5-2022

BEYOND THE HIJAB: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HIJABI MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California university. A qualitative phenomenological design was implemented to explore from the students' perspective and in their voices; a reporting of what they encountered as they navigated the campus communities they must also learn to negotiate. Considering both the historical and current push for internationalization in higher education settings, coupled with the national climate of fear concerning Muslims within the United States, a Postcolonial framework was used to examine students' daily interactions, engagement, sense of belonging and inclusion, and campus "intellectual practices" with respect to representation in those practices. Data was collected through individual in-depth interviews with nine research participants. Each participant was asked a series of 10 semi-structured open-ended conversational questions aligned with the 3 overarching research questions focused on their experiences in the classroom and other general campus settings. The findings illustrate participants' individualized stories and nuanced perspectives and highlight the complicated experiences each one shared. In conclusion, recommendations for educational leaders, educational reform, and future research are considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin in the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful. All praise is to you. First, I wish to acknowledge and offer my humblest gratitude for everything I have been blessed with. I am thankful and often awestruck for the privilege of life's journey, including the achievements that have brought me immeasurable joy and the challenges that have helped shape my character.

I thank my father and my mother, Abdelrahman and Naima Sharweed, for their devotion to living a life that honors the grace of the Almighty, and therefore too, the sanctity of humanity. I thank them for teaching me the obligation we have to support others; and selflessly putting the needs of their children, the family unit, and their extended family and friends above themselves. Your resilience in the face of the incalculable challenges that come with immigrating from your home, your entire community of support, to provide a better life for your children can not be articulated with the preciseness it warrants. How scared yet hopeful you both must have been. Your sacrifices set the foundations many people have continued to benefit from and build on. You are both love personified.

Baba Habibi, thank you for living a life of purpose; your quiet strength never went unnoticed. I wish you were here now to see the realization of this goal, our goal. May God grant you eternal peace and rest your beautiful soul in Jannah Al-Firdaus (Allahumma Ameen). Mama, Umey, thank you for your benevolent spirit, ability to always see the good in others, and endless and unwavering support. Your dogged persistence and intuitive ability to redirect my

too often misguided efforts continue to be the means by which I am able to achieve my goals.

I thank my sister, Sawsan Abdelrahman Sharweed, for her reliability, wisdom, fortitude, support, and most importantly, love and laughter, "SHPUNK!" It was in those moments when I could not see a better future that you stoically assured me there most certainly was one and that you would always be there to make sure we would reach it. You are my best friend and much better half. You cannot know how often I look to you as my North Star, my guidance, and as a source of strength.

To my son, Abdelrahman Sabbah, I cherish your every breath. You are my magnum opus, my heart walking outside of my body. A brilliance and splendor I sometimes fear I am not worthy of. You should know that this goal was achieved because I often reflected on how I wanted to present myself to you. I hoped this would be an example of what is possible, despite life's familiar struggles, and make you proud of me. Mama did it, BooBoo!

To my daughter born from my spirit, Ayah Khairallah, you too are my Life-Giver. Thank you for being the good one! You have taught me that hard work, a little vulnerability, and a lot of laughter go a long way in life. Babe, watching you grow and succeed has brought me such motivation and strength! Use your grace and beauty to continue to change the world.

Yaseen Abdelfatah, I see you habibi! I see how you always keep it real and motivate me to carry on, "*so I could at least finish before you graduate*." In

you, I see also the answer to my prayers; Allah sent me a brother for Abdel and two sons brighter than the sun. I see too how you are phenomenal in so many ways, your heart alone, as gentle and caring as any parent could hope for. I plan to keep seeing you succeed, prosper, and still motivating me to be better!

To each and every one of my family and friends, thank you. Thank you for your words of encouragement, prayers, reminders, words of positivity and confidence, threats, jokes, books, notes, messages, all of it. Every one of these stuck with me, pushed me forward, and reminded me that no one can do this life alone. I love you all. Of special recognition, I would like to thank: The Mohamed and the Saleh families who helped lift us so that the void left by my father's passing did not consume me, and for the ongoing support in every way imaginable; I love you dearly my clan (shoutout to my crazy babies Marwa, Sara & Safa), Amy Amer for being my sounding board every time I needed to complain and say a bad word or two, Stacia McCambridge for your energy that I wish I could harness and for using that energy and your big heart to pull me along even when I fought it, these last steps would have been impossible without your help, Jacob Marcos for reminding me what was important and daring me to challenge myself when I was scared I couldn’t, Melissa Knapp my sweet bestie from so far back I think we need to tattoo that somewhere, for the kind and powerful reminders for why I need to keep going, my dear friend Tasha Greer for always living exactly how you wanted and reminding me to do the same, and Ryan

Lipinski for being the kind of supervisor who gave me the support, safe space and the tools to find myself and the end of this project.

A very special THANK YOU and prayer for my committee Chair, Dr. Enrique G. Murillo, Jr. You may not remember, but it was you who reached out to me when you saw me on campus and cared enough to sit me down and ask me how I was going to get this project finished. You simplified each step and made this entire process so wholly accessible. You demystified this educational journey and allowed for what this covered brown girl never imagined was possible. I would not have been able to finish without your guidance.

Dr. Dany Doueiri, Jazakum Allah Khair, for everything you have helped me accomplish and for the time and effort you poured into this project. Many in the Muslim community know and rely on you for help in different aspects of their life, Dr., and you are always there, willing to help, and always with a kind word and smile.

Dr. Cecilia Ornelas, ¡Gracias mi querido amigo por todo tu apoyo y orientación! Thank you for your words of encouragement and insight into balancing my mental and emotional well-being with this project that I loved and was overwhelmed by.

I want to finish with a word of heartfelt gratitude to the students who participated in this study. The time you dedicated to sharing your stories and what I have gained from them is invaluable. These experiences, from the lens of a female Hijabi international student navigating an academic existence that isn't

certain how to characterize you, will help to inform all those who wish to learn and those who never thought to ask.

As a Hijabi, I can attest that my sisters and I wear our Hijabs as a mantle of pride, yet I hope too that people will take the time to look beyond the Hijab and see the individual identities and human existence within each of us.

Allahu Akbar, wa la hawla wala quwwata illa bilLah.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the collective international student body; it is you who have inspired this undertaking. Too often, the voices of this population, frequently relegated to the fringes of the communities they are seeking to embrace, are silenced in subtle yet profound ways. In completing this project, I humbly aspire to provide a platform whereby they speak their truth because it matters.

"*It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—…; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder*." *--Du Bois, W. E. B.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women who wear a traditional headscarf (Hijab) do so with varying motivations, but all do so because of religious obligation. In Islam, one of the recognized core beliefs is modesty, which religious scholars have defined requires practicing women to cover their bodies, including their hair. It is the unmistakable marker identifying the woman wearing a headscarf (Hijabi) as a Muslim. Having worn the Hijab for over 24 years, it has become as much a part of my identity as my name and physical features. Consider now the intersectionality of being an international student who is also a Hijabi. With over 1 million international students attending universities within the United States (International Educational Exchange, 2021, see figure 1), what happens when you take an international student, a Muslim Hijabi who is building language and contextual socio-cultural competency, and require them to navigate the university system? What is their lived experience while simultaneously trying to navigate high-stakes outcomes such as securing an education they perceive will be the key to their future success? International students leave their homes and travel great distances to seek an education where they imagine they have the greatest opportunities. The American university system finds itself at the heart of this influx of international applicants, accepting thousands of students each year. This situation is complicated further considering the current political climate in the United States (U.S.) regarding the international Muslim community.

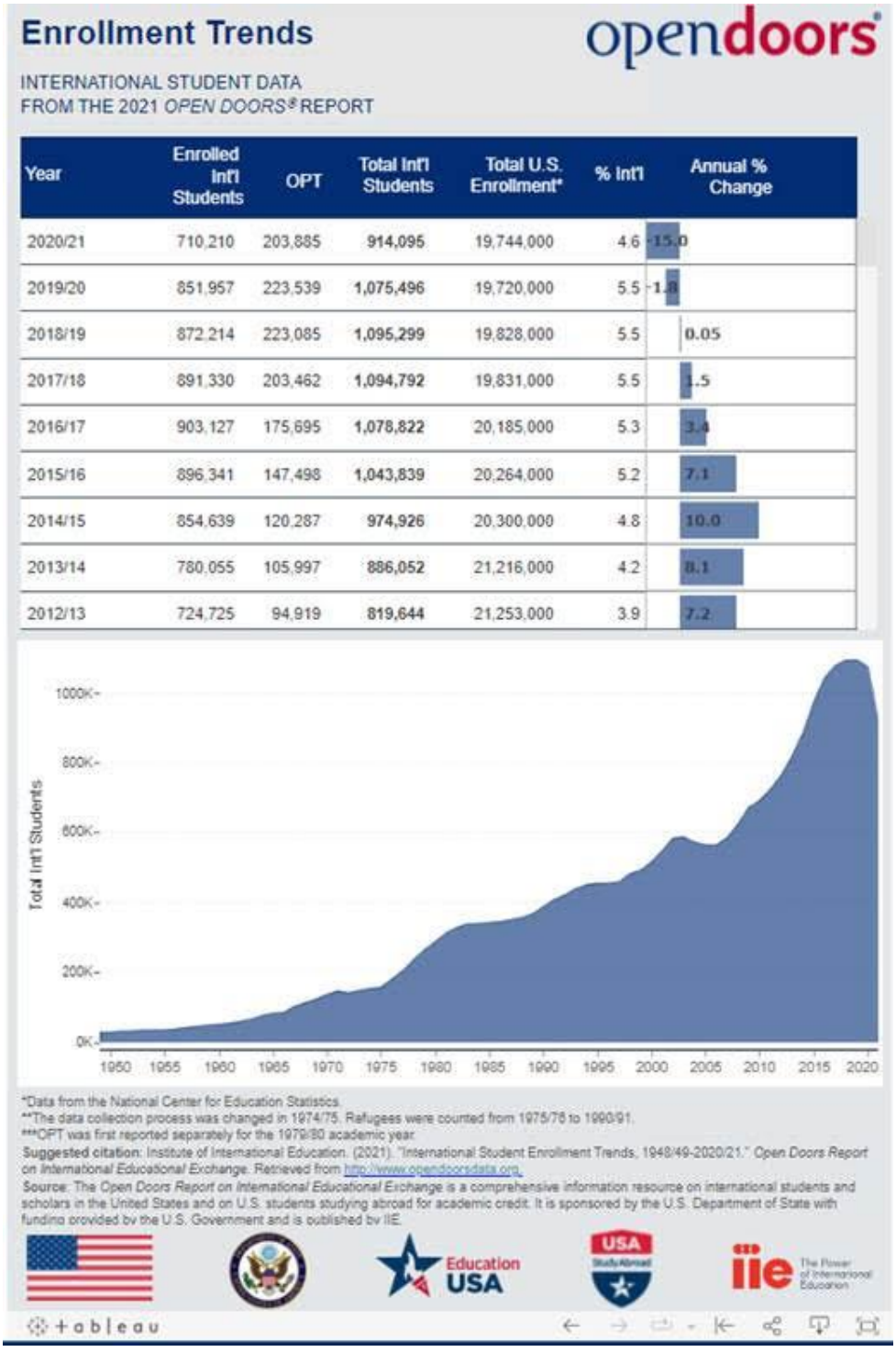

Figure 1. International Student Enrollment Trends.
(International Educational Exchance, 2021)

Considering the two variables as mentioned above, and as international student enrollments continue to persist, so too do considerations regarding the lived experiences of the international students within their campus communities. Therefore, this researcher's goal is to enlighten understanding of the higher education community by examining the current lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear the traditional headscarf, the Hijab, once they enter the American university setting.

Problem Statement

Actively and aggressively increasing international student enrollments has continued to be a high priority for many higher education administrators within the United States. This is partly because international students help globalize local communities and partly because of the financial benefits international student tuitions bring. According to the 2019 Benefits from International Students report conducted by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA, 2019), international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contribute 41 billion dollars to the U.S. economy annually. The active increase in international student populations at higher education institutions leads researchers to consider the factors that may impact their integration and experiences in their new study environments. These factors are compounded by world events, the U.S. government’s historically negative opinion of some in this demographic, and subsequent actions against foreign-born persons, specifically those from predominantly Muslim countries. An example would be the Trump

administration's effective ban on Muslims entering the U.S. from preselected predominantly Muslim countries and the active and ongoing portrayal of Muslims as a threat to societal wellbeing, leading to the current climate of fear and intolerance.

With the above mentioned international student enrollment increase, combined with the climate of fear throughout the nation, the question also arises if/how the higher education communities the students are joining are helping to acclimate them to their new environments. An important factor to consider is that international students have chosen to attend universities predominantly comprised of domestic, non-international student populations. Compounding this is the domestic students' exposure to other nationalities, many of whom report they have had little to no exposure to international students prior to their studies in higher education (International Educational Exchange, 2020); these combined factors all impact the international student experience.

Another layer to this situation is directly related to the international students themselves. More specifically, the female Muslim international students who wear Hijab, a physical marker that easily identifies the wearer as Muslim. With this identifier as the first thing domestic students may see, coupled with the underlying knowledge that there is a culture of fear surrounding Muslims in the U.S., there is a potential for international and domestic students to experience increased anxieties. These anxieties can potentially become amplified for the international students interacting within the American university system.

International students' willingness to participate on campus may also be impacted by how much experience they have interacting in an academic setting. Another element that influences this situation is the cultural ideologies of the international students, some of which come from countries that value silence and reflection over social or public participation.

With the current international student context highlighted, this researcher desires to clarify what takes place in the local higher education setting concerning the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students. It is also the desire of the researcher to analyze what may be the causes of interactions that take place and if they are positive or negative. Therefore, this paper will focus on the lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear the Hijab. Through qualitative data collection via interviews, this researcher will reflect on the students' daily interactions, reasons for those interactions, and their sense of belonging, representation, and engagement. More specifically, this researcher aims to discover how female Hijabi Muslim international students feel their campus communities receive them and how this results in the interactions that play themselves out in the classroom and around campus. Through the analysis of research done in the higher education setting, the researcher will also attempt to look at some solutions or suggestions for systemic change.

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear the Hijab as they navigate their academic experiences within the university setting. It was concentrated on students who had been at the university for one or more years and who had been or are currently studying. It is essential to center the voices of this population of students because, as the literature highlights, they are traversing complicated social, cultural, and personal experiences unique to this demographic. Despite the data highlighting increased enrollments of international students in American universities, the limited quantity of data available on this population is equally important. Since universities invite students to attend their institutions, it is also a professional and moral obligation to ensure that their experiences are considered. By implementing focused research collection and analysis to gain insight into the lived experiences of minority and often marginalized communities, educational organizations can work to ensure authentic efforts at building and sustaining equity and belonging are implemented.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University?
2. What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences?
3. What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting?

Significance of the Study

Capturing the nuanced and multilayered elements of one's existence is not just difficult; it is a delicate and individualized endeavor. However, knowing this does not negate that important themes permeate students' experiences, and when these are identified, they provide essential data that help inform the broader higher education community. Additionally, given that many campus communities share institutional learning outcomes that integrate messaging on the importance of diversity and inclusion and that many strategic plans include goals focused on students' sense of belonging and engagement, the study increases in significance. In concentrating on campus diversity and inclusion, the broader student populace can understand how the dynamics within global communities influence the ways in which people see the world. They develop dispositions to interact and collaborate respectfully with diverse individuals and groups and acknowledge their own perspectives and biases.

Therefore, the significance of this research can be identified in a few ways; all of them centered around the influx of international students at higher education institutions and focused on Hijabi Muslims, specifically. First, since there is a lack of research on female Muslim international students' lived experiences attempting to navigate their academic and social environments, this research will attempt to add to the conversation. In addition, much of the literature explains the experiences of the international student as it relates to self-perceptions or issues dealing with students' perceptions of their educational

experiences abroad. Little research has been focused on how these lived experiences may or may not impact interactions within the higher education setting. Another significant factor is the realization that many of these students come from traditionally feared and/or misunderstood backgrounds, like students from predominantly Muslim regions such as Saudi Arabia. Of added significance, this researcher noticed through observations of various campus activities while working at the university that many international students, once matriculated to the main campus environment, were still only socializing and communicating with other international students. The researcher began to consider the causes of this and if this phenomenon was carried over into other areas throughout the campus setting. The researcher also considered how this lack of interaction could be compounded in smaller settings, such as the university classroom. The question begged to be considered, did these students feel they belonged, were engaged, and were included in their current higher education setting? Also, this researcher was interested in revealing how their personal and academic experiences were/are shaped by these factors. More importantly, if needed, what could be done within the university setting that would ensure transformative change?

Assumptions

Some of the assumptions of this project include the notion that international students are seen with negative perceptions in the higher education campus setting. It was assumed they were judged to have academic and social interactive deficiencies that require instructors to provide them more attention,

and thus producing a greater workload for them. Furthermore, some argue that international students take up valuable space in courses that should be afforded to domestic students currently struggling to register in required courses for graduation. Therefore, it was assumed that some on the campus find international students a burden to service. Another assumption is that they create an atmosphere of difficult and awkward conversational communication, as they are seen as lacking key communicative skills. It was also assumed that some of the individuals who interacted with the Muslim students believed some of the stereotypical characteristics assigned to Muslims, such as being fearsome and distrustful. Finally, it was assumed that all participants shared their experiences accurately and provided a truthful accounting of their time studying at the university.

Delimitations

This study will look into female Hijabi Muslim international students' lived experiences in relation to their experiences of belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting. However, this study will not look at the perceptions held by the international students of themselves. This study will also not address international students' perceptions of the quality of their academic programs while studying in the higher education setting. Additionally, the research study will not look at student experiences in the general public or at experiences with family and friends, except in the circumstances with direct connection to their university experiences. Because of

the qualitative in-depth interview methodology, this study included only 9 participants, all of whom were in advanced post-baccalaureate studies.

Role of the Researcher

As the research attempts to identify the lived experiences of female Muslim Hijabi university students, this researcher recognizes some essential factors that may significantly impact the outcome of the findings of this research. First is the researcher's role, having been at the forefront of the recruitment and educational introduction of many international students on campus through her previous position as Academic Coordinator of the English Language Programs. This is the sole program for language study at the university where students prepare before they can matriculate to the main campus for university study. Many international students on campus must attend this preparatory language school prior to their enrollment in the main campus setting. Knowing this, there may be some hesitancy on the part of the students to speak about their authentic experiences for fear of being offensive to the researcher or those still involved in the programs the researcher may be associated with. Another element is the fact that the researcher also identifies as a female and is a Muslim Hijabi, which may also present problems. If, for example, some of the students want to share any negative or problematic feelings they may have towards the possible difficulties they have with wearing the Hijab. Lastly, this researcher also recognized that, given her Egyptian heritage, the students might have some apprehension about sharing all of their experiences for fear of judgment or disdain, given the

researcher’s religious and cultural background. Being aware of these factors, the researchers' goal is to explain these variables to the participants and reassure them of their anonymity and safe space for communication.

Definitions of Key Terms

The key terms help clarify both cultural and religiously specific terminology, in addition to important vocabulary relevant to international education:

1. **Abaya:** loose over-garment, a robe-like dress worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world.
2. **Domestic Student:** Students who study at institutions where they hold citizenship or permanent residence.
3. **Globalization:** The exposure to differing ideologies from global/international sources.
4. **Hijab:** a type of veil worn by some Muslim women to cover the head and neck.
5. **Hijabi:** Muslim women who wear the traditional religious headscarf, Hijab.
6. **International Students:** Students who come from international origins to study.
7. **Internationalization:** Creation of programs and recruitment efforts to implement international measures in higher educational settings.
8. **Muslim:** People who practice Islam.

9. **Native English Speaker:** Someone whose first written and spoken language is English, rather than learning it as a foreign/second language.
10. **Niqab:** In addition to the hijab, a veil covering the face that leaves the eye area uncovered.
11. **Non-Native English Speaker**: Someone whose first written and spoken language is not English, and they have had to learn it as a foreign/second language.

Summary

This introductory chapter helped establish the importance of the study in the larger context of higher education and clarified issues impacting international students specifically. In the subsequent chapters, the researcher reviews the literature in Chapter 2, highlighting key historical and socio-political factors influencing international students and Muslims. In Chapter 3, the researcher identifies the methodology, a phenomenological qualitative design, and the theoretical framework, Postcolonialism, as the means by which data was collected and analyzed. In Chapter 4, the data was analyzed for key themes and sub-themes. Lastly, in Chapter 5, recommendations, conclusions, and a reflection are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

International students leave their homes and travel great distances searching for an education where they imagine they have the most purposeful opportunities. The American university system accepts thousands of students each year, some of whom come from predominantly Muslim countries. This situation is complicated further, considering the political climate in the United States in relation to the international community and, more specifically, Muslims. Considering the two aforementioned variables, and as international student enrollments continue to expand, so too do considerations regarding the international students' lived experiences within their campus communities. Therefore, this researcher aims to enlighten the higher education community's understanding by examining female Muslim, who wear the traditional headscarf (Hijab), international students' lived experiences once they enter the American university setting.

The literature review highlights three critical themes in the literature related to Female Hijabi Muslim international students. First is a look at the history and current trends of the internationalization of higher education. The motivations behind student recruitment efforts, the development of comprehensive academic programs for international students, and reflection on their benefits and drawbacks are considered. Next, with over 1 million international student enrollments in the United States (International Educational

Exchange, 2020, see figure 2), over 3 percent of which are from predominantly Muslim countries, examining the current climate within the U.S. concerning Muslims and Islam is considered. The researcher also looked at the literature highlighting issues that impact Muslims in the United States. The most significant themes were historically Islamophobic policies and ideologies, Anti-Muslim political rhetoric, Islam's depiction in popular culture, and U.S.-related terror events. These are all foundational factors that have led to a climate of fear and distrust of Muslims and Islam. Lastly, having identified that a large number of international students attending universities in the U.S. are Muslim, it is essential to look at the research on different issues impacting Muslim international students in the U.S. and abroad. The theme identifies problems such as acclimation to university settings, the impacts of cultural practices and classroom behavioral norms on the interactions between international and domestic students, and international students' sense of worth and belonging in their university settings. These findings highlight some of the struggles Muslim students encounter in higher education and necessitate further research on their potential sources.

Theoretical Lens

By its very nature, the act of traveling to study abroad gives rise to a potential power dynamic concerning students and institutions. The student, in this case, female Hijabi Muslim international students, will attempt to navigate unfamiliar and long-established rules of academic cultural hegemony (Gramsci,

1971). Mongia et al., 1996, expounds on the importance of understanding the dominant culture and its impact on those in vulnerable positions. This research will look at potential hierarchies of existence as they are found in a local Southern California university and explore, through the students' lived experiences, what is validated, and accepted, allowing for a sense of belonging. A Postcolonial lens will be implemented to identify what themes will present themselves. Given its theoretical underpinnings examining colonialism's cultural and political legacies, Postcolonial theory determines the power dynamics present in various settings. In this instance, the dominant academic culture, institutional social norms, and markers for belonging and inclusion. Murillo et al., 2004, cite McKinney, 2000, who explains that cultural hegemony is so ingrained in the academic structures to the extent they are imperceptible. They "…are implicit in nature and because of this, institutional norms and rules are conveyed and sustained in such ways that the power relationships at the heart of them are not…examined by the participants in the exchange" (p. 352-353). Griffiths et al., 1995, further explain, "In both literature and politics, the postcolonial drive towards identity centers around language…For the postcolonial to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth the problem with identity" (p. 125).

The international students seek to study in institutions where they are required to assimilate to the language and academic cultural hegemony while simultaneously navigating the institution's social paradigms, which further

supports how the Postcolonial lens can identify potential impacts on the student experience.

The Internationalization of Higher Education

The internationalization of higher education began after World War II, with world leaders realizing the need to reconstruct societal norms. No longer were they looking at only internal advancement and growth; they began to see that what was outside of country borders affected what was inside just as significantly. The leaders' explicit intention to develop their countries into global civilizations, civilizations that could compete in the world market, led to the development in the United States of such entities as the Institute of International Education (IIE) (De Wit, 1995, 2002). Such institutes are concerned primarily with developing and implementing international relations and studying global issues. This push by world leaders for an explicit focus on international perspectives related to the social order led to the eventual focus at universities on the internationalization of higher education. De Wit (1995, 2002) explains further that, "immediately after World War II…higher education (had) been at the center of social, political, and economic developments… (and) terms such as international education, multicultural education, and comparative education…(were) the expression of (these) developments" (p. 5). From the beginning, higher education was the focus of planned improvements and was the gateway to possibilities and future opportunities.

Thus began the focused push for institutional change and planned internationalization at universities in the United States. During the following years, “the situation changed, with developments such as the decolonization of the developing world, expansion of higher education, and the changing role of universities as generators of human resources in addition to their traditional roles as centers of scholarly study” (De Wit, p. 8). Through these developments came the establishment of such initiatives as study abroad programs, which initially allowed students to travel overseas to various parts of the world to study how different cultures lived daily. As the implementation of internationalization efforts continued to grow, so did the reflections on the overarching goals and objectives of these efforts. University administration began to recognize the need for study abroad programs that taught students how others lived and actively incorporated international efforts within their organizations.

As the developments of internationalization efforts within modern-day universities continued to progress, so too was the realization of specific problems taking shape. The previous ethnocentric practices and ideologies focusing on international societies compared to the United States did not best serve growing internationalization purposes. Another element that plagues universities' internationalization efforts is the underlying perception held by some researchers that these efforts are made solely with budgetary incentives as the primary goal. Knight and De Wit (1995) note that some institutions are “characterized by the emphasis on economic arguments to promote international cooperation and

exchange in higher education. However, rationales focusing on creating a common regional identity have also become important" (p. 9). Knight and De Wit (1995) argue that "the global environment (has) moved from one hegemonized by the superpowers…to a de-hegemonized world" (p. 9). They continue to explain that higher education institutions must focus on current practices, then change the focus from how great we are to how great we can be if we work and learn from each other. These factors warrant an in-depth look into how internationalization efforts must also be focused on measures to implement substantive changes in higher education settings and that such changes will be long-standing and legitimate.

As international students continue to choose to attend American universities, their numbers are significant enough to warrant extensive research and discussion. Some researchers have entered the debate by focusing on the apparent interest of higher education administrators' push to increase international student enrollments as well as on the effects of these enrollments on the current student population (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Brustein, 2007; Coate, 2009; Stohl, 2007). Altbach & Knight (2007) look specifically at how the internationalization of higher education, through the building of global universities, has both benefits and drawbacks in academia. Their study consisted of looking at the global community and the efforts of universities in America to build "sister" universities abroad that service students within a particular field and then move those students back to American universities after

a prescribed period. The researchers focus mainly on the following significant factors: quality assurance, program accreditation, the recognition and validation of the education gained abroad, and lastly, the establishment of regulated policies and procedures. The researchers further explain that the most crucial fact that developed from their study was the realization that, 'today's emerging programs and practices must ensure that international higher education benefits the public and not simply be a profit center," (p. 304). Brustein (2007) expounds further by taking a detailed look at some of the challenges facing higher education instruction in America, including both internationally focused curriculum designs and faculty acceptance and implementation of these designs. He also looks at the integration of some international student programs within campus communities. Coate (2009) chooses to look at internationalization from a lens that addresses the complicated relationship universities are placing themselves. She posits that "higher education institutions are on dubious grounds in terms of their relations with international students, and that these flawed relations are reflected in pedagogical practices in the classroom" (p. 271). Her research also investigates the complicated "binary" relationships that sometimes occur when international students are viewed through the lens of "other" and are therefore delegated the role of quaint representatives of whole nations and cultures.

Jongyoung Kim expounds further on the complications for international students in U.S. universities. Through his study using 50 qualitative interviews,

transcribed and classified using open coding techniques, he highlights Korean graduate students' learning and cultural experiences in the U.S. His study focuses on how “global knowledge and the power relations of language” create an unstable learning environment for international students. Through his data analysis, he found that students perceived themselves as inferior in their current academic setting for several reasons. First, students explained their lack of intellectual capital, as they must now learn about the subject matter and learn how to learn about the subject matter. Kim explains, “Academic Capital is cultural capital produced and circulated in schools and academic circles” (p. 457). Classroom performance norms, professor expectations, study habits, and other educational expectations must all be relearned in the new target environment, a task that is both daunting and intimidating in their opinion. Next, students expressed their sense of inferiority concerning their performance in their non-native setting. Students who were once at the top of their classes, leading discussions and contributing to classroom learning, were now relegated to observers and receivers of knowledge. Lastly, students describe the formation of new identities within the new settings and the lack of intellectual capital (Kim, 2012).

However, in recent years, with budget crises that have plagued many universities, this push to recruit international students has created a seeming divide in administrator, faculty, and students' positions. Some researchers have focused on the challenges facing higher education while noting the opportunities

administrators must recognize. Others have taken a differing approach, questioning if the internationalization of university classrooms is necessarily directly related to the quality of education. Jang (2009) cites Knight (2001), explaining that, “Knight (2001) questions the validity of the academic rationale as follows:

> There is a perception that the more international a university is, the better it is, and the higher quality its programs are. Of course, we want to believe and ensure that the international dimension of teaching/learning, research, and service is enhancing the quality of education, but do we have a way to prove it? (p. 4)

Jang concludes that the research results identified a positive correlation between internationalization efforts within certain aspects of university programs and the quality produced within these programs. She explains that her research results showed “statistically significant and positive effects” that were seen chiefly when international students' presence was more prominent.

Others have chosen to focus on the benefits of the internationalization of higher education, arguing that the current world conditions justify the need for the transformation of students in our educational institutions into global citizens (Shaunessy, Suldo, Hardesty, & Shaffer, 2006). They argue this can be achieved through added program measures to internationalize the college classroom. Schwieger, Gros, & Barberan, (2010) explain that culturally diverse classroom environments can be:

> . . .a space in which the most diverse body of students and teachers converge, producing a unique learning environment. (I)n the multicultural classroom of the 21st century, “otherness” and cultural diversity are an integral part of the learning process that must be embraced, rather than restricted, in order to provide quality university education in increasingly globalized institutions. (p. 148)

Through their research study, Schwieger, Gros, & Barberan explain the importance of embracing multicultural classroom environments and that it is necessary to create these environments as often as possible. They also explain that the multicultural classroom, “when managed responsibly” (p. 154), allows for student interactions that become enduring authentic lessons of life and living.

Another benefit is curriculum reform and application efforts (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010; Wihlborg, 2009). For the greatest impact, researchers explain that curriculum must be developed with the intent not only to promote an international or multicultural environment. There must be a deliberate definition of the curriculum outcomes, and both instructors and students must outline them.

> The issues of internationalization and developing intercultural competencies can be situated against the larger problem of creating learning environments, steering cultural flows, making certain cultural flows and cultural meetings possible, and thereby attaining certain learning outcomes rather than others. (p. 604)

The advantage of curricular reform is that it requires reevaluating current academic standards and practices, compelling instructors and school administrators to critically examine their program objectives. The benefits of this critical examination are abundant, as researchers also argue that any time a self-reflective exercise is undertaken, new understandings of what is lacking arise.

Continuing to explore curricular reform concerning the internationalization of higher education, Signorini et al., 2009 argue “that culture cannot be reduced to immutable concepts such as nationality or other regional geopolitical constructs” (p. 262). The argument is that curricular reform must take a more practical approach and avoid reducing solutions to simplistic models that associate every intercultural interaction element to rigid stereotypes that do not account for human nature's unpredictable fluidity.

Still, others address the value of internationalization by noting its encouragement of cross-cultural communication but stress that this is achieved mainly through the classroom instructor's active encouragement and participation (Tompson & Tompson, 1996; Ryan & Viete, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2010). Tompson & Tompson expound on this by explaining that “the most important strategy…, is for instructors to be "... aware of [their] own feelings about diversity and willing to talk about them" (p. 57). The instructor's role in establishing an environment open to dialogue and accepting of cross-cultural communication should thus not be taken lightly. Edwards (2007) expounds further on this by explaining that the educator and the educational facility's role is such that;

creating intercultural environments advocated by the instructors creates environments rich with learning.

Stohl (2007) explains the key to successful internationalization programs in the higher education setting is faculty buy-in, noting that “in virtually every university system, the faculty in the academic departments hold the keys to education. They decide… who gets what, when, and how” (p. 367). This is important in underscoring that no matter how much effort is put into internationalizing the higher education setting if there is push-back from faculty to these efforts, they will all but deteriorate. He also highlights how the faculty is responsible for setting the classroom environment. If and when they are not convinced of the benefits of internationalization efforts, then the impact will also be present in their classroom interactions.

Some also note certain hindrances of having international students in the higher education classroom. Lindsey Parsons, 2010, explains that the effects of the push for international recruitment and international student participation in higher education facilities have not been studied thoroughly enough in specific areas. They suggest that a greater emphasis on more specific internationalization efforts be applied. The importance of such research is seen in the implementation of internationalization efforts. If, for example, everyone attempting to implement internationalization efforts within their university classrooms does so using various methods, the effects will be disjointed. Ultimately, the proponents of focused internationalization reform in higher

education argue efforts to internationalize higher education communities lack the guidelines needed to achieve any goals and therefore lack the follow-through necessary for successful results.

Research on the negative perceptions of international students highlights correlations between the levels of negative perceptions directly related to the perceivers' educational achievement. In their study, Ostapczuk, Musch, & Moshagen, (2009) used a randomized response technique to establish as non-biased a response to the various levels of xenophobia individuals harbor. Their study suggests that individuals who have had frequent and positive interactions with people of other cultures were more willing to interact with international counterparts. They also found that their responses correlated with their educational levels. Therefore, both of these variables lead one to conclude that the higher education institution is an ideal setting to foster such interactions. This finding is crucial as it gives grounds to arguments supporting a push for the internationalization of higher education.

In addition, counter internationalization arguments stem from the notion that the financial benefits of international student recruitment, given the high tuition international students pay, do not outweigh the inconvenience their classroom participation creates for domestic students. One example is the question of space availability within impacted classrooms. Stohl (2007) explains,

> . . .(t)hose of us involved in the effort to internationalize invested much time and effort to mobilize key constituents… (They) needed to be

> convinced that saving places for international students would not deprive local students of the opportunity to attend taxpayer-supported universities. (p. 363)

He also explains that other factors are associated with some of these fears. The rationale that leads to the negative perceptions of international students in higher education also stems from the perception that they require extra instructional attention from professors in the classroom, leading to less time spent with domestic students also requiring instructional attention.

Other researchers have focused on the administration's motives that push for the internationalization of higher education, citing that these motives are not always in the best interest of the students and educational community. Lindsey Parsons (2010), Stohl (2007), and Edwards (2007) also explain that the stakeholders making these decisions may not always think through the overall effects the push for internationalizing may have on the constituents forced to live with these decisions. Instead, they argue that these administrative decisions take more of a competitive or financial stance than an instructional based one. Therefore, it must be concluded that until a specific motivation for internationalization is established, one that is not monetarily motivated and is therefore focused on the transformative effects it is capable of bringing about, the establishment of the benefits of internationalization may be unrealistic.

In conclusion, by exploring past efforts to internationalize their higher education settings, shaped by organizational, curricular, financial, and

globalization goals, we see the ever-fluctuating effects of universities' internationalization efforts. The internationalization of higher education can thus be considered an educational obligation brought about by motivations to globalize future generations and perpetuated by the current budgetary and social expectations, as noted earlier. Successful internationalization efforts in higher education depend heavily on reflections on the past, current practices, and future strategic goals and objectives. How these efforts have been directly impacted by society and therefore impact international students will be the focus of the following themes.

National Views on Islam and Muslims: Past and Present

Considering the internationalization efforts in U.S higher education settings, it is imperative to turn to the current national climate students enter. As previously mentioned, of the one million international students within U.S universities, over 3 percent come from countries with predominantly or large Muslim populations, such as Saudi Arabia and India (International Educational Exchange, 2020, see figure 2). The complexities of the convergence of these factors become apparent when considering their potential impact on the international student experience. In the United States, Islam and Muslims are viewed with distrust and are synonymous with terror and terrorism. The sources of these perceptions are layered but can be traced to several key factors. To understand the current climate of fear and distrust of Muslims in the United States, one must first look back to historical events, Islamophobic laws and

policies, and a narrative systematically developed through popular and news media platforms.

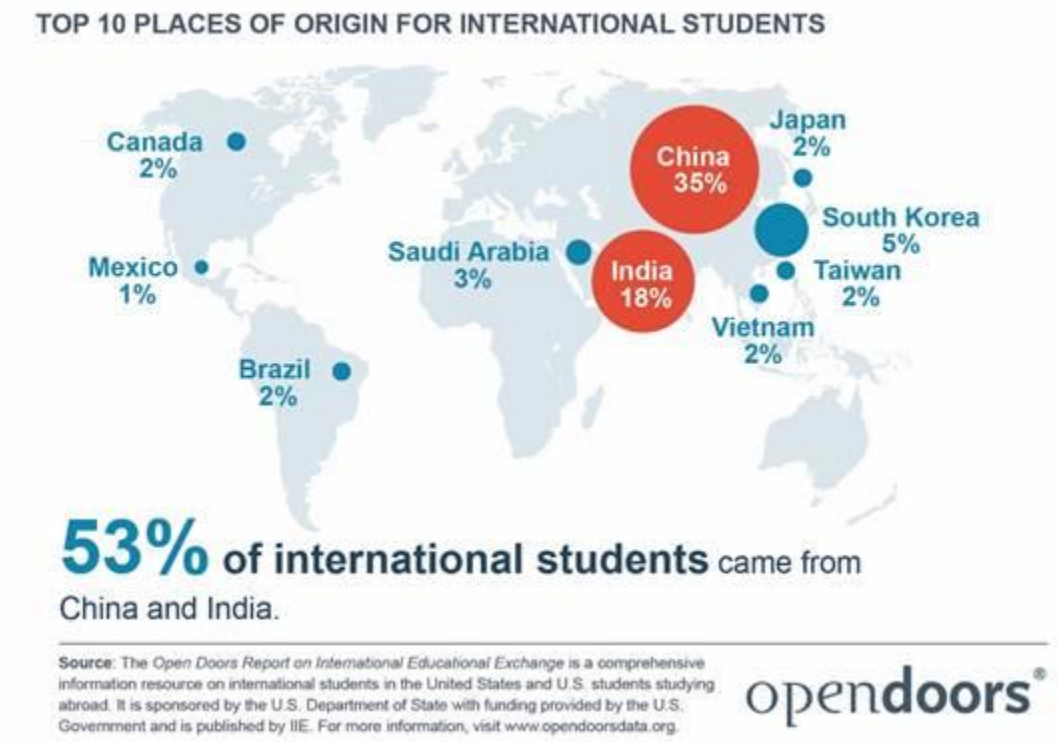

Figure 2. Top 10 Places of Origin for International Students (International Educational Exchange, 2020)

Beydoun, K. (2018) explains that as early as the founding fathers at the Constitutional Convention, fears of Islam and Muslims plagued the formation of the then fledgling nation, “Muslims were not adherents to the world’s second-largest religion, in the mind of founding American Orientalists, but rather an alien, unassimilable people from the Middle East.”(p. 55). We see that America

positioned Islam as the antithesis of its ideals and ideologies at its founding. In identifying Muslims as the other, the Middle Eastern opposite to Western liberty, relegated Islam to everything America did not want to be. It can be concluded then that following Islam would render the Muslim in direct opposition to being American. This juxtaposition of religion with national identity was further complicated during the transatlantic slave trade since distinctions were made between Muslim and non-Muslim captives. Rana, J. (2007) explains the progression of anti-Muslim sentiments, “Muslim slaves were early on identified in racial terms as “overly tanned” and “Moor,” giving an Arab valence to their African-ness. Such was the migration of racial and religious beliefs that European conceptions of the Muslim/Arab enemy continued its presence in the early Americas” (p. 155).

Edward Said, an expert and leading researcher in Postcolonial studies, expounds on the American perception of Muslims by highlighting the complicated and often one-dimensional characterization of Muslims in the west.

> So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab–Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have, instead, is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world. (Said, 1980, para. 11)

Fear of Muslims, Beydoun (2018) further highlights, “lives on today and steers how politicians, journalists, and everyday citizens think about Muslims and frame Islam. It is fluid and potent. It is the root system that gave rise to and drives Islamophobia. Justifying fear of and violence against a people requires a foundational system that actively dehumanizes that people” (p. 55). Examples of this are seen with the implementation of Islamophobic Executive Orders like the 2017 “Muslim Ban,” enacted by the now twice impeached former United States leader, Donald Trump. On January 26, 2017, 6 days into his administration, he signed Executive Order 13769, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorists Entry into the United States.” This executive order listed six predominantly Muslim countries; Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. With this executive order, a few things are conspicuously evident. The most alarming is that the political leadership believed it necessary to make known on a national and international platform that Muslims were not welcome in the United States. Second, and more concerning, was the use of inflammatory rhetoric like foreign terrorists, synonymous with these countries, to help drive home the ideology that Muslims are foreign terrorists with an underlying interest in coming to America to cause harm.

According to a 2016 survey done by the Pew Research Center inquiring if Americans view Muslims as Anti-American, roughly half of the population surveyed affirmed they did regard them as having Anti-American sentiments. This study translates to an underlying fear and distrust of Muslims' motivations

living in the U.S., with nearly half the population harboring a sense of mistrust towards them (Michael Lipka, 2016). Another recent Pew Poll (2017) further illustrates Americans' hesitancy and concerns in accepting Muslims and Islam (see Figure 3). The figure provides a visual representation of the religions polled. Islam is consistently at the bottom of the list of ideologies people trust, regardless of age group.

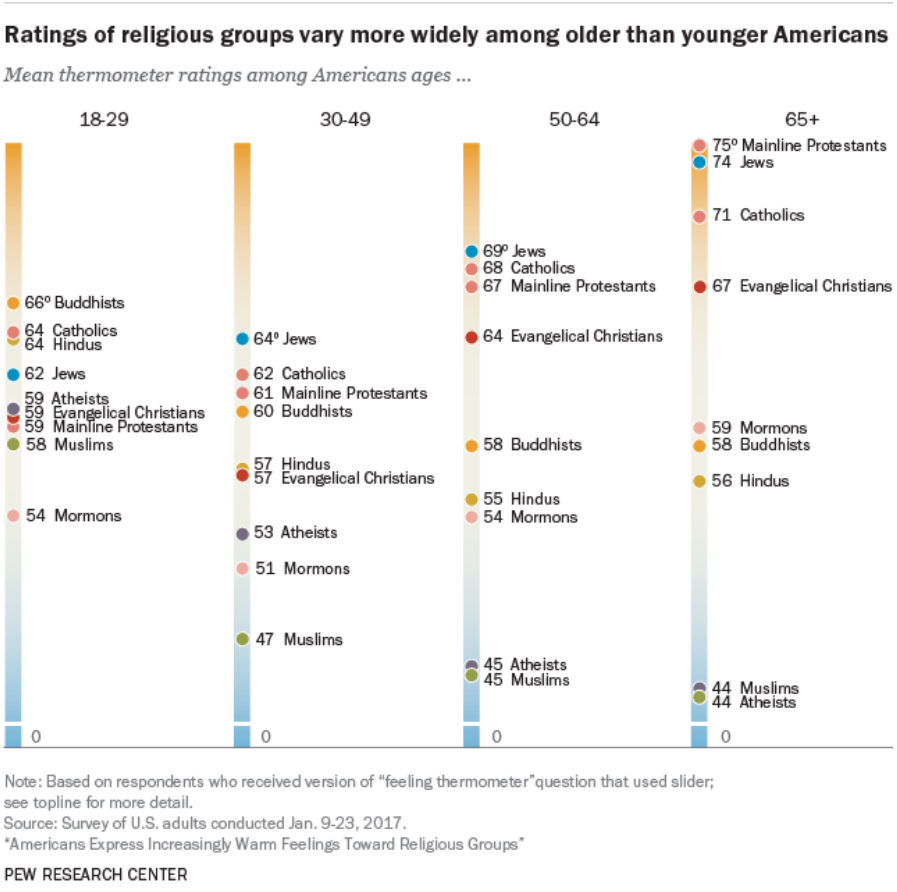

Figure 3. Ratings of Religious Groups
(Mitchell, 2020)

In his paper commissioned in response to the Carnegie Challenge, Sam Afridi (2001), expounded on the issues facing Muslims in America and explained,

> Muslims are prone to vicious stereotypes, negative public imagery, insidious profiling and attacks that equate Islam with terrorism and radicalism. Hate crimes targeting American Muslims are not uncommon. As it struggles for acceptance and understanding, the American Muslim community routinely faces those who question their status and view them with distrust. For many, Muslims remain "the other" the outsider, the enemy, the threat. (p. 4)

On the heels of this insight on Islam's conditions and further complicating Muslims' position in the U.S. were the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. With the horrific attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, trust and perception of Islam in the U.S. plummeted. Ushered in on the heels of these attacks was further incendiary rhetoric in news outlets, anti-Muslim movies and television series, and violent acts committed in retaliation against Muslims or individuals who were perceived to “look like” Muslims. Additionally, a “War on Terror” was waged halfway across the world but felt in very palpable ways by Muslims living in the U.S and abroad.

In many parts of the world, including the U.S., Muslims were acutely feeling the impact of the “War on Terror”. Sheridan (2006) explains how Muslim Hijabi women were the most common victims of hate crimes and discrimination mainly because of their highly recognizable religious identity. She highlights,

> . . .the single most predominant factor in determining who was to be a victim of an attack or infringement was their visual identity as a Muslim…The primary visual identifier appeared to be the hijab, or headscarf, worn by many Muslim women. Women were more likely to be targeted than were men, particularly those who looked to be of Muslim or Arab descent. (p. 319)

Du Bois, 1903, expounds further on the negative impacts such othering has on the human spirit and intellect. Explaining that “facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate” (p. 6). He frames one's ability to see oneself as worthy is grossly diminished when that worth is projected back by those who view you with animosity and aversion. “In a world where it means so much to take a man by the hand and sit beside him, to look frankly into his eyes and feel his heart beating with red blood…one can imagine the consequences of the almost utter absence of such social amenities” (p. 111). Although Du Bois initially wrote for a different purpose and audience, the philosophy behind his words can be applied to other subjugated groups. For example, in this instance, Muslim international students seeking an education in an environment that may see them with contempt and distrust.

In conclusion, the fear and distrust of Muslims in America is a long-standing and complicated issue, and Islam in the U.S. has continued to struggle

for legitimacy. Muslims in America have an ongoing uphill battle, whether against the historically situated perception of opposing Christian identity to the current fight against its perceived threats to Western notions of freedom. As mentioned previously, this situation is complicated further for the international students of the Muslim faith who, in addition to the other challenges studying in new environments brings, will also have to navigate the false and harmful identity they are assigned by way of association.

Muslim Students' Experiences in Higher Education

Considering the research done on the internationalization of higher education and establishing the negative perception of Islam and Muslims in the U.S., the next theme is the Muslim student experience in the U.S. higher education setting. McDermott-Levy (2011), in her phenomenological study on 12 female Arab-Muslim nursing students, originally from the country of Oman, now studying in the United States, posits that students believed that wearing the hijab may have been the source of prejudice both on and off-campus. Moreover, women who wear the hijab thought that the professors and classmates were hesitant to speak with them because they assumed that the Muslim women wearing the hijab did not speak English. McDermott-Levy used a method of descriptive phenomenological inquiry to help identify the perceptions of her sample group. The participants were asked a series of 7 open-ended questions in individualized interviews that lasted between 1-1.5 hours. The data analysis resulted in the following themes: Going Alone, Anti-Muslim Sentiment, Not

Paying Much Attention, Having New Freedoms, Shifting Paradigms, Maintaining Religion, Cultural Immersion, English Immersion, Making American Friends, Self-Directed Learning, and Growing. McDermott Levy concludes, “In addition to their academic needs, international students must adapt to living in the host country… Without the presence of their family, the Omani women in this study described experiencing discrimination, exposure to different ways of thinking and living, as well as an awareness of being alone and doing things on their own” (p. 77).

Tindongan, 2012, explains Muslims have lived in the United States since the early settlers and have struggled with acceptance and faced regular opposition even as early as the “drafting of the Pennsylvania state constitution of 1776” (p. 52). Her account highlights the historical and thus deep-rooted struggles Muslims face in gaining acceptance in American societies. In her research, Tindongan used a qualitative research design to conduct a three-month study using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and photographic data collection (Photovoice) to gain insight into the lived experiences of adolescent Muslim students' and their parents. She was able to identify six themes and three meta-themes. They included: “School, Teachers, and Peers; 2. Impact of a Small-town, Rural Environment; 3. Time and Space for Islam; 4. Impacts of 9/11; 5. Muslim Identity, and 6. Negotiating Identity. The meta themes were: 1. Belonging; 2. Resilience; and 3. Living in Liminal Space” (Tindongan, 2012, p. 3-4). In the analysis, Tindongan found that although the students expressed relatively positive experiences, they did report a sense of not fully belonging to

the communities where they lived and went to school. Her study points out the importance of the system-wide interpretation and implementation of inclusion and support efforts to ensure students feel they are genuinely included and accepted. Her research also points out that genuine inclusion has to go beyond policy and procedure to align with authentic experiences and a vision students can see themselves included in.

Seggie and Sanford 2010, to help identify students' perceptions of the campus religious climate at a mostly Christian university campus setting, conducted face-to-face interviews with six Hijabi Muslim female undergraduate students recruited through snowball sampling. The interviews consisted of 13 questions, covering both demographic and background information and open-ended questions that helped to highlight the participants' experiences and relationships on campus. They explain that through their qualitative case study, students shared a mixture of responses regarding perceptions of their undergraduate experience, and "[t]he data suggests that participants have both positive and negative campus climate perceptions. Participants perceive the climate welcoming and supportive to a certain extent," (Seggie and Sanford, p.75). The critical factor regarding their perceptions of either positive or negative experiences surrounded the identification of their headscarves, their academic success, expectations for inclusiveness, and the occasionally reported occurrences of marginalization. Seggie and Sanford 2010 further explain that the

central defining factor for these students is their Hijab, a visually distinctive marker that distinguishes them from other, even non-Hijabi Muslim students.

In looking at Muslim students, and more specifically, the female Muslim Hijabi student within a university setting pre the 911 terror attacks, Cole and Ahmadi (2003), reflect on the perceptions and experiences of these female students during their time in university. They posit that “given the zeitgeist of cultural diversity and college enrollment trends, exploring the experiences of Muslim women who veil has the capacity to broaden the complexity and understanding of our diverging college student populations” (p. 47). They conducted a qualitative study of 7 female Hijabi students from differing national origins. Implementing open-ended interview questions, they sought to identify these Hijabi women's perceptions and experiences on a large college campus. Their research was “designed to provide a depth of understanding through anecdotal evidence discussing: (a) the college experience and perceptions of Muslim women who veil, (b) their reasons for veiling, (c) their perceptions of the college environment, and (d) whether their collegiate experience affected their decision to continue or discontinue veiling” (Cole & Ahamdi p. 47). Through their research they were able to identify six recurring themes, “being a good Muslim, a Muslim identity, stereotypes and misconceptions, social reinforcement, modesty without the veil, and religious obligation” (Cole & Ahamdi p. 54). The resulting feedback highlighted that students grappled with wearing the Hijab, people’s perceptions of them around campus, and their perceptions of themselves. They

also explain that some of the participants shared desires to remove the Hijab based on this feedback, and some even did remove it once on campus for an extended time.

Speck (1997) looked at the Muslim student experience, focusing mainly on possible religious bias among professors. His was a two-part study that looked at Muslim student feedback on their encounters with religious prejudice in the higher education setting. The first part of the study consisted of a questionnaire distributed to Muslim students at a weekly obligatory Friday prayer. Muslim students' responses indicate encounters with religious prejudice, but those who completed questionnaires gave few examples of such prejudice (Speck, 1996). Once collected and analyzed for general feedback on discrimination, the second part of the study focused on interviews with four of the original respondents in an attempt to collect specific examples and in-depth detail. An analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed that students identified the following four problems: (1) professors' misunderstanding of Muslim practices may result in misrepresenting them in the classroom; (2) professors may use media that introduce misunderstandings about Islam; (3) professors may fail to maintain attitudes of respect for certain religions in the classroom, and (4) professors may not make an effort to accommodate students' religious practices (Speck 1997, p. 40). Key to his findings is that the interviewees collectively shared that in their experiences, the general understanding of Muslim practices and beliefs is alien to many within the United States, including and most important to this study, the

students' professors. Beyond general misperceptions about Islam, interviewees noted that Americans as a group do not understand Islamic practices such as polygamy, covering (particularly the wearing of a Hijab), the modesty of dress in general, and fasting, particularly fasting associated with Ramadan (Speck 1997, p. 40).

Asmar, C., Proude, E., & Inge, L. (2004), through a grant from the University of Sydney, Australia, looked at the university experience of both male and female Muslim students in several university settings in Australia. The researchers look at students' satisfaction with university support services, sense of belonging, and perceptions of discrimination. They used personal networks, campus Muslim Student Association meetings, and snowball sampling to identify the survey participants. From the 175 responses received, "It can be seen that well over half the students (61 %) agreed that they feel part of a group of staff and students committed to learning, and feel able to explore their academic interests with staff and students (51%). However, less than a third (31%) feel they really belong to the university community" (p. 53). Their justification for this sense of dissatisfaction is tied primarily to the students' understanding that there was a lack of support. Examples included were a lack of dedicated space for prayer and overall discomfort with the campus culture. "When asked whether they felt Muslim students were valued at their university, women were significantly less likely to agree than men, as Table 4 indicates. Whereas 41 percent of men agreed, only 23 percent of women did, and a quarter of the

women disagreed” (p. 56). Asmar et al.’s findings further support Muslim students' university experience as complicated and multilayered. Simultaneously, they find value in academics and recognize the lack of support needed to foster a sense of belonging to their social and cultural development.

Summary

Having examined the themes relevant to female Hijabi Muslim international students within the context of their higher education experience, it has become apparent that further research on the lived experiences of this student demographic is necessary. The complexities of leaving one’s “home” and those familiar/familial surroundings for the opportunity to study abroad can seem to many a pathway to greater opportunities. However, can that same perspective apply to Muslim students? Considering the potential underlying animosity towards Muslims, coupled with a lack of cultural competence to process this animosity, leaves room for a potentially complicated educational journey. This researcher aims to grapple with these issues by highlighting the female Hijabi Muslim international students’ lived experiences through the lens of Postcolonial Theory. This researcher will examine their experiences within the contextualized settings, considering the established social and political power dynamics and how the processing of these experiences translates into their sense of belonging within their university settings. Throughout the review of the literature, the standard research methods most salient in the studies cited are qualitative in design. Many of the researchers implemented open-ended interview questions

and/or surveys. The literature also highlighted the importance of a qualitative method to help capture the detailed subtleties of participants' diverse experiences. This study will aim to be grounded in these same methodological practices via a phenomenological design.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous literature highlighted the internationalization of higher education, considering both the push for and motivations behind these efforts. Also of significance in the literature was the research done on Muslim students' experiences in higher education, which helped highlight significant factors such as the struggles students experienced when acclimating to study environments or their self-perceptions. The literature also highlighted the systemic Islamaphobia prevalent in the United States, seen through examples such as the terrifying portrayal of Muslims in popular and news media and national climate surveys highlighting society's mistrust of those who identify as Muslim. The researcher will describe the qualitative research design, methodology, and theoretical lens implemented in this next chapter. A qualitative design was implemented to collect and analyze the data, given the themes highlighted in the literature, coupled with the researcher's goal to anthropomorphize the students' lived experiences using a phenomenological research design. The research questions the researcher hopes to explore are 1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University, 2. What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences, and 3. What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting?

Researcher Positionality

Having lived as a minority for the entirety of my conscious existence and having dealt with some contentious situations directly related to my minority status, the research topic and subsequent design are simultaneously personally important and cathartic. To say different would begin this study under false pretexts and deny the authenticity I hope to establish. Researcher positionality, or world view, as clarified by Darwin Holmes, “may predispose someone towards a particular point or point of view, however, that does not mean that these necessarily automatically lead to particular views or perspectives” (p. 2). For transparency in this study, the following are factors that highlight my positionality. I was born in Marsa Matrouh, Egypt, a small beachside town on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. I was raised here until just after I turned four years old. At that time, in the fall of 1979, my parents, also both born and raised in Egypt, immigrated with my sister and me to San Gabriel, a small suburb outside of Los Angeles, California. I was raised there until I turned eleven, when we moved to Bloomington, California, a quieter, more rural area. My father, who gave up his comfortable existence as a businessman in his small hometown for a chance at a better life for his two daughters, accepted employment as a maintenance man in a state-run hospital. He would make a daily four-hour commute to his job. He did this almost until the day he died. I learned about hard work, resiliency, and unconditional love from this sacrifice. My mother, a teacher in her hometown, became a housewife whose primary purpose was to assure our academic

success. She continuously reminded my sister and me about our great opportunities and how it was our “job” to take full advantage of them. Having been raised within a culture, Arab, and religion, Islam, that was almost entirely unrepresented in every aspect of my life (except as evil in the mass media), I recognize now I carried an unspoken understanding that I didn’t belong fully within the society I was navigating. All of these variables have a strong influence on how I see the world and how I react to and maneuver throughout it. Growing up on the fringes has helped me be both sensitive to people’s needs and also sensitive to the plight of the “othered.” Whether it is oppressed immigrants, women, children, or people dealing with problems of gender equality, I always feel I am obligated to give their issues (my issues) a voice. I think too that my background has also shaped my past and present career paths. Again, because I feel such a connection to the struggles of immigrants and those who work hard for an opportunity to better their existences, I elected to engage in work that facilitated in some way this path, education. In my previous role, I worked closely with large populations of international students studying in higher education. In working with this population of students, recognizing some of their struggles, I decided to look at the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students in their higher education settings. My motivations for this research are driven by my background as an immigrant confronting the various obstacles I have had to contend with as a woman of color in this society, and in great part too, because of my personal experiences making sense of my world as a Muslim

Hijabi. Having reviewed research on international students and Muslim students, I recognized too there was a gap in the data and literature on this topic. More than this, though, the motivation to research the lived experiences of this specific population stemmed from a deep professional and personal responsibility I feel as an educator, a woman, and Hijabi.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Existing as a minority in a majority setting, be that as an immigrant, exile, or by ethnic identity, awakens an intrinsic striving to prove your worth. Lamming (1960) cited in Griffith et al. explains further that, “when (the minority) is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonized his own history, then there are certain complications. For each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of the (power) Headquarters,” (p. 12-13). This research aims to examine the lived experiences of the female Hijabi Muslim international students directly through their accounting. The study will take place at a local Southern California University, which has approximately 20,000 students, 6% of which are international students. The study implements a qualitative phenomenological design and is grounded in Postcolonial theory. The intersectionality of the phenomenon, Hijabi international students, coupled with their positions as minorities studying in the cultural hegemony found in the Western university setting, a qualitative design provided the most salient method to capture the students’ lived experiences.

Colonialism, at its basest, is the violent invasion and subjugation of nations. For example, colonializing European countries implemented the ethnic cleansing and singularity of being on the nations they occupied through military force. The legacy of this colonization results in the positioning of the colonizer's doctrines as the dominant and, therefore, coveted objective, broadly infiltrating the ideological and foundational structures of the colonized societies. This simultaneously erases the colonized nations' history and reduces them to positions of subordination. Postcolonial theory focuses on the impact of these colonial forms of power and the continuing dominance of racial and cultural hierarchies by centering on marginalized voices. Within the context of this study, specifically in the higher educational setting, Postcolonial theory helps identify constructs for academic hierarchies, clarifying what and how female Hijabi Muslim international students might experience navigating such environments. Postcolonial theory also permits consideration of the themes that arise from the data to help "detail the situations of migrant groups within First World states" (Mongia 1996). Mongia et al., 1996, cite Bhabha, to further explain, "(t)he term Postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World comes to be framed in the West" (pg. 1). To be clear, the traditional definition of Postcolonialism, considering the colonized and their experiences within the setting of the colonization, will not be the focus of this paper. However, the

structural and relational influences of the prevalent power dynamic within the academic setting will be considered. Edward Said (1978) highlights that “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied” (p. 13). This is important to this study as students’ lived experiences cannot be fully understood without also considering the power dynamics they are navigating, and reflecting on their lived experiences in relation to them.

Edward Said’s seminal piece “Orientalism” (1978), which many argue is the foundational work serving to establish current Postcolonial theory, is the first important consideration to this study. In his text, Said explains how the dominant Western powers create the binary opposite of the Western ideal, the Middle Eastern “Orient” or “the Other.” They also strategically align the “Other” with intrinsically violent and primitive existences, justifying the domination and elimination of these societies. Said further explains, in defining the Orient in such a regressive way, the outcome becomes the eventual production of discourses that identify the Orient in nothing more than tropes and as single dimensioned beings. What prevails are texts, historical accountings, paintings, poetry, and other material sources all supporting this concept of the exotic “Other.” It becomes impossible to view the Orient in any context outside of this because exposure to the Orient is mediated through these discourses or sources of “knowledge.” For this study, given that most of the international female Hijabi’s are both from previously colonized nations and primarily from the “Orient” or “the

Middle East", how they are perceived and interacted with is significant to their overall lived experiences. If their peers and faculty know them through these same tropes, are the students sharing experiences that support their sense of feeling "othered" in their courses? In addition, do they share examples of being othered in other academic settings or in on-campus social interactions?

A critical Postcolonial perspective is the students' positionality interacting in the various university spaces. International students are studying in academic settings most have newly entered. Therefore, they are trying to navigate both the educational and socio-cultural norms of their institutions. Additionally, many of these students are from previously colonized nations. In Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak, her deconstruction of the impact of being from a historically colonized nation highlights the positioning of the colonized as subjugated "other." She explains the extensive impact of colonization, which by its nature consigns the colonized and all aspects of their epistemic and lived experiences as other than the desired societal goal, "(t)he clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as other" (Griffiths, et al.,p. 24-25). This positioning is vital to this study as the potential for the students to interact with societal and self-imposed othering must be considered. The impact of the othering is also essential considering the previously gained knowledge the students bring with them. Is this historical knowledge unrecognized or is it dismissed as insignificant parts of their existence? As Spivak further explains,

“(t)he palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as subjugated knowledge, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate” (Griffiths, et al., p. 25). Such dismissal of experience and knowledge situates students as incapable of critical thinking, devoid of historical knowledge and human experiences. Therefore, the legacy of colonialization does not end with the departure of the colonizer from the nations they colonized. On the contrary, the generational impacts of this othering are ingrained in the colonized’s structural and ideological existence and must also be considered in this study.

In “Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” (1984), Bhabha explores the concept of mimicry and explains it is the emergence of,

> . . .the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, a sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power. (p. 126)

He posits that in adopting the colonial constructs of being, a rebellion against it simultaneously arises. Therefore, in considering the lived experiences of the female Hijabi Muslim international students for this study, it becomes significant that we then deliberate to what extent students take on or “mimic” the habits of the dominant culture of power and to what extent they dissent? Like their domestic peers, international students are not coming to university settings devoid of human experience. These are complex individuals with similarly complex existences; therefore, it is critical to consider how mimicry within their

university impacts their lived experiences. Additionally, through a Postcolonial lens, we can also explore how the international students apply their historical ideologies to their lived experiences. Do students feel they must surrender their native language, mimic the language expressions of those in power, and are they made to feel the target language is superior? How is the creative process, development of ideas, or presentation of academic projects considered? Are they consigned to performative social interactions, presenting themselves as caricatures, how they sense their domestic counterparts would like to see them, are comfortable with them? Where do students feel they have agency, and how? The insight provided through considering mimicry as described by Bhabha is therefore also vital to consider.

Research Design

This researcher implemented a qualitative research design and exploratory interview-based data collection method to report on the participants' individualized lived experiences. A qualitative design allows the participants to share their nuanced lived experiences from their perspectives without looking to prove the outcome of a hypothesis or assumptions. In addition, qualitative studies allow for the natural evolution of meaning needed to articulate the layered and often intangible realities of participants' experiences. Maxwell (2005) explains, "Qualitative research has an inherent openness and flexibility… leading to a focus on meaning" (p. 22). The research questions are 1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern

California University, 2. What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences, and 3. What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting?

With a qualitative study, the researcher can also look at the participants' experiences and the reality created for them through the processing of these experiences. Maxwell (2005) explains, “in a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the physical events and behaviors that are taking place, but also in how participants in your study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior” (p. 22). Qualitative studies are therefore more suited to maintaining the participants' individuality and considerations of shared experiences or salient themes. This distinction is also important for this study, given that the participants are international students. This additional factor is critical in identifying the various stratums students are interpreting to attain the reality of their meanings.

Qualitative studies also allow for the contextual understanding of data collected. For this study, collecting students’ accounting of their lived experiences allows for the open dialogue of narrative sharing, the opportunity to understand what they experienced and where, how, why, and with whom all becomes possible (Glesne, 2013). In qualitative designs, participants are given the space to share to the extent of their comfort through the flexible data collection methods. Interviews allow for the individualized exploration of a phenomenon, while open-ended questions give participants the freedom to evolve through the

data collection process. These qualitative data collection and knowledge-building measures do not fix participants to a specific desired outcome.

Research Methodology

The researcher determined the research study should implement a phenomenological design to describe the participants' lived experiences situated within the phenomenon of being a female Hijabi Muslim international student in the higher education setting. Phenomenology, rooted historically in philosophical studies and first developed by Mathematician and Philosopher Edmund Husserl, was initially concerned with answering questions about meaning and describing experiences by attempting to find the "pure logic" of investigation. As described by Cerbone (2014), Husserlian phenomenology strove to, "proceed without the aid of any unexamined assumptions; phenomenology is to be a "presuppositionless" form of enquiry" (p. 12). Following Husserl, philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty each add to the understanding of phenomenology by applying varying considerations or opposing methods for analysis. In opposition to Husserl's approach, where the researcher is to isolate her personal experiences to describe the phenomena being considered, Heidegger, for example, suggested it was imperative in understanding the data that the researcher ideally have extensive first-hand knowledge of the phenomena (Mapp 2008). Sartre, focusing on the analysis of experiences, posits that the conscious inclusion of the "I" or the "ego" of the researcher is vital in fully understanding the lived experience of the study

participants. Sartre also suggests the simultaneous transferal between conscious and subconscious reflection is the natural progression of understanding lived experiences and, “characterizes himself as “conspiring” with that experience, where that means reviving the experience while following alongside it,” (Cerbone, 2014). Through the study of post-war veterans, Ponty elevated the phenomenological considerations of lived experiences by researching the extent to which we can grapple with the physical and metaphysical experiences we encounter. Lived experiences, per Ponty, were not just manifested through our view of encounters but our actual physical presence within the world. Cerbone further explains Ponty’s definition of experiences as those that,

> . . .are manifest as near or far, here or there, in reach or out of reach, above or below, available or unavailable, usable or unusable, inviting or repulsive…in relation to our ways of inhabiting the world, and such inhabitation is always bodily in nature. (p. 102)

Over time, phenomenology research paradigms evolved to include a social science approach, with current theory focusing on the research subject’s accounting of an experience within the context of a specific phenomenon, with the understanding that this first-hand accounting provides the humanistic element required for authentication. Mapp (2008) clarifies phenomenological approaches are primarily concerned with, “searching for meanings and essences of the experience. It obtains descriptions of experiences through first-person accounts during informal one-to-one interviews…allowing the experience to be

understood” (p. 308). Van Manen (1990) further explains the intrinsic connectivity between person and world, aligning phenomenology as the natural next process for those researchers seeking to understand authentic human experiences, calling this the “principle of "intentionality." Van Manen also explains that hermeneutics, or the science of interpretations of experiences, in relation to the subject, researcher, and the world are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, true validity of data analysis on lived experiences are attained through phenomenological research methods, as these research tools best meet the needs of those seeking to understand the layered meanings and emotions inherent to the human experience, “hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the logos of other, the whole, the communal, or the social” (p. 7).

Through phenomenology, as discussed earlier, the research participants will be afforded the opportunity to share their lived experiences with the established understanding that there is no expectation for a specific set of outcomes. Phenomenology also seeks to find meaning in lived experiences, allowing for the variances intrinsically tied to human existence and where they are grappling with everyday issues. Lastly, phenomenology allows for a broader approach to finding meaning or “truth.” Moran & Mooney (2002) explain that in seeking the “truth” of a shared lived experience, “metaphysical truth, or “the” truth itself, must have a different content, within the limits of the priori structure of the

world, for each person because the content of world being is, in every case, different for each person (p. 210). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, given the unique and multilayered phenomena of the female Hijabi Muslim international students navigating their higher educational institutions, the phenomenological method for data collection and analysis best aligns.

Design Specifics

The research focused on current and former female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University. This research site was chosen, as previously mentioned, given the researcher's previous role as the Academic Coordinator of the English Language Program. The researcher was in this role for approximately 14 years, and witnessed hundreds of students attending the program. One of the primary responsibilities of this role was the academic programming for all international students who entered the university still requiring language remediation. The principal purpose of the program was academic language and cultural studies. Students attend courses Monday through Friday for 10-week increments, and course topics include composition and grammar studies, current events, and popular music. Uniquely tailored social programming designed to assist with student transition to campus culture and climate were also central curricular components of the program. At the end of the 10 weeks, students who successfully completed their assigned level in the language program moved on to the next higher level of study. While attending the English Language Program, which was located in a separate building at the

far end of the campus, international students were relatively isolated from the main campus and did not come into active contact with other domestic university students during class sessions. Eventually, students who completed the highest level of preparatory study were able to matriculate to the university to focus on undergraduate or graduate programs. The researcher would often encounter her former international students, then studying in their primary majors, and inquire about their wellbeing and acclimation to the campus climate. Often she would get answers that highlighted personal struggles students were experiencing concerning their sense of community and acquisition of academic expectations. It occurred to this researcher that an in-depth inquiry into what the students were experiencing, focusing on their daily lived experiences, could be valuable as both a means to inform the current practices at the English Langauge Program and also potentially for the broader campus community. It is also imperative to consider the researcher's role at this juncture. Maxwell (2005) explains, “in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done” (p. 83). Highlighted above, the researcher shares her previous English Language Program academic and social programming responsibilities and how many international students attended these programs. The researcher recognizes the potential conflict this may create for participants. They may be afraid to participate or might feel pressured to participate out of obligation. Additionally, the researcher is herself a Muslim Hijabi. She has previously shared her personal

experiences with contentious and judgmental individuals, who have taken issue with her Muslim identity, so there is also a recognition that these previous negative experiences may influence data analysis. The researcher is also of Egyptian descent; given that all of the participants are of Arab heritage, there is an additional layer of native language and cultural familiarity. This can potentially impact the students in a few ways. Participants may feel intimidated to speak their authentic truth for fear of judgment or that the researcher may share their information with others in the larger Muslim or Arab communities. On the contrary, this may also make the participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences, knowing the researcher has a shared lived experience, language, and religion.

Although it is essential to get enough data to achieve saturation of salient themes and categories (Taylor et al., 2015), as mentioned previously, small sample sizes are ideal for the detailed analysis implemented in phenomenological studies. Given the narrative elements needed to get the full scope of the students' lived experiences, data will be collected through individual in-depth interviews of participants. Interviews, as Van Manen (1990) explains,

> (1) may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. (p. 66)

For this study, the researcher interviewed 9 students. The interviews were conducted via the video meeting platform Zoom. This remote video interview platform allowed for the simultaneous recording and transcription of interviews while also ensuring privacy, given that each participant was only able to access the interview with a private link and password provided by the researcher. Each interview was scheduled for 45-60 minutes, but the researcher also explained if a potential follow-up interview were necessary, the participant would be contacted. The participants were asked to answer a series of ten semi-structured open-ended conversational format questions about how they perceived their daily lived experiences on campus, including their experiences in academic classroom settings and social events. Questions were developed by the researcher considering the phenomenological approach, which looks to access "the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions" (Van Manen, 1990). Questions were also formulated considering the research mentioned in chapter two of the dissertation, specifically centered on international student experiences, the current climate of fear in the United States associated with Muslims and Islam, and the Muslim student experience in higher education. The students selected were all those who actively wear the Hijab, and are all international students. International students are identified as those students enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs at the University on temporary F1 and J1 visas, and do not have American citizenship. Participants in this study were recruited based on the knowledge they

had completed or were actively studying in undergraduate or graduate programs at the university. After IRB approval was attained, the participants were recruited through email solicitations of current and previous international undergraduate and graduate students and through snowball sampling. Students were asked to sign consent forms after reading participation guidelines where the researcher explained that they were not obligated to participate in the study and could back out or stop the interviews at any time. All participants were also given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The interviews took between 45 to 60 minutes to conduct, and once they were concluded, transcriptions were reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy compared to the video recordings. This was an important step because the transcribing program did not fully capture all of the utterances made by the international students for various reasons, including accent, lowered volume, and unstable internet connectivity.

Once the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy, the researcher began the indexing and categorizing of the data. An analysis was done to examine the significance of recurring themes and their meaning to the research project. The researcher implemented both the use of NVIVO software and hand-coding in excel to identify themes and subthemes. Glesne (2013) explains that researchers should arrange the indexed categories in hierarchies, looking for categories and subcategories. The indexed categories and subcategories were then listed in an electronic codebook, which later served in developing the coding charts highlighting the indexed themes. Of importance to a phenomenological

methodology are the two primary approaches to data analysis. Moran & Mooney (2002) highlight that the two primary functions of phenomenological data analysis are interpretive and descriptive. In keeping with the literal meanings of the data, the descriptive method is primarily concerned with presenting data in its most natural form. Meanings are assigned to the literal utterances of participants. The interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology allows for layered interpretations and multiple meanings to be assigned to data. For the purpose of this study, the researcher implemented both methods in analyzing the interview data to ensure credible and authentic data analysis. Additionally, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the researcher implemented the four core questions researchers should ask themselves as identified by Glesne (2103),

1. What do you notice?
2. Why do you notice what you notice?
3. How can you interpret what you notice?
4. How can you know that your interpretation is the “right” one?

For this study, the researcher asked herself what she noticed and did not notice to be certain that individuals or themes were not omitted from the analysis. Additionally, the researcher implemented a reflexive contemplation of the data to ensure the intrinsic biases did not impact data analysis. Next, the researcher assessed her own values and subjectivity to look for possible influence on the indexed themes and their analysis. Additionally, to consider the accuracy of the interpretations, the researcher enlisted feedback from colleagues and conducted

member checks to ensure the data collected matched what participants shared. Lastly, the researcher sent copies of each transcript to the individual study participants for their review. She asked that if they saw any inaccuracy with the information, to please contact her.

Summary

In summary, this researcher implemented a qualitative phenomenological research design using a Postcolonial theoretical framework to conduct interviews and analyze data on the lived experiences of the female Hijabi Muslim international students at the university. The study hoped to capture the experiences of this population by allowing them the opportunity to share, in their voices, their stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This study aimed to seek insight into the daily lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear the Hijab as they navigate their academic journeys at the university. The researcher concentrated on students who had been at the university for one or more years. Given the limitations COVID restrictions created, this study took place virtually via the Zoom video platform. Zoom provided the initial transcriptions of the interviews, but the researcher also reviewed the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. To help gain insight into the participants' lived experiences, the study was guided by the following three research questions: 1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University, 2. What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences, and 3. What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting? Lastly, in this chapter, once the data were coded for themes, an analysis focusing on the significance of the themes was conducted. This study was grounded in a qualitative phenomenological design and analyzed from a Postcolonial lens. As previously highlighted, Moran & Mooney (2002) clarify two primary functions of phenomenological data analysis: descriptive and interpretive methods. The use of descriptive analysis requires the

researcher to examine the information found in the data on a surface level. This allows the researcher to define what has been described by the research participants occurring in the given phenomenon. In comparison, interpretive analysis requires looking at the nuanced and layered information from the data to highlight some of the potential interpretations for those occurrences. For this study, the researcher implemented both methods in analyzing the interview data to ensure a multilayered approach. Both methods are also recommended in qualitative data analysis to provide in-depth and, thus, more credible and authentic data analysis.

In progressing through the research study and ensuring cross-stakeholder and cross-method triangulation, the researcher conducted the data collection in the following ways. First, students were recruited via the English Language Program at the university. An initial email was sent to students in the program requesting participants for the study, and five students responded. These five participants were sent a message with a synopsis of the topic and research goals via the current English Language Program administrator, who is closely acquainted with the participants. The program administrator introduced the research topic, helped answer any questions concerning the purpose of the study and background information on the researcher, and gave the participants the contact information to reach out to the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. This, as the participants later shared, allowed for a preliminary discussion on the topic and interview questions. The researcher was

able to connect with the remaining participants directly via the professional networking platform, LinkedIn. The researcher sent a message to her contacts on the platform, and four students responded. Additionally, four of the nine participants also requested research questions in advance, both to help familiarize them with the topic and prepare for the interview. During the interviews, the researcher also implemented member-check strategies, often reiterating responses for participants. This is significantly important in studies with participants whose first language is not English, as it helps identify if the participants' responses to questions and the researcher's understanding of the responses align with the intended meaning.

Once the interviews were concluded, the researcher began the data analysis of the transcribed interviews. First, since all of the participants are international students whose second language is English, and to ensure the accuracy of the data, each recorded Zoom video interview was reviewed simultaneously with the written transcripts. While reviewing the transcripts, the researcher began taking notes of initial themes emerging across interviews. Once finalized, the researcher then considered the data by examining participants' responses across individual interview questions, isolating similar responses into coded themes and sub-themes. Next, the researcher again reviewed the identified themes, categorizing them into broader overarching themes. Finally, the researcher used the NVIVO software to analyze the data, run a text search query, look at exact, specialization, and generalization word

tree maps, and create a word cloud that provided a visualization of word frequencies and associations. Implementing the use of NVIVO as an additional tool to code the themes allowed for a multilayered approach to the data analysis and provided a different method to correct potential bias.

Participant Demographics

The following section includes individual demographic and personal information to contextualize understanding of the participants' backgrounds. The nine participants in this study completed their studies at a local Southern California University. Five of the nine participants attended the university as members of a cohort in a teacher training program completed over an academic year. In this program, participants were on campus an average of 6 hours a day and were required to attend specialized training courses as cohort members. Additionally, they were required to participate in conversation partner sessions in focused conversations in English with domestic university students. They also participated in on-campus events and special teacher training sessions with guest speakers and had leisure time where they had opportunities to explore campus facilities. The remaining four participants were students working on completing their degree programs at the university. Each of the four participants first attended English language training at the university language program before matriculating to main campus study. This is required for those students who have not mastered the necessary level of English proficiency to qualify to begin their academic programs directly upon admission to the university. Once

enrolled in their degree programs, the remaining four participants attended courses at the university an average of three to four days a week for about three hours each day, attended campus events, and utilized various campus facilities and programs. The following is an individual breakdown of each participant listed by their pseudonym.

Hannah, from Saudi Arabia, attended the university to attain a Master's Degree. She first studied in the English Language Program, and after completing the highest level of study needed to enter the university, she matriculated directly into her desired MA degree. Hannah shared she was first scared about what she would expect at the university. Her friends who were already studying on campus had described stories of experiencing difficult transitions into university life. She also expressed an initial apprehension at navigating her courses at such an advanced level because she knew the expectation would be that she would need to be an active and engaged participant in discussions and course assignments. Hannah described her daily routines once she entered the university, her experiences connecting with other students and to the larger campus community, and the experiences she encountered being an international student studying abroad.

Rideenah, also from Saudi Arabia, completed her Master's Degree once she successfully moved into the university after her English language preparation. Rideenah shared that she focused the majority of her academic experience primarily on the classroom. She described arriving on campus a few

minutes before her courses began and returning home afterward. She explained this was mainly due to her other responsibilities, including a spouse and elementary school-aged children. Rideenah identified that the campus activities that she could attend were more community-based, like campus movie nights and the annual fall semester Pow Wow, since these were more geared for families and allowed her to bring her children. Through the feedback on her experiences at the university, a considerable amount of her campus experiences and relationships were built in her courses, at the campus Writing Center, and during the family-oriented community activities held on campus.

Dawlat, a participant in the teacher training program from Saudi Arabia, shared she is an English teacher and attended the university for a teacher training program. Since she is an English teacher, Dawlat also expressed confidence in her ability to communicate and interact while on and off-campus. Given the intensive schedule for the program, Dawlat spent most of her day, Monday through Thursday, on campus, taking courses, having lunch with other female cohort members, and exploring different campus facilities. Although she attended almost every day on campus, Dawlat also shared that she spent most of her time only with the other female cohort members in her training program or with the instructors of their courses. She did not show interest in attending campus activities and explained that she felt she did not have time.

Aisha, also an English instructor and cohort member in the teacher training program from Saudi Arabia, participated in an academic year at the

university. She shares that she spent a considerable amount of time on campus attending courses, having lunch with her fellow cohort members, visiting the gym daily, and even hiring a personal trainer. She explained that her goal was to participate in the training and come away with a strong comparison between the educational system in the United States and Saudi Arabia. Aisha described her experience in the program as one that she felt pride in because as she moved through the program, it was apparent that many of the people she met had little exposure to Muslim women who wear the Hijab. She explains she reached this conclusion both because of the number of times she was stopped and asked why she was wearing her Hijab and through the discussions she had with university students in the conversation groups she attended.

Naima has taught English in Saudi Arabia since 2001 and also attended the university as part of the teacher training program. Naima shared that she chose to live further from campus because she was looking for a high-ranking school for her elementary aged children, so she settled in a home about thirty minutes from campus. This required that she commute to campus each way, resulting in less time on campus before and after courses. She shared that she not only wore Hijab but also a face-covering worn by some Muslim women, called the Niqab. As she shared in her interview, Naima's wearing of the Niqab led her to be more conscious of the places she interacted in and actively avoided areas where there were large crowds of younger students. She also shared that

she didn't attend too many campus events but chose to participate in activities conducted at her children's school, as these were smaller and more "controlled."

Rawia, also a Saudi national, taught high school English and joined the university for the teacher training program as part of the same cohort as Dawlat, Aisha, and Naima. She explained she was very excited to be a part of this training program and was usually the first one in classes each morning and one of the last to leave. She made sure to try and experience each of the opportunities afforded her through her training program. She participated in all conversation group sessions, attended campus activities, and took part in a home visit and dinner arranged by the program administration. Rawia expanded on her experiences at the university by presenting at the International Women's Day campus event and organizing and helping host the Saudi National day celebration, which she shared was attended by a diverse population of students and other campus members. She shared that she came to the university with "diversity" as her goal and tried at every opportunity to experience how to diversify her experiences, learn how to interact with diverse populations, and help others see how diverse her culture was.

Omimah came from Saudi Arabia and studied at the English Language Program to help build her English proficiency. Eventually, she continued on to attain her MA from the university as well. She explained she was a highly active member of the campus, joining and eventually sitting as president of the club tied to her MA program. In the academic year that she was president, she organized

the club conference held at a local mountain resort, which required extensive coordination and communication with various on-campus and off-campus departments. She also helped coordinate club sponsored activities on campus and at outside facilities such as parks and restaurants. She shared that many international and domestic students attended these events. Omimah also revealed how she made the conscious decision early in her program that she would push herself outside of her comfort zone and experience as many things as was possible. Some of the experiences she shared included taking an undergraduate oral communication course to help build her presentation skills, teaching a course in the English Language Program for a large group of international students from her native country, and developing close friendships with people from all nationalities.

Fatimah, the last of the cohort members that participated in the study is also an English teacher from Saudi Arabia. She shared that she valued education and described learning as having no age limit. This belief, coupled with her goal to experience and learn from the things she would see in her program, motivated her to attend the university. Fatimah also described that one of her core principles was to smile when interacting with people because "smiling is the secret to gain other people. I believe smiling break all the borders." She shared that she attended her courses and the other activities in her program, focusing on looking at the differences and similarities in the people she was interacting with. She explained she felt this was the best way to learn and grow. Fatimah made it

a point to help people learn about her Hijab because, as she described, she wore it with pride and wanted to help people understand why.

Zibidah, an MA student from Saudi Arabia, began her studies in the English Language Program. She took on a position as a student assistant in the program, working as a liaison for other students coming from Saudi Arabia. She describes her time studying at the university as some of the best of her life. She also describes this time as her first opportunity to make a large number of international friends. She concentrated her time on expanding her language proficiency and lived experience on campus by attending various campus events for domestic and international students. Zibidah also describes her experiences on campus as character building. She had to expand her knowledge of campus facilities to assist the students she was placed in charge of and learn to communicate with program administration and other campus offices.

To summarize, a total of nine students participated in this research study. Five Saudi Arabian nationals attended the university for a teacher training program for one full year, beginning in July 2019 and ending in July 2020. The remaining four participants, also Saudi Arabian nationals, attended the university at separate times between 2016 and 2021. Each of these four participants studied at the university, ranging from three to five years. The amount of time this group of students spent at the university depended on the English language proficiency level they entered with. Students who came to the university with little to no English proficiency and tested into the beginning levels of English language

training spent a lengthier time preparing for their university studies. In contrast, those students who had more advanced English skills entered their degree programs with shorter English preparation time. This language preparation also correlated to the time they needed to prepare for their degree programs and complete them once they were accepted and matriculated. A complete listing of participants and their demographic and academic information is listed in table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant's Name; Nationality, and Degree/Program of Study.

	Name	Nationality	Degree/Program of Study
1	Hannah	Saudi Arabian	MA
2	Rideenah	Saudi Arabian	MA
3	Dawlat	Saudi Arabian	Professional Training
4	Aisha	Saudi Arabian	Professional Training
5	Naima	Saudi Arabian	Professional Training
6	Rawia	Saudi Arabian	Professional Training
7	Omimah	Saudi Arabian	MA
8	Fatmah	Saudi Arabian	Professional Training
9	Zibidah	Saudi Arabian	MA

Summary of Findings

The majority of the research participants shared that they enjoyed studying at the university. Each of them responded with similarly positive remarks to questions asking them to summarize their overall experience, describing their time studying on campus akin to "the best ever" or something they wish they could do again soon. The study participants also describe course faculty mindful of their needs, implementing academic and religious accommodations when possible. Additionally, their time spent on campus, within spaces for academic support services like The Writing Center and library, or communal gathering spaces like Starbucks or the Student Union, was also positively recollected. Two of the study participants also shared they are actively looking at other academic programs they can apply to and continue their studies in the United States. It should be noted that this is in no way an attempt to identify that all of the participants shared identical experiences. Theirs was no monolith of existence. Although each study participant was a female Hijabi international student whose educational path was similar, their lives and lived experiences differed in many ways. That said, the consensus was that being a Hijabi international student studying in Southern California, specifically at the university, did not present any conspicuous difficulties. On the contrary, many participants described classroom and campus spaces they perceived as positive, and interactions within these settings they defined as inclusive, accepting, and respectful.

However, a closer look at the data reveals patterns of behavior students were exposed to, comments made towards them, their own conscious and subconscious choices, and additional factors that need to be considered better to comprehend the full scope of the students' lived experiences. It is here that the researcher, with the critical discourse on systemically structured power dynamics Postcolonial theory provides, implemented an investigation to extract the nuanced reality present in the data. Interpreting through a Postcolonial lens allows for considering the impacts of cultural hegemony on the experiences the students described navigating and the probable explanations for those experiences. In the interviews, students relayed overt and intangible influences on their daily choices in navigating the campus academic and social terrain. Said (1978) explains this intangible yet critical influence as the accepted norms of cultural hegemony.

> Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more in- fluential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. (Said, 1978, p. 15).

In the data, we witness the imperceptible margins of cultural hegemony as it regulates the students' daily lived experiences. These margins are present in "innocent" questions they are asked, choices they make on where they feel comfortable engaging, and ultimately their conclusion on their sense of representation and belonging. Within the guise of normalized behaviors, some of what the participants shared portrayed interactions that were not jarring enough to be perceivably uncomfortable to them. However, by identifying the themes and sub-themes, it becomes apparent these behaviors were discernible enough that several of the study participants recollected and shared them. Highlighting the degree to which they recognized the accepted cultural norms and, to some extent, how much they felt they could not or should not deviate from them. A total of 7 themes and 12 sub-themes were identified (see Table 2). The themes were categorized to their alignment with the three overarching research questions. What follows is a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the themes with respect to what they elucidate on the daily lived experiences of the female Hijabi international student research participants.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-Themes

1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California university?	2. What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences?	3. What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting?
Self-Isolation	**Familiarity**	**The Monster: You feel it**
a. Affinity	a. Positive	a. Overt/Direct Comments
b. Avoidance	b. Willful Ignorance	b. Difference
Why do you Wear That	**This Happened to my Friend**	**Intellectual Practices**
a. Burden to Educate	a. Fears and Expectations	a. Equity
b. Judgement		b. Accommodations
		Safe Spaces
		a. Representation

Research Question #1: What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University?

Self-Isolation

Affinity

Several participants described daily schedules that included interacting primarily or solely with other students from the same national and religious group. The explanations for these behaviors ranged from a similarity in the native language and cultural familiarity to a shared educational experience resulting in studies and activities that required interactions with their familiar classmates.

Some participants also described an active refusal to interact with others outside of their cultural group. They explain their affinity to the familiar was also motivated by their sense of comfort. Other participants shared schedules or life responsibilities that dictated that they came to campus directly before classes, leaving immediately after. This, too, resulted in self-isolation, where the participants were only interacting with other Saudi Muslim Hijabi students. Mongia et al. (1996) cite Hall in explaining that what the participants were doing was building a community within their academic settings, what is termed as an 'imagined community.' In these communities, they are able to draw closer to what they know; a familiar nationality, religious practices, and language, and center their sense of self as juxtaposed to an environment they do not know.

> It belongs irrevocably, for us, to what Edward Said once called an 'imaginative geography and history', which helps 'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the difference between what is close to it and what is far away'. It 'has acquired an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel'. Our belongingness to it constitutes what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community. (Mongia et al., 1996, p. 117)

Additionally, these insular communities imagined by the participants served as a buffer from potential discomfort in having to interact with the unfamiliar closeness of the university setting. It also provided an additional layer of protection which is the figurative value assigned to this community by the

students. Below Hannah begins her interview by describing how much of her time was spent with only other Saudi students.

> "Are all my time with, especially with, Saudi students. Because it's the same traditional culture."

Omimah also explains that her initial motivations for self-isolating were a sense of comfort within the familiar. Even in the classroom setting, when course faculty would try to integrate the students and provide opportunities for interactions, their default preference had them gravitating back to those students who shared their same national and religious identities. As Omimah acclimated to her campus setting, she later shared that she became far more active with other campus initiatives and interacted with several other students and campus members, but at the beginning of her studies, what was familiar was safe.

> The group working with native speakers was helpful, very helpful. But yeah and in the first quarter was so difficult for us and even we refused it we didn't want to do that, we were not comfortable. We want a group, a Saudi group, our own group.

Hannah further explains that she focused her time on four primary areas on campus. These places, she explains, were where she attended her courses, got snacks and drinks with other Saudi friends, and went to study when she had the opportunity. She does explain that her limited campus exposure was due to her familial responsibilities, young children, and a spouse. However, her time on campus, principally with other Saudi students, supports that her affinity to the

familiar was anchored more in the sense of comfort and imagined community and less on the demand on her time.

Hannah: "There four places for me it's student Union, Starbucks, library, College of Education."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Okay, so when you went to the student Union did you go with who did you go with I shouldn't ask (did you go) who, who did you go with?"

Hannah: "With my friend."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Were your friends also international students?"

Hannah: "Yes, same my country, and she was a Muslim and wear Hijab."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Okay, so she also wore Hijab and also from your country. Did you ever go to the student union with anybody who was non-Saudi from one of your classes to?"

Hannah: "no."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "to study?"

Hannah: "no."

Like the other research participants, Hannah built an imagined community within the larger campus setting, allowing for their conscious and subconscious sense of self through the familiarity of the others.

Avoidance

Some participants described avoiding staying on campus for extended periods of time and avoiding spaces on campus they were concerned may pose a potential discomfort. Hannah explains that she would go directly to her course, occasionally study at the library alone or with another Saudi classmate, and then return directly home. Her explanation again is tied to other responsibilities.

> "(I would go) directly to my class of time after that I went to the library, maybe for one hour. Then I back directly to my home because I have kids."

However, through this description, it can also be concluded that she avoids situations and people she is not familiar with because, as highlighted previously, she also describes spending time only with other Saudi students.

Naima also describes her avoidance of specific spaces, but it is a recognition of an environment she describes as too crowded and less controlled for her. Her explanation for avoidance supports the idea that her motivations are tied to a fear of the unfamiliar and an awareness of risk. Because she is not familiar with these spaces and the audience present within them, she actively avoids having to interact in these spaces.

> Naima: "not exactly for example about the food court, I didn't feel comfortable because there were a lot of young students and they are there were too many students and I I maybe I am I felt uncomfortable because I was afraid if somebody maybe talk to me with some, or speak

to me with something that I won't like. It didn't happen, but maybe I didn't like the crowded places because of that."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "It because it's younger more open audience, less controlled?"

Naima: "yeah, less controlled and they were in groups."

What Naima describes emphasizes that she does not feel like she fits in these spaces, and as Griffiths et al. explain, this 'lack of fit' is an example of displacement.

> Place and displacement are crucial features in Postcolonial discourse… 'place' in Postcolonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterized firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language, of a gap between the 'experienced' environment and descriptions the language provides, and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place." (Griffiths et al., 1995, p. 391)

First, her displacement is seen in the description of her apprehension about interacting in crowded, less controlled spaces. By stressing that someone may say something to her that she 'doesn't like', it is evident that she is referring to someone potentially saying something negative about her Hijab. Secondly, she recognizes that as an international student and second language speaker, her lack of cultural competence also works to displace her. Without the language,

history, and experience in this space, Naima concludes that her only decision is to avoid these spaces as a means of self-preservation.

Why do you Wear That

Burden to Educate

Almost all of the research participants shared an experience, and some shared multiple experiences, with being asked the question, "Why do you wear that?" in relation to the Hijabs and Niqabs they wore. Some of the questioners asked the participants while in classes, while others were asked when moving in spaces on campus. In each of the instances, the participants expressed a sense of responsibility to help educate those who wanted to know about their Hijabs. They describe explaining in detail their motivations and religious practices. Rideenah explains that she was asked to help clarify differences in the style and ways she and her colleagues wore their clothing and the reasons for wearing Hijab.

> "They just asking, they are wondering why you wear this why? Like when we walk in the campus, when we finished our classes we grab our things and we want to go, they asked why you wear this, why you wear abaya and your friend without abaya, she can wear anything? I told it's depends as a religion we have to wear long sleeves, long abaya, long Hijab."

Naima also describes instances where she was asked about her Hijab and Niqab. One instance, she recalls a campus staff member asking her why she covered her face and her hair.

"I think they are working in the university, ask me politely about my niqab why I'm wearing it why I'm wearing it while my colleagues are just wearing hijab."

Fatmah describes being asked for specific details on the regulations for wearing her Hijab. More than just an explanation as to why she was wearing her Hijab, they wanted to know when she didn't have to wear it and under what circumstances.

Fatmah: "yeah and in that class we have different nationalities, from different grades I don't know they are from grade one, they call it freshman"

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "freshman yes."

Fatmah: "yeah freshman or something so they are from different levels in the College and it was interesting because, as I told would they want to learn why are we wearing Hijab, do we wear Hijab all the time, even if we are at home? So they want to know the philosophy of Hijab."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "So you have, you have, you feel you have the responsibility?

Fatmah: "Yes, to explain that"

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "because you are the one wearing the hijab and and people will ask you questions so you have the responsibility to respond to those questions?"

Fatmah: "Yeah…"

With each of these examples, the burden to educate those questioning the Hijab became blatantly apparent. The participants did not indicate in their interviews a sense of being bothered by these questions; many shared a sense of pride in having this position as an educator. However, when considered critically, the act of questioning why the participants are wearing the Hijab is problematic. Since each of the nine participants shared they experienced some version of this question, we must look at the deeper implications of this line of questioning. First, by questioning why the participants are wearing Hijab, there is an implicit understanding that wearing Hijab is different from the cultural norm within the context of the university setting. And although the participants did not interpret this form of questioning in a threatening way, Murillo et al., 2004, clarify that such acts are in line with "(t)he work of Gramci…particularly the concept of hegemony which seeks to explain the mutations of domination that maintain power structures without explicit force. (p. 160)." Here, the questioners exercise their force, albeit seemingly benignly, and request to be informed.

Also, with the pretext of being informed, the questioner is positioning the existence of the Hijab into what Edward Said characterizes as the "exotic other." With this exotic label is the insinuation of a myriad of complicated and fantasized associations, like having to wear the Hijab at all times, being forced to wear the hijab, etc. Hence, the questions shared by Fatmah where they want to know if she "has to wear her Hijab even at home?" Additionally, Stephen Foster clarifies the function of interacting with the exotic:

> The exotic is a symbolic-interpretative element [2] that, among other things, allows members of one social group to understand another social group which they see as different from their own. The cultural Difference is thereby assimilated, if not reduced, and through this dialectic the world of comprehended diversity is enriched and expanded. The resulting understandings are, however, systematic distortions, and the assimilation of Difference is limited since the exotic is fastidiously kept at arm's length rather than taken as one's own. (Foster, 1982, p. 22)

Foster expounds further that in such binary relationships like wearing Hijab and not wearing Hijab, or attempting to understand differing motivations for wearing Hijab, the Hijabis are assigned the implied role of the unfamiliar, in contrast to what is familiar, understood and broadly accepted, in the context of this scenario the Western tradition of not wearing Hijab.

Judgment

Participants described an additional element to the questions asked about why they wore the Hijab. This level of questioning is also problematic but at an even more disquieting level because the questions are also loaded with judgment. Aisha explains how she was asked about being forced to wear her Hijab, and if she really believes, this is what she should do.

> "Yeah I am I remembered some of the students asked us, what are you wearing like this? Why you, why are you covering your face, is this because you are forced to do that? Is this, because you believe you this is

a faith you believe in to cover? And sometimes we just respond, sometimes we just respond with the short answers yeah, this is my religion, I am I am a Muslim, so I am wearing this because I believe in my religion."

Dawlat describes being asked about her Hijab and her friend's Niqab. She explained she experienced this several times, but each time concluded this was primarily due to people's unfamiliarity with the Hijab, and their fear for their wellbeing.

"(people) felt sorry for us because they didn't understand why she covered her face."

When considered critically from the perspective of the Postcolonial objectification of the "other," the experiences Dawlat is describing have broader, more insidious implications, because of the imposed judgments and strikingly offensive sexist microaggressions. Sara Suleri (1992) explains that when Western ideologies "make assumptions of women as an oppressed group…(they) never rise above the debilitating generality of their "object" status." (p. 274-275). This assumption that the Hijabis need to be felt sorry for, or need to be enlightened about the possibilities of life without their oppressive Hijab, positions them as having to continuously defend their religious beliefs and prove their genuine commitment to the choices they have made to wear the Hijab.

In the next example, the individual on campus yelled his questions across several feet and then moved toward the study participants until he was close

enough to continue the conversation. Again, Dawlat explains she felt the man questioning them wasn't trying to be discriminatory in his inquiries, but she got the sense that he felt sorry for them like they were being tortured with having to wear the Hijab and Niqab.

> "Yeah and he said, can I ask you a question now yelling with all his lungs like, **CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION**, when we turn, he said, '*Wearing this in front of your face, how can people see you and appreciate your beauty*?' And I think he didn't discriminating, he felt I think I think he felt sorry for us, is like torturing"

The mannerisms used by this individual to question the students, yelling from a distance to assert his inquiries, and the actual questions asked, requesting they explain to him how he is expected to admire their beauty, creates a challenging situation for these students. He is making a value judgment not only on the validity of wearing the Hijab and Niqab but also doing it in such a way that he positions himself into the role of some knowledge keeper tasked with having to save the Hijabis from the regressive act of modesty. Too often, as Said (1978) has explained, the Western 'Oxidant' through its domination of the Eastern 'Orient" has assigned itself the role of rehabilitating the 'subject race' from the pervasive Oriental despotism plaguing their minds because they are too suffused in ignorance to recognize the need for it themselves. What plays out in this interaction is an example of this quasi salvation, where this man is valiantly stepping in to save the Hijabi students from their Hijab and, "its eccentricity, its

backwardness, its salient indifference, its feminine penetrability (Said,1978, p. 206). Additionally, by asking them, "how can people see you and appreciate your beauty," he is not only assaulting them with comments inundated in overt sexually aggressive meanings, this line of questioning also relegates the student's into a position where they have to defend their choices for how they choose to represent themselves. Again, putting the burden on the students to educate others on the life choices most others are not required to validate.

Research Question #2: What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences?

Familiarity

Positive

In considering the positive factors the participants shared about their individual lived experiences, one was a sense of familiarity the students felt in the spaces they interacted in. When students began to feel familiar with their surroundings, they could build a connection to their spaces. Students also described negative impacts of presumed familiarity, as some individuals asked questions or made comments based on a perceived understanding of their Hijabs and Muslim identity. These presumptions were evident in the questions asked by individuals in their classes and on campus and in the reactions they saw from different people while the research participants were interacting with them.

Rideenah, for example, describes how one of her classmates, in a show of solidarity and support, decided to fast with them for the Muslim holy month of

Ramadan. She explains that he made an active effort to familiarize himself with the tenets of the fast, and was cognizant that he would partake in the traditions in the same way as the Muslim students. She explained this was very impactful to her, because he was showing his support for their traditions.

> Rideenah: "So one time we all of us, we invite them to do have Iftar with us in the campus."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "you had you had a separate event, like an Iftar (dinner for breaking fast) and you invited to your classmates to attend?"
>
> "Rideenah: Yes, yes, and one of them, he was fasting. He said, I'm gonna fast like you guys, and he was fasting."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: “Oh, MashaAllah.”
>
> Rideenah: "Yes, he said i'm going to try to experience from morning to evening yeah."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "And then, and then he came and broke his fast with you guys?"
>
> Rideenah: "Yeah the same eat first date and then water the same us."

Aisha also explains that the diversity she found on campus was a positive sense of familiarity to her. She compared this to stories relayed to her by colleagues assigned to other states. They shared difficulties interacting with individuals at the campuses they were studying at and whose demographics were not, in their opinion, diverse.

"There are multiple nationalities and diversity here, I think. Because we have a lot of colleagues in other states, they feel different and they feel different, but in California the situation was very normal."

Rawia shares similar sentiments about the diversity on campus and how this gave her a positive sense of familiarity and acceptance. She explains that for her, the diversity and acceptance she felt gave her a sense of community and was like being back in her home country. For her, there was not a difficult transition to studying at the university.

Rawia: "The day daily life there is smoothly especially in that university or in Cal State, because you know it's a diverse diverse diverse culture, so they accept you even if you are Muslim you wearing Hijab or whatever, they involve you in their society in their community smoothly."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: 'Okay, so you felt like smooth transition for you there?"

Rawia: "Yeah, i've been relaxation they're like my home like my country."

These examples highlight the importance of environments rich in diversity for international students in minority positions like our Hijabi research participants. Sara Ahmed (2007), through her work on the critical impacts of diversity within university settings from a Postcolonial framework, posits that a sense of belonging can be achieved when efforts to diversify campus environments are implemented to speak to the global citizen.

> “Importantly, diversity becomes a means by which certain others, who are ‘global citizens’, can be appealed to: it is about a variety of people… The discourse of global citizenship is indeed a useful one…In other words, diversity becomes an instrument or technique not only for attracting people to the university, but also for dealing with differences within the lived environment of the university. (p. 244)

Willful Ignorance

In contrast to the positive familiarity previously considered, the participants also described instances where negative and presumptive comments were made by some of the people they interacted with. First, Aisha explained how during some of her experiences in classes speaking with native students of English, some of them expressed surprise at the level of sophistication they witnessed when speaking with the research participants.

> "Like we have a class with the other American students to help us improve our language and yeah and when we interact with them interacted with them, they become surprised how we think I don't know, maybe they relate ignorance with Hijab or something like that, when they talk to us and we discussed many, many, many things they say oh you are they saying you are smart, you are, you have a big dreams. Yeah and you also sophisticated and you have the, I think they didn't expect the Muslim woman to be to have like big dreams. Because we traveled there to United States with our family. So our family supported us to go there, and our

husbands were taking care of our children. Just to provide us a good education, to provide us a great opportunity to improve ourselves so they were like fascinated."

Fatmah shares the level of surprise and fascination the domestic students conveyed at the fact that these Hijabi women were accompanied by their spouses to support their dreams to further their educational training. It can be deduced that this speaks to the positionality of the interlocutors, insomuch that the domestic students' surprise at the level of support the Hijabis were receiving contradicts the assumptions they had to the contrary.

Fatamah also shared some of the feedback she got during the conversation partner sessions with reference to the pictures she shared depicting their daily lives back in Saudi Arabia. The domestic students were notably confused and surprised by the images of parties and the Hijabi women dressed in party clothing that did not align with their assumptions of how they lived.

Fatmah: "So, and so they don't know they maybe social media or media in general never talk about Hijabi Muslims."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "That's an important point."

Fatmah: "So, once the heard you know, sometimes we have pictures on our phone for parties or something we showed them they say are you sure you are wearing these? So you know people lack of information and the lack of the source of information and communicating with Hijabi Muslims about it."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Right, so they they're coming to the situation in your opinion, really lacking an understanding of just Hijab in general or having a misunderstanding? That has been my experience too like they have an idea of Hijab which isn't."

Fatmah: "The full idea, yeah."

Fatmah tries to identify the source of the confusion and surprise. She related it to a lack of information on Hijabis or an abundance of misinformation via social media and other media platforms. The possibility of this being a cause can not be wholly negated since an abysmal amount of misinformation on Muslims and the Hijab is circulated online. In addition to this possibility, however, one must also consider that such presumptive deductions result from a larger systemic construct. Abdul R. JanMohamed explains conclusions like these are often the result of institutionalized cultural hegemony where the representative from the dominant collective makes the, "invariable assumptions about his moral superiority (which) means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society's formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the (other)" (p. 65).

Fatmah also described an instance where she was asked about the technological advancements in her native country. One student in the conversation partner class commented to her something along the lines of, I thought all of you ride camels back home.

> "Someone told me, the other way other side people told you're still ride `camels? So because they don't know, so they have no connection between Hijab and Muslims, what they noticed about only I think they focus on Muslims as terrorists, as bad people. But when they talk to us, you know, sometimes your way of talking you're giving your ideas that are discussing make relief inside, your mind and heart, it make it's like you are clearing their vision."

Although tantamount to a racist trope, this example of willful ignorance is also an example of the practice Said, 1978, describes of the Oxidant creating 'Knowledge' on behalf of the 'Orient'. Knowledge equates to power, so those who create the knowledge or promulgate it, also assign the subjugated position to the 'subject race'. Said outlines examples of the historical positioning of third-world bodies within this power dynamic, citing journals kept by European colonists and their construction of knowledge about Egyptians under European rule.

> "Arabs are therefore known to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative" …cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately." (p. 38).

It would be blatantly erroneous not to recognize the similarities between what Fatmah shared she was asked about the reality of life in Saudi Arabia and what Said highlights from the journals written by the European colonists. Both are examples of Western knowledge creation and reinforcement of presumptive regressive existences. This situation speaks to the increased need for knowledge

creation from the source to ensure authentic and accurate depictions, for example, in this circumstance, what life is like in Saudi Arabia.

This Happened to my Friend

Fears and Expectations

The research participants shared that they had many fears and expectations before arriving on campus and even directly after. These fears and expectations were tied to the advice received from Muslim Hijabi international students already studying on campus and other individuals the study participants had interacted with. Dawlat describes being warned about wearing a Hijab in public. Her children's teacher cautioned her that one of her relatives was forced to remove her Hijab out of fear for her safety after Trump took office.

> "And the teacher of my kids she said, maybe because she saw your headscarf I know my cousin she used to wear a headscarf now after the President President change, she took it off.

Hannah describes being told by many students already studying on campus that she should try and avoid a particular instructor, as he had a reputation for not liking Muslim students. Her experience was very different from what they described to her, but it did lead to a heightened sense of caution when she initially began taking his course. To her pleasant surprise, he was not like they described or how she imagined, and she remembered that she enjoyed his course immensely.

Hannah: "Yeah then they told me about specific instructor, he doesn't like a Muslim and then he doesn't like to help us, but when I for for my experience with him, he was amazing."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "You took that same instructor as your friend?"

Hannah: "Yes, He wasn't."

Lastly, Omimah shared fears about being a Hijabi and studying in the United States. She had heard stories from her friends that they had experienced people saying inappropriate or threatening things to them about their Hijabs. She also highlights that her friends who wore Niqab had increased difficulties as compared to those who only wore Hijab. Omimah clarified that she did not have that same experience in her time at the university.

Omimah: "Everybody was okay everybody was okay with with me wearing Hijab everywhere, I didn't feel anything like weird in California no nothing. I heard from my friends, some people are doing like bad stuff or bad words and stuff, but for me no I did this."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "This happened to them."

Omimah: "It happened to them yeah, especially people wearing burka (Niqab)."

The participants' fears and expectations highlight the importance of being correctly informed about what to expect when arriving on campus and how it impacts a student's experience before and while studying.

Research Question #3: What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting?

The Monster: You Feel it

Overt/Direct Comments

To identify students' sense of belonging, representation, and/or engagement, the research participants were asked to consider their time spent on campus, where they felt the most accepted, and places they believed to be not welcoming or uncomfortable. Some participants described comments made towards or about them, while some described feeling welcomed in all of the spaces they visited. Others explained that although no one directly commented to them, they felt that they would not be accepted in some spaces and because of this feeling, they did not interact in these areas. Naima, one of the research participants who wore both Hijab and Niqab, describes an incident where she was ridiculed by a group of students she described as blond and young. This incident occurred while she was walking alone to class. Naima also explained she didn't often walk to class alone for fear of someone making a negative or threatening comment to her.

> Naima: "Yeah and there was one time, I was alone and come back to my class from the writing center I saw two blonde students, two males and one female, two boys and one girl. They were sitting together and chatting loudly i've don't, I do, I did think that they meant to me, but they didn't talk to me and A face to face or showing that they are meaning me, they said,

one of them said i'm really seeing I see a real monster right now and other one saying really and they laughed loud, and they looking at me and talking, I didn't know exactly it's 90% I thought they was talking about me, but I have to give the chance they may be they not meaning me, but I didn't know but that is the reason why i'm avoiding people."

Rideenah also describes the challenges she faced while on campus, not tied just to her Hijab, but more to being an international student navigating the academic expectations of the institution. In response to a question asking her to consider the positive experiences she remembers, she said directly, all of her time was challenging.

"(As an international student) on campus every every time every moment was as if it were a challenge for me."

She did go on to describe her graduation ceremony as the pinnacle of her experiences, but in that initial response, there is much to be considered. What Rideenah describes highlights that although they will have positive experiences, international students, female Muslim Hijabis, in particular, are burdened with additional struggles. The examples show they are expected to perform at advanced levels in a language that is not their first, acclimate to an unfamiliar environment and have the burden of educating others on their religious choice for wearing Hijab. These scenarios create an experience where, "every time, every moment," students are required to meet expectations and goals at levels even greater than their native counterparts.

Difference

The students also described incidences where they felt uncomfortable while on campus at times. Although what they defined was not in relation to a specific occurrence, what they termed 'a feeling" was used to describe this discomfort. They share that this discomfort was also tied to their recognition that they are a minority at the university, and they described not seeing many Hijabis on campus. Dawlat, when relating some of the discomforts her friend expressed experiencing while studying on campus, reiterates that sometimes there is a feeling of discomfort one senses when presented with specific situations.

> "There is no there were no incidents that happened between them, but she felt it. Sometimes you can feel it."

Omimah also recalled a circumstance while studying in a course whose demographics consisted primarily of undergraduate students. She explains that she felt like a stranger in this setting, mainly because she was the only international student in her public speaking course. Her intimidation in the course was also heightened because she was required to give oral presentations to the class and was concerned that her level of English proficiency was not advanced enough.

> Omimah : "I felt a little bit not welcomed when I had to do when I had to take undergrad class. I I remember it was communication skills or public speaking."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Public Speaking."

Omimah : "It was a little bit hard experience for me because I was the only international student and I felt like I'm the weird stranger I felt stranger more than the Hhijab I felt stranger and like it was difficult a little bit."

Omimah's explanation about feeling like a stranger is an important point. This is what Hall (1996) refers to when he explains, "there is a difference which is positional, conditional and conjunctural." Although Omimah states that more than her Hijab made her feel alienated, she recognizes that part of her apprehension was that she was the only Hijabi and international student in the course. This recognition supports the argument that feelings of belonging are aligned with representation, and therefore it is impactful when an individual experiences being the only one occupying a space.

Naima also highlights her feelings of discomfort concerning her choices on where to interact. She shared that she would not enter spaces where she did not see other Muslim Hijabis. Her motivations for this were also an example of her sense of ‘difference.’

Naima: "I tried to avoid, I tried to avoid the places that may not like my faith, people like that."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Right, those places were not comfortable for you, you didn't feel welcome."

Naima: "Yeah".

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "You're avoiding the possibility of that."

Naima: "Yeah, I always follow my gut."

Griffiths et al. explain that an individual's awareness of their difference, the feeling they have that alerts them to their minority status, can be a catalyst for choices about the places they will interact.

> The 'difference' of the Postcolonial subject by which s/he can be 'othered' is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial difference of the body and voice (skin color, eye shape, hair texture, body shape, language, dialect, or accent) are read as indelible signs of the natural inferiority of their posessors. (Griffiths et al., 1995, p. 321)

With the recounting of their ‘gut feeling,’ the study participants provide insight into their intrinsic awareness of their difference, how it sometimes leads to a sense of alienation and, therefore, results in a lack of engagement.

Intellectual Practices

Equity

The research participants shared overwhelmingly positive experiences when asked about their courses. Some students shared they were able to make meaningful connections with their course faculty, and some shared instances where faculty would attend their campus sponsored religious or cultural events. Others recalled that the efforts put forth by the faculty resulted in building their academic confidence and were instrumental to their success. Several participants also described faculty who conducted courses in a way that established a sense of equity. Omimah explains how some of her instructors, once they noticed a pattern of isolation among the Saudi students, implemented

a pedagogical strategy, assigning students group projects. The premise, she clarifies, was to help acclimate students to one another and help build a relationship among the students while also encouraging language proficiency.

> Omimah : "They liked it for sure because I am at the beginning, or in the in the first quarter me and my Saudi classmates were sitting together close to each other, and speaking Arabic sometimes to explain to each other stuff like this, then later they even the professor's they put us more or they did group works, more group work where they put international, they distributed international students in groups so in every group we had the native speakers."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "So they have you interacting with both native and non-native students?"
>
> Omimah : "Yeah, and that's what helped us."

Rideenah also describes how her ability to succeed was tied directly to the confidence built in her by her course faculty. Her example highlights how the faculty, mindful of their international student status, attempted to destigmatize the use of language support tools such as translation devices, as they saw it as a means for building equity among the native and non-native speakers of English.

> Rideenah: "(Faculty instructor) very friendly and he gave us trust for in ourselves yeah and you can do whatever you want, you can speak, if you have any difficulty with the language with the with me just stop me as an

international student i'm going to explain again if you need the translate you can use your phone whatever you want."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Oh wow."

Rideenah: "Yeah they really Yaney MashaAllah help me Yaney and if they not have this this this passion, I will not pass."

Fatmah also describes having the distinct sense that her instructors dealt with them in a manner that was not "strict", nor did they give her the impression they considered her "strange."

Fatmah: "Because the instructors are fair enough, they deal with us equally. They are not strict and they are not finding we are strange because you are wearing Hijab or we have different customs or something so what I like about them, they want to learn from us as we want to learn from them."

Fatmah's experiences speak to a larger influence on her academic progress at the university. Providing inclusive environments where leniency was the applied method of instruction created learning spaces she was able to thrive. Additionally, by allowing her to come to these spaces with the sense that she was not "strange," which can also be read as 'a stranger,' her instructors created a community she was motivated to engage in.

Accommodations

Of significant importance to the research participants were what they acknowledged as accommodations made by the staff and faculty to ensure their

religious comfort. Several of them remembered instances where they were given the option to participate in conversation partner discussions separated by male, female, or mixed-gender groups. Dawlat and Naima both describe this accommodation as one they recognized with considerable gratitude because it was an option provided organically from the start of the program and not a special request that had to be made.

> Dawlat: "Yeah and I would like to mention that there were classes, that we have to interact with the native speakers, so we can improve our spoken language and the, the university organized that we have separate classes, that the the person that i'm interacting with or having conversation with that is a female because they understand that my religion that doesn't it's not it's not doesn't allow interacting with men but, its frowned upon."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: So were you assigned a partner or did you guys just have to find each other?"
>
> Naima: The university, to our great university and giving us what makes what makes us be more comfortable with they divide this as students are so to have men male and female groups."

The accommodations for the conversation partners signify a few essential points for the female Hijabi students. One, by providing the different options to interact and still have conversations in these spaces, program staff ensure the students are not deprived of educational opportunities because of their religious preferences. Secondly, by engaging in performative allyship and making this an

option that students did not have to request, the program staff signal to the students they have taken the initiative to educate themselves on their preferences, have considered ways to accommodate those preferences in advance, and are demonstrating their active steps in attempting to create an environment of acceptance and belonging.

Furthermore, Rideenah also shared that her instructors allowed them to leave course lectures to accommodate their prayer times. The faculty explained that there was no need to ask for permission when going for prayer; they were instructed that they could get up and leave the room whenever necessary.

> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "What about prayer were you able to go pray?"
>
> Rideenah: "Yeah, always. Always they they give us time. Once I tell my teacher that I want to pray he, they or she or he they said just go don't ask, we know that you are a Muslim we know your culture."

This allowance for prayer times is another vital accommodation the students shared they sincerely appreciated. Since Muslims pray five times a day, it is challenging to make sure one does not miss a prayer if, for example, one is in a course lecture. For those Muslims who observe the five daily prayer times regularly, there is a significant amount of anxiety that goes with the possibility of missing a prayer. Recognizing the need to have the time to pray and explicitly expressing support for it helps alleviate potential stress associated with having to ask each time and the possibility of invoking faculty irritation or discomfort.

Safe Spaces

Representation

Said (1978) explains that representation is how power and authorization get distributed because those with hegemonic control can construct knowledge about those without authority. Consequently, representation is doubly significant for the one about which the narrative is being built, as it is how they also see themselves. Interacting within spaces where the research participants felt safe, and felt they saw themselves represented was a point several of them recalled. First, we have Omimah, who described the annual campus event called "The Hijab Challenge," put on by the campus student organization Muslim Student Association. For the challenge, non-Muslim female students at the university are encouraged to try wearing the Hijab for a few days. She explains that this was an essential activity for her to witness, as it helped affirm her sense of being seen and was a visual representation of her belonging on campus.

> Omimah : "I remember seeing, or like they had something called a Hijab experience."
>
> Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "Uh huh. I remember that."
>
> Omimah : "Yes, yes, where they allow women were not wearing Hijab to get the experience of wearing Hijab I remember, they did it several times."

It is important to identify that the representation found in the activity described above is further legitimized because, as Omimah shared, this event was constructed and implemented by Muslim Hijabi's studying at the university.

Therefore, since Muslims control the event's particulars and control the implementation and dissemination of the information collected, this too becomes an exercise in self-representation.

Dawlat describes a different yet just as impactful marker of representation on campus. She recalled that in the newest building on campus at that time, a washroom and prayer room were built for students. This allowed students who wished to perform the obligatory washing and purification of the body before prayer easy access to both facilities.

> Dawlat: "Yeah then Cal State there's the new building and had like a prayer room."

To her, the fact that the administration thought to include such spaces for students was a strong indication of a commitment to students' sense of belonging and a prime example of positive representation.

Finally, and of equal importance, are instances students shared where the lack of representation also impacted their campus experience. Rideenah shared how the lack of representation and accommodation at the campus Recreation Center resulted in her inability to access this key campus resource.

> Rideenah: "So I really want to go to the gym area, but you know as i'm am. I wearing a Hijab and abaya. I feel like i'm it's not the right place for me, because you know it's it's a place as as the United States it's a place for people who work out there and wearing specific clothes. Right, yes, for me, as a as a as a as a student are wearing Hijab and I can't I can't go there. I

really want ,I I love to work out a lot. But I can't as you know it's a it's it's a really big and beautiful place."

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: "It is. It is yes."

Rideenah: "Yeah nice yeah and it really I wanted to go there, but I can't."

For Rideenah, had she been afforded the opportunity to attend the gym, it would have been a great chance to gain a sense of engagement. Again, because of her awareness of difference and the fear that she might be ridiculed for wearing a Hijab and other modest clothing at the gym, she made the decision to avoid this space altogether.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings pulled from the data collected via the Zoom interviews with Female Hijabi international students were considered. The data resulted in 7 themes and 12 sub-themes and were presented in relation to the three overarching research questions. It was important for the researcher to present the data in as much of the participants' voices as possible. In keeping with the qualitative research design, several direct quotes were included. The first research question: 1. What are the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at a local Southern California University, resulted in 2 themes and 4 sub-themes. The research participants described daily lived experiences that had varying elements. They recalled situations of self-isolation where they chose to interact with similar national and religious groups and avoid areas they were not familiar with. They also described instances where they were

asked to educate their domestic peers and other individuals on campus with regard to wearing Hijab, and that occasionally resulted in judgmental responses.

The second research question: What are the factors that lead to these lived experiences, produced 2 themes and 3 sub-themes. The research participants recalled positive and negative factors that impacted their daily experiences. Some of them shared occasions where they made genuine connections with their campus peers. Others described the diverse population at the university as a factor in helping them acclimate faster to their educational experiences. Many of the participants shared experiences where they were exposed to questions and comments about their culture and positions as female Muslim Hijabis. Lastly, some of them shared fears and expectations they anticipated due mainly to information they were exposed to through other students and friends.

For the third and final question, 3: What are their experiences relevant to belonging, representation, and/or engagement in their current higher education setting, 3 themes and 5 sub-themes emerged. This was the largest amount of both themes and sub-themes, and relevant to this, the data pulled concerning this question provided the most enlightening information on the students' lived experiences overall. They recalled instances where individuals on campus made overt derogatory comments about their Hijab. Students also shared their feelings of difference and its impact on their willingness to engage in specific spaces on campus. Some of them highlighted the impactful and much appreciated

accommodations and establishment of equitable practices in their courses, leading to a sense of belonging. Finally, students recalled instances of campus efforts to represent their needs, expressing feeling recognized and appreciated.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear the Hijab as they navigate their academic and social encounters within the university setting. The goal was to center the Hijabi international students, magnifying their individual stories in their voices. The enormity of the dissertation platform, which few individuals have the opportunity to complete, was not lost on the researcher. Therefore, this study focused on presenting a nuanced look at the participants' lives, highlighting their personal journeys to emphasize the human experience each of us negotiates differently. This is imperative to the research because when you humanize folks through their stories, it becomes harder to deprive them of their existence, which too was a goal for the researcher. A qualitative phenomenological design was implemented to best collect the rich data that are detailed and varied (Maxwell & Wooffitt, 2005; Becker, 1971) enough to tell these stories. Qualitative methods also allow for the contextual relevance achieved through narrative data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews (Glesne, 2013). Postcolonial theory is primarily concerned with critically examining how hegemonic power structures relegate marginalized groups socially, politically, and culturally (Said, 1978; Spivak, in Griffiths et al., 1995; Hall, 1996) and best served the goals of this study. As international students, Muslim females, and Hijabis, these research

participants are a minority in the Western hegemony where they are studying. Therefore, in principle, they are consigned to the subaltern statuses Postcolonial theory functions to disrupt.

Overview

This research study is essential to the literature on international students for two key reasons. First, to date, there is no accounting of the lived experiences of female Hijabi Muslim international students at this local Southern California setting. Additionally, it serves institutions of higher education to hear from each student demographic group. Also, the opportunity to hear directly from the students about their experiences is vital, given the active and ongoing recruitment of international students to higher education settings. The more information collected, the better the students can be served. In the literature review, three primary themes were highlighted. First were the themes surrounding the push for internationalization in the university setting. The literature historically contextualized the motivations pushing student recruitment efforts, the complications surrounding valuable academic programs, and some of the benefits and drawbacks related to student success and resources in the university setting. The literature also provided valuable context concerning issues that impact Muslims in the United States. Most salient in this body of literature were the historically Islamophobic ideologies and policies implemented systemically in legal structures in the United States. Additionally, the Anti-Muslim political rhetoric, Islam's depiction in popular culture, and terror events in the

United States were equally important and are all key factors that have led to a climate of fear and distrust of Muslims and Islam in the United States. Lastly, with the data provided on the large number of Muslim international students studying at universities in the United States, the next theme highlighted the varying issues impacting Muslim international students in the U.S. and abroad. The theme identifies complications with student acclimation to university life, varying cultural and classroom behavioral norms and their impact on the interaction between international and domestic students, and international students' sense of worth and belonging in their university settings. These findings highlight the need for a closer investigation of the Muslim student experience in higher education, precisely, the Female Muslim Hijabi experience, since this group of students is so easily identifiable as Muslim because of their Hijab.

In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology of the dissertation were considered. A qualitative phenomenological design was implemented, using descriptive and interpretive methods for data analysis. The use of descriptive analysis methods allowed the researcher to describe what the research participants shared in recounting their daily lived experiences (Cerbone, 2014; Glesne, 2013; Mapp, 2008; Maxwell, 2005; Taylor, et.al., 2015). This was imperative to give readers a visual of what the participants saw, whom they interacted with, and where they interacted. Interpretive analysis of the data allowed the researcher to deep dive into subtle details of those described occurrences and consider participants' mindsets, what emotions they were

grappling with, and their motivations. A Postcolonial lens was also used to explore the salient themes from the data and examine their contextual and layered meanings. Knowledge and representation are used as a tool of dominance and to maintain skewed power dynamics. (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1984; Suleri, 1992; Murillo et.al., 2004; Mongia, 1996; Griffiths et.al., 1995). The skewed power dynamics and struggle for accurate representation were apparent in some study participants' experiences. For example, when interacting on campus, many individuals displayed a lack of knowledge concerning the Hijabi identity. It was also evident in the willful ignorance these individuals expressed in their opinions of Islam and conveyed through their questions regarding the participants' religious and cultural practices. The burden placed on the participants to counter misinformation about their faith and motivations to wear the Hijab also highlighted the situatedness of those they interacted with. Finally, by using Postcolonial theory to examine representations of the Hijab and hear about the participants' experiences in their voices, the ownership of the narrative is reassigned to them, resulting in a shift in representation and power dynamics.

Findings in chapter 4 resulted in 7 themes and 12 sub-themes. First, the participants described daily interactions where they spent most of their time with other female Hijabi international students. This choice to self-isolate was mainly because of the participants' affinity towards other Hijabi's and their comfort level interacting with students of similar national and religious backgrounds. They did share that they made friends with individuals of different nationalities and faiths,

but they also explained that their primary set of friends was other Muslim Hijabis. Many also shared that they would only visit the same few campus facilities, like the library and The Writing Center. They visited these spaces primarily alone or with one or two friends and always to study. This highlights that the students' main goal on campus was to focus on their academics. Some also explained they actively avoided spaces where they did not feel welcome or where they sensed there was a potential that someone may say something insulting to them. Avoiding specific spaces, mainly those crowded with domestic students, stresses that the study participants had an intuitive understanding of the potential for a negative confrontation. Additionally, the research participant's also had several instances where they were asked, "why do you wear that" related to their Hijab and Niqab. They were asked questions that underscored the general lack of information or misinformation people have on Hijab and, in some instances, were encumbered with judgment. The students described feeling a responsibility to educate others on the purpose of wearing Hijab, cases in which they had to dispel misunderstandings about their motivations to cover modestly and help clarify for some that wearing Hijab does not equate with the need to be rescued.

Further findings draw attention to both positive and negative factors that impacted the daily lived experiences of the study participants. Some of them shared how they were able to make meaningful friendships with campus faculty and academic peers over time. Others cite the diversity of students on campus, having a sense that they were not the only minority group, as a primary factor in

assisting them with settling into their academic environment. The study participants also shared experiences of having to contend with willful ignorance from some individuals during classroom and campus interactions. They were exposed to comments and asked questions loaded with assumptions about their culture, how they lived in their countries, and were met by some with surprise at their level of sophistication. These instances were unsettling to the participants since they were required to validate their religious and cultural practices and defend their choice to wear Hijab and Niqab. One of the participants concluded that her domestic peers must associate the hijab with ignorance. Once they started having meaningful conversations about their hopes and futures, she felt her classroom peers were sincerely astonished at how similar they were. Finally, the participants also expressed fears they harbored upon their arrival and initial studies at the university. Some of them communicated with female Hijabi international students already studying on campus. Others had heard warnings about the mistreatment of some Hijabis from Muslim international students in other states. Each of the anecdotal scenarios, because it created a fearful expectation of what the participants would encounter, impacted their initial experiences at the university.

Finally, in reflecting on the study participant's sense of belonging, representation, and/or engagement at the university, the data revealed 3 themes and 5 sub-themes. One study participant shared an encounter of an overt derogatory comment made toward her. This instance, although rare, was

impactful to the student because it confirmed for her a sense of difference she explained she had already been having difficulty with. She also explained that her feelings of difference caused her to avoid certain places for fear of being harassed. This incident was one of the more troubling ones relayed by the students because it was an example of what the student was trying to avoid, and therefore the impacts are far greater than just living the trauma in the moment. Living with the fear of something and then having to experience it, she was put in the position where she now had to overcome an additional barrier. Other students also shared their sense of difference and the challenges they faced. Still, they explained that their exposure to the campus environment helped them overcome the hardships associated with this and eventually gained a stronger sense of belonging. The study participants recalled their course faculty with fondness and gratitude. They mentioned the genuine attention paid to their individual needs and their instructors' consideration with which they conducted their courses. They described open communication styles and a strong sense of equity, as their instructors did not treat them differently from their domestic peers. They also gave several examples of instructors allowing accommodations vital to the students' sense of engagement, like being allowed to pray during class time and being encouraged to use translation devices if needed. Lastly, students also described their sense of representation while experiencing campus events such as “The Hijab Challenge” and discovering a dedicated wash and prayer room where they could perform their obligatory prayers. These safe spaces allowed

the students to feel connected to their university setting and gave them the sense that they were seen and welcomed on campus.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

The study findings demonstrate several key areas educational leaders might consider for future practice. First, the data highlights that most of the study participants tended to self-isolate, seek out others with similar identities as means of protection and comfort, and avoid unfamiliar spaces. In coordination with university student life offices, it is recommended that international programs assign the incoming international students a campus partner to serve as an ambassador and friend for their first few months on campus. These ambassadors could take the initiative to acclimate the students to campus life, introduce them to the various campus facilities, and ensure they understand all that the campus has to offer to them. This could be set up as a for-credit course for which the ambassador students could sign up, so they are motivated to follow through with their assignments, and so there is administrative oversight of the activities the students are attending. The ambassadors would also be responsible for ensuring the international students get answers to pending questions they may have. Data should be collected on the international student experience with the ambassadors at the end of the course for ongoing assessment and program improvement.

It is also recommended that the campus communities become spaces where critical conscious elevation is encouraged, systematically implemented,

and actualized in everyday practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and training too often serve at a surface level, where many students, staff, and faculty tackle only blatant examples of exclusion and discrimination. The data shows many more examples of obscure incidences of discrimination and judgment regarding female Hijabi international students. Diversity training should include exercises for reflection on the burdens we place on others to educate us, shifting the responsibility from the minority groups to those outside of the group wishing to be informed. Also, as the data showed, the participants were asked questions that “seemed innocent” on the surface but had more insidious impacts. The training should also include examples of these questions to emphasize how they register with the responders as judgemental and require explanations that validate or excuse their positions.

Additionally, when recruiting students, it is recommended that international programs collect data on the students’ motivations for studying abroad and essential facts about their lives. This information can be used to develop training and recruitment materials that better answer some important student questions in advance. This information can also be shared with English Language instructors, so they know the students who will be entering their courses and allows for the building of rapport before their arrival on campus. International programs can also send the incoming international students testimonials from current students on their courses and campus life. Furthermore, sending informational videos from former international students

with the top tips to make the most of their academic experience and videos from current university leadership and faculty in the top 5 majors the students typically enter would also serve to familiarize students with their campuses. Each of these initiatives helps introduce students to what they will encounter upon arriving on campus and help dispel specific fears they may have based on false information shared with them by their peers.

Lastly, university leadership should take steps to further representation and access for all students. One of the key points the study participants shared was the intuitive understanding that they could not visit specific spaces like the Gym and Student Union. They described feeling out of place or that it wasn't for them because of their Hijab. It is recommended that a survey be conducted of the entire student body and sub-groups of students to assess the varying needs. For example, at the Gym, recreation leadership can look into providing a women-only hour throughout the day or designating a space for women only. The same initiatives can be taken at the campus pool, where Hijabis are unequivocally denied access simply because they cannot swim in mixed-gender environments. This situation is not mutually exclusive to Hijabi women; however, a survey of the general campus population may highlight that many people would wish to see these types of transformatively inclusive measures. Lastly, it is also important to start allowing students ownership of their representation on campus. It is recommended that Student Life partner with affinity groups on campus to develop meaningful material that will help tell their individual stories. These could

be streamed on campus screens, strategically placed posters, reading materials distributed across campus, and can even be implemented in the curriculum covered in communication and Ethnic Studies courses, to name a few.

Next Steps for Educational Reform

For this study, educational reform needs to be considered in two ways. First, are the policies, educational practices, and support initiatives at the international program level. Next, the broader campus strategies for student success are considered. When developed in a scaffolded approach, both may help provide a holistically beneficial educational experience for all international students. International programs generally have a practice where they recruit masses of students; however current methods do not include efforts to understand individual or even general student needs in advance. Recruitment policies should consist of requirements to educate staff on the students they serve prior to their arrival on campus. This training should go beyond general biographical information and cover in-depth socio-cultural issues and ways to identify signs of distress and find the appropriate resources. There should also be a follow-up on student experiences and resources allocated to help students with adjustment needs.

International programs should also look critically at their curriculum and assess to what extent they are implementing inclusive educational practices. A review of the texts, other course materials, and educational practices will ensure a balanced approach. This will also help students' academic and social

adjustments and develop an enabling environment that centers on students' needs. Instruction should also include aligning course outcomes to engage students in assignments that allow for their self-representation. Of equal importance is the development and application of a curriculum that encourages students' consideration of others' representation and assignments that foster sincere reflection on their positionality in the broader context of the university and strategies for overcoming potential obstacles. Lastly, scholarship programs should not set limits on student academic programs. For example, the Saudi Arabian students in this study should be afforded the opportunity if they want to study in Arabic or Islamic studies courses. This would be a prime opportunity to engage with other students who have a genuine interest in these topics and would be an excellent chance for the international students to start making domestic student connections on campus.

International programs need to develop more robust student support services to meet the unique challenges this population faces. This can be achieved either by creating a student support office within the international program's administrative units or through partnerships with the larger student services programs already available on campus. These support services should include resources that help international students with concerns common to this demographic, such as issues of isolation, homesickness, culture shock, campus acclimation, community building, and finding safe spaces to interact. Lastly, international programs need to develop a process to follow up with students once

they matriculate into the university. There should be additional support for at least 6 months to a year following the student's enrollment into the main campus. This way, the international programs reach out and provide ongoing support for their students, and there is no threat of a gap in student support.

Educational reform at the broader campus level should be more comprehensive, as the data has shown this is where the students will face the most significant challenges. Campus leadership should first assess the percentage of Muslims and Hijabis attending the university. This will help identify the demographic of students represented on campus and allow leaders to determine what support programs are required to help the students succeed. Next, the campus should look at employment recruitment efforts and align leadership positions to reflect the representation of the student populations they serve. Additionally, an assessment of Muslims in leadership positions should be conducted to help ensure representation in spaces where significant and impactful decisions are made. Lastly, campus leadership should partner with international programs to create bridge-building initiatives. One such program could be conversations between campus leadership and incoming international students prior to their matriculation to campus. Another program could be to shadow a university student for the day in the last quarter before the international student enrolls in their primary major. This will demonstrate to students there is a genuine concern for their well-being and ongoing cohesive support from their

initial studies in the Langauge program through their transition to main campus study.

Finally, the campus community needs to assess its current efforts at inclusive curriculum development. Given how often the research participants were asked why they wore Hijab and all of the assumptions that came across in this type of questioning, it is painfully evident there is a significant gap in understanding the Hijabi experience. This educational reform recommendation goes beyond the training recommended earlier and is a more comprehensive recommendation focusing on a multidisciplinary curriculum. A task force can be developed with cross-disciplinary faculty representation to establish a core curriculum that addresses issues such as students' religious beliefs and their right to represent those beliefs without judgment. The development of a curriculum like this should also help students understand the historical implications of specific questions and the importance of taking the initiative to learn about others to better understand themselves in the larger global setting.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for future research studies:

1. A Qualitative Study of the Lived Experiences of Female Muslim International **Undergraduate** Students: By default, given that the respondents that offered to participate were all graduate students, did not collect feedback from undergraduate international Hijabis. It would

be an important piece to consider, given that a few of the participants described feelings of discomfort when it came to being around younger audiences, which is what you find most often in undergraduate courses.

2. A Qualitative Study of the Lived Experiences of Female Muslim **Domestic Undergraduate** Students: It would be valuable to consider the domestic Hijabi experience. Although the domestic Hijabi may not have to contend with similar cultural competency issues as international students, it would be valuable to collect insight into their lived experiences on and off-campus and compare how these experiences impact their academic journeys.
3. A **Mixed-Methods** Study on the Lived Experiences of International Hijabis **Off Campus**: Throughout the collection of the data for this study, many times, students would reference experiences they had off-campus and describe how impactful these experiences were. It would be extremely valuable to collect data on these off-campus experiences in a narrative interview-based data collection methodology and compare it to quantitative survey analysis. These varying methods for data collection would help identify how often the students encountered certain types of experiences and why.
4. **Domestic Student Perceptions of their Hijabi Peers**: Looking at the domestic student perception of Hijabis will also help identify students'

understanding of their Hijabi peers and potential reasons for this. This study should be a randomized survey that asks questions to help assess student perceptions of Hijabi Muslims regarding their intelligence levels, ability to speak their native language, level of sophistication, daily lived habits, and freedom of choice.

5. **International Student Perceptions of Campus Resources**: A mixed-methods approach, using both survey and interview questions, this study will assess student perceptions of the resources available to them on campus and would also be a valuable addition to the current literature. This study would help identify the campus resources students are familiar with and also highlight what areas need to be better advertised. This study will also give the researcher insight on the places students do not feel comfortable visiting and potential reasons why.

Limitations of the Study

Research Sample:

The research participants who responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study were all graduate or professional post-bac students. Once all of the interviews were completed, and the researcher reached out a few more times through email and via the LinkedIn platform, it was concluded that there were not any more students interested in participating in the study. Therefore, this study was limited to the experiences of only the advanced degree students

and did not include the undergraduate international Hijabi students' lived experiences.

English Language Proficiency:

Many of the students recruited for this study were fluent in English. However, since all of them were second-language speakers, a few participants struggled to fully articulate all of their feelings. What was helpful was that the researcher speaks Arabic fluently, and since this is the first language of all of the study participants, she was able to translate or provide words to help support student needs. That said, transcriptions for international students with a program that is not coded to identify accents in the language resulted in incorrect transcripts that had to be checked extensively for accuracy and consistency.

Research Setting:

The virtual Zoom platform made completing the interviews seamless, allowing for the researcher to meet with the participants at all hours of the day when it was convenient for them. However, it also created a slight barrier in communication due to occasional lag times, participants who did not turn on their cameras, and lower audio on some of the interviews. The virtual setting did not allow for some of the natural connectivity that happens in face-to-face conversations, therefore, it took longer to establish a conversation flow with some of the participants.

Final Reflections and Conclusions

This part, this last part, I claim in the first person. I will not write in a detached third person because this part is my lived experience. My previous professional role, overseeing the English Language Program and the international students who attended the university for their studies, was the catalyst for this project. But, it is also true that this project was a lifetime in the making. First, it is imperative to recognize, as Hall explains, “that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position…” (Griffiths, et. al., 1995, p. 227). I approached this project aware of my bias as a Hijabi, as a Muslimah, and because of my previous responsibilities overseeing international student education. I also understood that I would need to check these biases, to the extent that it was possible, at the proverbial door. I made every effort to distance myself when I developed my research questions, writing and rewriting my interview questions, and throughout the interviews with my research participants. There were many times during the interviews when I wanted to comment or say, but what that person did was wrong or what a position of privilege that individual is coming at you from, but I did not because I knew this was not my lived experience and these were not my stories. Once the data was collected and I could go in and begin to analyze it from the Postcolonial lens, I was able to tell both the research participants’ stories and consider the larger implications of what they shared. What developed were complicated and

individualized experiences ranging from student mothers who limited their time on campus because of their familial responsibilities to learning about students who took every opportunity to participate in campus clubs and activities. Each participant had a different experience, and each one of them explained how much they loved studying at the university.

However, of critical importance to this study is what Kanneh as cited by Griffiths et al, describes as the "kind of violence…where 'unveiling' equals 'revealing…barring…breaking her resistence …making her available is confused with a mission of female liberation and a paternalistic notion of empowerment, which, in practice and at base, is a politics of ownership and control (p. 347). These female Muslim international students were questioned, judged, and harassed, all in the name of liberation and the paternalistic notion of empowerment. Through some of the questions asked, the research participants were forced to defend their decisions to wear Hijab and prove their level of culturally acceptable sophistication to validate their existence. And although this was not the majority of what the students shared, these themes are equally as important to consider.

Many of the study participants were also interested in what motivated me to research this student population. They asked me, “Why do you want to do this study,” below are some of my responses that I will leave the reader to interpret:

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: With all of the rhetoric and about anti-Islam and anti-Muslim talk, I was worried in my heart about my students. You know hijabs we have a mark, we have a sign that says i'm Muslim. So I want to know, like what's happening to my Muslim students, what is happening to them in the classroom on campus. Is there something that we need to do better to make sure we are serving them to the best and helping to make them successful, making them comfortable. Most of these students are coming from predominantly Muslim countries, so they don't even know to worry about somebody chasing them or bothering them. I want to hear the female international Hijabi experience in their voice. And you know whether it's positive or negative, it is important to explore.

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed: In the United States of America, not a negative experience but. Yeah it's it's just an acute awareness that people are not familiar with my scarf and people are, not everybody, but a good majority of the people that I interact with on a daily basis are just not familiar, they just don't know right maybe they're a little bit scared because of the news and what they see. I've never had AlhamduliLah like i've never had somebody try to attack me or overtly you know challenge me i've had people make comments when I walk somewhere. I've had people you know, people will stare… just an unfamiliarity with hijab and Muslims even

even at the university level, and so that's why that's really the catalyst for you know how can we give voice.

Suzy Abdel R Sharweed:…I love international students so it's my goal to just add to the conversation I don't have the misconception that I am going to change the world but, exactly what you said you know when you have the responsibility and you can just put the information out there, hopefully somebody will take from it. And, and even if you help one person understand you know the lived experiences of female international students who wear hijab that's one person more that you know that didn't know before so yeah my goal is small, but I hope, hopefully with with some impact InshaAllah.

As a Hijabi who continues to learn the intricacies of navigating the social and professional stratum of my existence, I, too, needed to hear the stories shared by my international sisters. Through the recounting of their daily lived experiences, listening to the joys they experienced with new situations and accomplishments, and the fears and struggles they overcame, I saw parts of my life reflected back at me. It was an affirmation, a reiteration, that some of my same challenges and accomplishments also mattered. This project also allowed me to reflect on those times that most impacted my lived experience. Situations requiring I exercise a great deal of resilience, such as overcoming being the only

Hijabi in almost every professional setting I interact in. Also, living with the daily trauma that plagues most Hijabis when interacting in public spaces given the underlying fear of being harmed by someone who hates Muslims. This study also confirmed that I was not alone in my intuitive understanding that at times I am being looked at with a mixture of contempt and pity, whichever was greater; these projected sentiments are steeped in judgment and self-righteous conclusions. The reality of the Hijabi experience is that it is laden with heavy responsibility. Yet, almost every Hijabi I have interacted with explains the burden is worth the fulfillment they experience representing this Muslim sisterhood. Hijab is the mantle we don to exercise our right to be modest, focus on our spiritual enlightenment, and battle the constraints of the hegemonic ideologies that the Western ideal of women is the only existence with value. Hijab is the nonverbal albeit deafening response to the damaging rhetoric propagated to assault the Hijabi experience. For these and many reasons, it was of highest importance to collect and share the stories of the female Hijabi Muslim International student. Therefore, through this research study, I humbly aspire to proffer an exercise in resistance and the reappropriation of our hijacked identities.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS AND PROTOCOL

DEVELOPED BY

SUZY ABDELRAHMAN SHARWEED (2021)

Questions for Interview/Survey Suzy A. Sharweed
Semi structured interview in a conversation format.

Start with an intro of self and plan for conversation. Explain this will be a fluid conversation, and I may also have follow-up/clarifying questions. This is a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. Try to speak English, but may also switch to Arabic if needed.

Please give examples for your answers.

1. Can you tell me a little about what a typical day on campus consist(ed) of for you?
2. Can you share about your participation in your classroom discussions? How often do you participate and why is this the case?
3. Have you attended any campus activities? How many? What were they?
4. What spaces on campus can you enter and feel welcome?
5. What spaces on campus do you enter and feel you are not welcome?
6. Can you think of and share any positive experiences you have had in your classroom setting?
7. Can you think of and share any negative experiences you have had in your classroom setting?
8. Can you think of and share any positive experiences you have had on campus outside of the classroom?
9. Can you think of and share any negative experiences you have had on campus outside of the classroom?
10. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 1-3-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-267
Title: BEYOND THE HIJAB: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HIJABI MUSLIM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY
Creation Date: 3-29-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Enrique Murillo Jr
Review Board: [redacted]Main IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Expedited	Decision Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member Suzy Sharweed	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact sharweeds@coyote.csusb.edu
Member Enrique Murillo Jr	Role Principal Investigator	Contact EMurillo@csusb.edu
Member Enrique Murillo Jr	Role Primary Contact	Contact EMurillo@csusb.edu

APPENDIX C

COLLEGE OF EXTENDED AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

RECRUITMENT APPROVAL LETTER

[redacted]

WE DEFINE THE *Future*

College of Extended and Global Education

[redacted]

[redacted]

December 6, 2021

To whom it may concern,

Please allow this letter to serve as approval for Suzy Abdelrahman Sharweed to email [redacted] matriculated international students to request participation in her research study.

Beyond the HIjab: Lived experiences of Female Hijabi Muslim International Students at a southern California University.

Sincerely,

Stacia McCambridge

Director of International Admissions and Student and Financial Services

College of Extended and Global Education (CEGE)

smccambr@csusb.edu

(909) 537-3941

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

[redacted]

College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

Student Informed Consent: Interviews

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear Hijab and are studying at [redacted] This study is being conducted by Suzy A. Sharweed under the supervision of Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., Ph.D., Professor of Education, [redacted] This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, [redacted]

This interview is for the purpose of collecting data on the daily lived experiences of female Muslim international students who wear a head scarf (Hijab), as they navigate their daily academic and social experiences at [redacted] The study hopes to capture the experiences of this population by allowing them the opportunity to share, in their voices, their daily lives at the university. Through this study, the researcher is also hoping to center the participant's voices and to report back and help inform the higher education community, since little research has been done on female Muslim international students who wear the Hijab.

The interviews will be conducted via the video meeting platform Zoom. This platform allows for the simultaneous video recording and transcribing of interviews while also ensuring privacy, given that each participant will only able to access the interview with a private link and password provided by the researcher. The participants will be asked to answer a series of ten (10) semi-structured open-ended conversational format questions about their daily lived experiences on campus, including their experiences in academic classroom settings and social events.

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you can opt-out at any time during the interview. The interviews will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. You may choose not to answer one or more questions. In addition, information you will give will be

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transcribed and shared with you for your approval before incorporated into the study's text. You will be able to withdraw any of your responses within one week after transcripts are shared with you. The research has been approved by [redacted] Institutional Review Board (IRB).

All of your responses will be confidential. This consent form and the voice and video recording files will be placed in a password protected Google cloud service provided by [redacted] All video and audio recordings will be deleted one year after the conclusion of this research project. One copy of this consent form is for you to keep for your records. The paper(s) to be written will report on your gender, religion, and lived experiences at your school of study; however, the researcher will use pseudonyms and not reveal your identity.

The interviews will take between 30 to 45 minutes. If additional time is needed, a separate interview time will be scheduled at your convenience and only with your approval. Again, there is no obligation to participate in any follow-up interviews. The researcher recognizes that there may be some potential emotional distress in this study, if for example, the recollection of some experiences bring up uncomfortable or negative experiences. As a precaution, [redacted] campus counseling and psychological resources will be shared at the conclusion of the interviews.

If you have any questions, need to report anything, or require further information on your rights, please contact the primary investigator and advisor Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., Ph.D., Professor of Education, [redacted] at (EMurillo@csusb.edu) or (909) 537-5632 (office).

All research results will be available via ScholarWorks, an open access institutional repository showcasing and preserving the research, scholarship, and publications of [redacted] staff, and students. The repository is a service of the

College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

John M. Pfau Library and can be found here: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/ and at 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407.

By signing below, I confirm that I have been informed of the study and understand its purpose and nature. I confirm that I am at least 18 years old, and I understand the consent document and freely give my consent to participate and be recorded.

I understand that the interview is being video and voice recorded. (Please check the ☐

Signature: Date:

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