

**Go, and you will return: Locating meanings in young Muslims' lived experience  
at schools in Christchurch, New Zealand via an adapted IPA method  
influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R).**

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For:

Trixie: mummy will always hold your hand #otters #purplelotus

Megan: there's a place where I'll see your face again #withhope

My late father, sisters, mum, and large extended family

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explored the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand; how they made sense of their experience and the meanings they placed on it, and their coping strategies. Its central argument is that young Western Muslims engage in a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social affairs within their everyday encounters of a secularised environment. For this group of participants, their acts of sensemaking helped them construct meaning frameworks in building their social identity. As the findings of this study suggest, this identity is constantly shaped and re-shaped along dimensions of time and space. It is a result of individual awakenings that find synergy within their own critical reasoning, a form of everyday *ijtihad*. The use of an adapted IPA method influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R) was necessary to enable the exploration of the participants' Muslim consciousness while the small sample size made it possible to study the personal experiences of a group of young Muslims from an idiographic approach. A limitation of this study stemmed from the constraints of member-checking that was substituted with the peer-review process. This study conceptualized that understanding young Muslims' sensemaking and meaning-making is part of inclusive practice and within the broader context, suggests that the IPA-R approach is a solution to the 'textbook Muslims' approach.

## 1. Chapter One - Introduction

The brevity of life on earth cannot be overemphasized.

I cannot take for granted that time is on my side, because it is not.

Heaven can wait but I cannot.

(Bonny Susan Hicks, 1968 – 1997, RIP)

### 1.1 Overview

In order to provide cogency to the overall thesis, the chapter starts with a brief personal background which covers my values and worldview, how the decision to pursue a PhD came about and the selection of this research topic. It then moves on to the idea conception, the overall aims and significance of the research, the research question and the epistemology. This is followed by the relevance of the thesis topic, and an explanation that locates my research within the context of lived experience. The chapter also provides a brief overview of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand. In closing, it will touch briefly on the structure of the whole thesis and provide a rationale on the terms and spelling used.

### 1.2 My PhD journey

We always begin with the client's story in social work. So this is my story, in brief. I would credit my decision to return to university as very much influenced by the late Bonny Hicks<sup>1</sup>. I have always had a particular fascination for reading her books<sup>2</sup>. I especially liked "*Heaven Can Wait: Conversations with Bonny Hicks*" (1998). It was written by Tal ben-Shahar after

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<sup>1</sup> The late Bonny Hicks was a former Singaporean model cum writer famous for her anthropic philosophy and for discussing issues deemed too controversial for the then Singaporean public. She died in 1997 in the SilkAir MI 185 crash.

<sup>2</sup> *Excuse me, are you a model?* (1990); *Discuss Disgust* (1992)

Bonny's untimely death based on the correspondence between them. I was particularly drawn to the way Bonny puts her thoughts and feelings to paper. I found her reflections of her pain growing up feeling 'excluded' from her peers<sup>3</sup> at school and later, on facing criticisms from a group of Singaporean traditionalists (ben Shahar, 1998) profound and deep. Her writings were very real and down to earth, depicting everyday mix of emotions that generally most of us grapple with. Contrary to what her critics felt, for me, it was time that Asian readers get a dose of what is real and the space to express our deepest thoughts instead of always having to repress them. Such was the power of the meanings in her words (Baumeister, 1991).

I now know her style of writing was what van Manen (1990) termed as hermeneutic phenomenological writing, very much characterized by a "deep collective sense" (p.132). He described phenomenology as similar to poetry.

It speaks partly through silence: it means more than it explicitly says (p.131).

Reading Bonny's writings felt just like that. Her reflections were strong and insightful; in turn it made me reflect too. Bonny talked about her preparations to enter university and her thoughts on various philosophers work, in particular Ayn Rand. However her untimely death in the SilkAir MI 185 crash in December 1997 ended everything. Reading and reflecting on her thoughts made me contemplate about going back to university too and the search for the meaning of life. Looking back, I now know it was a latent quest for new knowledge very much ignited by Bonny's words.

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<sup>3</sup> Bonny was made to feel 'different' at school as she was born of a Singaporean Chinese mother and a British father (whom she never had any contact all her life). She was raised by her single parent mother with the help of her maternal grandmother.

The need to step back into an educational environment also made me recall my happy days growing up and studying in a Catholic missionary school<sup>4</sup> in Malaysia. The library period and end of year movie screening time were my happiest moments. I loved reading all the Enid Blyton books especially the *Amelia Jane* series and remember watching *Mary Poppins*, *Bridge on the River Kwai* and *The Ten Commandments* (I will never forget the scene where Moses parted the Red Sea). The Infant Jesus nuns were strict but always kind and softly spoken. We all had chores daily, and we also got to camp in the school grounds as Brownies in the holidays, doing everything ourselves. We were all of the different races<sup>5</sup> but ‘colour blind’. Lunch time meant eating together under the trees and sometimes, even up among the branches. It was not a big school and, had minimal resources, but it was certainly a happy place. Today, when I watch the *Little House on the Prairie*<sup>6</sup> DVDs with my daughter, it gives me that same feeling of happiness.

I decided then that by stepping back into an educational setting, perhaps I might be able to find again that sense of simple happiness, that feeling of togetherness when people learn and do things together. Most important of all, I knew being around books would keep me happy. That was how I made sense of the need to embark on this PhD journey then. Looking back, the most challenging time in the last few years were the period of uncertainties during the two major earthquakes and the re-adjustment post-earthquake. What has been good in the last stage of the PhD journey are some of the friendships made with fellow research students at university.

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<sup>4</sup> Infant Jesus Convent Schools

<sup>5</sup> Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, Indigenous, others (of mixed parentage)

<sup>6</sup> This is a popular American drama television series featuring a family living on a farm in Walnut Grove, a small community in Minnesota in the 1870s and 1880s.

I now know what Bonny Hicks meant when she spoke of the need to pursue knowledge in a setting that promotes exchange, discussion and contemplation (ben Shahr, 1998). I found it over the many lunches, dinners, discussions, and weekend activities with fellow research students. The fact that we were all from different disciplines, different stages of studies and backgrounds made the conversations all the more interesting and meaningful. As Gadamer (1989) said, “to a certain extent, a conversation has its own spirit” (p.383). The sense of personal sharing led to deeper forms of understanding (van Manen, 2012) and gave life to what can often be a lonely journey.

### **1.3 Introduction and Idea Conception**

Islamophobia was a concept foreign to me and many of my friends. Malaysia, after all, has Islam as its official religion and like many who started primary education in the seventies the curriculum at that time initiated my formal association with Islam through Arabic lessons in primary school. My uncle’s subsequent conversion to Islam by way of marriage introduced Islamic way of life to the family through consideration of what is *halal*<sup>7</sup> to be served to my uncle’s family in family gatherings. I also studied Islamic History in Sixth Form and did an option paper on Islamic Civilization in undergraduate years. It then grew wider to an interest of issues in the Middle East specifically the issue in Gaza from a humanitarian perspective. The attack on the World Trade Centre in US on September 11, 2001 (9/11) changed all of that.

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<sup>7</sup> Permissible in the Islamic faith

I was one of the many whose perception of people from the Arab continent was one of negativity and fear after the 9/11 events in US. Even though the local media in Malaysia downplays many of the Western reports, in actual fact, our daily lives were very much influenced by the West specifically US through television, internet and the print media. The negative remarks about Muslims from the Middle East were constantly heard in everyday conversations all around us. The turbaned and bearded image of Osama bin Laden was like a page out of our photographic memory; dominating our thoughts whenever an Arab subject was mentioned. In our minds, the Islam that we know in Malaysia was different from the Islam in the Arab continent. That was how we made sense of things then, and many of us still do now. The remarks and the looks on my friends' faces when I mention my research focus tells me that many still have this perception that all Arabs are a link to Osama bin Laden.

It was only after I had the opportunity to work on a Gaza Charity Campaign Project with a group of Arab Muslim<sup>8</sup> students while working in a private higher educational institution in Malaysia that my perception and view of them changed completely. The lived experience I had from my association with them humbled me, gave me totally fresh and wider discerning perspective in terms of my views of the Arab people, their culture and religion. I also heard and understood from their perspective what 9/11 meant to them and that the attacks in the US hurt them as much as it hurt the Americans. It taught me that they had an approach of internalizing their thoughts, and that this cognitive activity was very much guided by meanings they ascribed to their experiences in a foreign land. It showed me that everything

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<sup>8</sup> International Muslim students from the Middle East. As Malaysia is predominantly Muslim, we differentiate the many foreign Muslims in Malaysia by linking them to their country of origin; i.e. Indonesian Muslims, Mauritius Muslims, Bangladeshi Muslims, and so forth. Local Malaysian Muslims are generally referred to as Muslims. This is also in line with Ramadan's (2012) view of one Islam, but many cultures, that is, when using the phrase Arab Muslims, it is to say Arab in culture, but Islamic in principle.

they do is based on piety to the main tenets of Islam, that is, the five pillars of Islam and the six practices of the faith<sup>9</sup>.

What struck me in particular was the strength they build in coping with living in a foreign land, their discipline in fulfilling daily religious obligations (daily prayer of five times a day) and their openness and kindness towards people of other race or religion. I remember an occasion where I was given a view as to how they made sense of things around them. One of the students had approached a stray dog and started playing with it. I was shocked and commented that it was forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims to touch a dog. The student told me it was not, and I continued to argue with him, saying that it is. He said something to this effect:

This dog is also a creation of Allah, which means we need to love it all the same. We are only required to perform ritual cleansing if we come into contact with its saliva. There is Dettol, and there is soap. What is the problem? We Arabs are concerned only with the important aspects of Islam that is fixed, that is Allah is One, and the Prophet Muhammad is his Messenger, prayers, fasting, giving of alms, and to perform the Hajj. We care about the big issues; the dog is a small issue. Sometimes Muslims make a big fuss over small issues, but neglect the important things. They never pray five times a day, and many fall asleep at the mosque during Friday sermons. Why attend mosque then?

This reply changed my own interpretation of Islamic practices from that day onwards, even though I am not a Muslim. It made sense to me that if the main principles are not observed, it only makes a mockery of the minor ones that are amplified. His reply demonstrated his personal way of interpreting Islam in facing the daily pressures of life in a foreign land. The

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 1

Arabic culture that they inherit provided them with the context to locate meanings (Baumeister, 1991) in facing the many choices that they encounter. While I refer to this group of students as from the Middle East, in reality, they are from various parts of the region<sup>10</sup>, each of them with different family upbringing, differing level of religiosity and a past and socialization unique to them self. All of them had to face the effects of 9/11, but each made sense of it differently.

They shared stories of racism and acts of discrimination from the various other races in Malaysia whom they said viewed them with distrust and fear and labeled them ‘terrorists’ or ‘suicide bombers’. They talked about lecturers that avoided eye contact and ignored them in classes and of course mates that refused group work with them. They felt they were often misunderstood and feared out of people’s own ignorance and persistent efforts to exclude and marginalize them. To sum it up, there was ‘quiet shock’ and ‘silent hurt’ as they did not expect to face such experiences, not when Malaysia has Islam as its official religion. Thus their meaning construction of their encounters with others led them to ‘self-other’ by keeping to friends from similar backgrounds.

My contact with them left a lasting trace. I once was parochial in my perception of them, but when engagement and reflexivity was established, it changed. From a love of Megan Fox to Facebook, MSN chats, Youtube, Spanish football clubs and Manchester United, my lived experience teaching and befriending the Arab Muslim students tells me they were no different to any teenager or youths today. It tells me they have a story, measured from their own set of values and beliefs. I see the rich description of their stories as being able to aid

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<sup>10</sup> Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, Qatar, and Oman and Somalia included. See footnote no.11 on Ramadan (2012).

understanding and benefit the practice, academia and community at large. Fook's (2002) call to social workers that one must not be stuck in a rigid or even loose commitment to one single perspective of thinking as it hinders the flexibility required in today's dynamic context of intervention comes to mind.

The starting point of a phenomenological research rests heavily on what deeply interests the individual and of identifying this interest as a true phenomenon (Wagner, 1983; van Manen, 1990). I was curious and wanted to know more about young Muslims experience in schools in New Zealand. I wanted to know what it was like for them being in the West, especially when they come from such a diverse and highly visible culture, heavily laden with stereotype and prejudices. How do they make sense of their experiences and what meanings do they place on them? How can we as social workers understand them better and do more?

Roy (2004) argued that the relationship of Muslims to Islam is one that has undergone considerable reshaping as a result of "globalisation, westernisation and the impact of living as a minority" (p. ix). His claim that it is not so much the theological content of Islam, but how its followers make sense of it for guidance and application in their life in the West reflect my argument that young Western Muslims engage in a personalized version of *ijtihad* in managing their daily affairs in a secular environment. My argument draws upon Baumeister's (1991) view that the self is a vast, complex, and intricate entity, but is capable of making sense and meaning of life. That one can find answers within oneself, what Baumeister (1991) termed as "selfhood as value base" can also be found in Ramadan's (2004; 2010a) call to Muslims to "return to self" as a way to locate the original *al-fitra*<sup>11</sup> (the essence of self) that is

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<sup>11</sup> This is further discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.1.1

pure and untainted. I suggest Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad*<sup>12</sup> that is concerned with a "return to self" is the inward search for meaning that Baumeister (1991) described. Being in a foreign land means the central value bases that the Western Muslims have come to take for granted in their everyday life in their original homeland is no longer present (Roy, 2004). It is the longing for that familiar structure that creates the search for meaning.

Thus I argue that young Western Muslims in New Zealand schools engage in a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad*<sup>13</sup> in managing their social affairs within their everyday encounters of a secularized environment. Through acts of sensemaking, they construct meaning frameworks to build their social identity. Exploring<sup>14</sup> the idiographic accounts of young Muslims' sensemaking and meaning-making forms part of inclusive practice as meanings are highly discreet and intricate and integral to their actions and well-being. A universal application of a generic model of Islam is neither sufficient nor appropriate as this not only denies young Muslims their individual agency but mutes the multiplicity of voices and ultimately excludes their being and belonging.

#### **1.4 Aims and significance of study**

The principal aim of this study is to explore the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand, how they made sense of it and the meanings they

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<sup>12</sup> This is further discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.1.1

<sup>13</sup> *Ijtihad* – acts of ethical and critical reasoning that requires deep contemplation and thinking skills (Ramadan, 2004). Further discussion on the concept of *ijtihad* is in Chapter Two and Three.

<sup>14</sup> See this chapter Section 1.4.1 – epistemology. Note that there is also an explanation on how I foreground methodological concerns with regard to my participants' Islamic worldview in Chapter Four (Methodology) (section 4.1.1) specifically on the departure from traditional IPA to an IPA influenced by the Ramadani philosophies (IPA-R). Muslims' construction of reality occurs within Islam.

placed on their experiences. The experiences and the meanings they make affect their sense of well-being and belonging that in turn impact on their coping mechanism (Westerink, 2013). Therefore, in opting for a *lived experience* approach, the focus is on the unique nature of each human situation (van Manen, 1990). I hope to illuminate the meanings they place on their experiences through the lens of Helmut Wagner's (1983) phenomenology of consciousness supported by Tariq Ramadan's framework for Western Muslims (2004, 2009, 2010, 2010a). I provide the discussion on the concept of lived experience in the later part of this chapter while phenomenology of consciousness is included in Chapter Four (Methodology). Detailed discussion on Ramadan as a theoretical framework is in Chapter Three.

The significance of this research will be:

- (i) To provide an understanding of the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand, their sensemaking, and the meanings they place on it;
- (ii) To add to the body of knowledge especially on school social work with Muslim youths in New Zealand and international and to build an understanding of their coping mechanism via the meaning construction of their sense of being and belonging at school, and;
- (iii) Specifically, this study aims to provide the practice with a better understanding of hidden biases and latent prejudices inherent in all of us so as to bring about cross cultural sensitivity in practice.

## **1.5 Research question**

The main research question that guides this research is:

**What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?**

From the main research question, I hope to find answers to the following sub-questions:

- (i) How do Muslim students make sense of their schooling experience and what meanings do they place on it?
- (ii) How does this then impact on their sense of well-being and belonging and their coping strategies with regard to their schooling experience?

## **1.6 Islamic Epistemology**

In establishing the appropriate epistemological stand for this thesis, I discuss briefly the philosophical stand of Western Enlightenment and Islamic Enlightenment. Both the Western Enlightenment and Islamic Enlightenment call for self-directed thinking and freedom in individual reasoning though they differ in matters of intention and pathway.

At the core of Western Enlightenment thinking are the dual factors of reason and rationality (van Egmond, 2007). The focus is primarily on the individual, regarded as having the capability to escape the shackles of self-incurred immaturity to achieve the independent process of thinking for oneself (William, 2011) in a state of freedom. This Western Enlightenment drawing on the works of, for example, Voltaire and Kant, rejects the idea of

organized religion and absolute faith, and encourages reason in thinking and the pursuit of individual well-being. It believes in men's ability to establish a dignified life for themselves away from divine intervention, superstitions, myths and traditions that put them in servitude to the monarchy or feudal hierarchy (Zafirovski, 2011). Thus the intention here is for individuals to achieve freedom, justice and equality among others through the pathway of cognitive prowess that practices rational thinking. It serves no God but the individual's own sense of well-being.

In contrast, Islamic enlightenment starts and ends with Islam. Everyday *ijtihad* for Muslims is about independent reasoning that strives to please *Allah*, to uphold the *syahadah* and achieve the good of *al-maslahah* (common good). It draws on reason and Revelation in a process that is both internal and external. The internal process of enlightenment strives to reason critically to achieve self-objectivity with the aim of retaining its unity with God (Yazdi, 1992). It has the ultimate goal of achieving *nafs al-mutmainah* (the soul that is at peace). In other words, the aim is to stay away from all that is *haram* and to remain on the path of righteousness. The external process takes the form of one's act of bearing witness to their faith, supported by the consciousness of 'knowledge by presence' (Yazdi, 1992) that *Allah* is the Creator and the Source of all knowledge.

As such, it is deemed complete *tauhid* (Oneness of God and Truth) when one acknowledges that everything that happens to a person, be it good or bad, happens with God's permission, and there is nothing that one can do to decrease or increase it, except by the will of God. This does not mean one leaves everything to *Allah*. On the contrary, the intention to remain in unity with God to achieve *nafs al-mutmainah* in the individual self is arrived at in consideration of what is good for others/the *ummah*, and in line with contemporary times.

The pathway to *ijtihad* is one that engages in reflection and reason to decipher God's signs in nature, history, and text (Khan, 2014, p. 4). Islamic Enlightenment views men as the best of creations and thus is capable of independent rational thinking, rather than being a blind follower (*taqlid*) (Khan, 2014).

Therefore, the epistemological foundation of this research will be guided by the Islamic perspective of knowledge construction<sup>15</sup>. Islamic epistemology is Quranic-based within the *tauhid* (Oneness) paradigm and is guided by *istiqamat* (objectivity) (Kasule, 2005). Revealed knowledge (Quran) is absolute knowledge while other types of knowledge are relative (Kasule, 2005). The Islamic epistemology views all knowledge as from *Allah* and humans access this knowledge via Revelations or in an active way through empirical observation and experimentation (Kasule, 2005). Thus, knowledge can be innate or acquired. This worldview also asserts that Muslims have knowledge of their Creator even before birth (Kasule, 2005). *Allah* is central to the Universe with the ultimate source of knowledge being the Divine Revelation (Azram, 2011; Weiler, 2013). Placing the source of knowledge as arising from human consciousness is in line with the Divine Revelation as one's state of being-in-the-world and being-created-by God is revealed to us in our knowledge of ourselves as we do not simply exist, but know that we exist (Kalin, n.d.). Weiler (2013) termed it the epistemology of *Allah* where the *Quran* and *Sunnah* are used as a guide by Muslims to help them discover their ontology (existence).

This immediate and intuitive awareness was the focus of Yazdi's (1992) concept of Islamic epistemology, which he described as 'knowledge by presence'. This knowledge is void of

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Four, section 4.1.1 on my explanations on foregrounding methodological concerns to fit my participants' Islamic worldview as opposed to IPA that draws from Heideggerian philosophies

mental or linguistic representation but presents itself through human expressions in general and self-judgments in particular where one arrives at the truth of knowledge by presence through experience of one's feelings and sensations (Yazdi, 1992).

When one says, for instance, "God is the Truth," one is simply saying that God exists or God is the Necessary Being. (Yazdi, 1992, p.47).

Yazdi's (1992) conception of Islamic epistemology sits well with Khan's (2014) conception of Islamic enlightenment, of which the core of it is rooted in the call to use one's faculty to think and reason, that is, a call to personal *ijtihad*. Failure to do so is akin to self-imposed immaturity and will lead to the phenomenon of *taqlid* (blind faith) (Khan, 2014).

Therefore, there is a clear distinction between Western and Islamic epistemologies represented by the individuated versus collective notion of identity. This needs to be taken into consideration in my study on young Western Muslims. As such, in adopting the interpretive phenomenology paradigm that is framed around the Islamic perspective of knowledge, the philosophical focus here is on the participant's socially constructed reality that occurs within Islam. This means an attempt to interpret the participants' sensemaking and meaning-making of their schooling encounters which is framed to their Islamic worldview. This approach sees people as engaging in "everyday hermeneutics" as people are always changing, always processing and always interpreting their world. In short, these are personal acts of autobiographing, forming an identity construction in the process (Grimshaw, 2013<sup>16</sup>). In the case of my participants, this occurs within Islam, thus theirs is an approach of framed sensemaking.

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<sup>16</sup> Associate Professor Michael Grimshaw, delivering a seminar at the University of Canterbury, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013

This also means acknowledging the role of my participants as active co-constructors in the creation of meaning and understanding in the research process as they frame their sensemaking and meaning-making to their Islamic worldview with me attempting to make sense of it via an active interview process. The role of language in shaping meaning and experience (Wagner, 1983; Baumeister, 1991) is also acknowledged. Language can be ambiguous as meaning is interpersonally constructed in conversation therefore, one cannot be the expert at ‘knowing’ (Dean, 2011, p.78) another’s meaning, but merely in attempting to facilitate this knowing as it emerges.

In adopting the social constructionist stand, the task is to comprehend the phenomenon or act at hand from the point of the client. The importance of meaning in social work practice specifically for case assessment is not new (Parton & Byrne, 2000; Sheppard, 2006; Dean, 2011). It is part of practice to recognize that the ontology of our clients, communities, and organizations “*exist in real time and in open systems*” (Floersch, Longhofer & Suskewicz, 2013, the italics are from authors, p.1). In other words, there exists multiple subjective realities layered in everyday life and a sensemaking and meaning-making approach via participants’ retrospection is most apt to reveal meanings that lay hidden. This approach facilitates a platform for both the researcher and participants to be co-creators of meaning, and supports the claim that social work is a form of interpretation (Harms & Connolly, 2009).

As such, my study on young Muslims’ lived experience in Christchurch schools is a study of individual’s sensemaking and meaning-making that occurs within Islam. I see these students as sensemakers of their encounters that is framed against their interpretation of their faith, and I will not understand their sensemaking until I understand the meanings they assigned to their encounters from their individual Islamic perspectives. The intention here is to achieve

understanding of the phenomenon at hand and for both parties to benefit from the critical reflection process. The reflection process guides one to understand not only oneself but oneself in relation to the other. As a Malaysian and having an understanding of Islam and the Islamic way of life through education and family ties, my informed position<sup>17</sup> helps me delve into the complexities and sensitivities of cross-cultural research on Muslim students' lived experiences in New Zealand schools.

My aim is to interpret the individual's construction of experiences that occurs within Islam, and to study consciousness of (young) Muslims means to focus on their Muslim consciousness (Ramadan, 2010b). The only way to access as close as possible this experience is through giving it an idiographic focus as per my central claim that meanings framework are highly personal and intricate. The homogeneity of participant samples is a matter of organization, and does not reflect identical natures. This research hopes to provide that platform to the young Muslim students within the context of their natural surroundings, that is, within their Islamic worldview. All of the above form my Islamic epistemology and interpretive phenomenology positioning for this study.

### **1.7 Taking the qualitative approach**

I have chosen a qualitative approach as opposed to quantitative as this study aims to understand and interpret the meanings of the participant's experience. In other words, the determinant of the right approach rests on my aim of explicating meanings, that is, the exploration of complex psycho-social phenomena. This means selecting an approach that is

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<sup>17</sup> The issue of researcher bias is dealt with through the process of peer-review. See Chapter Four, Section 4.11.1.

antithetical to nomothetic inquiry and the prioritization of an inductive nature as opposed to a deductive approach (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). I came to the understanding that the qualitative approach via the application of Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method can facilitate my attempts to explicate meanings from the students experience at school as IPA is idiographic, inductive and interrogative in nature (Smith, 2004).

The use of IPA with minority population has particular salience as its methodology emphasizes openness to human experience and the unique features of the experience that may be outside of the researcher's experience, giving it the capacity to privilege indigenous knowledge and experience (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Thus I was particularly drawn to IPA as a way to illuminate young Muslims' experience in school in New Zealand as I was aware that Muslims generally rely on elements of meaning (*makna*) and intention (*niat*) in interpreting religious texts. Along with this too is my awareness that the focus of my study is on the experience of young Western Muslims at schools.

This means I needed a method that would allow me to explore, describe, interpret and understand their lived experience incorporating each of their unique personality and their Islamic worldview as set out in my central claim. The need to incorporate the Islamic worldview of the participants is an important consideration as Islam is a way of life. To second guess the motivations and interpretations of individuals who may hold different worldviews from us (MacLeod, Lewis, & Robertson, 2014) is certainly not professional standards framework. There is much to gain when a research focuses on personal experiences as no one experience is the same nor can it be replicated (Wagner, 1983). The term 'Islamic worldview' also denotes a need for a method that can explicate the epistemological and ontological (Crabtree, Husain & Spalek, 2008) aspects of it.

Shaw's (2011) suggestion that an experiential qualitative research has the potential to "reveal the struggles and celebrations of everyday life" (p.28) as it is the key to our understanding of the human condition points to the phenomenological view of prioritizing meaning out of a person's experience (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). The focus on understanding meaning is also deemed central to social work practice, and that while a hermeneutic approach to social work theory might be new, it is by no means new to practice (Scott, 1989). Individualizing people in the social context they are embedded in is the fundamental purpose of social work practice (Meyer, 1995; Mattaini, 1995).

Therefore my preference for a qualitative approach via an adapted version of IPA is premised on the quest to understand personal experience, values, and meanings from an idiographic lens. No doubt phenomenology studies have a small sample size, and as Wagner (1983) pointed out, the nature of phenomenological findings are such that it is not fixed. However, the findings can be extended for use in a nomothetic approach, leading to the possibility of group generalizations (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008) or for triangulation (Cotteril, 2014). Thus, it is not a question of which is better, but which best suits the research question. The logic of the sample size is also to ensure that a more closely defined group is obtained for whom the research question is most significant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). All the above point to the fact I would need a qualitative phenomenological approach for the study. Further discussion on the methodological approach and the adapted IPA approach is in Chapter Four (Methodology).

## 1.8 Relevance of thesis topic

As of 2011, one in four persons out of New Zealand's 4.3 million populations is overseas-born. On top of this, forty to fifty thousand new immigrants from 150 countries enter New Zealand each year, making diversity in terms of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religion an ever growing issue (Ward, 2011). As of 2013, the number of Muslims in New Zealand increased 27.9 percent from 2006, numbering 46, 149 people<sup>18</sup> (Statistics New Zealand, 2014) and they represent the fastest growing religious group in New Zealand (Ward, 2013). The continuous political instability and civil war in the Middle Eastern/African region will continue to contribute to the number of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide and New Zealand's commitment to the United Nations refugee program at 750 persons<sup>19</sup> per year is not likely to be scrapped in the short to medium term (Singham, 2006).

Post 9/11 too, and later the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombing in London, reports of increased level of suspicion, prejudice and discrimination against Middle Easterners and Muslims in the West also surfaced such as in Australia (Mansouri, 2004; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007), the United States (Sirin & Fine, 2008) and Europe (Bayham, 2008). In New Zealand, the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment was reflected in the increase in the number of complaints of racial harassment received by the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator (Butcher, Spoonley & Trlin, 2006). The effect of the attacks in New York spared no one and for Muslims in New Zealand, it was no exception (Asia:NZ Foundation Media Release, 2009).

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<sup>18</sup> Of this figure, 25.7% were born in New Zealand, 21.0% in the Pacific Islands, 26.9% in Asia, and 23.3% in the Middle East and Africa (Statistics New Zealand, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> This figure remains status quo at present though there are calls by the Red Cross to increase the number

The call for social workers in New Zealand to live up to their responsibility to name and confront racist attitudes when they come across it as part of upholding values of social justice was also made by Henrickson (2002). He argued that while the ANZASW expects a commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi to be adhered to as standard practice, in reality, there exist an on-going multiplicity of cultures and societies in New Zealand today. The view that bicultural practices need to be adapted to accommodate the diverse mix of people in New Zealand today is also shared by Ward (2013). In fact, Ward (2013) argued that the inclusion of ethnic minorities into a fair and equitable participation in New Zealand need not be at the expense of biculturalism as the third principle in the Treaty listed equality for all citizens. From the social work perspective, the practice would not be able to operate efficiently and facilitate people into active citizenship if policies remain rhetoric or absent (Sheppard, 2006).

Schools being sites of social interactions are also fertile grounds for racial and discriminatory construction and research has proven that people of minority status are often targeted (Rendall & Stuart, 2005; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Cristillo, 2008; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009). One of the key findings in Butcher, Spoonley and Trlin's (2006) research was that schools in New Zealand were inflexible and lacking cross-cultural consciousness. New Zealand's unique heritage of its colonialist past and the relationship between the Crown and Maori represented by the Treaty of Waitangi and its implications on everyday life in New Zealand are also challenges for anyone new to the system (Stewart, 2010). They not only have to adapt to a new environment, but also immerse themselves in English and Te Reo Maori. Classroom dynamics and pedagogical practices are also impacted

by New Zealand's culture of high egalitarianism, individualism, and tolerance for ambiguity (Stewart, 2010).

This suggests students of collectivistic background such as Muslims grapple with trying to make sense of things amidst an environment that is contrary to theirs, such as being on first name basis with their teachers, and having to adjust their religious obligations<sup>20</sup>. Those who are of refugees' background would understandably experience even greater challenges due to a past that is often traumatic, and a present environment that expects them to completely assimilate (Watts & White, 2004). As Mir (2009) pointed out in her ethnographic study with US female Muslim undergraduates, "White society urges non-Whites to assimilate, and uses non-Whites to diversify mainstream spaces" (p.131). Sirin and Fine (2007) argued that when one's social identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse, either through social relationships, and/or media, it is young people's lives that will be the first to be impacted, either psychologically, socially, or politically (p.151).

Mujcic and Frijters<sup>21</sup> (2013) study in Australia, for instance, demonstrates the existence of systemic racism inherent in the phenomenon of White privilege. White privilege refers to the enjoyment of benefit that White people enjoy without them even asking for it such as being shortlisted for jobs on the basis of their name, race or skin color. It exists in implicit ways with majority carried out unconsciously (Ayres, 2015). This suggests an angle of discrimination that is not easy to confront and rectify as it is always carried out away from

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<sup>20</sup> This is such as foregoing Friday congregational prayer at the local mosque due to on-going lessons while in Islamic countries, Fridays are designated a weekend so that all male Muslims can perform congregational prayers.

<sup>21</sup> See Brisbane study: Still not allowed on the bus: It matters if you're Black or White (Mujcic & Frijters, 2013) for details.

public scrutiny, and is no less discriminatory than acts of overt racism. Generally, people are guided by intuition, and their sensemaking acts facilitate them putting two and two together and coming to a (plausible) conclusion. Thus, one party may present a faux facade of acceptance, while another indulges in 'silent acceptance' despite a sense of awareness.

I consider Ramadan (2004)'s advice to Muslims in the West to leave acts of self-pity behind, and participate actively in the society that is now theirs as borne out of an insider knowledge of the phenomenon of 'White privilege', and a silent acknowledgement of its existence. Similarly, studies on confirmation bias also demonstrated the prevalence of implicit biases among White American lawyers (Reeves, 2014). Discrimination in the job market was also demonstrated in Dobson's (2012) study with New Zealand Muslim women. These studies confirm my own experience as a minority ethnic in New Zealand with insider experience of hegemonic tensions in the course of this study, through observing how children play at school, and stories shared by other ethnic minority mothers on how they made sense of their children's experience at school, and their dealings with school teachers and administrators.

The need to develop models of practice and delivery located within New Zealand's diverse communities was mooted as early as 2009 at the Fourth International School Social Work Conference in Auckland. Thus I see my study as an attempt to fill that gap in view of the projection by Statistics New Zealand that, by 2021, the population of ethnic minority people other than Maori and Pacific will be at 18% (Ward, 2011). The latest 2013 census also indicated a growing Asian population in New Zealand (Spoonley, 2014). This can only mean the need for a new group of social workers to be trained while the current ones will need to retrain. As important as it is that one needs to be culturally sensitive and competent when dealing with a specific ethnic group, and to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi, it is equally

important that other minority groups are featured and understood in New Zealand's social work arena.

It cannot be denied the ANZASW has a deep commitment to the bi-cultural aspects in its work. However, looking into the concept of *paiheretia* in Maori, where this means the principle of integrated goals (Durie, 2003), my view is that the ANZASW should be able to find the balance needed to include everyone. As Durie (2003) argued, to pursue a single overarching goal, to the exclusion of other goals, is not consistent with contemporary Maori realities and fails to capture the significance and the spirit of *paiheretia*, of its generosity and the need to balance diverging interests. Henrickson's (2002) argument that past experiences have indicated that imposing existing models of practice, applying national and cultural values and expectations on migrant populations simply does not work echoes Nash's (2002) findings that a high percentage of social workers (49.5%) indicated that better cultural understanding was what they needed in order to be more competent in cross cultural work. Nash argued the ANZASW practice standard of bicultural competence is different from multicultural or cross-cultural competence and this is one area social workers clearly felt was difficult.

The available literature on social work with Muslims often attend to bridging the gap in understanding Islamic practices from a broad and generalised perspective (see Barise, 2005, Hodge, 2002, 2005; ). The only published book on Islam and social work by Crabtree et al (2008) is also understandably focused on the perspective of enlightening non-Muslim social work practitioners with the tenets and practices of Muslim clients, made more generic by the understanding that Muslims itself is a very diverse group. Such literature no doubt contributes to the limited knowledge of our understanding of the Muslim population, in particular those

who now call the West their home. It may alleviate a certain level of apprehension in working with Muslim clients, but I argue that this only leads to further (un)intentional generalization of Muslims, particularly when the practitioner has limited interaction with Muslims. I argue that there is a need for social work research with Muslims to take a ‘lived experience’ approach seeing that a crucial part of a social worker’s job is to engage with people’s lived experience (Mensinga, 2009) whilst for Muslims, their identity is very much determined by their Muslim consciousness (Ramadan, 2004).

The question of how do non-Muslim social practitioners<sup>22</sup>, agencies, or organizations engage with the diversity of Islamic spiritualities and differing Muslim identities in the course of practice was raised by Nazari (2014) in her New Zealand study. However, while the issue of diversity was rightly raised by Nazari, her use of Haddad’s<sup>23</sup> (2002) definition of who is a Muslim and who is not, and Sander’s<sup>24</sup> (1997) categorization of Muslims only serve to further generalize Muslims. I suggest that this may lead to further (un)intended generalization by non-Muslim practitioners. I would argue that such categorizations are at best, of educational use as a first step for a general understanding of Islam. In practice, the person-in-environment approach would require an acknowledgement that one needs to get back to basics, to starting from where the client is, and their sensemaking of it. Dobson (2012) described her study on New Zealand Muslim women as one that takes root from Hage’s (2003) suggestion that “it is at ground level of human experience that representations are

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<sup>22</sup> Nazari (2014) uses the term social practitioners to include both social workers and counsellors in the New Zealand context.

<sup>23</sup> Haddad (2002) was of the view that a Muslim should not be defined by whether he/she is a practising or non-practising Muslim, as long as the person feels he/she is one, it is sufficient for the person to claim to be one.

<sup>24</sup> Sander (1997) categorized Muslims into 4 types: ethnic Muslims, cultural Muslims, religious Muslims, and political Muslims.

played out in society and in different social contexts” (p.95). Similarly, Oikonomidou (2010) said:

In times of transition, exclusive attention to the larger structural forces that impact individual lives’ cannot grasp the depth of their experiences. The ways in which they [and we] respond to the persuasive influence of these forces should be [closely] examined (p.18).

Therefore, the broader implication is that if social work is not to be left trailing behind, there exists a need to call for a model of practice that is not only culturally sensitive, but one that includes addressing the self in relation to other. It is in first addressing the self that one can see other.

Thus, my application of IPA for social work research is to explore how young Muslims act out and negotiate their way in a Western secular environment, what Edgeworth (2011) described as “changing times and altered spaces” (p.13) as these are “issues of emerging social relevance” (p.13). It strives instead to be an added source of reference for social workers and policy makers to further improve their understanding of self and practice, and service delivery.

### **1.9 Islam: An overview**

Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life therefore aspects of spirituality are uniquely comprehensive to Muslims (Barise, 2005; Prothero, 2010). Muslims emphasize a sense of collective responsibility and this reinforces how they view their place within society (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). The primary concern here is on societal well-being, and not just the welfare of the individual (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000), a concept known as *al-*

*maslahah* (for the common good) (Ramadan, 2010). Its principle of *al-fitra* (Ramadan , 2004, 2010b) refers to the pure, original self, that is, the belief that every human being is born with the inclination toward God and the good (Prothero, 2010).

There are an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, making Islam the second largest religion after Christianity (Desilver, 2013). While there is a general perception that Islam is associated with the Middle East or North Africa, statistics point to nearly two-third concentration of Muslims in the Asia-Pacific region (Desilver 2013). Islam is the name given to the message revealed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)<sup>25</sup> in AD610 in Mecca, Saudi Arabia (Hafiz, Hafiz & Hafiz, 2012). It is believed to be the third revelation from God to humankind after the Torah to Moses and the Bible to Jesus Christ. Thus Muslims believe that both Judaism and Christianity are true revelations of the same God and that Jews and Christians are all ‘people of the book’ (Abu-Harb, 1997) or what is known as the ‘Abrahamic’ faiths as they all trace their roots back to Abraham, where for the Muslims, it is through Abraham’s son, Ishmael (Hafiz et al., 2009). People of the Islamic faith are known as Muslims and regard the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last of the prophet and the Messenger of God (*Allah*). Both the terms Islam and Muslim derived its meaning from the Arabic root *salam* to mean ‘peace’ or ‘submission’ (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). The centrality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to Islam is as Moses is to Judaism and Jesus is to Christianity (Haynes, Eweiss, Mageed & Chung, 1997).

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<sup>25</sup> PBUH – Peace be upon Him – Muslims use this acronym as a sign of respect to the Prophet Muhammad and also other prophets such as Moses and Jesus

The two sources of religious authority for Muslims are the Holy Quran and the *hadith*<sup>26</sup> (Barise, 2005). The Holy Quran is made up of 114 *surah* (chapters) while the *hadith* is the validated traditions of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) words and deeds (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Barise, 2005). It is crucial to be aware that although Islam is seen as a universal religion, the original texts of the Quran and *hadith* are in Arabic and where the Quran is concerned, only the original text can be referred to as the Quran (Barise, 2005). This means quotations of verses from translations of the Quran merely refer to the meanings of the Quran (Barise, 2005). The Quran has been translated into more than forty different languages (Hafiz et al., 2009).

Muslims believe that the essential message delivered from God through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last of the prophets, that is “to believe in one God, to worship Him, and to do as many good deeds as possible in order to be reunited with God in the hereafter” remains the same and is repeated often in the Quran (Hafiz et al., 2009)<sup>27</sup>. Muslims belief in the predestined life is tied to the principle of *kun fayakun*. This refers to the overarching pointer of the greatness of *Allah* as the originator of heavens and earth. Thus, the saying in the Quran, *Be, and it shall be* (Quran 2:117) is one that Muslims draw upon as a source of meaning. The *Syariah*, or Islamic law contains moral or legal guidance on aspects of daily life based on the Quran and examples of actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) known as the *sunnah*. It covers aspects of marriage, divorce, inheritance, contract matters and criminal punishments (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

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<sup>26</sup> Note that Muslims believe there are two versions of hadith – the validated and the un-validated ones. The hadith is the written form of *sunnah* (the Prophet's deeds and actions, mannerisms, and ethics) narrated by those closest to the Prophet. Some scholars use the terms *hadith* and *sunnah* interchangeably.

<sup>27</sup> This is cited from an e-book therefore there is no page number

The Quran is deemed the ultimate authority and guide for all Muslims (Ramadan, 2004; 2010a), while the *hadith* and the *sunnah* are secondary sources to add clarity to one's understanding and interpretation of the Quran and the Islamic laws that has developed over times (Hafiz et al., 2009). While the Quran is a source of document for all Muslims, the effectiveness of it is said only to work for those who are pious and faithful. Its characteristic is known as *syifak*<sup>28</sup>, that is, it is a cure for all of mankind's problems. It is therefore known as a blessing (*rahmat*), enlightenment (*hidayah*), and a guide as each time one reads it, it is said that a new learning occurs. In *Surah al-furqan*, it is said that during the Day of Judgment, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) will cry as many Muslims have forgotten to read the Quran, while those that do, do not understand it or practise it right<sup>29</sup>. The understanding among Muslims is that to cause the downfall of Muslims, one only need to keep them away from reading the Quran. Therefore, the emphasis on Quran lessons by Muslim migrant families is borne out of this reverence for the Holy Quran. The focus on cognitive aspects of practice, what Ramadan (2010a) termed as 'Muslim consciousness' is also evident in *Surah al-Baqarah, 2:44*, where Muslims are asked "to think".

In everyday life, the concept of *ummah* (religious community) in Islam is translated into practice through the concept of *ukhuwwah*<sup>30</sup> (to care and love fellow Muslims unconditionally). Another complementing Islamic concept is *istiqamah*. The concept of *istiqamah* in general understanding means "to strive to remain calm and confident" of *Allah*'s plan in any situation. Thus, to cultivate a calm disposition also means to strive towards the

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<sup>28</sup> As per explanation by Ustaz Mohd Erfino Johari

<sup>29</sup> As per explanation by Ustaz Mohd Erfino Johari

<sup>30</sup> The three guiding principles for *ukhuwwah* are: the cultivation of forgiveness and generosity as the foundation of strong relationships among fellow Muslims; strength in unity via care and love for one another; everyone is of equal standing in the eyes of God except through acts of piety

right direction, that is, to put all faith in *Allah*. Very briefly, the distinction between faith and reason that Ramadan (2010a) included in his suggested framework for Western Muslims is an example of the *istiqamah* translated into everyday practice via cognitive reasoning.

### **1.9.1 The five pillars of Islam and the six articles of faith**

The five pillars of Islam<sup>31</sup> is an important aspect of being a Muslim and children are taught the significance of it from a young age. Its role is to guide Muslims to cultivate good moral existence (Barise, 2005) though one needs to be mindful that there are varying degrees of observance in any Muslim society (Hafiz et al., 2009; Crabtree et al., 2008). The five pillars of Islam focus on the outward signs of the faith, while the six articles of faith<sup>32</sup> is more contemplative in nature as the focus is on living the Islamic message, that is, the practice (Hafiz et al., 2009), what Ramadan (2012) referred to as *al-aqidah* (creed). Both have important implications for social work practice with Muslims (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Crabtree et al., 2008). The centrality of the five pillars of Islam and the six articles of practice are the starting point of Ramadan's (2004) framework for Western Muslims and points to guidelines and boundaries as established in the Quran under *Surah al-kaafirun (109:6)*, that says: *la kum di nikum, wa liya din*. This phrase is translated to mean 'unto you your religion, and unto me my religion'<sup>33</sup>. The gist of this *surah* concludes that Muslims are not forbidden to communicate or cooperate with non-Muslims in general as long as the main creed (*al-aqidah*) and theological aspects of Islam are not compromised, a point repeatedly stressed by Ramadan (2004, 2010a,2010b) in his work.

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>33</sup> As per explanation by Ustaz Mohd Erfino Johari

### 1.9.2 Meaning (*makna*) and intention (*niat*) in Islam

The centrality of the concept of meaning and intention in Islam is an important consideration for this study which prioritizes young Western Muslims' application of *ijtihad* in order to make sense of their schooling experience. The emphasis on meanings in interpretation of religious texts and the influence of *hadith* denote that Muslims generally do have a tendency to allude to meanings in their behavior. Actions as meanings, then, are outcomes of the process of interpretation in human minds that are then acted out in everyday life (Baumeister, 1991).

The significance of meaning in Islam is addressed from four perspectives:

(a) Is the matter forbidden? (b) Principles of understanding texts (c) The importance of collective good and (d) Intentions should be left to *Allah* alone (Webb, 2014).

These perspectives are reflections of the principle of right action (orthopraxy) that takes priority over the principle of right doctrine (orthodoxy) (Prothero, 2010). Therefore, in issuing a *fatwa* (religious ruling), one of the most important axiom is the concern given to meaning, and not the name (Webb, 2014). Intention (*niat*) in Islam prioritizes that if one acts out of good will, then it is this good will that determines if the act is morally right. It is common for Muslims in Malaysia to urge others to give the benefit of the doubt when they are not privy to full information of a person's actions or behaviours. By prioritizing meaning and intention to guide one's decision making, I argue that an internalization of the mix of religious upbringing and one's environment is what leads young Western Muslims to

embrace a personalized version of *ijtihad* in their quest to balance both aspects of meaning and intention.

### **1.10 Muslims in New Zealand**

The two main divisions of Islam in the world are Sunni and Shiite. The majority of the world's Muslim populations are Sunnis (90%) and approximately 10% of the rest are Shiites, where majority are in Iran and a smaller number in Iraq (Eickelman, 1998). This division between Muslims was due to the disagreement over leadership of the first Muslim community following the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Hafiz et al., 2009). Sunni Islam accepts that the first four Caliphs (including Ali) are the rightful descendants of the Prophet and the word Sunni means followers of the Prophet's customs (*sunnah*). Shiite Islam meanwhile sees Ali as the first true leader of the Muslim community and rejects the first three Caliphs (Blanchard, 2009). Sunnis and Shiites of various ethnic background and national origin form New Zealand Muslims leading to its own unique set of problems arising from issues of worship, communication and management of religious interests and preferences (Kolig, 2006).

The earlier arrivals of Muslims to New Zealand were Chinese Muslims brought to work in the goldfields in South Island (Kolig & Shepard, 2006) but left no trace of their heritage behind (Shepard, 2006). The end of World War II saw changes in government policy where a limited number of refugees were accepted, and this included Muslims from Turkey and the Balkans (Shepard, 2006). Subsequently the liberalization of immigration policies in the mid-1960s saw the arrivals of Muslims, mainly from South Asia including Fijian Indians, professional and skilled workers and also those enrolling for higher studies at New Zealand

universities (Shepard, 2006). It was not until the late 1980s that Muslim numbers started rising dramatically due to political upheavals elsewhere and changes in the New Zealand's immigration policy. This included a large number of Fijian Indians who were mostly Muslims that fled the 1987 *coup d'état* in Fiji and refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Kurdish and Afghanistan and a small number of Kiwis who converted to Islam (Shepard, 2006). All of them make up what the Muslim community is like in New Zealand today: myriad, complex, one *ummah* yet not the same (Shepard, 2006).

The general tendency by New Zealanders to see Muslims as a specific religious community and not as a sub-group of identity among a diverse group of ethnicities contributes to an on-going stereotype and prejudices against them due to ignorance and the wave of Islamophobia worldwide (Kolig, 2006). They are generally seen as having a particular religious need and a challenge to the host culture (Balsano & Sirin, 2007), thus they remain the focus of media reporting and political rhetoric (Kolig, 2006). Studies on Muslims youths in New Zealand paint a picture of complex identity (re)construction as a way to negotiate popular essentialist stereotypes of Muslims and the fluid conditions of diaspora and minority contexts (Naqvi-Sherazee, 2008; Stuart & Ward, 2011, Japserse, 2013; Stuart, 2012; Dobson, 2012; Alkharusi, 2013).

The paradoxical position of Muslims in New Zealand is reflected in the fairly even split view with regard to whether New Zealand Muslims are part of mainstream society, and therefore, if it is appropriate for Muslim women to wear the *burqa* (Kolig & Kabir, 2008). On the one hand, they are expected to integrate, while on the other, they continue to be at the receiving end of a negative image accentuated at the global level, putting them under considerable suspicion (Kolig, 2006). Kolig's (2006) view that Muslims in New Zealand experience

distance and maintains it via their pragmatic approach to everyday life in New Zealand (Kolig & Kabir, 2008) is what I suggest as a silent acknowledgement of the prevalence of everyday 'White privilege'. It is a reflection of the intimate and intertwined nature of power and knowledge inherent in dominant groups who possess the power to influence the outcomes of reality (Foucault, 1982; Martin, 2003).

### **1.11 Locating my research within the context of lived experience**

The term *lived experience* is not new in social work literature or practice even though nursing, allied health, education and qualitative psychology dominate most of the research on lived experience (Benner, 1995; Chesla, 1995; Bowden, 2006; Millward, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Griffiths, 2009). At times, the research had phenomenology as title headings, but as van Manen (1990) argued, the study of lived experience is the study of phenomenology as lived experience is the fundamental approach to obtaining insights into the subjective meanings of phenomena in people's lives (van Manen, 1997).

In social work, Black and Enos (1981) first explored the sociological phenomenological approach in clinical social work research through the use of poetic self-analysis. They alluded to the utility of the meaning framework for clinical social work where interpersonal interventions are of primary focus. Research in social work utilizing the phenomenological approach has been gaining popularity this last decade (Pascal, 2009). However, I could not find any social work research on lived experience using the IPA approach at the time I submitted my research proposal in December 2009. As of present, to my knowledge thus far,

only two international PhD studies<sup>34</sup> might be from the social work discipline embracing the IPA approach as the research framework. This is in the work of Dima (2009) who investigated on the experiences of young people leaving care in Romania and Oke (2009) on foster carers' perceptions. This could be the fact IPA is itself a new approach in qualitative psychology (Smith, 2009). In Pascal's (2010) study on the lived experience of cancer survival, she adopted the Heideggerian phenomenology approach. Similarly, Wilcke's (2002) research on the experience of a group of refugee women of the former Yugoslavia that had resettled in Canada also took the Heideggerian phenomenological approach. The Heideggerian phenomenological approach views human existence as an individual that is embedded within a social context. Thus it is not surprising to see social work research on lived experience favouring the Heideggerian approach.

In its most basic form lived experience refers to our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life; its reflexive quality characterized as an awareness that is unaware of itself (van Manen, 1990). An interpretive study of lived experience takes into account the wholeness of life (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), made up of meaning units. Gadamer (1989) extended upon the word 'experience' and suggested it alludes to the fullness and intensity of life, implying the many parts that make up a significant whole, as in Baumeister's (1991) chunks or fragments of life meanings. Thus, it is the past as it has been 'lived' and 'experienced' and made up of parts of the whole. Only through acts of retrospection can we capture this awareness and a study of lived experience starts with a direct description of experience as it is (van Manen,

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<sup>34</sup> I have not been able to establish if these two studies were from the Social Work discipline despite extensive search online for access to the theses. They may also be of health psychology background.

The most recent social work thesis that incorporated a mixed quantitative method with IPA for data analysis was by Edwards (2012) – See Edwards, L. (2012). *Not just another hole in the wall – An investigation into child and youth perpetrated domestic property violence*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Canterbury, NZ, for details.

1990; Smith, 2009). Lived experience therefore, is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. It is a return to the basics, to what was original (van Manen, 1990; Husserl, 1970). Stated simply then, a study of lived experience, also known as phenomenological research, is a study that focuses on the construction of meaning, and draws upon the overarching horizons for understanding.

The need to read beyond the surface of the text is due to the epistemology of experience being determined by the epistemology of language and text (van Manen, 1990). Thus one's act of retrospection can only be articulated through language and text (Baumeister, 1991). While consciousness itself is not something we can describe directly, the fixation with consciousness is unavoidable as it is the only access humans have to the world. Thus, in adopting a phenomenological approach, the focus is on phenomena as it presents itself to consciousness (van Manen, 1990).

Researching lived experience is therefore a systematic and orderly approach to extricate and describe the internal meaning structures of a phenomenon; it is the study of essences. It studies what we take for granted in our everyday lives, through making explicit the meanings we attach to our human experience, which would otherwise remain implicit (Finlay, 2011). It is interested in finding out the nature or essence of the experience. It is not interested in the factual status of particular instances, that is, whether something actually happened, how often it tends to happen or if the experience is in any way linked to the appearance of other conditions or events. It is the study of existential meanings in the sense that much effort is given to describe and interpret the meanings to a certain level of depth and richness (van Manen, 1990). In my study, the focus is on the participants framing of their sensemaking to their Islamic worldview.

What sets phenomenology apart from all the other social or human sciences is its focus on explicating the meanings as we live them, on our terms, in our everyday existence, located within our lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). It is about attempting to understand another person through asking them how their world is lived and experienced (Finlay, 2011). Pascal (2010) argued a study of lived experience illuminates the many truths and realities of everyday life as it helps the researcher(s) obtain an understanding of the meanings and perceptions of the individual's world. Her experience in doing phenomenology research led her to conclude that there are both personal and academic benefits and this includes transformational changes in the researcher. In fact, it has been suggested that phenomenology's research route is that of exploring fore-structured communication across cultures (Wilson, 2012) alluding to the utility of its "hidden" nature (van Manen, 1990).

As early as 2002, Wilcke (2002) highlighted the lack of social work research using the hermeneutic phenomenology approach. She argued, amidst the limitations of the approach, her study presented findings that deepened our understanding of certain aspects of the refugee experience, and had implications for furthering social work knowledge, education and practice. Most important, the study demonstrated the risk of researchers objectifying and categorizing people for the purpose of research and serves as a reminder that peoples' lives are richer and more complex than the categories we may impose on them (Wilcke, 2002). She further argued the hermeneutic phenomenology approach provided her the tool to reflect on the meaning of the experiences, leading to additional perspectives of understanding. The method also laid bare her own unacknowledged assumption of what it means to be a refugee and forced her to analyze her own projections and reinterpretations. Further espousing the utility of a lived experience research is Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao (2004) who

highlighted that the openness and transparency processes inherent in the phenomenological approach are what facilitates the steps of critically questioning the meaning and ultimate source of the experience, exposing what lies deep beneath it.

## **1.12 Summary and Conclusion**

The main aim of this thesis is to give voice to young Western Muslims at school via their sensemaking and meaning-making that occurs within Islam. A broader aim of this study is to get social workers to reflect on self and their relation with Other, in order to work out unchecked biases (if any). This is one way to address the perpetuation of systemic racism, if ideals of upholding social justice are to have real meaning in the context of practice (Henrickson, 2002).

I conclude this chapter by reiterating my stand that absence of any discriminatory experience or narrative is not necessarily an indication that integration of young Western Muslims at school is going well. Above all, I suggest that, similar to implicit biases that go undetected and the phenomenon of (un)conscious White privilege, young Western Muslims' awareness of their position of disadvantage is a taken for granted position and managed via their application of *ijtihad*. Thus, locating meanings in the young Muslims experience at school is important, precisely because meanings reflect the shared mental representations of relationships between things, events, and relationships (Baumeister, 1991, p.15). It is what connects, and is real in a person's mind as a result of their internal interpretations.

In this chapter I have set out the context of my study, the Islamic epistemological approach, the answers I am seeking and my arguments on locating my research from a lived experience

perspective. My reflections on the utility of a lived experience study will be explored further in Chapter Eight (Conclusion). I have also provided a basic overview of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand. In the following chapter, I discuss the relevant literature for this study, specifically on school social work and young Western Muslims at school.

### **1.13 Structure of thesis**

Following Chapter One, Chapter Two will be a Literature Review to establish a scope of what has been done by others and the relevant gaps (if any). This is to establish the significance of my present study and how it contributes to existing knowledge.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework that frames this study. These are Ramadan's philosophies for Western Muslims (2004, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory, and Ramadan's (2010a) model of applied *ijtihad* in order to explore the participants' meaning-making. The use of Ramadanian philosophies as theoretical framework is a prerequisite to the adapted IPA method.

Chapter Four discusses the Methodology of this study in detail including all aspects of the research process. This chapter also includes an acknowledgement of the tensions in applying IPA and Heideggerian philosophies on Muslim participants, and an explanation on the adapted IPA approach influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R). It will also present my detailed arguments on the decision to pursue it from a qualitative phenomenological perspective.

Chapter Five is a summary of researcher's reflection on the informal engagement with each participant, in their community, and particularly via social media and email as this mode of

communication was at the request of the participants. These reflections are taken up to support the data analysis in Chapter Six and contribute to the circularity of understanding.

Chapter Six discusses the findings of the study - the superordinate theme and the sub-themes incorporating the textual element that supports the findings.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings in light of the study to extant literature and a model of school social work practice that extends from the current 4A's model.

Chapter Eight concludes with the summation of the study, the broader general implications for practice, my reflections via the selves that I bring into the research process, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research. I address also the issue of IPA's small sample size and the contributions of this study. It concludes with the positioning statement.

#### **1.14 A note on the terms and spelling used in this thesis**

The spelling of Arabic/Islamic terms used in this thesis, except those directly cited from referenced sources, will take the Malaysian version, due to my familiarity and ease with it. There are no major implications resulting from this as advised by Dr Mohammad Alayan, my Cultural Supervisor. In instances where information on Islam is cited from translated sources, where it may include citations from the Quran, some paraphrasing might not be possible in order to retain the original author's interpretation of the Quran. These are made known at the relevant sections through footnotes. I also acknowledge that my understanding of Islam is derived partly from the guidance of Ustaz Mohd. Erfino Johari, Director of Education Malaysia-New Zealand. However, I take sole responsibility for any misquote and attribute it to my own misinterpretation.

Following van Manen (1990), the word 'person' is preferred in place of 'individual' as far as possible as an acknowledgement of the 'uniqueness' in each person. It may not be possible when citing directly from other sources. The terms social workers and practitioners are used interchangeably in the thesis. I do not see any significant difference, but rather a personal preference for both terms. The term 'young Muslims', 'Muslim youths' or 'Muslim students' are also used interchangeably, mainly due to citing from other sources. My personal preference is the term 'young Muslims'. For me, the term young Muslims denote they are full of promise and it is part of our duty to include and nurture them to their best capability. Being a Malaysian, where majority are Sunni Muslims, my worldview and understanding of Islam may reflect a sway to the Sunni practices, however, it should not be seen as a bias or of favouring a certain denomination. It is more a matter of cultural and religious socialization. A glossary of Islamic terms is also included in the attachment for easy reference.

## **2. Chapter Two - Literature Review**

If you think about it, we are living away from our country,  
so it's all right, we can still pray at home.

(Imran, research participant)

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature on Western Muslims' experience at school, and school social work practice with Muslims. It concludes with a summary of key conclusions and research gaps. Within the broad scope of the reviewed literature, this thesis attempts to address the following main research question:

**What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?**

The literature search was conducted at various stages of this study, at the beginning to identify literature gaps and periodically for relevant updates. Subsequent filtering was made after perusing the abstracts with annotated notes written physically on the selected papers and filed in physical folders. The annotated notes were then turned into drafts at the writing stage. A bibliography manager was used to manage the list of references.

The search prior to research proposal was done using subject guides as per librarian's recommendations. The databases of PsycInfo and Index New Zealand were searched using keywords of social work, Muslims or Islam, and school for the period 2000 - 2010. It returned a result of 37 and after perusing the titles and abstracts, only 15 were found to be

directly related to social work/social welfare. It was found that the major themes of the literature were focused on educating social workers on Islam and its aspects of spirituality and practice (Hall, 2007; Khaja & Frederick, 2008; Crabtree et al., 2008), or ethics and implications for cross-cultural practice (Linzer, 2006; Ross, 2007; Suarez, Newman, & Reed, 2008). A further few touched on clinical intervention skills within the context of the Arabian peninsula.

The database of Aotearoa New Zealand's Social Work Review was searched through Index New Zealand. Two articles on school social work were found; however, only one was in the New Zealand context (Wheeler & Simmons, 2009) while the other was in the Australian context (Testa, 2009). While Wheeler and Simmon's article does not specifically focus on interventions with Muslims at school, I found it to be an important source to glean additional insights into school-based social work in New Zealand, particularly their community development approach. This will be discussed at later sections of this chapter.

An online search of *Social Work Now*, the professional practice journal of Child, Youth and Family, New Zealand was further carried out. A check on New Zealand theses was also conducted on the site NZresearch.org.nz while the Australia Trove was checked for Australian theses. Both checks were done using keywords of Muslims, Islam, youths, and school. There were none that touched specifically on young Muslims at school from the social work perspective. The databases of the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Education were also searched to obtain background knowledge on research and reports on Muslims in New Zealand and the relevant governmental policies that were in place. Again, there were none that reported specifically on Muslim students in school.

Overall, from the literature search, I found only two studies that explored school social work with Muslims (Al-Ajlan, 2000; Al-Qarni, 2004). However, both studies were located in the context of secondary school students in Saudi Arabia with the aim of informing practice on cross-cultural sensitivity when working with Arab Muslim<sup>35</sup> students and their families in the United States or in Saudi Arabia (in the case of Al-Ajlan, 2000). Both studies focused specifically on Arabic culture and Islam from a general perspective and do not delve into the specifics of individual understanding and practices, and how they are played out within a secular school context.

However, what was insightful was Al-Qarni's (2004) suggestion on the application of Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) as a tool for practice with Arab Muslim clients via modified guidelines<sup>36</sup>. The foundational concepts of SFT reflect those of Strengths Perspective, with emphasis on self-determination and internal strengths. While Al-Qarni acknowledged criticisms of the SFT approach as lacking empirical evidence and paying minimal attention to emotional support, he maintained that SFT has its utility in Saudi settings. He insisted SFT's solution-focused and goal-oriented direction is extremely well-suited for practice in Arabic settings characterized by heterogeneity and conservatism.

In the case of Al-Ajlan, the study was conducted using quantitative methods. Through identifying and comparing the actual and ideal roles of school social workers in Saudi Arabia,

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Qarni made a distinction between what is Arabic culture (which is also embraced by Arab Christians) and what is Islamic culture

<sup>36</sup> SFT views human problems as non-pathological but linked to social systems. Therefore it emphasizes that solutions can be found hidden within the social systems. Of particular significance is the concept of 'the miracle question', deemed the cornerstone technique in SFT.

this study sought to identify the major problems facing social workers and getting their views on improving counseling services for secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Put simply, this study prioritized the voice of the practitioners, not the students.

From time to time, literature search was also done to ascertain whether any updated research on young Muslims in New Zealand, particularly those pertaining to their schooling experience and from a social work perspective has been carried out. The literature search confirmed the paucity of literature not only on school social work in New Zealand but also social work with Muslims in New Zealand. The conclusion of this early review was that while there were social work literature that covers aspects of Islam and Muslim practices, and family interventions, there was none from the perspective of young Western Muslims at school. It raises the question of how much does the profession know and understand with regard to young Western Muslims' experiences at school and their coping mechanism.

The core focus of school-based social work is in ensuring children's right to quality education is upheld; schools being sites of social interactions and personal growth impact on a person's well-being and their future success. The work of Sirin and Fine (2008) in the US, Mansouri (2008) in Australia, Zine (2008) in Canada, Coles (2008) in UK and Trlin, Butcher, and Spoonely (2006) in New Zealand all point to undercurrents of racism and discrimination played out on school grounds. Socio-cultural issues are dominant in school settings and this necessitates the need to explore and understand how young Muslims experience school in the West, how they make sense of it and the meanings they place on it. I have in Chapter One laid out the importance of locating this study within the context of lived experience and meaning from the social work perspective.

Thus, as literature on young Muslims from the person-in-context perspective is limited, I formed the belief that a continuing focus on using a universal application of generic Islam will only lead to projections of group identity marker, i.e. Muslims as a homogenous group. I argue that this creates (un)intended generalization of Muslims with aspects of its practice diversity and the uniqueness of each *muslimin*<sup>37</sup> neglected. I suggest that this on the whole overshadows the social work concept of the person-in-environment context where (young) Muslims are concerned. The central argument of this thesis is that young Western Muslims practice a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social encounters in a secular schooling environment. The meanings they make are intricate and personal as making sense and interpretation of experience is essentially a personal and intimate process and draws from many aspects and at many levels (Baumeister, 1991).

While a general framework and understanding of Islam and its practices are useful, I argue that it is necessary but not sufficient for practice, and can lead to unintended phenomenon of ‘textbook Muslims’<sup>38</sup> (Sensoy, 2009) knowledge acquisition. It leads to one getting carried away trying to “see into them” via the umbrella of Islam, rather than to “see with them.” In “seeing into them” I suggest that one would need to interpret their interpretation of their experience on the back of the person’s understanding of their faith. This process of interpretation is cyclical, drawing both into close proximity and is transformational and

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<sup>37</sup> Adherents of the Islamic faith

<sup>38</sup> Sensoy’s (2009) work aim to challenge us to consider which part of our knowledge about Muslims is actually knowledge derived from textbook, in the absence of personal contact and knowledge, hence the term ‘textbook Muslims.’ See Sensoy in Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) for details.

reflexive for both. I view this as of utility to practice and what Sheppard (2004) advanced as the importance of not just listening but also understanding in social work interviewing skills.

Baumeister (1991) argued people engage in meaning-making as a way to explore strategies that make them feel good rather than bad. As such, Ramadan's (2004) call to (Western) Muslims to engage in ethical creative reasoning (*applied ijihad*) can be interpreted as a call to Muslims to make sense and meaning of their environment as a way to achieve well-being. The phenomenological focus in IPA prioritizes understanding and 'giving voice' to the concerns of participants. The interpretative element prioritizes contextualization and researcher making sense of the claims from a psychological perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Therefore, I maintain that the starting point to understand young Western Muslims' experience at school is from their lived experience.

## **2.2 Overview of school social work practice**

School-based social workers are a growing international phenomenon, with an estimated 50,000 practitioners in 43 countries (Kelly, 2008). This number would have increased as there are currently school-based social workers in 49 countries<sup>39</sup> (International Network for School Social Work, 2014). Globally, school-based social workers practice in a variety of micro and macro level capacities, facilitating in areas such as skills training; individual, family and group work; crisis intervention; home visits; parent support and education; advocacy work for students, parents, community or schools systems; teacher training and support. In this way, social work has crossed function into multidisciplinary team work in

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<sup>39</sup> There have been no updates on the estimated number of school-based social workers worldwide by the International Network for School Social Work even though the membership countries have increased to 49.

recent times, serving as the link between the many systems within which young people are engaged with and are needed for the optimization of young people's psychological and physiological health (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014).

In short, the key areas that school-based social workers are generally involved in intervention work are children's right to education, psychological and behavioural health, and physiological health, alongside advocacy work in areas of cultural and political changes that impact on a young child's education. In essence, the main aim of school-based social work is to sustain a child's access to quality education within an environment that nurtures its growth and well-being.

School-based social work is considered new within the social work discipline even though it has been recognize in the United States of America for over a century (Allen-Meares, 2010). In contrast, while school-based social work in China has been around for more than two decades, the first social work qualification examination was conducted only in 2008 (Levine & Zhu, 2010). In India, it was reported that not only is school-based mental health services non-existent, the lack of communication between practitioners and researchers, as well as a lack of access to literature on school-based mental health services further frustrates their development. In Malaysia, the need for more recognition and professional standing for school-based social workers was highlighted by Alavi et al., (2012).

In New Zealand, the school-based 'Social Workers in Schools' (SWiS) programme started in 1999 though the social work profession has had a history of more than five decades. This then suggests that there is a blinkered approach to education and practice by the social work profession in New Zealand with regard to young Muslims' well-being at school despite more

than sixteen years of establishment. This lack of reflection by the profession is cause for examination regardless of whether the young Muslims are a minority or that they seem to be presenting well at school. It may also suggest that New Zealand social workers do not know how to approach practice from the religion and spirituality aspect, particularly with Muslims.

It is a known fact that children in this 21<sup>st</sup> century are still mired in poverty-stricken environments with unmet basic needs, poor or nil health care on top of insufficient access to quality education (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). These are big challenges for school-based social workers and it is no surprise to see most of these services concentrated in areas targeting the most vulnerable. In Malaysia, the high prevalence of child abuse (physical, sexual and mental) was identified among school-going children in areas of low socio-economic status (Alavi et al., 2012).

In New Zealand, the SWiS programme caters specifically to schools of deciles one to four from primary to intermediate years. This reflects the commitment and focus of the government to work with children from the most vulnerable background, particularly those of Maori and Pasifika descent and is reflective of the government's commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi. However, this means a significant proportion of students are excluded where school social work is concerned, leaving them to find ways to 'fend' for themselves, such as the young Muslims in schools in New Zealand. Thus, I maintain my argument that exploring and understanding how they 'fend' for themselves, via a personalized mode of everyday *ijtihad* is a form of inclusive practice.

### **2.3 Limited literature on school social work practice**

There has been substantial progress made in school-based social work around the world, however the majority of literature on this area is still from the United States (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014; Allen-Meares, Montgomery & Kim, 2013). The paucity of literature on school-based social work worldwide includes limited empirical evidence (Kelly, Frey & Anderson-Butcher, 2010). It is also the same in the Australian context (Lee, 2012) with Testa (2014) noting that in the context of Australian school social work, documented information on how primary school children experience school-based social work programmes is not available.

In South Korea, the marked increase in the number of social workers being registered, of which the numbers are second only to the number of social workers in the United States, also did not contribute to additional research on school-based social work (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013). In New Zealand, the paucity of literature on school social work is also evident with so far only one report<sup>40</sup> of evaluation of the Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) programme available publicly. This evaluation of the SWiS services was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development and conducted by Belgrave et al. (2004) and provided some insights for this study. This will be further discussed in the section on SWiS in New Zealand.

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<sup>40</sup> This could be due to the fact that an evaluation of such a wide-scale programme needs to extend over a period of time before any significant impact on student wellbeing and progress can be recorded (Belgrave et al., 2004).

## **2.4 Models in practice**

The contextual lens through which school social work practice has been viewed is theoretically rooted in systems approaches, such as the ecological systems perspective and the school-community-pupil relations model (Kelly et al., 2008; Allen-Meares, 2010; Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). These models assert that (a) youths must be viewed as part of a larger system that has an impact on their behavior, and (b) interaction between the multiple systems must form part of intervention (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014, p.106). As such, these models in the systems approach construe a form of versatility that help facilitate effective assessment, understanding, and intervention plans for the diverse groups of school-age children around the globe. Underpinning this approach is the ‘big picture’ framework that gives space for the filling in of localized intricate mechanisms. Put simply, it has what is generally known as a ‘glocalized’ approach, i.e. global universal framework for intervention but to be adapted and contextualized to a local situation.

In the United States, the current model of practice evolved from a focus on special education for students needing it to one that is available and accessible for all school-based students (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). The move to an enlarged clientele was driven by the objective to provide school-based mental health services that operate across a full continuum that starts from early prevention to after onset of interventions and treatment for severe and chronic problems (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). It is the ‘response to intervention’ approach that is based on four principles: capacity building, detailed and quality interventions

that is guided by data-based decision-making and include multi-tiered framework<sup>41</sup> of services (Kelly et al., 2008). School social workers are also increasingly expected to operate from an Evidence Based Practice (EBP) framework (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014; Powers et al., 2011). This approach reflects the absorption of the wider social work trend of combining theories into everyday practice.

Similarly, in Australia, school-based mental health services are delivered via the whole school approach with a focus on improving health and well-being of students (Rowling, 2009). This approach reflects the prevalent referral trend of behavioural and mental health problems in Australian schools (Lee, 2012). The school-wide intervention approaches are run by both teachers and service professionals in Australia through the school-level risk<sup>42</sup> and protective system<sup>43</sup>. The whole school approach is seen as a more effective system of intervention and beneficial as it includes structured components that help school leaders in carrying out the tasks such as a staff communication plan, parents and families resource information kit, referral pathways that are clearly defined, and access to school-based resources that specifically caters for health and behavioural use (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014).

Clearly it is a very comprehensive model of intervention as it involves all stakeholders, from

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<sup>41</sup> Tier 1 – deals with school-wide interventions and are delivered in classroom settings ; Tier 2 – also known as “selective interventions” caters to students with higher needs and often delivered via group settings; Tier 3 – intervention with students that has the highest needs, individually tailored and require multisystemic intervention (See Frankiln et al., 2012 for details)

<sup>42</sup> This involves intervention that takes into account school failure rates, incidences of bullying culture, behaviour management model etc (See Rowling, 2009, for details)

<sup>43</sup> Positive school climate, opportunities for school success, achievement recognition and rewards etc (See Rowling, 2009, for details)

school leaders to family members and agencies at various stages, ensuring that everyone is part of the system. The availability of a communication plan would also further strengthen the working model and one I view as a critical component of the whole process as essentially it is about synergy among all stakeholders.

An example of the whole school approach in Australia is the St Paul Model (Testa, 2011; Testa, 2014). Being a school in an area categorized as the second most disadvantaged municipality in Melbourne, Australia, the St Paul model draws from socio-ecological health and student well-being discourses. Both the discourses operate on the premise that the complex interwoven relationship between the person and their environment, including their social, emotional, economic and cultural has an impact on student well-being and student achievement (Testa, 2011). Similar to the American model, the St Paul model operates on a continuum of care incorporating early intervention, prevention, intervention and post-intervention with the goal of improving student well-being (Testa, 2011).

In essence, be it the whole school approach in Australia or an all-school based students approach in America, the focus is to work on sustaining student well-being. It works on a completely different platform to the voluntary self-referral approach as in the New Zealand model under the SWiS program. The whole-school approach is what I deem comprehensive as it reflects a more inclusive approach through inculcating proactive steps to include everyone regardless of whether they present with a symptom or not. At early prevention stage (Tier 1), this would include various education and advocacy tasks that also include networking and communicating closely with other stakeholders. In contrast, the approach of voluntary self-referral is not without its strengths as it means more engagement and self-determination; however, I would suggest that this then leave gaps for early prevention as

interventions only begins after onset of behavioural or mental issues when a person self-refers and after obtaining parental consent. This suggests it is more reactive than responsive.

#### **2.4.1 A New Zealand example**

The challenge in identifying models of practice in New Zealand is curtailed not only by the lack of literature on school social work, but also empirical studies. There was only one journal article by Wheeler and Simmons (2009) that reported on a social work placement at a decile four secondary school that had an enrolment of approximately 500. Opting out of the usual predominant model of casework or counseling practice for school-based social workers, they suggested a model of “loitering with intent” that is based on a community development approach. They argued the utility of this approach rests on the illuminated strengths-based and social justice themes as the school environment is one that does not exist in a vacuum, but rather a network of stakeholders. I see this as a mini- whole-school approach that has been creatively tweaked to a local context, in order to fit in with practicum goals, school vision, budget and timeframe.

Wheeler and Simmons (2009) narrated their discovery of the “development from below” approach (p.42) in working with Maori students on the STOP Smoking Program. Whilst this insight was obtained from fieldwork placement, I would view this as a classic example of EBP for school-based social work as it highlights the everyday realities of the students at school and the environment that they are in. The flexibility of this community development approach means it facilitated the “whanau working with whanau” concept of the Maori model to flow through, facilitating the students themselves to take the lead in engaging more of their friends into the program. They emphasized that the takeaway point from this model of ‘loitering with intent’ is “to enjoy the students, to engage with their energy and enthusiasm

and to let them know you are on their team” (Wheeler & Simmons, 2009, p.44).

The phrase ‘loitering with intent’ is similar to social work practice of outreach or inreach approach where social workers are encouraged to obtain first-hand knowledge of what goes on in a community. By doing such, one not only gets in-touch with reality on the ground but also extends their own presence to those on the ground as opposed to sitting in their office sifting through papers and churning out policies. The strength here is in creating meaningful contact thus establishing trust and engagement. In a nutshell, it is about school-based social workers stepping into their work setting with an open mind, and approaching it from a position of enquiry and learning, one of the seventeen key competencies outlined in the SWiS program.

## **2.5 The 4A’s approach for school social work intervention**

Following the identification of the wide gap in literature for school social work worldwide, Allen-Meares & Montgomery (2014) suggested the Four As approach (Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011) as a framework for school social workers worldwide. The foundational principles of the Four As approach is the belief that children’s rights to education are to be safeguarded and all threats eliminated. The Four A’s represent the elements of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014, p. 109). This approach grew out of criticisms that existing political frameworks do not acknowledge the existence of multiple factors that impact on a child’s right to education.

The element of availability refers to access to free education for all children. This is in terms of availability of adequate and quality resources that makes for a quality and supportive

learning environment, be it human, physical or budgetary resources (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014; Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011). Allen-Meares and Montgomery also suggest that this would entail tasks such as advocacy work to realize the attainment of the overall goals of a quality education that includes improved facilities, adequate funding and appropriate allocation of resources.

In accessibility, this refers to education systems that do not discriminate on any grounds including for those most marginalized (Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011). It also includes the application of culturally-relevant and gender-sensitive interventions by school-based social workers in order to facilitate optimal learning (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). In essence, I view accessibility as advocating for the incorporation of mechanisms of inclusive practice in education.

The element of acceptability explains the use of educational content and teaching methods that are relevant, culturally appropriate, and of quality as a means to uphold the human rights of all in education (Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011, p.11). The role of the school-based social worker here is to work alongside the teachers by soliciting culturally relevant materials or research information as a way to engage students who may feel or is different from other students due to their ethnic minority backgrounds. In this aspect, it is to be acknowledged that many teacher training faculties today do include cultural perspectives as part of teacher training curriculum. However, there would be instances where a certain culture might be new and even if it is not, it is certainly dangerous for one to assume that what was learnt at teacher education or social work school is adequate.

As I see it, the role of the school social worker is not as the know-all in cultural matters but as a resourceful person that takes dedicated steps to ensure service delivery is effective and professionally delivered even if it means having to research herself/himself and then share this information with the school/teacher(s). It not only reduces part of the teachers' workload but can create good working relationship between the parties concerned. Part of the challenges of working in schools is the lament by social workers that they are often not regarded as professionals in their own right (Lee, 2012; Phillipa & Blosser, 2013). Finding ways to include oneself into the system is part of a school-based social workers task.

The element of adaptability is about having an education system that is flexible enough to cater to the diverse needs and abilities of the students in meeting the best interests of the child, and can adapt to different contexts (Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011). In other words, this is similar to taking the Multiple Intelligences (MI) approach where each child is seen as possessing a reservoir of capability towards learning and the role of the educator is to work with the child based on his/her strength. It is the approach of the Strengths Perspective in social work which advocates for practitioners strengthening the protective factors (Saleebey, 2007).

In summary, this means the role of the social worker at all four elements of the 4A's model can encompass all levels of the ecological perspective, where at different times or context, it can move between micro, meso, or even macro-levels of the ecological system. As I see it, the four-element approaches do not limit a social workers' role in a school-setting to a certain boundary, but necessitate a strategy that is proactive, responsive, and innovative at the same

time.

## **2.6 Social Workers in Schools (SWiS), New Zealand - Background**

The SWiS programme grew out of the need to address the impact of social and economic factors on the lives of families/whanau which impact on the well-being of children and young people growing up in New Zealand. The programme serves as a way to provide early assistance and intervention to children and families/whanau, to prevent social problems from escalating into more serious issues thus affecting the children's educational attainments and achievements and also their social outcomes. This service bases social workers in selected low-decile primary, intermediate and secondary schools, working primarily with children in years one to eight within these schools. As of 2013, the strong demand from schools for specialist support for children has led to the expansion of the presence of SWiS to all decile one to three primary and intermediate schools, where approximately 131,000 children across schools in New Zealand have access to this service (SWiS, 2014).

### **2.6.1 Overview of SWiS services**

The SWiS service has a vision to:

Enhanced life outcomes for children whose social and family/whanau circumstances place at risk their chances of achieving positive education, social and health outcomes (SWiS, 2014, p.6).

The outcomes it seeks are: children who attend school on a regular basis and with active engagement, thus moulding children who feel safe and has a strong sense of identity and well-being (SWiS, 2014, p.6).

The school-based setting is intended to help children and their families/whanau to physically

feel and see the presence of SWiS service. This is to help break down the barriers and stigma for families/whanau that require assistance. Social workers based in school settings are employed by non-governmental social service providers and work in partnership with other staff members as part of the school community. They may work in one school, or a group of schools, depending on the provider's agreement with the Ministry. Currently, one 'full time equivalent' social worker serves an approximate roll of between 400 and 700 students, and this can be from a combined cluster of schools (SWiS, 2014, p.6). Thus, similar to the school-based social work services for schools in the US and Australia, the SWiS in New Zealand is a service that targets intervention in areas of behavioural, psychological, and physiological.

### **2.6.2 SWiS – Models of practice**

The core principles that underpin the work by SWiS are strengths and evidence-based practice, similar to the United States and Australia. It is based on child-centred, family/whanau-led and is culturally responsive. Chief amongst the principles is the need to acknowledge that the child's right to have their well-being and safety protected forms the first and paramount consideration in the delivery of service. This includes when the child self-refers to SWiS services and does not want their family/whanau to know. The social worker will need to work with the child to determine the best approach to obtaining parental consent for on-going SWiS services. This is on the understanding that all referrals must have the consent of families/whanau.

The three areas that SWiS work in are social work with children and families/whanau, planned group activities and programmes, and liaison with community and other service professionals through the multi-agency approach. This reflects the delivery of all three tiers

of service. Measuring the outcomes of SWiS services for individuals as well as their families/whanau is done through collecting information based on a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework for review by the Ministry of Social Development. The data will focus on reporting how much was done, how well it was done, and if anyone was better off after the intervention and complemented with a narrative report (SWiS, 2014, p.20).

## **2.7 Summary**

Allen-Meares and Montgomery (2014) argued that the paucity of literature on school-based social work around the world means there is much work to be done to meet the needs of the world's youths. The limited literature available also restricts the profession's ability to offer useful suggestions for advancement out of the United States. The difference in cultural and political context means not much is known about whether the United States model can be of meaningful use in other parts of the world (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014). As such, while this present study is exploratory in nature, the argument is that the 4A's approach for school social work practice is adequate for practice with young Western Muslims as it is contextually flexible and sensitive with reflections of universal values of justice and equality.

While the suggestion in the 4A's approach is to take culturally-relevant and gender-specific interventions in school-settings so as to assist with optimal learning, detailed intricacies of what involves culturally-relevant initiatives is not specified. One can conclude that this is because every client would have their own culture traits regardless of their race, creed, color or background. Thus I maintain my central argument that what is culturally-relevant to young Muslims is their brand of everyday *ijtihad*.

I believe that Meares-Allen and Montgomery's suggestion that school social workers worldwide draw on Melchiorre and Atkins (2011) 4A's approach and Franklin et al's (2012) three-tiered approach is due to their elements of flexibility for adaptation to local contexts. I would like to point out that there is room for flexibility within both models for adaptation with clients in any country or context. As Ramadan (2004) himself pointed out humanity does share many universal values such as equality and justice and the preservation of dignity. These are what I see as the essence of the 4A's and three-tiered approaches for school social work practice. Inherent in both approaches is what I see as a suitable accommodation of the everyday *ijtihad* that young Western Muslims practise and embrace through acts of sensemaking and meaning-making.

## **2.8 Young Western Muslims at school**

While there is an abundance of scholarly literature on Muslims in America post-911 addressing a wide range of matters, the lack of literature on young Muslims' experience at school within the American context is a stark exception (Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Gunel, 2007; Sensoy & Stoneblanks, 2009; Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi, 2009; Khan, 2009; Javed, 2013; Abukar, 2014) given that the migration and mobility of Muslims have been on a constant rise (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

One of the most comprehensive and compelling work on the experience of Muslim American students is the compilation of studies edited by Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009), *Muslim voices in school: Narratives of identity and pluralism*. This collection of scholarship prioritizes the voices of young Muslims in the West through a focus on how they live out their faith in their

everyday schooling in the West. The collection represents the three main groups participating in education: the young Muslims at school, Muslims at university, and Muslim educators, scholars, and administrators in education. For the purpose of this literature review, and in line with the research question, I draw only on insights from the section on young Muslims at school (Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi, 2009; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009, Sensoy, 2009<sup>44</sup>) and compare it to experiences of Muslim students elsewhere in the world and in New Zealand.

### **2.8.1 An approach of counterstory narratives**

This collection of scholarship, while rooted in education, portrayed the courageous awakening of a group of young Muslims at school in America. The starting point for this collection is premised on Kincheloe's (2008) 'imagining what could be' and his argument that while schools produce and legitimate knowledge, there is a sense of privileging the dominant through a disregard of others and other forms of knowledge production (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009). Thus while the various chapter authors used different method in data collection, their overall aim is to approach the study of Muslim American students' experience from the lense of counterstory narratives (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009).

As I see it, the strength of this approach is in its ability to elicit latent positive themes as this approach requires that the participants indulge in reflection or writing exercises. This puts them 'in the driver's seat' and presents the opportunity to take charge to construct and tell their story, as opposed to it being told by voices that are neither theirs nor validated by them.

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<sup>44</sup> This chapter by Sensoy (2009) does not deal specifically on the experience of Muslim American students but rather on the phenomenon of 'textbook Muslims' – that has an indirect impact on how Muslim students are viewed and treated by their peers, teachers, educators, community at large etc.

The downside to this approach would rest on participants who are not eloquent or expressive in writing. A positive theme that emerged from all four studies (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009) was the theme ‘discovering courage.’ This theme reflects the young Muslim students’ struggle with experiences of alienation and marginalization and their individual respond to stereotyping, hostility, and discrimination.

### **2.8.1.1 A courageous awakening**

Abo-Zena et al.,’s study draws from the narratives of personal courage written by Muslim sixth graders as part of the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum<sup>45</sup>. This study had a very diverse participation comprising of Muslim youths who were either native born, of immigrant origin, or refugee background from seven different countries and spanning three continents. This diverse selection allowed them to obtain as diverse as possible a range of experiences of personal courage that illuminated how the participants overcame challenges arising out of their participation at school. The narratives amplified the students’ vulnerability but at the same time reflected their way of pushing through their anguish through acts of personal courage (such as speaking out or taking part in activities that they had initially resisted).

These personal acts of courage are what I deem acts of sensemaking and meaning-making. The way the students pen their lived experience of personal courage stories on paper reflected their inner thoughts and subjectivity, and led them to discover not only their strengths in the process, but also understanding that their peers reactions were more out of curiosity and lack

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<sup>45</sup> This is a regional competition for public and private schools in the greater Boston area in memory of Max Warburg, a sixth grader who battled leukemia with much courage prior to dying. See <http://www.maxcourage.org/home.php> for details

of knowledge about Islam than being judgmental. In short, the writing activity pushed them into a reflective mode (van Manen, 1990) and helped them acknowledge their own courage. On the whole, the theme of courage in Abo-Zena et al.,’s study can be viewed as running on two streams. Male Muslim students had to challenge the negative stereotypes of them as a “problematic” group with links to terrorists while female Muslim students had to speak out with words and actions to counter the prevailing Western conception of them as weak, oppressed and lacking control of their own lives. This ingrained prejudice of the West against the Orient was described by Said (1978) as a double standard process of ‘othering’ and the long-standing legacy of colonialist ambitions.

That Islam and Muslims are often treated as homogenous and portrayed as the opposite of the West was also the contention of various scholars (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Poole, 2002; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Kolig & Kabir, 2008). It is the phenomenon of ‘textbook Muslims’ (Sensoy, 2009) as mentioned earlier. I see this as a cyclical phenomenon especially when the media continues to vilify Muslims (NZIS, 2004; Jansen, 2009; Peek, 2005; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Kolig & Kabir, 2008; Woodlock, 2011) and representation of Muslim women and the veil/hijab continuously painted with negative connotations (Zine, 2001; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Coles, 2008; Mosalli, 2009; Downie, 2013).

While Abo-Zena et al. did not specify how their analysis was triangulated the question of trustworthiness was represented by what I see as their approach to infusing aspects of reality and authenticity into the Muslim student’s narratives. The narratives were interspersed with reflections of their own past schooling experiences as Muslims in the West. This approach along with generous extracts of the students’ writing gave the narratives a touch of reality and

takes readers along the student's journey (Seidman, 2013). In short, the approach taken by Abo-Zena et al. (2009) is informed by an insider's perspective.

The intention of a counterstory perspective is to empower and repair damaged identities (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009) and Abo-Zena et al. seemed to have accomplished this through an approach that is very personalized and sensitive. I strongly believe that this approach works well with ethnic minority students as writing opens up a 'safe space' for them while the process is one of transformation, both for the participants and also the researchers. I do not believe that one can truly understand another person's experience, as much as we try to put ourselves in their shoes, only as close as possible. In this aspect, if I look at my own experience as a minority in New Zealand, and the stories shared among us, Abo-Zena et al.'s approach of drawing from the Muslim student's narratives has done extremely well. The message as I see it is clear and profound. It gives it ground perspective.

#### **2.8.1.2 'Textbook Muslims'**

Western media and political discourse has led to fear and negativity of Muslims deeply ingrained in the public sphere. The effect of political undertones impacting on the school environment is a reality (Kincheloe, 2008) as both do not operate in a vacuum. Thus it is no surprise that schools are fertile grounds for the enactment and reinforcement of the phenomenon of 'textbook Muslims.' In fact, Mansouri and Kamp (2007) suggested there appeared to be a trend at the social level indicating increasing social marginality of Arab and Muslim communities in Australia as a result of the political environment. This was attributed to the more overt forms of social exclusion and racialized discourses towards Arab-Australians as an aftermath of the 9/11 events and the War on Terror, an argument advanced

by Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) in the American context and Jasperse (2009) in her New Zealand study.

In her study on how young people in Norway talk about religion and diversity, Von der Lippe (2011) found that young students' language, is to a large extent influenced by the culture that they are a part of. Their varying statements about Islam and Muslims are a by-product of the cultural repertoires and discourses to which they have access. She suggested her findings resonated with Lamont's (2000) theory on cultural tools that are given different meanings in different context. In short, macro structures do impact on intergroup relations and the compilation of work by the authors in Sensoy and Stonebanks' (2009) book all point to its flourishing, both in the wider community's rhetoric and also in young Muslim students' experience (Zine, 2001; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Javed, 2013, Mirza & Meeto, 2013).

### **2.8.1.3 Multiple selves and fluid identities**

Another theme that ran through the four studies is the prevalence of the students' multiple and fluid identities (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009). By adopting an approach of multiple identities the students overcame hardships in their conflicting environment. This was consistent with the findings on young Muslim New Zealanders who engaged in a dynamic acculturation process (Stuart & Ward, 2011, 2011a; Jasperse, 2009; Stuart, 2012). The students' religious identity acts as the central and supreme driver of behavior that helps them find a balance in managing the multiple roles and demands of the varying environments that determine which identity they take on (Stuart & Ward, 2011). The various environments are also kept separate and distinct as a way of achieving

balance. They belong to neither culture but in doing so, produce one that is unique (Stuart & Ward, 2011). Stuart and Ward (2011) argued, for the young Muslims in their study, blending was an outcome of a dynamic acculturation process.

While the attention placed on Muslims by the media and in political discourse in Australia and New Zealand is much greater than any other religious groups due to the rise of political Islam (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Kolig & Kabir, 2008), Woodlock's (2011) study with Australian Muslims found that Australian-born practising Muslims did not encounter conflict negotiating their Australian and Muslim identities. Both identities were strongly valued and embraced with those who perceived themselves as being excluded from civic life did not take to negative channels to protest their position. Similar finding was also established with Muslim students in Canada (Peek, 2005; Nagra, 2011). These positive findings could be because the students' personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* is based on key fundamentals of Islam and strong support from key anchor persons in their lives, an argument reflected in Ward and Stuart (2011) and Jasperse's (2009) findings in their New Zealand study with Muslim youths.

All these again reflect my argument that young Western Muslims' engage in a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in order to make sense and meaning to gain acceptance both at home and at school. It is as I said it earlier, ultimately a question of being and belonging.

#### **2.8.1.4 Islamophobia**

Coles (2008) suggestion that Islamophobia is a relatively new term but a very old prejudice is evident in the everyday experience of many young Muslims in the West. He contended that

the prejudicial behaviour has little to do with Islam itself but is more about people's prejudiced perceptions of Islam does point to the cumulative effect of 'textbook Muslims' as Sensoy (2009) advanced. The way Muslims are perceived has evolved from being the enemy without, to enemy at the gate, and now, to the enemy within (Coles, 2008) due to migration and refugees resettlement all over the world. Thus, it is no surprise that proximity does not translate to improved co-existence but creates subtle and overt tensions due to on-going bias in cultural repertoires reinforced by the phenomenon of 'textbook Muslims.' This raises the question of where are the dissenting voices within Islam. Thus I maintain that the use of an adapted IPA to explore this voice via a non-traditional participant approach is critical to us understanding young Muslims' experience at school.

In Mansouri and Wood's (2008) study, they found that while Arab students in Australia generally find their experience with peers pleasant, the perception was that teachers treated them with some degree of discrimination and prejudice. Female students, like many of their counterparts the world over had to bear continuous harassment and prejudice due to their high visibility in dressing especially the headscarf or the hijab. Mirza and Meeto's study (2013) of female British Muslims also had the participants recounting how teachers kept making comments about their headscarves with some teachers even openly deriding their headscarves. In Imam's (2009) study, a key finding was how media discourse of Islam shapes the public school curriculum. This means, while wider ideals of equality ensure that everyone is given access to education, minimisation of experiences of 'textbook Muslims' will always be a contentious issue, especially in the West. This will occur as long as conversations of difference are not embraced (Prothero, 2010). Thus it is no surprise that studies on young Muslims generally unearth themes of isolation and marginalization (Mansouri & Kamp,

2007; Ahmad, 2007; Saeed, 2007; Klocker & Salabay, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009).

#### **2.8.1.5 Guilty by association**

The studies by Abo-Zena et al. (2009), Khan (2009), Imam (2009), and Mossalli (2009) all highlighted the dangers of perception by educators that frequently assumed all Muslims as a monolithic group with similar characteristics and needs. The assumption is that as long as the student is Muslim or Arab, he/she would be competent enough to speak on all matters with regard to Islam or on any of the acts of violence claimed to be done in the name of Islam elsewhere in the world. This finding supports Prothero's (2010) claim that generalizing about the overall effects of religion is a hazard of its own. Similarly, Baumann (1996) pointed out the terms 'culture' and 'community' can hide differences across groups and individuals. In this instance then, the Muslim students experience of being 'swept' into one homogenous group creates an underlying resentment and sense of bewilderment at being 'grouped' with issues or people that they have no association with.

These sentiments were expressed especially by those who were born in the US or had arrived when they were very young. As one of Khan's participant said: "I'll be like, I was born here all my life. I don't know" (Khan, 2009, p.30). It is resentment for being made "guilty by association" (Abo-Zena et al., 2009). These are sentiments that were also raised in Mansouri and Kamp's (2007) Australian study with Arab Muslim students. The Muslim students in Abo-Zena et al. and Mansouri and Kamp's study viewed the act as one that 'singles them out.' Seen from a phenomenology perspective, it alludes to an underlying theme of wanting to be seen as 'normal' or 'same' as their peers. In the student's mind, the act of teachers

singling them out, and perceiving them to be the ‘authority’ on Islam or their ethnic culture only serves to reinforce their being ‘different’ from their peers/dominant group at school.

#### **2.8.1.6 Coping mechanisms**

Harris and Roose (2013) meanwhile found that young Australian Muslims’ engagement in civic activities were largely driven by the pressure they felt being in a hostile environment. The young Australian Muslims indicated they felt the need to be seen as a ‘good Muslim’ by being active in civic life especially by young female Muslims wearing the hijab. The strong need to reflect the ‘good’ of the religion was as Harris and Roose (2013) suggested largely their response to being conscious of constantly being scrutinised in their every movement as an ‘other’. This reflected the findings by Nagra (2011) in her Canadian study where the young Muslims engaged in ‘reactive identity formation’ as a consequence of experiencing discrimination or racism. Nagra further claimed that there are no variations between Muslims born in Canada or elsewhere as all seems to experience the same experience. I would argue that this phenomenon is not unique only to Muslim students in the West, but anyone that has to transition to a new environment would either withdraw passively or emerge resilient. Naqvi-Sherazee (2008) termed this as a turn to neo-revivalism characterized by time, place, and circumstance. I see this as an indicator of the individual’s psychosocial strength and religiosity. A person of weaker mind and personality would find a new environment stressful.

Muslims or minority ethnic students are frequently accused of ‘sticking to their own people’ or ‘anti-social’ when clearly it is more a case of them reacting to being marginalized or discriminated against. I argue that their sensemaking and meaning-making of their experiences via a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* leads them to self-other. This

mode of self-othering was highlighted by Naqvi-Sherazee (2008) in her study on identity of second and third-generation diaspora Muslims in which she argued they continuously engage in a re-negotiation process so as to sustain a model of religiosity that can fit in with the host society.

Regardless as to whether they took to being more religious with external presentations of religiosity, a more proactive approach to assimilating into community events, or finding opportunity to educate others about aspects of Islam, they all reflect the students' way of coping with unpleasant experiences (Khan, 2009; Nagra, 2011; Abukar, 2014). Sirin and Fine (2008) in their book *Muslim American Youths: Hyphenated Identities*, found that male Muslim Americans seemed to portray a lot of anger and hurt and preferred to ignore or brush away those 'others' that discriminate or ostracise them. Meanwhile the female Muslim Americans seemed to take an educational approach when faced with discrimination. They saw themselves as having a duty to educate people who are ignorant about them, their religion, culture and practices. This was also the findings in Stuart's (2012) study.

Ward and Stuart (2011) in their New Zealand study found that having a strong Muslim identity helped Muslim youths cope with the negative impact of discrimination resulting in no impact on their life satisfaction. In contrast, a weak Muslim identity was associated with a significant decrease in life satisfaction. Similarly, findings from other studies also indicated the role of religion in helping young Muslims cope with pressure (Hodge, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Jasperse, 2009; Harris & Roose, 2013). In Khan's (2009) study, her participants resorted to using Islamic symbolism (veiling, hijab, vocal profession of the Islamic faith), jokes and humor to counter negative stereotypes or tense situations, and Muslim peer groups and associations as a way of coping. These forms of coping are not

unique to Khan's participants, but synonymous with many other Western Muslims' styles of coping (Nagra, 2007; Downie, 2013).

In the UK, findings from the LSC (2007) study indicated that the strategies employed by the young Muslim learners were very distinct from the non-Muslim learners. They were more likely to take a stand of avoiding conflict when in such a situation. The LSC (2007) found that three types of strategy were used by the young Muslims however the uniting feature of the strategies is the goal of sustaining family harmony overriding the pursuit of personal happiness. A concern from the LSC (2007) study is the stand of internalisation taken by the young students, where they not only avoided talking about it, but also made no attempts to resolve the issues. Some do seek support from respected community members such as religious teachers to help them solve their problems. Of particular interest was a point raised by LSC (2007) that majority of the Muslim students indicated they were not comfortable seeking out their teachers' advice and also were not sure how their teachers could help solve their problems with their parents. As Abukar's (2014) findings indicated, American Muslim students face on-going challenge from externally imposed identity conflicts and also their own internal struggles to find a balance in their religious identity that is accepted not only at home but also among peers at school. This dilemma again points to what is of priority to the Muslim students: love and acceptance of family and peers, two critical areas that support their academic success and well-being.

#### **2.8.1.7 Stressors**

The following study on Somalian Muslim youths (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2010) in Finland and their struggles at school highlight the impact of a school curriculum that excludes their

history and a family environment that is equally challenging. Termed as “the generation-in-between” (p.287), some of them were unaccompanied minors, some had single parent while some had lost other siblings. Their varied backgrounds had an impact on how they cope with challenges of being in a new society and particularly at school. They found themselves ‘sandwiched’ between having to adapt to a new school environment that were not exactly welcoming while lacking the support of family/parents who themselves were still grappling with traumas of a refugee/asylum seeker past and now weighed down by employment worries.

The curriculum infused into their “immigrant class”<sup>46</sup> (p.276) did not help but seemed to ply additional pressure on their mental health. This of course has an impact on the Muslim students’ academic progress.

During the final school term, the students experienced confusion, pressure, even despair and hopelessness, in their attempts to fulfill the instrumental culture requirements needed for-post comprehensive education. The expressive culture demands of the home environment and in school added further pressure (Alitalppo-Niitamo, 2010, p. 287).

A particular metaphor used by one of the participants summed up their sensemaking and meaning-making: “At least the boat didn’t capsize and nobody drowned” (Alitalppo-Niitamo, 2010, p. 287). Alitalppo-Niitamo’s arguments that this reflected the lack of teacher sensitivity and the school’s lack of inclusive practice, findings that corroborated with Sabry and Bruna’s (2007) study on Muslim students experience in Iowa public schools.

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<sup>46</sup> This immigrant class was made of immigrant students who were regarded by the school administrators as requiring extra support in their learning. See Alitolppa-Niitanmo (2010) for details.

## 2.9 Summary

Butcher, Spoonley, and Trlin (2006) stressed that immigrants and refugees continue to perceive and report experience of discrimination, exclusion and prejudice in their day-to-day life. The stigma of being a risk to national security is usually imposed on them by the general public (Kolig & Kabir, 2008). The notion of being given a 'fair go' is seen to be rooted in New Zealand society and meant to represent equality of opportunity, was also clearly not translated into everyday realities and practices (Human Rights Commission, 2012). The New Zealand situation as summed up by Kolig and Kabir (2008) is that the presence of Muslims continues to be a paradox: at times a valued minority, but at others, a suspected and hated 'other'. Ward (2013) described the New Zealand situation as a third form of multiculturalism, that is, 'everyday multiculturalism'. She argued this reflects situations where ethnic communities have the rights and protection, but in reality, it is not what it should be.

Majority of the studies on Western Muslim's experience at school are carried out via the approach of 'insider's perspective'. This in part is seen as the strength of the data collection process as engagement and trust in eliciting rich, thick descriptions were not seen as a barrier. Elements of bias in data analysis were carefully managed as majority of the participants utilized enquiry approaches that included elements of reflection. All the authors in the studies also declared their background and interest and clarified how their personal understanding is incorporated into the analysis.

The literature review has shown that Muslim students in the West (re)negotiate fundamental aspects of their spirituality and adapt to what is norm so as not to lose their authentic self, yet

remain relevant to peers within the social sphere. In short, as I see it, these are acts of *ijtihad* (applied critical reasoning) (Ramadan, 2004) and reflect a keenness to embrace it all-religiosity and peer-group acceptance. Thus, I maintain my central argument that young Western Muslims engage in a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in order to make sense of their everyday experience at school. While sensemaking can exist on mere plausibility (Weick, 1995) but Baumeister (1991) also argued that one of the advantages of finding meaning is that it helps the person interpret their experience in a certain way and steer them into positive roles. It prevents dissatisfaction from festering and developing into social problems (p.9). Therefore, one of the tasks of school based social workers would be to facilitate this process in intervention. A further conclusion from the literature review is the gap in school social work practice in terms of advocacy work to counter school boards and administration, policies and curriculum from operating on a mode of (un)conscious prejudicial assumption, such as, the ‘textbook Muslims’ approach.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The social work profession in New Zealand cannot continue to operate from within the bicultural framework, relegating minority ethnics to piece-meal ‘reactive’ support. The social work profession’s raw material is people, and people consist of pluralistic connotations. Social exclusion and social inclusion are two sides of the same coin and are core components of social work practice (Sheppard, 2004). Drawing from Mansouri and Kamp’s (2007) reiteration that a strong and inclusive education facilitates young Muslims pathway to active citizenship which includes future employability and Valtonen’s (2008) contention that labor market discrimination is prevalent in settlement communities, I argue that young Muslims’ sense of ‘otherness’ is an issue the social work profession cannot ignore as social justice is

the profession's core value. It is a current issue that affects their future citizenship. Adams, Dominelli, and Payne (2005) argued social work is transformational when its focus is on people's lives as they are now but the changes that we work on have wider implications stretching into their future.

This literature review has established that there is a lack of school social work research worldwide and the New Zealand situation is part of the scenario. This research not only fills the gap in school social work literature by approaching Muslim students' experience from the perspective of their sensemaking and meaning-making, but also via the less traditional participant, that is, young Western Muslims at school. Social workers in New Zealand cannot rely nor practice from the perspective of 'textbook Muslims' and it is timely that these young Muslim voices are given a platform in a future that is part of theirs too.

In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical approaches that frame this study. These include Ramadani philosophies for Western Muslims, his model of applied *ijtihad*, and the sensemaking theories.

### 3. Chapter Three - Theoretical Framework

The word Islam is not a simple translation of submission to Allah. To truly apprehend the meaning of submission or peace in the Islamic universe of reference one needs to study the Muslim consciousness and understand what Allah, human beings, and the Revelation mean to the person.

(Ramadan, 2014)

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the central theoretical framework for analysis is drawn from the works of Tariq Ramadan (2004, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) as guided by emerging data. Overall, I am guided by Ramadan's contentions that Western Muslims<sup>47</sup> take the approach of reconciliation where so long as Western ideas and accomplishments are good, just, and humane, they are free to adopt it into their own lives and ways of thinking. In adopting Tariq Ramadan's philosophies, I acknowledge the view that while there is a universal *ummah* with the Universe as a social context for all, in essence, it is still the individual Muslim that is responsible for constructing his/her own sense of belonging in the West through faithfulness to the central tenets of Islam. Through bringing their own historical backgrounds and contextual realities into the equation, they chart their own future in the West (Ramadan, 2004).

Ramadan (2004) termed this one's personal *ijtihad* (ethical and critical reasoning). This application of *ijtihad* is dependent on the individual's Muslim consciousness. An individual's Muslim consciousness is one's conception of *Allah*, human beings, and the Revelation

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<sup>47</sup> While the bulk of Ramadan's work focused on Muslims in Europe and America, he argued his philosophy of pluralism and reconciliation for Western Muslims with foundations of universal shares values of humanity and justice is applicable to Muslims elsewhere, eg. Australia, New Zealand, or Asia (Ramadan, 2004). Ramadan's (2012) argument that there is only one Islam but many Islamic cultures is also what I experience from my work with Muslim youths (both Arabs and SEA) hence my central claim for this study.

(Ramadan, 2014). By exploring an individual's Muslim consciousness, we can come to an understanding of whether the individual is one that is closed and exclusive, or open and respectful of Otherness and difference (Ramadan, 2014).

Through the Ramadanian approach, I maintain the central argument of this thesis; that young Western Muslims engage in a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social encounters in a secular schooling environment. Thus, a universal application of a generic model of Islam is neither sufficient nor appropriate as it denies young Muslims their individual agency<sup>48</sup> and has implications for social work practice. Further underlying my argument is my understanding of the monotheistic character in Islam, where Ramadan (2010b) put forth that faith, a construct of trust and conviction, projects a mysterious meaning that is personal to each individual's understanding. Similarly, Ramadan (2004) also placed emphasis on reason as an important part in how we make sense of the world, but insists that only a discourse that is drawn from the central tenets of Islam can provide that true reason. In fact, Ramadan (2004) insists that religion plays a crucial "part in the structure of human consciousness" (p. 16). The central argument of this thesis also aligns with Mensinga's (2009) suggestion that engaging with people's lived experience is a core task of a social worker's job.

No doubt Ramadan's work addresses the issue of modernity for Muslims in the West as a whole; however, one must note that he is careful to leave this to each individual's contextual

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<sup>48</sup> Where individual agency is concerned, note that for Ramadan it is still within the purview of what is accepted within Islam. The notion of freedom in decision-making in Islam is that God /Allah has given each the intelligence to decide on what is right or wrong. It is also the Islamic view that when one faces a dilemma, one should return to Allah and seek *taufiq and hidayah* (wisdom given by God through the light and grace of Allah) via prayers and acts of piety towards Allah. See Section 3.1 of this chapter.

understanding and (re)interpretation. This is represented through an emphasis on individual decision-making that is guided by a sense of intimate awareness and an acknowledgement of one's vulnerabilities that is always in need of Divine interventions and blessings (Ramadan, 2004). Thus, I interpret Ramadan's "integration of intimacies" (Ramadan, 2010a, p.67) in his framework for belonging in the West as essentially referring to an individual's act of sensemaking and meaning-making that incorporates their sense of responsibility towards religiosity.

Ramadan's (2004) suggestive framework for Western Muslims also includes asking them to individually ponder the questions of "*Where are we? Who are we? In what way do we want to belong?*" (p.63). These questions, Ramadan said, are essential to Muslims locating themselves in the West and achieving that sense of belonging that is guided by their Islamic faith. Ramadan (2010a) referred to this sense of belonging as a process of "feeling comfortable" and "at home" (p.67) and being in active participation in the society that they are in now. In this sense, my understanding of Ramadan's 'integration of intimacies' is one that encompasses the personal aspects of one's religiosity and active participation in the society that they are in now.

Ramadan's (2004; 2010a) work on Western Muslims is based on the need to "re-read, reconsider, and revisit" (2004, p. 69) one's understandings of the Islamic texts and the Prophetic traditions in light of contemporary realities, and Muslims' presence in the West as located within a 'space of testimony'. Incorporated within his theory of 'space of testimony' is his argument that the universe is the social space for Muslims (Ramadan, 2004). Ramadan's framework of modernity for Western Muslims is based on a core principle of faithful adherence to the Islamic principles of worship and practice while embracing a

contextual flexibility in social matters. Therefore, through Ramadan's key concepts of being for Western Muslims and 'space of testimony', I explore young Muslims identity in the West and their sense of belonging.

In this regard, being is investigated through the young Muslims' negotiation of their religious identity formation whilst Ramadan's 'space of testimony' is used to explore young Muslims' sense of belonging at school in an attempt to understand their construction of the phenomenon of inclusion/exclusion that they present through their notion of 'normality'. The term 'normal' appears persistently in their sensemaking narratives, particularly with regard to emphasizing their everyday experience at school and their interactions with peers. Specifically, I place this term in the context of Ramadan's (2010a) use of the term "integration of intimacies" (p.67) in his framework of reconciliation for Western Muslims and seek to understand the individual's construct of 'normal' and question if 'normal' is the new 'different' for adaptation at school, and how the limit of this 'normal' is defined within their faith?

Underlying my data observation is also Ramadan's (2010a) contentions that Islam is "first and foremost an answer for the majority of Muslim hearts and consciences" (p.33) in their search for meaning. He further maintained that existential questions seeking meaning perspectives can only be obtained through the realms of religion or philosophy. Put simply, people inherently draw meanings to their life situations through the lens of religion or philosophy simply because they seek that internal sense of stability and order, and religious philosophies can provide that thread of assurance and coherence. In this sense then, Ramadan is right as long as young Muslims are practicing Muslims regardless of whether their understanding of Islam is one of a literalist approach or context-dependent. If they fit within

Ramadan's framework of applied *ijtihad*, meaning-making would then flow from the main structure of *ad-din* (the global conceptions of life and death) and *al-maslahah* (for the common good). This would mean a regard for keeping to the main tenets of Islam but also bearing in mind, how this can reflect good for the wider community.

To this end, both key concepts which Ramadan proposed as means to an ends for Western Muslims allow me to analyse how young Muslims' religious identity construction are reconciled with the phenomenon of inclusion/exclusion that occurs in school settings. While the concepts are presented separately, they are to be taken as interrelated and contribute to the circularity of understanding. I frame my approach to Ramadan's key concepts as one of incorporation, where being and its *al-fitra* are approached from the angle of its practical relations to its existence within the 'space of testimony,' that is, the West. The implications of young Muslims' sensemaking is analysed through Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory and further supplemented by Ramadan's (2009) model of applied *ijtihad* for meaning-making and contextualized to Park's (2010, 2010a) meaning-making model (MMM) (See Section 3.6 below).

Maintaining the focus on lived experience and thus the idiographic accounts of young Muslims at school in this study means taking heed of the phenomenon of Muslim consciousness (Ramadan, 2010a) to make sense of the participants' sensemaking and meaning-making. I see the process of sensemaking and meaning-making as operating on a continuum. Thus my argument is that located within young Muslims sensemaking is ultimately a return to self, what Ramadan (2004; 2010a) termed as the essence of a Muslim's being, the *al-fitra*. Al-fitra in Islam means one's original 'true and pure' self that is not tainted by desires but puts total total trust in Allah and the pre-destined life. This is also

consistent with Husserl's central tenet of phenomenology of 'back to the things themselves'<sup>49</sup>. It is also applying Sheppard's (2004) holistic approach for social work practice, that is, that there is more than seeing the person in their present situation, but as a person that is undergoing a dynamic process of living and changing. This is consistent with the data that points to aspects of past and future having an impact on their present actions.

### **3.2 Being and the formation of a Western Muslim identity**

To explore the concerns of being and identity, I draw from Ramadan's (2010a) statement that Islam is "first and foremost an answer for the majority of Muslim hearts and consciences" (p.33) in their search for meaning. I place my understanding of this through what is commonly understood by Muslims as the concept of *taufiq* and *hidayah* in Islam. These two concepts govern a Muslim's thoughts and actions in their everyday life. *Taufiq* is generally understood by Muslims as the strength of wisdom gifted through God's grace while *hidayah* refers to the pathway of light from God. Both concepts are complementary of each other as *taufiq* without *hidayah* is deemed incomplete *deen* (light). In this regard then, the Muslim consciousness that Ramadan (2010a) raised refers to a deep rooted consciousness of *taufiq* and *hidayah* and it is the individual interpretation and understanding that guides a person's actions and behavior. An example would be the reaction of one of the student with regard to how he faced being taunted as 'Al-Qaeda' at school. The young participant said the crucial thing to remember is to uphold the good image of Islam.

Thus, through a focus on data analysis that seeks to understand how Islam is positioned within the participants' hearts and consciences, I explore how this is reflected in the

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<sup>49</sup> See Section 3.4 for details

participants' recount of their everyday lived experience. My aim is to explore how aspects of religiosity intersect with their experience and how this presents itself to consciousness (van Manen, 1990) as they look back. It is the 'heart and conscience' that represents one's identity construction as ultimately one's actions are determined by the guidance one's conscience imposes on them. Baumeister (1991) posits that meaning is pervasive as all our actions are infused with meaning. I have in Chapter One touched on the concepts of *niat* (intention) and *makna* (meaning) and how they are linked in the context of Islam and its implications for everyday practice by *muslimins*.

Another operative word of Ramadan (2004; 2010b) is the term 'inspiration' (2004, p.147), in that faith is the inspiration and impetus for one's actions. Ramadan specifically referred this to its use by Muslims in the management of their social affairs. Ramadan argued that the social sphere is a critical area for Muslims and requires on-going vigilance of a basic respect for the universal principles of Islam, thus requiring careful application of their faith, but not to the detriment of others. In this sense, he argued the inclusive nature of Islam means one's care towards others in the community including non-believers is a representation of his/her relationship with his/her Creator. This is also what Ramadan meant when he emphasized the value of consistency in one's actions and behaviour in that it is not only a consideration for *ummah* members but a consideration for all of humanity (Ramadan, 2004).

The term 'inspiration' was defined by Ramadan as:

It shows the way, but says nothing about the choices, strategies, and priorities to be applied to social action in a given society. It is for the citizens, in the midst of their own realities, to make their choices, work out the stages, and propose realistic and reasonable reforms in each of the societies in which they live. (Ramadan, 2004, p.147-148).

Though Ramadan uttered these words in the wider context of social reorganization and political participation, in the context of my study then, I adapt his words to analyse how ‘inspiration’ is embraced by the young Muslims in the context of their schooling experience as schools are sites of power and organization. It is taken to understand how they perceive the realities that they face and how much or little their beliefs provide the ‘inspiration’ for them to arrive at realistic and reasonable solutions in the management of their social affairs. It leads me to the questions of “How do they experience school?” It also raises the question of “in what way do they seek to belong?”

Ramadan (2010a) argued that people have multiple moving identities that serve different purpose within different contexts, and my own experience is consistent with this. The data seems to point to this too. The young participants seem to consciously construct some form of negotiation, where each of them negotiates based on their own terms, regardless of whether it is family pressure or peer pressure. In the context of my study then, my aim is to explore how their negotiated strategies impact on how they each construct a discourse of ‘normal’. Synonymous with the notion of inspiration is also Ramadan’s call for the practice of *ijtihad* among Western Muslims. The next section discusses this concept.

### **3.2.1 Ramadan on *ijtihad* (critical reasoning)**

*Ijtihad* is referred to as the tool Muslims use in reconciling their external desires with internal mediation (Ramadan, 2004). Through what is termed as the ‘reasoning effort of creativity’, Ramadan’s notion of *ijtihad* denotes the internal struggle and reasoning with the ego that one undergoes. In performing *ijtihad*, one takes into account the original sources (the Quran and

Prophetic traditions) and factors of context and environment that one is operating in (Ramadan, 2004). In other words, *ijtihad* is generally understood by Muslims as the amount of energy one puts into thinking and contemplation in challenging situations in order to arrive at an understanding that does not conflict with the original teachings of the sources yet relevant to current situation.

If, as Ramadan proposed, that *integration of intimacies* and *ijtihad* are all concepts that will facilitate Western Muslims' sense of belonging in the West, I draw further on the concepts of '*istiqamah*' and '*muhasabah diri*' to further make sense of Ramadan's notion of applied *ijtihad*. *Istiqamah* is the practice of one always striving to head in the right direction in Islam in one's daily affairs. Supporting this is the reminder to adopt the practice of '*muhasabah diri*' (self-analysis and self-reflection). I would argue that essentially Ramadan's *ijtihad* is an everyday version of *ijtihad* as *ijtihad* in the true sense is practised by well-learned Islamic scholars in order to deliver a *fatwa* (religious ruling). The interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is not something ordinary Muslims can undertake without proper and adequate training.

In attempting to understand how young Muslims construct their sense and meaning-making, I also draw on the two key points of the monotheistic tradition provided by Ramadan (2009) for Western Muslims to approach the re-reading of the Islamic texts and the Prophetic Traditions (*sunnah*). They are: first, the absolute acceptance and without doubt aspects of Islamic worship and rituals; and second, the need for humans to always exercise intelligence and creativity in the sphere of social affairs. Ramadan theorised it as the notion of permission. This he said refers to Muslims having the power to accept and embrace principles

that do not contradict the Islamic principles and at the same time stay away from prohibitions. He contended that this is the pathway to *ijtihad*.

Ramadan's claim that *ijtihad* is the only way Western Muslims can bear witness to their faith at the same time be active contributors in society (Donnelly, 2002; Ramadan, 2004) is useful in exploring young Muslims' negotiation of their religious identity and sense of belonging at school when faced with peer pressure and challenges in social relationships. Muslims believe that challenges are thrown their way as a test of their faith. It is also their belief that it is a reminder that they return to 'Him' as one who is not challenged has no need of 'Him'. It is the sixth article of faith in Islam, of the belief in *qada* and *qadar* (see Section 1.6, Chapter One). I see Ramadan's (2004) emphasis that *ijtihad* is to be embraced by (Western) Muslims as in line with my understanding of the concept of free will and decision-making in Islam; that is, of a need to use one's cognitive abilities to think. In fact, Ramadan (2015) emphasized that Muslims are capable of thinking ethically and not rely on fatwas to be issued. The important thing to remember, said Ramadan (2012) is to always be guided by the five pillars of Islam and six articles of faith.

Therefore, in the context of my study, the intention is not to measure the young Muslims level of religiosity or preparedness for *ijtihad*. Rather, these understandings are taken to explore their sense and meaning-making and how *ijtihad* is represented through their ongoing and emergent identity construction and management of everyday social affairs with peers and others at school. At a macro level too, the everyday representation of Muslims in political and media discourse is an indirect impact on their identity construction. I term it an "everyday *ijtihad*" in the sense that these young Muslims face daily temptations and exposures within school settings or at social events such as alcohol, drugs, and representations of sex and

violence that is so prevalent in the media or television in the secular West. For the purpose of this study and at the level of the participants too, it is an everyday *ijtihad*<sup>50</sup> as it is the minimum Islamic knowledge required in order for them to live and practice as a Muslim. In IPA terms, my analysis incorporates the hermeneutic circle through the exploration of parts of the whole and the whole of the parts in my attempt to elucidate the lived experience of young Muslims in school. In this sense, these understandings are taken up in my reflections on the young Muslims sense and meaning-making in Chapters Five (Reflections on non-formal engagement) and Six (Findings).

The concept of historicity was also emphasized by Ramadan (2010b). This refers to a reliance on prior recognition and acknowledgement of God, that only through a strong need for Him, can one find meaning in life. Ramadan rephrased Kant's original existential questions<sup>51</sup> to one of "Where do I come from?" (p.5). He wrote that:

Our past, which is always so present, our experiences, our questions, our encounters and our wounds make us what we are, determine us and decide part of our identity (Ramadan, 2010b, p.8).

The focus in elucidating the meanings is concerned with its link to the past, of its intimate tensions and inner conflicts that oppose the mind and body (Ramadan, 2010b). The natural state of the individual is to always be 'in tension', that is to be torn between the demands of

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<sup>50</sup> The true practice of *Ijtihad* along with *maslaha*, and *fatwa* are all the prerogative of Islamic scholars who have studied and mastered the subject (Ramadan, 2004). Ramadan's suggestion that Western Muslims need to engage in *ijtihad* is to be understood as what I term as everyday '*ijtihad*'. Ramadan insists that Muslims can and should use their ability to think and make decisions, and should not be dependent on religious rulings (2015).

<sup>51</sup> What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for? (Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason) (Ramadan, 2010b, p.5).

the conscious mind that strives to be in control and the emotions and passions that take possession of the mind, the body and the heart (Ramadan, 2010a). This means I need to explore how the young Muslims in this study make sense and meaning of their existential dilemmas of past and present in the current context of two contrasting worldviews – their Islamic worldview and the Western secularism. This would be on top of their own internal desires and expectations of family, school, peers and community.

Ramadan's (2004) notion of *al-fitra* refers to the deepest level of a person's being, the true original self. One of Ramadan's popular posting on social media is the phrase: *Tell me what you do with your suffering, and I will tell you who you are*. This was explained by Ramadan as an internal struggle (*jihad*) to purify, control, and liberate one's heart, where the end result will be the reconciliation with who one really is, that is, the essence of a person's being, the *al-fitra*. This inward turn in Islam is represented in one's return to a full "need for Him" in one's quest for meaning (Donnelly, 2002; Ramadan, 2010b). This line of thought has foundations from Ramadan's Nietzschean background<sup>52</sup> (2010a).

In simple practical understanding, in times of crisis or challenges, the act of repentance (*insaf*) and acknowledgement of one's limitations and vulnerabilities (*redha*) in one's intimate conversations with God are consistent in this return to a full "need for Him" in a Muslim's life. It is this act of acknowledgement that gives rise to a Muslim's consciousness of acceptance of fate and a belief in God as all-knowing and Almighty inherent in the concept of *Qadar and Qadak* (predestined life and death). Generally, practising Muslims view life

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<sup>52</sup> See *What I believe* (Ramadan, 2010a) for details on Ramadan's work drawn from Nietzschean's notion of suffering and the dependent yet carefree nature of a child

challenges as an enjoyment, a testimony that God still loves them through trials and tribulations that are intended to remind them to return to Him.

Ramadan's (2010b) framework of *al-fitra* is deemed helpful in exploring how young Muslims in this study navigate not only their present life that is influenced by a past, but also how they tacitly weave their 'preparation' for *jannah* (paradise) in the hereafter through their present actions. Specifically, Ramadan (2010a) pointed out that the tensions that Western Muslims' experience is the result of trying to balance the spiritual tension of a faith<sup>53</sup> that calls for liberation of the inner self while the everyday realities are seemingly full of contradictions and imprisonment of the heart, i.e. what they actually want. To a certain degree, this line of tension is evident in the emerging data and necessitates further exploration in light of Ramadan's observations. These understandings are taken to explore how young Muslims in this study construct and reconcile the tensions of school life versus their religious self, the choices that they make and the formation of coping strategies.

In doing so, I explore too their decision-making and how they place this within their understanding of the concept of free-will in Islam and against the contemporary realities of their life in the West. Drawing further on Ramadan's clarification that the Islamic tradition views the heart as being enveloped in a veil and requiring acts of consciousness to enforce the opening of the heart, I place this in the context of what is apparent (*zahir*) and what is hidden (*batin*). As such, I consider this in light of the young Muslims encounters with others and of what is ordinarily taken as mundane and tacit without much reflection on their part. In doing

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<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that people of other faiths (Christians, Jews, Buddhists etc) do not experience this mode of spiritual tension in the context of modernity, in fact, Ramadan's (2010a) emphasis is that it is an experience that all human beings encounter in their fight to hold on to their values and freedom

so, through their reliving of their schooling experience, I am attempting to elucidate the hidden and explore the meanings of their epiphanic moments – is it one of celebration, resigned acceptance or of anguish? In IPA terms, I am seeking out the conceptual, psychological elements of sensemaking.

### **3.2.2 Freedom, meaning and truth**

To the question of being and its *al-fitra*, Ramadan (2010b) further suggested that “existence cannot escape consciousness” (p.8). He wrote that in all our decisions, we will always come back to questioning our choice in life.

A human being is a being ‘in need’ and who must make choices: when it comes to making existential choices, deciding not to choose is still a choice. The return to self is the first and final stage of all human experience: the reflections of the ‘I’, of the ego, of consciousness and the unconscious, of the emotions and the mind mirror the adult’s questions about freedom, meaning and truth. (p.9).

Through his elaborations on the true meaning of *jihad* in the Islamic tradition, Ramadan thus argued that the quest for freedom, meaning and truth is about managing our natural, individual and/or collective contradictions, and seeking peace. To bear witness to one’s faith is thus, in Ramadan’s terms, to strive for a state of security, well-being and peace (*al-aman*). Faith is seen as the answer that echoes the personal and universal experience of every consciousness, regardless of the choices one makes (Ramadan, 2010b).

I thus return to a reflection on the phenomenological understanding that being is always being-in-the-world. This means one whose primary experience of the world is of a practical relation with and through others. Freedom is thus seen as a practice and is the outcome of our

relationship to the world. Ramadan (2004; 2010b) argued that there is absolutely no contradiction between the realm of faith and reason. He argued that the universe, like the revealed books, calls on reason to find a way to meaning and to try to bring about, through awareness of responsibility and the exercise of control, ethical actions and harmonies of being.

His contention was that Muslims can rely on two fundamental teachings of Islam to guide them on how to be in the world, wherever they live, that is, to cultivate a sense of intimate awareness of their responsibilities and of the different states of human life; specifically humility through a need for divine's interventions and blessings. It is part of Ramadan's 'integration of intimacies'. In this sense then, Ramadan's focus on the return to self is thus of one that is of an ontological basis. In arguing that one seeks well-being and peace, what Ramadan meant is that while the return is to a "need for Him", his framework of reconciliation offers a view that one's quest for well-being and peace should not be at the expense of others but of ethical consideration of others.

In light of this understanding, to explore the young Muslims sense of freedom and well-being is to focus on their relationships with their Creator, their family, peers and teachers and how their approach to care is considered against their own needs and desires. Of critical importance is their own sense of how they emerge – is it one of resilient, acceptance, or capitulation? And how is constructed within their own understanding of the Islamic framework of freedom, meaning and truth?

The young Muslims in the present study show a consistent and conscious reference to their Islamic faith in their daily negotiation of encounters at school and within their framework of

decision-making and coping strategies. In light of their religious obligations and beliefs, that is seen as largely in contradistinction to others. The view that they are different and constantly grappling with tensions and dilemmas remains to be probed through conceptual analysis in order to obtain further insights into their sense and meaning-making process.

### **3.2.3 Ramadan's 'clash of perceptions'**

The term 'clash of perceptions' (Ramadan, 2010b, p.ix) was used by Ramadan in reference to our lives in this era of globalization and modernization which he argued has kept us trapped in our identities and differences. He wrote that:

Fear, doubt and distrust are imperceptibly colonizing our hearts and minds. And so the other becomes our negative mirror, and the other's difference allows us to define ourselves, to 'identify' ourselves and, basically, gives us some reassurance. The other becomes our 'diversion', in Blaise Pascal's sense of the term. The other distracts us from ourselves, our fears, our doubts, whilst the presence of the other justifies and explains our suspicions. We have projections, but at the same time we have to admit that we have no projects (p.ix).

What Ramadan is suggesting here is that it is only through experiencing obstacles we are forced to seek Divine's blessings and interventions and reclaim one's *al-fitra*. As such, Ramadan's thoughts on *al-fitra* are important theoretical tools for me to elucidate the essence of the young Muslims identity. Through Ramadan's 'clash of perceptions', I explore how the young Muslims in this study produce and reconcile their perceptions of encounters with others through their 'horizons of understanding' that is projected from prior knowledge (historicity). It is considered to shed light on how this then forms the base for the construction of their unique Islamic identity and reconciled in association with others who are not. In short, what I am trying to explore here is whether the young Muslims in this study see

themselves as ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or ‘us’ versus their internal selves, with the later an approach Ramadan (2010a) suggested Western Muslims should embrace without apprehension.

All the above understandings are also taken to explore how young Muslims ‘claim’ their space within the secular schooling environment and their construction of freedom within the paradox of inclusion/exclusion at school. In this regard, Ramadan’s thoughts on a return to self as the pathway to freedom are further considered within emergent data. Do the young Muslims view their schooling experience in the West as one of freedom, full of restrictions, an unwilling adaptation, or uniquely on their own terms?

### **3.3 ‘Space of testimony’ (*dar al-shahada*)**

Ramadan (1999) proposed that Muslims presence in the West be referred to as *dar al-shahada* or ‘space of testimony’. He argued that Western Muslims “are at home and must consider the attainments of these societies as their own” (Ramadan, 2004, p.5). The term *dar al-shahada* is derived from the proclamation of faith all Muslims profess in embracing Islam. In advocating for Western Muslims to approach their presence in the West as a ‘space of testimony’, what Ramadan is proposing is that Western Muslims continue to uphold and be guided by the Quran and Prophetic Traditions in their Western life and be positive contributing partners in the West. He maintained that only through a consistent and genuine practice of presenting a good image of Islam to the non-Muslims audience in the West can overall good and harmony be achieved.

He said:

It is up to Muslim individuals to be and become committed citizens, aware of their responsibilities and rights. Beyond the minority reflex or the temptation to see themselves as

victims, they have the means to accept a new age of their history. For those who were born in the West or who are citizens, it is no longer a question of “settlement” or “integration” but rather of “participation” and “contribution” (Ramadan, 2004, p.6).

Ramadan’s (1999; 2004; 2010a) view, that a Western Muslim must not only see his/her space as in the West but to treat this space as “at home” (Ramadan, 2004, p.5), is taken to analyse the sense of belonging negotiated by the young Muslims in this study. Ramadan also advocated that it is of “absolute necessity” to have a “deep knowledge of one’s environment” (p.166) in order to achieve successful integration. While he was referring to the context of legislation, in the context of my study, I would take this to mean young Muslims understanding and familiarization with the school environment and their role within it.

Inherent in Ramadan’s (2004) call to participation is his view that Western Muslims need to work towards reform not as “Muslims” but as citizens. What Ramadan meant here is that Western Muslims need to remain cognisant of their responsibilities towards others and the concept of wider justice and fairness for all. He further argued that one should not approach their community of faith (*ummah*) through blind loyalty. To this end, the focus of my analysis would be on how they navigate their mode of interaction with peers and their sense of participation and contribution with regard to their school and social life. Do their notions of ‘normality’ embody Ramadan’s *dar al-shahada* or one that is defined on their own terms is what I aim to investigate.

To further analyse young Muslims coping strategies and the interplay of external factors on their well-being, I draw on Ramadan’s (2004) focus on five sociopolitical conditions in the ‘space of testimony’ that he claimed as being the necessary elements to support the

flourishing of the Muslim personality. These conditions are: freedom to manifest faith and spirituality; freedom to worship individually and collectively; physical security; freedom to educate others about Islam; and freedom to participate in the social, political, and economic life of one's community. In this sense, I explore all five factors within the young Muslims narratives and attempt to explore if these conditions are apparent in their sensemaking and how it is placed within their meaning structure. Specifically, I look at how the meanings placed on these conditions translate to their sense of well-being.

In the context of my study then, Ramadan's 'space of testimony' provides a layout for me to explore how the young Muslims in my study perceive their belonging in the West and within the context of a secular urban schooling. It is also to further shed light on their identity construction and social relationships within their framework of religious interpretation and construction. In other words, it provides me with the conceptual tools to explore the connections between them bearing witness to their faith and how this is interpreted and applied in both areas of critical interest to their identity formation and sense of belonging; that is, of religious practice and worship, and of the management of social affairs. It was specifically pointed out by Ramadan (2010a) that religious practice and worship are set in texts and are to be followed. In social affairs however, he maintained that it is open to contextual adaptation except what is strictly forbidden in Islam.

### **3.3.1 Ramadan's philosophy of pluralism**

In his philosophy of pluralism, Ramadan's (2010b) main point is that in one's quest for meaning, it is critical that the person situate him/herself in the centre so as to address and understand the diversity and creativity that makes up one's worldview. His focus is on the recognition of one's view, and that only by taking the risk of stepping away from it and becoming decentred, can one then gain access to the shared fate and hopes of many others. What Ramadan meant here is not that one gives up their worldview, but that in association with others whose worldview are in contrast to theirs, to consider what is different and understand it from the other's viewpoint. Specifically, he pointed out that one should not be focused on one's own community of faith to the exclusion and detriment of others, and this includes towards non-believers.

In this regard, the sense of freedom and well-being of the participants in this study which Ramadan (2010b) earlier concluded as ultimately a question of faith is explored through how they bear witness to their faith, that is, in how they negotiate a principled style of living in active co-existence with others. It is to establish how much they want to do things right and to be at ease, consistent with the notion of *ijtihad* and the inner peace that Ramadan suggested all humans seek.

### **3.3.2 Ramadan's framework of reconciliation**

In attempting to explore young Muslims sense of belonging that sits on intersections of intra and intergroup relationships, I further consider Ramadan's (2013) framework of reconciliation for Western Muslims, that is, of reconciliation with self and openness to others.

This is considered through Ramadan's (2010a) use of the term "integration of intimacies" (p.67) that refers to the process of "feeling comfortable" and "at home" (p.67). This process of "feeling comfortable" and "at home" refers to Ramadan urging Western Muslims to make a commitment to their new home in the West and give back to their societies of which they are now a member. He maintained that ultimately it is psychological and intellectual factors that nurtures and is nurtured by the sense of belonging. While Ramadan acknowledged that one's sense of belonging involves deep and sometimes complex psychological dimensions that feed on various elements of discourse and representations (2010a), he also made it clear that it is a big mistake for a Muslim to be obsessed with his/her minority status as the idea of a minority or second class citizenship in the West does not bring people together.

This line of argument is traced to Ramadan's (2010a) insistence that differences are relative. He argued the root of the problem lies in "perceptions and representations, which produce affiliations and outline differences and exclusions (Ramadan, 2010a, p.69). In essence then, what Ramadan meant is that a persistent embrace of the victim mentality will not bring Western Muslims into a position of harmony and stability. In other words, the differences are always going to be there. It is a question of how one chooses to embrace it. My aim here then is to place the young Muslims constructs of 'normality' against Ramadan's 'integration of intimacies' and explore if they come to the same meaning. While Ramadan's model of belonging for Western Muslims is one of 'critical belonging' where he said they must not be afraid to speak on issues that contradict universal values of humanity, he also said that ultimately it is they themselves that need to determine the profound, accepted meaning of belonging that also takes cognizance of their Islamic faith (2010a).

In this sense, Ramadan's use of the terms "intimacies" and "profound" brings me to agreement with Ramadan that one's sense of belonging is self-determined and not imposed by others. I am then inclined to take both terms as a reflection of the concept of *ijtihad* that Ramadan himself suggested. *Ijtihad* as explained earlier is one's personal quest for meaning through critical reasoning. Thus what Ramadan means here is that a sense of belonging is achieved through how individuals themselves define what is intimate to them and what gives them the sense of profundity. To this end, it is as Ramadan said, ultimately the relationship and conversations one has with his/her Creator is personal. Therefore, my aim here is to look at how a perception of 'normal' cultivates a sense of belonging at school for the young Muslims and how their identity formation restricts or facilitates a certain mode of belonging.

### **3.4 Summary**

My approach to the theoretical framework to elucidate the lived experience of young Muslims at school in this study is therefore one of incorporating Ramadan's *al-fitra* into his 'space of testimony'. In doing so, I base my approach on Ramadan's argument that essentially these are fundamental to Western Muslims well-being and sense of belonging in the West (1999; 2004; 2010a, 2010b). The use of Ramadan's key concepts alongside sensemaking theory are taken up to attain insights into young Muslims everyday realities at school as the everyday life is what makes a person's lived experience (Scott, 2009) and consider the implications of this for school social work practice.

### **3.5 Making sense of the sensemaking approach to data analysis**

A critical task of this study is the exploration of how young Muslims make sense of their schooling experience and the meanings they assign to it. Two threads of contention remain the focus of exploration, that is, of being and belonging. This present study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a tool for data analysis. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) described IPA studies as proceeding on the back of Edmund Husserl's argument of 'back to the things themselves' or what is regarded as a concern with the way things appear to individuals in experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Taking an IPA approach means accepting the view that human beings are sensemaking creatures, where the accounts that participants share is taken as a reflection of their attempts to make sense of their experience.

Of critical importance would be the focus on the connecting links in the experience to important events of the past. This is consistent with Giddens and Pierson's (1988) notion of the effect of distant events and actions and their constant shaping and re-shaping our contemporary lives. I see this as a particular feature for the participants in my study as they move across and between continents and culture, time and space.

Taking a sensemaking approach means focusing on understanding how the everyday flow of experience takes on a significant turn via reflections as the critical point in attempting to make sense of the young Muslims' sensemaking. The young Muslims in this present study possess a collectivistic cultural background (Hofstede, 1980), of which religion and culture are enmeshed as Ramadan (2010a) pointed out. Their enactment of self is not only towards

their individual needs but of what serves as best for all. This mode of sensemaking and meaning-making is one that occur within Islam; a framed sensemaking.

As Goffman (1959) contended too, there are front stage and back stage realms in the social enactment of individuals. I see this as inevitably impacting on their public self-presentation, which Goffman (1959) observed as being circumscribed by perceptions of self, referent group, and present environment. Inherent in this approach is also the understanding that there are multiple selves in our presentation to others at the various junctures of experience and context. It is what Ramadan (2010a) stated as our possessing multiple identities where they each perform different function and role at different times, and that this should not be a barrier nor viewed as a baggage by Western Muslims but part of identity development and personal growth. Ramadan (2010a) suggested reducing one's identity to a single dimension that takes priority over every other will only perpetuate a sense of isolation and weakens one's coping in times of crisis or tension. This line of thought makes sense to me as someone who grew up in a multicultural environment and persistently having to negotiate the various identities at different times and with different audience. It is not one front and one back but rather many fronts and many backs.

The emerging data indicates that sensemaking for this group of young Muslims leads to meaning making with elements of their Islamic faith remaining central among other interwoven factors of family, peers, gender, culture, ethnicity and community. This is consistent with Graafland, Mazereeuw and Yahia (2006) findings that religion is an important source of influence on sensemaking. For this group of young Muslims, sensemaking their

way in an environment that is “not naturally”<sup>54</sup> (Ramadan, 2010a, p.35) theirs becomes a way for them to generate a sense of meaning, order, and claim their place in the world that is considered critical to adolescent development (King & Roeser, 2009). It is the set of beliefs, worldviews, and religious resources that structure an ideological context for a young person to generate meaning and order (King & Roeser, 2009; Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013).

This is also consistent with Blumer’s (1986) claims that social reality is both crafted through individual and collective means. Further, taking Mearleau-Ponty’s (1968) claims that one’s views are always generated from a point, I argue that their faith serves as a social and moral compass in the young Muslims sensemaking and meaning making and this helps them achieve a “uniquely constructed” personalized sense of belonging in the urban secular schooling context. After all, identity construction is inherent in the sensemaking approach (Smith, 2004, 2009). This in turn contributes to their overall positive coping that is congruent with Dezutter and Coveleyn’s (2013) claim that transcendent meaning system can stimulate meaning making when one is confronted by life stressors. They further laid claim that achieving meaning is a critical factor in the coping process.

It is important that an understanding of how young Muslims perceive and talk about events at school be investigated as part of inclusive social work research. How they construct and assign meaning to their social experience and integrate aspects of their understanding of their faith is critical to understanding their sense of being and belonging as the level of religiosity and social background of each participant varies. Baumeister’s (1991) contention is that

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<sup>54</sup> Of all the 8 participants, 6 were born overseas and arrived in New Zealand in their teens. Only two arrived when they were below 5 years old. As one participant recounted, females in hijab is not a pervasive matter unlike where he came from. Another felt weird not hearing the ‘azan’ (call to prayer) in public space and has to get used to missing out on Friday congregational prayers due to lessons.

while meaning can be superimposed on life, life can exist without meaning (p.14), my position is that meaning connects and is what gives impetus to actions.

While I do agree with Baumeister (especially when the situation is one of to survive, as in the priority is to get through day to day, with no time to reflect on life's meaning), I argue that for young Western Muslims, their encounters at school lead to them engaging in a highly personalized version of *ijtihad*, and ultimately meaning-making. This is because their sensemaking is framed to their faith, and in Islam, meaning and intention are synonymous with readings of Quran. The meanings made are personal and individual, but it is also fundamentally social (Baumeister, 1991) and is rooted in their faith. This has implications on their sense of being and belonging.

This it is not only identity development that can be elucidated from this double hermeneutic process but also how aspects of coping inform their sense of belonging and identity development. Stated differently then, through a combination of Ramadan's discourse on modernity for Western Muslims and a sensemaking approach, I am seeking to make sense of their everyday realities via their sensemaking and meaning making. The intention is to understand the processes they take as part of their conjoint efforts at leading what they themselves represent through the metaphor of 'normal'. What do they mean by normal? How is it normal? How did it become normal? And what is not normal? These are questions I seek through the sensemaking approach in my attempts to illuminate their lived experience of schooling within a secular context.

I am also mindful of Mead's<sup>55</sup> (1934) idea of human being as in possession of a self and the element of human consciousness as an integral part of action and interaction. These then tell us that there are a lot going on in sensemaking, between the internal self, and the self with external others and the environment. If, as Ramadan (2004) contended, that the concept of *ijtihad* needs to be embraced by Western Muslims through a contextual reinterpretation of the Islamic sources, then a sensemaking approach serves as a bridge to understanding the interplay of faith in the psychosocial processes of young Muslims' sensemaking. Of particular importance then would be what their sensemaking can tell us about how they perceive their experience in the midst of others, particularly in the context of their intergroup interactions. It brings to mind questions of how do they negotiate what is me (us) versus what is you (them)? This is because sensemaking is an act that is "never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (Weick, 1995, p.40). Sensemaking is a process that has elements of interactivity and interdependency, where one's actions influence and are influenced by others as they come into contact with one another. It is an act that is on-going and swift, and can be easily taken for granted (Weick et al., 2005) as sensemaking has no beginnings or endings (Weick, 1995).

Taking a sensemaking approach in data analysis also means aligning it to the dynamic research process that is part of the IPA framework. This means the active involvement of not only the participant but also the researcher in the research process of attempting to get close to the participant's world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Through an emphasis on both parties' sensemaking, the focus is directed towards the element of cognition as the central analytic

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<sup>55</sup> Note that Mead never published his own work rather it is a collection of his work by his students. Therefore, while it is acknowledged as his ideas/work, it needs to be understood as an interpretation of his students' understanding of his work.

concern. As such, it makes sense to include sensemaking as part of the theoretical framework to help me in exploring the participant's perceptions and meanings of their experience. A sensemaking approach is also intended to orient me to embrace an "interpretative relationship" with the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 66) in order to delve between the layers of meaning.

This would require me to take a sustained and critical engagement with the text in order to access the participant's social and personal world (Smith & Osborn, 2008), what Ricoeur (1970) termed as the hermeneutics of suspicion. This means while interpretation is grounded in the data, I would need to be critically aware and remain open to what the text may have to say (Ricoeur, 1970). This form of reflexivity facilitates my access to how 'reality' is seen from the perspective of each participant and a way of sustaining the integrity of the data as it is essentially my sensemaking of the participants' sensemaking. As such, an IPA study is an interpretative endeavour (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and sensemaking needs to be part of the theoretical framework for data analysis.

### **3.5.1 The sensemakers**

Sensemaking as a methodological approach to study human sensemaking was described by Dervin (1992) as "a coherent set of theoretically-driven methods" (p.62). Harun (2007) argued that essentially a sensemaking methodology encourages researchers to focus on framing questions in a way that facilitate stories to be generated from the vantage point of the sensemaker. Meanwhile Helms Mills, Thurlow and Mills (2010) in their study of gender incorporated Weick's (1995) sensemaking with Foucault's concept of discourse to formulate

what they termed as critical sensemaking. The intention was to address the issue of power relations that they argued was missing in Weick's model.

Recent use of sensemaking as a diagnostic tool in the analysis of qualitative data was by Paull, Boudville and Sitlington (2013). Their paper demonstrated how researchers can make use of sensemaking to diagnose and explain phenomena in ordinary situations, and how it can be added as an analysis and interpretation tool. Their emphasis on researcher sensemaking as a result of one of the researcher's persistent need of wanting "to dig" deeper to understand the appearance of anomalous data (perceived difference in data – See Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington, 2013 for more) is what I term as the double hermeneutic approach in IPA.

Similarly, McKee, Mills, and Driscoll (2008) in their study of workplace spirituality proposed the use of sensemaking as a heuristic approach in understanding social psychological processes. They argued the focus on processes in sensemaking rather than outcomes allows them to explore how individuals make sense of workplace spirituality, how they enact it, and the impact of differences in meaning on the individuals and ultimately the culture of the organization. Weick (1979) termed this as a process of building cognitive understanding of the world we live in. Put simply, this process is an individual act, enacted within one's cognitive space and privy only to themselves, yet dependent on others and the operating environment at the same time. It is a process of selection, retention, and enactment (Weick, 1979, p.45). In this sense, enactment becomes the end result of selection and retention where actions are carried out to reaffirm what they believe. It is thus crucial that we understand sensemaking as it affects one's attitudes and behaviour.

One of the early considerations of sensemaking and meaning-making perspectives in social work was raised by Rodwell (1998) when she reminded social work practitioners and researchers of being duty bound to collect all information “in ways that expose “facts” useful to all sides” (p.10) as multiple perspectives exist in sensemaking and meaning-making. Aries and Johnson (2006) meanwhile approached carer’s experience of adoption through an interpretative methodological framework that capitalises on making sense of narratives. In particular, I find Harun’s (2007) suggestion of taking sensemaking as a communication tool for further scrutiny of what goes on in interethnic interaction as most apt in studies that has an intercultural perspective.

I agree that the sensemaking approach can serve as a fine toothcomb to sieve the intricacies and intimacies of meanings that are as Ricoeur (1970) puts it, never given to us in a direct manner, especially in the context of my study with young Muslims. This is also in light of Ramadan’s (2004, 2010a, 2010b) observations on Western Muslims where he said some tend to take the victim mentality. They blame others/environment rather than to be active in participating in their new environment. Whether this is also reflective of the participants in this present study is what I hope to illuminate.

While arguments have been laid on the missing aspects of ‘power’ in Weick’s model (Helms & Helms Mills, 2010; Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington, 2013), in the context of my study, this does not serve a problem as the emergent data does not indicate aspects of power struggle, rather there seems to be forms of reconciliation. In the following sections, I first explore Weick’s (1979, 1995) sensemaking model for an overall conceptual understanding. In particular, I look at the seven sensemaking properties that Helms Mills (2003) viewed as essential analytical tools in understanding the sensemaking process.

I then discuss Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* on how it sits within Park's (2010, 2010a) model of meaning-making. In taking this approach, I see sensemaking as a precursor to meaning-making. While Park's models of meaning-making is generally applied in the context of traumatic events and illnesses, in contrast to this study's exploration of sensemaking and meaning making in the context of school life, the conceptual tools provided by both Weick and Park are used as a guide to map and explore the young Muslims' sensemaking and meaning-making. Both Park (2005) and Silberman (2005) view the meaning systems perspective as most suitable in studies that inquire into religion's role in stressful situations.

### **3.6 Sensemaking**

Karl Weick's (1979, 1995) seminal work on sensemaking is widely applied in organizational studies as it provides detailed descriptions of the sensemaking processes at both the individual and organizational level. Regardless of whether it is in an organisational context or a school setting, people will always engage in sensemaking as sensemaking is literally "the making of sense" (Weick, 1995, p.4). ). Sensemaking is always the making sense of something, and cannot be of nothing. In order to sense something, there must be a sensation in the first place, and it is the construction of that which then becomes sensible that makes up sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Thus in taking a sensemaking approach to data analysis, my starting point would be Weick's (1995) "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" (p.12). However, in line with my participants' Islamic worldview, I adapt this question to one of "How do I adapt what I see to how I think within Islam?" This is because as Muslims, my participants know that what they

think must first and foremost be in accordance with Islam and the Revealed Texts. Therefore, this adapted frame of understanding lays the foundation for my application of the double hermeneutics process in IPA or what Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington (2013) termed as researcher analysis (sensemaking as an analysis tool). Specifically, this broad understanding of needing to make sense of the large volume of data is driven by the main concern of this study, that is, young Muslims sensemaking with regard to their schooling experience in an urban secular setting. In keeping to a sensemaking approach in data analysis, my aim then is to meet the three fundamental principles of IPA that is, phenomenology, hermeneutics (within Islam), and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Meanings are produced and shaped by cultural horizons (Ricoeur, 1981) and individuals are constantly seeking to make meaning of the information and the environment that they are in (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). In this present study, it is the young Muslims' Islamic faith that makes up their cultural horizons, set against a backdrop of secularism and Western modernity. I take Ramadan's (2012) position that it is one Islam, but many Islamic cultures. For Muslims, religion and culture are entwined. These contrasting horizons are bound to lead to Ramadan's (2010b) "clash of perceptions" (p. ix) thus creating what Weick (1995) termed as interruptions that arise due to gaps in expectations. In this regard then, sensemaking serves as a way to manage the uncertainties and the questions that abound. Words are used to explain a set of circumstances which then leads to action (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The explanations might not be accurate but tend to favour plausibility in the sensemaker's mind (Weick, 1995). It is as Weick (1995) contended, a making of sense.

A sensemaking approach in an IPA study would mean a phenomenological concern with exploring the essential components of phenomena or experiences which make them unique from others (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), at the point where it takes on a significant turn for the experiencing person. It is a study of how individuals perceive, construct and interpret the world in which they live, and in this case, the school environment which is an important developmental site for young people. While the research participants rely on their religious and cultural frames to make sense of their experience, fulfilling the hermeneutical aspect of IPA means I will need to understand the mindset of the participants and the language that is used to articulate their schooling experiences, in order for me to interpret his or her message (Freeman, 2008).

A sensemaking approach provides me with the framework to explore as close as possible the existential aspects of the experience from the perspective of the subject. In other words, it is the participants that produce the meaning of the phenomena while the researcher attempts to decode that meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). A critical process here would be the researcher asking critical questions such as:

What is the person trying to achieve here? Is there anything meaningful being said here, which was not intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that the person himself or herself is perhaps less aware of? (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.8).

To put it simply, an interpretative stand in IPA is driven by the understanding that there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). If the phenomenon exists, then surely it must mean something. Going back to the questions Weick (1995) proposed as critical in the sensemaking investigation, “How they construct what they

construct, why, and with what effects?” (p.4) would mean my enquiring “what agency helps the young Muslims construct what they construct, why, and with what effects?” Specifically, it points me to an individual agency, that is, the exploration of their Muslim consciousness, and their relation with the “sacred” as Ramadan (2004) suggested. This in a way affects their sense of being which translates to identity development as sensemaking is grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995).

The principle of idiography in IPA refers to the in-depth analysis of single cases and the examination of individual perspectives of the participants and the contexts that they are in. It has a preoccupation with the particular, and not the universal (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Its focus is to procure the opportunity to learn as much as possible about the person, his or her response to a specific situation, and consider connections between different aspects of the person’s account (Smith, 2004). In this regard, I would be looking at individual constructs of fear, hopes, doubts and moments of epiphany with regard to their schooling experience. A sensemaking approach thus makes this possible. I posit that only through a focused attempt at making sense of a person’s sensemaking can the researcher obtain as much information as needed, as the data collected is in the form of text. The focus on the emic perspective of the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) combined with an etic interpretation of the researcher brings the individual unit of focus into a culminated whole.

The way participants talked about their experience at school and their perceptions of the experiences is inherently tied to their identity formation processes and inadvertently their beliefs system. Thus, in attempting to explore the essence of the young Muslims being, my aim here is to establish the apparent (*zahir*) and the hidden (*batin*) from their sensemaking narratives. These include the questions of: Are there significant differences in the way each

of them approached their sensemaking? How do they position Islam, themselves, their family and others in their sensemaking? Ultimately, the aim is to explore how sensemaking affects the public self in the sense that what does their self-talk actually mean? Specifically, what do they mean when they persistently self-affirm that “everything is normal for me”. All these questions are advanced in hope of elucidating the young Muslims lived experience at school and their coping strategies. The issue of what can a circumscribed sample tell us about young Western Muslims is addressed in Chapter Four (See Section 4.13).

At the same time, the aim is to explore their concept of freedom with regard to decision-making and management of social affairs in light of their religious sentiments. As Giddens and Pierson (1988) put it, there are varied sources of anxiety and as I see it, modernity in a Western context for young Muslims grappling with everyday realities in their encounters with others does produce paradoxical realms. It is social reflexivity of a world that increasingly overwhelms us with information rather than pre-given modes of conduct (Giddens & Pierson, 1988), what Ramadan (2010a) purported as driving Western Muslims to a continual need to redefine themselves in light of encounters of difference.

There are seven properties in sensemaking as proposed by Weick (1995). They are (i) grounded in identity construction (ii) retrospective (iii) enactive of sensible environments (iv) social (v) ongoing (vi) focused on and by extracted cues; and (vii) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995, p.17). These seven properties make up the sensemaking process and when taken together or interdependently, they help explain how sensemaking occurs (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington, 2013). It is important to note that these properties are in no particular order of importance. Some are pivotal in the sensemaking process and legitimize certain events (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington (2013).

In the first property of grounded in identity construction, sensemaking was described by Weick (1995) as originating with the sensemaker. This means that one partakes in sensemaking as a way to fulfill our natural human need of needing possession of an identity, in particular, one that is stable and positive. This identity creation process is interactive, where it is constantly being redefined as a result of our experiences and being in contact with others. In the context of this study, this means the identity construction of the young Muslims are constantly in a state of being defined and re-defined. It is as Ramadan (2010a) suggested: a phenomenon of reactive identity development that is in opposition to what one is not, or even against others. Through a sensemaking approach in data analysis, my aim then is to understand the process of reactive identity development in this group of young Muslims. In particular, I am looking to understand how decision-making is achieved when factors of social and religious beliefs clash. At the same time, the lens of identity construction can be used to explain the participants' mode of socialization and participation at school. Is it one of participation or withdrawal? Do they feel included or excluded?

The second property of retrospection is the act of recalling past experiences to rationalize present events (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The property of retrospection is useful in exploring the link of past events and the kind of impact it has on the young Muslims current experience at school. Is it one of negativity (emotional baggage) or is it one of positivity (catalyst of hope/growth)? How does this in turn impact on their sense of identity and belonging at school? Specifically, I am seeking to understand their goals in the long term and enacted within, what matters most to them, or what hurts most? What does it mean to them to be stereotyped as a "terrorist" and what does it mean to be singled out for wearing the veil?

The third property of sensemaking is that of enactive of the environment. Weick (1995) described enacted environments as one where it is an “activity of ‘making’ that which is sensed” (p.30). This means that it is individuals that create their own reality but at the same time, can find themselves being circumscribed within the every environment that they created (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington). In this regard, this property can be used to analyse how young Muslims enact their environment, and if they view it as one that is liberating or confined. Specifically, I am looking to explore how aspects of their religious beliefs are incorporated to form the meaning of freedom on their terms.

The fourth property of sensemaking is social. This refers to the sensemaking process as contingent on others, regardless of whether they are present or not. This means the presence of a social context is always prevalent in our sensemaking. Through this property, I am looking to explore how the presence of rules and expectations serve as guidelines for a certain standard of behaviour. In the absence of such, how do this group of young Muslims then make sense of tacit knowledge and manage expectations of a certain school culture, peer group pressures and family expectations? All these contribute to explaining their identity construction and sense of belonging.

The property of focused on and by extracted cues refers to the sensemaking process where individuals tend to draw on a certain element of fixation to the exclusion of others as a way to rationalize their interpretation of current event. In this sense, our retrospective nature of sensemaking direct us to draw from past experiences and structures in deciding which cue to extract to help us make sense of a certain situation. As it is the aspects of plausibility that attracts the sensemaker rather than accuracy, we tend to distort our perceptions or exclude what we feel as not accurate. This means a risk of error in judgment. For this present study,

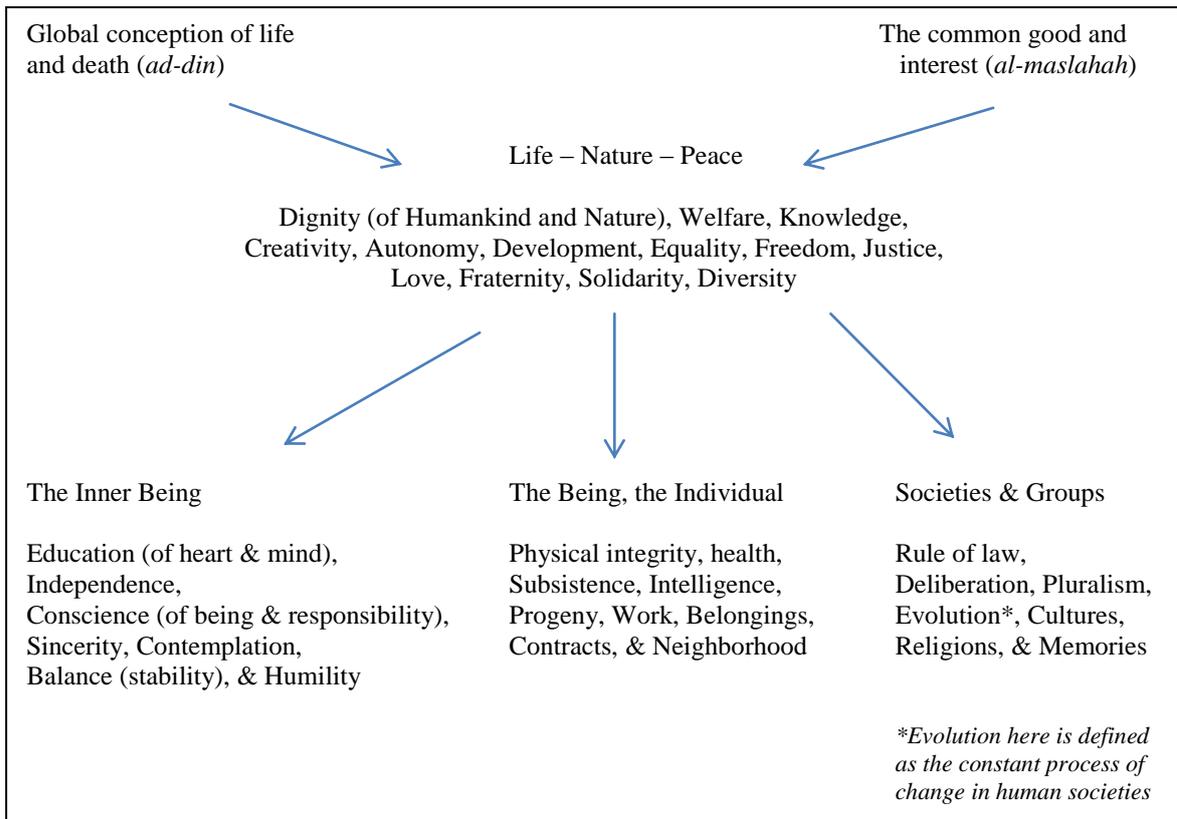
identifying and understanding the appearance of biases and reliance on plausibility in decision-making helps to elucidate the gaps in young Muslims' perception of events and others. It provides a framework to explore what makes up a certain viewpoint.

Overall, sensemaking is an on-going process. While Weick (1995) contended that sensemaking has no beginning or ending, he suggested that in our attempts to make sense of what is happening around us, we select moments out of the continuous flows and extract cues from those selected moments in order to construct and reconstruct our enacted moments of reality. This means novel or new situations can shock individuals into making sense of them of which some of it might produce positive feelings while some project negative connotations (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington, 2013). In other words, sudden onset of interruptions produce ambiguities or uncertainties and it forces us to deal with it. With regard to this present study then, it is the exploration of the 'many' moments at school in order to further make sense of how young Muslims indulge in identity construction and construct their space at school. What do they draw on to sustain their own sense of security? How do they cope with insecurities?

### **3.7 Ramadan's applied *ijtihad* (2009) as a tool to make sense of young Muslims' meaning-making**

In making sense of the participants' meaning-making, I draw from Ramadan's proposed contemporary ethics of three-dimension applied *ijtihad* that is based on the Revealed Book (Quran) and the Book of the Universe. I apply this to make sense of the participants' meaning-making. The data indicates that they use their own interpretation of the two to harmonize their daily encounters as practising Muslims.

## Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad*



From Ramadan (2009, p.143), Figure 10.2

Ramadan's proposed model of applied *ijtihad* is to be understood both vertically and horizontally. On the vertical axis, the first dimension is what Ramadan termed as global conceptions of the Islamic way and life that must always sit in harmony with protecting the common good and interest of all. The *ad-din* denotes how a Muslim must always strive to bear witness to his/her faith through remaining faithful adherents of the concepts of life and death as prescribed in the two revealed texts. Ramadan explained that this global dimension of *ad-din* is tied to a person's *al-fitrah*, citing the Quranic verse 30:30 in support of his arguments.

So set your face truly [be faithful] to the religious conception of life and death, as a sincere monotheist. [This is] the natural attraction in which God has [naturally] created mankind (Ramadan, 2009, p.137).

However, in doing so, Ramadan further argued that the broader conception of *ad-din* includes the concept of *al-maslahah*. This is understandable for if the root is comprised of two texts, of which one is the Book of Universe, surely the other complimentary aspect to living the Way (*as-shariah*) would be the protection and upholding of humanity.

This is followed by three objectives that Ramadan (2009) argued form the *a priori* goals of the essence of the Islamic message. These are drawn from the Prophet Muhammad's practices and acknowledgement of the Universe as a sign of God's existence: life, nature, and peace. Ramadan pointed to three crucial messages in the Revealed text that support these goals – of the verse that associates the killing of one man as killing of all mankind, the Quranic verse on protecting God's creation, and the call for peace captured in the root of the word Islam, that is, *salam* (peace). Ramadan argued these three goals form the pillars in propping up the two primary higher objectives and are the founding pillars of ethical elaboration. In using the term elaboration, what Ramadan meant here is the need for the person (a Muslim) to reflect deeply and reasoned out the three conceptions of ethics that grew out of the two main higher objectives. It is the concept of *istiqamah* as explained earlier.

The third dimension incorporates humankind's link of being and action to the higher objectives and its three founding ethical pillars. This includes actions both as an individual and also as a member of society. Ramadan also highlighted that the list here is not definitive and suggests that the objectives here include promoting and protecting dignity (of

humankind, living species, and nature, welfare, knowledge, creativity, autonomy, development, equality, freedom, justice, fraternity, love, solidarity, and diversity (p.139).

In drawing from both texts, Ramadan's contention is that it is the texts that stipulate the higher objectives, while the essential and primary character is made explicit by history and the evolution of nature and societies. As such, in understanding young Muslims, understanding how they interpret their understanding of their Islamic texts and how this is played out in everyday life should form part of practice intervention.

### **3.7.1 Ramadan's applied *ijtihad* and Park's meaning-making model (MMM)**

How then does Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* sit with Park's meaning-making model? I contextualize Ramadan's applied *ijtihad* to Park's MMM as the MMM demonstrates that spirituality, a core aspect of global meaning is linked to how one perceives and deal with the discrepancies of global and situational meanings. This in turn has an impact on a person's well-being and their coping mechanisms.

Park's (2005, 2010, 2010a) MMM for understanding meaning, spirituality, and stress related growth is based on two levels of meaning, global and situational. It is discrepancy-based, that is, it proposes that people's perception of discrepancies between their appraised meaning of a particular situation and their global meaning (i.e. what they believe and desire) (Park, 2010a) creates distress, which in turn gives rise to efforts to close the gap in discrepancy and thus minimize distress. The model posits that efforts at meaning-making are essential to adjustment to serious illness by helping patients either assimilate the illness into their pre-illness global meaning or helping them to change their global meaning to accommodate it.

In this sense then, what is global in Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* are the first two levels of the vertical axis (the global conceptions of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah* along with the three foundational pillars of ethics – life, nature and peace) as these are the root of the Islamic faith based on the two revealed sources. The situational aspects would be the individual's being and actions, both in their private realms, in encounters with others and also as part of the school community. The meanings that the young Muslims assign to the 'discrepancies' they encounter determines their ways of coping and subsequent adjustment as the MMM views the degree to which one perceives one's illness as discrepant from one's global beliefs determines the extent to which the illness is distressing (Park, 2010a).

Park's work is underpinned by two central claims (Scardigno & Mininni, 2013). The first is Park's reflection drawn off Baumeister's view of the centrality of meaning in psychology and its link to religion and the second claim rests on the view that religion is a source of both common and special systems of meaning (Scardigno & Mininni, 2013). In other words, both these claims of Park as suggested by Scardigno and Mininni (2013) can best be understood as first, meaning-making as cognitive in nature with religion as the source of philosophical foundation for a sense of coherence; secondly, while religion provides the basis for meaning-making, it has both qualities of generalization and also individualization.

Contextualizing Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* to Park's MMM, and applying it to the participant's meaning-making, I have to ask the question of how do I define traumatic events within their schooling experience? Or, rather, is there to be expected some form of traumatic events in their encounters at school? I posit here that Park's MMM is suitable to be used in combination with Ramadan's model to shed light on their meaning-making process

regardless of whether their encounters are traumatic or not. What is evident from the data is also the indication that the participants do indulge in meaning-making in order to be in alignment with the global life meaning, in this instance, the global objectives of life and death (*ad-din*) and the principles of common good (*al-maslahah*).

Underpinning the meaning-making process is also the element of reflection on situational meaning (Scardigno & Mininni, 2013) that Park (2010) defined as “meaning in the context of a particular environmental encounter” (p. 258). This reflection is activated when a person encounters distressing or unexpected events and leads to the attachment of meaning and an evaluation of the gap between appraised and global meaning (Park, 2010). Taking Ramadan’s model then, I would suggest that situational meaning is a natural process that occurs as a result of a person’s attempts to balance both the principle of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah*.

### **3.7.2 How do I read Tariq Ramadan?**

This thesis is essentially about young Western Muslims’ experience of school from a social work perspective. A critical aspect of this is that I offer my views on how I make sense of Tariq Ramadan and his philosophies as it impacts on my interpretation of his works. There are criticisms by various parties on Tariq Ramadan. One critique is by Caroline Fourest (2008), who remains the most polemic and controversial where Ramadan’s followers are concerned. For Fourest (2008), Ramadan’s objections to Voltaire’s play was seen as an affront to Voltaire’s key ideas of a person’s right to be in disagreement with another and for their right to speak out. To Ramadan however, it was about Voltaire lacking the “question of decency and good manners” (Fourest, 2008, p. ix) towards Muslim adherents. Fourest viewed Ramadan’s stand on faith as the supreme guide in all matters as an attack on European heritage and values. To Fourest (2008), Ramadan is “a supreme finder of words that elide and

hide meaning, that glide away sinuously from confrontation” (p. ix – x). In short, Fourest termed it as ‘doublespeak’. Another matter of contention for Fourest was Ramadan’s refusal to call for an immediate ban on stoning for adultery. Ramadan’s suggestion that a moratorium be applied while matters of justice are looked into (such as fair legal representation for the accused) needs to be understood from the perspective of Ramadan as a Muslim that is bound by what is clearly stated in the Quran, of which he does not have the liberty to change.

As a non-Muslim reading his work, I find that I fluctuate between an easy read and a read that raises further questions. It prompts me to pause, think, and reflect on the significance of his words, and attempt to understand it from within my own understanding of Islam and from my personal encounters with Muslim friends and relatives. The gist of Ramadan’s work is constantly repeated but this is understandable as Ramadan’s philosophies revolve around a contextual re-reading and interpretation of the Revealed Texts and the Prophetic Tradition. His philosophy of *ijtihad* is similar to Muqtedar Khan’s (2014), where they both draw on the Quran and its instruction to Muslims to “think”.

What I do struggle with at times is defining the terms that he uses and trying to come to an understanding of what exactly is meant; such as the term “integration of intimacies”. It took me several readings to make sense of this and to finally interpret it as essentially referring to a person’s sensemaking and meaning-making, of which their past, present events, and future hopes are brought together in harmony (a phrase Ramadan used in describing his model of applied *ijtihad*). I came to the understanding that “integration of intimacies” for Western Muslims essentially refers to them being at home in the West (a term also frequently used by

Ramadan in his talks and on social media) and accommodating their religious practices (intimacies) in ways that do not flout the central requirements of Islam, yet fit with their new contemporary Western living. I re-evaluated my encounters with ambiguity in my readings of Ramadan to be his attempts to encourage his readers to practise *ijtihad*. I do not find his philosophies patronising as they are essentially his suggestion on how Muslims in the West can find unity with self, God, and their new home. Malik (2010) accuses Ramadan's work as shallow, not reflecting depth in thinking, and does not pose difficult questions. In this sense, I understand Ramadan's work to be as what he intended it to be: an orientation into *ijtihad* for the reader.

Fourest (2008) questions whether Ramadan is:

An intellectual who advocates a modern, liberal Islam; or is he a smooth, astute, well-mannered Islamist preacher? (p. xiii).

In general, I do not agree with Fourest that Ramadan engages in doublespeak. I find in Fourest "guardedness" towards him & Islam/Muslims in general, which precludes the openness that her subscribing to the ideals of Voltaire and the values of Western Enlightenment imply. I do not read as widely as her, but by referring to Ramadan as "Brother Tariq" instead of Professor Tariq (when he is an Oxford Professor), I read it as veiled sarcasm, not the brotherhood respect that usually accompanies the term "brother" in the Muslim/Asian community. Fourest is well read, and an accomplished intellectual, but my thoughts are that in order to understand Ramadan's work, one need to read his whole works, the Quran, the Prophetic Tradition, and similar work of others such as Muqtedar Khan or Reza Aslan. A follower of Voltaire would not be able to appreciate Ramadan without the

circularity of understanding that is required for Islamic epistemology and ontology, and its application in contemporary times.

While it is my participants who follow Ramadan, I personally find his philosophies engaging and non-confronting. As a Buddhist, I find his thinking a reflection of the ‘middle path’ philosophy in Buddhism. It is non-confronting as I am able to rationalise for myself if what he is saying is reflective of his stand as a Muslim, and as one that follows the Prophetic Tradition. I do not see it as doublespeak just because Ramadan’s words are seen as categorically Western when facing a Western audience, and Islamic when facing a Muslim audience, as Fourest puts it. If one is familiar with the Prophetic Traditions, even the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was known to be on pleasant terms with the Jews and Christians, and in fact encourages respect in language and behaviour when engaging with non-Muslims. On a personal level, I became a fan of Ramadan when I read his views on the situation of non-Muslims in Malaysia, and saw the consistency of his philosophy of pluralism in practice applied on non-Muslims (Zurairi, 2015). If Ramadan is one that engages in doublespeak, then he should have spoken the language of the conservative/extremist Malaysian Muslims.

### **3.8 Summary and Conclusion**

It makes sense that in exploring the lived experience of young Muslims in school in Christchurch City, New Zealand, sensemaking forms part of the theoretical framework for analysis. This is because, as Eriksen (2004) puts forth “...many events are interpreted through an ethnic frame of understanding” (p.44). While Eriksen in this instance is referring to a person’s ethnicity as having an influence on one’s sensemaking, I would posit that it can

be applied to one's religious beliefs as well. One's ethnicity creates a certain perspective on life, and through continuous interaction with others, these perspectives change. In similar ways, one's religious beliefs also formulate one's thinking and ways of making sense of things around them. It highlights to me that understanding sensemaking and the meanings people placed on it is important particularly when a person's ethnicity, culture or religious beliefs are different from the dominant group.

Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) placed sensemaking as having a central role in human behaviour as they argued that meanings that materialize through sensemaking is what guides and controls a person's identity and actions. Specifically, it serves as an additional analysis tool (Paull, Boudville, & Sitlington, 2013) to address the questions of young Muslims' sense of being and belonging in their daily shared experiences at school. It is, as Ramadan (2010b) stated:

The other distracts us from ourselves, our fears, our doubts, whilst the presence of the other justifies and explains our suspicions. We have projections, but at the same time we have to admit that we have no projects. In fact the other becomes our diversion (p.ix).

Therefore a sensemaking approach to data analysis provides the pathway for both the empathic and questioning stand that is synonymous with an IPA approach. In Ramadan's (2010a) terms, he called it the "intellectual empathy" and "dialectical approach" (p.29). What Ramadan means here is the need to look at a pedagogy that prioritizes people's psychological state without making them feel guilty or to stigmatize, but arising from mutual understanding. In this sense, it is to be understood that the element of uniqueness in individuals need to be explored holistically. Rodwell's (1998) arguments that language, narrative, socio-historical and cultural processes are all foundations in meaning-making reflects the elements that

persist in intercultural encounters, and, in this instance, between young Muslims and others in this Western context.

Whilst Park (2010a) did caution on the complexity in crafting a definition of meaning-making as often the process is complex as it is not clear which aspects of cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioural are engaged in the meaning-making process (Westerink, 2013), this study does not cover aspects of this complexity. This study maintains the central argument of this thesis and that the participants in this study do reflect Park's MMM through the reconfiguration of their beliefs, that is, the application of a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad*. The use of Ramadan's framework for Western Muslims as a theoretical framework is supported with a sensemaking approach to data analysis. The application of Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* is further used to eliminate the meaning-making process with Park's MMM as a tool to contextualize it.

In the next chapter, I discuss my choice of methodology. This includes the rationale for using a qualitative methodology for social work research and the type of inquiry that I am exploring. Of significance will be my explanation for the need to move away from a traditional Heideggerian-type of IPA to an adapted form of IPA that is influenced by Ramadanic philosophies (IPA-R).

## **4. Chapter Four - Methodology**

Phenomenological research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love.

We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face  
with its mystery

(Max van Manen, 1990, p.5-6)

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I provide my rationale for using a qualitative methodology both in terms of its suitability for social work research and the inquiry that I am exploring. The use of a phenomenological approach for social work research is gaining popularity (Pascal, 2010) but my use of an adapted version of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a tool for analysis within the qualitative paradigm with Muslim participants is new. Therefore, while this is a rather detailed chapter, it is crucial that I make clear the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that undergird this present IPA study of young Muslims' experience at school.

Other than a write-up on the selection of participants and sample size, this chapter covers the process of gaining ethics approval, the interview plan, gatekeepers and participants' recruitment, data collection, data transcription, data translation, data analysis, the peer review process and the issue of rigour and trustworthiness. I conclude the chapter with a summary on my choice of a phenomenological approach and the use of Ramadanian philosophies to make sense of the participants' sensemaking and meaning-making. It includes with what I consider to be the key contribution of the phenomenological method for social work research with Muslim participants.

#### **4.1.1 The departure from traditional IPA to an IPA approach influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R)**

Because of the critical relevance of the adapted method to the thesis, this section deals solely with the rationale for the departure from traditional IPA<sup>56</sup> to an IPA approach influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R). Detailed discussion on the theoretical foundations of IPA will be in subsequent sections.

The central argument of this thesis is that young Muslims in Christchurch schools in New Zealand engage in a highly personalised version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social affairs within their everyday encounters of a secularised environment. Theirs is a form of framed sensemaking as their application of *ijtihad* draws from within Islamic structures to help them make sense of the environment and their encounters. While the sample size for this study is small<sup>57</sup>, this does not detract from the fact that there are tensions in applying Heideggerian philosophies on Muslim participants. Therefore, the application of IPA as a tool for analysis adopts Ramadanian philosophies for Western Muslims as a theoretical framework. My adaptation of an IPA approach influenced by Ramadanian philosophies is driven by the need to capture the participants' framing of their experience that draws from their Islamic beliefs for interpretation. This adaptation is not only to foreground methodological concerns, but to stay "faithful" (Smith, 2003, p.26) to the data that reflects the complex nuances of the influencers and drivers of their Islamic beliefs and values on their sensemaking.

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<sup>56</sup> This approach was taken after advice from my supervisors and further readings on Heidegger's background and the influence of Nietzsche in his work. Emerging data also indicate a potential mismatch of worldviews.

<sup>57</sup> The issue of sample size of seven is discussed in Section 4.8 while the implication of this is further discussed at the end of this chapter alongside the contribution of a phenomenological approach in social work research with young Muslims.

IPA's theoretical foundations are hermeneutics phenomenology and idiography (Smith, 2009). The main aim of an IPA study is to explore how individuals make sense of their experience, on the assumption that people are always engaged in acts of interpretation in their everyday lives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and the meanings the place on it (Smith, 2003). However, in the process of carrying out this study, I came to realize that the inherent tensions need to be acknowledged and managed. IPA as a tool for analysis fits the cognitive aspects of meaning that I was looking to explore, but its theoretical foundations that draw from Heideggerian existential philosophy and hermeneutics clash with the Islamic worldview of the participants.

The existential clash between Heideggerian and Islamic philosophy takes root from the question of the meaning of *being* and the truth of *being*. In *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, Heidegger (1971)<sup>58</sup> said that to think *being* is “to respond to the appeal of its presence ...to let each of these be” (p.x). This thinking arises from Heidegger's argument that philosophy has forgotten *being*, therefore to respond to *being* is to let *being* “reveal themselves”. This was later followed by Heidegger's (1993)<sup>59</sup> claims that the truth of *being* is to be found in confrontation with *being*'s history. For Heidegger (1993) *being* is a *being* in relationship with itself, thus *being* is the history of itself. This means *being* is dependent on and determined by *being*. This self-sufficiency was explained by Heidegger (1993) in the following:

The fullness and variability of being never comes from the “is” and from being, but from beings themselves (p.26).

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<sup>58</sup> Translated by Albert Hofstadter, 2001

<sup>59</sup> Translated by Gary Aylesworth, 1993

Therefore the experience of *being* is paradoxical in nature where *being* is both emptiest and surplus at the same time; is the most complete and also unique. Freedom for *being* in Heidegger's (1993) thinking is one that self-legislates (p.30).

On the contrary, to think is part of faith in Islam as pointed out by Ramadan (2004; 2010a). When one thinks, it is always of *Allah*. It cannot "let things reveal themselves" as in Heideggerian thinking. In Islam, one comes from *Allah* and to *Allah* is one's return. Faith in *Allah* is reflected in the proclamation of the *syahadah*. One utters the *syahadah* in confidence and bears witness to this faith through one's actions. This is the reason why Muslims are also known as the caliphs of Islam and children are called 'little caliphs'. This is man in Islam (Abul Quasem, 1975). Man cannot be in a position of paradox, rather man is confident (*yakin*) of *Allah* and does not wait for *Allah* to reveal Himself. The universe is proof of *Allah's* greatness. It is man that needs to unveil his heart and find his *al-fitra* through seeking out *Allah* as the one that is dependent on *Allah* and submits to *Allah* is the complete one (Ramadan, 2010a). The Islamic concept of *ihsan* puts man in the position of being observed, and not the observer as man knows that *Allah* is there, ever knowing and ever observing. Everything that a Muslim does is always in awe of and is mindful of the presence of *Allah*.

Heidegger's (1971) essence of thinking asks "what" is the essence of a thing, but, in Islam, *Allah* is not what or who. In Islam, *Allah* has no name and is beyond definition, beyond comparison. In Islamic epistemology, truth comes from *Allah* and is found in the Revelation (*Quran*), and cannot be contested. In fact, to contest the truth of the *Quran* is deemed blasphemous, thus Muslims say "*Allah al Haq*" (God is the truth). That is why Muslim children are taught to recite and memorize the Holy *Quran* in Arabic from young. This is to

ensure that the faith is strong and even if one does not speak Arabic, one is confident of the promise of God's word. Regardless of where Muslims reside, Quran classes are a must. To be able to memorize and recite the Quran is part of *ihsan*. To have *ihsan* is to be sure of Allah's grace and protection and to trust in Him<sup>60</sup>.

In short, in Islam, man is not determined by being, but by Allah. The freedom in Islam is the freedom given to man to think and choose the right path bearing in mind there are consequences if they were to choose the wrong path, thus the need to think and strive for the 'right way' through *istiqamah*. The 'leap' for truth in Heideggerian (1971) philosophy is towards the world, but in Islam, 'the leap' is towards *Allah* (and the Revelation). For Heidegger (1993), truth is established in *being* that opens up to the world but in Islam, truth is in the return to *Allah* (Ramadan, 2010a).

The existentialist position of the Heideggerian philosophy that dismisses the importance of God<sup>61</sup> and the view that life does not automatically project meaning (Nichols, 2009) adds further tension. This is contrary to the position in Islam where life's meaning is fixed. One of the central tenets of Islam is the pre-destined life, of the belief in *qadar* and *qadak* (See Chapter one, Section 1.6). Included in this pre-destined life is also a concern for life in the hereafter, of which its conditions is determined by how one lives his/her life in this present

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<sup>60</sup> The Prophet (PBUH) said: Be mindful of God, and He will take care of you. Be mindful of Him, and you shall find Him at your side. If you ask, ask of God. If you need help, seek it from God. Know that if the whole world were to gather together in order to help you, they would not be able to help you except if God had written so. And if the whole world were to gather together in order to harm you, they would not harm you except if God had written so. The pens have been lifted, and the pages are dry.

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger takes Nietzsche's Death of God as to mean the death of philosophy, and a switch to atheism. For Heidegger, God is just a poetic fiction, with God's presence as a concealed presence (See *Building dwelling thinking in Poetry, Language, Thought* by Martin Heidegger, tr. Hofstadter, A. (1971), New York: Harper Colophon Books).

world. Man's action in this life is always reflective of what will come hereafter at *Padang Masyar*<sup>62</sup> where one will be questioned by *Allah*. However, for Heidegger, *being* ends when it dies. It is clear that Heideggerian philosophies strike at the root of the meaning and the status of divine revelation in Islam, specifically, on the One God and One Truth in Islam as opposed to Heidegger's (1971) multiple truths and freedom as a result of a practical relation with Other.

Another point to note is Heidegger's work that draws from Nietzsche. Nietzsche and his claim that God is dead<sup>63</sup> views God as no longer having validity as the source of moral values. This includes the fading of beliefs in a higher divine order by its followers. Clearly, this is in total contrast to Islam and the concept of *tauhid* (One God, One Truth). Muslims revere *Allah* and pray directly to Him. They serve and fear *Allah* and as evident in the *syahadah*, the belief is that there is no God except God, and Muhammad is his messenger. Even to prioritize the Hadith is deemed *haram* (forbidden) as the Hadith is merely the sayings and acts of the Prophet. The Hadith cannot take priority over the Quran, and is used merely to further explain the Quran. The Quran itself is deemed perfect and complete, and is the complete source of truth.

The starting point of this thesis also draws from Wagner's insider approach to understanding phenomena where I argue that young Western Muslims embrace a form of personalised *ijtihad*, what Ramadan (2004) termed as the Muslim consciousness. This Muslim consciousness holds the key to their expression of religious beliefs (Hassan, 2008) and the

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<sup>62</sup> The day of reckoning – Day of Judgment

<sup>63</sup> See Kaufmann, W. (1974), *Nietzsche: Philosopher, psychologist, antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, for more on Nietzsche.

meanings they place on their social encounters. In contrast, the Heideggerian view is that one's primary experience of the world is **not** mediated by consciousness, but instead is the result of a practical relation to the world (Heidegger, 1971). Retaining Heideggerian philosophy in IPA would contradict not only my central claim, but also the Islamic worldview.

On the whole, taking into account that the sampling for this study involves young Muslims, this major clash of philosophies thus would raise concern at every level of data analysis, particularly as this thesis focuses on the young Muslims application of *ijtihad*, a mode of consciousness that draws its rationale from their Islamic faith (as explained in Chapter Three, Section 3.7). Thus, the adapted version of IPA replaces Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology with Ramadan (2004, 2010a, 2010b), and a turn to Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness (1983) to further make sense of Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* on the participants' mode of Islamic sensemaking and meaning-making.

Wagner himself insisted the immense complexity and possibly inexhaustible range of phenomenological studies mean that there will always be various groups of phenomenologists and argued that no one holds the key to the ultimate truth in their hands as they each tackle phenomenology from their philosophical point of view, and make up their frames of reference accordingly. Wagner's open approach to new forms of knowledge and insistence that there is something to be learned from the various groups as long as we do not have to accept any of them dogmatically is how I make sense of the need to re-model Smith's (2003, 2008, 2009) IPA to suit my study on young Muslim's sensemaking and meaning-making of their schooling encounters.

As such, my approach in this instance is one of approaching IPA as a tool, and not as a framework to be imposed wholesale on the data. I make clear the following caveats in my application of IPA:

(a) The use of an IPA approach as a tool is for matter of organization, and does not draw on Heideggerian phenomenology, but from Ramadan's framework of applied *ijtihad* for Western Muslims. Thus, it is not traditional IPA *per se*, but one that is modified to fit with this present study of young Muslims sensemaking and meaning-making. Their framed sensemaking necessitates an Islamic framework in order to be consistent with their frames of reference in meaning-making. Their sensemaking is a process of enactment (Weick, 1955) that occurs within their Islamic faith.

(b) The element of double hermeneutics in interpretation and the idiographic focus remain the central concern alongside the use of Ramadan's philosophies. The approach here is still on the active role of the researcher to gain access to the participant's experience, and through interpretative activity, attempts to make sense of the participant's worldview. This means the critical exploration of experience from the participant's Islamic perspective and attempting to reveal what is undertaken tacitly and without much reflection on a routine basis.

(c) The essence of Heidegger's *being* is care. In the Ramadanian approach, the essence of a *being* is *al-fitra* (2010a), which in its original form is pure and submits fully to *Allah*.

## **4.2 Method selection**

In Chapter One (1.4.2), I briefly touched on the reasons I opted for the qualitative approach along with the epistemological foundations that informed my worldview (1.4.1). In this section, I expand further on this.

### **4.2.1 A qualitative approach for social work research**

This study aims to understand and interpret the meanings of the Muslim student's lived experience in Christchurch schools. One of the main differences between qualitative and quantitative approach is in how data is analyzed. Taking a quantitative approach would require the reduction of phenomena to numerical values for statistical analysis and the causal-link outcome explanation which I do not see as realistic in my study of lived experience since my focus is on the meanings they place on their specific experience (Smith, 2003).

In the literature review I have established that the "textbook Muslim" phenomenon is a problem for young Western Muslims at school. To make sense of how the young Muslims make sense of this, I would need an approach that can elicit emotional narratives through spontaneous and informal familiar settings, similar to the settings in practice. This effectively means the use of in-depth interviewing in qualitative research as a way to elicit information on the participants' social worlds (Silverman, 2011). Silverman's emphasis that qualitative interviewing not only gives researchers access to exploring the points of view of the participants, but also elevate these points of view to "culturally honored status of reality"

(p.133) is appealing for application to my data sample of young Muslims whom I argue embrace a highly personalised form of everyday *ijtihad*.

I also draw from Poindexter's (2003) argument that a query and response model cannot fully explore and explicate the many aspects of human experience. The complexity of human nature and psychological make-up cannot be measured or explained via quantitative methods (Kuckelmann, Cobb & Forbes, 2002). In this instance, I am looking to make sense of the young Muslims' sensemaking and meaning-making via the adapted Ramadanian model of applied *ijtihad*. Only a qualitative approach via the phenomenological tradition can facilitate the elucidation of the essence of the Muslim consciousness that is aligned to Wagner's (1983) phenomenology of consciousness, an approach that privileges individual consciousness before social experiences.

While there has been a surge in social work research taking a qualitative approach including open-ended unstructured interviewing where the "researchers invite conversational encounters to create space for intricacies and vicissitudes of respondents' lived experiences" (Poindexter, 2003, p.384), Poindexter noted that many failed to carefully weigh in on the words – the definitions and socially constructed contexts of meaning and even the researchers' role in co-constructing the research interview. In this present study, the participants' cognition has a direct impact on how they frame their sensemaking and meaning-making. The cognitive processes via their application of everyday *ijtihad* facilitate their understanding and interpretation of their everyday encounters at school.

This process occurs within their understanding and interpretation of Islamic central tenets which then impact on the meanings they place on it and subsequently their actions and

behaviours. Their sense of being and belonging at school is thus an outcome of their framed sensemaking. This, as I set-out in my central claim, is expressed by the participants via their application of *ijtihad*. Meaning, as mentioned earlier, exists at every level of our interpretation (Baumeister, 1991). For the young Muslims, their practice of everyday *ijtihad* is always linked to meaning and intent, a key structure of Quranic interpretation. To gain access to these meanings require a qualitative approach.

Further noting Mensinga's (2009) claim that the role of social work is to engage with people's lived experience, an experience that is deeply personal and what Wagner (1983) described as never the same, but merely similar at closest, I then thought about what would be the best approach to illuminate the young Muslims' lived experience at school. I wanted a method that would reflect the social worker-client dynamics in practice, where the elements of meaning and understanding is given critical focus (Sheppard, 2006) via both the researcher and the researched as co-producers of meanings and the personal involvement and subjectivity of the researcher a core focus. This I consider a reflection of case management where the social worker at the end of the day would be the one writing the case report and making summation and recommendations.

Therefore, locating my research within the context of lived experience essentially mean I needed a method that focuses on individual consciousness as a means to the person's outer-world, that is, "from the individual to the social, and from the person to the group" (Wagner, 1983, p.2). For me, this represents an approach that puts the participants' view of reality as important raw material for data analysis. It is prioritizing what is experienced as inside consciousness, that is, how we experience all that is non-self (the outer world reality) (Wagner, 1983, p. 9).

This means using a method that not only addresses the main research question of “What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?” but also one that is flexible enough to accommodate the Muslim participants’ worldview and prioritizes their Muslim consciousness. This again points me to the qualitative approach that is more flexible due to its iterative nature as opposed to quantitative structures. Grounded theory explores emerging theories, while narrative analysis has a focus on how the story is told, and the way it is narrated. I am looking to explore deep into the subjective experiences of a person, an approach that prioritizes a person’s consciousness, in line with my central argument that young Muslims engage in a highly personalised version of everyday *ijtihad*. Thus IPA’s phenomenological base that is traced back to Husserlian phenomenology is deemed most suitable albeit some needed adaptation as clarified in Section 4.1.1 earlier. The phenomenological stand views individual consciousness as the primary link to all that a person knows and do in the social world as this consciousness is experienced subjectively (Husserl, 1970).

Therefore, through the application of IPA as a tool of analysis, I explore and attempt to elucidate the meanings in the young Muslims’ lived experience. IPA is essentially an approach that uses participant’s account of their experience in an inverse manner, that is, the person-in-context to capture the person’s relatedness to the phenomena at hand (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). My ultimate aim is, as Smith (2003) puts it, “to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world” (p. 26). This means paying close attention to consciousness as Husserl (1970) argued that consciousness of something is always driven by intentionality. This state of consciousness would include states of pre-consciousness and unconscious (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p.45).

There have been efforts to promote phenomenology as a method for social work research (Wilke, 2002; Pascal, 2006, 2010) and this is seen in a few recent social work studies (Goldberg, 2011; Morrissey, 2011; Rickers, 2012). The nature of social work practice is complex (Shaw & Gould, 2011) therefore I see the need to embrace and explore different approaches in social work research. I am drawn to explore Wagner's (1983) suggestion that a phenomenology of consciousness is one that explores the psychology of consciousness and volition. This ties in with Islam's emphasis on meaning (*makna*) and intention (*niat*) as I explained in Chapter One (See Section 1.6.2). Wagner's suggestion that researchers who opt for a phenomenological approach should be driven by their own quest of what is of importance to them as human beings and their human existence also makes perfect sense to me.

### **4.3 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology studies the description of a phenomenon as it is experienced consciously and attempts to illuminate the meanings and perceptions that are ascribed to the experience (Pascal, 2010). It is what van Manen (1990) termed as the study of the *Hidden* and as such argued that phenomenology does not problem-solve as it does not go on a purpose-filled solution seeking journey. Rather, it is the meaning-making that phenomenology is most concerned with. I do not see this as a shortfall in the phenomenological approach and suggest that one should not simply close our mind to the possibility of locating a serendipitous solution simply because it has a *Hidden* nature. We need to recognize its transformational qualities both for the researcher and the researched as phenomenological research provides

the platform for both parties to engage in conjoint sensemaking of the experience in focus (Finlay, 2011).

As Finlay (2011) wrote: It gives participants “the opportunity to be witnessed in their experience and allows them to ‘give voice’ to what they are going through” (p.10). This, by itself, is an aspect of emotional relief that I consider to be of immense qualitative value, something that emerged in the participants’ reflections<sup>64</sup>. Thus, at this stage, I would allude to phenomenology as not only having a *Hidden* nature but also one that is serendipitous. The meanings derived from the experience can be tapped and contextualized to wider issues in the outer world thus contributing an indirect solution. As stated earlier, I shall revisit the question of the utility of a phenomenological study at the Conclusion of this chapter.

#### **4.4 Helmut Wagner’s (1983) Phenomenology of consciousness and sociology of the life-world**

Wagner’s<sup>65</sup> (1983) brand of phenomenological approach to the life-world is one that draws from Edmund Husserl’s work and its application via that of Alfred Schutz’s sociology of the life-world. Wagner’s phenomenology of consciousness moves from “inner consciousness to outer world, of a focus on the individual to the social, and from the person to the group” (p.2). It tries to makes sense of and interpret individual consciousness of an experience that is captured in retrospect and attempts to fit that interpretation with the realities in reference.

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<sup>64</sup> This aspect of emotional relief via reflections was conveyed by my participants in my informal Facebook messaging with them after end of study. This will be further discussed in Chapter 8 (Conclusion) under methodological reflections. . This mode of communication is covered under the Human Ethics Application.

<sup>65</sup> Helmut Wagner was a student of Alfred Schutz, while Schutz was a student of Husserl who explored phenomenology via the lens of other thinkers too, most notably the work of William James, John Dewey, and George H. Mead. See Wagner’s (1983) Phenomenology of consciousness for details.

Inherent in this approach is attention to Husserl's retention and protention. Retention refers to human's capacity to retain immediate memory of something passing while protention is the instance of immediate anticipation of the emerging future. Put simply, it is a reference to the historical dimension in one's experience – of a present experience that has a past, and projects into the future.

Wagner's definition of phenomenology as a system of interpretation that helps us view ourselves, others, and everything else that forms part of our experience (p.8) has an emphasis on "isolated, individual consciousness and an individual being whose consciousness it is" (p.3). Therefore, phenomenology of consciousness can be used to shed light on Ramadan's (2010a) model of applied *ijtihad* that emphasizes one's consciousness for ethical critical reasoning as a way to achieve a meaningful life via the concepts of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah* in Islam. Thus I consider Ramadan's applied *ijtihad* as reflecting a phenomenological stance as the term *ijtihad* by itself means "to struggle" or "to conquer" new horizons.

The notion of vantage point in Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness is helpful for interpreting Ramadan's (2009) model of applied *ijtihad*. Wagner (1983) described one's vantage point as acts of perceiving and conceiving ourselves and others that are in the realm of one's experience. Ramadan proposes that Western Muslims see things from a new perspective and unlearn old traditions that no longer fit in with the new environment that impede on their citizenship in the West. For Ramadan, this is perfectly acceptable as long as it does not compromise the central tenets of Islam. At the same time, it does not mean that this new thinking is embraced at the expense of *al-fitra*.

On the contrary, what Ramadan is suggesting is that (Western) Muslims must always question what is ethical and what is not within Islam. To practice *ijtihad* is to bring forth the Muslim consciousness, one that re-reads the Islamic texts and contextualize it to present environment and maintain the root focus of social justice in Islam. This can be argued as allowing the same possibilities as the Husserlian inner and outer horizons and Schutz's intentionality of consciousness (Wagner, 1983). The inner horizons refer to intangible elements that we see as being part of ourselves while the outer horizons are tangible objects that we see as not part of ourselves. Meanwhile intentionality of consciousness is spontaneous and is always directed at something to the exclusion of everything else. Thus from one's vantage point of *ijtihad*, one sees, hear, reach and directly experience and realize some potentialities while ignoring others based on one's intention, attention, interest, and motivation (Wagner, 1983, p.68) that draws from within Islamic beliefs and practices.

In adopting Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness, I like that Wagner moves within a middle ground perspective, of keeping to Husserlian phenomenology while also drawing from Schutz's contribution to a phenomenological version of sociology of social relations for interpretation. This, as I see it, is in tandem with Ramadan's call for a philosophy of pluralism in his framework for (Western) Muslims, and also an approach I see in the emerging data of this present study. I suggest that Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness reflects Ramadan's (2010a) view of his own position as a mediator and a bridge (p.14) between Muslims and the West that works to secure a middle ground on both sides for mutual co-existence. The sections on IPA's theoretical foundations will go into further details on Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness and how it complements that of Ramadan's philosophies.

#### 4.5 The Idiographic Focus

The concept of idiography in IPA is drawn from the work of Gordon Willard Allport (Smith, 2003). Allport's concern for the uniqueness in each person's experience and behaviour is based on his views that people are made up of more than just 'point of intersection' (Smith, 2003, p.14) but, having structure, they are coherent and active. An idiographic approach means a focus on the interplay of external factors that may be quite specific to the person. It is premised on the belief that no two persons have the same traits and personality, as the background of each and a combination of other factors would have impacted on them differently thus affecting how they each experience the world.

Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness (1983) is also premised on the understanding that every encounter is unique, is not repeatable and thus does not result in an identical experience. At best, it can mean similar, even if it is experienced by the same person (p.48). Drawing from Mead (1934), Wagner further stressed that even when persons act according to existing group conventions, there is still an element of originality in their actions. This is reflected in my central claim that young Muslims' application of *ijtihad* is highly personalised and intricate though the participants are deemed homogenous.

The concern with the particular is at two levels – at details of the phenomenon and thus the depth of analysis and to understand:

How particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.28).

In a sense, the concept of idiography applied to Wagnerian phenomenology is also the application of Mead's acknowledgement that access to self-consciousness and 'me' is only via reflective action, therefore an affirmation that self-awareness is a cognitive phenomenon, and not emotional (Wagner, 1983). Locating this within Ramadan's applied *ijtihad*, I see it as the *ijtihad-in-process*, that is, the pursuit of balance in *al-fitra*.

The uniqueness of experience seen as embodied, situated, and perspectival must not be misunderstood to mean that the concept of idiography is just a focus on the person (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It includes the context of what is around that person as he/she is immersed and embedded in it, through objects and relationships. In other words, it is person-in-environment in the phenomenology of consciousness and the acknowledgement of outer realities in one's consciousness.

#### **4.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a branch of phenomenological philosophy founded by Jonathan Smith. Its approach is phenomenological as it involves detailed examination of the participant's *lifeworld* (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is concerned with how people make sense of their experience in their personal and social world, and the meanings they place on it and draws upon an idiographic focus (Smith, 2003).

Larkin's (2011) definition of IPA is a meaning-focused, qualitative method with a deep commitment to understanding the first-person perspective from the third-person position, in so far as possible. This is achieved through the medium of intersubjective inquiry and analysis and is reflective of Wagner's clarification on the use of the first-person singular

pronoun of “I” in phenomenological writings. It is a representation of the experiences reported by the experiencing person. Wagner further argued the necessity of the I-form is to stress that:

One gains access to the data of consciousness only by observing the one consciousness that is directly accessible to me: my own (p.45).

This puts the I-form as a form of validity of the trustworthiness of the description of the experience. It makes clear that while it cannot be generalized, the self-description can certainly be personally vouched for.

An IPA approach means the concern with the person as a sensemaker, not just a perceiver or conceiver/constructor. This is because a person’s perception is always given meaning which has a link to their *lifeworld* (Smith, 2003). An IPA study is concerned with the phenomenological aspects where its key focus is in exploring experience in its own terms (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is characterized by a ‘bottom up’ approach (inductive) and does not set out to prove a hypothesis but rather attempts to provide detailed insight of the subjective world of the participant through the reflected personal experience of the subject. It draws on Husserl’s ‘back to the things themselves’ as a base for the start of IPA studies (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

The findings of an IPA study are recognized as the interpretation of the researcher, as it is about the researcher attempting to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experience, what Smith termed as double hermeneutics (Smith, 2003). Smith and Osborn (2008) argued the researcher’s role in an IPA research process is dynamic. In attempting to get an insider’s perspective, the researcher would need to get close to the participant’s world.

However, it is wrong to assume access is straight forward as it is made complicated by the researcher's own conceptions, which in fact is a prerequisite for the double hermeneutics process (Packer & Addison, 1989; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This complexity of experiential data can be minimized through rigour and systematic analysis (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The Husserlian tradition of phenomenological reduction in data analysis is thus used as a way to protect solipsistic inclinations (Wagner, 1983) or bias assumptions (Englander, 2002).

In attempting to explore experience in IPA research, the focus is on what matters to the participant, of which they have some understanding of, and of which the researcher seek to understand the participant's perceptions of it (Larkin, 2011). Meaning is central and that the aim is to understand the content and complexity of the meanings and not the frequency (Smith, 2003). The experts here are the participants with regard to their experiences, and it is through their own words, with as much detail as possible, researchers gain access to their thoughts, commitments, and feelings (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Smith (2003) termed this the social constructionist tendency as language is made the focus here and is seen as something to be investigated in its own right. Chapman and Smith (2002) described it as being engaged "with the meaning that experiences, events and actions hold for participants" (p.126). In short, taking an IPA approach means having a riveting fascination with meaning in a person's experience. Therefore, an IPA study is:

Concerned with where ordinary everyday experience becomes 'an experience' of importance as the person reflects on the significance of what has happened and engages in considerable 'hot cognition' in trying to make sense of it (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 33).

Smith (2010) argued that an IPA study is deemed sufficiently trustworthy if it shows clear commitment to the theoretical principles of IPA (phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic), is transparent so as to allow readers to follow-through, the analysis is coherent, plausible, and interesting and the sufficient use of sampling from corpus as evidence. He further suggested a high quality IPA study would meet additional criteria of having a clear focus and offering depth to the analysis in a specific area with strong presentation of data and interpretation that not only engage but enlighten the reader. The importance of capturing good data in the interview process is critical to making an IPA study an exemplar (Smith, 2010). This is very much dependent on the skill of the interviewer. The extracts selected should portray some aspects of “convergence and divergence, representativeness and variability” (Smith, 2010, p.24).

The methodological processes of IPA are discussed in the sections on data collection and analysis in this chapter. Issues of how I navigate trustworthiness and rigour are addressed at the end of this chapter.

#### **4.7 Ethics Approval**

As my study involved interviewing and contact with young people under the age of 18, approval was required from the Human Ethics Committee (HEC) of the University of Canterbury prior to start of study. I submitted my ethics application to the HEC on February 2010. It came back with twenty points of query on March 3rd, 2010. Please see attached Appendix 2 for full details on the queries raised by the committee. This was looked into in detail and each point of query replied/attended to by the 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2010 (please see attached

Appendix 3 on the replies to HEC). I subsequently obtained approval to conduct my study from the Human Ethics Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.

Another application to extend the age range of participants, from earlier ten to sixteen years of age to eighteen years of age was submitted on Dec 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. The reason for wanting to do so was largely due to the fact my realization that seventeen and eighteen year olds were still at high school and to exclude them from the research would not seem fair and representative of the sample I wanted to have. I address the issue of ‘representativeness’ in Section 4.8 of this chapter. It was also due to the exposure I had from my test/pilot interview with an eighteen year old Muslim boy (I will elaborate on him in Section 4.8 – pre-testing). He presented very detailed and rich data which prompted me to re-think my earlier age criteria. The approval for the age extension was given on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

#### **4.7.1 Cultural Advisor**

To address the concerns on cultural sensitivity due to the fact that I am a non-Muslim, I secured the assistance of Dr Mohammad Alayan, a prominent Muslim community leader and educationist in Christchurch. He agreed to be my Cultural Advisor and also offered the assistance of his wife, Dr Maysoon Salama, who runs a Muslim childcare centre and leads the women’s religious classes at the local mosque. Please see attached Appendix 4 on the roles of a Cultural Advisor with regard to my study.

The use of a Cultural Advisor was of great help to me especially on gaining access to the Arab Muslims community in Christchurch. As he is also a respected community member of the An-Noor mosque in Christchurch, many of the participants/parents who saw his name

printed on the information sheet immediately identified with a familiar name and my access to them was extremely pleasant and smooth sailing. In working with the Muslim community, the patronage of a well known respected community leader is considered an aspect of importance (Barise, 2003).

#### **4.7.2 Risks and benefits, confidentiality and privacy issues**

The Declaration of Helsinki stated:

Every research project involving human subjects should be preceded by a careful assessment of the predictable risks in comparison with foreseeable benefits to the subject or to the others. Concern for the interests of the subject must always prevail over the interests of science and society (“Declaration of Helsinki”, n.d.).

Similarly in social work practice, the client’s wellbeing must always take precedence over other concerns.

The risks and benefits of my study were discussed with my team of supervisors including my Cultural Supervisor and Anas Sedayo, the then President of the Saudi Students Club, University of Canterbury. The general consensus was that this was a low risk study circumscribed within the research ethical guidelines that are to be observed at all times. The initial scoping done with the Muslim community in Christchurch was also very positive with both Dr Mohammad and Anas Sedayo welcoming the research focus. Some members of the community spoken to at their weekend functions commented they felt important and proud that there will be an opportunity for members of the community to share their schooling experiences. They felt it would help others better understand their culture and religion

especially with regard to their children's schooling experience and needs. Research in the UK by Ahmed (2009) on the voices of young British Muslims highlighted the importance of young Muslims not only being seen but heard and valued within Islam and the wider society. It is also my hope that this study will help Muslim parents have a better understanding of the many dimensions of their children's struggles and triumphs in schools.

As this thesis will be available to the public via the UC research repository, I would need to balance the needs and wellbeing of the participants above all against the requirements of the final research report. The Muslim community in Christchurch is not particularly large, and participants narratives might make them vulnerable to easy identification by others and may cause them emotional distress or unanticipated embarrassment. Other than ensuring the use of pseudonym, I will also need to carefully omit names of school, personal information on parent's occupation or country of origin whenever required in order to protect their identity. Any other information that is seen as being able to expose their identity will also be omitted or changed. The researcher will also apply for a one-year embargo on the thesis as a further measure to protect my participants' identity. This is done to ensure some time has lapsed after the conclusion of the study as this study was widely announced at the mosque and among the Muslim community in Christchurch. It is considered that with time it will make my participants' identity less identifiable.

#### **4.7.3 Translation of information sheet/consent forms into Arabic and engagement of Arabic translator**

As a measure of preparation, and in anticipation of some parents requiring information to be written in Arabic, both the consent and information forms were translated into Arabic. This

was done by a former Arab student in Malaysia. Dr Mohammad checked the translation and commented that it was very well done. He advised, however, that the information should only be in one page long and not more than that. He was of the view that lengthy information would only confuse or overwhelm them and if needed, they could always approach him for further information. The information sheet was subsequently condensed into one page. (Please see Appendix 5a, 5b, 6a, and 6b for the English and Arabic version of the relevant forms). A local Arab female native speaker was also spoken to with regard to her role as translator in the interview and research process. The understanding was that her services will be engaged on an ad-hoc basis in the event it was required. However, none of the students requested the use of an Arabic translator as they were all conversant in English.

#### **4.8 Sample selection and size**

An understanding of how specific persons and groups are selected while others are not is a crucial part of developing an ethically and methodologically sound research study (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). The following section details the rationale behind the selection of participants and determination of sample size for this study.

In selection of research participants, the question a phenomenological researcher needs to ask is what does ‘representativeness’ means in the phenomenological perspective (Englander, 2012, p.19). Unlike a quantitative study that is evaluated on the basis of a sampling method, a phenomenological study aims for a general knowledge about a particular phenomenon. We may know that people will be able to take part, but we generally have no idea about the distribution thus the question of “how many?” is irrelevant to a phenomenological study (Englander, 2012, p.19). Rather, it was suggested that for phenomenological research, the

selection of participants should be guided by the question, “*Do you have the experience that I am looking for*” (Englander, 2012, p.19). It is therefore a researcher’s job to find and select participants who report having had a particular experience(s) of the phenomenon.

The intensity of activity in an IPA study characterized by in-depth interviewing, transcribing and many levels of analysis for each case means a relatively small sample size is enough for the potential of IPA to be achieved (Smith, 2010) as the main aim of an IPA study is to understand what personal and social experiences mean to the people that experience them (Shaw, 2010). The focus is on quality, and not quantity (Smith, 2010). The way the question is framed denotes the fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative psychology study (Giorgi, 2009). In quantitative psychology it takes the form of “How much?” or “How many?” as compared to “What is it like?” for a qualitative phenomenological study.

Framing the question this way facilitates the participants describing the events or objects that they encounter, their emotions, the people in their life, their hopes, dreams and so on (Shaw, 2010). This indicates that statistics will not be a consideration in the critical evaluation of a phenomenological study in relation to the selection of participants. The phenomenological researcher is not interested in how many or how often one has had a particular experience, though this might appear in the data. This again reminded me of the need to ensure that I focus not only on the selection criteria, but also the need to minimize the risk of recruiting participants who do not possess the ‘depth’ that the present study require.

IPA’s requirement for an idiographic focus directed that sample selection should proceed through purposive sampling with homogeneous and small sample sizes. This will help ensure

rich, and varied description of experience for detailed and in-depth analysis. A homogeneous and small sample size is to mine the utility of an IPA study, i.e. the concern with “complexity, process or novelty” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.53). I understand homogeneity in IPA studies as a way to ensure the selection of a more closely defined group that is able to answer the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, the criteria set for sampling does not mean identical elements but adopt Wagner’s term of ‘similar’ as drawn from Mead (1934).

Therefore, the criteria set for participant selection, as guided by the research question: ***What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand:***

- (i) is a Muslim and practices a Muslim way of life
- (ii) is between the age of ten (10) - eighteen (18) years old
- (iii) is able to speak confidently and expressive in English or Arabic
- (iv) has studied in New Zealand school(s) for a minimum of one (1) year

An initial sample size was set at twelve (12) out of an estimated two hundred (200) Muslim<sup>66</sup> students in schools in Christchurch. The suggestion that data saturation happens after twelve (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006) provided an early reference point. An initial exploration of other PhD thesis in IPA studies in November/December 2009 also found they vary between ten (10) to twelve (12) for various reasons unique to the studies. However, this was later revised to ten (10) after the September 2010 and February 2011 earthquakes, when a few of

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<sup>66</sup> This was the estimation given by Dr Mohammad Alayan, Cultural Supervisor

the prospective participants initially spoken to moved out of Christchurch. Therefore it was no longer realistic to have twelve participants from a timeframe perspective<sup>67</sup>.

I was also reminded by Smith and Osborn's (2003) view that there is no right answer to the question of sample size and that it depended on various factors such as the degree of commitment to the level of analysis or reporting, the richness of the person cases and the constraints one is operating under. However, after completion of all ten (10) interviews, transcriptions, and initial analysis, I found that while each and every of my participants had shared a significant part of their schooling experience with me, three were not particularly rich for the following reasons:

- (i) The narratives did not yield adequate detail (despite many prompts during the interview);
- (ii) Further clarifications sought from them through emails went unreplied (despite many reminders).
- (iii) One female participant showed signs of distress during the interview and 'coping questions' were quickly put in place, with a break in the interview carried out. While she was subsequently sufficiently composed again to resume the interview, the narratives elicited proved too basic and were not descriptive. I did not think it was appropriate for me to risk adding 'pressure' on her through further probing; and

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<sup>67</sup> The two major earthquakes caused a lengthy period of uncertainty and inactivity in my research. The social work department was also 'officeless' for six months due to reorganization of office space in the university. Research students were told to work from home or at shared temporary spaces at the university. Most of my study materials locked at the university was also not accessible in the first two months after the February 2011 earthquake. I was also uncertain if I would continue with my studies or move to another city.

(iv) One participant did not hand in the consent forms (parental and his own) despite repeated reminders and his promise to do so that went on for more than six months. It reached a stage where the Facebook messages that I left for him then went unanswered. I made a mistake by carrying on with the interview as I had assumed that since he came with his father to the interview location (at a local library) and had apologized about leaving the consent forms behind in a hurry, it would be a non-issue.

As it was then already mid-2012, I had to go back to Smith and various other IPA studies to satisfy my own doubts on the issue of the right sample size again. This time also saw an abundance of resources available with regard to IPA studies, in particular was Jonathan Smith's *Evaluating the contributions of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (2010). In it, Smith listed a guide on what makes an exemplary and good IPA study (this will be discussed in the later section of trustworthiness and rigour). The emphasis was again to focus on the richness of the data and not sample size for IPA studies (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin; Smith, 2010). Based on Smith's (2010) guidelines, and after discussion with my Senior Supervisor, it was decided that the sample size be narrowed down, prioritizing the seven<sup>68</sup> that had rich descriptions.

In order to yield unique insights from small samples, in-depth data analysis will take into account both formal and informal engagement (Silverman, 2011). The informal engagement includes reflection from observations and engagement with participants at community functions and informal visits to home, mobile text messaging and social media messaging (Facebook). These were extracted from the reflective diary and fieldwork notes sent to

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<sup>68</sup> My Senior Supervisor advised that data unused in the thesis may have application in further study.

supervisors after each interview. These reflections are also used to help establish transparency during data analysis and peer review sessions and establish trustworthiness.

#### **4.8.1 Gatekeepers**

In general research understanding, gatekeepers are people who help a researcher gain access to people they wish to engage in the research process. As my research involved participation from Muslim students below the age of eighteen (18), consent from the parent(s)/guardian as legitimate gatekeepers was required prior to seeking their person consent (Silverman, 2011). The fact I was also seeking participation from members of the Muslim community, where observing and respecting the religious, cultural and community practices was important, meant the enlistment of gatekeepers were an important part of the research process. The gatekeepers I had was a snowballing group as it led from one to another and more.

I first had assistance from my former Arab Muslim students in Malaysia. They provided an initial contact of a Saudi student, studying in a master program at Lincoln University to assist me. He then introduced me to Anas Sedayo, the (then) President of the Saudi Students Club in Canterbury (for students in Canterbury and Lincoln). Anas then invited me to one of their weekend functions where I was then introduced to his wife, also a PhD student at Canterbury. I was told that a friend of their friend is a friend of theirs too and was welcomed warmly into the circle, in particular to this group of female Arab<sup>69</sup> Muslim postgraduate students of University of Canterbury. It gave me the opportunity to experience what Metge (2001) suggested as the level of comfort and adaptation through experience in cross cultural

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<sup>69</sup> Please note my use of the term “Arab Muslims” is to reflect Muslims of Middle Eastern/Arabic origins as opposed to Muslims of South East Asian origins.

communication and not assume that a formal or fixed code of right behavior is sufficient to form engagement.

Through this circle, I was regularly invited to their homes and community functions and experienced great hospitality from them. Similar stories of adaptation and challenges living in a foreign land were shared. I also had many opportunities for informal interaction with some of the participants. My new found friends subsequently advised me to seek Dr Mohammad Alayan's assistance since he is a prominent local resident and also committee member of the Muslim Association of Canterbury. My meeting with him was very fruitful and he agreed to be my Cultural Advisor. He agreed to announce my search for participants at the mosque and among the community members. As before, because I am a female, Dr Mohammad introduced me to his wife, Dr Maysoon and both of them told me I could see them at any time help is needed. Dr Maysoon also suggested I drop by the mosque on Saturdays where she runs a religious class for female Muslims. Over there, again I received a warm welcome and when I mentioned I was looking for research participants, some of the young female Muslims volunteered themselves.

The other gatekeepers came from within my own Malaysian Muslim community. The Malaysian Postgrads Association and community in Christchurch eased access to prospective participants. In fact, I had more than the number of participants I needed for the study. I applied the principle of inclusion and exclusion carefully, always bearing in mind not to offend anyone that I did not include through personally explaining my reasons, which was mainly due to the sample size quota.

## **4.8.2 Recruitment of participants (inclusion and exclusion criteria)**

As explained earlier, research participants were recruited through purposive sampling. However, not all the participants recruited came through the recommendations of gatekeepers. Some were snowballing samples.

### **4.8.2.1 Test/pilot participant**

One of my first participants (who subsequently became my test/pilot participant) was an eighteen year old boy. I actually met Amir<sup>70</sup> while waiting at a local library for a prospective participant. We chatted and when I told him about my research, he said it sounded interesting. He mentioned he remembers Dr Mohammad making an announcement at the mosque about my research after Friday prayers some weeks ago. I checked the inclusion criteria and noted that he met them all. Above all, he was fluent in English, having been in New Zealand since he was five years old. However, when I explained the research process to him, in particular the recording and transcription steps, he objected to being recorded. He requested that I do it through note taking.

It was explained to him that recording and transcribing were part of the research method. I said it would allow me to focus on what he was telling me, to take mental note of the non-communication signs, and the visceral effect that accompanied it. I further explained that note taking might disrupt the flow of his story and thoughts as there would be times I would

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<sup>70</sup> Name changed to protect identity

request him to slow down or to repeat what he was saying. However, I was not able to persuade him to change his mind or tell me why he did not want the interview recorded. In my journal, I noted my curiosity of whether this could be due to trust issue and his worries of long-term implications? As it was my first time meeting him, I suggested he took some time to think about it and we could discuss about it again the next time I see him. I also told him to let his parents know he was keen to participate in my research even though parental consent was not needed in this case as he had just turned eighteen. I felt it was crucial that respect be shown to his parents by letting them know what was going on. A sample of the consent form and the information sheet (both in English and Arabic) was given to him to be shown to his parents.

I then discussed with my team of supervisors on his reluctance to have the interview audio recorded. They suggested I try to find out his reason(s) and address it with him. It was suggested I may not be able to have him as a participant if he did not agree to it but I may consider having him as a test/pilot participant. We subsequently met up two weeks later and he said his parents had no objection to him participating in the research. Since he was already eighteen, I did not want to challenge his credibility by insisting I spoke to his parents in person but mentioned that I would need to pay them a courtesy visit some time later. Again, he insisted I do note-taking. I then suggested that his participation be included as part of the pre-testing interview, which he agreed. Parts of the interview were then done through note-taking and part was recorded halfway through. I was not sure why he consented to being recorded subsequently. Perhaps he realized it was difficult for me to capture his every word, every nuance after all, especially when he spoke so eloquently. The interview with him lasted more than an hour and a half, partly because of the note taking process at the beginning.

From this test/pilot interview, the original scheduled questions/areas for exploring the phenomenon did not seem confusing to the participant so only minor changes were made to it. The pilot interview made me realized the importance of ensuring the inclusion criteria are met and the strength of a good participant. It is similar to having a cooperative and engaged client in practice. I need not do much probing as he was very reflective and expressive. It took me away from unconsciously suggesting words to him (if he had faltered or paused) but instead allowed him to tell his ‘story’ as he experienced it, in his own words, making sense of the experiences as he retreated back to that time and space. I had that visceral sense of his relief when he finished his story for he stood up smiling widely and thanking me for the interview.

Realizing the richness and depth of his story, I subsequently tried to arrange to redo the interview with him again, this time to have it fully recorded. Unfortunately, due to exams the interview was postponed. Then the September, 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 earthquake happened. Amir subsequently moved to another town to stay with his sisters. I was not able to re-interview him and lost contact with him altogether as the mobile number he gave me did not work.

#### **4.8.2.2 Research participants**

My first interviews of one boy and two girls came through a recommendation from a Malaysian Muslim postgraduate student. As parental consent had been given, I contacted each of the persons separately for arrangements to meet and assess if they meet the inclusion criteria. I spoke to each one personally at their homes but privately, away from the presence of their parents. The parents were rather respectful of the privacy requirement of the study, and after serving some drinks and snacks, left the room we were in. Since I am a female

researcher, the session with the boy was done in the garden as a sign of respect and sensitivity to the Islamic guidelines of male/female socialization.

I went through the information sheet and child consent form with each person. I checked that they met the inclusion criteria, and most important, their participation was voluntary, and there were no elements of coercion or pressure from anybody. I also explained the withdrawal process if they changed their mind subsequently. When everything was clear, and I was satisfied the inclusion and ethical aspects had been met, I proceeded with the interviews and recordings. Subsequently one of them suggested I contact one of her school mates whom she said had encountered many challenges due to her wearing a veil to school. This was my first snowballing sample. I contacted the girl and was then put in touch with her mother. The same process of gaining parental consent and checking the inclusion criteria was carried out. From this girl, I was given another three prospective participants. However, while all three met the inclusion criteria, only one was enlisted in the end. One cited heavy school work and exams and the other was not keen to participate.

From the Arab Muslim gatekeepers, I recruited another four, three boys and a girl. The same process of inclusion check and briefing was done with their parents and them. The final male participant was recruited by me through social media (Facebook). He was a Facebook friend with two of the other participants (though he was from a different school and ethnicity). I saw that he was very eloquent and expressive when commenting on their Facebook pages. As he had a different ethnicity it interested me greatly as I wanted to have some diversity in participant selection. My view was that it would give me a variety of experience and perspective. I sent him a message through Facebook explaining about my research and attached the information sheet. I did not disclose to him that his two friends were my

participants to ensure my actions are not seen as pressuring or coercing him. He responded immediately and indicated his interest as he said he knows Dr Mohammad. I then sent him the parent and child consent form and made arrangements to visit him at his family home. The interview with him was subsequently carried out at the Education Library of the University of Canterbury.

All in, I had a total of six male and four female participants. This subsequently became four males and three females. Their age ranged from fifteen to seventeen and of different nationalities. All of them were coincidentally of the Sunni Muslim sect. A male participant and two females were migrant citizens while three males and one female were international students living here with their families.

#### **4.9 Data collection: the semi-structured in-depth interviews**

The main method of data collection in phenomenological research is through in-depth interviewing as this provides the pathway for participants' descriptions to be explored, brought to light and gently probed (Kvale, 1996). In justifying the use of interviews as a research method, it is crucial that one be guided by the research topic and the analysis method along with the researcher's view of how knowledge is constructed (Silverman, 2006). I therefore return to my research topic: exploring the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand and method of analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

I have earlier in Chapter One, Section 1.4.1 stated the need to subscribe to the Islamic concept of creation, God, and His divine attributes (Al-Allaf, 2006) in determining the

epistemology for this study. Therefore, my aim in using interview as a data collection method is on how interview participants actively create meaning, what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) termed as an ‘active interview’. The IPA method is itself concerned with how persons make sense of their experience and the meanings they place on it (Smith, 2004). This makes interviewing a rightful approach for me to collect the data that is required.

I am also mindful of what makes a good interview technique and the skills needed to pull off a successful interview, and that this should be shared by both the interviewer and interviewee (Silverman, 2006). This is because ultimately it is the access to the meanings that people attribute to their experiences and social worlds that we are seeking (Wagner, 1983; Silverman, 2006). I had elaborated earlier on in Section 4.7 my reasons why the sample size was reduced from ten to seven and the link to the non-richness of the data. This happened due to ‘technicalities’ in navigating Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995) ‘active interview’ in a few of the cases<sup>71</sup> with regard to the non-descriptive replies.

However, in Section 4.7.2.1 on the test/pilot interview, I had elaborated on how this was carried off well as both the participant and myself ‘symphonised’ well through giving each other the right space and timing. Holstein and Gubrium’s (1995) ‘active interview’ framework suggested the need to activate, stimulate and cultivate the respondent’s interpretive capabilities. They noted this is not to be confused with mere coaxing of respondents to the questions at hand, but rather, to enter into conversation with respondents in such a way that alternate views are brought to light. This is in tandem with the phenomenological approach of ‘reading beyond the surface of the text’ and the principle of engagement of client in social work practice.

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<sup>71</sup> See Section 4.8 of this chapter on my encounters with a variety of interview and interview-related situations.

The objective here is not to direct interpretation but facilitating an environment that fosters the natural flow and construction of a range of complex meanings that address the issues at hand, and are not circumscribed by predetermined agendas (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The open-ended questions helped my participant re-live his experience and me, as the main research tool here, attempt to enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of my participant through silent contemplation and a genuine interest in what he was saying. In a way, it also gave him co-partnership of the interview direction and introduced issue(s) that I might otherwise miss out and to see his experience from a ‘wonderment’ perspective.

In my view, taking the ‘wonderment’ approach also helped facilitated an atmosphere of genuine interest and indicated to him my belief that there was worth in his story. In getting the participant to share what the experience was like, I was giving him the opportunity to reconstruct his experience in alignment with his own sense of what was important, unguided by me (Seidman, 2006). The various level of emphasis in the narratives of the participants was testament to how valuable the ‘wonderment’ approach worked with the participants of this study. It was an approach that saw them take the lead in what was of importance to them and how it featured in their retrospection. The test/pilot interview certainly prepared my entry for fieldwork.

As recommended by Smith and Osborn (in Smith, 2003), I had a set of questions listed in an interview schedule (please see attached Appendix 7) and used this as a guide in the interview and was mindful not to let it dictate the flow of interview. The interview schedule was prepared much earlier in discussion with my team of supervisors to ensure I remain focused on the research question/topic. The preparation of a schedule did helped me to think in detail

what I hope the interview will cover, mull over any difficulties I might encounter and most important, allowed me to focus on the respondent's words on the day of interview and the visceral effect that comes across as the interview was going on. In doing so, it created a natural atmosphere, one of ease and comfort, of no pressure but a genuine attentiveness to hear the person out.

All the interview sessions were carried out in English except for two where it was done in Malay. Another was carried out using a mix of Malay and English as the participant weaved in and out using both languages. No translator was used here as Malay is the national language of Malaysia, and therefore is a language I am fluent in, and engaged with, on a daily basis<sup>72</sup>. I am confident the nuances in cross cultural meanings were not lost on me. The issue of whether meaning is lost in translation is addressed in the data analysis section of this chapter (Section 4.9.1.1.1). Noting Temple and Young's (2004) concern that translation issues are often neglected in many qualitative studies and presented as if the act of being objective erases all translation issues, I will discuss the impact of the translation and how this sits within the framework of phenomenology/IPA in the same section.

In in-depth phenomenological interviewing process, Seidman (2013) suggested the three steps interview. He suggested that the first step is to establish the context of the experience, second is to allow the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context it occurs and third, to facilitate the participants' reflection on the meanings the experience holds for them.

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<sup>72</sup> I also did an option paper in translation (English to Malay) at undergraduate level.

#### **4.9.1 Seidman's (2013) three steps interviews**

Seidman's three steps interview were adopted for the in-depth interview. The three steps entailed a focus on the life history, the details of the experience, and lastly the reflection on the meaning. The emphasis by Seidman (2013) that the first two steps are carried out properly to ensure the success of the third stage was observed through building up rapport with the participants prior, during and after the interview process.

In my study, the interviews with each participant were carried out in two to three sessions, with follow-up sessions done via social media (Facebook) or text messaging and emails in order to minimize disruption to the participants busy student life. This was also the preferred mode of communication indicated by the participants<sup>73</sup> included for final analysis and they each had interview sessions lasting from forty minutes to seventy, with follow-up sessions shorter. However, follow ups via social media resulted in many messages going back and forth and three of the participants even wrote lengthy replies<sup>74</sup> to the follow-up questions. All of these contributed to very rich data generation and data analysis.

At the end of each interview the recordings were played back for the participants where they were reminded that they can opt to have particular information deleted if they wish to do so. None of them took that option. They indicated they were happy for the digital recordings to be processed further and there was nothing in particular they wanted removed/deleted. One

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<sup>73</sup> Only one participant opted for email communication – See Chapter 5, Section 5.5.

<sup>74</sup> They wrote replies that ranged from 3 – 9 pages (1200 – 5500 words).

female participant listened to only parts of the interview as she had another appointment and said she was comfortable and confident with what she had shared.

Seidman's (2013) rationale for the three interview steps is to help build further rapport between participant and researcher as contact is then re-established every few days and in sequential succession. I would argue that in my study the rapport with my participants was developed not through the three interview sessions but over time, prior to interviews, in informal settings, in the company of their friends and family members. I would argue this is one aspect of engaging with Muslim participants as suggested by Metge's (1995) argument on cross cultural sensitivity where one's presence in a few sessions cannot equal cultural competency nor establish genuine rapport.

#### **4.10 Data transcription and rounds of analysis**

Transcription of interview sessions was done at semantic level (Smith, 2008). In my case, I find that data collection, transcription and analysis were all interlinked and overlapped each other from time to time. Each time I returned from an interview, I made field notes, played the recordings, made notes of any areas needing follow-ups then wrote a summary of the interview to my team of supervisors. At the same time, I continued scouring related literature especially on themes that came up unexpectedly during interviews in an attempt to make more sense of the data. At times data collection was stopped to allow me to consolidate and reorganize all the information collected before I continued with my field work. Reflexivity and interpretation of the data started from the moment I did the interview, during the interview, and after. It also occurred when (re)listening to the recordings, during the

transcription process, the writing and re-writing of interview summaries and analysis drafts to my supervisors, and when reading related literatures.

#### **4.10.1 Data transcription**

Data transcriptions for all ten participants were done manually by me though as mentioned earlier, only seven were utilized for final analysis. This was tedious, but it allowed me to get closer to the data and build that ‘intimate relationship’ needed for later stages of analysis. As guided by Smith (2009), it was transcribed verbatim. The location of punctuation in transcripts is important and needed to be done carefully as it is the beginning points of analysis and interpretation (Kvale, 1996). This is particularly true in my case as there were many instances when transcribing that I grappled with trying to sense the exact end of a sentence. In the end, I left it as a trail (...) as that was how I felt they ended their sentences. In line with Wagner’s (1983) suggestion on the use of first-person pronoun in phenomenological writings to reflect the author’s interpretation, my intention was to ensure the use of punctuation is as apt as possible. I included the punctuation only when the speech clearly indicated so.

All parts of the interview were transcribed as I wanted to have a complete feel of the data and not preclude information at such an early stage. This is also consistent with Seidman’s (2013) argument that selective transcribing cultivates premature judgments on what is relevant and what is not. There were two instances where minor parts of the data were excluded – the first being one part of conversation with male participant Fariz regarding the work of Dr Maysoon<sup>75</sup> and the other was a brief discussion by female participant Aleesya on driving

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<sup>75</sup> The wife of Dr Mohammad Alayan (my Cultural Supervisor)

licence requirements in her home country. Both parts, while not related to the topic of study, were briefly discussed to support rapport and engagement building.

#### **4.10.1.1 Data Translation**

As two participants had their interviews conducted in Malay, and another in part Malay, the transcripts were first transcribed into Malay followed by translation into English. However, as only seven participants were selected for final write-up, the translation aspects only involved two participants. In carrying out the translation, I drew from my past training where the first stage was to carry out the direct translation. This was followed by consideration of the context the texts were uttered and cultural aspects and nuances (if any) and then the translated texts re-written. Finally, the translation was read in totality to ensure meaning had been retained and was as close as possible to the original. In order to secure trustworthiness in translation, random parts of translated version (English) was tested by mentally translating it back to Malay for checking if the original words and meanings resurfaced. I did not do actual manual re-translation as that would be too time consuming. The rest of the interviews done in English were directly transcribed verbatim into texts for further analysis.

Temple and Young's (2004) three key questions for qualitative studies that involve data collection in more than one language was used as a guide to ensure the translated materials do not compromise any aspects of the analysis work.

(i) Does it matter if the translation act is identified or not?

(ii) Does it matter if the identity of the researcher and translator are the same?

(iii) When is a translator not a translator – that is, how far into the analysis do you involve a translator? (p.161)

As I hold the researcher/translator role in this study, I address only the first two as question three does not arise in my case.

In the first question – does it matter whether or not the translation act is disclose, Temple and Young (2004) suggested two influences needed to be considered: the epistemological position of the researcher and the centrality of the language that is determined by power and hierarchy. In the earlier Chapter One (Section 1.4.1), the need to adhere to an Islamic epistemological perspective was explained. In the earlier section 4.1.1, one of the caveats established for the application of an adapted IPA influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R) is the active role of the researcher in gaining access to the participant's experience, and through interpretative activity, attempts to make sense of the participant's worldview. In order to retain this double hermeneutics element in translation activity, it requires that I continue to uphold the knowledge that participant's sensemaking occurs within the Islamic concept of creation and epistemology. Taking this step is crucial in order for me to retain as close as possible the original intention and meaning of the participant's narratives.

Similarly the power relationships between languages and researchers, translators and the people they seek to represent in the research process must also be acknowledged (Temple & Young, 2004). Earlier in Section 4.9.1.1, I have disclosed my identity as a Malaysian, my level of fluency of the Malay language, and translation training at undergraduate level. I believe my grasp of the language is above sufficient and I was in no way rendered powerless by the language. My dual role, removed some of the dilemmas of translation in qualitative research. I am confident my reconstruction of the text (via translation) did not erode the value of its original meaning, and its original realities, subtly retained.

My engagement as someone from within the community of my participants, both before, and during the interview process placed the relationship in an amicable and balanced mode. This allowed my participants to articulate their stories in a natural mode – the sharing of their stories to an insider, not an outsider. The need for researchers who do not speak the same language as their participants to question the baseline from which claims are made about a particular language does not arise in my case (Temple & Young, 2004). In this instance, they are the nuances of the ‘everyday’ Malay language and the Islamic influencers that I should concern myself with in arriving at the translated data, of which I am extremely familiar having grown-up around it. This tacit knowledge is not something that one loses; rather it becomes a part of that person. It might have been forgotten for a while, but it slips back into memory like the familiarity one has with routine every morning once it is brought to fore. However, I note that one’s everyday activities in interaction with others can become taken for granted when cultural perceptions become ingrained. Thus, my reading and re-reading of the translated texts few times were attempts at addressing this issue.

The second issue with regard to the identity of the translator is again an issue of epistemology. Temple and Young (2004) contended that if researchers take the view of being objective and neutral, then any issues that arise from the act of translating are just mere technicalities that can be overcome. However, they argued researchers who do not subscribe to this view will then need to find the answer as to who can best represent whom in cross language research. The best option would be researchers who perform the translation themselves which then puts them in the ideal situation of cross language data analysis<sup>76</sup> (Temple & Young, 2004). As clarified earlier, I carry a dual role here. Temple and Young’s (2004) assertion “the situation where the researcher is fluent in the language of communities

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<sup>76</sup> Further details can be accessed from temple and Young’s (2004) journal article – See References.

she is working with is rare” (p.168) can be read as a plus point in the translation process I took.

How does the act of translation, then, sit within an IPA study? I reiterate that in any IPA studies, the centrality of meaning is what drives the whole research process and the above processes that I have detailed would to a certain extent keep me close within the boundaries of “being as faithful as possible to the phenomenon” (Smith, 2003, p.26).

#### **4.10.2 Declaring my interests**

I have in Chapter One detailed my background, experience, and how interest in this research topic came about. I am constantly aware that no two experiences are the same, and thus enter into the analysis process being mindful of the need to manage my biases. I have used the peer review process with my team of supervisors and reflective practice when reading and re-reading my initial field notes and descriptive analysis in order to minimize any semblance of bias. The enlistment of second and third readers was also done where I had the assistance of an Australian academic from the Education discipline and an Anthropology lecturer from the department during various stages of analysis. The help of an Islamic scholar<sup>77</sup> to assist in explaining Islamic and Quranic concepts also helped illuminate the themes analysis.

#### **4.11 Data analysis**

In analyzing texts, the large volume of words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages have to be reduced to what is of most significance and interest (Seidman, 2013). The most important

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<sup>77</sup> Ustaz Mohd Erfino Johari

aspect of this work is in the reduction of data inductively and not deductively (Seidman, 2013). This meant the researcher approaching the data with an open attitude to the transcripts, without any particular set of hypothesis or theory in mind to match what is in the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). While it is acknowledged that no one can enter an analysis with a blank mind, what is pertinent here is for the interviewer to declare his or her interest in the subject and ensure that his or her prejudice/bias is not brought into 'interaction' with the text. The data needs to be given the freedom to speak to the researcher and convey what it wishes to convey (Seidman, 2013).

Data analysis in IPA studies involves working round substantial verbatim extracts from the transcribed data (Reid, Flowrers, & Larkin, 2005). It starts with the researcher documenting their initial 'insider's perspective' on the phenomenon in the form of interpretative commentary, supported by verbatim extracts. Through the earlier phenomenological, insider position, the researcher starts by listening to the participant's stories, and prioritises the participants' world view at the core of the account (in this case, it is the participant's sense of *ijtihad*). The second is the conduct of inquiry within that perspective. This meant doing the analysis in a systematic and careful manner. This includes Smith's (2008) suggestion of starting with a free hand analysis. The third steps concerned critical reflection upon and evaluation of the interpretive account that is the outcome of the inquiry. I took this to mean the reflective aspects of interpretation that seeks to incorporate aspects of clarity and harmony of thoughts when performing the analysis.

Guided by Gee's (2013) analysis process, I started with the following: the reading and re-reading of transcripts for few times to familiarize myself with the data and have a deeper feel of the whole phenomenon. In doing so, my intention was to ensure I cover issues that I might

have missed out in the early stages of reading. I highlighted words/sentences that I think stood out. I also wrote my comments beside the words/sentences and sometimes at the end of a section of texts. Smith's (2008) suggestion that, in early stages of analysis the researcher takes a free hand in analysis means to note down anything or thoughts that come to mind initially. When the whole transcript had been completed, this was sent to my team of supervisors for review and their further inputs. I then matched my earlier comments with my supervisors' feedback and differences were incorporated into the comments section. This was followed through with discussions and feedback with the second and third readers external to the supervision process. This helped me look at things from a wider perspective and close the gap on things I missed out due to my 'over-familiarity' with the data.

I find that even at what I thought was the final stage of writing, as I was drawing up the table of themes and re-arranging the verbatim quotes, new understandings kept emerging. It formed as I re-read the interview transcripts again. Seidman (2013) did highlight the need to 'do away' with interview data at the stage where we think we have what is "important and of interest from the text" (p.119).

#### **4.11.1 The peer review process**

In IPA studies, it is recommended that enlistment of second and third readers be done (Smith, 2007). In my study, both my supervisors contributed to the analysis of the participants. In the later cases, particularly in the analysis of the male participants, the additional inputs came from the second and third readers. The peer review process was not only intended as second and third readers providing feedback but as a way to triangulate my own interpretation of the participants' interpretation of their experiences. The fact that I did not run member checking,

what Bryman (2007) described as getting the participants to check through the interview transcripts and analysis, also meant third party validation of my analysis was pertinent. My participants were not part of the member checking process as they each declined due to studies commitment. However, the overall research themes were conveyed to them.

I find the peer review process helpful, similar to supervision in practice. It provided a higher level of conceptual analysis which I struggled with from time to time. It also affirmed what Silverman (2001) and Seidman (2013) said about interpretation, that we are always interpreting, and that no two persons see or experience things in the same way. All this reflects the circularity of understanding, of the individual parts of the whole, and the whole comprising of individual parts. The different perspectives from different readers were individual parts that I merged into a whole, and in looking at the whole, I went back to individual sections of the interview to ground these views.

#### **4.12 The issue of trustworthiness and rigour in an IPA study**

Seidman (2013) argued there are many different pathways to establish trustworthiness. He viewed trustworthiness as a process that should be guided by a humble and common sense approach rather than the standard mechanistic response. For Wagner (1983), valid phenomenological-psychological<sup>78</sup> data is data that is acceptable by those who are competent to judge them, similar to all sciences that are subjected to critical scrutiny by those who are competent to do so. He argued that it is against the broad frames of reference that phenomenological data are transformed into phenomenological knowledge. Thus Wagner concludes that no one holds the key to ultimate truth in their hands. What this means is that

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<sup>78</sup> Wagner uses phenomenology of consciousness and phenomenological-psychology interchangeably

the experiences reported are as truthfully affirmed in so far as it appears in one's experience (p.45) and also the reason why Wagner insisted on the necessity of the I-form to represent subjective speak.

It is also the reason why IPA findings are not given the status of data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). Therefore the question of trustworthiness in phenomenological research is also tied to the question of how one approaches the representation of the observational accounts. Likewise, Smith (2010) argued on the importance of sufficient data as evidence and aspects of interpretation that is coherent, detailed and clear as part of the criteria of trustworthiness in an IPA study.

As such, I address aspects of trustworthiness from two angles: the interview process and the triangulation of the data analysis through the peer review process. I had in sections 4.9 (semi-structured in-depth interviewing) and 4.9.1 (Seidman's three steps interviewing process) detailed out the steps I took to ensure that I got as close as possible to the participant's subjective understanding, what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) earlier termed as "experience close" (p.33) as the focus of an IPA study. I acknowledge and took steps to retain as close as possible their interpretation of events and objects that occur within their Islamic worldview of creation and truth. I ensured that my role in the interview process was as a partner and to engage the participant through open-ended questions.

I have also detailed out the translation process in section 4.10.1.1, paying close attention to Seidman's (2013) advice that lived experience is accessed through language, taking into account again that this language is influenced by the participant's Islamic perspectives. This is considered along with Wagner's (1983) contention that language as a "cognitive vehicle"

(p.25) cannot adequately articulate our inside experiences even though it has descriptive abilities. Therefore his suggestion is that there is a need to pay close attention to the use of metaphor or symbolical terms used by participants to express what is inexpressible linguistically. This includes sensitivity to cultural and Islamic nuances of which I paid close attention to when analysing and translating the data (from Malay to English).

Ambiguity or gaps in the interview process was followed-up and supplemented by reflections on the informal engagement with the participants in their familiar environments (their external realities). Bracketing or phenomenological reduction in the Husserlian tradition is important and was done through the enlistment of second and third readers (this was explained in Section 4.11.1 of the peer review process). Crist and Tanner's (2003) suggestion on the use of team involvement for brainstorming and discussion as a way to add depth and insight to interpretations reflect the peer review process that I undertook. The use of team involvement ensured transparency in terms of recognition of assumptions that could have had an impact on the interview or interpretation process.

One of the methods for triangulation in an IPA study is through exploration of one phenomenon from various perspectives (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The perspectives provided by my team of supervisors, and second and third readers helped me form a detailed and multifaceted account of the participants experience. This served as a form of triangulation for the study via the exploration of one phenomenon, various perspectives (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The different perspectives made me reflect further and engaged with the data multiple times. This was also the 'hermeneutic circle' in practice, bringing the fore-structures of understanding (Packer & Addison, 1989) into the grand scheme of things. The intention was also to subscribe to Husserl's (1970) original intention of

grounding knowledge in the lived experience of everyday realities to arrive at a plausible conclusion.

The use of reflection to address aspects of authenticity in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) was also carried out via a write-up of the informal engagement with each of the participants (Chapter Five). Prior to this, after each interview session, I had also written a summary of each of the participants and my reflections of them for discussions with my team of supervisors. This initial analysis, what Smith (2008) termed as free hand analysis accompanied the summary report. Similar process was repeated with the external readers. I find this aspect of reflective writing extremely helpful in illuminating not only the meanings in the participants' narratives but also my own unconscious biases and expectations towards the participants. I revisit this discussion in the following last section of this chapter.

#### **4.13 Summary and Conclusion**

Interviewing as a method of inquiry is not only consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language but also assigns value to the individual – as someone whose story is worth the effort and is deeply satisfying for the researcher whose interests on the topic is what drives him or her (Seidman, 2013). For me, this method allowed me to engage and create rapport with my participants, challenge my interviewing and communication skills, and gave me many reflective moments.

In using interviewing as a method of inquiry with young Muslims, it involved much more than seeking answers to the queries but required that I build a pattern of sustained engagement with them, both pre and post-interviews. This led to rich descriptions from the

participants particularly when the rapport with them gained momentum in the later stages. Seidman's (2013) formula of context-building to ensure quality of data collected was certainly reflected in this process albeit needing a progression of time and space that was determined by the participants. In this sense, the qualitative aspects of IPA ensured that power remained with the researched group.

My reasons for adopting a phenomenological approach via the adapted IPA-R approach for this present study have beginnings in my central claim that young Muslims embrace a highly personalised version of *ijtihad* in their everyday encounters at school in the West. The use of Wagner's phenomenology of consciousness was necessary as a broad frame of phenomenological reference to interpret Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad*. Ramadan's framework for Western Muslims envisions Western Muslims as participating in active citizenship in the West, and not one of withdrawing into isolation or indulging in acts of self-centredness. It is a call to reject solipsism in everyday life and reflects the phenomenological view of human beings as having volition and of Islam's emphasis on 'thinking' to get to truth and wisdom (Azram, 2011). Thus in one sense while I have drawn from Ramadan's framework for Western Muslims as IPA's philosophical premise, the starting point for this IPA approach is still on prioritizing pre-reflective experience that as a result of their everyday activities becomes something taken for granted.

Taking a phenomenology of consciousness approach also means that I do not agree that the young Muslims in this study be viewed through the lens of behaviourism. Their strict observance of Islamic practices in daily life is an act of religiosity carried out through faithful

piety and a symbol of their acceptance of the *tauhid*<sup>79</sup>. While their actions and beliefs take cognizance of the central tenets of Islam, one needs to note that this cannot be seen as a blind following. They are matters of agency and self-determination that in Wagnierian (1983) term is called volition of self-determination and self-control. The elements of reward and punishment in Islam have far wider implications than can be explained by the behaviorist approach.

Islam requires that its followers ‘think’ as only with knowledge can man fulfill his responsibilities (Azram, 2011). Ramadan (2004, 2010a) reinforced this in his call to Western Muslims to always use their mind and consciousness of *al-fitra* in making sense of their environment while remaining faithful to the central tenets of Islam. To gain access and have deeper understanding of this type of Islamic volition calls for a method such as IPA. If Muslims themselves are required to ‘unveil’ their hearts via *ijtihad* that call for critical reflection and understanding as a way to connect directly with their Creator (Ramadan, 2010a), then researching this group of participants, regardless of the sample size, require a similar approach that ‘return’ to the source of things too. IPA as a cognitivist qualitative methodology does this as it opens up access to the participant’s sensemaking realm.

However, the application of IPA on Muslim participants cannot be carried out in a straightforward manner as I found out in the course of this present study. It is acknowledged that the sampling for this study is small and circumscribed to Christchurch and in Section 4.8, I addressed the prevalence of small sample sizes in phenomenological studies. I discovered that regardless of the sample size, it does not absolve the need for an adaptation of the research tool that reflects the Islamic frame of epistemology as explained in Section 4.1.1

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<sup>79</sup> Monotheistic character of Islam - One God, One Truth

with regard to the rationale for the departure from traditional IPA to an adapted IPA influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R). By doing so, it ensures that the research process is one that is process-oriented (Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2011) and stays ‘faithful’ to the data and maintains the inductive approach. The re-modeling of Smith’s IPA to an IPA influenced by Ramadanian philosophies was necessary to bring philosophical standpoint and method together in coherence. Indirectly, it serves as an additional marker of trustworthiness to the research process.

The use of an IPA influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R) as a research tool enabled the unravelling of thick descriptions and in-depth analysis into how the participants drew from Islamic structures and framed their understanding of it to their sensemaking via a process of enactment (Weick, 1995). Access to the cognitive data was made possible. This adaptation took cognizance of the participants’ sensemaking that prioritises the central tenets of Islam as the guiding principle, as evident from the data. The inside approach of prioritizing cognitive data demonstrated not only the impact of the participants’ application of *ijtihad* on their actions, but also how their actions impact on their internal state of mind. It brings out the participants sense of agency and volition and reinforces the view that young Muslims have a better understanding of what they are going through (at school) and Islam as guidance. As Ramadan (2010b) reiterated, to make sense of man’s quest for meaning, one cannot leave out faith (trust and conviction) and reason (observation and analysis), the two inseparable elements in a Muslim’s existence (Ramadan, 2010b) and IPA’s cognitive focus provides access to these two sources of authority where beliefs rest (Swindal, 2008).

It demonstrated that the value of carrying out an IPA study with a small sample size is in the capacity of the adapted method in bringing out elements of agency, volition and self-

determination in the participants application of *ijtihad*, countering conventional ‘patronising’ approaches in the field. These detailed intimate insights would not be possible if applied on a larger sample size as it will only lead to data overload and problems in data management (Holland, 2014). The reflexive character of this method not only made possible the elicitation of data that was poignant, emotive and interesting (Holland & Peterson, 2014) but also brought out the unconscious biases and expectations in my own deep-seated habits of thought (Wagner, 1983). In particular, the process of reflective writing of each participant led me to confront the hidden aspects of consciousness in my everyday activity that I undertook without much reflection.

In summarizing this chapter then, I draw from Wagner’s argument that a phenomenological approach is an attempt at explanation and its utility found in the need to unlearn and abandon deeply engrained habits of thought; to rid oneself of assumptions that underlie one’s orientation. This phenomenological study helps counter the phenomenon of “white privilege” (Ayres, 2015) as discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, I suggest that the phenomenological approach in my study via IPA is an alternative view to understanding young Muslims and a substitute to the ‘textbook Muslim’ approach. The adapted IPA method influenced by Ramadani philosophies (IPA-R) facilitated the angle from which to project the central claim of this study, and the small sample size facilitated a research process that was manageable and malleable.

I have in this chapter presented the methodological framework and the rationale on taking the IPA approach in my study. I have also detailed out the processes I went through and addressed aspects of trustworthiness in this study. My detailed descriptions of the data collection and determination of sample size, the interview

process, data transcription, data translation and analysis process reflect my attempt to be transparent on how I navigate the IPA approach in this study.

In the next chapter, I present my reflections on my informal engagement with the participants. These reflections represent a significant contribution to the circularity of understanding and the development of analysis.

## 5. Chapter Five - Reflections on participants and informal engagement

A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.

(Joan Walsh Anglund)

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a summarized description of all seven participants' profiles and my reflections on the informal engagement with them. This write-up is based on descriptive notes drawn from interview text, informal engagement and observations of participants (pre- and post-interview sessions). It specifically focuses on observation and reflective notes collated via social media interactions<sup>80</sup> as this was the most frequent medium of interaction. The reflection in this chapter also draws from Ramadan's (2014) argument that to understand Muslim consciousness is to understand what *Allah*, human beings, and the Revelation mean to a Muslim as these are the roots of the *syahadah* (proclamation of faith). Therefore, the focus on prolonged engagement is to provide scope while persistent observation is to provide depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to my understanding of their Muslim consciousness. This strategy of prolonged engagement also helped reduce impact of respondent bias based on the assumption that a long and trusting relationship allows the respondents to be more transparent and forthcoming with information (Padgett, 1988). In doing so, I am attempting to provide context to the theme analysis and findings in Chapter Six.

In writing this reflective piece on the participants, I discovered that I saw them (again) anew. Writing does make it all different (van Manen, 1990) as writing is that solitary space of temporal experience, "a world of textual reality where insights occur, and words may acquire

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<sup>80</sup> All my participants are aware and agreeable that parts of my communication with them will be used for analysis and thesis writing. However, the use of these materials will be as brief as possible.

a depth of meaning” (van Manen, 2012, p.3). That was how I came to see again how each of my participants were different and unique, each presenting their own brand of strength and vulnerability, yet sharing an overall similar experience of schooling in Christchurch, New Zealand. It also made me realize that in reflecting about them, I was essentially reflecting upon my own experiences too. Through their texts, I saw shades of my own experiences and it made me reflect more.

There were many moments when I hit the keys on the laptop, with the words flowing simultaneously out of my mind and via my mouth quietly, dictating my fingers to search for the right keys, in that same moment, I came face to face with my own unconscious biases. I stopped and I looked at the text and I saw what I was saying about others all this while. The text on the computer screen stared back at me and I realized I also saw my participants from the angle of ‘textbook Muslims’ too. I might think I did not and know I should not, but I never realized I did commit this sin until I started writing my participants’ stories. Van Manen (2012) writes that the self is affected in an even more fundamental way in writing, and in the following sections, I will share and highlight where this occurred in my writings. It is the reflective experience of language; one that disturbs its taken-for-grantedness (van Manen, p.4).

Due to the client confidentiality and ethics process, and the small, close-knit Muslim community in Christchurch, all names have been changed. Their countries of origin and all identifiable family-related information have been eclipsed to further protect participants’ identities. The four male and three female participants are all coincidentally from Sunni Muslim backgrounds and are aged between sixteen and seventeen. One male and two female participants are from migrant families while three males and one female are international

students living in New Zealand with their families. All four are no longer living in New Zealand. Some of these reflections will include excerpts of the communication I had with them, and, are presented in its original form (including graphics/emoticons, if any).

## 5.2 Fariz

My first contact with Fariz was via social media (Facebook). I had come across his name through another participant of mine, who was his friend on Facebook. I remember he stood out because he was always actively commenting on the Facebook postings by this participant of mine. It made me curious and I wonder if he has interesting stories to share about his schooling experience. That was how I came to notice him. In total, there were altogether twenty-three (23) follow-up messages<sup>81</sup> from me to Fariz and fourteen (14) replies from him. Fariz was seventeen at time of interview.

In my first message<sup>82</sup> to him on 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2012, I introduced myself, told him how I got to know his name, and the research that I was conducting for my PhD study. The message was sent at 8.51am, and the same day, at 1.38pm, he had replied my message.

yea sure. When and Where????? (10/7/2012, 13:38)

I remember I felt ecstatic upon receiving his reply and noted especially his use of multiple question marks (five times). While the multiple question marks follow the “when and where”, taking the Ricoeurian method means letting Fariz’s “Yea sure” and the multiple question

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<sup>81</sup> These are for the period of data analysis, and does not include the messages after conclusion of data collection

<sup>82</sup> Please note all text communication with Fariz was via Facebook.

marks to precede the text. I felt he was extremely keen to participate since he had asked for venue and time details. There was a sense of ‘motivation’ prior to the question. If so then, what was his motivation? My early conclusion was that he must have a very sociable personality based on his very brief style of texting<sup>83</sup>, and the visceral effect of an eager tone reflected in his positive and prompt reply. Subsequently, I messaged him again that night explaining how the interview would be conducted, and reiterated the need for parental consent.

Much later that night (early morning), I received his reply that was sent out at 1.57am. It was also the beginning of the trend in his replies – always at those odd hours, punctuated with short replies, and the use of multiple exclamation marks to indicate a kind of emphasis. I wonder if this was his usual style of writing, and if he usually sleeps so late? He gave me his home address but this time, asked:

I live in xxxxxxxx<sup>84</sup> road. I was just wondering how you found me or got hold of me??  
(11/7/2012, 01:57)

I was happy that he had raised that question as I certainly would not want him to step into this study with doubts. From an instant eagerness to a questioning stand now, what had made him ask this question now? I needed to make sense of his thoughts since he was the author of the text (Schleiermacher, 2012) yet at the same time was aware of the need to remain open to what the text has to say (Ricoeur, 1970). Fariz’s “found me or got hold of me” and his twice

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<sup>83</sup> Note that I prefer the term ‘texting’ to ‘messaging’ even though the messages occurred via Facebook’s inbox. I am aware of Fariz uses his smartphone on the go, thus the probability of his acts of texting a reply each time. The style the texts were constructed and the use of ‘texting lingo’ also indicated to me a familiarity and ease around short text messaging.

<sup>84</sup> Address deleted

emphasis on the use of the question mark captured my attention. I noted my need to make sense of it was driven by the goal of crafting a reply that can put him at ease. Have I committed the offence of Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicions' by imposing my own thoughts of his worries onto the text?

I needed to go back to letting the text and the symbols take charge so as to let them project the author's meaning onto my understanding. "Found" or "got hold of me" seems to point to an outcome of some sort of snooping activities. He had started the sentence with "I was wondering..." suggesting that from the time of his first reply to the second one, there was a sufficient amount of thinking, and that while he did wonder, it did not stop him from giving me his home address. So perhaps it was not so much a worry, but more of a curiosity. After all, I have no valid reason to 'snoop' on him, other than to seek his participation for this study. I later linked this to what he had said in the interview – of his preference for face-to-face communication as he thinks it is weird to have online chats with people he has not met before.

I also noted the hours he was keeping, and wondered if he was up studying or chatting online with friends. In my notes, I had jotted down "So Fariz is no different from his peers?" Looking back and in reflecting on my interactions with him as I write now, I realized I have set a certain kind of expectation. I have expected him to be different just because I knew he was a Muslim. I do not see him in a negative manner, but I have unconsciously expected him to be a 'good Muslim', to be a different kind of teenager. The kind that sleeps early and wakes up for dawn prayers. The reflective experience of language made me realize my hidden 'textbook Muslim' perception; one I claimed others indulged in, but not me.

My online communications with him gave me another glimpse into his world. Each time I sent him a message, I could tell if he has seen my message or not as it will indicate “SEEN” and the time the message was read. There were three occasions where my messages to him were “SEEN” but he did not reply until much later. It did make me worry if he will change his mind. Much later, I saw that he was active on social media during the period he had read my messages. Going back to the data from the interview, it seems to confirm to me that he was very much a part of the social scene at school, and that he approached his studies and friends with a certain kind of reasoning that was mindful of his faith at the same time carving out his own social space. This social space experience was not limited to school but flowed into the online space. I felt that he most probably did not reply my messages due to his focus on his close group of friends, and was not really having second thoughts about his participation.

I look back to the time I first met him in person at the university library. He was tall, slim and very agile. His footsteps were brisk and firm as we walked to the discussion room. I had written down in my notes that he certainly had an aura of confidence, like someone who knows his environment very well. At the later part of the interview, I found out that the university library **is**<sup>85</sup> like a ‘second home’ to him as he spends an average six hours studying here daily after school. I also noted he had a 2-litre chocolate milk in hand which he later told me was his daily consumption. I had jotted down in my notes that “he is so Kiwi – milk over water”. Our conversation around the ‘milk’ became the icebreaker and he then mentioned that he had been in Malaysia before, at the United Nations Camp, prior to resettlement to New

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<sup>85</sup> I emphasize this word as I was in awe of the amount of time and the discipline he puts in with regard to his studies.

Zealand. We talked a bit about his stay at Malaysia and I could sense the rapport with him as he became more relaxed, stretching out his long legs.

Fariz spoke English eloquently with a strong Kiwi accent. He told me he had arrived in New Zealand a few months before he turned five. If it was a ‘blind’ interview, I would have mistaken Fariz as a Kiwi of Maori or Pakeha descent. The interview went well in the sense that he just seemed to talk on and on, and I never really had to probe much. My one simple question of “Tell me about school, what is it like for you?” and he would be talking for the next ten minutes or more. His body language was one of confidence and his gaze was steady, maintaining eye contact with me all the time. It was good as I was looking for ‘rich data.’ By the time the interview ended after close to seventy minutes, it felt like I had known him a long while. I have much to transcribe and analyse.

In my other interactions with him via social media, I noticed that he was a follower of Tariq Ramadan. I wondered if it was because he was born in Egypt so I sent him some follow-up questions. The following are his replies:

I follow Tariq Ramadan on facebook and I watch his debates online. I enjoy his intellectual approach in understanding current events (16/8/2014, 14:55)

Yea i also like his french writing and debates with French politicians. (16/8/2014, 15:00)

It seems like he was a fan of Tariq Ramadan as he had used the term “enjoy”. I was intrigued with his use of the terms “debates”, “intellectual approach” and “current events”. It was also the first time he had written such a long reply (as compared to his usual style of one liner replies). It seems like I might have hit the right button with regard to a topic of his interest. Ramadan’s French writings have a lot to do with Caroline Fourest’s criticisms and his replies

to her accusation of “double speak”. Fariz had used the word “debate”. In a debate, there is a winner, and there is a loser, but it is also where both sides of debaters would need to engage in a lot of thinking and concrete facts of argument in order to outdo each other.

Comparing this interest of Fariz to the contents of his interview, I began to suspect that perhaps his motivations to succeed in life comes from following Ramadan’s work. This could explain why he spends such long hours studying after school every day and playing football on Fridays with his other Muslim friends at the local mosque. It seemed similar to Ramadan’s own schooling experience; of long hours of studies and also playing football (Ramadan, 2009). It suggests that perhaps he sees Tariq Ramadan as a role model, someone he can emulate. It perhaps also explain Fariz’s own ‘intellectual approach’ to the management of the various encounters he had at school, particularly his explanations on why he needed to stop at ‘lines’. His narratives in the interview reflect answers that had undergone some amount of thinking. He was not just answering with a brief yes or no, but they were always followed with lengthy and rational explanation. I could sense the influence of Ramadan’s work on him, and in reading the interview data in full, I found it much easier to understand him.

The possibility that Fariz could have been exposed to Ramadan’s model of applied *ijtihad* for Western Muslims and to use creative rational reasoning especially on matters of social affairs and contextualize it to current time was high. An intellectual approach suggests an approach that is based on logic and reasoning and Ramadan (2010b) did stress that one cannot avoid the use of consciousness. The word “intellectual” is defined as “acts or activities of an educated person that involve careful thinking (Cambridge Dictionaries Online). Meanwhile, the phrase “current events” can be understood as to do with matters of contemporary living (in this case Muslims in the West).

The link between the two terms is the word “understanding” (Fariz had said he enjoyed Ramadan’s intellectual approach to **understanding** current events). It suggests that perhaps Fariz is implying that Ramadan provides Muslims like him with the guidance, rationality, order, and meaning for their life in the West. Perhaps he enjoys it because it appeals to his own sense of how life in the West should be; in the sense that what Ramadan is proposing does not clash with his own ideals of wanting to remain faithful to Islam, yet does not hinder his participation in the wider community. There is a framework for him to contextualize his life in the West without compromising his religious identity.

His social media profile also showed his affiliation with a soccer group on Facebook. This group described their activities as “all soccer talks...purely football talk and no obscene language and coarse language. No personal attack”. While many people join groups on social media for various reasons, it at least suggests to me that he seems to have a keenness for sports and an active life out of school. Was I expecting something different? I knew from my past association with Arab students that football was a big thing for them so this sort of confirms it. I also saw that he was a fan of Swedish Muslim R&B singer, Maher Zain. Combining this piece of information to the interview data, it does seem to support my view of Fariz as someone who enjoys the contemporary Western life, but also one that is mindful of not crossing the ‘lines’ as he said in the interview.

There were two postings by Fariz that caught my attention. The first was a photo<sup>86</sup> which he had captioned as “Daily stereotypes Muslims face”. Is this something he experienced every

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<sup>86</sup> I am not able to disclose the nature of this photo as it may compromise confidentiality of participant’s ethnicity thus his identity.

day, since even I had unconsciously view him with a certain set of expectations? How does he feel about it? He was making a point, but was he angry or was he frustrated?

The other was a photo of Nelson Mandela with the caption:

*Huge respect for this guy. Africa lost a great man. Hopefully his legacy lives on in Africa.*

I looked at his use of the words “huge respect”. Mandela’s work is on anti-apartheid and Fariz is coloured. Was there something in his past that he had experienced and has now found a way to counter the problem as his use of ‘hope’ seems to suggest? I remember that during the interview he had brought up twice the story of his brother being asked to pursue plumbing by the school counselor. He had also talked about being singled out by his teacher and implied to it as due to him being coloured or Muslim. It seems like there is a connection here I can explore further with regard to his sense of belonging in the secular West.

I find Fariz someone extremely brilliant with a strong sense of what he wants to achieve. He is certainly proud to be a Muslim, but as I sensed from the prolonged engagement and the interview data, carries the weight of being double stereotyped - of being Muslim and colored. Thus, I feel his rigorous and unrelenting six hours of studies daily after school has a past. Educational success must mean a lot to him as a former refugee. He certainly seems keen to make a success of his life as a Western Muslim.

### **5.3 Hakeem**

I came to know Hakeem through the recommendation of Dr Mohammad Alayan, my Cultural Supervisor. However, I was also an acquaintance of his mother, a postgraduate student at university. I had met her earlier in 2009 at a function for Arab students in Christchurch,

though at that time, I was not aware that she had a son that fitted the research criteria. I did run into her a few times on campus after the function and had the opportunity to catch up with her. Our conversations usually revolve around our studies and life in New Zealand. Like me, she was also new in New Zealand then (in 2009) and was grappling with settling in. Over time, we both got busy and communication between us was restricted to the occasional email catch-ups.

Thus it was both a surprise and a joy when I arrived at Hakeem's house and found out that his mother was someone I knew. I remember seeing the familiar car in the driveway so my first question to him when he opened the door was: Is Mona<sup>87</sup> your mother? In this regard my first visit to Hakeem's home was different than all the other participants. I also got introduced to Hakeem's father. Hakeem's father told me that he has a business back home therefore his stay in New Zealand is only for short periods each time. Whenever he was away, it was Hakeem's responsibility to take care of his mother and younger siblings. From then onwards, I was frequently invited to their home on weekends especially when Hakeem's father was away. However, I made sure that Hakeem was a willing and informed participant<sup>88</sup> for my research.

On all of the occasions that I visited, I could see how he always took charge<sup>89</sup> but was also respectful of his mother's presence. If there was a stereotype of male Muslims being controlling or patronizing, I certainly could not find it in Hakeem or his father in the two

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<sup>87</sup> Name have been changed for confidentiality reasons

<sup>88</sup> This was made known and explained to him when I first met him at his house.

<sup>89</sup> At the end of their stay in New Zealand, Hakeem was the one handling all the sales of household items online, and the packing.

occasions that I met him. Hakeem would usually leave me and his mother to chat after our meals and re-appear politely when I was leaving. His polite ways and brotherly love was evident in his interactions with his siblings. He was always soft-spoken and gentle with them most of the time. One thing that stood out for me from the visits was the repeated story of his younger sister's treatment by the school, and the subsequent handling of it by the school principal<sup>90</sup>. It was never related in anger, but punctuated with sighs of disappointments.

He kept repeating "the Principal shouldn't have called the police. She can see our car from her office so she can always walk over and talk to my mum". What was Hakeem trying to convey here? Was this about his disappointment that he was not there to protect his mother? Or was it about the intentional act of the Principal in bringing in police involvement over a parking issue? In a lot of Asian/Muslim culture, involvement of police brings humiliation and shame. Was this what Hakeem felt? Hakeem seems to also suggest a sense of injustice too as he had commented "...she can always walk over and talk to my mum" further hinting that whatever misunderstanding could have been solved without police involvement. It was a 'small' issue that involved "walking distance" solution. I later linked this to his frequent use of the word "unfortunate" in describing his own experience at school.

It also suggested the indirect manner he showed awareness of the 'white privilege' phenomenon when he explained that they saw no point in complaining to their embassy representative as the Principal was most probably friends with the police as Christchurch was

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<sup>90</sup> Due to a previous issue with Hakeem's sister had at school and a misunderstanding over parking in a drop off zone, the Principal had given their car registration number to the police who then waited for Hakeem's mother and issued her with a summon few days later. They felt that this matter could have been solved by the school principal personally and bringing in the police was not necessary as they had not challenged the Principal's authority.

a small place. While this incident was about his sister, I wonder if it had the Husserlian retention and protention<sup>91</sup> effect on him and how these in turn impacted on his experience at school particularly with administrators? While I am conscious that each person's experience is never the same, but merely similar (Wagner, 1983), this episode is later taken up in order to shed light on his passive approach when he was called 'Al-Qaeda' at school. His subtle awareness of the 'white privilege' appeared again when in later communications, he divulged that the boy who called him 'Al-Qaeda' at school has a 'big personality' and he doubts the Principal would do much even if he complains.

I also discovered that while he is less expressive in person, he had written more than 5500 plus words when I sent him some follow-up questions. His detailed replies and reflections astounded me. The quiet and well-mannered boy who only had 71<sup>92</sup> friends on Facebook wrote the longest reply among all the other six participants. It was also the same when I communicated with him via Facebook messaging. Somehow the replies were lengthier, and there were a lot of back and forth questions from him too. Was this because of gender, language, or was it because the online space has more permeable borders? Was it the close proximity when in person that he was conscious of? On a social media platform, this proximity becomes less pronounced and perhaps this was the reason why his participation seems more 'engaged'? In fact, he was the only participant to email and check if his replies to the follow-up questions were helpful or not.

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<sup>91</sup> See Chapter Four, Section 4.4

<sup>92</sup> At that point in 2014 and in comparison to the other participants who had friends ranging from 300 to more than 1000 friends

19/07/2014 02:06

Hi, I wanted to ask you, how did u find my answers " where they useful or not "

Subsequently, he sent another one.

21/07/2014 07:58

Hi Erin, I remembered that u have asked how do I feel that my mates are not discomfoted by me, I took several personality test and I've got my results saying that I'm an isfj type of personality and when I rid the description I found that it's 100% true, and in the description it says that I'm able to know how to comfort others naturally without thinking about it at all, I also know my weaknesses now which are also true but no one is perfect, for example I was once in the airplane and my ticket said that my seat was on the edge ( so u can go out and come back easilly ) but an old guy who had the middle seat asked me to change, so because I'm too nice I let him change and then I got the worst seat and I kind of regreted what ive done but I just can't say no, and I hope to change that a little at least

While the information he shared was not in the context of his school experience, but it suggested how he was being changed as a result of his participation in this study. It showed his awareness of his weaknesses and that he has been thinking about it and evaluating his situation as his following message seems to indicate.

Ya I understand that but sometimes I want to use the word no at least once. (21/7/2014)

It perhaps also explains why he chose to stay quiet earlier on when he was called 'Al-Qaeda' at school. On Facebook, the name of his Christchurch school is still displayed on his profile page despite his family having left New Zealand a while ago and he is now studying at an international school. I tried to interpret this beyond what was immediate and visibly apparent,

and contextualize it to what Hakeem had said in the interview about having found acceptance with peers at school.

This act seems intentional and suggest the links it had to what he had mentioned in the follow-up interview; that he and his family had felt “homesick” for Christchurch because “life is beautiful” over here. It was interesting that he had chosen to use the term “homesick” despite having encountered some “unfortunate” incidents, as he said.

Having Hakeem as a research participant was certainly a pleasing experience and I always felt touched that he always ends his communication by saying: “*I pray that your studies go well. Don't worry*”. I thought I was supposed to be the one to say that to him. It also indicated to me how he constantly used words that reflected his consciousness of and belief in *Allah*.

#### **5.4 Imran**

Imran was recruited via the introduction from the Arab Students Society of Canterbury. He was sixteen at time of interview. I remember when I first contacted him via the email address that I was given, it took him a week before he replied with just a short sentence:

*So do you need my signature and my dad on both documents?*

That was all he said in reply to my email to him. I noted in my notes that he had referred to his father as ‘dad’. Looking back, what was I expecting? That Arabs cannot refer to their father as ‘dad?’ Honestly, I would have expected him to say ‘father’. ‘Dad’ sounds very Kiwi to me, but then he has been in Christchurch for the last seven years. Again, this was how I came to see my own biases and expectations once I had to start writing and reflecting on each of my participants. Comparing this piece of information to what he shared during the

interview and my subsequent contacts with him, it suggested just how well adapted Imran was to life at school in Christchurch. I remember his saying in the interview that “one needs to think where they are now” and I can now understand where he was coming from.

Other than the interview session I had with Imran, my other contact with him was either via emails or social media, Facebook. Prior to that I had spoken to his father a few times on campus and he had given his consent for me to contact Imran directly and to check with him if he was interested to participate in the research. I had the impression that he must have a very busy student life as his father had mentioned that he was always busy with assignments and exams. I also came to know that he was not the only person that seemed to be busy as both his parents were also postgraduate students and active in the student community. Imran was sixteen at time of interview.

After the interview, I had told him that I have some follow-up questions for him. His reply, as before, was brief.

Yeah sure, just message me the questions

So that was the start of me always having to send him courtesy emails whenever he took longer than usual to reply my messages. He was also the participant that I had the least informal contact with, either in person or via social media in the sense that it was not as regular as compared to the rest of the participants<sup>93</sup>. In the interview, he had mentioned that he preferred “to talk rather than type”. In the end I had to resort to calling him whenever I needed further clarification on the information that he had given me. However, my prolonged

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<sup>93</sup> My contact with the other participants (except Sureen who was not on social media) was as frequent as daily to three to five times a week.

engagement with Imran went on for more than two years, and after he left New Zealand, it was periodical.

When I first met Imran for the interview at the public library, all I saw was his wide smile as he walked towards me. I noticed that he was carrying a back pack and an expensive looking slim laptop in his hand. Contrary to his very ‘brief’ one-liners in email communication, he was rather chatty in person. He had a voice that matched his constant smile on his face. The few times I called him, I could even hear the ‘smile’ in his voice. Like Hakeem, he still had his Christchurch school listed as part of his profile even though he had left in 2013. Evident of his very busy school and social life was also present on his Facebook account via the hundreds of photos<sup>94</sup> that was uploaded frequently from various events. These included photos from school sports and social events.

I could see how busy Imran was and thought how much he has changed from the boy who in his early days at school had “...stood there, didn’t talk to anyone...” to this very popular and sociable boy. In the spirit of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion, I was aware that I needed to be mindful of how much can a photograph tell, and whether it is telling the story that was rightly so other than what was immediately apparent. I needed to make sense of these photos in tandem with the interview data for a more vigorous analysis and know that it cannot be interpreted on its own. Its interpretation require what Carroll (2000) termed as an art-historical context. If these images were in part about the culture in which they emerged

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<sup>94</sup> I will not discuss aspects of the photos in detail as this was not covered in the Human Ethics application and while communication via Facebook was at my participant’s request, analysing their social media photos was not part of the agreement I had with them. My focus is on their text and the meanings within it. The use of photos in general is just to support my other observations.

(Barrett, 2010) then how was Imran part of this Western culture? The photos suggested a subtle consciousness of the barriers he needed to self-impose.

While he had many photos taken with his classmates and seemed to be having a good time, I noticed that while his classmates had alcohol in their hands, his was soft drinks that looked like Coke or Sprite. I also saw some photos that he took with his female classmates, but again, it seems to suggest a conscious effort to leave a ‘gap’ between him and the girls. At times, he was always standing next to some other boys as if he was trying to avoid direct contact with the girls in the photos. It seems to suggest a conscious effort on his part to maintain a respectable distance. I later linked this to what he said in the interview as needing to keep to “within barriers.”

I left the interview with a sense of serenity, of knowing that the visceral effect I had from my meeting with him gave me just that feeling. There were no disappointments described, no struggles, and clearly nothing unpleasant. He had this smile on his face from beginning till the end of the interview. His easy going nature made it almost impossible for anyone not to like him as a person.

## **5.5 Hanna**

In writing my reflections on Hanna, I am conscious of smiling to myself. This is how I would sum up the effect of meeting and interacting with Hanna. I got to know Hanna through another participant who had mentioned that I should interview this girl at school who wears a ‘*tudung*’ (scarf) and was constantly teased about it. She was sixteen at time of interview.

Hanna had this cheerful face and wide big eyes that smiles back each time I look at her. It seems such a contrast to how she described herself as “hiding in the school toilet” when she first started school in Christchurch. The interview with Hanna was conducted at a vegetarian café near her house. She had told me that she was a regular here for the bubble tea. It makes me smile that her personality seems to match her favourite drink. Looking back to my first contact with her that was via Facebook, I remember the first time I saw her smiling profile picture on Facebook. I had assumed that she was of mixed parentage (she looked Caucasian/White but with a headscarf).

In person too, she looked exactly ‘White’ but she clarified that she was not of mixed parentage. This aspect was also later mentioned in the interview where she talked mostly about her headscarf and how she endured her teachers’ and classmates’ frequent stares. It suggests that her feeling left out and being left out intentionally (her construction) by her peers was due to her looking ‘different’ due to her headscarf. It also helped shed light on how she made sense of her outward appearance as compared to what she described as her ‘normal’ Kiwi classmates. Her headscarf was something that invited frequent and constant reaction from others but it did not deter her from wanting to be part of activities and events at school.

Other than the interview, my other interactions with Hanna were at a social event near university and the rest were via Facebook for all the follow-up queries and informal interactions. It has always been relatively pleasant and easy to chat with Hanna online because of her very cheerful personality. In fact, the first thing she had written after my first message to her was:

hi erin sorry about the very late reply! i don't mind doing the one-to-one interview! ☺

Sorry once again (20/6/2011, 22:28)

(Hanna frequently included smileys/emoticon in her chats/messaging with me).

She did not even ask for more details or had any questions with regard to the research. I had expected that she would at least have one or two questions even though I did include the information sheet in my first email to her. It alluded to Hanna's very easy going and friendly personality as I bring this observation into the analysis. Particularly, it helped shed light on Hanna's persistence to make friends at school and locate a sense of belonging.

I also found her to be very proactive in all her communications with me. She never fails to include alternatives or offer suggestions to whatever that we were discussing. This again, supported what she shared in the interview and how I formed the understanding that despite wearing a headscarf, Hanna was not someone with closed views; rather her thoughts and actions reflect what Ramadan (2014) described as Muslim consciousness that has qualities of openness towards others and acceptance of difference.

Her following replies point to how it helped me made sense of her thoughts and behavior.

oh hi!!! sorry i have been so so busy!!

will you be sending it by e-mail or do you want to pass it to me like face to face kind of thing....???? i am not sure but if you are close to aleesya you can pass it to her in school or i can meet you after school and meet you like near Burnside (suburb) somewhere.....

(4/7/2011, 10:39)

i finish at 12.30.... can you send it through me e-mail then?? , i think you can attach a file through this facebook e-mail thing that i am writing to you with now.... but if you can't me e-mail is hanna@hotmail.com ...

(4/7/2011, 20:48)

*hanna*<sup>95</sup> 😊

To me, she was just full of energy, always thinking, always assessing and always offering solutions. In short, it suggests her wanting to be part of what is happening. It was also how she described her efforts to make herself included at school.

Hanna was not just a participant in my research, but was also a very active 'recruiter' for this study.

if u do want more gals i do have 3 in mind 😊x

(1/3/2012, 20:54)

Thus doing the interview with her was itself a very pleasant experience as she switched in and out between her emotions and moods when retrospectively narrating her schooling experience to me. At times she would seem confident, at other times, seeking reassurance.

She had said in the interview:

*...but I just have to live with it really.*

Among all the other participants, Hanna was the most expressive in terms of emotions and facial expression. At one point, when narrating how she had hidden in the school toilet during

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<sup>95</sup> Name and email address fictional to protect identity of participant

lunch break, she teared up. However, she also laughed a lot during the interview. Interviewing Hanna felt like a sharing session with a friend I have not seen for a while, with this friend just filling me in on what has been happening in her life.

At another time, I managed to meet up with Hanna again at a food fair organized by Muslim students at university grounds during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Hanna came with her family. I could see from her interactions with her parents that she comes from a very close-knit family. In fact, both her parents are among her 669 friends<sup>96</sup> on Facebook, and occasionally she would engage in banter with her father on Facebook. It was really nice to read the posts father and daughter wrote to each other, arguing playfully on social media. In between, her mother or an aunt would join in. While I could see the love they had for each other, I also realized that this could mean Hanna had no secrets from her parents. It was a very transparent family. At least, it was, to me. Perhaps this also explains Hanna's resilience with regard to being teased constantly about her headscarf at school and why she never seems to give up making her presence accepted at school.

For me, Hanna with or without her headscarf is just Hanna. She is just one of us. She is quick to feel the hurt, but also quick to forgive and move on. There is this complex mix of strength and vulnerability. She is persistent in wanting to be part of mainstream yet holding on tight to her Muslim identity. I have in the beginning carried with me that unconscious bias, imposing my view of how I see her onto her. Ricoeur's (1970) hermeneutics of suspicion makes so much more sense now. Interpreting Hanna and interpreting text requires the same approach of "double motivation" (p.27). I needed to remain open to what Hanna can show me, and to stay loyal to that rigor of probing beyond the surface.

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<sup>96</sup> At that time around July 2012.

## 5.6 Sureen

Prior to meeting Sureen, I had formed the impression that she was a very busy and active person. That was because in her first email reply to me, she told me she had just finished her exams and gave me a few slots that she was available for interview. I remember I smiled reading that email as it felt like I was trying to get an interview appointment with a Chief Executive Officer. My interview with Sureen lasted close to an hour and was conducted at her house. Subsequent follow-up sessions and prolonged engagement were all via emails. At time of interview, she was seventeen.

Sureen is tall, slim and athletic looking. At the interview, she was dressed in a dark blue track suit and a headscarf neatly tucked in around the jacket collar. I had a glimpsed of the close-mother-daughter relationship<sup>97</sup> in action when she walked in and headed straight to her mum after arriving home from school. There was this smile on her face as she kissed her mother's hand, an Islamic gesture of *salam* (greetings) and she chatted a while to her mum.

I remember I had asked her what it was like walking into school every morning, and her very curt reply was: "I drive". I had this aspect written down in my reflective notes as my unconscious bias of seeing Sureen as a young female Muslim student that is different from her peers. I knew some high school students drive to school but I admit that it did not even cross my mind when I set out to interview the participants. As much as I sometimes think I

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<sup>97</sup> I had arrived earlier and was chatting to Sureen's mom prior to her arriving home from school. Her mother had told me that Sureen is very close to her, and that they (as parents) do not have to worry much about her as she is very independent and responsible.

am an insider in this research process, I was also beginning to realize I am an outsider as well. I honestly did not mean to stereotype her but wonder if she thought I did.

Sureen also had an English accent that reminded me of Christiane Amanpour<sup>98</sup>; very eloquent and very clear. However, her narratives felt ‘distant’ in the sense that I had to keep prompting her to elaborate with some examples. In turn, she seemed frustrated as her body language and curt replies seemed to indicate. I knew I would have to have follow-up sessions with her, and that it was best I do not push her at this stage. After the interview, I emailed her to thank her for her time, but I never heard back from her. I had the feeling she was just too busy as another of my communication with her indicated so when I emailed her the interview transcripts.

*I really do not have the time to read through everything, although I have skimmed through it.*

*I would love to reply properly but I really am far too busy this year. Sorry again.<sup>99</sup>*

If I were to compare Sureen to Hanna, who was very expressive and cheerful, then I would say Sureen is the exact opposite. This is not to say Sureen is expressionless, but rather, she exudes confidence with a style of communication that borders on being direct and straight forward, like a journalist. It made me wonder if there was another side to her that I did not get to see and that perhaps my role as a researcher and someone older had an impact on how she interacted with me. Perhaps she is different when she is with her peers or close friends at school as what her interview data seems to suggest.

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<sup>98</sup> CNN Anchor and Chief International Correspondent of British-Iranian background

<sup>99</sup> 3/4/2012 – email

Looking back and reflecting on my more than 3 years of formal and informal communications with Sureen, getting to know her, and both her parents, my opinion of Sureen is that it takes her a while to warm up to a person, but once she does, she is very personable and very easy to talk to. As she had later said in another email, “it really isn’t hard to get along with people who differ from you”. It added up to what she shared in the interview; of a person that has an active school life via a focus on her studies and sports activities and never judging what her peers were doing even though she said she distanced herself from the “parties, drugs, and alcohol”.

In the last series of follow-up communication sessions I had with her, my sense that I have been accepted by her became stronger. The tone of her emails lightened a lot as compared to the ones in the beginning and her replies were prompt. She even started inserting ‘smiley’ emoticons. It made me think that there must be a smile on her face as she typed those emails. It was that certain “in-touchness” (van Manen, 2012, p. 97) characterized by the addressive and revealing forms of email and letter writing that van Manen had described.

*Sure, send me the questions and I’ll get back to you when I can. Enjoy your weekend!*<sup>100</sup>

*Wishing you the best with your studies! If there is anything else I can do, just let me know and I’ll do my best to get back to you quickly. Thank you 😊 I hope you have a wonderful month also.*<sup>101</sup>

At another time, she had written:

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<sup>100</sup> 5/7/2014 – email

<sup>101</sup> 10/7/2014 – email

*I hope your research goes as well as it possibly can! Take good care of yourself and get through the last winter month. Spring is coming!*<sup>102</sup>

I was very happy reading this email of hers. It was not just the fact she had taken the particular effort to show her concern for my well-being, but it was her last sentence about the advent of spring, and her use of the exclamation mark. It suggests that she was in a happy mood when she was writing that email to me. From someone who had in the beginning, kept reiterating that she was very busy, even to the point of saying “I am probably not the right person you should be talking to,” I felt a great honor to be included in her joy, whatever that was.

For me, it seems I have gained her acceptance, and in a way also suggests perhaps she now views her participation in this study differently. Her following reply seems to indicate her change of perspective.

*So lovely to hear from you! Thank you for the kind greeting. Congratulations, I hope it all turns out perfectly!*<sup>103</sup>

I am aware that people generally write “lovely to hear from you” as a standard polite reply, regardless of whether they really meant it or not. However, in Sureen’s case, I do not think she would have written so if she did not mean it. It was also followed by a string of positive adjectives. Was her change of perspective because she now regards me as a trusted person or because something else is making her happy? Van Manen (2012) termed both email and letter writings as possessing addressive and revealing forms. He said:

To write is to make oneself appear in the presence of the other (van Manen, 2012, p. 97).

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<sup>102</sup> 27/7/2014 – email

<sup>103</sup> 24/7/2014 – email

While I had made myself appear in her presence first, she had also made herself appear in mine, and indirectly in this study.

Thus my fears in the beginning that Sureen was not ‘reachable’ were grossly inaccurate. In my first fieldwork write-up to my team of supervisors in 2012, I had in fact described meeting Sureen with the metaphor ‘citadel’ in contrast to Hanna whom I described as “the ‘girl next door’”. That was how different my experience of interviewing both of them felt like. I agonized over the difficulties in getting Sureen to open up, with her persistent reply of “I am very busy”. I struggled with needing more descriptive replies and heeding Human Ethics guidelines to be mindful of the participants’ study commitments. That Sureen had in the end turned into that ‘Spring’ person was just an amazing feeling. I felt like I had achieved that inside approach of phenomenology when I finally had a glimpse of Sureen’s beautiful soul. It suggests the moving ‘worlds’ of phenomenology – of one that is constantly changing and expanding, but the experiencing identity remaining constant (Wagner, 1983).

I remember clearly my struggles trying to get Sureen to open up more. At one point, I had asked her about her preference on music. I felt that I needed to know more about her. She was the only participant that was not on social media thus my only way of reaching her was to engage with her through emails. I had asked if she listens to Maher Zain<sup>104</sup> as a few of the other participants follow him on Facebook.

*I’m not sure what you mean about the music stereotype. I can enjoy all kinds of music without any relation to where it came from. It’s really just a matter of taste. For example, there is Indian music I absolutely loathe and Indian music I like, English music I hate and English*

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<sup>104</sup> Swedish Muslim R&B singer of Lebanese origin

*music I like, Arabic music I hate and Arabic music I like. There's even Romanian and Greek music I find myself liking as well as Christian, Jewish, Muslim, whatever. I think you assumed the reason had to do with race/religion but I highly doubt that's the case. It's definitely a matter of personal taste and what we're accustomed to.*

My seemingly innocent question seemed to have triggered off her longest reply I have ever received. It got me thinking a long while. Was she angry with the question, just like about her walking to school? Loathe and hate were both very strong words and she had placed them ahead of 'like'. I doubt the words represent who she is. I felt her use of the words and extremes of Jewish and Muslim had something more to it, as if she was making a point. What was it? Why was she angry? She had pointed out that I had made an assumption about her. Had I assumed that she would like Maher Zain just because of race and religion like she said?

In retrospect I suppose she was right. I was not even aware of my bias until Sureen pointed it out. I could not see beyond her being 'Muslim' and wearing a headscarf. I could not imagine her listening to Taylor Swift<sup>105</sup> or Beyonce<sup>106</sup> but I had expected her to listen to Maher Zain, which she neither confirms nor deny. In all respect, my bias was unintentional. I see myself as I write now. Writing does force one into a reflective mode (van Manen, 2002). No wonder I had written in my report that while Hanna had repeatedly stressed on her difficult experiences with her 'headscarf', Sureen had made no mention of it at all in the interview or at any other times. I had expected her to, but it did not happen, and I kept looking out for that. This understanding helped me understand why Sureen said she feels perfectly normal attending school as a Muslim in Christchurch. It made me understand that it was me that

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<sup>105</sup> American pop singer

<sup>106</sup> American pop singer

could not see her as ‘normal’ because of my ingrained biases; biases that I was completely unaware of and most probably would insist I did not have if I had not conducted this study.

What have I learned from my informal engagements with Sureen? While I had earlier lamented to myself that my access to Sureen was restricted to emails only, unlike the other participants whom I could reach 24/7 via social media, I can now see where I was wrong. Just as in phenomenology, there is serendipity in everything that one does. The key is to look for the *hidden* (van Manen, 1997). As explained by van Manen (2012), the use of emails as the medium of communication has that paradoxical risk of isolation and mystery versus the fostering of un-looked for intimacy (p. 100). It taught me a new way of looking at emails, and to search deeper into the meanings (van Manen, 1997; Wagner, 1983). I had taken it for granted in my every day practice of writing and receiving emails, to the extent I was beginning to term it “a dinosaur form of communication” as people move on to Whatsapp<sup>107</sup> and Snapchat<sup>108</sup>. It is a “novel experience” (van Manen, 2012, p. 97), and I have Sureen to thank for that.

## 5.7 Zul

Zul was the most passive among all the other participants. He was very quiet, and needed frequent probing. Subsequently, I had to conduct five follow-ups with him via emails and multiple messages via social media for a period of close to four months before I could analyse the interview data. For example, when I asked him to elaborate further on what he

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<sup>107</sup> A free cross-platform mobile messaging app

<sup>108</sup> A photo messaging application developed by former Stanford University students, popular with teenagers and young adults

meant by “best” with regard to his experience playing football with his friends, he replied “best because I got to play with my friends”. I had to prompt him further by asking him to include descriptions of his emotions and feelings, and if there were anything in particular that he remembered about the event.

However, in the last follow-up, I decided I needed to change my style of questioning by prompting him to give me examples after each line of reply. I also told him to phrase his replies in Malay, and to write as freely as he liked. I knew from the interview that he was not comfortable conversing in English. I told him I would take care of the translation and he was free to express himself in standard Malay or colloquial Malay. I felt perhaps this would help from my own experience trying to speak Mandarin. This strategy seems to work, and finally, I was able to obtain some rich information about his schooling experience in New Zealand. In fact, in his last follow-up replies, he talked openly about his feelings, and how he felt he has changed not only from his schooling experience in New Zealand, but also from his participation in this study.

For me, Zul was the participant that showed the most transformational change in this study. From the very shy, soft-spoken boy at the beginning of this study, he became the one that took the initiative to update me on his new life studying overseas<sup>109</sup>, and to thank me openly on social media for inviting him to participate in this study. He told me that by participating in this study, he had learned to reflect on his experiences, and can see his own strengths and weaknesses. He mentioned this learning has helped him cope well in his new life studying in a different country now.

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<sup>109</sup> His family left New Zealand sometime around July 2013.

I first contacted Zul through his mother, a contact given by a friend who knows the family. His parents were agreeable to him participating in the study and had also spoken to him about it. I met him at his house in the presence of both his parents, as my way of keeping to cultural sensibilities. After the initial explanation with regard to his participation and his rights as a participant and Zul had indicated his understanding, the interview was carried out in the garden area of his house. The interview had many awkward pauses, as he did not respond well to my prompts, and many times, he just looked at me with a blank stare when I asked if he could elaborate further. I felt I had tried to assist him to be more descriptive and felt bad putting him in such a difficult position.

Looking back, I learned that in interviewing passive participants like Zul, the key is not to give up too early, but to try various other strategies. I had made the mistake of following 'blindly' the requirements for 'rich description' by Smith et al., (2009), and had set him aside when I saw that he was not expressive. However, after meeting him a few times at cultural events around Christchurch, and having the opportunity to talk to him in informal settings, I sensed that he was more relaxed and could open up better. I did wonder if the earlier problem was due to gender issue as he had mentioned in the interview that he was not familiar at all dealing with someone from the opposite sex.

He had said that the history behind his awkwardness around girls was due to his background studying in an Islamic School in his home country. As much as I was focused on keeping to cultural sensibilities, I seemed to have overlooked the gender issue. From my observations of him at informal events, I could see that he was most chatty when with the adult male community members or peers. In fact, he was very proactive in helping to set-up or clean-up at the various events. He definitely seemed to keep a distance from the other girls in his age

range. This seems to suggest his awareness of religious and cultural expectations. This aspect helped me understand his need to do things right (*istiqamah*) when read in context with the interview data.

What was most interesting in my prolonged engagement with him was his acceptance of me at the last round of follow-up sessions that had changed so much. This can be seen in how he viewed himself in the last follow-up session via email:

*In my opinion, the change has been good as it is really helpful in daily life. For example, if anything complicated happens, it has trained me to use my mind to find a solution.*

*I feel my experience in New Zealand is very valuable to me and helps me in many aspects.*

*Perhaps I will be furthering my studies overseas soon. I will know what to do when I am there.<sup>110</sup>*

(translated from Malay).

He had alluded to how living and studying in Christchurch has taught him to use his ‘mind’ to solve challenges. It suggests a sort of awakening for him; it was not that he had not engaged his mind prior to this, but as Zine (1997) had suggested in her study, this prevalence seems more frequent when Muslims live in a non-Muslim country. When in non-Muslim environment, Muslims are forced to confront their Muslim consciousness more rigorously when they have to decide how to perform their religious obligations in an environment that makes no preparation for them. As Ramadan (2004; 2010b) suggested, Muslims need to apply *ijtihad* and find critical reasoning that are ethical in their quest to belong in the West. His last sentence – “*I will know what to do when I am there*” further supports the suggestion that his new found awakening and confidence is linked to his experience in New Zealand. It

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<sup>110</sup> 23/7/2014 – email

has taught him to ‘think’ and reflect in search of solutions, as opposed to the everyday taken for granted familiar situation in his home country.

A few days after the completion of the last follow-up session, he posted the following quote on Facebook.

*At that point when you feel you want to give up, think of the reason that has made you held on for so long.*

Then in another of his message to me via Facebook, he wrote:

*I hope Allah makes everything easy for you*

(translated from his original: *Semoga dipermudahkan segala urusan*)<sup>111</sup>

A literal translation of the word “*dipermudahkan*” means “to make easy”. However, the use of this term by Muslims is always in conjunction with *Allah* in mind. No one can make things easier except *Allah*. It is in the *syahadah*. Both content taken together reflects his Muslim consciousness and suggests that the one reason that has helped him held on for so long is his faith in *Allah*.

## **5.8 Aleesya**

I have placed Aleesya last in this chapter. I think I need lots of clarity to reflect on my interactions with her. Aleesya is the participant I have had the longest informal engagement with, prior and post-research. In the process, her mother has also become a friend as we share our common joys and pains of raising an only daughter that not only struggles with locating

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<sup>111</sup> 25/7/2014

themselves in the West, but also finding their place in the East. My over-familiarity with Aleesya requires that I take many steps back, and think deeply in order to do justice to the essence of who she is. It is made complicated as Aleesya sometimes seem to present contradictory sides to her. Other than the informal engagements, I had two interview sessions with Aleesya with the rest of the follow-up queries done via social media.

As the only daughter, Aleesya is much loved and very close to her parents, particularly her mother. At every community event, if her mother is there, Aleesya will be there. At time of interview, Aleesya was just two months short of turning seventeen and was in New Zealand with her family as an international student. They have been here for close to three years and had previously lived in the United Kingdom. Aleesya tells me that she is part of a popular all-girls group at school, whose membership comprise of mostly Caucasian Kiwis. She uses make-up like most teenagers her age and while her friends wear shorts in summer, in Aleesya's case it is always jeans. On Facebook, she has more than 600 friends (at time of interview in 2012).

Aleesya neither displays nor denies her Muslim identity. I remember my first thought on meeting her was that she does not wear a headscarf and the word 'contemporary' came to mind as opposed to her mother who wears the headscarf and traditional long dress. As I now write, I realize again I had this unconscious bias of expecting to see someone in a headscarf just because that person is a Muslim. I find myself intrigued by the many aspects of convergence and divergence of values that she portrayed with her "fluid identity". I did think if it was difficult for her trying to integrate into the secular environment at the same time needing to keep to the expectations of her faith and community values. In my reflective notes, I had written of my own confusion trying to make sense of who she is. I had wrote that if she

was experimenting with new identities (Brimm<sup>112</sup>, 2013) or if she was Tyler's<sup>113</sup> (1997) version of a passing identity?

This was because she kept repeating that the reason she does not wear a headscarf was because she was scared of being called a “terrorist”. But if she is no stranger to change and adaptation, why is she so worried about that? Or was it more a fear of being associated with a group that mainstream rejects? Or is it a fear of rejection as a whole? In comparison with the interview data, my observations of Aleesya in informal events and via social media, I began to understand that she seems to have this fear of being left out by her peers. At the same time, she struggles with trying to maintain the religious aspects of her when in contact with them. As she alluded to in her later follow-up replies, people form connections by having things in common with other people. This helped me make sense of her ‘distance’ with the headscarf. It suggests that she was not ‘passing’ her identity, but more of wanting to be seen as ‘normal’ as Aleesya never tried to ‘pass on’ her Muslim identity. She was just more subtle with it in what I see as attempts to be ‘normal’ among her peers. This was evident in my other observations of her.

At the second follow-up session, I had picked her up after school and the interview was conducted at McDonald's so that we both could eat at the same time. I had written down in my notes that it was Aleesya herself that suggested we go to McDonald's and that it was ‘okay’ for her as I was aware that some Muslims do not regard McDonald's meat serving as

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<sup>112</sup> Brimm's (2013) ‘Global cosmopolitan’ refers to young, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-national persons who are fast-thinking and also creative in experimenting with their unique version of identities.

<sup>113</sup> Tyler (1997) maintained people engage in passing as a way to obscure differences and to assert their uniqueness as a response to oppression. It is seen as a sign of a victim, of one that gives in to the order of things without a struggle.

*halal*. In a way, it suggests her interpretation of the Revealed Texts and contextualization of her situation in the West as she said to me: *Islam does not make things difficult for us*. Thus, this also suggests Aleesya's version of *ijtihad*. At this session, I saw Aleesya in her school uniform for the first time. She wore a long sleeved white shirt paired with a school jacket, a long skirt that almost covered her ankles, and full length socks with black shoes. It suggests a consciousness to maintain modesty in a subtle manner.

There were many instances where she had "SEEN" my message sent via Facebook but she never replies them. It seems like there were times I could reach her, at other times, I could not. I wonder if she was really busy with her studies or if something was troubling her? So I engaged in a kind of waiting; "objectively and subjectively waiting" (van Manen, 2012, p. 128). I needed her reply, but I knew I also needed to wait patiently. In between I send her messages of support from time to time, but always mindful that I do not overwhelm her. Most of the times I could see that she was active on Facebook. That at least put me out of my worry. I figured if she was chatting online with friends, then she must be alright. That seems to be the pattern of my on-going communication with Aleesya during the research period.

At another time, Aleesya had written to me excitedly when she had news that Tariq Ramadan would be giving a talk at her home country.

Aunty!!! Tariq Ramadan is coming. Im super excited

I'll try get his autograph for you ☺

When I asked her what was it that she liked about Tariq Ramadan she never replied me. I can only guess that like Fariz, she likes Ramadan's framework for Western Muslims: of staying

true to Islam with a focus on the Revealed Texts yet cultivating a critical mind in a contextual way. That was what I saw in her, but unlike the other participants, she struggles more than them to achieve balance in this area, thus, her continuous exploration of her own religious identity in the West via keeping up with Ramadan's work.

## **5.9 Summary and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a summary of each of the seven participant's profile alongside my reflection of the informal engagement I had with each of them. These reflections are taken up together with the findings in Chapter Six in order for me to form my circularity of understanding. I have not kept to a standard style of writing and reflecting on each of my participant. This was because I could not. They were each different, and each had their particular brand of personality in my interactions with them. I started off this chapter thinking I would be writing a profile analysis and reflection piece on each of them. I thought the framework would be the same for each of them.

However, I realized that I cannot use a standard frame for each of them. None of them had that one same style of interaction with me. Even if they had, at best it was similar, not identical (Wagner, 1983). They each also had their personalized version of *ijtihad* in making sense of their schooling encounters in the West. What was apparent, however, was that they each were conscious of their presence as a Muslim in the West and the need to maintain this identity albeit through various adaptations and strategies.

In the next chapter, I present the research findings, that is, the key themes that emerged as a result of the analysis.

## 6. Chapter Six - Findings

Muslims are no longer foreigners in the West

(Olivier Roy, 2004, p.102)

### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented my reflections on the prolonged informal engagement with each of the participants. These were taken up to assist with the development of the analysis at various points to shed further light and ground the findings presented in this chapter. These steps are consistent with IPA's requirement for the researcher to be proactive and to engage with the data so as to preserve the centrality of the participant's perspective and the researcher's interpretation of the text (Wagstaff et al., 2014).

In this chapter I present the themes that emerged as a result of the analysis. The themes emerged as a result of close readings, reflective write-ups, careful consideration and systematic interpretation (Shaw, 2010). The themes represent how the participants experience schooling as young Muslims in a secular environment and captures the complexity of their seeing, feeling, and being. The superordinate theme is labelled "striving for *istiqamah*". This superordinate theme sets the scene for the two supporting themes of "locating a sense of belonging" and "normalizing self". While the themes reflect the participants' responses to their schooling environment and their encounters with peers and teachers, their sensemaking and meaning-making are also reflective of the ways the participants engage with these experiences.

The themes are presented in one analysis section and incorporate the participants' account, reflections of their schooling experience and my interpretation of their reflections (Smith et al., 2009). They are presented alongside extracts of the participants own words<sup>114</sup>, what Seidman (2013) described as facilitating participant's consciousness onto paper and into the reader's mind. The use of verbatim quotes is to ground the analysis process in the data and make transparent the analysis process (Smith, 1996). It also serves as a way to allow participants' voices to be incorporated into the reading, providing transparency and promoting authenticity (Smith, 1996; Brocki & Wearden, 2006). For the reader, it is to help establish the relevance of the interpretations (Wagner, 1983; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and bringing the whole experience into 'nearness' (Smith, 2003; Van Manen, 2012). The discussion on the implications of the findings in relation to extant literature and how meaning-making is central to helping young Muslims cope at school will be in Chapter Seven.

In arriving at the themes, I was guided not only by prevalence, but also the relevancy and richness of the data that contributed to the overall experience under study. While the themes are presented separately, they overlap and support each other. The data analysis remains guided by an empathic hermeneutics combined with a questioning hermeneutics, that is, to interpret and understand from the participant's view point, one individual case at a time (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The themes from the first case were then used to orient to the subsequent analysis with emerging themes from later cases also reviewed against the rest and each other, acknowledging that participants can be similar but also different (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

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<sup>114</sup> The extracts are participant's own words as transcribed from interviews or as per their emails/social media messages. Please note no efforts have been made to correct grammatical errors (if any) or re-write sentence structure so as to retain participant's words/text as originally conveyed.

Similar to engaging in the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (See Chapter Four, Section 4.9.2.1) at the analysis stage, an overall back and forth view of how they tie in with each other when reading each individual themes helped me consider their coherence to each illuminated theme. Thus they each contribute as parts feeding into the whole experience making the whole a culmination of the various parts. In explicating and arriving at the themes, I was guided by the main research question: What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?

## **6.2 Striving for *istiqamah***

The superordinate theme that represents the young Muslims’ lived experience at school is ‘striving for *istiqamah*’. This theme emerged as a strong theme overall for all the participants, albeit in varying degrees of convergence and divergence. *Istiqamah* in Islam generally means “to head in the right direction, acting rightly, and with no deviation”. In striving for *istiqamah*, what this superordinate theme alludes to overall are the acts of intentional consciousness and volition that reflect individual agency and self-control.

In describing this theme, I use the word ‘strive’ to reflect their cognitive *jihad* (struggle) that points to them possessing agency and volition in bearing witness to their faith. The data does not reflect them ‘seeking’, as ‘to seek’ implies that they are still searching for the *hidayah* (grace and acceptance of *Allah*) which is not true for this group of participants who are all practicing Muslims. In striving for *istiqamah*, one’s acts and behaviours are always mindful of getting it done in the best possible way as commanded<sup>115</sup> in the Quran. There are five

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<sup>115</sup> See Surah al-fatihah (6:29) – the first chapter of the Quran and is part of the ritual in a Muslim’s daily prayer. It seeks Allah’s guidance and mercy to stay on the path/direction that Allah has commanded (as explained by Ustaz Mohd Erfino Johari).

conditions for the achievement of *istiqamah*<sup>116</sup> and the data across all participants seem to reflect a consciousness of these conditions albeit presented in variation in their narratives.

All of the participants talked about how, as Muslims, practicing their faith in a Western context, they made conscious decisions with regard to their socialization at school, and with peers from school. It was reflected in a clear and intentional manner and showed a strong sense of personal agency and volition despite them at times being in the ‘thick of things’, being coaxed by friends or faced with peer pressure. They clearly had a mind of their own and knew where to draw the lines. All of them participated actively in the social circle at school, but each approaching it in their own unique ways. Aspects of religious expectations were ‘weaved’ into their socialization through skillful and unwavering negotiation with their peers. Through it all, they construct their own unique individual identity markers.

This superordinate theme also reflects the need of participants to achieve equilibrium in both key areas of their young lives (social and personal) where negotiating the boundaries of their faith is ever present and on-going and is axiomatic to the whole process of them achieving *istiqamah*. It is especially pronounced and made more significant as they grapple with being in an environment where religion is seen as something very personal and is kept separate from the public domain. Their actions do not point to them ‘rejecting’ this environment, but suggests the appearance of mindfulness and consciousness of the need to keep to religious beliefs and values. In short, striving for *istiqamah* is constant in everything that the participants do.

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<sup>116</sup> 1. That these acts are carried out solely for the sake of Allah 2. That it is done on the basis of knowledge 3. Acts of worship are done in the manner that has been commanded 4. To do them in the best way possible 5. To restrict oneself to what is lawful while performing those deeds (Imam Nawawi, Hadith 21).

## 6.2.1 Striving for *istiqamah* in the social realm

### 6.2.1.1 Parties/Alcohol/Drugs

**Fariz's** account of how he manages his social interactions suggests the strong hold he has on agency and volition in his striving for *istiqamah*. He not only emphasized his firm stand of not attending parties but further described it as a need to stop at "lines" where social interactions are concerned. These "lines" suggest a kind of demarcation that Fariz placed on his social activities; that is, between what is permissible in Islam and what is not. He then went on to state how he "stopped" at these lines while his friends continue beyond them; a further indication of his spiritual discipline. By stopping, it reflects Fariz's consciousness that he is now at a position where he can no longer go forward or risk flouting the Islamic teachings. It is a reflection of his awareness and presence of mind as while his friends continue on, he is able to pull back, as reflected in his words "where I stand", a reference to his Islamic values.

*Ermm they go to parties, but I don't go to parties. **I never** go to parties.*

*I honestly **don't wanna go** you know, I'm Muslim, and all those drinking and stuff, and all those kind of things, prohibited stuff, I don't wanna be influenced in their own way. So ermm, I will hang out with them a lot, but when it comes to parties and other things, it's like they know me for quite a long time. They know **where I stand** in those kind of stuff.*

*It's just **lines**. I **stop** there, and they just **continue**.*

**Imran** adopted the term "barriers" in his account as a way to indicate his consciousness of the need to keep to boundaries in his social interactions. His participation in mainstream activities is one that clearly indicates the engagement of evaluation against what his faith

allows. Imran talked about his participation at parties and social events but maintained his Islamic stand.

*I mean it's okay to join in the activities and all, but like when I go to parties, I don't drink. My friends drink. They eat pork and I don't.*

That Imran's actions are deliberate and conscious can be seen in the extract of the transcript below. It suggests his personal choice of keeping to the mandatory requirement to stay away from what is prohibited in Islam.

*As long as it's within the barriers of Islam and all those.*

This need to do so does not prevent him from socializing, but is a salient feature of his way of socializing. It is a feature that is non-negotiable and constant. The phrase "all those" alludes to Imran being mindful of all that is important and central in Islam, a marker of striving for *istiqamah*.

However, for **Aleesya**, she portrayed worries and indecisiveness in trying to make a decision to attend birthday parties. Her struggles with weighing up her options were clearly reflected in her narratives.

*I want to attend the birthday parties but I worry about what I'll eat, I don't know. I did think of bringing my own food.*

*...there were a few times I had to turn down invitations to birthday parties because there were drugs and alcohol involved.*

### 6.2.1.2 Gender relations

Striving to stay on the path of *istiqamah* is also evident where issues of gender relations are concerned. Whilst it seems that there is a form of *carte blanche* acceptance to manage gender relations, the participant's account pointed to a process of internal rationalization with consideration given to varying situations.

*...if say I can't have a girlfriend, I don't know, I can't really interpret in any other way you know... (Fariz)*

**Fariz's** "can't really interpret" should not to be taken as his lack of knowledge of Islam, but rather a reflection of his faithful piety and acceptance of *tauhid* (Oneness) in Islam thus the need to keep to the Islamic guide on gender relations. It points to his consciousness of needing to keep to *istiqamah*.

Similarly with both **Hakeem** and **Hanna** too, their accounts suggested a consciousness of what is permissible and their intention to keep to it in the best way possible.

*I don't talk to girls that much because I don't have relationship with girls but if I needed to, I would as long as I'm not passing the Islamic Law or flirting or any sexual contact and we try to avoid speaking with them especially in my age right now because as I said men are easily attracted to them. (Hakeem)*

*I opt out...I don't want to be in the swimming pool with another gender. (Hanna)*

*Once I had to hold a guy's hand, but I told the teacher I can't, and she understood. (Hanna)*

While **Hakeem's** effort to keep to *istiqamah* takes on a more flexible stand, his

consciousness of the need to maintain boundaries was reflected in his use of the phrase not “passing the Islamic Law”, to indicate his consciousness of not overstepping boundaries as set out in Islam.

In **Zul’s** case, striving for *istiqamah* in managing gender relations was more pronounced for him as he came from an all-boys religious school in his home country. It was an experience that put him out of place and forces him to find ways to work around it as suggested by his descriptions:

*I felt **odd** and **struggled** a bit when I first started school. Imagine I studied in a religious school, and here, the girls just approached me and ask me questions...It was such a **test** for me talking to her.*

By putting it as odd and a struggle, it suggests Zul’s efforts at trying to make sense of what is visually a reality for him now, of the free relations between male and female, which is against everything that he has been brought up with, thus his calling it a ‘test’. This suggests efforts by him to ‘pass’ the ‘test’, and to do so requires that he strives for *istiqamah*.

*I can see that girls and boys here have very free relations. I don’t blame them. **I know they are not Muslims.***

In rationalizing that his (new) classmates are not Muslims, Zul is indirectly inferring to himself as a Muslim thus the need for consciousness of *Allah*, which means the need to do things right. However, he does not expect his non-Muslim classmates to do so.

### 6.2.1.3 Peer pressure

Even when there was pressure to conform, the participants presented a clear sense of agency and volition.

The following are **Sureen**'s account:

*I think it's just different values...Some of them got kids, some of them are into drugs and drinking, all of the things that I like to **distance** myself from.*

*The pressure is still there. Like any high school student, you're always gonna get that. It's really up to the person to decide what they value, and whether they'll **stick to it**.*

In Sureen's case, her account was accentuated by her use of the word "distance" to suggest the gap she puts between herself and the activities that her friends indulge in that are contrary to Islamic teachings. Her use of the phrase "stick to it" alludes to the strength with which she holds on to her Islamic principles.

## 6.2.2 Striving for *istiqamah* in personal realm

### 6.2.2.1 Prayers/Fasting/Religious obligations

**Fariz**'s account of his views on the obligations in Islam again pointed to his being in control of his agency and volition.

*There's a lot of obligations but it's **nothing I can't do**, handle, you know. **I have to handle it. I don't really want to not do it.***

His account points to his being driven by intention as a result of an informed choice guided by faith. It was not something easy however none of these seemed to deter him.

Both **Hakeem** and **Zul's** account of how they negotiate aspects of prayers in Islam are also reflective of the other participant's views with regard to prayers. These accounts again pointed to the role of agency and volition in the young Muslims' sensemaking and meaning-making and their consciousness of the need to achieve *istiqamah*. Even though performing prayers is one of the five pillars of faith in Islam and is a matter of daily worship, the participants' accounts of how they had to adapt and navigate this central faith requirement suggest their practice of '*ijtihad*' and allude to a need to go the way of *istiqamah*.

The following is **Hakeem's** account:

*Replacement prayers in Islam is not a problem because each culture defers from one to another, for example, some people have to work in prayer time so they would have to pray in another time...but praying in mosque on the fixed time of each prayer is better...I do feel sad sometimes but this is life and we just have to get through it.*

**Hakeem's** use of an example of work hours clashing with the fixed prayer time highlighted how he made sense of the need to be realistic and take into account situation of the new environment. While he acknowledged that performing prayer under ideal situations is best, his sensemaking helped him understand the need to accept and make the best of situations. It is "life" in a new environment that calls for adaptation and new ways of thinking. It is of continuity in striving and moving forward when he said "*we just have to get through it*". It suggests that restrictive conditions should not be a barrier but rather one should strive to

overcome it.

Similar sentiments were also expressed by **Zul** with regard to having to frequently miss the Friday congregational prayers at the local mosque due to school and distance.

*Friday prayers I do it at home during Maghrib time. It feels **weird** because in my country, I pray all the time. It is weird that I don't get to pray in a mosque on a Friday. I do feel **guilty**, but **Islam does not force us to pray on a Friday. Allah knows better.***

However, in contrast to Hakeem who takes a more pragmatic view of the situation, Zul describes it as weird and of having guilty feelings. It suggests that for Zul, there seems to be an element of discomfort for not being able to do what is required by his faith. The word 'guilty' suggests some amount of anguish that he grapples with and how important this aspect is to him. In Zul's case, the influence of his religious school background helped him make sense of his situation and rationalize that *Allah* is all-knowing and all-forgiving of his current situation, and would not fault him for missing out on his prayers. By doing so, it also appears to contribute to his well-being.

Assigning meaning via the faith framework is also evident when **Zul** describes the content of his prayers.

*Usually when I pray, I will ask for forgiveness and guidance from Allah and that **he will make things easy for me.***

It suggests that there are situations that are challenging for him but his faith and awareness of *Allah* is ever present, and that as long as he keeps to *Allah's* ways, he will be alright.

For **Imran**, adapting his prayer schedule was also something he accepted well and rationalizes it as part and parcel of being away from his home country.

*Well, Friday, depends if I have something important or not. Sometimes Friday time prayer is on lunch time, so **I can go for prayers and come back**. So sometimes I can't, which is **mostly**.*

*Well, it's strange at first, but **if you think about it**, we are living away from [...<sup>117</sup>], so it's **alright**. I can still pray at home.*

**Imran**'s account alluded to him striving to do the right thing, though it was not something he could meet as often as he would like. This is reflected in his taking time out from lunch and rushing back and forth from school to mosque and back. When it was not possible to do so, his obligations towards prayers was performed at home.

**Imran**'s description of how he continued to participate in sport activities during *Ramadan* (fasting month) is also reflective of his acceptance and understanding that fasting is mandatory practice, and should not be used as an excuse to withdraw from sports activities.

*I still participate in sports during Ramadan. It is not something I can't do. Just sometimes it's difficult, but **if you know** you have to fast, then that's fine.*

In saying "if you know", suggests that for Imran, awareness of what he needs to do is also accompanied by preparations. The preparation that Imran alludes to is the mental preparation that is required to see him through his participation in sports while also fasting at the same time. This mental preparation alludes to a consciousness of *Allah* and that as long as he is mindful that his actions are done with the intention to please *Allah*, there is no reason why he cannot handle both tasks.

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<sup>117</sup> Name of country omitted to protect identity of participant

Through a reflective comparison with her peers, **Hanna** highlighted the need to be conscious of one's Creator and to always 'think' and acknowledge the source of their existence.

*We pray everyday, we pray five times a day...ya it helps because you know how, like my friends, teenagers, they don't do anything. They like go out to the malls, **they don't stop to think who is doing this for me, and all that kind of thing.***

For **Hanna**, to pray means to reflect on her existence and one way she could show her gratitude to her Creator. She described it as a 'normal' process, alluding to it as one that is undertaken naturally, and with full conviction, that is, of her *syahadah*.

*Ya because it's just, **it kind of brings your mind to, to who is doing this for you, and then aren't you gonna thank someone for like having me in this world, all that stuff?***

Hanna's reflective response captures the complexity and nuances of her sensemaking and meaning-making that points to her being mindful of the existence of God. It suggests that these questions are constantly in her mind and the answers affirmed without a doubt, reflecting her outlook that is always conscious of *Allah*, and her efforts to keep to the right path, a core element of *istiqamah*.

#### **6.2.2.2 Modesty/Headscarf**

In **Aleesya's** case, she strives to achieve *istiqamah* is reflected in her keeping to pants or jeans at picnics with her friends even though her friends are all in shorts.

*Ahh they wear like shorts, I don't wear shorts. **If we're going to a picnic, I will wear pants, jeans.***

By doing so, it is about her need to maintain her modesty as required by her faith and upbringing. It is suggestive of her being conscious of *Allah's* presence and wanting to do things right. Her actions reflect a personal choice as Aleesya is the only Muslim girl in her group of friends, and being at a picnic, away from family and community, no one is likely to find out if she did not.

However, this also seems to contrast with Aleesya's views on the headscarf (she says she does not wear the headscarf as she thinks it will lead to people calling her a terrorist). In this sense then, why is it that the jeans are okay for Aleesya but not the headscarf? I explore this further under the theme of "normalizing self" in Section 7.4. This point illustrates the uniqueness of each individual's journey in striving for *istiqamah*. For Aleesya, her striving for *istiqamah* is a process that is full of complexity and tensions. Her accounts suggest the subtle ways she holds on to her religious identity in her attempts to feel included. This could perhaps be due to her growing up for the most part in the UK, away from her home country, and her minimal close association with Muslim peers.<sup>118</sup>

### 6.2.2.3 Projecting the good image of Islam

Seeing and treating people as equals was **Sureen's** way of expressing *istiqamah*. In Islam, everyone is equal in *Allah's* eyes and no one has the right to judge or condemn another's actions except *Allah*.

*And I'm a person that don't judge people, I don't stereotype. I'm trying to see the good in people, and so I found them to be equal. As people I like them equally.*

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<sup>118</sup> Aleesya mentioned in my prolonged engagement with her that even in the UK, the school that she attended had only a small number of Muslim students with her being the only one in her class.

By talking an approach of seeing others in a positive light, what Sureen is reflecting here are the three *a priori* goals of the second dimension in Ramadan's (2009) model of applied *ijtihad*. It is suggestive of her need to do things right and to respect that everyone is a creation of *Allah* and her way of bearing witness to her faith through a constant consciousness of *Allah*.

Therefore, in arriving at this superordinate theme, as the verbatim quotes indicated, each participant made attempts to fit in and adapt in various ways yet held on steadfastly to their faith and beliefs. In doing so, it involves thinking that was guided by understanding, critical reasoning and intellect. Even when faced with challenging situations, the participants described their acts of adaptation that suggest a consciousness and evaluation of the situation. They then navigate their acts intentionally towards achieving *istiqamah*, regardless of whether it is in the social or personal realm. Therefore their intentional acts help them navigate through unconventional situations reflecting a continuous striving for win-win solutions.

### **6.3 Locating a sense of belonging**

Being in a foreign country and having an image that precedes one's presence can be a frightening and isolating experience for many and for my participants, they are no exception. Their narratives imply they carry the weight of prejudices and stereotypes of them as Muslims. Thus the theme "locating a sense of belonging" emerged as a supporting theme to the superordinate theme of "striving for *istiqamah*". This theme alludes to the participants'

ways of finding acceptance in their social interactions with peers while also preserving their Islamic values and practices.

Their narratives reflect their efforts to find ways to belong, and be part of the mainstream activities even though some of these clashes with what their faith allow. When such situations arise, they negotiate their way to fit into both worlds, yet ensuring the boundaries are in place and observed. While they each had to traverse different pathways to belonging, their goal was always to find a way to belong and to achieve well-being. For some, it was a journey of discovery, where the challenges along the way pushed them into various modes of adaptation to locate that sense of belonging. A few had to grapple with the shock of a complete change of environment before they could locate a sense of belonging and some experienced bouts of momentary belonging before it culminated in a more complete form. This reflects each participant's individual situations and ways of being. In locating a sense of belonging, they achieved this either through personal efforts or as a result of others' acceptance of them.

### **6.3.1 Locating a sense of belonging via personal efforts**

In **Fariz's** account, he talked about how he adapted "really fast" and suggested that his subsequent acquisition of the English language helped him to locate a sense of belonging at school.

*I was here when I was real **young**, so I **adapted quite fast**...probably my first year, only had some language difficulties...**adapt to primary school quite fast, really fast**, and ermm I was probably fluent in English by then...*

In his later schooling years, he adopted an approach of being a “joker” at school, and forming in-groups as a way to locate a sense of belonging.

*I'm quite talkative, in terms of like in class, and stuff, and with my friends, you know...Ya, ya, quite a lot...ya, quite a **joker**, ya. (Fariz)*

It indicated that through being the centre of attention in class and among friends, it gave him a network of connections that feeds into his sense of belonging at school. This sense of belonging feeds into his well-being as he finds them enjoyable, fun and entertaining, an environment that is made up of lots of talk, jokes and laughter. This means he was never alone at school.

*...they are also **talkative**, they are also **jokers**, **they make jokes** you know, **they are fun** to be around, you know, quite **fun** to be around, quite **entertaining** you know...all that kind of stuff.*

Even within the in-group memberships, Fariz maintains his extrovert personality and seems to revel in it. It suggests he derives a huge amount of joy from this group of friends.

*Ermm my immediate friends, which is the group I usually hangs out with, are mostly Asian friends, which are like two Chinese, one Korean, and one half Kiwi, half Japanese...who I hang out with on weekends, sometimes we go places, those kinds of things...it's **fun**, it's **enjoyable**, **entertaining** sometimes, you know. Err sometimes they're crazy, like they do weird stuff, you know, but ermm yes, **pretty, pretty good**, you know.*

This multicultural mix of in-group membership also gave Fariz a shared sense of understanding and destiny.

*...that's also why I hang out with quite a multicultural group...they understand different cultures you know.*

*...I have this friends from Sudan as well, which is some of them speak Arabic really fluent, they're really hard core Christians kind of thing, but they do understand Islam. They do ask me questions. It's not really a debate you know. I'll ask them about this, and they'll ask me about that, and why we are different, why do we do this? We do talk about it.*

It was also the same for **Hanna**.

*This group I hang out with, they're the ones who are very, very strong Christians, like we share religion like kind of aspects...*

*..She's Romanian...and then I have Indian friends who are non-Muslims, and then I have...Ohh I have like Vietnamese, ermm ya, it's really my group of friends, I have 7 countries.*

While she chose to have non-Muslim friends, they were of similar cultural backgrounds and religious values, giving her a sense of belonging in her very big school.

In **Hakeem**'s case, he described what playing football meant to him through reflecting on his past experiences playing football in his home country.

*The reason we all love football is that it gathers people from all kinds of classes around our neighbourhood, the rich and the poor plays together like there is no difference between them. I can still remember my days playing with different colored or poor players, but the beauty of it was that there was not a single racist comment said.*

Football, for Hakeem, gave him a sense of belonging as it not only took away “differences” but put everyone equal. He highlighted how the focus was on the game, not race, skin color or the language a person speaks.

*...because football joined us and that's the beauty of football. They were easy to make friends with. It made me feel great because each time I felt lonely I would just go and play which was awesome. They didn't care where I came from or what language I spoke. If you can play you*

*are welcome, and that felt great.*

He went on to describe how this feeling of belonging is reinforced when he represented his school team in competitions.

*To be honest each time I played football for them in a match, I felt that **honor and commitment** to that school and I used to feel like **I'm fighting for it in the pitch.***

His use of the metaphor 'honor and a commitment' suggests a sense of deep pride and loyalty.

In **Imran's** case, his sense of belonging was not achieved immediately due to language barriers.

*Well, I didn't talk to anyone. **I just waited for it**...because even if I just stood with people, play sports and all that...took me a while you know, to get their **language**, then start talking and all that.*

He described how lonely and isolated the feeling was in the beginning especially when he was standing among others and no one acknowledged his presence. However, this did not deter him from trying to find his place at school once he overcame the language barrier. Also like all the other male participants, playing football or some form of sports helped Imran locate a sense of belonging at school.

He also described his first encounter of 'morning tea' at school as 'phenomenal' suggesting he found the whole experience as something completely unexpected and that his sense of belonging could have been momentarily disoriented.

*So at morning tea, I ate my lunch, and then at lunch, when it came to lunch time, everyone sits together at lunch time, so I had no food (laughs). It's like, what are people doing here?...ya that morning tea was kind of strange a bit (laughs).*

The use of the adjective 'strange' further suggests that Imran finds the event unusual and affecting his sense of belonging. By choosing to highlight this event, it suggests that for Imran, this most probably serves as a wake-up call to him that he is no longer on familiar grounds, thus locating a sense of belonging would be critical to his schooling journey in Christchurch. While this was achieved subsequently via his participation in football and other social events around school, it was his overcoming the language barrier that was crucial for this success. Imran is also the international student that has been the longest in Christchurch (7 years).

**Hanna's** account suggested her sense of belonging was a culmination of numerous 'momentary' sense of belonging that built up over a period of time.

*It was a bit **hard** because nobody really knew what Islam is, and they all like kind of stared, and some of the teachers asked, so ermm it was a bit of a **challenge** to go to school.*

It was unlike some of the other participants where their sense of belonging grew progressively over time. For her, it was a 'shocking' start made complicated by the fact she was eleven when her family migrated to Christchurch, an age where she had to also negotiate gender issues important in Islam. Her wearing of the headscarf coupled with her very 'English' look seemed to have caused further confusion among her classmates and teachers who likely had difficulties reconciling an image of a "white" girl wearing a headscarf. This early experience which she described as 'hard' suggested a feeling of isolation that had a

lasting impact and was evident in her preoccupation with the headscarf issue in the whole interview.

This very 'hard' situation that Hanna described was reinforced by her use of the word 'challenge'.

*Well, my classmates weren't very eh, **didn't really like me**, for who I am, like why **I wear a scarf**, and then I had a friend that came from my country, but they made friends with her, better than me, because **she fit in without wearing a scarf, but I was with a scarf**, so it was just very **hard** for me to be in the group.*

*If they ask your friend beside you a question, and then they answer, but they skip you, and then they move on to the other girl, so they like **single you out**.*

By saying that no one knew what Islam was, it suggests Hanna's lonely and isolated position at school where people 'stared' and teachers' action 'singled' her out made what Hanna described repeatedly as 'hard'. It suggests that she had a 'hard' time trying to 'breakthrough' and include herself among her peers at school.

Her feelings of hurt and isolation were also evident in the following:

*I was, **I was left alone for few weeks**. For the first few weeks I was there, I was just, sometimes **I was just in the toilet** for the whole time because (laughs)...**you know how the awkward feeling of just left out?** It was just so sad for me, but **once I think back, it was just so stupid**. **Awww why am I in the toilet?***

In the following, Hanna talked about her acts of retrospection, suggesting the engagement of sense of agency and volition to overcome her 'isolated' position. It showed her persistence.

*In intermediate it was hard to make friends. But **I had to just try** to make friends. **I kept talking** to them, and then **I went around asking questions** you know, like where is this, where is that, so **I just had to try** to make friends, so ya.*

Hanna's difficult situation followed much of her intermediate days and ironically, as she herself pointed out, it was only on her last day of school (graduation from intermediate) that people stopped staring.

*I was **happy** because I wore a scarf that day...**nobody looked** at me that day, just everyone was having fun you know. I think they were all distracted...they just played the game with me ya...so **they didn't really look at me as much**.*

The happiness that she described pointed to her finally locating a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging, while momentary, had an epiphanic quality that was crucial to Hanna's development of confidence and well-being.

Hanna's accounts also point to a consciousness of past and new experiences in her encounters with peers and teachers over her headscarf at both intermediate and at high school.

***I wore a scarf here but I felt kind of left out**...scared to talk to me, so I, **somedays I wore scarf, somedays I didn't**.*

This soul searching and ambivalent feelings suggests a struggle with trying to locate a sense of belonging, where she associated the appearance of the scarf as a barrier to belonging, and

its absence as facilitating belonging.

The same feelings of ambivalence resurfaced at high school where Hanna continued to struggle with associating the scarf as an item that excluded her from the rest of her peers, indicating her need of not wanting to be left out.

*At lunch time, there were few moments where guys would just...come up and like call me terrorist.*

*So I didn't want to wear a scarf, because I know I would feel left out...*

Whilst the 'scarf factor' seems to be significant and intrusive, it also suggests that Hanna only sees it as a barrier to her sense of belonging. Never once was the scarf mentioned from a negative point of view. It was always about 'herself'.

*Everyday I walk to school, it just, I just put in my mind, what am I gonna do today? How am I gonna embarrass myself again, that kind of thing?*

That the scarf was always an item of positive value to Hanna was evident in her following account. Again, ultimately, it seems to suggest that it was about "I".

*...but my mother told me to wear a scarf, like a confidence booster that kind of thing. After I wore a scarf, it was just **amazing** what I can do. Just like ignore people's reactions. If they do call me a terrorist, like in my previous school, I would do, I would complain*

What Hanna was experiencing suggests the ambivalence over the tension between faith and contextual belonging. It appears that Hanna seems to be moving toward resolution of this tension by bringing together the scarf (a symbol of her faith) and her Muslim identity.

For **Sureen**, she locates her sense of belonging via her studies and active involvement in sports. This was evident in her comparison of her schooling experiences at two different schools in Christchurch. Her sense of belonging was anchored to how motivated she felt with regard to her studies.

*There are people here that will help you do well. If everyone around you is doing well, then you'll be **motivated** to keep up with them.*

*They were the **same kind of people, with the same kind of mindset, and views, and values**, so I just relate to them more. As people, I enjoyed there more.*

Her narratives also suggested that being in an all-girls school made her active involvement in sports and interaction with others easier thus facilitating a sense of belonging.

*Ahh you name it, I play it. I play mainly basketball and soccer, and I play badminton. I do running, cross-country, athletics. Honestly, **I do every sport that you can imagine**. I'm a big fan. I like being active.*

*...especially if they are a **female, cos it makes life a lot easier**.*

This was also the same with **Zul** who talked about how his command of the English language improved through his intentional acts of seeking out friends who were good in their studies and also played sports.

*In the school, **I like to be friends with those who are good in their studies and also sporty**. It gave me lots of benefits. **I improved my English** slowly even though it was quite bad.*

*I like playing **soccer** with my friends at school as we **interact and joke** when playing. It also made our **friendship closer** as most of my friends like to play soccer too and **we got really close**.*

*We **talked a lot**, when playing soccer, in class, before going home too. At home, we **continue** to chat on Facebook. Sometimes during the holidays I invite them to my house and we **played together**.*

*During break time, **I will play at the field**. There are **many students** there. From there I get to make friends with those from other classes.*

It suggests that language helped him locate a sense of belonging at school and contributed to his well-being and sense of self as his description of his interactions with peers in class, out of class, playing sports or online seem to suggest.

**Zul** further illustrated how this closeness with his friends gave him a sense of belonging, describing it through his emphasis on the word ‘together’.

*At school, we did many activities **together**. In class, we learned **together**. For group work, we had **lots of discussions**. Outside of class, we played soccer. I feel really happy when I get to play with friends. **I am happy and they are happy too**.*

He even took further steps to embrace the language of his peers to further consolidate his sense of belonging with them.

*I am not selective with friends. I am friends with everybody. Kiwis, Asians, Islander, Maoris. I also **learn their language as we got closer**. I have a few close friends and till today, we are still friends.*

For **Aleesya**, she described her experience at high school as an easy path, attributing it to the fact she does not wear the headscarf as compared to her friends that get frequently teased as ‘terrorists’. Her choice of words: fit in, positive and accepted all alluded to her successfully locating a sense of belonging at school. While she said it was the act of others that made her

feel accepted, what underlies here is the fact she does not wear the headscarf that makes this acceptance easy and very forthcoming. Her hanging out with friends during lunch time is also one way she located her sense of belonging which she described as an extremely happy event.

*I initially thought it would be hard to fit in at first in a brand new school, **but when people were positive towards me I felt like I was accepted.***

*I do look forward to going to school every morning simply because I enjoy this school. I also love my group of friends that I hang out with at lunch time. We would always laugh and joke*

### **6.3.2 Locating a sense of belonging via the actions of others**

The participants' accounts also suggested that their sense of belonging was derived not only from their own efforts to fit in but from the effort of others to include them.

**Hakeem** talked about how he felt when his teachers started taking note of him and his religion.

*...but when **they started learning about me and my religion**, they would come and congrats me and my family during Eid and **I didn't feel like they were racist by any way.***

Hakeem's account suggested the efforts taken by others to make him feel included gave him a sense of belonging that was profound and deep as was evident from his social media message after his family left Christchurch.

*I miss everything, the way they made me feel, like Christchurch is **home** to me, their **friendship**, their **trust** and just the whole experience of living in New Zealand and Christchurch, to be honest, for me, is unforgettable...**If I could choose one wish, I would choose going back to Christchurch.***

The use of the metaphor “home” suggests Hakeem viewed his whole schooling experience in Christchurch as a place full of warmth and love. The consequence of him feeling such a strong sense of belonging to Christchurch and his school was in part contributed by the acts of others.

In **Imran’s** narratives too, his account suggested that with time, and acquisition of English language skills, and the frequent interactions through sports and camping, he finally found his ‘place’ at school.

*I mean some of the challenges we were doing during camping...err helping each other over the wall or something...kind of lifting someone or like that. You have to be **close** with someone you trust, so **he will lift you up**, or something like that.*

In a way, Imran’s choice of words, “trust’ and “lifting” to describe his experience camping with his classmates seem to point to the formation of a close bond as a result of the activities. This bond is further strengthened in reciprocative ways during social encounters is indicated below.

***I just feel that they really try their best to make me join and have fun together.***

*We’ve known each other for a while so ya. Even with barbeques and all that, they normally have sausages, just pork whatever. **They have something else for me.***

Like Hakeem and Imran who also derived a sense of belonging as a result of other people’s actions, **Hanna** also experienced the same. Her descriptions and choice of words “single me out” again suggests that the issue was always about her sense of belonging, of wanting to be included.

**Hanna:**

*I have a few Kiwi friends, they don't really, they don't **single me out**, like how people used to in intermediate school. They, **they're just your friends because of who you are, how you think and how you do your work and all that.***

**Hanna's** persistence in needing to locate a sense of belonging was again evident when she contrasted herself with a Kiwi classmate, describing the other girl as a "normal Kiwi teenager" and herself as "all covered up".

*So ermm I have a friend who is sitting next to me and she's inside, just like a **normal teenager**, a Kiwi teenager, make up and how she dresses all Kiwi. And **she doesn't really mind talking to me, who is all covered up and all that, so ya I feel good with a person who is more like that, they don't mind talking to anyone who's just a person right?... so ya.***

She had said that she was just "a person" and while it sounds as if she sought confirmation from me when she asked "right?", it was more of an emphasis that she was just a person, the same as her "normal Kiwi" classmate once stripped of her scarf.

At another time, **Hanna's** description of her participation in the group game, *Mafia*<sup>119</sup> suggested the good feeling that she had was a result of her being placed in the "innocents" group.

*...but they kind of kill me first, don't know why, but they did (laughs)...so ya that was kind of my good experience.*

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<sup>119</sup> Also known as werewolf game, the game is modelled after a conflict between an informed minority (mafia) and an uninformed majority (the innocents). Each player is secretly assigned a role linked to one of the teams and there are two alternating phases – "night" where the mafia may "murder" an "innocent" secretly and in the "day" surviving players debate the identities of the Mafias and vote to eliminate a suspect. The game continues until all of the mafia has been eliminated or until the mafia outnumber the innocents.

This alluded to the possibility that Hanna had entertained thoughts that she had expected the class teacher to make her a 'Mafia'. Subsequently the act of her classmates eliminating her as a suspect further reinforced her sense of happiness, again giving her that momentary sense of belonging.

She also described her elation at being asked to share some information about Islam by her social studies teacher.

*...and the whole period, I was talking about my religion. It was kind of weird, but it was also nice so like I let out everything to everyone, so ya.*

She talked about the contradiction in her feelings, between weird and nice. Her feeling weird suggests Hanna trying to get use to the new way she is being looked at, from being ridiculed as a 'terrorist' for wearing a scarf to being the centre of attention in a positive light now. Her use of the phrase 'let out everything to everyone' seems to point to an overflowing of emotions that has been suppressed for a long while. By 'letting out' it also suggests that Hanna could have been feeling 'under sieged' for a period of time as a consequence of her past experiences with regard to her use of the headscarf at school.

Meanwhile **Zul** described how his teacher had cried as a result of his failure to write.

*The teacher tried to get me to write but I did not say a word. She tried so hard to help me and then she cried.*

*When I meet them outside class, they will acknowledge me. Sometimes they even play soccer with us.*

Zul's account here seems to suggest that his overall sense of belonging and pride at his school was a result of the sincerity of his teacher towards his learning progress. The other teachers' acknowledgement of him out of class and at times joining them for soccer also suggest that Zul's sense of belonging at school was derived partly from feeling accepted by others around him.

Having a best friend at school also seems to help reinforce **Aleesya's** sense of belonging.

*She's very understanding and caring. She's also one of those rare people who are non-judgmental. She had seen me pray before and she described it as interesting, and asked to explain the process step-by-step.*

In describing her best friend as 'rare' and 'non-judgmental', it suggests that this perception arise out of Aleesya being conscious of the other Muslim students' experiences with racism and discrimination at school, and her own fears of experiencing it. There is also a sense of pride when her best friend took an interest in wanting to know more after watching her pray. Prayers are very personal acts and to have her best friend showing an interest in what she was doing probably helped made Aleesya feel very accepted.

**Aleesya** further described how she always shares food with her best friend among other things.

*We'd take selfies, talk about school, boys, share each other's food, meet up with other people. I always feel happy around her, her positive vibes are contagious.*

This act of sharing suggests something that is liked by both or the splitting of a portion of food into two similar portions. This indicates a kind of closeness and common bond that helps give her a sense of belonging at school as it creates a very personal meaning for Aleesya.

#### **6.4 Normalizing self**

The theme ‘normalizing self’ supports the superordinate theme of ‘striving for *istiqamah*’ and complements the theme of ‘locating a sense of belonging’. This theme alludes to the intentional acts of consciousness by the participants to ‘normalize’ themselves and the situations they encounter in attempts to locate a sense of belonging. The term ‘normal’ appears persistently in the participants’ narratives and in variations. For some like Imran, he used the term ‘strange’ in place of ‘normal’ while Hanna used ‘awkward’. However it alluded to the same intention of wanting to ‘normalize self’. The participants’ construction of ‘normal’ is almost always used in comparison with their construction of ‘different’. In this sense, all the participants do not seem to view themselves as different from their non-Muslim peers yet by doing so they also project an awareness of being exactly that.

In **Fariz’s** account, he projected three ways of ‘normalizing self’. He saw his study schedule as ‘normal’ and he also projected a form of ‘normalizing self’ when he downplayed his Muslim-ness at school. He also saw his ‘Western-ness’ as a form of ‘normalizing self’.

*Just ermm wake up, go to school, I come round 8.30am, school starts, I come home from school around 2.30pm, and I come here, to university library, and I study for like sometimes, from 5 – 10pm, or 4.30 to 10.30pm like that. I study six hours a day...I have tutoring with my brother on*

*Mondays, Wednesdays I'm with another person. That's from Mondays to Thursdays, and Fridays, I have off, and Saturdays and Sundays I have work. **Then just back to normal.***

By describing his daily study schedule as a 'normal' event, it seems to suggest that for Fariz, who has a refugee background, a dedicated focus on studies is 'normal' as it is the route to future success. It also indicates that he does not view his actions as extraordinary but merely what anyone in his situation would adopt.

A strong indication that he tries to blend into the school scene with as little demands as possible is when he said the following with regard to prayer room facility at his school:

*In my school, I don't know. I don't think there's really anything available. **I never ask for anything.***

By taking an approach of not asking for anything, where 'anything' here refers to his needs as a Muslim student, it alludes to Fariz's attempt to have a 'normal' student presence at school, similar to his non-Muslim peers. By not asking for anything, it suggests that Fariz does not want any differences or special needs to be highlighted (such as prayer room, ablution facilities, or time off for prayers) indicating his approach of 'normalizing self' at school.

In describing how his other Muslim friends view him as 'Westernised', Fariz used the metaphor of "*culture shock*" to illustrate how displaced he would feel if he were to return to his home country now.

*They think that I am quite Westernised or something cos I've been here quite a long time, but if I was the person that's ermm just came recently, you know, I would be you know, massive **culture shock**, you know.*

In doing so, he seems to be projecting a motivation to construct an identity of ‘normal’ that is aligned to his Western peers.

Fariz’s account of being a fan of *Shortland Street*<sup>120</sup> and discussing it with his friends at school is also suggestive of his need to ‘normalize self’ and be part of the conversation, emphasized by his “until now”.

*I watch **Shortland Street** like I don’t miss an episode. Until now.*

The values projected on *Shortland Street* are a clash with Islam’s, but for Fariz to find such fascination with it suggests his ways of being Western without it being real in his everyday life. In a way, it ‘normalizes’ his existence with his peers but like the television drama itself, is not a reality for him.

In **Hakeem**’s account, his attempts to ‘normalize’ himself can be seen in how he took up rugby even though football was his favourite game.

*Most of them like rugby, so you know, **I just go with my friends.***

It suggests that playing rugby was not only important but a way for him to be one of the ‘boys’. It ‘normalizes’ him when he is part of the fraternity.

**Hakeem**’s account also indicated how he downplayed his Muslim-ness at school when he saw no need to abstain from sports during the fasting month of Ramadan, but to go about it as usual. In this sense, what is usual to him is reflective of his ways of ‘normalizing self’

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<sup>120</sup> Shortland Street is New Zealand’s long-running prime time soap opera. It is a television drama that generally all Kiwis are aware of.

at school.

*Even in high school right now, I play sports, go to PE classes, **everything** [discussion on Ramadan].*

The emphasis that Hakeem puts on “everything” indicates a clear intention on Hakeem’s part, a decision that most likely came about as a result of critical evaluation and reasoning. In this sense, the “everything” here infers to Hakeem’s act of not only continuing his active involvement in sports during Ramadan but any other activities that are required as long as they are within the permissible parameters of his faith. It points to his intention to ‘normalize’ self.

Acting ‘normal’ and keeping to the requirements of his faith when at social functions was **Imran**’s way of ‘normalizing self’.

*I mean they drink and all that, but I don’t, **so just normal**. Just drink own juice. They normally have that.*

‘Normal’ for Imran was about being his usual self, and what he thinks is the best alternative in his management of his social affairs. Similarly, he also described it as ‘strange’ with regard to his morning tea experience and about not being able to pray the way he used to back home.

*Well, it’s **strange** at first... [discussion on prayers, not being able to pray at scheduled time]  
...ya that morning tea was kind of **strange** a bit...*

This further suggests that for Imran, there is a need to ‘normalize self’ in an unfamiliar and new environment if his sense of belonging is to be developed and sustained.

The theme ‘normalizing self’ appears in **Hanna**’s narratives in multiple forms. While she sometimes alternate between the use of the term ‘normal’ with other terms like ‘awkward’, in essence her actions seem to suggest an effort to ‘normalize self’ as a way to fit in and belong.

*...it just comes to you normally, it doesn't matter if I'm at the movies with friends, I would tell them I have to do my prayers, I have to do, and they don't really mind...*

*I think I feel better having prayers, like if I stop being Muslim and turn to Christianity, I think I would still have to do prayers, **because it's just normal.***

For **Hanna**, it suggests that the act of praying is what makes her normal.

In managing others’ perception of her headscarf, **Hanna** had also insisted that she needed to “*just be myself*”, alluding to a self that intentionally chooses to remain the ‘same self’.

*But in high school now, I'm wearing a scarf throughout, because I know if I wear the scarf, nobody would, I mean, they would ask questions, but **I would just be myself.***

In this sense, to remain the ‘same self’ suggests a form of ‘normalizing self’ for Hanna.

At her later stages of schooling in high school, **Hanna** transitioned into having a strong sense of self in facing the various reaction to her ‘Whiteness’ and her headscarf.

*...but in like the malls and all that, they, the other Muslims also stare, because you are White and they look at you, why are you wearing a scarf? Are you trying to make fun of Muslims, that kind of thing. So if they ask me, I would tell them I'm not really Kiwi you know...I'll just tell them **it doesn't matter** what race you are, or where you are from, just, if you're a Muslim,*

*you're a Muslim, it doesn't matter where you come from.*

Her use of the phrase “*it doesn't matter*” alluded to her wanting to be seen as a ‘normal’ Muslim, a form of ‘normalizing self’.

Hanna’s ways of ‘normalizing self’ is also apparent on gender issues particularly around swimming.

*I don't mind if it's girls and girls, but if it's girls and boys, I just opt out, so I just sit next to the pool, and they don't mind.*

By saying that her classmates and teachers do not mind her opting out of swimming, what Hanna is suggesting here is that her act is one that is sanctioned by all. It does not set her out as different from the rest, but allows her to remain her ‘normal self’, which is the self that is similar to her peers, but needing to observe religious guidelines on gender relations.

She further described how wearing a *burqini*<sup>121</sup> actually makes her feel awkward, a choice of word that suggests her fear of ‘all eyes on her’.

*No, not the burqini. I feel awkward in a burqini.*

Instead of the *burqini* facilitating her inclusion into swimming, her rejection of the *burqini* suggests that her focus veers more to ‘normalizing self’ than to drawing attention to the differences between her and her peers.

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<sup>121</sup> An adapted modest type of swimming togs for Muslim women

However, in contrast to the *burqini*, Hanna displayed a different form of ‘normalizing self’ when this time she maintained that wearing the headscarf is a form of safety for her as opposed to her peers that wear short skirts.

*It’s very good (laughs). It’s better than, I feel myself, it’s better than me wearing like you know, how some girls wear short skirts, like really short? They pull up the skirts like really short? It’s better than me doing that and people honking at me so I think that’s much safer for me ya.*

This suggests that for Hanna, the protective factor of the scarf helps facilitate her effort to ‘normalize self’ despite it being a marker of difference. This is also a reflection of the complex and intricate ways she made sense of her encounters at school.

Her need to avoid being the centre of attention further indicate Hanna’s attempts to ‘normalize self’ among her peers.

*Ya (laughs)...but I try not to make a big fuss in front of everyone, because it’s just, I don’t wanna have myself in the middle of the room, **just kind of myself**... (laughs)*

By not making a fuss and drawing attention to herself, it suggests that this helps take away the reality that Hanna is a Muslim. This removal of attention helps her maintain her ‘normal self’.

In describing how she felt in class, Hanna talked about maintaining her ‘normal self’ despite believing that her classmates did not like her.

*...once when I first came I was a new gal, we did this Math thing and I didn’t know what to do, so this girl refused to tell me what to do. I don’t know whether it’s my looks, my hair, my clothing, so I just like **let it be. I just want them to accept me**, not trying to put up another person, right, **just***

*myself, and they didn't really like me.*

It was also how she felt with regard to prayer room allocation.

*...but I can't really change it, I mean...but I can't really ask them to make a prayer room for Muslims right?*

The need to 'normalize self' again appears in Hanna's narratives on how she manages peer pressure and challenges at school. The tensions around having to accept the challenging circumstances were 'normalized' with the solution of seeking comfort among friends.

*But I just have to live with it really...and maybe complain to other people? (laughs)*

*Ya, you just talk to someone and then they make you feel better really...like your best friend, ya.*

While it does not appear to make objective sense, these tensions that the scarf is 'good' and the *burqini* is 'bad', but it suggests that this is Hanna's own customized way of adaptation, which is what makes sense to her.

In her choice of friends too, Hannah's account suggested her attempts to 'normalize self' when she opted for a wide mix of friends as a way of avoiding accentuating her 'Muslimness'.

*I don't really like to hang out with just my own religion because it's just, you just show everyone else it's a Muslim clique kind of thing...it's just not, it's not correct to just hang out with the Muslim society ya.*

A persistent need to be ‘normal’ yet not ‘different’ was also what Hanna’s account suggested when she talked about her rights to wearing a headscarf at school.

*...there was a point where I asked my parents why don't they ever let you wear color like pink, yellow? And they said it's just not fair for other people who wants to wear more than what they're already wearing...so I was thinking about that ya, **why are we greater than other people who are not wearing scarfs?** So that kind of makes sense to me and that was kind of good...*

In insisting that she should not be given that extra privilege, it points to her attempts to be seen as normal as possible in her scarf.

For **Sureen**, her ‘normal self’ is when she is part of mainstream activities at school without her religious background being brought into the discussion.

*Ohh completely **normal**. I never had any problems [as a Muslim].*

*I just felt like any other student, go to school, learn, go home, do homework, all the **boring** stuff.*

By saying that she never had any problem at school, it suggests that like her non-Muslim peers, Sureen’s existence at school as a student is merely that, with religious duties and obligations kept separate and a matter of personal adaptation. The use of the word ‘boring’ to describe school, where ‘boring’ alludes to something unexciting or repetitive, also suggests a form of ‘normal’.

This 'normal' construct is also used by **Sureen** to equate herself as similar to her peers.

*I've bene here for such a long time that you could probably say that I am quite a lot like them.*

*In the sense that I grew up with all of everything that they also grew up with, so I never had any difficulty with English, with their culture or values, all that stuff. So I'm...**I always feel completely normal.***

*It's good, it's **normal**. I don't really see race.*

Sureen's account here suggests that she is fully aware that the culture and values of her non-Muslim peers are not consistent with her Islamic culture and values. However, it is not an issue for her as she knows how to manage this clash and she also does not allow it to impede on her progress at school. It is normal for her as the normal here implies 'familiarity'. Her account of Muslims now being a common feature in New Zealand further attests to her 'normal' equals 'familiarity' construct, that is, Muslims' presence in New Zealand today is a normal occurrence.

*...but now I mean, you see us **everywhere**.*

While the headscarf is an issue of contention for Hanna, and not even mentioned in Sureen's case, for Aleesya, avoidance of it seems to be a tool for her to 'normalize self'.

**Aleesya:**

***I don't wear the scarf** so they don't know that I'm a Muslim, but my friends, those that wears the scarf at school, people call them **terrorist, all sorts of names**.*

*I heard my friends calling them that. My Kiwi friends, they call those that wear the scarf, **terrorist**. That is why I don't wear the scarf.*

**Aleesya**'s construction of the scarf as a marker of difference seems to originate from her fear of being called a terrorist thus her refusal to wear the scarf suggests an attempt to 'normalize self' among her peers.

*She probably felt embarrassed because she got picked on for being **different**.*

While she rationalized her decision not to wear the headscarf as being due to her fear of being called a terrorist (as she saw happened to her friends), her explanation of what it means to be left out seems to point to a deeper fear of being rejected on account of being different.

*I think no one likes the feeling of being left out. Being left out means someone is **different** from the rest and may have a **hard time fitting in**. Human beings are very social creatures so it makes sense why we would want to have **connections by having things in common with other people**.*

Emphasizing that having things in common with others is what leads to connections and a sense of inclusion seems to suggest a fear of isolation more than a fear of being called a terrorist. The strong need to have things in common with her peers point to Aleesya's sensemaking of what is 'normal' and acceptable at school.

This is further evident when **Aleesya** explained her fear of being judged for wearing the Muslim swim togs.

*I have swimming togs that covers the **Auraah**<sup>122</sup> but I probably wouldn't wear it at school because people might judge me.*

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<sup>122</sup> The part of the body that is exposed and must be covered when girls and boys reach puberty.

In **Zul**'s case, he said the following:

*I will say **never mind** when they don't understand what I'm saying.*

His attempt at 'normalizing self' is captured through his use of the term 'never mind'. In this sense, Zul's account of 'playing it down' when things are complicated suggest efforts to 'normalize self' in the eyes of his peers.

For Zul, 'normal' for him is when he does not get picked on or bullied.

*I don't feel odd as everyone treats me like **normal**. I don't get bullied. So I don't feel odd.*

## **6.5 Summary and Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to explore how young Muslims experience school in Christchurch, New Zealand: their sensemaking and the meanings they assign to their experience. The findings reported in this chapter indicated that the way this group of research participants experience school is always guided by the goal of doing things the right way, that is, to strive towards *istiqamah*. It suggests that for these participants, the influence of faith in their life is ever constant and reflect the monotheistic worldview of Islam. This superordinate theme is supported by two other themes of locating a sense of belonging and normalizing self.

The emergence of the two themes contributes to the central argument of this thesis that young Muslims engage in a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social encounters at school in a secular environment. These two themes demonstrate that young Muslims exercise self-agency and self-volition, and are testament to what I

mentioned earlier<sup>123</sup> that young Muslims have a personal and intimate understanding of what they go through (at school) and draws from their faith as guidance.

In arriving at the superordinate theme and supporting themes, and even after finalizing them, I regularly re-read the transcripts closely to adjust my input. In doing so, I was engaged in a dialogue with the data as I pondered on what appears to ‘speak’ to me. In this sense, I was guided by what seemed important to me as I continued to re-read the transcripts. For example, contrary to Zine (1997) and Ali’s (2012) study, the issue of headscarf was not something my participants wanted to dwell on, thus my own lack of emphasis on it. Even with Hanna, the headscarf was part of her journey to as a Muslim; what she wanted very much was to be seen as a person, just like her peers. The data suggests that it was not a focus they wanted.

Smith’s (2003) argument that there is no actual separation between the stages of analysis and writing up holds true for me. My analysis of the data expanded during the writing phase and there were many instances I made amendments and re-checking the data as the data continued to speak to me. The whole process reflected what van Manen (2012) described as the reflective process of writing. As I write, I reflected, and I went back to the transcripts again and again to secure the assurance that I had not overlooked anything and that what I have is relevant.

I am aware that no interpretation is ever complete, and that no explication is ever final. However, I am satisfied that I have tried my best to be reflective of the participants’ experiences and my own reflections on the meanings of those experiences. In the next

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<sup>123</sup> See Chapter 4, Section 4.13

chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings to extant literature. The findings are also taken up for consideration on the centrality of meaning-making for school social work practice with young Muslims.

## 7. Chapter Seven - Discussion

Clients and their experiences are the realities that social work has to deal with;  
they make social work what it is.  
(Malcolm Payne, 2005, p.3)

### 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six I presented the findings of this study. The resulting themes were the superordinate theme of “striving for *istiqamah*”, and two supporting themes of “locating a sense of belonging” and “normalizing self”. The discussion in this chapter surrounds the three illuminated themes, and their relation to the research questions and the implications for social work practice and policies. I begin the chapter with a summary of the key findings and a recap of the literature review findings that were presented in Chapter Two. I then move on to the discussion of the key findings presented in Chapter Six and their link to extant literature. This will be followed by the consideration of the extent to which the findings address the research questions. I close the chapter with the discussion on the implications for school social work practice and policies. The limitations of this study and recommendations for future research will be in Chapter Eight along with my reflections on the research process.

The main research question for this study was concerned with how young Muslims experience school, that is, in relation to the question of their being and belonging. The sub-questions were concerned with exploring how young Muslims make sense of their experiences at school, the meanings they assign to them, and their coping strategies. As such, the themes deemed relevant for discussion based on the key findings and research questions are: striving for *istiqamah* - everyday acts of *ijtihad*, locating a sense of belonging – pathways to inclusion and well-being, and normalizing self – braving encounters of difference. The

broader implication for social work practice and policies as a result of the key themes is an inclusive model of school social work practice with young Western Muslims based on the 4A's model.

## **7.2 Overall summary of key findings**

The themes highlighted in Chapter Six are central to the experiences of the seven participants of this study. Supplemented by my reflections on the prolonged engagement with the participants in Chapter Five, they provide significant understanding and answers to the major research question that framed this study: **What is the lived experience of Muslim students in Christchurch, New Zealand?**

This study documented both the positive and negative aspects of my participants' experience of the New Zealand schooling system. I consider these personal insights into their sensemaking and meaning-making of these encounters as a meaningful approach as it prioritizes how young Muslims adopt meaning and intention into their everyday lives and helps us relate to their subjectivity on a more personal level. All of them placed high emphasis on maintaining aspects of their religious identity in their schooling pursuits; while they were conscious of keeping the two areas separate to a degree, aspects of adaptation were practised whenever possible. All of them showed a strong desire to 'tick all the boxes' and a strong hold on their agency and volition, reflecting a strong need to strike a balance that is controlled by internal and external factors that surrounds their schooling experience. The definitive factor that drives the young Muslims' agency and volition in doing so is their acts of everyday *ijtihad* to achieve *istiqamah*: the need to do things right. Similar to the findings in Collins et al. (2011), the findings in this study indicated that none of the participants in this

study can be defined solely by their religious affiliations, neither, though, can they be understood apart from how their faith and life experiences shaped their worldviews and decision-making.

In the literature review in chapter two, I established that the lack of literature on young (Western) Muslims from a social work perspective is also a reflection of the lack of literature on school social work worldwide. This present study intends to add to the growing body of school social work literature, particularly with young Western Muslims. Through the counter-story narratives approach, the literature review established positive coping themes that show young Muslims' courageous awakening, and the construction of multiple selves and fluid identities in relation to the stressors they experience at school.

These stressors were attributed to themes that reflect Islamophobia, the textbook Muslims phenomenon, and guilty by association. These themes were elucidated from narratives of young Muslims at school worldwide. They show how young Muslims perceive these negative encounters and reveal the dynamics of their coping mechanism and resilience. The conclusion from the literature review was that young Western Muslims negotiate fundamental aspects of their faith and adapt to what is norm so as to sustain their authentic self, yet remain relevant to peers and the wider community.

Findings of this present study indicate that these repertoires of experiences and ways of coping are also reflected in my participants though there are degrees of variance as to how they each experience it. It also confirms that their ways of being and belonging is similar to the conclusion of the literature review. As such, the findings of this present study do not point to major concerns except an indication that the well-being and sense of inclusion of young

Muslims seemed to increase when the level of diversity in school increases. The use of a small sample size facilitated the idiographic and prolonged engagement approach resulting in rich data, a key requirement of the IPA approach. This close scrutiny of how young Muslims experience schooling in Christchurch allowed some very personal accounts not possible in other qualitative approaches or with a larger sample size.

Aside from the key findings, what stood out was how the overall perception participants feel as a result of their schooling experience in Christchurch. Their narratives challenge the prevailing perception that South Island as predominantly white necessarily translates into an overall negative experience for young Muslims at school. In fact, as one participant<sup>124</sup> put it so profoundly, Christchurch is home to him and that if he has one wish, it is to be home in Christchurch again. This is despite the ‘pockets’ of negative experiences he and the rest of the participants encounter at school. Whether this is just the perception of a small sample or that the geographical location is not reflective of wider South Island hegemonic dynamics can be further investigated in future research. It may reflect what Ward (2012) pointed out, that New Zealanders’ inclusive attitude towards ethnic minorities stop at interjection of food and entertainment, and that as long as these young Muslims have not entered the job market, they will likely be welcomed especially international students.

Similar to the counter story narratives approach, the prioritization of my participants’ voices via a focus on their everyday *ijtihad* and studied through the adapted IPA method influenced by Ramadanian philosophies allow me to appreciate the positive ways they take control of their encounters guided by a worldview that Orientalism construction paints as destructive and violent. *Ijtihad* can serve as a method of legal reformation for Muslim communities in the

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<sup>124</sup> This international student has left Christchurch

West as it is grounded in the Quran and Sunnah and is the pathway for the understanding of the essence of the Muslim consciousness in the context of change (Delic, 2006). As Ramadan (2010c) explained, any Muslim will need a basic knowledge of Islam<sup>125</sup>.

However, interpretation of Quran is not something everyone can do. It is only through worshipping acts (prayers) that one gets close to the spiritual text as the heart is moved by what one reads (Ramadan, 2010c). There are no intermediaries in between this mode of consciousness; this Muslim consciousness is a direct relationship with *Allah* and guided by their own intellectual readings and what their heart tells them, they make decisions. It is what Ramadan (2014) described as the three things that will indicate a Muslim's sense of religiosity: their reverence of Allah, respect and care for human beings, and their approach to the Revealed Texts. Without the application of an adapted IPA method, access to "experience close" (Shaw, 2011) would not be possible. Ramadan's philosophies not only provide Western Muslims with a framework for participation in the West, but insist that they draw on themselves and their contextualization of their re-reading of the Revealed Texts (Ramadan, 2004).

For this group of young Muslims, their striving for *istiqamah* is essentially what drives all their attempts in managing their belonging at school as a Muslim in a secular environment. It reflects their ways of being via efforts to 'tick all the boxes' in both their school life and personal life. The participants' act of striving for *istiqamah* signifies an important aspect of the Muslim consciousness (Ramadan, 2010a; 2014) and is what inspires them. This confirms that their faith is what inspires and drives their actions (Ramadan, 2004). In the Quran, to

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<sup>125</sup> The need for prayers, how to pray, what are the meanings of the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith

have Muslim consciousness is to cultivate *taqwa*, that is, consciousness of *Allah* the Creator at all times, and a reminder to Muslims to live life as commanded in the Quran (Ross-Sheriff & Husain, 2004).

They persistently made effort to belong at school and also derive an overall sense of belonging from the efforts of others to include them. Through a strategy of “normalizing self”, they achieve a sense of integration that allows them to retain their religious identity at the same time. This effort to ‘normalize’ themselves among peers is a result of them being conscious of how others view them yet seeking acceptance with conditions attached. It reflects their way of being religious actors in the public space (Roy, 2007). Their acts of “normalizing self” are at times geared towards minimizing the impact of their Muslim-ness and at other times to highlight it. Each participant’s ways of “normalizing self” were different but their acts were all intended to make their presence as “normal” as possible, yet retaining the religious aspects of their identity. It is their being at school; this being accepts that school is *dar al-shahada*, their space of testimony (Ramadan, 1999).

### **7.3 Striving for istiqamah- acts of everyday ijihad**

*Istiqamah* as explained in earlier chapters is about ‘heading in the right direction’ and this was a notable intention on the part of all the participants. The use of terms such as ‘lines’, ‘barriers’, ‘not passing test’, ‘can’t’, ‘don’t want’, and ‘distance’ that permeate their narratives and understood from the context of their experience all point to this underlying theme of needing to keep to the right path. To be conscious of *Allah* is to be mindful of doing things right, as my participants’ actions seem to exude. Their persistence demonstrates agency and volition (Wagner, 1983), what Mead (1934) described as the idea of a self and the

element of human consciousness that drives action and interaction. Similarly, the sensemaking theory views the act of sensemaking as always contingent on others and never in isolation (Weick, 1995). In this sense, I would add on that in Muslims' sensemaking, while there are aspects of interactivity and interdependency, there is another more critical element that oversees all that they do, which is their cognizance of their Creator.

For my participants, their moving to a new country and environment, with the exception of one who came when she was one (Sureen), their being 'caliphs' of Islam in a non-Muslim environment that is dominated by secular and open values are experiences that make them confront the new reality and a push factor that reminds them to hold on to the values of doing things right as commanded in the Quran. As Fariz said, the challenges and temptations that they face in their new environment are viewed as a 'test' of their faith, not as a burden, a view shared by the other participants. In facing this 'test' then, their acts of striving for *istiqamah* are not only strengthened but becomes as Hanna described it, "*it just comes to you normally...because it's just normal*"<sup>126</sup>. It becomes their being; their *al-fitra*.

Understood within Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad*, a person's *al-fitra* is tied to the *ad-din*, one of the two global conceptions of the Islamic way, the other being *al-maslahah* (the principle of common good). The concept of *ad-din* contains the principles on how a Muslim bears witness to his/her faith as faithful adherents of the concepts of life and death as stated in the two Revealed Texts. Thus their striving for *istiqamah* was not just about them being Muslims; it was their living out the *syahadah*, of the need to do things right as sanctioned by their faith, albeit adapted to fit into the contemporary Western settings. It reflects my participants "living the way"; the *as-shariah* (Ramadan, 2009, p.137). This concurs with

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<sup>126</sup> Hanna – See Chapter Six, Section 6.4

Naqvi-Sherazee's (2008) description of young Western Muslims as neo-revivalists; they engage in a process of re-negotiation with the intention of sustaining a model of religiosity that can fit in with the host society. In Stuart and Ward's (2011) study, they termed it as an act of young Muslims balancing the two worlds: of personal and social.

The sensemaking theory posits that the presence of a social context is always prevalent in sensemaking, where the sensemaker draws on rules and expectations as guidelines for a certain standard of behaviour (Weick, 1995). Ramadan (2004) termed it an approach of reconciliation, of adopting what is good, just, and humane from the West into their lives and ways of thinking. This approach of reconciliation as Ramadan suggested, can be achieved via a model of applied *ijtihad*, where the major concerns of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah* are considered in light of the context/situation one is in (Ramadan, 2010b).

Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* as elaborated in Chapter Three flows vertically downwards from the two main global conceptions of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah*, where the protection of the three *a-priori* goals of life, nature, and peace forms the second dimension that serve to remind Muslims to reflect deeply and justify their acts and behaviours (Ramadan, 2009) as occupants of this Universe created by *Allah*. While the second dimension is about ethical elaboration, the third dimension of this model is about how Muslims should act both as an individual and also as a member of society. In short, the second dimension is structured towards guiding Muslims to contemplate how to support the two main global conceptions and is more personal while the third dimension is action-oriented and more social. In this regard, the approach of reconciliation is reflected in my participants' narratives regardless of whether they were in the social or private realm.

The emphasis by my participants on religiosity is also what Roy (2004) described as the process of re-Islamization, born out of a need to express explicitly the Muslim identity when in a Western context. Therefore, the participants' act of striving for *istiqamah* also concurred with Ramadan's (2004) description of young Muslims in the West defining their Muslim identity through faithfulness to the principles of Islam, yet very much a part of the Western societies, reflecting the identity construction component in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In persistently wanting to live up to their goals of *istiqamah*, they draw cues from their environment (Weick, 1995) and then weigh their options, distinguishing between what is relevant and applicable from the Islamic perspective, and letting go of what is not (Roy, 2004). It concurs with Ammerman's (2003) suggestion that the construction of a religious identity is a matter of choice. In Ali's (2012) study, her participants referred to their decision to don the hijab as a matter of personal choice, and not one that was forced on them.

The idea that faith was actively embraced and positively projected by young Muslims in the West was also one of the key findings in the LSC (2007) UK study with Muslim youths. In Javed's (2013) study on high school Muslim students in New York, he had similar findings for one group of participant whom he described as outgoing and comfortable with the American way of life. However, in the other group, he found that their strict observance of aspects of religiosity made it difficult for them to feel included in the American school system and hostile toward others, including fellow Muslim students, whom they accused of being 'secret Muslims' (p.216). None of such narratives appear in the data.

In fact, my participants were all very respectful of non-Muslims. For example, Sureen said she views everyone as equals (in describing her classmates that indulged in alcohol and drugs use) and Zul who witnessed a couple kissing at school excused their behaviour with the

explanation “because they are not Muslims”. Meanwhile Hanna, the girl most overwhelmed with the attention others put on her headscarf, was never angry but felt hurt and confused that she was constantly targeted over her headscarf. All of them negotiated their space in the secular environment, and found ways to participate as active citizens without compromising or letting go of their religious identity, always mindful of the need to do things the right way.

This is evident in how they negotiated their socialization with non-Muslim peers at school while participating in both school and extra-curricular activities (swimming, participation in sports or attending birthday parties). Their road to *istiqamah* is not a blind following, but as the Quran commanded: “to think”. In Islam, mankind is bestowed with the freedom to choose whether to lead a good life or an evil life (Ross-Sherif & Husain, 2004). To think is to perform *ijtihad* (Ramadan, 2010b) that is, to critically evaluate the context and decide which way to go, and for the participants, it was clear that they strived to get things right. Taken together, my participants project Ramadan’s (2004) definition of a Muslim identity that draws upon the four elements<sup>127</sup> and also the balancing of the second and third dimension of Ramadan’s (2009) model of applied *ijtihad* as they strive to protect the *a priori* goals in support of the higher objectives of *ad-din* and *al-maslahah*.

The LSC (2007) study also highlighted young Muslims as having ‘remarkable moral clarity’ (p.16) in their thinking. Similarly for my participants, their narratives demonstrate how they self-impose ‘lines, barriers, or distance’ in their social interactions. These point to a salient feature of their ways of socializing; that any aspects that clash with their faith and values

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<sup>127</sup> First: faith, practice and spirituality; Second: understanding of Islamic sources and Quran with a contextual re-reading ; Three: Education and transmission ; Fourth: action and participation – external behavior that shows how one behaves towards others and their faith

were clearly non-negotiable. For a few of them, it was a kind of ‘abstention within acceptance’. For example, Imran is a frequent presence at social events but stays away from alcohol or non-halal food. My prolonged engagement with him on social media also revealed that in most of the photos from these events, there always seems to be a ‘coincidental’ gap whenever a female classmate is positioned next to him. For him to be able to handle the peer pressure at these events on a regular basis and yet remain who he is, is a commendable feat many sixteen year olds find difficult to accomplish. It shows the strength of his Muslim consciousness, one that is mindful of the *ad-din* and his responsibility towards his own being and his actions as a member of society within the third dimension of Ramadan’s (2009) model of applied *ijtihad*.

Striving for *istiqamah* also appeared in the personal realm despite this being a private space. This is a reflection of their Muslim identity that can be explained within the second dimension of Ramadan’s (2009) model of applied *ijtihad*; one that is constantly contemplative and mindful of the higher objectives. It is also a reflection of Ramadan’s concept of historicity (2010b) where one’s constant and strong need of *Allah* is what helps them find meaning in life. Therefore their actions in this realm are very much driven by self-regulation. In other words, what they do or how they act in their personal realm is about how they serve *Allah* and His commands. One of the most significant aspects of this is with regard to how the participants navigate their prayer obligations.

Fulfilling prayer obligations is not just a matter of routine Muslims perform day in and day out. The obligation to pray is part of the five pillars of Islam and Muslims are expected to pray as a way for them to reflect, evaluate, and be reminded of the presence of *Allah*. As

Hanna<sup>128</sup> said, to pray is to have a “date” with *Allah* and be grateful to their Creator. The participant’s reflections on what prayers actually means to them in an environment where Islam is not the dominant religion exhibit how they retain their Muslim consciousness in order to draw a sense of meaning, order and place (King & Roeser, 2009; Graafland, Mazereeuw & Yahia, 2006) as it engages them in an on-going process of *ijtihad*.

However, as the participants narratives<sup>129</sup> imply, they were all able to evaluate and rationalize on their situation and made adaptations to their prayer schedule with regard to this one very critical aspect of their being Muslim. All of the participants except for Sureen<sup>130</sup> mentioned that being able to fulfil their prayers at school is not an issue for them, citing the principle of replacement prayers and that *Allah* is all-knowing of their situation. They not only showed realistic expectations of the context that they are in, but their narratives also suggest that they do not view restrictive conditions as a barrier to their being Muslim. Rather, they strive to overcome it by performing replacement prayers at home or whenever and wherever possible as in the case of Hanna (while out with friends at the mall). This suggests a type of “integration of intimacies” (Ramadan, 2010a, p.67) as they each contemplate on their personal responsibilities and how to belong in this secular environment.

Hakeem saw his situation as something one needs to get through while Imran mentioned the need to think where they are now. Zul said Islam does not force them to pray on a Friday and that *Allah* knows better. In a way, their intentionality of striving for *istiqamah* reflects what

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<sup>128</sup> Hanna – derived from one of the conversations during prolonged engagement

<sup>129</sup> All of the participants mention how they adapt their prayers schedule except for Sureen. This will be explored further in Section 7.4 – Normalizing self.

<sup>130</sup> Sureen is the only participant that did not talk about her religious needs or identity in a direct manner

Ramadan (2010b) explained as a human being's natural need to manage one's natural, individual and/or collective contradictions in their quest for peace. The ultimate goal is to stay on the right path as this will ensure peace. Zine (2001) argued that it is a phenomenon that seems more prevalent when Muslims move to a non-Muslim country. This prevalence understood through Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad* is also a reflection of Muslims' consciousness of the *ad-din* and the *al-maslahah* in their quest to live life the *as-shariah* way; a result of their contemplation and reverence for *Allah's* universe and creation in their new environment (Ramadan, 2009) and their way of being as a projection of the *syahadah*.

Therefore, in the case of my participants, while they declare their religious identity by making it known to friends and teachers that there are limits to their active participation at social events or at school, their religious needs at school were always downplayed. For Hanna who wears the Muslim headscarf, having a high visibility and higher risks of harassment did not deter her from continuously using the headscarf once she managed to overcome her fears of being targeted. This declaration of religious identity is an act of intentionality meant to help them achieve *istiqamah*, what Stuart and Ward (2011) termed as balancing acts in their study.

This present study showed that regardless of time and space, striving for *istiqamah* is an ongoing process. Through acts of retrospection, their past amplifies their present action as they continuously refer to past experiences and compare them to present, rationalize and make adaptations and concessions. It suggests that what matters most to this group of young Muslims is the need to keep to the right track. For those participants of migrant backgrounds, future plans featured in their narratives. Sureen for example, talks of going to medical school while Fariz wants to be an engineer. Hanna meanwhile wants to do nursing. For the

international students, they wanted to collect as much good memories as possible in their time in Christchurch. As Imran puts it, “take as many opportunities as you can, don’t miss anything...as long as it is within the barriers of Islam”.

It is as what Ramadan (2004) advocated for Western Muslims, of the need for participation and contribution that goes beyond mere settlement or integration. This means a model of exemplary behaviour towards others and their faith that is consistent with the teachings of Islam (Ramadan, 2004). This is what their striving for *istiqamah* is all about. It reflects their observance of the two main higher objectives in Ramadan’s (2010b) model of applied *ijtihad*, of the *ad-din* (global conception of life and death) and the *al-maslahah* (principles of common good). Doing so is an essential part of their being Muslim and is a first and foremost consideration in all that they do. Therefore, for the participants in this present study, being at school in a secular environment helped them reaffirm their religiosity. It concurred with Zine’s (2001) study that being in a secular educational environment reinforces their evaluation of their religious obligations and how best they can meet them within the confines of schooling, yet at the same time does not impose on others. This also sits well with the Islamic concept of *insan al-kamil* (the perfect one) and reflects what the findings suggested: of the participants striving for *istiqamah* not only in their social interactions but also when it involves personal desires and needs.

Analysed from the element of ‘focused on and by extracted cues’ in the sensemaking theory, it suggests that the participant’s focus on keeping to the central tenets of Islam helps guide them reconcile past events and current situation to arrive at a vantage point; they show extreme moral clarity as seen in the participants in the LSC (2007) study. The centrality of faith in everything that they do also correlates with the findings in Stuart and Ward’s (2011)

study where the young Muslims strong sense of religiosity was identified as a contributing factor to their satisfactory level of acculturation to wider New Zealand society. In fact, what stood out from Stuart and Ward's study were the steps the young Muslims took to maintain a sense of who they were. The balance that they injected into their activities was not to the extent they had to compromise their own principles, a pattern reflected in my participants too.

#### **7.4 Locating a sense of belonging: pathways to inclusion and well-being**

In the literature review, I demonstrated the prevalence of studies on young Muslims revealing themes of isolation and marginalization (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Ahmad, 2007; Saeed, 2007; Klocker & Salabay, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009). While the participants of this present study indicated a subtle sense of 'othering' and sporadic encounters of Islamophobia, their deeper objective of wanting to achieve an overall goal of *istiqamah* sees them making efforts to locate a sense of belonging at school. The participants portrayed two ways this was achieved. One way was through their concerted personal efforts that again reflect their hold on agency and volition, and the other was through their making sense of other's acceptance of them. From the sensemaking perspective, taking steps to manage disruptions (Weick, 1995) and assign meaning is a way of coping (Park, 2010, 2010a) and for the participants, locating a sense of belonging was clearly an important need.

The Ramadanian concept of "integration of intimacies" (Ramadan, 2010a, p.67) for Western Muslims stressed that an individual's decision-making is guided by a sense of intimate awareness and an acknowledgement of one's dependency on *Allah*. This means, in their quest to belong in the West, Muslims need to strike a successful integration of aspects of their faith

with an active participation in society. They should also reflect on the questions of “Where are we? Who are we? In what way do we want to belong?” (Ramadan, 2004, p.63). In this sense, my participants employed various strategies in their quest to locate their sense of belonging at school amidst encounters of difference. Contrary to popular discourse that paints Muslims as anti-social and of possessing a lifestyle incompatible with Western values, my participants’ persistent efforts to find themselves a ‘space’ among their peers demonstrated a style of thinking parallel to Ramadan’s (2010b) philosophy of pluralism and framework of reconciliation (2013) as explained in the theoretical framework.

The personal efforts they put in and the way they perceive other’s efforts to include them are acts of contemplation and reflection that suggests my participants view themselves as ‘us’ versus their internal selves and not a stand of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (Ramadan, 2010a). In Baumeister’s terms, it is a representation of the young Muslims four basic needs for meaning<sup>131</sup>, which if satisfied, gives them a deep sense of satisfaction (Baumeister, 1991). Understood from Ramadan’s (2010b) model of applied *ijtihad*, aside from the two main higher objectives, there are three conceptions of ethics (of inner being, the being, and societies and groups) that Ramadan says a Muslim need to reflect deeply on.

In this sense, the active ways the participants in this study sought to locate a sense of belonging at school that contributes to their sense of well-being, but at the same time does not impose itself on others demonstrate the complex and intricate ways they engage in the

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<sup>131</sup> First: **Purpose** in activities geared towards longer term achievements; **Value or justification**: people’s motivation to feel that their actions are right, justifiable, and good regardless of whether it was motivated by self-interest or financial gains. People generally avoid the negative value; **Efficacy**: people’s need to believe that they have some control over events; **Self-worth**: people’s need to make sense of their lives in a way that enables them to feel they have positive value (Baumeister, 1991).

process of critical reasoning and evaluation in their overall goals to achieve *istiqamah*. Particularly, they demonstrate a sense of purpose and value in striving to do things right and have a positive presence at school. While they believe that their fate is determined by *Allah*, and it is part of the five pillars of faith to believe in the concept of life and death as prescribed in the Revealed Texts (*Qadar and Qadak*), this is not to be confused with the notion of freedom in Islam that asks that Muslims use their mind and intelligence in determining their actions and behaviours. My participants' sense of efficacy and self-worth is certainly a reflection of the *a priori* goals of the essence of the Islamic message in Ramadan's model of applied *ijtihad*.

For example, while the majority of the participants found language a barrier to effective communication, especially in the early days, this only serves to push them to find ways to feel included at school. This was contrary to Alkharusi's (2013) findings on female Arab Muslim students at New Zealand universities where they were found to be reluctant to engage with the host culture. My participants achieve this mostly through sports like playing football or rugby, or formed in-groups membership based on what was important and of interest, such as befriending other students that showed the same level of commitment to their studies or shared similar religious or cultural values. As pointed out by Mansouri (2013), the schooling environment is one of the many multi-layered contexts that impact on the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic dynamics of migrant youths' journey towards cultural identity formation. For the young Muslims in this present study, the complex and intricate ways each of them engaged in to feel included at school was no different. For my participants, their educational experience in Christchurch schools is one that makes them view their space as *dar al-shahada*. The personal relationships and social activities that they each pursued shaped their schooling experiences.

A salient feature of my participants' style of communication was the heavy use of social media and online games with their peers to keep communication channels open and fluid (24/7). This was also my mode of prolonged engagement with them as my participants led busy and active lives. While this means that my access to them was relatively easy, and made the research process fluid, I also saw that this was a platform that they were most at ease in as they engaged frequently and continuously with their peers out of school hours. While this can at times lead to negative experiences, though I did not see this happen during the research period, overall, this was seen as helping them strengthen their friendships with peers and contributing further to them locating a strong sense of belonging. This use of technology is synonymous with their ways of being in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The global virtual Muslim *ummah* (community) is active 24 hours a day.

Findings also reinforce the utility of sports and extra-curricular activities in promoting a sense of cohesion and belonging in an environment of difference. These activities also facilitated my participants' grasp of the English language that in return supported their self-confidence and trust in others. For example, Hakeem talked about how his sense of trust developed when he finally understood what his friends were talking about instead of his earlier perception that they were talking about him. By immersing themselves in all these activities, it gave them a sense of belonging at school, and keeps them away from seeing themselves as a minority or second class citizen in the West (Ramadan, 2010a).

The pervasive theme of ‘headscarf’ that permeates many female Muslims experience in the West did not escape this study and appeared in three<sup>132</sup> distinct ways in this present study. For one participant, Hanna, it was a journey of discovery as she grappled with the discrimination and isolation due to her donning the headscarf at school, but ultimately being able to reconcile her initial experience of exclusion with the scarf (re)constructed as a protective item and also an education tool. Hanna persisted in making her presence acknowledged and included at school through constantly asking questions and various attempts at befriending her classmates.

This parallels Harris and Roose’s (2013) study where young Muslim girls in *hijab* persist in being active in civic life as a way to change public’s negative perception of them. By assigning a positive meaning to her headscarf, Hanna’s actions reflect Baumeister’s (1991) argument that people use meaning framework in positive ways (Baumeister, 1991) and Ramadan’s suggestion that Western Muslims need to have a “deep knowledge of one’s environment” (Ramadan, 2004, p. 166) in order to achieve successful integration. In similar ways, Ali’s (2012) study found that the use of *hijab*<sup>133</sup> by female Muslim students was a way to help them affirm their Muslim identity and cope positively.

Hanna’s reaction was contrary to the findings in Girling, Liu, and Ward’s (2010) study on how Asians cope with discrimination in New Zealand. Their study found that Asians cope with prejudice and discrimination levelled at them through pushing it out of their mind or

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<sup>132</sup> One viewed the headscarf as boosting her self-confidence, another saw it as inviting harassment, while another makes no mention of it at all. This will be discussed under the theme ‘normalizing self’.

<sup>133</sup> Some authors use the term headscarf and hijab interchangeably. The hijab or the headscarf is used by female Muslims to cover their hair as outward signs of modesty. In this study, I refer to it as headscarf so as to retain the term used by my participants. For me, both serve the same purpose.

treating the experience with little importance. For my participants, it was more a case of positive reactive identity formation (Ramadan, 2010a). They re-construct their negative experiences into a positive construction. In this way, their sensemaking assigned a positive value into their meaning-making, what Baumeister (1991) explained as the preferred goal in people's search for meaning. Their reasons may be plausible, but it helps them cope positively.

While all the participants mentioned that they did not limit their circle of friends, what was a common factor was their selection of friends that shared similar values and background to them as they stood out visibly different from the dominant groups at school. This was in the case of Fariz, Hakeem, Hanna and Sureen. This parallels another of Ali's (2012) findings that the comfort these young students derive from having friends of similar background was a critical factor in facilitating their adjustment to school and sense of belonging. Ali (2012) pointed out that for some of her participants, what was important was not that the girls had to be on the same page with regard to religiosity, but of a friendship that allowed for a certain understanding of values and beliefs to flourish.

As Ali (2012) puts it, "these friends were people who intimately understood what it was like, for example, to be Muslim, Afghani, or Pakistani" (p.129), a sentiment echoed by one of my participant (Fariz). Their diverse but similar backgrounds helped the girls in Ali's study affirm their religious and cultural identities, as evident from my participant's narratives too. This particular way of belonging was also what was found in Ahmad's (2007) study on Muslim women at British universities. Her participants navigate the tensions they encounter in the highly secularized and clubbing scene at universities through forming close friendships with people that are religiously or culturally similar.

The acknowledgement of their faith or religious identity by their peers or teachers was seen as being able to give the participants a profound sense of satisfaction and strong sense of belonging. This contributed to them feeling accepted and as one of the participants described it, it allowed her to “let out” everything, suggesting that for young Muslims at school, the burden of their identity and weight of public scrutiny and stereotype are real and constant in their psyche. By getting them to share aspects of their faith with the class during lessons not only gave them a sense of importance but also suggest a level of personal touch that meant a lot to the participants. Similarly, simple acts such as acceptance of someone in a headscarf sitting next to them or in group games, sharing of food, or even asking for further explanations on prayers also led to the participants feeling immensely accepted.

While forming close friendships (such as having a best friend) are ways that contributes to one’s well-being, it was the particular ways that my participants made sense of these friendships that gave them a sense of belonging. It reflected how personal they took their encounters with others and the impact it had on them. In Peek’s (2005) study, she found that her participants felt less pressure to conform when they were able to cultivate friendships with peers that had similar backgrounds and religious values. It was also a way for them to construct, reinforce and reaffirm their strong emerging religious identity (Peek, 2005).

The contrasting effect can be seen when the ‘textbook Muslim’ phenomenon appears in classroom pedagogy or in social contexts. For example, Fariz shared his frustration with regard to one of his teachers that had generalized on honour killings and peers that persisted in stereotyping all Muslims as terrorists. It is the ‘guilty by association’ phenomenon that creates resentment in many young Muslims at school as pointed out in the literature review

(Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009). However, as discussed earlier, my participants' ways of sensemaking and meaning-making buffers the impact of their negative experience and help them cope, similar to the effect of the narratives of personal courage approach in Abo-Zena et al.,'s (2009) study. In Bahiss's (2008) study on how international Muslim women adjust to university in New Zealand, it was found that the international students regard their process of adjustment as a 'gentle shift' rather than a 'huge shift'. In this sense, Hanna's various momentary 'pockets of belonging' can be viewed as a gradual shift too. This was in the case of the *Mafia* game that the class indulged in and how she 'let out' when asked to share her knowledge on Islam in her social studies class.

The importance of supporting students to gain a sense of belonging at school was Stewart's (2010) contention when she argued that New Zealand's schools have a complex mix of egalitarian culture, individualism and tolerance for ambiguity, making it extremely challenging for newcomers unfamiliar with these unique pedagogical practices. This also perhaps explains why Sureen seems to have a relatively easier pathway in feeling included at school. Sureen came when she was one and commented that she might as well be born here as she feels completely normal studying in Christchurch. In particular, out of all thirteen<sup>134</sup> Muslim students that I interviewed in this research process, Sureen was the only one that never discussed her religious needs and identity directly. I explore further this aspect of Sureen's identity in the next section on 'normalizing self'.

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<sup>134</sup> Please note my explanations on how a few of these participants dropped out from the research process in Chapter Four. The figure thirteen includes the two girls that moved out of Christchurch after the February 2011 earthquake and the pilot interview.

While this study's findings has shown is the positive ways this group of young Muslims cope with encounters of difference and discrimination, it is equally important to discuss these negative experiences so as to provide a base of understanding where these negative encounters originated from and in what form it manifested. These have implication for policies and practice. It is social workers professional duty to collect information in ways that expose facts useful for all sides (Rodwell, 1998) as highlighted earlier in Chapter Three (Section 3.4.1).

**Fariz** talked about how he felt a particular male teacher had targeted him and a few Afghani students as an act of anti-Muslims in comparison to the treatment given to Korean students. Meanwhile **Hanna** described being sidelined by a teacher as an act of singling her out. **Aleesya** talked about teachers that seemed racists in dealing with particular students especially female students in headscarves. **Hakeem** narrated how racist his intermediate school principal was over his mother parking longer than 5 minutes in the drop off zone<sup>135</sup>. It was a small issue that could have been easily settled by verbal notice but the principal had called the police to speak to his mother. He hinted at the phenomenon of 'white privilege' when he said that it was because the principal could see from her office window that it was a Muslim woman in a headscarf. He said if it was a white Kiwi woman, he was sure the police would not have been called. He also said they did not complain further to their embassy as they were of the perception that the principal and the police knew each other well or else why would the police act so fast on such a small parking issue?

At another time, in the same school, **Hakeem** was randomly called an "Al-Qaeda" by a White Kiwi boy. When I asked if he complained to the school authorities, he said he did not

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<sup>135</sup> This was narrated in my prolonged engagement with him

as he was aware that the boy was a “big personality” at school and that the principal would not dare take action on him. Similarly, a large part of **Hanna**’s experience in school was linked to her Muslim headscarf, rather overwhelmingly at her ‘very white’ intermediate school and sporadically at her more diverse high school.

The above examples of experiences can be understood from acculturation theory where it argued that the attitudes of wider society toward immigrants are generally represented in immigrants’ expression of feelings (Berry, 2005). These representations of encounters of prejudices and discrimination are major stressors that impact on one’s acculturation process and outcomes (Berry, 2005). This study did not use the lens of acculturation theory for analysis as the phenomenological focus is on meanings. However what is to be noted here are topics critical for pedagogy practices and praxis as they impact on a student’s being and belonging at school. I explore this further in the section on implications for broader general practice and policies in Chapter Eight.

Lack of teacher/administrator sensitivity in classroom practice is not a new issue. It is a recurring theme for studies on Western Muslims’ experience at school (Zine, 1997; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Podikunju, 2008; Alitalppo-Niitamo, 2010; Ali, 2012; Javed, 2013; Mirza & Meeto, 2013) or Muslim students experience at Western universities (Ahmad, 2007; Bahiss, 2008; Alkharusi, 2013). In particular, Mansouri and Wood (2008) specifically pointed out in their study that while Arab Muslim students generally find their experience with peers pleasant, the perception was that teachers treated them with some degree of discrimination and prejudice. Muslim girls meanwhile had to deal with harassment due to the *hijab*.

Another common predicament of many Muslims in the West is the phenomenon of “guilty by association” highlighted by Abo-Zena et al.’s (2008) study. This refers to the expectations of teachers at school on young Muslims to explain incidents of September, 11 and the Twin Towers attack, or other acts of extremism committed by individuals elsewhere as if these students can speak on behalf of the perpetrators of the terror acts. The largely Eurocentric influence of Western education and an environment that run counter to the cultural and religious norms of many Muslim students resulted in alienating experiences for many Muslim students (Zine, 1997; Bahiss, 2008). In Gunel’s (2007) study, one of the major findings was that her participants felt most comfortable in their social studies classroom as compared to other classrooms.

Reference to curriculum experience appeared in two of my participants’ narratives, that is, Hanna and Hakeem, and point to how critical it is to acknowledge a young person’s cultural and religious values in classroom and curriculum planning. **Hanna** described her elation at being able to share about Islam while **Hakeem** perceived his teacher’s act of acknowledging him and his family’s celebration of the Muslim New Year as “not racist”. Both experience reinforced their sense of belonging and one can only infer that the opposite effect happens in the absence of such practice. While Ramadan’s ‘space of testimony’ can give young Western Muslims a sound framework of integration into Western societies, on the other hand, school social workers need to play strong advocacy roles to influence education practice and policies. Studies that focused on curriculum experience (Zine, 1997; Gunel, 2007; Ali, 2012) all point to the difference it can made to a student’s sense of belonging when cultural sensibilities are observed. In particular Zine (1997) argued that inclusive schooling practices that reflect the socio-cultural demographics of the school population increases a student’s sense of belonging (Zine, 1997).

The phenomenon of white privilege appears in Hakeem's narratives twice and while this theme rarely appears in direct manner in the various studies on Western Muslims' experience at school or university, I challenge this perspective in that it is a reflection of the 'silent' and 'away from public scrutiny' characteristics of the phenomenon of white privilege (Mujcic & Frijters, 2013; Ayres, 2015) that caused this to escape most young Muslims' narratives in direct manner. This does not mean that they do not carry this perception. White privilege as mentioned earlier refers to the existence of systemic racism that favors people of white heritage even without them asking for it or being aware of it (Ayres, 2015). For example, this can happen in job applications where white applicants unknown to the hiring personnel are given priorities over non-white applicants. As my study explores meaning, I re-visit this aspect in my own participant's narratives and suggest that their worldview of challenges as a 'test' of their faith is the reason why my participants do not talk about this in a direct manner. In this sense, it points to the 'hidden' nature of phenomenology.

In Fariz's account, he talked about how an Asian school counsellor told his brother to "*just study plumbing*" when his brother enquired about a scholarship application to university. Subsequently, Fariz also shared his thoughts on his future where he said thoughts of where he and his family members will be in future and his job prospects are constantly on his mind. This is despite them being citizens of New Zealand. I see this as his indirect way of expressing his awareness of the phenomenon of white privilege. Understanding and managing this is critical to a young person's sense of belonging and well-being at school.

### 7.5 'Normalizing self' – braving encounters of difference

In the literature review, I had pointed out the prevalence of young Muslims adopting multiple and fluid identities (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Khan, 2009; Imam, 2009; Mossalli, 2009; Navqi-Sherazee, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Jasperse, 2009; Stuart & Ward, 2011; Stuart, 2012). This phenomenon also appears with my participants as the findings indicate.

The need to reconstruct or reshape their self-concept and identity was a result of my participants encountering norms and values that decisively influenced how they saw their selves and the situation they are in. Through various strategies that suggested their attempts at normalizing self among their school peers, their approach to schooling is one of a strategy of trying to co-exist with minimal disruption to others. In other words, it is a separation of religion and schooling, something Sureen made very clear when she made no mention of her religious needs and identity at school. Specifically, my participants strategies of 'normalizing self' reflect Ramadan's (2004) argument that Muslims "should not submit to their environment, but on the contrary, once their position is secure, they should be a positive influence within it" (p.73).

In Ali's (2012) study, the theme 'normal' was about young female Muslim's goal of wanting to fit in at school, 'fly under the radar', and control visibility. In particular, the *hijab* issue struck out as a point of contestation between what is perceived as 'normal' dressing in the West and what is not. The 'normal' construct was also implied from the contrasting point of

‘weird’ with regard to how others perceived them as *hijabis*<sup>136</sup> playing lacrosse at sports. The need for Ali’s participant’s to reduce attention on them was also the reason why some of her participants did not request for accommodation of their dietary needs during the fasting month of Ramadan. Some of her participants also saw themselves as ‘normal’ as they did not wear the hijab or do not lead ‘traditional’ lives.

In contrast, my participants’ construct of ‘normal’ appears constantly in various contexts and spaces and contrary to Ali’s (2012) findings, was not dependent on the social environment, demographics or equity policy in their respective schools. This ‘normal’ identity that they adopted was sometimes for the purpose of fitting in, at other times to accentuate their Muslim-ness, while for some it was to reduce their visibility. They reflect a complex mix of goals and the personalized ways they each deal with it in various contexts. The girls reflect a more varied mix of goals as compared to the boys.

**Hanna** for example, grappled with the *hijab* in a journey of discovery. The *hijab* was a piece that hindered her inclusion at intermediate school but was a tool for her to accentuate her Muslim identity at high school and also to educate others about Islam. At the same time that she insists on opting out of swimming due to it being a mix session, she also felt that wearing the *burqini* would only cause her to feel ‘awkward’ and garner attention. In her choice of friends, her goal was to reduce ‘visibility’ by not sticking to a ‘Muslim clique’ in her own words.

**Sureen’s** ‘normal’ was represented by the absence of a direct mention of her religious identity and needs in the interview and the whole period of prolonged engagement. There was

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<sup>136</sup> Muslim girls in hijab

only a hint of it when she said “it would be easier” in reference to being in an all-girls school. For Sureen, normal means equal to her peers in terms of the overall schooling experience.

**Aleesya’s** normal is to reduce visibility. She saw the headscarf as a tool that would hinder her fitting in with her peers at school. Normal for Aleesya is to look non-Muslim in the physical sense. Her not wearing shorts during picnics with friends does not compromise her goal of wanting to fit in as the jeans is a Western article of clothing. Instead it serves to reinforce her wanting to be ‘normal’. Similarly, she views the wearing of the Islamic swimming togs as something that would increase her visibility and be judged by others. In a way, in contrast to Sureen, Aleesya typifies what Ramadan (2010b) explained as the tensions that Western Muslims’ experience as a result of trying to balance the spiritual tension of a faith that requires liberation of the inner self (that is what Aleesya actually want) in facing the everyday peer pressure that surrounds her schooling.

For the boys, their goal was to fit in without compromising their religious identity. **Fariz** watches *Shortland Street*, New Zealand’s longest running prime time soap drama as a way to allow him to contribute to the conversation with friends when at school and secures his ‘one of us’ goal. **Hakeem** plays rugby instead of football so as not to feel left out. For Hakeem, normal means being ‘one of the boys’. This is also reflected in his stand not to skip sports during fasting month. **Imran’s** normal was to have a presence at social events but keeping to the requirements of his faith with regard to alcohol, drugs, and gender relations. For him, to feel ‘strange’ is to be ‘not normal’ as past experiences taught him. **Zul’s** normal is when he is included and is treated as part of the group.

For Muslim youths like Fariz who is not only coloured but Muslim, they live lives constantly being stereotyped or as he said, 'picked on'. This feeling of being part of the fraternity has major implications for his well-being. It is this 'good feeling' that drives his motivation to construct a 'normal' identity within his faith framework as a result of his reflective conversations with self and his deep knowledge of his environment (Ramadan, 2004). People cannot really escape consciousness as they come face to face with the realities of life so they continuously think and question (Ramadan, 2014) as a major part of people's mental activity is focused on other people (Baumeister, 1991).

Seen from another angle, Fariz's integration strategies also points to Mansouri's (2013) argument that migrant youths, particularly second generation migrant youths do not necessarily inherit monolithic or historically continuous cultures. A lot of them often do contest prevailing historical cultural norms that their parents or earlier generations engage in (Mansouri, 2013). They question the relevancy of some of these practices in terms of time and space and often show an appetite for a more malleable identity as my participants seem to project. To assume that they cannot be 'normal' and integrate well with their peers at school on the basis of their religious beliefs is counterproductive as this suggests the 'textbook Muslims' approach of seeing them as homogenous and possessing a common culture.

In normalizing self, my participants expressed this strategy not only where social interactions occurred, but also in personal matters that fall within the schooling context. Where personal needs were concerned, each participant expressed different ways of doing this but what was a common feature was how they all downplayed elements of their religiosity at school. This was evident especially on matters related to prayers, prayer room facilities or time-off for Friday congregational prayers. There was also a common awareness that they are a small

community at school and therefore it was not realistic for them to expect that their needs be addressed. For example, Fariz mentioned that “I never ask for anything”.

However, this is not to be seen as them relegating themselves to second class citizenship as clarified earlier within the Ramadani concept. Seen within Ramadan’s (2010b) model of applied *ijtihad* and his call to Western Muslims to participate not as Muslims but as citizens, it is about acknowledging their responsibilities towards others and the concept of wider justice and fairness for all (Ramadan, 2004). In this sense, their ‘normal’ embodies Ramadan’s (1999) *dar al-shahada*. This means their acts of ‘normalizing self’ are contrary to what host society generally feels towards Muslims; that their religious needs and practices are a challenge to the host culture (Balsano & Sirin, 2007) and neither were they trying to ‘fly under the radar’ like the participants in Ali’s (2012) study.

Being Muslim, for this group, was not just a label, but of needing to act right and normal. It is a reflection of agency, as these are conscious lifestyle choices, written on their terms in order for them to ‘tick all the boxes’ and to belong to their chosen groups. This was what Ramadan (2004) meant when he said Muslim identities are “not closed and confined within the individual and personal domain (p.81). It is defined by what one is as a Muslim and what one believes in (Ramadan, 2004). From the sensemaking perspective, their acts of needing to be ‘normal’ are a projection of how my participants define their Muslim identity; one that is stable and positive. Their flexibility and a continuous re-interpretation of their environment lead them to continuously redefine their identity. It is a phenomenon of reactive identity development that is in opposition to what one is not, or even against others (Ramadan, 2010a). For my participants, it is to define who they are and not to set themselves up against

others as they exert considerable effort and determination to feel and be 'normal' and included at school.

'Normal' then for my participants is a reflection of their being; *al-fitra*. *Al-fitra* is one's authentic self; it is the result of one who in facing trials and tribulations of life finds reconciliation in the end with one's true self (Ramadan, 2004). In being 'normal' they are the new 'We' that understands that the West is full of pluralistic societies and they have no choice but to see themselves as also part of this pluralism as Islam is a Western religion as well as a religion for Muslim-majority countries (Ramadan, 2010c). This new 'We' is what encapsulates Ramadan's (2009) vision of a radical reform that sees not only contributions from textual and contextual scholars, but also from a group of critically engaged and creative Western Muslims. Therefore, as the data shows, their insistence on a construction of 'normal' is their way of embracing Ramadan's new 'We' in the West that is focused more on contribution than integration. In Sureen's words, "I feel completely normal".

Negotiating between two cultures or spaces can be difficult for Muslim students as they strive to maintain their own values at the same time to have contact with the host culture (Alkharusi, 2013). Identity theories also suggest that in constructing an identity, an individual generally strives to be of a certain type of person while sustaining a unity with the group that he/she wants to achieve membership with or at least be seen as favourable for membership (Erikson, 1994). Similarly, Gest (2013) also suggested one's inner logic of the dialogical self helps individuals access multiple systems of ideas, values and knowledge, facilitating what he termed as cultural frame switching, reflected in my participants framed sensemaking. This allows them to move flexibly between the different cultural meaning systems (or contexts) in response to situational prompts. That individuals derive cues from specific social context that

they are in and in turn, opt for the most appropriate switch reflecting dual cultural identities was also Benet-Martinez's (2012) contention.

For my participants, by taking an approach of 'normalizing self', they place significant effort to maintain their religious identity at the same time determine the degree of their involvement with their peers whether at school or at social events. This not only gives them a sense of control but of self-confident. All of the participants portray this confidence in their narratives that imply their schooling experience in Christchurch is nothing out of the extraordinary as they know who they are, that is, not second class citizens but of being confident of asserting a 'normal' Muslim identity within the social sphere.

## **7.6 Research questions**

The main research question that guides this study is:

**What is the lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experience of young Muslims at school in Christchurch, New Zealand. It argues that young Western Muslims practice a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social encounters in a secular schooling environment. Findings suggest that my participants embody the characteristics of Ramadan's (2010c) Western Muslims of the new 'We' in the West; one that embraces the philosophy of pluralism in their Islamic worldview and a principle of reconciliation reminiscent of the Prophet's ways (Ramadan, 2012). It reflects their view of school as *dar al-shahada* and the "integration of intimacies" where they positively

incorporate their sense of belonging. Their acts of “normalizing self” suggests not only their adoption of a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad*, but also a reflection of their *al-fitra*; one that is open and respectful of Otherness and differences (Ramadan, 2014). All these understandings were made possible through the adapted IPA method influenced by Ramadani philosophies which shed light on my participant’s Muslim consciousness and their ways of belonging at school.

The use of sensemaking theory confirms the prevalence of young Muslims’ application of a personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social encounters in a secular schooling environment. It also showed that in their enactment of their everyday reality, they do not view their faith as one that restricts their freedom, but as a source of guidance and well-being. The findings point to the subjectivity, relativity and the very personal nature of each of my participant’s thinking, actions, and behaviours. In a schooling environment that is defined by a Western context of secularism, where ideas and beliefs converge and diverge at varying points, they each rely on their own application of *ijtihad* in arriving at conclusions and decision-making as a way to manage their social encounters. This is how my participants experience schooling as Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The sub-questions:

- (i) How do Muslim students make sense of their schooling experience and what meanings do they place on it?

Faith in Islam is a key factor that is built around the *syahadah* and Islam is the key determinant in the lives of (young) Muslims (Ramadan, 2010a; Ramadan, 2014; Coles, 2008). In the case of my participants, their Islamic faith pervaded every aspect of their lives and served to confirm their worldview; that Islam is both a religion and the complete way of life for them. They are loyal to their faith, yet impatient under the auspices of the *Ummah* brand that is one yet diverse. Thus they engage in their own brand of interpretation. They combine what is textual with what is contextual to arrive at an understanding, that is, the use of the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith to guide them in the management of their social affairs. They reflect what Ramadan (2009) suggested as a need for contemporary Islamic thought that moves forward in relevant ways in facing the challenges of time in the West. Everything that they do is geared towards achieving *istiqamah*.

They also placed great emphasis on locating a sense of belonging at school and understood that this first and foremost, needed to come from their own personal efforts. They place various meanings into their encounters but always with the goal of achieving *istiqamah*. As the findings indicate, they constantly and consciously negotiate their religious identity within the schooling context. They made sense of their experiences through integrating via a safe approach that allowed them to participate in the secular environment yet retain a strong sense of their Muslim identity. At all times, faith remains the central and supreme driver of my

participants' behaviour and actions as it determines how they assign meanings to their encounters within the context of their schooling. The positive meanings that they assigned to all their encounters reflect how they view their presence at school and a reflection of their "integration of intimacies" (Ramadan, 2010b).

(ii) What are their coping strategies with regard to their schooling experience?

They rely on their own critical reasoning and while guidance is sometimes sought from immediate family members, at the end of the day, it is still themselves that 'live' the encounters in the present everyday space. It is they themselves that execute whatever decisions that they ultimately make. My participants reflect a certain type of everyday dynamism that I see as 'walking in the footsteps of the Prophet'. As the data shows, my participants are already practising what Ramadan (2004, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) proposed for Western Muslims. The centrality of the Revealed Texts and Universe and a contextual re-reading of them are ubiquitous in the data. While Ramadan (2009) suggested that new geography creates new spheres of authority, and whether this is reflective within the circles specializing in *fiqh* and ethics in the New Zealand Muslim community, it is not an area that my study is investigating.

However, I argue that in the absence of evidence reflective of Ramadan's vision, what my data show is that these young Muslims have taken it upon themselves to move forward creatively and live their life right. The creation of a 'normal' identity arises out of their 'reflective conversations' with self in the context of their contact with others, what I earlier pointed out as reflecting the approach of 'us' versus 'internal selves' (Ramadan, 2010a). It is their everyday *ijtihad* based on the notion of *istiqamah*. Their sense of meaning, freedom, and

truth understood within the Islamic framework guides their *al-fitra* to a constant consciousness of *Allah* is a reflection of how they cope at school in the West. A return to *Allah* is their way of coping. Park (2005) noted that religion has often been included as a meaning system that, amongst others, provides an alternative to help one cope with suffering and hardship. While Westerink (2013) aptly pointed out that there is no reason to assume that only religion can provide coherent meaning systems, in this study, the data does indicate the participants' reliance on their own brand of everyday *ijtihad* in guiding them in their management of social affairs with peers from school. The return to religion in private lives suggests a link to a sense of loss and isolation (Westerink, 2013). For my participants then, their faith is reinforced as Islam is a way of life, and anchoring oneself to its tenets to support meaning-making is nothing unusual. What is different is that they each craft their own versions of meaning-making with a conscious stand to remain faithful to their Islamic beliefs so as to achieve their personal goal of optimizing their lives in the West (and at school).

### **7.7 Implications for practice and policies - Utilizing the 4A's model of school social work practice with young Western Muslims**

The findings of this study suggests that many of our generalized fears toward the presence of the Muslim community in the West are more due to the 'textbook Muslim' approach than a result of real engagement at ground level. This study also tells us that for this group of young Muslims, their construction of a 'normal' identity and approach suggests that it is not a particular model of Islamic social work that is required, or that only Muslim practitioners would know how to deal with them. I argue that the young Muslims' brand of everyday *ijtihad* has particular importance and needs to be acknowledged. Their inner voices and their meaning-making, properly understood forms the fillers into the 4A's model of social work

practice that Allen-Meares and Montgomery (2014) suggested can be contextualized and applied worldwide.

The strength of the 4A's model lies in what I term as the 'glocalized' approach, that is, the flexibility of its global universal framework for intervention makes it possible to be adapted and contextualized to a local situation. This model is known to be effective and adequate for one to work with students of various backgrounds, culture and context (Meares-Allen & Montgomery, 2014). The framework of the 4A's model has the universal values of equality, social justice, and dignity. These are values that humanity shares (Ramadan, 2004). Inherent in the 4A's model is what I see as the suitability to accommodate the everyday *ijtihad* that young Western Muslims practice through acts of sensemaking and meaning-making.

On its own, the 4A's model is a sufficiently inclusive approach for school social work practice regardless of a young person's ethnic identity or religion. The underlying principle of the school social work model in the 4A's approach is the belief that children's rights to education are to be safeguarded and all threats eliminated. Within the framework of the 4A's approach for school social work practice too, the element of accessibility warrants that no one is to be discriminated on any grounds including those most marginalized (Melchiorre & Atkins, 2011). This includes the application of culturally-relevant and gender-sensitive interventions by school-based social workers.

However, as the detailed intricacies of culturally-relevant initiatives are not provided within the model, it is up to the local school social workers to initiate this. Where Muslim clients are concerned, the prevalence that being Muslim more often than not precedes their being is an everyday reality. Thus, I assert that these culturally- relevant initiatives cannot be piece-meal

adaptations as this only perpetuates the risks of the ‘textbook Muslims’ approach (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009) and the pervasiveness of (un)acknowledged patronizing ways non-Muslims stereotype Muslims. Hence, taking a phenomenology of consciousness approach via an adapted IPA approach influenced by Ramadanian philosophies is seen as most suitable to understand how young Muslims experience school as a way to add meaningful culturally-relevant initiatives into the 4A’s approach for the enhancement of their well-being and sense of belonging at school which then supports their academic development. This application can also be applied to other areas of social work practice.<sup>137</sup>

While Al-Qarni (2004) suggested that the Solution Focused Therapy approach is most suitable for use in Arab settings characterized by heterogeneity and conservatism, I do not agree that this approach can be used on (young) Western Muslims because they are neither heterogenous nor conservative and the approach lacks the personal touch of prioritizing their stories. However, reflecting on my prolonged engagement with my participants and to ‘borrow a page’ from the ‘miracle question’ concept in the Solution Focused Therapy application, I suggest that in a ‘glocalized’ model of 4A’s framework for school social workers, the notion of ‘taking history’ in culturally sensitive ways be applied and included as part of the 4A’s approach.

Taking history is especially crucial at the early stages of intervention as it helps build and sustain engagement with young Muslims. Their worldviews and strong sense of collectivism suggests that in working with them, it is not a matter of a formal interview session, but rather, a period of prolonged engagement that is required. Similarly, a generic model of Islamic knowledge is helpful but it is not the means to an end. It may support clinical skills in

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<sup>137</sup> This will be further discussed in implications for policies and practice.

interviewing as with interviewing any other client of different faith or backgrounds. However, a diagnosis model of taking history is crucial in working with Muslim clients as this helps us to filter the meanings they assign to past experiences and understand their worldviews. It sets the pathway to effective intervention work that is likely to carry long-term positive implications. A similar approach was seen in Gunel's (2007) thesis on Muslim girls' experiences in US Mid-Western school settings that focused on their cultural identities and interpreting the social studies curriculum. Gunel (2007) described how informal conversations with her participants on aspects of each other's past histories and backgrounds led to better engagement and development of trust and them seeing her as an "ally" (p.79).

This notion of taking history is based on Baumeister's (1991) arguments that life's meaning that fill modern lives exist as fragments. Each life may consist of several themes or story lines, as well as numerous events that may bear no particular relation to any lasting theme. The notion of taking history then is to understand the person from a larger context. This means, while the approach to intervention with young Western Muslims should take a personalized approach that is guided by the client's version of everyday *ijtihad*, the social worker, on the whole, needs to reach across from a wider platform with regard to assessment. It is in other words, the mechanism for the person-in-context framework that starts from where the person is.

Taking history then is about getting clients to share their personal background right from where they were born and their journey to NZ. From taking history, we get the chunks of meanings (Baumeister, 1991) that they attach to other parts of their experience that in turn informs the particular event/experience that is under assessment. This forms part of the circularity of understanding. It is the configuration of a culturally sensitive model of care

within the 4A's model of school social work intervention. Understanding meaning is critical because meaning connects things (Baumeister, 1991). They are a "shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships (Baumeister, 1991, p.15). For Muslims, everything that they do is always based on meaning and intention that is tied to their faith as this study has indicated.

## **7.8 Summary and Conclusion**

How my participants experience schooling as Muslims in a secular environment was studied through their sensemaking and meaning-making. This approach allows me to see the ways in which young Western Muslims make sense and assign meanings to their everyday encounters at school and how aspects of their religiosity interject with their schooling. This is because Islam is a way of life and for the young Western Muslims the variance with which they live their Islamic identity is their way of being. In particular, the meanings that they assign to these encounters allow us to understand how they cope and adapt at school, a place young people spend a major part of their time learning and interacting in preparation for future prospects and challenges. Ultimately it is a question of their being and belonging at school.

The use of a phenomenology approach is also to give voice to the less traditional participant to narrate their own experiences of schooling in the West from their meaning-making perspectives. Their application of a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* is a process of framed sensemaking where young Muslims draw on aspects of their religiosity to help them make sense of their schooling encounters. *Ijtihad* in Ramadani term refers to the cognitive aspects of personal critical reasoning and creative engagement that is framed against one's historical backgrounds and the contextual re-reading of the Islamic Revealed

texts. In particular, this study takes into consideration the everyday challenges of young Muslims at school and provides stakeholders with insights on how to deal with cross-cultural sensitivities and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that is seen from the young Muslim's perspective.

The wider impact of the contribution of this study is to challenge readers to question their own biases and assumptions and to reflect honestly on how much the influence of the 'textbook Muslims' approach has crept up on them. I suggest too, that for future school social work interventions or studies that focus on young Muslims, to consider looking at how young Western Muslims transition schooling over time as a way to gain further insight into how the time factor facilitate their being and belonging at school as these are coping dynamics linked to mental health and has impact on their active citizenship. As Smith and Osborn (1998) put it, the contribution of IPA studies is in incremental ways to broader conceptual understanding. Taking a phenomenological approach has also highlighted to me my hidden biases and assumptions that were confronted in the writing process. Thus I suggest that the phenomenological approach in this present study via an adapted IPA framework is a solution to the 'textbook Muslim' approach.

The adoption of an adapted IPA approach that is influenced by Ramadanian philosophies and its application on Muslim participants via a focus on their sensemaking and meaning-making has demonstrated the intricacies of the participants' everyday *ijtihad* that is framed against their religious worldviews. As Ramadan (2014) puts it, the word Islam is not a matter of a simple translation to mean 'peace' or 'submission' to *Allah*. He argued that to truly apprehend the meaning of 'submission' or 'peace' in the Islamic universe of reference one needs to study the Muslim consciousness and understand what *Allah*, human beings and the

Revelation mean to the person. This can help us understand if the person is one that is exclusive and closed, or one that is open and respectful of Otherness and difference (Ramadan, 2014). Therefore, I reiterate again that the use of an adapted IPA method influenced by Ramadanian philosophies (IPA-R) has made it possible for me to study and understand my participants' Muslim consciousness. Without Ramadan's framework of applied *ijtihad*, and his philosophies for Western Muslims, the IPA method in its original form is not sufficient for studies that prioritize cognitive understanding of Muslims. My participants' stories are intimate portrayals of challenges young Western Muslims face that Kincheloe (2008) suggested as voices that are often ignored.

In the next concluding chapter, I discuss my reflections with regard to the research process. A summation of the study and how I made sense of it forms the starting point of Chapter Eight. The limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are also included in Chapter Eight.

## 8. Chapter Eight - Conclusions

*Jalan di hadapanku panjang dan sayup  
perlu kulalui seghairah hidup*

(A. Samad Said, National Laureate, Malaysia – translated from Qu Yuan)

The journey onward is long and poignant  
I face with as much enthusiasm as I face life  
(my translation)

### 8.1 Background

In Chapter Seven, I discussed the findings in relation to extant literature and the extent to which the findings addressed the research questions. The implications of the study for school social work practice and policies with young Western Muslims were also presented. In this concluding chapter, I provide the summation of this study and my reflections arising from the research process. I include too the broader implications for general practice and policies as identified from the data, and the limitations of this study and suggest areas for future research. I conclude the thesis with the positioning statement.

### 8.2 Synthesizing the study

This study explored the lived experience of Muslims students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand; how they made sense of their experience and the meanings they placed on it. Its central argument is that young Western Muslims engage in a highly personalized version of everyday *ijtihad* in managing their social affairs within their everyday encounters of a secularised environment. For this group of participants, their acts of sensemaking helped them construct meaning frameworks in building their social identity. As the findings of this study suggest, this identity is constantly shaped and re-shaped along dimensions of time and

space. It is a result of individual awakenings that find synergy within their own critical reasoning, a form of applied *ijtihad* that Ramadan (2004, 2010b) proposed and what I argue is an everyday form of *ijtihad*. For this group of young Muslims, away from what is familiar, they return to the central tenets of Islam and personalize their meaning-making so as to locate their place in the West.

The quality and degree of attentiveness that this group of participants place on their encounters that is framed to their interpretation of their own religiosity require that I engage with a method that facilitates my being attentive to their lived experience. As discussed in Chapter Seven, this was the adapted IPA method that was influenced by the Ramadanian perspective. Taking the Ramadanian perspective that is rooted in a model of reform via an applied version of *ijtihad* for Western Muslims was needed to shift the focus from religion to one of religiosity (Roy, 2004) as my central argument claims. This is also to reflect my stand of distancing my central claim from the culturalist approach that sees Islam as the main issue (Roy, 2004) and maintains that social work practice with Muslim clients need to do the same.

Locating my research within the context of lived experience, focusing on the meanings my participants' placed on their experience is to return to an understanding of how they engage agency and volition in their re-reading of the Islamic texts, that is, to focus on meaning and intention as this is synonymous with Quranic readings and interpretation. While grounding methodological concerns require that I draw from a philosophical foundation that reflects my participant's worldview, I also needed one that can facilitate my "being as faithful as possible to the phenomenon" (Smith, 2003, p.26) that is as perceived by their Muslim consciousness. Without an adapted version of IPA that draws on Ramadanian philosophies, this would not be possible. This is a group of participants that has a specific worldview (Islam) that influences

how they see and live out their lives in the West. Their agency and volition is shaped by their Muslim consciousness (*taqwa*).

Ramadan's philosophies not only provide Western Muslims with a framework for participation in the West, its core message is that Muslims draw on their intellectual reserves to think and contextualize their re-reading of the Revealed Texts, hence his model of applied *ijtihad*. Ramadan (2010) stressed that Muslims need to take personal responsibilities to engage in reforms and bring forth their confidence as a way to liberate their thinking from a dependency on *fatwas*. There are three things Muslims need to consider in relation to their striving to be rational beings: attentiveness to issue of Revelation, religious experience, and their knowledge on testimony and trust (Ramadan, 2010).

Thus I reiterate that the contribution of this thesis is in the adapted methodology of IPA that draws from Ramadanian philosophies. Islamic consciousness is a symbolic universe that gives expression to deeply held religious beliefs (Hassan, 2008). The original model of IPA that has Heideggerian phenomenology as its foundation cannot be applied on Muslim participants for reasons I explained in Chapter Four. It addresses being-in-the-world, not Muslim consciousness.

### **8.3 Reflections: the three selves in research**

As IPA findings are essentially the researcher's interpretation of the participant's interpretation, how I situate myself in the research process needs to be acknowledged as this contributes to my role in the research process and also the phenomenon under study (Reinharz, 2011). How I brought myself to the research, how I engaged with the research

process, and how I conducted the research (Testa, 2010) is critical to the whole process. The three selves that we bring to the research process are the research self, the personal self, and the situated self (Reinharz, 2011). Understanding and managing my various selves were important as while I am not a Muslim, my background and past socialization meant that I can at times be seen as an insider, at other times, an outsider. The use of a reflective self was needed to ensure that I manage the boundaries of these two perspectives so as to ensure a research process that is transparent and trustworthy.

In the following section, I provide my reflections and how I manage my three selves in conducting this study.

### **8.3.1 The researcher self**

The research self is the self that one brings to the research process. One's role in the research process is not entirely up to the researcher but also very much determined by how others facilitate the researcher's entry into the field (Reinharz, 2011). In this regard, my application of IPA as a research tool with the focus on Muslim students meant that first and foremost, I needed to foreground methodological and epistemological concerns. Thus, the support from my supervisors in the form of critical feedback made me delve further into my readings and navigate this process. The whole process required that I went back to my past readings of Tariq Ramadan and my notes. I was lucky that I had kept all the annotated notes and when I was made to re-read the notes to find answers to the questions my supervisors were posing to me, I was glad that I had not discarded them. I realized that my being overwhelmed by the stacks of reading materials that I kept accumulating daily was due to my not having a workable method to manage my readings. What helped in the end was following the *Thesis Whisperer* blog and the recommended method of "taming" the literature review.

The whole process of having to adapt the IPA method to reflect my participant's worldview also made me realize the importance of reaching out for expert advice when I needed it. I had accepted the foundational philosophies of IPA without a critical mind and had placed all my focus on data collection. Looking back, my Malaysian Chinese background and values found it extremely difficult to ask for help particularly when I was aware that my supervisors had a busy schedule, but I have learned. The support of close friends, the use of reflective journal<sup>138</sup>, having membership to the IPA forum<sup>139</sup> and relevant reading materials all helped me understand further how I was being changed by these interactions and in return, how I also changed the research process.

Throughout the whole process especially towards the end, when writing up the findings, I became aware of how mentally exhausting it can be. The IPA approach is one that requires complete focus and commitment and extremely recursive. I am aware that while I seem to have weathered the storm, there were days when I wanted to give up as well. The complexity of the process and the feelings can get overwhelming at times when I also have fulltime care of my young daughter. When the research process dragged on longer than expected, having a mentor to "offload" my doubts and fears was also a motivating factor to keep me believing in what I was doing. I know having the support of many others around me were critical to me finishing this study.

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<sup>138</sup> I wrote emails to myself instead of keeping a hardcopy format of reflective journal. I particularly liked this format as it felt very 'real' talking to myself and allowed me to express as much as I want.

<sup>139</sup> An online forum for IPA researchers organised by Prof Jonathan Smith

### **8.3.2 The personal self**

The personal self is the self that one brings into fieldwork (Reinharz, 2011). Being a female non-Muslim researching on young Muslims at school meant I needed to manage not only parental consent, but most important cultural sensibilities. How my prospective participants, their family and the community view me was critical to the success of my fieldwork. I had to constantly ‘think’ ahead prior to meeting any one of them such as “Is what I’m wearing today looks alright?” Later, as the research progressed, and the participants indicated their preference for social media communication, I also had to constantly ‘think’ about my interactions with them and make sure that I do not over-engage while also needing to build engagement. I was always mindful of when I needed to put on my researcher cap, and when I could use my “Facebook” friend cap.

This need to maintain boundaries as a researcher and as a friend on social media was at times blurred, particularly as my participants themselves flitted in and out between being my participant and being my Facebook friend. I know that the use of reflective emails and supervision were useful ways for me to sustain and balance an appropriate degree of attentiveness that was required and to keep to the guidelines as approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury. The availability of online journal articles on researching with Muslim participants and the guidance of my Cultural Advisor and the Director of Education Malaysia – New Zealand also helped me navigate my ins and outs in the field.

### 8.3.3 The situational self

The situational self refers to the self that is created as a result of being in the research process (Reinharz, 2011). One of the questions that always lingered in my mind was whether I was an insider or an outsider in this study? The question that Fay (1996) raised was also one I frequently discussed with fellow postgraduates: “Do you have to be one to know one?” Dwyer’s (2009) arguments that qualitative researchers occupy this space between the insider/outsider dichotomies certainly reflect my position.

We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant “researcher” role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between (p.61).

In reflecting on this then, I do know that, for one, my participants saw me as an insider as their “as you can understand” or “as you know” littered the communication I had with them. I would say that I occupy the space between this circle of impact (Dwyer, 2009). I had acceptance and trust from my participants, and for a while, I did ‘walk in their world,’ (Weld & Appleton, 2008) as I grappled with the many difficult moments in carrying out this study. I ‘lived’ the cold, uninterested stare at presentations and conferences and copped online abuses due to the misconception that I was a Muslim when part of my study was published in 2013. My strategy of prolonged engagement requires that I bring a part of me into that engagement process, but I am also much aware that my experiences are only similar, and can never be the same (Wagner, 1983) with my participants.

Towards the end of this study too, where aspects of termination had to be considered, I was made aware that there existed a need to consider aspects of cultural sensitivities against what

is the standard requirement in termination practice. I have been welcomed into the participants' homes and by their families as well. Many of them also came through the recommendations of gatekeepers, of whom I need to maintain trust and respect. It would seem disrespectful and culturally inappropriate if I were to cut off all contact as soon as the study was accomplished. It did not occur to me in the beginning that being friends with the young participants on social media would have later implications in termination. However, supervision, the peer review process in data analysis, the reflective writing process and the reflective emails all helped me see how my thoughts was changed by these interactions and in return, how I managed the research process.

#### **8.4 Broader implications for relevant practice and policies**

In this section I address the implications of this study for the various stakeholders and the related fields of research or practice. This study identifies several smaller contributions to the field of research on young Western Muslims at school. As the core of this study is the prioritization of meanings therefore the contributions and implications for practice and policies also take the form of a more nuanced and reflective format. This also reflects the characteristic of a phenomenology of consciousness where it is about making the unknown known (Wagner, 1983).

##### **8.4.1 Implications for young Western Muslims at school in New Zealand**

This study has given the participants the opportunity for their voices to be heard. The semi-structured interview method that focused on getting participants to narrate their schooling experience in a flexible manner has given them the opportunity to self-evaluate

retrospectively and discover their own hidden perspectives. Getting them to articulate their thoughts and feelings in retrospection gives them the opportunity to verbalize past experiences and confront its meaning in present form. The use of an adapted IPA approach has also shown that it has similar characteristics to the counter-story narratives approach in that the reflective process also brings out the positive ways young Muslims cope with peer pressure and challenges at school. These are inputs that social work practice can take note of when working with Muslim clients with regard to incorporating elements of religion and spirituality in practice. Social workers' cultural competency depends, "amongst other things, on an understanding and appreciation of the impact of faith and belief" (Gilligan & Furness, 2006, p.617).

All the participants in this study are as similarly 'normal' as any other students in New Zealand schools. They have dreams, hopes and feelings. They want and do participate actively at school and most important, like many teenagers their age, they just want to be understood. They appreciate the opportunity to be part of this study and hope this can lead to better understanding by the wider New Zealand community on why they think and act in a certain manner. In particular, as the findings suggest, theirs is not a stand of anti-social and being difficult, but there are limits as to what they can participate in. If, they can compromise on critical component of their faith such as prayer, their abstention from certain social events may not mean an anti-social stand, but of needing to adhere to religious and sometimes also cultural guidelines. This is one aspect that teachers/educators/policy makers should take into consideration.

For international students like Imran, Hakeem, Zul, and Aleesya, their stories have allowed us to understand how they made sense of their schooling experience in Christchurch, New Zealand and the positive meanings they assign to their overall experience of being here. It tells us what they appreciate about the New Zealand education system particularly the size of the schools and the availability of the sporting facilities. It tells us that New Zealand's focus on sports and outdoor extra-curricular activities can in fact be the differentiating factor for New Zealand's export education industry. Their struggles with language in the early days but of being able to adapt after a short period shows not just their capability and resilience but of the success of New Zealand's ESOL programme and surely the dedication of the ESOL teachers.

The meanings they assign to their experience help answer the very personal question of "What makes for an inclusive experience for a young Muslim at school?" It is the little and personal ways teachers/educators show they care that really matters to them. It tells us that a simple *Mafia* game goes a long way in contributing to a student's well-being. These are inputs for teacher training and curriculum planning. As Ali (2012) pointed out, "curriculum is the cornerstone of what happens in the classroom" (p.209) while Zine (2004) argued that teaching materials should serve to "demystify stereotypes and Islamophobic notions and tendencies (p.115). The point is to be open to introducing such materials in a critically engaging manner such as the 'safe house' approach in the contact zone theory (Pratt, 1991) where the availability of a moderator ensures that controversial topics such as veiling or the rise of Islamic extremism (Ali, 2012) are discussed and managed from various perspectives.

Their sharing also tells us that their peers at school are on the whole good ambassadors for Christchurch schools. Perhaps there are lessons of inclusivity that we need to learn from our young Kiwis at school as they seem better at accommodating their Muslim classmates' religious needs. These are acts we should acknowledge and celebrate because essentially they are the ones that will enter the workforce and work with others as New Zealand becomes more and more diverse. Education policy makers should look at how to strengthen this exemplary behavior in New Zealand schools.

### **8.5 Limitations of this study**

Appraising the participants' sensemaking and meaning-making is a key aspect of this study. Therefore in addressing the issues of limitations in this study, I first address the issue of sample bias. This is followed by how researcher bias is managed.

As the IPA method uses purposive sampling with set criteria, the sampling protocol on this study is biased at the outset. It precluded those who did not meet the criteria but may have presented a unique set of experiences. Participants originally comprised a sample of ten which was then reduced to seven due to the various reasons as explained in Chapter Four (Section 4.8). The participants' socio-economic status is also not representative of the wider Muslim community in Christchurch with only one participant coming from a refugee background. Two confirmed and one prospective participant from refugee background relocated after the Christchurch earthquake<sup>140</sup>. Their departure impacted on the diversity of the sample. With limited time and the continuous aftershocks bringing uncertainties, new recruitment of participants focused on recommendations from associates within the

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<sup>140</sup> Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011

university. This resulted in not only a total sample of participants of Sunni backgrounds, but also a group that seemed firmly focused on educational achievement and with strong family support. The sole participant of Syiah background was eliminated<sup>141</sup>.

It must be noted too that all the participants lived approximately within 8km radius of the University of Canterbury and attended school within this area too. While a few of them had previous experiences at schools out of this radius, generally their schooling experience has been circumscribed within this location and context. This may have contributed to them enjoying a more ‘international’ environment that is more open to the notions of difference compared with students in other educational settings.

My own background and experiences, as an international student and now migrant, as declared earlier in Chapter One (Section 1.1 and 1.2) inevitably placed me in a mode of seeing things from my own familiar perspective. My participants were not part of the member checking process (see Chapter Four, Section 4.12) even though I did check with them if they would like to do so. Two did not reply my messages while the rest said they were too busy with exams and assignments and were not keen to be part of the post-interview process. One participant also left New Zealand soon after completion of the interview and another two prior to the completion of the findings.

However, to manage aspects of trustworthiness, I have made regular use of the peer review process with my team of supervisors and other academics from time to time to check my own underlying assumptions and perspectives as elaborated in the earlier section 8.2. Taking van Manen’s (1990) suggestion that writing is a reflexive process, I wrote multiple drafts of my

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<sup>141</sup> See Chapter Four, Section 4.8 – issue with non-handing in of consent forms.

analysis, findings, and discussion in an attempt to rid myself of what is familiar. Being able to contrast my own experience and thoughts with theoretical understanding on paper helped make reasons and ambiguity clearer.

### **8.5.1 Recommendations for future research**

Berry (2005) suggested that in order to understand cross-cultural psychology, it is crucial that studies on acculturation focus on examining and understanding cultural contexts. The crux of Berry's (2005) argument is that only through understanding the cultures that are in interaction can we make sense of the individuals that are in contact. Future social work research can look at exploring the lived experience of Kiwi students interacting with Muslim students in school. Similar to the counter-story narratives approach, a counter-story approach to how young Kiwis contribute to an inclusive schooling environment for minority ethnic students can provide social work practice with a clearer understanding of how both groups make sense of each other and in what ways this can be improved to achieve 'goodness of fit.' This is also one way of balancing the question of equity for all stakeholders. A combination of various stakeholders' perspectives in future research has the capability of providing a holistic view of how social workers in school can work towards minimizing social exclusion and at the same time achieving outcomes in social inclusion.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This was a phenomenological study from a school social work perspective seeking answers to the lived experience of Muslim students in Christchurch, how they made sense of it and the meanings they placed on it. The use of an adapted version of IPA influenced by Ramadani

philosophies and a small sample size made it possible to study the personal experiences of a group of young Muslims at school from an idiographic approach. The application of the same approach on a larger population will only lead to a diminishing of value of discovery as it is then a study of wider patterns of behavior (Cotterill, 2012) instead of a study of meanings of a novel experience.

The focus of this study was on meanings, and I reiterate the basic principle of social work of always starting with the client's story. In doing so, listening and understanding is important, however Sheppard (2006) also said it is more than active listening; it is "listen and know what I mean" (p.161). Therefore, I argue that the adapted IPA approach encapsulates the 'goodness of fit' that I seek through locating my study within the context of lived experience. Shaw's (2011) reiteration on the concept of 'experience close' (p.29) in an IPA study as extremely suited for health psychology is particularly appealing for me in the context of a cognitivist approach for exploring the lived experience of young Muslims in schools albeit requiring methodological and epistemological foregrounding to suit the participant's Islamic worldview. Humans have great potential to be reflective, (Giddens, 1988) being the ones that know their lives most intimately and the context in which it unfolds. This, I maintain, is where we start with our clients.

## **8.7 Positioning statement**

As I look back, I sum up my lived experience of doing this PhD in one word; serendipity. Serendipity because in the midst of all the earlier challenges and struggles, especially the few times I wanted to quit because I felt guilty that Youtube was my official babysitter, my then 8 year old daughter told me: "Mum, I know what is serendipity. It's on Youtube. Marie the cat

says it means magic, a miracle.” Along this PhD journey, there have been many more chance discoveries, from the readings, the research process, and the chance friendships with the participants, their families, fellow research students and other academics. As I come to the end of this journey, I know a new one is waiting for me. I started the PhD journey in search for the meaning of life and on the back of the influence of the late Bonny Hicks’ words. Therefore, I will do as what my participants are doing and that is to keep moving forward and walk the right path.

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## **Appendix 1: Additional information on Islam**

The following information on Islam is taken from the booklet, *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam* (2nd Edition), 1997, by I.A. Abu-Harb. As part of the instructions on reprinting or reproducing of this booklet, and as a mark of respect for Islam as a non-Muslim, I will not paraphrase. The full online version is available at [www.islam-guide.com](http://www.islam-guide.com).

The religion of Islam is the acceptance of and obedience to the teachings of God, which He revealed to His last prophet, Muhammad. The **six articles of faith** are:

(1) Belief in God

Muslims believe in one, unique, incomparable God, Who has no son nor partner, and that none has the right to be worshipped but Him alone. He is the true God, and every other deity is false. He has the most magnificent names and sublime perfect attributes. No one shares His divinity, nor His attributes.

(2) Belief in the Angels:

Muslims believe in the existence of the angels and that they are honoured creatures. The angels worship God alone, obey Him, and act only by His command. Among the angels is Gabriel, who brought down the Quran to Muhammad.

(3) Belief in God's Revealed Books:

Muslims believe that God revealed books to His messengers as proof for mankind and as guidance for them. Among these books is the Quran, which God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. God has guaranteed the Quran's protection from any corruption or distortion.

(4) Belief in the Prophets and Messengers of God:

Muslims believe in the prophets and messengers of God, starting with Adam, including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them). Muslims

believe that Muhammad is the last prophet sent by God and that all the prophets and messengers were created human beings who had none of the divine qualities of God.

(5) Belief in the Day of Judgment:

Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment (the Day of Resurrection) when all people will be resurrected for God's judgment according to their beliefs and deeds.

(6) Belief in Al-Qadar:

Muslims believe in Al-Qadar, which is Divine Predestination, but this belief in Divine Predestination does not mean that human beings do not have freewill. Rather, Muslims believe that God has given human beings freewill. This means that they can choose right or wrong and that they are responsible for their choices.

The belief in Divine Predestination includes belief in four things: (i) God knows everything. He knows what has happened and what will happen. (ii) God has recorded all that has happened and all that will happen. (iii) Whatever God wills to happen happens, and whatever He wills not to happen does not happen. (iv) God is the creator of everything.

**The Five Pillars of Islam** are the framework of a Muslim's life. They are the testimony of faith, prayer, giving *zakat* (support of the needy), fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime for those who are able.

- (i) The testimony of faith is known as the *Syhadah* which must be said with conviction in order to convert to or embrace Islam. This saying means "There is no true god but God (Allah), and Muhammad is the Messenger (Prophet) of God." The testimony of faith is the most important pillar of Islam.
- (ii) Prayer: Muslims perform five prayers a day and each prayer does not take more than a few minutes to perform. Prayer in Islam is seen as a direct link between the worshipper and God. There are no intermediaries between God and the worshipper.

Prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. A Muslim may pray anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories or universities.

- (iii) Giving *zakat* (support of the needy): Islam views all things as belonging to God, and wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The original meaning of the word *zakat* is both 'purification' and 'growth.' Giving *zakat* means giving a specified percentage on certain properties to certain classes of needy people. A person may also give as much as he or she pleases as voluntary alms or charity.
- (iv) Fasting in the month of Ramadan: Every year, in the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations. The month of Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Although fasting is beneficial to health, it is regarded principally as a method of spiritual self-purification. *Eid Al-Fitri*, a feast day commemorating the end of Ramadan is then celebrated.
- (v) The pilgrimage to Mecca: The annual pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca is an obligation once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to perform it. The annual *Hajj* is performed in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. Male pilgrims wear special simple clothes which strip away distinctions of class and culture so that all stand equal before God. The rites of the *Hajj* include circling the Kaaba seven times and going seven times between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa. Then the pilgrims stand together in Arafah and ask God for what they wish and for His forgiveness, in what is often thought as a preview of the Day of Judgment. The end of the *Hajj* is marked by a festival, *Eid-Al-Adha*, which is celebrated with prayers.

## **Appendix 2: Queries from Human Ethics Committee (HEC)**

**From:** Human Ethics <human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz>

**Sent:** Wednesday, 3 March 2010 10:49 a.m.

**To:** Erin Loo

**Cc:** Andrew Frost; Annabel Taylor; Hazel Ashton; Amy Fletcher; David Gleaves; Erin Harrington; Ken Booth; Lindsey MacDonald; Michael Grimshaw; Natalie Baird; Neville Watson; Nicky Richardson; Steven Tucker; Tami Howe

**Subject:** HEC APPLICATION 2010/11

Erin

The Human Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has raised several questions which they would be grateful for your feedback on/response to.

The committee had a number of concerns regarding this application as set out below. It is strongly recommended that a detailed and considered redrafting of the application occurs.

- In question 5a of the application, reference is made to providing information to “relevant stake-holders”. What does this mean and how might this be undertaken and communicated? The applicant needs to clarify processes and outcomes for both the HEC and participants.
- The information sheets adds “policy makers” to whom information will be communicated – please answer as above.
- Given the topic of research, the researcher and supervisors need to be able to demonstrate competence in cultural, ethnic and social understandings within Arab Muslim society.

- Further to this, Questions 14 b and c in the application should be changed to “yes”.
- Given the specific criteria of 9d, does the researcher have an estimate of the actual number of children in Christchurch that meet all four criteria? If there is only a relatively small number who do, then issues arise of keeping everything confidential especially as a PhD becomes a public document via the UC Library database.
- Further to this, it needs to be clearly stated in all information and consent forms that a PhD is a public document via the UC Library database.
- Please state who is the translator – they will need to sign a confidentiality agreement. Please provide this information for the HEC.
- Who transcribes the interviews? It is noted that 12 lots of two hour interviews will involve a great deal of transcribing.
- The HEC has raised concern that a two hour interview is a very long interview for a tweeny/young teen and the length of time itself could cause distress.
- All forms need a statement that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury HEC.
- The information sheet mentions the possibility of more than one session yet this is not mentioned in the application – please respond.
- Please provide greater detail on the recruitment process as to how Sedayo, Ali and Alayan will select students for participation.
- Please clarify whether these three named people therefore select the students for participation or just provide a list of possible contacts for the researcher to contact for participation. To avoid any issues of coercion, it is strongly recommended that a list of possible participants if provided to the researcher who then makes their own decision as to who to contact and who participates.
- The consent form for the child states “no-one will know my answers including my parents”. However, given that the child is provided a transcript of their interview to review, what

steps are in place to ensure that parents will not also view the transcript? What if a parent insists on looking at the transcript? This seems to place a lot of responsibility on a young child being able to say “no” to their parents – please respond.

- It needs to be clearly stated in the application, information sheet and consent form as to whether the interview will be conducted with or without parental support. What steps are in place in the following scenario:
  - Parent/guardian wishes to be present but child does not wish them to be present
- Please carefully read over your information sheets and consent forms so that all information communicated is clearly understandable for the lay public.
- There is an identified issue of possible coercion given the age of the participants. What steps are in place to ensure that:
  - participation is free choice of the tweens/young teens? and
  - the participants are clearly able to withdraw participation from the project which includes the withdrawal of information already provided?
- The information sheet mentions possible other sources of information such as diaries, video or drawings. Please clarify what happens to these extra sources of information that may be of a private nature.
- Please note that access to videos that involve other participants apart from the one being interviewed will need the consent of those being represented in the videos. It is suggested that the reference to videos be deleted and that the issue of access to personal diaries be strongly reconsidered.
- In the information sheet, please delete the reference on the second page, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, that participation may lead to positive growth and improved self-esteem for participants. This could be read as coercion.

The Committee will be grateful if you could address the above issues in writing by amending your application and/or supporting documents accordingly; please return them to me for the Committee's further consideration. These can be sent via email attaching one copy of the documents as necessary.

If you wish to disagree with a comment please carefully and briefly state your argument. If the Chair is unable to sign off in the light of your comments the approval may be delayed and may await a meeting of the Committee.

Please note that in the interests of ensuring a swift resolution to the issues raised by the Committee a copy of this email has been forwarded to your supervisor to assist in any amendments/clarification required.

Please contact the Chair, Dr Grimshaw, (University Extn: 6390) if you wish to discuss any of the above comments prior to submitting your revised application.

Regards

*Lynda*

Lynda Griffioen

Secretary

Ethics Committees

Hours: Monday & Friday 8.30am-2.00pm and Wednesday 12.30-5.30pm

University of Canterbury

Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha

Private Bag 4800

Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Telephone +64 3 364 2987 Extn 4879

### **Appendix 3: HEC Application – Reply to queries**

1. Q5a. Who are the relevant stakeholders? They are: Ministry of Education, NZ Association of Social Workers, Ministry of Ethnic Affairs.

Findings and suggestions are to be forwarded to them via a report.

If findings arise of a nature that is relevant or might be of use to other departments / organization not listed here, it will be forwarded to them too.

2. as above

3. Competence in cultural, ethnic and social understandings within Arab Muslim society:

Researcher: Please see attached Additional Information

Supervisory team: Please see attached Additional Information

4. Q14b and c – changed to yes.

Q14b. could participation involve mental or emotional distress?

Q.14c. Is there a possibility of giving moral or cultural offence?

As researcher is a female non-Muslim, interview location will be in surroundings familiar to participant such as living room of home / community centre. While privacy is needed, doors must not be locked. In interview sessions, researcher will wear “baju kurung” (Malaysian national costume) comprising of a long dress and skirt covering hands and legs. If wearing jeans, it must not be tight fitting and accompanied by a long sleeve blouse and scarf to cover shoulder and neck.

No interviews will be conducted on a Friday (as the Muslims, especially male participants) need to perform Friday prayers at the mosque. Daily prayer times will also be observed and if need be, interview sessions will be temporarily suspended to enable the participants to fulfil their prayer duty.

The most likely days and time of interviews will be on a Saturday or Sunday (so as not to disrupt school activities/homework), either at morning time (between 9 – 12 noon) or noon time (between 1.30 - 4pm) so as not to disrupt prayer time.

A continuous engagement and relationship building with the Arab Muslim community at their function and with the guidance of Dr Mohammad Alayan and his wife and Anas Sedayo and his wife, I hope to minimize this risk.

At all times, I need to be aware of cultural differences, pay special attention to sensitivity, warmth and empathy to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with the participant and the overall community.

5. There are approximately 200 Arab Muslim students in Christchurch schools meeting the purposive sampling criteria (estimated number as given by Dr Mohammad Alayan).

6. Edit information on consent and information forms to include the statement: PhD thesis is a public document via the UC Library database.

7. Translator: Wael Ali, Master student, Lincoln University

Confidentiality agreement: as attached

8. Interviews:

Researcher will transcribe the interviews (as per the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis method). Interview sessions will be from 45 minutes to an hour each, and will be repeated if additional information or clarification is needed. Further interview sessions will be shorter or may only require a phone call. All sessions will have breaks in-between, depending on participant's response and comfort.

9. Length of interview time is reduced to 45 minutes to an hour. There will be breaks in-between and consistent with the Arab Muslim culture, drinks and snacks will be prepared for the interview sessions by researcher. This hopefully will make participant feel more at ease and natural.

10. Forms edited to include the statement: The project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury.

11. It has been mentioned – Please refer answer no. 6.

12. Selection of students for participation:

Anas Sedayo and wife Hanadi Katouah: Anas is currently the President of Saudi Students Club (Canterbury). Together with his wife, also a PhD student at Canterbury, they are well-known among

the Arab Muslim community in Christchurch especially Saudi postgraduate students from Lincoln and Canterbury. They will provide a list of possible participants meeting the purposive sampling criteria of the research.

Dr Mohammad Alayan and his wife, Dr Maysoon Salama: Dr Mohammad is a prominent member of the Arab Muslim community in Christchurch. He is the Chairman of Al-Noor Charitable Trust and together with his wife, Dr Maysoon Salama, they operate the An-Nur Childcare Centre in Christchurch. He also runs an education consultancy business, specialising in recruitment and pastoral care of international students to New Zealand, in particular, Muslim students.

Dr Mohammad and his wife will provide a list of possible participants meeting the purposive sampling criteria of the research.

Both lists provided will be merged into one and where duplication of name exists, it will be edited.

Researcher will then go through list and contact the prospective participants individually through giving the parents a call and followed by a visit to their home thereafter.

Both Anas and Dr Mohammad has also mentioned that an announcement will be made at the mosque that participants fulfilling the research criteria are being sought for voluntary participation in this research and that parents may contact the researcher directly for further information if they are interested to allow their child to participate.

13. as above

14. The transcript will be reviewed by the child in the presence of the researcher only and after the child is satisfied / comments given and edited, the transcript will be kept by the researcher.

15. Edit information on consent form to include the following: Interview will be conducted only after parental consent. However, parents are not allowed to sit-in on interviews.

16. To go through information and consent form again.

17. After parental consent has been given, researcher will visit prospective participant in the home to explain about the research and how the child can participate. It will be explained to the child that while their parents has agreed to allow him/her to participate, they are to decide if they wish to

participate or not. It will also be explained to them that they are free to withdraw / change their mind at any stage of the research process and all information provided will be deleted.

18. All private sources of information (diaries / drawings) will be returned to participant; however a photocopy will be made for safekeeping by researcher and to be destroyed after 7 years.

19. Noted: videos: deleted

20. Noted: deleted

### **Human Ethics Committee Application 2010**

Additional information:

#### **Erin WH Loo, PhD Student**

I am from Malaysia, a Muslim country and have studied basic Arabic in Primary 1-3, Islamic History in Form Six and Islamic Civilization in university (option paper). I have also taught and worked with Arab Muslim students for more than 3 years in a private college in Malaysia (2005 - 2009). I currently have the continuous support of my fellow Arab Muslim students in Malaysia and their friends / network here in Christchurch. I am regularly invited to their homes and functions here in Christchurch and also learning basic Arabic language from them. The Muslim culture is something I grew up with in Malaysia and understands well as I also have Muslim cousins. However, I cannot say that I know everything about Islam / Muslim people thus I have also asked for support from Dr Mohammad Alayan in the capacity of a Cultural Advisor to my studies. He has indicated his interest and agreement and has met with me regularly to discuss my research topic. Please see attached job description of role as Cultural Advisor.

Both my Senior Supervisor and Co-Supervisor (Dr Andrew Frost and Dr Annabel Taylor) are from the Social Work Programme and are providing supervision to me in areas of social work theories, philosophy and research.

**Dr Hazel Ashton, Associate Supervisor**

Competence in understandings of Arab/Muslim society – she has focused quite a lot on Middle East politics from 1991 Gulf Crisis, (grounded research with Palestinians for Middle East debate, and Iraqi people for report "New Zealand and Iraq" 1996, (essay published in UC library). For her doctorate she designed a methodology around intercultural communication including participation of Arab Muslims (she had some Arab translation as a result of this). As part of post-doc she did some research in Cairo and Alexandria, including talking with Brian Chambers about building NZ - Arab connections, education - including especially the largish increase in Saudi students coming to NZ. She talked with him just before he took up position as ambassador in Riyadh. Recently she was on the Women Interfaith committee - where she engaged with Muslims and invited a sociology student (Malaysian Muslim whom she have informally supported) to present on the panel. She is also learning Egyptian Arabic currently.

#### **Appendix 4: Role of a Cultural Advisor**

1. To discuss, advice, guide and mentor researcher on the teachings of Islam (way of life), Muslim community's religious and cultural practices in general and in Christchurch, NZ.
2. To act as liaison person between student and the Muslim community in Christchurch.
3. To assist in recruitment of research participants by recommending a list of prospective students to be approached for research purpose.
4. To facilitate / mediate in any dilemma situation (if arise) such as misunderstanding between researcher and parent or researcher and research participant or if participant feels distress relating an experience.
5. To be the centre point of reference for any conflicting / ambiguity in interpretation or understanding of a certain narrative/action by research participant.
6. To read and advise on student's thesis especially with regard to student's write-up on Islam and the Muslim community and to recommend suitable resources for further reference (if needed).
7. Above all, to facilitate the peaceful and respectful relationship between researcher and the Muslim community in Christchurch and all in general.

## Appendix 5a: Guardian / Parent Information Sheet and Consent Form



Dear Parents

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Erin Loo, a PhD student from the University of Canterbury (Social Work Program of the School of Social and Political Sciences).

The title of my research is “**The lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand**”. Your child’s name was suggested to me by ..... Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he/she fulfilled the following criteria:

- (i) is a Muslim and practices the Muslim way of life
- (ii) is between the age of 10 – 18 years old
- (iii) is able to speak confidently and expressive in English or Arabic
- (iv) has been in New Zealand school(s) for a minimum of one (1) year

In this research, I wish to explore the experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand, that is, to understand how they cope as a Muslim in a New Zealand school, the environment and the meanings they place on their school experience.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, I will be conducting interviews with him/her in a setting your child is comfortable and familiar with i.e. your home, public library or community centre. It is estimated that the interviews will take around forty-five (45) minutes to an hour and will be audio recorded. If, after the interview, more information or further explanation is needed, subsequent rounds of interview will be carried out in steps similar to the first round however this should be less than twenty (20) minutes, or might require only a phone call. Do note that part of the research process requires that parents do not sit-in on the interview(s). If you have any concern(s) at all about this procedure, please discuss with me directly.

All interviews are audio recorded so that I can focus on what your child is telling me. Your child will be allowed to listen to the recordings at the end of the interview and may request for some parts to be deleted if that is his/her wish. It will be transcribed verbatim (written down word for word) at a later stage and your child will be

allowed access it and has the right to correct any information that was not accurately transcribed, or to request for some parts to be deleted. However, in order to protect the confidentiality of the interview content, you, the parent, will not have access to the recordings or transcription.

Your child's participation is voluntary. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you and/or your child will remain free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Rest assured that the identities of the young people interviewed will not be known and any other materials that can identify them will not be disclosed. A separate consent form for your child is also attached to help him/her feel part of the process, however it is your consent that is being sought here. Interviews will only be conducted after parental consent.

Thank you. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at the following:

**Erin Loo,**

**Department of Social Work**

**School of Social and Political Studies**

**University of Canterbury**

**Tel: 3642987 ext 4268    Mobile: 0211261933**

Email: [erin.loo@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:erin.loo@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

Or my Senior Supervisor, Dr Andrew Frost at the following:

Dr Andrew Frost

Coordinator, Social Work Programme

Department of Social Work

School of Social and Political Studies

University of Canterbury

Tel: 3642987 ext 8449

Email: [Andrew.frost@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:Andrew.frost@canterbury.ac.nz)

If you have questions regarding yours or your child's right as a research participant, please contact the Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury.

The Secretary,

Human Ethics Committee

**Level 6, Registry Building**

**Telephone: 6241 or +64 3 364 2241**

**Fax: 6856 or +64 3 364 2856**

**Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)**

For concerns relating to Muslim culture and practices, please contact:

**Dr Mohammad Alayan**

**General Manager**

**Alayan & Associates**

**New Zealand Education Consultants**

**48 Springs Road, Christchurch**

**Tel: (03) 3493223**

**Email: [alayanmnz@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:alayanmnz@yahoo.co.nz)**

Please feel free to discuss this information sheet and consent form with Dr Mohammad Alayan.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you willingly agree to allow your child to participate, that you and/or your child may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims though this is not likely as this study is strictly for academic purpose.

Signature

Date

Please note that PhD thesis is a public document via the UC Library database.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury

(approval date 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

## Appendix 5b: Child Participant Consent Form



I am willing to take part in this PhD study called: **The lived experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand.**

I understand that the researcher, Erin Loo is from the Social Work Programme of the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury and is aiming to describe my experience in school, how I cope with it and the meanings I put on my experience.

I understand that I will be interviewed in a place I am familiar and comfortable with for between forty-five minutes (45) to an hour (1) and I might be contacted again by the researcher if she requires me to explain further. However, the follow-up sessions will be shorter (maybe up to twenty minutes) or may be just a phone call. The interviews will be conducted in English and audio recorded. I can request for an Arabic translator if I feel more comfortable speaking in Arabic and I will get to listen to the audio recordings at the end of the session. I can request for some parts to be deleted if that is my wish. I will also get to read the recordings of the interview after it has been written down word for word) at a later stage and I can correct the information if it is not what I mean.

I will be asked questions about myself, my religion, my school activities, schedules and school-work in detail. I will also be asked to describe about my experience in school with my teachers, friends, peers, school work and others and how I cope with it.

I am taking part because I am willing to. I have been told that I can stop at any time, and if I do not like a question, I do not have to answer it. No one will know my answers, including my parents, friends, teachers or school authorities without my giving permission. I understand that I can also withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please note that PhD thesis is a public document via the UC Library database.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury  
(approval date 26<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

## Appendix 6a: Child Consent Form (Arabic)



أنا على استعداد للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة بعنوان الحجاب، اللحية، البرقع، التجربه الحيه للطلاب المسلمين في كرايست تشرتش. نيوزلندا. وأدرك أن الباحثه ، ايرين لو وي هونغ من برنامج الخدمة الاجتماعية في كلية العلوم الاجتماعية والسياسية ، جامعة كانتربري ، تهدف الى وصف تجربتي في المدرسة ، وكيف أتأقلم معها والمعاني المستخلصه منها.

أنا أدرك انه سوف تتم مقابلي في مكان يعد مألوفاً بالنسبه لي واشعر فيه بالارتياح مابين خمسه واربعين دقيقه الى ساعه، وأنه سوف يتم الاتصال بي من قبل الباحثه في حال احتاجت منى أن أفسر لها بشكل مفصل بعض المعلومات التي ذكرتها مسبقا ولكن هذه المره لن تزيد المقابله عن عشرين دقيقه او مجرد مكالمه هاتفيه. المقابله سوف تكون باللغه الإنجليزيه ومسجله صوتيا. أستطيع أن أطلب مترجما عربيا إذا أحسست أني أشعر براحه اكبر من خلال تواجده واستطيع الاستماع إلى الشريط الصوتي للمقابله بعد انتهاء المقابله. أستطيع أن أطلب حذف بعض الأجزاء إذا رغبت في ذلك. وأستطيع أيضا أن اطلع على نص المقابله المكتوب بعد عدة مراحل من البحث وأن اطلب تصحيح أي معلومه إذا لم تتطابق مع ما قصدته.

سوف يتم سؤالي عن نفسي وعن ديني وعن نشاطاتي المدرسيه والجدول والعمل المدرسي بالتفصيل. وسيتم أيضا سؤالي عن وصف تجربتي مع أساتذتي وأصدقائي وأقراني والعمل المدرسي وأشياء اخرى وكيف أستطيع التأقلم معها.

سوف أشارك بهذا البحث لأنني مستعد وأريد ذلك. ولقد تم إخباري أني أستطيع التوقف في أي وقت أشاء وإن لم أحب أي سؤال يمكنني أن لا أجاب عليه. لا أحد سوف يعرف بإجاباتي من ضمنهم والدي وأصدقائي وأساتذتي او إدارة المدرسه إلا بإذن مني. وأنا على علم أني أستطيع الإنسحاب من المقابله في أي وقت أشاء.

Please note that PhD thesis is a public document via the UC Library database. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury (approval date 26th April 2010)

## Appendix 6b: Information Sheet (Arabic)



### ورقة المعلومات

المعلومات في جامعة كاليفورنيا في ترويسة

مشروع بحث الدكتوراه: التجربة الحية للطلاب العرب المسلمين في مدارس كرايست تشيرش ، نيوزيلندا

اسمي ايرين لو وي هونغ وأنا طالبة دكتوراه في قسم الخدمة الاجتماعية في جامعة كانتربري. إنني أقوم ببحث عن التجربة الحية للطلاب العرب المسلمين في مدارس مدينة كرايست تشيرش كجزء من دراستي. هذا البحث النوعي يهدف إلى الوصف بالتفصيل التجربة الحية إلى كل فرد مشارك وذلك لتزويد أصحاب المصلحة وواضعي السياسات بفهم واع لتجربة الطلاب المسلمين في المدارس. وهذه الدراسة سوف تساعد النظام على توفير احتياجات الطلاب بشكل افضل.

ويتم اختيار المشاركين في هذه الدراسة بناء على المعايير التالية: 1- العمر ما بين 10-18 2 عربي وينتمي الى واحد من 22 دولة عربيه ويمارس الإسلام (3) درس في مدارس نيوزلنديه لمدته لا تقل عن سنه (4) واثقين من أنفسهم ويتكلمون اللغة العربيه أو اللغة الإنجليزيه.

واقترح اسم طفلك لي من قبل انس سدايو ، رئيس نادي الطلبة السعوديين في جامعة / كانتربري الدكتور محمد عليان. هذا البحث ينطوي على استخدام المقابلات شبه المنظمة مع كل مشارك على حدة. ومن المتوقع أن المقابلة ستستغرق حوالي ساعتين في كل مرة ، وسيتم اجراء مقابلات اخرى قليله إذا كانت البيانات التي تم جمعها تشير إلى الحاجة إلى مزيد من التوضيح. طرح الأسئلة سوف يكون الإجابة بلا او نعم وسوف تكون الاسئلة غير مباشره. ويتم ذلك من أجل تمكين المشاركين من تبادل خبراتهم الشخصية مع الباحث بحرية . اسئلة مركزه أو اسئلة محددة يمكن استخدامها لتشجيع المشاركين على مزيد من التفاصيل. وسوف تكون الجلسات مسجله صوتيا والبيانات سوف تكون ايضا موثقه كتابيا. يسمح للمشاركين في هذه الدراسة إذا رغبوا للاستماع للشريط الصوتي للمقابلة وايضا الاطلاع على البيانات المكتوبه. يستطيع المشارك أن يطلب حذف بعض اجزاء المقابلة في حال تغير رأيهم بعد الاستماع للشريط الصوتي. يسمح ايضا للمشارك في هذا البحث بأن يسرد تجربته عن طريق وسائل أخرى مثل دفتر اليوميات ( المذكره ) أو عن طريق فيديو او عن طريق الرسم اذا اراد ذلك .

سوف أتخذ كل خطوه ممكنه لضمان حفاظ مصلحة الافراد المشاركين في هذه الدراسة مع مراعاة واحترام طريقة المسلمين في العيش في جميع الاوقات, في هذا الخصوص سوف استعين بأنس سدايو وزوجته هنادي والدكتور محمد. في حال شعر احد المشاركين بلوعه او آلام نفسيه بسبب

تذكره وعيشه مره اخرى للحظات صعبه من تجربته سوف يتم توفير استشارة خاصة أو أي خدمه مناسبه لحالته. سوف يتم الحفاظ على سرية وخصوصية معلومات الافراد المشاركين في هذه الدراسه عن طريق استخدام أسماء وهميه وعدم الكشف عن أسماء المدارس.

المشاركه في هذه الدراسه تعتبر اختياريه ويمكنك سحب طفلك في أي وقت. لدى طفلك مطلق الصلاحيه للإسحاب من المشاركه في هذه الدراسه إذا اراد في أي مرحله من مراحل البحث. عملية الانسحاب تتم عن طريق ابلاغي شخصيا.

النتيجه النهائيه لهذا البحث سوف تكون أطروحة الدكتوراه وهناك احتماليه أن يتم نشر بعض المقالات في الجرائد. بعض البيانات قد تقدم وتنتشر ايضا في اجتماعات أو ورش عمل ولكن تظل سرية وخصوصية كل فرد مشارك في هذه الدراسه اولويه كما ذكر سابقا. سوف يتم اخطار المشاركين في هذه الدراسه عندما يتم نشرها.

سيتم تخزين جميع المعلومات التي تم جمعها وما يتصل بذلك في غرف عمل الدكتوراه في جامعة كاننبري وسيتم حماية الملفات المخزونه في الكمبيوتر بكلمه سرية وتمشيا مع الأنظمة الحكوميه ، سيتم تخزين جميع المواد البحثية في الجامعة لمدة سبع سنوات قبل ان يتم تدميرها

لن يتم دفع أي مقابل نظير المشاركه في هذا البحث. ولكن كلي أمل ان يكون البحث سبب في حدوث نمو ايجابي. وزرع احترام الذات والاهم من كل ذلك الشعور بأن الطالب انجز شيئا من خلال مشاركته في هذا البحث ومساهمته الفعاله في تحسين المجتمع.

سوف يتم إرفاق طلب للموافقه لك لكي تسمح وتعطي موافقتك لطفلك بالمشاركه في هذا البحث. سوف يتم إرفاق طلب للموافقه منفصل لطفلك ايضا لكي يكون على وضوح تام بمراحل البحث ويشعر بأنه جزء مهم من هذا البحث. ولكن في النهايه موافقتك كأب أو ام تظل هي ما نسعى اليه.

إذا كان لديك أو لدى طفلك أي استفسار بخصوص هذا البحث الرجاء التواصل معي على:

ايرين لوو

قسم العمل الاجتماعي ،

كلية العلوم الاجتماعيه والسياسيه ،

جامعة كاننبري ،

77 طريق كلايد ، 102 b الغرفه ،

ايلام ،

مدينه كرايستشيرش 8041 .

هاتف : 4268 3642987-03 ext

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## **Appendix 7: Semi-structured Interview schedule**

Main question

**What is the experience of Muslim students in schools in Christchurch, New Zealand?**

Sub-question: (a) What is their coping strategy with regard to their schooling experience? (b) What forces help or hinder their experience in school with regard to their obligations as a Muslim?

Respondent's experience of school in Christchurch, New Zealand

### **A. School**

- 1) Can you tell me a brief history of your schooling experience here in Christchurch, NZ, from when you started till now?
- 2) Can you describe, in your own words, what happens in school daily?
- 3) What do you usually do in school?
- 4) How do you feel about school here? (prompt: *emotionally, mentally?*) Teachers? Friends? School rules?
- 5) How do you feel about *going* to school here? (prompt: *physically (like do you feel like waking up to go to school every morning?, emotionally, mentally?)*)
- 6) What do you think about school here? (prompt: *emotionally, mentally?*) How is schooling here different from before?
- 7) How does schooling here affect your daily life? (*at home, interests, friendships, religious obligations, relationship with family etc?*)
- 8) What can make your schooling experience here better?
- 9) If you had to describe what schooling here means to you, what would you say? (prompt: *what words come to mind, what images? A nickname?*)

## **B. Identity**

9) How would you describe yourself as a person? (prompt: *What sort of person are you? Happy, moody, quiet, nervy, brave etc.*)

10) Since starting school in Chch, has this made a difference to how you see yourself? (prompt: *If so, how do you see yourself now as different from before you started schooling here? How would you describe that change?*)

11) How about the way other people see you? (prompt: *parents, family members, friends from before?*)

## **C. Coping**

12) What does the term “schooling” here mean to you?

13) How much do you think about your schooling here?

14) Do you see yourself as being different at school and at home?

15) Do you see yourself as different when mixing with school friends and when you are with people from your own community?

16) On a day-to-day basis, how do you deal with school? (Prompt: *is there a particular way you deal with it? Your ways of coping with a problem at school?*)

17) Do you think about your future much?