled to all Canadians, including Canadians from Muslim and
Arab communities, and in turn they created spaces in which targeted people could discuss their concerns and obtain legal advice and support. Through their work on this campaign, Abdul-Haq and Layaal became increasingly aware of the fear and lack of rights awareness among members of Muslim, Arab, and other targeted communities.

Other participants reported experiences of aggressive policing in their neighborhoods and communities, at public demonstrations oppositional to state policies and practices, and at the Canada-United States border. This chapter also provides some insight into the ways youth from Muslim communities have experienced the impact of post-9/11 ‘security measures,’ including state surveillance, restrictions on civil liberties, detentions, and deportations. Some participants shared emotional accounts of community members who had been detained or deported, and personal experiences of being stopped, questioned, and searched at airports and borders. The accounts that I retell in this chapter leave me wondering what young people, particularly young people from racialized and low-income communities, are learning about police in schools.
Chapter Seven:
Citizenship as (Re)-Construction of Gendered Discourses and Practices

In this chapter, I re-tell the stories of seven young Muslim women creating cultural and political spaces for themselves and other young Muslim women. Within these spaces they collectively and critically explore what it means to be Muslim women in their homes, communities, schools, and in the broader context of Islamophobia in which they are constructed as silent, passive, subservient, and victimized—*not fully human or agentic* (Thobani, 2007; Razack, 2008; Zine, 2009).

I introduce Nabila, and discuss her after-school drop-in program for Muslim adolescent girls. I then present Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil, and elaborate on their young Somali women’s group. Next, I introduce Jamila, Khadijeh, and Zaynab, and discuss their young Muslim women’s collective. This is followed by a consideration of other participants’ reflections on gender issues. In this chapter, I demonstrate how young Muslim women are actively re-constructing gendered discourses and practices of citizenship and belonging.

**Nabila and the After-School Drop-in Program for Muslim Girls**

**Nabila: “I was a raised by a male. I think he did a pretty good job.”**

Nabila, a young woman in her mid-20s, was born in Toronto, Ontario. Nabila’s father, an Afro-Trinidadian and convert to Islam, migrated to Canada from Trinidad for better economic opportunities. Nabila’s parents separated when she was very young, and her father and his family had raised her with the support of an extensive network of Afro-Caribbean Muslim convert communities in Toronto. She attended a French immersion public elementary school in Toronto and a suburban public secondary school in a small southwestern city outside of Toronto. She received her early Islamic education at home and in the mosque, and, as she moved from
adolescence to adulthood, she pursed Islamic education independently and formed support
networks of Muslim peers.

Nabila reported that she had received her early political and religious education at home,
and, more specifically, that her father taught her about their African ancestry and diasporic
connections, white-settler-colonialism, slavery, racism, Islam, and issues concerning Muslim
transnational communities. For example, Nabila’s father told her:

We come from a history of displacement, moved from our homelands in Africa,
and taken to Trinidad…There is also a history of displacement here [in Canada].
The original peoples still exist, and their living conditions are horrible. We profit
from their misery.

These teachings inculcated in Nabila a sense of solidarity with oppressed peoples and
connections to African diasporic communities. Through these teachings, she learned about her
family’s history of displacement; she also learned that Canada was founded by white-settler-
colonialists on the material and cultural domination of the original inhabitants of the land, and
that she too was implicated in the present-day oppression of these first peoples. Nabila learned
narratives that countered hegemonic master narratives of Canadian history.

Nabila’s father was an avid reader, and had instilled a love of learning and reading in her.
He was also politically engaged. Some of her earliest memories were of attending Palestinian
solidarity demonstrations in Toronto with her father. Nabila’s participation in such activities with
her father, a political role model, fostered in her a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of
others within and beyond Canada. Nabila reported that other family members were also political
role models, including an aunt who had organized an anti-racism campaign in Toronto.

Nabila’s father also taught her to value herself, and that she was entitled to dignity,
respect, and equal human rights. She said of her father,
I was a raised by a male. I think he did a pretty good job. He has always instilled in me a sense of love in myself as a woman...He emphasized that Islam prohibited female infanticide, which had been common practice...Education should not be denied because I am a woman.

Nabila’s father taught her that Islam had been liberating force for girls and women in early Islamic Arabia. The right to education of girls and women resonated with Nabila because within her extended family, she had noticed a “cycle” among her female relatives: “A lot of my female cousins were pregnant by the time they were 18. I saw certain cycles repeating. I think that these cousins believed that they didn’t have other options…I wanted to change that attitude.” Nabila resisted gendered discourses and practices within her extended family, and determined that she would re-construct these discourses and practices to expand life opportunities for herself and her female relatives by completing her own secondary and post-secondary education, thereby providing her relatives with an alternative female role model.

Nabila excelled academically. She attended a Toronto French immersion public school with a diverse student population, amidst which she had felt a sense of social belonging. She played the clarinet in the elementary school band. Nabila attended a public secondary school in smaller city in southern Ontario, where her father had relocated for work. Nabila told me that she had difficulty adjusting to her new school environment:

When I moved to [small southern Ontario city] at age 14, I was a minority as a Black person and as a Muslim person. I had severe culture shock. I was able to find a close group of friends.... If I didn’t have them I would not have survived out there. I had them as a support base.

Away from her extended family and community support networks in Toronto, Nabila depended on her new friends, other youth of color, to help her get through secondary school. She also made
connections with peers through a social justice and equity focused student group at the secondary school. She was involved in Haiti solidarity work, as well as a youth civic engagement initiative outside of school. Through these extra-curricular activities, Nabila was exposed to social movement learning that fostered the development of her critical consciousness, and her sense of autonomy and capacity to effect change.

Nabila said of her classroom-based citizenship learning experiences: “I had a lot of problems with a lot of stuff I learned in high school.” She highlighted two classroom experiences that contributed to expanding and deepening of her critical consciousness. Her excitement for the course *Canadian and World Issues* waned when it became clear to her that the teacher’s version of the course was based on an uncritical reading of global inequalities and hierarchies: “The teacher promoted a ‘savior mentality’. She focused on poor people in Africa. She would tell us, ‘we have to do whatever we can to help them’.” In Nabila’s view, the teacher had presented a distorted image of African nations and African peoples by failing to situate the issue in the context of colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism, by presenting Africans as poor and helpless, and by promoting a sense of superiority among students by encouraging them to take up the ‘burden’ of a new ‘civilizing mission’. These classroom teachings conflicted with Nabila’s prior knowledge of the African continent and its peoples, acquired in part from home. Nabila challenged this teacher: “I would tell her that we needed to go deeper than that. ‘How do we implicate ourselves in these problems? We live in a privileged country. We’re responsible’…I was looking for a deeper analysis.” By pushing the teacher to consider how they, as Canadians, were implicated in North-South hierarchies, Nabila enacted a form of activist citizenship in the classroom. Nabila’s *Canadian and World Issues* teacher, in turn, rebuked her for being “too sensitive and too radical.” Despite this teacher’s attempt to silence her and marginalize her as “too sensitive and too radical,” Nabila voiced her critical and dissenting perspectives.
Nabila described a starkly contrasting classroom-based citizenship learning experience in a *Native Studies* course:

*Native Studies* was the most critical of all my courses. The teacher acknowledged Canada’s history of colonialism and the issues facing First Peoples. He acknowledged his *whiteness*...For white people racism is invisible...They really don’t get it. It has to be shoved in their faces.

Nabila’s *Native Studies* teacher openly addressed issues of race, racism and white privilege, locating himself in the classroom as a white male teacher. He acknowledged that many white people take the privilege and power of whiteness and masculinity for granted and relegated to invisibility

This teacher also acknowledged that Canada does have a history of colonialism, and of the past and present oppression of First Peoples. Rather than a traditional museum approach to *Native Studies* that is mainly concerned with traditional legends and ways of life presented as past, the *Native Studies* teacher provided opportunities for students to learn directly from First Peoples by arranging a visit to Brantford, Ontario, where there are two reserves: Six Nations of the Grand River. This teacher encouraged students to closely examine their own and others’ perceptions, feelings and beliefs. Nabila wrote a paper for that course in which she had expressed her outrage towards residential schooling, and made connections between the displacement and dispossession of First Peoples and her own people. Outside of the classroom, Nabila was involved in a justice and equity focused student group run by the *Native Studies* teacher.

Nabila’s Islamic education was comprised of various non-formal and informal learning experiences at home, in the mosque, and in Muslim children and youth groups. She was raised as a Muslim and had visited the mosque regularly with her father. She attended *madrasah* to study the *Holy Quran*, and had attended summer camps and special programming for Muslim children
and youth. Her father maintained close relationship with his Christian family members, and Nabila was allowed to celebrate Christmas with them: “I always had a very open view about my Islam from the beginning because a lot of the people I loved weren’t necessarily Muslim.” She articulated a negotiated position, acknowledging her need to remain connected to her Christian family members and to practice Islam. She had also been raised as part of an Afro-Caribbean Muslim convert community in Toronto: “There was the Muslim convert community that was from the Caribbean... They all supported each other. The kids grew up together.”

As a teenager she drifted away from Islam, like some of the other Muslim youth involved in this study. In preparation to explain to her father why she was no longer Muslim, Nabila started studying Islam independently: “I was an undercover science geek… The scientific knowledge in the Quran was undeniable to me…that led to more reading. Finally I thought, ‘Shoot! I think I’m Muslim’.” Through her independent studies, Nabila realized that Islam was indeed her path. Following this realization, she reached out to the local university’s Muslim Students’ Association to build community with other young Muslims. However, she felt frustrated by the tendency within the Muslim Students’ Association to avoid discussion about gendered discourses and practices in Muslim communities. Although she had self-consciously decided to wear hijab to demonstrate her commitment to Islam publicly, she questioned the group’s preoccupation with Muslim women’s bodies.

After completing secondary school, Nabila moved back to Toronto to pursue undergraduate studies. At university, she specialized in life and social sciences, and developed a particular interest in women’s sexual health and reproductive rights. She said of her exploration of Women’s Studies: “I took one course in women’s studies and dropped it. It was very white, feminist. I was not into it at all.” Although feminist interventions changed the academic curriculum by expanding it to include the voices of women, Nabila’s experiences of Women’s
Studies was exclusionary because it did not take an anti-racist approach or include the lived experiences and perspectives of women of color. Nabila completed a degree in biology and equity studies. She planned to pursue graduate studies in women’s sexual health and reproductive rights to support public health initiatives for women and girls of Afro-Caribbean ancestry in Canada and in the Caribbean.

Nabila’s identity as a woman prompted her to interpret Islam in a way that is consistent with a human rights-based approach. For example, she stated, “Both genders are equally subservient to Allah.” Alternatively, at times she attempted to extract religion from culture as when she said patriarchy is a cultural issue and not a religious issue. Her Afro-Caribbean-Muslim identity channeled her active social engagement with younger women of similar religious and ethno-cultural backgrounds with whom she identifies and feels a sense of solidarity. Moreover, through her participation in advocacy groups, she learned how to address conflict through recourse to argumentation and communication, and she was able to teach these tools to adolescent Muslim girls, and apply them to new problems.

The After-School Drop-In Program for Muslim Girls: “I wanted the girls to learn how to advocate for their rights.”

Nabila had been building relationships with Muslim adolescent girls who frequented an inner city Toronto youth centre. She determined that the girls needed a female-only safe space to get together and discuss issues pertinent to their lives: “I was informally building relationships with some of the girls— big sister, little sister. I saw the potential in them. I saw a little bit of myself in them. I wanted to be there for them.” Nabila emphasized her responsibility towards Muslim communities as a role model or “big sister” for Muslim adolescent girls, as she had in her own family.
She articulated her rationale for creating an after-school drop-in program: “As young Muslim women living in a non-Muslim society we are often faced with struggles, barriers and injustices that often go unnoticed, misunderstood or completely ignored.” Nabila’s rationale for the program reflects her construction of what it means to be Muslim and female in mainstream Canadian society, and her understanding of Muslim adolescent girls’ needs to harness cultural practices and values to challenge social exclusion and marginalization in society. Nabila also defined her main goal for the program: “a platform for Muslim girls to start talking about these issues, to unify, support, learn and encourage one another.” Through the main goal for the program, Nabila articulated her advocacy and vision of citizenship, building inter-generational relationships with adolescent Muslim girls, and helping them build community with one another as a means to resist social exclusion and marginalization.

Nabila, recognizing the girls’ commitments to their families, invited the girls’ parents to attend open houses at the youth centre. In this way, she could address any questions and concerns about the program, which she had framed as “an after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls.” A few parents visited, and, after Nabila explained, “I don’t want the girls to feel alone,” they agreed that their daughters might feel more comfortable talking to Nabila than with them about some issues and expressed support for the program.

All of girls who attended the program were of African ancestry: some of their families had migrated from the Caribbean and others from East Africa. Eight girls attended the program on a regular basis; special activities, including a trip to the theatre to experience a stage adaptation of Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), sometimes drew up to 20 girls. The main activity in which Nabila engaged the girls was discussion about gendered discourses and practices in their families, communities, and schools. She explained,
Patriarchy is almost invisible. For a lot of us gender segregation, hiding women, is normal. It’s not questioned. That’s what I wanted to bring out. … Muslim girls and women have certain standards to live by that are not necessarily enforced on Muslim boys and men. At the same time, they don’t question it. That’s just the way it is… I wanted to get them to question the reasons behind this... These are gender issues, not religious issues. How do we start confronting these issues? Even though we didn’t come up with solutions, we started the discussion.

Nabila’s other main goal for the program was to instill new forms of critical consciousness in the girls by guiding their examination of the patriarchal forms of social control in their families and religious communities. One of the first discussion questions Nabila posed to the girls was, “What does being a Muslim woman mean to you?” She framed the question as follows:

Women in Islam are the constant subject of rhetoric when speaking on the dialectics of oppression and liberation and paradoxically are used as the standard of both. What does this mean? With patriarchy so saturated in modern society… I mean it as the way power has been engendered so that women are constantly kept in positions of subservience to men, when ultimately both are in EQUAL subservience to Allah.

Nabila articulated a negotiated position, acknowledging their religious beliefs as Muslims and contesting prescribed and constraining gender expectations in their families and communities.

Gradually, as the girls became more comfortable with Nabila and one another, they started asking questions and guiding the conversation themselves: “Even though it was slow to start, once they opened up they really opened up.” Some of the girls wanted to marry when they reached 18 years of age, so Nabila initiated discussion about women’s sexual and reproductive rights and health. The girls were “shocked” when Nabila recommended that they talk to their prospective partners about their sexual histories and require them “to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases.” The “shock” was related, in part, to Nabila’s willingness to broach a
“taboo” topic and to the reality that not all Muslims refrain from pre-marital sex and are honest about their sexual history. Nabila tried to help the girls assess whether they were ready to marry, “If you’re ready to get married, then there should be no problem having this conversation. You’re looking after your own safety.” In this way, Nabila also tried to teach the girls a sense of personal and bodily autonomy.

Nabila served as an educational role model, and helped the girls navigate secondary and post-secondary education system. She assisted the elder girls with their university and scholarship applications. Like Nabila, some of the girls would be the first members of their families to attend post-secondary education institutions and needed academic and social supports that they could not necessarily obtain from their parents or siblings who were not as familiar with the Canadian post-secondary education system.

Nabila became a political role model, and the after-school drop-in program became a platform for public and political collective action. She relayed that the girls, who attended a nearby public secondary school in which a strict dress code was enforced, were angered by their school principal’s insistence that they wear hijab in a particular way. Nabila worked with the girls to devise a strategy for addressing the matter constructively:

We wrote to the principal. At first he was ignoring us. We drafted a letter to the school trustee as well, but we didn’t need to send it because the principal got in touch with us. I wanted the girls to learn how to advocate for their rights. There are ways to do things respectfully...That was a huge part of our group as well.

Nabila taught the girls how to advocate for themselves. Thus, Nabila enacted a form of activist citizenship by helping Muslim adolescent girls create legitimate social and political spaces for themselves—in school and society—and actively negotiate the parameters of what it means to be Muslim and female within their own families, communities, and schools.
Amina, Asmara, Salsabil, and the Young Somali Women’s Group

**Amina: “So, I’m not black?”**

Amina, a young woman in her early 20s, was born in Saudi Arabia, where her parents had temporarily settled en route from Somalia. Her immediate and extended family “had dispersed around the world” at the onset of war and conflict in Somalia. Amina’s parents had determined that Canada and the United States were better options for permanent settlement, because of the social, cultural, political, and economic rights entitled to permanent residents and citizens. Amina and her siblings migrated to Canada with their mother while Amina’s father migrated to the United States, and had only recently joined the family in Canada. Amina was 3-years-old when she arrived in Canada. Her mother was the primary caregiver and provider for many years: “My mom is a factory worker. Back home my mom was a paralegal. She came here and decided to get to work to provide for us.” Her father had been trained as an engineer in Somalia, and he found work as an engineer in the United States.

Amina obtained Canadian citizenship when she was a young girl: “I got my citizenship when I was 7-years-old. My mom wrote my test for me, but I got my citizenship card, shook hands with the judge, and sang, ‘Oh Canada’.” As discussed in chapter six, Amina began questioning what it meant to have official Canadian citizenship when she was stopped and detained for questioning by United States border police as she attempted to enter the United States to attend the Inauguration ceremony of Barack Obama in Washington, D.C. (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Amina and her family had lived in Toronto social housing since they had settled in Canada in the late 1980s. One of the neighborhoods in which they lived was designated as a “priority” neighborhood by the Toronto municipal government in 2005. While she was a young tenant living in this particular neighborhood, she witnessed violence from her doorstep: “I was
used to seeing guns, drugs, and police. That was home.” Fearing for her family’s safety, Amina’s mother moved them out of the neighborhood when she was able find an alternative housing option:

My mother took us out of the “priority” neighborhood. She said, “I’m not going to sit here and watch you risk your lives when you walk out the door.” The violence was crazy where we lived. The gun violence was out of control.

She said of her learning through living in social housing: “I feel like “priority” neighborhoods teach you to be strong.”

Amina regarded her mother, who had been the primary caregiver and sole provider for most of their time in Canada, as a female role model who exemplified “strength.” Amina’s mother worried that her children, who had never been back to Somalia, would become disconnected from their homeland, so she had established connections to the diasporic Somali community in Toronto. Amina said that she could not “blame” her mother for discouraging discussion about the war and conflict in Somalia because its impact was still deeply felt in the diasporic Somali community in Toronto.

Amina attended three different Toronto public elementary schools. She completed kindergarten at the first elementary school, Grades 1 to 6 at the second elementary school, and grades seven and eight at the third elementary school. The second elementary school that Amina attended was located in the neighborhood in which she lived. All of the children living in the neighborhood also attended that school, and Amina had felt a sense of social belonging among them. She came into contact with white students for the first time at the third elementary school: “Grades 7 and 8 were my first experiences with white people… Everyone was so strange to me. When I started there I had a hard time connecting with people, I started to keep to myself.”
Amina had felt alienated within a predominantly White student population, and coped by withdrawing into herself.

Paradoxically, Amina described her secondary school experience as “difficult,” because she was marginalized by some of her Black/African peers:

I was experiencing discrimination by my own people. We were talking about Hip Hop and Hip Hop stereotypes. I said that there are stereotypes, but there are people who live up to stereotypes. One student turned around and said, “What do you know? You're not even Black.” I wasn’t even wearing hijab then. I asked, “What do you mean I’m not Black?” He said, “You don’t have the nose. You don’t have the lips.” I said, “So, I’m not Black?”

While Amina identified as Black, a Black peer who did not read or imagine her body, particularly her facial features, as Black, rejected her. Amina pointed out that she “was not even wearing hijab then.” Wearing hijab, she suggested, would have marked her as Other among her Black peers. Amina understood that when she migrated to Canada she had become Black.

Through this particular peer interaction Amina learned that although she possessed a body that is read in the dominant social imaginary as a diasporic African/Black body, she might not be read or imagined as Black by other Black peoples. This negotiation of racial and racialized identities was particularly evident in the narratives of other Black/African youth involved in this study. Despite, or perhaps because of, these social challenges, Amina was actively involved in the school community as a student government representative.

Amina was pursuing an undergraduate degree in political science at a university when I interviewed her. She was enjoying her classes, which were “smaller” and allowed for “more time with teaching assistants and professors.” She was engaged in the classroom and in the wider school community and held leadership positions in the university’s Students’ Council, Somali
Students’ Association, and Muslim Students’ Association. She had thereby established a sense of belonging within Muslim, Somali, and wider student communities. In particular, she described the Muslim Students’ Association as her “safe haven,” and expressed appreciation for the “welcoming” and “multi-faith” prayer space and special provisions during Ramadan offered by the Muslim Students’ Association. Outside of the university, she was actively involved in a local mosque and local Somali communities. She was also planning to invest more time and energy into the young Somali women’s group.

Amina’s Islamic education was primarily informal and self-directed. She started focusing on her faith when she encountered personal difficulties:

I always used to say, “I’m Muslim by association.” I was not into it. I experienced some hardships. I asked, “Why? Why is this happening to me?” My mother pointed out that I didn’t have a relationship with God. She said, “When you build that relationship, everything will come into place.” I am learning. Alhamdulillah\textsuperscript{27}. I am becoming a better person.

Thus, in her home environment, Amina received spiritual guidance from her mother, who encouraged her to build a relationship with God through studying and practicing Islam.

Asmara: “I am black, female, and Muslim. I call this the ‘unholy trinity.’”

Asmara, a young woman in her mid-20s, was born in Somalia. Her father had fled from Somalia to Italy at the onset of the civil war. His involvement in the Somali National Movement put him at great risk for persecution. Asmara and her siblings went to neighboring Kenya with their mother. Her mother applied for refugee status and was granted asylum in Canada. Asmara was 4-years-old when she arrived in Canada with her mother and siblings. After successfully petitioning for family reunification, Asmara’s father joined them. However, her parents

\textsuperscript{27} “Alhamdulillah” is an Arabic phrase that means all praise is due to God.
eventually separated. Asmara and her siblings lived with their mother, whom she described as “a
strong Black Muslim woman.”

Asmara described her parents as politically active, and she participated in anti-Apartheid
demonstrations with them. Her father and uncles had been involved in the Somali National
Movement, and she lost an uncle during the war. Her mother would not talk about her
involvement in the Somali National Movement, but Asmara had vague memories of their time in
Nairobi, Kenya:

Injured freedom fighters would stay with us while they recuperated or got medical
care… My mom and aunts would take care of them in our house. If they were too
far-gone my mom and aunts would try to find them safe passage to another
country… My mom and aunts were activists, but my mom called it ‘brotherhood.’

Although her mother refused to answer questions about her own history, she encouraged Asmara
to seek answers elsewhere. Asmara “interviewed” members of the Somali diaspora community in
Toronto to learn more about the war. She “kept up with what’s going on at home”:

I’m on the different newswires and blogs. I attend the different meetings for the
diasporic community in Toronto to stay informed. I like to follow current affairs
in Somalia, because many of my family members still live there… No matter how
long I’ve been in Canada, Somalia is my homeland.

For Asmara, Somalia was “home.” She drew on knowledge, experiences, histories, and cultural
resources circulating through Somali diaspora communities and the global news media to
develop a sense of belonging and commitment to family and communities in Somalia.

As discussed previously in chapter five, Asmara and her family lived in Toronto social
housing, including some “priority” neighborhoods:
I lived in priority neighborhoods…I grew up with the idea that it didn’t matter that we lived in a priority neighborhood as long as we lived close to a mosque. My mom would try to find housing that was close to a mosque so we could have after-school or weekend classes to off-set the negative neighborhood experiences.

Mosques provided relatively safe spaces for Asmara and her siblings to be with other Muslim children and youth, and to study and practice Islam. Asmara credited her mother, Muslim communities, and religious faith for helping her maintain a “healthy disconnect from the neighborhood.” When Asmara was 10-years-old, her mother decided to move the family to Nairobi, Kenya for 1 year to “get a feel for living in Africa and being African”:

The war was ongoing in the South and the North was unstable, so we couldn’t go back home. My mom opted for the closest thing, Nairobi, Kenya, to get a feel for living in Africa and be African…We went to school. We learned Swahili. My mom decided to live near a mosque so we could have our evening classes. It was a wonderful experience. I got a chance to have new experiences. I saw different levels of poverty… It opened up my eyes. When it came back it didn’t matter where I lived. It didn’t matter that I lived in a priority neighborhood… I was always kind of separate from my neighborhood. I could survive anywhere. I could do anything. I didn’t have to belong there. I could belong anywhere.

Her experience in Kenya contributed a new situated knowledge about social exclusion and marginalization, which allowed her to understand her life as a youth tenant in social housing neighborhood in Toronto within a larger conceptual framework of citizenship and belonging.

When Asmara returned to Canada, she enrolled in a full-time Islamic secondary school that drew Muslim youth from all over the city. She described her Islamic school experience as “a lesson in global citizenship”:

Islamic school was a like a world of its own. It was a lesson in global citizenship. I met people from all parts of the world, and learned from them... My
understanding of citizenship didn’t come from *Civics*… Protesting the United States invasion of Iraq, raising funds for refugees in Muslim countries, and organizing food drives during Ramadan were my experiences of being a citizen. My community wasn’t limited to my neighborhood or to my country. It was a global citizenship.

Within the context of the Islamic school, Asmara built relationships with other youth from diverse Muslim communities in Toronto, and worked with them to support Muslim communities inside and outside of Canada. These learning opportunities were particularly meaningful for Asmara, and she had developed a sense of “community” that expanded across Toronto and beyond Canada. Aside from courses in *Civics*, her one major critique of the formal curriculum was that it did not focus explicitly on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, when there were opportunities for independent studies, she would focus on the history of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and share her newfound insights with the other students: “When there were opportunities for independent studies, I would focus on African luminaries or history of Islam in Africa. It was always eye opening for other students.”

Asmara completed an undergraduate degree in life sciences at a university in another southwestern Ontario city where she founded the university’s Somali Students’ Association, so that she could be in community with other Somali youth. She had taken advantage of services offered by the Muslim Students’ Association. However, she perceived the Muslim Students’ Association to be “nepotistic” and “patriarchal,” so she decided against running for an executive position in the organization. Asmara was completing a graduate degree in public health when I interviewed her. In addition to her work in the young Somali women’s group, she planned to contribute to public health initiatives in the Somalia diaspora community.

Asmara said that being Black, female and Muslim constituted her core sense of self:
I am Black, female, and Muslim. I call this the “unholy trinity.” If you want to get somewhere in the world you do not want to be any of those three things. You don’t want to be Black. You don’t want to be a woman. You don’t want to be a Muslim. I am all three!

As a Black Muslim woman living in Canada, Asmara was subjected to racism, sexism, and Islamophobia—multiple and interlocking oppressions.

Salsabil: “I was always connected to God.”

Salsabil, a young woman in her mid-20s, was born in Somalia. Her earliest memories of Somalia were of moving from house to house to evade persecutors: “We kept moving, and eventually left the country for safety reasons. We were always one step ahead.” Salsabil fled to Egypt with her mother, siblings, maternal grandmother, and an uncle. (Her parents had divorced.) Her mother then migrated to Canada by way of the United States, where she had received assistance from a local church to sponsor the rest of the family: “Our mom got help with a church that helped sponsor all of us. We lived in motel for a few months… It was strange, but nice to be with my mom.” Salsabil’s mother and maternal grandmother were the primary caregivers and her mother the sole provider. Salsabil had examples of “strong women” in her life.

As discussed in chapter six, Salsabil defined her experience as a youth tenant in Toronto social housing as a significant citizenship learning experience. She had felt “stigmatized” by friends who would not visit her at home, because it was located in a “bad” neighborhood. Salsabil would often ask her mother, “When are we going to move?” The family lived in Toronto social housing for 8 years, saving money to purchase their own home. Although Salsabil had “struggled” as a youth tenant, she had also exercised her agency and autonomy in that limit situation.
Salsabil’s mother, a trauma counselor, coordinated support services for the women who lived in the neighborhood. Following her mother’s example, Salsabil joined a tenant coalition advocating safe spaces and services for neighborhood children and youth. Thus, in her neighborhood context, Salsabil chose to work alongside other neighbors who cared about the neighborhood. Also, as part of an employment program targeted at youth tenants in social housing, Salsabil was able to access gainful employment opportunities:

[A large corporation] was hiring from our community...It was a great opportunity. It was supposed to be a 6-month internship, but I kept getting my contract renewed. I stayed for 2 years. It gave me a hand up. It wasn’t a hand out. It was a hand up.

Although Salsabil had, at times, felt trapped within her neighborhood, various choices and opportunities enabled her to develop her autonomy and capacity for political and economic engagement within and beyond the symbolic and geographic boundaries of the neighborhood. A series of violent incidents forced Salsabil’s mother to seek out alternative housing options:

There were a lot of killings in our neighborhood. When guns came into the city we were really affected. One guy died in front of our house. I was the last person to talk to him. I thought it was my brother, so I ran out to him. I picked him up and held him. I know others who were shot.

Salsabil attended public elementary and secondary schools in Toronto. She entered the school system in Grade 2. She was placed in a class for English language learners: “I was eager to learn English and get out of ESL. That was my goal.” She switched to a new elementary school in Grade 4. Salsabil described the classroom environment as “competitive.” Many of her classmates attended after-school academic enrichment programs. Salsabil’s mother could not afford the additional cost of tutoring, but Salsabil learned from her classmates: “It was good to be
around them. They knew what university they wanted to go to. I made friends with students who
knew what they wanted to do. Making those connections helped me navigate through school.”
Thus, peer support networks helped relieve some of the “anxiety” she had about school and
helped her plan for secondary and post-secondary education.

Salsabil’s peer network was particularly important because she felt “anxious” around
teachers. With her mother working and going to school and her older siblings struggling with
their own issues, she needed the support. Salsabil attended a secondary school located in the
neighborhood in which she lived, so she knew a lot of the students there. She said, “By the time I
got into high school, I was trying hard.” Salsabil had planned to go to university, so she focused
on academics. She completed secondary school and entered university.

During those 8 years when Salsabil and her family lived in social housing, Salsabil’s
older siblings struggled with and succumbed to negative pressures, which had left limited
support for Salsabil: “Everyone had their own thing. We couldn’t even support one another.”
During that time, Salsabil did experience some sense of community within her neighborhood.
Salsabil said that her Islamic faith was one of the factors that helped her resist the negative
pressures of her neighborhood context: “As a child, I was always connected to God. I was always
conscious.” Within the neighborhood there was a growing Muslim presence: “In my
neighborhood there were a lot of people converting to Islam.... There was a close enough
[mosque] in the area… It had a good effect on people. It called and reminded people.”

When I interviewed Salsabil, she had taken time off from university to work, so that she
could help support her family. She discussed the stresses of balancing school and work, but she
worried about completing her university degree because she already had, what she referred to as,
“three strikes” against her: “You need that credential, so people can’t use that against you. I
don’t need another strike. I have enough strikes against me.” Salsabil said being female,
Black/African, and Muslim constituted her core sense of self and meant having “three strikes” against her. Salsabil, who had migrated to Canada as a child refugee with her family from Somalia, said, “People always ask where I’m from. I don’t fit in here [Canada] or in Somalia.” I’m neither here nor there.” Salsabil believed that her darker skin and covered hair distinguished her from “real” Canadians. Having spent only her early childhood in Somalia and most of her life in Canada, however, Salsabil felt that she was not a “real” Somali. Thus, Salsabil seemed to situate herself in *the third space*— “somewhere between here and there.”

**The Young Somali Women’s Group: “What’s going on with Somali girls?”**

The idea for the young Somali women’s support group was conceived during a small and informal gathering of young Somali women, who had come to know one another through family and community connections. The young Somali women present at this gathering had also been involved, in various capacities, in different youth-focused initiatives in Toronto’s priority neighborhoods, including public consultations on youth spaces, anti-racism study circles, and youth and police dialogue initiatives.

Both Amina and Salsabil were present at this gathering. Salsabil recalled that the main focus of the conversation was the question, “What’s going on with Somali girls?” Amina described the conversation in further detail:

We had a conversation one day about how Somali males and females seem to be living completely different lives. The girl is to go to school, maintain the house and a 4.0 GPA. The Somali male can go to school if he wants or he can play soccer if it he wants. Basically, he can do what he pleases. There were so many outlets for guys. Why can’t we start creating outlets for girls? We can open a gym for them. We can have a space for sitting down and having a talk… Parents don’t understand. That’s a general statement. They’re not used to Canadian society. They’re not used to us coming home late from studying. It’s school, work and
home. Nothing else. Why can’t it be school, work, leisure time, and home? We’re trying to have the best of both worlds. We’re trying to open the doors that were shut from the beginning for these girls.

The young women discussed patriarchal forms of social control in Somali families and communities. They decided that they would conduct a needs analysis to better understand the needs of Somali girls and young women. These young women formed the “core” group.

Each of the core group members recruited five other young Somali women for participation in the needs analysis. The needs analysis included an anonymous survey and focus group (co-designed by the young women). The survey and the focus group questions addressed a variety of topics, including personal health, quality of interpersonal relationships, quality of schooling experiences, access to quality recreational opportunities, access to quality job opportunities, and awareness of related supports and resources. Amina reported the results, “Some of the girls do drugs, drink alcohol, and have unprotected sex… They don’t have opportunities. They’re seeking alternatives to replace the lack of opportunities.” As I discussed in chapter five, young girls living in high poverty neighborhoods face specific risks because of their gender—harassment, pressure for early sexual initiation, intimate partner violence, and high risk of sexual assault with early sexual initiation bringing its own hazards: pregnancy, the risk of sexually transmitted disease, and dropping out of school to care for children. All these hazards have serious long-term implications for the prospects of adolescent girls living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated levels of poverty.

After examining together the findings of the needs analysis, the core group reflected on the challenges they had faced as adolescents from the Somali diasporic community living in high poverty neighborhoods in Toronto. They also discussed how they had managed to overcome their limiting situations. Salsabil discussed the importance of subjectivity: “One thing I learned
from sociology is that it’s good to be subjective. That’s what created the women’s movement.” She explained with the example, “This is who I am. I know a lot of young girls might be going through what I went through. How can I help?” Asmara said of herself and other Somali girls and young women, who had also arrived in Canada from Somalia as political refugees and had grown up in relatively high poverty contexts in Canadian inner cities: “We had to adapt quickly. Some of us did and some of us fell by the wayside… It hurts us when we see someone we know who is alcoholic, on drugs, or involved in gangs. What are the differences? Life chances?” She continued, “We wanted to give the girls another picture—Just because you grew up here in this situation doesn’t mean you can’t do this. We are well educated, well connected and well known in the community. Despite the challenges we all made it… We are an example for other girls.” The young women understood that they could draw from their personal lived experiences to support other Somali young women and girls and to serve them as role models.

The young women decided that they would continue to meet on a monthly basis, and invite other young Somali women to attend. As Amina explained, “We like to have a social gathering every month. To create a comfortable setting we do it at our homes. We’ll each bring five girls… We talk about what affects us.” Salsabi said, “We’re supporting each other. Politicizing each other… We talk and reason with each other.” She continued, “Girls don’t usually come out of their house. We’re getting girls from different tribes and neighborhoods together. We’re very divided. We’re also challenging those divisions by making connections.” Salsabil discussed community and parental expectations of what it means to be a “good” young Somali woman: “You’re a young woman now, so act like this. You’re going to get married, so behave this way. We reject that.” Amina listed off some of the conversation topics: “We’ve spoken about body image, hijab, female genital mutilation, religion, families, Somalia, marriage. I feel like we can talk about anything.”
Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil described what they had experienced through the young Somali women’s group. Amina, who already had a close relationship with her mother and sister, said that she gained “a sense of sisterhood”—“sticking together, having love for one another even if you disagree with one another.” Asmara expanded, “I have learned that we can help one another and not agree with one another. The group is connecting young women who are so different. It is natural to have a difference of opinions. I am learning problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.” She continued, “We are unifying on the basis that we all want the best for each other. Our end goal is to love the best things for each other.” Through her involvement in the group, Salsabil had learned that, in being a young Somali woman, “struggle is an asset”: “We are good at negotiating. We’re negotiating in family, school, and communities… You are who you are. Hold yourself up.” People will want to bring you down. There is so much violence.” Working collectively, these young Somali women had taken action towards building community with other young Somali women.

In this respect, like Nabila’s weekly after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls, the monthly social gathering for Somali girls and young women served similar purposes: to provide an inclusive space in which young Somali girls and young women could gather to discuss issues pertinent to their lives and to support one another. These gatherings also provided Somali girls and young women opportunities to discuss civic, political, cultural, and economic issues and to interact directly with role models: young Somali women who managed to avoid the negative risks associated with living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated poverty, who were pursuing post-secondary education, and who were contributing to their families, neighborhoods, and communities. The monthly social gatherings were therefore a site of citizenship learning.
Jamila, Khadijeh, Zaynab, and the Young Muslim Women’s Collective

Jamila: “I always felt like I couldn’t be Palestinian.”

Jamila, a young woman in her mid-20s was born in the West Bank, and lived there with her grandfather and mother until just after the beginning of the First Intifada. When Israeli soldiers forced their way into Jamila’s grandfather’s home and brutalized him, Jamila’s mother decided to leave. Jamila and her mother reunited with Jamila’s father in Jordan before moving together to Bahrain, where he had found employment. She grew up in Bahrain. Jamila told me that she had been defined by the personal trauma of Israeli occupation and the loss of her sense of “home” among family in Palestine.

Jamila’s father, a Palestinian, had been involved in the Palestinian liberation movement as a university student in Egypt and had suffered severe consequences for his involvement. He refused to discuss his past with Jamila because he did not want her to get involved in the movement and face the same fate: “He faced so much violence that he felt he had to shelter me from it…He never really shares the details of his activism. I think it hurts him a lot.” Jamila’s father encouraged her to think about her location in the world as a female and to challenge gender-based inequity: “He pushed me to be a feminist.”

Exiled from Palestine Jamila’s father was able to complete medical school in Iraq and find a job as a doctor in Bahrain. As a foreign-trained doctor there, however, he could only obtain a 1-year contract, subject to renewal or cancellation at the end of the year. Thus, their lives in Bahrain were insecure: “We didn’t know if we would have to leave…He would only get 1-year contracts… That was a difficult way to live.” Jamila and her mother could not work in Bahrain due to work permit stipulations; and, as a female, Jamila would require her father’s

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28 The First Intifada refers to the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation that took place from 1987 to 1993.
permission to access social services. Jamila said, “I appreciated Bahrain for housing me and giving me opportunities that I couldn’t have had, but I was also angry because I didn’t have a cultural education. I always felt like I couldn’t be Palestinian.” Her mother had tried to provide her with an Arabic language education at home.

Jamila had attended an elementary school for the children of migrant workers from India in Bahrain, because it was more affordable than other schools. She described it as a powerful site of her citizenship learning:

I studied in a very interesting school, the Indian school of Bahrain. I was one of the only Arabs there…I was taught to be part of this Indian community. India is so huge, with different states. Every state is so different with so many different cultures, languages, and religions. I was surrounded by diversity of identities… I was taught that India is about diversity, more than about its unity. That was something that hit home for me. I had this idea of Arab unity, but I always wondered how Arabs could be united when Palestine is violated. I didn’t understand Arab Unity. Being introduced to diversity opened up a lot for me. Elementary school was really interesting.

In addition to cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity on the Indian subcontinent, she learned about racism at the elementary school: “The Arab students were seen as the owners of the school. Our Indian friends and colleagues had to be some kinds of slaves for them… These dynamics played throughout the school… It was really an issue inside an entire country.” Through these observations of social inequalities, Jamila started to understand that the Indian school of Bahrain was, in fact, a microcosm of Bahraini society. Jamila identified with her Indian peers: “I always associated with the Indians. I wasn’t part of the Arabs. I was part of the Indians. I felt like a minority.” Jamila was a minority as a Palestinian living in Bahrain.
Jamila attended an American secondary school in Bahrain. She recalled her experience of 9/11: “I saw it on TV. I thought, ‘We’re going to eat shit.’ At the time I didn’t see the world as Muslim and non-Muslim.” Jamila’s perspective of the world changed and she began to see it as divided between Muslims and non-Muslims, and she struggled to find her place in this world:

It triggered a lot of questions. I had to fight to be Muslim, even in Bahrain. In the American school, you could feel that. Most of the teachers were Canadian, American, young professionals, young graduates, who came to the Gulf to seek teaching opportunities. They were so valued. They were more valued than local teachers. They were given a bigger salary, house, and accommodation… We always struggled to be in Bahrain and that made me angry. The American teachers’ attitudes changed they were a lot more cautious around us… We burned an American flag. It was interesting now thinking about it. The school was full of American and Canadian teachers. There was that rally a week after 9/11. Suddenly the students became political. They felt like they had to fight to be Muslim. It was another part of identity I kept hidden. I’m fighting for it I don’t believe in Islam.

Jamila discussed the importance of social and cultural rights in Canada that did not exist to the same extent in Palestine, her homeland, or Bahrain, where her family had resided.

Jamila’s father was “secular” and “anti-Islam” and he encouraged her to question religious teachings. In contrast, her mother was “very religious.” Jamila felt that she had religious faith, but questioned the basis of some religious beliefs and practices. As relayed earlier, Jamila noticed that Arab students were given special privileges in Bahrain. For example, only Arab students were allowed to attend deen29 classes even though some of the Indian students were Muslim. Jamila questioned why deen classes focused on Islam and not on the diverse religions represented by the students. When Jamila broached the matter with the deen

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29 The Arabic word “deen” is often translated in English as “religion.” Jamila translated the term “deen” as “religion.” However, “deen” might also be defined as an Islamic way of life.
teacher, she told her that she “should not be questioning these things.” Jamila described the pedagogical approach: “The way we were taught Islam was ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts,’ stories of Prophets’ lives.” However, Jamila continued asking questions, particularly in relation to teachings about the status of Muslim women. The girls and the boys were separated for deen classes, and Jamila’s deen teachers were women. Jamila recalled some of the teachings, “We were taught we have to cover our bodies because men’s sexual nature would be aroused if we showed more skin… We were taught that a woman’s education comes secondary to her marriage.” Jamila resisted these teachings, which reinforced patriarchal social controls. The main focus of deen classes was memorizing verses of the Holy Quran and this particular learning opportunity was meaningful for Jamila: “I connected with the language. It is beautiful poetry. My grandfather was a poet. My father was a writer…Learning the lines was a spiritual practice. I felt like I was connecting with something, but I didn’t understand the words enough at the time.”

As an international student attending a Toronto university, Jamila found herself immersed in the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement. Through this work, she met other Palestinian youth, and, for the first time in her life, she experienced a sense of belonging as a Palestinian. She also gained deeper insight into Palestine: “Most of my knowledge came from my activism… The knowledge specific to Palestine was something I had to pursue outside of formal studies. I have a degree in Middle East studies, but there was not one course on Palestine.” Jamila also developed a critical feminist analysis that continues to inform her work in the movement: “I was part of this nationalist movement for the liberation of Palestine…It’s about fighting for the freedom of Palestine. Why am I busting my ass doing these things for a future that would exclude me as a woman?” She observed that young women tended to be placed in secondary roles: “Women were put into logistical roles. They were not seen as good enough to contribute to political discourses.” She felt used by the group: “We organized a talk about
women, war, and resistance. I had to speak out as a Palestinian woman in the First Intifada. That was scary. I was so young. I felt like I was tokenized.” Jamila cited Daoud Mikhail’s statement, “liberate yourself, you liberate the land,” as influential in the development of her feminist analysis of the movement. She described the personal impact of the statement: “The change needs to come from within us... I no longer saw myself as a victim of the occupation. I saw myself as someone with the power to change circumstances around me.” She had essentially come to see herself as agentic, having the power to effect personal and social change. After graduating from university, Jamila became increasingly focused on developing a feminist analysis of the movement and working on women’s rights issues. Jamila’s Palestinian solidarity work is discussed further in chapter nine.

Khadijeh: “I’m Palestinian.”

Khadijeh, a young woman in her mid-20s, was born to 1948 Palestinian refugees. Her parents migrated to Kuwait from Lebanon 1 year after the Lebanese Civil War began. As non-citizens in Kuwait, however, they had limited access to social and economic opportunities. Her parents, who already had friends in Canada, decided that Canada would be a better option for establishing a permanent home. The family migrated to Canada and settled in a city outside of Toronto.

Khadijeh received her early cultural and political education at home. Khadijeh’s mother and other Palestinian women organized a Palestinian cultural group for children to help preserve Palestinian culture and to inculcate in the children a connection to other Palestinians and

30 “Liberate yourself, you liberate the land” is a statement by Daoud Mikhail, a Palestinian-Christian, and one of the founders of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He is the father of Palestinian-Christian legislator, activist and scholar Hanan Daoud Khalil Ashrawi (1946-present).
Palestine. Khadijeh recalled, “They taught us debke\textsuperscript{31}... I do remember my mother being active in that way... There are still pictures of me holding little Palestinian flags and wearing keffiyeh\textsuperscript{32}. “ These women wanted to foster in their children a connection to their homeland, Palestine, and took it upon themselves to create such learning opportunities. She discussed Middle East politics with her father, who had a history of student activism: “My father was already very politicized and he had been since he was a teenager. When he started to see that in me we started engaging in political discussions.”

Khadijeh’s sense of belonging in Canada was shaped, in part, by her parents’ experiences of employment in Canada. She spoke of their “checkered” employment histories: “My parents had a really hard time getting jobs. It was a typical immigrant story. They have a very checkered work history from when they arrived here.” In Kuwait, her father had worked as an accountant, and her mother as an administrative assistant. She recalled a “traumatic” interaction with the Canadian judicial system—her father’s immigration hearings: “I remember being in court with my family because they wanted to deport my dad for not fulfilling the obligations of the business...I was too young to understand...I remember crying in court. I didn’t want to go anywhere else.”

Her sense of belonging in Canada was also shaped by exclusion and discrimination she had experienced at school. Khadijeh attended public elementary and secondary schools and her memories of elementary school were still vivid: “I remember a lot about elementary school, because I hated it. I had a lot of problems in elementary school. That’s when I became aware of race issues.” The elementary school’s student population reflected the influx of Lebanese newcomers in the 1980s and Somali newcomers in the 1990s. Khadijeh felt that the teachers did

\textsuperscript{31} Debke is a popular Arab folk dance in Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

\textsuperscript{32} Keffiyeh is a traditional headdress typically worn by Arab men. It is also a symbol of Palestinian solidarity.
not treat Lebanese and Somali students as well as they did other students. While she was academically successful, she did not feel that there was a space for her in the classroom: “I did very well academically. I really didn’t like the environment. I didn’t feel like I belonged.” She had “clashed” with some of her teachers. Khadijeh’s Grade 7 teacher denied the existence of Palestine: “The teacher was asking students about their cultural backgrounds… When she asked me, I said, “I’m Palestinian.” She started laughing. She said, “Isn’t that funny, class? Palestine doesn’t even exist.” I didn’t really know why she said that. Now I understand the politics.”

Khadijeh started listening to Hip Hop when she was about 10-years-old. The lived experiences and perspectives of urban African-American youth told through rap lyrics and beats resonated with Khadijeh, who had also felt marginalized. Hip Hop music introduced her to African-American histories and struggles for liberation. Khadijeh’s and other participating youths’ experiences with Hip Hop are discussed further in chapter eight.

When Khadijeh was bored at school, she would go to the public library to borrow books instead of going to school:

Reading was what I was mostly engaged with. My friend and I would skip class and go to the public library and take out books… I finally got around to reading the *Official Biography of Malcolm X.* I read James Baldwin. I read Frantz Fanon. I read bell hooks. By accident I read, *Killing Rage,* by bell hooks… The book starts with her saying she is on the airplane and had a sudden urge to kill the white man sitting beside her. She talks about the trauma of racism…I wasn’t reading the work of Arab or Muslim writers. I was reading African-American writers with the exception of Fanon… That was my main political education. I have to credit that. The African-American experience not my experience, but I learned a lot from those writers.
After 9/11, Khadijeh started wearing her kaffiyeh to school, studying Islam, and making “links with the literature of African Americans”: “I was now more interested in and focusing more on my place as a Palestinian, an Arab, and a Muslim…Why was there discrimination against Arabs and Muslims before 9/11? It didn’t appear out of thin air.” Khadijeh was in a Grade 12 math class, when she learned about the terrorist attacks: “The news was announced on the speakers. TVs were on all day...My teacher said, ‘The Palestinians did it. They’re saying the Palestinians did it.’ I was immediately defensive, ‘what the hell? Why is she saying that? Nobody knows who did it!’” She described another teacher’s attempt to engage students in critical media analysis:

One well-meaning teacher, asked us to analyze some media… There was a picture of a Palestinian at a protest. He had a kid on his shoulders. The kid was wearing a fake bomb. It was a provocative image. This guy beside me cursed, “They are all fucking crazy!” I said, “Fuck you!” I had cut my hair off. I was this angry, lesbian, Palestinian, Muslim, and crazy suicide bomber person. I confused everyone at this point.

An English high school teacher facilitated her involvement in diverse student groups:

I was not engaged in school except that this one English teacher started paying attention to me, and helped build my self-confidence... As supportive as my parents are, they were also learning how to navigate the school system. They didn’t know how to apply for university here… I think the teacher picked up on the fact that I was queer. She kind of acted as a mentor. She was not open in the school. It was one of those unspoken connections. She took me under her wing. I think if it wasn’t for her and another teacher, I would have remained disengaged. That year the teacher convinced me to get involved with the social justice club and start the gay/straight alliance. Because of that teacher I felt a little more connected to the school. I started to get involved.
With the support of this teacher, Khadijah felt more connected to the school than she had in all her years as a student. She also had a teacher and a guidance counselor who helped her and other students connect to the wider school community and make healthier choices. It was expected that she would go to university. Khadijah had completed an undergraduate degree in legal studies, and was pursuing a law degree when I interviewed her for this study. As an undergraduate student she had been involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work. This is discussed further in chapter nine.

Khadijah’s parents enrolled her in an Arabic language and Islamic school on Saturdays, but she quit after 1 year: “It was a poor environment. I was much older than other kids because I couldn’t read and write Arabic. The teachers were parent volunteers. I remember having hell explained to you. I remember being scared I would go to hell.” Khadijah’s mother practiced Islam and taught her children *Quranic* verses and basic Islamic guidelines for living their lives, but tried not to impose religion on the children. When Khadijah was about 15-years-old she started exploring her sexuality and questioning her sexual orientation. She used the Internet to search for Islamic perspectives on homosexuality: “I found a website about Islam and homosexuality. The moderator put up verses and disputed interpretations against homosexuality… I used the message board a couple of times. That was the extent of my engagement with Islam. I was trying to learn more about gender and sexually fit within that framework.” Throughout the interview, Khadijah questioned whether what she was saying was “Muslim enough.” She explained what *being Muslim* means to her and why it was important to be in a young Muslim women’s collective:

The reason why it’s important to me is just because I wasn’t raised in a particularly religious way, but that doesn’t mean that Islam hasn’t been part of my life. I was antagonistic towards it. I embraced it. It was still part of my life. It was a force… It’s not just because of 9/11. It’s not just because people stereotype
Muslims. It’s because I situate my personal struggles in my context. If that context is Islam, then why should I talk about Christianity, which is not my experience? Islam is contradictory force in my life…I think it provides me with an ethical and justice oriented foundation. At the same time I can be very critical about the religion or the practice of the people who may have ideas that come from hybrid of religion, culture, racism, classism, gender and patriarchy…Of course I’m going to engage with it. It’s not to the exclusion of everything else. Some people see it as all encompassing so they engage to the exclusion of there things, but for me it’s one very important framework I can work with but not the only one. I also grew up in the dominant culture, which is non-Muslim. I’m also very critical of that.

This statement reflects Khadijah’s critical engagement with Islam as one guiding framework in her life. She drew from multiple anti-oppressive frameworks.

**Zaynab: “I was an activist kid in school since I was little.”**

Zaynab, a young woman in her late 20s, was born in Toronto, Canada. Her father, an Indian Muslim, and her mother, a Danish Christian, divorced when she was very young. She grew up in a predominantly White, middle-class neighborhood in a small town in western Ontario, where she attended local Catholic elementary, middle, and secondary schools. During weekend visitations with her father in Toronto, she spent time with her extended Indian Muslim family, attended classes at the Islamic school, and visited the mosque.

Zaynab visited her father two weekends per month, and during those visits she was exposed to political issues concerning local and global Muslim communities: “My dad always had us talk about politics at the dinner table. Islam is wrapped up in politics. I never separated Islam and politics. I would go home to [small town] and people thought I was this weird kid who talked about politics.” For Zaynab, Islam and politics were inextricably linked. She felt
personally affected when a mosque in her small town had been vandalized, and when the First Gulf War began. Zaynab learned community building and organizing from her father: “I had this idea that you just do it… I learned that from my father… We had crazy picnics with kids everywhere… There was this idea that you build a picnic out of nothing, you build a mosque out of nothing.” Zaynab emphasized the importance of resourcefulness, self-reliance, and community for immigrants: “You don’t wait for someone else to do it for you. You do it yourself. That’s where I learned all my stuff. It’s an immigrant experience… You make it happen.” By observing her father, Zaynab learned possibilities for self-determination.

In elementary school, Zaynab started noticing that she was “different” from her peers, because of her multi-ethnic and multi-faith background: “The teachers would single me out on World Culture Day at school, because they knew that I had an Indian background.” In middle school, Zaynab started experiencing bullying: “the Paki dot thing started,” and “students would call me ‘Paki.’” She recalled, “I knew it was racism, but I didn’t have the language to talk about it.” Zaynab felt the impact of racism, but she did not have the “language” that she needed to name the oppression.

As a middle school student, Zaynab was introduced to political activism and women’s sexual health and reproductive rights by her Grade 6 teacher: “I was learning about citizenship in Catholic school. We went to protests… The abortion was a huge part of learning that citizenship stuff.” This teacher had taken Zaynab and the rest of the class to the local abortion clinic to participate in anti-abortion rallies: “I was a little feminist. I was talking about abortion rights in Grade 6. My teacher would take us to abortion clinics to protest in front of them. The teacher would talk about why abortion is wrong. I would argue with her.” This teacher, despite her personal beliefs, created a space for Zaynab’s critical and dissenting perspectives.
After reading children’s writer Jane Langton’s *Fragile Flag* (1984), Zaynab decided that she would be like the protagonist: “I read this book called, *Fragile Flag*. Did you read it? I read it in Grade 6. It’s about this girl who leads a march to Washington to stop a nuclear war. I thought that was going to be me.” In the protagonist, Zaynab found a role model. Zaynab, who did not want to be defined by her peers as “the weird girl without friends,” started to re-define herself as an environmental activist: “I didn’t have a lot of friends, so I got involved in activism.” She started her middle school’s first recycling club.

In secondary school, Zaynab became increasingly involved in environmental activism. Although she had been “disengaged” from the classroom, she forged a sense of purpose and belonging to the wider school community by leading the school’s environmental club and participating in the students’ council. Secondary school teachers selected Zaynab to spend one semester studying environmental and popular education at an outdoor education facility. She “thrived” that semester. Through the program, she learned that she “wasn’t stupid” and she also felt a sense of community, and developed a supportive network of peers outside of her secondary school.

When Zaynab returned to her secondary school, she resumed her position as head of the environmental club. Zaynab continued to be involved in environmental activism inside and outside of school and she ran a retreat for youth environmentalists for 5 years: “Volunteers would make food, speak, etc. We’d have 100 youth for about 5 years and with no funding. I had this belief in things not being about money. We can make it ourselves.” She also created a group with other students of color at her secondary school called the “Brown Coalition,” so that they would have someone to sit with in the cafeteria at lunch: “You can create community out of something. Something started clicking in my head around that stuff.”
During that time, Zaynab had also been exploring her sexuality and questioning her sexual orientation. Students who suspected that she was a lesbian beat her up at school. The captains of the football team and the hockey team were among the students that instigated and participated in the violent assaults against Zaynab. Teachers also subjected her to homophobic discrimination. When she told one teacher that she wanted to pursue Women’s Studies at university, the teacher “warned” her, “There will be lesbians in the program.” The next day, Zaynab handed the teacher a copy of Ellen Bass’s (1996) resource book Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth—and Their Allies, which speaks to the basic aspects of the lives of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. Zaynab had also started speaking publicly about violence against women as part of the Riot grrrl movement.

Zaynab pursued women’s studies and environmental studies at university. Through coursework, she started developing an anti-racist analysis, which she applied to the environmental movement. She became increasingly involved in local and transnational Indigenous people’s environmental movements. By the time she completed university, she was focusing her studies and activist work primarily on women and trauma.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Zaynab, worried about the health and safety of other Muslim children and youth, contacted local schools to offer anti-oppression workshops. For most of her young life, she felt conflicted about her religious identity: “My father would tell me I was Muslim. I wasn’t sure… I went to Catholic school every day. I went to Islamic school two times a month.” After 9/11, she started identifying publicly as Muslim. Her father often encouraged her to get involved in Muslim community organizing: “My dad would ask why I was doing work for others and not for Muslims. For me, doing Muslim organizing was about wearing a hijab and

Riot grrrl is an underground feminist punk movement that emerged in the Northwestern United States in the mid-1990s. The movement created space for young women to gather collective strength and to speak out against gender-based violence.
working in a mosque. I never thought there would be people like me in those spaces…I never thought I was pure enough.” Zaynab questioned whether she could get involved in Muslim community organizing, because she was not “practicing.” She began attending gatherings of her female Muslim relatives:

We were having intellectual conversations and inspiring talks about how they nurture themselves and how they challenge things. They were doing these things in the mosques that were community organizing. They would organize sisters’ nights.

Her aunts and cousins, who were actively engaged in their communities, expanded her understanding of Muslim community organizing. Zaynab continued to spend time at the mosque: “I would find my way to ladies quarter and sit by myself. I felt at peace. That was my Islamic education… Seeing people shoulder to shoulder… Standing in solidarity with a number of people. For me that is beautiful and powerful. I think that’s where my education was seated.” In our conversation, Zaynab talked about how she had learned the stories of the female companions of Prophet Muhammad from her father: “I think the most influential were the stories about the Prophet’s wives. They were not just the Prophet’s wives. They were their own women. Zaynab, Aishah, Khadijah, and Sumayya… I grew up with stories of strong women.” Through her experiences of providing support to Palestinian women living in refugee camps in Lebanon and 9/11, she felt increasingly connected to Islam. She said of 9/11: “Yeah, I guess, 9/11 did impact me. I started identifying more vocally that I am Muslim. I started having conversations that I wasn’t having before. What does it mean to be Muslim?”
The Young Muslim Women’s Collective: “We just wanted a space for young Muslim women.”

Jamila, Khadijeh, and Zaynab were core members of a collective by and for young Muslim women that formed in response to the murder of Pakistani Canadian teenager Aqsa Parvez by her father and brother on December 10, 2007 in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Zaynab had been working as an advocate for women trauma survivors. When she heard the news of the teenager’s murder, she started contacting other young Muslim women, asking them to join her in grieving the tragic loss. In that moment, Zaynab needed to be in community with other young Muslim women, so she began to build it: “I sent out an email to random women…Women I had met at fairs, women I had seen at events...” One of the young Muslim women Zaynab called was Khadijeh, who had been studying law and working on issues of domestic violence in immigrant communities. Khadijeh, in turn, reached out to Jamila, who had been working on issues of religious fundamentalism at a women’s rights focused non-governmental organization. A small group of young Muslim women gathered together one snowy evening. Zaynab recalled, “In that room we had space to say what we had never been able to say.” Similarly, Khadijeh explained,

People just wanted a space. That was the first political act. This is before we planned or spoke publicity. This was a chance for people to come and meet. It was open to people no matter how they identified. It was confidential. Muslim. Religious. Non-religious.

Because of the powerful sense of belonging and community that developed during that first gathering, the young women continued meeting on a monthly basis.

Eventually they decided to form a collective based on shared leadership and decision-making. As Zaynab explained, “We built community from shared responsibility and shared
experience.” The collective decided to invite other young Muslim women to “yell, grieve, cry, mourn, shout, resist, and discuss violence against women.” The collective’s first initiative was framed as a discussion group for young Muslim woman who wanted to dialogue about how gender-based violence impacts their lives, their families, and communities: “At these discussion groups we want to continue to dialogue about violence against women, how we feel, and what we want to do about it in a safe, supportive environment.” As this statement suggests, the dialogue was intended to provoke critical reflection and action to transform oppressive gender-relations. The founding members of the collective, who initiated the dialogue, had learned “anti-oppression language and analysis,” through their community development work. The collective engaged in extensive dialogue about what it meant to create a “safe” and “supportive” environment for all young Muslim women. The young women determined that the space would be limited to young Muslim women only, but that it would be open to all women and trans people who self-identified as Muslim. The space was explicitly defined as “pro-choice,” “anti-racist,” and “queer and trans positive.” The collective worked to create a space where young Muslim women could “leave their fears at the door” by striving to work within an anti-oppressive framework, continually re-examining their individual and collective biases and assumptions and how those might create unsafe spaces for minorities within the collective.

The collective organized a retreat for young Muslim women. About 30 young Muslim women, ranging from their late teens to early thirties, attended. While much of the retreat focused on relationship building, a significant part was also spent discussing the possibilities of formalizing the collective into an organization. The later part of the afternoon was spent working in different committees: organizational structure, organizational policy, social programming, fundraising, and political activism. After the retreat, some of the young women attempted to revive the discussion. However, efforts to formalize the collective were unsuccessful. Many of
the young women wanted the space to remain one in which they could be in community. Many of these young women worked in not-for-profit organizations, and they feared that formalizing the collective would ruin their “sense of community.” Jamila, Khadijeh, and Zaynab were among those who resisted formalizing the collective. Zaynab explained, “It’s a bunch of us getting together and eating food… We’ve had people get money from being in the group. That’s created some challenges in organizing. When people become paid staff. They have sense of entitlement.” Some disagreed, and eventually drifted from the collective. The collective secured external funding from local civil society organizations, but on their terms, and remained a fluid and dynamic space that became the platform for several individual and collective projects, rather than a formal organization.

The collective slowly became a platform for public and political action. Zaynab explained, “We created a trusted network, and the grassroots organizing just happened.”

The collective organized a media campaign challenging a sensational cover story of Aqsa Parvez’s death, which involved a letter-to-the-editor-writing campaign and an intergenerational panel of Muslim women and allies. They developed a critical analysis of the story, which, they argued, had not situated Aqsa’s death within the Canadian national context of violence against women or domestic violence, and, instead, had portrayed her death as a cultural problem imported to Canada by Muslim and South Asian immigrants. Frustrated with dominant public narratives about Muslim women, the collective began producing their own narratives through film, poetry, art, and publishing. Khadijeh and Zaynab explained the importance of the collective’s publication:

Khadijeh: We don’t want to get stuck responding to things all the time. The formation of our group and our major campaigns have been reactionary… Creating media and art is really interesting to me.”
Zaynab: We get involved in cultural production. By putting out our narratives we’re connecting with other women. I didn’t know there were others… We found out that there were other life forms on earth. We exist. We’re here. There isn’t one way of being Muslim.

Through cultural production, the women created opportunities to explore and to develop their voices, to tell their own stories, and to connect with other young Muslim women.

Perhaps more importantly, the collective created a spiritual space in which young Muslim women could explore Islam and what being Muslim meant to them without fear of judgment.

Khadijeh: I wanted to have a space to hang out, to engage with others, and to learn from one another... I’m meeting people who are much more spiritual than me... I’m discovering a space for me to be Muslim if I choose…Being in the space is leading to transformation in others and myself.

Jamila: The biggest thing about the collective for me is the sense of security. I felt that I could finally accept the things that I thought were contradictory to Islam...My passion for human rights to me is very much Muslim. Being honest is Muslim. Confronting my own judgments is Muslim. I understand Islam in a different way than I did before… There are women who have struggled with their identities as Muslims. I didn’t know that.

The collective recognized that dialogue among Muslim young women along with allies needed to go beyond meetings. It has been a creative avenue for them to express themselves, share experiences, and connect with others through writing, art and design. The collective provided a space young Muslim women and trans people mentor, share skills and tools to challenge oppressive cultural productions and reject exclusion.
Gender and Islam: “When you educate a woman you educate a nation.”

Some of the young men in the study expressed their views on gender-relations in Muslim communities. Talib, for example, talked about his concerns about the contradictory messages within Muslim communities about relationships between unmarried young men and women. He discussed contradictory messaging about relationships between young Muslim women and men, more specifically that gender segregation fostered unhealthy relationships between young Muslim women and men. Mustafa talked about gender inequity in the Muslim youth organization in which he was involved.

Other young women, including Aamanee, Jamila, Khadijeh, and Maliha, discussed the threat and experiences of gender-based violence in activist projects, and spoke to the importance of safe spaces. Maliha discussed the need to create safe spaces for Muslim girls and young women to reduce isolation: “Having a space to talk is important. Just a space to say, ‘this is what I’m going through,’ and for another to say, ‘this is what I’m going through,’ is important. We can support each other.” Maha shared her dreams of supporting transformative educational initiatives for Muslim girls and women in the Middle East, as well as a horrific memory: “You read ridiculous things. There was a fire in a girls’ school in Saudi Arabia. The girls were not veiled, so the firefighters would not go in. Little kids and teachers burned alive... The pre-Islamic mentality that is still left in the Muslim world.” Maha described the March 11, 2002 girls’ school fire in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in which “religious police” (officially the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice) stopped schoolgirls from leaving the burning school building and hindered rescue workers because they were not wearing “correct” Islamic dress. Maha asked, “What would the Prophet say that little kids were burned because they weren’t in jilbabs\(^{34}\)? The wives of the Prophet would accompany him on the battlefield.” Maha

\(^{34}\) The Arabic word *jilbab* refers to a full-length outer garment, worn in public by some Muslim women.
believed that societal transformation depended on women’s education: “When you educate a woman you educate a nation. Women are dangerous for their intellect, sexuality, and bodies…She has been taught, brainwashed, that she is inferior to men.” She called on Muslim women to stand up for one another’s rights and freedoms.

Summary

This chapter provided insight into the citizenship learning and practices of seven young women who were actively working to create and nurture safe spaces for other Muslim girls and young women. Nabila, Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil acted as civic and political role models for other girls and young women. They recognized that they could draw on their realities and lived experiences of negotiating what it meant to be Muslim, immigrant, and female within their families, communities and schools to assist other Muslim girls and young women facing similar challenges. Opportunities to learn from civic and political role models appear to meaningfully support young people’s civic and political commitments. Additionally, Nabila, Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil modeled democratic citizenship (e.g., advocating for social, political, cultural and economic rights for other community members), provided academic support (e.g., assistance with applications, information about school systems), social support (e.g., someone to talk to and strategize with), and spiritual support (e.g., someone to engage with in spiritual and religious practice). All seven of the young Muslim facilitated discussion about issues pertinent to Muslim girls’ and young women’s lives, including Islam and the status of women, women’s sexual health and reproductive rights, violence against women and girls, self-defense, and healthy relationships. These young Muslim women offer insight into the range of issues concerning girls and young women from diverse Muslim communities. The spaces created by the seven young women gathered women for the purpose of community building (and expanding social networks). The young Somali women’s group gathered together young Somali women from
diverse backgrounds (ethnicity, tribal affiliation, religiosity, socioeconomic status, education level, citizenship status, etc.). The after-school drop-in program served young Muslim girls living in an inner city Toronto neighborhood. The young Muslim women’s collective brought together diverse Muslim women working on social justice issues from across the city, including many trauma survivors. Such social networks, by promoting feelings of social belonging, may help to reduce isolation, improve functioning, and facilitate healing. The spaces were sites of struggle for enhanced citizenship rights. The after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls and the young Muslim women’s collective in particular were originally intentioned as private sites for discussion of personal issues and became sites of public and political action.
Chapter Eight:
Citizenship as Critique and Resistance in Spoken Word Poetry and Hip Hop

Poetry is a political act because it involves telling the truth… So, poetry becomes a means for useful dialogue between people who are not only unknown, but mute to each other. It produces a dialogue among people that guards all of us against manipulation by our so-called leaders. —June Jordan (cited in Quiroz-Martinez, 1988, ¶ 4-5)

Late poet June Jordan believed that poetry could engage the poet and the audience in a dialogical process based on an ethic of honesty, enabling people to identify and protect themselves against untruths. Such an understanding of poetry is rooted in philosophies of education for liberation and transformation, or “cultural action for freedom” (Freire, 1998).

In this chapter, I explore the emancipatory possibilities of two related art forms and spaces that merge poetry and politics—contemporary spoken word poetry and Hip Hop—through the stories and voices of young Muslims engaged in these cultural movements. Both contemporary spoken word and Hip Hop are rooted in ancient African traditions of oral/aural storytelling (Fisher, 2003, 2005).

Spoken word poetry is performative (Jordan & Miller, 1995) and it encompasses all oral/aural traditions of storytelling, language, rhythm, sound, beat, and music (Jordan & Muller, 1995). I am interested in spoken word poetry as “poetry for the people”—“consciousness-raising,” “comprehensible,” and “not hidden away from ordinary people” (Jordan & Muller, 1995).

Hip Hop has been described as “an art form, lifestyle, and communication tool for human rights and peace rooted in an ancient culture” (Diaz, 2012). Rose’s (1994) definition of Hip Hop culture remains one of the most comprehensive definitions to date:
Hip Hop is an Afro-diasporic cultural form, which attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of Black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame. (p. 71)

Rose’s (1994) definition captures the complexity of Hip Hop as a lived experience connected to the history and context of Afro-diasporic communities and other marginalized communities living in the United States. Hip Hop was created by marginalized African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Puerto Rican youth growing up in the South Bronx in the 1970s in response to urban renewal, de-industrialization, poverty, and racism (Rose, 1994). Hip Hop gave these youth the option of forging “alternative local identities” and “family-like bonds” with other youth in “fashions and language, street names, and most important, in establishing neighborhood crews and posses” (Rose, 1994, p. 34). Hip Hop also gave youth the choice of “fighting with words, art, dance or the ability to produce good beats” (Fernando, 1994 cited in Stapleton, 1998, p. 219), and it “enabled youth to create their own cultural space within the city that countered the poverty and alienation that surrounded them on a day-to-day basis” (Stapleton, 1998, pp. 219-220). Hip Hop consists of four main elements: MCing (rapping), DJing, graffiti art, and break-dancing. In this study, I am particularly interested in the fifth element of Hip Hop—knowledge—“The fifth element, as an education and self-reflective tool, offers hope, instills agency, and widens world perspective” (Diaz, 2012, ¶ 11).

Maha: “Okay, let them read about my religion and I will defend it.”

Maha, a young woman in her early 20s, was born in Algeria, where she lived and attended school until she was 8-years-old. Maha described her family as “privileged.” Her father was a medical doctor and her mother a French teacher. It was their privilege, she said, that enabled the family to “pick up and leave” shortly after the onset of the Algerian Civil War
(December 26, 1991—February 8, 2002). Maha and her family migrated to Canada in the 1990s, settling first in Montreal, and eventually in Toronto. In its early days, the war claimed the lives of family members and friends. Maha recalled, “My dad was working at the hospital at that time. He would stay late. There were bombs, murders… You’re a kid and you fear whether your dad will return.” Maha did not grow up discussing political issues with her parents at home, but she carried with her childhood memories of war and conflict. Maha’s parents focused on building their lives in Canada, and she was well aware of the challenges her father had faced securing employment. Her father had completed medical school in Algeria, but his foreign credentials were not recognized in Canada: “My father is a doctor… Typical immigrant story… He doesn’t practice here. He didn’t feel like going back to school. He is working in a bank now.” Maha’s mother found work as a French teacher in Islamic schools. Through her father’s “immigrant story,” Maha developed insight into inequitable immigrant and employment policies and practices in Canada. This lesson in Canadian citizenship and belonging is reserved for racialized migrants from the so-called Third World.

Maha had attended a private French school and madrasah, which was closed at the beginning of the Algerian Civil War. She believed that her prior travel experiences and encounters with diverse cultures and peoples facilitated her adjustment to her new life in Montreal: “We [Maha and her sibling] were able to adapt very fast because of the previous traveling experiences. We weren’t sheltered children. We met French children and African children in private school.” To avoid being ostracized by her Québécois peers, however, Maha created a story about herself: “When I first came to Montreal…I told them I was born in France. That was my story, and I stuck to it—pretty pathetic.” She felt that her “name was a burden,” but her “fair” hair and skin color, and her “thick French accent” made her story believable. Maha completed Grades 3 to 7 at a public school in Montreal.
Maha described two classroom-based learning experiences that catalyzed her exploration of the arts and Islam. A socio-political Hip Hop recording, shared by a Grade 7 French teacher, was transformative for Maha:

My Grade 7 teacher recommended that I study Muzion's song, Tel Pere, Tel Vice. The song had a profound effect on me. It talked about incest...I had never heard of incest before. The song awakened my consciousness and made me realize how sheltered I was.

After listening to the recording in the classroom, Maha brought it home to share with her mother. They were both moved to tears by the lyrics. The lyrics expanded Maha’s understanding of children’s lived experiences and of the pedagogical potential of poetry. As a secondary school student at a public French school in Toronto, she continued developing her creative writing and performance skills in English and drama classes.

In the aftermath of 9/11, a Grade 11 English teacher’s pedagogical intervention to challenge Islamophobia transformed Maha’s perspective on being Muslim: “He assigned an article that said the Quran compared Jews to swine...He asked what we thought. That pushed me to do my own research.” This activity motivated Maha to learn more about Islam and to re-examine what being Muslim meant to her. Maha explained the personal impact of 9/11 on her: “Prior to 9/11, I didn’t care about Islam very much. 9/11 really made me in defensive mode. I said, ‘Okay, let them read about my religion and I will defend it.’ It was about pride.” Although Maha had not “cared about Islam very much,” she carried the mark, “Muslim,” and felt compelled to educate her peers about Islam and Muslims:

In high school, I studied many different articles about Islam. The ones that affected me the most were Yasmin Mogahed's articles about women, hijab, and

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35 I understand Hip Hop and rap as socially and politically conscious, or “socio-political, when they focus on the social, economic, and political situation of oppressed people…” (Akom, 2009, p. 64).
Islam. This activity taught me to love my religion. It created the Muslim identity I currently hold and cherish. Of course, this identity has changed over time, it has been constructed and deconstructed and has taken on various shapes and forms.

Yasmin Mogahed’s writings transformed her perspective about Islam from an oppressive force to a liberating force in the lives of women and girls. This Grade 11 teacher’s pedagogical intervention to challenge Islamophobia, which had introduced students’ to multiple and conflicting perspectives about Islam and Muslims and created space for them to confront their personal biases, contributed to the development of Maha’s sense of herself as a young Muslim woman.

When I interviewed Maha for this study, she was working towards an undergraduate degree in French and Middle East studies. She explained, “I’m rediscovering my history, my past through the history I am studying today.” For Maha, 9/11 was more significant now that she could situate it in historical context:

I remember I was in Grade 9. This guy was like, “Yo, dude, the twin towers were blown up.” I didn’t know the twin towers…I didn’t know the history of 9/11…Now I look back. I’m a history student. The history of the United States, the prior World Trade Centre bombing, the historical relationship between the United States and Afghanistan, the Taliban, and Al-Qaeda… A million people died in Iraq since 9/11… I lived to see that…I lived history. That affects me now.

Through undergraduate courses such as *History of the Modern Middle East*, Maha developed more nuanced understandings of contemporary crises including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

I learned that the Arab world is and has been in a very sad state. My idealistic views of pan-Arabism with Gamal Abdel Nasser\(^{36}\) were once again shattered. The

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\(^{36}\) Gamel Abdel Nasser Hussein (1918—1970) was the second President of Egypt from 1956 until his death. As a colonel in the Egyptian army, he led the 1952 Egyptian Revolution catalyzing a new period of modernization, and socialist reform in Egypt with advancement of the pan-Arab movement.
conquest of Palestine was my favorite topic of discussion, and once again I was disappointed at the disunity of the Arabs and their betrayal of Palestine and the Palestinians.

Maha learned of the implication of Arab leaders in the plight of Palestinians. In an undergraduate course on modern Islamic thought, she was introduced to multiple and diverse Islamic scholars and their works: “We studied scholars, such as Tariq Ramadan and Muhammad Abduh. We compared Irshad Manji to Ali Shariati and Amina Wadud... I realized that there isn't one way to look at Islam… I had to accept that my view was not the only one.” Through this course on Modern Islamic Thought, she expanded her understanding of Islam.

After completing undergraduate studies, she planned to pursue Islamic studies in the Middle East: “I intend on moving to [the Middle East] to study with a shaykh. I strongly believe in the traditional way. You sit with a teacher. You learn from a teacher…I’m in the making.” Maha expressed particular interest in supporting Muslims through her future work: “What I do in life is going to revolve around that and the struggle of Muslims throughout the world… My issues are women, education, Palestine—if I could summarize it in a few words.” Maha’s political commitments and engagements reflected her social identities and binding solidarities to Muslim transnational communities and Palestine, disrupting national projects and ways of practicing citizenship within and beyond Canada.

**Mustafa: “I have to teach myself.”**

Mustafa, a young man in his mid-teens, was born, raised, and educated in the Greater Toronto Area. His parents had migrated to Canada from Tanzania in the 1990s to build a better life than was possible in their home country. In Canada, Mustafa’s father worked in the immigration and settlement sector and his mother volunteered at local public schools. The family
initially settled initially into an inner city Toronto neighborhood, but moved as soon as they could due to neighborhood safety issues. The new neighborhood was relatively safer.

Mustafa received his early political education at home. The family discussed African history, the relationship between Africans and Arabs, colonialism, and racism. His father had started a volunteer program that helps newcomers navigate Canadian society. Mustafa said of his father: “He loves to help others. I picked that up off of him.” Thus, Mustafa learned community building in part from his father, and from his mother, who served as a volunteer in local public schools. Within his family, Mustafa had various learning opportunities that appear to support his political commitments: discussing political issues with his parents, and observing his parents’ efforts to improve their communities.

Mustafa attended a public elementary school, and was completing his secondary education when he spoke with me. He planned to pursue undergraduate studies in the social sciences and humanities. Mustafa received his early Islamic education at home and madrasah. Mustafa was a secondary school student when I interviewed him for this study. He spoke about some of his difficulties at school, including harassment from Muslim and non-Muslim peers. His Muslim peers, who were predominantly of South Asian origin, subjected him to racist stereotypes of young Black/African men, including “criminal.” These peers did not even recognize Mustafa as Muslim: “You would think Muslims were raised with diversity. I’m not just pointing at non-Muslims.” Mustafa’s non-Muslim peers subjected him to racist and Islamophobic stereotypes, calling him “terrorist” and sounding “boom” when he walked by. He described difficulties with school staff, including an administrator who refused to recognize the Muslim Students’ Association as an official student organization. Mustafa said that the administrator justified his refusal by stating that the local school board no longer endorsed faith-based student organizations. Although Mustafa’s bid for officiating the Muslim Students’
Association was unsuccessful, he challenged the authority of the administrator by reviewing the school board policies on student groups himself. Through this experience, he learned, “I have to teach myself.” Rather than allowing him to be defeated by this particular limit-situation (e.g., posed by a school administrator ‘misusing’ school board regulations), Mustafa determined that he would take responsibility for his own learning (e.g., of school board regulations on faith-based student organizations).

Mustafa highlighted the efforts of a World Religions teacher to dispel stereotypes about Islam and Muslims as an important formal educational experience: “My teacher is Jewish. When we studied Islam we did a roundtable discussion my teacher asked, ‘What do you think about Islam?’ Students said things like, ‘oppression’, ‘terrorism’, and explosions.’ She tried to kill stereotypes of Islam. That was inspiring.” Mustafa’s World Religions teacher apparently had used a problem-posing, dialogical approach to create an open and inclusive classroom climate, in which Mustafa and his classmates were encouraged to examine their own Islamophobic biases, and discuss and debate related stereotypes. Mustafa’s World Religions teacher inspired him to assume the role of educator, and to inform others about Islam and Muslims.

Outside of secondary school, Mustafa was actively involved in a Muslim youth organization, which provided leadership opportunities for young Muslims. For Mustafa, the peer network that he had developed through his work in the Muslim youth organization provided social support that helped to offset some of the difficulties he had with peers at his secondary school. He felt an immediate connection to the other youth involved in the organization: “The Muslim youth I met were going through similar challenges. I had known them for a week, but I felt like I had known them my whole life.” In addition to providing social supports, the organization provided Mustafa with opportunities to develop his leadership skills. Acting in a leadership role, Mustafa was responsible for organizing educational and recreational
opportunities for the youth. He was increasingly involved in educating other Muslim youth and had recently given a presentation at an Islamic conference. The focus of the presentation was Black history and Islam: “There was Malcolm X. There was Bilal\textsuperscript{37}. We talked about that…People came up to me after to say it changed their perception of Black history and Islam…I plan to give presentations on other topics that aren’t talked about as much, like Islam and environment.”

Mustafa had attended madrasah on weekends since he was 8-years-old, including a makeshift madrasah set up in the back of a butcher shop. He said of that experience: “It was ineffective because it was crowded in the back… It took forever to get your turn. By the time you got your turn, you forgot.” He expressed desire to continue pursuing Islamic studies independently to support his work in local Muslim communities: “If I want to maintain this Muslim activism I’m going to need the education to back it up.” Mustafa reiterated the importance of seeking knowledge, and, in this case, about Islam and Muslims to inform his activist work in Muslim communities. He enacted citizenship by educating other Muslim youth about Islam. Some of his peers within the Muslim youth organization were involved in local spoken word youth movements, and encouraged him to write and perform poetry.

\textbf{Talib: “Some of my earliest memories are of rallies.”}

Talib, a young man in his early 20s, was born in Toronto, Canada, and raised in an inner city Toronto neighborhood. His parents found temporary refuge in Egypt after escaping persecution in Ethiopia. They received political asylum from the Canadian government and entered the country in the 1980s. Talib and his parents are Oromo, an oppressed ethnic minority

\textsuperscript{37} Bilal ibn Rabah al-Habashi (Peace Be Upon Him) was an Ethiopian slave born in Mecca in the late 6th century, between 578 and 582. He was among the first slaves freed by Abu Bakr. Bilal was known for his beautiful voice and Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) chose him as his muezzin, making him the first muezzin in Islamic history. He died sometime between 638 and 642.
in East Africa. Talib explained, “The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in all of East
Africa, the largest in Ethiopia, but a very, very oppressed group. The majority of Oromo are
Muslim and Ethiopia is a Christian state. We are indigenous people. We are native. We are
Muslim.” Talib’s parents had been actively involved in the youth-led Oromo liberation
movement, and, therefore, targeted by government forces.

Talib received his early political education at home. Participating in Oromo solidarity
activities with his parents were among his earliest childhood memories:

Some of my earliest memories are of rallies… Back in the day there was this big
cultural fair and parade… The Oromo had a float. I was a little kid, 4 or 5 years
old, leading the parade, dressed in traditional Oromo clothing and yelling, ‘Oromo
liberation! Oromo liberation!’ My parents were always fighting for Oromo
liberation.

Talib’s parents exercised their Canadian citizenship rights to raise awareness about the plight of
the Oromo people, to struggle for enhanced citizenship rights for the Oromo people, and to lobby
the Canadian government to defend their human rights. Talib was too young to understand fully
the significance of that early political education: “As active as my parents were, I didn’t really
know what was going on… Now that I’m in my 20s, I’m learning my father’s stories.”

Talib attended Toronto public schools: a public elementary school in with a large
European Jewish student population, a public middle school with large Italian and Jamaican
populations, and a public secondary school with a large Black/African student population.
Recognized as gifted and artistically talented in elementary school, Talib was chosen to
participate in school plays, including one written to commemorate the United Nations-approved
motion advocating restitution for Chinese migrants who had labored to build North American
railroads: “There was a big play called, ‘Iron Road.’ Our school was chosen to do a smaller
production. I was cast as a Chinese revolutionary worker… The production was elite: I was the only Black kid in the group.” These unique educational opportunities had separated Talib from his Black/African peers. Talib’s negotiation of what it means to be Black was a prominent theme in his life story.

Talib was involved in an extra-curricular “African Studies” program: “The 10 Black kids in the school would gather together and learn about drumming. It was very narrow-minded. The members of the Afro-Caribbean community who ran the program had a weird romanticized idea of Africa.” Talib had struggled with what it meant to be Black, African, Oromo and Muslim: “I had a halo of confusion around me—being Oromo, but not being Oromo; being Muslim, but not being Muslim. I wasn’t Caribbean. I wasn’t mainstream Black…I was all these ‘Others,’ but I found a way to fit in.” Talib rejected a singular construction of Blackness: “People forget that within the Black identity there is so much diversity.” Although the “African Studies” program promoted a singular Black/African identity, it also provided a space in which Talib could explore articulations of Blackness and supported his exploration of Afro-diasporic histories. Talib was actively involved in organizing Black History Month activities. As a middle school student he continued to negotiate what it meant to be Black, joining the basketball team to fit in with his peers: “All the Black kids played basketball.”

From elementary through his first year of secondary school, Talib attended a local madrasah, primarily attended by youth from East African communities, on weekends. The madrasah was closed down immediately after 9/11. Talib was “happy” that he no longer had to attend “Muslim school.” He did not feel personally concerned about post-9/11 backlash against Muslims: “My friend said, ‘Muslims watch out.’ It didn’t have to do with me, because I’m black… Blacks aren’t associated with Muslims… My skin color protected me… It was different for South Asian kids.” As a young Black/African male, however, Talib had already developed a
sense of himself as vulnerable to police harassment and misconduct (as discussed previously in chapter six).

By the time Talib entered secondary school, he was living a “double life”: “I was living a double life. I was selling weed. I was also a squeaky clean kid.” He struggled with feelings of guilt: “I would randomly fast here and there. For the month of Ramadan I would quit doing everything. I would get really into it... I was the best of the worst.” Like Talib’s elementary school teachers, his secondary school teachers and a vice-principal recognized his academic and social potential: “A teacher and administrator forced me to take strictly academic classes…I didn’t have to take transitional courses. The pressure was a catalyst for change. People believed in me.” Talib credited the vice-principal, a young Black woman, with helping him realize his leadership potential:

My high school VP was a young Black woman. She took a special interest in me. She recognized I was leader of brats. I could control them. When I was in Grade 9, the student council president was a black sister. She took a special interest in me too. In Grade 9 and 10, I always in the office for dumb stuff… The VP would give me random responsibilities. She made me responsible for morning announcements now. Before that, I would come to school late everyday. She knew I loved being on the microphone. She said, “If you don’t do it, there won’t be morning announcements.” Slowly she was shaping me into a leader… She put a lot of pressure on me, but I stepped up.

In addition, the vice-principal and a teacher forced him to take only advanced level classes. Through his commitments to the larger school community and academic success, he started to realize that he was a leader. His peers recognized Talib as leader, and he was elected school president and valedictorian. The academic and social support that Talib received from the vice-principal helped him complete his secondary education and plan for post-secondary education.
Talib won a scholarship that afforded him the opportunity to attend university, making his parents proud, but dropped out after the first month. As the first member of his family attending university in Canada, Talib felt heavy with the pressure to succeed: “I was only Black guy at graduation. I was valedictorian. I got scholarships… My parents were so proud...My dad was living through me, but I was feeling a huge amount of pressure.” Compounding this pressure was a sense of isolation from his peer group: “Education can separate people. Pursuing a post-secondary education created tension between my friends and me.” Advancing through the formal education system had increased Talib’s opportunities for social mobility, and, subsequently, distanced him from his friends who had not received the same kind of support from educators and who had not been able to pursue higher education. Without the support of his friends, Talib suffered. For a while he relied on alcohol. Eventually, seeing the negative impact that he had on younger boys who had looked up to him forced him to re-examine his actions and direction. Talib was forced to re-examine his actions and direction. He started channeling his energy into youth work in civil society and government (municipal) sectors, as well as writing. As I discuss later in this chapter, Talib worked on promoting political engagement among Black/African youth in Toronto. He decided to return to university and to focus on deepening his Islamic knowledge and developing his Islamic practice. When I interviewed Talib, he was pursuing an undergraduate degree in the social sciences, writing and performing poetry, and working with young men in prisons.

Talib took comfort in an Islamic teaching about the man who had murdered 99 people. Then, he felt remorse, asked for forgiveness, and received Allah’s mercy. Talib described a recent encounter with a former classmate that catalyzed critical self-reflection and action. This former classmate had been a pious Muslim, and had taken upon himself to book a room at school

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38 This Islamic teaching is based on *hadith* from *Sahih Bukhari*, volume 4, book 56, number 676.
on Friday afternoons so that Muslim students could pray together. However, he had not received the same kinds of educational and professional opportunities that Talib had received. Talib described him as follows:

He wasn’t a popular guy. He was very into science. I had so much respect for him. I saw him this year at a Toronto mosque… He didn’t finish school. He was working security… That was an eye-opener. He was so religious, but he didn’t get the same opportunities I got… He looked happy… That was amazing to me… He struck my heart… Me, that guy who was more kafir[^39] had too many blessings.

When I interviewed Talib, he had just assumed a leadership role at his university’s Muslim Students’ Association. He had not thought that he could be part of the Muslim Students’ Association because he was still trying to establish a regular Islamic practice, but he realized that he could contribute by applying his insight into community organizing and building, which he had learned through his work in local Black/African communities to the Muslim Students’ Association. He explained, “I’m Muslim before everything. This year, I made that a priority.”

Knowledge and Community Building through Poetry: “I thought about my struggles and started typing.”

Maha, Mustafa, and Talib reflected on their development as spoken word poets, and their engagement in spoken word movements. As described previously, Maha was intrigued by the possibilities of poetry as a form of creative self-expression when her Grade 7 French teacher used socially conscious Hip Hop to teach critical literacy skills. She continued experimenting with language and expression throughout secondary school, writing poetry, taking drama courses, and “free-styling”: “I love free-styling. I had rap battles with African guys at high school.” She attended some poetry performances and also followed Hip Hop music entrepreneur

[^39]: The Arabic term “kafir” is usually translated as “non-believer” or “infidel.”
Russell Simmon’s televised series, *Def Poetry Jam* (2002 to 2007), which introduced the work of several American poets, including Muslim American poets to wider audiences across the United States and Canada. Maha named Suheir Hammad—a Palestinian Muslim poet and political activist living in Brooklyn, New York—as an inspiration.

Maha’s poetry reflected her multiple identities and affiliations, her experiences as an Algerian-born young Muslim woman living in Canada, her travel experiences, and her discussions about religion and politics with friends. She said, “I took history courses to help in my journey.” Regarding her approach to learning, she said: “I don’t limit myself to Islamic knowledge... Some Muslim scholars were zoologists, anthropologists, jurists, writers, engineers, etc. In order for me to come up with a conscious a philosophy I need to study a lot of different things.” She continued,

> I can’t sit there and only use Chomsky’s books to study the Palestine-Israel conflict. I’m going to need look at the founder of Zionism. I need to study the other perspective as well. I try to study a lot of different things. Black consciousness has been very, very influential. It has definitely shaped my view of a lot of things. When I study colonialism I can’t help but study the slave trade. I study different slave narratives, different philosophers… It’s interesting to study racist French philosophers… I always thought they were so wonderful… I would have never known that John Locke was a slave trader.

Maha’s learning process aligned with approaches education for liberation and transformation: it involved critically exploring and questioning with multiple and conflicting perspectives, hegemonic master narratives and counter-stories. Maha also credited her friends for expanding and deepening her worldview. She had befriended followers of Rastafari\(^{40}\), who had introduced

\(^{40}\) Rastafari is an African-centered spiritual movement that emerged in the 1930s in Jamaica, following the coronation of Haile Selassie I as King of Ethiopia in 1930s. Followers of Rastafari believe that Haile Selassie I is an incarnation of God, and that he will return to Africa its peoples living in exile as a result of colonization and the

Maha’s poetry became a medium for expressing her developing political and cultural critique. She said of her earlier poetry, “I stuck to the political a lot. It was cool. It was a process of finding myself as an artist. After a while it gets heavy. I’m tired of hearing people rant about the system. F--- the government…” Maha described her recent poetry as less direct,

I think there is a way to get to people without drilling their heads with the violence. The last poem I wrote was about poverty and third world children. It’s little kids trying to sell what they can at the red light. The hustle. I couldn’t say there are kids who are suffering… I figured, give the audience the context of the red light.

She articulated performance as a form of “teaching,” and poetry as a consciousness-raising, pedagogical tool. Through her poetry, Maha aspired to educate others about justice and human rights issues.

Mustafa expressed his spiritual change and action through poetry. As described previously, Mustafa spoke at length of his struggles with the bullying he was experiencing at school: “People pick on me because I’m African and Muslim. They say, ‘He’s dirty. He steals

planes and blows them up.” Mustafa told me about a time when he responded by punching the student who had shoved him into a locker. After the incident, he sought the guidance of his father, a man that Mustafa looked up to as a role model. Mustafa’s father related his own experiences as a boy, as well as lessons from the life of Prophet Muhammad: “I started reading about the Prophet. The Prophet was harassed, but he stayed humble. If he can do it, I can do it.” In addition to turning to his father for support and the life lessons of Prophet Muhammad for guidance, he started exploring non-violent ways to express his anger. Outside of school, Mustafa was involved in a Muslim youth organization, and his Muslim peers were able to provide social supports that were not available to him at school. Some of Mustafa’s Muslim peers were also getting involved in the local spoken-word and poetry slam scene, but it was while watching a 2002 film called, 8 Mile, starring rap artist, Eminem, that Mustafa thought that he too could use words to express his anger instead of physical violence:

I was watching 8 mile by Eminem. I felt like I could relate to him. He was this nervous boy with struggles. I had these struggles. I didn’t know how to talk them out. They were in my head. They created tension… He admitted his weaknesses. I felt like I could do that, too. I could try poetry and spoken word. I thought about my struggles and started typing. An hour later I had this decent piece of poetry.

Mustafa’s first poem told the story of that violent incident, as well as other related personal struggles or jihad. The Arabic term “jihad” translates into “struggle”—a religious duty of Muslims. Jihad encompasses three types of struggles: an internal struggle to maintain faith, the struggle to improve the Muslim community, and the struggle to defend Islam. However, the term jihad is often translated and interpreted as “holy war.” Mustafa’s jihad or struggle was to find a nonviolent way to express his emotions and feelings. Since that first poem, Mustafa wrote and publicly performed several poems on being Muslim, peace and conflict, and even the plight of child soldiers. Mustafa believed that it was his responsibility to educate people about Islam and
Muslims: “I want to change stereotypes...I realize one of the key things is not reacting violently. It gives them another reason to pick on me, ‘the angry Muslim is going to punch me in the head’. That’s not cool.” Mustafa’s understanding of himself as an agent with the capacity to effect personal change and social change was particularly evident in his determination to refrain from reacting to Islamophobic and racist discrimination and thereby not allowing others to define him, and, instead, to focus on creating meaningful learning opportunities for himself and others.

The devastation of Black communities during Toronto’s so-called “Summer of the Gun” was a catalyst for Talib’s development as a spoken word poet. Shaken by the homicides of Black/African boys and young men, Talib started exploring ways to support political engagement among Black/African youth in Toronto. He became involved in a lobby group for young people interested in municipal politics:

I became involved in the lobby group and took a large role in it. White kids were getting into politics. Black kids were getting killed… I was about engaging Black kids…I started getting into ‘edutainment’. I thought we could use arts to get their attention.

Talib started making connections between the arts, education, and social change. As described previously, Talib had been engaged in arts-based educational programming in school. He was already a self-described “closet writer,” journaling about what was happening in his communities:

I had a lot to say during the “Summer of the Gun.” I rapped in high school. I wrote a piece about what I felt about society…He said, “That’s dope. That’s spoken word.” I was like, “What’s that?” I went to an open mic night at a local club. I saw people performing. I thought I could do that …I got up on stage…People loved it. I was saying something unique… I was teaching kids.

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46 The “Summer of the Gun” was term coined by Toronto media because of the proliferation of gun-related shootings and homicides. In 2005, there were 144 shootings, and 52 gun-related homicides.
While on stage at the open mic spoken word event, sharing his lived experiences and perspectives of gun violence in his communities, he realized the consciousness-raising, pedagogical potential of spoken word poetry. Talib spoke of the importance of poetry, and, more broadly, about speaking out against oppression. He felt compelled to use his rights to freedom of expression, particularly because people were silenced elsewhere:

People were killed for their opinions. I will speak up… History books can lie to you. The system doesn’t always work for you. We, as young people, have the right to speak up. We have voices that are valuable. We need to equip all people with ability to speak up… Poetry is another form of communication.

He wanted to encourage young people to develop their communication skills, so that they narrate their own stories and counter hegemonic narratives. Talib conducted poetry-writing workshops for youth. The workshops aimed to pass down the tradition of storytelling to younger generations, and to help youth improve their communication abilities, so that they could effectively express themselves, and to help them develop a critical analysis of the world. Talib said,

As Muslims we are supposed to join good and forbid evil; by doing acts of good in this world, you are respecting the authority of Allah and it becomes an act of good. And for me, I come with a mindset of helping these kids to speak up against evil.

Through writing and performing poetry, these young poets created dialogical spaces in which they could experiment with language and expression, explore and map their social identities and binding solidarities to their communities, critically reflect on issues concerning them and their communities, and articulate their emotional lived experiences and perspectives.
Hip Hop Foundations of Muslim Youth Citizenship

Contemporary spoken word poetry has a long and complex history that is powerfully influenced by Hip Hop. Maha, Mustafa and Talib spoke of the influence of Hip Hop on their development as spoken word poets. Nine other youth made some reference to Hip Hop culture in their interviews for this study—more than any other cultural movement. I now address these references, and present one story that demonstrates the power of Hip Hop as a form of liberatory praxis.

Aisha had watched Black Entertainment Television (BET) “24/7” until the fatal shooting of her brother by a Toronto police officer forced her to expand her worldview. BET has been widely criticized for preserving and perpetuating racism against Black/African-American communities by shaping how Black/African-Americans are perceived in the popular North American social imaginary, and by adversely affecting how young Black/African-American viewers perceive themselves. A significant part of the programming is mainstream rap music. Aisha suggested that watching BET had kept her closed off from what was happening in the world around her. After the fatal shooting, Aisha started engaging with and reading the world.

Karim had grappled with contradictory messaging that he had received through commercialized rap music about what it means to be a young Black/African man. He negotiated and eventually rejected as his identity the form of Hip Hop that focused on materialism, violence, and disrespect towards women, because it did not align with his personal values.

In contrast, Zayn had been known as the “Hip Hop head” at his secondary school, and he credited politically conscious Hip Hop music, which was “always circulating in his head through his head sets,” for helping him get through secondary school. Zayn took an activist citizenship role by choosing politically conscious Hip Hop as the soundtrack of his identity. He also
supported Hip Hop literacy activities for children and youth from urban low-income communities of color.

The political music of rap metal band Rage Against the Machine catalyzed Abdul-Haq’s political and academic engagement. He printed out frequently asked questions about the band’s lyrics to help him make sense of the political content, which addressed issues including capitalism and imperialism, and to develop his own critical literacy skills so that he could also write powerful lyrics. Abdul-Haq also started applying himself in his English, History, and Political Science courses at secondary school, and various teachers provided additional academic supports that helped him successfully complete his courses and gain admissions to university. Abdul-Haq also founded a political Hip Hop student group at university, and supported Hip Hop literacy initiatives for children and youth.

Layaal informed me that on her way to meet me she had been listening to American-Peruvian rapper Immortal Technique whose lyrics addressed issues of classism, racism, poverty, religion, and government. Layaal’s musical tastes were influenced by the Black/African youth with whom she had grown up, and by her parents who had played Lebanese resistance songs on the record player at home.

Amina, Asmara, Salsabil, and their work with Somali girls and young women was informed by feminist perspectives forwarded by Emcee Queen Latifah’s through rap lyrics that addressed gender-based violence in homes, communities, and Hip Hop culture. Amina, Asmara, and Salsabil identified with a feminist Hip Hop soundtrack and a culture of respect for women and girls, a culture that formed the foundations of their work with Somali girls and young women.
Zaynab explained the significance of the Hip Hop mixes that her Muslim brother (who lived with their father in Toronto) had made for her:

Hip Hop was my saving grace. My brother would make me mixes… They were talking about politics…I grew up in the Public Enemy days… There were cultural signifiers you could latch on to. I saw my brother had links into community organizing and cultural production pieces that were very Muslim. This artist is Muslim. They had pride. I didn’t have that access point to be prideful. I was still trying to fit into the white mainstream.

Zaynab was living with her mother and stepfather in a predominantly white suburb, and was attending Catholic school. The Hip Hop mixes that her brother made for her included references to Islam, and several artists were Muslims themselves. Public Enemy, for example, was an American Hip Hop group known for their socially and politically conscious lyrics, including criticism of the United States government and its institutions (including police and media), and concern for the wellbeing of African-American communities. Public Enemy called African-American communities to action, to begin to understand how state power impacted them, and to develop strategies for resistance. They were also supporters of the Nation of Islam and the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Although Zaynab had been “trying to fit into the White mainstream,” the homemade Hip Hop mixes had provided a possibility for her to develop alternate identities and solidarities.

Khadijeh: “Why was I drawn to Malcolm X? From Grade 5 and onwards I was heavily into Hip Hop.”

Khadijeh had been disengaged in classrooms throughout most of her schooling, because she felt that she did not “belong.” However, she was passionate about learning and loved to read:
“I read a lot. Reading was what I was mostly engaged with. My friend and I would skip class and go to the public library and take out books, anything I could get my hands on.”

Hip Hop music informed Khadijah’s choice of reading materials. She recalled a conflict with her Grade 7 homeroom teacher over the focus of an assigned book report: “I remember wanting to do my book report on Malcolm X. The teacher said I should study Anne Frank… I had read something about Malcolm X. You know those mini biographies for kids? I think I pulled something like that from the library.” Khadijah explained that she had become interested in learning about Malcolm X, because he was referenced in the Hip Hop music that she had been listening to: “Why was I drawn to Malcolm X? From Grade 5 and onwards I was heavily into Hip Hop.” Thus, Hip Hop music influenced her choice of reading materials. It also introduced her to a powerful pedagogical model of resistance—African-American minister and human rights activist Malcolm X (also known by his Muslim name as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz).

Hip Hop exposed Khadijah to feminist role models: “Salt n’ Pepa gave me three females talking politics. I even remember not really understanding HIV/AIDS. I was too young to understand what was going on. Salt n’ Pepa had a skit about HIV/AIDS on one of their albums.” The all-female Hip Hop group Salt n’ Pepa served as powerful model of a collective of politically engaged and socially conscious women.

Hip Hop also expanded Khadijah’s worldview by connecting her to Afro-diasporic histories, cultures, and communities:

I felt very drawn to the African-American experience in the United States…. I finally got around to reading the *Official Biography of Malcolm X*. I read James Baldwin. I read Frantz Fanon. I read bell hooks. By accident I read, *Killing Rage*, by bell hooks… The book starts with her saying she is on the airplane and had a sudden urge to kill the white man sitting beside here. She talks about the trauma of racism. To be honest, I wasn’t reading the work of Arab or Muslim writers. I
was reading African-American writers with the exception of Fanon… That was my main political education. I have to credit that. The African-American experience was not my experience, but I learned a lot from those writers.

Hip Hop catalyzed Khadijeh’s exploration of scholarship by intellectuals, including James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon and bell hooks. Through their scholarship, which Khadijeh accessed through the public library system, she learned about histories of colonialism and racism, and started making connections to her own history of dispossession and displacement as a Palestinian and to her lived experience as a Muslim and Arab in a western liberal democracy.

In her identification with Hip Hop, Khadijeh took an activist citizenship role in her agency as a young person, and engaged in a process of critical reflection and action—constructing and re-constructing her multiple identities (e.g., female, first-generation immigrant, low-income, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim) in contrast to dominant identities prescribed to her.

The above references to Hip Hop demonstrate its relevance to these young people’s lives—a fundamental tenet of liberatory and transformative education is that it begins with students’ cultures and moves outward to the world as they read it. Khadijeh and many others turned to Hip Hop as a resource for naming their worlds, for locating themselves to one another, and for asserting a stronger sense of self.

**Summary**

Spoken word poetry and Hip Hop culture provide resources and spaces for liberatory and transformative possibilities for many of the young people in my study. They are youthful contemporary art forms that engage youth as audiences and performers in dialogical non-formal education and informal learning.
Maha, Mustafa and Talib were influenced by Hip Hop culture, and intrigued by the pedagogical possibilities of spoken word poetry. Contemporary spoken word poetry has a long and complex history influenced by Hip Hop, and both spoken word poetry and Hip Hop are rooted in rich Afro-diasporic traditions of storytelling, teaching life lessons, and preserving community histories (Fisher, 2005; Sutton, 2004). Contemporary spoken word poetry has and continues to create cultural and political spaces for Others to “speak a true word” and to overcome “silencing.” Language is a site of this struggle. For the poets involved in this study writing about political issues, such as gun violence in black/African communities in Toronto, *jihad*, status of Muslim women, and suicide bombing became a tool for resistance and a mechanism for activist citizenship expression.

Maha, Mustafa and Talib used poetry writing to reflect critically about issues affecting them and their communities, to express their emotional responses to these issues, and to assert their social identities and binding solidarities. Through the act of writing poetry they were reclaiming their voices, histories and futures, and thereby becoming “makers of their own way” (Freire, 1970, 1998). Maha, Mustafa and Talib perceived themselves as “teachers” and the act of performing poetry before audiences as potentially “educational.” Through the act of performing poetry before audiences, they created cultural and political spaces for teaching and learning in out-of-school contexts where poets and audiences can learn about one another’s lives and forge new relationships. They understood poetry as a consciousness-raising, pedagogical tool, and were committed to using the tool to disrupt generalizations and stereotypes of Muslim and other communities. Poets and audiences who participate in spoken word can “challenge stereotypical representations of their community, redefine their cultural identity on their own terms, and work at becoming agents of change in their own environment” (Sutton, 2004, p. 215). Maha, Mustafa and Talib created cultural and political spaces in which identity was not limited to
generalizations and stereotypes that had negatively impacted self-image of youth from Muslim and other communities.

The stories presented in this chapter illuminate Hip Hop’s influence in the young Muslim activists informal learning. In my study, it is apparent that Hip Hop nurtured their critical consciousness by naming concrete situations of oppression, by providing powerful pedagogical models of resistance, and by offering them alternative possibilities for the development and the expression of their identities and voices. The young Muslim activists in my study suggest that Hip Hop and spoken word poetry are integral to their cultures, providing dialogical spaces for knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, critiqued, and produced.
Chapter Nine:
Citizenship as Transnational Commitments and Engagements:
The Question of Palestine

In chapters five, six, seven, and eight, I re-told the stories of 16 young Muslim activists and discussed their efforts to transform concrete situations of oppression in their local communities. In this chapter, I re-tell the stories of two young Muslim activists—Aamanee and Maliha—and their involvement in local university campus-based Palestinian solidarity activities. This involvement offers a case for understanding young Muslims’ relationships with multiple communities in Canada and beyond, as well as their efforts to transform the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through local action. In addition to re-telling the stories of Aamanee and Maliha, it explores other participants’ engagements with the question of Palestine. These young Muslims’ narratives provide glimpses into their critical exploration and questioning of the gendered complexities of social movements, the religious nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the interconnectedness of liberation struggles of the First Peoples of Canada, Black South Africans, and Palestinians.

Aamanee, Maliha, and the Palestinian Solidarity Movement

Aamanee: “People were acting, speaking out.”

Aamanee, a young woman in her late 20s, was born in Kuwait to parents each originally from different parts of the Middle East (Iran and presently Occupied Palestinian Territories). The family lived in an apartment complex with a large population of Palestinians, Iranians, and Syrians: “We lived in an apartment building. There were two apartment buildings surrounded by a wall. It was like one big family.” Just prior to the First Gulf War, when Aamanee was 9-years-old, her family migrated to Canada and settled in small southwestern Ontario city with large
Persian and Arab diasporic communities. Due to difficulties finding stable employment in Canada, Aamanee’s father had returned to Kuwait to work while Aamanee and her siblings stayed with their mother and completed their schooling in Canada. Aamanee spent summers in Kuwait with her father. She held Canadian and Iranian passports.

Aamanee recalled overhearing whispered conversations between her mother and maternal grandmother about Palestine and the plight of Palestinians. Aamanee’s maternal grandparents had walked from Palestine to Lebanon along with hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians in 1948. When Aamanee entered university and started getting involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work, she started asking more questions, “I would ask [my mother] about what happened when she left Palestine. I would ask about refugee camps, and family I never met… That’s when she would talk to me… She never said, ‘This is what happened.’ I started asking.” Although politics, particularly the question of Palestine, had not always been discussed openly at home, Aamanee felt her mothers’ displacement and connection to Palestine.

Aamanee began her elementary schooling at a private British school in Kuwait. The administrators at the school gave Aamanee an English name, which, in their opinion, was “easier to pronounce” than her given Arabic name. The oppressive act of re-naming Aamanee seemed to alter her sense of self. She used the English name for many years, and it seemed to reflect her ambivalence about her religious and ethnic identities. She described her first few years at school in Canada as “very difficult.” The public elementary school had a large population of children from newcomer families. While Aamanee was bullied by some of the other children, teachers reached out to her and other newcomer children. Aamanee played an active role in the classroom and the wider school community, as a teacher’s helper, as a translator for other newcomer Arabic-speaking children, and as a member of the choir. Teachers who provided caring and personalized support enabled Aamanee to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom and the
wider school community. Aamanee attended a Catholic secondary school, and joined the school’s competitive track and field team. By the end of secondary school she had dropped extra-curricular activities to spend time with her then boyfriend: “Towards the end of high school I wasn’t really involved in any extra-curricular activities. I wasn’t allowed to date. Any extra time I had I would go and meet my boyfriend then go and run track.” Aamanee believed that this relationship also added to her ambivalence about her religious and ethnic identities, as she wanted to fit in with her boyfriend’s peers and family.

When Aamanee began a graduate degree program at a Toronto university, she decided to get involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work. Unlike at her previous university, the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement in Toronto was visible and active. She observed, “People were acting, speaking out.” She started studying the Palestine-Israel conflict, and participating in discussions and information sharing through social networking sites. She accepted an invitation to attend a meeting organized by a Palestinian solidarity group. She joined the group and affiliated with several other campus-based groups involved in the movement, forging her Palestinian identity and solidarity.

On 9/11, Aamanee was on her way to class at university when she learned of the terrorist attacks in the United States. The attacks were for her the impetus to re-focus on Islam and what it meant to be Muslim: “It helped and pushed me to learn about the religion… I almost felt like it was my duty to learn more so that I could give that positive impression to people.” Aamanee had received her early Islamic education at home:

Because I was in Kuwait, the British school, you had religion classes twice a week. Second was family. When I was younger my mother would sit me down and teach me the Qur'an. As I got older it was never like it’s time to study the religion now. When I came to Canada, my mother enrolled me into a Sunday school. I would learn Islam and Arabic. That lasted for about a year. After that it
was always me I would read books. I would ask my brothers to send me CDs and books about the religion. I pretty much learned it myself.

By the time she completed her undergraduate degree, Aamanee had reclaimed the Arabic name that she had been given by her parents at birth. She started studying and practicing Islam, again. After completing her teaching degree, she returned to Kuwait to work as a classroom teacher for a short while. She said of her return, “My return to Kuwait brought me closer to Islam and Arabness—hearing the adhan\(^47\) and being around my family.” She told me that her summer visits to Kuwait enabled her to reconnect with her father as well as to immerse herself in an Islamic way of life.

Aamanee felt deeply connected to Persian and Arab cultures, and actively participated in cultural activities within both diasporic communities in Canada. She said of her Canadian national identification, “I never say I am Canadian unless I’m talking about my nationality. Yes, I’m Canadian. In terms of culture and ethnicity, I don’t identify…I am just a passport holder.” Aamanee seemed to distinguish between being Canadian and having Canadian citizenship. Aamanee recognized that having Canadian citizenship enabled her to practice a flexible form of citizenship, and drew on rights and protections accorded to her as a Canadian citizen to work to effect change in Palestine through Palestinian solidarity work in Toronto or to work to effect change in Kuwait through working with schoolchildren in Kuwaiti schools. She understood that the protections accorded to her through Canadian citizenship allowed her to exercise rights that she did not have living in Kuwait or in Palestine under occupation.

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\(^{47}\) The *adhan* is the Arabic term for the Islamic call to prayer.
Maliha: “I wanted to be like my mom.”

Maliha, a young woman in her early 20s, was born into a Central American Catholic family. Her mother decided to migrate from Panama to Canada to pursue post-secondary education in social work. Maliha was 2-years-old when she arrived in Canada with her mother and younger sibling. Her mother “struggled” to provide for her young family, and Maliha and her younger sibling slept in the office in which their mother worked because they did not have another place to sleep some nights. Maliha said of her mother: “She didn’t want us to know we were poor.” Maliha told me that she learned from her mother’s example as a single mother and immigrant, and described her mother (and her maternal grandmother) as “independent” and “very strong.” Maliha’s mother was her first Islamic teacher and feminist role model.

Although raised a Catholic, Maliha’s mother was drawn to Islam, which she found liberating and something that she wanted for her young daughters. Maliha said that she “grew up in two worlds,” and that she traversed with relative ease between her immediate Muslim family and extended Catholic family. She talked about how social and political issues were discussed “all the time” at home: “With my mom it was about women’s rights, what it means to be a feminist and Muslim. We had these discussions from a young age. What does Islam say about women?” Maliha described her stepfather, who joined the family some time after their arrival in Canada, as important in the development of her political commitments and engagements:

My stepdad grew up under Apartheid in South Africa. We would talk about war and occupation. We attended Nation of Islam events. We weren’t part of the Nation of Islam, but my stepdad loved the energy and the speech…I didn’t understand the language, but I understood the feelings of empowerment and passion.
Maliha was exposed to Islamic and feminist ethics, and critical race and anti-colonial analyses by her parents, and these values and frameworks continue to inform her justice work.

From her mother, Maliha also learned how to build community: “My mother would build community with other single mothers. We played with their kids.” The politics of Maliha’s mother were expressed in more personalized “do-it-yourself” (DIY) activism. Her mother’s personal experiences of isolation as a newcomer to Canada and barriers limiting access to recreational and social opportunities for Muslim women were the impetus for creating an organization facilitating access to affordable and religiously-sensitive opportunities for other Muslim women: “It was recreation programs for Muslim women. She started female-only swimming. She started booking pools.” Her mother modeled that she could effect positive change in the lives of other Muslim women. Maliha started wearing hijab when she was 7-years-old to be like her mother: “I wanted to be like my mom. That’s why I started wearing it…She never forced me. She told me not to wear the hijab…I was stubborn. I continued to wear it. She didn’t want me to feel limited because I wore hijab.”

Maliha’s peers made fun of her for wearing the hijab, calling her names like “tent head.” She had the words to name the problem and went directly to the principal demanding justice: “I was furious. I went to the principal’s office. I told her that I deserved to go to school and not be subject to racist incidents.” The bullying got so bad by the time Maliha reached middle school that she asked to be home-schooled. At this time, she understood that staying in school could cause her more harm than good.

She was home-schooled for middle school and early years of high school. Maliha said of her home-schooling experience: “I grew the most in that period… It was self-learning… It was free, but a little lonely.” Maliha thrived while studying independently in the safety of her own home. At a home-school convention, Maliha learned about a puppet theatre group and decided to
join: “The group focused on raising awareness about social issues through puppetry. We would do puppet shows at schools. I talked about peer pressure, multiculturalism, drug abuse, bereavement, etc.” The puppet theatre group provided a space to make connections with other youth through cultural production or arts-based citizenship practice.

When she returned to secondary school, the school counselor insisted on putting her back in Grade 9. Again, Maliha advocated for herself:

I told her I was registered at the Ministry of Education… “I’ve been homeschooled, so you can’t set me back.” I made a deal with her, “Let me do one semester of Grade 11. If I fail, set me back. If I succeed, let me stay.” I succeeded.

Maliha successfully negotiated with the school counselor and completed Grade 11. She described secondary school as a relatively positive experience. The school had a large Muslim student population and Maliha made a lot of friends. She was in art class when she first learned about the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, but her teachers and administrators did not discuss what had happened. Maliha’s mother feared for her daughters’ safety and wanted to pull them out of school. However, Maliha insisted that they would be fine, and there had been no problems at school.

She described the Grade 12 English class novel study of Nigerian author Chinua Achebe’s (1958) *Things Fall Apart* as a highlight of her classroom-based learning opportunities. She said, “*Things Fall Apart* was very powerful… I think it was the first time that I heard the word ‘colonialism’ mentioned by a White male teacher in a high school classroom.” Although she could not recall the plot, the text resonated with her still, “I remember feeling a connection and pride in what I was reading…I remember it being a novel that discussed an African tribal community’s experiences of European colonization.” She described *Canadian and World Issues* as “important”: “For the first time in high school I was being told to think critically.” These
particular classroom-based learning experiences seemed to resonate with what she had learned at home through discussions about colonization with her parents and her mother’s modeling of critical reflection and action.

Maliha was the first person in her family to go to university, and, at times, she felt overwhelmed by pressure to succeed—a common experience of first-generation university students. She specialized in political science, because of her involvement in campus-based political activism: “I had a love-hate relationship with school… I was a political science major because I was doing a lot of political activism on campus. I thought I would take it into the classroom. It was way too theory-based with me.” She did enjoy other courses, including a course on representations of Black/African peoples in Canadian literature: “It talked a lot about what I was frustrated with. It discussed how curricula are organized around one identity, even in Canada, which is supposedly a nation that celebrates multiple identities. That is not translated in education.” Maliha made connections between official discourses of Canadian multiculturalism that displace anti-racism and the production of racist knowledge that marginalize the lived experiences and perspectives of Black/African peoples, and their use in the classroom. Through this particular course, she was able to express her emotional responses to racist discrimination that she had personally experienced, and to the persistence of racism in Canadian schools and society.

Maliha’s campus-based activism included Muslim student organizing, student union organizing, and various Palestinian solidarity activities. She was involved in a coalition of Muslim students’ groups, which aimed to bring together Muslim student groups to discuss Islamophobia on campus. She found that the Muslim students’ groups were hesitant to engage in the conversation. The students’ union invited her to join a taskforce to assess the needs of Muslim students after a prayer space was vandalized with graffiti that read, “Die Muslims! Die!”
After the success of the taskforce, she was encouraged to run for vice president. She won the election, and became increasingly involved in the students’ union. Maliha eventually withdrew from work in Muslim students’ groups, citing disrespect for young Muslim women in leadership as the main reason. Through her involvement in other campus-based political activism, she had to deal with misconceptions about young Muslim women among students with “leftist” political orientations: “I think they were more concerned about my identity as a Muslim woman than as a woman. They couldn’t understand how I could reconcile being a woman, a Muslim, and a social justice activist.” She felt frustrated that she had to spend limited time and energy to dispel such misconceptions before she could engage across difference in any meaningful way. As vice-president of the students’ union, she had forwarded motions at the local and national levels to protect women’s reproductive rights, particularly their right to choose an abortion when faced with a crisis pregnancy. She was overwhelmed by the response she received from conservative groups in Canada and the United States:

To me, the right to choose abortion is a woman’s basic right over her body. I supported the local’s stance. I didn’t want to use students’ funds to support activities that would involve the harassment and alienation of women. I put forward the motion at the local and national level. I didn’t know what I was getting into. It turned into a crazy debate. It wasn’t even about abortion rights or the right to choose. It was about how a Muslim woman could take that stance.

Conservative groups, working across religious difference to further particular moral agendas, appealed to Maliha’s sense of moral responsibility as a Muslim. She described what she learned through this particular experience:

The abortion debate was hard. The world felt like it was caving in on me. I didn’t allow that fear to manifest itself by shutting me down. I learned to be productive with that fear. I’ve learned to ask for help is not a bad thing… I’ve learned how to
speak up and be tactful. I’ve learned not to allow my anger to get the best of me. I’ve learned how to deal with anger and how to not internalize it. I was going to university and reading. I learned how to articulate myself to make change or provide alternatives.

Through this particularly challenging experience Maliha learned several strategies for coping with public and political life including how to express herself in a tactful way, and how to transform fear and anger into constructive action. She credited her family and friends for providing the support she needed to continue engaging in justice work, which, at times, subjected her to Islamophobia, racism, and sexism.

Maliha said of herself: “I am Muslim, Black, and Latina. Not one stands out. Am I Canadian? Yes. I am a citizen. I vote and I pay taxes.” Although Maliha wrestled with experiences of discrimination in Canadian schools and society, she claimed her Canadian citizenship as a voting and taxpaying citizen. She did not express conflict between her Canadian national identity and her religious or ethnic identities. She drew self-consciously on her rights as a Canadian citizen to claim a space for herself and her communities in the social and political landscape, which I discuss in further detail below.

**The Campus-Based Palestinian Solidarity Movement**

Both Aamanee and Maliha were involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work, and in this segment of the chapter I report on their experiences of non-formal education and informal learning experiences within the context of that work.

Initially, Aamanee had been involved in public education about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She set up an educational display designed to look like the Israeli West Bank barrier
wall\textsuperscript{48} and she would talk to passersby and handout pamphlets about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She experienced an incident of female-to-female aggression while she was distributing leaflets about a Palestinian solidarity activity on campus:

I was giving out leaflets to students and leaving leaflets on tables in the university building. After I finished outreach, I sat down in the lobby. My books, binders, and leaflets were on the table. A girl walks up and asks, “Are these garbage?” I say, “No, this is my personal stuff.” She says, “No, they’re garbage.” She picks them up and throws them in the garbage. I say, “Excuse me what are you doing?” She says, “These belong in the garbage. If you want them, you can get them from there.” I was furious. I asked her, “What is your name?” she said, “I’m not telling you my name.” I said, “Tell me your name…” Long story short, she wouldn’t tell me her name. She said, “I’m going to class.” I said, “I’m going with you. I’ll ask your professor.” I went into class. She went in. She sat down. I was really upset, almost in tears… I told the professor what had happened and that I had witnesses… The professor said she didn’t know the girl’s name, but that she would take my email and write me back with the girl’s name… As I was walking out the girl walks up to the professor and said, “This young lady was vandalizing the library.” Great, the girl probably told the professor some story.

Aamanee followed up with the professor, but the professor did not respond. Aamanee told two other professors about the incident and both suggested that she speak with an administrator responsible for managing student affairs. Aamanee reported the incident to a student affairs administrator. Rather than offer emotional support, the student affairs administrator re-directed Aamanee to the anti-racism office, where she prepared a statement about the incident. Aamanee had taken constructive action by reporting the incident, but the process, particularly encounters with unsupportive administrators, worsened an already difficult situation. She expressed

\textsuperscript{48} The Israeli West Bank barrier wall is a separation barrier made of concrete being constructed by Israel along and within the West Bank. Upon completion, the barrier’s total length will be approximately 760 km. Israel contends that the barrier wall is necessary to protect Israelis from Palestinians. In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that the wall is a breach of international law, and that Israel must tear it down and compensates Palestinians harmed by its construction. Israel has yet to comply.
concerns about her participation in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work and worried that she might be targeted by the university administration or that she might have difficulty finding work if prospective employers were to learn of her activities.

Aamanee had a sense that she was stepping outside of the boundaries of “good citizenship” by participating in Palestinian solidarity work. Despite her concerns, she remained committed to and involved in the movement and took on more responsibility, including organizational activities and committee memberships. She contributed to the development of educational materials for teachers about how to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in their classrooms. Eventually, she began coordinating a Palestinian university-initiated “right to education” campaign in Toronto—a campaign to raise awareness about how the Israeli occupation violates Palestinians’ right to education and to support students, teachers, and education in Palestine. Thus, Aamanee embraced her Palestinian identity and solidarities by educating others about Palestine and the rights and protections due to Palestinians.

During her first year at university, Maliha befriended a Palestinian student. This friend had expressed interest in attending Palestinian solidarity activities, but did not want to go alone. Maliha had already been involved in campus-based political activism and volunteered to go with her. Together, they went to a planning meeting for a commemorative demonstration to mark the first anniversary of the death of Rachel Corrie (April 10, 1979—March 16, 2003). Corrie was an American member of the Palestinian Solidarity Movement who was killed in the Gaza Strip by an Israeli Defense Forces bulldozer when she was kneeling in front of Palestinian family’s home to prevent Israeli Defense Forces from razing it. The Palestinian solidarity group was planning to re-enact an Israeli checkpoint. Maliha and the other volunteers were aware that Zionist student activists might be present at the commemorative demonstration, but did not want to engage with
them directly. They had resolved to “freeze” if and when the Zionist student activists attempted to disrupt the demonstration. Maliha described what played out:

We were preparing for the anniversary of Rachel Corrie’s death. There were thirty women in the group. We wanted to re-enact an Israeli checkpoint. We decided that if things got out of hand we would all sit down. We didn’t want to be confrontational. We knew there would be an opposing group. The civilians would sit down. The guards would point their guns at the civilians and freeze. We started… People took on their roles. All of these Zionists came into the hall. We decided to sit down… There were 300 of them… It was so crazy… There was a woman who had brought her 1-year-old baby girl. They got trapped in the mix. This Zionist guy starts yelling at the 1-year-old. He was yelling, “Are you prepared to be a suicide bomber?” The little girl was scared and trying to hold back tears. I got in his face, “You coward. Yell at someone who can yell back at you!” Then he proceeds to tell us that we should be raped. That’s when all gloves are off. I became very involved in Palestinian activism.

Maliha and the other young women had not anticipated the hatred or gendered aggression that they were subjected to by the male Zionist student activists. This violent experience, which she could have perceived as a limit-situation, galvanized Maliha’s involvement in the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement. Eventually, she too began coordinating a “right to education” campaign on her university campus.

Aamanee and Maliha were drawn to campus-based Palestinian solidarity work for different reasons. Aamanee had a personal connection to Palestine through her mother while Maliha had initially accompanied a friend to a meeting organized by a campus-based Palestinian solidarity group. Their activist citizenship involved advocacy, coalition building, and popular theatre. It also connected them to a cause beyond Canada. Through their involvement in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work, both Aamanee and Maliha faced violence and other potentially
negative consequences. The violence posed a limit-situation, but each of the young women remained firm in their resolve to continue their work.

Transnational Commitments and The Question of Palestine

Ten of the 18 young Muslim activists made some reference to the question of Palestine, more than any other international issue. I highlight their perspectives on the question of Palestine. I reflect on social movement learning opportunities within the context Palestinian solidarity work. Through their involvement in Palestinian solidarity work, these young people critically explored and questioned the gendered complexities of social movements, the religious nature of the conflict, and the connections between liberation struggles.

Gendered Complexities of the Palestinian Solidarity Movement: “Liberate yourself, you liberate the land”

In addition to Aamanee, Jamila and Khadijeh also identified as Palestinian. Both of the young women discussed being Palestinian, members of a stateless and transnational migratory Palestinian community. Their sense of national Palestinian identity was forged through direct and mediated experiences with the Israeli occupation of Palestine and in relation to the exclusionary definitions of national identity they encountered in schools and communities. Both of them discussed the gendered complexities of Palestinian solidarity work. For Khadijeh, the threat and experience of gender-based violence led to her withdrawal from organizing within the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement. Khadijeh was subject to sexual harassment by male students involved in campus-based Zionist activities: “A Zionist student sexually harassed me on campus. I reported it. Another guy reported that I called him ‘a dirty Jew,’ but I never did that.” Other Arab students involved in Palestinian solidarity work subjected Khadijeh to homophobic

49 As mentioned in chapter seven, “Liberate yourself, you liberate the land” is a statement by Daoud Mikhail, a Palestinian-Christian and a founder of the Palestine Liberation Organization.
discrimination: “Some of the Arab students were weird around me because they knew I was queer.” These oppressive experiences of harassment and threat, compounded with the challenges of living away from home for the first time, were too much for Khadijeh. She transferred to a smaller university closer to home, and decided against organizing with the local Palestinian solidarity group. She continued to attend public events, however. Through her involvement in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work, Khadijeh had learned about the gender complexities of social movements and the limits to her activist citizenship.

Jamila, who learned from her father that she deserved equality by right as a female, had become increasingly frustrated with patriarchal norms and sexist behavior that governed interactions between female and male activists within the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement. She started questioning her own involvement: “Why am I busting my ass doing these things for a future that would exclude me as a woman?” She observed that young women tended to be placed in logistical and supportive roles, rather than in leadership positions: “Women were put into logistical roles. They were not seen as good enough to contribute to political discourses.” She felt used by the group: “We organized a talk about women, war, and resistance. I had to speak out as a Palestinian woman in the First Intifada. That was scary. I was so young. I felt like I was tokenized.” Jamila cited Daoud Mikhail’s statement, “liberate yourself, you liberate the land,” as influential in the development of her feminist analysis of the movement. Jamila described the personal impact of the statement, “The change needs to come from within us... I no longer saw myself as a victim of the occupation. I saw myself as someone with the power to change circumstances around me.” After graduating from university, she became increasingly focused on developing a feminist analysis of the movement and working on women’s rights issues.
For both Khadijeh and Jamila, the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement became a space where they experienced patriarchal attitudes and social controls that regulated their activist citizenship.

**Religion and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: “Palestine. It’s not a Muslim issue.”**

There was some disagreement among participants about whether the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a ‘Muslim’ issue. For example, Talib remarked, “Palestine. It’s not a Muslim issue. It’s a human rights issue. It’s not about Muslims versus Jews.” Similarly, Aamanee remarked, “Palestine is not a Muslim issue…. Many Palestinians are Christian…I know many Jewish and Christian students involved in Palestinian solidarity work.” Thus, Talib and Aamanee agreed that Palestine is not a ‘Muslim issue,’ and Talib distinguished it further as a ‘human rights issue.’ They both complicated the conflict as not simply “about Muslim versus Jews,” with Aamanee substantiating her claim by drawing attention to the religious and cultural diversity of Palestinians, and to the religious and cultural diversity of activists involved in Palestinian solidarity work.

In contrast, others argued that the question of Palestine is a “Muslim issue.” Layaal discussed the role of religion in campus-based Palestinian solidarity activities organized by a “secular” Arab students’ group that she had been involved in. Layaal, who had once sold cupcakes to raise funds for Palestinian children at her Islamic elementary school and who had lost family members during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, was denied the opportunity to participate in this group’s solidarity activities because they did not want a visible Muslim woman representing them. They would not even allow her to sell falafels to help raise funds for the group: “They voted against having a hijabi represent their group…I wasn’t going around trying to convert people…I was selling falafels!” Layaal reflected on her religious identity and the role
of faith in her public and political action: “I am a Muslim, first and foremost. My activism comes from a sacred space.” She had been taught at home and in Islamic elementary school that it was her responsibility as a Muslim to care for the wellbeing of oppressed peoples. Islam was a profound influence in her life, and informed her public and political action. Her activist citizenship was religiously inspired.

Maha complicated the perceptions on Palestine when she suggested that it is a Muslim and Canadian issue: “As a Muslim I have as much rights to Jerusalem. Palestinians are deprived of that. I was deprived when I went to Al-Aqsa [mosque]. Israeli soldiers told me I could not pray in my mosque. I was told to read certain chapters in the Quran. My friend is a convert. She did not know all the verses. She wasn’t allowed in.” She continued, “As a Canadian, we should condemn what is going on. I don’t need to be Muslim to see, what’s going on in Palestine is wrong… There are universal issues we can agree on. Five million Palestinian refugees, checkpoints, and occupation are wrong.” Maha, as part of Muslim transnational communities, made a claim to Jerusalem based on religious rights, naming it as a holy city to followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. Under Israeli occupation, Israeli soldiers regulate access to Al-Aqsa Mosque. As a Canadian citizen, Maha drew on the rights afforded to her as a Canadian citizen to call for the promotion and protection of the rights of Palestinians. She continued, “As a Muslim I’m not going to deny there is bias. I am Muslim. I think this issue transcends religion and nationalism. It’s about human rights. Occupation is wrong. We should condemn brutality and violence. It’s in conflict with my Arab identity, my Muslim identity, and my Canadian values. It’s a conflict with everything that I am.” Layaal and Maha draw attention to the role of religion in their activist citizenship orientations and practices. By doing so they disrupt the notion that public and political spaces are secular.
Connecting Liberation Struggles from Canada to Palestine: “Too Close to Home.”

Both Layaal and Jamila wrestled with what it meant for them to live in Canada, a country founded on the colonization and genocide of First Peoples, and to commit to the liberation of Palestine and its people.

For Layaal, the question of Palestine felt too “close to home.” She had lost family members during a series of conflicts between Israel and Lebanon. A Grade 11 English teacher at her Islamic secondary school dispelled the “Columbus myth,” which stimulated her further inquiry into the histories of First peoples in the Americas and its analogies to the occupation of Palestine, which she had learned about from her parents. Layaal attempted to locate herself in relation to the present oppression of First peoples; and, to make connections between settler colonialism in the Americas and in Palestine. Thus, her encounter with a counter-hegemonic version of the history of the Americas in an English secondary school course nurtured her critical consciousness, activating background knowledge about Palestine that she had gained at home, elementary school and the mosque about Palestine, and enabling her to locate herself within settler-colonialism in Canada.

Jamila talked about how she started questioning what it meant for her to seek permanent residency in Canada. After completing her undergraduate studies, she was faced with the prospect of having to return to Bahrain if she could not find work within 90 days of graduation. Student visa regulations stipulated that any employment must be related to her university degree and that no other Canadian was available to take the job: “If I left Canada, it meant going back to Bahrain. I never felt part of Bahrain. I felt like I had found a community in Canada. I was part of the activist community.” Jamila had forged belonging in Canada through her involvement in Palestinian solidarity activities, which connected her to other youth from Palestinian diasporic
communities. She was aware of the privileges and paradoxes of legal citizenship status in Canada:

It opened up issues of Indigenous rights, especially as a Palestinian. What does it mean to get citizenship in a place that is based on apartheid and racism? It was depressing. I was thinking about being in Canada. Is this the future of Palestine? Will my identity, as a Palestinian, always exist in a metaphorical sense and never become tangible?

Like Layaal, Jamila found similarities between the historical and present situation of First peoples and Palestinians—both form nations without a state and are subject to continual oppression. These young women’s ambivalence towards Canadian national identification is inextricably tied to their recognition of their participation in settler colonialism. Further, their connection to Palestinian liberation struggles, and their exercise of Canadian citizenship rights to advocate for Palestinian human rights, can be seen as practices of activist citizenship that extends beyond Canada, connecting them to Palestine. Their statements about “living on stolen land” serve as critiques of the Canadian state and demonstrate the connectedness of liberation struggles.

Summary

This chapter has explored social movement learning opportunities in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work. The participants shared stories that demonstrated their relationships with multiple communities in Canada and beyond, as well as their efforts to transform the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through local action. Ten of the 18 youth in this study, including the three Palestinian youth, talked about the question of Palestine. The conflict in Palestine came up more often than any other cause. To redefine oneself as Muslim in the diaspora often entails
refocusing on persecuted and displaced Muslim communities, connecting to Palestine, and working to assist these Muslim minority communities.

Aamanee and Maliha, through their involvement in campus-based Palestinian solidarity work, were involved in advocacy, coalition building, visual art, and popular theatre. Both of the young women had confronted the threat and the experience of violence through their involvement in these activities, but resolved to continue working in the movement.

For some of the young women, their participation in Palestinian solidarity activities also revealed gender-based complexities in activist citizenship practices. For one of the young women, the threat and experiences of gender-based violence led to her withdrawal from organizing within the Palestinian solidarity movement. Student activists involved in Palestinian solidarity work and students involved in Zionist organizations subjected Khadijah, a self-identified ‘queer’ young woman, to sexism, homophobia, and violence.

Although there was some disagreement among participants about the religious nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for some it was an Islamic ethic that motivated their involvement in solidarity practices. Some expressed a sense of responsibility as Muslims for the wellbeing of oppressed peoples and their claims as Muslims to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Religion is therefore an influential force in some young people’s active citizenship expression within secularized western societies. The youth who took part in this study are finding ways of negotiating their religious and communal identities and solidarities.

Layaal’s commitment to Palestine and Palestinians was formed by the death of family members at the hands of Israeli military, her parents’ involvement in Palestinian solidarity work, and her sense of responsibility as a Muslim to care for the wellbeing of oppressed peoples. As a young woman who was visibly Muslim in hijab, Layaal had felt pressured to “become
religiously invisible” by some of the other Arab students involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity. They actually pushed Layaal out of the group.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine also raised concerns for some of the participants about living in the context of White settler colonialism in Canada. Some of them drew analogies between Palestinians and the persecution and displacement of Indigenous peoples in Canada. By drawing parallels between the dispossession, displacement and persecution of Indigenous peoples and Palestinians, they argued that the struggle for self-determination is connected within and across Canadian national boundaries. It also helped to explain some of the young people’s ambivalence about Canadian national identification.

The ambivalence expressed by the participants in this study toward Canadian national identification is inextricably tied to their recognition of their participation in the continual oppression of Indigenous peoples and their desire for and commitment to justice for First Nations. Their ambivalence is therefore rooted in a critique of the state’s policies and practices, expressed in statements about “living on stolen land.” At the same time, however, the youth spoke in a range of ways about how they leveraged rights and protections entitled to them as Canadians in order to support Palestinian struggle for liberation.
Chapter Ten:
Transforming Social Spaces, and Ways of Thinking and Acting:
Insights From Muslim Youth Citizenship

In chapters five, six, seven, eight, and nine, I re-told the stories of 18 young Muslim activists. In this chapter, I summarize and analyze the study’s two sets of key research findings corresponding to the two research questions that guided my study:

1. How do these youth learn citizenship? More specifically, how do they learn and become motivated to engage in activist citizenship?

2. How do these youth enact citizenship? More specifically, how do they seek to support the citizenship learning of others?

Through life history interviews, I collected the educational and political biographies of 18 activist youth, 16 to 29 years old, from Muslim communities in Toronto, Canada. I inquired about how and why they had become politically active, their experiences of citizenship education inside and outside schools, the range of issues that concerned them, and the various actions they took to address those issues.

In the pages that follow, I conclude this thesis. The remainder of this chapter is organized into two main parts. In the first part, I discuss two key sets of findings relating to these two research questions, and summarize the scholarly contributions of this study. In the second part, I discuss the study’s implications for educators. Finally, I map out avenues for future research.
Part One: New Insights and Contributions

Insights from Young Muslims’ Citizenship Learning

As stated in chapters one and two, my study is based on the premise that all education is citizenship education. I employed a broad definition of education that encompasses formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning. I used the notion of ‘citizenship learning’ as a process that takes place throughout one’s life (lifelong) and across diverse social environments (lifewide) (Schugurensky, 2000). In this study, I was particularly interested in citizenship education and learning for liberation and transformation. I listened to young people’s life histories for humanizing and dehumanizing learning experiences within and across diverse social environments, including schools, families, and neighborhoods. Supportive social environments in which agents feel a sense of belonging or community are critical in creating conditions for social transformation.

My review of citizenship education research literature in chapter two highlighted citizenship education and learning opportunities in diverse social environments – home, neighborhood, and school— that appear to meaningfully support young people’s political commitments and engagements. Such opportunities include discussing problems that impact young people and their communities and strategizing ways to redress these problems; witnessing concern among adults for the community and current events in their home, school, or neighborhood; and, experiencing a strong sense of social belonging (Amadeo et al., 2002; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Schulz et al., 2009, 2010; Torney-Purta et al., 2001, 2007). A large body of citizenship education research literature is underpinned by liberal political ideology and is concerned with young people’s intent to participate in national electoral processes. Although this research literature acknowledges that young people develop political commitments and
engagements (to the state) in the home and the neighborhood, it tends to frame the citizenship education and learning that takes place in these social environments in *deficit* discourses. And, while this literature acknowledges the importance of *supportive* social environments in helping young people make the connection between personal and social transformation, it does not explicitly examine how young people’s identities (e.g., race, class, gender, and religion) locate them in the social imaginary and delimit their opportunities for social belonging and political participation.

Using an expanded notion of citizenship that foregrounds issues of identity and belonging, I examined the youths’ life histories for insights into the formal and non-formal education and informal learning experiences that influenced their political commitments and engagements. Their life histories illustrated citizenship learning in home, neighborhood, and school, as well as through interactions with other state institutions (the police, the judicial system, the immigration system, and the employment system), popular culture (Hip Hop and spoken word poetry), and religion (Islam). Further, their life histories provided insight into citizenship as a cultural process of *self-making* and *being made* in matrices of power connected to the nation-state and civil society. As I stated in chapters one and two, I used an expanded notion of *civil society* that includes the family and the private sphere. In doing so, I draw attention to the unique learning, thinking, and knowledge that young people develop in their families and the wider private sphere and that they leverage in public and political action. I now discuss what I learned from the young Muslim activists’ life histories about their experiences of citizenship education and learning.
Families and Homes

As discussed in chapter two, there is general consensus in the citizenship education research literature that family background is influential in young people’s political commitments and engagements. Within the home environment, young people may experience parental modeling of political engagement; they may experience a home environment in which watching the news, reading the newspaper and discussing political issues with their family members is encouraged. My study offers additional nuances.

The youths’ narratives provided insight into processes of subject-making through informal learning experiences in their families and home environments such as parents who expressed interest in and encouraged discussion about political issues, and demonstrated ways to act on issues of concern by engaging in activist work themselves. The youths’ narratives revealed instances of resistance, and engagement in self-making.

Most of the youth reported that their parents expressed interest in and/or encouraged discussion about historical and contemporary political issues in Canada and beyond. Family conversations around the dinner table addressed a wide range of topics including poverty, racism and other forms of discrimination, settler-colonialism, slavery, and women’s rights. These conversations were often framed in anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist and/or Islamic perspectives.

Silences were audible in the youths’ narratives. Some reported that their parents discouraged discussion about homeland politics. They offered some reasons for their parents’ refusal to entertain their questions: to discourage their children from getting involved in actions that could have negative consequences, to focus on building their lives in Canada, or to preserve an idealized memory of “back home.” The painful impact of war and conflict was tangible in
some of the youths’ narratives, which included stories about moving from house to house to evade persecutors in war-torn Somalia or witnessing Israeli military officers brutalize family members in Occupied Palestinian Territories. Some of these youth drew on knowledge, experiences and histories circulating through extended families, diasporic communities, and the global news media in to answer their own questions about identity and belonging.

Still, some parents encouraged discussion about homeland politics, but discouraged discussion about Canadian issues. For example, Layaal reported that her parents were actively involved in diasporic projects, but explained away the racism that they were subjected to as a visibly Muslim family in Canada as isolated incidents. Through contradictory personal and social experiences of racism, however, Layaal learned that racism is pervasive in Canadian society. It is possible that Layaal’s parents too were trying to make sense of racist incidents, and that was the only explanation they could offer their children.

Most of the youth described their parents as “activists.” Some parents were politically active in their home countries and “brought the struggle” with them to Canada. The youths’ narratives revealed childhood experiences of attending political and cultural events with their parents, expressing solidarity with the Oromo by participating in Oromo cultural parades or expressing solidarity with Black South Africans by participating in anti-Apartheid rallies. Some parents demonstrated their “do-it-yourself” activist ethic through various community-building efforts, including building a mosque, starting a non-profit organization to help newcomers adjust to Canadian society, organizing recreational activities for Muslim women, facilitating community health workshops, organizing cultural activities for children, or by being a caring adult in the neighborhood. These youth learned from the “example” of their parents.
Some of the youths’ narratives revealed that they learned from the hardships that their parents had faced securing stable employment in Canada. These youth expressed ambivalence towards Canadian national identification because they understood that immigration and employment systems preserve and perpetuate inequities. It is difficult for young people to develop a sense of autonomy in families where economic realities limit and restrict decisions. These youth learned from their parents’ struggles to build better lives for themselves and for their families than was possible in their home countries.

Within the contexts of their families and home environments, the youth learned about citizenship through their parents’ political engagements and practices. In some cases, parents’ binding solidarities engendered in their children powerful connections to their ‘home’ countries and motivated their participation in diasporic national projects. In all cases, parents’ efforts to build better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities (within and beyond Canada) motivated their children to complete their formal education, to seek gainful employment, and to pursue justice work.

**Neighborhoods**

Nine of the youths’ narratives provide insight into contradictory emotional experiences of urban social complexity within the context of Toronto social housing communities. These youth understood themselves as precariously positioned in Canadian society because of their housing status. Their narratives revealed concerns about *housing, jobs, education, safety and security,* and *community health and wellbeing.* They spoke of feeling “stigmatized,” “hidden,” and “forgotten.” The deeply raced and classed nature of Canadian citizenship is nowhere more evident in this thesis than the lived experiences and perspectives of former and current youth tenants in urban low-income neighborhoods.
The issue of safety and security was a source of tension, contributing to a sense of “entrapment,” and, at times, desperation to move away. Salsabil had frequently asked her mother, “When are we going to move?” Salsabil and other youth spoke about their experiences of interpersonal and state-sanctioned violence—gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, gun violence, and aggressive policing. The presence of police in their neighborhoods did not engender feelings of safety and security. Brunson and Miller (2006) summarize well-documented reality: “Areas characterized by concentrated poverty and minority racial segregation are subject to aggressive policing strategies, including drug and gang suppression efforts, higher levels of police misconduct, and under-responsive policing” (p. 532). These geographic spaces are reputed as high-crime areas inhabited by criminals. I return to the issue of police repression and youth criminalization later in this chapter.

Such threats to safety and security pushed out most of these youth and their families as soon as alternate viable housing options became available. However, all of these youth spoke of a sense of social belonging and community in their neighborhoods through building caring relationships with other tenants, participating in neighborhood activities (e.g., neighborhood clean ups, block parties), and, in some cases, working with other tenants to redress neighborhood problems. These insights are suggestive of the importance of “neighborhood social capital” (Kahne & Sporte, 2008, p. 12).

The youth spoke about the importance of other sources of social capital in helping them resist social exclusion. These other sources of social capital included families, mosques, community centers and schools. For some of the youth, mosques provided alternate safe spaces to visit after school and on weekends, opportunities to build relationships with other young Muslims, and to further Islamic knowledge and practice. Schools were spaces where the youth
experienced marginalization, but sources of cultural resources necessary to begin to build better lives for themselves and their communities. Neighborhood community centers and organizations were sites where youth tenants could engage in recreational activities, and work with other tenants to address problems in their neighborhoods. Citizenship education research literature suggests that young people are more likely to express higher levels of commitment to political participation if they reported having experiences of neighbors dealing with community problems, when they felt adults looked after children, and when they had a general sense that their neighborhood supported young people. My study draws attentions to young people’s emotional experiences of place and space.

**Schools and Classrooms**

Fine and Weis (2003) remind us,

Schools are profoundly contradictory spaces. They can be repressive and toxic, and they can challenge social (in)justices by opening the doors that race and class hierarchies have glued shut. Schools typically reproduce brutal social stratifications, but occasionally create the very wisdom with youth and by youth that enables and even encourages challenge to social arrangements. Most schools serve as contacts that narrowly constrict identities of youth, but an important exception is that some schools wedge open opportunities for new selves to emerge. It is this latter type that we wish to emphasize here, while at the same time pointing out “what can happen” if intervention does not occur. (p. 3)

The young Muslims’ narratives provided insight into contradictory experiences of schooling, which I discuss below.

**Oppressive student-teacher interactions**

All of the youth described personal and social experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and classrooms, more so than experiences of anti-oppressive education.
Most of the young Black/African men involved in my study reported that they had been aggressively ‘policed’ at school: watched vigilantly for signs of unruly behavior, judged more quickly, and punished more harshly in schools. These young men’s narratives suggested that they understood themselves as “symbolic assailants” in the eyes of police and other adults in positions of public authority, including teachers. However, their narrative revealed patterns of resistance: performing respect for public authority, challenging public authority and/or transferring schools. These narratives are consistent with Dei’s (1997) previous research on the experiences of Black/African students and “drop-outs” in Canadian schools. Dei found that “Black male students experienced heavier surveillance by authority figures in school,” and he suggested that this “may account for a greater lack of compliance with authority structures” (1997, p. 250). It demonstrates how Black/African male students are being “pushed-out” of schools (1997, p. 250).

Maliha’s peers made fun of her for wearing the hijab. Maliha went directly to the principal demanding justice. The bullying got so bad by the time Maliha reached middle school that she asked her mother if she could be home-schooled instead. Even at that young age, Maliha understood that staying in school could cause her more harm than good. Maliha exercised her agency and autonomy by making a healthy choice for her self. I would argue that she did not “opt out”—she was “pushed out.” The elementary school did not provide a safe environment for Maliha.

Khadijah reported that she sensed that the teachers at her elementary school did not like the Arab and African children. One of her elementary school teachers had even denied the existence of Khadijah’s homeland, Palestine. Abu El Haj (2007) reports that many of the Palestinian in her study “have experienced similar encounters with teachers who refuse to
acknowledge both the legitimacy of their aspirations for an independent state and their everyday experiences living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank” (p. 286). In most cases, Abu El-Haj found, “these encounters often ended with disciplinary sanctions” (2007, p. 286). I believe that what Khadijeh experienced was a form of cultural imperialism: “To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of society render perspectives of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (Young, 1990, pp. 58-59).

In addition to racist discrimination, teachers and peers subjected Zaynab to homophobic discrimination and violence. In one instance, Zaynab responded to a teacher’s homophobic comments by giving her a resource book on anti-homophobia education. These are just a few of many stories of oppression and resistance documented in this thesis.

**Curricular silences and counter-stories**

In chapter two, my review of Canadian citizenship education research literature revealed national and provincial government priorities communicated through official civics and social studies curriculum, including de-emphasis on “education”—“the opening up of possibilities through exploration of alternative understandings, the critical application of evidence and the development of skills and dispositions necessary to act on the possibilities” (Sears & Hughes, 2006, p. 4). Kumashiro (2001) argues, “‘education’ is not something involves repeating what one already knows. Rather, education involves learning something different, learning something new, learning something that disrupts ones’ commonsense view of the world” (p. 8). It should not be surprising that only a small minority of the youth involved in my study reported having curricular experiences in which teachers had guided them in critical exploration and questioning
of hegemonic master narratives, including ‘the discovery’ of the Americas and the placement of ‘the responsibility of poverty’ on the poor.

Nabila described two contradictory experiences classroom-based citizenship learning opportunities in *Native Studies* and *Canadian and World Issues* courses offered by her public secondary school. Nabila’s *Native Studies* teacher acknowledged Canada’s national history of colonialism and legacy of racism, and the past and present oppression of Indigenous peoples. He attempted to move beyond a traditional “museum” approach to Native Studies that is mainly concerned with traditional legends and ways of life presented in the past by organizing opportunities for students to learn directly from First Nations peoples. In contrast, Nabila’s *Canadian and World Issues* teacher presented a distorted image of the African continent and its peoples and promoted what Nabila described as a “savior mentality” among students, imploring students to act to save Africa. I speculate that Nabila was able to resist her *Canadian and World Issues* teacher’s oppressive message because she had learned “counter narratives” from her father. Hooks (2003) asserts, “Without a counter-narrative (and, thankfully many black children learn counter-narratives at home so that they can defend themselves against this assaultive misinformation) children of color, Black children internalize the belief they are inferior” (pp. 95-96).

Only two youth reported curricular experiences in school in which educators had helped them explore 9/11 and the aftermath that constituted Muslims in frames of “threat” and “security.” Maha discussed the efforts of one of her English teachers, and Mustafa described the efforts of his *World Religions* teacher: each had attempted to redress Islamophobic discrimination by engaging students in examination of media representations of Islam and Muslims, and of their personal biases. Maha and Mustafa highlighted these particular
pedagogical interventions because they engaged them in the classroom and positively shaped the development of their Muslim identities. Abu El-Haj (2007) heard “curricular silences” in the schooling experiences of the Palestinian American youth involved in her study—none reported having classroom-based learning opportunities to critically examine and question the events of 9/11 and their aftermath. Abu El-Haj suggests, “at the very least, we must work to ensure that educators have the knowledge, commitment, time, and resource to develop classroom communities in which youth are taught the skills and dispositions needed to listen across difference” (2007, p. 310).

**Teacher support**

Some youth credited particular teachers and school administrators for providing caring and personalized support, and thereby engaging (or re-engaging) them in classrooms and wider school communities. Bilal had continued visiting the elementary school teacher who had helped him to recognize his capacity to make choices that would keep him out of the school principal’s office. The vice-principal at Talib’s secondary school recognized his academic and social potential, required him to take advanced level courses so that he would have the option of attending university, and put him in charge of morning announcements so that he would have to attend school daily. This vice-principal thereby affirmed Talib’s sense of self and social belonging. Talib had been a very popular student, and, prior to this administrator’s intervention, he had been using that popularity to sell drugs and throw parties for profit. By re-engaging him the classroom and the wider school community in constructive ways, this vice-principal had helped Talib to envision a different life path. Abdul-Haq credited two secondary school teachers for supporting his transfer to academic stream courses and nurturing his growing interests in history and politics by providing additional resources. Khadijah had been disengaged in the
classroom and wider school community up until her senior years in secondary school when an English teacher began providing Khadijeh caring and personalized support, helping her connect to student groups and to develop a sense of belonging to the wider school community.

**Peer support**

All of the youth discussed their social belonging within school-based peer groups. Several had formed friendships with peers from similar religious and ethno-racial backgrounds in an effort to affirm their religious and ethno-racial identities. For example, Nabila noticed that, by Grade 7 all of the ethnic and racial minority youth in her school had started hanging out together at school. Similarly, Talib said, “If you were black or brown, we were rolling.” Zaynab formed the “Brown Coalition” with other ethno-racial minority youth who attended her Catholic secondary school, so that they would have someone to eat lunch with in the school cafeteria. Salsabil and Asmara credited their peers for helping them navigate the school system. Salsabil had formed friendships with university-bound students, who could help her navigate elementary and secondary school and plan for post-secondary education. With her mother working and going to school, and her older siblings struggling with their own problems, Salsabil needed additional supports to get through school and strategically chose her peer groups. Asmara, in her Islamic secondary school, had formed friendships with diverse Muslim youth from whom she learned about different lived experiences and perspectives. Nabila credited a peer for helping educate her about LGBTQ issues and to examine her own homophobic biases. Mustafa was subjected to Islamophobic and racist discrimination from peers at school, but, on the other hand, received support from other peers in a community-based Muslim youth organization.

As discussed in chapter two, Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that explicitly civic learning opportunities in school were efficacious, but they did not see strong evidence that more general
academic and social supports in school fostered civic outcomes. They argued that focusing on teacher and peer relationships associated with academics and social development appeared insufficient as a means of fostering commitments to political engagement. The stories of the young Muslims involved in my study suggest that it should not be underestimated that teacher and peer relationships associated with academics and social development can help young people to forge a sense of belonging to classroom and school communities.

**Encounters with Police**

While much of the citizenship education research literature has focused primarily young people’s interactions and learning within schooling, the accounts that I have shared in this study bring attention to their relations to other state institutions, particularly the police. Further, citizenship research has elicited young people’s levels of trust in the police (e.g., Amadeo et al., 2002; Schulz et al., 2009, 2010; Torney-Purta et al., 2001), but it has not explored why some young people may have low levels of trust in the police.

The young Muslims’ narratives provide nuanced insights into processes of *subject-making* through youth citizen and police interactions—particularly how aggressive policing is experienced by youth from low-income communities of color on a day-to-day basis, by youth engaged in public and political protest, and by youth attempting to cross the Canada-United States border. More specifically, my study demonstrates how gender, race and class mediate young people’s interactions with the Canadian state vis-à-vis aggressive policing.

The young Black/African men reported personal and social experiences of being watched, stopped, questioned, and searched by police in their neighborhoods, on the streets, or in schools. These young men reported having a sense of themselves as “symbolic assailants” in the
eyes of police. These findings are consistent with previous research documenting Black/African men’s lived experiences of urban policing in the United States (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Fine et al., 2003).

Although none of the Black/African young women involved in my study reported having such everyday encounters with police, I do not want to suggest that Black/African women and other racialized women are not vulnerable to police harassment and misconduct. Brunson and Miller (2006) summarize some key findings from feminist scholarship that examines the intersection of gender, race and urban policing: girls are more likely than boys to experience juvenile justice interventions; African women and girls are punished more harshly than white women and girls; and, African American women and girls crime victims are less likely to receive help from police (p. 532). Visher (1983) challenged the assumption that police treat women in a ‘chivalrous manner’: “chivalry exists...for those women who display appropriate gender behavior and characteristics” (Brunson & Miller, 2006, p. 533). Visher found that African American women faced arrest at rates comparable to those of African American men (p. 534).

Some of the young women involved in my study reported personal encounters with police. Zaynab, while participating in the massive 2003 anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations in Montreal, was targeted by riot police. As a young woman engaged in dissenting citizenship, it might be argued, Zaynab did not “display appropriate gender behavior and characteristics.” Similarly, youth activists in Kennelly’s (2008) study reported experiences of brutality at the hands of Canadian police. The aggressive policing resulted in physical, emotional and financial harm for the young people involved in political action, and served as a warning to those who dare to engage in protest actions designed to challenge the state. Kennelly explained the aggressive policing of youth activism as follows: “policing acts not only as a
powerful material force limiting certain kinds of activist expression, it serves as a state-sanctioned symbolic marker of the (ever-shrinking) limits to democratic participation for young people” (p. 137). Nevertheless, youth public and political action in opposition to state polices and practices continue to grow, as evident at the 2010 G8/G20 meetings in Toronto and the “occupy” movement across Canada and throughout western liberal democracies.

Amina, Asmara and Salsabil were stopped and questioned for several hours at the Canada-United States border, which they were attempting to cross to attend the presidential inauguration of Barack Obama. Through these experiences, the young women were reminded that Canadian citizenship does not necessarily guarantee protection during a global “War on Terror.” The fear created by post-9/11 state surveillance, restrictions on civil liberties, detentions and deportations is well documented in studies of Muslim youth, particularly in the United States (e.g., Abu El Haj, 2007; Bayoumi, 2008; Fine et al., 2007; Maira, 2004, 2009; Zaal et al., 2007).

**Hip Hop Culture**

Dolby (2003) argues, “Individuals who do not have access to substantial political, civil, or social rights still exercise agency in the cultural realm, and this agency can have far-reaching implications for social relations. Moreover, cultural sites are pedagogical—often more so than political ones” (p. 269). Most of the youths’ narratives included some reference to Hip Hop culture. Although Talib had become disengaged from the classroom by the time he reached secondary school, he was immersed in Hip Hop culture. He desired to become a rap artist and wrote lyrics in his journal. Mustafa was inspired by rap artist EMINEM to use spoken word poetry as a means to express his anger and frustration at the Islamophobia and racism he was subjected to by peers at school. Both Abdul-Haq and Khadijeh had been disengaged from the classroom, but actively engaged in Hip Hop culture. Khadijeh was in Grade 5 when she started
listening to Hip Hop. The Hip Hop poetic narratives of African-American youths’ marginalization and resistance resonated with Khadijeh. She began reading the critical Black/African scholarship referenced in the lyrics, which furthered her development of critical consciousness. Khadijeh described Hip Hop as the primary source of her political education. Abdul-Haq was in Grade 11 when he started skipping classes to participate in free-style rap competitions. Political rap music transformed him. He wanted to emulate the rap lyrics, so he began studying them. Abdul-Haq began reading about the political issues and figures referenced in the lyrics. He realized that he would need to develop his critical literacy skills, so he began applying himself at school. Maha reported that her Grade 7 teacher’s use of socially conscious Hip Hop in the classroom sparked her experimentation with creative writing and storytelling. This was the only account of pedagogical use of Hip Hop in the classroom. Akom (2009) observes, “given the long history of socio-political conscious hip hop as a tool for illuminating problems of poverty, police brutality, misogyny, incarceration, racial discrimination, as well as love, hope, and joy—academic institution’s under-utilization of hip hop’s liberatory potential the classroom is surprising” (p. 54).

Hip Hop culture has been a space where the youth have found identity, humanity, and a place to develop their critical consciousness through the engagement of humanizing discourses such as art, music, dance or other creative expression (Akom, 2009; Diaz, 2012; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Rose, 1994)

**Islamic Education**

Findings from my study provided insight into the youths’ experiences of Islamic education, the development of their Muslim identities, and the role of religion in their public and political action.
With the exception of one participant, who had converted to Islam later in his life, all participants had been born into Muslim families. Participants shared stories about discussing Muslim world politics with their families at the dinnertable, attending Palestinian solidarity demonstrations or Nation of Islam gatherings with their families, attending madrassah at mosques (or even in the back of a butcher shop) on evenings and weekends, organizing bakesales in their Islamic elementary school to raise funds for impoverished Muslim populations in different parts of the world, observing their father help build mosques, observing their mother organize recreational activities for Muslim girls and women, or listening to sermons after Friday prayers calling for the alleviation of suffering in devastated Muslim populations worldwide. This thesis study provided some insight into variance in religiousity and adherence to faith within and across all families. For example, one participant described her mother as a “devout” Muslim and her father as a “fiercely secular” Muslim, who compelled to critically examine and question Islamic doctrine that she experienced in school and society. Another participant said that her mother had who lived with her Christian mother and step-family, visited her father had been immersed in her Muslim father’s world two weekends per month while growing up in a small Ontario town. Through such non-formal education and informal learning experiences, these participants had begun to develop a sense of themselves as Muslims.

All of the young Muslims spoke of the significance of Islam in their lives, and, more specifically about the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. One participating youth, Mustafa, named Prophet Muhammad as one of his role models. He drew strength from the life lessons of Prophet Muhammad to resist Islamophobic and racist discrimination he had been subjected to by his peers. Two of the participating young women, Zaynab and Maha, named Prophet Muhammad’s female companions--the Sahabiyat—as strong Muslim women role models.
Stories of the *Sahabiyyat* had powerfully shaped their understanding of the status of women in Islam.

As explained in chapter three, participants’ religiousness or adherence to faith was not one of the criteria for inclusion in this thesis study, because I wanted to promote substantive inclusion of youth activists who self-identified as “Muslim.” I asked the youth to tell me about their religious beliefs and spiritual approaches to life. For example, religious faith helped Salsabil navigate the risks associated with living in relatively high poverty contexts. It helped Aisha cope with the fatal shooting of a family member by Canadian police and transform the sorrow into public and political action on behalf of other youth victims of police brutality. Karim, Bilal, and Zayn said that the highlight of their weekly meetings with the social housing corporation was praying together. Although Aamanee had struggled to fulfill her daily obligatory prayers, she believed that she would hold her accountable for all her words and deeds, and she remained firm in her commitment to helping others: “I definitely feel that religion has had an impact on my life. I think I can tie my activism to the teaching of the Prophet: ‘If you see an evil act, you should stop it with your hand…’ That could link my activism…” Layaal, Talib, and Zayn referenced this particular Prophetic teaching as influential in their social justice activism.

The development of ummah consciousness was powerfully influenced by 9/11 and its aftermath, a phenomenon that has been well documented in studies of Muslim youth (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bayoumi, 2008; Maira, 2004, 2009). Several of the participants, even those who had previously been ambivalent about being Muslim, felt compelled to claim their Muslim identity by learning about Islamic and Muslim history, by educating the mainstream public about Islam and Muslims, and by developing critical analyses of 9/11 in historical context of imperialism and colonialism, and by protesting against the local and global “War on Terror.”
Interestingly, one participant had converted to Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, because in the *Holy Quran* (given to him by Muslim friends) resonated with him. He became actively involved in organizing an anti-Islamophobia campaign on his university campus, and eventually organizing a response to the erosion of civil liberties in Muslim and Arab Canadian communities. Even the development of critical analyses of 9/11 is noteworthy as a form of dissenting citizenship, because questioning “the 9/11 story” is tenuous especially for Muslims and those who “look like Muslims.” Participants drew attention to the persistence of oppression within the ummah. The young Muslim women’s collective and the after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls were efforts to resist and critique patriarchal forms of social control.

It is noteworthy that some participants expressed uncertainty about their “Muslim-ness.” Using a life history approach was particularlry useful for capture young people’s different life stages, and shifting and contextual identities. Zaynab had wondered whether she was “pure enough” to engage in Muslim activism, but eventually found her way. Jamila had grown up trying to negotiate between her “fiercely secular” father and her “religiously devout” mother, patriarchal social controls imposed on her in school and by the state of Bahrain. She was still grappling with what it meant for her to be Muslim. Negotiations of Muslim identity are also well documented in studies of Muslim youth (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bayoumi, 2008; Maira, 2004, 2009; Zine, 2000, 2004). More broadly, I feel that the accounts I shared within this study offer some insight into young Muslims’ experiences of Islamic education, broadly understood as encompassing formal and non-formal education and informal learning (see also Zine, 2008).

**Insights from Young Muslims’ Acts of Citizenship**

In this study, I was concerned with *agency*—the capacity to act in the world to transform it. I drew from notions of “justice-oriented” citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), “social
capital” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006; Sampson et al., 1999), and “relational agency” (Lovell, 2003) to understand the role of social interactions and relationships in public and political action, and more specifically to explain the ways in which those who lack social and economic power resist oppressive forces that impact them and their communities. The voices and stories of the young Muslim activists in my study reveal the collective dimensions of their understandings, expressions, and practices of citizenship.

**Advocating for Youth Tenants in Social Housing**

In chapter five, I introduced Bilal, Karim and Zayn, and discussed their youth tenant advocacy work within the context of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). In contrast to the other Muslim youth involved in my study, these young men were politically engaged in a project of the (municipal) government. However, I understood their work as both oppositional and propositional. Bilal, Karim and Zayn were motivated to engage with TCHC because they believed that learning about its political and organizational structure would help them better understand how to secure resources for their housing communities. Through their work in TCHC, they learned about how decisions are made and resources allocated and tried to figure out how they could influence TCHC.

This learning experience was difficult, provoking contradictory emotions that they struggled to reconcile. Karim had great hopes for effecting positive change in his community when he became involved in TCHC. Over time, however, he felt “tokenized” by TCHC, and frustrated by how little he felt he had actually done for his community in his capacity as tenant representative. The social and economic disparities between TCHC and the communities it claimed to serve deeply troubled Bilal. Zayn worried about maintaining his integrity in TCHC, which he perceived to be dishonest with its tenants. These young men developed critiques of
TCHC, its policies and practices, which they understood as racist and classist. They resisted and challenged urban mythology that “has identified Blacks with disorder and danger in the city” (Haymes, 1995, p. 4). In this way they sought to transform social spaces and ways of thinking and acting in TCHC. By sitting at “the table” they represented youth tenants, and they took what they learned through their work in TCHC and circulated it among youth tenants. In this way, they were seeking to transform social spaces and ways of thinking and acting in their housing communities.

I think it is significant that Bilal, Karim and Zayn met one another through their work in TCHC. They forged a sense of belonging and community with one another based on common struggles as young Black/African Muslim men. They served as a source of political and social support for one another by working collectively to ensure that youth tenant perspectives were heard by TCHC and by helping one another cope with and challenge racist discourses and practices that they encountered within and beyond TCHC. Zayn shared that he looked most forward to praying with Bilal, Karim and other young Muslim tenants and activists at their weekly TCHC meetings. It seemed that this sense of belonging to a Muslim community contributed to their sense of purpose and created a spiritual energy that enabled them to continue their work despite the obstacles and frustrations they encountered.

Foroughi (2010) examined of informal learning as experienced and expressed by low-income tenants, staff and managers involved in a city wide participatory social housing governance initiative (the Tenant Participation System) sponsored by TCHC. He found that tenants’ informal learning within the context of TCHC included learning about the political and organizational structure of social housing; learning about the lived experiences and perspectives of other tenants within and beyond their communities; learning confidence and developing a
sense of personal autonomy; and learning to improve participatory governance processes (p. 116-7). He found that younger respondents mentioned that their participation made them feel that they “mattered” (p. 117). Foroughi (2010) highlighted the informal learning of one youth tenant representative: “A youth tenant representative feels fulfilled that her participation has motivated other youth to become active; this gives her ‘a good feeling motivating to continue’” (p. 117).

My findings are consistent with some of this previous research, and offer some additional nuances by revealing participants’ contradictory emotions about their political engagement and practices in TCHC and their communities.

Although a full critique of TCHC policies and practices was beyond the scope of my study, I think that these young men’s experiences and expression of working within the context of TCHC raise critical questions about the extent to which TCHC, a project of the Toronto municipal government, actually support youth tenants’ substantive inclusion in decision-making processes that directly impact them. I situate the efforts of Bilal, Karim and Zayn within a longer history of political activism and social movement learning among tenants living and organizing in social housing communities in the United States and Canada. Demands for social change among public housing tenants—African Americans, the poor and other oppressed groups—powerfully catalyzed protest movements in cities across the United States in the 1960s: “In many cities, public housing tenants organized democratic tenants’ councils to negotiate with management over a range of issues; in some projects, tenants were elected to the boards of local housing authorities” (Purdy, 2004, p. 520). The ideas and practices of Canadian public housing were influenced by these developments in the United States (ibid.). Purdy’s (2004) analysis of tenant political organizing in Canada’s first and largest housing project, Toronto’s Regent Park
in the 1960s and 1970s, provides insight into a rich history of tenant organizing in Canadian cities that has largely been hidden by brutal stigmatization of its social housing communities.

**Resisting State Repression and Criminalization**

Abdul-Haq and Layaal, through their “know your rights” campaign, and Aisha, through her campaign against police brutality, resisted state repression and criminalization of their communities. I understood their acts of citizenship, in the form of these campaigns, as powerful expressions of courage, dissent, and solidarity in a post-9/11 political climate that is characterized by fear among those targeted by aggressive policing strategies. Thobani (2007) explains the role of aggressive policing strategies in nation-building: “Racial profiling puts people of color “back” in “their” place as outsiders-to-the-nation, stripping away pretentions of inclusion within liberal-democratic order” (p. 242). State policies and practices that construct and re-construct new categories of citizens who can be excluded from the rights and protections entitled to *all* citizens are a symbolic redrawing of national boundaries (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

Political education based on a dialogical approach was a strategy used in both of these campaigns to overcome “silencing” of their communities. Within each of these campaigns, political education and dialogue contributed to sophisticated analyses of and an oppositional consciousness against a political system that has created fear in their communities. The “know your rights” campaign was comprised of a series of workshops designed to inform Muslim and Arab Canadian citizens about the Canadian Security Intelligence Service’s (CSIS) activities in their communities, their legal rights and civil liberties, strategies for dealing with CSIS, and access to lawyers and human rights advocates. Further, the “know your rights” campaign provided opportunities for Muslim and Arab community members subjected to CSIS harassment
and misconduct to discuss the emotional and material impact of these activities on their lives, and to receive support. Fear, mistrust, and anxiety created by state surveillance and disciplining in these communities is documented in studies of Muslim youth (e.g., Bayoumi, 2008; Cristillo, 2008; Maira, 2004, 2009; Zaal et al., 2007). Maira (2009) reflects on the dissolution of “community” for Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans after 9/11:

For example, in spring 2003, SACH [South Asian Committee on Human Rights] organized a public forum on civil and immigrant rights for Muslim, Arab, and South Asian immigrants in Wellford, and invited South Asian and Arab American lawyers to speak to members of the community at a university campus close to Prospect Square. We handed out fliers at the mosque and at local South Asian businesses and restaurants, and also spoke personally to individuals in the community who we knew were concerned about legal and immigration issues. On the day of the forum, however, not one person from these communities showed up who was not a civil or immigrant rights activists. Talking later to people in the South Asian Muslim community about why they were missing from the event, the explanation was simple: fear. The government’s strategy was effective; not only did it produce self-censorship and repression, but it kept many from receiving help in defending themselves from the intrusions of the state or mobilizing collectively. The notion that people who were “missing” from public space after 9/11 were “the disappeared” is not simply a melodramatic phrase, but a condition produced in response to state strategies of disciplining and surveillance. (p. 279)

Like the “know your rights” campaign, the campaign against police brutality began with “political education,” as Aisha explained. Young people learned about state repression and criminalization of urban low-income communities of color in the United States and Canada, forms of collective resistance that emerged from within these aggressively policed communities, and examined the use of aggressive policing strategies in their own communities. Aisha’s campaign against police brutality involved creating safe spaces in which young people could gather to share their personal and social experiences as young people from low-income communities of color, to share their personal and social experiences of aggressive policing strategies, and to receive support. The campaign was built around youth culture, and core
component was an annual including an annual basketball tournament to commemorate the lives of youth victims of police brutality, to bring together young people from all over the city to play basketball together peacefully, and to provide education about police brutality. Using this strategy, the campaign was successful in reaching out to extremely marginalized youth. Parallel to these activities, the campaign endeavored to raise the profile of youth victims of police brutality in the media and through direct action. It was part of an action coalition attempting to block the placement of police officers in schools located in urban low-income communities. Similar youth-led efforts to challenge aggressive policing and criminalization of their communities are documented in critical youth studies (e.g., Kwon, 2006). Citizenship education research literature has been concerned with young people’s levels of trust in state institutions, including police. However, the impact of aggressive policing on young people from urban low-income communities of color is underexplored.

Creating Safe Spaces for Young Muslim Women

Creating a “safe space” for Muslim girls and young women was a primary concern of the young women’s groups featured in my study. These were cultural and political spaces—located beyond their families and schools—in which they could speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance.

The notion of “community” was centralized in these women’s groups. Nabila, through her after-school drop-in program, strived to build a sense of community among Muslim adolescent girls living in an inner city Toronto neighborhood. Asmina, Asmara, and Salsabil, who had come to know one another through their mothers’ social support networks, strived to build community with other young Somali women. The young Muslim women’s collective,
which formed in response to the murder of Aqsa Parvez, brought together diverse Muslim women working to prevent and end violence against women.

The notion of “dialogue” was at the heart of the women’s groups. The after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls, the young Somali women’s group and the young Muslim women’s collective were initially conceptualized as discussion groups. Within the context of the after-school drop-in program, Nabila guided the girls in critical exploration and questioning about what it means to be Muslim and female in their families, communities, schools and wider Canadian society. The Somali women’s group began as a monthly social gathering for young Somali women to enjoy tea in one another’s company and to discuss what it meant to be female and Somali in their families, Somali diasporic communities, and Canadian society. Within the context of the young Muslim women’s collective, the young women gathered to discuss violence against women, particularly their personal and social experiences, feelings, and individual and collective strategies for resistance. These young women’s groups offer insight into the range of issues concerning girls and young women from diverse Muslim communities, including Islam and the status of women, women’s sexual health and reproductive rights, women’s education, violence against women, self-defense, and healthy relationships. Further, through dialogue these young women developed critical analyses of existing power arrangements, particularly of patriarchy and its manifestations in their homes, communities, schools, and wider Canadian society.

The after-school drop-in program for Muslim girls and the young Muslim women’s collective in particular were originally intentioned as private sites for discussion of personal issues and became sites of public and political action. Nabila helped the Muslim girls understand how to advocate for themselves within advocate for their personal and bodily autonomy at
school. The young Muslim women’s collective launched a public protest against a sensational and Islamophobic representation of Aqsa Parvez’s murder. This involved preparing a critical analysis of the cover story and images, forming a coalition of diverse women’s organizations working to prevent and end violence against women in Canada, organizing a panel of representatives from these organizations to discuss violence against women in Canada, and organizing a letter-writing campaign to the magazine editor. Through these public and political acts of citizenship, these Muslim women’s groups attempted to transform ways of thinking and acting in mainstream media and public schools.

Through efforts to create cultural and political spaces for Muslim women and girls these young women reclaim political identities in opposition to hegemonic master narratives that construct Muslim women and women of color as victimized, silenced and oppressed. I understand the work of these young Muslim women’s groups as part of young Muslim women’s efforts in Canada and beyond to assert their personal and bodily autonomy.

Gender is a major theme in empirical work on youth from Muslim communities living in western liberal democracies. Abu El-Haj and Bonet (2011) identified three overlapping sub-themes that this research explores: (a) gender is a site through which youth are negotiating between traditional Muslim and modern Western cultural demands, (b) how young people are negotiating and enacting gender identities and practices in relation to attempts by new immigrant communities to carve out forms of authenticity in these new contexts, and (c) how Muslim girls’ gendered practices reflect struggles for citizenship in mainstream society. My study demonstrates how young Muslim women are working collectively to re-construct gendered discourses and practices in their families, communities, schools, and in wider Canadian society.
Telling Counter-Stories through Spoken Word Poetry

The poets involved in my study perceived themselves as “teachers” and the act of performing poetry before audiences as potentially “educational.” Through performing poetry before audiences, they created cultural and political spaces for teaching and learning in out-of-school contexts where poets and audiences can engage in knowledge and community building. Sparks and Growchowski (2002) argue that spoken word poetry is “a space and art form with the purpose of creating a new course in the margins” (p. 12). They draw from hooks (1990), who describes the margins as “a space of radical openness… a profound edge” which is “difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance” (p. 149). Similarly, Abu El-Haj (2009) describes storytelling and the arts as “free spaces” or “community spaces through which people might collectively re-imagine political possibilities” (p. 4).

Fisher (2003, 2005) explores the resurgence of spoken word and poetry venues in two African diasporic communities in the United States and their salience as venues for social identity and critical literacy development. Within these spaces, she found that learning was an intergenerational and cyclical process—a “circular thing, an opportunity for young people to learn from elders and for elders to learn from the youth” (p. 386). She found that the poets and the audiences were committed to establishing a Black knowledge base where legacies of Black leaders, writers and artists are preserved vis-à-vis spoken word events—cultural and political spaces in which identity and a feeling of belonging were not limited to generalizations and stereotypes that had negatively impacted the self-image of members of these communities.

Similarly, the poets involved in my study understood poetry as a consciousness-raising, pedagogical tool, and were committed to using the tool to disrupt generalizations and stereotypes
of their communities. Poets and audiences who participate in spoken word can “challenge stereotypical representations of their community, redefine their cultural identity on their own terms, and work at becoming agents of change in their own environment” (Sutton, 2004, p. 215). The poets involved in this study created cultural and political spaces in which identity was not limited to generalizations and stereotypes that had negatively impacted self-image of youth from their communities—youth from Muslim communities, from low-income communities of color,

The poets’ acts of citizenship might be understood as a form of “counter story-telling” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These youths’ poetry, or counter-stories, names Islamophobia, racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressions that impact them and their communities. In doing so, their poetry challenges hegemonic narratives that marginalize them and their communities. As Solórzano & Yosso (2002) remind us, “Indeed, within the histories and lives of people of color, there are numerous unheard counter-stories. Storytelling and counter-storytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (p. 32).

The stories and voices of the young Muslim poets involved in my study demonstrate the significance of spoken word poetry as a site for political education and alliance building for youth through popular art forms, which remain underexplored in citizenship education research literature. There is, however, a growing body of empirical work on American Muslim youth, in particular, which recognizes that young Muslims are accessing notions of citizenship through popular culture, particularly Hip Hop, rather than through formal political institutions and processes (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2009; Maira, 2000, 2008, 2009, 2010).
Advocating for Palestinian Self-Determination on University Campuses

Campus-based Palestinian solidarity activities were a site of political education and community building for some of the young Muslims involved in my study. For the Palestinian youth it was a site of Palestinian identity reclamation and mobilization in opposition to hegemonic narratives that dispute the very notion of “Palestine” and “Palestinians.” Palestinian solidarity activities help make visible Palestine and Palestinians in the world. Maira (2008) explains: “Activism, and solidarity, are not simply identities to be performed. At the same time, young Palestinian and Arab Americans are resisting the pervasive silencing and distortion of the Palestine issue by openly expressing their political critiquing and vocalizing their Palestinian identity (p. 187). Among the Palestinian American youth in her study, Abu El-Haj (2007) notes the “deep aspirations they have that one day they will behold an independent state of Palestine,” which “signal their sense of belonging to a national community that exists beyond the borders of a recognized nation-state” (p. 286). Many of the youth in her study experienced encounters with teachers who refused to acknowledge both the legitimacy of their aspirations for an independent state and their everyday experiences living under Israeli occupation. These youth often faced disciplinary action. The Palestinian youth involved in my study related similar experiences.

Other young Muslims in my study expressed solidarity with Palestinians and found their way into campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement. This solidarity might, to some extent, be understood as part of their “ummah consciousness” (Werbner, 2002). Appleton (2005) found among the young British Muslim university students involved in his study: “The most important issues, almost universally, were firstly Israel/Palestine and secondary the war in Iraq” (p. 184). To redefine oneself as Muslim in the diaspora often entails refocusing on persecuted and displaced Muslim communities, connecting to Palestine, and working to assist these Muslim
minority communities (Soysal, 1997; Werbner, 2002). As a young woman who was visibly Muslim in hijab, Layaal had felt pressured to “become religiously invisible” by some of the other Arab students involved in campus-based Palestinian solidarity. They had actually had pushed Layaal out of the group. Layaal’s commitment to Palestine and Palestinians was formed by the death of family members at the hands of Israeli military, her parents’ involvement in Palestinian solidarity work, and her sense of responsibility as a Muslim to care for the wellbeing of oppressed peoples.

As discussed in previous chapter, the campus-based Palestinian solidarity movement became a site for development critical analysis of settler-colonialism. Some of the youth began making connections among liberation struggles of First Peoples of Canada and Black South Africans, and the consequences for critiquing the Israeli occupation in Palestine. Bannerji (2000) has observed, “Acknowledged as the First Nations, Native peoples are like the Palestinians, who form a nation without a state and are subject to continual repression” (p. 75). Maira (2009) found that the “War on Terror” catalyzed new interconnections between movements and generated new kinds of political education, and new re-mappings of boundaries between movements and identifications:

One instance on my own campus is a multiethnic group of students at the University of California, Davis, who created a South Asian / Middle Eastern Coalition after 9/11 and became engaged in making connections between the detentions of Muslim Americans and the warehousing of African Americans and Latinos and Latinas in the prison-industrial complex. Asian American and Latino and Latina students at UC Davis also became aware of the struggles of Arab American students to bring to light the Palestine question in the face of repression and censorship in the U.S. academy. In spring 2005, the Third World Forum (a multiethnic student group), along with South Asian, Palestinian, and Latino and Latina organizations, cosponsored a talk, “Palestine and Philippines: National Liberation Struggles and International Solidarity,” which charted a history of U.S. imperial policies and overseas occupation, client states, and repression. Latino and Latina and Arab American students collaborated on a forum drawing attention to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and the parallels between
the building of a “security fence” to keep “terrorists” and unwanted aliens from crossing it and the Israeli wall that has encroached on Palestinian land and divided towns and villages in the West Bank. (p. 282)

Young women’s involvement in campus-based Palestinian solidarity activities revealed gendered complexities of social movements. For one of the participating young women, the threat and experiences of gender-based violence led to withdrawal from organizing within the Palestinian solidarity movement. Similarly, Mahrouse (2006) found in her ethnographic study of transnational solidarity activism that when gender is taken into consideration, the threat and experience of sexual violence profoundly affected the experiences of female activists. She pointed out that, “To bypass the dominance of male leadership, women in the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the anti-occupation of Palestine movement (to name a few), have found that women-only groups work best” (p. 175). This suggests that women only-groups may create more of a safe space for addressing questions of gender and sexual violence in social movements, and that there is a need for continual critical reflection and action to produce anti-oppressive consciousness and action in these organizations.

Regarding the pedagogical potential of Palestinian solidarity activism, Maira (2008) asserts,

The Palestine question is key, for it represents a crucible in which some of these domestic and transnational dimension linked to U.S. imperialism emerge most sharply. The evolving Palestine movement, the forms and rhetoric it uses and the alliances it generates, offers political pedagogy of U.S. empire that reveals the linkages between various struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and racism. (163).

I feel that Maira’s analysis is applicable to the Canadian context, because the Palestinian movement raises critical questions about Canadian foreign policy, settler-colonialism, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. As Abu El-Haj (2007) explains, “The commitment to and
engagement with transnational issues must not be taken as a sign of ‘disloyalty’ or a problem for
citizenship, but as an opportunity to help alls think about rights and justice across national
borders” (p. 311).

Summary of Contributions

I situated this study, consciously and purposely, in citizenship education research
literature. I was concerned about entering the space of citizenship education so that others might
come to understand that young people, who from communities marked as suspect in post-9/11
Canada, have much to say about schooling, policies, and practices that produce commonsensical
notions about what constitutes being Canadian.

While all of the youth reported that they had learned about citizenship and belonging in
schools and classrooms through oppressive interactions with educators or peers, a few of the
youth also reported powerful anti-oppressive pedagogical interventions that affirmed their
defining identities and ways of being. In some instances, young people leveraged cultural
resources, particularly counter-stories, generated in homes and communities to resist oppressions
in schools and classrooms. This study contributes important insights into young people’s
citizenship learning opportunities and experiences within and beyond schools. It should be
reiterated that many youth were entering schools with violent encounters with other state
institutions (e.g., the police, the judicial system, the immigration system, and the employment
system), which also informed their understanding of citizenship and belonging. This study draws
attention to the importance of youth culture, particularly Hip Hop, as a source of counter-stories.
Islamic education was another critical source of counter-stories. This study provides insight into
young people’s responses to official citizenship education curriculum in courses such as
Canadian and World Issues, English, Native Studies, and World Religions.
Another critical contribution of this study to citizenship education is an expanded notion of what constitutes being political. Llewellyn, Cook, Westheimer, Girón, Suurtamm (2007) raised concerns about under-reporting of certain kinds of citizen action among youth due to “discursive variation” (p. 18): “Young people may not identify their community work as civic engagement, perhaps because their participation is not inspired by a sense of civic duty. Instead, they volunteered for ‘the change to help in a cause they believed in, to connect with friends, or gain job skills’” (p. 18). Llewellyn et al. (2007) conclude, “The semantic and discursive barriers between generations can often make us fail to notice the ways that youth are, in fact, actively engaged in political and community work” (p. 18). In addition to semantic and discursive barriers between generations, I think it is also important to acknowledge ideological barriers. Traditional liberal notions of citizenship, by placing emphasize on the individual’s relationship to the state (and political participation in electoral processes), eschewing civil society as a site of collective agency and power, and marginalize socially diverse group identities, limit possibilities for understanding young people’s political practices. Employing expanded notions of citizenship, identity, and agency enabled me to capture the different ways young Muslims activists are enacting citizenship within and beyond Canada. The young Muslim activists’ justice work was based on a do-it-yourself ethic, and it was personal, interpersonal, and reflective. Religious identities emerged alongside ethnic and gender identities as bases for mobilization and in response to distorted representations and exclusions.

I situated this study in empirical work on Muslim youth in Canada and the United States. It addresses core themes in the research literature, including identity, gender, citizenship, and schooling experiences, and thereby provides points of comparison with the lived experiences and perspectives of other young Muslims. American Muslim youth studies, in particular, have
provided critical insights into young Muslims’ lived experiences of and responses to 9/11, the United States-led international and domestic “War on Terror.” While my study also addresses these themes, it does so by exploring how young Muslim activists learn and enact their political subjectivities in post-9/11 Canada. Canadian Muslim youth studies have also provided important insights into the formation of Islamic subcultures in public schools. My study focuses on ‘out-of-school’ cultural sites of collective agency and power created by and for young Muslims in Canada. It is also a contribution to a growing body of studies of Muslim youth conducted by Muslim researchers.

In addition to citizenship education and Muslim youth studies, I believe that the findings of this study are relevant to other disciplines, including cultural studies, critical ethnic studies, urban education and sociology, women’s studies, and political science.

Part Two: Implications and Avenues for Future Research

Implications for Educators

The core implication that I have drawn from my analysis of the 18 young Muslim activists’ cultural citizenship narratives is that educators must seek to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of their students. A fundamental tenant of humanizing education is that education must be situated in students’ lives and move outward to the world as they read it (Freire, 1970). All other implications that I have drawn are based on this core implication. A related question that I asked myself as I formulated these implications was: How can the voices and stories of the young Muslims involved in my study help educators think about what it means to create liberatory and transformative learning opportunities?
**Inquiring about young people’s identities**

Educators must inquire about young people’s defining identities and experiences of oppressions. As discussed in the previous section, most of all of the youth reported that they had learned about citizenship and belonging in schools and classrooms through oppressive interactions with educators or peers, and only a few of the youth also reported powerful anti-oppressive pedagogical interventions that affirmed their defining identities and ways of being. Their conflicted sense of belonging in Canadian society may be connected to the failure on the part of a majority of educators to critically examine their personal prejudices, which inevitably play out in classrooms, and to critically engage issues of identity and inequality. It is important to note the participating youth who had received some of their formal education in other countries (e.g., Bahrain, Kuwait) reported similar experiences of teacher racism and discrimination. Although I speak primarily to educators in Canada, implications are applicable beyond schooling in Canada.

**Inquiring about young people’s lived culture**

De Leon (2004) asserts, “Hip Hop is the dominant language of youth culture, and those of us who work with young people need to speak their language” (De Leon, 2004, p. 1). Indeed, this study suggests that educators need to learn about Hip Hop, and explore its pedagogical potential. Hip Hop culture has been a space where the youth of today have found identity, humanity, and a place to develop their critical consciousness through the engagement of humanizing discourses such as art, music, dance or other creative expression. Educators can begin by critically examining their own perceptions of Hip Hop. Morrell (2008) points out, “Negative perceptions of Hip Hop prevail among educators... With popular songs that seemingly glorify violence and misogyny, the genre is written off as more pathological than pedagogical”
Some Hip Hop music does indeed reinforce cultural and structural violence through sexist and heterosexist lyrics and imagery (for further analysis of sexism and heterosexism in Hip Hop (see Perry, 2004; Rose, 1994; Smalls, 2010). However, some Hip Hop music critically questions concrete situations of oppression and exemplifies literacy and artistry. Educators can explore Hip Hop’s many genres to expand and deepen their understanding of the diversity of voices and perspectives in hip hop music, and to help students make sense of different and contradictory messages in hip hop music. There is a growing body of Hip Hop scholarship, Hip Hop media, and Hip Hop education pedagogical resources, which educators can draw from to support the integration of Hip Hop into the classroom (Diaz, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

Educators can explore local grass-roots Hip Hop movements, make connections with local Hip Hop artists and collectives, and invite local Hip Hop artists and collectives into classrooms as “co-teaching artists” (Diaz et al., 2011). Inside the classroom, educators can draw from students who are active participants in Hip Hop culture to help build the curriculum. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) found, “teaching Hip Hop as a music and a culture of resistance can facilitate the development of critical consciousness in urban youth” (p. 89).

**Inquiring about young people’s home and neighborhood communities**

The youths’ narratives demonstrated that families provided role models, social and academic expectations, spaces for youth and their friends to gather and to discuss issues pertinent to their lives, as well as safety rules and guidelines for navigating harmful risks. In particular, the youth observed that their parents managed to exercise capacity, influence circumstances, and make autonomous decisions for themselves and their families despite social and economic constraints. I caution educators against framing families that are not able to provide such opportunities for their children as ‘problem’ families. The youths’ stories revealed that homes
and neighborhoods impacted their sense of identity and social belonging, healthy, safety, and overall wellbeing, and access to social infrastructure through which they develop their sense of agency and capacity for citizenship. Thus, housing has a direct impact on the extent to which young people experience social inclusion or exclusion. For the youth living in social housing in particular, housing presented symbolic, physical, and socioeconomic issues that hindered or helped young people’s access to social inclusion. Some youth had experienced discrimination from others because of their housing status, but, at the same time, had found a sense of community among other tenants in their neighborhoods. Many of the youth discussed the health and safety risks associated with living in neighborhoods marked by concentrated levels of poverty, and others shared limitations in terms of physical and social infrastructure in their neighborhoods.

This is suggestive of the importance of family, school, community, and government partnerships to meet students’ material and cultural needs for critical citizenship learning and engagement. It is necessary for educators to investigate these other worlds that young people navigate. This is particularly critical for helping teachers understand what kinds of resources are available in students’ neighborhoods and communities, and what additional supports they may need to provide. Thus, educators need to commit to partnerships with parents and communities to support student achievement and wellbeing, sharing information about young people’s learning and achievement (see also Pollack, 2008).

**Inquiring about young people’s interactions with the state**

Although public schools are most young people’s primary contact with the state, some young people are entering classrooms scarred by violent encounters with other state institutions. These findings demand that teachers engage with their students in critically exploring and
questioning the role of police (municipal, provincial, federal) in Canadian schools and society, theory and practice of ‘proactive’ policing and its links to the cultural idea of the ‘good citizen’, various forms of police misconduct, minority-police relations, as well as ways to engage constructively with police. These findings demand that educators work to create safe and equitable classroom and school environments in which students feel that they can discuss their encounters with police, and the impact of those encounters on their sense of citizenship, and their relationships with other adults in positions of public authority. In chapter six, Aisha, whose family member was fatally shot by a Canadian police officer, raised critical questions about the placement of police in schools: how can schools with police be safe and equitable for young people who have been victims of ‘proactive’ policing or worse? The youth involved in this study not only discussed encounters with the state (beyond schooling) through policing, but also through the judicial system, the immigration system, and the employment system. Teachers must situate policing and schooling within the larger context of the state to articulate the role of the state in regulating citizens’ opportunities for substantive inclusion in civil, economic, political, and social spheres.

**Building school-home-community partnerships**

Finally, another major implication for citizenship teaching and learning is the need for an integrated approach to citizenship education. The youth involved in this study sought ways to create safe spaces between homes and schools. They found and created these opportunities in out-of-school spaces, rather than within the school’s citizenship education curriculum. These out-of-school spaces offered youth an alternate space in which they could explore and speak back to the exclusionary discourses they were encountering in schools and society. An implication for citizenship education is to provide young people with opportunities to critically
question and explore injustice and work for social change, and to provide the tools young people need to create their own communities. Another implication is that educations be aware of local youth based activities and movements, so that they can help young people in their classrooms and schools build alternate support networks.

**Avenues for Future Research**

This study, which explored the citizenship learning and engagement of 18 young Muslim activists living in contemporary Toronto, Canada, suggests several avenues of inquiry for future research. Here, I offer the following four research proposals:

The life histories of the 18 young Muslims activists involved in my study can be understood as “counter-stories to hegemonic master narratives of nation, immigration, assimilation and belonging” (Benmayor, 2009, p. 138). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) remind us “Indeed, in the histories and lives people of color, there are numerous counter-stories Storytelling and counter-storytelling these experiences can strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (p. 32). I would recommend research that engages young people in the development of their “counter-stories” and “counter story-telling.”

Hip Hop and spoken word poetry are critical sites of political education and alliance building for the young Muslims involved in my study. I would recommend a sustained focus on Hip Hop and spoken word poetry as a form of liberatory praxis. More broadly, I would suggest increased focus on cultural production and consumption in citizenship education research. I believe it is important to look at young people’s cultural productions and formations as social commentary and political activism. I believe it is important to focus on the art form and the space of possibility where other young people engage with the cultural production or formation.
The young Muslim activists’ narratives described encounters, often violent, with state institutions. Indeed, all of the youth reported experiencing some form of oppression (i.e., classism, sexism, racism, Islamophobia, homophobia) in schools and classrooms, and even fewer reported experiencing anti-oppressive education in these spaces. Further, several of the youth reported encounters with other state institutions, including the police, the judicial system, and the immigration system. I would recommend further research on young people’s encounters with state institutions, particularly beyond schooling, for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the state shapes their understandings, expressions, and practices of citizenship.

I recommend further research on young Muslims’ political subjectivities and engagements within and beyond Toronto. As discussed in preceding chapters, the urban setting of this study, Toronto, enabled encounters among diverse young Muslims that might only be possible in global cities with significant Muslim populations. I think it is important to learn from young Muslims in other major urban cores in Canada (e.g., Vancouver and Montreal), but also in spaces and places in between and across the country.

Concluding Remarks

I met Talib one cool spring evening, after the *Maghrib*\(^{50}\) prayer, in a Lebanese *shwarma* shop on Yonge Street. We sat in the back, which had been converted into a *sheesha* lounge. Arabic dance music played in the background. We had only met briefly once before. On this evening, he entrusted me with his life story. He wove an intricate story, detailing many aspects of his life. He wanted to ensure that he provided sufficient detail in case we could not meet again. He expressed his hope that through this process of telling and re-telling, his story could

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\(^{50}\) The *Maghrib* prayer, “evening prayer,” is performed just after sunset. It is one of five daily obligatory prayers.
reach other marginalized youth in need of knowing that they are not alone and that there is hope. Just as Talib’s life story was a “counter-story” to hegemonic master narratives about young Black men that persist in the popular Canadian national imaginary, his life story was a “counter-story” about young Muslim men. I left our meeting feeling heavy with the weight of the life story and the responsibility of re-telling it, but I felt uplifted by his support.

The generous support that I received from Aamanee, AbdulHaq, Aisha, Amina, Asmara, Bilal, Jamila, Karim, Khadijeh, Layaal, Maha, Maliha, Mustafa, Nabila, Salsabil, Talib, Zayn, and Zaynab sustained me in this journey. I have had the privilege of listening to their life stories, as well as the privilege of breaking fast with many of them during Ramadan, of greeting them at Eid celebrations, of standing with them at political demonstrations with them, and of celebrating revolution. A party previously planned by Zaynab on February 2, 2011 transformed into an impromptu celebration of the Egyptian revolution. Maliha brought a cake with the inscription: “Resistance is not futile.” It was a beautiful winter’s night of solidarity and hope.

I believe that this study has captured formations of new Muslim solidarities. The Muslim population in Toronto is remarkable for its diversity. Within such an urban context, in an era of globalization and transnational migration, young people from diverse Muslim communities are encountering and entering one another’s worlds. The devastation of 9/11 and its aftermath have generated new political and cultural spaces in which young Muslims can explore and express their Muslim identities, and this was evident among the young people in my study.

Through the stories and voices of these youth, I have gained insight into what it might mean to live the teaching of Prophet Muhammad that I begin this thesis with. Although this thesis is part of an academic requirement, it was not written with the intent of sharing it only in
the rarified world of academia. I believe that these stories must be shared in local communities. The next part of this journey will involve sharing these “counter-stories” with young people.
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Appendix A
Interview Guide

General Information and Instructions:
All of these questions will not be posed to interviewees. The selection of questions will depend upon the answers provided and the time remaining in the interview. The participants will be reminded of the rights of their participation (e.g., refusal to answer questions, request to turn off the recording device, and/or withdrawal from the study).

Background
• What are the core elements that make you who you are?
• Please tell me more about yourself (where you grew up, family, social class, ethnic background or heritage).

Education
• Please tell me about your schooling and education (primary, secondary, tertiary; public, private)?
• What school-based educational experiences do you feel influenced your political orientation and work (activism)? (high school, college, university)
• What other educational experiences do you feel influenced your political orientation and work? (informal, non-formal)
• What did you learn about citizenship?

Political Participation (General)
• What forms of political action are important to you? In what forms have you been involved?
• How has Islam influenced your political orientation and work?
• What other ideologies have influenced your political orientation and work?
• What factors have motivated/inhibited your political work?

Status and Participation of Muslims in Canadian and International Contexts
• Describe your experience growing up in Canada (or other parts of the world as applicable).
• What is your view on the situation of Muslims/Muslim youth in Canada?
• What is your vision for Muslims/Muslim youth in Canada?

Political Participation (Groups)
• Please tell me about the group(s) in which you are involved. What activities are carried out? What are the goals of these activities?
• What is your role in this particular group?
• How long have you been involved in this particular group?
• What activities are carried out by this group? What activities have you organized? In what activities have you participated?
• What motivated you to organize/get involved with this particular group?
• What are some of the goals for your group/initiative/efforts?
• In your view, how does your group educate others?
• What have you learned through your involvement in this group?

**Group Setting:**
• Where group members meet to plan and discuss activities? Describe.
• Is it a volunteer group?
• Is there office-staff paid?
• How many people are in the office?
• Is the office open to the public?

**Group structure and process:**
• How often do the groups meet in person?
• What is the structure of the group? What is the distribution of power in the group?
• How are decisions made in the group?
• Are there explicit disagreements concerning the goals/intentions/practices of the group?
• How is conflict resolved in the group?

**Group educational activities:**
• What are the activities?
• How do the youth frame its purpose?
• Who attends?
• How many people and what kinds of people were invited/expected/attended?
• Where is the activity taking place?
• How long is the activity?
• Is the event public (open to everyone) or private (limited to a select audience)?

**Apparent meanings:**
• What are participants’ views on Islam’s relation to citizenship?
• What personal experiences influence participants to attend the activity/join the group?
• What are the expressed priorities of group members/participants?
• What are the expressed goals of group members/participants?

**Feedback**
• Is there anything else you would like to add?
• Is there anything you would like to ask me?