



University of Victoria

# Roots and Routes

## Migration, Faith, and Intergenerational Identity Among Ismaili Muslim Women in Canada

Khushi Makhani, Department of Social Sciences July 13th, 2025

### Project Overview

This research explores how first- and second-generation Ismaili Muslim women in Canada experience identity, belonging, and community. It focuses on how gender, culture, and faith intersect to shape identity across generations influenced by migration.

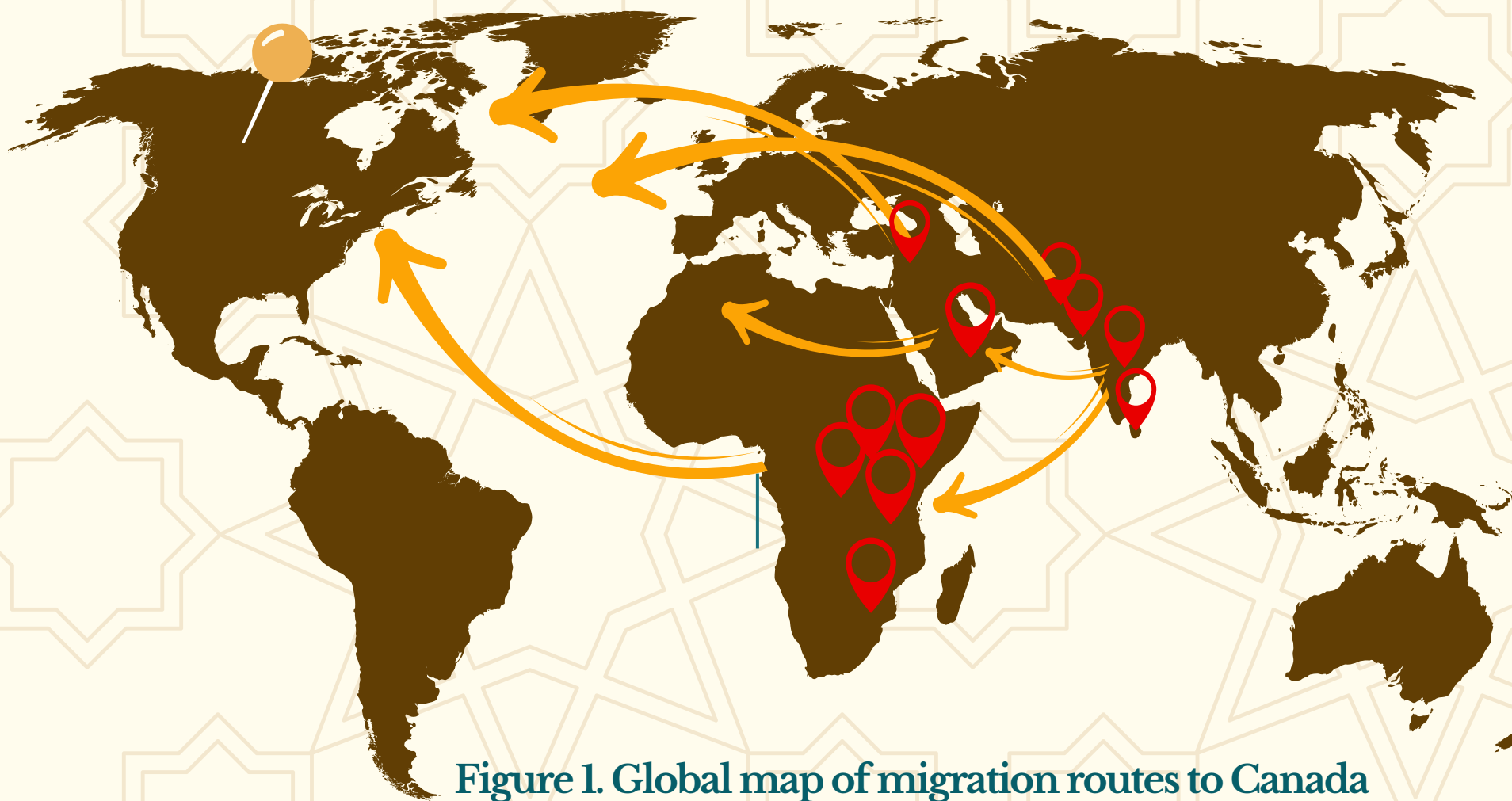


Figure 1. Global map of migration routes to Canada

### Context

The map above highlights the migration journeys of many Ismaili Muslim women and their families, including routes from East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, Mozambique), South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), and regions such as Afghanistan, Syria, and the UAE.

These migration routes reflect decades of movement shaped by political upheaval, displacement, and economic opportunity. Many families moved in stages, first settling in East Africa or the Middle East before relocating to Canada. For Ismaili women, these layered journeys have shaped how identity, culture, and faith are understood and passed down through generations. The experiences of migration continue to influence how they build community and navigate belonging in the Canadian context.

### Bibliography

- Gulamhusein, S. (2018). Living in the in-between as an Ismaili Muslim woman. UVicSpace.
- Khoja-Moolji, S. (2023). Rebuilding community. Oxford University Press.
- University of Ottawa. (n.d.). Legislated multiculturalism and hybrid identities [Thesis].
- Kraft, M. (2012). (Un)Belongings. Journal of International Women's Studies, 13(3), 29–45.

### What the Research and Participants Revealed

#### Identity In-Between Places

Many Ismaili women live between cultural expectations, balancing family tradition, Canadian norms, and personal faith. (Gulamhusein, 2018)

“At Jamatkhana (mosque), I’ve heard things like girls shouldn’t lift heavy things or that women aren’t fit for leadership. That stays with you.”

Second-generation respondent (13–17), Victoria

#### Community as Support and Pressure

Faith spaces like Jamaat Khana help preserve identity but may also create expectations to conform. (Khoja-Moolji, 2023)

“Canada and the Ismaili community are a home away from home. I feel I belong here, but it was not always like that... I don’t wait for the community to nurture the bond. As an immigrant, I am welcomed, but it is not an easy path.”

First-generation respondent (35–44), Vancouver Island

#### Belonging is Inherited

Second-generation youth often carry a sense of identity shaped not only by Canada but by where their families came from. (University of Ottawa Thesis, 2021)

“I’m mixed, and I’ve heard things like ‘you’re not brown enough to be a real Ismaili girl,’ even though I’ve always felt deeply connected to the community.”

Second-generation respondent, 18–24, Calgary

“My grandma came from India, my parents from Kenya. That story lives in me too.”

First-generation respondent, 45+, Toronto

“I feel at home here because I built my own community. But explaining what it means to be Ismaili is still confusing for people.”

Second-generation respondent (18–24), Victoria

“Jamatkhana (mosque) is where I feel most myself, but I also feel like I have to behave a certain way to fit in.”

First-generation respondent (18–24), Vancouver Island

“I’ve lived in Canada for 8 years now, it definitely took some time for it to feel like home, but I can truly call it home now.”

First-generation respondent, 25–34, Toronto

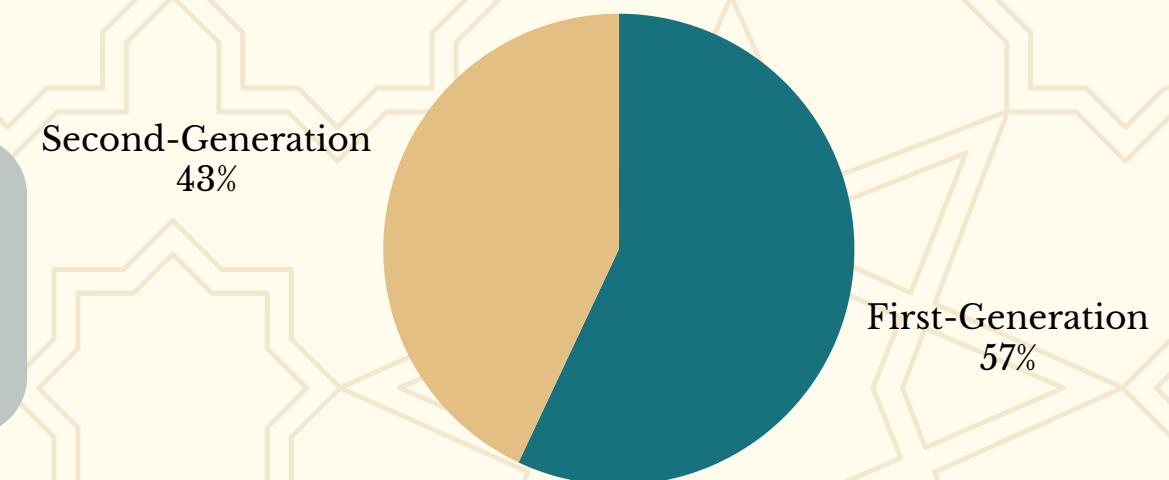


Figure 2. Generational identity of survey respondents.

### Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Valerie Kuehne Undergraduate Research Awards (VKURA), University of Victoria, and supervised by Dr. Shemine Gulamhusein.