

Living in the in-between as an *Ismaili Muslim* woman: An autoethnography

by

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BA, University of Waterloo, 2009
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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This autoethnographic research project explores how a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili Muslim*, grapples with the tensions of belonging and identity while living in the in-between spaces of multiple social locations. Using an intersectional third-wave feminist approach, a method I term “third-wave dervish”, I metaphorically spin in a similar manner to a whirling dervish. Each spin provokes a round of critical reflection grounded in a node of intersect. Throughout the dance, how each node of intersect – religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender – implicates the in-between spaces I find myself located within, on the periphery of, and wavering between is explored. Narratives from my early years, adolescence, as a young adult in a graduate classroom, and as a young practitioner serve as data. For the first time, during re-iterations of memories, experiences of being minoritized and racialized are acknowledged and I begin to challenge gender binaries and offer insight into how I unknowingly negotiated and navigated complex social spaces. Personal experiences and reflections are then translated beyond the self to offer insight into how human and social development practitioners can use the key findings of how a brown-bodied female moved through childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. The dissertation offers suggestions for practitioners to actively engage in, understand, and respond to children and youth’s verbal and non-verbal responses to experiences they are having. In addition, the text outlines the benefit of

and ways in which practitioners may encourage difficult conversations with clients who are minoritized, and how to foster safe spaces for children, youth, and young adults to explore their sense of belonging and identity.

Key Words: (1) Intersectionality, (2) In-between Spaces, (3) *Ismaili Muslim*, (4) Belonging, and (5) Identity

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Lastly, to my friends: let us raise a glass. Simply yet with ample esteem, thank you!

Dedication

To those living in the in-between with passion, intention, and trepidation.

Glossary

Various terms that may be unfamiliar to the English reader appear throughout the text. Insight into each of these terms, brief definitions, are below. Terms are also defined in context throughout the dissertation.

Allah – Muslim’s refer to God as *Allah*

Bait-ul-Ilm – religious education classes for Ismaili children and youth

Baiyah – the ceremony when a person becomes an Ismaili Muslim; similar to a baptism

Bajaji – a rickshaw, a three wheeled vehicle, in Tanzania

Chai – Indian spiced tea with cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, ginger and black peppercorns

Din – an Ismaili Muslim’s spiritual life

Du’a – the Muslim prayer that occurs three times a day for Ismaili Muslim’s

Dunya –reference to the materialistic life

Effendi – a whirling dervish’s master

Firman – a speech directed to and for Ismaili Muslims made by His Highness the Aga Khan, read in Jamat Khana

Ginan – a lyrical recitation like a hymn or song from the East Indian communities

Hazar Imam – the spiritual father and leader of the Ismaili Muslim community; known as His Highness the Aga Khan in the global community.

Ismaili – a sector of Islam; a division of the Shia branch

Jamat – the Ismaili Muslim community

Jamat Khana – a place of gathering and worship for Ismaili Muslims

Khushali – special celebrations such as *Navroz*, the day that the Imam succeeded his predecessor to become the Imam of the Time, and on the day of the Imam’s birthday

Muhindi – people of Indian decent in East Africa are referred to as *Muhindi*; also translated as brown skinned person

Murid – a follower of Hazar Imam

Navroz – the Persian New Year

Qasida – a poetic recitation from Central Asian communities; similar to *ginans*

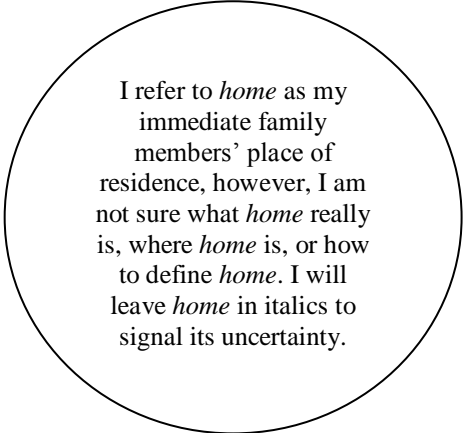
Sema – a whirling dervish

Tasbih – a set of prayers beads; in Islam, prayer beads have either 33 or 99 beads

Chapter 1

Training for the Dance

At a young age, I became an international traveler. Born in Calgary Alberta, Canada, I traveled to East Africa with my family during my second year of life. My memory fails me, thankfully to a certain degree, as many of the stories recounted include me being extremely ill during this excursion. Yet, the pictures that fill my families photo albums have always triggered my imagination. My family members sitting on the backs of elephants, riding along in what I assume are ferries, and the dirt road scenery that contradicted my paved neighbourhood at *home* encouraged me to expand my understanding beyond what Calgary offered. Since these early days, traveling has been a core part of my being. It has included family, school, sports, academic, and personal trips. More recently, I have also been able to travel for employment, volunteerism at an international youth summer camp, and research opportunities.



I refer to *home* as my immediate family members' place of residence, however, I am not sure what *home* really is, where *home* is, or how to define *home*. I will leave *home* in italics to signal its uncertainty.

As a child, I was also highly sensitive to the reactions and actions of my physical body. I knew my somatic self intimately, which privileged certain feelings and physical activities over others. For instance, I can vividly recall sitting near the back of the *Jamat Khana* as a young child and watching an unknown community member limp to the front of the hall to recite a prayer. My core, just below my belly button, immediately started aching, as if someone was slowly cutting into my skin to allow any excess fluid to seep out. I was unsure of what was happening in my body, but I was sure I wanted to take the pain away from this young man who wore his agony on his face. I had not yet formulated the words to describe how I was feeling or

had the confidence to share my sensations with others. I was, if I remember correctly, also worried that others would think I was crazy for saying such things and likely not believe my body's reaction as an innate understanding of my surroundings that occurred and occurs throughout my life and has established a basis of knowing for this research journey. In such situations, I would hunch over, tilt my head down – almost in a prostrate position – and start drawing figures in the *Jamat Khana* carpet with my right index finger. The repetitive action helped distract me from the others and allowed the pain to subside. Now, as an adult, I also have come to learn that I have empathic tendencies, where I “actually sense other people's emotions, energy, and physical symptoms in [my body], without the usual filters that most people have” (Orloff, 2017, p. 5). Hart (2003) offers another perspective as to why I may have distracted myself from the pain I was experiencing when he states that:

Children have a natural sensitivity and openness that allows them to hear the inner wisdom. Listening to intuition means noticing those subtle cues that we often tell children not to pay attention to – a gut feeling, a vague discomfort, a fleeting idea. Sometimes what is heard is remarkably beautiful. (p. 43)

I realize that I had learned to avoid the pain that was sharing a message with me and the natural compassion, the “sympathy for the suffering of others [that] often involves the desire to help” (Hart, 2003, p. 68) that I felt because I grew up in a context when developmental theorists implied “that children are self-centered and incapable of real empathy or compassion” (Hart, 2003, p. 69). However, Hart (2003) explains how “children can be enormously selfish and self-centered, but they can also be deeply empathic and compassionate” (p. 69) simultaneously.

As a child, I was also overly cautious and reserved during various activities. I often sat on the edge of the school playground and watched my peers leap from the staircase to the slide and


then the swing, or watched them swing from one monkey bar to the next. I learnt how to do the same in the park behind our family home, yet refrained from participating at school. Unsure of why I avoided the playground at school, I do imagine a part of my resistance was entangled with my desire to become invisible, which is discussed throughout this dissertation. Similarly, when expected to dance at celebrations, my body would freeze, my limbs would stiffen and I would drift into thoughts and questions that I did not know how to articulate. It was in these moments, if I could, that I would tuck myself behind one of my family member's legs in a sweet and innocent manner to avoid having to communicate, to appear tired, and to become invisible.

These somatic responses have continued throughout my life, however, recently I have come to really understand the extent of my body's ability to articulate my thoughts and feelings, and surface the tensions of belonging and identity that this research project explores in depth. For example, during my time in East Africa (2013-2014) while participating in a research project, I often found my body would resist, fight back, and physically scream with overwhelming sensations. These somatic responses provoked a hermeneutic process; the process of understanding what is being shared and making sense of the experience within the specific context (Schmidt, 2006). Almost immediately, with little conscious thought, my resistance, fight, and keen desire to practice from a respectful location that sometimes required a degree of conforming to my social location would drive me to interact with local community members in ways other than suggested by my female, Canadian, Caucasian, middle-class colleague and that often led to rewarding and productive dialogue. Experiences such as this one, where I initially engage, absorb what is occurring around me, interpret, and begin making meaning; what I label as somatic hermeneutics; has and continues to be an essential part of my grappling to understand my sense of belonging and identity. My introduction to hermeneutics, what informed much of

my thoughts and readings regarding the concept of hermeneutics was through the works of Caputo (1987, 1993, 2000). I further understood hermeneutics in an embodied manner by reading Spatz's (2015) work. Through Spatz (2015), who engages in research on learning and performing through the body and Schmidt's (2006) definition of hermeneutics as the process of making sense of experiences within specific social locations, I came to define somatic hermeneutics as the process of making sense of experiences through the micro-movements, sensations, and responses of my body while in and outside of a specific context.

While thinking about my somatic self, which triggered a plethora of stories, I decided to return to and sift through my journals. I came across excerpts such as:

...I usually think about writing my thoughts out during these moments [of questioning]



Years of journals fill my bookshelf in my family *home* in Calgary Alberta, while others from the past ten years occupy space on the shelves of my Victoria British Columbia *home*.

but often the weight of my body succumbs to the force of gravity: I slide further under the covers and then catch myself curled in a ball moments later. I would have never imagined my cognitive self to be stronger than my physical self. I have only known myself in a physical sense. (February 9, 2015).

And:

It is not a metaphor when I say my body is screaming. The cough I have vibrates through my entire body. My hands and feet have begun tingling and burning as soon as the thought of work comes up. And if I find the energy to do more than sit in front of the television, I am lucky. (May 28, 2015).

Reflecting on these excerpts, in a deep and critical manner, honoured and brought to my cognitive attention the extent of my body's ability to absorb, interpret, and understand the

context and experiences I have. For example, as a child I steered clear of dancing. One could say, I have two left feet and hips that do not move. While in Brownies, I was expected to participate in a dance performance. For weeks, we had extra Brownie meetings on Sunday morning to learn to dance. Our leader, strong, confident, and full of zest for dancing knew immediately that I was going to be the “challenging one”. Not only did I refuse to move like the other girls, my mind rejected the notion of remembering steps in a specific order. I did my best to skip practices but my family members were sure that I would build connections to the others if I regularly attended. I wanted to belong, to find a sense of connection to my peers and to the other Brownies in my troop. Yet, when the opportunity to belong presented itself, I hesitated, resisted, and on many occasions rejected performing as an elegant girl in a similar manner to peers. Now reflecting back, I find myself aware of how I constantly negotiated my sense of belonging as I wanted to be seen as a valuable member of the *Ismaili* community, yet not be seen as my female peers were seen.

My *friends*, those I yearned to be friends with but always remained a peer or acquaintance to, perhaps because of my resistance to perform as a girl and to buy into the need to dress a specific way or engage in female dominant activities such as dance, were dressed and ready to perform. I, on the other hand, refused to put makeup on. Jewelry was another battle. As I was just about to walk onto the stage my family member snapped on my costume jewelry, earrings on last. I, along with my peers at Brownies performed. We danced to *Chaiyya Chaiyya*, a Bollywood song from the movie *Dil Se* (1998) that roughly translates to “walk in the shadow of love”. This particular song takes place on a moving train performed by Sharukh Khan and Malaika Arora who dance in a single spot, feet barely moving. Now, looking back, I question why my feet were expected to move? Perhaps to fill the stage, to make our young bodies larger

than they were, to showcase the talents of some and the challenges of others? For me, while attempting to find a sense of belonging and identity within my Brownie troop, I also held true to my need to resist the expectations placed on me as a young female Brownie member. I allowed my body to move in a similar yet restricted manner to my *friends* and ignored the fact that I was dancing about love, a concept that confused me beyond loving my family members as I had yet to learn or feel a deep connection to others outside of my family.

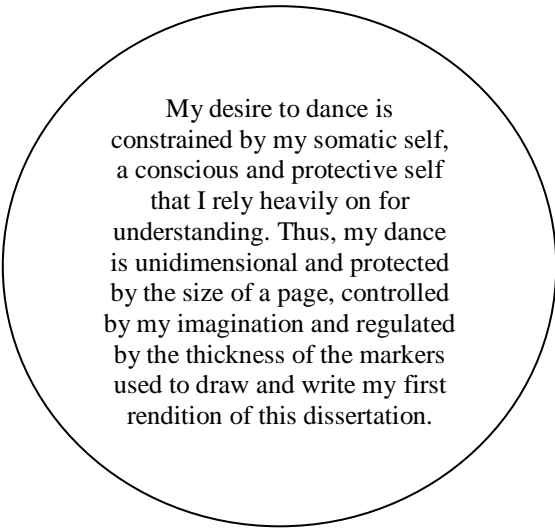
As I walked off stage, I remember seeing my family member's face, not happy nor disappointed but concerned that I needed to remove my earrings immediately. My ears, in the short seven minutes, had become inflamed, the puss starting to ooze, and my hands inching their way up to scratch. This is one of my only memory of dancing as a child, yet, it is the beginning of my grappling with living in the in-between spaces of social locations.

The above is a slight glimpse into the research process that takes place over the next several chapters. I will present an autoethnographical research project that explores the positive and challenging tensions of articulating and forming my identity and gaining a sense of belonging. In the next chapters I explain how my initial reflections fostered a curiosity about how religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender play a role in my sense of belonging and identity. Many of the narratives explored, including those of my experiences at *Jamat Khana*, Brownies, and while in East Africa have been triggered by journal entries that often led to me revisiting body sensations. Other narratives were triggered by conversations I had with *Ismaili* youth during two summer camps in East Africa. While I attempt to present my experiences in a linear manner, narratives are not lived or recalled in such a linear fashion. Iterated experiences become challenging and require multiple rounds of critical reflection and re-iterations because of the complexity, messiness, and entanglement each

narrative has with other narratives. For instance, during my travels to East Africa (2013-2014), I started to wrestle with the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of various social locations. At times, without the language to describe what I was experiencing, I struggled with living in one cultural setting while still attempting to hold onto cultural practices from other settings. I began to question my position as a female within the *Shia Ismaili Muslim* religious community, I yearned to engage in physical activities that I did back *home* in Victoria such as going for morning runs along the ocean side, and I became vividly aware of the power and privilege I held because of my affiliation to the *Ismaili* community and my Canadian passport. Concurrently, I was questioning my position as a female, my religious beliefs, ethics and values, how context influenced and influences my perceptions, and the shift from and between being a member of a minority group and reaping the benefits of my position within a particular minority group. The sheer number of questions occupying my thoughts was overwhelming, exciting, disorienting, and harmonizing. I found myself continuously spinning, similar to a whirling dervish.

My Dance

While I resisted dancing as a child, now, over twenty years later, I yearn to dance. I find inspiration in the acts of the whirling dervish. I ruminate about their act, the knowledge they gain, the intentionality with which they perform, and the multiple performances that create a singular dance, never ending nor beginning, simply continuing from moment to moment. It excites me that one can learn, seek guidance, educate, and connect with the self and others



My desire to dance is constrained by my somatic self, a conscious and protective self that I rely heavily on for understanding. Thus, my dance is unidimensional and protected by the size of a page, controlled by my imagination and regulated by the thickness of the markers used to draw and write my first rendition of this dissertation.

through dance. Thus, the dance of the whirling dervish, has captured me. I want to write my dance, to use the whirling dervish dance as a metaphor and image of thinking and moving through my experiences. The act of dancing, moving, and using my body as a means to express myself becomes ironic as it opposes my younger self's desire to be invisible.

As I write to mimic a whirling dervish, I spin in thoughts for minutes, hours, days, even months. I simulate the movements of my dance, acknowledge that I rarely feel stable and often sit in tension, constantly negotiate and navigate multiple contexts – spins – simultaneously, and often seek comfort in the border territories I have unconsciously, fluidly, and with great struggle created space within.

Allowing side-stepping

In order to deliberately showcase when I engage in parallel reflections while I maintain my primary focus on the narratives triggered by *Ismaili* youth at camp, journals entries, and readings that emerged during the research process, these momentary side-steps, those that clarify a word, offer a fleeting thought, or insight into an experience are placed in text-bubbles throughout the document (as seen above). In essence, the text-bubbles act as background dancers, filling in scenic gaps, providing additional contextual information, and offer another layer of insight into the research, critical reflection and analysis. Alternatively, when I step outside of a theoretical and critical framework and shift to narratives in an attempt to bridge my experiences with the nodes of intersectionality that are being explored, I will indicate this larger side-step, almost as if dancing two dances at a time using a right-sided heading. The below is an example of when and how this side-step will look throughout this dissertation.

Parallel Dance: My Embodied Experiences

Throughout my life, I have embodied the performance of a whirling dervish. I have and continue to find myself living and learning through resistance. For example, I remember walking into my first dance practice as a Brownie and seeing a table with multiple Bollywood videos on display so that we, the Brownies, could collectively decide on a Bollywood movie and song to perform to. The challenge for me was that I had not watched a Bollywood movie prior to this experience nor did I understand Hindi. In an act of resistance, I shied away from the group, found a corner of the hall to rest in, and waited in silence until a decision was made and I was instructed to join the group. In this subtle way, I resisted participation. In my spinning, just as a whirling dervish does in an intentional and delicate manner in order to achieve a deeper understanding, I have found myself constantly engaging in a process of inquiry. This process entails the formulation - formally and informally, knowingly and unknowingly - of questions to my experiences, a search for understanding, which then offers space for various other queries to arise. The act of spinning in, through, and beyond questions offers me the time and space to negotiate living in the in-between of multiple social spaces. Further, the ability to make sense of an experience often occurs in momentary pauses that help shape my ever-shifting sense of belonging and identity.

Thus, I turn to the whirling dervish as a metaphor for my own life journey, for my inquiry into understanding how I grapple with the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of multiple social locations. And just as the whirling dervish gains momentum and clarity as *he* whirls in an anti-clockwise direction with his head slightly tilted, the right hand directed upwards to receive the light and guidance from *Allah* (God), and the left downwards to deliver the received message to humankind, I find my own journey to hold moments of calmness, of momentum building

velocity, and of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (2008) to represent moments of pure, uninterrupted focus, and meaning making. In a sense, I replicate the dervish, perform my own dance, and begin to tease apart, while residing in, the messiness of the tensions of living in the in-between. It is over the next several chapters that I perform, first as an understudy to gain clarity in the works of scholars who have paved the path to understand belonging, identity, intersectionality, and the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of social locations (Chapter 2).

Before beginning to physically dance, I spend some time at my coffee table establishing my methodology, visually representing my journey, and articulating in written form my research process (Chapter 3). I then dance as a novice who stumbles onto stage to attempt my first dance and finally as a practiced performer, who elegantly offers insight into the complexity of living in the in-between spaces of multiple social locations as I move through exploring experiences from my early years (Chapter 4), adolescence (Chapter 5), and as a young adult (Chapter 6).

I bring my reflections and new understandings of living in the in-between to focus while inviting my *effendi's* (master's), the scholars who have privileged me with the opportunity and space to engage in such complex, messy, and challenging conversations, to join my performance and to offer a broader understanding and insight of my performance that I may have resisted or overstepped (Chapter 7). As I engage in dialogue with my *effendi's*, I acknowledge that my initial interest in the religious and spiritual, geographical location, ethnic and cultural, and gendered nodes of intersect were only a launching point. As I critically reflected upon my experience, the tensions that surfaced included experiences of racialization and minoritization, that I had not previously acknowledged or articulated. Through the research journey, I also learned that the nodes of intersect, greatly impacted my sense of belonging and identity are

religion, gender, and geographical location. I also notice that while I believe I live in multiple social locations, such as academic settings and in a Canadian context, it was not possible for me to engage in an exploration of all aspects of my life as a first-generation Canadian immigrant, thus I center my narratives on how I as an *Ismaili Muslim* move between and within spaces.

Being an *Ismaili Muslim*, intentionally becomes the focal point and the primary lens from which I reflect upon, critically explore, and engage in my research. Lastly, I end by thinking beyond my own experiences, returning to the narratives youth have shared with me, and offer implications for professional practice within the human and social development field and further areas of research inquiry (Chapters 7 and 8).

Chapter 2

Preliminary Whirls in Current Literature

In order to understand how I, as a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili Muslim*, grapple with the tensions of belonging and identity while living in the in-between spaces of multiple social locations, I root my research in autoethnography. I explore and articulate the research paradigm of autoethnography in the next chapter (Chapter 3). As I learned about autoethnography as a research method and attempted to whirl, to learn to critically spin within the narratives I share, I also learned about my feminist positioning. Coming to understand my position within feminism, specifically through the use of intersectionality, has been challenging, complex, unsettling, and a non-linear process. Thus, I start my review of literature by iterating my journey to understand and situate my research within a feminist paradigm before reviewing the nodes of intersectionality that are used in this study.

Parallel Dance: A Note on Process

My literature review was initiated by a course paper that encouraged me to sit in uncertainty, to articulate the curiosities and discomforts I was experiencing following a year abroad (as explored in future chapters), and to circle without restrictions in readings that captured my attention. As I thought about circling, I wondered if my non-linear approach to seeking understanding had something to do with not knowing where the beginning was, not knowing when and where I initially felt out of place, and uncomfortable. What I come to know through this research project is how I interact, learn, and understand my experiences through somatic responses. Caputo's (1993) writing allowed me to find some comfort in my discomfort of not knowing where the beginning of grappling with the tensions of belonging and identity were, as well as in my process of circling. He states:

It will do no good to tell the [wo]man to start at the beginning, because [her] difficulty is that [s]he does not know where the beginning is. Everything seems to [her] to go around and around so that [s]he cannot tell where it all starts. (Caputo, 1993, p.20)

As I continued to read, Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) article *Fear of offending: disclosing researcher discomfort when engaging in analysis* further triggered critical reflections of my own journey. In this article, I drew out that centering myself in my own research is an acceptable process. However, finding comfort in centering myself was challenging. Thus, I began to read broadly and widely to learn how others centered themselves - their narratives - in their writing. The first of my readings was Ayaan Hirsi Ali's (2007) work that describes how geographical location impacted her belief systems, including religious beliefs. Her work, including statements such as "The belief that this life is transitory and that it is the next one that matters is one of the core teachings of the Qur'an" (Ali, 2007, p. 111), which I greatly grapple with, inspired me to continue to explore literature regarding religion and the influence of religious belief systems on a person's sense of belonging and identity. While I strongly opposed much of what Ali (2007) claimed as well as found myself curious about Ali's relationship with Islamophobia, she was one of the first authors I read in my search to understand how other *Muslims* engaged with their faith and centered themselves in their writing. Following my reading of Ali's work, I sought out other *Muslim* scholars and authors. During this exploration I came across Moosa-Mitha's (2009) article on the social citizenship rights of Canadian *Muslim* youth. In this piece, Moosa-Mitha (2009) "focus[es] on 'recognition rights' to analyze the lived experiences of social citizenship that young Muslim men and women spoke of when interviewed as participants of a field study" (p. 121). More importantly, she notes that "faith-based identities are not always of a religious nature, they may be cultural or ethnic in nature" (p. 132), which led me to wonder about the

entanglement of religion, spirituality, ethnicity, culture, and the impact these four concepts had and continue to have on my sense of belonging and identity.

My circling, what I refer to as whirling or spinning throughout the remaining chapters, and further detailed as my method in Chapter 3, gained momentum as I reflected on my personal experiences as well as the curiosities that surfaced during my reflections. I whirled around in questions such as: why are youth more engaged in the *Ismaili* community in East Africa than compared to Canada, from my perspective? And, why am I more interested in my faith as an *Ismaili* when living in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania than Victoria or Calgary, Canada? Questions of uncertainty, rooting back to Descartes who states that one is only able to know what one's own mind knows and then goes on to say that "Consequently, whatever knowledge we have or acquire by means of reason is as dark as the principles from which it is derived and is moreover, infected with the uncertainty we find in all our reasoning" (as cited in Zlomislic, 2007, p.72), helped further guide my whirling journey. As I think about uncertainty and how feelings of uncertainty have encouraged me to actively explore in order to gain an understanding, a degree of certainty, I am reminded of de Beauvoir's (1976) literature on the ethics of ambiguity. I lean on de Beauvoir's (1976) statement:

To attain [her] truth, [wo]man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of [her] being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it. [S]he rejoins [her]self only to the extent that [s]he agrees to remain at a distance from [her]self. (p.13)

I take from de Beauvoir's work that my uncertainty, the ambiguity I have in my understandings, is beneficial, allows me to critically analyse the experiences I have had, and yet offers me a degree of separation that comes with not-knowing. My unknowingness – uncertainty – leads me to question the context of each experience I have encountered that has challenged my sense of

belonging and identity. I am, once again, curious about a person's context, environment, religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices, and ethnic and/or cultural influences. I started to recognize a pattern in my thoughts, one that constantly brought me back to the entanglement of multiple factors in my life that often simultaneously affected my ability to sense and articulate my belonging and identity. As I searched for language to describe this pattern, I found myself circling again and landing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) and bell hooks' (1995) intersectionality work.

I start my review of relevant literature, grounded in a sampling of the readings I engrossed myself in and offer insight into where I began my search to understand each concept beginning with my desire to understand intersectionality, its situated location within feminist theory and my initial resistance to identifying as a feminist. I then engage in an initial literature review relating to the nodes of intersect that become the basis for this research project. This chapter predominantly sheds light on the literature that captivated me, and highlighted the main points of tension I have been and continue to be grappling with. However, within the following chapters more focused literature is introduced than those I initially read prior to and during the initial phases of the research project. As I circled I continued to read to assist in understanding what I was noticing and what emerged as new understandings surfaced. I have chosen to thread this literature into the text where it informs the research process.

I also use this review of literature as a site to foreground some of the queries that provoked my research project as well as the narratives that repeatedly appeared during my reflection. Through the articulation of my own experiences and the literature that spoke most prominently to my experiences and understandings, I hope to offer an accessible scholarly

understanding of feminism, intersectionality, religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender in the remainder of this chapter.

Grappling with Feminism

Coming to understand my position within feminism, feminist thought, and intersectionality, has been challenging, multi-faceted, complex, and consistently shifting and altering. As I discussed with a friend early in 2017, since my childhood I have associated feminism with feminist practices. My challenge to be feminine - what I thought was to claim a feminist perspective – was to dress in particular ways and engage in particular activities based on my gender such as painting my nails and sitting still while my hair was being tamed and set, often had me feeling like I did not belong and that I did not fit. It was when I returned to Canada from East Africa in 2014 and started to share my experiences with friends and peers that I started to recognize that my actions such as resisting ways of living that were placed on me, my desire to hear the narratives of community members and place their knowledge at the centre of our learnings, as well as acknowledging the multiple barriers of living as a brown person, that my friends and peers started to highlight how I lived feminism. I continued to resist the belief that I enacted and lived a feminist life as I struggled to let go of my childhood understanding of femininity as feminism. I even used the work of scholars such as Crispin's (2017) out of context and leveraged the individual words to assure myself that I was not engaging in feminist work. For example, I used the following statement to justify my position as resisting feminism because I wanted to believe that feminism was about working towards my own advancements while not focusing on the advancements of communities I belong to through the work I personally partake in. Statements included:

“Being marginalized should have awoken us to how the system works...It made us focused on our own advancements, our own entitlement. Fighting for your own self-interest, without the awareness of your motives or the ramifications of your success, does not make you a hero” (p. 65)

Due to the initial associations I had made with the language of “feminism”, particularly that one needed to be feminine to be a feminist, I steered clear of readings related to feminism. I had not been introduced directly to the discourse or concept of feminism as a child or youth, felt I did not understand the goal of feminism or the position I would take within feminism, and had ignorantly believed the fights of the past were not my concern. However, as I started to explore the concept of feminism in greater depth, thanks to the pressures of my friends and peers, I started to learn about how feminism includes women’s fight for their human rights, the fight for the right to vote, and for equality in employment opportunities and wages. As I read, I began to recall how as a child I was drawn to the Wonder Women character. I was drawn to the fact that Wonder Women could live in a boys’ world, that she fought with boys, and that the boys did not treat her like a girl, at least to my young childhood eyes. Further, as I looked around my apartment, I noticed the vast array of books that either defined and articulated feminist theory, used a feminist lens within research methodologies, spoke of the challenges women, and people of colour face, and ways to speak about and engage in difficult dialogues, challenge, and be a female in the twenty-first century (Schneir, 1992; hooks, 1995; Saul, 2003; Harris, 2004; Ungar, 2004; Johnson & Ginsberg, 2015; Esses & Abelson, 2017; Ahmed, 2017).

As I critically reflected on the conversations I had with my friends and peers, as well as began reading about feminism, I recognized that I had another understanding of what feminism was and did. This understanding, one that I did not initially know was feminist, included

suffragettes I had unknowingly learned about as I flipped through Wonder Women comics as a young girl and more recently re-engaged with and learned how to articulate after reading *The Secret History of Wonder Women* (Lepore, 2014). As I started to learn about feminism without the blinder of feminine acts equaling feminist beliefs, I was able to further engage with Lepore's (2014) narration of Wonder Women and her history. Lepore (2014) discusses the progression of feminism through the narrations of Wonder Women's life and the entanglement of Wonder Women's story with the story of Marston, Wonder Women's husband, academic peer, a male psychologist, and the creator of the first lie-detector test. Marston had multiple female partners, one of whom was Wonder Women. Both of Marston's companions that are spoken of in Lepore's (2014) book protected and hid the multiple partnerships and shared parenting roles of their children in order to have the ability to fight for women's rights. After reading the work of Lepore (2014), I was able to associate feminism with the fight to dismantle the patriarchal system, a discourse and practice I personally was not focused on, at least primarily.

Each of the pieces of literature in my apartment led me to think more about feminism, my resistance to feminism and if my resistance was valid. Again, I found myself returning to and reflecting on my own experiences as a child, adolescent, and young adult and wondering how various "issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures" (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 304) impacted and continue to impact my sense of belonging and identity. It was through this reflective process that I came to learn about Crenshaw's work and her attempt to disrupt feminism as a white woman's privilege through the various intersecting aspects of a woman's life. The work of Mohanty (2003) who offers "a critique of "Western feminist" scholarship on Third World women via the discursive colonization of Third World women's lives and struggles" (p.501) also played a role in my new

understanding of feminism, from a non-white feminist perspective. Reading Crenshaw's and Mohanty's work offered me comfort as I started to recognize that I was not alone in my discomfort of belonging as a brown person living in a predominantly white world. It was also through Crenshaw's work that I was introduced to the concept of intersectionality. The more I read the more I understood that intersectionality is a theoretical framework that is grounded in the exploration of more than one category, system, and/or discourses and the relationships between categories, systems and discourses with roots in feminism, specifically third-wave feminism.

To learn more and gain further insight, and understanding of the use of intersectionality in human and social services, I turned to Hankivsky's (2014) who states that:

Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations... These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power... Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created. (p. 2)

Reflecting on Hankivsky's (2014) description of intersectionality, on categories and discourses that I was attempting to further understand (which I refer to as nodes of intersect) and on how intersectionality as a theoretical framework could enhance my research, I was further energized by a couple of Hankivsky's (2014) seven tenets of intersectionality. The first being that people's lives are complex and multi-dimensional and that "Lived realities are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together" (p. 3). The second is that people experience both privilege and oppression concurrently which is dependent on the situation and context.

I continued to read about intersectionality to ensure it was the theoretical framework I wanted to ground my research in. Through the works of Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) I learned how women of colour utilized intersectional work in their efforts to create equal opportunities amidst racism and classism by acknowledging the myriad of overlapping and reinforcing oppressions that people, especially women face. Thus, in order to strive for equality, feminists move beyond single analytical frames and explore “how issues of race, migration status, history, and social class” (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, p. 5) all simultaneously impact a women’s experiences. Dhamoon (2011), hooks (1995), and Ahmed (2017) allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how the personal becomes political and how personal narratives shed light on power dynamics, transformation, and the “ways in which subjectivities and social differences are produced” (Dhamoon, 2011, p. 234).

With a greater insight of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, I started to wonder how other scholars and researchers were using intersectionality. Morris and Bunjun’s (2007) work caught my attention and sparked my interest because of the array of intersecting lines and the impact each of these lines can have on a person’s life. For example, Morris and Bunjun (2007) draw my attention to the entanglement of “race, ethnicity, religion, language, class background, income, occupation, gender, education, ability, sexuality, immigration status, Indigeneity, age, family status, [and] geographical location” (p. 1) and the impact each of these categories has on a person’s sense of belonging, identity, and access to resources and services. As I learned about feminist theory, the intention behind many of the actions I unknowingly learned as a child when I read Wonder Women comics, and the language feminists use through Ahmed (2017), Crenshaw (1989), hooks (1995), and Morris and Bunjun (2007), I began to find comfort in feminist language.

The new comfort I found with feminist language and ways in which third-wave feminist intersectionality theory came alive was exciting. I found myself more willing to walk through bookstores and pick up books that are situated within the third-wave and intersectional frameworks of feminism such as *We Should All Be Feminists* by Adichie (2014) who attempts to re-define feminism by rooting feminist practices in inclusion and awareness while lifting the weight of the word feminist which according to Adichie (2014) has been associated with thoughts of hating men, women's desire to be in charge, angry women who do not want to wear make-up or shave, and women who do not have a sense of humour. Later, I was drawn to Crispin's (2017) book, *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, in which Crispin (2017) highlights "how feminism ended up doing patriarchy's work" (p. 53) and questions the approaches of feminists in their attempt to create change. Adichie (2014) and Crispin (2017) encouraged me to think about how I articulated and defined feminism, and the position I wanted to (and want to) claim within the feminist discourse.

However, even with my new learnings and comfort, for months I avoided articulating my location within a feminist theoretical orientation as I still held on to and struggle to let go of my original beliefs that to be a feminist meant being feminine, that feminist theory was limited to women's rights and the fight for equality, because those concepts did not align with my desire to understand the tensions of belonging and identity as a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili Muslim*. With much encouragement by my supervisor, committee members, and friends, as well as consciously knowing that intersectionality was situated within third-wave feminism, a wave that is focusing on diversity and global feminism (David, 2016), I continued to encourage myself to read about third-wave feminism. Rebecca Walker (1995) who is known to have kicked-off the third-wave feminist movement in the early 1990's and Heywood (2006) helped deconstruct my

perceived ideologies of feminism as rigid and solely focused on gender inequalities. Walker (1995) clarifies:

For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad. This way of ordering the world is especially difficult for a generation that has grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and otherwise afflicted. (p. 22)

Through the work of Walker (1995) and Heywood (2006), I began to acknowledge and articulate that third-wave feminism is the acceptance of multiplicities, contradictions and ambiguity. I also learnt that third-wave feminism is hard to thematize because many of the texts related to third-wave feminism are “loosely edited collection[s] of first-person narratives that are anecdotal and autobiographical in nature”, that a significant amount of third-wave feminist writing is focused on “media icons, images, and discourses rather than on feminist theory or politics per se”, and that embracing multiplicities of identities requires one to accept “the messiness of lived contradictions” (Snyder, 2008, p. 177). As I grappled with the challenges of third-wave feminism, as noted by Snyder (2008), I became curious about the first and second waves of feminism.

Knowing that the first two waves of feminism predated my birth, I quickly fell into the company of many other young women who Wolf (1993) speaks about when she explains how many women lack a historical understanding of feminism and are unaware of the two traditions

that have coexisted in feminism. She informs her readers that, “One tradition is severe, morally superior, and self-denying; the other is free thinking, pleasure loving, and self-assertive” (p. 166). Further, Wolf (1993) expresses how feminist ideology’s core tenets include a flexible and inclusive understanding that “women’s experiences matter” and that “women have the right to tell the truth about their experiences” (p. 138). As I reflected upon the core tenets Wolf (1993) introduces, I again wonder about the connection to feminist tenets prior to third-wave feminism. David’s (2016) work helps me understand the three waves of feminism and reminds me that each wave of feminism is not separate from the other but that each wave responds differently to the sociopolitical and economic contexts at the time.

I gather from David (2016) that in order for third-wave feminism, with a focus on diversity, to have come about and exist, first-wave feminism which focused on women’s suffrage in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and second-wave feminism that tackled civil rights, women’s rights, and social democracy in the 1960s to 1980s had to occur. Additionally, first-wave feminist theory aimed “to contest hegemonic and dominant constructions of gender, particularly womanhood” (Moosa-Mitha, 2015, p. 52). According to Moosa-Mitha (2015), White feminism, which “is limited because it privileges gender as a difference over any other” (p. 39), “...overlook[s] the social-political realities and oppression that individuals and collectivities experience on the basis of their “multiple differences” from White, male (although White feminists do undertake gendered analysis), heterosexual, able-bodied norm” (quotations and brackets in original text, p. 37). Thus, a component of the third-wave, the wave I was born into, honours that I am a woman of colour and that I am predominantly interested in understanding how my diversity, the “multiple differences” (Moosa-Mitha, 2015, p. 37) I embody compared to White feminists impacts my sense of belonging and identity. I believe that it is the multiple

differences that return me to my initial entry point into feminism, intersectionality, and allows each of these differences to be situated at a node of intersect that creates ease in moments and struggles in other moments while playing a significant role in my attempt to understand the tensions of belonging and identity, and my ability to live in the in-between spaces of multiple social locations.

With greater insight and understanding of the circling I did in an attempt to grapple with my positioning in feminist theory, initially entering the conversation through an interest in intersectionality, learning about third-wave feminism that exists because of the efforts of first- and second-wave feminists, and finding my way back to third-wave feminist intersectional theory, I now turn to an exploration of the nodes of intersect that ground my analysis.

Nodes of Intersectionality

My experience of living in the in-between spaces of various social locations has been complicated by fluctuating degrees of belonging, feeling as though I have manipulated and altered my desired sense of belonging many times throughout my young life to match new learnings and surroundings, and how my sense of belonging has shifted based on the geographical location I am situated in. During initial conversations with my supervisor, I started to explore my religious affiliations and the benefits of being an *Ismaili Muslim* while residing in East Africa. It was also during these conversations that my supervisor encouraged me to explore how my ethnicity and culture were playing out during my travels and how my gender influenced my sense of belonging and identity. One example that often comes to mind when I reflect on the conversations we had is my experience of wanting to go for long outdoor runs or wanting to walk to and from work and *Jamat Khana* while living in Dar es Salaam. I explore these

experiences in later chapters. However, it was such experiences that highlighted the tensions of race, gender, geography and physicality all at the same time.

Further, as I read through my journals, I noticed a pattern in my thoughts and queries. Between the ages of thirteen and nineteen I repeatedly questioned why I had to attend *Jamat Khana*, wondered about being brown while playing ringette, how being *Muslim* post 9/11 would impact me, noted the various times people told me I was the first *Muslim* girl to do certain things such as graduate from a recreational therapy degree, and started reflecting on other religious and spiritual practices that I could incorporate in my daily life. While I was reflecting on my conversations with my supervisor as well as my journal entries, I also engaged in dialogue with various youth who shared their experiences as young *Ismaili Muslim*'s living as minorities and the challenges they associated with their religious affiliations, cultural and ethnic ties, and gender. As these concepts continued to surface, I became more and more curious about how each concept, independently and entangled with one another, impacted my own sense of belonging and identity. Thus, religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender became my primary interests and are thus the nodes of intersect and lenses of perspectives that I deemed critical.

Parallel Dance: Beyond the Four Nodes

During my reflective process, I also pondered nodes of intersect related to ability – the fact that I do not have a physical, psychological, or mental disability – age, social-economic status, and the various ways people obtain, maintain, and use privilege and power. Each of these nodes of intersect, including the vast array of nodes I have not reflected on are critical to explore. However, based on my own grapplings and the narratives that were shared with me by a Canadian *Ismaili* youth, I kept finding myself returning to the four nodes of intersect: (1) religion

and spirituality, (2) geographical location, (3) ethnicity and culture, and (4) gender that I initially was drawn to. It is these four nodes that I explore in greater depth and base my initial round of analysis in. I note that the four nodes of intersect are the basis of my initial analysis because my lens of critical reflection during the second and third rounds of analysis were shaped by new learnings and understandings from the first round which often went beyond these specific nodes. For example, during one round of analysis, I learned, recognized, and articulated for the first-time experiences of racism I had as a youth. This new learning then shifted following analysis rounds and the literature I read and utilized to help create a richer understanding.

In a similar pattern to the way each node of intersect surfaced in my reflective journey, I explore relevant literature related to each node. I begin by exploring the concepts of religion and spirituality, move on to geographical location, and then ethnicity and culture, before diving into gender.

Religion and spirituality

The conflation of religion and spirituality is something that has challenged me, intrigued me, and excited me over the past several years. In Gulamhusein (2012), I articulate in great detail the struggle I faced to independently define and distinguish religion and spirituality from one another. I read widely in an attempt to gain clarity on the various views of religion and spirituality (Rockerfeller & Elder, 1992; Berry & Wernick, 1992; Kearney, 2010; Appfel-Marglin, 2011) which ultimately drew me to the work of Sheridan (2008) and Crisp (2010). While I learned to find comfort in not being able to fully articulate or define religion and spirituality, I landed on Sheridan's (2008) definition of spirituality, and Barnett, Krell and Sendry's (2000) and Vaughan's (1991) definitions of religion in an attempt to express the differences between spirituality and religion. Sheridan (2008) defines spirituality as the

connection to self, to other, and/or to an-other than human. Religion, on the other hand, according to Barnett, Krell and Sendry (2000) is “a personal or institutionalized system grounded in a set of beliefs, values, and practices” (as cited in Crisp, 2010, p. 4). Complementing Barnett, Krell and Sendry’s (2000) definition, Vaughan (1991) states that religion is a “subscription to institutionalized beliefs and doctrines” (as cited in Zinnbauer et al., 1997, p. 549). A participant in my Master’s research project also helped me form a distinction between religion and spirituality that has since stuck with me. Based on this participant’s experience working with women who have or are fleeing domestic abuse, she stated, “for me spirituality has, I’ve always thought of it as separate from religion...this kind of thinking about self and relationship to self and how do I care for that and grow that” (Gulamhusein, 2012, p. 7). Thus, while religion and spirituality are often conflated in literature, it is important for me to grapple with religion as independent from, while being connected to, spirituality when attempting to understand how my religion, the *Ismaili* faith, influences my sense of belonging and identity.

I turned to Pearce and Denton’s (2011) extensive writing on the various identities people may claim within a religious discourse and acknowledge that the “confluence of dramatic biological, psychological, social, and economic changes in adolescence suggests that this is a prime time for religious or spiritual change and development” (p. 5). For me, adolescence was also the time when I consciously questioned and actively attempted to disengage from the religious beliefs I was born into and raised within. As an *Ismaili*, His Highness the Aga Khan (the *Ismaili’s Imam*) provides direct guidance to members of the *jamat* (community) in various ways. At times guidance is through direct and private speeches where the *jamat*, in smaller and localized communities, comes together in rare but auspicious occasions to sit in front of and hear His Highness the Aga Khan speak. More frequently, during prayer services we, *Ismailis*, hear

previously recited *firman*s (speeches made for members of the *Ismaili* community) directed toward His Highness' *murids* (followers) and *ginans* (devotional hymns or poems). In these recitations, we gain insight and a deeper understanding of our *Ismaili* history, faith-based practices, and guidance on balancing our *dunya* (materialistic) and *din* (spiritual) lives.

Therefore, as an *Ismaili*, I have the opportunity to obtain constant and continuous guidance and direction in my materialistic life, as well as offered insight and practices to develop and maintain a positive spiritual life. I find, however, that actively seeking and desiring such guidance has fluctuated throughout my life and has been something I have predominantly resisted, moved away from, avoided hearing, and when enacted and followed, I often did so in secrecy. My reflections prompted me to grapple with my negotiations and navigations as I moved from within the *Ismaili* community to the periphery of the community and sometimes back to the centre of the community. During this grappling, I found Pearce and Denton's (2011) work to be most insightful and offered me language to articulate my experiences. Pearce and Denton (2011) discuss how a decrease in religious practices is not necessarily associated with a decrease in religiosity. They also note that "Many of the youth [they] interviewed feel that they have matured to the point that their faith is their own, and that makes it deeper and stronger" (p. 3). As I read, I wondered if I was less religious than others I was growing up with in the *Ismaili* community or if I was expressing my religiosity differently. My wonderings drew me to Pearce and Denton's (2011) three dimensions of religiosity, which they termed the three Cs. The *content* of religious belief is the "ideas or doctrines that characterize an individual's religiosity" (Pearce & Denton, 2011, p. 13). Religious *conduct* is the person's practices that express their religiosity. And, the last, *centrality*, which is also known as salience or religious consciousness, is the level of religious importance in one's life.

Reading about centrality captured my attention, and as I continued to explore how Pearce and Denton (2011) defined and utilized the concept of centrality, I was able to place my movement from within to the periphery, and sometimes back in, in a framework. Pearce and Denton (2011) acknowledge that adolescents, and I would include young adults, “are continually modifying their personal religious profiles” (p. 19) along a spectrum of beliefs, values, and practices. They introduce The Five As: (1) abiders, (2) adapters, (3) assenters, (4) avoiders, and (5) atheists (p. 55) of religiosity. I refer to the various degrees of religiosity as a faith-based belief spectrum. For me, I understand it to be a spectrum as there are two extreme ends, that of the abiders, who full-heartedly and with ease believe in a religious denomination, and atheists, who do not believe in religion of a higher power, which encompasses the mid-range beliefs of adapters, assenters, and avoiders. It becomes a spectrum as people do not necessarily remain in one particular spot but that beliefs may waver between the points along the spectrum as one ages, moves away from home, has a family, experiences the death of a loved one and so on. Here, I should note that while Pearce and Denton (2011) do not speak to how atheism is considered a religious profile, I believe atheists remain on the spectrum because of a long held personal belief that in order to be atheist one must acknowledge and/or accept the fact that others believe in the existence of God, and thus without the concept of God one cannot reject the belief in God.

What I appreciate most is that Pearce and Denton (2011) actively engage in dialogue about the movement between, back and forth, and from abider to atheist, and the coming to a resting place on the spectrum as adolescents grow, develop, and experience life in various scenarios. However, as I think about the movement people engage in along the spectrum from abider to atheists, I struggle to locate myself. As I learned through this research project, my struggle is due to the fact that I never feel settled in my beliefs and practices, that I continuously

waver along the spectrum between adapter and avoider, and often as a young child presented as an abider while residing somewhere between adapter to avoider. This inability to firmly locate myself along the spectrum does not come without surprise but it does offer insight into why I have read various books about *Islam*, peoples perspectives of *Islam*, and how *Islam* is taken up in social media as well as fictional and non-fiction books (Nasr, 2000, 2001; Armstrong, 2002; Simons, T.W. Jr., 2003; Sajoo, 2004; Aslan, 2011; Hughes, 2013; Charbonnier, 2015; Kundnani, 2015). These books have helped me situate myself along the spectrum in varying places depending on what I find myself connecting to. An additional insight for me was that I do not reside on either end of the spectrum but that I am constantly shifting between being an avoider, assenter, or adapter depending on the time of year, the celebrations that are taking place, if I am surrounded by family, and based on my geographical location. In many ways, I learned about my in-between movement along the faith-based belief spectrum and started to make sense of the feelings I was having, my behaviours, and the intimate connections I had to certain aspects of the *Ismaili Muslim* faith.

Further, I am captivated by Pearce and Denton's (2011) work because it contradicts the work of Bibby and Posterski (1985, 1988, 1992), on whom much of my earlier understanding of adolescent religious practices was based. Bibby and Posterski (1985, 1988, 1992) claim that within North America religious affiliations are decreasing while spiritual associations are increasing within the adolescent community. Alternatively, Pearce and Denton (2011) imply that religious affiliation is not decreasing but practice modes and physical attendance to a place of worship is shifting. Others, such as Hill et al., (2000), Zinnbauer et al., (1997), and Gollnick (2008) discuss the confusion regarding spirituality. Spirituality, when exploring the origins of the word, originates from the root word *spirit*, which "refers to the spirit of God, standing in contrast

to whatever opposes God” (Principe, 1983, as cited in Gollnick, 2008, p. 25). The direct relationship to God, which is now more commonly associated with institutional practices, is likely one of the reasons a clear and articulate definition for spirituality is hard to find.

Scholars such as Roof (1998), who discusses the concept of ‘new age spirituality’, talks about the inwardness of spirituality that encompasses aesthetics, emotions, finding a sense of purpose and meaning, and establishing a set of ideals and principles. Crisp (2010) describes five concepts of spirituality including “meaning, identity, connectedness, transformation and transcendence” (p. 7) which are core tenants to human experiences. More recently, the concept of postmodern spirituality has appeared within the literature. Jankowski (2002), Miller (1998), and Roof (1998) speak about resilient spirituality, which is one’s ability to overcome times of struggle through the process of understanding oneself, others, and the world through subjective and emotional experiences versus the cognitive processes of knowing. Though many scholars (Coles, 1990; Miller, 1998; Jankowski, 2002; Gollnick, 2008; King, 2009) attempt to define spirituality, including King (2009) who states that “spirituality can even be understood as a form of resistance to traditional religion” (p. 15) and then further states that “Some writers oppose spirituality and religion so strongly that they consider spirituality as connected with all spiritual orientations and practices *outside* religious institutions” (italics in original, p. 15), spirituality is most often defined in relation to religion. According to Spilka (1993), the inability to clearly define spirituality, a challenge I am also struggling with, has him doubting the usefulness of the term in empirical research. Further, Sheldrake (1991) speaks of the nuanced definitions and meanings that have been given to spirituality over thousands of years, which has also left spirituality difficult to define.

Thus, the mutual influence and interdependence of religion and spirituality (King, 2009) that is displayed throughout the literature, the shift from an institutional practice of religion to a secular practice (Hill et al., 2000) which is considered to be spiritual (King, 2009), and the ambiguity of religion and spirituality and how each “can be manifested in healthy as well as unhealthy ways” (Gollnick, 2008, p. 29) are at the root of the confusion in defining spirituality. Because of this confusion and the recognition that all the narratives used in this research lean towards my religious engagement with the *Ismaili Muslim* faith, I tended to lean towards literature regarding religion while engaging in critical reflection. For example, other critical scholars that have framed my understanding of religion - and subsequently spirituality - include Caputo (2006) and Coles (1990).

Caputo (2006) believes that God’s existence is the grounding factor in religion and how a person’s actions are influenced by their belief in God. Posing a critical question, Caputo (2006) asks and responds to: “What then is religion? Religion is ethics; it is doing your duty where the voice of duty of conscience is taken as the voice of God” (p. 32). Coles (1990), on the other hand, never explicitly identifies his research in the realm of religion, however, Coles (1990) describes narratives of children’s religious experiences including weekly church attendance, submission and surrendering to Allah, and Jewish practices of following the law to be a “good person” (Coles, 1990, p. 253) throughout his work on spirituality.

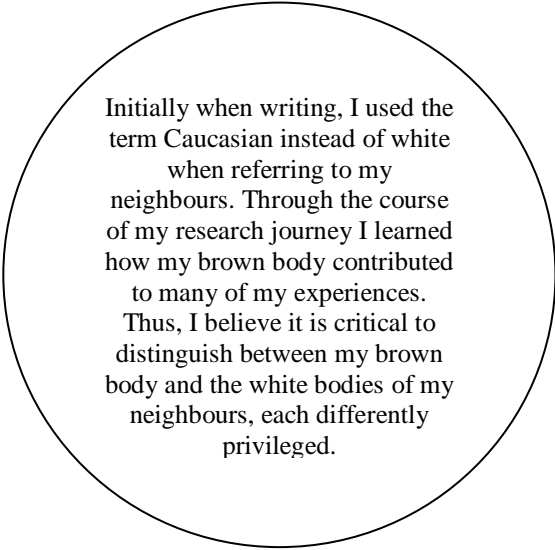
The many examples provided by Coles (1990), the definitions and explanations of religion by Zinnbauer et al., (1997), Hill et al., (2000), Gollnick (2008), and Caputo (2006), as well as the examination of the faith-based continuum by Pearce and Denton (2011), highlight the complexity and importance of religion for a person’s sense of belonging and identity, as well as how religion may contribute to or hinder spaces people reside within. What I was left with as I

reviewed the current literature, was that I had gained my own understanding of spirituality and religion. Spirituality, as I understand it, is an umbrella term that represents how people connect to others, and can describe a connection they may have to an-other than human, as well as how people understand their own actions, behaviours, thoughts, and sensations – their connection to self. Religion, alternatively, is one way to obtain spirituality, almost like a toolkit or framework to achieve connection and understanding. Because the two concepts are uniquely identified in my understanding but also so deeply interwoven with one another, I continue to use both terms, religion and spirituality in this research project. I do, however, recognize that I have focused primarily on religion, the institutional and doctrine faith-based practices in this review. This is because, through my reading, I became aware that my grapplings were largely in relation to the religion I was born into, the religious practices I was expected to partake in, and how I situate myself within the *Ismaili* community. As mentioned early, when I think about my movement within and along the periphery of the *Ismaili* community and along Pearce and Denton's (2011) faith-based spectrum, I find myself simultaneously grappling with how my geographical location impacts my religious positioning. In the next section I explore geographical location in more depth.

Geographical Location

Growing up in Calgary Alberta, Canada, allowed and required me to situate myself within many contexts. From birth, I was part of the Calgary immigrant, first-generation, and minority community. My parents, just before I was born, moved from one lower socio-economic environment to another with marginally more privilege. Their move from a townhouse to a bungalow with a large front and back yard, having white neighbours versus other immigrant

family neighbours, and a respected school just minutes away, allowed me to grow up in assumed comfort and sense of security. I vividly remember spending most my days with non-*Muslim* peers and many of my nights close by my family member's sides as we partook in *Ismaili*-based activities like evening prayers and social celebrations. I, like many other Canadian immigrants and first-generation people, have been immersed in multiple worlds since birth and have learned to transverse and live in the in-between without much deliberate thought.



Initially when writing, I used the term Caucasian instead of white when referring to my neighbours. Through the course of my research journey I learned how my brown body contributed to many of my experiences. Thus, I believe it is critical to distinguish between my brown body and the white bodies of my neighbours, each differently privileged.

Now, however, as I reminisce about my earlier years, I wonder how geographical location played a role in my life and the in-between spaces I have found and continue to find myself in. This curiosity stems largely from my time in East Africa (2013-2014) where I started to recognize that many youth within the *Ismaili* community lived in complexes that are largely *Ismaili* populated, attended Aga Khan educational systems with high populations of *Ismaili* peers, participated in predominately *Ismaili*-based sports teams, and most often developed close relationships with other *Ismaili* children and youth. Geographical locations became even more critical in my research journey as I met youth from around the globe during a summer camp in Mombasa, Kenya. Immediately, youth identified themselves as living in areas of safety or war, based on academic institutions that were or were not present in their geographical communities, and the religious denominations that populated their communities which rendered them as having a minority or majority status.

While many scholars, such as Beebe et. al. (2015), Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2002), and Marger (2006) imply that location is related to cultural practices, beliefs, and values of people, in this research it will be critical to clearly distinguish and articulate the impact geographical location has on each narrated experience. For example, in Ashley's (2012) ethnographic research on dance education in New Zealand, she sheds light on the cultural differences of dance through contextual perspectives. During her research, she witnessed various dance moves from students around the globe. Ashley (2012) provides one particular example that highlights how geographical location can contribute to behaviours and practices. For example, we are introduced to a young male from Afghanistan who displays a 'snake dance' that he explains as a dance of celebration for *Navroz*, the Persian New Year. The 'snake dance' was seen by his peers as being a 'party move'. However, for this young male, the 'snake dance' held a different value and purpose, it was associated with a particular and cherished celebration, which differed from his New Zealand peers understanding of the dance move.

Geographical tensions also arise in a narrative by Fadiman (1997) who shares how the collision of cultures within specific geographical locations and contexts can implicate cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Fadiman (1997) narrates a story of a Hmong family who had recently immigrated to America where their youngest daughter had been diagnosed with epilepsy. The story speaks to the contentions between how the medical team in America wanted to treat the young girl's epilepsy versus the way in which the Hmong community from Laos would have approached episodes that Western medicine has labeled as seizures.

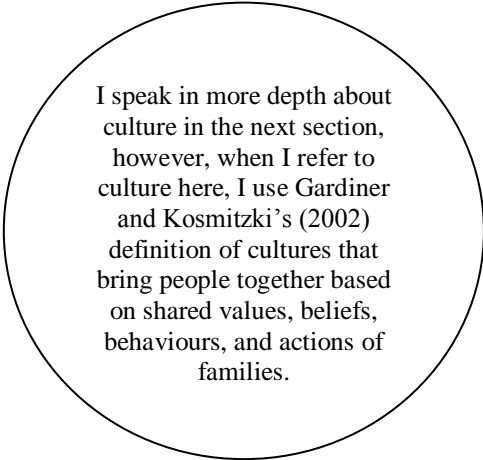
Through research, such as that completed by Ashley (2012), and narratives, like Fadiman's (1997), the tensions geographical location has on one's practices, behaviours, and perspectives became more visible to me. As I became more vigilant to how geographical location

impacts a person, my curiosity around those who moved frequently was sparked. I was drawn to the work of Pollock and Reken (2009) who speak about the intricacies of growing up in various locations. Specifically, Pollock and Reken (2009) speak about *third culture kids*, who are people “who [have] spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the[ir] parents’ culture” (p. 13) or his or her passport country. While focusing on the geographical location of childhood lives, Pollock and Reken (2009) foreground their work in acknowledging that their research deals with people and thus they are “writing about process and progress, not [a] fixed entity” (p. 4). Further Pollock and Reken (2009) state:

In our globalizing world, the degree of cultural complexity many now face within their families is staggering. Traditional assumptions of what it means to belong to a particular race, nationality, or ethnicity are constantly challenged by those whose identities have been formed among many cultural worlds. (p. 4)

For *third culture kids*, tensions often surface regarding feelings of belonging, a constant question of where home is, and where they are from.

Pollock and Reken (2009) provide ample examples of children who moved to *third cultures*, also known as ‘culture between culture’ or ‘interstitial culture’ by Useems (as cited in Pollock & Reken, 2009), who grew up within expatriate communities that integrated components of their home culture and their host culture. The research done by Pollock and Reken (2009) can be extrapolated to various cultural communities, as they include cross-cultural environments, people living in biracial homes, and people who cross borders in their adulthood as geographical factors infused with multiple cultural



I speak in more depth about culture in the next section, however, when I refer to culture here, I use Gardiner and Kosmitzki’s (2002) definition of cultures that bring people together based on shared values, beliefs, behaviours, and actions of families.

foundations impact a person's sense of belonging and identity. Thus, while this particular research project does not explore *third culture kids* specifically, many of the tensions, cultural associations, and feelings shared by *third culture kids* are similar to my experience as a minority and first-generation Canadian who also grappled with finding a sense of belonging, pondered over where home might be, where I am from, and what my primary identity is. Brettell (2016) adds to Pollock and Reken's (2009) work by expressing the rich relationship between gender and migration, the influence of laws, policies, citizenship, and labour markets impact on migration of people and family units. The end of Brettell's (2016) writing suggests that future studies "take gender into account to understand decisions to migrate, processes of border crossing, experiences of settling into a new social, economic, and political context in the place(s) of destination, and the transnational practices that sustain associations with a home country" (p. 172). Through my exploration of *third culture kids* and how geographical locations impact a person's sense of belonging and identity, I have come to understand that location does and will strongly impact how a person lives in the in-between geographical spaces.

However, before I return to Brettell's (2016) expression of genders impact on a person, to explore gender as a node of intersect, a concept that my Child and Youth Care students remind me is culturally and socially constructed, I share some insight on ethnic and cultural literature.

Ethnicity and Culture

Initially in my pursuit to gain a deeper understanding of ethnicity and how the term was used within current literature, I attempted to distinguish ethnicity from culture. Now, after a great deal of reading (Geertz, 1973; Adam & Allan, 1995; Satzewich & Wong, 2006; La Follette, 2013) and reflecting, I have concluded that ethnicity and culture are deeply intertwined and that the two terms are often used interchangeably. For example, in Marger's (2006) work, when

speaking about American ethnic groups, immigration, multiculturalism and the aftermath of the September 2001 World Trade Center attacks – often referred to as 9/11 – Marger (2006) uses the terms Arab Islamic terror networks, Arab Americans, Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs, and followers of the Indian religion, to describe people who appear to be associated with *Muslim* extremists. The distinction between Arabs and *Muslims*, in and of itself, is significant as one refers to a racial group while the other a religious group, respectively.

In Mucina's (2015) doctoral dissertation she utilizes the term South Asian to identify "larger dominant discourses operating in Canada, which depicts all brown bodies as one unified culture and identity" (p. 10). Mucina's (2015) use of the term culture can be seen as conflated with people's ethnicity, as defined by Fenton (1999). The word ethnic is defined by Fenton (1999) "primarily in contexts of cultural differences, where cultural difference is associated above all with an actual or commonly perceived shared ancestry, with language markers, and with national or regional origin" (p. 4). Gillborn (1990) adds that ethnic groups are distinguished through specific language, history, ancestry, and religion. On the other hand, Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2002) note that culture "serves to define values, beliefs, and actions of families" (p. 50). Definitions of culture often include terms such as "*beliefs, values, way of life, shared attitudes, morals, and characteristics*" (italics in original, Hackney & Bernard, 2017, p. 7). Others, such as Corey, Corey, and Corey (2014) acknowledge that culture is not defined by ethnic or racial heritages but that it can refer to groups of people who are identified by their age, religion, socio-economic status, gender, or sexual identity. Additionally, Pollock and Reken (2009) state that culture "means a group of people who have something in common" (p. 13).

In many ways the various definitions and perspectives on culture and ethnicity help me articulate if I am referring to cultural traits such as beliefs and values or ethnic groupings based

on shared commonalities like language and religion. Yet, I often find myself struggling to understand how various scholars use the terms, especially culture, as it is largely undefined and used with an assumption that the reader is aware of the term and as though the term is homogenous. For instance, Mucina (2015) and Polluck and Van Reken (2009), begin their writings with statements such as “My body was a walking representation of my family, my community, and my religion and culture” (Mucina, 2015, p. 1) without clarifying what is meant by culture. Bhabha’s (1994) work, on the other hand, offers some insight into how he understands culture that intrigues me as he discusses cultural differences versus the more commonly utilized language of cultural diversity.

Bhabha’s (1994) definition of cultural differences strongly relates to the work of third-wave feminists and intersectionality as he defines cultural differences as the point when two or more cultures meet. Bhabha (1994) notes that it is at the point of cultures meeting when challenges and potential problems are most likely to occur in which ambiguous areas known as third spaces are created. What I was reminded of as I read Bhabha (1994) is that when more than two cultural elements collide, the belief that culture is homogenous is disrupted, that there are limitations in the purity of cultures, and that cultural practices and signs such as language usage and dressing choices can be appropriated and interpreted in various manners.

Thus, as I write and attempt to distinguish ethnicity and culture from one another while also recognizing the deep-rooted connection between ethnicity and culture. I define ethnicity as the traits a person is born with, those that are prescribed such as my families use of the *Kutchii* language and my nationality as Canadian each considered some of my ethnic traits. Similarly, Pollock and Reken (2009) refer to a person’s passport country or passport culture as ethnic distinctions. Alternatively, culture is defined in regards to the groups and communities a person

self-identifies with and that are developed throughout one's life. For instance, cultures can include peer groups, immigrant and first-generation communities as expressed by Mucina (2015), sports communities, and so on. These cultural identities can also be the communities a person chooses to participate in. But, due to the complexity of distinguishing ethnicity and culture, I often use the terms interchangeably or simultaneously. I also find I use the term culture to refer to the conflation of ethnicity's and culture's definition as the traits a person is born with and the groups and communities a person self-identifies with. The example that immediately comes to mind is gender. As I explore below, I was raised to believe gender was binary, that I was born female versus male which was based on my biological make-up. As I aged, I learned that some biologically female people do not associate with being female and identify their gender, and community of belonging – culture – as transgender, male, or gender neutral. I am struck with the intricacies of cultural identification, especially gender, as I read the available literature as well as my own journaled grapplings of complying and resisting gender expectations.

Gender

When I first learned that intersectionality was situated in feminist theory I resisted the concept and theoretical framework. Initially, I found myself resisting the label “feminist” as I associated it with being feminine and doing “girly things”. Once I found comfort in my position as a feminist – as described earlier in this chapter – I started to notice those around me and their actions. I actively became witness to many of my female peers and role models shifting from independent lives to those dependent on newly formed intimate relationships, giving up their personal interactions and encounters to stay by their new partner's side, and even putting their own pursuits on hold to support their partner's success. I, at first, was confused as to why these

actions and behaviours bothered me, however, as I read Crenshaw's (1989), hooks' (1995), and Snyder's (2008) work, I realized my frustration and confusion was due to my female counterparts letting down the feminist fight that occurred prior to me being born. This was also when I consciously became aware of how often and how rooted I am within feminism, not just as a female but as a person. I note that I have circled back to my earlier discussion on feminism, and believe this circling is critical as gender and feminism were initially intimately interwoven for me. Here, however, I push beyond my initial understandings of feminism and explore gender as one facet of feminist theory.

I began my exploration of gender literature with Butler (1990) who asks, "To what extent does the body *come into being* in and through the mark(s) of gender? How do we reconceive the body no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will?" (italics in original: p. 12). Heavily relying on the works of Irigaray (1985, as cited in Butler, 1990) and Beauvoir (1986, as cited in Butler, 1990), Butler (1990) speaks about becoming female because one is not male, that one "*becomes* a women...an ongoing discursive practice" (p. 45). Butler's (1990) reading of Irigaray (1985) and Beauvoir's (1986) work expresses that the performance of gender produces regulated practices of gender coherence. Thus, as I found myself constantly returning to and questioning the idea that if an act is not masculine then it must be feminine, therefore female. I am, as I question the relationship between feminine and female, reminded that the works of Irigaray (1985), Beauvoir (1986), and Butler (1990) were situated within an era when gender fluidity was subtly eluded to and predated the unconcealed and increased awareness, acceptance, and visibility of people within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) community where many in this community may challenge the perspectives of traditional gender research. I, however, have never

questioned the performativity of people who identify as members of the LGBTQ community as I do not identify with the LGBTQ community. Further, from a young age I have been free to connect with and interact with people who identify as LGBTQ but have also been taught that I am a female based on my biological make-up and therefore was expected to act like a girl and engage in an intimate relationship with a male. As a cis-gendered heterosexual female engaging with men was taken for granted. Equally, I learned that gender is performed differently based on culture and religion.

Sound bites from Girls, Inc., that tell girls to be “Strong, smart and bold”, from Nike who encourages girls and women to “Just do it”, along with messages such as ‘you can be whatever you want’ (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004), challenge girls to reach beyond their potential as set out by their male counterparts. Baumgardner and Richards (2004) inform their readers of how girls have achieved their greatest potential, how girls have become professional athletes and have desires to lead countries as presidents. On the other hand, as I continued to read, I was also reminded of the confusion such sound bites produce as “messages [boil] down to integrating themselves [females] into a male world and proving they could do masculine things” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p. 59). Building on the works of Butler (1990) and her predecessors, second-wave feminism encouraged behaviours at the other end of the spectrum compared to those expected of girls and women in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s who were enforced to participate in *female* things. So, during second-wave feminism girls and women were “left to assume, and thus promote, the notion that to be a ‘good girl’ you had to master ‘boy things’” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p. 60) while rejecting femininity.

More recently, during the third-wave feminist movement, a movement that is still progressing, the performance of “being a good girl” has shifted to a philosophy that “being a girl

is good” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p. 64). Thus, as I moved through literature regarding the multiple waves of feminism, I acknowledged the different ways in which females have performed their identity(s) based on the era in which they were and are growing up in. I also now understand that girls and women, in the third-wave of feminism, are spending their efforts challenging new and often times silenced conflicts such as gender violence, reproductive rights, reclaiming derogatory terms, maternity leave policies, single motherhood challenges, and racial equality. What I am left with is an attempt to balance my understandings of and enacted behaviours of femininity and masculinity while still being female yet not always feeling normatively female. This struggle is explored in later chapters.

As I think about my journey through literature on gender and feminism, I recall acts of gender performativity and the constraints it imposed in my family home. At a young age I desired my parent’s support in letting me mow the lawn during Calgary’s short summers or shovel the snow during the long winters. My abilities to perform the physically demanding tasks were never underestimated, yet my keen interest to help was dismissed on the basis that it is a male’s responsibility to care for the property beyond our house walls and to perform laborious jobs. It often created confusion for me as I was allowed to play sports and was expected to carry my own hockey gear to and from the change room, go camping with other females and males, rarely allowed to attend sleepovers which seemed to be popular among my female friends, and not expected to sing or dance like many of my female friends. Additionally, I was given the opportunity to follow my sibling and their male dominated friends group around as I learned to snowboard, and play floor and street hockey with them. From my own experiences, and the readings I have engaged with, I now wonder how much the cultural and geographical locations my parents were raised in influenced their understanding of male and female roles, what

constituted appropriate activities for me to participate in and how I should dress. And while today, nearly twenty-five years later, we often joke about the frilly dresses and decorative socks my parents dressed me in, I believe that was also culturally formed and informed by the geographical context my family was situated within, which they attempted to conform to, while also maintain traditional and cultural practices. In many ways my family as a whole was learning to live in the in-between of various social locations.

Tying It All Together

Bhabha (1994) sums up the goal of this research project beautifully when stating early on in his book:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (p. 2)

So, while I recognize that there is a great deal of literature and knowledge addressing the concepts of intersectionality, religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender, what I have learned is missing is a personal exploration of a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili* female who is consistently grappling with, negotiating, and attempting to live in the in-between. Thus, I am confident that my theoretical location within an intersectional third-wave feminist framework yields a wonderful opportunity to explore the complexities of living in the in-between spaces of social locations, as well as the ability to highlight the skills and

challenges of identifying and articulating a sense of belonging and identity as an *Ismaili Muslim*, immigrant, and first-generation person.

Parallel Dancing: Physically Moving from Literature to Methodology

While thinking about the four nodes of intersect: (1) religion and spirituality, (2) geographical location, (3) ethnicity and culture, and (4) gender that I yearn to focus on and critically grapple with, I unconsciously shift to my center table, sit on a bolster, open a fresh sketch book, and lay out pencils and pens of different size and texture. My hands, which often grow cold and fingers that tingle in discomfort, articulate my full body sensations and conscious reflective process as I begin to draw a mandala.

This particular activity, new to my practice, allowed me to visualize each node of intersect, to understand how entangled and connected religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender are. As I continued to draw, memories from my early years, adolescence, and young adulthood were triggered. Mulcahy's (2013) expression of her first mandala creation workshop came to mind. Mulcahy states the process:

drew out my fears, my old beliefs and assumptions and day by day I began replacing these with new ones that were more productive. I noticed that my confidence began to grow and the practice development terms of authenticity, person-centredness and human flourishing were beginning to have real meaning for me. Mandala making was providing me with the opportunity to go inwards on a regular basis in order to seek validation and direction. (n.p.)

Carrying similar feelings to Mulcahy, I thought about how the mandala process allowed me to sit in a space that encouraged me to connect with myself in a more unique way than I had become accustomed to and provoked a meditative journey of finding ways to express what I was sensing

through my body. In many ways, the journey of my first mandala creation was much more than a distraction from reading and writing. It was also this process that led me back to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow that I initially learned about in my first year of undergraduate studies. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) offers insight into flow, a "state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4), which is exactly where I found myself as I drew.

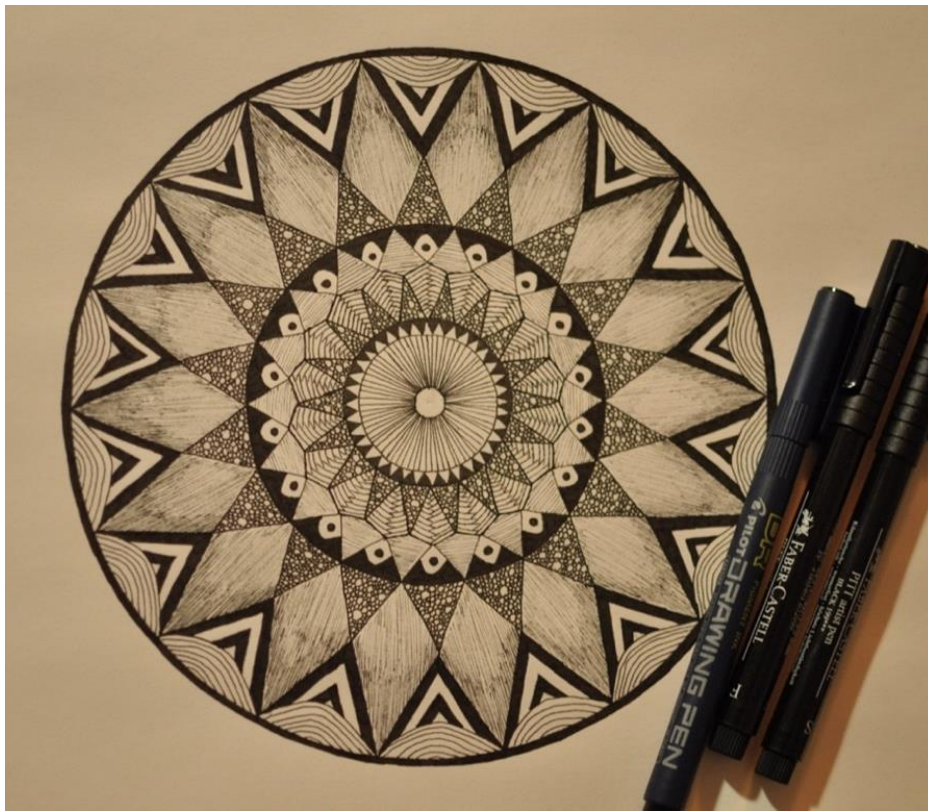


Figure 1: Mandala Creation

The meditative drawing process would support Grant's (2016) belief that it takes time for unique ideas to happen and that procrastination is a creative individual's means of coming to rare concepts. Further, Jung (as cited in Mulcahy, 2013) discovered the mandala as an approach to relieve his own and his patients' suffering in psychotherapy, as a way to explore his inner world and a practice that had a positive and calming influence. The mandala creation has been a

journey that allowed me to recognize the critical need for established self-therapeutic time, to provoke space that consciously connects the mind and body, and creates an environment that encourages flow to occur.

As I drew and my narratives started to surface, I was reminded of an experience I had while traveling in East Africa (2013-2014) that introduced me to the whirling dervish. The growth of the mandala, from tight, constricted and narrow to wide, bold, and all-embracing, represented the gown of a dervish. As a dervish walks onto stage, their white gown is framed within a black cloak, their gait narrow, and their hands tucked beside them. Youssuf (2011) shares how a dervish's black cloak is shed, their gowns begin to splay, and their arms extend as they dance to gain a connection to an-other than human.

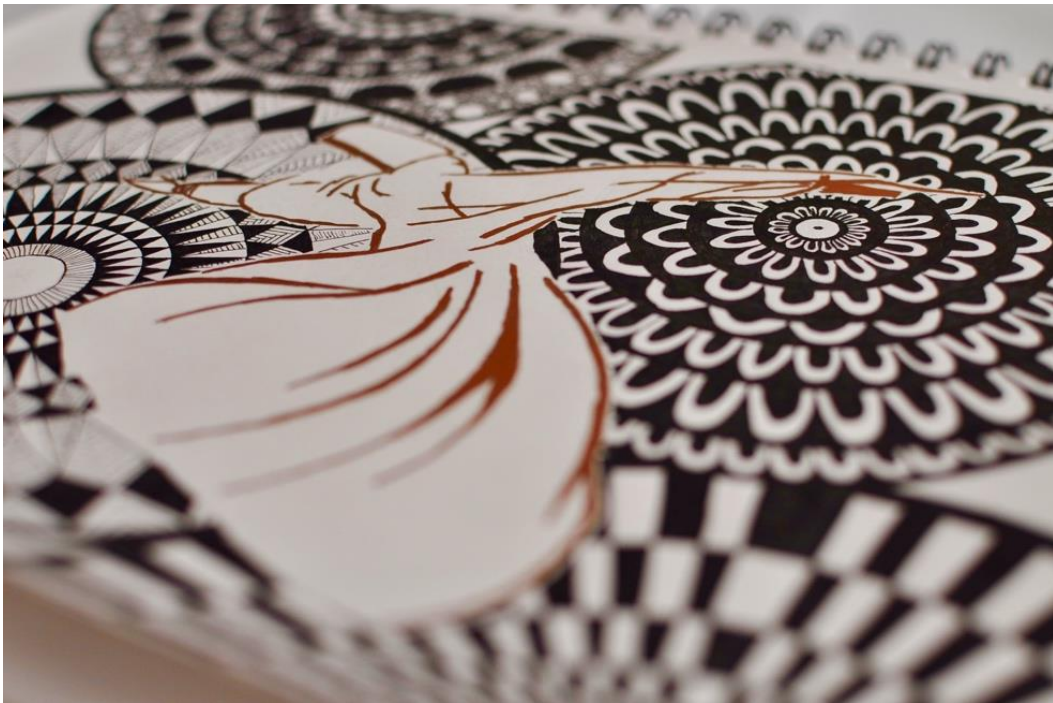


Figure 2: A Dervish Dances

My drawings, each more detailed than the previous, lead to various questions. The process of drawing allowed me to move beyond the “deeply entrenched body/mind dualism” that

Shusterman (2012, p. 5) discusses. Through the physical act of drawing I “overcome such dualisms by recognizing [my] body as a site of active perception and subjectivity” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 5). During this process, I begin to find myself questioning why I felt more connected to the *Ismaili* community while residing in East Africa, if my religious beliefs had shifted since my travels, and how being female influenced my sense of belonging. Thinking about how my theoretical location within third-wave feminism, and my pull to understand, complicate, and derive meaning from my own narratives led me to Ellis’ (1997, 1999) work where she states that a researcher’s interest and intrigue in the process of exploring because of their own experiences makes autoethnography exciting and productive. Within moments, I felt as though I had found a methodology that fit my research goals and personal quest best. The next challenge I faced was framing my study within a methodology that requires a researcher to become vulnerable, to partially separate from experiences that are near and dear in an attempt to critically analyze, deconstruct and make meaning out of such experiences, and to stay within a theoretical framework without conflating such work with self-therapy. For me, through my new love for drawing and connection to the whirling dervish, I turned to the whirling dervish to help boundary and structure my research method.

Using the Whirling Dervish as a Method

I began my whirling journey at birth and have since embodied the act of a whirling dervish over my life time. Shusterman (2012) utilizes the word soma, a Greek word for body, to describe the sentience of lived bodies as opposed to the physical body, something that is crucial for a dervish in order to achieve an embodied philosophy - the ability to demonstrate “one’s philosophy through one’s own bodily example, expressing it through one’s manner of living” (p. 4). Both the act of drawing and metaphorically whirling has given me the opportunity to

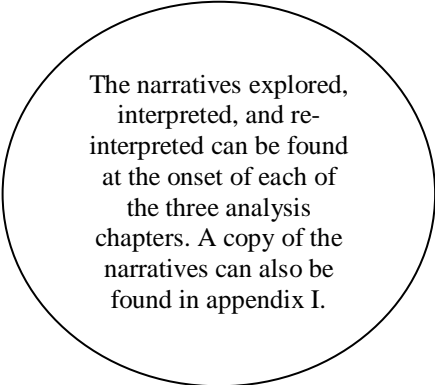
showcase my embodied philosophy. I also learned about a belief from many of the families I met while traveling through East Africa in which the fetus picks the parents he/she is going to be born to. If this is true, my first act was one of the greatest and most profound acts of my life. I was born to family members that taught a strong set of morals, values, and ethics and at the same time expected assimilation into the community I was being raised in. My family members allowed me to go beyond their understanding of recreational and leisure activities by letting me join a local ringette team in Calgary Alberta, Canada. And while they may have not understood what the game was about they rarely appeared to fear participation. With only a little resistance they took me around Calgary looking for equipment neither they or I knew of. I also recall during my first year playing ringette that our team lacked a team manager. Without question one family member stepped into the role and spent hours creating spreadsheets, an overly organized binder, and sought out each and every tournament our team could attend. When one coach informed my family members that I would need to learn to tie my own skates because he was not going to be at an upcoming tournament a family member spent their free time at work that evening soldering together a skate tying contraption based on the ones seen at the local sports store.

I was reminded of my ringette story along with various other stories while interacting with a Canadian *Ismaili* youth in East Africa at a summer camp (2016). As I sat with this youth from Canada, she began to share with me her own experiences of playing ringette and the balancing act of religious, cultural, and secular activities. Immediately she became a mirror of my youth, sharing similar questions, challenges, and lack of language to articulate the complexity of living in multiple locations. In this moment, I recognized the need to understand the tensions of living in the in-between of multiple social locations for *Ismaili Muslims*.

The narrative that surfaced while talking to this youth also triggered the recalling of a young adulthood experience of mine. As I entered my undergraduate studies at the University of Waterloo, I found myself studying Therapeutic Recreation, a field unknown to many of my *Ismaili Muslim* peers. My family members never questioned my desire to enter such a field. In fact, they made time to grapple with how they would explain to their family and friends, defend the field, and honour why I moved away from home to achieve my goals of obtaining a Therapeutic Recreation degree. Following my degree, in a fluid and non-negotiated manner, my family members helped me move west to the University of Victoria.

It is the surfacing of narratives, the triggering of other narratives, and the inquiry process that is associated with each narrative, that enacts the initial spins in my whirling dervish's dance. Each experience provokes a rotation, each rotation gaining momentum for the next faster, more focused, and critical round of interpretation to take place. For example, my time in East Africa is made up of a multitude of rotations, some challenging, some rewarding, others confusing. The totality of these spins led me back to Victoria BC where I worked in an environment and attended classes that had me constantly spinning to grapple with my experiences in East Africa, my attempt to re-integrate into a community I had once considered *home*, and to start to explore how various nodes of intersect (religion and spirituality, ethnicity and culture, gender, and geographical location) influence my sense of belonging and identity.

Just as a whirling dervish performs various dances to create a performance, and ultimately reach transcendence (a sense of greater knowing), the narratives I depict create a fuller view of the various narratives that impact, contribute



The narratives explored, interpreted, and re-interpreted can be found at the onset of each of the three analysis chapters. A copy of the narratives can also be found in appendix I.

to, and inform my sense of belonging and identity. I draw upon three clusters of narratives, that have been triggered by conversations with the Canadian youth I connected with in East Africa and by flipping through my journals, which initiates my whirling dervish dance.

Let's Dance

In the next chapter I explore the use of autoethnography and intersectionality that congruently align with third-wave feminism and allow for an exciting, emerging, creative, and unruly method to emerge. With a keen desire to honour and mimic a whirling dervish's dance, the beauty of insight that occurs as a dervish spins with focus and intention to achieve enlightenment and the freedom within a structured form of practice, I tie together my theoretical location with my methodological approach through a unique method I have coined as *Third-Wave Dervish*. This research process, a method that is emerging and is reflective of my whirling, will hold the necessary space to allow for an ever-evolving process of gaining knowledge via various sources such as my somatic sensations, learning through resistance, and understanding through the works of scholars within religion and spiritual, ethnicity and culture, gender, and geographical discourses.

Chapter 3

Method – Third-Wave Dervish

Imagine, you walk onto a stage, your tall felt black conical hat worn with pride, a white robe rests under your black cloak. After three slow and steady spins, you remove your black cloak to symbolize the liberation from your worldly attachments and showcase the shrouds of your ego. Your tall black hat houses your ego similarly to a tombstone. Once cleansed of worldly attachments you slowly begin rotating in an anti-clockwise manner. Your velocity with each rotation speeds up. Your right hand finds its way to face to the sky and your left down to the earth in an attempt to find balance. Your eyes find one spot to focus on as your spin turns into a whirl. This whirl, focused, intentional, offering silence and movement, insight and space, reflection and understanding. Your body is now ready to receive learnings from beyond. Your dance, the combination of multiple spins, transforms you into a *sema*, a whirling dervish.

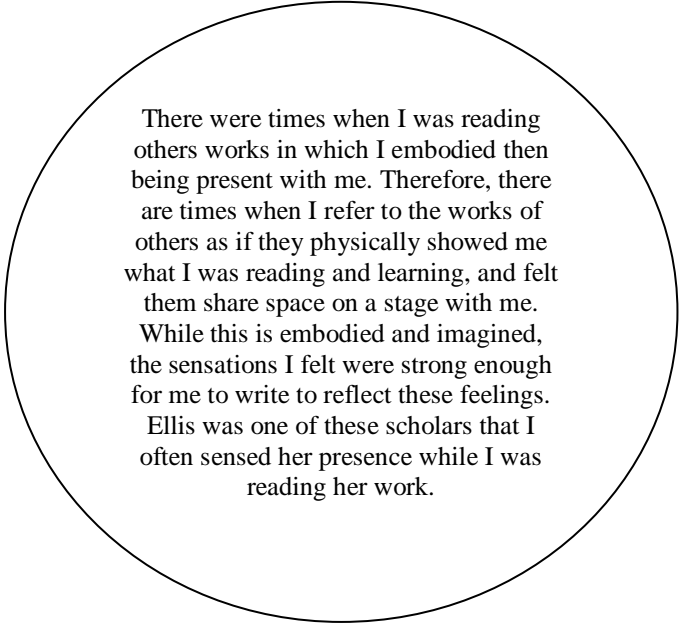
My spins, each evolving and provoked by the previous spin parallels autoethnography's emergent, uncertain approach and acknowledges that experiences do not occur in isolation. I was drawn to autoethnography, a term coined by Hayano (1979) to describe the qualitative research process as "ethnographic research done on one's 'own people' through an insider's perspective" (p. 99, as cited in Hoppes, 2014, p.64). The term was then adopted by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) who describe autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)" (p. 273, parenthesis in original). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) claim that autoethnography is the study of self through narrating experiences and state, "Who a researcher is, is central to what the research does" (p.13). Ellis and Bochner (2010) add that doing autoethnography is a way to research something that is meaningful to the researcher, to

explore questions researchers hold tightly, and to utilize the researcher's own interests to inspire inquiries.

Once having completed a few preliminary spins to further understand autoethnography as a qualitative methodology, I found myself uneasy on my feet, stiff, dizzy, and distracted. In an attempt to avoid an embarrassing fall on stage, I sat down to ponder how I would continue to dance with intensity while not feeling uneasy, stiff, and dizzy. I sought guidance from my *effendis* (masters) who spin amongst their pupils for the last round of a show's whirling, as I pondered how to relax my muscles, find my footing, focus, and remain vigilant. I read the works of scholars on opposite sides of the stage in an attempt to locate the middle spot where my dance could occur. On one end Chang (2008) danced in a step-by-step approach to autoethnography that includes worksheets and writing exercises similar to those I resisted at Girl Guides. Chang (2008) walks her readers through a data collection process, field notes collection, self-observation techniques, how to include external sources of data such as interviews in the research process, how to sort, code, and interpret the data, and how to disseminate findings. Further, she conflates autoethnographic work with ethnographic research and narrative inquiry by utilizing aspects of the self in collaboration with narratives of others. The approach to autoethnographic research that Chang (2008) takes felt overly structured, limited in the ability to live within one's autoethnography, and lacking personal connections, emotions, and vulnerabilities. Ellis' (2009) review of Chang's (2008) mentioned the same sentiments I was feeling, so I looked across the stage to Ellis (2009) and her peers to witness their dance.

As I read Ellis's (2009) writings, she showed me that autoethnography is emergent, uncertain, and experienced within a social context much like a dervish's dance. Within moments I found myself spinning with Ellis's guidance when she stated that she "want[s] autoethnography

to stay unruly, dangerous, passionate, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative – in motion, showing struggle, passion, embodied life, and collaborative creation of sense-making” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 363). My muscles relaxed, my feet moving yet centered to one spot on the floor, my spin ignited, and my body moved off to Ellis’s side of center stage in order to whirl with her understanding.



There were times when I was reading others works in which I embodied then being present with me. Therefore, there are times when I refer to the works of others as if they physically showed me what I was reading and learning, and felt them share space on a stage with me. While this is embodied and imagined, the sensations I felt were strong enough for me to write to reflect these feelings. Ellis was one of these scholars that I often sensed her presence while I was reading her work.

Ellis’s peers Adams and Bochner momentarily joined the whirling that Ellis and I participated in parallel to one another and reminded me that autoethnographic writing “seek[s] to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience[s]” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p.277) through the combination of autobiographical and ethnographical writing. They also acknowledge that dervishes (researchers) do not solely live through experiences to make them a part of a published document but that these experiences create narratives that emphasize moments of significance or epiphanies in their lives. These autobiographical narratives are then combined with an ethnographic research approach that creates an understanding of cultural experiences for insiders, also known as cultural members, and outsiders, cultural strangers, by studying “a culture’s relational practice, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p.275).

I knew in these initial rotations with Ellis that I wanted my dance to be impassioned, embodied, vulnerable, evocative, and intimate. Knowing that I had found a way to whirl with

focus, intention, and vigilance, I began to spin to locate a theoretical location. At first, I spun in resistance to feminism as I conflated feminine acts and “feminine things” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p.61) with feminism, as explored in the previous chapter. I spun, re-interpreted, and reflected on my resistance to be outfitted in frilly dresses with matching hair pins and socks, my desire to sit with my male family members at *Jamat Khana*, and to cut the lawn or shovel the snow versus clean the house or cook. It was during these spins that I found stability and clarity in third-wave feminism’s intersectional theory.

As noted in the previous chapter, I leverage third-wave feminism’s intersectionality which “can be widely applied to the study of social groups, relations, and contexts” (Dhamoon, 2011, p.230). Synder (2008) notes that “personal stor[ies] constitutes one of the central hallmarks of third-wave feminism” and that Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1994) uses an intersectional approach to gain a deeper understanding of personal stories (Dhamoon, 2011). In order to spin in search for understanding, to make meaning, intersectionality attends to the multiple axes of oppression and privilege that a person can experience based on race, ethnicity, class, and so forth. I begin to make meaning of my own experiences and to critically reflect upon, re-read and iterate my narratives to surface the tensions of belonging and identity while living in the in-between spaces of social locations as an *Ismaili* woman. However, I opt not to critique my experiences as I am unable to return to the exact moment of each narrative and believe that each experience occurred for a reason, sometimes unknown. I trust that my critical reflections, an active doing of feminist research that requires critically thinking about the process, the relationship and quality of the data and analysis (Smith, 1999), will offer insight into the challenges as well as strengths of living in the in-between and ultimately lead to practical implications for human and social development practitioners.

Data Narration

As I walked onto the stage, my black cloak housed memories from my early years, adolescence, and young adulthood. Memories were triggered as I read through my journals, as I engaged in dialogue with *Ismaili* youth at an international summer camp, and read books such as “A different kind of daughter” by Toorpaki and Holstein (2016) that speaks of a young Pashtun girl’s resistance to becoming woman and doing “feminine things” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p.61; Butler, 1999). Thus, the next few spins created the space to narrate particular experiences from each stage in my life. Narratives such as my resistance to faith-based learning, participating in *Ismaili*-based Girl Guides, playing ringette as a “brown girl”, and how I began to seek belonging to the *Ismaili* community during my undergraduate studies.

Just as my dance is impassioned, embodied, vulnerable, evocative, and intimate, I want my re-interpretations and the various re-iterations of my experiences, my narratives to capture the vulnerability, the passion, the intimacy, resistance, and keen desire to belong. To do this I turned to Bochner and Riggs (2014) for guidance. They explain five components of storytelling within narrative inquiry research that helped keep my spinning in motion. The first is the depiction of people as characters within the narrative; second, the creation of a scene by describing the context, the place. Next, the narrator is required to introduce a crisis or an epiphany that provides dramatic tensions that become the focal point of the stories resolution. Fourth, is an awareness of the temporal order of events and fifth, is the recognition that the story has a point or moral that gives meaning to the experiences presented. In addition, Scofield (2007) taught me that there must be an intention behind each written component, that the setting and major event needs to be clear to the reader, that characters need to be appealing and at times

heart wrenching, and that the main event needs to be clearly distinguished from the supporting or minor events that occur throughout the narrative.

After reading Bochner and Riggs (2014) and Scofield's (2007) work, I found myself grappling with the idea that I cannot control how my readers would take up my written recollections of my experiences. With this uncertainty looming over me, I found myself making my way to my living room coffee table, as mentioned previously, with an untouched sketch book in my left hand and my right hand attempting to balance a rule, a protractor, pencils, eraser, and pens. As I settled onto the bolster inches away from the table my left hand began to flip open the sketch book and my right hand began to draw circles, each circle wider than the next and ready to be connected to one another through design. While my body focused on the mandala presenting itself on the paper, my mind began formulating words to articulate my early years, adolescent, and young adulthood experiences. On stage, similarly to the widening of the circles in the mandala, my black cloak falls to the ground and my white robe begins to splay as I begin to iterate my experiences.

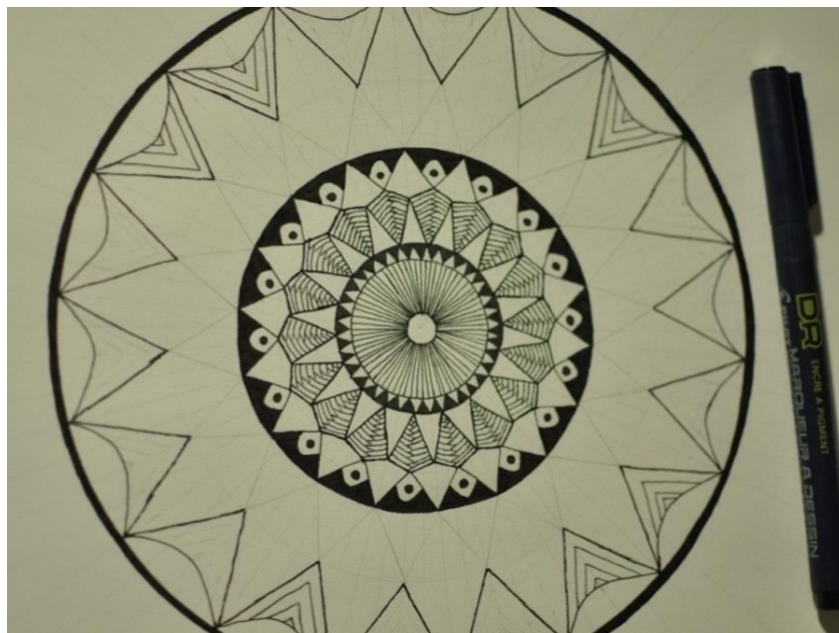


Figure 3: The beginnings of my reflective process

The next spins require me to transcribe each narrative. Over a period of months, I whirled in my articulation of experiences. I attempted to follow Bochner and Riggs (2014) and Scofield's (2007) advice to create evocative narratives. As I fine-tuned each narrative, parallel narratives were triggered. Single narratives from each stage in my life transformed into clusters of narratives. For instance, I went from sharing a singular story of seeking the inclusion of spirituality in my graduate counselling course to articulating this narrative alongside my uncertainty and resistance to include *Ismaili* religious practices within my professional practice that may have compromised a professional working relationship with a youth around the same time.

Each of these clusters of narratives, interpretations of events, and the context relating to each event is then utilized to highlight the tensions of belonging and identity that I constantly negotiated and continue to negotiate. However, in order to meet the expectations, set out by my autoethnographic *effendis*, I spun to provide insider insight into the narratives, creating the evocative and intimate narratives encouraged by Ellis (2009). My process required me to return to narratives initially documented in my journals that iterated my experiences as well as the positive and challenging tensions that surfaced on loose leaf paper. For example, in Chapter 4 I highlight my quiet and shy demeanor as a child and share my desire to connect with a male classmate during *Bait-ul-Ilm* instead of the females in my class. Following the narration of my experiences, as my black cloak is removed from the stage, I pause. The momentum of my thoughts, however, were too strong for my body. I began spinning again. This time, as I spun I entered the re-interpretation (critical reflection) process that helps bring the intersectional nodes of religion and spirituality, geographical locations, ethnicity and culture, and genders impact on my identity and belonging to the surface.

Re-interpreting the Data

The dance of a dervish requires practice, dedication, stamina, and risk. Similarly, through the re-interpretation process I take guidance from the dervish and well-known autoethnographers, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner to allow the process to unfold in a structured yet fluid and emerging manner. To re-interpret the data from a critical and vigilant lens, I spun in search of tools and techniques to help me refine methods of distancing myself from the data, while acknowledging that I would forever be emotionally connected to each narrative. I address the challenge of being intimately connected to and constantly an insider in my research later in this chapter. However, to overcome my concern with this challenge, Ellis (1997, 1999) provides me with the necessary reminder that the connection I have to the narratives - data - is not negative but that the connection honours the researcher's - my - intrigue and creates momentum in my spinning.

While I spun in these various thoughts and critical explorations, I kept returning to the dervish's ability to remain within a preassigned space on the dance floor, the ability to transcend within boundaries and began to question how my own work could remain within a particular frame and offer insight through pre-determined lenses. Just as an elegant dervish's performance is made of hundreds of spins, each creating enough momentum for the next, each slightly faster than the previous, and each offering a unique understanding, I wanted to find a way to do the same in my dance of ideas/concepts/interpretation. The re-interpretation process starts slowly, with the first few spins to loosen up the narratives and capture the initial thoughts of the researcher. These thoughts include insight into the context, offer queries that arise such as "why did I initially react with resistance as a child during faith-based learning?", and highlights epiphanies like, how my early years were grounded and housed within the *Ismaili* community.

These slow spins, as they developed in depth and speed, provoked faster and more detailed, critical, and focused spins to occur. I was then able to begin to tease apart the religious and spiritual, geographical locations, ethnic and cultural, and gendered implications on my belonging and identity. For instance, when re-interpreting my early years' narratives, at one point I start grappling with gender expectations, which then spins me into reflections on religious practices associated with being female versus male. As I spun in the intersectional node of religion and gender, I was launched into a spin requiring me to explore locational practices for a young female *Ismaili*. Each spin emergent, offered various provocations to further my search and encouraged me to grapple within and make sense of the tensions that living in the in-between of social locations has on my sense of belonging and identity from differing perspectives.

The written component of my whirling mimics the cyclical movements I make on stage. After writing sections, often distinguished by the lens of interpretation, I would use a different colour pen and engage in a round of critically reflecting on my narratives, editing, and refining my writing before transcribing my writing on my computer. As I typed, I participated in another round of critical reflection to surface further tensions and simultaneously performed another round of edits. Once again, this time with text printed from my computer, I sat with coloured pens and re-read, reflected upon, re-iterated, and articulated further understandings, perspectives, and insights that surfaced from my writing. Following yet another round of computer-based edits, I circulated my writing to my committee members, received feedback, revised on the computer, printed each chapter's cumulative feedback notes and engaged in another round of critical reflection. The various rounds of writing, reflecting, re-iterating, and re-writing lead to greater depth, further insight, and continuous surfacing of valuable tensions, perspectives, and skills that allowed me to find comfort while living in the in-between spaces of social locations as

a young child, adolescent, and young adult. The process also led to three critical implications for practice that can be found in Chapter 7.

The process of understanding my sense of belonging and identity within different stages of my life and social locations continued until my young adulthood narratives were explored. Once able to articulate the tensions, insights, and implications of living in the in-between spaces of social locations through repetitive, intense, and thorough re-reading, one more round of re-reading took place. In a similar manner to a dervish's performance, to maintain the honour of and seek further guidance from, I welcomed my *effendis*, those scholars who have dedicated their work to religion, spirituality, ethnicity, culture, gender, and/or geography, as well as feminism, to whirl with me.

These spins allowed scholars such as Butler (1990) to contribute beliefs that doing gender is different than being a particular sex, or Spatz (2015) who articulates that somatic responses occur because of the connection between the mind and body in a holistic manner. Re-iterating with the support of others also provided me with the opportunity to acknowledge potential oversights and gaps in my spinning. More importantly, perhaps, is that whirling with others invites dialogue and allows this research to reach beyond myself. It is here, in my spinning, that I am able to intentionally slow myself, distance myself from the stage by returning to sitting at my coffee table, and think beyond the self, to offer educators, counsellors, social workers, nurses and others within the human and social development discourse practical implications when working with first generation Canadian immigrants regarding belonging and identity that will lead to enhanced holistic care practices.

Parallel Dance: Practical Description of Method

Metaphorically whirling occurs as I engage in a practical, methodological, and pre-determined manner. As written above, in a metaphoric manner, I engage in various steps as I work through my research, which I explain in a practice manner here. The first step included engaging with current literature, reading through past journal entries, and speaking with youth. The reflective process that followed my initial step often triggered memories of my own experiences that I then spent time articulating in coherent narratives. These narratives form the basis of my research as they became the data source. Once my data was collected, the process of analysis began. This process included multiple rounds of explorations, critical reflection, and the use of a feminist lens to understand the tensions of belonging and identity that surfaced in each narrative presented. Each round of analysis was deliberate and guided by one of the four nodes of intersect that I deemed critical earlier on. As rounds of analysis occurred and new understandings surfaced, further rounds of analysis often occurred through the lens of these new understandings. For example, as I learnt about, grappled with, and articulated my experiences of racism, I returned to my original narratives and analyzed the narrative through the discourse of race and racialization. Lastly, after various rounds of analysis occurred and I felt I reached a point of saturation – discussed below – I shifted my focus from my own experiences and narratives and began to think about practitioners within the human and social development field. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I shed light on the key findings, offer three implications for practice, and discuss potential research opportunities to further our understanding of people's experiences of living in the in-between spaces of social locations. However, autoethnography, much like other research methodologies, has a few limitations that require diligent and intentional attention to ensure best research practice, that I now turn my attention to.

Autoethnography Limitations

One challenge with autoethnography, as a methodology, is that the author (researcher and participant) continues to live and experience new things while narrating, experiencing, interpreting, analyzing, and disseminating research data and new understandings. However, with each new experience, the reflection and analysis of narratives written alter as new understandings and perspectives create new insights to interpret previous experiences. For example, in the midst of writing my analysis I spent seven weeks in East Africa, five of which I spent at an international youth (15-17 years of age) camp. On my flight to Tanzania and then Kenya I was reading about women of colour (Rojas, 2009), cosmopolitan ethics (Appiah, 2006), and feminism (hooks, 1995). I was attempting to find language that clarified what feminism is and how I interact with feminist theory, how I articulate the strengths and challenges that are associated with being a woman of colour and the relation skin tone has to culture, race, and ethnicity that Rojas (2009) begins to tease out as she expresses an experience she had in a park with her niece, a light skinned girl who wanted to play with a boy, a darker skinned child. Further, I was curious about the concept of cosmopolitan ethics, pluralism and why the Aga Khan ethical framework highlights these concepts. Appiah (2006) expresses early on in his book that the building of larger societies required people to meet, interact with, and live amongst people and cultures that were unfamiliar, and thus through the ethics of cosmopolitanism people learn to live together, perhaps learning to live in the in-between spaces of social locations. As I read, reflected and grappled with the works of Rojas (2009) and Appiah (2006), the terms continued to muddle and become further complicated, so, I intentionally encouraged myself to sit in the discomfort of not having the right words versus resisting and finding new language or concepts in an attempt to skirt around the challenges I was facing.

Then, part way through camp, nearly three weeks after my initial flights to East Africa, participants engaged in a talent night. Many participants played instruments, sang popular songs, and performed dances from their home regions. Unexpectedly, at the mid-point of the evening a fairly quiet, extremely respectful, and brilliantly talented youth who I would have never imagined seeing on stage got up and began reciting one of her poems, *Arcipluvian*, that she had written and publically posted on her personal blog in 2016. Her voice crystal clear and her message one that sent tears to nearly every person in the room. As ZiyanaK (2016) read:

*My body is the sanctuary of my lineage,
the safe that holds an inheritance too great
for me to apologise it away,
for me to denounce the differences in my complexion
simply because of their colour.
Identity is encoded into my body
like needlepoint spots of every hue
weaving paintings from the shades of my bruises.
The pigments of my skin
fit the whole range of the spectrum,
yet somehow, I am only ever seen
as a dusky shade darker than white.
It began when prejudice crawled into
the cardboard corners of my crayon-box
and tried to make me understand
that I was less of a human being
simply because I didn't fit
onto the lightest, brightest section
of the colour wheel.
I've met the cold, grey eyes
who believe in uncoloured sterility,
but my eyes are kaleidoscopes
with stained glass irises, seeing
that somewhere in their achromatic psyche,
they confused prejudice for purification
and bleached away their humanity.
I want to spill every colour from my body,
make them realise that the canvas of my skin
isn't dark because it is a fusion of every colour,
because it is a prismatic collection
of everything undefinable by a single shade.
I will not decolourise the parts of me*

*that are too bold to be monochromatic,
 too complex to be folded into a label;
 my skin is painted from a thousand points of colour,
 like a picture made of pixels.
 Don't ascribe a hue to me
 when you haven't seen me living in rainbows,
 and don't understand how
 there is no one colour to tint
 the human spirit.
 My skin has been painted
 with the bruises of every ancestor
 who fought to claim their colour.
 Now I claim my own pallet:
 I draw variegations onto my bones
 with the raw spectrum of my crayon box,
 finger-paint marbled streaks
 into the ridges of my face,
 tattoo onto my heart the pride I hold
 for being arcipluvian.*

I caught myself, with uncommon tears in my eyes, turning to my friend and whispering, “this brings so much more meaning to my dissertation, I wonder if she’ll let me use it?” ZiyanaK’s (2016) youthfully mature words provided me with a new significance on how being a woman of colour impacts how I perceive the world and my experiences, as well as how others perceive and interpret my experiences. Her words give me a new understanding of hooks’ (1995) and Rojas’ (2009) work that highlights the strengths women of colour hone in order to sit with and overcome the daily challenges and tensions they - we - encounter. Following ZiyanaK’s (2016) reading, I returned to previously written components of my analysis and thought forward to unwritten pieces, with a new perspective. I was reminded of the strengths and challenges I as a woman of colour house, and how such a position influences my re-interpretation of recollected experiences. My spinning, thus, quickens to catch up with the daily influences of each experience I have, yet no matter how fast I spin or write, in autoethnography one must stop

spinning to share momentary iterations related to the research understandings while also acknowledging that interpretations will constantly shift based on new lived experiences.

Working through constant re-interpretations

The challenge – when does my spinning pause? How do I know when I have made enough sense of a cluster of narratives that I am then able to move on to the next cluster? Perhaps there is no end to the spinning; that the process of meaning and sense making is never complete as belonging is constantly negotiated and renegotiated, identities are constantly altering, intersectional nodes continuously shifting, and perspectives forever changing. However, while re-iterating my narratives, a natural pause often presented itself when insights became repetitive creating a point of saturation. At this point of saturation, when I believe I have hit a degree of understanding that continues to surface through critical reflection, my spinning briefly stops, my feet find a new spot on the floor, and my whirl reignites with the excitement to spin again in another cluster of narratives.

In an attempt to reduce confusion, work within the messiness of autoethnography that is associated with the multiple layers of complexity, constant negotiation and re-negotiation of interpretations, and the tensions that arise as new experiences alter previously explored narratives, I do my best to become transparent in my writing. For instance, prior to analyzing narratives related to my spiritual beliefs and connections (Chapter 6), I acknowledge the struggle I have writing the chapter because of the location I was in when I initially started writing the chapter. As you will read, I was sitting at a Baptist initiated eco-village approximately an hour outside of Nairobi Kenya surrounded by Baptist missionaries who use the eco-village as their retreat to “take a break” from East Africa (personal communication, July 23, 2017), by the expat workers and their families from China who were vacationing from their international

infrastructure development jobs at the eco-village, by our international youth participants, facilitators and staff who were located in the eco-village to experience East Africa, by the American owners of the Eco-village, and by Indigenous workers who wait-on and serve each of us. The location and those I was cohabitating with became critical in my spinning, as you will read in coming chapters. Being transparent and sharing these insider reflections, also helped me slow my spinning, to uncover the various layers in my re-reading, and vividly express the complexity of each narrative. Through this process I hope that, and believe, that the limitations of living and engaging in new experiences while writing becomes a strength. However, for this to become a strength, it is critical to acknowledge that throughout this process I remain an insider in the research.

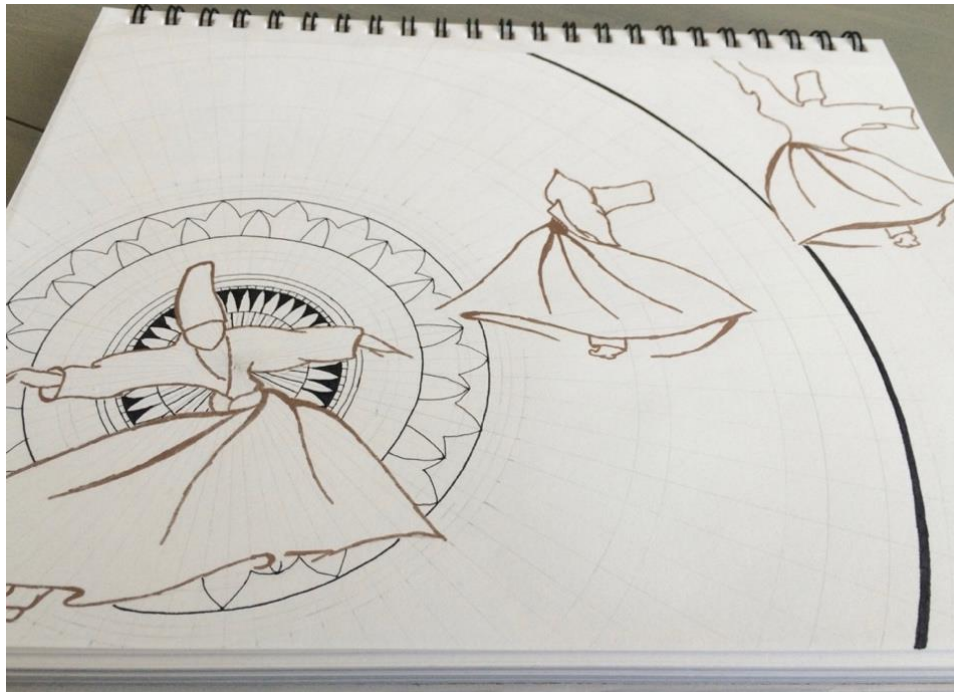


Figure 4: Never fully complete

Consistently an insider

As I worked through the research process, it was important for me, as the researcher, and the focus of the research, to acknowledge the strength in critical feminist research approaches

that have made “insider methodologies much more acceptable in qualitative research” (Smith, 1999, p.137), as well as to understand the various roles I played in the process. Throughout the research process I considered my own narratives to be the basis of the research - the data. Due to the intimate nature of autoethnography, it was important for me to find techniques to distance myself, at least partially, from the data - re-iterations - and critically examine the narratives written, to interpret stories, and to create links between the provided narratives, literature, experiences others may have, and professional practice. Such a process situated around personal narratives that “propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context...and invite[s] readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p.279-280) helps define the value of engaging in a research process that requires me to maintain a constant balance of simultaneously being engaged and detached.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) offer guidance on how to articulate reliability and validity in autoethnography. By redefining reliability in regards to the “narrator’s credibility” (p.282), that the experience could have occurred, and if the researcher actually believes the experience to have happened, then an autoethnographic researcher adheres to reliability constructs within research. Validity, as articulated by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), “means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (p.282) and that “The story is coherent” (p.282). By adhering to Ellis, Adams and Bochner’s (2011) guidelines, being a constant insider, and adopting Smith’s (1999) perspective that insider research requires constant reflexivity, while also stepping outside to critically examine narratives through the lenses of other scholars and in relation to similar data presented in literature,

autoethnography becomes a strong social science research methodology, which also becomes generalizable. To become generalizable, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) suggest that the readers are able to compare the narratives shared to their own lives, by being able to grasp the similarities, differences and reasons why, as well as feel as though the narratives help inform them about the unfamiliar.

Because the researcher is always an insider, another limitation with autoethnographic research is the challenge to maintain a high degree of anonymity for those represented in narratives as well as the risks associated with a researcher sharing their vulnerability. Before moving into the research analysis, it is critical to briefly articulate these ethical considerations.

Ethical Research Considerations

Potential risks and benefits

I believe it is important to note that autoethnography comes with many risks, with the most prominent being emotional. Along my journey, especially over the past few years, I have faced various challenges. Many of these challenges have sparked various lines of inquiry and propelled me to undertake this particular research study. This inquiry, into finding livable space, is rooted in my uncertainty of where I reside, the discomfort of attempting to live within and on the periphery of multiple communities simultaneously, constantly attempting to find the ease of living in the uncomfortable, and a search for safety in those situations that become difficult and potentially dangerous. Reflecting on my own fragmented narratives and continuing to explore previous experiences required great self-care practices and a method of recognition of when I may have needed to seek guidance and support from a counselor and/or my supervisor.

Further, without attempting to generalize my own experience and recognizing that other *Ismaili Muslim* youth who I have connected with over the summers have similar experiences,

this is an attempt to shed light on one person's experience and make this experience accessible to others who are searching for livable spaces. I take courage from writers such as Jerkins (2018), who writes a collection of short essays describing her experience of being a black woman living in the United States of America, specifically in New York. Jerkins (2018), similar to my own writing, risks the emotional challenges that come from vocalizing and publically sharing experiences of being minoritized and racialized in a hope of eliciting change in systems. Hence, I deem that the benefits largely outweigh the potential risks of widely sharing my personal narratives. Sharing insight into the attempt to find and/or create a livable space as a first-generation Canadian woman is a study that has yet to be completed from an *Ismaili Muslim* perspective. This study will therefore reach, hopefully, many people who are attempting to find their own livable space, for those who are supporting first-generation immigrants and their families as they begin to live in the in-between of various social locations, and provide a new perspective to guardians and caregivers of the thoughts, challenges, and questions their own children and youth may be experiencing.

Confidentiality

Various people have contributed to my personal narratives, throughout my life. It is important to note that the narratives shared within this research project are from my memory, writings, perspective, and interpretation. Many of the people referred to will not be difficult to identify, however, in an attempt to maintain their anonymity to the best of my ability I will refer to each person in a generic manner such as friend, peer, co-worker, client, and so forth. Alternatively, a quick internet search may lead to my family member's identities being shared. Thus, I have taken the time to share with my immediate family the research I have conducted and obtained their support and encouragement. Yet, in an attempt to keep their identities as

anonymous as possible, I refer to each of my family members as *family member*, throughout my research. In this, I also believe that the narratives gain versatility, that readers are able to imagine their own relations playing specific roles in the shared narratives, and hopefully provide another level of connection between the research, researcher, and reader.

Thus, while autoethnography hosts various challenges for the research including the insider - myself - who has “to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities” (Smith, 1999, p.137), the outcome of such a methodology that produces “analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p.284) outweighs the struggles encountered as I whirled. I believe, now more than ever before, that becoming “vulnerable, shar[ing] openly, and perserv[ing]” (Brown, 2012, p.64) in a time when so many *Ismaili Muslim* youth, such as ZiyanaK, have shared with me the complexity and messiness of living in the in-between of social locations, it is not only my research calling but also my responsibility to engage in such a research project. And, it is with great honour, discomfort, and excitement that I begin my re-iteration(s) of living with the tensions of living in the in-between of social locations as a young girl growing up in Calgary Alberta, Canada.

Chapter 4

Whirling in my early years

As I walk onto the stage to perform the first of three dances, memories of the various stories my family has shared with me over the years begin to surface. I think about guidance offered by Paul in *Written as I Remember It* (Paul, Raibmon & Johnson, 2014), which emphasizes that new understandings and knowledge can be drawn from hearing and/or reading narratives repeatedly. She shares how “Elders taught her to remain receptive to new meanings and lessons regardless of how many times she had heard a story before” (Paul, Raibmon & Johnson, 2014, p.5). Thus, many of the previously shared narratives are re-iterated in the following chapters to help draw out new understandings and knowledge. Here, in this chapter, I initially start spinning with my earliest memories as these early years’ experiences impact later experiences throughout my life. However, I also acknowledge that critically reflecting on my early years is challenging due to the time lapse. Yet, these experiences remain central to who I was and who I am today.

The earliest story that comes to mind is of the first time my family took me outside of our three-bedroom home. I was approximately six weeks old when my family bundled me up, placed me in my car seat, and drove me to *Jamat Khana* for the first time. As a family, we were greeted by extended family members and friends. I recall nothing of this day beyond the stories shared with me, but, I do know this cold day in February 1987 was extremely special for my family. On this day, the religious leaders at the *Jamat Khana* my parents attended performed my *baiyah*. With the recitation of prayers and the drops of sacred water placed in my tiny mouth, I became a *Shia Ismaili Muslim*. From this day forward, with the support of the *Ismaili* community, my family would teach me how to carefully consider and observe the power of *Allah* (God) at all

times. Gollnick (2008), offers insight into Jung's (1935) work that promotes parents to do just that, to focus on teaching their children how to observe the power of God. The emphasis of carefully considering the divine (Gollnick, 2008) was expected to infuse each move I made, each activity I engage in, and was to contribute to my daily successes.

Narratives continued to surface as I walked along memory lane, attempted to find my position on stage, and centered my feet to begin whirling. Each memory reminded me of how much of my early years, formative cognitive development, and extracurricular activities were rooted in the *Ismaili* community. Through multiple rounds of critical reflections and re-readings of the narratives that transpired, I was excited by the revelation that my innate resistance did not deter me from learning, knowing, and enacting the ethics, values, and beliefs I was raised with but offered a critical lens to understand and live those ethics, values, and beliefs. The energy I have gained from this recognition has ignited my spinning. My spinning starts slow enough for me to narrate, re-iterate, and share my early years' memories of resisting faith-based learning in order to articulate the tensions of belonging and identity that occurred early in my life, largely subconsciously.

Resisting faith-based learning

The first of my experiences beyond my family unit, attending evening prayers, and secular school that I will focus on occurred at Bait-ul-Ilm (religious education classes). This was also the first of my experiences that I remember resisting faith based learning. In grade one, I vividly recall sitting in circle time while the teachers went around the circle having each student individually recite the first part of the Holy Du'a (prayers). Every week I attended, I sat in circle time sweating, shaking and attempting to somehow become invisible. As my turn was about to arrive, typically two students down from me, I would

urgently need to use the bathroom. My bathroom trips were long, often prolonged by looking at pictures on the walls and reading all the comments marking the junior high school's bathroom stalls to ensure that I would return to class following circle time and just in time for snack break. I had little motivation or desire to learn the Du'a and even less to understand the meaning of the prayers my family members encouraged me recite with them three times a day.

While spinning to re-iterate my goings-on at *Bait-ul-Ilm*, my spin started to speed up as I learned how active, involved, and intensely my body responds to experiences. These moderately tempoed spins surfaced my body's resistance and my desire to be invisible as a young child. With innate sensitivity, subconsciously I began expelling energy through physical micro-movements, releasing toxins through my pores, and ultimately forming/enacting the need to escape the social location I was positioned within. My somatic acts of resistance were never disrespectful; at least I hope I was always respectful. I remember being quiet, shy, and had it not been for my physical form, I may have conquered many children's dreams of becoming invisible almost in an act of wanting to fit in and belong. So, when I disappeared for extended periods of time, my absence was not like the others. Our high school aged female teachers, twins, rarely recognized that I missed my turn reciting the *Du'a*, or if they did, they graciously let me off the hook. One peer in particular, a young boy, was never so lucky. His attempts to leave the classroom were often dismissed, he struggled to recite the *Du'a*, and at the end of his turn he'd look my way and smirk as if he knew my body was already spinning and I was about to take flight.

As I initially reflect on my early *Bait-ul-Ilm* experiences, it starts to become apparent that I was negotiating my expected attendance, my disinterest in learning the *Du'a*, the limited sense

of connection I felt to my peers, with whom I sometimes did want to belong, and being aware that I sometimes isolated myself, resisted certain activities, and held a level of unease because of my below grade level reading skills. Simultaneously, I participated in Girl Guides with other members of the *Ismaili* community.

Faith-based Girl Guides

Prior to joining the Ismaili Girl Guides, for nearly a year I watched from the corner of a school gym while my family members participated in Ismaili Scouting. I was drawn to the outdoor survival teachings and worked to remember the steps to tie knots, start a campfire, and set up a tent so I could secretly practice in my bedroom at night with family members' supplies. As soon as I was old enough to join Girl Guides my family enrolled me in the Shia Ismaili Muslim Girl Guides troop. On one hand, I was excited to learn what I scrutinized my family members learn. On the other hand, I was nervous to interact with the girls from my Bait-ul-Ilm classroom and Jamat Khana on an additional night of the week. Further, I wanted our uniforms to be pants and a shirt versus a brown dress.

Within weeks I wished I could have been a part of Scouts instead of Girl Guides and on many occasions wanted to do the activities the boys were doing in the school gym versus those that we were doing in the school classroom gathered around desks. A month into our Girl Guiding year I was told that our Brownie troop was going to be performing a Bollywood dance for an upcoming celebration. I desired connection to the other girls in the troop as I watched them all laugh, play, and go to each other's houses from Jamat Khana, Bait-ul-Ilm, and sometimes from secular school. Yet, I resisted the expectations placed on me to sit at a desk and learn through worksheets and desk crafts compared to learning through doing as the boys and my non-Ismaili Girl Guide friends were; to wear a

brown dress to meetings, expected to recite the Du'a, and to dance. I found myself attempting to skip dance sessions held on Sunday mornings in the social hall at the Jamat Khana by being difficult to wake up or experiencing stomach aches. Once at dance rehearsal, I refused to move, found my way to the corners of the hall, and turned silent. With strong encouragement from my family and stern guidance from the troop leader, I made it to the performance hall weeks later, minutes before the performance, without makeup or jewelry, and a stiff body. I hesitated and on many occasions resisted to perform as an elegant girl. In the end, I performed. More accurately, I filled space on the stage as my peers gracefully danced to Chaiyya Chaiyya.

Girl Guides invoked similar physical responses to those that I had at *Bait-ul-Ilm*. I often found myself attempting to become invisible by being silent, rarely verbally expressing my unease or enjoyment, physically reacting to experiences, and seeking ways to avoid reciting the *Du'a*. The skills I mastered at *Bait-ul-Ilm* transferred to Girl Guides. On the days I was scheduled to recite the *Du'a* and could not find a reason to skip our meeting, I would have to use the bathroom just before 19:30 - the time evening prayers started. If I sensed any reservation from my Girl Guide leaders to let me potentially leave the room prior to 19:30, I would start to shake, sweat, and scratch my left inner elbow to the point that I needed to use the bathroom to wash the little blood I produced and tame the rash I fashioned. The process of walking to the bathroom, reading the array of words on the stall walls, washing and soothing my inner elbow, and returning to the classroom took longer than reciting the *Du'a*.

At this point, my spinning and desire to re-interpret my early years' experiences, has gained such momentum that my robe has fully splayed. As I re-interpret the above narratives over the next several pages, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of how religion and

spirituality, ethnicity and culture, gender, and how being located in Calgary Alberta, Canada, impacted my sense of belonging and identity as a young child.

Balancing My Spinning

Part of a whirling dervishes experience is attempting to calm the vertigo sensations that occurs as one rapidly spins. It is, from my understanding, in the moments of calmness when the vertigo-like sensations ease that new understandings arise. Thus, learning to spin and find moments of ease without getting dizzy is a crucial part of my dance. In order to find a maintainable speed, a point of focus, and intention, I initially started spinning to surface critical insights that help shed light on details that highlight some of the tensions of belonging and identity I experienced as a young *Ismaili* girl. The two tensions that immediately surface for me are stuck in the nodes of religion and gender. For example, it is apparent that my early years were grounded and housed within the *Ismaili* faith and community. As I prepared to attend religious ceremonies or cultural celebrations, I was outfitted in frilly dresses with matching hair pins and socks from an *Ismaili* owned store. While I was expected to perform, to dress, as a girl, once at *Jamat Khana* I sat on the men's side of the prayer hall with my male family members. Further, many of my social experiences stemmed from birthday invitations of peers from *Bait-ul-Ilm*, or informal gatherings in the social hall at *Jamat Khana*.

Spinning in such reflections triggered other experiences in *Jamat Khana*. I vividly recall spending hours in *Jamat Khana* witnessing the dedication and work ethic of family members. My family would help open, organize, facilitate, clean, and close *Jamat Khana* on a regular basis. On special occasions, I would accompany my extended family to *Jamat Khana* in hopes that I would get to skip sitting inside during prayers and be able to help prepare *sherbet* (a light pink dessert drink made from ice cream and milk) and *chai* (tea) for the *jamat* (members of the

Ismaili community) following prayers. However, as a female, I was often guided inside the prayer hall as I was not to lift heavy objects, stir *sherbet* in a pot large enough for me to bathe in with a metal spoon that towered over me, nor get dirty.

In a similar fashion to the way I found myself drawn to my living room centre table, legs crossed, and pen and paper in hand to draw a mandala at the onset of my research journey, I would sit inside *Jamat Khana* sketching designs in the carpet, combing the worn red threads from one side to the next in order for my designs to come alive. As the *Du'a* was recited, I copied the movements of others, or mimicked the movements associated with the *Du'a*, so that my extended family remained blind to the limited knowledge I had of the words of the *Du'a*.

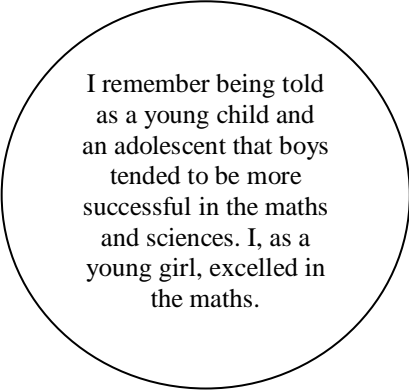
Between regular *Jamat Khana* attendance and *Bait-ul-Ilm*

classes, I mastered the order and timings of the hand gestures associated with the *Du'a*: I had honed the skills of silently and respectfully resisting the religious expectation of learning the *Du'a* in my own way. Thus, when my extended family took me to *Jamat Khana* late and told me to recite my *Du'a* in my head,

I could motion the gestures with enough precision that it appeared as though I knew the *Du'a*.

What I was really doing was refining my mathematic skills by working on my times tables between each gesture, while also finding a way to belong and not appear different from the others.

The complex, tense, and deeply in-tune negotiations I made during *Bait-ul-Ilm*, *Jamat Khana*, and while at Girl Guides, which sit entangled in the node of religion and gender requires significant exploration. Over the next several spins, I reflect on and re-iterate how gender impacted my sense of belonging and identity. Then, I spin to uncover religious, ethnic, and

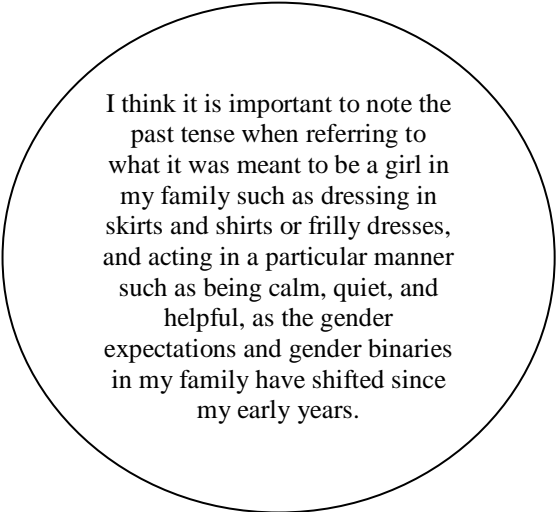


I remember being told as a young child and an adolescent that boys tended to be more successful in the maths and sciences. I, as a young girl, excelled in the maths.

cultural traditions and practices that influenced my early years. Finally, as I spin to reveal a deeper understanding of my early years, I account for spirituality's role in my being.

Whirling as a Girl

Dervishes, traditionally, are men dressed in robes. I, a female who resisted “feminine things” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004) from my early years, now find myself drawn to understand the complexities and tensions gender hosts. I seek to dress in a robe, spin as the male dervishes elegantly do, and find movement between the centre and periphery of being a girl. For me, being born a female was a gift. Much of my extended family anticipated a second male to be born in my family, based on our familial history. Thus, perhaps from the moment I was



I think it is important to note the past tense when referring to what it was meant to be a girl in my family such as dressing in skirts and shirts or frilly dresses, and acting in a particular manner such as being calm, quiet, and helpful, as the gender expectations and gender binaries in my family have shifted since my early years.

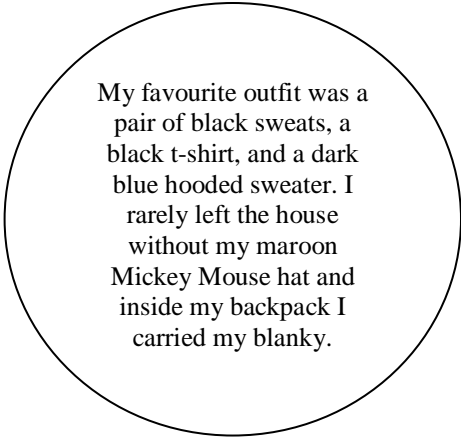
conceived I began my resistance to gender expectations. I believe I chose to be female, yet a female that pushed - and pushes - the boundaries of what it meant to be a girl. I embraced certain expectations set upon me by my family and the *Ismaili* community and the society I was being raised in such as being calm, respectful, truthful, and dressing in a particular manner. The girl tendencies, the “feminine

things”, were not my concern. What I believe I was concerned with, and actively resisted, was being forced to adopt “feminine things” such as: participating in domestic acts, preparing to become a mother, and dressing in “girly” outfits. As I critically reflect, I start to make meaning of my gender resistance and I begin to grapple with my early years’ ability to understand and distinguish what was expected of me as a girl and the tensions I lived with by being labeled a girl.

As mentioned, I repeatedly performed traits such as acting shy and quiet, consciously and whole-heartedly being respectful, and dressing in frilly dresses. These expectations created a sense of unease and tension for me as I would predominantly resist yet on other occasions desired to be “girly” and dress up, giggle with the other girls, sit with my peers on the female side of *Jamat Khana*, and want to be called cute, sweet, and beautiful. Many of the learnings regarding how a girl should be were taught to me at *Jamat Khana* by family and community members, were supplemented by cultural expectations of the way one presents oneself, and facilitated by the easy access to a community member’s clothing store that predominantly sold *Jamat Khana* items for young children. The lessons of being polite, respectful, and presentable are now embedded in my daily activities, however, as a young child I did not know that this was what I was learning. For me, I mostly felt a sense of unease, disconnect, and a desire to not participate in the teachings that took place at *Bait-ul-Ilm* and *Jamat Khana*. Additionally, my engagement in certain activities was restricted because of my gender. Returning to an earlier example, because girls, especially at *Jamat Khana* and in my family, were not supposed to lift heavy objects or get dirty, I was unable to volunteer with my male family members during prayers. Alternatively, I was expected to sit inside the prayer hall amongst my peers. The gender expectations set upon me by my family and the *Ismaili* community transferred to various other facets of my early years.

At *Bait-ul-Ilm*, when I urgently left the classroom to use the bathroom, I would spend time reading the markings on the junior high school’s bathroom stalls and began to grasp the terminology girls used to describe one another. I recall seeing the letters S, L, U, T and B, I, T, C, H written repetitively on the stalls with names attached at the beginning or end. At the time, I did not understand that the girls writing on these walls were being mean and shaming one

another. I did know that writing on the property of others and speaking of others without them in the room contradicted my family teachings. Nevertheless, every Saturday when I walked into the bathroom, for a brief moment, I was fascinated by how publicly the girls disobeyed the teaching I was absorbing but not fully accepting. Now, on reflection, I realize I was constantly attempting to find a way to hold true to the ethics and values I was being taught but also how to own, act, and carry these ethics and values in a way that made sense to me. My thoughts were further complicated on one Saturday at *Bait-ul-Ilm* when, after one of my regular bathroom excursions, I remember watching my female twin educators interact with the other educators. Watching their interactions, specifically a long debate regarding whose bag and shoes matched best, and what each of them planned to wear to *Jamat Khana* later that day provoked my curiosity of the competitive nature girls had with one another. I wondered if girls were always in competition with one another. It was not only the dialogue that sparked my inquiry but also the rejection of one female educator who was wearing sweat pants, a baggy t-shirt, and carrying a backpack. When asked what she was going to wear later that evening, she stated that she was unsure and quickly dismissed herself from the group. In that moment, looking back, I wish I could have given that educator a glance to show my shared sentiments. That day, unlike the other girls in my class, I too was wearing sweat pants, a hooded sweater, and carrying a backpack.

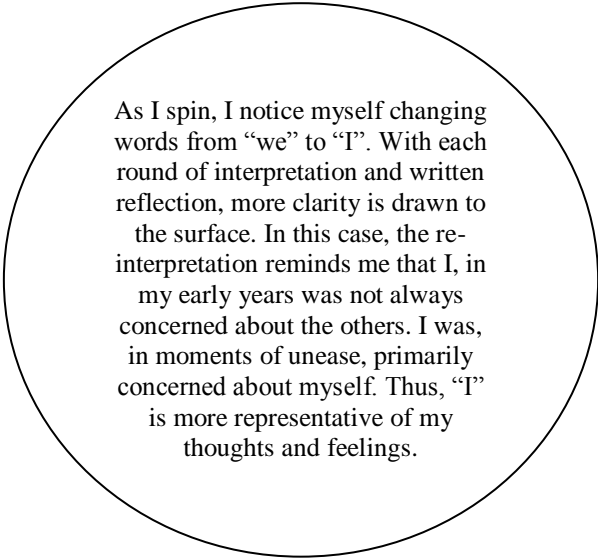


Similar to the educator who was rejected, whom I often observed from a distance, I attempted to surround myself with male peers. During *Bait-ul-Ilm*, I was drawn to one other

student in class. He, who then became a friend I have treasured well into my adulthood, shared similar somatic responses to me. We always found a way to partner together during dedicated group work time, spent our snack breaks together playing soccer, and constantly sat in class so that our gaze could find one another without much effort. We dressed alike, sat criss-crossed in the same way while many of the girls and our educators sat with their legs tucked under them and slightly off to one side. We talked in a similar manner, both struggled to read and write at grade level, and neither of us independently completed our assigned worksheets. Yet he was regularly unsuccessful in his attempt to avoid having to recite the *Du'a*. The greatest difference between us, one I find myself rapidly spinning within and simultaneously stuck to respond to, is: why was he never able to use the bathroom just prior to his turn to recite the *Du'a* in class but I was never denied the right to go to the bathroom? While I can assume it has something to do with gender, I wonder why a girl in discomfort was more accepted by our female educators than a boy in discomfort. My guess, based on the literature regarding the prevalence of attention deficit disorders (ADD), that I have encountered throughout my university studies, is that my male peer likely was seen as an overactive, disrespectful, disruptive, and an uninterested boy whose parents struggled to control his behaviours. According to Hill (2017), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) behaviours usually present themselves between the ages of six and eleven years of age and that boys are more often referred to practitioners to be diagnosed than girls. On the other hand, my micro-movements, sweating, need to use the bathroom, and quiet and shy demeanor may have been presented as a young girl who is unsure of herself, struggling with self-esteem or confidence issues, and in need of some extra support, care, and attention. The ways in which our similar behaviours were interpreted was likely driven by the

gender boundaries our biological sex trapped us within, and because of this, my male peer's attempt to become invisible was less successful than compared to mine.

Gender laden complexities are also apparent during my Girl Guide experience. Having to wear a brown dress, with a cross body sash and mini purse attached to my mid-waist belt, was



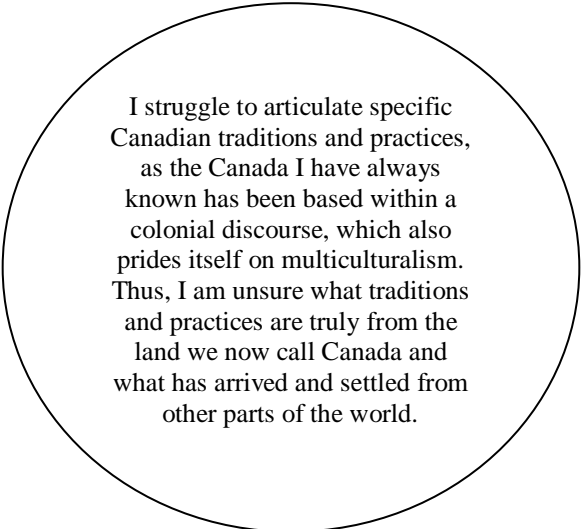
As I spin, I notice myself changing words from “we” to “I”. With each round of interpretation and written reflection, more clarity is drawn to the surface. In this case, the re-interpretation reminds me that I, in my early years was not always concerned about the others. I was, in moments of unease, primarily concerned about myself. Thus, “I” is more representative of my thoughts and feelings.

my initial challenge with Girl Guides. I was unsure of how I was going to learn about and attempt to set up a tent, build a fire, or run around the gym in comfort while wearing a dress, a uniform worn by all Brownies in the Calgary region at the time. The Boy Scouts, I had eagerly watched, were physically engaged in their programming; running, squatting,

sitting with their legs splayed apart, and their bodies separated by outdoor equipment such as fishing rods, tackle boxes, tents, and fire starter kits. I recall sitting in my room the night before my first Brownies meeting wondering how I was going to physically engage in activities without accidentally showing anyone my underwear. In many ways, the clothing I wore as a child, such as my Brownies uniform, and the teaching that accompanied specific clothing such as having to keep my legs together and not run around while wearing a dress, impacted the things I could and could not do. Then, on the day of my first Brownies meeting, when I learnt that our sessions were held in a classroom versus the gymnasium as it was for the *Ismaili* Scouts, I was even more upset. Why, just because I was a girl, was I expected to sit at a desk, to colour, to create beadwork, and to engage in conversation with others versus actively learn outdoor survival skills

like the boys? My frustrations with having to accept and perform “feminine things” grew and activated somatic resistances to my experiences.

My spinning, a somatic act, now helps me articulate my early years’ physical responses. In many ways, in a protective manner, my body safeguarded me from the emotional struggles I regularly encountered but was not able to voice, let alone be aware of. As recounted earlier, as a child, I would react to costume jewelry and products on my face within minutes. My ability to prepare for events was hindered by my physical responses, my resistance, such that, on the day of our Brownies dance performance I arrived jewellery and make-up-less. A family member had to accompany me into the preparation room, help decorate my face, neck, and ears, and implicitly provide moral support until seconds before my peers and I stepped onto the stage. This same family member, missing the first and last moments of my first dance performance, also had to greet me as I walked off the stage to remove the earrings that had provoked the swelling and oozing of my earlobes within a seven-minute period. For me, more than taking off the painful ornaments, it offered me the opportunity to repetitively request our family’s early departure from the celebrations. Just as my body refused to perform the dance as an elegant girl, my body also resisted the attire of what was expected of my brown body as it was dressed in a Bollywood outfit. Other times, to declare – unknowingly at the time – my location on the periphery of the gender binaries created for me, I would showcase the scars I obtained from scratching my inner left elbow or the cuts and bruises that accompanied learning how to ride a bicycle, rollerblading,



I struggle to articulate specific Canadian traditions and practices, as the Canada I have always known has been based within a colonial discourse, which also prides itself on multiculturalism. Thus, I am unsure what traditions and practices are truly from the land we now call Canada and what has arrived and settled from other parts of the world.

and playing in the wooden tree house in our family's backyard. Finding space on the periphery allowed me, I believe, to enact a feminism I was comfortable with, to express myself, and to attempt to dismantle the idea of an elegant girl – central in the discourse of how a girl should be.

Many of the gender complexities articulated above are rooted in cultural beliefs and practices that span beyond the small, yet powerful, *Ismaili* community I belong to. My mind turns to Crispin's (2017) discussion on the patriarchal world we live in, a culture that "we [women] also shape ourselves to what men value in women which is sexuality and beauty" (p.33). Through such a culture of patriarchy, that Crispin (2017) states led to "squabbling over who does the housework and childcare in a nuclear family" (p.34) then led to women questioning their sense of belonging, value, and contribution to society (Crispin, 2017). As I continue to read Crispin's (2017) work and grapple with the conceptualization of claiming feminism as she defines it that "made us [women] focused on our own advancement, our own entitlement. Fighting for [our] own self-interest" (p.65) compared to Mayfield (2015) who speaks about "functional, feminist, and positive standpoint of marginality" of girls who are socially positioned on the periphery as a "source of great personal and interactional power" (p.180), I begin to recognize that my experiences are not directly attributed to being a young *Ismaili* girl, but to being a girl. Being a girl – performing as a girl is expected to act – is further complicated when I re-interpret my experiences at *Bait-ul-Ilm* and Brownies through a religious lens. While *Ismaili*'s have always lived among people of other faiths, never in isolation, I believe that some of my teachings, those my family inherited through oral histories, are shaped through religious implications, cultural influences, and geographical adaptations as my family migrated from East Africa to Canada prior to my birth. It is in the nodes of religion and culture that I find my feet

moving towards while my spinning speeds up with excitement to uncover new understandings of the tensions of identity and sense of belonging I moved within as a child.

Spinning in the Nodes of Religion, Ethnicity and Culture

While critically reflecting, I became aware of the privilege I had as a young child – and continue to have – as a member of the *Ismaili* community. The *Ismaili* community is bonded by religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and guidance offered by His Highness the Aga Khan, as well as by attending communal prayer, and as Ramji (2007) states, “as a community [we come] together for purposes of prayer, fun, and sharing of our blessings” (p.35). Through the various ways in which we connect within the *Ismaili* community, my religious affiliation offered me opportunities to engage in cognitive development activities and improve my social skills that I may not have had otherwise through opportunities in the secular environment. For instance, while Scouts and Girl Guides is an international organization, had Scouts and Girl Guides not been associated with, led by, and participated in by *Ismaili*'s, I am not sure my family would have enrolled me as a Brownie. For my family, there was a sense of safety and confidence that programming was offered with the best of intentions, with an awareness of religious and cultural practices such as reciting the *Du'a*, altering schedules to match religious events, and engagement in culturally-based activities that were associated with *Ismaili* led extracurricular activities. Yet, my family remained vigilant as to how my experience within the *Ismaili* community impacted my engagement with non-*Ismaili* peers and secular expectations. For example, it was through my family's connection to others at *Jamat Khana* that my family was able to find me an affordable and beneficial tutor to help with my English language skills.

As I spin, I find myself pondering Ramji's (2007) narrative of her connection to the *Ismaili* community, especially within the *Jamat Khana* space as a young child growing up in

Kenya. Ramji (2007) mentions that the *Jamat Khana* is not only a prayer space but a place of gathering and celebration, and in larger *Jamat Khana*'s such as the Burnaby British Columbia *Jamat Khana*, *Jamat Khana*'s "are venues for many educational and networking events" that offer space for social and cultural interactions and act as "centres of communal identity" (p.41). I begin to recognize that the religious practices were forefront in regular gatherings within the *Ismaili* community, however, these gatherings often intersected with cultural practices. I turn to the example of clothing when speaking about the node of religion and culture in my early years as I remember associating specific clothing with special events. To highlight, when my family ironed and laid out a simple *Panjabi suit* for me to wear to *Jamat Khana*, I knew it was the celebrations of the new moon, a fancier suit that I tried on at a store prior to seeing it in my closet indicated a grander celebration such as His Highness the Aga Khan's birthday, the day His Highness the Aga Khan became our present living *Imam* (spiritual father), or *Navroz* (the Persian New Year). On other occasions, it was acceptable for me to wear a dress or pants and a blouse.

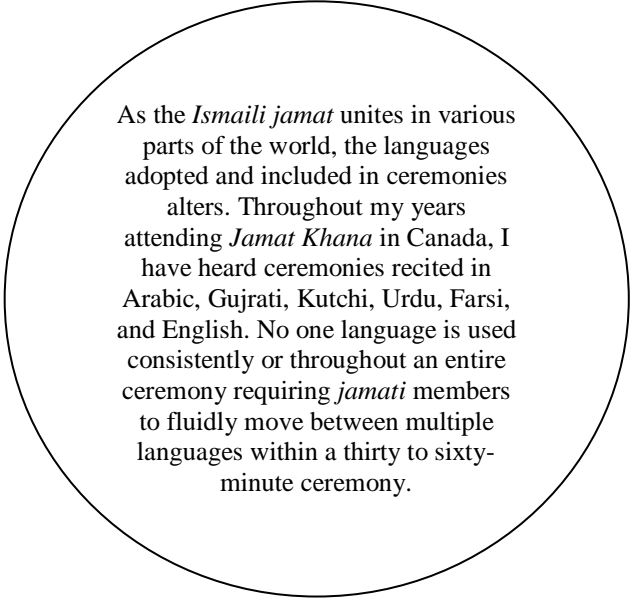
As I re-iterate the days of getting dressed for *Jamat Khana*, I recall wanting *Panjabi suits* like the other girls. I wanted to hear people tell me and my family that I looked beautiful and that my outfit was pretty. In many ways, I also wanted to blend in, look like the others and belong. I constantly sat on the periphery of wanting to wear pants and a blouse because I found those items to be more comfortable than wearing a decorated pair of baggy pants with a long, often beaded, top and an oversized thin scarf that never seemed to stay on my shoulders. When my family would take me shopping for such outfits, I would become timid, cranky, and believed nothing was nice or looked good on me. I hesitated to try on clothes because they were often tight and I did not recognize myself when I looked in the mirror. On the other hand, as soon as I tried on an outfit that I felt comfortable in, it was hard for me to hide my smile and the little hop

in my feet that exhibited the confidence felt when I had a glimmer of a sense of belonging (that I liked, believed in, and cherished). The culture of clothing while initially seen as a simple act of preparing for an occasion, draws out the tensions embedded in cultural practices. The constant, and often sub-conscious, negotiation of wanting to belong and wanting to resist practices that felt uncomfortable, often expressed themselves somatically for me. When I felt a sense of connection and in a way recognized myself in the mirror, I had a light step, an unwavering smile, a desire to sit with the other girls in *Jamat Khana* or *Bait-ul-Ilm*, and happily said goodbye to my family in the car or at the main entrance to buildings. Alternatively, when there was something I struggled to vividly express, when I felt a sense of discomfort or as though I did not belong, my little body became heavy, movements restricted, shoulders turned in, left pointer finger moved into place inside my mouth and my blanket in my right hand. I would attempt to hide behind my dark maroon Mickey Mouse hat and refused to leave the side of my family member(s).

Now, I see how my willingness and comfort level in the clothing I was wearing on a particular day related to the sense of belonging and connection I felt to the event I was attending and those I was surrounded by. For example, on the days I would typically dress up most for, not only did I not see the person I envisioned myself to be in the mirror, but I also knew that *Jamat Khana* was going to be heavily populated, prayers would take longer, I'd likely lose sight of my family members in the crowd, and have to engage in the social and cultural interactions Ramji (2007) speaks positively of that I felt uncomfortable in doing. Alternatively, days that I was allowed to wear pants and a blouse, I knew my family was going to arrive at *Jamat Khana* slightly before the first prayer and leave immediately following prayers. Not only was I comfortable in my clothing but I was also able to regulate my body for the short period of time that we would be at *Jamat Khana* through activities such as finger drawing in the carpet,

working on math equations in my head, and pondering how we, *Ismaili* community members, seemed to all know one another yet rarely speak in depth to more than a few other families.

While I spoke only to a few others, I believe that I had a unique bond with my peers at *Bait-ul-Ilm* and *Jamat Khana* because of a shared and unspoken understanding that each of our



As the *Ismaili jamat* unites in various parts of the world, the languages adopted and included in ceremonies alters. Throughout my years attending *Jamat Khana* in Canada, I have heard ceremonies recited in Arabic, Gujrati, Kutchi, Urdu, Farsi, and English. No one language is used consistently or throughout an entire ceremony requiring *jamati* members to fluidly move between multiple languages within a thirty to sixty-minute ceremony.

families at some point immigrated from India to East Africa and then to Canada. While each of my peers and their families have their own migration narrative, I believe we shared similar beliefs, values, ethics, and practices rooted in the *Ismaili* faith such as: being expected to prioritize our academic studies, to respect, support and help others within the *Ismaili* community to our fullest

abilities; and attendance in *Jamat Khana* was expected and often non-negotiable. To a large degree, I was also taught through the cultural practices and acts of my family members that my primary friendships should stem from within the *Ismaili* community and predominantly take place within the *Jamat Khana* setting.

As I reflect upon the inclusive messaging presented to me as a child, that those at *Jamat Khana* are my spiritual brothers and sisters, that we are all equal, and that I should not discriminate against others (a belief and value I am thankful my family expected beyond the *Ismaili* community), it is hard for me not to re-iterate the disconnection and differentiation I often felt at *Jamat Khana*. Yet, amongst the discomfort and the desire I have to explore the somatic behaviours that highlight the feelings I had – and often still have – I find myself first

spinning in intrigue by the conflation of various languages, which represent cultures, used within the Canadian *Ismaili* prayer ceremony. For example, the *Du'a* is recited in Arabic while other ceremonies are recited in Gujrati, Kutchi, Urdu, Farsi, or English. From my experience, the language that dominates ceremonies is determined by the population within the specific geographical location the community is residing in. In Calgary Alberta, in my early years, leaders often provided communal prayers in Gujrati or Kutchi. Now, when I attend *Jamat Khana* in Victoria, British Columbia, on days when there are many children and youth in attendance, the prayers are offered in English. On days when there is a larger percentage of adults and older adults, the prayers are recited in Gujrati. To add to the conflation of languages, when *jamat* (plural of *jamat*) members from Central Asia immigrated to Canada, they brought with them the *qasida* (a poetic recitation in Farsi) that sometimes is recited instead of a *ginan* (a lyrical recitation in Gujrati) that comes from Indian and East African *Ismaili* traditions.

As I ponder the inclusion of various languages and religious practices grounded in cultural traditions beyond the Canadian borders, I return to a journal entry from 1993 when I first remember hearing a *qasida* being recited in *Jamat Khana*. My mis-spelled, grammatically horrific, and barely understandable writing takes me back to the ever so slight swaying of my torso and the stillness in my usually twitching legs that I embraced when I heard the *qasida* being recited. The peace, calmness, and connection I felt to the poetic tune confuses me though, as I lack the knowledge of what was being recited, what messages were being passed on. Yet, according to my journal entry, my slight sway turned into full body twitches, my legs began to shake up and down, and my mind started to wander and envision my next ringette game or rehearse my times tables as soon as the *qaisda* was done and the next prayer recitation began. Now, as I sit here and reflect and re-interpret my experience, I find my spin slowing as I start to

recognize that my experiences and queries offer various social locations for me to reside within, move between, and ultimately leave me living in the in-between. For instance, I was expected to simultaneously build and maintain friendships within and outside of the *Ismaili* community, accept a Canadian academic curriculum and *Bait-ul-Ilm* teachings at the same time, and dress based on the context in which I was located within such as jeans, shorts, t-shirts, and sweaters at school or dresses, pants and a blouse, and *Panjabi suits* at *Jamat Khana*. Each internal negotiation, decision, and regulating behaviour I made was based on who I was interacting with and if the others were *Ismaili* or not and were often displayed within and through my body.

Parallel Dance: Bringing the Body to Call

As I critically reflect on narratives from my early years, I begin to recognize how much time I spent watching those around me and learning to listen to the sensations in my body. I remember sitting at the back of the prayer hall in the same line as my male family members on the other side of the hall. By now, I had accepted my families and the Muslim cultural belief that males and females are to pray separately. I sat in-between a counter of coffee table height and an older lady in her volunteer uniform while fidgeting with my outfit's scarf, periodically attempting to sight and make eye contact with family members, while also trying to cross my legs as tight as possible, trap my hands between my ankles and calves, and maintain eye contact with the *Tasbih* (prayer beads) I had placed on the carpet just slightly in front of me. My body tense, left knee uncontrollably bouncing up and down, armpits sweating, and teeth chattering. At the time, I believe these behaviours felt normal while I was in *Jamat Khana*. Now, I recognize these somatic responses as an indication of my discomfort and a way for my body to regulate itself.

My new understanding of how my early year's body regulated itself during times of unease, discomfort, and in moments of struggling to feel a sense of belonging, additional spins in my dance are initiated. These spins trigger the same gut turning, leg twitching, pores perspiring, and bladder clenching reactions I had as a child when I struggled to express my resistance to perform as a girl, to be religiously *Ismaili*, and to enact my desire to live on the margins of the bounded identity formed for me. I now understand that during these moments, in my early years, I wavered from living on the periphery of and wanting to live in the heart of the *Ismaili* community.

Momentary Calmness

Just as a dervish attempts to find momentary stability and insight while whirling in a state of vertigo sensations, I seek the same. As my first dance, one of great discomfort, unease, instability, as well as practice, experience, and clarification of what whirling is and how it occurs, I find ease in acknowledging that my early years' experiences showcase the tensions of identity and a sense of belonging as I lived in the in-between social spaces of gender, religion, and culture. Grappling with gender implications, spinning in the nodes of religion and culture, and arriving at a location I struggle to vividly articulate feels oddly similar to the unease I remember as a child. As a child, through my body, I knew that I did not fully belong, that my *Ismaili* peers, except for my one male peer, were not my friends, and that I did not resonate with many of the *Ismaili* religious practices. Yet, I wanted to be invited to the other girls' houses, to run around the *Jamat Khana* foyer and social hall with the other children, and to be asked to recite any of the prayers in *Jamat Khana* even though I likely would have declined the request. In an immature yet sophisticated manner, I challenged many of the expectations placed on me, resisted the oppression my gender encountered, and began creating my own identity that wavered

on the margins of the religious and cultural norms that were to frame my female *Ismaili* identity. Through the expression of my discomfort, my resistance and avoidance to engage in the learning of the *Du'a*, and my movement between spaces, I started to formulate practices and behave in particular ways. For me, this instinctive knowledge of the kind of girl I wanted to be, the kind of ethics I wanted to live my life by, and who I wanted to connect with was my way of enacting the child I desired to be and wanted to see in the mirror.

However, without the language to express my feelings and the sense of disconnect I often felt, I turned to my male family members to inspire my clothing choices, to copycat the activities they were participating in, and to mimic their behaviours in *Jamat Khana* and at the dinner table. I resisted, fought, and refused to get dressed for *Jamat Khana*, and intentionally came out of my room in similar outfits as my male family members for *Bait-ul-Ilm*. On the other hand, in order to remain physically close to and emotionally connected to my male family members, those who, from an early age I was deeply connected to, I also performed gender specific tasks such as setting the table, wearing a *Panjabi suit* my family bought for me and told me I was beautiful in, and sitting on the girls' side of the prayer hall after the age of six with the girls I sometimes wanted to look like and play with to avoid a fight following *Jamat Khana* and thus the right to stay up to watch late night television with my family. So, while I knew little beyond the religious and cultural teachings associated with being *Ismaili*, I chased the unknown. I attempted to escape the cultural teachings that were and are entangled with religious practices and gender roles, yet never strayed too far away from the teachings I learned, and occasionally desired to embrace. I see now that I wanted to define being a girl, not in regards to being feminine nor masculine, but in regards to being me, a child that moves between frilly dresses and *Panjabi suits* on special occasions to jeans and a t-shirt on other days. I found comfort on the periphery of wanting to


learn, respect, practice, resist, push against, and adopt the religious, cultural, and gender expectations placed upon me, while at the same time find moments to counter these expectations.

Chapter 5

Physically Whirling into Adolescence

Entering adolescence was challenging. I recall feeling uncomfortable and lacking confidence in my body. I was confused by the changes in my physical body, my emotions, and the shifts in my geographical and school communities as my family moved from one home to another, and I transitioned from elementary school to junior high. Unlike many of my peers, I was overweight and wore oversized clothing that I was told I would grow into and I felt I could hide my body in. When I was asked why I wore such thick clothing during the summers, I often responded by saying I was feeling cold and unwell. Although I was uncomfortable in my body, I embraced sports; I yearned to play ice hockey and tried out for every team possible at my junior high school. My family, with hesitation because of my academic struggles, agreed to register me in ringette, a happy balance between a boys' ice hockey team and an all-girls sport played on ice.

Registration day was a blur. My family focused on finding the right table in the community gymnasium to sign my name up, get a list of required equipment, and pay my fees. I, on the other hand, circled the gym many times over, stopping periodically at random tables to learn about all the other winter sports I could potentially play. In my circling, I remember pausing at the ringette table each time I passed by to check on my registration status. I had also stopped at the soccer table a few times in an attempt to memorize when outdoor seasons registration dates were, and how much it would cost for me to play, before moving on to the next table, the ice hockey table. I attempted to clarify why they did not have an all-female team a few times; I believe I was trying



I had a friend who introduced me to the sport of ringette, a game she played with great passion, after sharing my frustration with her about not being allowed to play ice hockey because there were no female teams.

to wrap my head around why I was not allowed to play. It was not until graduate school that I realized it was not the people behind the registration table that restricted me from playing ice hockey but the politics of being female, a node of interest explored throughout this chapter. As I critically reflect, I begin to recognize that I found a sense of belonging and comfort in that gymnasium. The size of my body did not phase me and the somatic response of discomfort that I had become accustomed to sensing in my younger body was no longer present. The sensations in my body including my feet rapidly moving one in front of the other in an attempt to circle the gym as many times as possible, a steady beat in my chest, and a desire to remove the multiple layers of clothing and run free in a t-shirt offered comfort, ease, acceptance and belonging.

In this chapter, I mimic the circling I did that evening in the gymnasium, as I whirl to grapple with and understand how the physical use of my body enacted feminist beliefs and values such as body-based resistance grounded in my early and not yet articulated feminism, which has helped me find a sense of belonging as well as provide a forum to articulate my identity. I begin my whirling with a narrative that was triggered by a youth at a summer camp in 2015 who shared with me her tensions of playing ringette as a brown girl. I also explore, and critically reflect upon, my experiences of wanting, needing, to move my body while living in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Both of these experiences are situated in the tensions of living in the in-between and a deep desire to belong to community on the periphery. While the tensions written into the narratives can come across as negative, the hope is that through critical reflection I am able to draw out moments of tension, present the complexity of living in the in-between, and showcase my belief, based on experiences, that life is often unstable, challenging, constantly shifting and altering with mere moments of stability and calmness.

A winter sport as a first-generation Canadian

Playing ringette as a youth was a significant part of my life. It was the first time I felt like I belonged to a community while also recognizing that I have always been a member of a family community, the Ismaili Muslim community, a school community, and many others. I gained a sense of belonging within my ringette team and the ringette community, as well as found a way to expel excess energy. On the other hand, there were times I felt I did not belong such as when I would be pulled out of team events, practices, or games because it was Du'a time or a special occasion in Jamat Khana. As the only goalie, I also trained differently and separately from my teammates, adding another layer to the disconnect I sometimes felt to my teammates. As I learnt to negotiate these challenges and feelings, I was asked to play on an eighteen to twenty-year old team as a sixteen-year old. The girls on this team often avoided talking to me on and off the ice, planned team gatherings at the bar, and our team Christmas party on the one day my family and I indicated I could not participate in activities on due to religious commitments.

However, while I played, and for the most part was happy on the ice, I was constantly fighting against or trying to negotiate balancing Jamat Khana attendance. Learning the Ismaili prayers, the Du'a, is what allowed me to register for ringette one season. Thus, under pressure, I learnt the Du'a in a few short days prior to the last day of ringette registration. All of this played (and plays) a part in how I moved between my secular and religious lives.

My experience playing ringette was complex, at times uncomfortable, and other times where and when I felt most like the person I desired to be. Yet, as I critically reflect on my

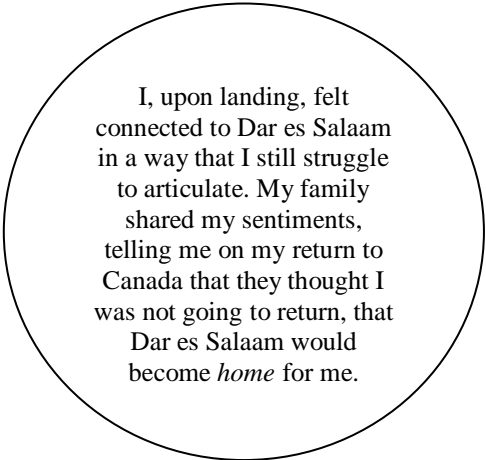
experience at ringette I recognize that the resistance I exhibited in my early years continued into my adolescence. I resisted the limitations set upon me as a young child when I was expected to attend prayers on a regular basis, when I was to attend to my academics prior to my extracurricular, and when my extracurricular activities such as ringette would - in a sense - act as a reward. Quite the opposite is true in fact. Playing ringette allowed me to make sense of my world, it offered me a time to physically utilize my body and through such movements begin to understand what the sensations in my body indicated. I started to learn about the somatic hermeneutic process I engage in on a daily basis and how to acknowledge, understand, and respond to the visceral interactions I have. For example, it was during my first ringette tournament, just prior to the finals, that I begin to recognize the tingling in my toes almost as if my feet were waking up from a sleeping state. The tingle was my body's way to indicate to me that I was nervous, unsure about what was about to happen, and that I was situated outside of my comfort zone. Our team had not won a single game prior to this tournament and all of a sudden we were playing for first place. I was nervous, scared, and extremely unsure of how the hour and a half on the ice would be as it was a new experience for me. My spinning to critically reflect upon the influence playing ringette had on my sense of belonging and identity is complex, multilayered, and intimately entangled in the relationship I have had and continue to have with my body. However, it was my experience of conversing with a youth and my time in East Africa (2013-2014) that triggered memories of my days playing ringette and needing to use my body, my muscles, in a productive manner.

Needing to move, in Dar es Salaam

Arriving in Dar es Salaam brought with it many learning moments that often led to new perspectives and insights. My experience, in a new and (un)known environment,

quickly had me yearning for a safe space to work out and to go for outdoor jogs. The streets of Dar es Salaam are uneven, chaotic, uncontrolled and over populated with vehicles, creating great risks for pedestrians, especially solo females. Each morning and late afternoon I would risk walking four blocks to and from work and on occasion the five blocks to Jamat Khana in order to fulfill my deep desire for outdoor physical activity. The physical safety risks were high and I was constantly told not to do such things, yet, my body sought or was seeking an escape from the tensions at work, a removal of the excess weight gained, and a need to be utilized to its fullest capacity. Moving won the battle. I secretly walked whenever possible. However, I never found a space to run so I turned to bedroom body weight workouts, running the stairs in my apartment building, and on rare occasions a swim in my apartment buildings bug filled outdoor pool.

I whirl in similar thoughts to my ringette experiences as I reflect on my desire to run in a restricting yet comforting environment and my resistance to allow safety and gender roles to



I, upon landing, felt connected to Dar es Salaam in a way that I still struggle to articulate. My family shared my sentiments, telling me on my return to Canada that they thought I was not going to return, that Dar es Salaam would become *home* for me.

prevent me from walking to and from work or *Jamat Khana*. My geographical location, became apparent for the first time, and had a significant impact on my abilities. My gender, as a female, was even more limiting than when in Canada. On one hand, the restraints I felt as a female in East Africa provoked a greater level of resistance and fight for independence than I had ever

previously experienced. I would walk down the street, past the fresh fruit vendors, the entrepreneurs trying to earn a daily wage selling used shoes, the local barber shop, and goats grazing on the few strands of brownish-green grass before arriving at an international school

gated and guarded with American SUV's filling the parking lot, drivers waiting inside and house help guiding expatriate students to and from their classroom doors before crossing one of the busiest roads in *Upanga* (a community) to arrive at work. I traveled as a sole female, one that wore Birkenstocks, leggings, and a long blouse with a small pale blue backpack that safeguarded my laptop, cell phone, notebook, journal, and a few *shillings* (Tanzania currency) for lunch. The risks of being mugged or being hit by a motor vehicle was great, the sense of freedom and movement even greater. I, with intention, would wake up every morning and tell myself that walking to work was my way of pushing back against the constraints placed upon me as a foreign female and a way for me to enact the sense of belonging I felt in Dar es Salaam.

On the other hand, as I critically reflect upon other experiences I had in East Africa, such as my involvement in the *Ismaili* community's institutions and within rural community workshops, which are iterated in the coming pages, I also learn about my ability to balance my resistance with acceptance and a form of compliance. For example, while working in rural communities, I, with intention, would acknowledge my religious ties to the *Muslim* faith, engage the little local language - Kiswahili - and Arabic I know, dress in clothing that covered my shoulders and knees that I was taught is respectful of the context I was living in, and maintained a neutral demeanor regarding my belief systems. My neutral demeanor came out in subtle instances such as when *Muslim* Master students in one rural community spoke to me about the lack of validity of knowledge if it was taught to them by a homosexual person. While I believe that knowledge can come from anyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, I acknowledged their beliefs in that moment without challenging them, as I recognized my geographical location in a community and culture that viewed varying sexual orientations as illegal. Now, as my spinning becomes more practiced than when critically reflecting upon my early years draws my

attention to the various in-between spaces I find myself in, with a new degree of aptitude. However, I still focus and intentionally critically reflect to prevent potential dizzy spells. The time I spent on the ice playing ringette and my time in East Africa are rooted in complexities, messiness, and constant negotiations. For instance, in both experiences, being female created both unspoken and vividly articulated boundaries for me, my body inhibited and contributed to my sense of belonging and identity, and my innate resistance provoked me to “be me”. However, before spinning in the nodes of intersect that offer insight into how I lived in the in-between, I thicken each narrative by adding insider information, details, and a glimpse into my perspectives of each experience.

Spinning Around Spinning

My black cloak now back stage and my robe fully splayed, my whirling embraces my body. The somaesthetics I rely on offers a unique way to understand and make meaning of my experiences. In an attempt to make meaning, I simultaneously spin in multiple mini spins, each triggered by the other. One spin reminds me of the dismantling of my North-East Calgary ringette team because of the limited number of registered players. Those who registered, including myself, were placed on teams in the North-West quadrant of Calgary. It was during this transition to the North-West, that the age group I was to play with already had enough goalies while the older aged teams lacked goalies. Thus, in order to play the position I had come to love, I was asked to play with the older girls and therefore was bumped up to a team in the next age group. Not only was I playing ringette in a new geographical community, out of a new home arena, and with players I had never met, I was also two to three years younger than my teammates. As I reflect, the differences between my teammates and I begin to surface and I find myself rapidly forming a list of these difference, which in essence was a result of the disconnect

I felt on this one particular team compared to the sense of belonging and acceptance I felt on the North-East team I had previously played on. I began thinking about how I was the only goalie on the team, the only visible minority on the team and one of very few visible minorities to be playing ringette at the time, that I was the only one that relied on my family for rides to and from practices and games, and I believe one of very few, if not the only one, that was actively negotiating faith-based practices with ice times. I do not recall ever hearing one of my teammates speak about needing to miss a practice, game, or team event because of religious commitments. In many ways, as I look back to this particular season, I ponder my supervisors work around youth having to feel accepted while simultaneously feeling a sense of personal belonging (personal communication, October 2017), neither of which I felt and led to a feeling of being an outsider.

However, I am continuously drawn back to my earlier experiences of playing ringette where for the first time I felt like I belonged. I vividly recall my first season as a young adolescent wanting to, struggling to, and expected to carry my hockey bag from the car to the arena, down the long hallway to the dressing room prior to practices and games, and the reversal after practices and games, on my own. Unlike many of my teammates, I wanted to do this on my own, without my families help or wheels on my hockey bag as it offered me a sense of identity, allowed me to utilize my body in a productive and physical manner, and helped create a sense of connection to the equipment that I wore which protected me from the rings intentionally shot at and past my body. At school, I worked hard to learn to read and write English at grade level so that my grades would not prevent me from playing. When a tournament was approaching, I would, without much guidance or encouragement from my family, ask my teachers what I needed to complete to stay on top of my school work so that I could justify to my family that I

would not fall behind academically if I missed a day or two of school. And, I started to gain a sense of independence that allowed me to engage and participate in activities in a way I had not yet experienced.

Parallel Dancing: Knowing Through My Body

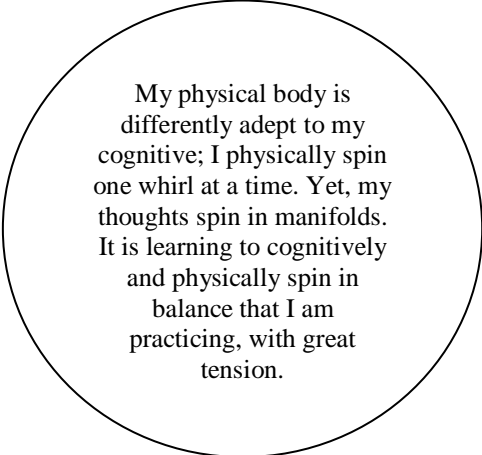
The narratives that have been triggered and surfaced as I critically reflect, as well as the re-reading of each narrative have largely relied on my somatic experiences, responses, and understandings. It was not until I read Spatz (2015) that I started to understand and articulate my body's experiences as an epistemology. According to Spatz (2015), "an epistemological account of embodied practice is one according to which such practice actively encounters and *comes to know* reality through technique, rather than simply producing or constructing it" (italics in original, p.26). Spatz (2015) offered me new language to articulate what I have labelled as somatic hermeneutics, the process of absorbing, interpreting, and making meaning through the sensations in my body. Further, Shusterman (2012) introduced me to the term somaesthetics, suggesting that "Somaesthetics highlights and explores the soma – the living, sentient, purposive body – as the indispensable medium for all perception" (p.3). What draws me to Shusterman's (2012) work is that Shusterman claims that somatic consciousness is shaped by culture and that "somaesthetics is interested not merely in describing our culturally shaped forms of somatic consciousness and modes of somatic practice, but also in improving them" (p.4). Ultimately, Shusterman (2012) encourages philosophers and those in various interdisciplinary studies to "truly embody or live their thought" (p.5) versus merely writing philosophy. Similarly, Spatz (2015) argues that "*Embodied practice is epistemic*" (italics in original, p.26).

I am also drawn to Markula and Pringle (2006) who introduced me to the idea that "human movement practices shaped and modified social meanings in a manner that helped

produce advantages and disadvantages for particular individuals and social groups” (p.3). I start to question how I derive meaning from my physical body, how the body based resistance I have experienced throughout my life while also attempting to regulate such resistance in order to comply, belong, and create an environment of respect and acceptance for others, has played a role in the ways in which I keep myself safe, in a state of comfort while in discomfort, and how I make meaning of the social locations I am situated within. Thinking about human movement, my own movement as I whirl to critically reflect upon and begin to make sense of the tensions of living in the in-between of social locations, I am drawn back to my initial spin that re-tell my experiences of playing ringette and living in Dar es Salaam. However, now, I spin with insight from Markula and Pringle (2006) who relay Foucault’s understanding of gendered identities via sport that I return to as I critically reflect upon and re-iterate experience as a ringette player.

Re-focusing my Spinning

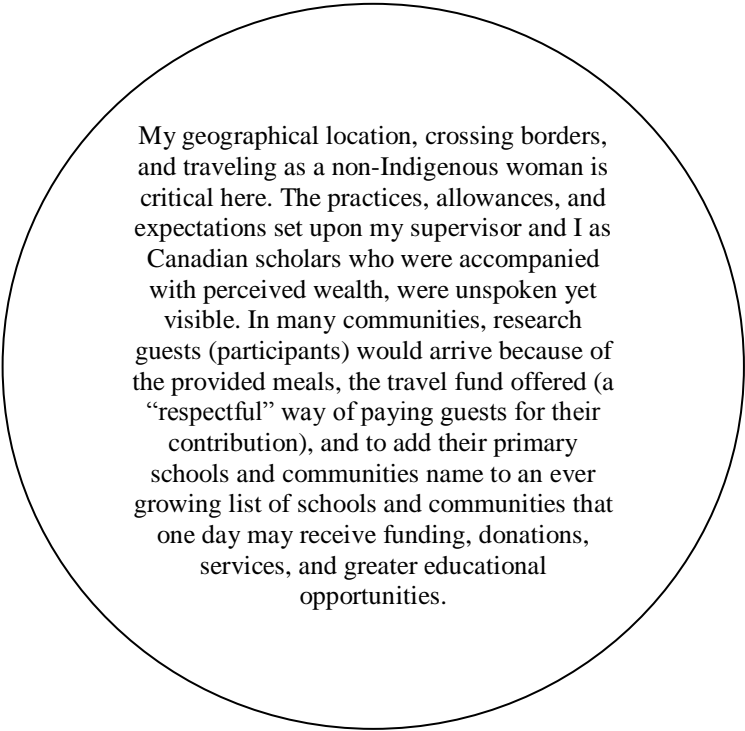
My spinning has rapidly increased. I am finding momentum in the critical reflection of how I interpreted my experiences on the ice, in the dressing room, and amongst my teammates first through my somatic responses and then through a conscious and reflective practice. Ringette became a complex space for me in which I began to distinguish different sensations in my body such as those that implied happiness and excitement, which I often felt on my first ringette team, and others that offered insight into my discomfort, lack of belonging, and “minoritization” (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011). I struggled with the varying degrees of - and perhaps perceptions of - acceptance, support, comradery, and independence my elder teammates had compared to what I



My physical body is differently adept to my cognitive; I physically spin one whirl at a time. Yet, my thoughts spin in manifolds. It is learning to cognitively and physically spin in balance that I am practicing, with great tension.

felt I had. What I failed to notice at the time though, was the willingness of my family to allow me to engage in extracurricular activities and exhibit my independence in situations such as with elder teammates, to travel to games and tournaments with others, and to allow me to stay after my teams designated ice time to play on an older women's team. These acts of independence, being able to engage in activities without direct family engagements, became vivid as I reflected on my time in East Africa. I am prompted to return to my experience in Dar es Salaam and my need to run, to move, to do things on my own; to showcase my independence.

While I was located in Dar es Salaam, I travelled extensively to Coastal Kenya and West Nile Uganda with my colleague, who also played a supervisory role. Our travels were often



My geographical location, crossing borders, and traveling as a non-Indigenous woman is critical here. The practices, allowances, and expectations set upon my supervisor and I as Canadian scholars who were accompanied with perceived wealth, were unspoken yet visible. In many communities, research guests (participants) would arrive because of the provided meals, the travel fund offered (a "respectful" way of paying guests for their contribution), and to add their primary schools and communities name to an ever growing list of schools and communities that one day may receive funding, donations, services, and greater educational opportunities.

convoluted by different belief systems that presented themselves through our interactions with Indigenous community members. The fine details are perhaps better left unarticulated, but what I gathered was the many years I had of learning how to interact with people based on their location - contextual and social, flipping between languages - sometimes using

broken language skills - depending on my audience, and accepting that I live on the periphery of many communities, allowed me to build relationships and engage in curious and non-judgemental dialogue. With this recognition, I start to grapple with living in the in-between of my innate reaction to resist what is occurring around me and balancing the values of respecting

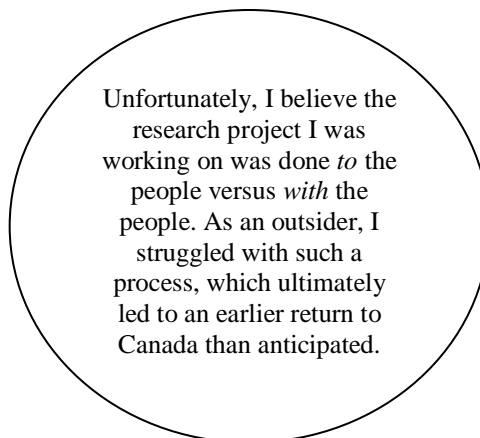
others and the belief that I should attend to the cultural practices of others if they do not cause harm. A brief but significant experience is triggered as I think about this space in the in-between and as I reflect on my experience as a Canadian in Tanzania.

I remember taking a *bajaji* (rickshaw) ride to a European grocery store in Dar es Salaam with my housemates. We wanted to go to this particular store in hopes of finding pasta, high quality yogurt, spices we are accustomed to from our Canadian diets, and candy. The privilege of being able to afford foreign products without much thought or concern for the cost now highlights one of the disconnects I held with the greater Dar es Salaam community, especially the Indigenous community. I recognize that not only did I have a degree of privilege but I also maintained a life that balanced my Canadian upbringing in the Tanzanian context; at many moments, I felt neither Canadian nor Tanzanian while at other moments, I felt more Tanzanian than Canadian and vice versa. Living with a greater than average income and funds from Canada, with the awareness of specific international goods, and the ability to feast in a manner that fit my upbringing versus the context I was residing in clearly showcases my ability to live in Tanzania as a Canadian, an outsider. Returning to our *bajaji* driver, he was curious about our fair skinned origins. In mixed Kiswahili and English, he asked where the three of us were from. Without hesitations, he accepted my housemates' responses of "Canada". When I responded with the same answer, he turned his head to look at me, chuckled, and in Kiswahili said, "you think you are from Canada but you are really from here". The smile I wore expressed my sentiments to his welcome, acceptance, and knowing that my sense of belonging in Dar es Salaam was validated and rooted deeper than I allowed myself to believe, yet I knew I was not Tanzanian by birth.

It was moments such as this one, in the *bajaji*, or when in community doing research on early childhood education programming, that I became a cultural broker, a term I first heard when working at the Native Friendship Center in Victoria BC and later read in Michie's (2003) and Bigart and McDonald's (2016) work. By cultural broker, I mean the moments I played the role of an outsider, learned from the Indigenous people, and attempted to understand their cultural practices. Through this process, I started to respect their perspectives, their ways of living, and attempted to respectfully adapt qualities of their lives that would allow me to work in collaboration with them. I worked to gain acceptance within the community and in a sense, feel as though I belonged. Rarely did I have a desire to resist their ways of being, however, when I did notice somatic sensations of resisting in my body I was usually alone in my hotel room or at a café journaling. It was, in an unarticulated way, my learning of living in the in-between that I have an innate sense of when it is safe to push back or when complying to the context I am located within is safer for me.

Similarly, my ability to situate myself within others' contexts also occurred when I felt an immediate sense of belonging. This often occurred when I spoke in local dialects, when working within the *Ismaili Muslim* community to run programs for populations I am most comfortable working with such as children, youth, and young adults, and when I attended conferences in East Africa. It was through my innate and somatic responses that I allowed myself to be guided by my body's reaction, the tingling in my fingers and feet, the gut turning sensations, and the constant ache in my lower back around my kidneys, that encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zones, to resist the acts being *done to* the Indigenous communities, and to act as a cultural broker – mediator. For example, during one of our community research visits, it was my ability to switch between fluent English and broken Kiswahili, to introduce myself to an elder in a

respectful and culturally contextual manner, and to offer my colleagues and my utmost respect for being allowed to access critical information our institution had been seeking for many months. It was my ability to negotiate between being an insider and an outsider that allowed me to create fluidity and partnerships between the Indigenous people we worked alongside



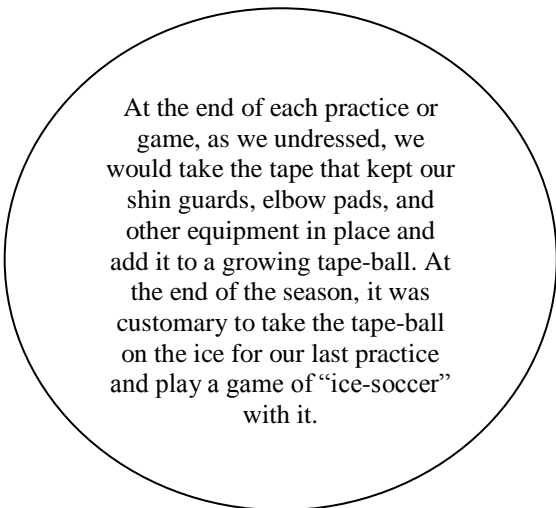
Unfortunately, I believe the research project I was working on was done *to* the people versus *with* the people. As an outsider, I struggled with such a process, which ultimately led to an earlier return to Canada than anticipated.

with and the non-Indigenous people that were *doing* the work *to* the communities. *Doing* implies an act is done towards another person or community, for example, arriving in a rural community and claiming that there is a need for greater access to childcare and providing the structure and content of the childcare curriculum. The *to* indicates the direction of support. In this instance, for example, the work was provided to the community versus the community having a say in the process, content, and structure. However, my ability to negotiate the in-between, allowed me to bridge the work being done to a community with the goals and desires of the community.

Further, my somatic experiences playing ringette as a youth and travelling to East Africa as a young adult are entangled in religious and spiritual, ethnic and cultural, gendered, and geographical complexities. But, unlike in the last chapter, the narratives I draw upon surfaced a tension, a node of intersect, I had not anticipated or previously explored, grappled with, or articulated in any manner. It is through my spinning with racialization that the tensions of gender, religion and spirituality, ethnicity and culture, and geographical location are embedded in my lived experiences. Thus, this chapter takes on its own form, it spins widely and intentionally in racialization while briefly pausing to explore each of the other nodes of intersect.

Because I am Brown

I have spent years spinning to understand my experience as one of few brown girls who



At the end of each practice or game, as we undressed, we would take the tape that kept our shin guards, elbow pads, and other equipment in place and add it to a growing tape-ball. At the end of the season, it was customary to take the tape-ball on the ice for our last practice and play a game of “ice-soccer” with it.

played ringette in Calgary, Alberta. Certain teams

I played with, such as my first season’s team, I never consciously realized my brownness. During

my first season, I was more concerned with

learning to skate and keep up with the other girls

who had already learnt how to skate, played a

season or two of ringette, and were comfortable on

the ice. We were young, yet we each had an unspoken acceptance of one another and our status

as *B-division* players; we knew we were all weaker players than the girls on the *A-team*. Our

bond was built on a child’s innocence, not knowing that we had differences, that our life

journeys were each unique or that we were unlike one another. I believe our gender contributed

to our bonds as we were all young girls, unaware that one day our degrees of femininity, our sexual orientations, and our values and beliefs would potentially create a division in our bonds.

Together, we were a group of girls who supported one another, cherished our times together,

fought like siblings, and never left the dressing room without adding to our team tape-ball or

uncoordinatedly dancing and wailing to that week’s hit song. The practices and games I missed

to attend *Jamat Khana* were seen no differently than when my teammates missed ice time for a

birthday party, a school performance, or because they felt ill. In fact, our team year end party

was organized so that I could eat with the team, swim with my teammates, and celebrate our

achievements during our award presentation before having to shower and dress myself in the

hotel pool change room in a *Panjabi suit* to attend *Jamat Khana* part way through the

celebrations. My coach, a white woman, who had little knowledge of Indian attire, helped me get dressed, made sure that no pieces of my outfit got wet from the change room floor, walked with me as I entered the pool deck to wait for my family, and gathered my teammates so we could take one final picture before I left and the rest of the team continued to swim. In such moments, I am not sure I was fully cognisant of the fact that I was brown, that I was different from the other girls on the ice; I felt like I was another member of the team, an equal member. Perhaps, in such moments, I had found the imperfectly perfect balance of living in the in-between of social spaces; that my body of fair complexion had allowed me to pass as more than, or different than, a brown body which contributed to my felt acceptance and sense of belonging on this particular team. Thus, perhaps, when I walked out on the pool deck in my *Panjabi suit*, the body my teammates accepted me as and I had embodied was what they still saw. In a way, my ability to find a balance in the in-between is because of my ability to somehow pass as the “hegemonic ideals of physical desirability” that suggests that “immigrants might be acceptable if they appear as “pretty white women”” (Brown, 1997, p.603).

I am, however, not blind to the fact that being *brown* did play a role in my interactions on the ice. While my team in my first season was accepting, the coaching staff inclusive of my family and I while planning events in an attempt to accommodate for religious and cultural ceremonies, I did hear other teams make comments about seeing a brown girl on the ice. I would overhear queries about my family members’ presence on the bench, questions about if my family and I knew anything about the sport, and once heard that ice sports were not meant for immigrants and that I should not be playing. These remarks, clearly stuck with me, yet, as a young adolescent, I had not fully accepted that I was brown, that I was a woman of colour, and thus had not consciously acknowledged that these comments were aimed at my family and me. It

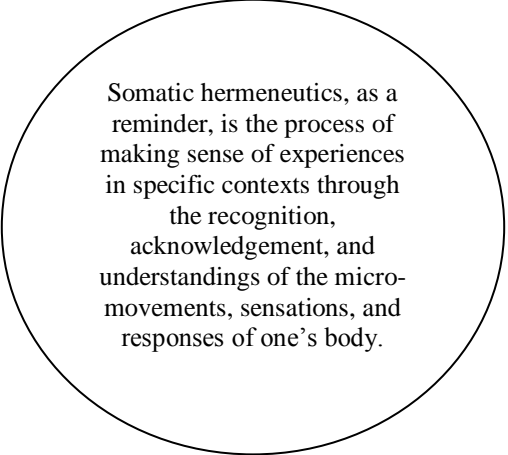
was during my experience playing ringette with the older girls that I started to grapple with the racialization my skin colour brought with it.

I am finding my spinning slowing, each turn a little more hesitant than the previous. I fear using language that suggests acts of racism. Yet, I know that my experience playing ringette as a sixteen-year-old was politicized because of my race. Through previous experiences of living within, on the periphery of, and outside of social locations, I learned when my body felt safe to move from the outside, to the periphery, and then inside, or to retreat back to the outside.

Articulating this learning beyond the somatic responses I experienced is challenging. I remember feelings of irregular heart palpitations, a shaking in my shoulders and arms from the tension caused by my clenching fists, and my gut warming up and grumbling when a situation felt unsafe. These somatic responses became a norm for me as I walked into the arena and headed to the dressing room while playing with the older girls.

Through a somatic hermeneutic process, I knew what corner of the dressing room to sit in that would not interfere with the dynamics of the other girls, and that would allow me to avoid direct communication and thus direct harassment. If I needed help with my goalie pads I turned to one other teammate who always sat

near me and who was also excluded from the team likely because of her weight and limited feminine qualities. I was also aware, through the girls' actions and words that they were uncomfortable with my skin colour. I recall, at one tournament two of my teammates (the captain and assistant captain) strongly encouraged me to put on make-up two shades lighter than my skin tone before we took team pictures. I refused profusely and likely was only included in the picture



Somatic hermeneutics, as a reminder, is the process of making sense of experiences in specific contexts through the recognition, acknowledgement, and understandings of the micro-movements, sensations, and responses of one's body.

because I was called by our coach and the photographer to take the traditional position of the goalie in the middle of the team's front row. At another event, when the team planned to party and celebrate the end of the calendar year, the captain and assistant captain picked one particular club in Calgary, announced the club in the dressing room after our last practice, and then turned my way and said, "you cannot come because you are too young and they do not let people like you in", referring to people of brown skin complexion.

My teammates actions ate away at me. I would and still do spin in discomfort, begin to feel less than, and buy into the racialized conceptions that I was (am) "other" because I am not white. It was through a pedagogy of exclusion that my socially constructed "markers of habitus such as gender, class, race and ethnicity" (Dagkas & Hunter, 2015, p.548) was used by my teammates to position themselves in comparison to me. Markula and Pringle (2006), via the work of Foucault, acknowledge that "power is always present within human relations" (p.98) and that power is located within the body. Thus, by the positions my teammates and I took up, we enacted through our bodies the power dynamics in the room. Unlike my previous team, my ability to belong was limited, I was consistently seen as *other*, and my experiences were differentiated from my teammates, which ultimately created a specific identity for me in the dressing room, on the ice, and at ringette.

As I critically reflect on and re-iterate my experience playing ringette with the older girls, I again begin to see the balancing act of resisting and complying. Finding and positioning myself in the corner of the dressing room and making little to no eye contact or conversation with the others were both acts of resistance and compliance. On one hand, I worked hard at not allowing my teammates to prevent me from playing a sport I had come to love. On the other hand, I positioned myself in a particular manner that offered my teammates a degree of power that I

never challenged. I also hid the dressing room dynamics from my family which either contributed to the continuation of such dynamics or, more likely, protected me from further isolation and racialization. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) speak to the in-between space I attempted to maintain in the dressing room. My compliance - acts of protection - were an attempt to keep myself in-between the intended damage to my “social status and relationships” within the rigidly enforced rules of popularity and the more harmful practices of “ostracism, female bullies spread[ing] rumors about, leav[ing] incriminating phone messages for the parents of, and hurtful insults at their victims” (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004, p.45).

Without directly sharing my experiences with my family, to also protect them, and thus without knowing exactly what was happening in the dressing room, my family comforted my tears, my unspoken pain, and often reminded me about how far I had come academically, socially, and skill wise on the ice since I had started playing ringette. At the time, and now as I re-iterate such challenging moments, I return to my resistance that protected and continues to protect me. I spin as I re-iterate the resistance I honed as a young child that kept me engaged and empowered me to continue to show up for each practice and game that I could. I started to learn how to negotiate feeling like an insider and an outsider on my ringette team. To do this, as my family drove me to the arena, I would talk myself through a somatic hermeneutic process by reminding myself of the physical sensations I felt while I was on the ice. I would silently hype myself up through what I call body talk, a concept I learnt to articulate only recently as I read about thinking through the body (Shusterman, 2012) and how performing, physically moving, is an epistemology, a way of knowing (Spatz, 2015). I would start with my feet, recognize the tingling and micro-movements in my runners that articulated my discomfort, the unease I felt, and then attempt to stop the movements and seize the tingling as I envisioned my feet in my

skates. I worked my way through each of my limbs in a similar order to how I undressed from my street clothing and dressed in my ringette equipment. It was the days I allowed myself to go through this process that my teammates actions and dialogue bothered me least. I also think I was able to maintain a positive regard for ringette and myself - my sense of belonging and identity - because I often got invited to play with the open women's team (twenty-one years plus), who embraced me in much the same way as my first ringette team, offered me rides home after late night games so my family did not need to wait for me, and ensured team events took place in settings I could participate.

The weight I held from my experience at ringette, the same weight that slowed my spinning, releases to a certain degree and shifts drastically as I think about my experience in Dar es Salaam. My race, ethnicity, and religious affiliation offered various degrees of privilege in Dar es Salaam. As the *bajaji* driver implied, I am from Tanzania. Picking up Kiswahili came with few challenges as I have heard the dialect throughout my life in our family *home*. Building rapport and a sense of belonging within a community required only a single visit to the local *Jamat Khana*, and working for - although indirectly - and being a follower of the Aga Khan offered me a respectable position in society where I had a sense of safety, access to resources and services, and I was not concerned with financial hardship.

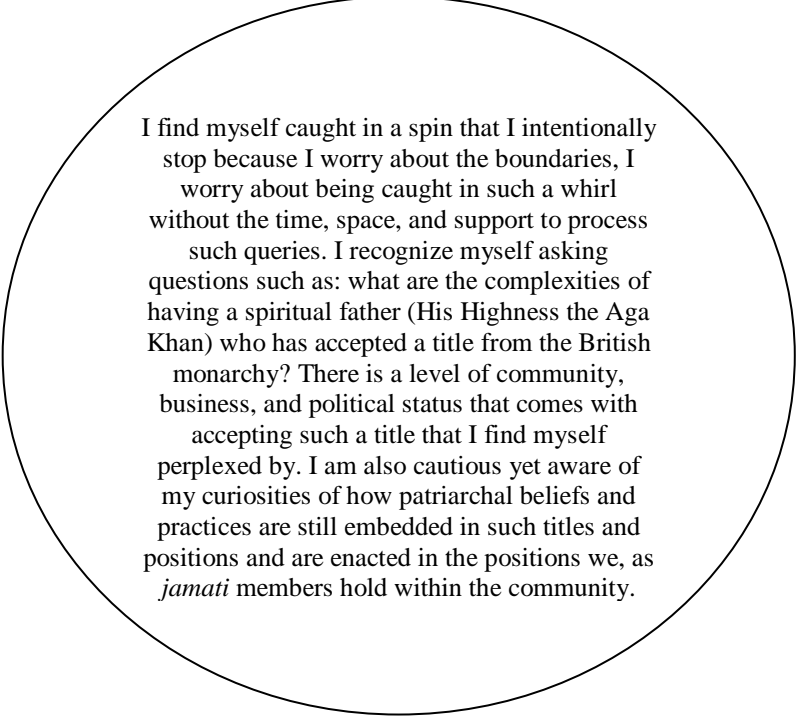
As I reflect, I find myself returning to an unlined piece of paper, pulling out various sized black ink pens and drawing dervishes that represent the various communities I belonged to while in Dar es Salaam. The first dervish a scholar. I intended to travel to East Africa to complete a research fellowship, thus a whirling scholar seemed most fitting for my primary purpose in Dar es Salaam. The many other dervishes represented the various roles I played within the *Ismaili* community. One dervish was connected to Upanga *Jamat Khana*. As I walked in *Jamat Khana*

on my first eve in Dar es Salaam, I immediately looked to the front where the leaders sat facing the *jamat*, yet I did not see the leaders, I saw my grandparent looking back at me. My tense, shaking, and sweaty body immediately eased and without being aware of my actions I took a seat, turned to the person beside me and engaged in a conversation in Kutchi, an act I do not recall doing in any other *Jamat Khana*. My sense of belonging extended to an *Ismaili* friends group and *Ismaili* institutional programming such as becoming a member of the youth and sports board, acting as a coach for young *Ismaili* children learning to play soccer, and so forth. The connection I felt to the *Ismaili* community, and thus my sense of belonging and identity as an *Ismaili* drastically shifted during my initial trip to East Africa.

The shifts left me in a new, unexplored, in-between. As I critically re-read, the questions that are triggered from my time in Dar es Salaam include queries such as: is it okay to participate in *Ismaili* institutional programming while being unsure of my religious beliefs? How do I balance the ethics of being *Ismaili*, that I now know I embody and enact daily, while also maintaining a desire to remain disconnected from religious ceremonies? I finally found the words to ask what I was truly grappling with: can I be culturally and secularly *Ismaili* but not religiously *Ismaili*? As these words find space on the piece of paper between dervishes, my dance is halted. My feet side step the point on the floor they had bonded to, and I begin a parallel dance to grapple with my new location, sense of belonging, identity, and privilege as an *Ismaili* in Dar es Salaam.

Parallel Dancing: From Immigrant to Privileged

I feel almost paralyzed with my right arm still moving to direct my hand to write words I have previously avoided, was unaware of, and those that add yet another layer of complexity to the tensions I am grappling with. Without being consciously aware, as I landed in Dar es Salaam,



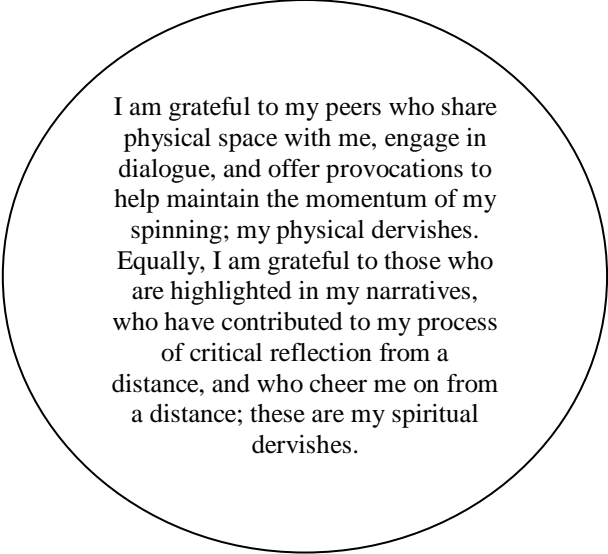
I find myself caught in a spin that I intentionally stop because I worry about the boundaries, I worry about being caught in such a whirl without the time, space, and support to process such queries. I recognize myself asking questions such as: what are the complexities of having a spiritual father (His Highness the Aga Khan) who has accepted a title from the British monarchy? There is a level of community, business, and political status that comes with accepting such a title that I find myself perplexed by. I am also cautious yet aware of my curiosities of how patriarchal beliefs and practices are still embedded in such titles and positions and are enacted in the positions we, as *jamati* members hold within the community.

I occupied a position of privilege. I belong, ethnically, culturally, and religiously, to a group of people who historically settled in East Africa from East India, in search of a better life, a life of stability and security. While I re-iterate my experiences in East Africa and believe I did my best to respect the values, beliefs, and practices of the

Indigenous people, I now sit with the tension of both my ancestral and my own role in exploiting millions of people. The privileges I gained as an East Indian *Ismaili* in East Africa - often referred to as a *Muhindi* - is vast. Generations before me and those that followed, had and have access to Aga Khan educational institutions. Financial stability was earned through family business adventures. The *Ismaili* community offered a place and physical space of belonging (Ramji, 2007), local and accessible resources such as tutoring programs, social welfare systems, and early years' development programming. I cannot escape this whirl, this new understanding that leaves me to grapple with, make sense of, and seek an uncomfortable generative space to situate myself within and work from in East Africa and Canada.

I am curious if it was my innate knowledge of the harm done to the Indigenous people of East Africa, which I assume is similar to Indigenous communities globally, that was verbalized through the gut wrenching pain I felt, the desire to stay crawled up in a ball under my covers, and my resistance to act in a similar manner to or follow the lead of my Canadian peer that I was

responding to. For example, I return to and
 ruminate over an event held by my
 colleagues and I in an East African rural
 community. My peers informed me of the
 struggles they had faced to connect with
 certain key stakeholders in an attempt to
 access information held only in oral form.



I am grateful to my peers who share
 physical space with me, engage in
 dialogue, and offer provocations to
 help maintain the momentum of my
 spinning; my physical dervishes.
 Equally, I am grateful to those who
 are highlighted in my narratives,
 who have contributed to my process
 of critical reflection from a
 distance, and who cheer me on from
 a distance; these are my spiritual
 dervishes.

Without much conscious thought, at least in
 the moment, I walked up to a stakeholder and in Kiswahili, I greeted him as an elder, requested
 his support, and offered my blessings. Instantly, the information my peers had been seeking for
 months was shared. The acknowledgement of my social location, my recognition of my privilege
 as a female to have access to higher education, and my respect for this stakeholder as the expert,
 broke down barriers and formed a working alliance that encouraged progress on the projects at
 hand. However, without this critical pause in my dance, the intentional side step, and the
 spinning around my social location and privilege as a Canadian *Shia Ismaili Muslim*, I am not
 sure I could continue to whirl with focus, intentionality, and respect for others that are physically
 and spiritually spinning with me.

Stepping Back Into My Initial Whirl

The node of racialization, the enabling “conditions for racial stereotypes to be inscribed
 onto racialized [non-white] individuals as an *inherent* marking of their racial community” (italics
 in original, Walia, 2013, p.65) emerged unexpectedly and with great momentum. Now, with
 intention, I stop my spinning momentarily. My white robe no longer splayed, my arms tucked
 inwards as to offer myself a hug, and my feet finding one another to position themselves to spin

again in an attempt to surface and sit in the tensions of spirituality, and ethnicity and culture that emerge within and beyond the tensions of racialization, gender and geographical location as explored above.

Moving through spiritual, ethnic and cultural tensions

As an adolescent, and especially after my experience playing ringette with a group of older girls, I believe I embodied the knowledge that I was different from the norm, that I experienced the world from a minoritized, racialized, and ethnically different way. However, not having the words to articulate my differences, I learned how to adapt, resist, comply, cope, and transgress through various spaces in ways that allowed me to be as close to the person I desired to be. Markula and Pringle (2006) speak about identities that are socially constructed that offer an “ideologically constructed ‘false’ identity” (p.99). Underneath such an identity “lays a true self: an ‘un-alienated’ self” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p.99) that I was able to find when the power structures within the dressing room were removed and I was simply another teammate, who was needed in net, that allowed me to discover and enact the self I strived to be. For me, stepping onto the ice for each practice and game was my spiritual act - a fight against the injustices that occurred on my brown body.

Playing ringette was spiritual on many levels. I am reminded by King (2009) that spirituality is linked to all human experiences including a connection to “human creativity and resourcefulness” (p.3), as well as a connection to “a sense of celebration and joy, with adoration and surrender, with struggle and suffering” (p.3). As I spin in meaning making to understand the acts done to my brown body, the suffering I endured as well as how resourceful I was in order to keep myself safe within the dressing room, I begin to recognize that the connection I developed to myself was sophisticated and crucial. My sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and sense of

belonging, especially during my first year of ringette, grew. The academic and social confidence I attained also began to flourish as I learned to find joy, knowledge, skills, and a sense of being alone in the world through the literature I began to read.

Hearing the voices of fictional and non-fiction characters - those I do not directly refer to in this text but who have strongly influenced me - who struggled to live in certain social locations such as war inflicted environments, hiking along mountain ranges, and as immigrants captured me (Akhtar, 2012; Boo, 2012; Al-Solayle, 2016; Rizvi, 2016; Toorpakai & Holstein, 2016; Thomas, 2017; Jerkins, 2018). I recall my interest in such books beginning with a book my high school English teacher offered me. It was this book, given to me as my classmates read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a piece of writing I deeply struggled with, that changed the way I engaged with reading and writing. While my classmates read, understood, re-articulated, and re-enacted *Macbeth*, I read *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* by Daniel Quinn (1992). I was immediately drawn to the teacher-pupil (gorilla-human) relationship and how one could learn from being in the presence of another, actively listen - and see, and trust the sensations in one's body. This book, which still sits on my bookshelf in almost new condition, was the first book I recall reading in its entirety, that I understood components of enough to articulate in written form, and that I desire to read at the beginning of each March, the same month I first received the book.

It was through Quinn's (1992) book and a few others shared with me by my English teacher, and my increased understanding of my sense of belonging that I started to recognize and intentionally shift my behaviours, language, and actions based on the social location I found myself in. For example, when in the dressing room with my eighteen-year-old teammates, I knew to say very little, to not show my discomfort and hurt through facial gestures, and to arrive

with just enough time to dress and thus spend as little time with my teammates as possible.

Alternatively, when I played with the women in the open division, I would tell jokes, offer ideas for team activities, and stay well past the time it took to change back into my street clothing. In a sense, I became adept at reading environments, sensing the connection I had with others, and knowing when and what I could do to protect myself to the best of my abilities.

My ability to respond to my social contexts at ringette, *Bait-ul-Ilm*, *Jamat Khana*, and school - to decide to resist or comply - allowed for a degree of comfort and fluidity to do the same as I travelled. From Simpson's (2011, 2017) books which offers insight into living as an Indigenous woman in Canada - is rooted in resisting dominant narratives and comfortable categorizations, as well as the need to bring together the sacred and profane (Simpson, 2017) and the resurgence of oral cultures, local languages, and traditions of governance (Simpson, 2011) - influenced my interactions with and understanding of experiences in and alongside Indigenous communities and the spiritual component of engaging with others. Being able to meet Indigenous community members on their own land, with respect and gratitude, and with the regard that they are the expert offered a spiritual level of connection to others. Just as connecting to the self, connecting to others requires the ability to know where to position myself within relation to others, how to articulate myself based on those who I am in dialogue with, and how to present myself. For instance, returning to my experience in a rural community in East Africa, to connect on a generative, productive, and respectful level with stakeholders, I knew to ensure my clothing covered my shoulders and reached my knees, and that I began conversations with the little dialect I had of the community's local language. What felt like natural gestures to me, fostered connections that were deeper than they appeared compared to the researcher-participant connection I witnessed with my peers.

I pause to think about how much of my spirituality, the desire to respectfully and genuinely connect with myself and others, is grounded in the religious ethics I was raised with. While I am unsure about how much I absorbed as a child or adolescent at *Jamat Khana*, now as I critically reflect, I recognize that the *Ismaili*, and *Islamic* ethics of generosity, respect, support for others regardless of faith, and education that His Highness the Aga Khan speaks about in his *Firmans* and public speeches, are ethics I absorbed, embodied, embrace, and enact each day.

King (2009) helps me articulate the connection between my spirituality and religion when she notes that “spirituality is clearly connected with religion, but not exclusively contained by it” (p.2) and that the “transformative quality of spirituality as lived experience, an experience linked to our bodies, to nature, to our relationships with others and society” (p.4), which draws me back to inquiring about how my religion and spiritual beliefs and practices are linked. There is a core component to the *Ismaili* faith that is rooted in the ethics of care, a care that I did not always experience at ringette and that has triggered my approaches with others in East Africa. More so, religion - being *Ismaili* - and engaging in religious practices - attending *Jamat Khana* - greatly impacted my participation in ringette and my ability to travel to East Africa. I constantly negotiated, alone and with family, the in-between space of being *Ismaili* as central to my identity, as a sometimes insider, compared to living on the periphery of or outside of the *Ismaili* faith and community depending on how being an *Ismaili* impacted other activities I wanted to engage in, such as ringette.

Throughout ringette seasons, it was constantly debated which religious ceremonies I was allowed to skip, which tournaments my first ringette team would attend based on the religious events occurring during that time of year, and which ringette games my team would need to find a substitute goalie for so I could attend *Jamat Khana*. During the months of March, July and

December, the *Ismaili* community celebrates *Khushali*. *Khushali*, from my perspective, not only signifies a special occasion such as the Persian New Year or His Highness the Aga Khan's birthday, it is also the time when the *Ismaili* community gathers in large numbers, engages in religious ceremonies and cultural activities, and rejuvenates one's commitment to the faith and community. The months of March, July and December often bring out the newest, most fashionable, and elegant outfits, have children living away from their families travelling to celebrate these special days with family and friends, and brings people together to share meals. On the other hand, for me, having weekly gatherings during the months of March and December often meant greater amounts of negotiation with my family. It was during these months that I would either miss more ringette than during other months of the season or miss more ceremonies at *Jamat Khana*, which in my family are deemed highly significant. This constant tension often left me resenting my *Ismaili* identity as I privileged the sense of belonging I felt when I was on the ice.

My spin begins to accelerate as I re-iterate my resentment, my strong desire to disconnect with aspects of the *Ismaili* faith such as prayers and attending *Jamat Khana*, and to explore how quickly this resentment faded, in certain ways, following my Master's degree. It is because of my affiliation to the *Ismaili* community, the maintenance of living on the periphery of and occasionally centering myself within the community, that I heard about and applied for a research fellowship opportunity in Dar es Salaam. And, while I initially believed that I was hired on because of my academic and professional interests and skills, I later learned that one of my supervisors in Dar es Salaam strongly encouraged their colleague to hire me for multiple reasons. Not only would I be able to positively contribute to the Early Childhood Education research project and the academic institution, but that I would also be able to contribute to and support the

Ismaili community in Tanzania. My affiliation to the *Ismaili* community, my understanding of the Aga Khan Institutional frameworks, ethics, and practices, as well as my scholarly skills all played a part in my successful application. Further, it did not take long for me to situate myself, or be situated by others, once arriving in Dar es Salaam.

A few weeks into my trip, I started to understand the power that came with being a Canadian passport holder, an *Ismaili Muslim*, and professionally being associated with His Highness the Aga Khan in Dar es Salaam. For instance, some of the privileges I have while living in Canada were replicated in East Africa including access to quality health care. When I shared that I worked at an Aga Khan institution peoples' eyes sparkled, the service I received was of greater excellence, and I was treated as though I had great wealth. I felt a sense of security that at any time I would be able to leave the country if there was political unrest. I also knew that local community members would be side-stepped and I would be sought to educate and produce educational materials because I held a Canadian degree. I was, and perhaps for the first time in my life, residing in a context where I held power, held a sort of unclaimed security, and knew that my knowledge was greatly sought after. As I spin, I wonder if in a way, being *Ismaili Muslim* in East Africa enacted similar "justified colonization and imperialism" (Selod & Embrick, 2013, p.645) that previously occurred against *Muslim* populations within European, and predominantly Christian, societies. Was I able to be in East Africa, to engage in the work I did, and maintain a level of privilege, comfort, and positive regard because of the religion I was born into?

My spin halts. I find myself dizzy, unstable, and grappling with how the religion I was born into influenced and influences my spiritual beliefs, values, and practices. I begin to think about the complicated connection between religion and spirituality as I silently re-iterate my

experiences of being disrespected, not supported, and isolated at ringette. Further, I was curious about my keen desire to present and enact respect, support and inclusion when working with others in rural East African communities. I also attempt to articulate how the messages I received within a religious setting such as gaining an education at a higher level, to actively live in pluralistic communities, and to offer support to communities of need allowed me to engage in acts that I consider spiritual. With this realization and my dizziness easing, I begin to spin again, a little more tentatively, as I become witness to the extent of the entanglement of my religious affiliation, my spiritual practices, and culture. I start to recognize that my family's migration to Canada in the 1970s following "a series of immigration reforms in the 1960s [that] resulted in the arrival of large numbers of non-European immigrants" (Kazemipur, 2017, p. 206) is more complex and messier than I had previously acknowledged.

Narratives of religious and spiritual inclusion and exclusion that I struggle to articulate as I attempt to whirl on uneasy feet, are further triggered as I narrate, critically reflect upon, and re-iterate experiences from my young adulthood. I find myself needing to pause, needing to ground my feet on the dance floor a few steps from my current position, and at the same time hold space on the dance floor for the tensions that surfaced while re-iterating experiences from my early years. My white gown settled, my arms slightly off to my side in an attempt to find balance, and my feet positioned with my left heel tucked beside my right arch. I position myself for further whirling as I focus on and begin to re-iterate narratives situated in my young adulthood, particularly during my early days in practice as a young counselor in my next chapter.

Chapter 6

Whirling as a Young Adult

During my Master's degree, I intensely questioned what I was potentially giving up, my ability to attend, be an active member of, and my social location as a young graduate student. At the same time, I resisted change and yet without realizing it, my outlook on life was changing. My career and research desires shifted overnight, my connection to human and social development practices such as counseling, child and youth care, and recreational therapy ripened, and I started meeting youth and adults who were challenging their own understandings of religion and spirituality. Evans (2017), a scientific atheist who is interested in spiritual experiences draws on and articulates Ehrenreich's (2002) work by acknowledging that significant spiritual experiences, those that alter a person's understanding and way of living, need to be explored. Ehrenreich claims that while she remained committed to rational empiricism she still wants science to explore odder phenomena, that spiritual experiences are "a public health issue", and that when a person has "a shattering type of experience and never says anything about it, it is time to investigate" (Evans, 2017, p.3). During my Master's, this is exactly where I was at. I doubted change, I questioned faith, and I was grappling with my own connections to nature, myself, and others. Through one pivotal experience during my Master's, my understanding of myself, my sense of belonging and my identity was shattered and, as Evans (2017) suggests, I needed to begin to explore, to investigate my own experiences. I begin this chapter by iterating an experience from my Master's degree followed by an experience as a young practitioner. In a cyclical manner, as in the two previous chapters, I critically reflect upon, re-iterate, and tease out the tensions I experienced as a young adult, and bring to light the in-between spaces I found - and find - myself living within.

Narrating my Experience as a Young Adult

In my Master's degree program, I was expected to take a human change class. This particular course, one I was vocally resistant to take and engage in because of my belief that change is not possible and that I was unable to change another person's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours, became the catalyst for my own personal search to understand my connection to and relationship with spirituality, and by extension, religion. Through my experiences in this course, my research focus also drastically shifted - changed - from wanting to study the impact on child development for families living in rural East Africa to what contributes to and prohibits counselors from including spirituality in their practices (Gulamhusein, 2012). My classroom experiences, narrated below in "In the Classroom" becomes more intricate and tangled by my experience as a youth worker a few months following the course, which is narrated in "As a Young Practitioner". As I spin, within and around these two narratives, I continue to grapple with my connection to spirituality, my sense of belonging to the *Ismaili* community, and how I started to make meaning of my identity as a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili* that ended the last chapter. It is this grappling that becomes the basis of this chapter.

In the Classroom

A semester into my Master's program at the University of Victoria in the School of Child and Youth Care, our cohort took a change theory course, one that explores counseling practices, techniques, and introduces various forms of thinking about change. It was clear to my peers and professor that I believed counseling was not effective, a waste of time, and that people do not change. I attempted for weeks to find different language for change and along the way engaged in mock counseling sessions. The first role play of my sessions as a client was done in front of our cohort, without my full

agreement. I sat in constant twitch, voice shaky, fingers and toes freezing, and constantly attempting to maintain the same speed in my responses as the speed my counselor was asking me questions at. I witnessed the cringed looks of my peers in the audience and started to question if I was a bad daughter, an unsupportive sibling, and if doing my Master's degree at a fairly young age was a mistake; all things I was proud of and confident in prior to this twenty-minute exchange.

That evening I sat at home sadder than I had ever been in my adult life and feeling as though my once, only a few hours earlier, happy life had disappeared. I knew immediately that I was in for a ride and that my exposure to this course was going to alter my life drastically. As I reflected, I recognized that my mock counsellor lacked the skills to understand and/or incorporate elements into her practice that calmed me, built connection and relation, and supported where I was at. I began to feel unsafe, uncared for, and sad about my very fortunate and privileged life and experiences. I also learnt that I have a spiritual belief system and practice that is deeply rooted and derived from my religious upbringing and from the teachings my family instilled in me through day-to-day interactions and activities such as hearing the other person, validating feelings, finding self-error in interpretations, and seeking to serve and support others whenever possible. These values and principles were not incorporated in our counselling sessions, which led me down a research and career path I would have never followed had it not been for this experience.

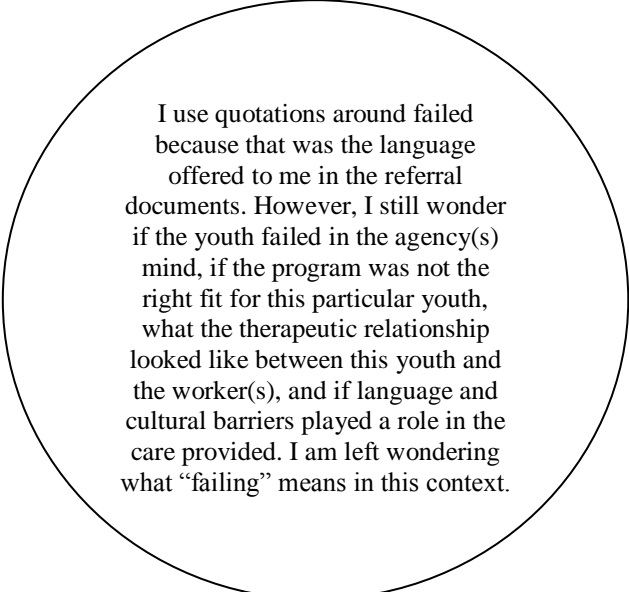
As I initially spin and return myself to that winter course, my fingers start to tremble, my knees begin to bounce as if I was offering a horse ride to a young child, my mouth starts to dry out, and the pores on my forehead and underarms open their floodgates. I was the youngest student in

our cohort, fresh out of my undergraduate degree, and still grappling with how the disciplines of Therapeutic Recreation (TR) and Child and Youth Care (CYC) interacted with one another. I, beginning in December prior to the winter holidays, voiced my disinterest in a counseling course. My peers, for the most part, let me voice my disinterest knowing that I would still be present in class the first week of January with my pre-readings and assignment complete. While I resisted participation in class somatically and verbally, I knew I was expected to take this course in hopes of graduating, thus I remained respectful to the efforts of my professor and peers and in many ways complied to the expectations placed on me. Once again, I found myself in a space that I did not feel fully comfortable within, yet capable of being uncomfortable in.

As I critically reflect upon the first day of the human change course, I recall eating lunch on my own outside under the sun after a morning of difficult news, theory-based discussions, and a viewing of a counseling session. Prior to returning to class I was using the bathroom, where while I washed my hands my mock counseling partner - and peer - informed me that we were going to start the afternoon session by completing our first mock session in front of the class. I momentarily froze. My hands stopped moving under the running tap and my gaze glossed over. Seconds later I turned to my partner, whom I had my back to, and without much conscious thought loudly said, "WHAT?" My walk down the hall felt longer than twenty feet and harder than the half-marathon I was training for at the time. Stomach rumbling, body sweating and freezing simultaneously, and my mind racing, I sat in the classroom silently, distressed, anxious, and discouraged. The extent of the discomfort I felt was new and unknown; all terms of emotions I had previously only known intimately through my textbooks. My spin slows as my mind returns to the depths of sadness I felt that evening, the inability to call my family or friends to tell them what I experienced as I did not know how to describe my day to them, and my body

numbed knowing I had to return to class the next day and likely sit in two other counseling sessions, one as a client and the other as a counselor. I reflect on how I wanted to quit, to email my professor and inform them that this class was not for me, that I did not want my peer(s) to have access to such information in my life, and that today's session had proven that counseling is harmful and ineffective. I remember sitting on my couch, the television on to offer some noise and companionship, a full wine glass in hand, and my laptop beside me for that moment I was ready to write to my professor. When the moment came for me to start typing, the words formulated on the screen drastically different than those orally rehearsed. I started to explain the sensations in my body, my newly formed dislike for the person I now saw myself as, my desire to attend class only to learn more about change, and asking for help to understand what happened in the session, what I did wrong, and how to learn not to do what was done to me. I sat in a space where I truly wanted out and nothing to do with this course while also wanting this course to become the focal point of my semester because I knew I had so much to learn and that I could not be alone in my experience. The discomfort in my body lived for weeks, a discomfort I have only felt once again, but this time as I positioned myself as the professional.

As a community-based youth worker, one of my clients was a young *Ismaili Muslim* who had been referred to the program I worked for after several "failed" service attempts by other agencies. My therapeutic relationship with this youth often was located on the periphery of professional and friendly boundaries and was another pivotal experience for me. Below I share



I use quotations around failed because that was the language offered to me in the referral documents. However, I still wonder if the youth failed in the agency(s) mind, if the program was not the right fit for this particular youth, what the therapeutic relationship looked like between this youth and the worker(s), and if language and cultural barriers played a role in the care provided. I am left wondering what "failing" means in this context.

a narrative regarding my interaction with this youth before offering further insider perspective regarding this experience. I then engage in a dance that critically reflects on and re-iterates how these two pivotal narratives influence(d) my sense of belonging and identity.

As a Young Practitioner

As the only community-based youth worker within the agency I worked for and in the specific context of North-East Calgary Alberta, I engaged in support work with children and youth aged eight to seventeen. One of my clients was an Ismaili youth whose family had arrived in Canada from Central Asia. This youth and her family attended the same Jamat Khana that I had attended throughout my childhood and adolescence up until I left Calgary to attend University. Therefore, this youth's parents knew my family members and was aware of who I was.

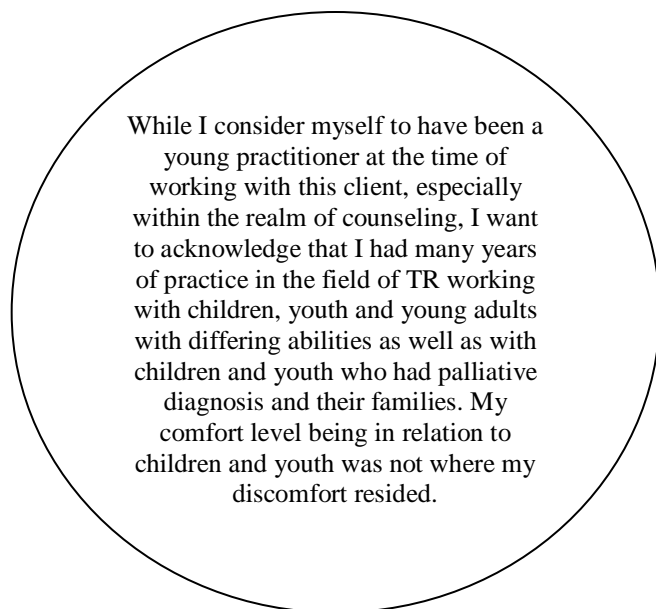
However, not knowing exactly who this youth was when I received the intake file from the agency I worked for, I booked a visit to meet the youth and her family in a similar manner to all other clients I had worked with. As I entered the family home, immediately the youth's family welcomed me warmly and we were able to have a highly informative session as we sat on the floor and indulged in Chai (tea) and traditional Central Asian snacks. After our initial visit and a further review of the file, it became clear that this youth's family had shared more with me in the one hour we spent together than they had shared with various other workers over multiple visits. My guess was that they openly shared the challenges their family faced because I was a familiar face, that I had an assumed understanding of cultural practices, and was believed to share similar religious beliefs. Our work together started in her family home and slowly moved into the community at local coffee shops. Our first session in a coffee shop, the two of us sat

discussing her lack of desire and engagement at school and her involvement in the Ismaili community. As we talked and became more comfortable with one another, the questions she posed for me became more and more challenging. When she began asking me questions about my lack of attendance in Jamat Khana, I stumbled to respond coherently as my brain filtered through my own disconnect and questioning of the faith.

The complexities of our interactions, beyond our family relations, grew after I responded to one of her questions regarding my Jamat Khana attendance with noting that my work and school commitments often interfered and/or prevented me from attending. This youth, knowing that part of my job was to spend time with her, then asked if I would attend Jamat Khana with her. Again, I stumbled. There were many challenges that crossed my mind including the ethics of being with a client outside of work hours and confidentiality as many Ismaili community members in Calgary were aware of my job and the client group I worked with. There were many other layers of complexities to our work together including the knowledge that if I decided to terminate our professional relationship that this youth would likely not receive another youth worker or the support she required and deserved. More so, I struggled as I actively resisted and questioned the faith we were believed to share while also wanting this youth to find positive and supportive connections within the community which she felt she belonged to.

At the time of working with the youth depicted in the narrative above, I was a young practitioner whose “counseling” practice experience was limited to group work at a drop-in program for youth and as a community youth worker with three previous clients, one male and two females between the ages of ten and thirteen. I was working through how my TR degree and my new interest in counseling practices such as narrative, play and spiritual therapy merged to support

those who I work with. When defining spiritual therapy I take inspiration from Henry (2006)



who writes a chapter in Kwee, Gergen and Koshikawa's (2006) publication regarding the benefits of including spiritual and therapeutic strategies such as meditation and mindfulness during counseling sessions. In addition, Coles (1990) and Hay and Nye (1998) write about the religious and spiritual experiences and questions that children have had and recounted, and King (2009) who articulates why people globally seek spiritual connections in their lives, how spirituality is sought in religious contexts and the interconnectivity of religion, spirituality, culture, nature, gender, science and technology. While working through my experience in the human change course, my professor suggested I read Kwee, Gergen and Koshikawa's (2006) text as they explore counseling practices rooted in Buddhist psychology. It was through this book that I started to find language that I felt linked religion and spirituality while also allowing me to remain in the in-between of religion and spirituality and clinical and spiritual practices of counseling. For example, de Silva (2006) in Kwee, Gergen and Koshikawa (2006) speaks about meditation, which can "lead to greater ability[ies] to concentrate greater tolerance of change and turmoil around oneself, and sharper awareness" (p.60). de Silva (2006) follows the explanation of meditation with how such spiritual practices can be used clinically as behaviour change strategies for mental wellness challenges, grief, and so forth.

Drawing on the scholarship of Kwee, Gergen and Koshikawa (2006), Coles (1990), Hay and Nye (1998) and King (2009) led me to articulate spiritual therapy as a practice of being client oriented, responsive to where my client is at and acknowledging the current needs they voice, as well as acknowledging variations of cultural practices, religious associations, and spiritual diversities of human beings. At the same time, to understand and practice as a counselor, I was also in the beginning stages of collecting and reading literature on counseling and the inclusion of religion and spirituality in practice for my Master's thesis. Thus, I found myself hyper-vigilant to the religious and/or spiritual practices my clients engaged in and how their religious and/or spiritual beliefs interacted with their worldly (day-to-day) activities, without really being able to define or articulate the similarities and differences between religion and spirituality. I held and still largely hold, to Sheridan's (2008) definition of spirituality as connection to self, other, and an-other than human. I have also come to find space in articulating religion as a practice directed by rules and doctrines that can offer support and guidance in obtaining a spiritual connection. These two definitions will likely never feel fully encompassing, however they help me resolve the tensions of how religion and spirituality are connected and how I have found space in the in-between, constructs that dominate this chapter.

It is without doubt that my own experience as a mock-client influenced the way I perceived my role as a community youth worker, my interactions with my clients, and my personal quest to understand how religion and/or spirituality appear in counseling and in my personal life. The node of religion and spirituality becomes a focal point for this chapter as I begin to understand my connection to the self, others, and an-other than human differently, and I enter a phase in my life that has me highly involved in *Ismaili* religious practices and institutional organizations. My new degree of involvement with the *Ismaili* community began in

Dar es Salaam through institutional programming, as explored in the previous chapter, and has since continued through local (Victoria BC), provincial (BC), national (Canada), and international (Tanzania and Kenya) projects. The challenge I face is that I am constantly balancing feelings of comfort and discomfort with the work I do within the community. I often have a desire to refuse working on projects because they are associated with the *Ismaili* community but then agree to them after hours of pondering why I resist serving the community I was born into and would not have batted an eye at the same opportunity if it was an external community. I am also drawn to *Ismaili* community projects because of the assumed shared ethics each member of the project may hold that I learned I also held when I met and began working with my *Ismaili* client. Again, I find myself in the in-between as I attempt to live and volunteer within the *Ismaili* community while still being unsure of my religious connection to *Allah*, what brings *Ismailis* and *Muslims* together. It is from this node, the in-between of religion and spirituality, that my whirling begins again and where I begin to explore the situated tensions that surfaced during class and as a young practitioner. It is, however, important to note that the perspective from which I find myself critically reflecting and re-iterating the above narratives has been triggered by my recent understanding of the node of religion and spirituality that I find myself, has allowed me to travel to East Africa several times, and is informed by a recent experience in East Africa (summer of 2017).

Triggering My Perspective of Re-interpretation

Upon arriving in Kenya, the camp staff team I was a part of gathered at an eco-village just outside of Nairobi, members joining as they arrived in Kenya, some in pairs and others alone. During our staff and facilitator training, any spare moment I had I would find a seat at the originally Baptist owned eco-villages café table with my notebook, multi-coloured pens, a

laptop, my phone, iPad, and books; some items remained in my backpack but there were moments when I was trying to organize myself in which all items made their way onto the table top. Amongst the tourists at the eco-village, I blended in. Amid the Indigenous community members, I stood out vividly. I learned just how much I stood out when a young child approached me to tell me that she had never seen so many coloured pens before, questioned how some of my pages had plastic covering (laminated), and where she could find such materials within walking distance of the eco-village. Just as the child finished talking, the waitress who had now been serving me for three days appeared at the side of the table I was seated at, looked at my book (Rojas, 2009), the coloured pens I had given the child, and quietly, almost under her breath, states, “oh, you’re a woman of colour!” To my peer seated next to me, the experience was sweet, cute and funny. To me, I immediately turned to Rojas’ (2009) book titled “Women of Color and Feminism” sitting next to my laptop and started to wonder if I was being positioned closer to a white female, with privilege and power because “preference [is] usually given to those who are lighter [skin tones]” (Rojas, 2009, p.1). I continued to think about Rojas’ (2009) prologue where she writes about the marginalization of women of colour and found myself whirling in the narratives explored in the previous chapter of this dissertation, as well as the location I was taking up as I moved through East Africa.

Days after returning to Victoria, I was left wondering about my participation in consistently moving along a spectrum ranging from “woman” on one end and “woman of colour” on the other, both in this experience and my previous experience with the *bajaji* driver described in Chapter 5. A Canadian Indigenous scholar, S. de Finney, shared with me a similar tension she encountered as she traveled through Europe. She spoke about how she could “pass” as a white, or nearly white, person, potentially Latina, and as an Indigenous person during her

travels, which then provoked thoughts regarding the ability to “pass” as being other than Indigenous, as she is identified and identifies herself within the Canadian context (S. de Finney, personal communication, September 13, 2017). I was also introduced to Rachel Dolezal’s narrative, a white woman who passed as mixed or half-black and utilized this ability to “pass” in her favor. Further, I started seeing articles such as *Why are some black Africans considered white Americans?* (Makki, 2017), which speaks to the idea that “by the 20th century, if a man looked white, he enjoyed full benefits of citizenship” (n.p.) and draws out the absurdity of racial classifications made solely on the language one speaks. Another article I was drawn to was written by Niloufar Haidari (2016) who writes about and titles her article *uncovering the “privilege” of being a white passing person of colour*. She speaks about the in-between space of not immediately being discriminated against as she is not recognized as a brown body while at the same time suffering from discrimination once people learn she is an “other”, non-white. As I spin to grapple with my own ability to “pass” and simultaneously be “othered”, I find myself reflecting on and re-iterating my experience at the eco-village and the groups of people among whom I was situated.

Each group had a unique reason for being at the eco-village, often reasons that conflicted with another population’s reasoning. For example, a large group of Baptist missionaries who were serving in East Africa, and their families, gathered at the eco-village on a yearly basis for a retreat. As I spoke to one fellow, a spouse of one of the missionaries, he explained to me that the eco-village, with a Baptist college and an international primary school on site, offered an American vibe, a brief escape from “East African culture”. On the other hand, as an *Ismaili Muslim* group who intentionally chose to bring youth from around the globe to Kenya in an attempt to highlight service learning in one majority world country, the eco-village was for many

of our facilitators and participants their introduction to “East African culture”. Within the secure confines of the eco-village, participants minimally interacted with Indigenous community members when meals were being set-up and served, when having their rooms cleaned, and while shopping at the eco-village gift shop. I believe, had we as staff not engaged in critical conversations regarding our context, location, mandate, and goals, and not adjusted our programming to leave the eco-village to engage in locally based service projects, to visit the Graduate School of Media and Communication, and other sites based in local contexts more than initially planned, our interaction with East African culture would have been nominal at best.

Over the past decade I have entered, removed myself from, sat on the periphery of, and re-entered, re-removed, and re-positioned myself within the *Ismaili* community. However, as I found myself located in a predominantly *Ismaili* context for a month, I started to recognize that each time I shift geographical locations I also shift the in-between space I occupy. For example, while in East Africa for summer camp, I found myself sitting in-between the tensions of my religious identity and sense of belonging. I started to ponder: What is my belief and connection to the *Ismaili* community? How has it changed since my Master’s research project? And, how does my connection to and participation in the *Ismaili* community, faith-based activities and culturally associated activities play into my behaviours, perceptions and interpretations of experiences? As I spun in religious based questioning, I sat with a scholar who joined the summer camp team to help guide participants to create links between the *Ismaili* faith, service, and their materialistic worlds. This scholar guided me to Esmail’s (1998) work, which is rooted in the process of continuous inquiry. After months of spinning in discomfort I started to find comfort in Esmail’s (1998) exploratory model of coming to an understanding within a religious context. He explains that continuous inquiry drives renewed hunger for deeper understanding,

which for him “is critical in spirit” (p. 12). It is, with this new understanding, the extrapolations of Esmail’s (1998) work that encourages continuous religious-based inquiry into everyday inquiry, especially as I find myself constantly moving from within, to the periphery of, and outside of my religious node of intersect that I return to spinning in two pivotal experiences. These two experiences, in the classroom and as a young professional, that initiated my conscious exploration of how the discourses of religion and spirituality and the tensions of residing within the in-between spaces of religious engagement and spiritual understandings have impacted my identity and sense of belonging.

Building Momentum (Insight) to Whirl

As I initially spin in my experiences in the classroom and as a young practitioner, I first notice and recall that I was predominantly located within cis-gender female contexts. Within my Master’s cohort, we were a group of women ranging in age from early-twenties to mid-fifties, largely white, and most, if not all, my peers held undergraduate degrees within the human and social services field. By the time we had started our human change course, our cohort had been together for four months, built (perceived) trusted connections between one another, debated in various academically rich and critically challenging conversations, and shared multiple social activities; we held professional and personal bonds with one another. My dance is interrupted with intense memories of the start of our human change course, a start that likely shifted our interactions in class that I have not previously reflected upon. I notice my feet shifting to the left, finding a new location to whirl as I critically reflect on and re-iterate the memories that begin to focus my mind and ease the dizziness caused by my instable spinning.

Parallel Dance: Critically Reflecting on the Start of Human Change

It is hard for me to avoid or postpone the narratives that whirl alongside my experience with my Master's cohort. As our cohort returned to class in January following the winter holiday, we learned of one of our classmate's passing just before we were told about Michael Mahoney dying by suicide. As a cohort, we were expected to have read a significant part of Mahoney's (2003) text that offers insight into psychotherapy practices and skills to support practitioners in helping others make new meaning in their lives. At the front of Mahoney's (2003) book I wrote three questions, each on a small pink sticky note. Before reading the book, I asked:

1. Can people change?
2. Can people help others to change? and,
3. Are some forms of helping better than others?

On top of these three questions I placed a large blue sticky note asking: if as counselors we are expected to help others make meaning and sense of their life experiences, why then was Mahoney (the author of this book) unable to do this for himself?

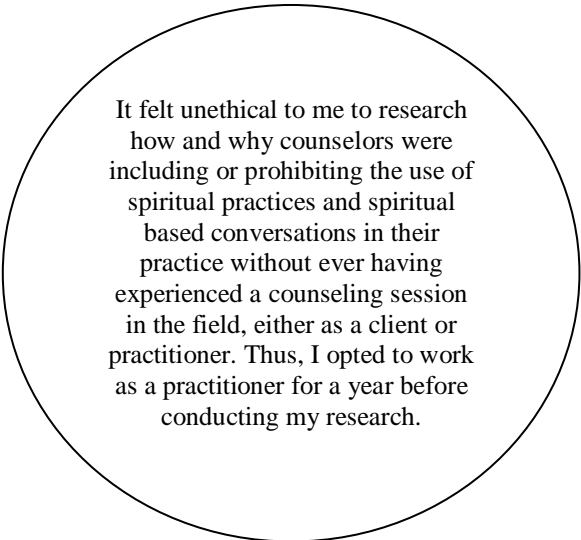
My questions were left unanswered for some time, I believe strategically unanswered by my professor so that I engaged in self-reflection that encouraged me to begin a personal search to understand counseling, counseling practices, and practitioner skills from a perspective that was my own. Critically reflecting, even before my own mock counseling experience took place, I had started asking meaning making - spiritual - questions to make sense of the losses we had begun to hear about and to make sense of my own experiences.

My spinning, moments ago rapid and full of quickened spirit - breath - is now slowing and finding the deep breath that allows me to critically reflect upon my experiences. I find myself returning to my initial whirl, to continue to offer critical insight into the narratives, the

tensions, and the impact my experiences during my Master's degree had, and continues to have on my identity and sense of belonging.

Returning to my Initial Spinning

While the demographics of my Master's cohort had minimal diversity, which at the time did not occur to me. I started to see the lack of diversity within the human and social service field when I returned to Calgary following my course work. I was living with my parents after six years of being on my own and was searching for a job that would offer insight into counseling perspectives and practices. I wanted to take the time to learn about counseling methods, my own preferred practices, and what it meant to interact in a therapeutic relationship before I took on my research project. A few months after arriving in Calgary, I found a job as an after-school drop-in youth worker. The program was led by two wonderful white middle-class women and was held in a community centre basement office space that had one manager, a couple of administrative personnel, and one social worker, all of whom were also white middle-class women. However, the demographics of the students who attended the program were quite diverse. Youth with Aboriginal, African, Indian, European, and likely mixed backgrounds attended in large numbers and often isolated themselves from one another based on their ethnicity and culture.



It felt unethical to me to research how and why counselors were including or prohibiting the use of spiritual practices and spiritual based conversations in their practice without ever having experienced a counseling session in the field, either as a client or practitioner. Thus, I opted to work as a practitioner for a year before conducting my research.

As workers, we attempted to break down ethnic and cultural barriers through interactive activities such as hip-hop dance, DJ'ing sessions, and multicultural food days. It never felt like

enough to me but it felt like more than the attempts of others, so I followed along. Additionally, because of my position as a part-time employee working out of a community centre, I rarely attended staff meetings at our main office. The one day I did attend, because I was already at the main office to discuss a potential increase in hours and a new position as a community youth worker, I noticed a pattern in service provider demographics. Management and staff, at this particular agency, replicated that of my Master's cohort. Many of the employees were white women who served predominately white families. The challenges of having a largely white, middle-class staff composition became even more concerning for me, a woman of colour, when I began working with my *Ismaili* client.

I remember comments, which can be taken in both productive and limiting ways, like, “well, you are brown like her so that is why she talked to you”, “only you would be comfortable going into their home and sitting on the floor to eat and talk”, and “you understand her/your religion so change her thinking”. Within such statements multiple layers of complexity arise including a lack of cultural sensitivity, generalization of belief systems, and the positioning of me as the token *Muslim* worker. I also start to wonder how being situated in Calgary Alberta plays into such demographics. As a child, I remember Calgary to be segregated by ethnic and/or cultural groups with a majority of immigrants residing in the North-East quadrant of the city. Accessibility to ethnic and cultural events, resources, and activities such as non-English movies, ethnic restaurants, and clothing shops was also limited, from my experience. However, now, in 2017, when I return to Calgary things have changed. We have a Mayor who is a person of colour, the city often wins cultural awards such as Cultural Capital of Canada (2012), various ethnic and cultural restaurants are easily accessible, clothing stores that tailor to the various ethnic communities in Calgary are visible, and service providers such as police officers, medical

doctors and nurses, and government officials represent the diversity of Calgary's demographics. However, as the comments my colleagues and supervisor made surface in my writing, I notice the pace of my spinning increasing as my hand writes faster, my toes tingle as though they are going numb, words jumble together as I attempt to form coherent sentences, and I start to critically think about how my position as a woman of colour within the human and social development field situated me within various in-between spaces and the impact ethnicity, culture, and geographical location had on these experiences.

Situating ethnicity and culture in my spinning

I was born with a "brown body" (Mucina, 2015) that willingly and unwillingly represented specific ethnic and cultural perspectives. In the classroom, it was evident that my ethnicity, the traits I was born with, varied from the others. I rarely, at the time, spoke about my ethnic origins from East India and East Africa, yet the complexity of such origins, which entangles religious beliefs and practices as a *Shia Ismaili Muslim*, have influenced various beliefs and values I enact daily. For example, in the narrative "In the Classroom", I start to articulate how my family's religious beliefs, values, and teachings that often stemmed from religious doctrines, such as service to others, underpinned my daily actions. As my spin quickens yet dampened by the restriction of being stuck in the node of religion and ethnicity, I start to understand how complex living in the in-between of social locations is. In this scenario, not only am I attempting to balance an East African origin that greatly influenced the rules in my family household and the expectations to live by particular ethics, I am also balancing the religious beliefs and values that guide my family's day-to-day practices that I often felt uncomfortable with and the values, beliefs, and practices I absorbed from living in the Canadian context such as actively participating in sports and dressing in a particular manner.

Further, through cultural norms, the practices rooted in the groups and communities I self-identified with at the time of these experiences, and the religious (and ethnic) community I was born into, I learned the values of reflection, relations, and collaboration. Mahoney (2003) speaks about a practitioner's need to engage in relational practices as understanding a client's "human bonds" (p. 44) as critical. In my family home and at *Jamat Khana*, I was constantly reminded to bond with others through a shared understanding that together we are stronger in both a worldly (*dunya* - materialistic) and spiritual (*din* - religious prayers) manner. I was also taught that my spiritual practices should be rooted in an *Islamic* viewpoint, which conflates religion and spirituality. Yet, when I left my family's home I started to explore and include Buddhist and Hindu practices into my daily routines. What I was unaware of was that in a way I had returned to a particular version of *Ismailism* in which Hindu and Mediterranean Muslim practices were adopted and amalgamated (personal communication, M. Moosa-Mitha, November 2017). Again, I struggle with the tensions of living in the in-between of spiritual and religious beliefs, values, and practices in a similar way to the experimenting and conflation of spiritual and religious practices that I was partaking in personally, and secretively as to not upset my family.

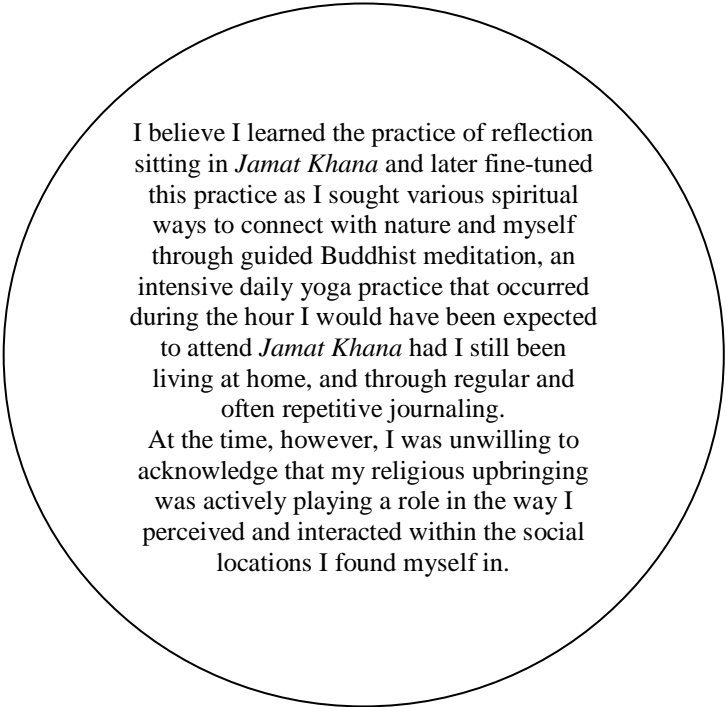
I recall an experience at *Jamat Khana*. For days, my family had been requesting that I join them in *Jamat Khana* as I had not gone in a few weeks. To create a sense of ease in our house, and to hold space in-between my own beliefs and practices and those my family raised me with, I agreed. My agreement was another balancing act of complying and resisting as I made my attendance conditional on the fact that I could sit just outside the main prayer hall in the foyer behind a glass wall that allowed me to hear and see the ceremonies yet be distanced from them. Throughout the ceremony, with a *tasbeeh* in hand, I recited a Buddhist mantra. In that moment, I was holding another in-between space of appearing deeply engaged in prayer - which in essence

I was - and practicing a connection to others and potentially an-other than human that felt right to me at that time. Through this reflection, I witness the multiple layers and vast conflation of practices, which draws me to Madsen's (2007) work. Madsen (2007) highlights the benefits of simultaneously utilizing multiple counseling modalities, primarily collaboration, in order to meet clients where they are at. For me, the struggle is two-fold. On one hand, I struggle to distinguish between the spiritual and religious at various times in my life, a struggle that is so deeply rooted and complex that I often do not recognize when I move from the spiritual to the religious and vice versa. In a sense, I wonder if my ability to live in the in-between and fluidly between the spiritual beliefs, values and practices and the religious beliefs, values and practices that I was taught, has allowed me to unconsciously negotiate a sense of belonging within and beyond the *Shia Ismaili Muslim* community. Alternatively, I begin to think about how in order to maintain best practice as a counseling practitioner, and in my personal quest to further understand my relationship to the *Ismaili* community, my experience "As a Young Practitioner" needs further exploration to highlight the amplified tensions of living in the in-between space of religion, spirituality, ethnicity that I sometimes found and continue to find myself within.

In, "As a Young Practitioner", my ethnicity, as a member of the *Shia Ismaili Muslim* religious group, roots my client's family's willingness to share insider information with me. They openly and without hesitation share information regarding the youth's nuclear and extended family members' participation in gangs, the active use of drugs, the trend of their children dropping out of high school, family financial struggles, and the reliance on their faith to overcome the challenges they face(d). In a similar way to how I assumed that my peers and I shared an academic cultural belief that gaining higher level education at any age is valuable, my client's family assumed I shared cultural, ethnic, and religious practices with them because I was

born into an *Ismaili* home, became *Ismaili* within weeks of being born, and because they regularly saw my family at *Jamat Khana*. The assumptions I made regarding my peers' academic beliefs and the assumptions my client's family generated greatly impacted therapeutic relationships, connections, and practice modalities utilized during counseling sessions.

For me, personally, because of my assumed belief that we as a cohort believed in higher education at any age, when I was questioned about my choice to come to grad school at the age of twenty-one, I was taken aback. I further started to doubt myself, and my academic choices, when my mock counselor implied that I was too young to be completing my Master's and that I should have taken the opportunity to travel the world with my friends. Perhaps a missing piece for my mock counselor was that as a family unit I could not afford to take time off and travel, that my options were to either work or continue studying with the support of student loans. There



I believe I learned the practice of reflection sitting in *Jamat Khana* and later fine-tuned this practice as I sought various spiritual ways to connect with nature and myself through guided Buddhist meditation, an intensive daily yoga practice that occurred during the hour I would have been expected to attend *Jamat Khana* had I still been living at home, and through regular and often repetitive journaling.

At the time, however, I was unwilling to acknowledge that my religious upbringing was actively playing a role in the way I perceived and interacted within the social locations I found myself in.

is a degree of privilege and access to resources that is associated with the suggestion of traveling that I did not meet. However, my assumptions regarding the value of higher education and the interaction I had with my mock counselor led to hours of reflection, deep and difficult questioning regarding what I knew to be true of my journey to the classroom and ultimately a slight but significant falter in my

sense of belonging within my cohort and my identity as academically capable. I asked myself

questions like: am I too young to be here? Perhaps, were my early years of struggling in school who I really am and have I in some way been faking my academic abilities over the past years? Can I do this? Am I smart enough to be in grad school? These questions triggered questions like: do all my classmates think this way and see me as incapable? Was my sense of being accepted by my peers, which gave me a sense of belonging, skewed? Did my somatic hermeneutics process fail me? And, do my professors share these sentiments? I spent days asking myself these questions while I actively avoided conversations with my peers and family in case they were to find out I was doubting myself and therefore give them reason to tell me they agreed with my doubt. It was months of living in the in-between of questioning my academic abilities while also trying to prove my academic abilities in the classroom during discussions and presentations, and in my written assignments. These questions and reflection triggered another side step. This time, I catch myself spinning in a parallel whirl as I recall my journey to an identity that connected academia and me.

Parallel Dance: Journey to an Academic Self

I realize that my feet have stopped moving, that my robe is slowing as it continues to twist around my body with the momentum of my previous rotations. I begin to ponder the idea of my academic identity, an identity that blossomed later in my young adulthood when my high school teacher handed me Quinn's (1992) novel, *Ishmael*. I recollect all the struggles I faced in school, the challenge I had reading the simplest of sentences, my ability to creatively skip my turn to read out loud in class through tactics like stating the font size on the overhead projector was too small, that I was beginning to lose my voice due to a cold, that I had a headache and reading was causing more pain, becoming disruptive to others and thus expected to sit quietly in my seat and miss my turn to participate in class, or when all else failed claiming that I urgently

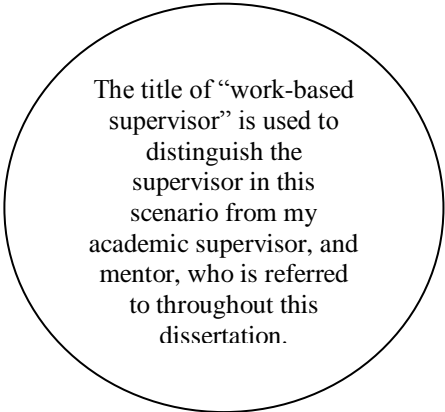
needed to use the bathroom. I knew when I was uncomfortable because my body would tense up, my imagination would run wild until it concocted the perfect reason to reside on the margins of what was going on, a place I found myself to be most content and comfortable. Further, I had created a pattern in my responses to situations that felt uncomfortable, the bathroom always my last resort as it contradicted my regular behaviour of rarely needing to use the bathroom, thus looking innocent in young eyes.

My spinning is now completely paused as I recall the shame I felt for not being able to read and comprehend like my peers or family members. This shame, something I would never tell my family about nor claim that reading was too hard, that I just couldn't do it even though I was trying my best, then turned into a narrative that claimed that there was no value in learning to read, that reading was not going to get me anywhere in life anyways. I hid my shame behind my creativity, my desire to engage in crafts, to play outside, and by being overly willing to help in the classroom, at my caregivers, and in our family home. I started to live in the in-between of the expectations that were set upon me as a student and the comfort I felt doing tasks other than academic based learning and began to create an identity as the teacher's helper, and the quiet but helpful child, which allowed me to feel a sense of belonging within the tasks I was engaged in versus the people I was expected to associate with. Now, I pause in critical reflection and ponder what triggered my initial desire to learn, to connect with my peers, and start to identify as academically capable before receiving Quinn's (1992) book that had me attending every class even when my peers were skipping, that motivated me to take notes in class regardless of how much I was comprehending, and striving for the best grades possible while knowing they would never match my family members' grades or expectations.

I learned about my trigger to learn and identify as academically successful while sitting in *Jamat Khana* following prayers and listening to a family member tell my friend about my childhood. I sat there listening to my family member openly, and I believe for the first time in front of me, share the struggles I had as a child, talking about my delayed development, late speech onset, limited reading abilities, and the lack of interest I had at school up until I started to play ringette. In my head, I return to the re-iterated narratives shared in the previous chapter and recognize that the struggles and challenges, the messiness and tensions I had danced through as an adolescent were all to prepare me for the later dances I would take part in. The whirling that occurred in my early years was to help me build a base for my sense of belonging and identity that was strong enough for me to find comfort while living on the periphery of many social locations. In my adolescence, I started to hone tactics such as listening to my body speak, understanding what it means when my toes tingle or when my fingers find a pen to fidget with that allowed me to recognize my discomfort. I learned to find a means to fluidly move from one social location to another such as escaping to the bathroom, and to navigate ways of finding a sense of comfort, identity and belonging within the discomfort I often found myself within. My feet now quicken and I begin shifting back to my temporarily paused dance.

Returning to the Wooden Dance Floor

My spin is no longer heavy nor sluggish; I spin vigorously now. Just as I had made



The title of “work-based supervisor” is used to distinguish the supervisor in this scenario from my academic supervisor, and mentor, who is referred to throughout this dissertation.

assumptions about my classmate’s beliefs relating to the academic values I held, I recognize that my client, her family, and my work-based supervisor had made assumptions regarding my religious, spiritual, cultural, and ethnic beliefs, values, practices, and orientation. My client

and her family, knowing that I was raised in an *Ismaili* home and that as an adolescent had regularly attended *Jamat Khana* with my parents assumed that I was still regular in my religious practice. They, following our first session and the disclosure of family information, invited me to stay with them to recite the *Du'a*. This being our first visit together, and me being unsure of the ethics in such a scenario, I decided to act in a manner that felt most respectful and stayed until we had finished reciting the evening prayers. Our second session a few days later was supposed to be a one-on-one with my client, however when I arrived at her home to pick her up her mother had greeted me at the door and mentioned that she prepared a meal for us to share. Growing up in my family home I learned that it was customary to feed guests who walked through the front door; I also knew this custom to be true for my client's family. I started to feel uncomfortable, my body started to twitch, the awkward smirk on my face began to appear, and my toes and fingers started to go cold. I could feel myself wanting to run out of the room, go for a long walk, feel the earth under my feet, and begin to ground myself. I also knew that the boundary between being a community youth worker and an *Ismaili* mentor and friend quickly blurred. My discomfort, now something I had become accustomed to and aware of, often indicated to me that I was going beyond the ethical framework in which I lived and provoked a cycle of reflection, examination of the situation, and a decision of how to move forward. I started to recognize the tensions I sat in; the situation complicated by religious association, assumed shared religious practices, gender expectations, and geographical locations. For my client's family, it was a common practice for women to stay together in the home, to cook together, to serve the men in the family their meals before sitting to share a meal together, and to attend and sit together as a group during prayers, which my client and her family warmly welcomed me to participate in. At the same time, being in a new geographical context, I now believe that my client and her family

were seeking a sense of belonging to the Calgary community and that I perhaps offered an entry into that sense of belonging being born and raised in Calgary and polishing the skills needed to navigate between the *Ismaili* community and the community at large.

However, following my unexpected session with my client's family and a reflective process, I requested that my next visit with my client be at a coffee shop walking distance away from her school. My intention was that I could meet my client directly after school hours and at the same time avoid having to greet and disrespectfully decline a meal with her family. At first, I thought my planned had worked. My client and I both meet at a local coffee shop, enjoyed a cup of hot chocolate, and engaged in conversations regarding beliefs around education, the trauma she faced at home, and her struggle to live under the expectations of her eldest brother. I felt like we were making progress and was excited to continue my working journey with this client. My excitement, unfortunately, just as quickly dissipated as my client and I sat in my car so I could drop her home. As we sat down, my client asked if we could pick up her mother and then go to *Jamat Khana* together. I struggled with what to do. On the one hand, I wanted to respect the religious beliefs and practices of my client and her family. In fact, I wanted to encourage positive community engagement. On the other hand, I had no desire to attend *Jamat Khana* as I was amid my own questioning and resisting of the faith. In the moment I needed to respond, in a way that maintained the therapeutic relationship we were building yet allowed me to maintain some power over my own religious and spiritual practices. For that one day, knowing in my head that I would then need to seek supervision, I opted to tell my client that I could drop her and her mother off at *Jamat Khana* but that I had another commitment I needed to attend to and therefore could not stay with them. The desire to attend *Jamat Khana* together continued for my client, a request that I believe now, after critically reflecting on the vastness of her search to belong

within the *Ismaili* community, was rooted in a sense of connection she felt to the therapeutic relationship we had built, to her belief that we shared the same religious practices because we “belonged” to the same religious community, and her belief that praying together brought us closer, increased our human bond. My client also likely did not know that my commitments and my lack of attendance was

because my religious

belief system was in

question, and thus I found

myself struggling as I sat

in tensions of living in the

in-between of social

locations. I wanted, badly,

for my client to access and

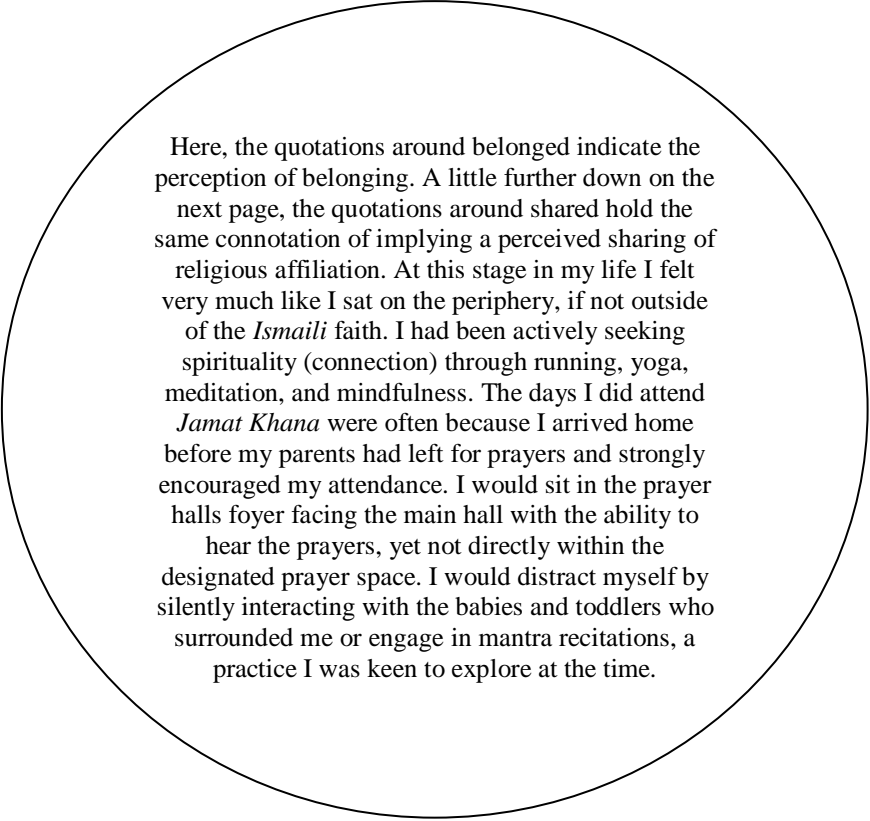
maintain a connection to

her and her family’s faith

and the community that gave them strength, hope, peace, and a sense of belonging, yet at the

same time I wanted to distance, resist, and position myself outside of the same faith and

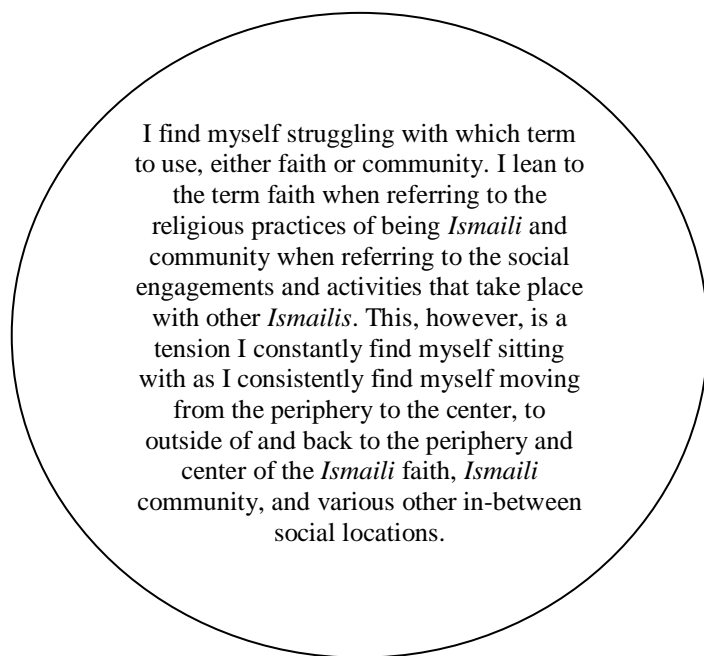
community.



Here, the quotations around belonged indicate the perception of belonging. A little further down on the next page, the quotations around shared hold the same connotation of implying a perceived sharing of religious affiliation. At this stage in my life I felt very much like I sat on the periphery, if not outside of the *Ismaili* faith. I had been actively seeking spirituality (connection) through running, yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. The days I did attend *Jamat Khana* were often because I arrived home before my parents had left for prayers and strongly encouraged my attendance. I would sit in the prayer halls foyer facing the main hall with the ability to hear the prayers, yet not directly within the designated prayer space. I would distract myself by silently interacting with the babies and toddlers who surrounded me or engage in mantra recitations, a practice I was keen to explore at the time.

The therapeutic relationship I attempted to maintain with my client was made more complex by the mis-tellings I was sharing in order to protect my desired location on the periphery of, and often outside of, the *Ismaili* faith. I worried about the potential repercussions of such an act and eventually turned to my work-based supervisor for support. However, my work-based supervisor’s understandings and expectations of my therapeutic relationship with my client

further complicated the situation. When I reached out to my work-based supervisor, it became evident that there were many assumptions being made as to why I was the best youth worker for



this client. The greatest assumption made paralleled the assumption my client and her family had made; there was a belief that our “shared” religious affiliation, cultural practices such as respecting - not necessarily participating in - the month of Ramadhan, living our daily lives through an “*Islamic* ethical lens” as it was described to me by my work-based supervisor, and sharing a language,

which Gillborn (1999) claims can represent one’s ethnicity, meant that I would understand this client best and thus support her best.

My mind races with questions as I critically reflect on the experience I had with my work-based supervisor. I am confused by the assumptions made, the belief that being from the same religious community means implicit understanding of one another and that only I can engage with this client regardless of the tensions it is raising for me as a practitioner, as a person. I wonder if I could relate best to this client because of our “shared” religion and ethnicity, then how would I, or am I expected to work effectively with clients who differ in religious affiliation to me? Because of the belief that our shared religion makes me a good fit, are the ethical boundaries of my practice altered? At what point does my own discomfort practicing as an *Ismaili* impact our therapeutic relationship? What happens if and when this client learns that I

have not been forthcoming in regards to my beliefs? And, I am curious about how our geographical location, how being situated in a pluralistic community that predominately had white middle-class female practitioners, and my client's particular expectations and desires within the therapeutic relationship played a role in the beliefs of my supervisor.

The questions continue to flood my mind and my feet take the burden. They begin to slow down as I begin to acknowledge that my attempt to find a sense of belonging outside of the *Ismaili* community differed from my client's attempt to belong within the *Ismaili* community. Similarly, at school I attempted, at first, to situate myself outside of the counseling field, whereas my mock counselor held strong to her insider position as a counselor. Further, I recognize that I have found ways to move from the edges of nodes of intersect to the centres, from the centres to the edges, and the ability to resist and/or comply to my geographical and cultural contexts in order to practice within the ethics I follow while engaging in professional practice as a counselor. Understanding how geography plays a role in my movement is critical and a node of intersect that has remained in-between the lines thus far. However, as I shift my whirling to a more fragmented, almost like a dance of pivots to grapple with the struggles I faced during these two crucial experiences that I strongly attempted to situate myself outside of the religious and classroom space and those shared in previous chapters, I begin to critically reflect on the consistent and sub-conscious space I resided in along the periphery, entering at moments of convenience, habit, desire, and expectation while also allowing myself the space to exit when the discomfort and unease was too great. This ability to move within, in-between, and beyond social locations is a skill that grew from the various tensions I encountered throughout my life, a critical skill that has allowed me to live in the in-between with some ease and comfort and foregrounds the basis of my next chapter.

Chapter 7

Seeking Understanding in Stillness

I have been dancing. My once two left feet and hips that did not move found comfort on the stage. As I whirled in anticipation of surfacing the tensions of living in the in-between of social spaces from the nodes of religion and spirituality, geographical location, ethnicity and culture, and gender, I struggled to grapple with the conflation of religion and spirituality as so many others including Gollnick (2008), Coles (1990), and Hay and Nye (1999) also have. I found myself leaning towards the node of culture more than ethnicity as I attempted to make sense of my girlhood experiences while attending *Bait-ul-Ilm* and *Jamat Khana*, playing ringette, and residing in East Africa. I quickly sought solace in the fact that the risks I was exposed to, such as racism at ringette, and risks I took up, such as walking to and from work in Dar es Salaam, ranged in degree and potential harm based on my geographical location.

After years of whirling, my dance has taken on a new form, perhaps a new degree in my third-wave dervish training to understand the social spaces I reside within and in-between in a new way. I envision my spins slowing, each spin a little heavier with new understandings and the realization that I navigated, moved, and embraced moments in the in-between that I had not yet acknowledged, critically reflected upon, and articulated. As my spins came to a stop, I saw one of my *effendi's* walk onto the stage generously holding out the black cloak I removed at the beginning of my dance. I found my way to a seated position, legs crossed, hands clasped and resting on my shins. There was comfort in my feet as the pressure from the dance was released; the new understandings that provoked immense reflection, internal debate, and questions to guide my professional practice with children, youth, and families had found its space in my core, which is grounded by my sit-bones, thighs, and shins. My *effendi* helped me retain the heat -

motivation - generated during my dance by placing my black cloak on my shoulders. However, as he released the cloak from his hands, I immediately noticed the weight of the cloak, heavier than I remembered it to be. The weight encouraged me to find physical stillness; the articles, chapters, and books weighing down the cloak had been provided by various *effendi's* including my supervisor, committee members, peers, scholars I have crossed paths with as I whirled, and those articles, chapters, and books I sought out as I spun and grappled with my new understandings. Many of these documents make appearances in the three previous chapters (Chapter 4-6) including the work of Hill (2017), Ramji (2007), Markula and Pringle (2006), Dagkas and Hunter (2015), and Rojas (2009).

Now, as I continue to critically reflect and uncover the tensions I grappled with, those that surface while living in the in-between of various social spaces, I sit in stillness. Stillness draws my attentions away from the initial nodes of intersect I was interested in. The way in which I situated my research, and myself, allowed me to uncover a feminine identity of my choosing, a feminism I was unaware of yet embodied and enacted throughout my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. From my seated location, my perspective is also altered. In my lowered body positioning, I feel slightly removed from my own narratives that have been shared, critically reflected upon, and re-iterated. It is now time to iterate the major constructs that surfaced during my analysis. To do this, I begin with an exploration of religion, culture, gender, and geographical location. As I work through these nodes of intersect and articulate the learnings that come from each node, I also include practical implications for human and social development professions, whom I refer to as practitioners. As in the previous chapters, narratives of my experiences are drawn on to highlight moments of tension, of risk, of the ability to move from one location to another, and to provide examples of how practitioners may use the learnings

from this research project. These practical implications are written in a mimicking fashion to the parallel dances in the previous chapters, with the headings placed on the right-hand side of the page.

Tensions within the Nodes

I am reminded by Paul, Raibmon, and Johnson (2014) to continue to read each narrative with the intention to learn something new. Thus, as I do this while sitting at center stage, I start to question if I struggled with the religious components of *Bait-ul-Ilm* or the culture of learning something that I was expected to learn. At Brownies, was I grappling with the entanglement of religious and cultural practices in a setting I assumed would be different or gender expectations? While re-iterating my ringette experiences, the tensions of belonging, rejection, and religion surface, but was I really attempting to display who I desired and believed myself to be, my identity? Then, in Dar es Salaam, was I working through gender limitations due to the geographical location I was situated in or the fact that I was actively returning to a religious community I resisted for years? And, as I iterated, reflected upon, and re-iterated my experiences with spirituality in the classroom setting and as a young professional, was I truly grappling with spirituality or with my religious affiliation and my new acknowledgement as a racialized and marginalized person?

In fact, throughout each experience, subconsciously and consciously, I was attempting to grapple with and navigate each of these multi-layered, complex, and entangled constructs. I was at almost all times holding space for the religious, cultural, gendered, and geographical location nodes of intersect while attempting to find or create space that I could live within. This space, what I refer to as liveable space, was often on the periphery of social spaces, in what I consider to be border territories. I am drawn to the language of liveable space(s) as it implies that I can

occupy and reside in the created space, yet, this space is not neutral. Liveable spaces are spaces of great tension, complexity, requiring elegant and intentional negotiation, and at moments are peaceful, welcoming, accommodating, and stable. For instance, creating a liveable space in Dar es Salaam, allowed me to move my body, be active outdoors, and hold onto a sense of independence. Alternatively, while in this liveable space, I also participated in various risky acts such as walking to and from work and *Jamat Khana*, which was highly negotiated.

I recognize that I am drawn to feminist geography in a way and begin to see another layer of my unknown feminism surface. According to Jackson (2016), feminist geography “understands territory as personal and relational, starting from the body, through which we experience, perform and interpret territoriality” (p.293). Border territories, on the other hand, as a slight alteration of borderlands, a term used by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), describes the spaces between “politicised spaces such as the city space, the nation” (Smith, Swanson & Gökarikel, 2015, p.258) that represents the gaps amongst the defined social spaces. For example, as highlighted in my iteration of my experiences as young professional within the *Ismaili* community, I often found myself in the border territories of religious spaces, close enough to know about, understand, and engage in religious practices, yet far enough beyond the religious boundary to also disengage, resist, and remove myself from the *Ismaili* community. Another example that surfaces throughout my experiences resides within the gender border territories. I often navigated not wanting to be a girl but being okay with being a girl, wanting to be a girl but not too girly, wanting to be seen differently than the other girls but not as a boy, and not wanting to be a girl but also not wanting to be a boy. It was within the border territories that I found a degree of comfort to be situated within, to be removed from dominant discourses and labels, to

have control over the territory I was situated in (Storey, 2001), and be the person I most desired to be.

I also found that it is in the border territories that my desired self as someone who engages with social spaces in a somatic manner could reside. For instance, while at *Jamat Khana*, I was expected to sit quietly and still throughout prayers. However, on days such as the one when I sat behind the glass wall in the foyer of *Jamat Khana* surrounded by moving children and their families, I found a border territory that allowed me to recite a mantra, sway to a different beat than the communal prayers, and shift my body without disrupting others. On other occasions, such as during *Bait-ul-Ilm* and Brownies, my somatic sensations of needing to use the bathroom, experiencing micro-movements like the twitching of my feet, and my respectful demeanor, often allowed me to be invisible. This invisibility, which was rooted in a sense of modesty and understood through a somatic hermeneutics process, allowed me to remain in the border territories as I struggled to belong while also innately knowing I did not fit in and that the practices of our faith did not make sense to me. Within the border territories, I relied on my *awkward body* to make sense of what was happening. My awkward body is not only brown, and thus racialized and minoritized, it also articulates experiences somatically through twitching, sweating, stomach turning, and acts as a tool of resistances, as well as identifies when and what social spaces I am willing to enter into. In essence, I rely on my somatic self to mark boundaries and create clear borders between pre-established social locations and liveable spaces. I also acknowledge Paur's (2007 in Smith, Swanson and Gökariksal, 2015) work which claims that racialized bodies become part of scholarship, while attempting to "build neighbourhoods" and border territories where the embodied experiences of racialized and gendered bodies often reside to gain communal strength and power. Smith, Swanson and Gökariksal (2015) continue to share

how racialized bodies – those that become “othered” – are often focal points in research because they are different and unknown. As I read their thoughts, I begin to wonder if my own research will be of interest to others because I consider myself an other in many ways, have voiced the differences I have sensed, experienced, and reflected upon, as well as acknowledged that this research contributes to the body of scholarship on racialized bodies.

I am drawn back to when I initially sat down, had the cloak placed on my shoulders, and succumbed to the concepts that surfaced as I critically reflected upon, and re-iterated my experiences. I realize that the in-between spaces of social locations I encountered were greatly implicated by religion, culture, gender, and geographical location. What I was not expecting to surface was the degree and weight gender takes on and how strongly gender is implicated by culture. It is here, in the node of gender and culture, that I find myself seated, twitching in excitement and sweating with wonder.

Contemplating my gendered body

Sitting allows me to think about my awkward body, one that sweats as I protect myself from unsafe and uncomfortable social locations. Ahmed (2017) uses the term “sweaty concept[s]” to describe the process of pulling away or out of shattering experiences, as well as the “descriptions of a body that is not at home in the world” (p.13). While I use the term somatic, Ahmed (2017) speaks about sensations and notes, “if a sensation is how a body is in contact with a world, then something becomes sensational when contact becomes even more intense” (p.22). She also notes that feminist work, which I initially struggled to language my work as, because it did not feel like my academic home, “is often memory work” and “begins with a body, a body in touch with a world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around” (Ahmed, 2017, p.22). My body, especially as a young child, often felt uneasy in the world. The

desire to dress as I knew the boys and men to dress in my family and community, the clothing of jeans, sweatpants, t-shirts, and sweaters versus dresses, skirts, and blouses is only one example.

Thinking about how I performed, how I wanted to dress, and how I behaved as a child, I turn to critical transgendered research to understand gender-variance and the now widely visible allowance of children to “stray from the expectations of their assigned sex – from the clothes, toys, and play groups they prefer to their repeated articulations about their sense of self (e.g., “I’m your son, not your daughter!”)” (brackets in original, Rahilly, 2015, p.339). Discussions of gender variance attempts to dismantle ‘gender binaries’, which according the Rahilly (2015) are the “dominant cultural presumptions about sex and gender: namely, that there is an expected “congruent” relationship between one’s sexed body and their gender identity and expression” (p. 341). Reading the work of Rahilly (2015), I began to question if I, at a young age, was stepping beyond the expected norms, the gender binaries, that my family found comfort in. I thought about how I grew up in a family home that rarely spoke about gender roles yet actively performed gender roles such as the snow-shoveling and lawn-mowing examples offered earlier. Our family home was different than that described by Rahilly (2015) who speaks about an ideological aspect of second-wave feminism in which people resisted male and female dominate stereotypes and initiated language and practices of ‘gender-neutrality’. In a moment of concern that provoked me to grapple with my own perspectives, and resistance, and if I perhaps had limited and reduced my gender variance due to socially constructed norms within my family and the communities I often participated in, I turned to Krylova’s (2016) work on gender binaries and the limitations of poststructuralist methods. As I read and began to understand the progression of research that explores how gender categories became “binary-reproducing category[s]” (Krylova, 2016, p. 309), I recognize that I, a cis-gendered heterosexual female, sit on the periphery of

gender binary research as the discourse of gender binaries has not taken into considerations people who have broken or stepped outside of binary norms, according to Krylova (2016). What does become critical, however, is the ways in which I took up being a female while also residing within the confines of the binary systems that has a long historical rooting.

Gender, or the acquisition of feminine tendencies as Ahmed (2017) languages it, restricted the ways in which I interacted with the world. For instance, I recall my initial experience at Brownies sitting at a desk completing worksheets compared to my desired interaction with Girl Guides that mimicked the Boy Scouts running around a gymnasium. Similar to Ahmed's (2017) sentiments, I began "to experience gender as a restriction of possibilities, and [I] learn[ed] about worlds as [I] navigate these restrictions" (p.7). For me, navigation was innate, and rooted in a pulling away from the center of social locations and experiences, finding my space in the border territories to diligently watch what was occurring in the center. I would then acknowledge and act upon my somatic responses, the sensations I had, and respond accordingly. Many of my initial responses were acts of resistance.

hooks (1995) speaks to "experience[s] of resistance" (p.52) as a way to find strength to overcome, and live in the pain of racialization (which I speak to later in this chapter) and victimization. What I take from hooks (1995), as I critically reflect on my experiences as a young girl who often resisted, is that I must refrain from labeling myself as "just" a girl, which is not boy (Butler, 1990), so as to not deny myself agency. I draw from and live, although unknowingly initially, the work of third-wave feminists, who differ from second-wave feminists, and claim that girls are strong and have a distinct feminist identity (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004). However, as I contemplate Baumgardner and Richards' (2004) writing, I find myself returning to a statement Ahmed (2017) makes. Ahmed (2017) states, "To live a feminist life is to make

everything into something that is questionable” (p.2) and that living a feminist life “might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world” (p.1). So then, I question the context of Baumgardner and Richards (2004) note that younger women who “grew up in a feminist – influenced time” (p.63) such as myself, “take certain freedoms for granted” (p.63) such as choosing to have children, playing sports, and obtaining previously male dominant institutional careers. Based on my re-iterated narratives, I would agree that I grew up in a time when feminist movements were taking place, yet I lived in a context where I was not introduced to feminism. However, as I worked to make sense of my world, a world I did not feel comfortable within because of the complexities I held with my gender expectations, I became a willful girl.

According to Ahmed (2014, 2017), willfulness is a style of politics in which a person is not willing to go with the flow and occurs in ordinary places such as where one lives and works. As I re-read, I begin to realize what I initially understand as an act of resistance, the immediate dismissal of or push-back to what was occurring around me and expected of me, to a sense of willfulness that is rooted in my innate and somatic responses that protected me as well as helped guide my perspectives, behaviours, and connection to others in times that I felt uncomfortable and unsafe within. My own willfulness, what I have until now claimed as resistance, started at a young age. I willfully attended *Bait-ul-Ilm*, *Jamat Khana*, and Brownies in a manner that respected the gendered and cultural expectations placed on me such as the clothing I was to wear, the side of the *Jamat Khana* I was to sit on, and the activities like Bollywood dancing I was to participate in. However, I never fully engaged or enacted the expectations placed on me. At *Jamat Khana* and Brownies I often wore my shorts under my outfits so I could still run around without concern of my skirt or dress flipping up, I would doodle on worksheets at *Bait-*

ul-Ilm and Brownies and the carpet at *Jamat Khana* versus completing the assigned activities or listening to and participating in the communal prayers being recited. I sit wondering, if I was a boy who felt out of place, as though I did not fit or was not at home, how would I have responded to similar situations or the experiences I had in Dar es Salaam with community elders, wanting to commute to and from work and *Jamat Khana* via foot, or as an ambitious student during my Master's degree.

In order to live willfully, to develop “strategies that draw attention to one’s plight in such a way that will merit regard and consideration without reinscribing a paradigm of victimization” (hooks, 1995, p.58), and to find space in the border territories, in the in-between spaces of social locations, I often relied, and continue to rely, on my body’s somatic responses. However, these responses, what Ahmed (2017) describes as sweaty concepts, were not seen as good girl behaviours. The twitching of my legs, the sweating of my pores, and the constant movement of my doodling hands were minor, micro in fact, movements that only those directly around me were witness to, yet, those around me were often the closest to me and had the greatest impact on me. Thus, they often attempted to minimize my somatic responses, responses that were distracting to others and seen as a bad girl behaviours, without recognizing what was provoking such behaviours.

Practice Implication #1: Understanding Child and Youth Responses

Sitting still, as though I have found my home, reminds me that it is my responsibility as a practitioner to sit in the unknown, to share the discomfort my clients may be experiencing, and to become vigilant and aware of my clients’ somatic responses, their sensations. In order to do this, it is my belief that as practitioners we need to become aware of our own experiences, to understand when and why we may have felt like we were on the periphery, living in the in-

between or the center of social locations. Further, it is critical to become aware of our own somatic responses to our contexts and understand how our experiences and responses impact our interactions with our clients. For example, when working with the *Ismaili* youth I introduced earlier, had I not paid attention to my body's messaging that I was entering into a situation of extreme personal discomfort, which transfers to professional practices, I may have attended *Jamat Khana* with my client and her family. By doing so many ethical boundaries would have been blurred and/or crossed including confidentiality, working outside of work hours, and the blurring of professional and friendship relationships.

On the other hand, and bringing myself back to the concept of being vigilant to the somatic responses of our clients, I wonder if my experiences at *Bait-ul-Ilm*, *Jamat Khana*, and Brownies would have been more positive and fulfilling if someone recognized my micro-movements, understood or took the time to explore the sensations I had in my body, and helped create a more physically stimulating environment for me to learn in. I question this because of my ringette experiences in which I came to learn how my confidence, sense of belonging, my identity, and my engagement at school all increased once I was able to use my body in a productive and powerful manner. Thus, I believe as practitioners that it is our responsibility to become aware of the non-verbal somatic language our clients are sharing, to pick up on micro-movements that speak to discomforts and unease as well as those somatic responses that share comfort and ease. By being able to read our client's somatic responses we will be able to engage in varying degrees of conversation, to support in the finding and making of liveable spaces, and to help our clients navigate living in border territories. I think it is important to pause here, find calmness in my body that has started to twitch with excitement just as it did as I stepped onto the ice, as I recognize that my desire to continuously be aware of my clients' somatic responses as

well as create a conducive space for them is rooted in the compassionate, flexible, and encouraging family context I grew up in. I often, as a child, adolescent, and now a young adult, have leaned on the support my family provided me with as well as the lessons I learned from my family that I know now translates to my practice. This family support, has been critical in many ways as explored below.

Living in a supportive family

According to Butler (1990), women, and girls, are a paradox and “are designated as the Other” and “are the negative of men” (p.13). Butler (1990) draws on the work of Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir, and states that “the female sex becomes restricted to its body” (p.16). Alternatively, the male body is disavowed and has the ability to be used as an “instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom” (Butler, 1990, p.16). Further, and more recently, Mayfield (2015) discusses normalized gender roles within secondary classrooms, the time I began playing ringette on an older girls’ team, and suggests that media’s portrayal of marginality is about what girls lack in regards to status, wealth, and sexual appeal. The challenge I now am aware of, because of the reiterations of my narratives, is that in the moments of distinguished hierarchies such as at ringette when our coaches turned to the faster, prettier, white, and more popular players, was that I was not consciously understanding and responding to the situation but was focused on understanding and easing the somatic responses I endured. In order to ease my somatic responses, I sought space on the periphery, in the border territories.

I apply Mayfield’s (2015) concept of marginality for many adolescent girls based on their brown bodies, bodies that were seen to be poor, who are believed to not meet social, emotional, and economic expectations to my own experiences at ringette. I know my skin colour and age played a role in the ways my teammates treated me, yet at the time I was not able to articulate the

racialization and “minoritization” (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011) that I was experiencing. Further, I grew up in a family environment that allowed me to find ways to express myself, act out the in-between spaces I was learning to navigate, and had an environment that made it safe for me to live in the border territories, which mimicked the corner of the dressing room I would find refuge in before and after ringette practices and games. As I think about my family environment many memories surface in regards to my self-expression. While there were specific celebrations in which I was required to dress a particular way, my family rarely, if ever, restricted me from wearing my “tom boy” clothing at home. I was always supported in my desire to wear my maroon coloured Mickey Mouse hat to and from school, Brownies, tutoring, *Bait-ul-Ilm*, while running errands with my family, or visiting family and friends’ houses. I even recall family members telling others to let me be, to let me wear my hat if it makes me happy, when they were asked about why I always wore it. Later, it was my family’s willingness and flexibility to step into the unknown and support my dreams and goals of playing ringette, soccer, field hockey, snowboarding, marathon running, and any other sport I wanted to pursue. In fact, as highlighted in Chapter 6, it was the attentiveness of my family members, the realization that when I started playing ringette (and other sports) that I was calmer, more engaged and willing to learn at school, and that my self-esteem, confidence, sense of belonging, and identity began to positively form and grow. Witnessing me become the person I desired to be was only one step of the dance, however.

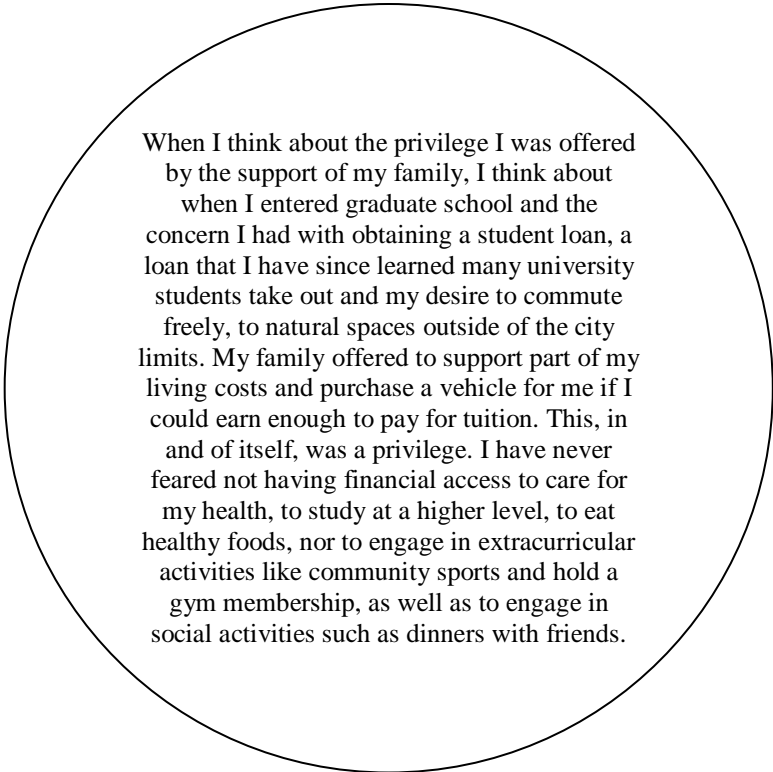
My family was supportive and encouraged me to work through my feelings at ringette even when they did not know what they were. I was allowed to do the things that made me feel good and helped me prepare for ringette games like listening to dark depressing music on the way to the arena. We, as a family unit, would negotiate attendance and participation in *Jamat*

Khana, *Bait-ul-Ilm*, other *Ismaili* oriented events, and family events so that I would be able to play ringette. As I write this, I remember missing a part of my first-cousin's wedding to participate in a ringette tournament, showing up at the reception hall just as family members and friends were leaving and in time to help with the manual labour of cleaning up. Other examples include the many days that I would go to *Jamat Khana* half dressed in my ringette gear with a family member. Once at *Jamat Khana*, we would quickly partake in our personal prayers and then immediately leave for the arena prior to the commencement of communal prayers. Some days my family would drop me off at the arena a little early, go to *Jamat Khana*, and then come pick me up. On one rare occasion, I had an extended family member drop me off at the arena while my family attended *Jamat Khana*. I remember being upset that my family did not come to my game as I believed that game was an extremely important one. Part way through this particular game I glanced over at the crowd from my goalie net in hopes of seeing my family, yet preparing myself for the likelihood that they would not be there. As I glanced over and caught sight of my parents sitting in their saree and suit beside the other parents bundled up in their winter jackets, I felt a sense of ease, joy, pride and fulfilment fill my body. The negotiations my family and I endured were constant and taught me, directly and indirectly, that living in the in-between, living as an immigrant, a minority, requires constant negotiation and flexibility.

Practical Implication #2: Engaging in Conversation

As I think about my experiences, it is hard to claim that I negotiated and moved between social locations on my own. During our dance performance in Brownies, a family member was beside me as I walked through the main doors, stayed with me in the dressing room, and walked with me to and from the side of the stage. My family actively participated in my ringette journey from allowing me, and thus often themselves, to miss *Jamat Khana*, as well as playing key roles

like team manager. It was the emotional and financial support of my family that also allowed me



When I think about the privilege I was offered by the support of my family, I think about when I entered graduate school and the concern I had with obtaining a student loan, a loan that I have since learned many university students take out and my desire to commute freely, to natural spaces outside of the city limits. My family offered to support part of my living costs and purchase a vehicle for me if I could earn enough to pay for tuition. This, in and of itself, was a privilege. I have never feared not having financial access to care for my health, to study at a higher level, to eat healthy foods, nor to engage in extracurricular activities like community sports and hold a gym membership, as well as to engage in social activities such as dinners with friends.

to enter into my Master's degree at a fairly young age, as well as my family's resources that entitled me to own a vehicle which allowed me to hold jobs such as being a community youth worker. Even more recently, my family's encouragement and willingness to live thousands of kilometers away from one another and to trust that I can physically,

emotionally, mentally, socially, and spirituality care for myself, which has allowed me to travel to volunteer and work globally. And, while this has been my experience, as well as something I wish for every first-generation *Ismaili* (immigrant) girl, it is also something I do not believe can be pushed onto my clients and their families.

However, I do believe as practitioners, that we can support our clients and their families in having difficult, sometimes risky, conversations that may lead to negotiations of in-between spaces. Johnson and Ginsberg's (2015) edited text discusses various topics that may be considered difficult to have with girls, that a practitioner may pull from when conversing with a client. For example, a chapter by Edell (2015) talks about voice diaries, as a method, which also offered girls the opportunity to hear themselves. Using such a process, one that captures a girl's voice that:

Her joy floods into and out of her new devices as she learns to control and own what she speaks about. Her enthusiasm flows as she moves through a cycle of speaking, pausing, rewinding, playing back, and listening. She is not just thinking thoughts. She is not just speaking aloud. She is exploring how the words that she chooses and the efforts of her voice chamber can be heard. (Edell, 2015, p.55)

As a girl learns about the strength and power in her voice, finds ways to language her thoughts, experiences, and desires, her voice is then capable of engaging in difficult conversations. The process also requires practitioners to work with family members, including the client, to learn how to listen. Here I return to Paul's teachings about listening and taking guidance from her sharing of "remain[ing] receptive to new meanings and lessons regardless of how many times [one has] heard a story before" (Paul, Raibmon & Johnson, 2014, p.5). I draw on Paul's teachings as a reminder that clients, and their families, may need to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives multiple times over before deeper meanings are heard. Without the opportunity to share and hear multiple times over, negotiation becomes challenging as the negotiation is not at the root of the concern.

For me, I believe I would have had a louder, more obvious, voice if those closest to me, my family members and teachers, for example, would have recognized and inquired about my micro-movements. However, there were also times, especially as I entered the family car after ringette, when I would be asked about my quiet demeanor that was opposite of my previously chatty personality that appeared during my first year playing ringette after an exciting and positive game. My somatic responses were apparent to my family members, yet I did not know how, nor wanted to, express the experiences I had in the dressing room. I was concerned about the comfort, rather discomfort, my family would feel when they heard about my experiences. I

worried that their potential anger towards my teammates and coaches would prevent me from playing, and that as a family we would give into the injustices I, and by extension my family, experienced. This insight draws me to various challenges a client may face while attempting to find their voice.

One challenge is the “lack of critical language to capture experiences” (de Finney, Loiselle & Dean, 2011, p.88), which often falls in the unknown spaces of border territories. A youth in de Finney, Loiselle, and Dean’s (2011) research expresses the challenges of languaging experiences in the border territories of gender binaries by stating, “Well, I kind of knew early on I didn’t really identify as a girly-girl, I guess not a boy but not a girl, like somewhere in between I guess, it’s hard to describe” (p.88). hooks (1989) highlights this same challenge by noting that “Language is also a place of struggle” (p.16). Another challenge is wanting to resist and restrict what one voices in an attempt to protect others, such as my attempt to hide my family from my victimizing experiences at ringette. Further, if I was to voice my experience, I feared the consequences I would face in the dressing room, a protected space for the majority and unprotected for the minoritized. Therefore, creating space, as practitioners, to disrupt dominant discourses such as gender binaries, to acknowledge that there is not a particular age when a person begins to negotiate the in-between of social spaces, and to recognize the innate wisdom of young children (a concept I return to in the pages ahead) that informs a clients’ sense of belonging and identity is critical.

So, while I strongly encourage practitioners to create opportunities for clients to find their voices, I also caution practitioners to think about the context their clients’ voices are being used in and how and where they are being heard. To continue to draw on my ringette experience, I resisted using my voice within my family context. However, I believe I would have felt more

confident, more sure of my voice, if I had an external person, such as a practitioner of colour, to converse with. I intentionally state a practitioner of colour as the assumed shared experiences, that are discussed by scholars such as hooks and Ahmed, likely offer a greater degree of sharing. In addition, when possible, a practitioner may create a communal setting, groups, for clients to come together and share their experiences. For instance, had a practitioner brought the few other brown body ringette players and myself together, we would have likely been able to share our narratives, with the little language we had, and gained strength in knowing we were not alone. In this sense, I believe it is critical for practitioners, who may or may not share experiences with their clients, to act as liaisons with client allies.

My thoughts are interrupted. I recognize, as a practitioner, that it is critical for me to help my client(s) find their voice, to support families in hearing one another's voices, and to create spaces for allies-ship, yet, I am interrupted by the thoughts and considerations of safety. My legs now tingling as they awaken from numbness, I shift slightly in my seated position placing my right shin on my left, opposite of what it has been and continue my reflection on safety.

Thinking safety

My awkward body often indicates when I feel unsafe in a situation. The somatic responses I experience encourage me to resist and/or adapt to environments such as when I resisted engaging in a particular research method in East Africa and adapted to the local context to engage in a manner that felt respectful and ethical to me. In my family's home, safety was also negotiated, especially as I moved through my adolescence and young adulthood. The degree and depth of the various conversations we had in our family home shifted as I aged, which tended to broaden our dialogue. For instance, as a child when I asked why I had to say my *Du'a* or perform particular religious ceremonies, the response was usually 'because we are *Ismaili* and this is what

we do', or 'because we have been guided by *Hazar Imam* (His Highness the Aga Khan) to do so'. More recently, when I ask similar questions, my family is more likely to give me the historical accounts of why, share personal anecdotes, and offer space for me to ask further questions. A component of this shift is likely due to my age and ability to grapple with, make meaning of, and interact in a mature manner with the conversations and knowledge being shared. Another component is that I have established and voiced my perspective and location in the border territories and accepted my family members' locations. Through this process, a challenging and difficult negotiation of what to share, how to say it, how to live it, and allowing space for my family to think and live in ways that make sense and meaning for them, our family has created a respectful and safe space for each of us to reside within.

Making safe spaces is not as easily done as noted above or below, though. Scholars such as Weekes (2003) discuss the challenges of one-dimensional communities when groups of people are categorized in wider communities that go beyond the "physical or geographical boundaries of people and place" (p. 48) such as the black community. Here, Weekes (2003) shed light on "young women discussing how their identities are forming come to experience a sense of communal breakdown should their definitions of what it means to be young and black be disrupted" (p. 48). Similarly, Singh and Burnes (2009) discuss the creation of developmentally appropriate spaces for transgender youth to seek support from school counselors as well as within their school setting. Additionally, Cook and Malloy (2014) talk about the safety of clients walking into counselling sessions as well as the safety created for counsellors, who, as they note, "spend more time in their offices than clients do" (p. 437) and thus counselling spaces "actually impact the counselor more than the client" (p. 437). What I gather from Weekes (2003), Singh and Burnes (2009), and Cook and Malloy (2014), and translate into my own experience in my

family home as well as my practice, is that safety is often perceived, is built on trust, on the ability to make “issues almost nonexistent” (Singh & Burnes, 2009), and the creation of space that is affirmative, respectful, non-judgmental, culturally accepting with culturally competent care providers, and allows for multi-dimensional communities that allow people to display and perform their sense of belonging and identity in ways that are meaningful for them. Yet, I am reminded of the complexity of safety, the perception of safety, and how easily safety can be manipulated, abused, or used in the form of control by Crispin (2017). Crispin (2017) claims that “Safety is about control” (p. 130) and that “In order to feel safe, things have to be made predictable” (p. 130-131). Further, Crispin (2017) notes that safety is a surface level concept that is reliant on outward behaviours, that safety is unsustainable and short-term because of the ever-changing contexts people reside within and move between, and that one can feel safe while not actually being safe. An example Crispin (2017) offers that stands out to me is when she speaks about “the city that brags about how safe and clean its streets are, and meanwhile the jails are filled with the homeless and the poor and the mentally ill, and littering gets you publicly whipped” (p. 131). I translate the works of Crispin (2017) to practice as I think about the fictional spaces counselling environments offer to clients, how our work as practitioners needs to be sincere and extend beyond our offices and moved into the various communities our clients reside within, and how we can help families create spaces, deeper than the surface, for children, youth, and young adults to explore their identities and sense of belonging within various contexts.

I notice my back straightening in a similar manner to a child trying to reach for a cookie on the table top, I am reaching for my pen to articulate my deeper felt sense of safety as a child. As a child, my family created a space for me to try new things, risk disappointment, and to feel

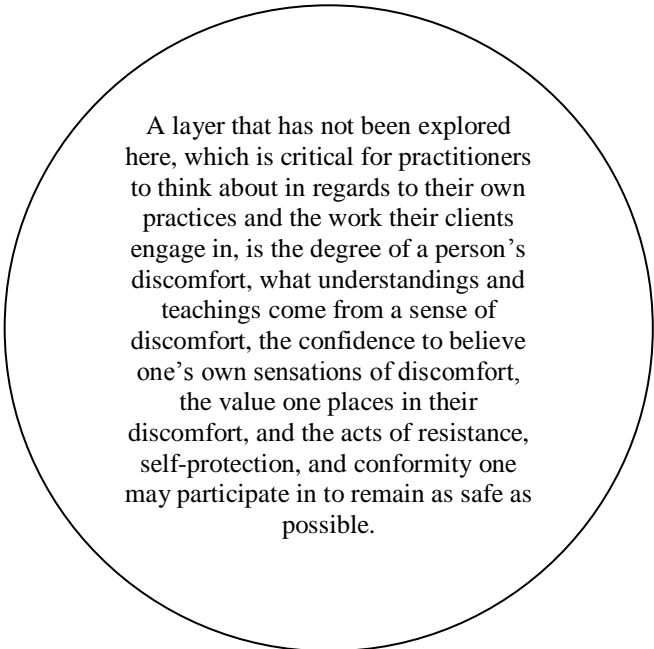
as though I had a voice. I was never overtly restricted by my family due to my gender, religion, culture, or geographical location. My family also never restricted me or limited me based on my academic achievements. If I wanted to learn to ride a bicycle, they offered me the resources necessary and within our family's means and encourage me to go outside and ride one. I always knew that I needed to behave and dress in a particular manner at specific events but at home I could be the person I wanted to be. When I was frustrated, angry, sad, happy, hyper-active, and so forth, they weathered my emotions with me. More importantly, my family never introduced the idea that I, a brown bodied girl, was less than anyone else or incapable of doing particular things because of my religion, culture, gender, or geographical location. In a similar fashion to Ahmed's (2017) experience, my family "taught me that my mind is my own (which is to say that my mind is not owned); they taught me to speak up for myself" (brackets in original, p. 4-5).

Practical Implication #3: Creating Safety

While my family created safety for me to be who I desired to be, I often faced situations which were not safe, such as playing ringette with the older girls and while working in Dar es Salaam. A component of the challenge I faced was that I was not sure why certain social spaces felt unsafe. I relied on my innate wisdom, the somatic responses and sensations I experienced, to inform my sense of safety. For instance, when my feet twitched, gut turned, heart paused as if missing a beat, and my palms dripped with sweat, I knew I was unsafe even if I could not identify why I felt unsafe or what was making a particular social space unsafe. Yet, I find comfort in knowing that my somatic responses were keen, active, and constantly telling of what was occurring around me and within my body. I also find solace in knowing that I did not, and do not, just imagine the discomfort, unease, and lack of safety I experienced. Scholars my research has drawn me towards, including Ahmed (2014, 2017), hooks (1995), and Baumgardner

and Richards (2004, 2005), remind me that injustice and violence - racial and gendered - still occur regularly. I take from their works that feminism has moved well beyond the discourse of universal suffrage and into the use of “strategic resistance” (hooks, 1995, p.30) to resist labeling based on religious affiliations, cultural traits such as skin colour, and gender binaries.

Thus, as practitioners, I believe our primary responsibility is to acknowledge that people including young children, have an innate knowledge of what feels right and wrong, safe and unsafe. Secondly, it is our responsibility to build positive professional relationships with our clients. In doing so, as practitioners, we begin to understand the meanings of our client’s somatic responses, words, and the degree of (dis)comfort our client exhibits. At the same time, we build trust with our clients, which in turn increases the degree of safety our clients sense. A challenge here is that clients may require safe spaces beyond the practitioners-client relationship in order to feel safe within the professional relationship and to transfer their learnings, new understandings



A layer that has not been explored here, which is critical for practitioners to think about in regards to their own practices and the work their clients engage in, is the degree of a person’s discomfort, what understandings and teachings come from a sense of discomfort, the confidence to believe one’s own sensations of discomfort, the value one places in their discomfort, and the acts of resistance, self-protection, and conformity one may participate in to remain as safe as possible.

and perspectives, and their voice into their day-to-day environments. Therefore, it is also our responsibility to support our clients in finding and creating safe spaces, negotiating those spaces that feel unsafe. The first step is to bring awareness to the somatic responses a person may experience. By acknowledging the various somatic responses one may have, a person

may become more aware of their innate, unconscious, feelings in a particular situation. Then, once a client is able to identify and articulate when and where they feel safe or unsafe,

conversations about why they feel the way they do becomes important. Within this dialogue, actions to find or create safe spaces can take place, or dialogue around removing oneself from a situation may occur.

As I think through this process, I find myself reflecting on an experience I had while in East Africa that highlights the power of such conversations. I recollect the night I got back to my hotel room after engaging in a research session with community leaders who had been described to me as unwilling to participate or share information. That evening, after greeting these community leaders in their local language, honouring them as experts, and collecting the documents, narratives, and insight the research team had spent months attempting to collect, my colleague and I engage in a conversation about the politics of research. This conversation included discourses of my colleague's gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and practices, and raised concerns around disregarding power hierarchies, community members' roles and responsibilities, previous disappointment communities felt when outsiders dropped in to do research, and the position I placed myself in as a Canadian *Muslim* scholar with familial ties to East Africa. My somatic responses were heightened and my unease at the dinner table became unbearable. I politely excused myself and sought refuge in my hotel room where I drafted an email requesting support from my mentor. A short while later, my mentor and I were speaking on Skype. At first, I shared my experience and the sensations I felt in my body. We then continued to talk about when such somatic responses were heightened and how I could create safety for myself. Each potential outcome that I proposed was followed with a brief conversation that provided insight into the positive and negative consequences that may come out of that response. In the end, I requested the space to transcribe our collected data and begin formulating our reports from the hotel while my colleague taught a course during the day that I initially was

going to participate in. This approach offered me space away from the challenging relationship that was building between my colleague and I, maintained my primary purpose of being on the trip, and still held space for my colleague and I to connect when away from contexts that triggered her and created an unsafe environment for me.

From this experience, it becomes evident that a practitioner's ability to walk their client through their sensations, experiences, and potential responses is critical. In this way, as practitioners, we do not define or articulate the spaces our client(s) may be navigating, but we offer our client(s) the ability to contemplate, reiterate, and negotiate the in-between social spaces they may find themselves within. As a practitioner, depending on the relationship created with the client(s) family, we may take our work one step further. By offering family members insight into the ways in which we engage in such conversations and providing them with the tools and techniques to engage in similar conversations at home, families will be able to create similar safe spaces for their children and youth.

Closing My Cloak

I have spun and now have sat with my *effendi's*. Through my whirling, I have come to learn that religion, culture, gender, and geographical location plays a role in how I interact with the social locations I move between, reside within, and find comfort on the periphery of. I recognize that my awkward body was, and often still is, my voice and that throughout my life I embodied and enacted an unknown feminism. Whirling allowed the node of gender and culture to surface, which required me to language racial and marginal experiences I had not previously labelled. I even began to see concepts of "passing" (hooks, 1995), for example, the ability to appear white because of skin tone while being racially brown or of appearing to be Spanish because of my hair instead of East Indian, surface, a concept I had previously not heard of. None

of this is easy, linear, or relaxing. This project has been messy, challenging, cyclical, and forever shifting.

Now, as I sit and button my cloak up, I am left pondering the implications of practice, thinking about how I, and others, can practice being vigilant, aware of, and responsive to clients' somatic responses. As I think about these somatic responses, some invisible such as my gut turning, and others visible like the twitching of my leg, I notice myself shifting to a standing position. As I stand, preparing to leave the stage, I glance at my family in the audience and say a silent thank you. It is my family's flexibility, willingness to negotiate, and compassion that has taught me about the power of engaging in difficult and uncomfortable conversations, who allowed me to find my voice, and participated in my journey as I navigated various social locations and the border territories in which I found home. Through my family's teaching, as a practitioner, I will strive to practice the same flexibility, willingness to negotiate, and compassion for my clients. In order to achieve this, I will root my practice in creating safety. The first step to creating safety for others is for me to clear the stage and join my *effendi's* on the periphery of the stage. Here, I aim to hold space for my experiences and newly formed knowledge while allowing my client(s) to dance.

In the next chapter, I return to my initial position seated at my coffee table with a pencil and paper in hand as I prepare to draw another mandala. This time, as the lines intersect and a design begins to present itself, I ponder what needs to be researched next and what current research, such as feminist geography, could further inform this and future research projects regarding living in the in-between of social spaces and implications for practice. I shift my attention and awareness past my own experiences and think about the experiences of other immigrant, racialized, and minoritized youth. I end my research project by highlighting the major

tension(s) of identity and sense of belonging that surfaced and offer a final recount of the practical implications that have come about.

Chapter 8

Returning to my Coffee Table

As I walk off the stage I have been dancing on for the last few years, my *effendis* encourage me to join them, to sit with them on the periphery of the stage. I sit with them and witness the dances of the many youth who now take their position on the stage. A few of these youths are those who triggered some of my own iterations during summer camps held in East Africa. I begin to recall the locations of our conversations together, typically while sitting at a dining table or outside in the grass and usually between formalized activities. The narratives these youths shared with me would often parallel my own narratives that I mulled over and grappled with. It was the realization that my experiences were shared with others, that youth were also living in the in-between spaces of social locations, that would often provoke my reflections and stimulate my formal research quest. While I filtered through how I arrived at the stage and why I engaged in such a rigorous and challenging dance, my eyes flutter across the stage and land on the unstable feet, wobbly movements, and timid grin of one youth. This youth and I spoke on various occasions about being brown *Ismaili Muslim* girls playing ringette for the same community, only we played a decade apart. We shared stories about trying to balance *Jamat Khana*, *Bait-ul-Ilm*, and ringette. As I recall the narratives she helped trigger, I notice a young boy dancing beside her. He, who disclosed the shift in his religious and cultural practice when immigrating to the United States of America (USA), helped me think through the variations in my own religious and cultural practices between Canada and East Africa. His steps even more shaky than the youth who played ringette and as he caught sight of my glance he started to tremble and fumble in the space of another youth I first met at a coffee shop conversation. He, the son of a *Muslim* father and Christian mother, spoke to me about the years

of reading he has done to understand the similarities and differences in religious beliefs and practices while also attempting to define his racial and sexual orientations.

My feet begin to twitch, my palms sweating, and my shoulders shrugged to my ears. The discomfort I sense symbolic of my desire to go beyond the specifics of my personal exploration in hopes that I can broaden the scope of my research and the implications drawn from it beyond myself. With this recognition, I turn to my *effendis* and offer my gratitude before leaving the hall, returning home and finding my way back to my coffee table, sketch book, pencils, and other drawing supplies. I am drawn to the mandala, just as I was at the beginning of my research journey. Each layer of the drawing takes me further beyond myself than the previous layer. I begin my reflective drawing wondering about the experiences of other *Ismaili* youth, boys and girls.

I think about the many *Ismaili* youth from around the globe (approximately 200) I have engaged with over the past few summers. Those I connected most closely with all spoke about balancing *Jamat Khana*, *Bait-ul-Ill* (or other forms of religious education based on geographical location), secular school, and extra-curricular activities. Over and over again, I heard and felt the challenges these youths were voicing and were requesting support to navigate. I found myself empathizing with the youth, “connecting with the emotions that someone is experiencing” (Brown, 2012, p.81), however, I felt unequipped to offer guidance as I was grappling with how to live in the in-between spaces of my religious affiliation, the activities associated to being *Ismaili*, and my own secular activities. Yet, I believe that was part of the connection the youth and I held, that neither of us were knowing, that we equally shared space in the unknown and the discomfort of border territories, and that these youths had an innate sense that I would understand their experiences because of the way I interacted with them, other facilitators and

staff on site, and the religious teachings and activities that occurred at camp. Now, after my own critical reflection, I take away three learnings from working with these youths. The first, having the space to share, through speaking, art, or other forms of communication, the struggle of balancing religious and secular beliefs, practices, and activities with others who are also struggling can create a sense of belonging through shared understanding. The second, not having answers when hearing the narratives shared by the youth encouraged them to engage in their own critical thought and reflexive process, which often led to them determining their own ways of navigating their in-between spaces, their liveable spaces. For me, the negotiations I heard and witnessed reminded me that there is no singular way to navigate the in-between and each youth's navigation is complicated by their unique context (gender, religiosity, culture, and geographical location). This reminder brings me to the third learning: it takes patience, and respect, when sitting alongside youth who are attempting to navigate and negotiate the in-between spaces of social locations.

As these three learnings surface, the first layer of my mandala fills in and my hand shifts a few millimeters out to create the next layer. While drawing the next layer, I recognize that the youth I connected with were not limited to the female gender. These youths represented female, male, non-gendered (a term used by one youth when describing their relationship to gender), and transgender populations. So then, I wondered, if these in-between social space negotiations are not limited to gender, then perhaps they are also not limited to the *Ismaili Muslim* sector, or a specific religion one is affiliated with. My drawing pauses. I reflect on my initial inclination that being *Ismaili* was central to my sensations of discomfort and fostered many of my somatic responses. Now, I sit pondering how my specific religious affiliation implicated my sense of belonging and identity differently throughout the various stages of my life. At the same time, I

am also aware of how I have always remained vigilant to how my negotiations and navigations impact my relationship with my immediate family members. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I have been fortunate to have a family that is flexible, willing to negotiate, and compassionate. However, if this was not so, as I sensed was of some of the families of the youth who shared with me, I am curious about how negotiating and navigating the in-betweens of religious and secular activities would look and occur. As this layer fills in, a few gaps are visible, places for future research that stem from my curiosities.

The first gap that presents itself occurs as I become aware of the fact that my religious affiliation to the *Ismaili Muslim* faith, did in fact complicate the in-between social spaces I was navigating that leads me to wonder about the navigation and negotiations other *Muslims*, beyond the *Ismaili* tradition grapple with. Exploring the various ways *Muslim* youth engage with their faith, the timings of religious activities, and the types and timing of secular activities will likely affect the degree of negotiation and navigation. For instance, while I was living in East Africa, I started to notice the balance between religious and secular aspects of the lives of *Muslims*, regardless of gender. Likely because of the heat as well as the dominant *Muslim* population, extra-curricular activities such as soccer (football in East Africa), cricket, and so forth occurred after sunset and after evening prayers. Thus, many youth would attend prayers, which was centrally located to the fields they played at, and then as a collective traveled to the field, played the sport of their choice before returning home for a late meal with family and friends. In this scenario, a person did not have to choose between playing a sport or attending *Jamat Khana*, *Mosque*, or another site of worship such as my experience growing up in Canada where many of the extra-curricular activities I participated in occurred during the hours of prayer.

The second gap is that this research project focuses on my experience as a child, adolescent, and young adult. I am left with curiosities associated with attempting to negotiate and navigate the node of religion as a young boy, non-gendered youth, or transgendered person. For instance, and something I have not discussed in this project, is that boys have certain roles they are expected to fill, at least from what I witnessed as a young child. Much of my life I witnessed men leading religious ceremonies and holding leadership positions. And while I know that women are encouraged to take leadership positions, I imagine, and gather from some of my conversations, that the expectations set on many young boys would offer a fascinating perspective. Further, because of the structures within the religious and cultural communities associated with *Islam*, as with secular communities generally, I am not sure there is equal access, understanding, or acceptance of youth who identify as non-gendered or transgendered and thus am keen to hear about their experiences navigating not only the in-between spaces of the religious and secular node of intersect but also navigating expectations places upon them based on binary gender roles.

The third gap that presents itself in my drawing holds great tension. This research project has largely focused on my experiences as a youth and young adult, a reflection of past experiences that I iterate and re-iterate but do not currently live within in the same way as I experienced them as a child, youth, and young adult and which I will likely continue to grapple with as I age. Thus, I am curious about the understandings of youthful experiences and implications for practice that can be drawn from speaking with, hearing, and critically reflecting upon youths current and active negotiation and navigation of living in the in-between spaces of social locations today. I am curious, as the world shifts and alters daily, how *Muslim* youth are finding and/or creating liveable spaces in today's economic, social, and political climate. I draw

on an example by a youth who shared with me. This youth, a Canadian whom I met in East Africa, expressed her concern with the political climate in the USA post 2016 election. Her concern was not primarily focused on the youth in the USA but for those living in Syria, Iran, Iraq, and other majority world countries that are impacted by war. When I asked why she, at the tender age of fifteen, was so concerned about global politics, something I was unaware of at that age, she was quick to tell me that she needed to be aware of the politics because she has formed friends in those countries, she sees the increased rates of immigration occurring at her school, and she cannot turn the television on or walk through a bookstore without her attention being drawn to the trauma that is occurring globally. I gathered from her conversation that the in-between spaces of social locations she is negotiating are far broader than those that I negotiated and navigated as a youth as her international connections are wider, her sense of belonging expands beyond the physical and into social media, and that her negotiation also considers the negotiations of those who are immigrating to the community she belongs to. Thus, I believe it is important that further research includes the voices of current youth who can narrate the tensions they are facing in the moment.

I notice as I acknowledge the above gaps in my research, areas of potential further study, that I have once again shifted my pencil and started drawing another layer. The detail in this layer appears more shaky and larger because of the twitch in my legs. I become particularly aware of my somatic responses in this moment. As my legs bounce, I notice my hips tense up, my back curves in, my shoulders round with my left elbow resting on the coffee table and my forehead resting in the palm of my sweaty left hand. My right hand continues to draw broad strokes on the off-white paper while I sit thinking about the present. I begin to think about the negotiations and navigations I currently grapple with such as my current location within the

center of the *Ismaili* community I resisted and sat on the periphery of for much of my life, my attempt to find the periphery and border territories of our religious practices while maintaining certain religious practices and being heavily involved in secular projects within the *Ismaili* community and the Aga Khan Development Network, which is associated with the *Ismaili* community. Though the current negotiations and navigations go beyond the scope of this research project, I believe it is critical to acknowledge and articulate that the process of finding and/or creating liveable spaces does not cease as a person reaches a particular age. Further research on the negotiations, tensions, and skills adult *Muslims* encounter and utilize to live in the in-between spaces of social locations would offer another perspective as well as insight into the teachings second, third, and further generations are receiving from their parents and/or elders.

My hand and pencil leap to another layer of my drawing. I am caught thinking about the degree of tensions each generation of *Muslims* in Canada may face and if these tensions will increase or decrease. For example, I still struggle to negotiate the attendance level to *Jamat Khana* my family requests of me with that of my own desire. Out of respect, and without wanting to cause ill-feelings, fragmentations in our relationships, and to not discredit the benefits my family members receive by regular attendance at *Jamat Khana*, I still find myself creating reasons to miss *Jamat Khana* such as engaging in extra-curricular activities during prayer time, or attending *Jamat Khana* a few minutes after the first prayer begins, remaining in the foyer during prayers, and immediately leaving following communal prayers so I can tell my family I went while also not fully engaging while in attendance. Similar to when I was younger, I also negotiate which celebrations I want to attend and sometimes still resist dressing as expected when I attend out of respect for my family. More interesting to me, I do not live with my family and yet as an adult still engage in such negotiations of practices and navigation of family

relations. However, while I do not have my own children, I would assume that my understanding of the struggles and tensions I have experienced and continue to experience would shape the way my potential future children are raised, expected to live in the in-between, and supported as they attempt to develop their identity and find their sense of belonging. This leads me to another future research project that involves hearing and critically reflecting upon the experiences of second and third-generation Canadian *Muslims*, especially in a time when *Muslims* globally have been positioned in a precarious position, which is beyond the scope of this project but critical to note.

I find my focus returning to the center of the mandala, back to my own experiences and the process of iterating and re-iterating the narratives that were triggered as I danced. I am curious about the implications of sharing vulnerable, rebellious, passionate, and embodied experiences with others. I recall Ellis, Adams and Bochner's (2011) guidance to research something meaningful to the researcher and "to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience[s]" (p.277) in order to capture my readers. Now, I sit wondering how hearing my experiences, the ways in which I negotiated and navigated the in-between spaces of social locations and found or created liveable spaces in the border territories contributes to or hinders the negotiations and navigations of others, especially other young first-generation Canadian *Muslims*.

As I spend time pondering the impact of my research, I initially return to the shared experiences youth narrated for me. For many of these youth, the greatest challenge they voiced was not having the language to share their experiences or to describe their somatic responses. I remember one youth, as the two of us sat at the dining table together and spoke about our experience of being one of very few people of colour in our elementary classrooms, pause and

ask why my leg was shaking, if I was cold or nervous. I responded by saying that my leg often shakes when I am in uncomfortable settings or a memory of an uncomfortable experience is triggered. Before I could finish, this youth starting asking if that is the same reason their stomach turns and fingers become extremely cold in particular situations. While I do not know if that happens for the same reasons my legs begin to shake, my shared narrative offered this youth a perspective into somatic responses. I, while attempting to offer some comfort, encouraged them to note when, what was happening, and potentially why they experienced particular sensations, as well as language to use when sharing their experiences with others. This is one example of how this research can be liberating and beneficial to others. Hearing other narratives can offer language and a way to express experiences that a person may be struggling to do on their own.

On the other hand, using the same example, perhaps this youth's somatic responses are related to other causes such as poor circulation and digestive concerns. By associating their sensations to the somatic responses I shared, this youth may be missing a health concern that requires medical attention. Or, a conversation similar to the one I had with this youth may lead to a hypersensitivity to one's somatic responses and negatively impact a youth's interaction to their context and others. For example, one youth who I shared dialogue with regarding somatic responses started to equate each response with a negative experience, energy, or sensation and struggled to overcome these sensations and fully participate in programming. It took further conversations to talk about how my somatic responses offer insight and often guide my reactions but that I do not always associate each response with a feeling. I recall offering the example that my hands are often extremely cold even amid the summer but not because of the context I found myself within. We also discussed how the cold of my hands because of my poor blood circulation was a different cold then what I felt when my hands start to sweat and indicate

discomfort. Thus, knowing one's body and learning about the different ways it communicates is also a critical part of such conversations. Further, I have only iterated a few of my experiences, which is limiting. If a youth (or others) does not connect with one of the narratives shared, understands the language differently than I intended, or has a varying perspective and/or approach to navigating a specific tension, reading my perspective may be challenging and create further debate. In this sense, it is possible that this research may create a greater degree of complexity for others.

Thinking about the liberation and complexities such research can offer leads my hand and pencil to the outer layer of my mandala. Here the design represents the potential support a practitioner may offer. I initially reflect on the three practical implications stated in the previous chapter: (1) understanding the somatic responses of children and youth, (2) engaging in difficult conversations with youth, and (3) creating safety for youth to express themselves and learn skills to negotiate the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of social locations. Now, I also sit and wonder about the risks associated with such an approach to practice for practitioners. I am drawn back to my experience as a young practitioner as I reflect on the hypothesized outcome(s) of sharing my disconnect, resistance towards, and active disengagement with the *Ismaili* community. Sharing this information would have likely reduced the connection my client and I had, positioned me as rebellious, disrespectful, and maybe even sinful, which would have created an "us" versus "them" scenario. Being in this scenario would likely create a less trusting environment, would have positioned my sincere curiosities around the benefits of engaging in and with the *Ismaili* community as challenges, and potentially disrupted the positive attributes my client obtained from belonging to and participating in the *Ismaili* community.

Therefore, I think it is critical for practitioner's to be aware of the amount of disclosure – the amount a practitioner shares about themselves (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014; Hackney & Cormier, 2013; Hackney & Bernard, 2017) – in order to avoid unintentionally disregarding beliefs, values, and practices of clients. As well, I encourage practitioners to root their practice in strengths-based approaches and relationship building (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014; Hackney & Cormier, 2013; Hackney & Bernard, 2017) so that a practitioner is aware of the supports, practices, and beliefs that bring joy and positive regard to their client(s) and offers a practitioner insight into when and how to challenge a client's thinking and behaviour. For instance, with my young *Ismaili* client, I was able to gain her trust in the sense that she could share anything with me and knew I will maintain confidentiality unless she was planning to harm herself, another person, or I was required to share information with government officials. Our conversations and my willingness to book sessions that worked around her school requirements and desire to attend *Jamat Khana* daily showed my respect for her choices, desires, and the expectations placed on her. Because of the trust and respect we built for one another, I was able to engage in difficult conversations regarding involvement in gang activity, drug and alcohol use, school absences, the abuse she experienced, and her reasoning for staying closely connected to a religious community and culture that was not always a positive attribute in her life. Thus, I was able to maintain a supportive and caring position in her life while also challenging her to think beyond her perspectives.

The Last Pencil Mark

I end my drawing knowing I, as a practitioner, want to find ways to build positive and enriching professional relationships with my clients. In order to do so, I remind myself that my experiences, are not limited to those in this research project, are only of one person and offer

only my insight into the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of social locations. However, this research offers others language to describe their own experiences and somatic responses, provides connection in knowing one is not alone as they attempt to find and/or create liveable spaces, and that it is acceptable to disrupt religious, cultural, and gendered expectations.

Additionally, reading the narratives of another person may cause one to see their experiences differently, which can further complicate the journey of living in the in-between spaces of social locations. Therefore, as practitioners work with youth who are negotiating and navigating the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of social locations, I would encourage them to keep in mind:

- (1) that children and youth have the innate wisdom to know that when something feels right, it is comfortable, or wrong, may feel uncomfortable;
- (2) that it is critical that a practitioner brings their attention and awareness to their own and their client's somatic responses and to understand what these responses represent;
- (3) that difficult conversations are possible when a trusting and positive professional relationship is built and maintained;
- (4) that it is critical to create safe spaces for youth to explore the in-between and build skills to help navigate and negotiate the tensions of living in the in-between spaces of social locations; and
- (5) that negotiating and navigating the in-between can start at a very young age (there is no specific age) and that such negotiations and navigations are likely to occur throughout one's life (there is no stopping age).

Lastly, this research project is simply one component of much more work. Future research may explore the experiences of a larger array of first-generation Canadian *Ismaili* youth, girls, boys,

and those who identify differently. Perhaps research will extend beyond the *Ismaili* sector of *Islam* and explore the experiences of first-generation Canadian *Muslims*. I anticipate also seeing research that takes into consideration second and third-generation *Muslims* experiences as well. Through such research, I believe border territories, liveable spaces, and the peripheries of social spaces will become more accessible and allow many who are negotiating living in the in-between spaces of social locations a greater sense of belonging and stronger identity. As I, and others take up future research projects from a now known feminist perspective, I keep in mind Ahmed's (2017) words. She states:

feminism is sensible because of the world we are in; feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences. We might work over, mull over, these experiences; we might keep coming back to them because they do not make sense. There is agency and life in this making. (Ahmed, 2017, p.21)

Ultimately, there is much more work to be done, especially as *Muslims*, and many other immigrants, find themselves in precarious positions including unstable and constantly shifting immigration policies, war, and civil conflict that is documented daily in new reports and on social media sites. Others, such as Rizvi's (2016) in *The Atheist Muslim*, Ayed (2012) in *A Thousand Farewells*, and Toorpakai and Holstein (2016) in *A Different Kind of Daughter*, share their experiences as immigrants and living in unstable and unsafe contexts in their novels, all highlighting the shared experiences of those living in the in-between spaces of social locations that requires further study. This initial project, the first study to explore the experiences of a first-generation Canadian *Ismaili* female is the start.

I honour the tensions, both positive and challenging, I have encountered, somatically responded to, and found comfort within. I am forever grateful for the flexibility, willingness to negotiate, safety and compassion my family held (and holds), shares with me, and has taught me to hold and offer to others. Similarly, I am thankful to the many *effendis* that have enriched my life. And, I am humbled by my innate ability to negotiate social spaces, find ways of creating liveable spaces, and being able to occupy space within various border territories. I will continue to re-iterate my narratives, to learn through each iteration, and continue to develop practical implications for my, and hopefully others', clients.

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Appendix I

Whirling in my Early Years

Resisting faith-based learning

The first of my experiences beyond my family unit, attending evening prayers, and secular school that I will focus on occurred at *Bait-ul-Ilm* (religious education classes). This was also the first of my experiences that I remember resisting faith based learning. In grade one, I vividly recall sitting in circle time while the teachers went around the circle having each student individually recite the first part of the *Holy Du'a* (prayers). Every week I attended, I sat in circle time sweating, shaking and attempting to somehow become invisible. As my turn was about to arrive, typically two students down from me, I would urgently need to use the bathroom. My bathroom trips were long, often prolonged by looking at pictures on the walls and reading all the comments marking the junior high school's bathroom stalls to ensure that I would return to class following circle time and just in time for snack break. I had little motivation or desire to learn the *Du'a* and even less to understand the meaning of the prayers my family members encouraged me recite with them three times a day.

Faith-based Girl Guides

Prior to joining the *Ismaili* Girl Guides, for nearly a year I watched from the corner of a school gym while my family members participated in Ismaili Scouting. I was drawn to the outdoor survival teachings and worked to remember the steps to tie knots, start a campfire, and set up a tent so I could secretly practice in my bedroom at night with my family members' supplies. As soon as I was old enough to join Girl Guides my family enrolled me in the Shia Ismaili Muslim Girl Guides troop. On one hand, I was excited to learn what I scrutinized my family members learn. On the other hand, I was nervous to interact with the girls from my *Bait-ul-Ilm* classroom

and *Jamat Khana* on an additional night of the week. Further, I wanted our uniforms to be pants and a shirt versus a brown dress.

Within weeks I wished I could have been a part of Scouts instead of Girl Guides and on many occasions wanted to do the activities the boys were doing in the school gym versus those that we were doing in the school classroom gathered around desks. A month into our Girl Guiding year I was told that our Brownie troop was going to be performing a Bollywood dance for an upcoming celebration. I desired connection to the other girls in the troop as I watched them all laugh, play, and go to each other's houses from *Jamat Khana*, *Bait-ul-Ilm*, and sometimes from secular school. Yet, I resisted the expectations placed on me to sit at a desk and learn through worksheets and desk crafts compared to learning through doing as the boys and my non-Ismaili Girl Guide friends were; to wear a brown dress to meetings, expected to recite the *Du'a*, and to dance. I found myself attempting to skip dance sessions held on Sunday mornings in the social hall at the *Jamat Khana* by being difficult to wake up or experiencing stomach aches. Once at dance rehearsal, I refused to move, found my way to the corners of the hall, and turned silent. With strong encouragement from my family and stern guidance from the troop leader, I made it to the performance hall weeks later, minutes before the performance, without makeup or jewelry, and a stiff body. I hesitated and on many occasions resisted to perform as an elegant girl. In the end, I performed. More accurately, I filled space on the stage as my peers gracefully danced to *Chaiyya Chaiyya*.

Physically Whirling into Adolescence

A winter sport as a first-generation Canadian

Playing ringette as a youth was a significant part of my life. It was the first time I felt like I belonged to a community while also recognizing that I have always been a member of a family

community, the *Ismaili Muslim* community, a school community, and many others. I gained a sense of belonging within my ringette team and the ringette community, as well as found a way to expel excess energy. On the other hand, there were times I felt I did not belong such as when I would be pulled out of team events, practices, or games because it was *Du'a* time or a special occasion in *Jamat Khana*. As the only goalie, I also trained differently and separately from my teammates, adding another layer to the disconnect I sometimes felt to my teammates. As I learnt to negotiate these challenges and feelings, I was asked to play on an eighteen to twenty-year old team as a sixteen-year old. The girls on this team often avoided talking to me on and off the ice, planned team gatherings at the bar, and our team Christmas party on the one day my family and I indicated I could not participate in activities on due to religious commitments.

However, while I played, and for the most part was happy on the ice, I was constantly fighting against or trying to negotiate balancing *Jamat Khana* attendance. Learning the *Ismaili* prayers, the *Du'a*, is what allowed me to register for ringette one season. Thus, under pressure, I learnt the *Du'a* in a few short days prior to the last day of ringette registration. All of this played (and plays) a part in how I moved between my secular and religious lives.

Needing to move, in Dar es Salaam

Arriving in Dar es Salaam brought with it many learning moments that often led to new perspectives and insights. My experience, in a new and (un)known environment, quickly had me yearning for a safe space to work out and to go for outdoor jogs. The streets of Dar es Salaam are uneven, chaotic, uncontrolled and over populated with vehicles, creating great risks for pedestrians, especially solo females. Each morning and late afternoon I would risk walking four blocks to and from work and on occasion the five blocks to *Jamat Khana* in order to fulfill my deep desire for outdoor physical activity. The physical safety risks were high and I was

constantly told not to do such things, yet, my body sought or was seeking an escape from the tensions at work, a removal of the excess weight gained, and a need to be utilized to its fullest capacity. Moving won the battle. I secretly walked whenever possible. However, I never found a space to run so I turned to bedroom body weight workouts, running the stairs in my apartment building, and on rare occasions a swim in my apartment buildings bug filled outdoor pool.

Whirling as a Young Adult

In the Classroom

A semester into my Master's program at the University of Victoria in the School of Child and Youth Care, our cohort took a change theory course, one that explores counseling practices, techniques, and introduces various forms of thinking about change. It was clear to my peers and professor that I believed counseling was not effective, a waste of time, and that people do not change. I attempted for weeks to find different language for change and along the way engaged in mock counseling sessions. The first role play of my sessions as a client was done in front of our cohort, without my full agreement. I sat in constant twitch, voice shaky, fingers and toes freezing, and constantly attempting to maintain the same speed in my responses as the speed my counselor was asking me questions at. I witnessed the cringed looks of my peers in the audience and started to question if I was a bad daughter, an unsupportive sibling, and if doing my Master's degree at a fairly young age was a mistake; all things I was proud of and confident in prior to this twenty-minute exchange.

That evening I sat at home sadder than I had ever been in my adult life and feeling as though my once, only a few hours earlier, happy life had disappeared. I knew immediately that I was in for a ride and that my exposure to this course was going to alter my life drastically. As I reflected, I recognized that my mock counsellor lacked the skills to understand and/or

incorporate elements into her practice that calmed me, built connection and relation, and supported where I was at. I began to feel unsafe, uncared for, and sad about my very fortunate and privileged life and experiences. I also learnt that I have a spiritual belief system and practice that is deeply rooted and derived from my religious upbringing and from the teachings my family instilled in me through day-to-day interactions and activities such as hearing the other person, validating feelings, finding self-error in interpretations, and seeking to serve and support others whenever possible. These values and principles were not incorporated in our counselling sessions, which led me down a research and career path I would have never followed had it not been for this experience.

As a Young Practitioner

As the only community-based youth worker within the agency I worked for and in the specific context of North-East Calgary Alberta, I engaged in support work with children and youth aged eight to seventeen. One of my clients was an *Ismaili* youth whose family had arrived in Canada from Central Asia. This youth and her family attended the same *Jamat Khana* that I had attended throughout my childhood and adolescence up until I left Calgary to attend University. Therefore, this youth's parents knew my family members and was aware of who I was.

However, not knowing exactly who this youth was when I received the intake file from the agency I worked for, I booked a visit to meet the youth and her family in a similar manner to all other clients I had worked with. As I entered the family home, immediately the youth's family welcomed me warmly and we were able to have a highly informative session as we sat on the floor and indulged in Chai (tea) and traditional Afghan snacks. After our initial visit and a further review of the file, it became clear that this youth's family had shared more with me in the one

hour we spent together than they had shared with various other workers over multiple visits. My guess was that they openly shared the challenges their family faced because I was a familiar face, that I had an assumed understanding of cultural practices, and was believed to share similar religious beliefs. Our work together started in her family home and slowly moved into community at local coffee shops. Our first session in a coffee shop, the two of us sat discussing her lack of desire and engagement at school and her involvement in the *Ismaili* community. As we talked and became more comfortable with one another, the questions she posed for me became more and more challenging. When she began asking me questions about my lack of attendance in *Jamat Khana*, I stumbled to respond coherently as my brain filtered through my own disconnect and questioning of the faith.

The complexities of our interactions, beyond our family relations, grew after I responded to one of her questions regarding my *Jamat Khana* attendance with noting that my work and school commitments often interfered and/or prevented me from attending. This youth, knowing that part of my job was to spend time with her, then asked if I would attend *Jamat Khana* with her. Again, I stumbled. There were many challenges that crossed my mind including the ethics of being with a client outside of work hours and confidentiality as many *Ismaili* community members in Calgary were aware of my job and the client group I worked with. There were many other layers of complexities to our work together including the knowledge that if I decided to terminate our professional relationship that this youth would likely not receive another youth worker or the support she required and deserved. More so, I struggled as I actively resisted and questioned the faith we were believed to share while also wanting this youth to find positive and supportive connections within the community which she felt she belonged to.