

**Major Research Paper for partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters of Sociology**

**"Integration in Canada of Muslim Women  
Immigrants from the Middle East"**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent to which Muslim Middle Eastern immigrant women are integrated in Canadian society, such as in its labor force. This research examines some of the difficulties that this group of Muslim women may encounter in finding suitable occupations which may require them to register in graduate schools in order to gain Canadian credentials, and therefore fit better into the Canadian job market.

The research includes both qualitative and quantitative parts. In the qualitative section, some interviews with Muslim Middle Eastern women from previous research, the notion of the veil in Islam, as well as its meanings in diaspora according to some Canadian women scholars are examined. In the quantitative section, the research results are based on PUMF (Public Use Microdata Files), of the 2001 and 2006 Censuses and for analyzing the data, SPSS was used as the statistical tool. Because of the specific research interest, a new category was created in the quantitative section; I worked with the category of Muslim immigrant women aged between 15-64 with Middle Eastern and West Asian ethnicity and birthplace.

The results revealed that, although as it was mentioned mostly in qualitative data that Muslim/Muslim Middle Eastern women are discriminated against in the Canadian labor force/academia, the mentioned group of women do not necessarily suffer from a high level of underemployment. This might be partly because of the multicultural character of Canada, as well as being distanced from September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 event, and thus for Muslims being less stigmatized by that.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and General Research Problem**

In the 1990s, Canada welcomed many immigrants from a wide variety of countries. But the question is whether immigrants encounter any difficulties as they arrive in the host country. There are various factors which affect the experiences of immigrants who are living in a new society. Immigrants need to be integrated and adapt to their new circumstances. Immigrants are expected to help with the progress and the economic improvement of the host country in which they are living and working. It is expected that they obey the rules which are set for them by the government of the host country. Integration is an important element that needs to be studied for immigrants who are developing a place for themselves in Canadian society.

This paper will focus on Muslim women who have immigrated from the Middle East and West Asia to Canada, in order to examine whether or not they are well integrated and adjusted in a Western country, Canada. The reason that Middle Eastern and West Asian Muslim women are specifically examined in my research is partly because of differentiating this group of Muslims, who do not necessarily have the same characteristics as other Muslims, with different ethnic origins, as well as filling some gaps and gathering more information about Middle Eastern Muslim immigrant woman in Canada.

Muslims are considered to be a relatively new religious group of immigrants in Canada, but the experiences of Muslim men and women immigrants are not similar. In this paper some particular recent aspects of immigrant women's experiences and more specifically of Muslim women in Canada will be examined to understand their socio-demographic characteristics. Moreover, I aim to examine the nature of labor force participation of Muslim immigrant women in Canada who are from the Middle East and West Asia.

What I try to examine in my research is the extent to which Muslim women are not given the same as opportunities as Canadian women. This means that, while living in a multicultural society in which ethnic minorities are formally respected as citizens and allowed to keep their own identity and cultural practices, there is still a barrier to their having the same occupational opportunities as Canadian women. I hypothesize that one of the biggest barriers for Muslim women in Canada has been their practice of veiling.

In order to address these aspects of my research problem, both qualitative and quantitative secondary data will be used. I will examine some indicators such as the birth place, religion, education, occupation and occupational status of Muslim women in Canada by examining the 2001 and 2006 Census of Population of Canada focusing on those from the Middle East. In addition, using available texts, some narratives of Muslim women in Canada will be studied in order to see whether their religion, language or even their gender affects the integration process, such as their ability to find an appropriate job. Also, more detailed information about Muslim women from the Middle East will be given as we proceed in the paper.

## **Chapter 2: Research Questions and Conceptual Framework**

### **a) Research Questions**

As it will be shown by the statistics later in my paper, a lot of immigrants (women) are willing to take further education in Canada. This leads to the question of what the reasons are for immigrants (women) taking their education to higher levels in Canada, in spite of the high cost of doing so. For example, is it because having a university degree from a country other than Canada is devalued and underestimated that immigrants undertake higher/further university education or it is only the immigrants' willingness to study? Also, another question which can be asked here is whether or not immigrants in Canada can enter the labor force on the basis of their past credentials and how easy it would be to do so? Moreover, are the jobs that immigrants can find in Canada relevant to what they had studied? Also, to what extent do the above mentioned questions speak to the experiences of recent Middle Eastern and West Asian immigrant women in Canada? And finally, it is very crucial to see how the answers to all of these questions make the integration process of immigrants either easier and shorter or harder and longer for them.

### **b) Conceptual Framework**

From the very beginning, Canada has always encouraged immigrants but there were some worries accompanying it. Some Canadians were worried if immigrants would occupy the best jobs. On the other hand, there have been some other groups of people who have thought immigrants might cause poverty (Isajiw, 1999).

The concept of cultural pluralism refers to "an approach to race relations that acknowledges the cultural diversity of modern society and accepts the legitimacy of ethnic

minority cultures. One of the implications of this is to introduce strong elements of ethnic minority culture into the curriculum of schools" (Lawson & Garrod, 2001:55).

In general, there are different types of integration amongst which cultural, social and economic integration will be discussed here. Cultural integration is defined as "unifying disparate parts into a cooperative and functioning whole" (Fleras, 2010: 14). There are two factors defining integration as a cultural phenomenon. First of all, integration illustrates a process in which the dominant and subordinate parts in the society are working together without losing their difference. The second definition of integration is what is called "the mosaic" in Canadian literature. The mosaic occurs in a society when there is no obligation for dominant and subdominant groups in one society to be merged together, whereas in the notion of "melting pot" in American literature, a new culture is formed from all majority and minority groups. As the rate of immigration in different countries increases, integration becomes a vital issue for discussion. Integration would be discussed in order to examine whether the host countries have some policies about immigrants which assist immigrants in becoming better adapted in the new context (Fleras, 2010).

In fact, as the concept of "the mosaic" shows, subordinate groups such as Muslim Middle Eastern immigrant women are not forced to be assimilated into the culture of a host country such as Canada. But the longer immigrants live in a new society, the more they may see the desirability of quitting or changing some of their practices in order to be well integrated in the new context.

There are various definitions for social integration but the closest definition to my research questions would be considering equity and the same rights for everyone. UNRISD mentioned that social integration has various meanings. One of its meanings is having the chance to work or not. The general trend in the world is shaped in order not to exclude some

groups of people in a society and in order to reach the desired level of integration in societies, a decrease of discrimination is required (UNRISD, 1994). Otherwise, if discrimination exists in a society, it will cause racism.

The term racism refers to the "beliefs and ideas about race that are often translated into negative feelings and discriminatory or hostile actions against members of the supposed racial group. Racism can be expressed as individual racism or institutional racism, whereby members of a group discriminated against, such as in access to housing or employment" (Lawson & Garrod, 2001:201).

Also to talk about economic integration, it is notable that it is a mode of relation of the units of a system by virtue of which, on the one hand, they act so as collectively to avoid disrupting the system and making it impossible to maintain its stability, and, on the other hand, to "co-operate" to promote its functioning as a unity' (Scott & Marshall, 2009: 114). There are various aspects of the integration of immigrants in Canada's society, including economic integration.

Integration in general can become an important issue especially in some multicultural societies such as the United States or Canada. In these contexts cultural diversity is evident, mainly because of immigration from different source countries. Minority ethnic groups expect some equal rights for themselves in the host country in order to be considered as a full cooperators and a member of that society, which would ease and accelerate their integration process into the host country (Kymlicka, 1995).

There is a definition for ethnic groups by Lawson and Garrod, who refer to ethnic group as a set of people who share the same language, history, customs, religions and/or identity and who consider themselves as a distinct group within the rest of the society, and/or are considered to be a distinct group by others. Regarding ethnic groups the emphasis is on

people's identity which helps them shape their behaviors in society. As the minority group shapes its own community, emphasis on customs and traditions helps preserve the group's frontiers (Lawson & Garrod, 2001). Also, ethnic group is defined by Schermerhorn as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (Schermerhorn, 1970:12). As it can be seen, there is a similarity in the way that the term "ethnic group" is defined by these two sources. Lawson and Garrod and Schermerhorn have similar emphases.

As Kymlicka states, immigration is one of the origins of cultural pluralism. In fact, the multicultural policy of Canadian government says that rather than assimilation for immigrants, it is their poly-ethnicity which is encouraged. According to the government of Canada in 1991, laws do not only concern individual rights, but also support the collective rights of immigrants in the new society. This can be found in Canadian policies and demonstrates the notion of equality in the Canadian context, which is at the same time accompanied by differences as well (Kymlicka, 1995).

As Isajiw says, ethnic identity and religious identity are often not separable (Isajiw, 1999), so it is essential to examine both religious and ethnic identities which may intersect in some points, although these two are not identical. In order to maintain ethnic communities and their identities, some religious institutions can be helpful.

According to the Census, some changes in the concentration of religious groups can be seen. The Canadian census in 1991 shows that Catholic and Protestant groups, formerly the dominant religious groups in Canada, were no longer as important; their percentage of the population decreased over the period from 1981 to 1991. At the same time, the immigration

of some other religious groups such as Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists started to increase in Canada (Isajiw, 1999).

Moreover, as is mentioned by Stuart Hall (Bendixsen, 2010), in modern societies identity is constantly changing in various contexts, locations and situations. He argues that identities are not fixed and there is always the possibility of changing an individual's self. As Jenkins says, identity is a fluid and dynamic concept which can be reshaped according to the social setting and the place in which someone is living (Bendixsen, 2010). In addition to talking about identity in general, I will discuss religious identity as well.

In the discussion of religious identity, Lipset and Rokkan say "religious identity is an identity which one was born into and socialized through the family and community. However, one of the characteristics of modern society is the increased leeway to choose and frame political and religious identities" (Bendixsen, 2010). Furthermore, Stephen Warner says that "religious identities often mean more to individuals away from home, in their diaspora, than they did before, and those identities undergo more or less modification as the years pass" (Bendixsen, 2010).

Having said that, I will later investigate to what extent recent Muslim immigrant women from the Middle East perceive their religious practices, such as their veiling, as an obstacle to their better integration in Canada's labor force and/or its educational system.

## **Chapter 3: Background on Canada: Immigration and the Labor Force Participation by Women**

For various reasons during the two past decades, a huge number of extremely skilled workers and educated people from all around the world have started moving to some developed countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013). Canada's policy encourages immigrants not only because having immigrants economically benefits Canadian society, but also because there are demographic desires such as population growth, which will be fulfilled as more immigrants decide to come to Canada. And finally the third reason is that Canada has admitted a lot of highly educated immigrants due to the specific selection policies this country applies to its candidates.

### **a) Current Immigration Policy: The Point System**

Like any other country, Canada, as a recipient of a huge number of immigrants annually, has its own immigration regulations. In 1962, Canadian immigration regulations changed to a "point system". According to this rule, people from all ethnic backgrounds with specific education, training and skills were welcomed in Canadian society in order to help meet Canadian economic demands (Isajiw, 1999; Li, 2003). Also, from another point of view, the "point system" was a way to help Canadian society with its economic improvement, as well as being a method of regulating immigration. New sets of rules, which were mainly according to merit points, were shaped for the people who wanted to be accepted in Canada. Each independent applicant was evaluated on the basis of the possession of a collection of features and each feature was given a set of specific merit points. In general there were nine qualities that were mentioned: for training and education between 0-20 points were assigned, for some personal characteristics such as adaptability, incentive and invention between 0-15 points were allocated, between 0-15 points were assigned for the occupational request related to the

job that an applicant would pursue, between 1-10 points were allocated for occupational proficiency, from unskilled to professional. Finally, the applicant's age was given between 0-10 points, knowing either English or French was worth between 0-10 points, arranged employment had either 0 or 10 points, having an acquaintance or relative in Canada was worth 0 or 3 or 5 points, and finally employment chances in the country of destination was given between 0-5 points (Isajiw, 1999).

The demographics of immigrants have shifted from Europeans, who were the predominant immigrants in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, to more immigrants from Asia after 1980s (CIC, 2005). Because of the political instability in some parts of the Asia, especially in the Middle East, a huge number of immigrants decided to move to Canada as secure place to which they could flee from the tensions and war.

One of the important discussions about immigrants is the matter of the rights in the host country. The human rights legislation in Canada has insured its people have various rights such as legal rights and democratic rights consisting of liberty, right to life and equalities, as well as supporting people against discrimination which might be caused by people's different color, race, sex, religion or national/ethnic origins. These laws are meant to promote societal integration.

Many problems that immigrants have had for their adaptation in the Canadian society were caused by some prejudices against non-white "races". Thus in 1980s, the multiculturalism policy regulated its goal considering minority groups. One of the criticisms of multiculturalism was that stressing cultural differences generates more inequality. Therefore, multiculturalism started to re-define its objectives in order to diminish racism, as well as to increase equity regarding behavior and opportunities for minority groups. In fact, what the policy of multiculturalism in Canada now seeks is to give a sense of belonging to

ethnic minorities in Canadian society, which would result in their greater integration into the society. One of the principles of this policy is to diminish the barriers to fully taking part in Canadian society, a society which treats all the cultural groups equally. There was a Multicultural Act in 1988, which emphasized equality. As the federal government states, the purpose is to "ensure equal opportunities for employment and advancement for all ethnic and racial groups" (Isajiw, 1999: 248; Li, 2003). As is obvious, the issue of social justice is something that the Canadian government is concerned about: if social justice were fully achieved, racism would no longer exist and all the groups of people would enjoy equity in public spheres.

## **b) Gender and Labor Force**

As Armstrong & Armstrong state, there is a wage difference between men and women (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010). In the research by *Globe and Mail* that they talk about, it is illustrated how men and women are treated differently in Canada in the matter of income and the way in which men with less education are able to make more money in comparison to women with a higher level of education (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010; Boyd & Yiu, 2009).

In terms of having access to labor force, there is discrimination among women as well. Women from particular racial, religious and cultural groups are treated differently, and do not all have access to the same job opportunities, particularly for high income jobs (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010). Although some exceptions may exist, in general not only would white and non-white women be hired for lower income jobs in comparison with their male peers, but also it would be more challenging for non-white women to be admitted to higher income jobs (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010; Boyd & Yiu, 2009).

## Chapter 4: Methodology

The 2001 and 2006 Censuses of Population Canada were used for the quantitative part of this paper, including some original statistical analysis using the Public Use Microdata Files (PUMF) of the 2001 and 2006 Censuses, with SPSS as the statistical tool. It is notable that I did not use weights in my analysis and the reason is that although Statistics Canada recommends use of weight for frequencies, their use is less appropriate for other statistical analysis, such as the qui-square and therefore I have not used that. I also did a literature review. To do this, I used different resources such as the Metropolis website, the issues on "Immigration and the Intersections of Diversity" (2005) and on "Foreign Credentials Recognition" (2007) of the journal *Canadian Issues* published by the Association for Canadian Studies. I also used the book *Our Diverse Cities* (2004) published by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as the CCMW (Canadian Council of Muslim women) website, data bases from the University of Ottawa library website such as Academic Search Complete, Dissertations and Thesis, E-journals, J-store, proQuest-databases, RefWorks, *Thesis Canada*, as well as *Sociological Abstracts*, and some chapters of books. Moreover, I looked at the theories and empirical studies being done by such authors as Homa Hoodfar, Yildiz Atasoy, Sedef Arat-Koc, Denise Helly, Sherene Razack and Haideh Moghissi, who are all recognized scholars on Muslim women in Canada.

In order to get the appropriate material for my research, I applied some keywords to these literature searches such as Muslim, Muslim woman, immigrant\*, Canad\*, Middle East, integration, labor market and veiling. I was not necessarily provided with precise sources in the qualitative literature review on recent Muslim immigrant women who are from the Middle East and West Asia<sup>1</sup>, as most of the sources referred to "Muslim women" and

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, I will be saying "Middle Eastern" to refer to women who are Middle Eastern and West Asian by their ethnicity and their place of birth.

"Muslim Middle Eastern women" interchangeably. Although there were a lot of sources which talked about Muslim women in general, only in a few articles and book chapters were Muslim women from the Middle East and West Asia specified. This was one of the difficulties I was confronted with. Since Muslim women are such a diverse group, all the available information about them does not apply necessarily to my research.

Because of my specific research interest, which is about Muslim recently immigrant women in Canada (1996-2006) from the Middle East, in the qualitative part I examined this group of Muslim women, or more specifically where possible, those from Iran. In the quantitative section, I worked with the new category that I created, based on the Censuses for 2001 and 2006, considering only the immigrant women (especially recent immigrants) whose place of birth and ethnic origin were both the Middle East or West Asia.

Unfortunately I was only able to examine the "religion" variable in the 2001 Census<sup>2</sup>, so I simply examined women who were Middle Eastern and West Asian by ethnicity and place of birth for the 2006 Census. It was shown by the 2001 Census that among recent immigrants, Muslim women constituted a large percentage of Middle Eastern women immigrants as well as being a large percentage of them than in earlier years. So use of the category of "Middle Eastern" in 2006 provides an approximation of Muslim women, especially since an increasing percentage of the Middle Eastern women immigrants seem to be Muslim.

There are two different categories I considered for "immigrants" in the years 2001 and 2006. For 2001, "recent immigrants" is a single category of people who immigrated to Canada between 1996-2001, and all other years of immigration were grouped as a new category of "earlier immigration". For the 2006 Census, on the other hand, there were three categories, people who immigrated to Canada between 1996 and 2001, between 2002 and

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<sup>2</sup> There was no question about religion on the 2006 Census

2006 and "other years of immigration" as the last category. Therefore, I distinguished the years of immigration for 2002-2006 from those from 1996-2001 in some parts of my analysis. This allowed for comparability with the 2001 data regarding those who had immigrated during the most recent years. The reason is that the period of settlement or adjustment for immigrants is possibly more than 3 to 5 years and that is why this very recent period of immigration is considered.

I analyzed the following: religion (only for 2001); place of birth; ethnic origin; year of immigration; highest certificate; diploma or degree; occupation; labor force activity and class of worker. All of these variables were recoded to between two and five categories, that were, insofar as possible, equivalent in the two Census years. The number of categories was limited, in order to make the cross tabulations easier to understand.

For occupation, managers, professionals and semi-professionals and technicians were recoded as "professionals and managers", supervisors, administrative and senior clerical personnel were recoded as "supervisory jobs", skilled sales and service personnel, skilled crafts and trades workers, clerical personnel and intermediate sales and service personnel were recoded as "skilled jobs", and semi-skilled manual workers, other sales and service personnel and other manual workers were recoded as "semi-unskilled jobs". Also, not available ones were recoded as 9 "missing" and those who did not have a paid occupation recoded as 8, "not applicable". Both categories 8 and 9 were excluded from the percentage distribution and chi-square analysis of occupations.

Another significant variable examined in my work was the highest level of schooling. The people with no degree, a high school graduation certificate or diploma, other trades certificate or diploma and registered apprenticeship certificate were recoded as 1, "secondary or less". The second grouping was for women with college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate

or diploma from a program of 1 year to 2 years, college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma from a program of more than 2 years, as well as university certificate or diploma below bachelor's level. They were recoded as 2, "post-secondary". The last group included everyone with a Bachelor's degree, university certificate or diploma above Bachelor's level, degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry, as well as Master's degree and earned Doctorate degree, recoded as 3, "University degree". Anyone who had not completed their certificate, diploma or university degree was recoded as 1. Also, the not available ones were given a new code of 9 which meant missing values, and the not applicable ones were recoded as 8, both of which are excluded from analysis. It is notable that for 2001 Census, only not applicable existed, whereas for 2006 Census, both not applicable and not available existed.

To examine labor force activity for the 2001 Census, those who were employed-worked, employed-absent and unemployed-new job-did not look for work were put in one group and were recoded as "employed", unemployed-laid off-looked for full time work ,unemployed-laid off-looked for part time work, unemployed-new job-looked for full time work, unemployed-new job-looked for part time work, unemployed-looked for full time work, unemployed-looked for part time work were recoded as "unemployed" and finally unemployed-laid off-did not look for work, not in the labor force-last worked in 2001, not in the labor force-last worked in 2000, not in the labor force-last worked before 2000 and not in the labor force-never worked were recoded as "not in the labor force". Also 99 which indicates to not applicable ones (persons less than 15 years of age) was recoded to 9 and not included in analysis.

For examining labor force activity for 2006 Census, employed (worked in reference week), employed (absent in reference week) and unemployed-new job-did not look for work were recoded as "employed". Unemployed-temporary layoff-did not look for work,

unemployed-temporary layoff-looked for full time work, unemployed-temporary layoff-looked for part time work, unemployed-new job-looked for full time work, unemployed-new job-looked for part time work, unemployed-looked for full time work, unemployed-looked for part time work were recoded as "unemployed". And finally not in the labor force-last worked in 2006, not in the labor force-last worked in 2005, not in the labor force- last worked before 2005 and not in the labor force-never worked were recoded as " not in the labor force". And 99 which was not applicable was recoded as 8 and it was excluded from my analysis.

Also the class of worker variable was examined for both Census years. For 2001 Census, the category combining paid worker (wage and salary earners) and unpaid family worker was recoded as "employed workers". Paid workers (self-employed incorporated without paid help), paid workers (self-employed incorporated with paid help), self-employed unincorporated without paid help, and self-employed unincorporated with paid help were recoded as "self-employed". Also 9, which was not available, was recoded to 8 and excluded from the analysis.

The class of worker variable for 2006 was recoded slightly differently as unpaid family workers were in a separate category in the PUMF. Paid worker (working for wages, salary, tips or commission) was recoded to "paid workers". Paid worker (self-employed without paid help, incorporated), paid worker (self-employed with paid help, incorporated), self-employed without paid help, not incorporated, and self-employed with paid help, not incorporated were recoded to "self-employed". Unpaid family workers (worked without pay for a relative in a family business or farm) was recoded to "unpaid family worker". Code 8, which meant not available, was given a new code of 9. And code 9, which indicates to not applicable, was given a new code of 8. Neither 8 nor 9 were included in the analysis.

The reason the long form Census of 2001 and 2006 were analyzed was the comparability between these two years and in order to examine to what extent the occupation and education characteristics have changed for the immigrants that I am interested in. The General Household Survey of 2011 was similar in content to the earlier long forms of the Census and was available also, but because its completion was optional, the results are not comparable with those of the earlier Censuses. Consequently I did not examine it in my own work.

Place of birth and ethnicity were recoded into Middle East and West Asia vs. all other ethnicities and places of birth respectively. Also, for 2001 Census where religion was available I recoded religion as Muslim vs. all other. Finally, I used filters to limit my analysis to adult women aged between 15-64, who are Middle Eastern women. And also, for the period of immigration, I examined 1996-2001 vs. all other years of immigration for 2001 Census, whereas three categories were created for 2006 Census, being 1996-2001, 2002-2006 vs. all other years of immigration.

## **Chapter 5: Results: Middle Eastern Muslim Immigrant Women in Canada**

### **a) Population Overview**

Based on the 2001 Census, 579,600 or two percent of the total population of Canada was composed of Muslim immigrants. But, Muslims in Canada are not a homogenous group. Muslims vary according to their national and ethnic origins. According to the Census 2001 the largest Muslim population in Canada is those of South Asian ethnic origin of around 212,805, which is equal to 37% of the Canadian Muslim population. After that, West Asians (Middle Easterns) are the next largest Muslim population in Canada. The statistics also show the number of West Asians living in Canada, which is about 81,360 and equals 14 percent of the Muslim population of Canada (Rahnema, 2006).

According to my analysis from 2001 Census, among the adult women who have immigrated to Canada during 1996 to 2001 and are of West Asia and Middle East ethnic origin as well as being born there, 74.6% are Muslim, whereas 25.4% report other religions.

Also, according to my analysis from 2001 Census, among the women aged between 15-64, more Muslim adult women have immigrated to Canada between 1996 and 2001 than in earlier years (17.1% vs. 5.9%), but only a minority of Muslim women immigrants in this period of immigration are Middle Eastern (36.9%). Moreover, among women immigrating to Canada from West Asia and the Middle East and who were born there, there has been a recent increase in the percentage who are Muslim, to 74.6% for recent immigrant women, from 50.4% for earlier years of immigration. Therefore limiting the analysis to women who are of both Middle Eastern ethnic origin *and* birthplace provides the best approximation possible of Muslim women with these ethnic and birthplace backgrounds for 2001, and, extrapolating, for 2006. Although analysis of Middle Eastern women who are Muslim are

presented for 2001, so are analyses for all Middle Eastern women, in order to indicate how similar the two groups are, since it is only the latter which can be analyzed for 2006.

## **b) Education and Labor Force Activity**

As it was mentioned before, Muslims are among the fastest growing immigrant population in Canada. As the Census in 2001 shows, a considerable number of Muslims in Canada are women, 276,075 out of a total of 580,000 (Jaffer, 2005). One of the biggest obstacles for these Muslim women to being well-adapted to Canadian society is their underemployment and low income, which is not equal in comparison to other Canadian-born women<sup>3</sup>. According to Hamdani's (2004) research for CCMW (Canadian Council of Muslim Women), Muslim women are among the most vulnerable groups in Canada, because, despite the high level of education they have, they most suffer from discrimination in labor force.

This issue can be better understood as a Middle Eastern (Iranian) interviewee, who lives in Toronto and got her Master's degree from Germany, describes her situation in Canada. She describes the procedure of applying for a job in a shoe store in Toronto while waiting to get an admission to a graduate school in Toronto, as well as the different stages she had to go through to get the job. Here is how she depicts her experience:

Even you want to work in "Payless Shoe" store they asked me do you have Canadian experience? I did 3 times interview for the job in that store with different level of managers and I did a written exam (psychological test) and finally got the job. Because I applied for university admission and I was waiting for the acceptance so I need a job for handling my life. (Hojati,73:2011).

That is the experience of a well-educated immigrant woman.

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<sup>3</sup> The author did not specify whether he means Canadian born, other immigrants (non-Muslim) or both Canadian born and immigrant women.

The tables below, based on my analysis of 2001 PUMF data, show the education and occupation of Muslim Middle Eastern women vs. other Middle Eastern women and women from other combinations of ethnicity and birthplace.

**Table 1: Education of adult women\*- Census 2001**

Status	category	Highest level of schooling			(Total N)
		secondary or less	post-secondary	University degree	
	All women	61.0%	22.0%	16.9%	(276531)
	All immigrant women	64.0%	20.4%	15.5%	(168060)
Immigrated 1996-2001	Muslim Mid E	56.1%	11.3%	32.6%	(567)
	Mid E	58.3%	12.5%	29.2%	(760)
	All other	51.2%	16.2%	32.6%	(8206)
Immigrated in Previous years	Muslim Mid E	66.8%	16.1%	17.0%	(757)
	Mid E	64.6%	16.8%	18.6%	(1502)
	All other	61.6%	20.6%	17.9%	(37321)

\*Here and in all the tables that follow, "adult women" refers to age 15-64

Table 1 shows that there has been an increase in the percentage of recent Muslim immigrant women in the university education. It is about 15 percentage points higher than that for women who immigrated previously. This clearly shows that Muslim women who immigrated between 1996 and 2001 are more educated than those who immigrated to Canada in previous years.

It must be noticed that a higher percentage of all three categories of immigrant adult women (Muslims, Middle Eastern and women from other ethnicities) for period of 1996-2001 have university degrees in comparison with earlier years of immigration. So for all women immigrants the percentage with a university degree is greater for recent immigrants-

in fact almost doubled. In addition, recent immigrant Middle Eastern women are in fact a bit less likely to have university degree than are other recent immigrant women.

**Table 2: Education of adult women- Census 2006**

Status	category	Highest level of schooling			(Total N)
		secondary or less	post-secondary diploma	University degree	
	All women	69.3%	20.0%	10.7%	(409507)
	All immigrant women	58.2%	24.1%	17.6%	(127448)
Immigrated 2002-2006	Mid E	75.0%	9.4%	15.6%	(1184)
	Other immig	70.5%	12.3%	17.2%	(27191)
Immigrated 1996-2001	Mid E	62.9%	8.6%	28.6%	(2590)
	Other immig	70.0%	12.9%	17.1%	(45170)
Immigrated in Previous years	Mid E	72.4%	14.7%	12.9%	(12616)
	Other immig	70.4%	18.3%	11.3%	(950908)

As table 2, for 2006 shows, it is noticeable that the highest percentage of immigrants holding university degrees is the Middle Eastern women who immigrated between 1996 and 2001, with a percentage of 28.6%. On the other hand, it is surprising that 75% of women with Middle Eastern ethnicity and place of birth immigrated between 2002 and 2006, have secondary or less, whereas between 1996 and 2001 the percentage of Middle Eastern women who have secondary or less is lower, 62.9%.

It is noteworthy that most of these well-educated immigrants face difficulties regarding credentials, experience, etc. when they apply for jobs in Canada. As it was cited by Adamuti-Trache et al. (2013:179), in a study by Grant and Nadin, "more than 50% of the skilled immigrants who experienced problems with credentials and work experience recognition, report being disappointed, sad, hurt, frustrated, and depressed". As Adamuti-Trache et al. state, encountering decreases in both job prestige and income made immigrants consider

acquiring Canadian university credentials. The majority of these immigrants were people who had achieved university degrees in their own countries but finding an appropriate job according to their qualifications seemed impossible. As the Statistics Canada in 2005 shows, "about two-thirds of newcomers to Canada in the early 2000s had plans to pursue education or training" (Adamuti-Trache et al.,2013: 180).

Adamuti-Trache et al. state that immigrants in Canada suffer from severe underemployment. As the data shows, in 2008 more than 42% of foreign born workers were over qualified in terms of higher education for their current job positions while only 28% of Canadian workers were dealing with the same situation (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013).

Although Canada has officially declared that there is the same opportunity for all the people in the country, there are not equal conditions for everyone. In other words, people are given the equal opportunities but not the equal conditions in order to reach those chances.

Immigrant women, particularly ones from Third World countries, have been disadvantaged regarding accessibility of suitable jobs, education, language courses, and socially and economically are not supported by the government. Immigrant women, now typically from Third world countries, are hired for low-skilled jobs. It would be a very tough combination to be considered a person belonging to a visible minority group as well as not being native-born in a society. These women earn less income than the Canadian born women, despite working longer hours (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010).

Hamdani elaborates more on this issue, stating that Muslim women usually have part-time jobs and they are paid less than other Canadian-born women<sup>4</sup>, despite being well-educated (Jaffer, 2005). This becomes clearer as a focus group participant states: "I have a master in Science, and work in a laundry two or three days a week. Because of my work

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<sup>4</sup> Refers to the same information as in foot note 3

schedule, which includes some shift work and last-minute shifts, it is difficult to take any training or classes" (Wayland, 2006).

**Table 3: Labor force activity of immigrant adult women- Census 2001**

Year of immigration	Category	Labor Force Activity			(Total N)
		employed	Unemployed	Not in labor force	
1996-2001	1	31.1%	11.4%	57.5%	(563)
	2	33.1%	10.6%	56.3%	(755)
	3	50.5%	6.6%	42.9%	(8143)
Other years	1	44.0%	6.5%	49.5%	(757)
	2	50.5%	5.0%	44.5%	(1501)
	3	65.1%	3.0%	31.9%	(37093)

1. Muslim Middle-Eastern adult women
2. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
3. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

As the analyses in table 3 show, Muslim Middle Eastern women are as likely as all Middle Eastern women to be employed. Both are less likely to be employed than other immigrant women, more likely to not be employed and slightly more likely to be unemployed. But as it is shown in the table for earlier years, Muslim Middle Eastern women are the least likely to be employed and most likely to not be.

Table 4 below, based on my analysis of 2006 Census, illustrates the labor force activity of Middle Eastern adult women and adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth. The highest percentage of immigrant women who are employed are Middle Eastern immigrant women immigrated between 1996 and 2001, while for earlier years it is adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth who are slightly more likely to be employed. But in general, most of the adult women (with Middle Eastern ethnicity and birth place or from other ethnicities and birth places) are not in the labor force. The results are very similar for all of them, but the highest percent not in the labor force can be seen for the most recent immigrants (2002-2006), regardless of their birthplace or ethnicity.

**Table 4: Labor force activity of immigrant adult women- Census 2006**

Year of immigration	Category	Labor Force Activity			(Total N)
		Employed	Unemployed	Not in labor force	
2002-2006	1	15.6%	3.1%	81.3%	(1184)
	2	14.4%	3.4%	82.2%	(27228)
1996-2001	1	24.3%	1.4%	74.3%	(2590)
	2	21.7%	2.5%	75.7%	(45282)
Other years	1	21.1%	2.6%	76.2%	(12616)
	2	23.0%	1.1%	75.8%	(952129)

1. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
2. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

In table 5 below, class of worker in the 2001 Census is compared for Muslim Middle Eastern adult women, Middle Eastern adult women by ethnicity and birthplace as well as adult women immigrants from other combinations of ethnicity and birthplace. Very high percentages of all three categories of immigrants (Muslim Middle Eastern, Middle Eastern by ethnicity and birth place as well as all other ethnicity and birth places) are paid workers, and the results are very similar for recent immigrants as well as for earlier years of immigration. Recent immigrants are slightly less likely to be self-employed.

**Table 5: Class of worker of immigrant adult women in the labor force- Census 2001**

Year of immigration	Category	Class of worker		(Total N)
		Employees(paid and unpaid family workers)	Self employed	
1996-2001	1	91.5%	8.5%	(248)
	2	92.0%	8.0%	(337)
	3	92.7%	7.3%	(5252)
Other years	1	90.3%	9.8%	(400)
	2	89.2%	10.8%	(886)
	3	90.1%	9.9%	(27482)

1. Muslim Middle-Eastern adult women
2. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
3. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

In table 6, class of worker is examined for Middle Eastern adult women as well as adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and birthplace using the 2006 Census. As the table shows, the results regarding class of worker are quite similar for both Middle Eastern immigrant women and the adult immigrant women from other ethnicities and places of birth. A high percentage of both groups are paid workers, and tiny minorities are unpaid family workers. However Middle Eastern women had a higher percentage of self-employment than did other immigrant women in both recent periods, especially 2002-2006. Changes in the economy may have contributed to overall increases in women's self-employment but I wonder whether it is a strategy for dealing with discrimination or other problems in the job market. For Middle Eastern women it may reflect a means of having more traditional types of desirable jobs or of other sorts of economic activity from their country of origin, and be a conscious choice on their part.

**Table 6: Class of worker of immigrant adult women in the labor force- Census 2006**

Year of immigration	Category	Class of worker			(Total N)
		Employees(paid)	Self employed	Unpaid family workers	
2002-2006	1	75.0%	25.0%	0%	(148)
	2	81.9%	17.5%	0.6%	(5919)
1996-2001	1	85.0%	15.0%	0%	(740)
	2	87.1%	12.4%	0.6%	(12874)
Other years	1	85.4%	13.4%	1.2%	(3034)
	2	85.3%	14.2%	0.5%	(259148)

1. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
2. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

By looking at the results of a longitudinal survey which was done from 2000 to 2004, employment and occupational achievements of recent immigrants to Canada can be examined. Problems such as finding jobs, language barriers, the problem of status dislocation

and the like, which make the adaptation process challenging especially for immigrants, are also evident in this survey (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013). In this regard, Table 7 lists my analysis from Census 2001 on the occupations of immigrant adult women.

**Table 7: Occupations of immigrant adult women in the labor force- Census 2001**

Year of immigration	Category	Occupation				(Total N)
		Professional and managers	Supervisory jobs	Skilled-jobs	Semi/unskilled jobs	
1996-2001	1	33.1%	5.6%	31.0%	30.2%	(248)
	2	30.3%	6.5%	32.6%	30.6%	(337)
	3	29.5%	7.6%	31.8%	31.2%	(5252)
Previous years	1	32.5%	7.5%	37.8%	22.3%	(400)
	2	32.6%	9.4%	39.3%	18.7%	(886)
	3	31.2%	11.2%	34.8%	22.9%	(27482)

1. Adult Muslim women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
2. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
3. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

As Table 7 shows, there is not a big difference between recent Muslims and other Middle Eastern immigrants, nor with immigrants of other ethnicities or birthplaces in the matter of working as professionals, which is about 30% and the figure is very similar for the immigrants of previous years. Also the percentage of those adult women immigrants who have skilled jobs and semi/unskilled jobs are very close for recent immigrants, about 30% in each case, although for earlier years a smaller percentage of each category is in unskilled jobs and a higher percentage in skilled jobs.

**Table 8: Occupations of immigrant adult women in labor force- Census 2006**

Year of immigration	Category	Occupation				(Total N)
		Professional and managers	Supervisory jobs	Skilled-jobs	Semi/unskilled jobs	
2002-2006	1	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0%	(148)
	2	18.9%	6.7%	40.2%	34.1%	(5920)
1996-2001	1	40.0%	10.0%	30.0%	20.0%	(740)
	2	22.4%	6.7%	32.1%	38.8%	(12985)
Previous years	1	20.7%	13.4%	53.7%	12.2%	(3034)
	2	33.4%	13.9%	33.5%	19.2%	(259443)

1. Adult women with Middle-Eastern ethnicity and place of birth
2. Adult women from other combinations of ethnicity and place of birth

As Table 8 shows, in general, an improvement can be seen from 2001 especially for Middle Eastern immigrants regarding their occupation. The percentage having managerial and professional jobs is higher in 2002-2006 and lower in previous years. But the percentage with unskilled jobs is high for 1996-2001 immigrants, and more mixed for supervisory jobs. And a lower percentage have skilled and semi/unskilled jobs between 2002 to 2006.

For other ethnicities and places of birth, the highest percentage for the immigrants having professional and manager jobs was 33.4% which was during previous years of immigration. So it might be concluded that the reason is because recent immigrants are younger, so they are less experienced, as well as having had less time to integrate into labor force although they might have more credentials. In addition, recent immigrants do not have Canadian experience, as well as not being familiar with the job market. In contrast immigrants, who immigrated earlier, are older and they are more experienced in Canada as well as knowing the job market better. This is not, however, the case for Middle Eastern women, because, in the

more recent periods of immigration, a high percentage of Middle Eastern women are in managerial and professional jobs.

**Table 9: Relevance of occupation and education of Muslim immigrant adult women in labor force - Census 2001**

Year of immigration	Occupation	Highest level of schooling			(Total N)
		Secondary or less	Post-secondary	University degree	
1996-2001	<b>Professional and managers</b>	13.1%	33.3%	57.6%	(82)
	<b>Supervisory jobs</b>	4.1%	3.7%	8.1%	(14)
	<b>Skilled-jobs</b>	36.1%	44.4%	21.2%	(77)
	<b>Semi/unskilled jobs</b>	46.7%	18.5%	13.1%	(75)
Previous years	<b>Professional and managers</b>	12.3%	48.8%	64.6%	(130)
	<b>Supervisory jobs</b>	7.7%	6.0%	8.3%	(30)
	<b>Skilled-jobs</b>	45.0%	35.0%	22.0%	(151)
	<b>Semi/unskilled jobs</b>	35.0%	9.5%	4.2%	(89)

In Table 9 based on my analysis of 2001 Census, the relevance of education and occupation is shown for Muslim Middle Eastern adult women. As the table 9 shows, between 1996 to 2001, 13.1% of Muslim Middle Eastern women are overemployed doing professional or managerial jobs while having secondary degree or less. In the same period, 21.2% were underemployed doing skilled-jobs while having university degree. In addition, 18.5% of Muslim Middle Eastern women are underemployed because of doing semi/unskilled jobs with post-secondary degree, as well as 13.1% who do semi/unskilled jobs while holding university degree.

Also in previous periods of immigration, 12.3% of Muslim Middle Eastern women are overemployed, but it is notable that this people are probably more often managers than professionals, which might be because they have moved up through family firms. 22% with university degree are underemployed because of doing skilled-jobs with a university degree. Moreover, 9.5% and 4.2% of the women are underemployed because of doing semi/unskilled jobs while having either a post-secondary diploma or a university degree.

In the focus groups presented in Wayland's article (2006), immigrants described the difficulties they had encountered since arriving in Canada. They mentioned how their expectations differed from what they had been told or imagined about the labor market and their difficulties on finding a suitable job according to their education (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013).

Moreover, some other respondents indicated their experiences of discrimination in Canadian society which could be because of their accent, color of skin or their hijab (Wayland, 2006). Another issue is to see how valid immigrant's foreign (non-Canadian) credentials are considered to be. As mentioned by Guo (2007), immigrant women are among the groups who are suffering from their previous university degrees being devalued, as well as their previous work experiences not being well recognized in Canada in comparison to their Canadian-born counterparts, and this is a topic that needs to be examined in future research.

Moreover, as Guo states, those immigrant women who are mostly highly skilled have to start by doing manual jobs or they are in occupations which are not challenging enough for them because of not being relevant to their educational background (Guo, 2007). The author states that the problem of foreign credentials not being accepted, as well as hardship in finding a suitable job, would be significantly greater for those immigrants who come from

Third World countries, whereas immigrants from more developed nations would not encounter such difficulties (Guo, 2007).

According to my results, table 10 shows the relevance of occupation and education for Middle Eastern adult women based on 2001 Census.

**Table 10: Relevance of occupation and education of Middle-Eastern immigrant adult women in labor force- Census 2001**

Year of immigration	Occupation	Highest level of schooling			(Total N)
		Secondary or less	Post-secondary	University degree	
1996-2001	<b>Professional and managers</b>	21.6%	8.8%	69.6%	(102)
	<b>Supervisory jobs</b>	36.4%	13.6%	50.0%	(22)
	<b>Skilled-jobs</b>	60.0%	14.5%	25.5%	(110)
	<b>Semi/unskilled jobs</b>	75.7%	9.7%	14.6%	(103)
Previous years	<b>Professional and managers</b>	25.6%	27.7%	46.7%	(289)
	<b>Supervisory jobs</b>	49.4%	24.1%	26.5%	(83)
	<b>Skilled-jobs</b>	67.5%	19.5%	12.9%	(348)
	<b>Semi/unskilled jobs</b>	83.1%	10.8%	6.0%	(166)

As Table 10 shows, a high percentage of Middle Eastern immigrant women between 1996-2001 with university degrees have managed to get professional and supervisory jobs, in comparison with earlier years of immigration.

On the other hand, between 1996 to 2001, the percentage of the Middle Eastern immigrant women who are underemployed has doubled in comparison with previous years. From 6% to 14.6% of university graduates are in semi/unskilled jobs and from 12.9% to 25.5% of

university graduates are in skilled jobs. But in general, it is good to see that a huge percentage of Middle Eastern women have appropriate occupations according to their education.

**Table 11: Relevance of occupation and education of Middle-Eastern immigrant adult women in labor force- Census 2006**

Year of immigration	Occupation	Highest level of schooling			(Total N)
		Secondary or less	Post-secondary	University degree	
2002-2006	Professional and managers	0%	50.0%	56.0%	(74)
	Supervisory jobs	100%	0%	0%	(37)
	Skilled-jobs	0%	0%	100%	(37)
	Semi/unskilled jobs	0%	0%	0%	(0)
1996-2001	Professional and managers	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	(296)
	Supervisory jobs	100%	0%	0%	(74)
	Skilled-jobs	33.0%	33.0%	33.0%	(222)
	Semi/unskilled jobs	75.0%	25.0%	0%	(148)
Previous year	Professional and managers	23.5%	35.3%	41.2%	(629)
	Supervisory jobs	63.6%	18.2%	18.2%	(407)
	Skilled-jobs	56.8%	29.5%	13.6%	(1628)
	Semi/unskilled jobs	90.0%	0%	10.0%	(370)

Also, in Table 11 according to my results from the 2006 Census, the relevance of occupation and education is shown for Middle Eastern adult women. From this table, it can be concluded that underemployment in 1996-2001 is higher than other years (before and after) with a percentage of 25% of women who have semi/unskilled jobs holding a post-secondary diploma, but it is notable that less underemployment of university graduates can be seen relative to professional and managerial jobs in that year.

Sometimes particular tasks become more challenging for specific groups of immigrants due to their bicultural life style. Here is an example of a Middle Eastern (Iranian) interviewee who talks about her complicated situation. She talks about her experience and describes how she is dealing with her motherhood tasks in addition to her academic responsibilities as a Master's student, while working in order to support her family financially:

I usually work at night and then in the morning immediately go to school. At noon I return home to have time with my children. I want to be home when they come back from school. So it is really tiring and stressful handling everything, school, work, and family for me as an immigrant woman. How much time do I have to handle my school work as a second language or how much do I get from work that makes me happy? It is really hard (she talked in a sad tone) (Hojati, 2011:11).

As Hamdani mentions, a huge number of Muslim women in Canada are mothers who have the principal home responsibilities, as well as being active members in the labor force. As the Census in 2001 shows, about 57% of the Muslim women in the labor force were the women who had children to take care of (Hamdani, 2004). As it is mentioned by Jiwani, immigrant women can be recognized as a high risk population. They are vulnerable because of the multiple tasks and the bi-cultural lifestyle they have inside the family and child-rearing as well as their work outside. Moreover, Jiwani indicates the term "role overload" that exists in US, UK and Canadian literature as one of the characteristics of immigrant womens' lives. Thus Jiwani states that the discussions around multiple roles happens in a larger social context and is the responsibility of the host country, which has a crucial role in intensifying the so-called role overload for immigrant women (Jiwani, 2001).

The lack of an appropriate arrangement with their spouses to contribute in the household chores encourages some women to stay at home and not to look for employment in the labor market. Secondly there is the tendency in some Muslim families to reduce women's encounters with outsiders (foreigners). This may be because of cultural limitations; it is the norm of some traditional and patriarchal Muslim societies that working women outside home are not either accepted at all or at least not accepted in certain types of occupations (Hamdani, 2004).

In this context, Rahnema documents that despite the high level of Muslims' education in Canada, they are faced with a high level of unemployment and lower level of income, but my analysis does not show that. Yet he claims that, compared to their European counterparts, they are more integrated into the Canadian society. However, Canadian multiculturalism despite its achievements, has failed to effectively combat racism (Rahnema, 2006).

In addition, Ruby states that this racism exists as a result of the role of the Western media, especially after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, illustrating hatred against Islam and Muslims, in addition to the tendency of North American media to portray Muslims as terrorists (Ruby, 2006). A particular aspect of inequality for Muslim women can relate to the use of the veil, which will now be discussed.

## Chapter 6: Veiling

### a) The Notion of the Veil in Islam

Jaber-Harb (1996) argues that the members of the religion of Islam are supposed to respect "five duties in Islam", including Muslim beliefs in God and Prophet Mohammad, prayer five times every day, fasting in Ramadan, *zakat* (giving 1/10 of your annual salary to poor people) and finally going to *Hajj*(Mecca), where Muslims around the world show submission to God. In fact wearing the hijab is not one of these duties. There are five verses in the Quran which can be referred to while talking about Muslim women's veiling. Three of them will be discussed here and the other two at the end of this chapter.

1-Sourat 33, the Confederates, verse 59:

Oh Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women that they carry their great veil. This will cause them to be distinguished from those women who do not cover their heads and thus will bar the vulgar men from making trouble for them. And Allah is the merciful forgiving (Saffarzadeh, 2009: 775).

2-Sourat 24, the Light, verse 31:

And tell the believing women who down their look, and the ones who keep their chastity, and the ones who do not display their ornaments except to their husbands, or to their fathers, or to their husband's father, or to their sons, or to their husband's sons, or to their brothers,...

(Saffarzadeh, 2009: 633).

3-Sourat 33, the Confederates, verse 32:

Prophet's wives! You are not like an ordinary woman: you are to be an example of piety, so do not speak with a soft voice while speaking to a man as he may feel tempted for you (Saffarzadeh, 2009: 768).

Jaber-Harb argues that the Quranic verses do not contain the general prescription that dictates that women hide their faces. In Islam, the prescriptions about the obligation of wearing the veil are rather the influence of socially constructed morality. Furthermore, Jaber-Harb argues that the veil does not have a Muslim origin. She goes further and states that the

practice of wearing the veil, in the Arab world, existed before Prophet Mohammad. In fact, in most of Mediterranean civilizations, women of lower status such as slaves covered their head: this indicates that, according to different studies, the veil for women is not an Islamic invention. Jaber-Harb states that before Islam, the veil had emerged in Egypt and in the Middle East. She states that the veil has had different forms and functions according to the place and periods of time, but since it became widespread in the Mediterranean area, its social and religious definition became especially strong, and it was confirmed in the societies in which it was adopted (Jaber-Harb, 1996, my translation).

The term *djilbab* refers to the veil in relation to women's clothing in Islam. This word means chemise (shirt), coat or shawl. As Mansour Fahmy says, it is not "a piece of clothing specially adapted for covering the face" (quoted in Jaber-Harb 1996: 14, my translation). Also, the *nikab*, a different type of veil, is a piece of fabric that has two holes in it for eyes. The *bourkou* is another veil of the same type, which goes back to two centuries after the prophet Mohammad's death. Jaber-Harb states that today the forms of veiling continue to be diverse. For example, in Asia women wear a veil which does not cover their face. In Iran, the traditional veil is the '*chador*' which is a long piece of, usually black, fabric that covers from head to feet. Jaber-Harb argues that a new element that appeared in the recent years is a kind of standardization of clothing with the hijab. Actually it is not about the homogenization of the color or the texture of the fabric, but the form of the clothing which aims to free women's arms and make wearing the veil easier for them (Jaber-Harb, 1996, my translation).

Jaber-Harb tries to convey the positive aspects of veiling for women, without talking about its negative implications. Jaber-Harb does not have a holistic perspective about the issue of Muslim women's veiling, nor does she examine the reasons that people in different contexts are asked to veil or tend to practice veiling. Iran can be considered as an example of a country in which veiling has caused some limitations on the participation of women in

some public spheres, instead of easing their presence in the society, in order to depict their abilities and competency. As it was shown by Moghadam, the hijab can also imply some negative ideas, which can lead to women being more constrained and isolated. Although it is true as Moghadam anticipated that there would soon be changes in Iran's society and its patriarchal system would be moderated because of the growing number of university educated and working women (Moghadam, 1992), still some governments use religion and especially women as a tool in order to impose their ideas on people's lives in the public spheres.

Moghadam describes how some religious practices can cause women's restriction in a society such as Iran. She emphasizes that gender in Iran is strongly politicized and in order to understand it better, it would be a good idea to examine it within its own patriarchal context to see the philosophy behind it. She briefly talks about the changes that have occurred in Iran since the Islamic Revolution. Regarding the hijab and women's appearance, the veil became mandatory for women. Furthermore, women were not allowed to initiate divorce and gender segregation was introduced in different public places in the society. Also there were no co-educational schools anymore and teachers who were not considered religious enough, according to Islamic rules, were asked to leave their jobs. Some textbooks were revised. The school textbooks were changed to ones that did not have many pictures of women, and the few that they included mostly displayed women doing domestic tasks.

In a Western country such as Canada, Hoodfar argues that veiled women will be considered to be backward and traditional creatures (Hoodfar, 1993). When Muslim Oriental women enter a Western country, their practices and their identities would be under scrutiny and this is what causes some negative attitudes about their practice of veiling.

Discussions of the notion of wearing the hijab in a non-Muslim environment have a long history. The first debates began in France in 1989 and after that, the same arguments around the issue of the Islamic headscarf began in 1994-1995 in Quebec. Helly (2012) studies this issue in Canada, particularly in relation to the hijab.

Helly mentions the frequently negative stigmas presented by the media as well as the public discussions about Orientalism and implies that Islam and modernity are located at opposite poles, with the former including the oppressive power of men over Muslim women. She argues that wearing Islamic clothing in a Western context is considered as oppression of Muslim women by men by some Westerners, as well as indicating women's lack of agency and autonomy. These stereotypes exist both in Muslim and Canadian societies.

This is illustrated by the response of a Middle Eastern (Iranian) interviewee who studied in a Canadian university and experienced negative attitudes by her professor regarding veiled Muslim women's agency and intelligence. The presumption of the professor was that Muslim women who are veiled are not capable of critically writing and thinking. The interviewee finds that this presumption is being raised in a colonial and prejudicial context (Hojati, 2011).

Helly states further that amongst the reasons for experiences of inequality by Muslim Canadian women is the way they are dressed. The hijab or the Islamic dress code is emphasized since other Islamic clothing such as the chador, burqa or niqab are not largely worn in Canada. Korteweg (2008 in Helly (2012)) also notes that in 108 articles from *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post* and *The Toronto Star* in which this assumption is articulated,

“Islam” restricts women’s capacity to act, and Muslim women are victims, “with limited agency.” Women were depicted as victims of the male parties in faith-based arbitration – spouses, fathers, Imams (Helly,2012:7).

Helly continues that there are two reasons for Muslim women being known as alienated subjects. She distinguishes the situation of women in some Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Somalia in which they stay in isolation as well as being deprived of individual rights, whereas in countries such as Iran, Turkey and Indonesia it is the "Islamic law" that imposes a distinction between men and women in society by making women dependent to men and putting them under men's custody and power, without confining them.

The way Helly differentiates the reasons why Muslim women are treated as strange and dangerous creatures is important, since it is inappropriate to see and judge Muslim women around the world from one lens. In a country such as Iran, it is the "Islamic law" that imposes the distinction among women and men in public domains in the name of religion, but it does not necessarily mean the lack of women's agency and intelligence in such a context.

Yegenoglu on the other hand, suggests that there should be a distinction between the understanding of Westerners and of the Oriental women who themselves wear the veil, as he says that Westerners are not completely able to comprehend veiled women and the reasons behind their veiling. This concealment of Oriental women behind the veil causes some questions from which we might conclude that the real identities of this group of Oriental women are hidden (Yegenoglu, 1998). So the main assumption in the West about Oriental women is not what the veiled women themselves think about it, but rather how they are perceived in the eyes of the Western people.

As a Middle Eastern (Iranian) female immigrant university student in Canada illustrates, ethnic origin, religion and someone's nationality, as well as his/her gender, are amongst the most important elements of how a person is understood in a society. She describes how nervous she was during her Master's studies at university as a Middle Eastern Muslim woman

wearing the hijab. She notes how hard she tried to exhibit an affirmative picture of herself in order to get rid of the common stereotypes accompanying her appearance (Hojati, 2011). Another example is of a formerly veiled Middle Eastern (Iranian) woman who mentions veiling in the Canadian context as a barrier to her identity and the way she is perceived in the Canadian society. She notes in her interview how relaxed she became after removing her veil in the academic setting. She states that now she feels more relaxed and that there are no longer negative ideas accompanying her. She feels that by wearing the hijab, she was always under scrutiny, as well as not being successful in obtaining the job she currently holds (Hojati, 2011). Here is what she states:

With hijab I never could get this job, I am sure about it. If I compare myself to the beginning of my study, I know my English is improved and also my skills but if still I had hijab with this improvements in skills, I could not improve and get this professional job (Hojati, 147: 2011).

These experiences of minority women about the way they are perceived in Canadian society have an influence on the way they describe their identity. As Bhabha notes, " the issues of identity, nationality, nation state and their correlation with culture, language, discourse and narration are important to an examination of one's identity" (Asgharzadeh, 2005: 77). It is important to hear and analyze the voices of Muslim women in Canada, instead of having Western voices speak for them. These Western voices often try to generate some negative ideas about Muslim women that lead to some of the difficulties Muslim women encounter in a Western context. Thus, to better understand to what extent Muslim women would be integrated in Canadian society, such as in its labor market and academia, a discussion of the issues on women's veiling in Canada would be of importance.

Therefore, one of the reasons that Muslim women may tend to unveil themselves is because of their negative experiences on veiling in a Western context such as Canada.

## **b) Ideas on Veiling and Muslim Women's Agency in Diaspora**

Attitudes of scholars on veiling in diaspora also need to be carefully studied as they have less actual contact with the contexts which Muslim women have dealt with. Here some different ideas on veiling are presented, most of which talk about the matter of veiling of Muslim women in general and sometimes it is not specified from which countries the Muslims come and whether reference is made to Muslims who are living in a Western context. I would argue that Arat-Koc (1999) and Atasoy (2006) have unrealistic perspectives about veil and the reasons behind it. Both of them say that women's personal ideas about veiling need to be examined, whereas in many cases, such as in Iran especially after the Islamic revolution in 1979, covering head and body was imposed on women in the society. The veil can have different functions, among which women's safety in the society is only one of them. Another important function of veil can be as a kind of political discourse.

Arat-Koc, as one of the unveiled oriental scholars in the diaspora, argues that if wearing the veil has connotations of Orientalism, then we are oversimplifying it, because in this way we interpret veiled women as isolated people in the society, who are also more traditional. In my opinion, this view is incomplete. There are numerous reasons why women decide to wear hijab in a Western setting such as Canada. According to Arat-Koc, sometimes women veil in order to be able to protect themselves and prevent their bodies from being objectified or as a way of stressing their uniqueness. Veiling for them might ease their presence and participation in the public sphere (Arat-Koc, 1999).

Bartkowski and Read note that the matter of Muslim women's veiling, as well as considering women's veiling as a sign of their oppression by men, has been exaggerated by many authors who discuss that. They mention that there are a variety of reasons and incentives for Muslim women who decide to veil that can be recognized only if the scholars

try to examine the phenomenon from an insider point of view, rather than interpreting it from their own westernized perspectives. For some women the practice of the veil is a way of expressing gender dissimilarities, while for others it is a way of commenting critically on some aspects of Western colonialism in Middle Eastern cultures. As Elizabeth Fernea believes, the veil does not carry a fixed meaning in itself and it means something completely different for people in Muslim cultures than it means for Westerners (Bartkowski & Read, 2000). Moreover, Hoodfar argues that we should stop presenting colonial ideas on Muslim women. She says that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the veil has been seen by westerners as representative of men's dominance over women in Islamic countries. However, that is inaccurate. She states that the meaning of the veil in Muslim countries changes rapidly, something which might not be recognized by westerners who have rather more fixed ideas about the reasons why Muslim women veil. So it is necessary to separate foreign images which exist about veiling and the reasons why Muslim women tend to practice it in a non-Islamic context (Hoodfar, 1993). In addition, Hoodfar mentions various other reasons women may veil, such as looking more attractive, covering one's identity or concerning some traditional principles.

Also there is an incorrect stereotype believed by westerners about what women wear as hijab. The prevalent idea about the veil is that it is very long black clothing that protects all parts of the body of women and puts limitations for women's movement. But the reality is it has nothing to do with restricting women's movement, diminishing their freedom, keeping them at home or putting boundaries for their presence in society. By looking at the procedure of veiling in the history, it would be obvious that one of the most crucial requirements for assuring a family's livelihood was women's labour and the way they dressed put no limitations for their movements (Hoodfar, 2003).

Hoodfar later explains that women's clothing in the Middle Eastern countries is a sign of caring about customs and ethics in the society, so, she says, throughout history, various groups of people have cared about modesty, not only about religion. The author believes that "the practice of the veiling and seclusion of women is in fact pre-Islamic and originates in non-Arab Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies" (Hoodfar 2003: 6). In fact, in some places such as the pre-Islamic Iranian, Byzantine and Greco-Roman empires, veiling showed people's status in the society. But unfortunately, she says, people were not happy to be veiled in some nations like Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan (Hoodfar, 2003). Hoodfar shows that it has been argued in two verses of Quran why women need to wear the hijab. In one of the verses it is mentioned that women need to conceal specific parts of their bodies such as bosoms and adornments (Surat al-Nur, verses 30-31), while there is another verse which tries to explain the reason behind veiling for women. It refers back to the prophet's time and argues that, in order for them not to be disturbed in society, the Prophet's wives needed to cover their body in a way that they are distinguishable or known and therefore not to be annoyed in public (Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59) (Hoodfar, 2003).

Having presented this background, Hoodfar focuses on the persistence of colonial images of Muslim women from the Western perspective. She talks about her own experience as a non-veiled Muslim woman in Canada in addition to gathering some data on young Muslim women in this country. She argues how, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the West the veil has symbolized the inferiority of Muslim cultures. Hoodfar states that while the meaning of veiling has been static for Westerners, its meaning and functions have varied and changed in the Middle East, especially during rapid social change (Hoodfar, 1993).

## Chapter 7: Discussion

Hoodfar and Moghadam can be grouped together. Both mention the role of important social changes in the history of a country as one of the key elements to be examined while discussing gender roles. I strongly agree that many Westerners interpret veiling as a sign of women's oppression, which hinders their activity in the society. This is because of the lack of information about and communication with those women. But as these two authors discuss, it is crucial to investigate the social process that a country has been through in order to understand the gender roles for both genders.

Moreover, Razack (2008) talks about the "Sharia debate" in Canada, and she highlights the fact that Muslim women are trapped between ignorance of their rights and growing up in conservative and patriarchal societies. Therefore, as Razack mentions, some Canadian feminists have employed these frameworks that establish a religious division. She calls the division a "color line" (Razack, 2008; Arat-Koc,2010) which indicates differences between people of color, specifically Muslims, and white, liberal, modern people in the West.

Razack indicates September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 as an event by which the so called "color line" which specifically marked Muslims, became more evident. As a result, some criteria were needed in order to help Muslims and bring Muslim countries freedom, human rights, democracy and women's rights. Razack talks about the practice of the hijab and some fears that were generated by it in most Western contexts, since 2001. The instance of forbidding the hijab in different countries such as France has been mentioned by various Canadian social commentators when talking about faith-based judgments. She concludes that in each case Muslim women's bodies become a theme that raises many debates. Thus, Muslim women's bodies become a context in which citizens and nations are known as modern and civilized, whereas immigrants and Muslims are marked as pre/not modern creatures ( Razack, 2008).

Also Bilge (2010) notes that the history and political culture of Canada and Quebec are marked by a quest for moderation and "peaceful decolonization", which differs from the history of the modern state in France and the United States , which is characterized by "radical split ups , rough revolutions and doctrinaire spirits" (Bilge, 2010: 221, my translation). It can be recognized in Quebec, through public debates held recently about religious accommodation, that the attraction of the French cultural conformity model, which revolves around the abstract notion of citizen, and is influenced by its stated version of secularism, differs from those principles of Quebec.

Bilge's contribution on this topic is to show that this model is not only promoted in the name of secularism, but also continuously through discourses of gender equity which draw clear boundaries between the "us" and the "not us", which reduces the possibility of ambiguous locations and blurring boundaries , in addition to eroding the legitimacy of pluralist ideals. As Bilge states, there is no doubt that gender equity plays a central role in these debates, and it underlines the abandonment of multicultural ideals in favor of cultural conformity (Bilge, 2010:221 , my translation).

Far from merely serving as a representational strategy for challenging accommodation of religious minorities, the discourse of gender equality refers to Quebec society as the site of choice of sexual liberties to be protected against all religions, by amalgamating gender with the visibility/availability of women for men (Bilge, 2010, my translation).

Although it is generally considered that the demand to reduce the visibility of the female body is the expression of a "sexist fantasy", the author shows the opposite, which is that making women visible may also involve sexual fantasies hidden behind a speech about nationalized gender equity. Bilge suggests that in a discursive environment where gender equality is made a key marker of a modern liberal society, supposed to differentiate allegedly

pre-modern and non-Western cultures, it is essential that feminist researchers carefully observe the ways in which arguments are used in order to be anti-immigration/assimilationist. Bilge (2010) argues that the goal in the current feminism in Quebec is to create oppositional forms to encourage research from intersectional and transnational perspectives and take seriously into account that political race and nation are promoted through liberal rights, and freedom of speech , as well as the discourse of gender equity (Bilge, 2010, my translation).

I agree with Bilge (2010) and Razack (2008) in the sense that they say women's bodies have become a common discourse. In my opinion in a Western multicultural society such as Canada, the debates about the veil may cause more seclusion for these minority groups, and may ask them to put more effort into being accepted in the social sphere and seen as "normal" members of the society who are capable of working, studying and sharing their ideas like any other members of Western society.

In general, I think Bilge (2010) is right in the sense that she says that considering Muslim women's veiling as an indicator of their backwardness in a multicultural society such as Canada contradicts the prevalent idea of gender equality that exists in Western and modern contexts. From my point of view, differentiating Muslim women as a distinct group who lack equal opportunities would be simplistic as there are other factors that need to be considered regarding Muslim women's practice of veiling. Moreover, looking at Muslim women as "other" as well as considering their veiling as an element which shows their unequal condition to men, contradicts the definition of multiculturalism. Therefore, as it was mentioned earlier, Muslim women as a group who belong to ethnic minorities may experience a lower level of integration in the Canadian society.

In the same context about gender equity and the notion of being seen as "other", as a person who belongs to a minority group in a Western society such as Canada, Moghissi

(1999) discusses the issue of patriarchy and its relevance to male/female relationships in diaspora. She stresses that the patriarchal system and the meaning accompanying it, which is the domination of men over women, can be explained differently when people live in a different context from their home countries.

According to Moghissi (1999), Iranians experience a "new" racism, something that she calls "cultural racism". She adds that although Iranians may not always be recognizable by their facial features as individuals who belong to an ethnic minority, other elements make it possible to differentiate them as immigrants of Middle Eastern origin, such as their names, their national origin and their culture amongst which the hijab can be considered as one of its vivid features (Moghissi, 1999).

Jiwani also indicates existing racism in Canadian society which she describes as being "a white dominated society, in which the color of your skin is the single most important factor in determining life chances, as well as your dignity, identity and self-esteem" (Jiwani, 2001: 6). Furthermore, she mentions that immigrants come to West, which is widely known as offering democracy, modernization and economic success, in order to experience upward mobility, but sometimes their qualifications and skills are devalued and therefore they are asked to have Canadian experience (Jiwani, 2001). The issue of immigrants finding suitable jobs, however, cannot be judged simply, as there are various factors that work together in order to make the process of looking for a suitable occupation longer, that may cause the integration procedure of immigrants to be harder, particularly during the first 4 or 5 years after the immigrant's arrival (Jiwani, 2001).

In order to clarify the above mentioned points about the issue of Muslim women's veiling as a sign of their backwardness, there are few points that need to be mentioned. It was stated that the negative ideas about Muslim women's veiling have been through a different process

in Canada from that in France. Therefore, in my point of view, since Canada is a multicultural society, it is expected that various practices of different minority groups should be perceived less negatively than in France and the hijab should not only indicate restrictions for these women, or their being deprived of individual rights. It is also important to keep in mind other probable reasons Muslim women may have for practicing veiling in a context in which covering the body is not an obligation. Moreover, the practice of veiling and veiled women needs to be investigated more carefully, as Helly does, and generalizations should be avoided, since Muslim women are heterogeneous group. Finally in relation to the racism which exists in Western countries such as Canada, I do not agree with what Moghissi (1999) considers to be "cultural racism", and rather prefer to see it as "cultural differences". In Canada as a multicultural society, there are possibly fewer negative ideas about Muslim women's veiling than in other Western countries. This might be partly because of the frequency of Muslim women being in the public sphere. Moreover, as time passes, Muslims are not associated with such political events at the international level as the event of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

Canada is one of the biggest immigrant receiving countries in the world, and over 13.4 million immigrants have arrived over the past century. Canada has accepted large numbers of people from a variety of ethnicities including from Asia and the Middle East (Janhevich & Ibrahim, 2004). Investigating Muslims from Middle Eastern ethnic origin and birthplace in the 2001 Census, as well as the Middle Eastern immigrants by ethnicity and birthplace in the 2006 Census was of importance in my research. According to my analysis on Census 2001, Muslim women are 74.6% of all recent women immigrants of Middle Eastern ethnicity and birthplace. Since the 2006 did not include religion as variable, my analysis for that year is of women immigrants of Middle East and West Asia ethnic origin and the place of birth.

In the quantitative section, I was guided by the suggestion of my supervisor to create a new category in 2001 of Muslim Middle Eastern women by ethnicity and the place of birth as a distinct grouping from other Muslim women, while the grouping for 2006 is only of immigrant Middle Eastern women by ethnicity and birthplace. In addition, for the qualitative part I tried to find the most relevant materials about the specific group of women that I am interested in, but I was not always provided with sufficient information about them, as many authors only talked about Muslim women in general. So in the literature review part of my paper, wherever it was possible I gave some information about Iranian women as an example of Middle Eastern women and, if reference was made explicitly to Middle Eastern women, I specified this.

According to my results from 2001 Census, Muslim women are highly educated, as 32.6% of those who immigrated to Canada between 1996-2001 had university degrees. Also, according to the 2006 Census, Middle Eastern women who immigrated between 1996-2001 have a higher percentage with university degrees than do other immigrants. But it is

surprising that a higher percent (75%) of recent Middle Eastern women immigrants who immigrated between 2002-2006 had only completed secondary school or less compared to immigrants from 1996-2001 for whom the percentage was 62.9%.

The results in 2006 Census are different, and it needs to be asked whether this is because in this Census year there were fewer Muslims or whether there was another reason for that? The results for 2001 Census are very similar for Muslim Middle Eastern and all Middle Eastern adult women immigrants, whereas for 2006 we do not know to what extent the Middle Eastern Muslim women's occupation, education, the relevance of occupation and education, labor force activity and class of worker would be similar to those of all Middle Eastern women.

Moreover, according to my analysis from the 2006 Census, progress can be seen from the 2001 Census, especially for Middle Eastern immigrants, as a higher percentage of them have professional and supervisory jobs and a smaller percentage have semi/unskilled jobs.

Also, according to the 2001 Census between 1996-2001, 13.1% of Muslim Middle Eastern women are overemployed. But still there are an important percentage of Muslim Middle Eastern immigrants who are underemployed. Moreover, according to my analysis of the 2006 Census, underemployment for Middle Eastern women is higher between 1996 and 2001 compared to previous years as well as to the period from 2002 to 2006.

As a result, it can be concluded that the matter of underemployment should not be generalized to all Muslim women or even to all Middle Eastern immigrant women, because as my analysis shows there are many of them who have occupations consistent with their level of study, and even some who are overemployed. We might be able to say that Muslim women immigrants to Canada experienced their more difficult situation or they were discriminated against most during 1996 to 2001, as according to my results, they had the

highest rate of university education during this period of immigration while at the same time the higher percentage of underemployment was observed.

Thus, generalizations should be avoided and we cannot claim that Muslim women's veiling as an important part of their identity is necessarily a negative marker of their existence, which leads to their seclusion and to their not being integrated in a Western country such as Canada. In addition, the practice of veiling has a historical existence which has multiple meanings, so we have to avoid discussing it only from one lens, whether as an indicator of freedom which eases women's presence in society, or as a sign of the backwardness and restrictions placed on Muslim women. Thus, it really depends on the perspective from which we are examining Muslim women's veiling and also on the context in which we are looking at it. It is likely that women's veiling influences the way these minority groups are perceived in Canadian society, but we have to keep in mind that this is not the only factor.

Moreover, it is notable that, according to my analysis of the 2001 Census, a very high percentage of Middle Eastern women are paid workers who immigrated to Canada between 1996 to 2001, which shows they are active members in the society and more specifically in the labor force. In addition, according to the 2006 Census, a very high percentage of Middle Eastern women are again paid workers.

When the class of worker is discussed, it is assumed that the strategy of Muslim families is distinctive, but the data for both 2001 and 2006 Censuses do not show a big difference between the class of the workers of Muslim Middle Eastern women and that of other Middle Eastern women or immigrant women from other combinations of ethnicities. There might be various reasons for this. One might be because of the underreporting of unpaid family workers or the reluctance of Muslim families who run their own business to report whether

the women in these families are unpaid family workers. Another reason is that it might be a strategy that is adopted not only by Muslim Middle Eastern families, but also exists in other cultures as well. It might be related to the sort of businesses people have, such as small commercial businesses, which might need more family members in it.

In general, it is important to raise the question for future research of whether underemployment is a negative consequence of veiling. This is a significant issue which needs to be examined.

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