

Juxtaposing *sonare* and *videre* midst curricular spaces:
Negotiating Muslim, female identities in the discursive spaces of
schooling and visual media cultures

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In Education

Ottawa, Ontario

April, 2011

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Our hope for readers is something other than a reading that can only find what it is looking for, perhaps a reading that surprises, a place where disjunction occurs, obliged by the text to see how we see, out of the overdetermined habits of reading, a reading that is other or more than we should like it to be, always more and other, protean. Purposefully not intelligible within standard frames, it is...about multiple, shifting reals...[it] rubs against the desire for interpretive mastery and implicates an audience rather than persuades or seduces.

(Lather, 2007, pp. 42-43)

ABSTRACT

Muslims have the starring role in the mass media's curriculum on otherness, which circulates in-between local and global contexts to powerfully constitute subjectivities. This study inquires into what it is like to be a female, Muslim student in Ontario, in this post 9/11 discursive context. Seven young Muslim women share stories of their high schooling experiences and their sense of identity in interviews and focus group sessions. They also respond to images of Muslim females in the print media, offering perspectives on the intersections of visual media discourses with their lived experience. This interdisciplinary project draws from cultural studies, postcolonial feminist theory, and post-reconceptualist curriculum theorizing. Working with auto/ethno/graphy, my own subjectivity is also brought into the study to trouble researcher-as-knower and acknowledge that personal histories are implicated in larger social, cultural, and historical processes. Using bricolage, I compose a hybrid text with multiple layers of meaning by juxtaposing theory, image, and narrative, leaving spaces for the reader's own biography to become entangled with what is emerging in the text. Issues raised include veiling obsession, Islamophobia, absences in the school curriculum, and mass media as curriculum. Muslim females navigate a complex discursive terrain and their identity negotiations are varied. These include creating Muslim spaces in their schools, wearing hijab to assert their Muslim identity, and downplaying their religious identity at school. I argue for the need to engage students and teacher candidates in complicated conversations on difference via auto/ethno/graphy, pedagogies of tension, and epistemologies of doubt. Educators and researchers might also consider the possibilities of linking visual media literacy with social justice issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Patricia Palulis. I am forever grateful for the generosity you have shown to me in a million different ways – the books, the friendship, the dim sum, the encouragement, the telephone calls, the patience, the goat socks, the rich conversations ... whatever it took to get me through the stuck spots. By showing me there are other ways to write and do research, you have let another bird out of its cage.

I would also like to thank Dr. Diana Masny, who has been an important part of my academic life at the University of Ottawa for many years now. As you know, the disruptive but exhilarating theoretical adventure you led us through in your epistemologies course has been transformative for me, in both my personal and academic lives.

Thank you to Dr. Cynthia Morawski, for bringing your aesthetic sensibilities to my project. You have greatly enlarged my understanding of literacies, auto/ethno/graphy, and raising sons. I am especially grateful to you for reminding me that teachers are also bricoleurs. Reading the evocative richness of your writing was an inspiration for me in my own writing.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Timothy Stanley. Over the past 9 years you have been there with advice and assistance whenever I needed it. Since we both come at our work from quite different angles, having to respond to your tough questions has forced me to push my thinking in productive ways.

I am thankful to Dr. Mari Wesche and Dr. Sima Paribakht, who first encouraged me to undertake doctoral work. Without your encouragement, I likely would not have done so. I will never forget your kindness.

This work would not have been possible without the seven young women who volunteered to be participants. You were generous with your time, your personal stories, and your viewpoints. I learned a great deal from you, and perhaps readers will be similarly affected by your stories. I feel a strong connection to all of you, which is a testament to your warmth and generosity of spirit. In a troubled world, you are like the brightest stars in a dark sky. You make me hopeful. Thank you.

Thank you to Dr. Judith Robertson, for believing in my work. Even though you had to leave my committee when you retired, your contribution was significant. I am truly honoured to have been able to read in feminist theory with you. Your positive feedback on my comprehensive examination will always mean a great deal to me.

I thank my husband, David and my children, Stephen and Kathleen for their support, encouragement, and understanding during the many years I have spent working on this thesis.

Finally, thank you to the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* who provided three years of funding for this doctoral project. I was able to attend numerous national and international conferences during this time, which provided me with valuable feedback, a chance to make connections with other researchers, as well as publishing opportunities.

DEDICATION

I would like dedicate this doctoral thesis to two individuals:

To Dr. Ted/Tetsuo Aoki, whose devotion to seeing and hearing our world more complexly was the inspiration for this work; and,

To the memory of Dr. Joe Kincheloe, who opened up the spaces of the possible with his theorizations of the bricolage and the epistemological bazaar.

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Decolonizing research...is not simply about challenging or making refinements to qualitative research. It is a much broader but still purposeful agenda for transforming the institution of research, the deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting, and disseminating research and knowledge. (Linda Smith, 2005, p. 88)

Unsettling knowledge are those ideas that disturb the convenient truths through which we organize our thoughts and make meaning of our experience of the world. These are the theories that creep up on educators and disturb them with difficult thoughts: that education is not synonymous with rationality and control, but also that one might become unreasonable, irrational, and intractable, that the persistent crises in the field...will exceed all reason and discompose all prior efforts at advancement. Unsettling knowledge invokes skepticism. (Malewski & Sharma, 2010, p. 369)

Kathleen, Diane, and Stephen Watt.
Persepolis, Iran. 1996.



In this thesis I critique some of the ways the mass media portray Muslim women in North America, while deconstructing my own processes of othering. As Dr. William Pinar pointed out at my thesis defense, how we come to see ourselves and others is situated in a particular historical context. There has been a long history of Muslim-Christian-Jewish tension in the world and recent events such as the terrorist attacks in New York and elsewhere have understandably led to distrust and even fear. At such times, binaries such as "us" and "them" proliferate and it is this tendency I work to disrupt in my text. Aoki asks us to stay with the tension in-between categories so we might learn to see and hear our selves and others more complexly. This auto/ethno/graphy is the story of my struggle to respond to Aoki's call...

Preface
Provoking curriculum through the epistemological bazaar

A provocation . . .

A single photograph displayed on the front page of The National Post during the Iraqi elections – an extreme close-up of a Muslim woman's face with a tear in her eye – marked a profound transformation in my ever-shifting subjectivity . . .



Front page of *The National Post* (Jan. 31, 2005), 60% Dare Vote in Iraq. Caption reads: "An Iraqi woman in Amman, Jordan, weeps as she displays her ink-stained finger after voting yesterday."

In that moment of looking, my past, present, and future collided to unsettle the sedimented layers of my multicultural complacency (Watt, 2007). I am unsure which manifestations of language might have been at play in that instant. There can be no stable, coherent narrative to explicate why this particular image proved so provocative, but after my encounter with it on that chilly February day I began to see and hear differently. Suddenly narratives related to Muslim women were coming at me from everywhere. Situated as I am, as an educator who has lived and taught in various contexts both in Canada and internationally in predominantly Islamic countries, I feel compelled to respond to the call for complicated conversations in curriculum (Pinar, 2004), invoking border epistemologies to disrupt the binary terror of humanism. How might educators and students interrogate and negotiate identities in ways that move us

beyond monolithic understandings of self and other towards more embodied meanings? With curriculum theorist, Ted Aoki (1990a), I search for ways to compose curricula that allow for polyphony, "an opening up to a deeper realm beyond the reach of the eye, a realm where we might begin to hear the beat of the earth's rhythm" ¹ (p. 375).

¹ My personal narratives will appear in italics throughout this text.

The singular event of having noticed a tear in a stranger's eye was a significant moment in the flow of my personal and academic lives. The word *tear* may refer to a drop of clear salty liquid from the eyes² or to the ripping apart of something by force³. Ziarek (2001) writes that “it is the tear, or the separation of the self from its sedimented identity, that enables a redefinition of becoming . . . [toward] the continuous ‘surpassing’ of oneself” (p. 39). A single tear, tears at my edges, compels movement in-between uncomfortable storied, visual, and academic spaces where not-yet imagined curricular conversations might take place. The unexpected provocation of a tear thus sets off this staging of further provocations . . .

To create this research journey about negotiating identities in the discursive spaces in-between schooling and visual media cultures, I draw on the propensity of the “intense intradiscursivity” (Bhabha, 2000, p. 376) and interdisciplinarity of the bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005). This involves threading and rethreading live(d) experiences through those theoretical and disciplinary lenses that suit the task at hand. As Kincheloe (in Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) suggests, bricoleurs “see the power of disciplines not in the truths they own but in their kinetic possibilities that emerge in relationship” (p. 61). Bhabha (2006) argues bricolage “allows you to relate to a tradition or various traditions of thinking and yet to articulate something different, or something original, or something distinctive” (p. 23). Palulis & Low (2005) remind us “there are multiple ways to enter a text,” and we may come in “[t]hrough the main entrance or through another door” (p. 3). Following on this idea, I am drawn to provocative possibilities of Kincheloe's (2008) notion of the “epistemological bazaar” (p. 32), which I stumbled upon by chance as one might find an unanticipated treasure in a seldom-visited shop off the beaten path.

² www.yourdictionary.com/tear

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tears

Alluding to bazaars in the context of this study expands upon the theorization of bricolage and provides a means to link my experiences living abroad in predominantly Islamic countries to the spaces of this inquiry. How might identities be unsettled by disrupting dominant western epistemologies — those habitual ways we make meaning about our worlds? Kincheloe (2008) writes:

Bricoleurs make sure that Western rationalism is removed from its sacred sanctuary as the only legitimate mode of knowledge production. They take rationalism into the epistemological bazaar where it assumes its place as simply another way of making meaning and producing knowledge about the world. Here it co-exists with traditions coming from different places and times. It encounters modes of perceiving that utilize both rational and emotional dynamics and make use of context and interrelationship in unique ways. Bricoleurs like to hang out in the epistemological bazaar. In this locale they can engage in unimagined conversations that move them to new levels of insight derived from juxtaposing diverse forms of meaning making. (p. 32)

Could dwelling in the epistemological bazaar – rather than remaining confined within pre-existing disciplinary and research boundaries – provide a means to open up present frames of knowing to the possibilities of thinking our selves and others differently?

My writing swerves down the tortuous corridors of theory and live(d) experience towards unknown, unknowing destinations as I contemplate past, present, and future forays into bazaars. A stroll through an oriental bazaar is a richly sensual experience, and memories come flooding back: hot glasses of chai bursting with the sweetness of melting lumps of sugar placed under the tongue; the delicious scent of brilliantly-hued herbs and spices heaped up high on tables; mesmerizing calls to prayer in Khan-al-Khalili at Iftar; sweaty bodies brushing past in the oppressive summer heat; finely-woven carpets and rustic tribal kilims on offer in Kerman, Rawalpindi, Aleppo, and Baku; mouth-watering showarma layered with spiced meat and garlicky yogurt served from a tiny Damascene shop near Bab Al-Sharki; “evil eyes” made of blue glass staring back at me from every corner of Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar; half-familiar words swirling around in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and Turkish. Each lane in the market has a particular specialty, and you pick and choose with care depending upon your needs and inclinations. Although I love them all, perhaps my favorite bazaar is Qissa Khawani in Peshawar — famed as a place where professional storytellers used to tell tales to travelers who met at this crossroads on the Silk Road. Like all bazaars, it offers unlimited opportunities for unplanned encounters. Live(ly) face-to-face haggling and negotiation are an inevitable part of every visit. You never know what you might find or who you might meet when you enter into the bustling spaces of a bazaar — alive with everyday human activity, interaction, and exchange.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

Just as there is a great deal of multiplicity and movement in a bazaar, there is much going on in the live(d) human and theoretical spaces of the bricolage. I weave my stories with participant stories, my life amidst their lives (Trinh, 1989), to think about how we push against and defend the boundaries that define and confine us. The bricoleur understands “the frontiers of knowledge work rest in the liminal zones where disciplines collide” (Kinchloe, 2001, p. 689). I once imagined intercultural education required a person to become “a boundary-crosser” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 3), but Canadian curriculum theorist Ted Aoki (1990b) points us elsewhere. He rethinks curriculum in ways that draw us into “the lived space of between — in the midst of many cultures, into the *inter* of inter/culturalism” (p. 382). Aoki maintains:

Although it is a place alive with tension, in dwelling there, the quest is not so much to rid ourselves of tension, for to be tensionless is to be dead like a limp violin string, but more so to seek appropriately attuned tension, such that the sound of the tensioned string resounds well. (p. 382)

Bhabha (2006) similarly prefers to think in terms of “cultural intersections” (p. 16). For Bhabha “it is not as if something comes and ‘crosses over’ into something else, it is more that cultures abut on one another. There is a kind of internal struggle” (p. 16). Aoki expressly moves away from the identity-centered spaces such as *self* and *other*, *east* and *west* into the generative interstices. By holding binaries in embodied tension, could curriculum gesture towards bodies that exceed social and cultural inscription (Lather, 1991)? In this hybrid, multi-vocal text I seek spaces where identity “becomes a site of contestation and negotiation” (Russell, 1998, p. 9) . . . where it is “more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle” (Trinh, 1992, p. 140).

Aoki (1985/1991) describes a situated curriculum as a “curriculum in the presence of people and their meanings” (p. 231). By bringing our own unique, rich experiences to the learning situation, research participants, scholars, and I actively generate knowledge through complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004), paying heed to Aoki’s (1990a) suggestion that “the

time is ripe for us to call upon *sonare* to dwell juxtaposed with *videre*” (p. 373).

sonare (verb, Latin) [soe-NAR-eh].

1. To make a noise/sound; to speak/utter; to express/denote; to echo/resound; to be heard; to celebrate in speech (Whitaker, 2007).
2. In relation to music theory it means to sound; to play; to resonate; to have a sound (Dolmetsch, 2007).

videre (verb, Latin) [VID-er-ay].

1. To see; to look at; to consider (Whitaker, 2007).

That both *sonare* and *videre* are active verbs in Latin is significant for Aoki (1986/1991), for whom curriculum exists in the tension between curriculum-as-noun and curriculum-as-verb.

Aoki draws on Pinar’s (1975) theorization of curriculum as *currere* – the Latin infinitive of curriculum — that denotes “the running of the course” (Pinar, 2004, p. xiii). *Currere* marks the reconceptualization of curriculum from noun to verb:

Curriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than a process. It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope. Curriculum is not just the site of our labor, it becomes the product of our labor, changing as we are changed by it (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 848).

A strategy for self-study, *currere* is “an intensified engagement with daily life” (Pinar, 2004, p. 37) that asks us “to slow down, to remember and even re-enter the past...to meditatively imagine the future” (p. 4), and to understand “with more complexity and subtlety, one’s submergence in the present” (p. 4). Rather than a story about the other, this auto/ethno/graphy works through *currere* to inquire into my “own self-formation within society” (Pinar, 2004, p. 16).

Dwelling in the epistemological bazaar invites complex questioning about “[w]hat makes our knowledge both possible and problematic” (Lather, 1991, p. 41). As Block (1998) points out, education “has nothing to do with marked paths and coming home. Rather, [it] has more to do with meandering and getting lost” (p. 326). This fieldwork as home/work (Visweswaran, 1994) engages the discursive curricular spaces of schooling and visual media cultures to inquire into our readings of self and other as an ongoing project to decolonize minds and bodies. By critiquing

cultural assumptions I challenge mainstream knowledge about Muslim women and seek “truths”⁴ hidden by the stories we tell ourselves (Pinar, 2004) — remaining ever uncertain about where this might lead . . .

Am I also saying that anthropologists, once they do their homework, will have “nowhere to go”? Yes, but not entirely. Home once interrogated is a place we have never been before. This sense of “being at home,” I suggest, allows feminists and anthropologists alike to travel in radically new ways. For “indeed the countryside ‘at home’ has always held promise of dangerous journeys.” (Visweswaran, p. 113)

The inquiry...

In Chapter One I reflect upon the live(d) experiences that provoked this inquiry into the high schooling experiences and sense of identity of young Muslim women in Ontario high schools post 9/11. The next two chapters situate this study in the academic literature and theoretical discourses. Research participants are introduced in Chapter Four, and issues in-between identity and subjectivity are engaged with a particular focus on what it might mean to be young, Muslim, and female in Ontario at this time. Chapter Five considers negotiations of visual media cultures as unofficial curriculum. Participant readings of media images are juxtaposed with my readings of personal photographs. Chapter Six engages our entanglement in veiling discourses both inside and outside schooling contexts, and Chapter Seven considers negotiations of the curricular spaces of high school. The final chapter discusses the im/possibilities of pedagogies of tension and epistemologies of doubt, toward an embodied curriculum as lively discomfort.

I want a discourse that troubles the world.
(Denzin, 2010, p. 10)

⁴ Clifford (1986) refers to ethnographies as “fiction and partial truths” not in the sense of being false, but because they are made up or fashioned. Writing culture is based on exclusions, and as ethnographers we select and impose meaning. Power and history thus work through our texts.

CHAPTER 1:
AN AUTO/ETHNO/GRAPHIC INQUIRY EMERGES IN-BETWEEN
LIVE(D) EXPERIENCE AND ACADEMIC STUDY

Nothing is more challenging
than when what is familiar
is renamed
and therefore displaced into another discourse.
If you take reading as that kind of process, not simply looking but having the vocabulary
of a work *retool* what is familiar,
it is a very productive thing. (Bhabha, 2006, p. 21)

Performative writing is *nervous*. It anxiously crosses various stories,
theories, texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice, unable to settle
into a clear, linear course, nor willing nor able to stop moving,
restless, transient and transitive, traversing spatial and temporal
borders, linked as it is to what Michael Taussig calls “a chain of
narratives sensuously feeding back into the reality thus
(dis)enchanted.” (Pollock, 1998, p. 90)

[R]eaders are travellers;
they move across lands belonging to someone else,
like nomads poaching their way across fields
they did not write. (De Certeau, 1984, p. 174)

As she names them, they appear... The story tells us not only what might have happened, but also
what *is happening* at an unspecified time and place. (Trinh, 1989, p. 133)

The emergence of a research journey

This study engages the high schooling experiences and sense of identity of seven young Muslim women growing up in Ontario post 9/11. It considers how they negotiate available subject positions in the complex discursive sites¹ of schooling and visual media cultures, as seen through my own entanglement in language.

What compels us to undertake a particular research project and why do we choose to situate our work within one theoretical discourse over another? In this first chapter I give an account of various life experience that collide and/or intersect to provoke this intertextual inquiry, including everyday conversations, academic study, my life abroad, teaching experiences, and visual encounters. Given the multiple threads of meaning I set out to engage, this study is situated within the spaces of cultural studies, postcolonial feminist theory, and post-reconceptualist (Appelbaum, 2006) curriculum theorizing, which favors “nomadic discourses of curriculum and educational studies” (p. 12). Appelbaum writes:

The point is not to find a home or homelessness in marginality, but shelter *and* transport in nomadic epistemology and practices (p. 18)...In a hypertextual or hypermedia environment, history and generation are a thread, but the role of the “father” is decentered. More important than the conceptual discourse are the interwoven strands of connection which link the concepts in ever-increasing ways. (p. 20)

This bricolage thus sets out to write a plural, unstable, intercultural story in which borders and boundaries are questioned (Trinh, 1991). I pull from the less familiar depths of the epistemological bazaar (Kincheloe, 2008) to open up meaning making at borders so that the limits of categories that define bodies might be pushed at and shifted in as-yet-unimaginable ways.

¹ Hall (1997b) reminds us that language is not simply an abstract system, that meaning-making takes place in particular contexts. Subject positions emerge out of a specific history, out of a specific set of power relations. “Discourse can never be abstracted from the conditions of its production and circulation in the way that language can. The most significant relations of any piece of discourse are to the social conditions of its use, not to the signifying system in general, and its analysis exemplifies not an instance of that system in practice, but its function in deploying power within those conditions. At this level. . . discourse is the means by which those conditions are made to make sense within the social relations that structure them” (Fiske, 1996, p. 3).

In the intertexts of this auto/ethno/graphy (Morawski & Palulis, 2009), I rework the discourses through which I have lived my life in an effort to “(under)mine systemic hegemony and . . . unpack the language that helps to sustain it” (p. 6). It is impossible to predict where unraveling journeys, unpacking baggage, and re-arranging artifacts (p. 6) might take us, but it is the movement itself and not the false promise of a final destination that I am most anxious to engage here. Trinh (1991) asserts our “experiences in life are complex, plural, and full of uncertainties and this complexity can never be reduced and fitted into the rigid corners of ready-made solutions” (p. 112). There is no stable, definitive story to tell — only fragments which never stand still. Trinh (1992b) describes fragmentation as “a way of living at the borders” (p. 157). She (1991) writes:

Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside nor outside. One has to push one’s work as far as one can go: to the borderlines, where one never stops, walking on edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit. (p. 218)

Aoki (1990b) brings the im/possibilities of living at borders into education by reimagining curriculum as tensioned occasions. Palulis and Low (2005) draw on Wolfreys’ notion of a “chance occasion” in their close readings of Aoki’s work to ponder what *reacquaintance* might mean for curriculum. It involves “on the one hand, a refamiliarization with what is unfamiliar, and, on the other, a defamiliarization with that which has been taken for granted” (Wolfreys, 2004, p. 3). In this inquiry I seek out the productive capacities of Aokian tensioned occasions to stage such a *reaquaintance*. How might we interrogate and negotiate identities to move beyond humanist understandings of identity and culture as autonomous, stable, and homogenous towards more dynamic, relational, embodied meanings?

By placing auto/ethno/graphic narratives side by side with media² discourses and academic literature I seek displacements implied in the movement of *currere* (Pinar 2004). This is a process by which we review the past to examine our self-formation; it is the theorization of our lives as curriculum. Pinar writes that it is “through subjectivity that one experiences history and society and through which history and society speak” (p. 23). It is in the subjective realm that students and teachers connect academic knowledge to their self-formation and therefore, Pinar argues, the “reconstruction of the public sphere cannot proceed without the reconstruction of the private sphere” (p. 21). By theorizing our personal stories we may see what the official stories hide, thus creating “passages out of and away from the stasis of the historical present” (p. 39). If educators hope to provoke students to break through the limits of the taken for granted we must experience breaks with what has been established in our own lives (Greene, 1995). In Aokian (1993) terms this is a matter of “experiencing differences in kind in the tension between the master stories and the daily stories” (p. 211). Visweswaran (1994), reading Bhabha, reminds us that in telling our individual stories we are telling stories of the collective. Trinh (1989) similarly writes:

Every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future. The body never stops accumulating, and years and years have gone by mine without my being able to stop them, to stop it . . . My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me. (p. 123)

As I weave our narratives anxiously through the inter/texts, questions are raised about the nature of educational experience broadly conceived. With Trinh (1989) I see stories as openings (Watt,

² Kellner (1995) defines media culture as consisting of “systems of radio and the reproduction of sound (albums, cassettes, CD’s, and their instruments of dissemination such as radios, cassette recorders, and so on); of film and its modes of distribution (theatrical playing, video-cassette rental, TV showings); of print media ranging from newspapers to magazines; and to the system of television which stands at the center of media culture)” (p. 1). “The various media – radio, film, television, music, and print media such as magazines, newspapers, and comic books – privileges either sight or sound, or mix the two senses. . .” (p. 1). Stack and Kelly (2006) use the term *media* to mean “both the mediums of communication (radio, recorded music, Internet, television, print, film, video) as well as the products or texts of these mediums (journalistic accounts, television shows and film productions, video games, web sites)” (p. 6).

2007). We write narratives that pose questions about our experience in the world and invite readers to join us in the examination of the complex issues that are evoked (Grumet, 2001).

Stories from the mundane events of everyday life

Although we may be largely unaware of their significance at the time, an infinite number of events in our personal lives and the wider world constitute our subjectivities.

Life is not a (Western) drama of four or five acts. Sometimes it just drifts along . . . In life, we usually don't know when an event is occurring; we think it is starting when it is already ending; and we don't see it's in/significance. The present, which saturates the total field of our environment, is often invisible to us. (Trinh, 1989, p. 142)

This research story emerges from “the domain of everyday life, [from] the mundane world where peoples’ everyday lives are lived” (Aoki, 1985/1991, p. 232). It reaches back through memory to my experiences as a teacher and student, and to the innumerable hours I spent as a young person immersed in popular cultural sites such as television and *National Geographic Magazine*. This research looks back upon and rewrites my experiences abroad living in the predominantly Islamic countries of Pakistan, Iran and Syria during the decade of the 1990’s, which provided me with unique perspectives. It is not that I have become an expert on Muslim cultures. Rather, I mine memories of live(d) experience for what they might suggest about my own cultural assumptions and their connections to broader social, cultural, political, and educational contexts. As Culler (1982) reminds us, experience is “divided and deferred—already behind us as something to be recovered, yet still before us as something to be produced” (p. 82).

Not long after returning to Canada in 1999, I began a master’s degree in second language teaching and learning and became increasingly interested in intercultural education. In 2004, I began a doctoral program in education and soon after started teaching advanced, academic English as a Second Language to international students as well as courses in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Ottawa. Rich stories emerged from these teaching

experiences, including some with connections to the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent flood of representations of Muslims in the mass media. As I have written elsewhere:

Many of the stories I have heard from students, friends, and colleagues who are Muslim and female confirm that the narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman is pervasive in our society. Women who wear hijab tell of being involved in struggles with teachers intent on “modernizing” them. Others avoid face-to-face meeting with administrators and potential employers for fear of being treated differently because of the scarf they wear on their heads . . . Even those women who do not adhere to Islamic dress codes are not immune from the effects of dominant cultural meanings. Muslim women who choose not to cover report that they are often assumed to be “more open minded” than women who do wear the hijab, or alternatively, not “real” Muslims. (Watt, 2007, p. 148)

Over the course of my life, I paid little attention to the ways that Muslims were being portrayed even though the images had always been right there in front of me — during the Gulf War, the American Hostage Crisis, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. I passively, unquestioningly, consumed the narratives of otherness that I saw and heard in the mass media and had met few Muslims face-to-face prior to moving to Islamabad in 1992.

The eight years we lived abroad provided me with stories to tell, but I found that no matter what I recounted in conversation with people who had never lived in those places – that we mostly liked the places where we had lived, that the people we met were warm and hospitable – most did not seem to hear what I was saying.

I spent three hours one afternoon talking with an acquaintance about our life in Tehran. Throughout our conversation she seemed enthralled with my stories because, she said, she knew nothing about Iran. And then, at the end of our conversation, she declared: “I would never want to go there. It’s too scary.” While I didn’t expect her to want spend her next vacation in the Islamic Republic, I wondered if she had heard anything I had just said.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Stories of my personal experiences could not compete with the dominant discourses about Iran circulating in society. Is this what Pinar (2004) means when he stresses the need to watch for the disjunction between our personal stories and grand narratives?

From the streets of Peshawar

Formerly part of the ancient Persian Empire, Peshawar sits at the entrance to the formidable Khyber Pass. A hub of trade at the historic crossroads between Central Asia and the Middle East, this 2,000-year-old frontier town is one of the oldest in the world and still thrives . . .

Nearly twenty years ago, a group of Canadians set out in a ramshackle bus from Islamabad to visit Peshawar's fabled Qissa Khawani Bazaar. Translated from Hindko, the name becomes, The Storyteller's Bazaar. In former times, caravans of merchants and travelers along the Silk Road stopped here to trade their goods, rest, and listen to the tales of professional story-tellers. Nowadays the old storytellers are gone but new stories continue to emerge from the bazaar, including my own. In spite of television images that bring this part of the world into our living rooms, it still feels so far away that I can hardly believe I was ever there. Even when I was there, standing on the streets of Qissa Kahwani Bazaar felt surreal. Since childhood I had wanted to travel to distant locales and Peshawar embodied the realization of this dream like no other city I had ever seen before.

Travel to Peshawar is not recommended for tourists these days, and this makes my visit feel even more extraordinary. Ashcroft et al. (2007) contend that contemporary tourism is in many ways the modern extension of colonial notions of possession by exploration and I am caught in-between the pleasures of writing this place as exotic and no longer wanting to exoticize places and peoples. While my fellow day-trippers had come here to hunt for treasures in the copper bazaar, I wandered through the streets of Peshawar capturing complete strangers through the lens of my camera. As Trinh (1998) writes, "[t]he process of othering in the (de)construction of identity continues its complex course" (p. 23).

The photos I took on that day are mostly of people going about their daily business. What struck me at the time was the seeming difference of this place and its inhabitants from what was familiar in my own life. I can still feel the thrill of "discovering" Peshawar and its peoples on that day. Years later, I return to these memories so I might deconstruct the role that my practices of looking might have played in the construction of identities, both my own and those of others. My assumptions about the people I was observing and photographing were based on information I was gathering through sight, for I had almost no verbal exchanges with anyone I saw and photographed on that day. I wonder: What "looking" was I guilty of? Given that I had met few Muslims before coming to Pakistan, which cultural narratives was I drawing on to "interpret" the people I was seeing on this day, and where had I learned these stories of otherness?

I took gorgeous photographs of tall, proud Pathan men in baggy shalwar kameez, some with bullet-studded bandoleers strapped across their chests. I captured images of Afghan refugees who had fled their homelands years earlier with the arrival of the Russians, and bearded tribesmen loading goods on and off of animal-drawn carts – a visual feast for my "modern" foreign eyes. I had never been anywhere that felt so alive with human activity and extraordinary sights, yet it was the women moving about under colourful burqas that

most intrigued me. After making some inquiries, I trudged up a narrow stairway into a second-storey shop in pursuit of my own souvenir burqa. The friendly merchant welcomed me and in excellent English introduced me to the term “shuttlecock burqa.” We sat, sipping tea, while I decided on bright orange and negotiated what I imagined to be a fair price. As I held the finely-pleated layers of cloth which flowed from the tightly-fitting head piece I thought to myself that “shuttlecock” really was a fitting name for this garment.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Here is a photo that I took in Peshawar on that day:



Ashcroft et al. (2001) describe how during the nineteenth century, “the exotic, the foreign, increasingly gained, throughout the empire, the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference, something with which the domestic could be (safely) spiced” (p. 94). Like many others before and after me, I was hooked on “culture collecting” (Trinh, 1998, p. 22) during the years I lived abroad. The accumulation of hand-made tribal artefacts and personal photographs continue to provide me with evidence, with reminders, of a more exciting existence long after the

return to my ordinary circumstances in Canada. Yet the storied memories now also provoke a profound uneasiness, for meanings shift with the passage of time. How do I account for my interest in collecting cultural artefacts and photos of covered women in Peshawar? What could it possibly mean? Trinh (1989) asks: “What do I want, wanting to know you or me?” (p. 76).



Woman wearing
shuttlecock burqa.
Qissa Khawani Bazaar,
Peshawar, Pakistan.
(Watt, 1992)

This was one of my most treasured photos from Peshawar. What was going on during these moments of looking? Kaplan (1997) contends “looking relations are never innocent . . . [but] are always determined by the cultural systems people traveling bring with them” (p. 6). As a child I had admired the exquisite, glossy images on the pages of *National Geographic Magazine*. They piqued my curiosity about other peoples and places but also provided powerful lessons on a world neatly divided into “us” and “them” (Lutz & Collins, 1993). Perhaps imagining myself under *National Geographic*’s employ at long last, I used my telephoto lens to maintain a distance from this approaching woman so I could get this shot. How very odd it seems to me now to take another’s photo on the sly, and yet tourists and journalists continue this practice without a second thought. Such photos are routinely taken in one locale and sold to media outlets that, in turn, traffic them to a public far away. Who ever questions or troubles this practice?

Trinh's (1992) reflections on capturing the other through film might have been written especially for me in the instants I was peering through the lens at this total stranger:

Watching her through the lens. I look at her becoming me becoming mine. (p. 101)

I come with the idea that I would seize the unusual by catching the person unawares. There are better ways to steal I guess. (p. 103)

In someone else's space I cannot just roam about as I may like to. Roaming about with the camera is not value-free; on the contrary, it tells us much about the ideology of such a technique. (p. 117)

I was intensely curious about the person under the burqa. What did she look like? What was her life like? What was she thinking? What was it like to see the world while remaining unseen? Did she feel the oppression under that burqa that I imagined she was feeling? All the questions I had were for my photographic subject. I never thought at all about my own motives, about how I was implicated in these moments of looking.

I wonder what this woman, whose photograph I took without consent, would say to me if she were given the opportunity to speak back? Years and years later, reading Kahf's (2008) description of covering made me think back to this woman in my photo:

I see without being fully seen; I know without being known. I shore up an advantage over what I survey. Like a goddess, like a queen of unquestioned sovereignty, I declare this is my sanctuary, my haram, from which I impart what I will, when I will. (p. 30)

It is like a second skin to me. It is supple as a living membrane and moves and flows with me. There is beauty and dignity in its fall and sweep. It is my crown and my mantle, my vestments of grace. Its pleasures are known to me, if not to you. (p. 27)

Just because my veil blocks your senses, doesn't mean it blocks mine. The veil is no blindfold. I see out; you are the one whose vision is obstructed. My senses are alive and have a field wherein to play, away from where your eye can penetrate. (p. 29)

Twenty years ago, I don't know if I would have been able to imagine a woman in blue burqa as anything other than oppressed. And of course, I imagined I was the one who was free.

I was grateful whenever I met someone with whom I could share my experiences living abroad, whether it was a colleague, fellow graduate student, or student. Looking back, I realized the role that some of these conversations played in helping me to identify my thesis topic. A colleague and I even decided to write and present a paper together at an academic conference, and I learned a great deal from our work together. The stories she shared from her perspective as a Muslim-Canadian helped me to notice things I hadn't paid much attention to before:

Even my very "open-minded" friends—who never articulate their minds for fear of insulting me—ask me, "Why don't you veil if you are a Muslim?" And I wish to answer, "Why should I?" Seriously, I still haven't figured out why I should. What strikes me most is my Iranian friend, who has chosen to veil in Canada, says her Canadian friends have never asked her questions about the veil. Then why does the subject of the veil pick up in my presence? I am a line of flight, a movement of "deterritorialization." I don't fit into the dichotomies of the unveiled and the Muslim . . . I am inconceivable.

(Hasan, in Watt & Hasan, 2006)

Hasan's words disturb. I hang, in particular, on the word *inconceivable*. "To conceive" is to imagine, to envision, to visualize, while the prefix *in* means *not*. What conditions of language have their hold on us so that we are unable to think of her beyond simplistic binaries? How might *identity* be cracked to create spaces to for the unthinkable to become thinkable? Ahmed (2000b) asks, "How can zones which are uninhabitable be populated" (p. 94)?

One day, a colleague passed me an article by Hoodfar (1993), whose experiences resonated with many of our own. Hoodfar writes:

Without any doubt I can . . . assert that the issue of the veil and the oppression of Muslim women have been the most frequent topic of discussion I have been engaged in, often reluctantly, during some 20 years of my life in the western world (mostly in the UK and Canada). Whenever I meet a person of white/European descent, I regularly find that as soon as he/she ascertains that I am Muslim/Middle Eastern/Iranian, the veil quickly emerges as the prominent topic of conversation. This scenario occurs everywhere, in trains, the grocery store, the laundromat, on the university campus, or at a party. . . What I have found remarkable is that despite their admitted ignorance on the subject, almost all people I met were, with considerable confidence, adamant that women had a particularly tough time in Muslim cultures. Occasionally western non-Muslim women would tell me they are thankful that they were not born in a Muslim culture. Sometimes they went so far

as to say that they were happy that I was living in their society rather than my own, since obviously my ways are more like theirs, and since now, having been exposed to western ways, I could never return to the harem! ... Frustratingly, in the majority of cases, while my conversants listened to me, they did not hear. (p. 5)

Barlas (2007) explains that she used to think that many of her students simply lacked knowledge about Islam, but she has gradually come to the realization that, “it would be truer to say that they lack any *meaningful* knowledge about Islam since, of course, they know a great deal about it by way of stereotypes” (p. 367). Grumet (2001) contends that understanding the relation of knower to known is what our work as educators is about.

Stories from the *Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students*

In 2006, when I was working on my thesis proposal, I attended a hearing at Carleton University organized to give Muslim students an opportunity to make statements about personal experiences of Islamophobia, for there had been incidents at Ontario universities where Muslim students were the target of intimidation and hate (Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students, 2007). The majority of those offering testimony on that day were women. I heard stories of professors surprised to find that women wearing Islamic covering could be outspoken and intelligent; of bus drivers refusing to stop; of numerous overt and subtle words, looks, and acts which question, deny, exclude, and commit violence. Following are statements made by three young Muslim women at Task Force hearings:

Even though I haven't, myself, experienced any physical acts of aggression or any outright Islamophobic comments, it feels like there is a measure of mistrust and suspicion and undue attention to my personal appearance. I have heard people snicker behind my back and say things like, “why is she here?” (University of Toronto student, p. 11)

I feel that other students are not welcoming and they look at me as if I'm a terrorist. They don't talk to me in the same way they talk to other people. (University of Windsor student, p. 11)

I know women who don't come to campus wearing a headscarf, like I'm wearing right now, because they know they are going to be targeted. (Ryerson University Student, p. 14)

Many of the narratives I witnessed on that day echoed those I was seeing and hearing in my everyday life (Watt, 2007) and I started to think seriously about where and how dominant meanings about Muslims are produced, circulated, and how they constitute our subjectivities. Every time I repeat the word “Islamophobia” I breathe new life into it; yet neither can I deny its existence. I read Palulis and Low (2005) reading Butler (1992) who asserts that to deconstruct words is “to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power” (in Palulis and Low, 2005, p. 5). Where do our responsibilities lie given our submersion in language?

Visual media discourses and fearing the other

The niqab has been in the news recently, often in the most unflattering terms. These new WMDs (women in Muslim dress) seem to evoke the same fear once reserved for the other WMD’s (weapons of mass destruction). The most vocal critics are European men in positions of power along with feminists. Few have taken the time to understand the issue from the point of view of the Veiled women, themselves. (Sheema Khan, 2009, p. 138).



*Newsweek
Magazine
(Dec. 2006).*

How do images such as the veiled woman on the cover of *Newsweek* operate as a powerful curriculum on otherness? Johnny and Shariff (2007) suggest the construction of an “us” and a

“them” creates a climate of fear. When the media repeatedly uses such binaries along with such terms as “homegrown terrorists” they perpetuate the idea that the enemy is within. The use of such language creates suspicion “by insinuating that all Canadian Muslims fit the profile of a terrorist” (p. 606). Following are three stories of fearing the other from inside and outside the classroom:

Many of our friends and family feared for our safety during the years we lived in Syria, Pakistan, and Iran. And no one ever came to visit. Was this because, as Edward Said has written, the Middle East [and I include Pakistan and Iran here] is largely unknown to Americans [and Canadians] except as it is related to “newsworthy issues” such as oil, war, or terrorism? Whatever the case, it seemed quite natural for people to worry about us while we were there. In a binary world, Canada is imagined as a safe space while and an abstracted “over there” can only be imagined as dangerous. When I tell people I traveled all around Iran without incident with whatever willing female friend I could find to accompany me, and that I felt as comfortable walking alone on the streets of Damascus or Tehran as I do on the streets of Ottawa, my tales are met with looks of disbelief and sounds of silence. (Watt, Personal Narrative)

My sixteen-year-old daughter told me about an exchange that took place in her Grade 11 World Religions class today. Students learned from the teacher and the course textbook that “Islam” means “peace.” Today a student in the class asked: “If Islam is such a peaceful religion, then why are so many Muslims terrorists?” (Watt, Personal Narrative)

I recall a conversation I had with an adult, female student in 2003. Rana grew up in the Middle East and was in Ottawa to perfect her academic English before beginning her doctoral studies at a prestigious Canadian university. She had lived in Canada several years earlier and was very comfortable living here. When I casually asked her what it was like living with her family in Canada since 9/11 she told me she was actually afraid to go out. She explained because she wore hijab and was easily identifiable as Muslim, she feared people were associating her with the images being portrayed in the media. Rana told me she and her friends often received unfriendly looks and words from complete strangers. Her greatest concern, however, was for her children at school. She explained she was an adult and could take care of herself, but would her children with their Arabic-accented English be welcomed? (Watt, Personal Narrative)

While I expected people to be afraid for us in Iran, I found Rana’s fear here “at home” shocking. Here was a sophisticated, intelligent, woman for whom I had the deepest respect – who had lived in a number of major cities around the world – living in fear, in mine. Hussain (2002) similarly reports that after 9/11 female research participants admitted to not leaving their homes for days,

afraid of being targeted because they were visibly Muslim. Rizvi (2005) calls on educators to consider how events outside of school affect certain groups of students. Faced with forms of public othering in the mass media, how might we educate ourselves to “complicate the process of seeing” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 3)?

It was around the time Rana told me her story that I noticed the image of an Iraqi woman with a tear in her eye on the cover of *The National Post* during the Iraq elections. Suddenly, narratives I had never been attuned to before were reaching my ears and eyes and the effect was distressing. I felt a dissonance between the ways Muslim women were being portrayed in the mass media and the women I had met face-to-face in my everyday life. Stanley (2006) suggests that if we really want to inquire into what is going on in our students’ lives we need to ask questions and listen to stories of personal experience, and if we don’t hear anything, we aren’t listening.

In/visible Muslim women in the Canadian print news media

March 23, 2007 (*CBC News On-line*):

Muslim women will have to remove their face coverings if they want to vote in Monday’s Quebec election, said the province’s returning officer. Marcel Blanchet announced Friday he was reversing an earlier decision that would have allowed Muslim women wearing niqabs to vote on March 26 without showing their faces. The initial decision ... sparked fierce debate in Quebec. The chief electoral officer’s headquarters were flooded with angry e-mails and phone calls, forcing Blanchet to hire two personal bodyguards and assign security officials to survey the building ... The [vast] majority of Muslim women in Quebec don’t wear niqabs, and none are on record as asking Elections Quebec for the right to vote without showing their faces. Concordia graduate student Afifa Naz, 25, doesn’t understand why this has become an election issue. Naz, who wears the traditional full face veil, said she and most other women would have no problem showing their faces to a poll clerk.

Friday, September 7, 2007 (*CBC News On-line*):

Muslim women wearing niqabs or burkas over their faces won’t have to remove them to vote in three byelections, according to Bill C-31, a new federal law ... Only a small number of women wear the niqab or burka, and they have never asked for special treatment.

Friday, October 26, 2007 (*CBC News On-line*):

The Conservative government introduced legislation Friday to force all voters – including veiled Muslim women – to show their faces for identification before being allowed to vote in federal elections ... The Tories were furious over a decision by Elections Canada to allow Muslim women to vote with their faces covered by burkas or niqabs during three Quebec by-elections in September. “During the recent by-elections in Quebec, the government made it clear that we disagreed with the decision by Elections Canada to allow people to vote while concealing their face,” Van Loan said. “That is why . . . we committed to introducing legislation to confirm the visual identification of voters.”

The significance of academic discourses

Being exposed to unfamiliar theories through academic study was crucial in providing alternative lenses through which to view my self and the world. The process of learning to challenge my own assumptions by linking the personal with broader cultural and societal discourses and events was facilitated through working with auto/ethno/graphy as a course assignment with Dr. Palulis. By revisiting past encounters with otherness and making connections to the present, my habitual ways of viewing the world began to crumble.

A number of professors and theorists have been influential, but a significant breakthrough came reading Nina Asher (2002). Who knows what it is about a particular reading that affects us, but her words set off a process that permitted me see my place in the world from entirely different perspectives. Asher brings postcolonial theory into curriculum in ways that help to see how colonialism — rather than something relegated to the past — continues to live on in my mind and body. Willinsky (1998) writes:

Given the enormity of imperialism’s educational project and its relatively recent demise, it seems only reasonable to expect that this project would live on, for many of us, as an unconscious aspect of our education. (p. 3)

Asher (2002) points out how “multicultural education” focuses on “minority” cultures without engaging critical, reflexive, nonessentialist perspectives necessary to interrogate relationships of power which shape identities and representations in education. She contends that multiculturalism

is a discourse about the other with little examination of selves from the dominant culture, privileging patriarchal, Eurocentric knowledge and normalizing the self/other split.

Schooling discourses tend to present cultures as unique, static, separate entities. How many Social Studies projects have been researched and written *about* other peoples and places with no consideration at all of the cultural lens through which we and our students read the world? This continues, in spite of critiques of written ethnography as a practice that produces rather than finds the other (Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Asher brings these Anthropological spaces into curriculum theorizing by questioning education's exclusive focus on the other without bringing in the self. This is an Aokian (1992b) gesture away from "our fondness of noun-orientated, thing-oriented entities, that give us a thing-oriented view of multiculturalism" (p. 269). Aoki suggests we "decenter ourselves from such an established metaphysical view, and... place ourselves in the midst, between and among the cultural entities" (p. 269). Asher calls on us to deconstruct processes of othering in relation to curriculum and teaching.

Pinar (2004) describes the educational and cultural task – given the hegemonic position of whites – as, in part, one of "self-shattering." He contends that the burden of history must be experienced both psychologically and individualistically, and understood collectively and politically if we are to move to horizontal planes of difference and dialogue. Wang (2005) argues:

There is no formula that we can rely upon to "cure" the diseases of racism, (hetero)sexism, classism, xenophobia, or other forms of social hatred. Although we as educators are institutionally granted the position of authority, we are situated in the social, political, and cultural construction of our own identities. How can unsettling students' identity not be accompanied by questioning our own selves? (p. 53)

Asher (2002) uses the term "hybrid consciousness" to describe "a productive force/space which develops in relation to our encounters with 'difference' and which allows us to engage with our own implicatedness in the very structures we are trying to change" (p. 82). She suggests at the individual

level “the process of reworking the boundaries of Self-and-Other unfolds as one encounters and attempts to understand one’s relationship with and/or connection to one’s difference” (p. 83). This involves deconstructing the self/other binary by considering “autobiographical encounters with Others” (Robertson, G., Mash, M., Tickner, L., Bird, J., Curtis, B., & Putnam, T., 1998, p. 3). For Asher (2005) a decolonizing pedagogy deconstructs the self/other binary by engaging the interstices that emerge at the intersections of different cultures, histories, and locations.

The writings of curriculum theorists such as Asher, Pinar, and Aoki unsettle and disrupt a life, setting me off on this project of reviewing, rereading, rewriting. What privileges do our social locations extend and/or deny? How do the places, the families, the cultures, and the language(s) we happen to be born into situate us materially, socially, and politically? What shifts when bodies and relocate? Could troubling the boundaries of self and other towards Asher’s (2002) always-in-process hybrid consciousness transform curriculum theory?

Stories from Muslim scholars

Inspiration for this project also comes from the work of various Muslim female scholars, such as Bhimani (2006) whose research encourages complicated conversations among Muslim women in Toronto, Ontario. She engages the concept of “reconstructing the culture of Ilm (Knowledge)” by creating spaces for Muslim women to tell their stories, represent themselves, and “respond to the misrepresentations of Islam and their lives” (p. 92). In Husain’s (2006) anthology, *Voices of Resistance*, Muslim women speak back to essentialized understandings of Islam and the women associated with it, which circulate in the discursive spaces of North American society. Husain calls on non-Muslim readers to “seek knowledge outside of what is generally offered them,” which involves rereading “between the lines and [unlearning] histories” (p. 4). Barlas (2007), who teaches about Islam to non-Muslim undergraduates, explains that the

process is fraught with difficulty not only because these students don't know much about Islam but also because "whatever they do know is in the form of 'negative' knowledge" (p. 369), much of which they have learned from re/presentations in popular culture.

Afzal-Khan (2005) has put together a collection of non-fiction, poetry, journalism, religious discourses, fiction, and plays as a communal sharing of wisdom. She seeks to show "a glimpse of some of the wonderful, illuminating, provocative, often heart-breaking, yet always uplifting, work of Muslim-American women writers, artists, activists, and scholars" by weaving together "different strands of conversation that have been taking place between women from diverse Muslim-American backgrounds since 9/11" (p. 4). Afzal-Khan juxtaposes diverse Muslim female voices in an effort to bring them "into dialogue with one another" (p. 4). She hopes,

...something new and dynamic can emerge from this recognition of a shared space and trajectory despite differences in outlook, culture, temperament, expression, and yes, the different relationship we each have to the concept of Islam and its place in our lives and identities. (p. 4)

Afzal-Khan exposes readers to "the wide array of thought and behavior embodied in the concept 'Muslim Woman' – so that its monolithic quality may be shattered to reveal the complexities and variety that no such single label can justly contain" (p. 4). The following poem is taken from her collection and speaks to the research act.

Expert
Sham-e-Ali Al-Jamil (in Afzal-Khan, 2005)

dusty desire
to suspend her in
a make-believe past.
traditional
customary
time warp.
instruct her
on her plight
you,
ventriloquist voyeur

telepathic authority
who climbs the bones of her spine
to get a better view.

expert of delusions
speaking of silhouette apparitions
draped in black,
non-entities restricted
to fantasy private spaces

ponder over this “kind” of woman.
grade A specimen B
displayed in glass case #5
scurrying about natural habitat
imaginary woman
indiscernible invisible kind of woman
distorted contorted
shadow woman.

but despite desperate wishes
you can’t claim her blood
healed wounds, heart
can’t explain what you don’t know
indispensable life-force
gut essence, dignity
unable to contain
nucleus incandescent spirit
substance, survival
who exists
in this modern present,
living being. (p. 106)

Interrupting dominant epistemologies

I came to my postgraduate work eight years ago with assumptions about what constitutes research—namely that it is a scientific, purely objective enterprise. Since that time research paradigms have proliferated “as a wild profusion” (Lather, 2006). Trinh (1989) writes for “many people truth has the connotation of uniformity and prescription. Thinking true means thinking in conformity with a certain scientific (read ‘scientistic’) discourse produced by certain institutions” (p. 124). One of the main tenets of producing “valid” results demands that the researcher take measures to keep him/her self firmly *out of* his/her study. As I became more engaged with the

epistemological bazaar I began to question objectivity and the “positivist yearning for transparency” (p. 54). Trinh explains:

The world of concepts separates itself from the world of signs, as if thinker could be conceived apart from thought and beyond it; as if science which comes about through the element of discourse could simply cross over discourse and create a world of its own without giving up the series of rational and empirical operations that make it up. No concepts function without signs – sign being both thinker and thought. (p. 64)

Poststructural theories of language shattered my long-held assumption that there could ever be a clear separation between the researcher and the researched. As Trinh so eloquently puts it, “[no] engineer can ever render the finger pointing to the moon so transparent as to turn it into the moon itself” (p. 64). These insights compelled me to move into messier, less comfortable, less stable, epistemological spaces. Trinh asks: “How can one ever come close to a general concept of the Human Being . . . when one still believes in escaping (even temporarily) the human while studying the human” (p. 64)? So, although I was attracted to doing ethnography, it was also being questioned.

Making cracks in ethnography

A conversation of “us” with “us” about “them” is a conversation in which “them” is silenced. “Them” always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. (Trinh, 1989, p. 67)

Anthropology is . . . better defined as “gossip” (we speak together about others) than as a “conversation” (we discuss a question). . . Gossip’s pretensions to truth remain however, very peculiar. The kind of truth it claims to disclose is a confidential truth that requires commitment from both the speaker and the listener. He who lends an ear to gossip already accepts either sympathizing with or being an accomplice of the gossipier. Scientific gossip, therefore, often unveils itself as none other than a form of institutionalized Indiscretion. (Trinh, 1989, p. 68)

As researchers, are we not in the business of stealing other people’s stories and using them for our own purposes? They are given unselfishly and we have the power to decide what to do with them. Can we ever come close to capturing someone else’s realities? When working with

research participants, questions of ethical responsibility are ever-present. While we may not be able to get away from research as a colonizing act, we might at least attempt to make cracks.

As I write this text to provoke complicated conversations, I acknowledge participant stories are being filtered through my language, my preferred theories, my worldview. Trinh (1989) describes her role as researcher in this way: “I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing” (p. 22). Trinh explains,

What we ‘look for’ is un/fortunately what we shall find. The anthropologist, as we already know, does not *find* things; s/he *makes* them. And makes them up. The structure is therefore not something given, entirely external to the person who structures, but a projection of that person’s way of handling realities, her narratives. (p. 141)

I read Palulis and Low (2001) who recall how anthropologist Elvi Whittaker “interrogates the writing of the other as a continuing act of colonization” (p. 44). They ask: “How can we proceed within this aporetic inscription? How can we proceed through the passage that blocks the passage” (p. 44)? Feminist theory has attempted to find “a less exploitive . . . way of proceeding” (Lather, 2007, p. 38). However, power imbalances remain in the research situation. While we may not be able to escape these, Visweswaran (1994) asserts we can attempt to situate ourselves in the field of power relations. Lather (2007) explains, Visweswaran advises “the workings of necessary failure versus the fiction of restoring lost voices...given the realization of the limits of representation and the weight of research as surveillance and normalization” (p. 38). Visweswaran refers to this as the loss of innocence of feminist methodology and proposes that we track failure not at the level of method but as “epistemic failure” (p. 98). She imagines a trickster agency that makes the distinction between failure and success undecidable. A “trickster ethnographer” knows she can never “master” the dialogic hope of speaking with, nor the colonial hope of speaking for. As Lather suggests:

Here the necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation let us question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysis, transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings. Such a move is about economies of responsibility within non-innocent space, a “within/against” location. (p. 38)

For Lather, who brings poststructural feminist theorizing into education, research becomes a practice of “doing it” and simultaneously “troubling it.” Drawing from Butler’s work on performativity, Lather explains meaning is dispersed and proliferated and agency may exist within a repetition. We repeat what is familiar and normalized for our work to be intelligible, but we do this in the hope that “the repetition displaces that which enables it” (p. 39).

Drawing from the im/possibilities of the epistemological bazaar (Kincheloe, 2008), I work with Lather’s (2007) notion of a “double(d) deconstructive logic” to interrupt my own truth claims, surrendering “the claim to any simplicity of presence” (p. 39), and “foregrounding the insufficiencies” (p. 40) of my re/presentations. Lather argues:

A doubled reading offers itself without guarantee... [and] authority becomes contingent... Hence, a doubled practice must disable itself in some way, unmastering both itself and the pure identity it offers itself against, theorizing the double as a way to move in uneven space. . . My interest in a feminist double(d) science, then, means both/and science and not-science, working within/against the dominant, contesting borders, tracing complicity. (p. 14)

Rather than authenticating a particular truth, I trace “the circulation of competing regimes of truth” (Britzman, 1995). The text thus becomes “a challenge to *learn*, and not to *know*” (Probyn, 2000, p. 54).

From ethnography to auto/ethno/graphy

Auto/ethno/graphy may make cracks in traditional ethnography’s colonizing effects. Rather than a unique focus on participants, the researcher’s subjectivity is brought into the study—a de/centering that troubles researcher as knower. It acknowledges that our personal history is implicated in larger social, cultural, and historical processes (Denzin, 1997). Trinh’s

(1988) concept of “inappropriate/d others” refers to the positioning of people who refuse to adopt the binary identity of either *self* or *other* offered in dominant theories of identity. Through auto/ethno/graphy this inappropriate/ed other may act as a “time traveler who journeys in memory and history” (Russel, 1998, p. 4) to become more aware of how subjectivity is implicated in the production of meanings.

For the bricoleur, culture is not only the context in which an unstable self operates, culture is also *in the self* (Kincheloe, 2005). I recall in a doctoral seminar that fellow classmates and I were perplexed when we first came across theorists such as Palulis using slashes in their writing as a way to destabilize ethnography. While I found it strange, even irritating, to meet these interruptions in the text, they also piqued my curiosity and compelled me to learn about poststructural theory. I decided I also wanted to work in these epistemological spaces. A look at the genealogy of the slashes in “ethnography” situates what is going in this research text.

I start off with Britzman (1995) reading Edward Said, who advises readers “encountering the texts of culture to consider both the structure of the narration and what it is that structures its modes of intelligibility” (p. 229). Said (1978) suggests:

The things to look at are styles, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of representation nor its fidelity to some great original. (p. 21)

Britzman goes on to explain that “in the doing and the reading of mainstream educational ethnography . . . it is the ‘ethno’ and not the ‘graphy’ that seems to be the focus of attention” (p.229). What this means is traditional ethnographic practices assume that readers can be taken into an actual world to witness for themselves cultural knowledge as it is “lived through the subjectivities of its inhabitants” (p. 229). She calls this the “straight version of Ethnography 101” (p. 230). This is the version that I was introduced to in my master’s and doctoral course work, and

I was immediately attracted to it. I didn't realize at that point that the textual qualities of modernist ethnographies "appear seamless because they blur traditional distinctions among the writer, the reader, the stories, and how the stories are told" (p. 229). I still assumed the ethnographer capable of "producing truth from the experience of being there and that the reader is receptive to the truth of the text" (p. 229). Poststructural theory explodes this belief.

Britzman (1995) points out "the ground upon which ethnography is built turns out to be a contested and fictive geography" (p. 230), for everyone who is a part of the endeavor – including the author, the participants, and the reader – is a textualized identity (p. 230). There can be no holistic ethnographic account because of the partiality of language, because "of what cannot be said precisely because of what is said, and of the impossible difference within what is said, what is intended, what is signified, what is repressed, what is taken, and what remains" (p. 230). Drawing on Clifford's (1986) terms, Britzman argues that from poststructural perspectives ethnography can only ever summon "fictions" and "partial truths" (p. 5) and "the authority of the ethnography, the ethnographer, and the reader is always suspect" (Britzman, p. 230). She questions three kinds of authority: the authority of empiricism, the authority of reading or understanding, and the authority of language. A "simple empiricism" (Smith, 1988, in Britzman, p. 230) assumes there is a stable reality out in the world that can be narrated and read. In terms of the authority of language and the "seeming stability of meaning from which it derives" (p. 230) Britzman takes as her point of departure Trinh's (1989) eloquent warning about the effects of writing:

Words empty out with age. Die and rise again, accordingly invested with new meanings, and always equipped with secondhand memory. (p. 79)

To disrupt the authority of reading – the belief there is "a direct relationship between the reader's reading and the text's telling" (p. 23) – Britzman draws on Althusser's refusal of textual

innocence: “There is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must ask what reading we are guilty of” (in Britzman, p. 230).

I would later meet Aoki reading Britzman (1995) – hand-written notes scribbled the margins of a photocopied text passed on to Dr. Palulis and then passed on to me – and I am thankful he brings these new readings of ethnography into curriculum so I might carry them on to someplace else. Palulis and Low (2005) refer to the “slippage of discourse through the ‘ethno’ and the ‘graphy’” that occupies Britzman. Aoki cracks ethnography by introducing the slashes to emphasize the in-between. A doubled reading gives us “ETHNO/graphy” as writing *about* “ethnos” (ethnic cultural identity), “an object of study already present awaiting uncovering and discovering” (p. 324). In this discourse language is understood as “a tool to represent the already present but hidden from view that precedes language” (p. 324) with language secondary to thought. Aoki contrasts this with “ethno/GRAPHY” which suggests “ethnos” is an effect of writing. He explains:

[H]ere writing actively performs in the formulation of “ethnos.” Within this discourse, language is no mere communication tool; the very “linguaging” participates in creating effects. (p. 324)

In addition, identity is not revealed but “constituted in signifying practice labeled ‘identification’” (p. 324). The later interpretation is “nonrepresentational, questioning the hegemony of ‘presence’ in the contiguous figure of ‘presence/absence’” (p. 324). The performativity of language is key.

Morawski and Palulis (2009) work with “auto/ethno/graphy” to “unsettle the scripts of hegemonic discourse” (p. 6). In an Aokian move, they would have us put slashes between the *auto*, the *ethno*, and the *graphy* to emphasize the doublings – the need for educators to dwell in the spaces in-between. The self is situated in culture, the cultural is in the self; the researcher

writes *about* culture, and also *re/produces* culture through language. For these curriculum theorists:

The slopes of auto/ethno/graphy offer intervals for breaks and gaps and swerves. To trouble and be troubled by the (dis)course. (p. 6)

And so, my initial resistance to what was new – those curious slashes – has become an epistemological innovation that I depend upon to theorize the yet-to-come of curriculum. With Trinh (1992c) I “think of theory as a practice that changes your life entirely, because it acts on your conscience” (p. 123). A purpose of curriculum theorizing is to help students and teachers understand theory as essential in our lives and not a rarefied object exclusive to academia.

This text performs a fractured, fragmented, shifting story due to the postmodern subject and our immersion in language. DeFreitas (2007) cautions that an author’s desire for presence is “never innocent and never without complication. In tracing that presence . . .the writer inscribes silence and absence while simultaneously making her/himself visible” (p. 2). As Trinh (1989) offers:

[W]hat she does not tell but allows us to read between the lines and in the gaps of her stories reveals as much as what she does tell. (p.134)

With auto/ethno/graphy “the writing writes the writer as a complex (im)possible subject in a world where (self) knowledge can only ever be tentative, contingent, and situated” (Gannon, 2006, p. 474). As I write these stories, these stories are writing me for “[t]he to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman is an endless one” (Trinh, 1989, p. 30).

The self is conceived as a text, “a project to be built. A project for bricoleurs” (Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p. 6), for as Trinh (1989) reminds us, “[t]o write is to become” (p. 18). Miller (2000) writes we “are ourselves bricolage, as well as bricoleurs. The point is to give ourselves

some leeway ... Some space. So that we may let education happen” (p. 59). Gannon (2006) explains:

In these texts, although personal stories are still privileged and the body and memory are sources of knowledge, theoretical texts thread through autoethnographic texts and author-ize different writing technologies. We do not abandon theoretical or critical frames in pursuing evocative provocative effects in the texts we write. Rather, genres and speaking possibilities proliferate. (p. 477)

To multiply meanings related to identities, I deconstruct the self/other binary that constructs identities and cultures as separate, autonomous entities. Butler (1992) suggests all identity categories need to be seen as “an undesignated field of differences... [as] site[s] of permanent openness and resignifiability” (p. 160). I engage my research questions by “speaking near by” (Trinh, 1994) research participants and their narratives of live(d) experiences midst official and unofficial educational contexts.

Research questions

Seven adult female university students participated in this study³. All of these women self-identify as Muslim, and attended high school in Ontario subsequent to the tragic events of September 11, 2001. To provoke critical thought related to Muslim students, language, visual media cultures, and schooling I compose multiple layers of meaning around three questions. Based upon narratives of their high school experiences and their readings of images in the print media, this project considers how young Muslim women negotiated their sense of identity in Ontario, post 9/11:

³ Participants responded to a recruitment poster put up at the University of Ottawa. After an initial conversation during which I described the study and explained what participation would entail, participants were provided with a consent form that contained this same information in writing. (See Appendix A). All participants signed the consent form before becoming involved in the study and were made aware they could discontinue participation at any time. Participants were also given hard copies of all interview transcripts and were provided with the opportunity to modify, add to, or withdraw any contribution they had made. More information about participants and their contributions appears in Chapter 4.

1) What subject positions were made available to these women in the complex discursive sites of schooling and visual media cultures?

2) How did they negotiate these subject positions in their daily lives?

In addition, through auto/ethno/graphic narratives, including readings of personal photographs I took of Muslim women while living in Iran and Pakistan, I challenge dominant meanings around identities, knowledges, and cultures by asking:

3) How is my shifting subjectivity entangled with the subjectivities of research participants in the discursive spaces of schooling and visual media cultures?

The ongoing effort to disrupt language and bring new discourses into curriculum is necessarily an academic, a public, and a personal one (Pinar, 2004). By working with bricolage I leave spaces where the reader's own biography might become entangled with what is emerging in these texts.

A note on the main theorists I draw from in this study

This research text sets out to engage border epistemologies to counter humanism's categories. Such a project necessitates crossing disciplinary boundaries as needed in order to engage complexity more fully. This is not a rejection of disciplinary knowledge, but a pragmatic need, as researcher, to borrow-from-everywhere. The bricoleur is a poacher, committed to using whatever is available to push forward his/her cultural critique. It is difficult to classify many of the theorists I draw upon because they also work in interdisciplinary spaces and avoid being labeled. However, in the interests of making my text more accessible to the reader, I provide the following brief outline of the main theorists I draw upon in this study.

As mentioned, my work draws from three main theoretical spaces: 1) post-reconceptualist curriculum theorizing, 2) postcolonial feminist theory, and 3) cultural studies. The main post-reconceptualist curriculum theorists I draw from include Patricia Palulis, Marilyn Low, and Erik

Malewski. Their work grows out of the reconceptualist movement, which includes William Pinar, Ted Aoki, Janet Miller, and Madeline Grumet, whose work I also depend upon to engage my research questions. Nina Asher, Trinh Minh-ha, and Patricia Palulis all work with postcolonial and feminist theory, and while I am not certain Patti Lather would classify herself in this way, her work speaks to me as being both feminist and postcolonial. The main theorist I draw upon working from the spaces of cultural studies is Homi Bhabha, who works with postcolonial theory. All of the scholars mentioned are also cultural theorists, but those I draw most heavily from include Ted Aoki, William Pinar, Pat Palulis, Cynthia Morawski, Marilyn Low and Trinh Minh.

As poststructural theorists, much of the work of these scholars can be traced back to Jacques Derrida. His concept of *différance* (1968) is key to my own theorizing, as it has been for many of the theorists mentioned. Given that I include a visual component in this project, I also draw on the aesthetic sensibilities of Cynthia Morawski, Patricia Palulis, and Trinh Minh-ha.

Finally, Joe Kincheloe's influence is everywhere on these pages. Without his theorization of the epistemological bazaar and the bricolage, this thesis in its current form would not have been possible. In Chapter three I give a more in-depth account of the many theorists and theoretical discourses I draw from in the writing of this interdisciplinary text.

CHAPTER 2: SITUATING THE RESEARCH

The critical shift...occurs when the term “tradition” itself is no longer understood as a received category, as something that exists naturally, outside cultural determination, but is in fact a social and historical construction, with an intellectual history...Once tradition is “de-essentialized,” it is no longer possible to understand it as something that can be discovered in exotic locations, and placed within given structures of classification (which are themselves increasingly understood as cultural artifacts). (Crysler, 2003, p. 196)

Positioning language as productive of new spaces, practices, and values, what might come of encouraging a plurality of theoretical discourses and forms and levels of writing in a way that refuses the binary between so-called “plain speaking” and complex writing? What are the issues involved in assumptions of clear language as a mobilizing strategy? What are the responsibilities of a reader in the face of correspondence theories of truth and transparent theories of language? What is the violence of clarity, its noninnocence? (Lather, 2000, p. 293)

Harraway’s writing
suggests
that social criticism by diffraction
will have to deploy different literacies
all at once. (Clough, 1998, p. xxiv)

We need to understand that writing is inscription,
an evocative act
of creation and or representation.
(Denzin, 1997, pp. 25-26)

Is “not conforming to the discourse” a kind of professional ADHD?
Perhaps there are just a few abnormal folks who are paralyzed by conceptual discourse. Just as a science of attention might be understood as constructing the notion of attention deficit, so might a commitment to conceptual discourse construct nomadic epistemology. Metaphorically, some people cannot participate and need to move around, they can not find a way to sit still and attend to the concepts. (Appelbaum, 2006, p. 20)

The customary literature review is a rite of passage into academia that demands stable, linear, discourse—the more comfortable, familiar way of representing knowledge. At the same time, as bricoleur I draw from the riches of the epistemological bazaar to “rebound from the brickwall of academic inscriptions” (Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p. 15). Berry (2006) explains bricoleurs “tell a different, not necessarily better, story than traditional and modern research literature” (p. 108). Bricolage is a relatively new research discourse that “borrows from many theories, methodologies, interpretive practices and narrative conventions” (Berry, 2006, pp. 108-109). Prioritizing this intertextuality, I place various texts side-by-side to bring in “their contradictions and tensions to complicate [our] thinking” (Springgay, 2008b, p. 1). “Anesthetized by my own schooling” (Palulis in Morawski & Palulis, p. 8), I seek ways to do research and education differently, aware that at the same time I am required to prove myself a capable researcher, a knowledgeable knower. This work thus entails occupying a tense “contradictory space between two agendas” (Crysler, 2003, p. 196). The first is conservative “and is defined by an acceptance of the academic system as it stands, adherence to the normative practices of professional self-definition” (p. 196). The second directly contradicts the first—to construct education “as an institution to be disrupted, and disturbed” (p. 196) and “to reveal the complicity of the critic in the construction of the object analyzed” (p. 196).

It is midst these complicated research spaces I negotiate the constant dilemma of borders, dwelling in a perpetual state of Derridian *un/decidability*. By actively engaging with the contradictions embedded in language and in our daily lives I attempt not only to “respond responsibly in the present but also to open up nonpresent possibilities” (Wang, 2005, p. 51). With Lather (2007), I write “a hybrid textual style that mixes the experimental and the straightforward” (p. 4). I navigate a tension-filled aporia in-between wanting to convince the reader that Canadian

Muslim girls and women face particular problems in their daily lives, and the dangers of reinscribing them as victims. This is a troubling task, for we are all subjected to dominant narratives such as Orientalism (Said, 1978) circulating in the discursive contexts of schooling, society, and the mass media, which construct Muslim women as an exotic, backwards, and oppressed “other” (Khaf, 1999).

Discourses of denial in an imagined community

Reitz . . . suggests that our perceptions of racism may be coloured by our pride in multiculturalism, a policy officially declared in 1971. [He writes:] “Canadians have as part of their self-image the belief in being inclusive, open, multicultural, and Canadians are proud of that . . . It would be inconsistent to then believe that there’s pervasive discrimination.” (Hildebrant, 2010)

Despite decades of multicultural education and equality legislation, Ghosh (2004) argues discrimination is on the increase in Canada. Reitz⁵¹ (2005) is troubled by the finding that the majority population of Canadian appears to either deny racial discrimination or regard it as a minor concern.² The liberal democratic nation is often imagined as a historically humanist project, as inherently innocent and egalitarian. However, as Jiwani (2006) asserts, the hierarchical nature of Canadian society “remains invisible (in terms of its dominance) yet transparent in the economic and cultural privileging of certain groups over others” (p. 6). Srivastava (2005) draws on the work of Anderson (1991) to assert that “the making of a nation or community requires not only imagining sameness and communion but also forgetting difference and oppression” (p. 39),

¹ This research is based on interviews and on the *Statistics Canada Ethic Diversity Survey*, 2002.

² As Stanley (2006) explains, racism is often assumed to be related to discrimination based on skin colour or phenotypical characteristics. However, “new racism” marks a shift from talking about biological differences to a focus on cultural differences. In addition, many tend to think of racism as unusual, as something committed by a minority of “evil” individuals, rather than as a banal, systemic part of Canadian institutions and society. Stanley’s framework for understanding racisms in educational contexts outlines three conditions which must be met in order for something to be considered a racism: 1) It involves racialization, which is the marking and constant reinvention of notions of fixed difference, most often around phenotypical or cultural difference. Racialization is always relational whether explicitly stated or not; 2) It involves the organization of exclusions along the lines of racializations. Exclusions may be territorial, institutional, social, symbolic, discursive, economic, or from life itself. Organization is purposive even if it is not deliberate; 3) It has significant negative consequences for the excluded.

while Trinh (1999) insists that “there is no such thing as a community that is truly homogeneous” (p.19). Nations are constructed around a “cult of origins,” framing themselves around a rejection of “those others who do not share my origins” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 2). This is a significant issue for curriculum theorizing. In spite of efforts, resistance to multicultural and anti-oppressive education has been widespread³. Many teacher educators are faced with teacher candidates entangled in discourses of denial (Jiwani, 2006) with regards to various forms of oppression in society and how these are potentially reproduced through education. Research suggests teachers may be caught up in the stereotypes related to Muslims (Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2006). How might postcolonial feminist theorizing from a cultural studies perspective transform the way we think curriculum?

Discourses of Islamophobia and citizenship in a democratic society

Canada has not been immune from post-9/11 Islamophobia and the politics of fear. I say this not so much to echo the episodic Muslim discourse of victimology but as a Canadian saddened by the impact of anti-Muslim prejudice on the Canadian polity, whose defining premise is the equality of all people living under one law, uniformly applied.
(Siddiqui, 2008, p. 1)

Canadian Muslims⁴ cite Islamophobia and media stereotyping as major concerns for their Communities, which is one reason I chose to thread visual media culture through this project. In a recent study with Muslim students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Toronto, Caidi and MacDonald (2008) highlight “Muslims’ malaise in a post 9/11 environment” and “the deep mistrust they hold vis-à-vis the media” (p.348). In a survey conducted with these students an overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) felt that others view them differently since 9/11. Similarly, in an Ipsos Reid poll (2008) “participants unanimously agreed that the period following

³ See Carson, 2005; de Freitas & McAuley, 2008; DiAngelo, 2010; Henry & Tator, 2006; Lund et al., 2006; Picower, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Solomon et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2003; Robertson et al, 1998; Wagner, 2005.

⁴ See Bakht, 2008a; Caidi & MacDonald, 2008; Hamdon, 2010; Ipsos Reid, 2008; Shaza Khan, 2009; Shaikh, 2006; D.F.A.I.T., 2006; Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students, 2007.

9/11 saw a dramatic increase in discrimination” (p. 7). When asked about whether or not they thought the media engaged in racial stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims, 95% of the respondents in the Caidi and MacDonald study agreed or strongly agreed that they do. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008), since the attacks of September 2001, Islamophobic attitudes are “becoming more prevalent in society and Muslims are increasingly the targets of intolerance” (p. 2). A recent poll also confirms negative feelings towards Muslims may be on the rise in Canada (Jimenez, 2008). Thirty–six percent of respondents across the country expressed anti-Muslim sentiment, compared to 27 percent a year earlier. Another poll commissioned by the CBC (Hildebrandt, 2010, March 15) found that one in three Canadians believe that Aboriginal Peoples and Muslims are frequent targets of discrimination. At the same time, Sheema Khan (2009) highlights the complexity of the Canadian scene:

The Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada (CAIR-CAN) released the results of a poll about how Canadian Muslims have fared in the year since that fateful day [9/11]. Of nearly 300 respondents, 60 percent indicated that they had been subject to some form of discrimination or bias, while 80 percent indicated they knew of someone else who had been subject to the same . . . And the results of the CAIR-CAN poll provide optimism: More than 60 percent of Canadian Muslims report acts of kindness and support by their fellow citizens in the wake of 9/11. Numerous interfaith dialogues, town-hall meetings, and open houses are evidence of the spontaneous outreach extended by fellow Canadians. (p. 32)

With all social phenomena, the situation is both complicated and fluid. The bricoleur sets out to theorize such complexity rather than impose simplistic frameworks which demand that we downplay or ignore the social world as dynamic and full of twists and turns.

Islamophobia is defined as, “a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological, and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination” (Zine, 2003, p. 2). Although a relatively new word in the English language, the realities to which it refers have been around in western societies for many centuries (Rizvi, 2005). Sway (in Stonebanks, 2010) adds,

“ultimately, Islamophobia also comprises prejudice in the media, literature, and everyday conversation” (p. 37). Zine (2006) has coined the term, “gendered Islamophobia” to refer to specific forms of discrimination leveled at Muslim women.

Hamdani⁵ (2004, 2005) writes more Canadian Muslims feel discriminated against than any other faith community, with nearly one in three reporting one or more episodes of discrimination. Hamdani (2004) suggests females may be most at risk because some are easily identifiable by their clothing and also face gender discrimination. He found that nearly one in three Muslim women has a university degree, compared with one in five among all women, and twice as many Muslim women hold postgraduate degrees as all women in Canada. However, the rate of unemployment (16.5 per cent) among Muslim women is more than double the rate of 7.2 per cent for all women, and they are concentrated in lower paying clerical, sales, and service occupations.

“Islamophobia” implies a fear of Islam and thus a unique focus on religion as a potential category of exclusion, but there are numerous intersecting social categories at play in the lives of Muslim females to be taken into account. As Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham (1997) caution, “the face of being female and Muslim may be stressed to the exclusion of other attributes of identity, such as age, class or regional origin” (p. 12). Sheema Khan (2009) shares this story:

“When I used to play hockey,” I began telling my co-workers over lunch. All of a sudden, eyes looked up in disbelief. “You played hockey?” asked a friend incredulously. “Yes,” I replied with a smile, thinking, “Doesn’t every Canadian play hockey at some point in their life?” And then it hit me. Muslim women, especially hijabis, aren’t expected to be interested in sports, let alone play. Perhaps a calming sport like croquet. But hockey? (p. 99)

This project engages the question of what makes such narratives possible. How does language constitute subjectivities so that we are enabled to see our selves and others in ways that have little

⁵ Hamdani’s research draws on other research studies, data from Statistics Canada, focus group discussions, interviews, and opinion polls. Data relating educational attainment to population includes adults only, which Hamdani defines as people aged 25 years and older.

to do with lived realities? As Kincheloe (2008) asserts, the bricoleur is future-orientated, interested in the realm of possibility. He describes this research attitude as “a kinetic epistemology of the possible” (p. 17).

The media’s role in defining otherness

Siddiqui (2008) writes, “Muslim-bashing has...become a regular feature of a segment of our mainstream media” (p. 2). Numerous researchers⁶ highlight the powerful role the mass media play in defining otherness and in constructing an interpretive framework related to minority groups. Henry and Tator (2002) contend the media are a very powerful institution in any democratic society, for they help to transmit a society’s central cultural images, ideas, and symbols as well as its narratives and myths. They highlight some reasons why news media messages are potentially influential. First of all, these media are considered an authoritative institution in society and have an agenda-setting function. If an item appears in a news report, it is assumed to be important. Secondly, if people have limited contact with a particular minority group, their attitudes toward them will likely be influenced by news reports. The media are a source of information and attitudes about communities that are perceived as outside the “imagined community” of the state. Thirdly, media can impose the social values and norms of society by drawing differences between what is considered “normal” and what is considered “deviant” behaviour. Fourthly, the media may reinforce one’s personal identity by providing a sense of belonging or not belonging.

In addition, according to Van Dijk (1991) the dominant definition of ethnic affairs in the press tends to be negative and stereotypical. Minorities and immigrants are generally portrayed as a problem or a threat, and are often associated with crime, violence, conflict, and unacceptable

⁶ See Henry & Tator, 2002; Grossberg et al., 2006; Jiwani, 2006; Kellner & Share, 2005; Sensoy, 2010a; Stack & Kelly, 2006; Steinberg, 2010.

cultural differences. The media “articulate and transmit powerful and negative messages about ethnoracial minorities, which in turn pass into the collective psyche of Canadian society” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 12). It is not that media constructions are simply misrepresentations because they reflect the values and belief systems of media owners and their audiences. These constructions, however, are often essentialized and do not reflect the particularity of lives.

A text has no fixed meaning and will not be read in the same manner by all readers (Hall, 1997a; 1997b). How we read depends upon where we are socially situated (Grossberg, L., Wartella, E., Whitney, D., & Macgregor Wise, J., 2006; Stack & Kelly, 2006). This means, for example, while racialized white people may see nothing wrong with a media report which contains stereotypes related to a particular minority group, members of the identified group may be offended by the coverage. Even though media consumers are not simply a homogenous, passive, uncritical mass and it is readers who bring meaning *to* the text, the media are simultaneously in a position to create and fix particular meanings and disperse these to a wide audience. In this way, they have a great deal of power to influence the nature of discourses on offer in the public sphere that potentially influences the attitudes and values of their audiences. They “articulate and transmit powerful... messages about ethnoracial minorities, which in turn pass into the collective psyche of Canadian society” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 12). Even if discursive spaces are contested spaces, power facilitates the dominance of some discourses over others. In reference to anti-Islamophobia education Zine (2003) argues there is a pressing need to deconstruct the politics of representation.

Mass media as curriculum

As a person of Muslim heritage, I have not always had a say
in my multitudes (Ali Khan, 2009, p. 159).

The truth of everydayness, it seems to me, is erased in the portrayal of the Muslim “other.” There are all too few images in the West of Muslims as embodied beings connected to time and life and able to interact in the world in ways that are sensual and loving. There is a dearth of representations for the many who are of Muslim/Arab decent or Muslim but do not make their religion or religious identity their sole or dominant identity. Fewer still are the representations of the millions of individuals or communities of Muslims who do not fit the western idea of them. (Ali Khan, 2009, p.164)

Macedo (2007) points out media discourses now teach us more about ourselves and others than all other sources of education. This implies much of what we “know” about Muslims comes from what we see and hear in the mass media (Abukhattala, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004). Unfortunately, research confirms the media have largely projected a homogenous view of Islam, constructing it as foreign or alien to the normalized ideals of western society (Johnny & Shariff, 2007). Although efforts are being made toward representing the diversity of these communities⁷, Muslim women and their roles in society often continual to be narrowly interpreted in the mass media⁸. Given the overwhelming presence of this institution in contemporary life we cannot separate what happens in popular culture from what happens in schools (Weaver, 2005), since “reality itself has been redefined by and through media cultures” (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2005, p.325). As Kellner (1995) puts it, media discourses help to “produce the fabric of everyday life” (p.1). Significantly, they provide the materials from which we construct our identities (Grossberg et al, 2006; Kellner, 1995; Stack & Kelly, 2006).

In Orientalist (Said, 1981; 1994) discourses, the covered Muslim, female body is a primary discursive marker of an oppressive, backwards, and dangerous Islam, and some contend that the

⁷ See Afzal-Khan, 2005; Ali-Karamali, 2008; Bakht, 2008a; Bhimani, 2003; 2006; CCMW, 2006; Hamdan, 2009; Heath, 2008; Muslimah, 2010; Nawaz, 2008; Tarlo, 2010; The Muslim Project, 2008.

⁸ See Ali-Karamali, 2008; Awan et al., 2010; Bhimani, 2006; Falah, 2005; Hussain, 2002; Jackson, 2009; Jafri, 1998; Jiwani, 2005; Kassam, 2008; Ramji, 2003; Rizvi, 2005; Sensoy, 2004, 2010a, 2010b; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2006; Shaheen, 2003; Siddiqui, 2008; Steet, 2000; Tarlo, 2010.

events of 9/11 have intensified this association⁹. While I am not arguing for a simple cause and effect relationship between media representations and exclusionary practices, Grossberg (2006) asserts stereotypes – even if only in the form of images appearing on TV or in the newspaper – can have significant consequences. For example, they may affect the self-image of those being portrayed and may influence how some people think and behave toward members of the groups being stereotyped. As Hall (1997a) explains, power should be understood not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion but also in broader cultural symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in certain ways. This includes the exercise of *symbolic power* through representational practices. Hall describes stereotyping as “a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence” (p.259), and points out that stereotypes occur when there are inequalities of power. Berger (1999) stresses the power to create images, videos, films, and so on – “all of which profoundly affect viewers’ emotions and beliefs, and have social and cultural implications as well” (p. 26) – should not be taken lightly. He contends those who work in the media should consider their ethical responsibilities toward others (Berger, 1999). There are few institutions or authorities that hold the news itself to be accountable (Seaton, 2003).

The significance of visual media cultures

[In terms of identity], only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth. (Alcoff, 2006, p. 7)

There has been a growing interest in “the visual” in the social sciences in recent years (Ball & Gilligan, 2010). Fischman (2001) suggested nearly ten years ago that visual media cultures need to be more fully brought into educational research given their epistemological authority in this postmodern, image-saturated age. While some efforts have been made via the recent introduction of media literacy in jurisdictions all across Canada (Media Awareness

⁹ See Abu-Lughod, 2006; Afzal-Khan, 2005; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Macdonald, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008.

Network, 2010; Ontario Elementary Language Curriculum, 2006), there remains much work to be done to bring visibility more explicitly into curriculum. Rapid technological developments are making contemporary society more visual than ever in that these “have generated a greater array of visual technologies with which to create and store visual records” (Ball & Gilligan, 2010). How might curriculum theorizing respond to the proliferation of images given the close links between identities, the mass media, and the power of the visual in meaning-making?

As Baudrillard (1988) noted two decades ago, it is no longer possible to distinguish between the “real” and the “unreal”, for images have become detached from any certain relation to the material world so we now live in a scopic regime dominated by simulations, or simulacra. While *vision* is what the eye is physiologically capable of seeing, *visuality* refers to how vision is constructed in various ways (Rose, 2007), how it “learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 232). The question of how we make meaning and construct our identities through seeing is a pressing issue for curriculum theorizing as “the eye does not merely see, but is socially disciplined in the ordering, dividing, and ‘making’ of the possibilities of the world and the self”(Popkewitz,1999, p. 22). As Berger (1999) points out, we gain a great deal of information about others solely on the basis of visual perceptions” (p. 17).

The following excerpt from *Lipstick Jihad* (Moaveni, 2006) describes an American-Iranian journalist’s experience of “being seen” after she puts on hijab for an interview with high-level Iranian government officials visiting New York City (she would not get an interview uncovered):

I unfolded the veil and draped it over my hair, tossing the ends over my shoulders . . . On this Manhattan street wearing a veil was the equivalent of going bare-headed in Tehran. Suddenly, I wasn’t invisible anymore. People’s eyes actually skimmed over me, instead of sliding past blindly, as they’re supposed to do on a crowded urban sidewalk. I had been so busy contemplating “to veil or not to veil” that it hadn’t occurred to me anyone else would notice. It was like wearing a neon sign, blinking “Muslim! Muslim!” (p. 171)

Exclusionary practices may be inflicted solely on the bases of what someone looks like, before

contact is ever [if ever] established (Nelson & Nelson, 2004).

Discourses of Orientalism

The power of the visual in the construction of identities is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a much larger system of intertextual meanings about Muslim women. Images do not gain meaning on their own, but accumulate meanings, or “play off their meanings against one another, across a variety of texts and media” (Hall, 1997a, p. 232). Even though each image carries its own specific meaning, at the broader level of how “otherness” is being represented in a particular culture at any one moment, we can see similar representational practices being repeated, with variations, from one site of representation to another. Western discourse relating to Muslims is highly gendered and veiled women receive a great deal of media attention¹⁰. They are often depicted as being oppressed by and subjugated under Islam. Rezai-Rashti (2005) writes “[g]ender issues in Muslim cultures are one of the most important elements of signification and categorization of their otherness, since gender issues have become one of the foundations of racialization of Muslims (both men and women) in Western societies”(p. 181).

Said (1981, 1994) analyzes how the west creates knowledge about its oriental “other.” In *Orientalism* (1994) he establishes that colonial discourse was not just about constructing the colonized other: “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (p. 1). It was ultimately “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (p. 43). The binary logic of Orientalism demonstrates the tendency of Western thought to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. Rizvi (2005) writes that in an introduction to a revised edition of his book *Covering Islam*,

¹⁰ See Ahmed, 1992; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Falah, 2005; Hoodfar, 1993; Jafri 1998; Jiwani, 2005; Kassam, 2008; Khan, 2001; Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2008; Muslimah Media Watch, 2010; Todd, 1998; 1999; Zine, 2003.

published after September 11, Said points out that “the focus on Muslims and Islam in the American and Western media has become characterized by an even “more exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility” (p. 170).

Jiwani (2005) reminds us Said is criticized by feminist theorists on the grounds that his work does not address the issue of sexuality and tends to be a totalizing discourse devoid of any spaces of resistance or counter discourses. At the same time, she finds Orientalism a useful point of departure as “it highlights the existence of a repository of images from which the collective stock of knowledge – everyday common sense knowledge – continually draws upon to make sense of the world” (p.181). Orientalism “constitutes a regime of truth based on an authoritative corpus of knowledge” (p.181). According to its logic, the orientalized body is a projection of all the west finds strange, alien, and abhorrent, and simultaneously exotic, inviting, and alluring (Said, 1981). Jiwani (2005) suggests the portrayal of the orientalized, gendered body in the news media demands interrogation on at least two levels. First of all, in its strategic use to define the boundaries of nation or imagined community (Anderson, 1991), and secondly in its role as the contemporary signifier of an other “who is considered to be the repository of all that is the antithesis or projection of the ‘self’” (Jiwani, 2005, p. 178).

In *Covering Islam*, Said (1997) describes how the media constructs “truths” about the Orient, Islam, and women’s oppression. He writes:

Much of what one reads and sees in the media about Islam represents the aggression as coming from Islam because this is what “Islam” is. Local and concrete circumstances are thus obliterated. In other words, covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what “we” do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are. (p. xxii)

In other words, there is little attempt to engage local historical, social, political, and economic factors when Islam and/or any of its adherents in media representations. This is evident in

discourses on veiling. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) write that preoccupation with the essentialized, veiled, Muslim subject, as a “signifier of patriarchal oppression” is an “exemplary instance of what Said has identified as the political enterprise of Orientalism” (p. 417). The veil symbolizes the “violence that Islam has inflicted on women” (Mahmoud, 2005, p. 136).

MacDonald (2006), writing about the problems of image and voice in media representations, points out “the capacity of images of the veiled Muslim female body to provoke intense reactions, both from Muslims and non-Muslims,” and critiques the obsessive focus on veiling. She asserts that an analysis of “the social, economic, and political positioning of Muslim women within very different regimes is inhibited by a fixation on veiling” (p. 7). MacDonald, drawing on Bhabha (1994), explains that in a manner characteristic of any stereotype, the veil refuses “the play of difference” (p. 75) while also exemplifying the fragility of “something that must be anxiously repeated” (p.66). Watson (1994) contends the “image of a veiled Muslim woman seems to be one of the most popular Western ways of representing the ‘problems of Islam’” (p. 153). MacDonald also reads Spivak who draws on Derridean philosophy to argue that “representation needs to break through the binary of ‘other/self’ and attend to the ways in which we are bound up with each other” (p. 16). Spivak (1988) writes:

Derrida does not invoke “letting the other(s) speak for himself” (sic) but rather invokes an “appeal” to or “call” to the “quite-other” (*tout-autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other) of “rendering *delirious*” that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us.
(p. 294)

Visual media cultures, schooling, and female Muslim students

A growing body of research suggests that Canadian Muslim girls and women face unique challenges in their daily lives both within and outside of school.¹¹ In the socio-political context of

¹¹ See: Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Alvi, 2008; Caidi & MacDonald, 2008; Diab, 2008; Hamdani, 2004; 2005; 2006; Jiwani, 2006; Kincheloe et al. 2010; McDonough & Hoodfar, 2005; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 2005; Ruby, 2005; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students, 2007; Watt, 2007; Zine, 2006.

the war on terror and Islamophobia educators concerned with social justice issues are faced with the question of how representations constitute the subjectivities of teachers and students and possible effects. How might curriculum theorizing become more attuned to the ways media discourses related to Muslims complexly constitute subjectivities?

Jafri (1998) asserts careless media portrayals of terrorists and “the oppressed Muslim woman” lead to discrimination and even violence against Muslims living in Canada. The Canadian Islamic Congress examined nine major Canadian newspapers and found an overall increase in anti-Islamic tone and usage following the events of September 11th (Hussain, 2002). In discussing the challenges of anti-Islamophobia education Zine (2003) observes orientalist constructions of difference permeate representations of Muslims, with images of terrorists and burqa-clad women being primary markers of the Muslim world. The proliferation of such images is a taken-for-granted part of the visual culture surrounding us—an unofficial curriculum that constitutes subjectivities and impacts material lives. Whether in media depictions or face-to-face encounters the bodies of Muslim women are frequently visually marked if women chose to wear Islamic covering or visibly “look Arab.” Even though only 15% of the world’s Muslims have roots in the Arab world, this group is frequently deployed in the mass media to represent all Muslims (Abukhattala, 2004; Johnny & Shariff, 2007).

Kassam (2008) examines the depiction of Muslim women in Toronto media. She notes Muslim females have recently received “a dizzying amount” of media coverage and inquires into what this coverage is saying about Muslim women in Canada. Kassam asserts that the majority of Muslim women appear as silent victims, observing that “[i]ronically, many of the women most familiar to media, such as Irshad Manji, are Muslim women who do not fit the stereotypes” (p. 83). However, Kassam claims such women are viewed as exceptions while the majority of

Muslim women continue to be assumed to be oppressed victims. When the Muslim woman is given a voice, such as is the case with Ayaan Hirsi Ali or Irshad Manji, “they speak in terms that are comfortable to the West as they rally to liberate the oppressed Muslim woman” (p. 83).

Kassam suggests there is little room for voices other than the ones that are comfortable to the mainstream, which, she argues, works to the benefit of the more powerful groups in Canadian society. Drawing on Jiwani (2005), Kassam argues as long as the Muslim woman remains a silent witness to her own oppression the imagined Canadian community can continue to be underscored as liberated, egalitarian, and benevolent. Rizvi (2005), writing on representations of Islam and education for social justice, observes that in the North American context clear differentiations are drawn between an “us” and a “them,” so those who are not “us,” do not belong “here.”

Rezai-Rashti (2005) argues in the Canadian education system colonial discourses related to Muslim women persist and that many in society “still rely on the old stereotypes as well as on the more recent popular images of Muslims portrayed by the media” (p.179). Muslim girls who wear the veil are often considered passive and oppressed and educators assume these girls have been forced by their parents to wear the veil. Working with international students and pre-service teachers I have witnessed the prevalence of these assumptions...

I invited a teacher who is Muslim to speak to my Bachelor of Education class about schooling and Muslim students. Before her visit I had teacher candidates write down any questions they had about working with Muslim students. Some wanted to know what to do if they suspected a female student was being forced to cover.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

In their study with predominantly white, female teacher candidates Sensoy and DiAngelo (2006) report these pre-service teachers were unable to see themselves as racially located. In addition, “their denial of sexism as a socializing force in their own lives” (p. 2) was frequently supported by the example of “the Muslim woman as the woman who is truly oppressed” (p. 2). These

researchers note the investment the student teachers had in the binary framework which structures western, humanist thought. When Sensoy and DiAngelo show their students images of women wearing veils and burqas from media sources, the narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman “consistently surfaces in response” (p. 5). Kahf (1999) maintains the narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman is “so diffuse as to be part of conventional wisdom in the Western world” (p. 1).

An essentialist concept of Islam “negates the sense of agency and looks at Muslim women as somehow trapped in fixed Islamic doctrines and edicts” (Rezai-Rashti, 2005, p. 179). Zine (2000) alleges Islam is seen as “a foreign cultural import” rather than an integral part of Canadian society. She argues many Muslim students are alienated by the social and institutional practices within public schools which conflict with Islamic modes of behaviour. Religious identification “adds another marker to the racialised, classed and gendered identities” (p. 308) which they must negotiate within the context of their educational experiences. In her study on the experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in an Islamic school in Toronto, Zine (2006) writes student narratives spoke to “the contested notion of gender identity in Islam” (p. 239). Their narratives “affirm and challenge traditional religious notions” (p. 239). Zine notes these girls are “subject to Orientalist representations of veiled ... women that represent them as oppressed and backward” (p. 239).

Hoodfar (1993) in her research with young Muslim women in Montreal, argues because for many the veil equals ignorance and oppression Muslim women “have to invest a considerable amount of energy in establishing themselves as thinking, rational, literate students/persons, both in their classrooms and outside” (p. 5). Even though the majority of Hoodfar’s participants were brought up in Canada and feel part of Canadian society, she was impressed by the degree to which the persistence of the images of oppressed Muslim women—particularly veiled women—creates barriers for them within Canada. These girls “represent

something other than themselves” (Cooke, 2001, p. 131). In her research on the portrayal of Muslim women in the Canadian mainstream media and its effects on women’s lived experiences, Jafri (1998) reports the comments of many focus group discussants demonstrate negative coverage often results in “feelings of insecurity and a loss of confidence in their identity—as Muslims, and as Canadians” (p. 3). In their daily lives Canadian Muslim girls and women confront and negotiate predetermined codes and signifiers and the contradictions contained in them (Khan, 2002). Given the media’s central role in our lives, the case for media studies has never been more urgent. In spite of this, Share (2009) describes media literacy as “still a brand new subject” in the United States. Canada has been a leader in media literacy education and all provinces now include it in the curriculum (Pungente, Duncan, & Anderson, 2005). The Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2006) addition of media literacy to the *K-8 Language Curriculum* is very timely in this regard, but work is needed to integrate it across the curriculum.

Justaposing sonare and videre as curriculum theorizing

Scholarly research and my own experiences suggest resistance to “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998) is common. Due to our immersion in a complex field of shifting, contradictory, competing discourses, racisms¹² and other forms of social oppression are dynamic and “very hard to see, track, and talk about” (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 25). Again, if we want to gain insights into what might be going on in their lives, we need to ask students questions and listen carefully to their responses (Stanley, 2006). How might we learn to refine our abilities to look at and listen to the said and the unsaid around us?

¹² Stanley (2006) points out there are different racisms, each with its own distinct histories and effects. This means that they can come together in the same place in complex ways one moment, and not be an issue the next. People might be racist in terms of one racism and antiracist in terms of another. There is no fixed form of racism because they change.

To disrupt the hegemony of the visual in our readings of selves and others, I draw inspiration from Aoki (1990a) who urges us to “hear curriculum in a new key.” In his critique of ocularcentrism in Western epistemology he contends “in becoming enchanted with the eye, there lurks the danger of too hurriedly foreclosing the horizon where we live as teachers and students” (p. 373). Emphasizing pedagogical questions of receptivity and listening, he argues the time “is ripe for us to call upon *sonare* to dwell juxtaposed with *videre*” (p. 373). This calls for a more embodied, “polyphonic curriculum” (p. 375). In contrast to the “closedness of synthetic, integrated harmony” (p. 371), which is the goal of traditional approaches to multiculturalism, a polyphonic curriculum invites the dissonance of multiple voices to come together in open, embodied, generative tensionality to unsettle the sedimented layers of subjectivities.

Carson (2005) argues there has been an absence of attention paid to an explicit theory of the subject in mainstream educational literature. This is significant for curriculum theorizing, for social transformation involves negotiating new identities for both the collective and for individuals in society. An alternative theory of the subject in education moves beyond humanist notions of identity as unitary and transcendent, towards an understanding of identity as relational, complex, and multiple. This research project aspires to provoke curriculum to challenge “our fundamental sense of our self and our social arrangements” (Saukko, 2003, p. 8) by becoming critically aware of the way our understanding of the world is mediated by cultural images and language. Could we put cracks in the confinement of humanist categories toward understanding identities as multiple by drawing from the epistemological bazaar to link visual media studies with social justice issues?

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL DISCOURSES

How well does the work present a partial and self-referential tale that connects with other stories, ideas, discourses, and contexts (e.g., personal, theoretical, ideological, cultural) as a means of creating a dialogue among “authors, readers, and subjects written/read”? (Pollock, 1998, p. 80)

“Difference” is ambivalent. It can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the Other.
(Hall, 1997a, p. 238)

**What autoethnography seeks to do is precisely to create a
“new qualitative research tradition” (Denzin 2006, p. 422)
and to open a new space
for analysis which is not tied to the explicit arguments, but rather
stems from “how stories work” (p. 422). (Dumitrica, 2010, p. 33)**

Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment.
(Trinh, 1989, p. 52)

Research as bricolage

Trinh (1999) observes “reality is always more complex than whatever we come up with to frame it” (p. 24). With this in mind, to engage my research questions I turn to Aoki, who “teaches us to read inside and outside of education—to disturb, disrupt, invoke” (Palulis & Low, 2005, p.6). With Trinh (1992a) I work “at the borderlines of several shifting categories, stretching out to the limits of things, learning about my own limits and how to modify them” (p. 137). Border epistemologies resist unified conceptual frameworks that fit into neat, ready-made classifications. By working at the interstices I move away from a decontextualized and reductionistic mode of research towards more rigorous, complicated levels of meaning making (Kincheloe, 2001). Berry (2006) writes that bricolage “is fast becoming a key way of rethinking what counts as research and how to conduct research” (p. 87), pointing out that its purpose is to provide “new knowledge, insights, ideas, practices, structures that move towards social justice” (p. 90). She explains:

In bricolage, the responses cannot be reduced to categories, classifications, numbers or themes in the manner that most research using interviews does. Bricoleurs frame their questions not just to evoke conversation but to push the topic under scrutiny beyond the immediate context and link the responses to other contexts which visibly or invisibly shaped or influenced the interviewee’s knowledge, beliefs and actions. The links are reminiscent of a hypertext image in which, as one response is elicited, the bricoleur “clicks” on the response and moves it in to another context. (p. 106)

As bricoleur, I thus draw on various theoretical perspectives to navigate through a world of diverse meanings, aware there is no final authority. This boundary work is multi-theoretical and multi-methodological, focusing on “webs of relationships instead of things-in-themselves” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.323). Kincheloe explains that bricolage exists “out of respect for the complexity of the lived world” (p. 324), a means to sidestep monological forms of knowledge and instead attempt to account for the complex relationships between material reality and human perception.

As bricoleur, I take what is available in my everyday life as educator and researcher – narratives of lived experience, participant stories and readings, media images, photographs, and theory – and arrange these strategically to create a layered, hybrid text designed to provoke thought. Through the juxtaposition of various images and texts I stage aporias to bring forth the complexity of the shifting discursive scene we all inhabit and struggle to make sense of. Working with border epistemologies means dwelling in the in-between so that something new might emerge. Third spaces are emergent sites, potentially full of tension, where competing interests meet. As the reader moves from one text to another he/she is confronted with diverse and conflicting perspectives. Some of these may resonate, and some may surprise. Fragmented and uncertain, it may not be an easy text to read. The reader may be forced to slow down and rethink his/her theory of reading. By mostly refusing explication, the text is left open so the reader's subjectivity might become entangled with what is emerging on these pages. Bhabha (in Sheshadri-Crooks 2000) writes:

The reader, for me, must feel engaged at all levels of witnessing, in the very midst of an unfolding of a theoretical idea. For me, writing is really a contingent and dramatic process. At various levels, it's really a great struggle with a sense of incompleteness and innovation. (p 372)

In the following narrative, I reflect on some of the research dilemmas I faced:

*Writing this text was a struggle. I knew what I wanted to study, but had no idea how to deal with the problems of representation and interpretation. I envisioned using textual strategies such as those used by Lather and Smithies (1997) in *Troubling the Angels*, but my topic and positionings are different and I was unsure how to proceed. How, as a racialized white, non-Muslim woman, do I write an open, decolonizing text that acts as a critical intervention into media representations of Muslim women as curriculum? At times, I worried I might be taking on too much for a single study. I wanted to include my stories, but also engage those of young Muslim women. But I wondered how I could bring in their narratives without crushing them under the weight of my interpretations? How could I create decolonizing forms of knowledge? And there was also the problem of where the media representations would fit in to all of this. Each of these three strands could have stood on its own as a research project, but I was determined to engage all three together rather than to pursue them in isolation from one another. I intuitively felt this was the way*

I had to do research. To engage this complexity resonates with how I experience the world. I am not a reductionist by nature, and prefer to struggle with the messiness, with the dissonance, with the full catastrophe that is life. Coming upon Kincheloe's conception of the epistemological bazaar, and Kincheloe and Berry's work on bricolage, offered me a way through the mess. Their work inspired me to find a form for my text that would permit me to work with the complex spaces I felt compelled to engage. By juxtaposing texts and images I had found a way to create a research text able to dwell in the messiness of language and life.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Post-reconceptualist Curriculum Theorizing

The Reconceptualist movement (Pinar, 1975; Pinar & Grumet, 1976) shifted curriculum from a preoccupation with the “narrow proceduralism associated with the Tyler Rationale to theoretical understanding broadly conceived” (Pinar, 1999, p. xvii). Curriculum was transformed from a “race to be run” to the more active, *currere*, or “running of the race” (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), which suggests “an intensified engagement with daily life” (Pinar, 2004, p. 37). The shift from noun to verb has major implications, for curriculum becomes more process than product, a negotiatory act (Richardson et al., 2003). Aoki calls us to move away from the managerial, technocratic, positivist orientation toward “multivocal, multiperspectival theorizings” (Miller, 1999, p. 498). Multidisciplinary in its orientation, reconceptualist curriculum theorizing aspires “to question and critique cultural values, beliefs, and actions toward re-envisioning education theory and practice” (Riley-Taylor, 2006, p. 64).

Post-reconceptualists (e.g., Low & Palulis, 2006; Malewski, 2010b) reassert their commitment to the movement implied in *currere*, refusing to imprison curriculum theorizing within pre-defined, monolithic boundaries (Appelbaum, 2006). They work with “nomadic epistemology” (p. 20) as their concerns shift to different relationships. Appelbaum contends:

In a hypertextual or hypermedia environment, history and generation are a thread, but the role of the “father” is decentered. More important than the conceptual discourse are the interwoven strands of connection which link the concepts in ever-increasing ways. (p. 20)

Post-reconceptualist theorizing attempts to embrace these new epistemological sites (Malewski, 2010). As Malewski (2010) suggests, such theorizing “foreground[s] new sensibilities within the field” by acknowledging and working with: 1) flux and change, 2) hybrid spaces, 3) reading differently, 4) divergent perspectives, 5) different contexts, and 6) understudied histories (p. 536).

Reflecting on “the next moment” in curriculum studies, Malewski (2010c) writes that contemporary theorizing attempts to “move curriculum’s discourse outside the range of the known” (p. 535) to function as a political intervention with the “capacity to spur people to think in excess of common thoughts and practices” (p. 535). Such work accounts for “the unknowability that resides at the crossroads of discursive challenges,” and Malewski suggests the need “to take action informed by our doubts and uncertainties” (p. 535). Crucially, here “our not knowing becomes a way of knowing” (p. 535). With Trinh (1992a), it is this new ground, “always in the making ... [that] interests me most” (p.138) both in research and pedagogy. For Aoki, “living pedagogy is always on the move” (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 2). Aoki (1986/1991) urges educators to dwell in the spaces between two curriculum worlds—“the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences” (p. 159), stressing the primacy of an embodied “live(d) curriculum” where “teachers and students are face to face” (Aoki, 1993, p. 212). Media discourses bring us into frequent contact with virtual others and these experiences also need to be engaged in our theorizing and pedagogies to disrupt humanist categories.

Modern forms of knowledge depend on a scopic regime that equates seeing with knowledge (Rose, 2007). Given Western thought tends to regard sight as providing immediate access to the external world, “[l]ooking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined” (Jenks, 1995, p. 1). Aoki (1990a) suggests educators become less enamoured with the metaphor of the eye and its modernist associations with the scientific, the instrumentalist, and the

technological. Denzin (1997) argues ocular epistemology “assumes primacy of the visual as dominant form of knowing” (p. 84). He asserts “[p]erception, however, is never pure. It is clouded by the structures of language” (p. 84). The great structuralist insight was that unmediated perception of an object is impossible. No longer is the interpreter outside the act of interpretation; the subject is now part of the object (Madan, 1996). This implies that the meaning of an image is not inherent in the image but is a process of exchange between the image and the viewer, whose beliefs inform one's interpretation (Jones, 2003). Interpretation depends upon historical context and the cultural knowledge we bring to images (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Feminism has long acknowledged that the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed (Jones, 2003; Kuhn, 2005), and that the representation of women is frequently a site on which wider, public meanings are inscribed (Gallagher, 2003). How might we then learn to listen to the visual, and visualize the auditory (Aoki, 1990a; Palulis & Low, 2005)?

For Aoki (1990a), curriculum conversation is not a conveyor belt of representational knowledge, but a matter of attunement. Conversation in this sense is not a simple exchange of ideas and information, but rather an openness toward the other, deeply grounded in lived educational experience. Insofar as we are receptive and susceptible, we can learn *with* and *from* the other. Fischman (2001), in his call to educational researchers to pay heed to the epistemological value of visual cultures, reminds us that politically we must remember that images circulating in popular culture not only carry information in the constant battle over meaning, but also mediate power relations. How might pedagogy permit us to *see* what is out there “beyond what we expect to find” (Rogoff, 2002, p. 32)? With Aoki (2003b), I turn to

poststructural curriculum theorizing in my search for living pedagogy in the inter-textual play between signifiers (p. 428).

Poststructural theory is concerned with the role of language in shaping what we know. It follows on Saussure's (1974) work in structural linguistics, which demonstrates language is based on a relation, that words produce meanings because they are elements in a system of differences. Rather than a mirror which simply reflects "reality," Saussure shows that language creates meaning, constitutes social reality. He also argues there is a central underlying structure to language, which depends upon centers. Derrida (1968), on the other hand, calls into question the notion of fixed, stable centers. His notion of "différance" is a critique of the metaphysics of presence. Différance comes from the French verb, "différer," which means not only "to differ," but also "to defer" or "to delay." It refers to the idea that each linguistic signifier is inherently contaminated with deferrals to, and differences from, an absent "other" (i.e., the negated binary) which is constantly in play. A thing's identity depends upon difference from the chain of signifiers strung out in space and time, so that meaning is never present in itself, but always already deferred, delayed. It is not that meaning disappears. Rather, différance highlights the temporal implications of meaning and how it is always open to challenge.

Différance critiques humanism's binary logic by demonstrating how each term is contaminated by the other. For Derrida, the problem with fixed centers is they attempt to exclude and by doing so, they marginalize others. Each term in a binary draws its meaning from the other, but one is privileged. In this way, power relations are embedded in language through binaries. Power attempts to fix meaning by suppressing the play of binary opposites, creating a violent hierarchy in which the centralized member of the pair becomes instituted as the real or the true. Representation attempts to fix meaning, but this can only ever be a temporary fixing. Signifiers

are always located in a discursive context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of the signifier depends upon this context. Thus, meaning is endlessly open to challenge and redefinition with shifts in discursive contexts. The degree to which meanings are vulnerable at a particular time depends upon the discursive power relations in which they are located. Berry (2006) writes:

Newspapers, curriculum guides, conversations, television shows and the world are packed with binarisms. The task for the bricoleur is to problematize them. They set up unequal representations and relationships and privilege the one side of the binarism as being normal, natural, right, true, and so forth and the other side abnormal, unnatural, wrong, or disabled. (pp. 104-105)

Deconstructive readings involve decentering, exposing the problematic nature of all centers. By deconstructing the terms of liberal humanist language we see what it takes for granted and what it excludes. This opens the way to alternative theorizations of subjectivity and language which may be more open to radical change.

Saussure (1974) emphasizes language as a system which pre-exists the individual speaker, and thus constitutes subjectivity. We do not precede language, but are produced by it. We are “always already” positioned by semiotic systems and by language. Therefore, the meaning of our words does not originate from our unique consciousness but from their place/meanings within linguistic-cultural systems. When we write we are also *written* because we must use concepts and conventions which already exist. Poststructuralism thus views all knowledge as textual. For Derrida (1967), since language does not represent reality but creates what is believed to be reality, there is no “pure” reality outside of what is being represented through discourse. The meanings of a text can never be settled but always already remain open to the play of textuality. This is not due to the various meanings of a given text, but the syntactic shifts which rise and dissolve in the spaces of differences and meanings in between. Intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980) points to how

each text exists in relation to others. Kristeva argues that texts have two axes. A horizontal axis connects the author to the reader of a text, and a vertical axis connects the text to other texts. The two axes are united by shared codes, and every text and every reading depends on prior codes. Intertextuality refers not only to the play of differences within writing but also between texts, where meaning is dispersed (Derrida, 1981). A text sets going a plurality of meanings, but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning. The notion of texts having fixed boundaries is thus questioned; there can be no clear inside and outside any text.

Cultural Theory

Bhabha (1988, 1990) draws on Derrida's (1968) conceptualization of *différance*—displacement within the linguistic sign—to critique the notion of cultural diversity that is a bedrock of multicultural education. Although cultural diversity may be celebrated, it must also be contained. Bhabha (1990) contends a “transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid’” (p. 208). He points out in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged, racism is still rampant in various forms because, “the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests” (p. 208). Drawing on the notion of *différance*, he deconstructs claims to the inherent originality or “purity” of cultures. Bhabha (1988) maintains that it is “the *in-between*, the space of the *entre* that Derrida opened up in writing itself – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (p. 209). He refers to this as the “third space of enunciation,” arguing that it is the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference. Although the third space is unrepresentable in itself, it constitutes “the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read

anew” (208). Therefore, all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. This is not about tracing two original positions from which a third emerges. Rather, for Bhabha (1990), it is this third space “which enables other positions to emerge” (p. 211). The process of cultural hybridity “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (p. 211). It is the productive capacities of Bhabha’s third space I attempt to invoke in this project.

Shanaz Khan (2002) draws upon Bhabha’s (1988, 1990, 1994) notion of hybridization in a third space to disrupt the notion of a monolithic Muslim identity. She explains that within this third space, “Muslim subjectivity is no longer about an identity politics making claims about absolute knowledge boxed in rigid boundaries, an identity that a few can control (such as Islamists) and others can vilify (such as Orientalists)” (p. xvi). Khan contends that “the unstable, hybridized Muslim identity is no longer a trait to be transcended but a productive tension filled with possibility” (p. xvi). She argues for rethinking how Muslims are positioned in a pluralist society, by producing “supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation” (p. 114), for a third space exceeds binaries, moves us beyond dichotomous thinking. With Khan, I seek in-between spaces where binaries might be shown to be something other than ontological absolutes.

Aoki (1990b) brings Trinh, Derrida, and Bhabha’s notions of in-between spaces into education by inciting us to rethink curriculum so as to sink more often into “the lived space of between—in the midst of many cultures, into the *inter* of interculturalism”(p. 382). Meditating on the word *crosscultural*, Aoki (1996) feels educators may be spending too much time emphasizing this “crossing” from one nation to another, from one culture to another. He ponders the usual meaning of “bridge,” the way that we give thanks to bridges for “helping us move from one place to another, the speedier the better, the less time wasted the better” (p. 316). He describes the

bridge one might find in an Oriental garden, “aesthetically designed, with decorative railings, pleasing to the eyes,” explaining “on this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, *such* bridges lure us to linger” (p. 319). He moves away from the identity-centered “east and west” into the space between east *and* west, undoing the instrumental sense of “bridge” and of curriculum. Aoki (1990b) notes although the multicultural curriculum emphasizes “many-ness” and diversity, opening up the “closed-ness” of the monocultural and bicultural worlds, the museum approach to distinct cultures, “assumes the structure of the viewer-viewed, of subject-object separation. As such, it is reductive –reducing others to objects, allowing a study *about*” (p. 381).

Theorists drawing on psychoanalytic theory¹ move me to question disinterested discourses of knowledge on offer in schools. These fail to consider the *ability* of students and teachers to “rationally accept new thoughts without having to grapple with unlearning the old ones” (Britzman, 1998, p. 88). As a member of the so-called dominant culture, I have been oblivious to how a vision of cultural harmony keeps those at the center safe. I also see myself in many of the preservice teachers I work with. Embedded in the textuality of my own education and society, I was blind to how the liberal strategy of “inclusion” assumes and perpetuates an unmarked normative order. Britzman observes such a view allows the two stingy subject positions of “the tolerant normal” and “the tolerated subaltern.” Others may be welcomed into the curriculum but “not because they have anything to say to those already there” (p. 87). Felman (1987) argues that, the truly revolutionary pedagogy discovered by Freud “consists in showing the ways in which ignorance itself can teach us something, become itself instructive” (p.79). Drawing on the reading practices of Freud and Lacan, Felman contends that ignorance is no longer simply opposed to knowledge; it is an integral part of knowledge. It is not a passive state of absence, a simple lack of

¹ See for example, Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1987, 1997; Kristeva, 1991; Robertson, 1997a; 1997b; Todd, 1997a, 1997b.

information, but the incapacity or refusal to acknowledge our own implication in the information. Teaching is thus not about the transmission of ready-made knowledge but “the creation of a new condition of knowledge, the creation of an original learning disposition” (pp. 80–81).

Knowing my own complicity in the colonial project, racism, and daily practices of exclusion, is difficult knowledge I grapple with every day. While I believe in the generative possibilities of the tensioned spaces of border pedagogies, I am not sure how to “do it.” Such spaces at times feel threatening, intensely uncomfortable. How to bring others to difficult knowledge in ways that promote conversation rather than close it off?
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Freud’s theorization of the unconscious displaces the unitary subject. The humanist subject is assumed to contain an autonomous, unique, and fixed essence. In liberal discourse, this implies a unified, rational consciousness. In contrast, poststructural theory proposes a subject that is precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or talk. This has profound political implications. Butler (1993) explains:

To deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term “the subject” refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it seeks in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that has previously not been authorized. (p. 15)

By abandoning an essentialized subject in favour of a decentered one, subjectivity is open to change. It is constituted within the society and culture in which we live, and various forms of subjectivity are continuously produced and change as discursive fields shift. The individual is thus always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity.

The concept of “différance” (Derrida, 1968) critiques the metaphysics of presence in which the speaking subject’s intention guarantees meaning, but language is where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Given the existence of the unconscious, experience becomes an unstable construct. The perceiving, conscious self is always already molded by traces

of experience in the unconscious mind. This perceiving self, which seems to perceive only in the present, is always “written” by unconscious traces. No perception, then, can be unpolluted. All are given meaning by what might be called a pre-existing *writing*, by the traces of our previous experiences which are themselves influenced by traces of other experiences. Since this writing is unconscious, it can be said to be a writing that exists before speech. As Denzin (1997) points out, experience is “out of reach of language and discourse and on the borderlines of consciousness and awareness” (p. 61). However, we can represent a life or its meanings as told in narrative, for this is “the realm of lived experience that is recoverable” (p. 61) even though the original meaning of a told experience is not recoverable. “There are only retellings” (p. 61), which “become new expressions of the experience” (p. 61). Denzin explains that “these tellings, told by the writer, now become the writer’s versions of the subject’s lived experiences. In this retold form, the subject is understood to be constantly caught up in the webs of discourses” (p. 61). I acknowledge the personal and political importance of experience, and take seriously the voices of individual women. However, I do not subscribe to the primacy of experience alone, for this depends on a liberal-humanist assumption that subjectivity is an autonomous, coherent, authentic source of interpretation of the meaning of reality. Rather, identity is always related to what one is not – to the other. It is only conceivable in and through difference. Identification forges a unity with the other, and also poses an imaginary threat. Kristeva (1991), drawing on Lacan, contends that in order to live with others, we have to learn to see *ourselves* as *other*. For Kristeva, difference is not the gap between one individual or group and another that is foreign to it, but a relation. Making sense of oneself occurs through the construction of the other. In addition, she argues that the stranger is in us; it is the unconscious. Just as it is difficult to come to terms with what is unknown

within ourselves, when we come face-to-face with the stranger we are uneasy because he/she resists definition.

Ahmed (2004), in her discussion of the relationships between signs and bodies in post 9/11 context, asserts signs can be bound to particular bodies in ways which “block” new meanings. She draws on Butler’s (1993) notion of performativity, which theorizes a signifier, rather than just naming something that already exists, works to generate what it apparently names. Performativity is about the “power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (p. 20). Ahmed highlights the significance of the temporal dimension of performativity. It is futural in that it names what is “not yet,” and at the same time depends upon the sedimentation of the past, for it reiterates what has already been said and its power depends upon how well it recalls that which has already been brought into existence. A performative utterance can only “succeed” if it repeats an iterable statement, cites norms and conventions that already exist. At the same time, to repeat something is always to open up the possibility it will be repeated with a difference. Drawing on Derrida (1988), Ahmed notes “iterability means the sign can be ‘cut off’ from its contexts of utterance; that possibility of ‘cutting’ is structural to the writerly nature of signification” (p. 93). Ahmed suggests that signs become “sticky” – take on associated meanings – through repetition. If a word is used in a certain way again and again, that “use” becomes intrinsic. Repetition has a binding effect, as the word works to generate other words. The resistance to a word acquiring new meaning is not about the referent; rather the resistance is an effect of these histories of the repetition of the word.

A number of education theorists² seek embodied spaces for education, a process of responding to the other on exposure, encompassing ways of knowing that are not merely cognitive, but relational and intercorporeal, where learning is a relation and not an object

² See Aoki (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005); Low & Palulis, 2000; Todd, 1997a; 2003; Springgay, 2008a; 2008b; Springgay & Freedman, 2007a

(Springgay & Freedman, 2007b). Teaching becomes a messy site of intertextuality “where the subjectivities of the characters involved collide, disperse and co-emerge as a bricolage of narratives” (Low & Palulis, 2000, p. 68). These movements “inscribe narratives that are not known in advance but are given-to-be-seen as one advances” (p. 68). Intersubjective relation is accomplished through story, and the “sheer experience of narrating or witnessing stories can transform persons in ways they often cannot control” (Newton, 1995, p. 291). Trinh (1989) describes the story as “a living thing, an organic process, a way of life. What is taken for stories, only stories, are fragments of/in life, fragments that never stop interacting while being complete in themselves” (p. 143). Newton explains that “narrative situations create an immediacy and force, framing relations of provocation, call, and response that bind narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text” (p. 13). A good story can “consolidate, compel, and challenge what is believed to be true about the world” (Sumara & Iftody, 2006, p. iii). Trinh (1989) writes:

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. . . No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it . . . The simplest vehicle of truth, the story is said to be “a phase of communication,” “the natural form for revealing life.” Its fascination may be explained by its power both to give a vividly felt insight into the life of other people and to revive or keep alive the forgotten, dead-ended, turned-into-stone parts of ourselves. (pp. 122–123)

How might the stories passed on via this text affect the reader? What shifts? What remains?

Readings of the self and of the other can never be simple or innocent because every reader is positioned through language, culture, history, education, ideology, and so on. Therefore, the possibility of reading is constituted in various ways prior to any individual act of reading. At the same time, “every text has a singularity for which the act of reading should be responsible and to which the act of reading should respond” (Wolfreys, Robbins, & Womack, 2002, p. 71). For these

reasons, we might avoid producing a reading which is either, on the one hand, “a passive consumption or, on the other, an active imposition of a particular meaning which suppresses or excludes other elements” (p.71). How might we open, rather than foreclose, on reading (Wolfreys, 2000), recognizing that what is read can only ever be “a momentary recognition” (p. vii)? With Wolfreys, I re/imagine curricular spaces which honor the impossibility of complete readings, while also attempting partial readings – spaces which open to patient, rigorous readings which acknowledge there is always something more.

Butler (2005) suggests that to take responsibility for oneself is “to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community”(p.83). To act ethically we accept error as constitutive of who we are. “It is not that we are only error, but it means that what conditions our doing is a constitutive limit, for which we cannot give a full account, and this condition is, paradoxically, the basis of our accountability” (p. 111). We are not simply the effects of discourses, but any discourse, any regime of intelligibility, “constitutes us *at a cost*” (p. 121), for our “capacity to reflect upon ourselves, to tell the truth about ourselves, is correspondingly limited by what the discourse, the regime, cannot allow into speakability” (p. 121). Ethics requires us to risk ourselves “precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human” (p. 136). For Butler, to be undone by another is a necessity, “an anguish ... but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient ‘I’ as a kind of possession” (p. 136).

Toward theorizing *Videre*

There's an awful lot of hype around 'the visual' these days. We're often told that we now live in a world where knowledge as well as many forms of entertainment are visually constructed, and where what we see is as important, if not more so, than what we hear or read. So-called 'visual illiteracy' is berated, and there are calls to restructure school and college curricula so that visual grammar can be learnt alongside understandings of texts, numbers and molecules. Yet there's also a lot of confusion about what exactly this might entail. Indeed, there's a lot of confusion about the visual itself. (Rose, 2001, p. 1)

If one "looks like" a Muslim
(read: brown or veiled),
the particularities of one's identity—
nation of origin,
ethnicity, actual religious affiliation—
are easily overlooked. (Abdurraqib, 2009, p. 136)

Rose (2007) writes "the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken" (p. 8). Mirzoeff (1998) contends "the postmodern is a visual culture" (p. 4). Jay (1993) uses the word "ocularcentrism" to describe the importance of the visual to contemporary western life. However, this is not only because images are more common or because "knowledges about the world are increasingly articulated visually, but because we interact more and more with totally constructed visual experiences" (Rose, 2001, p. 8). In other words, in our technological society, "the modern connection between seeing and knowledge is stretched to the breaking point in postmodernity" (p. 8). Haraway (1991) describes the scopic regime as follows:

Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely more mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice. (p. 189)

Haraway argues specific visions of social difference are reproduced through *visuality*³, and it is into this field of re/representation that we are born and positioned in the social order. This is one

³ Psychoanalytic discourses theorize both human subjectivity and *visuality*. For Lacan (1977) the visual is especially important, for he claims that certain moments of seeing are central to how subjectivities and sexualities are formed. Subjectivity is constructed over the course of our lives both culturally and psychically and Lacan argues that *visuality* plays an important role. He argues that as babies we all go through the *mirror stage* when we recognize that an image we see in a mirror is our self. As Rose (2001) explains, on the one hand "the mirror image and the body it apparently simply reflects are seen by the baby as complete and whole" (p. 113). This provides the baby with a pleasing sense of

of the threads of meaning I weave through the intertexts of this study, toward bringing our practices of looking and listening more fully into curriculum theorizing. What might our stories suggest about the social relations within which visualities are embedded? How might juxtaposing *sonare* and *videre* displace notions of settled identities?

When we view an image we bring our subjectivity to that image, but at the same time, “that subjectivity is imbricated in the images it sees” (Rose, 2001, p. 104). Hall (1999) explains:

The articulation between viewer and viewed is . . . conceptualized . . . as an internal relation. Indeed, the two points in this circuit of articulation privileged here—the viewer and the viewed—are seen as mutually constitutive. The subject is, in part, formed subjectively through what and how it “sees,” how its “field of vision” is constructed. In the same way, what is seen—the image and its meaning—is understood not as eternally fixed, but relative to and implicated in the positions and schemas of interpretation which are brought to bear upon it. Visual discourses already have possible positions of interpretation embedded in them, and the subjects bring their own subjective desires and capacities to the “text” which enable them to take up positions of identification in relation to its meaning. (p. 310)

In Hall’s account, images and viewers are mutually constituted. Seeing is mediated by language and is therefore relational.

Silverman (1996) draws on Lacan’s (1977) theorization of *the gaze*, *the look*, and *the screen* to articulate how identification involves a theory of representation. *The screen* is the cultural filter which determines how we should appear to others; *the gaze* belongs to those who look through this screen, and *the look* is the act of looking back at that other. Rose (2001) explains that this work supplements his earlier work on *the mirror stage*, and at this point “he is less interested in how the subject sees and more interested in how the subject is seen” (p. 120). *The*

his/her own body image and space, and “this vision allows the identification of other objects in that space” (p. 113). For Lacan, this is the moment when the child enters *the imaginary*, which is “the field of interrelations between subject and other people as objects” (p. 113). On the other hand, this mirror image also involves misrecognition when the baby realizes that the image in the mirror is not actually the baby, itself. Thus, the mirror image involves a degree of alienation from what is seen. The mirror image stage thus involves both identification with an image and alienation from it; both recognition and misrecognition (p. 113). Lacan argues that these dynamics of the mirror stage continuously structure subjectivity and explain the importance of the visual to our sense of self. However, as Rose points out, these dynamics are complex, “and the contradiction between identifying with the mirror image and being alienated from it is one of those moments of visual uncertainty” (p. 113).

gaze is a form of visuality that pre-exists the subject; it is the visuality we are all born into. In other words, *the gaze* is culturally constituted. Bryson (1988 in Rose, 2001) puts it this way:

Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses that make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated experience. Between the retina and the world is inserted a *screen* of signs, consisting of all the multiple discourses of vision built into the social arena . . . when I learn to see socially, that is, when I begin to articulate my retinal experience within the codes of recognition that come to me from my social milieu(s), I am inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before I did, and will go on seeing after I no longer see. (p. 120)

For Lacan, *the gaze* fails to offer visual mastery, for a number of reasons.

First of all, it continues at the level of the social even after our death, after the subject no longer sees. Secondly, Rose (2001) explains that Lacan calls *the gaze* “diffuse, evanescent and iridescent” (p. 120). It looks at the subject rather than the subject looking at or through it. Lacan (1977) writes:

In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture . . . What determines me, at the most profound level, is the visible, is the gaze that is outside (p. 106).

Given the externality of *the gaze*, Lacan suggests when “I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—*You never look at me from the place which I see you*” (p. 103). Finally, *the gaze* fails because it is structured through a screen of signs, which are substitutes for their referents and therefore, as representations, are different from that to which they refer.⁴

For Silverman (1992) this is a much more satisfactory theorization of the dominant scopic regime in that it breaks down the male/female binary because *the gaze* looks at everyone. Both men and women are spectacles through it, and “since its status as a screen of signs means it is

⁴ Lacan (1977, in Rose, 2001) suggests the child’s entry into culture—the signs that constitute language, visuality and what he calls *the Symbolic*—“is a traumatic separation from intimacy with referents” (Rose, p. 120). In this reworking of Freud’s theory of the castration complex, Lacan argues the complex deals with “not perceptions of anatomical difference but rather entry into *the Symbolic* and the substitution of signs for referents” which every child must go through. Therefore, *the gaze*, which is part of *the Symbolic* is also marked by the lack inherent in that substitution.

never a complete vision, neither woman nor men can attain visual mastery through it” (Rose, 2001, p. 123). This underlies Silverman’s (1996) theorization of “an ethics of the field of vision” that might “make it possible for us to idealize, and so, to identify with bodies we would otherwise repudiate” (p. 2). As Rose explains, *the gaze* “allows a greater range of ways of seeing to become possible, some of which may work against the cultural construction of some visualized identities as inferior” (p. 123). Kaplan (1997) writes that in making films, Trinh had to think through what might be involved in the subject-object looking relation. She explains Trinh’s filmic investigations led her to the realization that “it was not a matter of one subject interacting with one object, of any unitary ‘I’ trying to know a unitary Other” (p.136). Rather, Trinh “shows that the problem is that of multiple ‘I’s coming into contact with multiple ‘otherized I’s’” (p. 136). This seriously challenges the notion of object-subject looking relations and fixed identities, complicating the process of seeing enormously. Looking is not a simple matter, yet we mostly take it for granted.

Theorizing *Sonare*: Research as complicated conversation

I seek a complicating research framework to provoke conversation between various positions so discourses may be considered from numerous angles. To disrupt the hegemonic power of the visual to fix identities I employ a methodology of listening and a practice of doubt (Bhabha, 2002), for as Bhabha suggests, doubt is always an inseparable part of our knowledge. With Aoki (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005), Pinar (2004), and Saukko (2003), I shift conceptually from vision to sound and conversation, for the metaphor of sound considers “different realities in more porous or interactive terms” (p. 30). This does not fuse different realities into one view, or capture separate realities, for “the notion of sound imagines different realities and methodologies in terms of soundscapes that each have their distinctive chords, but that also resonate and interact with one another” (p. 30). Saukko suggests notions of reflection and refraction are based on the optical, and

are thus linear and non-interactive. An optical framework “obeys the visual logic of detachment, constancy, and control” (p. 30), and does not do justice to inclusiveness or the notion of interactive research. On the other hand, “multiperspectival research aims to hold different perspectives in creative tension with one another . . . [n]either good nor bad, but complicated” (p. 32). Dialogism “cultivates research and politics that appreciates the multidimensionality of social problematics” (p. 32); it does not resort to one-dimensional judgements. It is the “in-between spaces between conversations that invoke close readings and make things complicated – that keep things open – aporetic readings that take unexpected turns” (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 4).

Dialogue is increasingly seen as the radical condition of learning and knowledge. Lacan (in Felman, 1987) contends, “[n]o knowledge can be supported or transported by one alone” (p. 83). Felman argues “the position of alterity is indispensable,” for “knowledge is always the Other” (p. 29). It is “not a substance but a structural dynamic – it is not contained by any individual but it comes out of the mutual apprenticeship between two partially unconscious speeches that both say more than they know”(p. 83). Conversation is thus not a simple exchange of information but requires going beyond the surface, to take into account the unspoken and the taken-for-granted⁵.

Feminist theorizations of embodiment

Sara Ahmed (2000a) reminds us that bodies have had a privileged focus of attention in feminist theory. Bodies have been acknowledged as not simply given (as “nature”). They are differentiated, and as Bordo (1993) first theorized, subjectivity and identity cannot be separated

⁵ Just as I settle in comfortably with the notion of curriculum as complicated conversation, Appelbaum’s (2006) thinking disrupts my own. He writes: “There are ways in which conversation can take on aspects of hypermedia, and include a multiplicity of threads, interconnections, links, and spontaneous non-sequitors. In particular, conversation raises the appropriateness of humor, emotion in general, and all of the political, social, cultural, and dramatic elements of discourse that have been examined and analyzed by practitioners of many different fields of study. However, conversation has a directionality within which curriculum theorizing need not be imprisoned” (p. 22). With meanings and subjectivities in constant motion (increased to unprecedented speeds by technology) any text can only be a snapshot of time, space, and experience. I leave Appelbaum for another day aware my text and my self unravel even as I write.

from specific forms of embodiment. Ahmed is interested in moving beyond the differentiated body to an analysis of “how ‘bodies’ come to be lived through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby differences in ‘other bodies’ already mark ‘the body’ as such” (p. 88). Ahmed describes her concern as, not simply “to read differences on the surface of the body (the body as text), but to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over others, and in relation to others” (p.89). She moves beyond psychoanalytic understandings of embodiment, which she critiques as being too reliant upon a “generalizable other.” Ahmed focuses on “social practices and techniques of differentiation” (90). Ahmed explains that “bodies become differentiated not only *from each other* or *from the other*, but also through differentiating *between others*, who have a different function in establishing the permeability of body space” (p. 90).

Springgay (2008b) brings feminist discourses on embodiment into curriculum theorizing. She engages the notion of an embodied subject as being central to her “understanding of living in the world as difference,” taking the concept of the body to be “a flow of energies and surface intensities; a complex interplay of social and affective forces” (p. 1). Like Ahmed (2000a), she moves away from “the psychoanalytic idea of the body as a map of semiotic inscriptions and culturally enforced codes, towards an understanding of the embodied subject as becoming, as enfleshed” (p. 1). I read Springgay reading Weiss (1999) who views embodiment as a process of encounters, emphasizing our continuous interactions with other bodies (Springgay, p. 1). For Springgay, this means that knowledge is not created “within a single, autonomous body, but through the intermingling between bodies” (p. 1). Embodiment thus becomes *relational* (Springgay & Friedman, 2007b; Springgay, 2008b). Within this framework, relationality becomes connected to “notions of responsibility . . . [which] recognize the limits of knowability” (p. 1).

I am attracted to these spaces of “un/knowability” (Watt, 2007). I read Todd (2003) who draws on Levinas to locate possibilities for ethical forms of relationality in the immediacy of one’s encounter with the other. For Todd, ethics must be freed from epistemological certitude; it is something other than acting on knowledge. Levinas (1987) contends:

[T]he Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other’s character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other’s very alterity” (p. 83)

Levinas considers the other as infinitely unknowable. Todd therefore suggests that what is ethical or nonviolent becomes an attentiveness to and the preservation of the alterity of the other. With this understanding, Todd argues teaching becomes about staging encounters with otherness, with something outside of the self, while learning is to receive from the other more than the self already contains. This is in direct contrast to how curriculum typically deals with otherness, which is to *learn about*. Such an approach assumes that the other *can be understood*, and that such learning is both pedagogically and ethically desirable. However, as Derrida (1997) suggests,

Justice—if it has to do with the other . . . is always incalculable . . . Once you relate to the other as the other, then something incalculable comes on the scene, something which cannot be reduced to the law or to the history of legal structures. (pp. 17–18)

Todd explains learning in this sense is not about understanding the other but about “a relation to otherness prior to understanding” (p. 9). We cannot know ahead of an encounter how we might respond to the other, who disrupts our sense of our selves. This is openness as ethics:

In focusing on conditions instead of principles, codes, and rules ethics might be considered in terms of those *moments of relationality that resist codification*. That is, various modes of relationality create moments of nonviolence insofar as they define our ethical attention to otherness in ways that cannot be codified into prescriptions for practice. (p. 9)

Todd suggests if we claim to know or understand the other, we are exercising our knowledge over that other, “[t]he other becomes an object of my comprehension, my world, my narrative, reducing the Other to me” (p. 15). Following Levinas, Todd argues when we are exposed to the

other we can “listen, attend, and be surprised” (p. 15); the other affects us. Insofar as we can be receptive and susceptible, we can learn from the other as one who is different from the self. Aoki (2005) similarly looks at intercultural relations in terms of translation, suggesting that “a complete absolute translation is an impossibility . . . Translation as transformation is an ambivalent construction . . . a signification that is ever incomplete and ongoing” (p. 328). How do we provoke readings of self and other that have no closure and remain infinitely open to possibility?

Unlike the readerly text, the writerly text is less predictable.
It does not attempt to control the reader; he or she must make
his or her own connections between images, events and settings
that are presented by the author. In this sense, the writerly text
asks that the reader “write” while reading. (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p. 390)

Poststructural Critique

Poststructuralism is concerned with how discourse works, where it is to be found, how it gets produced and regulated, and what its social effects are. Since those living in the west have been born into the discourses of humanism we need to be attentive to how language produces “categories, binaries, hierarchies, grids of intelligibility based on essences. . . that reward identity and punish difference” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484). A number of regulating discourses (e.g., Islamism, secularism, Christianity, feminism, orientalism, multiculturalism, humanism, liberalism, nationalism, racism, etc.) criss-cross the textuality of schooling and society and work in material ways to construct realities. Each organizes ways of thinking into ways of acting in the world. Through deconstructive readings of language modernist notions of identity, knowledge, and culture may be disrupted. With poststructuralism, representation is always in crisis. It questions the authority of language, the seeming stability of meaning from which it derives, and the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the reader’s reading and the text’s telling. The act of writing itself is linked to the construction of knowledge. Poststructural theorizing

recognizes the scholar does not have privileged access to a space “above” discourses, but is also formed by them. Trinh (1992c) writes,

...sometimes anthropologists act as if they were fishermen. They select a location, position themselves as observers and then throw a net, thinking that they can thereby catch what they look for. I think the very premise of such an approach is illusory. If I pick up that metaphor again and apply it to myself, I would have to be the net myself, a net with no fisherman; for I’m caught in it as much as what I try to catch. (p. 130)

Interpretation is thus always open and beyond our complete control. Fragmentation, incompleteness, and inconsistencies replace unified, theory-driven analyses and the invariability of results and claims to authority because language is never our own. I thus do not seek a stability of positions, but fluidity of interpretation. Realities and subjectivities are not fixed via truth statements. Instead, the text enacts an interrogative mode through deferral and a refusal to explain (Britzman, 1995). As Palulis and Low (2005) suggest, “[i]f too much is given away, there is no longer a need to read – the story will already have been told” (p. 4). I hope to interrupt a comfortable understanding which “invokes the Cartesian belief in a unified, essential self that is capable of being reflected on and is knowable” (Pillow, 2003, p. 181), preferring to render the knowing of the self and others as “uncomfortable and uncontainable” (p. 188). This understanding subsumes both ignorance and knowledge, for uncertainty keeps thinking alive (Davis & Shadle, 2000).

Deconstructive readings provide insights into the process of asserting facts, question at every moment what is being asserted. Facts do not disappear, but their limits are exposed (Visweswaran, 1994) as we confront plays of power in processes of interpretation. With Derrida (1968), I seek de-centered modes of knowledge production by *speaking nearby* or *together with* rather than *speaking for or about* the other (Trinh, 1989, p. 101). This is “a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the

speaking place” (Trinh, 1994, p. 443). It reflects on itself and can come close to a subject without “seizing or claiming it” (p. 443). In such a text, “closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition” (p. 443). Each narrative speaks a partial truth, highlights different facets of discourses. Stories are juxtaposed, not to point to truth, but to provoke thought. Solutions are not offered; readers will not be told what they do not know. Rather, I aspire to awaken critical abilities (Trinh, 1991).

Lather (1993) and Saukko (2003) suggest different criteria for poststructural research. The notion of *multiple validities* suggests that there is more than one way to make sense of social phenomena, that we might approach reality more complex terms. It is not that there are no rules for conducting research, but “rather than one universal rule that applies everywhere there are many different rules, and we need to be aware how they make us relate to reality differently” (p. 19). Saukko describes “deconstructive validity” a means to assess research in terms of how well it unravels problematic social discourses that mediate the way in which we perceive reality and other people. The notion of “postmodern excess” (Baudrillard, 1980) of discourses suggests there is potentially an infinite number of “truths” or ways of approaching reality. Research is assessed in terms of how it manages to highlight the multiple ways in which a phenomenon can be understood in order to destabilize any fixed understanding of it. It is evaluated in terms of how it manages to unearth the constitutive binaries that underpin our understanding of a particular phenomenon. Poststructural critique assumes that there is no unbiased way of understanding the world. Driven by a democratic impulse “to listen to multiple voices and to challenge authoritative discourses” (Saukko, 2003, p. 21), it looks for the political investments and omissions of social “truths,” and works toward awareness its own commitments.

If true and false keep on changing with the times, then isn’t it true that what is “crooked thinking” today may be “right thinking” tomorrow? (Trinh, 1989, p. 125).

Working the ruins of received knowledge

Lather (2007), who brings feminist poststructural theorizing into education, describes writing experimental ethnography, “new ethnography,” “(post) ethnography” (p. 9), and I add, auto/ethno/graphy, as methodologies of “getting lost.” For Lather, this is not so much about “losing oneself in the knowledge as about knowledge that loses itself in the necessary blind spots of understanding” (p. vii). Lather elaborates:

This is Walter Benjamin/Jacques Derrida territory, what Paul de Man (1983) termed blindness and insight, where the necessary exclusion is the very organizer of whatever insight might be made and critical texts always turn back on the very things they denounce/renounce. (p. vii)

I read Lather, reading Derrida (in Malabou & Derrida, 2004) on *getting lost*. The idea of *getting lost* shatters modernist, common-sense assumptions about what it means to do research:

In a certain way, there is perhaps no voyage worthy of the name except one that takes place there where, in all sense of the word, one loses oneself, one runs such a risk, without even taking or assuming this risk: not even of losing oneself but of getting lost. (p. 11)

Epistemologically, this situates the researcher as “curious and unknowing” (Lather, p. 9) rather than on a quest for mastery, and becomes a project of “staging and watching oneself engage with the question of knowledge and the production of the object, the referent” (p. 9). We “think against our attachments” (p. 9) to the philosophy of presence and consciousness that scaffolds humanist theories of agency. After the crisis of representation and “a restless ‘post’ period that troubles all those things we assumed were solid, substantial, and whole – knowledge, truth, reality, reason, science, progress, the subject, and so forth” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), feminist poststructural theorists see their task as inquiry among “the ruins of humanism’s version of those concepts” (p. 1). They are skeptical about “regimes of truth that have failed us” (p. 1). Our task as educators becomes to “look awry” (Zizek, 1992, p. 2) and “ask questions that produce different knowledge

and produce knowledge differently, thereby producing different ways of living in the world” (St. Pierre & Pillow, p. 2).

On methodological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions

Methodology may refer to a simple set of methods or procedures, or to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie a particular study. In a poststructural study, methodology is secondary to epistemology and ontology. Since poststructural inquiry does not look for empirical, scientific “truths,” there is not the same need for empirical data, and when we do use it, we think of it in different ways. The use of empirical data grounds and centers, and assumes there is a reality out there to be grasped which is incommensurate with poststructural assumptions. The stories and readings of participants in this project are thus not used to point to some truth or another, but to provoke thought. My concern is to represent different voices and a multiplicity of interpretations. I assume interpretation to always be open and beyond my control as researcher. Fragmentation, incompleteness, and inconsistencies replace unified, theory-driven analyses and the invariability of results and their claim to authority. Traditional approaches to methodology, representation, and interpretation do not deal with these issues.

I draw upon the work of Patti Lather (2006) to discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding this research. For a deconstructivist, reality is ultimately unknowable, and “truths” are “socially constructed systems of signs which contain the seeds of their own contradiction” (p. 38). As Lather explains, “discourse is by nature inseparable from its subject, and is radically contingent and vulnerable” (p. 38). Reality is decentered, as there is a multiplicity of perspectives with no single reference point. Malewski (2010e) writes:

Older stories that talked of linear development toward consensus gave way to proliferation and dissensus. Situated knowledges became a resource for thinking with the idea that there is no one truth out there to be uncovered and, as a result, all knowledge is partial and linked to the contexts in which it is created. (p. 515)

Therefore, both truth and consensus are highly contextual and transitory and their unconditional link with rationality is questioned. What can be considered true, real, or right is always open to question. There are multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon depending on where one is situated. Malewski thus asks that we read “patiently and carefully” (p. 102), as well as aesthetically and ethically. Snaza (2010) invites us to “give up on the pursuit of truth” (p. 50) and instead “dwell in ethics, in commitments to people and the earth, in readings, which are always imperfect, partial, and interested” (p. 50).

Deconstructive epistemologies envision non-authoritarian modes of knowledge production. According to Derrida’s (1982) “différance” meaning cannot be fixed, and the relation between the knower and the known is always shifting and non-linear in space and time. There is an epistemic indeterminacy. Meaning is continuously constructed in relation with the other, and there is no endpoint. To disrupt linearity and researcher authority, I compose a troubling, multi-layered, hybrid bricolage through the juxtaposition of narrative, theory, and text. The text is arranged in order to “decenter the omnipotent author” (Schwant, 1997, p. 307). By dwelling in-between, I set out to engage border epistemologies at the junctures where categories meet. Through repetition (Butler, 1993) there is uncontrollable excess that may displace normativity and proliferate difference. This is a doubled practice (Lather, 2006, 2007) that works within and against existing categories as a means to keep thinking alive. This work is “offered as more problem than solution” (Lather, 1993, p. 683). As Lather states, it is not a mastery project but something to think with, toward complicating transparent theories of language.

A note on the use of images in this study

My interest in the visual grew out of a concern with how Muslim women are being represented in the media through images. For women who choose to cover, the hijab (or other

form of covering) acts as a visual marker of Islam. I was disturbed by the ways that many in the media were othering Muslim women, and yet when I started to work with auto/ethno/graphy I realized similar processes of othering in personal photographs I had taken in Iran and Pakistan. I began to make links between the personal and wider social, cultural, and political contexts through the juxtaposition of my images with those I found in the print media. Although I did seek permission for most of the images I took, I also took some without such permission. During a thesis committee meeting, we discussed whether or not it would be ethical to use these images as part of this project. Even the women who did grant permission could never have known at that time that their image would appear on the Internet when this dissertation is posted online. As a result, I have chosen not to use the photos where the faces of the women are visible. Instead, I will provide a brief description of the image. As far as the media images are concerned, since they are already in public circulation I have decided to include them in my text. To engage visual epistemologies, I think it is important that the reader experience them first hand, so that they might feel their effects.

I decided to include a photo of my son when he was 3 years old, running around at Faisal Mosque and a picture of my daughter in chador. When my committee asked whether or not this was appropriate, I checked back with my adult children to make sure they were still in agreement. They laughed at me and I suddenly felt completely out of touch with the world they inhabit, for it is so different from that in which I grew up. They reminded me that they both have Facebook accounts, and there are already plenty of photos of them online. I'm not sure how I feel about this, but it is a new reality that we as educators need to contend with.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Educational significance

Through considering how media images act as powerful public curricula in the constitution of subjectivities within the discursive spaces of schooling and society, this research sets out to provoke thought and contribute to the disruption of normative understandings of Muslim females. With Trinh (1991), I search for ways of writing, looking, reading, listening,

and relating to ourselves and others. What if curriculum were to open to embodied border pedagogies, to *neither this nor that*, both *this and that* (Aoki, 1996). This is not relativism, but recognition that knowledge, subjectivity, and social relations are not fixed, ontological absolutes, but must continuously be re/negotiated in face-to-face encounters if we are to move beyond essentialized notions of culture and identity. By keeping the spaces of difference alive could we break away from hegemonic discourses toward *curriculum in a new key* (Aoki, 1978/1980)?

Reading is an exercise in listening. Forming in yourself this capacity for listening in reading is forming yourself in reverse; it is losing your proper form. It is reexamining what is presupposed or taken as read in the text and in the reading of the text.

(Jean-Francois Lyotard, 1992, p. 101)

Chapter 4:
Troubling identities in the messy intertexts of
post-reconstructuralist curriculum theorizing

The past seven years have not been kind to the Muslim identity. Post 9/11, society's views on Muslims have changed substantially. In this new world—shaped by the horrific images of the collapsing twin towers—identifying yourself as Muslim is a hefty confession. Its often met by a raised eyebrow and perhaps a soft exhale. Then comes the barrage of questions and observations, subtly revealing society's myths about Muslims. Why don't you wear a veil? You don't seem to be a typical Muslim woman. You were born Muslim—but you're not practicing right? As the surprise slowly wears off, out comes the curiosity. What's it like to be Muslim in Canada? (Kassam, 2008a)

And there were lots of times when [once people got to know me, they] were like:
-“Wow, Noor. I had no idea Muslims were like this.” And, “Oh, wow, you're nothing like what I expected of a hijabi girl.” (Noor, Research Participant)

[I]dentities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

Culture, even multi-culture,
is to-ing and fro-ing in the sense of translation:

when you translate you move back and forth.

There is always restlessness, as you can never find a direct equivalent . . .

And what it means, really, is to put the viewing subject, the reading subject at the position where different systems of signification and meaning-making can intersect. When you are in the moment of that intersection, there will always be ambivalence, ambiguity. I think this is very important. (Bhabha, 2006, p. 15)

Interrogating identities: Where is a Muslim woman located in discourse?

When I designed the recruitment posters for this doctoral study, I used the following title to summarize the project to make it understandable to potential participants:

Muslim Female Identities, Schooling, and the Mass Media
Research Participants Needed

After putting these up on billboards across the university, I received the following email in response from a young woman interested in the study:

From: Sarah
To: Diane Watt
Subject: Muslim Female Identities Research

Hello,

I saw a poster on your research study that asked for volunteers. I am 24, I attended high school in Ontario (I graduated in 2001), and was brought up Muslim, but I only practice partially now (if that makes any sense) and my behaviour is not really motivated by my beliefs (it's not clear what you mean by "Muslim woman") . . .

Thank you,
Sarah

Sarah's request for clarification of *what I meant by "Muslim woman"* caught me by surprise and was another small reminder of my entanglement in language. What *did* I mean by "Muslim woman"? Does such a singular identity actually exist out in the lived world? When, where, why, and by whom, are the borders of such identity categories policed and/or challenged and with what effects? Since "[l]anguage creates as it decodes reality" (Pinar, In Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2006, p. x) where do our responsibilities lie? What power is invested in language?

Wolfeys (1998) warns that when we "give something a firm identity, insist that it is some *thing* . . . give it a label . . . it is easier to make it house-trained, to keep it under control" (p. 7). Differences may be "subsumed under the essence of a single category," St. Pierre (2000)

writes, “in an attempt to produce order and regularity” (p. 280). Language is indeed a crucial site of struggle. Trinh (1992b) stresses “[m]eaning has to retain its complexities, otherwise it will just be a pawn in the game of power” (p. 154), and Ali Khan (2009) charges there is “an obvious symbolic violence in denying a group the right to an embodied and complex identity” (p. 164).

You cannot take hold of it,
But you cannot lose it.
In not being able to get it, you get it.
When you are silent, it speaks;
When you speak, it is silent¹.

Since “[e]scaping the mother tongue is not easy” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 178), how do we become strangers in our own language to learn what it is hiding (p. 178)? Theorists working the spaces of poststructural theorizing resist humanism’s requirement to simplify the complex. Thrift (1999) contends that framing the world as “complex, irreducible and anti-closural [produces] a much greater sense of openness and possibility about the future” (p. 34). What if we were to while over our own “tangles of implication” (Miller, 2005, p. 223) in the shifting and contradictory discursive milieu where identities are negotiated? What might open up and/or close down by troubling identities in the post-September 11, 2001 world we struggle to inhabit together?

For me, all of these labels are, at worst, confining. But depending on the context, a label can be at times a constructive tool, especially when it is used convivially as a device to gather works together in order to help with their circulation . . . So, a label used strategically can constitute a means to draw attention to what tends to be neglected and to give exposure to works that rarely get to be seen. That’s when labels are at their best. But I think most of the time they invite conformity and, in the long run or in a wider scope, they prove to be extremely confining. (Trinh in interview with Kobayashi, 2006, pg. 162)

We also teased out where our identities
gave us privilege
and where they placed us in
marginal positions. (Bhimani, 2006, p. 94)

¹ Quoted in Trinh, 1989, pg. 96. Trinh attributes this quotation to Alan W. Watts (1958) *Nature, Man, and Woman*. Reprinted in 1970, New York: Vintage Books, p. 121.

Research Participants

The seven young women who contributed to this doctoral project were university students at the time of their participation and self-identify as Muslim. In terms of religious affiliation, they are associated with four different Islamic sects, including Sunni, Shia, Bohra, and Alawite. Besides Canada, they have family connections to Pakistan, Lebanon, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Somalia, Yeoman, Germany, East Africa, and India. Three participants immigrated to Canada as young children and four were born here. Each attended high school in Ontario after the events of September 11, 2001. Given the sensitivity of the topic of this inquiry, I chose to work with young adults rather than high school students. I would like to introduce each participant by providing a brief portrait, so the reader will have some sense of them as individuals. To protect confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms and have changed some of the details of their lives.

Miriam

Miriam has family ties to Syria and has travelled there on a number of occasions to visit friends and family in the village where her parents grew up. She feels a deep connection to her family's heritage and homeland, but cannot imagine herself ever living anywhere but in Canada. As a member of the less well-known minority Islamic Alawite sect, she faced unique challenges in high school. Alawite women do not traditionally cover, although they may dress conservatively. As her narratives indicate, this sometimes caused confusion for both Muslim and non-Muslim friends and acquaintances. I enjoyed Miriam's excellent sense of humour and her positive attitude. She was very active in student government, sports, and the Muslim Student Association during high school.

Tina

Tina is outspoken, dynamic, and articulate. She is concerned about the lack of

understanding she sometimes observes between peoples around the world, and is determined to do her part to promote peace. When she and her cousin, Sahar, decided they wanted to attend their neighbourhood Catholic high school they knew they were entering an environment where their difference as covered Muslim women would stand out, but this did not deter them. Tina was born in southern Lebanon and immigrated to Canada with her family as a young child. As a Shi'a she chooses to wear a black hijab when in public.

Sahar

Sahar was born in Lebanon and immigrated to Canada with her family as a child. Tina's cousin, she is also Shia Muslim and wears black hijab. Sahar is interested in learning about Christianity and other religions. She is dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding, and considers Canadian multiculturalism a model for the world. She keeps busy with her university studies and part-time job, and enjoys spending time with family and friends.

Noor

Noor is a graduate student and is planning to get married in the near future. Her mother was born in Pakistan and her father was born in India and completed his university studies in North America. She has never lived anywhere other than Canada, but enjoys visiting family in Islamabad and Dubai. Noor decided to start wearing hijab during her last year of high school and was the first woman in her family to do so. She is Sunni, and locates herself somewhere in-between being very religious and secular. A high academic achiever, as a high school student she was also very involved in sports, student government, and other extra-curricular activities.

Leila

Leila has family connections to Somalia and Germany. She grew up observing the tenets of Sunni Islam but feels she has much to learn. Although she chooses not to wear hijab she

doesn't rule out the possibility that one day she might decide to do so. Some of the female members of her extended family cover, while others do not. Her narratives suggest that during her high school years she had to negotiate the complex intersections of gender, religion, and race. Leila is very thoughtful and articulate and is involved in social justice work at her university. During her high school years she was very active in extra-curricular activities. She is an avid reader and has an impressive knowledge of popular culture.

Sarah

Sarah grew up in Ontario and belongs to the Bohra community, made up of about a million members worldwide. Her family has connections to India and East Africa. She describes herself as living a hybrid identity because although she does not see herself as religious, she does not fully embrace some of the customs associated with western youth culture either, such as drinking and partying. Her decision to not practice religion is at times difficult because her family's get-togethers often center around their religious traditions. During her high school years she made a conscious decision to keep her religious identity outside of school, and saw no reason to do otherwise.

Amal

Spending time with Amal is a pleasure. She is an animated storyteller with a wonderful sense of humour who captivated me with her stories. She came to Canada as a young child and speaks French and English. She is Sunni, with family connections to various countries in the Middle East. She attended both public and private schools in Ontario, and told me she was popular with her peers, and more of a leader than a follower during her high school years. Amal tried covering in her later teenage years, but after a short time decided not to continue.

Collecting participant stories and readings

One-on-one interviews were held with each woman during which we discussed their high schooling experiences and sense of identity². Four women attended the focus group session, which lasted 2 ½ hours. They also completed a questionnaire asking general questions about their impressions of media representations of Muslims³. As a group we looked at and discussed a number of images of Muslim women that had recently appeared in the print media. Many of these and participant readings appear on the pages of this thesis to engage media discourses in our everyday lives. Participants unable to attend the focus group session completed a questionnaire that asked for their written responses to the same images⁴.

An eighth woman spoke with me at some length one afternoon about what I was trying to accomplish with this project and about the possibility of becoming a research participant. After what I thought was a rich conversation, she decided not to join us. Trinh (1986-87) writes:

Silence as a refusal to take part in the story does sometimes provide us with a means to gain a hearing. It is voice, a mode of uttering and a response in its own right. Without other silences, however, my silence goes unheard, unnoticed... (pp. 15-16)

I was curious why this young woman refused to take part. She was busy with academic studies, but why, then, did she express interest in the research in the first place? Did she view me as an outsider, as another colonizing white, female ethnographer who would steal her story for personal gain? My imagination ran wild. Insecurities and doubts rose up and occupied my thoughts. I questioned the whole research enterprise. The uncertainties remain. How could they not?

² See Appendix B for the Interview Guide. Interviews lasted 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. Some women participated in two interviews.

³ See Appendix C for Focus Group Questionnaire.

⁴ See Appendix D for Individual Questionnaire on Media Images.

During the same period, Sarah – who did become a participant – offered this warning about Anthropology’s practice of writing the other:

They actually did a study at Harvard, an Anthropological study on my community and . . . I started reading it just out of curiosity when I was taking my Anthropology classes to see what it said . . . I read that and I think it was really off. I thought of sending a letter to the person [who wrote it] but I didn’t. It was off according to my experience, which must have been different from what he [the researcher] experienced . . . It wasn’t off in terms of being accurate—it was just the tone. I don’t know, it came across . . . it sort of left me to question Anthropology, especially the part about, you know, having the authority to, you know, the argument that objectivity will give you insights that are that much more special and different than from someone who can operate in two different worlds, is what I’m getting at . . .

Sarah’s words also disturbed me. How do we conduct research that is not colonizing? I agree that research can only be partial fictions⁵ and partial truths (Clifford, 1986; Visweswaran, 1994). As Davies and Davies (2007) explain, our focus has shifted “from the truth or falsity of particular accounts, or from their reliability, to a reading of accounts as performance” (p. 1157). Thus, auto/ethno/graphy (Morawski & Palulis, 2009) emphasizes the “auto” and the “graphy” to acknowledge the act of writing the other as an act of writing of the self, decentering the researcher as “knower.” The orchestration of this text—including participant narratives – is filtered through my experiences, obsessions, theories, and subjectivities, and as Trinh (1989) suggests, as we write we become.

⁵ “To call ethnographies fictions may raise empiricist hackles. But the word as commonly used in recent textual theory has lost its connotation of falsehood, of something merely opposed to truth. It suggests that partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are called fictions in the sense of “something made of fashioned,” the principal burden of the word’s Latin root, *ingere*. [...] Interpretive social scientists have recently come to view good ethnographies as “true fictions,” but usually at the cost of weakening the oxymoron, reducing it to the banal claim that all truths are constructed” (Clifford, 1986, p. 6).

The simplest vehicle of truth, the story is said to be “a phase of communication,” “the natural form for revealing life.” Its fascination may be explained by its power both to give a vividly felt insight into the life of other people and to revive or keep alive the forgotten, dead-ended, turned-into-stone parts of ourselves. (Trinh, 1989, p. 123)

Some might consider me, the researcher, an eighth participant, but I am much more and less than that. As author, I write the text, but I am also being written by the participants. I attempt to decenter my authority by creating a multi-vocal, layered, hybrid text that might disrupt my voice and authority. My experiences are written alongside those of participants to interrogate identities in-between academia, our personal stories, those of the reader, and those circulating in schooling and societal contexts such as the mass media.

[M]y own research is driven by my personal background. I should acknowledge that, shouldn't I? My project deals with identity issues. Doesn't it seem strange to talk about identity as if it's something that the researcher can study, without her own identity to come under microscope? (Dumitrica, 2010, p. 23)

For contemporary research content and processes such as bricolage, identifying how and why the researcher is positioned in the study is a must. Shifting positionalities [based on place, time, gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.] from which a researcher reads, writes, analyzes, indicate a recognition of the part played by the socializing texts of scholarly discourses, academic expectations and contexts throughout time and space. (Berry, 2006, p. 90)

In this intertextual inquiry, the concept of *identity* is pulled through the epistemological bazaar (Kincheloe, 2008) as part of the staging of an aporia. I patch together fleeting discursive and lived moments of *sonare* and *videre* to disrupt, unsettle, and relocate taken-for-granted identities. I write—not to capture, pin down, or declare a singular truth—but to see what this creative deployment of meanings might provoke. There is “no easy story here to tell, nor for the reader to hear, but a whirling of voices, figures, and histories” (Pillow, 2003, p. 189).

The knowledge produced in bricolage is a “pot-pourri of discourses, challenges and resistance to the status quo” (Berry, in Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 106). This takes place through the engagement of “different perspectives, readings, structures, processes, discourses, theories, methods, genres, and so forth” (p. 107). Gray (in deBoer & Gray, 2006) describes the bricoleur as “a person who collects information and things and then puts them together in a way that they were not originally designed to be” (p. 23). The bricoleur anticipates that “in this locale [we might] engage in unimagined conversations that move [us] to new levels of insight derived from juxtaposing diverse forms of meaning making” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 32). Kincheloe asserts it is meaning-making that comes from interrelationships, an “epistemology of complexity” (p. 7), which is “characterized by unexpected turns, re-traveled paths, reconceptualized assertions” (pp. 34–35) that “may surprise the bricoleur [and the reader] in its uniqueness and unanticipated qualities” (p. 34). What might arise in the juxtaposition of my stories, participant stories, and the meanings the reader brings to the text?

Unlike the readerly text, the writerly text is less predictable. It does not attempt to control the reader; he or she must make his or her own connections between images, events and settings that are presented by the author. In this sense, the writerly text asks that the reader “write” while reading. (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p. 390)

Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a “staging of subjectivity”—a representation of the self as a performance. In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based. The subject “in history” is rendered destabilized and incoherent, a site of discursive pressures and articulations.

(Russell, 1998, pg. 1)

This project incites us to think about our own “tangles of implication” (J. Miller, 2005, p. 223) in the contradictory discourses within which identities are negotiated. For Pillow (2003), rather than “clarity, honesty, or humility” (p. 192), this involves orientating ourselves toward the

messy, the unfamiliar, the uncomfortable, the unknowable, toward “practices of confounding disruptions” (p. 192). As subjects we are “multiple, complex, and proliferative” (Pillow, 2003, p. 193) and my research/writing strategies explicitly attempt to reflect these shifting realities. Marcus (1998) proposes “messy texts” as a means to represent fluid, complex social realities, for such texts are “many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical holism, but always committed to cultural criticism” (p. 392). Low and Palulis (2000) bring Marcus’ theorizing into education through their conceptualization of teaching as messy text. They ask:

Can language come to life in the messiness – the tremble of our teaching – in a space where mastery is possibly impossible – where fragments of innocent alterity are invoked – in ambiguity and metonymy – a place within the borderlands of the old and the new – where language is not conceptually and terminologically set but lives in-between? (p. 75)

St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) remark we are always speaking within the language of humanism, “a discourse that spawns structure after structure – binaries, categories, hierarchies, and other grids of regularity that are not only linguistic but very material” (p. 4). In this messy research text I thus seek out the in-between—the borderlands—of identities and cultures. These spaces do not exist in advance but open out with each new encounter.

Putting “identity” under erasure

Difference does not annul identity. It is beyond and alongside identity.
(Trinh, 1989, p. 104)

In her research, Shanaz Khan (2002) struggles with the use of the term “Muslim” and the “essentialist notions of originality and authenticity” (p.xxii) that such a label perpetuates. Along with theorists such as Bhabha (1994), Trinh (1989), and Hall (1996), Khan argues for understandings that “move away from notions of static, authentic, and original culture and identity” (p. 1). At the same time, she explains she must continue to use this identity category, for without a common language politics becomes impossible. Khan draws upon Spivak’s (1990)

concept of “strategic essentialism” to situate her vision of the Muslim woman “as part of a strategy to identify and engage with regional, situation-specific, and global struggles” (p. xxii).

Indeed, Trinh (1992b) contends that the “claim of identity is often a *strategic* claim” (p. 157). She describes what this process means in her own life:

It is a process which enables me to question my condition anew, and one by which I intimately come to understand how the personal is cultural, historical or political. The reflexive question asked . . . is no longer: *Who* am I? but *When, where, how* am I (so and so)? . . . Here the notion of displacement is also a place of identity: there is no real me to return to, no whole self that synthesizes the woman, the woman of color and the writer; there are instead, diverse recognitions of self through difference, and unfinished, contingent, arbitrary closures that make possible both politics and identity. (p. 157)

Derrida (1976), in his critique of the western philosophical tradition, puts humanist terms such as “identity” *under erasure*, for we cannot simply abandon them. As Hall (1996) explains, this act signals such terms are no longer “good to think with” in their original form. Since we do not yet have entirely different concepts to replace them, “there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms and no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally generated” (p. 1). This is what Derrida refers to as “thinking at the limit, as thinking in the interval, a sort of double writing” (p. 1). Hall explains that *identity* is a concept operating “under erasure,” in the interval between reversal and emergence, for it is “an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (p. 2). Thinking identity “the old way” means to think it in terms of the autonomous, Cartesian subject of western philosophy. In spite of theoretical critiques, most of us continue to take for granted the notion of “an integral, originary and unified identity” (p. 1). Perhaps clinging to the Cartesian subject permits us to imagine we can erect solid borders to protect our selves from the difference of the other.

Hall (1996) points out “because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse”

(p. 4) they should be understood as being produced in particular historical and institutional sites “within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (p. 4), within “the play of specific modalities of power”(p. 4). For these reasons, he argues, identities are “more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted identity” (p. 4), which is the usual, taken for granted meaning of *identity*. For Hall, identity refers to:

[T]he meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to “interpellate”, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be “spoken.” Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (pp. 5–6)

Viewed this way, identities are continuously constituted by language – which never stands still – and agency lies in repetition, in the performativity of language (Butler, 1993).

We have some way to go before newer theories of identity find their way into mainstream discourse. Binary thinking and the limiting categories such thought perpetuates are evident in my own practices of othering, visual media portrayals of covered Muslim women, participant narratives, the academic literature, and schooling discourses. Miriam’s narrative speaks to this:

Miriam: After you say you’re Muslim you feel like you’re being judged . . . I think that’s a tag that goes with a lot of assumptions. They just have these ideas about Muslims.

Diane: Are you saying after someone finds out you are Muslim you are looked at in particular ways?

Miriam: Oh, ya. I know. It happened. In high school, well I don’t look Muslim, right. So people didn’t know that I was Muslim in the beginning. . . [But] when you tell them you’re Muslim they automatically think certain things. It’s an unconscious thing or whatever.

Diane: What narratives do you think people associate with you?

Miriam: Well, definitely, like, terrorism comes to mind (laughs).

Diane: So, you have lived that?

Miriam: Oh, ya. After 9/11 and stuff like that it’s just something that people automatically associate with Muslims . . .

Diane: Would you say you are viewed with suspicion?

Miriam: Oh, definitely. My friends and I joke about it. That's the only way to deal with it, I guess.

I juxtapose Miriam's story with the following image which appeared on the cover of *The National Post* to accompany an article reporting on the murder of Aqsa Parvez in Toronto, in 2007. It is curious, for Aqsa did not wear a black neqab, nor is this type of covering typically worn by Pakistani, Muslim women. In fact, the caption states this is "a Palestinian woman wearing a hijab veil." As with many media representations of Muslim women, the image has no relation to the particularities of Aqsa's life or social positioning, but the stunning headline and

The deadly face of Muslim extremism

Tarek Fatah and Farzana Hassan
The National Post
Wednesday, December 12, 2007



A Palestinian woman wearing a hijab veil. Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

The tragic death of a Mississauga, Ont., teenage girl -- allegedly at the hands of her own traditionally minded Muslim father -- has sent shock waves across the world. Canadians are justified in raising concerns as to whether this is a sign of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in their own backyard.

provocative photograph may sell newspapers. I have never come across the term "hijab veil,"

before. The anonymous woman pictured in this image is certainly not wearing a hijab. Facts and details are apparently secondary in this visual depiction of a Muslim woman accompanying

Aqsa's story, yet the Orientalist meanings it generates do act as a powerful curriculum on otherness. Is this an example of "essentialized otherness?" The editors at *The National Post* are using an image of a Palestinian woman dressed in black neqab to stand in for all Muslim women, including Aqsa, a Canadian teenager. The headline accompanying the image – *The Deadly Face of Muslim Extremism* – reinforces semantic inks between the body of a covered woman, Islamic extremism, murder, and fear. In an interview on CBC Radio's *The Current*, Donna Marsh O'Connor (Sept. 7, 2010) – who lost her daughter in the twin towers in New York on 9/11 – alleges: "We have been socialized to be afraid of Muslims."

The details of their real lives don't matter;
perceived identity is all that counts. (Ali Khan, 2009, p. 154)

Afzal-Khan (2005) writes that when she was growing up in Lahore, Pakistan in the late sixties and seventies she had no idea she was going to become a "Muslim woman" after immigrating to North America, the land of possibilities. She explains:

I mean, the irony of having all those possibilities reduced to this one label is a bit mind-numbing, isn't it? Of course, this label did not envelope me then as completely as it has of late, in the post-9/11 USA . . . But now Muslims in general, and the Muslim woman in particular, have suddenly been handed the starring role in the post-9/11 Drama of the New Century. (p. 2)

Since language organizes meaning, to put something into a category is an act of power.

Discourses are taken for granted; they inhabit our usual ways of thinking and are taken as natural, as the truth. "Muslim" has thus been enabled to take on a common-sense relevancy. Shanaz Khan (2002) observes Muslim women "are seen in simplistic and limited ways as part of the undifferentiated group, *Muslim women*" (p. xxii). Through its categorizations, hierarchical binaries, and hostility to difference, humanism's structuring of language plays a decisive role in perpetuating exclusions. Is it difficult to see a Muslim woman beyond a limited and fixed meaning

because of the powerful hold language has over us? What possibilities for identities might auto/ethno/graphic bricolage open up?

At the airport in Damascus we make our way to the Iran Air counter. As we come around a corner I am suddenly taken aback at the sight of a crowd of women standing in the check-in lines – all of them draped from head to toe in long, black chador. In spite of having spent more than four years living in predominantly Muslim countries (Pakistan and Syria), I suddenly feel extreme trepidation. I have seen women in chador before, of course, but never so many together in one place. They were so black . . . and even ominous. How might I explain this reaction? Am I making unconscious connections to T.V. images of bodies viewed years earlier, to the American hostage crisis, to raging, fanatical mobs, shouting “Death to America?” In these moments of looking, have these women somehow become those television images? My husband had been to Iran several times and said it was not what people imagined. However, I am caught in the grip of those T.V. images. The black bodies evoke a visceral response. I seem to have no control over my thoughts or emotions. It is as if some power greater than myself is thinking, on my behalf.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

Labeling, sorting, and shifting bodies in the schoolyard: “It’s the unspoken”

In the following excerpt of our conversation during an interview, Jana talks about her middle school experiences and sense of identity growing up in Ontario. She offers her own theory of how practices of exclusion work in subtle, unspoken ways in schooling contexts.

Jana: In middle school, you don’t know yourself yet and you don’t know who you are as a person, your identity. The Arabs kind of get pushed in with the African Americans, you know. Like: “*Well, you’re not white, soooo you’re part of the black group.*” It’s funny because you end up adopting the hip hop culture and you end up listening to rap. You’re not going to find many Arabs who listen to punk rock or death metal. It’s funny because these small things in your life really do shape who you are. . . . At middle school . . . it was like the whites and the blacks—it was very divided—and if you were Arab you were just kind of automatically scooted in with the blacks and that shapes your personality.

Diane: So were most of your friends black, or Arab?

Jana: They were black, Arab, Somali . . . One was from Bosnia, you know, she was clearly not white. There’s something there. It’s “white” and “other.” And Arabs were just kind of part of the black group and that does affect who you become or your likings, or your personality . . . But as an Arab growing up in Canada in public schools you have a certain linking to a certain category.

Diane: How do you get put into a category? Do you have any idea how that works?

Jana: It’s the unspoken, like: “*Don’t you want to hang out with those guys, there?*” You get shifted there. It’s kind of like you’re playing at recess and someone’s listening to a song, or whatever—and remember you’re the awkward Arab that doesn’t

belong in the white group or the black group... It gets pushed on you, like subconsciously or somehow. That part just kind of gets pushed on you ... As the Arab person, you're coloured, you're darker skinned. Darker skin belongs with darker skin. So, you just kind of get shifted that way.

Diane: So do you think this is mostly based on the way people look?

Jana: It's based on the way people look, talk, and behave ... To be categorized according to race, you don't understand it as a kid. And nobody will straight up say, "No, I don't want to hang out with you because you're Arab." It's more like, you talk to them, and they won't be interested in what you have to say. Or, like:

- "*Hey, do you want to hang out?*"

- "*No.*"

It's just that subtle rejection. And then that group of people you end up with are all the other rejects, right (laughs). That's how it works. The whole idea of ... there's the popular group and then there's the regular people, and then there's the losers. It's sort of the same thing. But forget the popular group, you'd never even try to get in there. You keep it to like the regular people and the losers, but they're not going to straight up tell you: "*No, you're not cool enough to be with us.*" It's just their complete disinterest that will lead you to look for something else. And what are you going to look for? The person that was rejected before you, the person that was rejected before that, and then you form another group.

Jana's narrative of her experience of exclusion reminds me of how, in some of the courses I teach, the handful of students who are "visible minorities" often end up sitting at the same table together for the term. What is going on when this happens? Jana's story also brings to mind a scene from Karim's (2009) adolescent novel, *Skunk Girl*, told from the point of view of 16-year-old Nina Khan, who describes herself as "a Pakistani Muslim girl" living in upstate New York.

Nina describes the social groupings at her school:

Principal Young announces that for the first week of school we're allowed to eat lunch on the lawn behind the gym, as some kind of special treat. Even outside, the cafeteria groupings apply. Most of the black kids and the handful of Latino kids sit in one area while the white kids take up the rest of the lawn. The few other minorities like me and Steve Chang, a freshman whose parents own Ming Dynasty, sit on the white side. (p. 15)

Sahar's narrative of her social experiences in high school, on the other hand, resonates more with the dominant discourse of official multiculturalism, and may align more closely with the taken for granted ways Canadians may imagine the nation through the stories we tell ourselves:

That's why I like Canada, you know. You don't see whites with the whites, Arabs with

the Arabs, blacks with the blacks, Chinese with the Chinese. You see them all mixed. Like I have my Persian friend, my Chinese friend, my white European friend, my African friend – everyone. We’re all from different countries, different backgrounds, different religions. And we all learn from each other, we all share stories.

(Sahar, Research Participant)

Returning to Jana, later in our interview she also recounts her experiences in a private high school two or three years after being “shifted in the schoolyard” during middle school. In her high schooling stories, she describes how she successfully becomes not only a member of, but a leader of the most popular girls.

Aporia and the question responsibility

Derrida’s text leaves us with the infinite responsibility undecidability imposes on us. Undecidability in no way alleviates responsibility. The opposite is the case.

(Cornell, in Wolfreys, 1998, p. 1)

Wang (2005) brings Derridian ethics into curriculum theorizing. She explains *aporia* in Greek, indicates “the state of impasse, nonpassage, or logical contradiction that can never be permanently resolved” (p. 45). This may explain why Derrida is sometimes misunderstood and charged with over-intellectualizing at the expense of taking positive action in the world. How can stasis, after all, *get us anywhere*? How could the notion of “logical contradiction” be ethical? Wang writes the situation of constant dilemma is affirmed through the “impossible movement of traversing —without crossing—the ultimate border” (p. 45). This implies profound engagement with edges or borderlines, which Derrida argues can never be permanently fixed. Rather, “the borders of language/culture, discourse, and concepts are not closed but . . . always open to those that are not themselves” (p. 46). In remaining open to the other, “the demarcation of the boundary is not overthrown, but neither does it stay within settled territory” (p. 46). Therefore, it is “both impossible to pass the border *and* necessary to transcend it” (p. 46). In this “both-and” situation, “the juridical-political borders contained by traditions, society, and law are unsettled and

displaced” (p. 46). In this movement of displacement identity and nonidentity connect and intertwine, but they do not coincide:

It is in the very event of exceeding borderlines – an impossible passage – that aporia is experienced. At the moment the edge is overrun, contradictory imperatives and opposite gestures from both sides are fully awakened and thereby bring pressure for an answer. The affirmativeness of aporia through the impossible is implied at this moment of responding to conflicting gestures. To Derrida, the ethics of affirmation, if there is such an ethics, implies “that you are attentive to otherness, to the alterity of the other, to something new and other” (Derrida, 1992⁶ in Wang, p. 46). In a discussion of identities it is important to note that the border always remains to come as long as there is aporia, but it cannot be passed nor erased. This has profound implications for cultural and identity theory, for “the other cannot disappear into the self and must remain its alterity, its potential for newness.” (p. 47)

What does the Derridian (1993) concept of *aporia*, or un/decidability, offer to education, to research, to social lives? Derrida might suggest there is no responsibility *without* experiencing aporia. In other words, experiencing the aporia *is* responsibility. Just because there can be no ultimate solution given that meaning is always deferred, does not mean we are not obliged to make a choice, that we can not take a position. Derrida (1984) responds to the critique that aporia means non-commitment:

Not at all. But the difficulty is to gesture in opposite directions at the same time: on the one hand, to preserve a distance and suspicion with regard to the official political codes governing reality; on the other hand, to intervene here and now in a practical and engaged manner wherever the necessity arises. This position of dual allegiance, in which I personally find myself, is one of perpetual uneasiness. (p. 119)

The aporia is thus lived with double gestures. Derrida refuses an unthinking acceptance of universal rules or codes to ground decisions and actions, but nor does he advocate inaction. On the contrary, “the attempt to recognize the aporia requires us to be actively engaged with the contradictions in order not only to respond responsibly in the present but also to open up to nonpresent possibilities” (Wang, 2005, p. 51). Derrida believes we must never stop “confronting

⁶ Derrida, J. (1992). Taking liberties. In J. Biesta & D. Egea-Kuehne (Eds.). *Derrida and Education*, pp. 177-185. London & New York: Routledge.

the dilemmas of the human condition” (p. 49). By opening up to what is excluded, the Derridian sense of responsibility “has radical ethical and political implications, as it removes the guarantee of the absolute and leaves an uncertain condition for inventing singular responses” (p. 49). Hence, the aporia is decidedly *not* language games, neutrality, or inaction.

Aoki (1995) brings Derridian un/decidability into postmodern curriculum theorizing. He entices us into “the midst of doubled imaginaries” (p. 303), which he describes as “a space of paradoxical ambivalence with its built-in contradiction” (p. 310). Yet, Aoki insists, “it is a generative space of difference, an enunciatory space of becoming, a space where newness emerges” (p. 310). Aoki coaxes us into these spaces so we might “become aware of the adopted imaginaries within which we are enacting our curricular and pedagogical actions” (p. 310) and re/imagine them. By positioning ourselves in this new enunciatory space – that of difference – we might displace and reconstitute modernist conceptions of identity. Aoki (2005) cracks words open to invite the “more to come” and “incompleteness” (p. 321) into identities, cultures, and curriculum. We reenter the epistemological bazaar via the “binarism of Western epistemology” (p. 323)—so deeply inscribed on and in-between bodies—so I might carry it on to some place else in my own theorizing beyond the “entrenched imaginaries of modernity,” (Aoki, 1995, p. 312). By dwelling in-between signifiers Aoki (2005) provokes movement to “a less noun-oriented signification to living moments in life” (p. 328). He rejects the notion of stable identities and cultures in favour of continuous becomings, to open up binaries to other possibilities.

I am contending with an essentialized idea of what a veiled Muslim women is; she falls on the other side of the binary of a Western woman, and all that she represents. The fact that I am American, and more specifically African American, and still wear hijab does not translate in terms that are intelligible to this binary.
(Abdurraqib, 2009, p. 143)

Soon after arriving in Tehran I received an invitation to attend a formal dinner for women only, hosted by the daughter of the then-president, Hashemi Rafsanjani. I arrived in my long, dark coat and my kerchief scarf and was told that once everyone had arrived the doors would be closed to make sure no men could enter and then we would be able to uncover for the meal. Our hostess finally entered the hall, in full Islamic covering. She walked over to her place at the head table and peeled off three outer layers. In an instant, the body of a beautiful, young woman dressed in the latest European fashion stood before us. She wore a close-fitting jacket and short skirt. I still marvel at the shock this caused me initially. I can't remember what I had imagined she might be wearing under her chador, but this definitely wasn't it! Reading with my "western" eyes, the dark, Islamic coverings suggested a lack of modernity, whereas the fashionable suit was ultra stylish and signified cosmopolitanism. The juxtaposition on a single body of the "tres chic" with the "backwards and oppressive" was very perplexing. (Watt, Personal narrative)

I share these stories of binary confusion for what they suggest about my personal and wider cultural assumptions related to Muslim and non-Muslim identities and cultures. The later is uniquely my story, but I wonder if it also might resonate for others? This is a lived example of how language manifests in everyday expectations of social relations. St. Pierre (2000) writes: "Humanism is everywhere, overwhelming in its totality; and since it is so 'natural,' it is difficult to watch it work" (p. 478). It is within this im/possible context we struggle with the never-ending process of engendering a "hybrid consciousness" (Asher, 2002).

You're not what I imagined

How might curriculum theorizing permit us to see beyond our expectations? When we assume identity from humanist perspectives we are all some "thing" Aoki (2005). "The English word 'individual'" Aoki explains, "is an entity unto itself, a self 'in-divisible,' a totalized self" (p. 327). In other words, this is a noun-based identity. What if we conceived of cultures and identities in Aokian terms . . . as verbs rather than nouns, as active becomings, as open possibilities, rather than static, completed, essentialized entities?

Expressions of surprise, even in the twenty-first century, that veiled Muslim women can appear as Olympic athletes, "suicide bombers," feminists, politicians, musicians, or even comedians, underline the tenacity of beliefs that Islamic veiling is intrinsically incompatible with women's agency in the construction of their identities.

(Macdonald, 2006, p. 19)

I have always been a very good student but always when I have a new teacher and I talk or participate in class discussion the teachers invariably make comments about how they did not expect me to be intelligent and articulate...that I am unlike Muslim women. (Research Participant, In Hoodfar, 1993, p. 14)

When the only images non-Muslims are seeing of Muslim woman are like oppressed figures, that influences how others see us . . . And I find a lot of images of Muslim women make them look very sad, or they're very angry . . . And they treat every Muslim women like they feel sorry for us, and we're seen as a victim. I don't want people's sympathy. Either I get a rude sort of reaction from people or they almost feel sorry for me. And once they get to know me, they're like, "Wow, you're so different from other Muslim women." (Noor, Research Participant)

Diane: I remember just after arriving in Iran, I was given an invitation to attend a party for women only being hosted then-President Rafsanjani's daughter. I didn't know much at all about Islam or covering. When our hostess came into the hall she was covered in several layers of black cloth. Once all the men were gone, it was announced that women could uncover. You should have seen what our hostess was wearing under that coat. It shocked me. She had on a tight, short skirt, and looked very chic. This wasn't what I was expecting, at all.

Sahar: You know, a lot of my friends say that, too because when they see me all like this [in black head covering] I'm this quiet person. And then when we do an all-girls party you'll see me going wild and dancing. And they say to me, "*You can dance?*" "*Yeah, I'm a girl!*" (laughs). Some people misinterpret that if you're a hijabi you're like this at home. That's your personality. I'm like, no! I swear to God I'm not like that, I'm just like you, I want to have fun, I want to party, I want to do stuff. It's just that outside I want to be respected, you know what I mean? I sometimes feel wearing hijab gives me an advantage, especially when finding a relationship or a friendship because this way you're not basing your friendship on looks. You know how teens are. Oh, she's pretty, let's go with her. We're going to be popular. You know. I just find a lot of that in high school and it was funny in a way. I didn't think that actually existed, but it does. But now when you wear hijab, people love you for your personality, for who you are and I think that's so great because at that point the person truly understands who you are. Sometimes we're so taken by our looks, our outside, we tend to forget about what's on the inside. Just because a girl does not wear a hijab, that does not make her a bad person. Sometimes she'll be the kindest person. Just wearing a mini skirt does not mean, oh my God, she's bad. No. She can be wearing a skirt and that's her way of thinking "that's my fashion, that's how I want to dress."

Feminist scholar, Sara Ahmed (2000a) asserts when we avoid the encounter, fail to get close enough to face others, we are left with judging from afar by reading the other as a sign of the universal. The other becomes fixed as an object and sign by the refusal to get close. Lama Unu

Odeh (1993) describes a veiled woman as “not necessarily this nor that,” arguing she “could shift from one position to another” (p. 35). In refusing to enter into a relationship with a veiled woman, whether face-to-face or through an image, do we risk a failure to recognize the multiplicity of her subjectivity?

We might ask ourselves what language has its hold on us when we meet a Muslim woman and she is inevitably different from what we were expecting. Ahmed (2000a) suggests our pre-conceived notions of who “belongs” and who is “a stranger” needs to be challenged. She defines the stranger “not as some-body that we do not recognize, but as some-body that we recognize *as a stranger*, a form of recognition which relies on differentiation between the familiar and strange (hence being a stranger easily slides into *being strange*)” (p. 96). The process of recognizing strangers, or those who do not belong in a particular social space, “involves techniques of differentiation through reading the bodies of others” (p. 96). Ahmed suggests “the different value given to social spaces suggests that ‘being a stranger’ is not simply a relativisable condition of the world: some bodies are read as stranger than others precisely because of restricted “ownership” of valued spaces” (p. 96). How, then, is social space claimed and who has the power to make such claims? Ahmed asks how bodies come to be lived “precisely through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby the differences in other bodies make a difference to such lived embodiment” (p. 96)? She considers how the “very materialization of bodies in time and space involves a process of differentiation,” drawing on Butler’s (1993) definition of “materialization” as the production of an “effect of boundary, fixity and surface” (p. 9). According to Ahmed, to examine the function of cultural difference and social antagonism in the constitution of bodily encounters is thus not simply to “read differences on the surface of the body (the body as text), but to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain

shapes over others, and in relation to others” (p. 89). In other words, theories of postmodern subjectivity posit when the other comes into being as “other,” the “self” also materializes. What then, does viewing someone as strange or unapproachable tell us about who we are becoming in the spaces of our everyday lives?

The self as a relation

McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, and Park (2005) argue we “cannot afford a continued blissful ignorance of groups that are different from ours – a practice that is still perpetuated in the dominant school curriculum” (p. 164). At the same time, contrary to traditional visions of curriculum, which assume a unitary subject, the primary reason for learning about others “is not out of curiosity, tolerance, empathy, but as a window into a better and more critical understanding of ourselves” (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Sumara (1997) asserts “the sense of self is a relation, not an object” (p. 227). He writes:

When I look into your eyes, I do not see you. I see me. Am I seeing you when I look at you? Or am I seeing myself? What is the boundary between you and not/you, between me and not/me? Searching for a trace of others, it seems, is complicated. In seeking others, we locate ourselves. (p. 229)

For Sumara, interpreting others thus brings us closer to our selves. In tracing, we are traced. By searching for the trace in others, we are provoked to inquire into ourselves and our own situations. There are consequences “to not locating the trace, to not being able to locate oneself amid relations with others. It is the experience of being Othered, of being excluded, of being an outsider” (p. 231). David Smith (2003) similarly offers these thoughts on living in-between:

If Self implies Other, then the ‘I’ that I claim for myself lives in a condition of perpetual non-resolution and incompleteness, requiring as a condition of existence ongoing acts of engagement, conversation, and negotiation with Others whose very identity, too, depends upon ‘me’ for survival. ‘You’ and ‘I’ are the terrains out of which ‘we’ work and shape our shared existence. Such an understanding is, I believe, the necessary foundation for any visible ethics in the new millennium. (p. xvii)

Naming paradoxes & im/possible identities

As a “hyphenated” Japanese-Canadian who was sent to a Japanese interment camp with his family as a child, Aoki (1990b) has lived and deeply felt the elusiveness of identity:

I look at myself. I have been told that I am a Japanese Canadian with a Japanese Canadian identity. For many years I have been in search for this identity – searching into my heritage, searching for the ground on which I stand. At one time, I objected to the hyphenization of Japanese-Canadians. On another occasion, seeking ethnic purity, I dropped my name “Ted” and returned to my given ethnic name “Tetsuo,” until people started to ask me, “Where is Ted?” As you can see, I’ve been having difficulty and I have come to believe that it may well be that the elusive Japanese Canadian identity I am searching for may not be where people, including me, think it is. (p. 381)

In this passage we hear a “decentered Aoki who evokes and resists our reading of him” (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 8). Palulis and Low highlight Aoki’s doubling of identities and difference. He “was written by loss and erasure through internment camps and through the hegemony of academic structuralists resistant to his work and ... [he] wrote his way out of the confinement of the camps and out of the confinement of traditional curriculum” (p. 4).

Who is writing? Where am I – a pronominal ‘I’ that has long since lost its topographical bearings on the map of identity? (Palulis, 2003, p. 270).

#1: [A]s soon as you move from the position of a named subject into the position of a naming subject, you also have to remain alive to the renewed dangers of arrested meanings and fixed categories – in other words, of occupying the position of a sovereign subject. ‘Non-categorical’ thinking sees to it that the power of the name be constantly exposed in its limits. So in terms of subject positioning you can only thrive on fragile ground. You are always working in this precarious space where you constantly run the risk of falling on one side or the other. You are walking right on the edge and challenging both sides so that they cannot simply be collapsed into (p. 173) one. This is the space in between, the interval to which established rules of boundaries never quite apply.

(Trinh, 1992, p. 174)

#2: *My hairdresser, who immigrated to Canada 18 years ago from the Middle East, is upset because his sixteen year old son told him last night that he wanted to change his Arab name to one that sounded more North American.* (Watt, Personal narrative)

- #3: I can still recall with perfect vividness the first day of school each year, when I would squirm miserably in my seat as the teacher called roll. As she approached the K's and L's, I knew the second she slowed down that she had arrived at my name; that she would bludgeon its pronunciation I had already accepted, but I prayed not to be asked in front of everyone else its origins, to have to utter that word, Iran" (Moaveni, 2006, p. 9).
- #4: Miriam: I never saw any discrimination from the students at all, except for some of them that commented that I don't wear the hijab (laughs).
 Diane: They just couldn't believe that, or figure out why . . .
 Miriam: Ya, I actually had friend, who become one of my best friends later on. I met her in grade nine... [One day] they were taking attendance and so the teacher called my name, "Miriam," and I was like, "here." And then after we got to playing...she was like, "Wait, so are you Arabic or Muslim?" And I said, "Ya, didn't you hear my name was Miriam?" And she said, "Oh, I thought your dad just liked that name and called you that." "Oh, thanks."
 Diane: Did you ask her why she was asking you that?
 Miriam: Ya, because I don't look Arab at all. I look white and I don't wear the hijab and there's nothing that people would associate with Islam, so that's why. I get those a lot, actually.
- #5: Tianlong Yu: I told (my students) a naming paradox I experienced. Exactly because of racial discrimination I experienced and I was afraid would happen (I was aware of the University of Chicago and MIT study about how resumes with White-sounding names received more responses from prospective employers than those with white names). At one time I wanted to change my Chinese name into an English one. That was quite an agonizing experience as I was in a dilemma. I didn't want to give up the name my parents gave me and all of their expectations behind it; yet I didn't want my foreign name to turn people off in the job market and become an inhibiting factor in my new career and life in America. Sometimes I thought I should take an English name just to go with the established norms and rules in America (as many foreigners have already done here) . . . On the other hand, however, I wondered how much I must sacrifice to be accepted into the mainstream and why I have to contribute to this stubborn mentality that undermines true inclusion and diversity . . . I was compelled to recognize the existence of multiple identities and their contextual construction in my own life... My naming dilemma put me in a struggle for visibility, acceptance, and inner balance and harmony as well. By the way, the reaction of my close American friends to my thought of name changing was most interesting. They strongly opposed this idea, saying that they accept me for who I am and what I am, but they seemed to ignore my struggle in a racist society where names still bear high stakes that influence individual lives. As for today, I'm still undecided. While teaching multiculturalism, I have been compelled to tell my stories and live my struggles again and again . . .

Hongyu Wang: This is amazing! Names are an essential part of identity: how we name ourselves and how others name us influence how we perceive the world and are perceived by others. (Wang & Yu, 2006, pg. 33)

I/identities displacing

How could I, as me, meet these new people?

How would I have to change?

What of me was superficial and might be sacrificed,
and what need I keep to remain myself?

(T. E. Lawrence [of Arabia] in Kohls and Knight, 1994, p.81)

I am drawn to Lawrence of Arabia, for we were both in the Middle East, albeit in different times, places, and contexts. But is it not the same landscape in some ways? Rutherford (1990) describes the desert as an “uncanny space, its borders marking out a margin between the habitable and the uninhabitable. Yet despite its strangeness it holds a seductive fascination” (p. 9). He calls the desert a cultural metaphor: “in representing the margins of our culture and the knowledge and values that underpin it, it is also the place of their undoing” (p. 10). Baudrillard (in Rutherford) suggests “in the desert one loses one’s identity” (p. 10). Rutherford describes the Lawrence myth as a metaphor of uncertainty. Lawrence grappled with “contradictory emotions, loyalties and identities... His identification with the [Arab peoples] and their culture[s] displaced the centered position of his identity as a white man” (p. 9). Living with another people allowed him to submerge his English self, live at the margins, look at the west and its ways with new eyes. Living in the desert, Lawrence was neither English nor Arab. He says, “I had dropped one form and not taken on another” (p. 10). His identity was being displaced; he was *in-between*, neither this *nor* that, both this *and* that.

Aoki (1996), following Derrida and Bhabha, envisions third spaces between east and west, “as generative spaces of possibilities”(p. 319), as sites where pedagogy can happen. Trinh (1998) writes that such a space allows for “the emergence of new subjectivities that resist letting

themselves be settled in the movement across First and Second” (p. 19). This third space (Bhabha, 1990) implies movement, for “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (p. 211). The concern is not with tracing two original moments from which a third emerges, rather it “enables other positions to emerge . . . sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211). Identity is conceptualized not as an already accomplished fact, but as production, “which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990, p. 222). This has implications for our encounters with otherness. Bhabha (1990) explains:

[H]ybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them. (p. 216)

According to Hall (1980), “[a]ny society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant world order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested” (p. 134). What dominant meanings do we bring to readings of otherness, face-to-face or in the context of an image? How and where do social categories get produced and regulated and what are the effects? How do we open “what seems ‘natural’ to other possibilities” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 479). I struggle to get beyond the impulse to represent the *real* story of Muslim females and to get to know the *real* story of Muslim females is produced and taken up as the *real* story (Britzman, 1995).

Becoming aware of how language matters

I became more exacting about language in Dr. Palulis’s graduate class, where we were introduced to postcolonial and poststructural theories. That same semester I was in Dr. Masny’s doctoral seminar where we carried out an intense study of epistemologies. Each week we were introduced to a different theoretical lens to consider social worlds. Not only were our assumptions about research turned upside down, so were understandings of our lives. The experience of being introduced to so many unfamiliar perspectives was simultaneously overwhelming and exhilarating. At the end of the term, Dr. Masny asked us to share our epistemological stance with classmates. Students working with poststructural

theory got into a heated discussion about language and whether or not we should continue to use terms such as “explore” in our writing. As a term strongly implicated in colonial oppression, some of us argued it should be avoided. Several classmates thought this was going too far. It was, after all, just a word and when they used it they said were not thinking about colonialism. I suggested this might be a reason to limit the word’s circulation. A taken for granted acceptance of “explore” involves erasing or forgetting our history, but censorship is not appropriate, either. What are we to do about language difficulties?

(Watt, Personal narrative)

In spite of widespread critique of language in recent years, words such as *diversity*, *multiculturalism*, and *tolerance* resiliently circulate in the spaces of educational theory and practice as well as in public discourse. I entered graduate studies stubbornly attached to popular notions of multiculturalism as a benevolent aspect of Canadian society. Dr. Palulis suggested I read the recent literature in cultural theory. At the same time, Dr. Masny encouraged me to consider the concepts of identity and culture in modern and postmodern discourses. Once I had entered into postmodern theoretical spaces this is where I wanted to work, yet years later I continue to catch myself reproducing the categories and assumptions of humanist thought. It is not that we need to do away the language of humanism, for it will continue to be with us. Rather, we might expose its possibilities and its limitations as we work toward new understandings and a more just society.

Making the familiar strange, the strange familiar

Home-leavings are occasions to remove one’s self from the taken for granted assumptions of daily life in one’s own culture/society. Living abroad is a gradual process where the strange becomes familiar and the familiar becomes strange. In postcolonial theory, home-leaving becomes a double journey – we physically leave the familiar territory of home, as well as the familiar terms of humanism. The concept of home is important, for ultimately, we realize “the more one looks into one’s own culture, the more one sees there is no such thing as a place that one can return to safely” (Trinh, 1999, p. 22). Huddleston Edgerton (1996) discusses making the familiar

strange by,

...rendering the strangeness of the *other*, which has been made “familiar” through stereotyping and/or otherwise erasing, strange again though in a new sense of that term – a strangeness that does not assume strangeness to be frightening and hostile. The *other* is made strange when that comforting familiarity of stereotyping is abandoned and replaced with the disturbing exhilaration that comes from exposing “dangerous remembrances” about past experiences that are contrary to “official” thought as it is so often written/spoken in conventional discourses – experiences which contribute to the present drama, often in unexpected ways. (p. 134)

How might reconceptualizing stereotypes in this way offer new possibilities for education?

Someone else’s other

I don’t remember ever thinking myself as difference before a “photo incident” at the Faisal Mosque, in Islamabad, Pakistan . . .



At Faisal Mosque,
Islamabad, Pakistan
Photo by: Diane Watt (1992)
(Permission granted).

The Faisal Mosque in Islamabad contains vast, open spaces both within its walls and outside in its splendid courtyards. Nobody minds these spaces being used by running, leaping children when prayers aren’t in session, and so it became a favorite place for a friend and I to take our families. We adults absorbed the beauty of the architecture and the surrounding Margala Hills, and the children ran wild. One day, a smiling Pakistani couple asked to take our photo. We willingly agreed, but I wondered to myself why anyone would want a photo of us? The previous weekend I had spent an entire day photographing exotic strangers on the streets of Peshawar, without a second thought . . .

(Watt, Personal narrative)

This memory came back years later in the process of writing auto/ethno/graphy. It was an encounter that did not mean much to me at the time, but looking back, I understand its potential significance in new ways and now consider this event as a key moment of decentering in my life. Frankenburg (cited in Fine, Weis, Powell Pruitt, & Burns, 2004) contends, “Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility” (p. 131). This encounter provoked a rewriting of my experiences in light of new knowledge and theoretical lenses I did not have at that time.

I also began to inquire into how privilege is often based on the visual. As Rose (2007) suggests, social categories are not natural but constructed and “these constructions can take visual form” (p. 11). How might visual epistemologies translate into pedagogical practices that disrupt the power of another person’s skin colour, dress, or hair style to set off binary thinking? Sensoy (2007a) makes the following comment on her own racial privilege:

I was Muslim and Turkish for the first seven years of my life in the Middle East. Since then, my experience in Western North American society is that of a white person. It’s not that I stopped being a Turkish Muslim. Rather, the racialized readings of my body (based primarily on my skin color, the absence of a veil, and a ‘neutral’ accent) have afforded me profound privileges in a society steeped in racism, and white Christian privilege.
(pp. 361–365)

During the years we lived in Pakistan, I had not yet read Said’s (1978/1994) *Orientalism* and postcolonial theory, and when I thought about it at all, assumed that colonialism had been relegated to the past.

Writing auto/ethno/graphy made me realize the extent to which life in Islamabad, followed by years living in Tehran and Damascus, had unsettling effects on my sense of self that continues into the present. For the first time, I realized my own privilege. My attachment to a humanist, individualistic sense of identity influenced my readings of the social world:

Descartes' declaration that "I think, therefore, I am" confirmed the centrality of the autonomous human individual, a founding precept of humanism, a precept that effectively separated the subject from the object, thought from reality, or the self from the other.
(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 219)

The undercurrents of unease I lived with during those years abroad were perhaps due to the tension involved in *knowing* yet not really acknowledging that knowing. My sense of self was indeed shifting, more than I could know at the time. As Pennycook (1998) notes,

[T]he traces left by colonialism run deep. And these traces, these discourses, are not just to do with . . . former colonies, but have emanated from these colonial contexts to inhabit large domains of Western thought and culture. (p. 2)

Before reading postcolonial theory, I did not consider connections between my privilege as a racialized white woman and how subjectivities are linked to processes and effects of European colonization. Trinh (1998) writes "[t]ravelling can . . . turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed boundaries – a disturbing yet potentially empowering practice of difference" (p. 23).

When I started working with auto/ethno/graphy with Dr. Palulis, I wanted to figure out where my insatiable desire for travel and intercultural experiences might have come from. My paternal grandparents came to Canada from Hungary in the 1930's and neither ever learned much English. They depended on my father and his siblings to translate. My mother was not Hungarian but loved the food and the culture and so learned how to make dishes like chicken paprika. Eating grandma's potato pancakes as a small child was also a special treat. Do our family's lived cultural moments explain the connection I felt to "the old country" as they called it, even though my dad has never been to Hungary and neither have I? Somehow, these connections to a land we haven't even seen mattered to us. My maternal grandparents were British, Scottish, and Norwegian. I am a racialized white female, descended from Europeans, and this has brought me great privilege in my life. I am amazed at how the ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic difference within my family has been erased, based on our racialized whiteness. The myth of a homogenous, "white" Canadian culture perpetuates itself with such ease. It has taken me all these years to realize it doesn't take long to become a "real Canadian" if you are racialized white like me.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Locating otherness

[T]hese other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them on our grid.
(Bhabha, 1990, p. 208)

Noor: In sports, when I tried out for the volleyball team, the coach was like, “*Oh, I never knew you were the kind who knew how to play sports.*” He thought he was funny but it was just, in his jokes he was just perpetuating stereotypes. It didn’t make it funny. . .

Diane: So even though you weren’t wearing hijab he treated you that way?

Noor: Ya, I guess because I was one of the few brown girls.

Diane: So it wasn’t an issue of Islam?

Noor: No. I don’t think he even knew I was Muslim.

As soon as you meet someone, or shortly after you’ve had a few conversations, you can start to know, okay, what kind of non-Muslim is this? Is it someone who is open-minded, who is educated, and knows what they are talking about? Or, I also meet the other type of non-Muslims who are still asking really, really silly questions. You still get the stares, and you still, when you walk into stores, people will talk really slowly to you or be really rude to you because they assume you’re an immigrant and they can get away with it. So, I think when you meet someone you kind of judge, like what kind of non-Muslim am I meeting?

(Noor, Research Participant)

On the long flights from New York to London, I would imagine myself slowly turning brown as I neared the U.K. Or I would wonder where the halfway point was, fantasizing a moment somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean where I miraculously switched ethnicity. Confusingly, my skin color/ethnicity was somehow both fixed and variable; both an inescapable absolute and one completely defined by my geographic place.

(Ali Khan, 2009, p. 159)

Haraway (1991) uses the term “embodied knowledge” to emphasize the deconstruction of the mind/body dichotomy. She theorizes relations of difference as something other than hierarchical dominance. Haraway draws on Trinh’s (1989) concept of “inappropriate/d others” to refer to the positioning of people who refuse to adopt the binary identity of either “self” or “other” that is implicit in theories of identity. For Haraway, “(f)eminist embodiment . . . is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning” (p. 195). Identity and place are seen as a network of relations, unbound and unstable rather than fixed, challenging essentialist notions of place and being tied to the local and to face-to-face relations that are imagined as “authentic.” Boundaries are thus pushed up against and disrupted.

McDowell (1996) similarly draws attention to the ways in which movement and migration have forced us “to rethink ideas about identity, subjectivity and selfhood by disrupting another of those significant Enlightenment binaries: in this case the division between ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’ and to draw attention to the utility of ‘between-ness’” (p. 38). Migration from the formerly colonized periphery to the center collapses the distinction between the west and the rest, throwing into question western philosophical principles such as the Cartesian mind/body separation. It is significant that “us” and “them” now occupy the same geographical space. The west can no longer be identified with specific places or geographically defined people. Excluded by western philosophy, women have been “equally out of place in that discursive space called the West” (McDowell, p. 39).

Bhabha (1994) also emphasizes the impact of geographical movement on notions of identity. He suggests that hybrid identities are emerging as a consequence, theorizing the concept of a “third space,” a location “where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension particular to borderline existences” (p. 218). Bhabha’s view of the subject as multiple and fragmented echoes the subject of feminist theory:

The subjects of cultural difference do not derive their discursive authority from anterior causes – be it human nature or historical necessity – which, in a secondary move, articulate essential and expressive identities between cultural differences around the world. The problem is not of an ontological cast, where differences are effects of some more totalising, transcendent identity to be found in the past or the future. Hybrid hyphenisations emphasize the incommensurable elements as the basis of cultural identities. What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race . . . difference is neither One nor the Other, but something else besides, in-between. (p. 219)

McDowell (1996) draws a parallel between Bhabha’s notion of “hybrid hyphenisations” and bell hooks’ celebration of multiple hyphenated female identities. Identity theorized as performance

(Butler, 1990) is viewed as ongoing. The notion of subjectivity marks a crucial break with humanist conceptions of the individual, so central to western philosophy and political and social organization (Weedon, 1987). Subjectivity refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32). It is socially produced in language and as a site of struggle and potential change. The individual is “active but not sovereign” (p. 41).

The reason, I guess, for the cultural difficulty [with regard to identity] is that there are no territorial associations [with my religious group]. So what ends up happening is that the one million of us are dispersed, and there are large populations in different countries. . . So, what ends up happening is that you get this cultural mix just because everyone’s from somewhere different. (Sarah, Research participant)

Diane: Could you talk about your sense of your religious and cultural identities?

Miriam: Sure. I am a Somali girl, so I grew up Muslim. My family is Muslim but because my family didn’t grow up in Somalia, my family is fragmented in terms of where everyone came from. So we have all these different cultures merging in my household. My mother grew up in Yeoman, my dad grew up in Somalia and Germany, and so coming together we are united in the fact that biologically, I guess, we’re Somali and we’re all Muslim. But my mother’s own religious education was patchy at best. She knows stuff but it was hard for her to impart a lot of stuff to me. I went to Koran school when I was younger but . . . I’m one of those ‘ignorant Muslims’ (indicating quotations with her hands), in that I know the basics but if you get specialized, I’m lost. So it’s always been a part of my identity just because my mother has always stressed, you’re Muslim, you’re Muslim. But I don’t speak Arabic and . . . I didn’t grow up interacting with a lot of other Muslim kids. It was always sort of hard for me.

Khan (2002) disrupts the notion of a normative Muslim female identity by drawing on Bhabha’s (1988, 1990, 1994, 2006) theorizations of a hybrid third space. She envisions spaces where Muslim subjectivity is no longer “boxed in rigid boundaries” (p. xvi). She argues for the production of “supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation” (p. 114), for a third space exceeds binaries and moves us beyond dichotomous thinking. However, inhabiting hybrid subjectivities is difficult:

Ya, that's how I feel – stuck in-between. I can't totally fit into a western framework. I mean, I drink a bit, like wine or something, but there's that whole part of western culture which I just don't want to participate in. It might have something to do with the fact that I was brought up that way. So, I feel a bit isolated socially because of that. But I can't really engage with the Muslim kind of socializing because I'm a bit too western I guess... I like to think of it as liminality, which is one of my favourite concepts.

(Sarah, Research participant)

In-between spaces are ambiguous and tense. A modernist subject may seek to resolve such tension without realize its potentially productive capacities. Since the subject of poststructuralism is constituted not in advance of, but within discourse and cultural practice, the agency of such a subject lies precisely in its ongoing constitution. The “subject is neither a ground or a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process” (Butler in St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 7). What if curriculum opened to the idea that identities are negotiated rather than pre-given and fixed?

Carson (2005) argues that for social change to be realized through education there is a need to articulate an alternative theory of the subject, which would account for, “how subjectivity is constituted and reconstituted relationally through history, language and social position” (p. 8). When speaking of subjectivities, then, it is “not simply a matter of learning something new, but ...a matter of becoming someone who is different” (p. 6). For Britzman (1998) the work of learning is “not so much an accumulation of knowledge but a means for the human to use knowledge, to craft and alter itself” (p. 4). The process of auto/ethno/graphic writing may unsettle our selves, as connections between the personal, the academic, the social, the political, the historic, and the cultural are made.

Asher (2002) conceptualizes a hybrid consciousness as “a productive force/space which develops in relation to our encounters with difference” (p. 82). Subjectivity is endlessly open to revision and looking is part of this process. As I read and write I sense my subjectivity

transforming in ways I am not yet able to articulate. With Aoki (1995), “in my own becoming, I feel I am beginning to speak a vitally new language” (p. 311) even if only a stammer. As Said (2000) suggests, the postmodern subject struggles to live with tensions and contradictions even though these may feel unbearable at times:

I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one’s life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are ‘off’ and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I’d like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned to actually prefer being not quite right and out of place. (p. 295)

How might curriculum theorizing engage Said’s notion of identity as “not quite right and out of place?” What if the discursive spaces of schooling were to open to understandings of our selves and others as continuously negotiated rather than centered and stable?

Lingering notes . . .

The differences made *between* entities comprehended as absolute presences – hence the notions of *pure origin* and *true self*– are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident (the ‘onto-theology’ which characterizes Western metaphysics). They should be distinguished from the differences grasped *both between and within* entities, each of these being understood as multiple presence. Not One, not two either. ‘I’ is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. ‘I’ is, itself, *infinite layers*. Its complexity can hardly be conveyed through such typographic conventions as I, i, or I/i. Thus, I/i am compelled by the will to say/unsay, to resort to the entire gamut of personal pronouns to stay near this fleeing *and* static essence of Not-I. Whether I accept it or not, the natures of I, *i*, *you*, *s/he*, *We*, *we*, *they* and *wo/man* constantly overlap. They all display a necessary ambivalence, for the line dividing *I* and *Not-I*, *us* and *them*, or *him* and *her* is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.

(Trinh, 1989, p. 94)

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. I found I had two alternatives which to counter what in effect was the process of challenge, recognition, and exposure, questions like “What are you?”; “But Said is an Arab name”; “You’re American?”; “You’re American without an American name, and you’ve never been to America”; “You don’t look American!”; “How come you were born in Jerusalem and (p. 5) you live *here*?”; “You’re an Arab after all, but what kind are you? A Protestant?” “I do not remember that any of the answers I gave out loud to such probings were satisfactory or even memorable. My alternatives were hatched entirely on my own: one might work, say, in school, but not in church or on the street with my friends. The first was to adopt my father’s brashly assertive tone and say to myself, ‘I’m an American citizen,’ and that’s it . . .” The second of my alternatives was even less successful than the first. It was to open myself to the deeply disorganized state of my real history and origins as I gleaned them in bits, and then try to construct them into order. (Said, 2000, pp. 5–6)

Chapter 5

Negotiating¹ visual media cultures

Wherever you live, whoever you may be, once the screen lights up on your TV or PC, you become enmeshed in the world of global communications. You are connected. But connected to what? The relationship between technological *connectivity* and cultural *connection* is, in many respects, the crux, and the conundrum, that defines the problematic place of culture in the global world today.

(Bhabha, 2007, p. 2)

Dominant images that are readily accessible and immediately stimulating have done ... much damage ... in how our life stories have been told.

(Bhimani, 2006, pp. 95-96)

[R]epresentation is no longer a matter of accuracy and distortion but of identities that are produced and taken up in and through practices of representation.

(Grossberg, Wartella & Whitney, 1998, p. 220)

The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear. The photographer is always trying to colonize new experiences or find new ways to look at familiar objects—to fight against boredom. For boredom is just the reverse side of fascination: both depend on being outside rather than inside a situation, and one leads to the other.

(Sontag, 1977, p. 42)

¹ Gledhill (1992) writes: [T]he term “negotiation” implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take. As a model of meaning production, negotiation conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience (p. 195).

Reading in-between *sonare* and *videre*

Julian Wolfreys (2000) asks: what does it mean to read? As bricoleur, I ponder this question, uprooting it from the disciplinary spaces of literary theory to rewrite it into curriculum. What becomes of reading identities when it happens in a third space (Bhabha, 1990), in the messy inter/texts of teaching (Low & Palulis, 2000), through a hybrid consciousness (Asher, 2002)? How does reading inter/culturally become something other than what Wolfreys describes as “a violent act, a gesture of appropriation and disfiguration” (p. 139)? He contemplates the possibility of thinking reading differently by asking how we might “read so as to avoid having read” (p. ix). Such questions grow out of this inquiry into how we are being educated about otherness via visual media discourses, and I am drawn irresistibly to the possibilities of Aokian (2005) theorizing in-between *sonare* and *videre*.

Aokian discourse is an invitation to work the faultlines in-between. To “do” the work of reading. To labour in the text. I want to work Aokian discourse back on itself to disrupt the binary of visual and aural and call for a doubling of the one with the other – the one with an other. (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 12)

In a meditation on his schooling and teaching experiences, Aoki (1990a) describes how he had become “beholden to the metaphor of the I/eye – the I that sees” (p. 373). For Aoki, this implies an acceptance without question of “the primacy of the disembodied, objective world with its nexus of subject and object in which the prime integrating mode is the subject observing the object” (p. 373). He laments that the metaphor of the eye – or the notion of *videre* – is associated with the scientific, the technological, and the instrumentalist by curriculum workers, and prompts us to think about our dependence on words such as “insight,” “visions,” and “supervisions,” which “illuminate” our seeing. He asks what “other ways of being in the world” (p. 373) we might be neglecting in our lives as researchers, teachers, and students by becoming so “enchanted with the

eye” (p. 373), and incites us to “make room for *sonore*,” (p. 373). How to respond to Aoki’s call for a sonorous, embodied curriculum that “allows for polyphony” (p. 375) to open to realms “beyond the reach of the eye” (p. 375)?

Aoki’s (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005) theorizing inspires this decentering project, which disturbs humanist visual regimes – epistemological sites that “see” the world through a binary lens. How do visual encounters with others “inform the construction of social life” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 166), given vision is a cultural construction “learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature” (p. 166)? While talk and conversation “is the medium in which the exchange of meaning absolutely saturates the world” (Hall, 1997a, p. 14), the media are one of the “most powerful and extensive systems for the circulation of meaning” (p. 14). Much of what we learn about others we learn through the visually-orientated mass media (Grossberg et al., 2006; Henry & Tator, 2002; Macedo, 2007; Stack & Kelly, 2006). What if – in working toward a hybrid consciousness – we were to inquire not only into our face-to-face encounters with otherness, but also our interactions with the proliferation of images swirling freely and largely unquestioned between local and global contexts?

Most are unaware of the ways we are being educated and positioned by the media because their pedagogies tend to be “invisible and absorbed unconsciously” (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 4). However, given their ubiquitous presence and authority, Kellner and Share (2007) argue it would be irresponsible to continue to ignore these forms of socialization and education. Perhaps this is especially so with regards to images. These hugely influential unofficial curricular sites saturate our field of vision to such a degree that we barely seem to notice their presence. Media education is now being identified as an essential part of the curriculum all across North America, but much work remains to be done to bring it more fully into the classroom (Media Awareness Network,

2010; Kellner & Share, 2005; 2007; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2005; Yates, 2004). The importance of visual media literacy is now becoming increasingly recognized as a key component in media studies programs (Lipschultz & Hilt; 2007). What is hearable and seeable in a given encounter with a material body or a visual representation, and who has the power to circulate meanings about whom? As Hall (1997a) suggests, “the issue of power can never be bracketed out from the question of representation” (p. 14). Clifford (1988) asks: How might we “dislodge the ground from which persons and groups securely represent others” (p. 22)?

Drawing from less familiar, experimental corners of the epistemological bazaar (Kincheloe, 2008), where doubt becomes an ethical imperative, I juxtapose theory with images, readings, and narratives of lived experience, to engage questions surrounding visual media cultures and inter/cultural relations. In this chapter, research participants’ readings of visual media depictions of Muslim women are placed alongside my readings of photographs of Muslim women I took while living in Pakistan and Iran, to create an intertextual staging of the complex processes by which shifting discourses constitute subjectivities. Dwelling in tensioned curricular spaces midst *sonare* and *videre*, in-between material bodies and those depicted in visual cultures, how could we practice embodied acts of reading which “open rather than foreclose on reading” (Wolfreys, 2000, p. 18) in ongoing struggles toward a hybrid consciousness (Asher, 2002)? What do our readings suggest about our implication in language?

Reading images in the news media

Knowing my interest in this topic, a number of people have passed images on to me. The image on the following page arrived in my faculty mailbox from Dr. Stanley, with the following message: “This came with my *Globe and Mail* – it was a subscription drive!”

An instantly recognizable sign of difference, a Muslim woman in neqab provides a convenient subject for politicians and others to question multiculturalism, and sells newspapers and magazines. The imaginary category “Muslim woman” is thus produced and circulated in public spaces as the “truth” about Muslim women, while the voices of women, themselves, are seldom represented . . . let alone listened to.

The covered face
can tell a story
of a boundary erected, contact broken.
(Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 203)



The marking of difference is always highly charged . . . contrasts usually imply hierarchy... the marking of exotic difference brings ranking into play. Exotic practices are implicitly contrasted with Western practices, and, in the imagination of most readers, found wanting. (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 276)

Subscription drive flyer.

Cover image from: *Maclean's Magazine* (March, 2007).

Noor: Even just the title of that, I think it's so offensive. *Do they need rules?* Are they like these, you know, uncivilized human beings that don't know how to function in society so they need rules? You put a picture of her, and highlight it red, "*Need Rules*" [and] people, from this image, what they're going to take is, "Muslim" and "need rules." That's what they're going to take from this image. (Written response to questionnaire).

Leila: Wow. [What] strikes me is the headline! (a) [It is] totally problematic in it's tone and wording; and (b) [it] creates a very strange dichotomy with the picture. Western culture is socialized to believe that covered women are less free than western women, which is problematic and a whole other can of worms. Anyway, the headline implies that the woman on the cover is lawless and disrespectful to Canadian culture while simultaneously not free because of her head covering. It is a confusing impression to me and I'm not entirely sure what the cover should be saying to me...As an aside, the use of the word *tolerance* with reference to immigrants (the use of the word *tolerance* in general) implies condescension and angers me, so there is also that... (Written response to questionnaire).

Miriam: This picture, it's saying all Muslim women are dressed like this, all in black and almost fully covered. Why say "immigrant" and show only a Muslim woman? What they are implying is that all immigrants are Muslims (which is incorrect to the highest degree) and that they are an uncivilized and perhaps barbaric people who need a master to set the rules for them to follow obediently. (Written response to questionnaire).

During the period when this image appeared in *Maclean's Magazine*, there was a great deal of media coverage across Canada around the question of whether or not Muslim women should be required to uncover in order to vote in upcoming Quebec elections. These are the details amidst this barrage of media noise and confusion that continue to stand out for me:

The (vast) majority of Muslim women in Quebec don't wear niqabs, and none are on record as asking Elections Quebec for the right to vote without showing faces. Concordia graduate student Afifa Naz, 25, doesn't understand why this has become an election issue. Naz, who wears the traditional full face veil, said she and most other women would have no problem showing their faces to a poll clerk.

(CBC News Online. Friday, March 23, 2007)

The Council on American Islamic Relations Canada is concerned about possible backlash brought on by the new rules. "The chaos that preceded the Quebec election stigmatized a lot of people, and so a lot of people were actually scared to vote," said Sarah Elgazzar, a spokeswoman with the council. Only a small number of Muslim women wear the niqab or burka, and they have never asked for special treatment, Elgazzar said.

(CBC News Online. Friday, September 7, 2007)

The lack of self-restraint on the part of the Quebec media was noted by Taylor and Bouchard [*Quebec Commission on Reasonable Accommodation*, 2008]. In their final report they accused the media of not only being sensationalist, but indeed fomenting the so-called "accommodation crisis," when there wasn't one. "Trivial incidents" had been blown out of proportion.

(Siddiqui, 2008, p. 12)

It is in the midst of this complex discursive scene that I wish to linger, for as Palulis and Low (2005) note, “intertextual weavings are everywhere. (p. 4). What conditions make it possible to hear one narrative and not another amidst the din of public debate over difference that takes place in our everyday conversations, and in the spaces of schooling and the mass media?

It is the in-between spaces between conversations that invoke close readings and make things complicated – that keep things open – aporetic readings that take unexpected turns. (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 4)

How do we invite the complexity of lived worlds into the materiality of the classroom when official curricula stubbornly continue to privilege reductive knowledge, valued for its instrumental efficiency, ease of delivery, and measurability? Where are the spaces for the difficulties and tensions? For subjective, embodied, active, live(d) forms of meaning making?

Theorizing “seeing” in curriculum studies

Mitchell (2002) describes “visuality” as “practices of seeing the world and especially of seeing other people” (p. 166). He theorizes “the veil of familiarity and self-evidence that surrounds the experience of seeing” by turning it into “a problem for analysis” (p. 166). This is not self-evident, for seeing is a paradox:

[V]ision itself is invisible ...we cannot see what seeing is. (p. 166)

Mitchell suggests a need to put seeing “on display” and make it accessible to analysis, which he refers to as “showing seeing” (p. 166). Since visuality is a cultural construction, “learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature . . . [It] is deeply involved with human societies, with ethics and politics, aesthetics, and the epistemology of seeing and being seen” (p. 166). Visual culture is not limited to the study of images or media, but “extends to the everyday practices of seeing and

showing, especially those we take to be immediate or unmediated” (p. 175). He suggests analysis be “less concerned with the meaning of images than with their lives and loves” (p. 170).

Rose (2001) explains, that as a form of visibility that pre-exists the subject, the Lacanian *gaze* “allows a more complex visibility to be seen” (p. 124). Culturally constituted, this is the visibility into which we, as subjects, are born. Lacan’s (1977) theorization of a “*screen of signs*” between our eyes and the world – made up out of the multiple discourses of vision that are built into the social arena – brings a complexity to “seeing” which I bring to my curriculum theorizing. We learn to read the social world through the codes of recognition that come to us from our social milieu. We are thus “inserted into systems of visual discourse” (Rose, p. 120) that saw the world before we did. Since the gaze always emerges within the field of vision and “since we ourselves are always being photographed by it even as we look, all binarizations of spectator and spectacle mystify the scopic relations in which we are held” (Silverman, 1992, p. 151). Silverman’s conceptualization of an “ethics of the field of vision” (which I will return to in Chapter 6), works against the cultural construction of visualized identities. Binary distinctions may be disrupted through Lacan’s notion of the gaze, which allows a more complicated seeing to become possible.

In their analysis of *National Geographic Magazine*, Lutz and Collins (1993) inquire into the significance of the gaze for intercultural relations, describing the photograph as an “intersection of gazes.” In other words, a photograph is “not simply a captured view of the *other*, but rather a dynamic site at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect” (p. 187). Lutz and Collins describe this intersection as a “complex, multidimensional object” which “allows viewers of the photo to negotiate a number of different identities both for themselves and for those pictured” (p. 187), and may be “one route by which the photograph threatens to break frame and reveal its social context” (p. 187). Critiquing the idea of universal claims such as “the male gaze”, they

consider race, class, and gender as key factors determining looking relations. For Lacan (1977), the gaze comes from the other who constitutes the self in that looking. This look that the self receives is unsatisfying, however, because the other does not look at the self in the way that it would wish to be looked at. Bhabha (1983) draws on Lacan and Freud to argue that there is ambivalence in colonial looking relations, for “there is always the threatened return of the look” (p. 33). Lutz and Collins, reading Bhabha, contend that the look at the racialized other places the viewer in the uncomfortable position of both recognizing himself or herself in the other and denying that recognition (p. 191). In a decolonizing move, Asher (2002) incites educators to deconstruct processes of othering in relation to curriculum and teaching toward a hybrid consciousness. I extend Asher’s call to include not only our face-to-face encounters but also encounters with visual representations of otherness. What might reading in-between *sonare* and *videre* suggest about the constitution of subjectivities within and between communities? What if we were to try to account for our entanglement in looking relations as they are mediated by language? As Fiske (1986) suggests, meaning lies not in the image, but in the cultural discourses surrounding it.

In-between stories from the classroom & the mass media

People will sometimes randomly ask me about the Palestine-Israel situation. It feels strange. And they’ll be like, “*Oh, do you support suicide bombing?*” I’ve had that question before and it’s very, very awkward. Why would you ask someone that? It comes up on a fairly regular basis. You’d be surprised! People automatically think: “Oh, she’s Muslim, clearly she wants to blow herself up.”... It’s so frustrating. I was born in Canada!!
(Leila, Research participant)

Leila does not cover and, as a racialized black woman, does not visually conform to stereotypical assumptions many have about Muslim women. However, once fellow-students learn she is Muslim, certain questions come up. The category “Muslim woman” brings forth particular narratives and the effects on everyday lives are far-reaching. How do we interrupt the process

whereby some narratives stick to particular bodies with such ease? What makes it possible to assume if someone is Muslim he/she has insider knowledge about suicide bombings?

Leila's experience of being asked about suicide bombings echoes the experiences of Amal, the protagonist in Adel-Fattah's (2006) adolescent novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* As a young Australian Muslim attending an elite high school, Amal is also faced with having to respond to fellow-students' assumptions about her Muslim identity. In the following excerpt, Amal recounts a conversation she has with her friend Lara, another student at her school:

Lara approaches me during the week and asks me...whether I'd be willing to give a speech . . . on the topic of Islam and terrorism.

"It'll be really valuable, Amal. I mean, what those Muslims did in Bali was so horrible, so if you could explain to everybody why they did it and how Islam justifies it, we could all try to understand. What do you think?"

"I think *no*."

"No? Oh, come on, Amal! *Please*. It'll really spice up our next Forum meeting. Everybody's got loads of questions and you're the perfect one to answer them."

"Why? Because I'm Muslim?"

"Yeah, obviously." She gives me a 'well, duh' expression. Why do I have to deal with this? I feel like my head is permanently stuck inside an oven. Every time something happens in the world, and the politicians start barking out about Islamic terrorists and the journalists start flashing their headlines, it's as though they're turning up the oven heat dial. My head starts to roast and burn and I need air, coolness, somebody to keep me from exploding.

"You're Christian, right?"

"...Yeah... what's that got to do with anything?"

"OK, well I'll give a speech if you give a speech about the Ku Klux Klan."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, why not? They were really religious, so obviously what they did was textbook Christianity, right? And how about those Israeli soldiers bombing Palestinian homes or shooting kids?"

"Hey, you don't have to --"

"And while we're at it, maybe somebody else could talk about the IRA. Remember we covered a bit of it in Legal Studies last term? I'm just *dying* to understand how the Bible could allow people to throw bombs and still go to church." (pp. 250–251)

Stonebanks (2010), a Canadian educator and scholar with family ties to Iran, recounts a story about his wife that has similar undertones. Her story of a staffroom conversation is a lived

example of meanings about Muslims circulating in an educational context through everyday talk, and it attests to the power of the unofficial curriculum of the mass media to define otherness.

Stonebanks writes:

How much is the dehumanization of Islam a part of our schools? When my wife who is of English European descent announced in her staffroom that she was engaged to marry me, she received some congratulations but also overwhelming gasps that many of them had seen the film *Not Without my Daughter* and would never let their daughters marry an Iranian. Can anyone imagine the same response to a young teacher saying she's marrying someone of Irish descent? Would they warn her about *Angela's Ashes*? (p. 42)

How do we shake off stories that stubbornly stick to certain bodies? What assumptions do we have about Muslim and/or Iranian students in our classrooms and what is the source of our knowledge? How do we situate our selves in relation to the mass media's curriculum on Muslims? The media has a great deal of cultural authority, and "the average white middle-class reader may find little in his or her everyday experience to contradict it" (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 230).

The act of reading ... plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. (Allen, 2000, p. 1)

Muslim females reading terror through an image

The dramatic image on the following page appeared on the cover of *Newsweek Magazine*, in December 2006. Participants were requested to provide a written personal response to this cover image via a questionnaire that included this image and others.



Leila: I actually have little problem with this cover when considered on its own. It's blunt and straight-forward and if you're going to talk about a terrorist woman, having a woman on the cover is not all that silly. However, when considered in light of all the other images, it just feels like there are no good portrayals of Muslim women. They are consistently some sort of insidious thing and, of course, every Muslim woman covers fully – in black. There is no variety [in media representations] and that is troubling. The impression given is that Muslims come in one shape, size, colour, and covering and that not only screws up non-Muslims, it hurts Muslims as well.

Miriam: In this image the message is that again women in black are all terrorists and if you see one in the streets you should glare at her, give her dirty looks, and maybe pull the children away as if she has some disease. They are warning the country to watch out for these women.

Sahar: They can't say, "*Islam's battle of the sexes*" because Islam does not change its rules. It is various cultures re-forming Islam to what they want it to be.

Tina:

- 1) They are showing a female with a uni-brow, which implies that all Middle Eastern women who cover up are anything BUT women, since they do not respect femininity;
- 2) Again, Muslims are being associated with terrorism – "*Al Qaeda*" – so when non-Muslims and Canadians see this, they are seeing a link between Muslims and terrorism.
- 3) Any person can wear that veil and associate it with Al Qaeda. However, the consequence will fall on all Muslims.

On troubling stereotypes

In mainstream educational discourse, the concept of *stereotypes* is a familiar concept we often draw upon in our discussions around social justice issues. Representation thus becomes a matter of accuracy versus stereotyping, which is the process of distorting the depiction of a particular group. To talk in terms of stereotypes is to assume a particular group of people is inevitable and natural, “that its identity is singular and stable and exists independently of how it is represented in cultural codes in the media” (Grossberg et al. 1998, p. 233). In this view, the “struggle over representation...takes the form of offering one fully constituted, separate, and distinct identity in place of another” (Grossberg et al., 2006, p. 234). However, as Grossberg explains, in our electronic age, many people have a much more fragmented and fluid sense of their identities and they are much less committed to any single identity the way previous generations may have been. This does not mean stereotyping no longer exists, but the concept is now being troubled, given the assumptions it perpetuates. Trinh (in Trinh & Kobayashi, 2006) makes these comments in an interview:

Kobayashi: You don’t completely denounce [stereotypes], but rather try to use them for your own purposes . . . Can you state how you use stereotypes or rather your attitude toward them?

Trinh: First of all, I rarely use the term stereotype myself. Ideology criticism has taught us to denounce reductive forms of representation, but it has serious limits. Most of the time this kind of criticism leads to a dead end because it tends to block the very space of criticism with angry accusations in which “stereotype” is merely equated with lies and falseness: You’re repeating stereotypes of Us! Okay, but each one of us can accuse the other of falling prey to stereotypes when it comes to endorsing Our authority on the matter. So where does this lead us? Nowhere. We simply throw stones at one another and stop at charges such as: “You are making a stereotype out of this and that.” But if someone asks, “What makes it a stereotype? How does it function?” or “You are making a stereotype with this image and investing into this stereotype, why?” and further inquiries about how you work with that stereotype, then it starts becoming interesting. What happens then to the stereotype? Assuming that we agree on why it is a stereotype, it can, as a deliberate device, predetermine the way you see things or accordingly serve to change it. You start somewhere in order to go somewhere else, and something ready-made gets

subtly unmade. With humor and irony, for example, stereotypes can be used both to expose and to undermine stereotypes themselves... So for me, rather than talking about stereotypes, I would say that our languages and images are full of clichés; that in our desire to grasp things quickly we tend to fix things and to arrest forms rather than follow them in their shifting realities. (p. 163)

To discuss issues of representation in terms of stereotypes is politically necessary at times but in other instances may limit how we think about identities.

Hall (1997a) agrees a visual representation cannot be thought of as inherently positive, neutral, or negative, for we bring our own meanings to the text *as we read*. Every society tends, “with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant world order*, though it is neither univocal or uncontested” (Hall, 1980, p. 134). Interpretation is therefore dynamic and inevitably shifts over time and in different contexts, for it depends upon the social, historical, and political context in which a given image appears and also on the social and cultural locations of the reader. As Lutz and Collins (1993) assert, “the reader’s gaze is structured by a large number of cultural elements” but there is not one reader’s gaze. We can only speak of a “singular reader” and of the text as a single entity with a single meaning “so long as the agency, enculturated nature, and diversity of experience of readers is denied” (p. 196). In addition, there is the question of the split subject. Trinh (1992e) describes the subject as “a fragmenting and weaving of a multiplicity of I’s, none of which truly dominates – a subject on trial” (p. 237). As subjectivity shifts in the unstable networks of language, interpretations may shift.

Hall (1997c) also stresses reading “against what isn’t there” (p. 15), for “what is not said is as important to what is said as the things that are actually in the picture” (p. 15). The contestation and struggle over what is and is not represented in the media is referred to in cultural studies and media studies as “the politics of the image” (Jhally, 1997, p. 2). As Hall (1997a; 1997b; 1997c)

points out, cultural studies has paid a great deal of attention to practices of representation, which is always connected to the way that power operates in society. The notion of representation carries with it a common sense notion that something was already there and is simply *re-presented* through the media. Hall explains the other understanding of representation is that it *stands in for* something else. However, there is never one, true, fixed meaning about any social event or person. There can be no meaning until after something or someone is represented and again, different people and sectors of society may read the representation differently. This means that “representation is not *outside* of the event, not *after* the event, but *within* the event itself; it is constitutive of it” (Hall, 1997c, p. 8). Hall thus argues images be interrogated, rather than accepting them at face value. However, as stated, this process is not simply about “trying to understand the distortions which the media make of a meaning whose truth we could somehow find independently of the media” (p. 9). Rather, it is to analyze how various meanings enter into an image and how they constitute the subject or event depicted in the image as a site of cultural production. Hall defines culture as:

the maps of meaning, the frameworks of intelligibility, the things which allow us to make sense of a world that exists, but it is ambiguous as to its meaning until we’ve made sense of it. (p. 9)

Meaning thus arises out of the “shared conceptual maps which groups or members of a culture or society share together” (p. 9). Cultural Studies privileges the notion of representation as giving meaning, giving culture a central role. In other words, culture is not something you happen to have been born into, but is “literally the way without which we would find the world unintelligible” (p. 9), and it is continually being produced.

We can therefore only get meaning from an image, Hall (1997c) suggests, if we position ourselves in relation to what it is telling, for the viewer is implicated in the production of meaning.

It is “not that the image *has* a meaning” (p. 16). Rather, meaning is constructed in the relations of looking at the image, which the image constructs for us, and each image has a range of potential meanings. For Hall, the meaning a given reader makes depends on his/her “investment in the image or involvement in what the image is saying or doing” (p. 17). We talk about the images that “flood and barrage us with meanings . . . as if we can stand outside them and allow them to be there” (p. 17). However:

The fact is that, if we are concerned about the proliferation of images in our culture, it is because they constantly construct us, through our fantasy relationship to the image, in a way which implicates us in the meaning. And that is what is, in a sense, bothering us. We’re not bothered because we are barraged by something which means nothing to us. We are bothered precisely by the fact that we are caught. We do have an investment in the meaning which is being taken from it. (p. 17)

What, then, do our readings of otherness tell us about our investment in particular meanings?

Given the complexity of meanings circulating in any discursive context, it would be impossible to isolate out and draw direct and reductive causal links between media depictions and the lived experiences of young Canadian Muslim females. This is not to say that these meanings do have material effects, but these cannot be said to be stable or singular. Participant readings of images attest to this complicated discursive scene. In recreating moments of entanglement through writing, “seemingly disconnected ideas come together in provocative and inventive ways without ever becoming resolved” (Springgay, 2008b, p. 6). Springgay argues, “the performance of entanglement creates new openings and raises questions rather than seeking certainty or clarity” (p. 6). We can’t predict what meanings will emerge in the inter/texts between theory, media discourses, participant and researcher readings, lived experience, and the reader, but we can set the stage for something to happen.

The mass media in our everyday lives

When I began this project, I was curious about what it was like living as a young Muslim woman in Canada today after the events of 9/11, especially with the dominance of Orientalist discourse circulating in many popular cultural sites. Was it as difficult, as I assumed it must be? At the start of a focus group session², I asked two questions in a written questionnaire to get a sense of whether the media was, in fact, an issue for these women. Some of their written responses follow:

Question #1: What are your overall impressions of how Muslims are portrayed in the mass media (i.e., on television, in films, in magazines and newspapers, etc.)?

Noor: I notice two dominant themes:

- a) Muslim women as oppressed or sad victim; as subdued/shy; as covered; and,
- b) Muslim women as angry, strict, “other” – totally different from any other North American women. They don’t show the average Muslim woman in the context of North America and that’s what they should be showing.

Miriam: Overall, Muslims are not well portrayed in the media. The media is very selective, if they do show Muslims. There is always that “they-are-so-different” tone. Rarely is it a positive thing. I think the show *Little Mosque on the Prairie* makes a good point about this. They go over the issues that Muslims face in this society.

Tina: Muslims in Canada are portrayed in a less cruel manner than in the U.S. For example, if a person was to kill/rape/bomb you will see in the newspaper, a “MUSLIM” man did such-and- such. But we never see a “JEWISH” or “CHRISTIAN” man did such-and-such. And it definitely shouldn’t be like this because it is wrong to involve religion in the bad actions of a criminal. Overall, Muslims in Canada are discriminated against.

Leila: Women are conservative and oppressed or radically revolutionary . . . Men are terrorists or are unseen, though Muslim male rappers like Mos Def enjoy good press. I almost feel as though I am not being fair to the media, but the reality is, I rarely see anyone whom I identify with on a religious or a value level.

² Four participants did not participate in the focus group sessions. Two indicated the media was not an issue for them and they were not interested in that aspect of the study, and two were unavailable. The latter two instead chose to respond to images independently, in the form of a written questionnaire that included the images considered during the focus group.

Question #2: To what degree, if at all, has the portrayal of Muslims in the mass media been of personal interest and/or concern to you? Explain.

Noor: What people see on TV is their assumption of me. These assumptions (lots of them) include where I come from, who and what my family is like, etc. . . . When “they” meet me and I’m not “oppressed”, [and they realize] that I have a sense of humour, that I don’t *just* wear black, etc., they think that I’m *different* than the average Muslim woman, but in fact I *am* the average Muslim woman.

Miriam: It has not been much of a concern to me, mostly because everyone already has their mind set one way and it is hard to change their way of thinking. They don’t want to change their minds. Everyone has different opinions and I’ve learned to accept it. Those that know I’m Muslim are a lot more informed on the religion and those that don’t, they just treat me “normal.” I don’t cover so they don’t even know I’m Muslim.

Tina: Some things I think about include: Muslims wearing hijab were not allowed into a Catholic school until recently. . . A nine-year-old Muslim girl with the hijab on was not allowed to play soccer because of the hijab. . . Being refused a job because of your Muslim outfit, your hijab. (This was my personal experience as well).

Leila: As I get more interested in the world around me, it has become something of interest. I check out blogs, I read more about the Muslim feminist movement, and I look a lot more at Muslim visibility. I feel like there isn’t enough attention paid to the second generation Muslim experience because that is where so many people are coming from right now – negotiating their cultural values in a very different westernized world.

Leila: I feel like even media that is progressive drops the ball when it comes to religion. *Degrassi* is arguably the “it” show for heavy issues told in an entertaining way, and religious tensions and values are rarely explored in as much depth as is needed. Canada is a veritable cultural and religious smorgasbord and it is naïve to not even have one regular Muslim character anymore (the token Muslim girl left a few seasons back...). I think I have more to say, but its not coming out in written language properly.

After participants responded to these two general questions in writing, we discussed the impact of mass media in their lives as we looked at images of covered Muslim women projected onto a large screen. I saw this as an opportunity for participants to “read back” to media portrayals. At the time, there were few female Muslim voices out in the public spaces of the

media, but this is changing. As we read and discussed the images, stories of their personal experiences emerged . . .

A story is *not* just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can't simply be stopped at someone's request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end. (Trinh, 1989, p. 133)

Diane: Is the media an issue in your lives ... and if so, in what ways?

Tina: Yes. In grade twelve ... I did a project...about this specific topic. And I talked about Muslims and how they are portrayed in Canada. And I'm pretty sure we all heard about the nine year old girl who was not allowed to play soccer because of her hijab. And then another girl, she was eleven years old and was doing Tae-kwon-do I think.

Diane: Yes.

Tina: And I think it's all about discrimination. I even have a personal experience. I went to a job interview just recently. When the person hears my name, it doesn't sound Muslim. But when I went to the interview, like on the phone she [the employer] sounded different than when I went to her in person. [When I got there] she didn't shake my hand. I have been to many job interviews and the first thing an employer does is shake your hand. She wasn't even making eye contact with me – nothing, nothing, nothing. And it didn't even take two minutes for the interview. So, I felt discriminated against. I felt uncomfortable. I'm like, you know what? I took the time to come here, at least have respect. When I'm talking to you, like, please show some respect. So, that's a personal experience that happened in Canada.

Diane: What about the response from classmates to your presentation? ...

Tina: It's funny because you have people with bizarre thoughts. Like: "*Ya, they shouldn't have the hijab on because it's a safety issue.*" I'm like, actually, they did create, in fact, hijabs that go with soccer policy, so ... it doesn't present any hazards for yourself or others. And they were still: "*No, they shouldn't be allowed to wear it.*" And I was really surprised. It was like – wow – are there actually people in this world that think like that?

Noor: I think what is being shown in the media just makes a big impact on how other people view you. I think when you see something in the media, we really take anything we see in the media, and books, and the paper, at face value. We accept them as the truth. So, when the only images non-Muslims are seeing of Muslim woman are oppressed figures ... And I find a lot of images of Muslim women either look very sad, they're victims, or they're very angry. You know, they'll show a funeral scene where the women are hitting themselves. They're showing these images of extreme moments in their lives and non-Muslims see these images and then they go out in the streets of everyday Ottawa. And they'll see a woman who wears hijab and they'll think every woman is like that woman who they saw in the paper who was at a funeral, who had just lost a family member, who just lost

their home. And they treat every Muslim woman like they feel sorry for us, and we're seen as a victim...

Tina: So true.

Noor: But they don't realize I'm actually the average Muslim woman. Like, the average Muslim woman is a normal person. We're out there and we're so diverse. It's not just what you see in the media, the third world country, the women they show there who are suffering and dying and losing family members. I think that's what a lot of people see with the media images.

Miriam: (laughing) [I have a] funny story. Okay, so I was talking with my roommate and – I live in residence, so I have three roommates – and we were talking about the whole thing, with like taking a picture of one situation where, let's say a Muslim is crying out and lashing out. And I was talking to my roommate about this one funeral that I went to in the summer. This was the summer of grade nine, I think. And over there – this was in Syria – they had a funeral, and the person that just died was unmarried. He was in his late twenties. And his mom was going crazy over him. It was really depressing. It was literally the worst two weeks that I've spent over there ... People were carrying the coffin and everything and the mom, the sisters, and his whole family, they were crying out and everything. And my roommate made a comment. She was like: "*Oh, so it was just at that funeral? I thought they were always like that.*" (laughs) And I looked at her, and I'm like, okay. Well, what can you tell them? That's what they see ...

Another personal experience: I played badminton in high school and at one of the tournaments I was wearing pants, track pants. And I go over there to play, and then the judge guy, he's like, "*Oh, wait. Hold on.*" And apparently track pants are a hazard to safety! You're not allowing track pants on the court. And so I explained to him that for religious reasons I don't wear shorts and he still wouldn't believe me. And then my coach had to go over there and like, practically threaten him in order for him to let me play in the tournament. Now, that was really crazy. I never thought that could happen ... I was so shocked.

Noor: That's actually happened to me, too. I used to play soccer and every other game, depending who the ref was, they'd stop in the middle of the game and they'd blow their whistle, and they'd be like: "*She's not in proper uniform.*" I didn't even wear hijab back then and I think that's part of it. They think that if you wear hijab, that's your only excuse.

Miriam: Yeah.

Noor: If you don't wear hijab then why can't you wear shorts? They just assume that if you wear hijab then you have to follow all the rules. They don't get it that there are some women who follow the religion very strictly but they don't wear hijab, or vice versa. So, I think they just assume that because I didn't wear hijab then why wasn't I wearing shorts? Well, because I'm Muslim and I don't wear shorts. And then when they think of a Muslim, they think "hijab," like fully covered.

Miriam: That's so true.

Noor: And then they think, racially, they may think that your skin is lighter (referring to Miriam), so maybe they didn't believe that she was Muslim.

Looking at portrayals of covered Muslim women in the media prompted participants to recount stories of their own experiences related to dress codes. I read their stories as evidence these young women find themselves being judged according to other people's assumptions about "what a Muslim is"... against a stereotype. Noor and Miriam both faced challenges when they wanted to wear long sweat pants to play soccer and badminton during school extra-curricular sporting activities. The fact neither wore hijab confused officials, who were unable to imagine a Muslim female without full Islamic covering. Tina is promptly refused the opportunity even to speak during a job interview the moment the employer sets eyes on her black covering. Why did this potential employer respond in this way when she saw her? While they had a fruitful conversation by telephone, who did she now imagine Tina was now that she was visible? What narratives was the employer caught up in? Tina is surprised when her classmates agree women should not be permitted to wear hijab for sports such as soccer – even those especially designed for soccer. If a special sports hijab poses no danger, why would these students continue to object to women wearing them? Noor suggests "what is being shown in the media just makes a big impact on how other people view you," while Miriam wonders: "What can you tell them? That's what they see."

Breaking News: Female bomber kills 43 at food center in Pakistan

On Christmas morning I heard on the radio that a female suicide bomber killed 43 people in northwestern Pakistan. I went online a couple of hours later to look for a print version of the story and it didn't take long to find one. I cut and pasted it into this text as a stark reminder that in our digital age we negotiate our identities in-between local and global contexts in new ways. How will curriculum theory and pedagogy respond to this reality?

(Watt, Personal Narrative)



A Pakistani army soldier stands near the World Food Programme distribution point after a suicide bombing occurred in Khar, the main town of lawless Bajaur tribal district on December 25, 2010.

AFP/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

KHAR, PAKISTAN — A female suicide bomber detonated her explosives-laden vest killing at least 43 people at an aid distribution center in northwestern Pakistan on Saturday, while army helicopter gunships and artillery killed a similar number of Islamic militants in neighboring tribal regions near the Afghan border, officials said. The bombing appeared to be the first suicide attack staged by a woman in Pakistan, and it underscored the resilience of militant groups in the country's tribal belt despite ongoing military operations against them... In Bajur, the bomber, dressed in a traditional women's burqa, was queuing to enter the food aid distribution center in the town of Khar when she was questioned by police at a check point, local government official Tariq Khan said. "Police asked for her identity, but she ran toward the centre and lobbed hand grenades at the police," Khan said. "She exploded herself when she reached the crowd" of about 300. Khan said six policemen were among the 43 killed and more than 102 people were wounded, at least 30 critically. (A. Khan, 2010, Dec. 25).

Photographs, culture, and memory: Photographic encounters as *currere*

My approach to deconstructing "othering at the individual and systematic levels" (Asher, 2002, p. 83) also involves an examination of my own photographic encounters with Muslim women in personal photos and media images. From within the tense, dynamic spaces of post-reconstructuralist curriculum theorizing, I draw upon feminist scholarship (Kuhn, 2007; Kuhn and Emkio, 2006) to expand *currere* (Pinar, 1975) by linking photography with cultural memory. Onyx and Small (2001) consider memory work a feminist method that connects theory and

experience. Memories are discursive and there is growing interest in how they operate as a type of cultural text (Radstone, 2000). Kuhn (2007) describes memory work as:

[A]n active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory. Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as “truth” but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for its meanings and possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory. (p. 284)

Drawing on memory gives me – as auto/ethno/graphic inquirer – some access to the processes whereby I am becoming a subject in society. Particular events that are remembered and the way that these are reconstructed play an important role in the construction of the self (Crawford et al., 1992 in Onyx, 2001). Photos permit us to return to a moment and a place in the past, and offer us the opportunity to intervene in “the relations of looking through which we locate ourselves” (Kuhn & Emkio, p. 2). They can tell something about the “forgotten histories that shape our social landscape” (p. 2), interrupting the colonial gaze that positions us in the social world. Photography makes us aware of “the optical unconscious . . . the invisible structures of seeing through which we view our worlds and through which they have been in part constituted” (Benjamin, in Kuhn and Emkio, p. 4). Kuhn and Emkio suggest the potential for a radical politics in recognizing “the fragmented, contradictory stories and the excluded voices . . . stories and voices that demand that we acknowledge multiple ways of seeing and that, in turn, question the basis of our own subject positions and social order” (p. 4).

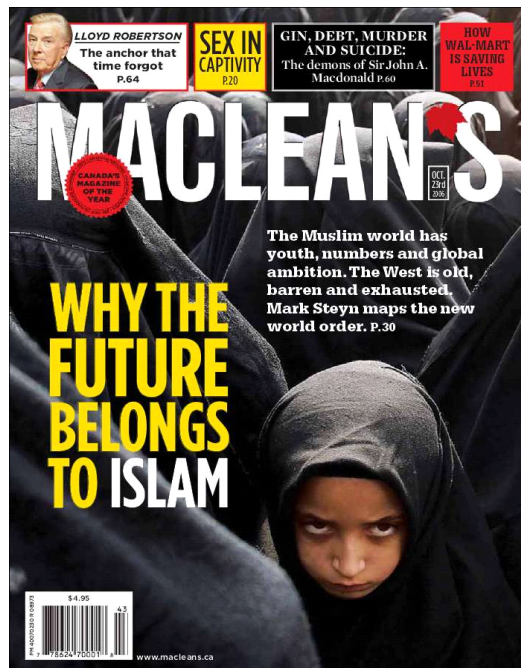
By reviewing photographs I took of Muslim women while living in Iran and Pakistan, I pose questions about how my subjectivity is bound up with the photos I decided to take. With Hirsch and Spitzer (in Kuhn & Emkio, 2006) I view these images as “a threshold” (p. 6) into memory for what they suggest about my self-formation. Radstone (2000) reminds us that the relationship between past events and our memories of them is far from imitative. We cannot see

the past in any unmediated form, for it is “unavoidably rewritten, revised, through memory; and memory is partial: things get forgotten, misremembered, repressed” (p. 286). Since I was the photographer, my images are artifacts of actual face-to-face encounters with Muslim women at the time the photos were taken. Kuhn (2007) describes this memory work as inquiry that “radiates outwards from the image, eventually to embrace even broader cultural, social, even historical issues” (p. 286). How do I locate my self in relation to others in the memory stories emerging from past visual encounters with Muslim women? What personal, social, and cultural meanings arise?

Reading Muslim women on the cover of *Maclean's Magazine*

Scholars examining visual media representations contend that Muslims are frequently constructed as *other* in the North American context. As Siddiqui (2008) points out, one recent example is an article that appeared in “Canada’s National News Magazine,” *Maclean's*, in October of 2006, entitled “*The Future Belongs to Islam.*” While accusations were made against the content of the article for producing Islamophobic discourse³ I don’t recall any discussion of the cover image and the ways it reproduces Islamophobic discourse. That cover image is on the following page:

³ For example, see Awan et al, (2010): “Human rights complaints against *Maclean's* magazine were filed in December 2007 by the Canadian Islamic Congress with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal and the Ontario Human Rights Commission. *Maclean's* magazine was accused of publishing eighteen Islamophobic articles between January 2005 and July 2007. The articles in question included a column by Mark Steyn titled “The Future Belongs to Islam.” (From: Wikipedia, *Human rights complaints against Maclean's magazine*. Retrieved June 10, 2010 from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_complaints_against_Maclean's_magazine).



My initial reaction to seeing this at a newsstand was immediate and visceral:

I am not meeting these Muslim women face-to-face, but am looking at an image of them, which isn't really them. They don't see me, or even a representation of me. There's no exchange. It's all one-way with me looking at them. But their image invokes an intense response. Where is this anger deep within me coming from? (Watt, 2008b)

I remember listening to a Muslim woman interviewed on CBC radio about this article and her response was: “Here we go again.” At the time this image appeared I was in Dr. Stanley’s *Racisms in Education* graduate course. When I presented this cover photo during a poster session, Dr. Stanley encouraged me to inquire further into the image, which led to writing and publishing an academic paper in a media studies journal (Watt, 2008). While putting together my analysis I learned a great deal about not only about this history of this photograph, but also about how images are used in the print media. In the article, I offer my particular reading of this image, aware there can be no definitive reading, knowing that my reading tells as much about me as it does about the image. I do not believe in a relativist approach – that an image can mean *anything*. Rather, I am interested in how we offer an account of our selves, of why we read in particular

ways at particular moments. Lutz and Collins (1993) contend that our readings are “never pre-cultural or entirely idiosyncratic” (p. 219).

As previously discussed, all images are open to a multiplicity of possible meanings, but through the use of captions, headlines, and editing Maclean’s attempts to fix particular understandings of identities and social boundaries. In my research into this photograph I learned that it depicts Turkish Shiite Muslim women who are dressed in black chador as part of the observance of Ashura, the Shi’a holy day of mourning. These women are displayed on the cover of *Maclean’s*, perhaps in a sensationalist attempt to draw the consumer’s attention to the feature article written by Mark Steyn, which, in alarmist tones warns that “*the world belongs to Islam.*” The women pictured are not related in any way to the content of the article and yet are unknowingly used to visually stand in for all Muslims – an extremely diverse group often depicted in limiting ways in mass media representations. Abu-Lughod (2006) contends the “power of [such] images of veiled women is that they dull our understanding and restrict our appreciation of complexity” (p. 10). In this Maclean’s photograph, binaries are constructed between an “us” and a “them,” potentially justifying everyday acts of exclusion, or worse.

[S]pectacle never admits to itself, that it is a spectacle.
(Trinh, 1991, p. 94)

I recently came across an analysis of *Maclean’s Magazine’s* recent representations of Muslims (Awan et. al, 2010). The authors, from Osgoode Hall Law School, look at a selection of articles found in the Magazine between January 2005 and July 2007. The report underscores that the media has been “the leading factor in the growth of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment in Canadian society” (p. 14), concluding that *Maclean’s* is a “case study in Media Islamophobia.” (p. 15). Who, then, stands to benefit from the publication and mass circulation of this cover image, and how?

I was curious about how Muslim women might read a photograph like this. At what points would our readings intersect, and where would they diverge? What might their readings suggest about my own? What knowledge are we creating between us? Here are some participant readings of the *Maclean's Magazine* cover image:

Leila: Honestly, I feel like this is a deeply creepy image. The girl is slightly sickly, looks a little demonic and looks sad as hell. The image is saying to me that while the future may belong to Islam, it won't be a good future at all. If I were a youth I would be massively unsettled by that. The image lacks colour and looks oppressive and factory-like. It feels calculated to inspire fear and to create a virus-like image of Islam. On the whole, the image is completely unrepresentative of the diverse Islamic cultures. Not everyone wears a black abaya. In my 20 years on this earth, for every one black covering, I've seen 100 jewel tones scarves and hijabs. (Written response to questionnaire)

Miriam: The little girl all in black surrounded by women wearing black burkas gives the sense of mourning, depression, and oppression. She looks very sad and from the picture I would think it's because she looks defeated somehow, like she can't do anything about her sad situation. The small caption, which says, "the future belongs to Islam" sounds very sarcastic to me. Here are the women in black burkas, all covered from head to toe and the little, unsmiling girl amongst them and they say, "*The future belongs to Islam.*" It's as if they're asking, "*Is this who you want to become in the future, where there can be no happiness and little girls that never smile?*" I think this is a negative image of Islam, which will rouse negative feelings in the audience ... and from which they will draw the wrong conclusions. They might think that if Islam was the future then the world will be a sea of women all covered in black and there would be nothing in the world worth smiling for. (Written response to questionnaire)

Tina: The young girl in this picture seems sad and in a way it seems that the hijab is being forced on her. I find the writings misleading and probably not related to Muslims. Since I never read this article I don't know where the "West" is going with this. What are they hinting at? (Written response to questionnaire)

Discussion during a focus group session:

Diane: What do you think people might think when they see this image?

Noor: I think they're thinking: "*Oh, great. The future belongs to Islam. Yeah!*" (sarcastic, laughs). Look at the image – it's just a sea of black.

Miriam and Tina: Yeah.

Noor: Very sad ... the child doesn't even have a chance to look at the camera. I bet she doesn't even know that the picture was being taken. She just happened to glance up and you get this very, creepy, morbid look on her face. It's not the nicest picture of her.

Miriam: Cheery.

Noor: Exactly. And just the title: *Why the future belongs to Islam*. I think people, like for non-Muslims . . . this is something people would see as a threat to them. *I don't* like this image. I don't see how a non-Muslim would like it.

Diane: Do you have any questions about the image?

Noor: Where was this picture taken?

Diane: It's actually Istanbul.

Noor: And why are there only women?

Tina: Yeah, and why are they all black?

Diane: Ashura.

Miriam: Oh.

Tina: Okay, well, that would make sense then.

Miriam: That explains a lot.

Noor: But still, where? Like on the street? Like, where are they? Is this walking down the street and this is what you see walking down the street? You know, I don't think that's what you see when you walk down the street. I'd like to know where it was taken.

Diane: Do you think people ask that question when they see it?

Everyone: No. No way. For sure, not...

Noor: They think it is just everyday life there.

Tina: For sure.

Noor: When you walk out on the street, this is what you see.

Diane: Here's the original image. It comes from *Getty Images*, which is a stock images outlet. So, they sell images. These are marketed to the media. Any media outlet can go to *Getty Images* and pick out and purchase a picture they think goes with their story.

Noor: So they just basically pick it out randomly... So, they probably didn't even know where it was taken.

Diane: If you go to the *Getty Images* web site it will give the name of the photographer and where it was taken and the context, but that information doesn't seem to matter much to the media outlets using images like this.

On the following page is the original photograph as it appears on the *Getty Images* web site. Participant readings of this image are included below (in the form of written responses to a questionnaire):



Miriam: When put in the right context this image is no different from any others that show people mourning. These women are observing Ashura, where they are in mourning and the black burkas make sense now. There is a reason why the little girl is unsmiling but not for the one deduced from the previous image but rather because of a death, which is understandable.

Leila: According to *Wiki* – because I am nothing if not a “bad Muslim” – Ashura is a time of mourning for Shi’as. Consequently, this photo is completely unrepresentative of the normal state of Islamic women in Turkey and thus calculated to give a fantastically creepy effect. My impressions still stand in this uncropped version. The factory impression is even strengthened.

Tina: As a Muslim, I would understand why women are covered up and sad because I know what the term, *Ashura* means. If I were a non-Muslim, I would form a negative image about Muslims (seeing them as reserved and unapproachable). I think this image should have a caption under it identifying what it means ... so that people don’t misjudge and form wrong ideas and opinions.

Laughter in Kashan

Davies and Davies (2007) point out what is seeable and hearable “shifts with the interactional space the researcher inhabits, with the time and the purpose in telling, and with the discursive possibilities available (or brought to conscious awareness) at the time of each telling”

(p. 1139). One of my favourite photographs is of a group of smiling young women wearing black chadors, standing together in a garden. As I look at the image today, I bring new meanings to it. How and why have my readings of this image changed over time? What is seeable and hearable now that I couldn't see and hear as I engaged with these girls a decade ago in this beautiful Iranian garden?

The photo was taken in Fin Garden in Kashan during a weekend trip I organized. It pleased me to tour others around Iran, especially those suffering from culture shock and hesitant to leave the relative familiarity of Tehran. During my three years in Iran I became an intrepid traveler. I imagined myself discovering this land for the first time like the famous western explorers I had learned about in school. Iranian friends told me I had seen more of their country than they, themselves, had seen. Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark – fearless, independent, female adventurers of decades past who had traveled alone throughout these parts of the world – became women I now closely identified with. I read all of their travel accounts and, retracing their footsteps, visited some of the places they visited. (Oh, those Assassin Castles!!) As I learned more and more about Iran, I flourished. My interest in the place and its peoples was insatiable. No sooner would I return home from one excursion and I would be making plans for another. Less avid travelers – even those living in Iran – found me courageous to go to the distant places I so easily went to, and I truly enjoyed being seen in that way. Nobody from my own circle of friends, family, and acquaintances had ever been to Iran, which somehow made my travel seem even more exhilarating. Many people back home, whose only knowledge of Iran was what they had seen on the TV news, imagined Iran as a dark, scary – even evil – place, which only added to the aura of mystery and my sense of herself as bold and confident. By “conquering” and “laying claim” through travel to places such as Kerman, Tabriz, Esfahan, and Yazd I fueled my own sense of self as the quintessential border-crosser, and my photos served as necessary artifacts – proof that I had really been there.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

I have fond memories of this photographic encounter with these Iranian girls. Five years earlier, I had used a telephoto lens to snap photos of unknowing subjects on the streets of Peshawar, and here I was again, still collecting. Besides offering the promise of an unusual artifact I could display as proof of an exotic Iranian adventure, this photo provided an excuse for contact. Seeking their permission to take the photo, I was proud I could speak some Farsi and be mostly understood. The girls also tried out their English on us, smiling and laughing. They lined up for our photos, and then we lined up so the girls could take photos of us. This time, my

photographic subjects had their own cameras, so there was a reciprocal exchange. As obvious tourists – our headscarves askew, and our long dark coats not-quite-as-well-put-together as those donned by the Iranian women – we were the spectacle in that place, wandering around these historic gardens with cameras in hand, largely unaware of the long, proud history of the Iranian people and the ways that our histories intertwined.

I become me via an other. Depending on who is looking, the exotic is the other, or it is me . . . I am the one making a detour with myself, having left upon my departure from over here not only a place but also one of my selves. The itinerary displaces the foundation, the background of my identity, and what it incessantly unfolds is the very encounter of self with other – other than myself and, my other self. (Trinh, 1998, p. 23)

Talking with these young Kashani women disrupted the image of raging, fanatical mobs I had seen on television during the American hostage crisis. There was dissonance between these openly gregarious girls and the angry TV mobs. They were not the same bodies, after all. We had been warned Iranian officials frowned on public displays of happiness, but if that were so, these girls were seriously misbehaving. If a woman in black chador was no longer who I imagined she was, who was I now?

What stands out as I look through my photos is my fascination with covered women. There are numerous “exotic-looking” men in my collection, but nothing attracted my camera lens more than a covered woman. Now I am critical of those with the power to represent otherness in the mass media for these same preoccupations. How do we work midst such tensions so others might be drawn into these difficult, complicated conversations in between sonare and videre?
(Watt, Personal narrative)

Toward embodied practices of looking: “An affection of the senses”

Springgay (2008a) argues for the theorization in curriculum of how bodies are constituted and materialized through visual encounters. Mitchell (2002) is similarly interested in how visual encounters with other people inform the construction of social life. Writing on the ethics and epistemology of seeing and being seen, he incites us to think about the knowledge we bring to

encounters with otherness. Given the mass media as a key site where identities are constructed, to bring questions about inter-embodied experiences into education implies inquiring not only into face-to-face encounters, but also those we have with bodies portrayed in visual cultural sites, such as print media images.

Ocular epistemology assumes primacy of the visual as dominant form of knowing. Perception, however, is never pure. It is clouded by the structures of language.
(Denzin, 1997, p. 84)

As MacDougall (2006) asserts, “meaning guides our seeing [and] allows us to categorize” (p. 1). It is “what imbues the image of a person with all we know about them” (p. 1). However, meaning also blinds us, for we only see what we expect to see or we are distracted “from seeing very much at all” (p. 1). Do we think about the narratives we bring to our visual encounters? MacDougall suggests because it can be so cursory, looking requires affection and attention:

To look carefully requires strength, calmness, and affection.
The affection cannot be in the abstract; it must be an affection
of the senses. (p. 7)

Given the power of the visual in the reproduction of identities how might we “complicate the process of seeing” (p. 3) so that identities are seen as fluid and complex?

Probyn (2003) writes bodies are connected to other bodies; they exist and acquire meaning in social spaces. She contends:

The body cannot be thought of as
a contained entity; it is in
constant contact with others . . .
subjectivity [is] a relational matter. (p. 290)

Springgay and Freedman (2007) imagine a bodied curriculum as “a curriculum that is no longer based in universals, but one that emphasizes complexities, multiplicities, and difference” (xxv). I read Ellsworth (2005) reading Kennedy in “the search to create concepts and languages that release and redirect the forces now locked up in . . . binaries” (p. 3). How might curriculum theory

further address them, “not as separate and in relations of opposition but rather as complex, moving webs of interrelationalities” (p. 3)?

Toward epistemologies of listening: “Having faith in their stories”

Munro Hendry (2007), in her discussion on the future of narrative argues, “we have no epistemology of listening” (p. 494). Rather, the emphasis in research “is on ordering and explaining with less on receiving and listening” (p. 494). She points out that researchers are most concerned with grasping, mastering, and using, and suggests that,

To have faith in their stories might mean not analyzing, not verifying, not seeking trustworthiness, but “plugging into” the experience of listening. (p. 495)

Even though our lives are not narratives and narratives can’t represent a life, we do engage in acts of meaning making when we tell our lives, and “stories are what make us human” (p. 495). For Munro Hendry, our narratives are “the tales through which we constitute our identities. We are our narratives [and] in this sense, they cannot be an object of ‘research’ or study. Who we are, is embedded in our stories” (p. 495). Rather than regarding research as a product whose purpose is to produce new knowledge or understanding, she proposes that we shift to thinking about “research as a sacred act that honours our humanity” by focusing on the encounter, itself, “attending to and being open to” (p. 495) the other. What if educational research were to “become present to our relationships and interconnections with others” (p. 495)?

Muslimah Media Watch: “Sisters are doin’ it for themselves”

Abura (2010) explains *Muslimah Media Watch* (MMW) is a one-woman blog started by Fatemah Fakhraie, in 2007. It has recently been re-launched as a web site featuring a team of 21 bloggers from around the world. The group’s mandate is described on their website:

Muslimah Media Watch is a forum where we, as Muslim women, can critique how our images appear in the media and popular culture. Although we are of different nationalities, sects, races, etc., we have something important in common: we’re tired of seeing ourselves

portrayed by the media in ways that are one-dimensional and misleading. This is a space where, from a Muslim feminist perspective, we can speak up for ourselves.

Abura observes that a few years ago “if anybody wrote about Muslim women in the down-and-depressed, stereotypical manner then it would be left to some sensitive Muslim man to reply. Or more than likely, it would just be left.” Much has changed with the advent of the Internet, “due to a new generation of media-savvy Muslim women who are fighting back with articles, blogs and witty comebacks quicker than you can say ‘oppressed housewife.’” As Fakhraie (June 28, 2010) declares on her blog, “Sisters are doin’ it for themselves.” In her July 13, 2010 blog entry, she writes about MMW being featured in a German publication:

I’m incredibly proud to say that *Muslimah Media Watch* was featured in the German *Zeit Online*, in an article about how blogging works as “social disinfectant” against “lies and racism”... Using Google translate, I learn that we’re referred to as “Arab women.” The irony that my writers and I are all referred to as “Arab” (rather than “Muslim”) in an article about blogging breaking down stereotypes is not lost on me. The reality is that we’re from several different ethnicities and are located all over the globe. But, hey, they’re trying...right?

Fakhraie is an American uncomfortable with the mainstream media’s tendency to portray Muslim women as, “exotic sex slave, oppressed woman, or dangerous terrorist” and so decided to set up the blog. MMW critiques “one-dimensional and misleading” representations of Muslim women in cultural sites, from small-town newspapers to major news channels and women’s magazines.

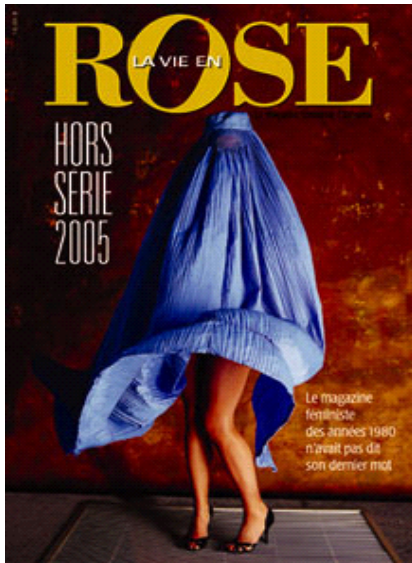
Another blue burqa

How does a burqa worn on the streets of Peshawar, resemble and/or differ from a burqa worn on the streets of Ottawa, or from a burqa pictured on the cover of a Canadian magazine, or from the burqa in my photo of a Peshawri woman, or from the souvenir burqa cached in my cedar chest? (Watt, Personal narrative)

In Chapter one, I include a photograph I took in Peshawar of a woman wearing a blue shuttlecock burqa, and here is another one, on the cover of *La Vie En Rose* (2005). A friend passed this image on to me. Rather than Muslim-woman-as-terrorist, or Muslim-woman-as-

oppressed, here we meet another common Oriental (Said, 1978/1994) stereotype: Muslim-woman-as exotic-other. Participant readings of this image are ambivalent in ways I had not anticipated.

The four participant comments below are written responses to a questionnaire:



La Vie en rose (Oct. 2005)
Les Éditions du remue-ménage
Photographie: Suzanne Langevin

Sahar: In a way it shows that Muslim women can be sexy but the way the concept is delivered is disrespectful to women who cover. I think that the picture is a bit degrading and vulgar.

Miriam: This is an offending picture, it's almost like they're saying, *This is what could be under there*. *wink* This could be taken as: A Muslim women can be deceiving by wearing a burqa but wearing nothing underneath it. Maybe the men should try to lift it a bit just to check?

Leila: Wow. That's interesting and provocative and wow.

Thought #1: This image is good because it acknowledges the idea that to be covered is not to be sexless.

Thought #2: Wait a minute. What exactly is the intention of this image? The [Marilyn] Monroe reference and the covered woman together are strange. Are you trying to tell me that a covered woman is still subject to sexual objectification and that the whole idea behind covering is flawed?

Thought #3: I'm so confused. I'm not smart enough for this image, clearly. If I was a Muslim teen, I'd feel mocked. If I was a non-teen Muslim, I'd feel incredibly confused.

Tina: I can see this image in a positive way, seeing that it could imply that Muslim women are women as well, and they do in fact show up in places like, *La Vie en Rose*, and are very pretty as well. The negative aspect that I get from this image is that Muslim ladies who cover could in fact be sluts and hoes, so don't really trust what you see, which is really disturbing and inappropriate.

The following exchange took place during a focus group session:

Diane: So, what do you think of this image?

Tina: I think its offensive.

Miriam: Yeah, I do, too.

Tina: It's just because, like, *Why be so negative?* Just respect ... like, Muslims want to dress this way, so respect that. It's funny how when they see us, they think we're wrong, but when we look at them, it's like regular. We don't look at you and say the way you dress is wrong, so why do you think that we're wrong dressing this way? I'm like, if they could think that way, than this image will probably make sense to them, but I think you should respect others. I don't know about her legs being exposed like this. What are they trying to portray?

Miriam: Yeah, what are they trying to say?

Noor: I feel like what this image is really saying is, "Muslim women cover themselves." We don't show a lot of skin. We cover ourselves. This picture is almost saying, "Don't you wonder what's under there?" (laughter). Don't you wonder how pretty she is? Don't you wonder what her body is like? We cover everything, right. We want to conceal our shape, conceal our body. This picture is almost saying, maybe the next time one of these girls walks by you, get a mental picture of what she looks like underneath all that. And that totally negates the whole point of us covering.

Tina: Yes, it's true.

Noor: Like, if you're going to show what we look like naked, then why wouldn't we just dress that way? There's a reason why we cover everything. The average person doesn't have the right to know.

Miriam: I agree, I totally agree.

Diane: You find it offensive?

Miriam: Yeah. I don't see anything positive about this.

Noor: Like, it is cleverly done.

Tina: Yeah.

Noor: It's very cleverly done. I think it's a very attractive picture ... You know, the whole thing, even just to look at. It's very clever. Like you take the half-covered woman and then underneath. I think it would pique someone's curiosity.

Tina: I was just going to say, it's funny because I have a couple of guy friends who have asked me: "Oh, what's the colour of your hair?" And I'm like, I'm not supposed to tell you. And they're like, "I wonder what you look like under that?" And I'm like, "Excuse me!" And then, he's like, "Oh, sorry, sorry, I didn't mean to ..." You get them wondering about it and I don't know what to do with that.

Miriam: I have a story, too. A friend, in high school, one person was asking her, "*So what's the*

colour of your hair?” because she wears a hijab. And my friend is like, *“I can’t tell you, I’m not going to tell you.”* And then the person says back to my friend, *“Oh, but your eyebrows are black so I’m guessing it’s black.”*

Tina: Yeah (laughs).

Miriam: My friend was Somali, right. And she goes, *“How do you know it’s not blue or orange?”* (Everyone laughs). That was funny. (Focus Group Session)

In their analysis of representations of otherness in *National Geographic Magazine*, Lutz and Collins (1993) write about “the pleasures and possibilities of reading” (p. 259). Dr. Judith Robertson encouraged me to consider the aesthetics of looking when I was in the earlier stages of this project, but it took participant readings such as those of this image of a woman in a blue burqa echoing the famous image of Marilyn Munroe for me to experience how aesthetics may play into our readings of images – even those we may consider offensive. As I have mentioned, my personal photographs have brought me a great deal of pleasure by feeding into my sense of self as an intrepid world traveler. I also spent many hours as a child looking at and loving the images of otherness in *National Geographic* and still have stacks of old copies piled up in a corner in my basement, for I could never bring myself to parting with those gorgeous images. They provided me with many hours of “imaginary tourism” (p. 266). Lutz and Collins write that the pleasures of photographs,

... include the pleasures of sight itself – colors, surprising shapes, and varieties of light; the pleasures of living – happiness in family love, challenges overcome and achieved, the joy of the new, including reading and learning. (p. 259)

Photos are evocative. We might relate our own life to what is going on in the photo, or be attracted the beauty of its subject or the composition. I always felt I was learning about the world from looking at *National Geographic Magazine*, which I was, and this sparked my interest in travel. At the same time, I was learning my place in the colonial order as a privileged, white, western woman.

Readers actively play with the idea of alternative worlds. For many, this adventure simply validates their own way of life as more comfortable, or more enlightened, than the other scenarios they visit through the images. Yet for large numbers of readers the pictures open up new imaginative spaces. (p. 274)

[T]he rendering of cultural difference as exotic accomplishes a number of things. It rivets attention; it marks a difference between the “normal” self represented by the reader and the other, who is represented in the photo; and it creates distance by treating those photographed as spectacle. (p. 275–276)

Stories of blue burqas shift and circulate...This full covering is culturally specific and thus has different forms and names depending upon the linguistic and cultural context in which it is worn. Burka/burqa is the Arabic word. Chador is the Persian word, and it's black. Chadri is the word used in Northwestern Pakistan and in Afghanistan. The shuttlecock burqa (or chadri) like the one in my photograph in Chapter One is made from lightweight fabric and the cap is often embellished with embroidery. It requires several meters of fabric to make one. Blue is one of the favorite colours, but it is also available in other colours including orange and yellow. The chadri, like most forms of dress, has a complex history. One of Afghan's former rulers apparently created it to prevent anyone from seeing his wives' faces. At that time, it symbolized upper class citizenship. The garment was made of silk, and the mesh on the face was made from lace. The chadri was later banned by the Afghan government (as was Islamic covering for women in Turkey and Iran) because it wasn't deemed “modern.” Apparently the upper classes gave their chadri to their servants. Before the Taleban gained power in Afghanistan, you would seldom see chadris worn in the cities, but they brought it back. When the west invaded Afghanistan in its war against terror many outside of Afghanistan thought that women would suddenly throw off their chadri and were perplexed when this didn't happen. In western contexts the burqa/chador/chadri often symbolizes sexual oppression, backwardness, terrorism, and/or the exotic. In 2004, France banned the wearing of the burqa. These swaths of cloth have recently been the focus of intense attention in Canada, even though only a very small minority of Canadian Muslims wears one. Stories of the chadri/burqa/chador (and any other names for this garment which I may have excluded) continue their complex course, as do the stories of the women who wear them (or don't). (Watt, Personal narrative)

In the following narrative, Jana explains that during her middle school years, her visible difference as an Arab-Canadian led to her being excluded from certain social groups. She preferred to hide or downplay that aspect of her identity. However, as she moves through her high school years she takes quite another tactic in her decision to take pleasure in the stereotype:

I remember in middle school I didn't want to be “the Arab girl,” especially because I came from Montreal, so English was my third language. So, I had a thick accent and I was

different and I didn't want to be. So at that point in my life if someone asked me, where are you from? I'd say, I'm Canadian, because I have a Canadian passport, or I'd mumble, quietly "*Syria, Muslim, you know.*" Now when someone asks me, are you Muslim? Where are you from? I say I'm Arab and I'm Muslim, and I have no problem saying that. Before I used to look at it – before I've had all the experiences I've had – I used to look at it as, I'm different and weird and I don't look like everyone else. But now I see the strengths there are to this difference that I have, and I like it because I look at it as its exotic, it's different, you know. And I just play to that... I don't say it in an embarrassed tone anymore or try to avoid it. I love being Arab. I try to show it in like some of my expressions. Like Arabs use their hands a lot and I do that, too. And I know I do it and I know it's like a mannerism of Arabs, and I'm proud of it. Before when someone would point it out I'd stop, but now I like the fact that – because I've had such good experiences while in school – being an Arab in these schools it taught me to, instead of be ashamed of it, to see it as a blessing, as something extra, an advantage that I have . . . The big hoop earrings, I die my hair darker, I like showing that I'm Arab.

(Jana, Research participant)

Toward more complicated readings of otherness in two popular cultural sites

With Sensoy (2007a; 2007b), I pursue the complexity of group identities by disrupting the binaries embedded in media and school representations of social groups. What questions could we pose in our classrooms and our theorizing about our practices of looking and listening to consider “the complex conditions of our mutual formation” (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1157)? For Davies and Davies, the ethical challenge is to “not rush to judgments that foreclose understanding of the conditions of possibility of particular lives and of what it is that makes for a viable life” (p. 1157). With Wolfries (2000), I ask how we might contemplate the possibility of thinking reading differently? How do we “learn to read patiently, rigorously, in such a manner that we know all the while that we have not yet read, we have not yet done (with) reading” (p. ix)?

Reading is never simple or innocent . . . because the reader, any reader, is always positioned through culture, history, education, ideology, and so on. Thus the possibility of reading is constituted in various ways prior to any individual act of reading. At the same time, every text has a singularity for which the act of reading should be responsible and to which the act of reading should respond. One should therefore avoid producing a reading which is either, on the one hand, a passive consumption or, on the other, an active imposition of a particular meaning which suppresses or excludes other elements. (Wolfreys, Robbins & Womack, 2002, p.71)

Site #1: Muslim Girl Magazine

Ausma Khan (2008), a law professor and the editor of *Muslim Girl Magazine*, explains the magazine was founded in January 2007 as a forum for young Muslim female voices to counter mainstream discourse where their voices were absent. Khan asks:

Where were the stories that were true to their life experiences? Where were the stories that represented how Muslims engaged with their faith and their communities beyond the singular representation of a girl wearing a headscarf? ...The picture of Muslim women, rendered so often in facile stereotypes, was reductive. (pp. 62–63)

Khan explains the mandate as not “merely a publication to make Muslims feel good about themselves or to make non-Muslims feel less afraid of Muslims” which she contends are “laudable goals yet not nearly ambitious enough” (p. 63). The creators of the magazine hoped not only to “enlighten, celebrate and inspire” but also urge “critical introspection” which challenges assumptions “many Muslims themselves hold about women and girls” (p. 63). A second goal was to “humanize Muslims to their fellow citizens” (p. 63), not by “manufactured enthusiasm for all things Muslim” (p. 64) but by portraying “how Muslim girls and young women actually lived their lives” (p. 64).

Below is the cover of the May/June 2007 edition of *Muslim Girl Magazine*. During a focus group session we discussed this new magazine. Leila had a subscription, and shared it with me during one of our interviews. I asked what she thought of this new publication. Our conversation follows:

Muslim Girl Magazine
May/June 2007



Diane: Could you talk about your response to *Muslim Girl Magazine*? I know you and other participants mentioned you feel there are mostly negative representations of Muslim females in the media, and nothing that you can personally relate to.

Leila: That's the thing. What I really liked about this magazine is that they show a lot of different girls, who all have different perceptions of themselves with respect to Islam. So we have girls who cover, girls who didn't cover, and people of different cultures, which is what I really liked. Like, black Muslims, which is a group of Muslims that aren't really looked at as much... So, that was sort of interesting – and I really appreciate it – that they showed so many different races. And they try to spotlight a lot of different things. Like, these two sisters [pointing to magazine], they're twins. One is Christian, one converted to Islam. So that was a really nice story. And they show a lot of Muslim girls achieving things. There is a Muslim girl who is a prom queen, which is something you don't really see that much (laughs). So in the sense of positive representations, it was really, really good for that ... And these two are one of the featured stories. He's a senator and that's his daughter. So he's the first Muslim in the House of Representatives, so she's his daughter. So they talk about that, which is very, very cool. It was very indicative of, I think, a lot of cultural values that a lot of Muslim girls growing up deal with. The emphasis on family in this magazine is huge, and it was something that really, really struck me. There are a lot of sections celebrating family. This isn't something that's really seen in a mainstream magazine.

Diane: ...Especially not in teen magazines.

Leila: Definitely not. And they talk to parents and they talk to teens and they talk about them

together. That's what I liked. There were things I didn't like and that was largely because it was a very rosy picture of Muslim girls growing up. These were all really well adjusted girls who were able to negotiate their two worlds not easily necessarily, but they're all success stories. And they didn't seem to have to go through too many, like, spiritual and emotional hardships in order to get to the place they were at. I sort of wanted to see maybe a story on somebody who struggled with Islam, and struggled with the culture clash, and came through it, whichever way. Like, I don't particularly care how they came out of it, whether they converted, whether they didn't, what they chose to do, but I would have liked to see that rather than . . . It was just a very happy-go-lucky magazine. And when I finished it, I was like, that was really happy. Where is the bad stuff? Where are the people who had, not bad experiences with Islam – well, I want to see even bad experiences with Islam – I think if you want to enlighten and celebrate or inspire, like that's their slogan, I think you need to show us the other side. So, it was just very, very positive, which is sort of a weird thing to be critiquing, but I just really would have liked to see that other side, too. . . . There are no articles, from non-Muslim perspectives, chronicling their experiences with the Muslim lifestyle. So, in that sense, it's helpful to get an idea of girls on the inside and how they feel. But it doesn't address Muslim girls in the context of them interacting with other cultures as much. The majority of these girls have Muslim friends. They do have some non-Muslim friends, but they pick their non-Muslim friends with similar values, which is something that a lot of girls do. But it's also something that a lot of girls don't do. And so, it's very pigeon holed, I think, because I feel that it really only addresses the one mind-set. Like all these girls are different girls but they have very similar value systems, which is good, but it's also bad.

Diane: Like the emphasis on the family.

Leila: That was even strange for me, and my mother really emphasizes family. But some of the articles, like I would never let my mom do that. I was really confused. There was one lady who was saying, *"I really like to watch what my children are watching and make sure that they're only exposed to stuff that reflects our values."* I would never watch TV if my mom did that. . . . To me, it's not necessarily a mirror image of the culture outside, but it does give you a lot of insight into what is valued and what people are going to be judging you on, and what people are going to want you to do later on. And I think you do have to be cognizant of the fact that, *"Hey, I don't live in a bubble where things are really sweet."*

Diane: Your critique is very insightful. It will be interesting to see how the magazine evolves and whether it stays on this level or not because it's only a little over a year old. . . .

Leila: And a big reason why it's like that is because, you know how the Muslim community has a big backlash against anything that is criticized in any way. And I feel like if they had started out and showed some portrayals of girls who had really struggled with their faith. . . . I think that really would have been an issue for some of the Muslim communities. They'd be like, *"Why are you giving our girls these role models? These girls aren't good."*

Diane: It's not Islamic.

Leila: Exactly. So, if you show a girl who was a drug addict, a Muslim girl who ended up doing drugs, that's not something that people like to talk about. They don't like to show that. People don't like to admit that Muslim girls are just as fallible as every other person. So, there's like a weird pedestal you're put on and then shoved kind of in the corner, and behind some curtains. So, I don't know if the magazine would have had the success it's had if it had attempted to do that early on. I think it needed a fan base before they could do anything really.

Diane: So, you think it was important for the magazine to first be accepted in the broader community. Obviously not everyone is going to like it the way it is, either, but you think this is safe?

Leila: I think it's a really safe publication, and I hope that they go a little riskier later on. This is the sort of publication that a mom can say, "*My daughter's not going to get any weird ideas from this so why don't I buy it for her.*" Rather than, "*Wow, maybe she'll end up ...*" That's just the nature of people, they want to protect.

Diane: Kids need some exposure to things.

Leila: I think to a certain extent, yeah, you do. I don't know. I never really had the experience of being super-protected because my mother was very busy. . . When it came to, especially stuff like the media, I read a lot of books and magazines and things that she didn't necessarily know about. I read enough that she wasn't going to be monitoring my reading consumption. I read a lot of fantasies, which kind of introduces you to really weird things pretty early on. And I read a lot of alternative fantasy, not mainstream fantasy, which really likes to push boundaries on pretty much everything. So I guess I was exposed to a lot of things that I don't know a lot of kids were at a young age, and I don't think it screwed me up (laughs). But I think it's important that you recognize that there are always going to be things out there that you don't necessarily agree with and understand and sometimes are really ugly, but I think it's just really important that you see it. Obviously at a younger age it really is important to keep you from things because you're not going to be able to understand them. I think you have to sort of judge when people think they're able to understand.

Site #2: Little Mosque on the Prairie

[T]he question of what we as an audience learn by watching shows that are rooted in a particular socio-cultural group's experiences sharpened for me in 2007, when the CBC launched a new sitcom, called *Little Mosque on the Prairie*...For the first time in my history as a Canadian who is acculturated (but secular) Muslim, there was a show on TV about "us." So was this "good" for us?
(Sensoy, 2008, p. 44)

Zarqua Nawaz's (2007) sitcom, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, portrays a small, eclectic Muslim community located in the fictional prairie community of *Mercy*. When I first viewed this

comedy, my initial response was to see it as a positive alternative to what I considered mostly negative representations of Muslims in the mass media. In spite of some reservations, Sensoy (2008) similarly views the relative positive potential of this program, especially when placed alongside the ways Muslims are often represented (or remain absent) in the school curriculum and the mass media. Sensoy argues in favour of representations that preserve the complexities of social life, pointing out that *Little Mosque* is unique in its representation of religious and ethnic diversity. Todd (1998; 1999) suggests a need to move away from an overly simple view of representations as being inherently positive or negative, for they function differently depending upon their social contexts and their various audiences. Within this frame, one might ask: to what degree does a program such as *Little Mosque* proliferate subject positions? Sensoy (2008) writes:

In a context of a sea of current and historical school and mass-media representations of Islam and Muslims, *Little Mosque* has taken on topics like feminism in Islam, has presented for open discussion some of the common stereotypes about the homogeneity of the Muslim community, it has brought to light some of the issues faced by Muslims living in a predominantly non-Muslim cultural milieu, and has done all this with a light tone, a tone we don't often see in relation to the Muslim community in Canada, or anywhere for that matter. (p. 52)

It was beyond the scope of this project to view this television sitcom, but we looked at an image from one episode as a prompt for our conversations about visual representations in the mass media . . . Scene from *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (*Little Mosque on the Prairie* web site, 2008):



As participants and I share and listen to one another's readings, we are faced with perspectives different from and similar to our own, and meanings shift as our subjectivities intersect, diverge, and displace. Hybrid spaces continuously form and dissolve at the borders of our storied selves in these fleeting moments of our readings. I learned a great deal about the complex nature of reading otherness and reading the self from participants. Their readings sometimes disrupted assumptions that limited my ability to see other possibilities. Discussing this image with participants one-on-one and during the focus group helped me to see how we can be affected through exposure to the readings of others.

Miriam: I think this image is a fun one. Even though the woman is all covered she can still do activities that were thought to be "not-for-her." She also seems happy and so do the other women in the image. She looks to be accepted and not looked down upon.
(Written response to questionnaire)

Leila: I have sort of a two-fold reaction to this image. On the one hand, I like that rather than sitting this out, the lady is actually participating. On the other hand, her swimming costume lacks dignity (and it is possible to find full-length bathing suits with dignity). My first reaction is more prevalent because the character is sort of crazy in and of herself, so I can excuse the "ridickulosity" of her outfit. But she's participating and I really like that because it shows that there are always ways of navigating the clash of values, and that's a lesson that really needs to be pushed out there. (Written response to questionnaire)

Sahar: I think it is funny. It shows women are women. We can do everything other women do except that hijabis are covered up. (Written response to questionnaire)

Tina: As a Muslim, I see this as very educational and it welcomes the teachings of Muslims and their beliefs. (Written response to questionnaire)

Diane: What do you think of the show, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*?

Leila: I think it's adorable.

Diane: It's one of the more positive representations of Muslims out there.

Leila: It very much is. Even my mother likes it and she doesn't like anything. It's not biting, that's the thing. The one clip that they had of Sadr, I think it was, and his daughter and him, the way he was harping on her for her clothing. *Every* Muslim girl knows where that's coming from. Everyone knows what you want to wear because everyone else is wearing that. And your parents go crazy over that. Everybody knows that, everybody. It is really interesting to relate to something like that on TV. (As discussed during a one-on-one interview)

Participants and I also discussed this image during a focus group session:

Miriam: I love this show. I think they deal with some issues that Muslims face in everyday life. And it's a positive image. There's nothing negative. Just having a positive show on TV every Wednesday night, where people can actually follow it, I think it keeps them a little more informed than they might have been.

Diane: Then you think people are learning more about Muslims from this program?

Miriam: I have three non-Muslim roommates, and we all watch it together, and they've learned from it. So, I think it's good.

Noor: I think it helps a lot of non-Muslims to realize how silly some of their questions and assumptions can be. But at the same time, I think this show is playing up the stereotypes. Like, none of the younger cast members have an accent, but every older person has a really thick accent from whatever country they're from. I find that stereotypical. Personally, I don't like the show . . . I feel they make Muslims look stupid all the time, even though the majority of the people involved in the show, the people who make the show, are Muslim. But if someone sees this picture they're going to be laughing at the woman who's wearing the Muslim bathing suit. I don't think they're like, "*Oh, good for her,*" seeing Muslims can swim. I don't think this is what they'd take from this image.

Diane: It is a comical picture, and the show is a comedy, right?

Miriam: Right.

Noor: But I think they just play up a lot of things. Like yes, they deal with a lot of issues that Muslims do deal with on a daily basis, like school life, and interactions with non-Muslim community members. But at the same time, I think they poke a lot of fun at some very valid concerns and issues that we have. I know it's a comedy and it's supposed to be doing that, but I think that if that's someone's only source of learning about Islam, that show, then they can get a lot of wrong ideas about Islam as well.

Tina: I personally don't watch the show but I've heard a lot about it. I have seen a couple of clips on the Net . . . This is the first time seeing this picture. If I was just looking at the picture, I'd look at it and I'd think, "*Muslim women are welcome.*" That's how I'd read this image, but had I seen the show I might have another idea because I might know more about it. But to look at this picture right now, I think this woman is welcome. Everyone in the picture is happy. The guy's happy. He's learning, "*Oh, that's how they dress when they go swimming.*" And then he respects how the Muslim girl – the girl wearing hijab – is going to swim. That's how I see it.

Later, during another interview with Noor I asked her about *Little Mosque* again. I wanted to find out more about her reservations, especially since I had viewed it as a "positive" cultural site where Muslims were finally being portrayed beyond the stereotypes. Saba's ambivalent reading disrupted my assumption that a cultural representation could be inherently "positive" or negative. She showed me how I was entangled in binary thinking...

Diane: Something I wanted to come back to from the focus group session were your comments on *Little Mosque*. Miriam saw it as positive and you were less sure. Could you talk more about the issues you have with this program?

Noor: Yeah. Actually, it's funny because I still feel it's not totally positive but my opinions have kind of changed as I've thought about it. Lots of people have started watching it and it has really drawn a big fan base amongst the Muslim community. So, I'll start with the positive things. I think there definitely are some positive things about *Little Mosque on the Prairie* in that it's creating awareness. I mean there's a show with a lot of Muslims on it and there's a hijabi on it which makes it really amazing for people who wear hijab because all of a sudden when people see a hijabi, even if they don't know a lot about Islam, they're like, "Hey, that's like that girl on that show." So, it kind of makes it less exotic. All of a sudden it's there, it's on TV, it's in a Canadian context and they see like, "Okay, there's a girl on it, a very attractive girl, and she mingles with the boys, everything." It puts it into a very Canadian context which makes it a good thing for girls like me because it kind of takes away the attitude that we're oppressed for the people that believe that. I don't think everyone believes that. But the negative thing about it is that it does play up on stereotypes. It kind of takes all of the really extreme issues of Islam and it puts it into a very comedic light, which can be a good thing but I sometimes find it plays up the stereotypes as well. So, if people know nothing about Islam, they can learn from it. Okay, there's hijabis, they're out there, they're normal, they're funny. But if people who know nothing about Islam look at it and learn Islam from it, like, "So, that means Muslims can't do this and can't do that," and a lot of things obviously have different interpretations. Like the hijab issue, I remember there was one episode where the father was like, okay, you've got your period so start wearing hijab. And it can be very dangerous if you know nothing about Islam.

Diane: Because they're assuming that every family is like that?

Noor: Yeah, and believing that's true. And that's not true. And quite frankly, in Islam a father would not even know when his daughter hit puberty because it's something very private and you keep to yourself and you don't share it with your dad. He would never even go down that road because he knows because he knows it's highly inappropriate.

Diane: It is interesting that they did that on the show, that they wrote that into the script.

Noor: Yeah, that the father was the one who was, "Oh, you have your period ..."

Diane: It reinforces the notion of patriarchy, where the men are controlling the women.

Noor: Exactly.

Diane: Okay, now I think I understand your initial response better.

Noor: See what I mean?

Diane: I saw the stereotypes on the show but I was not as tuned in to how they might come across.

Noor: Yes, there are good things but there are also bad things. If I had to choose I would choose for it to stay on the air because . . .

Diane: . . . that's all there is (laughs)!

Noor: Yeah, and ultimately it's good that we have some sort of representation.

Jackson (2009) draws on critical multicultural approaches to education to consider Muslim students and schooling, and is also concerned with the ways that the mass media educates about otherness. She argues for a need to develop "accurate and balanced perceptions of others" in the post 9/11 context. This seems a common-sense approach. However, I now understand how the notion of striving for "accuracy" in representations assumes that "an accurate perception" exists out in the material world. Kincheloe (2004) points out "there is no essentialized, unified Islamic world about which we can make uncomplicated generalizations" (p. 20).

For Todd (1997), anti-oppressive education is thus about "the inquiry into multiple meanings, not about the rectifying of specific images" (p. 150). She is critical of multicultural education's emphasis on the development of tolerant attitudes towards others as a solution to discrimination, arguing we need to move beyond the notion of "tolerance," which implies fostering a positive attitude *toward* those different than oneself. Todd suggests we instead strive towards "a new mode of understanding of our selves *in relation* to others" recognizing that "no self is possible without an other, without an outside" (p. 149). Todd draws on Bhabha's notion of the stereotype as being not only a relation of power, but also *a relation of desire*, in which "a sense of 'usness' is at stake when stereotypes are produced" (p. 150). She asks, "whose desires are implicated when stereotypes are mobilized in the popular media accounts of events" (p. 150)? Without acknowledging the dynamic of need and desire we are left in the position of calling for mere tolerance, "rather than struggling with the more difficult question of developing new social

relations ‘beyond tolerance,’ ones which fully recognize the play of power and desire” (p. 150).

Todd advises educators to look at not only how particular images serve the needs of those who do the representing, but also the ways in which “they invite us (the readers, the consumers) to share a certain social imaginary” (p. 150). Traditional approaches to multicultural education typically leave this unquestioned. In order to educate beyond tolerance, Todd states it is therefore important to understand that representations “are not simply concerned with telling falsehoods or truths about groups, but are involved in constructing a sense of who ‘we’ are, and who ‘they’ are, and how the society in which we live is understood” (p. 151).

“With tolerance, I don’t have to know anything about you but I tolerate you!”

Khan lets out a hearty laugh.

“That’s not much to build upon.” (Sheema Khan, in conversation with Chua, 2009)

[How do we] prompt the viewer to become self-aware,
not just in relation to others but as a viewer,
as one who looks or surveys? (Lutz & Collins, 1993)

Hana Hajar,
Saudi Cartoonist.
(In Malika, 2009)



Chapter 6

Entangled in veiling discourses

[I]t seems that the public, media and governments
cannot get enough
of scrutinizing and indeed penalizing Muslim women for what they wear.
(Bakht, 2008b)

The headscarf is really not a big issue for a lot of Muslim women. And most
Muslim women would really appreciate it if the media would figure this out soon
... The obsessive and often exclusive focus on the scarf is still reductive and
misses the point. Really, it's getting old. Give it a rest.
(Krista, In *Muslimah Media Watch*, 2009)

Canadians could be forgiven for thinking veiled Muslim women pose an urgent threat to
the integrity of our electoral system after Prime Minister Stephen Harper made one of his
first priorities in the fall sitting of Parliament a bill to force voters to show their faces at
the polls.
(Editorial, *The Toronto Star*, Nov. 4, 2007)

The Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC) is asking
Ottawa to introduce legislation to ban the wearing of
masks, niqabs and the burka in all public dealings.
(Oct. 8, 2009, MCC)

Muslim women in *Hijab* are regularly told by
Canadians "This is Canada. You're free here.
You don't have to wear that thing on your head."
Nur, a university student, discovered one day that
this view of *Hijab* can lead people to be quite
hostile. At university one day, a woman angrily
approached her, asking why Nur was dressed like
that, bringing herself so much attention, and bringing
"backwardness" to Canada, when feminists had
worked so hard for the cause of women the last
twenty years.
(Bullock, 1998, np.)

Hijab obsession . . . The previous chapter engages our entanglement in visual media discourses as informal, public curricula on otherness. As Haraway (1991) reminds us, we are all born into, and positioned within, specific fields of representation. Particular visions of social difference are thus reproduced by visibility. How might we become more attuned to the screen of signs that exists between our eyes and the world, “consisting of all the multiple discourses of vision built into the social arena” (Bryson, in Rose, 2001, p. 120)? Given that visibility is so familiar (Mitchell, 2002), visual discourses quietly constitute our subjectivities as we remain largely aware of the hold they have over us. In post 9/11 Canada, the veil¹ has become a powerful visual signifier of difference that clings to the bodies of many Muslim females, whether they cover or not. This chapter considers how bodies are caught up in veiling discourses within and outside schooling contexts, and possible material effects.

I had not planned to devote so much space to what Ali-Karamali (2008) refers to as, “that veil thing,” not wanting to reproduce the unrelenting obsession with this practice. However, as this project progressed it soon became evident that I could not downplay the issue of Islamic covering, either, for it powerfully permeates media representations, the academic literature, my personal narratives, and the stories of the high schooling experiences of the Muslim women participating in this study. This preoccupation with covering is not new, for practices of veiling have long been associated with Orientalism (Said, 1978/1994). Lewis and Mills (2003) note:

It is clear from the earliest Western accounts of travelers that the response to the veil is always overdetermined, reliant on a series of gendered, imperial and classed dynamics which respond to the seclusions of women in a variety of ways but which always privilege the veil as a symbol of the hidden order of Oriental society and as proof of its inimical difference from the West. (pp. 14–15)

¹ “[T]he English word ‘veil,’ which covers all aspects of the practice of veiling, has no Arabic equivalent. This points to the complexity and diversity of indigenous concepts of veiling which is often missed in English by ease of reference.” (Woodcock, 2005, p. 12)

Many of those critical of the continued preoccupation with Islamic covering point out that it simply does not deserve so much attention (Ali-Karamali, 2008; Heath, 2008; Macdonald, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Masood (2008) writes that “[s]o pervasive is this fascination with the hijab that it inevitably dominates most discussions of women and Islam as if no other factors matter” (p. 219). This singular focus thus leaves much about Muslim females unsaid. What violence is committed when a visual sign such as the veil is invested with the power to erase the shifting complexities of one’s subjectivity? Where and when and why does the veil come onto the scene, and with what material effects?

I recently went to hear Jasmine Jiwani speak at the University of Ottawa about violence and visual representations in the media. After Jiwani’s lecture, a young woman wearing hijab raised her hand to speak. She told the audience that she looked forward to a time when she might be viewed as more than the hijab she wore on her head. There were many other aspects of her identity besides her religious faith, and she was tired of the preoccupation with Islamic covering to the exclusion of everything else.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

Indeed, participant stories of their high schooling experiences create a complicated and contradictory picture of Muslim female subjectivities, interrupting fixed meanings about veiling and about Muslim women. These narratives call upon us to look and listen more complexly so new narratives may proliferate to disrupt easy categorizations. As the words of the young woman who spoke up at Jiwani’s talk suggest, a preoccupation with veiling evokes familiar forms of othering which limit our ability to see and hear the particularities of lives, and also fail to acknowledge that identity is relational, and constructed across difference. To deconstruct “hijab obsession” inevitably means deconstructing the self, for as Trinh (1991) suggests, “[e]very spectator mediates a text to his or her own reality” (p. 93).

As discussed in chapter 5, the issue of Islamic covering for women attracts a great deal of media and public attention. A woman in Quebec is asked to take off her neqab to attend an

English class, and when she refuses, another media feeding frenzy follows (Krista in *Muslimah Media Watch*, March 25, 2010).

“Everything was going smoothly in the school” [Aisha] told CBC news. “Everyone has been very good to me. It was a really heartbreaking experience for me because I really loved my school, and I think its my civil right to go there, to learn.”

Both Aisha and the center’s director, Mustapha Kachani, said the ministry [of Immigration and Cultural Communities] told them the veil is an obstacle to learning a language. (CBC News Online, April 12, 2010)

For the sake of about twenty-five women in the province who actually wear face-coverings, the province of Quebec formulates a law forcing everyone to show their face when dealing with government institutions. Stories about terror, war, and the oppression of women in far off lands are often accompanied by photos of anonymous covered women who have nothing to do with those stories (Jiwani, 2005; Fallah, 2005; MacDonald, 2006; Watt, 2008).

The preoccupation with Islamic covering is widespread. An article in *Muslimah Media Watch* (July 16, 2009), written by a reviewer named Krista, describes a podcast originally broadcast on Co-Op Radio in Vancouver, on a program about feminist issues. The radio segment is entitled, “Islam, women, and feminisms,” and is an interview with Irath Syed, a social justice advocate in Vancouver. Krista reports:

Shockingly, the topic of hijab came up (yeah, I know you’re surprised too. *yawn*). The interviewer referred to an obsession over the veil among non-Muslims, and Syed agreed that “it is clearly [a] mad, crazy obsession,” but clarified that the obsession manifests itself among Muslims, too. Like many of us, Syed expressed how tired she was of all the discussions about covering, and described it as an “inherent need to see ideological struggles play out over women’s bodies, and to control women’s bodies as sites of representation.” Within many non-Muslim communities, she said, hijab is seen as “an absolute symbol of oppression and a marker of pre-modernity,” but she also talked about the problems with it being seen within many Muslim circles “as the only marker of Muslim identity for women.” Syed described these two facets of the same problem – or, to use her lovely expression, “same shit, different piles” – and argued that “either way, it’s about controlling women’s bodies and removing women’s autonomy over their bodies.” It was kind of refreshing to hear people on both sides get called out for being way too hijab-obsessed. (p. 2)

In the public arena, the covered Muslim woman is a media star in heated debates about citizenship, multiculturalism, and “the limits of tolerance.” How do female, Muslim students negotiate their identities in a context where, according to Zine (2003), “certain Canadian identities have been called into question” (p. 2)?

Indeed, the print media’s use of images of covered women attracts attention and sells publications. An editor at the Montreal Gazette (March 6, 2010) writes:

Nothing – absolutely nothing – seems to fascinate Gazette letter-writers more than the wardrobe choices of Muslim women. In a city that tolerates any state of public undress, the appearance of one veiled woman in one French class in one CÉGEP is enough to unleash a barrage of mail – most of it profoundly negative and angry and some of it puzzlingly illogical. (p. B2)

Neqab has become a regular, everyday event in the news media. It is the Islamic garment of choice to draw attention to stories that question citizenship and multiculturalism by focusing on the cultural practices of Muslims as radically different and thus, possibly inferior. The following image, which appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, is used in this way:



The Globe and Mail
Saturday, March 18, 2005

The bold headline – *End of the multicultural myth* – strongly suggests the content of Wente’s article and the photo simultaneously evokes strangeness and familiarity. The caption states:

“In the immigrant neighbourhoods you see veiled women all the time.” Given the headline and the extreme close up shot of this woman’s eyes looking out from her neqab, even before reading the article we get the sense this might be cause for worry. The image depicts an unknown, un-interviewed, (un-knowing?), woman wearing a form of covering often considered strange and out of place in Canada. Images of silent, covered females are a familiar part of the media landscape. They often project fixed, Orientalist meanings of covered women as oppressed, strange, and threatening. No details of this particular woman’s life are provided – not even her name or where she is from. As the media regularly use images of the bodies of Muslim women for profit, they are simultaneously putting their own taken-for-granted readings of covered bodies into circulation as the “truth” about Muslim women. When we view such a photo of an anonymous woman, what do we hear? Trinh (1998) asks: What would it take for “I-the-Seer . . . to mis-see so as to unlearn the privilege of seeing” (p. 24)?

... to listen and to hear the visual – in exquisite doubling(s) – to visualize the aural – and to work the spaces in-between. (Palulis & Low, 2005, p. 12)

I read Bhabha (2006) to think about what “mis-seeing” might mean for curriculum theorizing. He contends the richest experience when viewing art or reading a book “lies in getting a new vocabulary...a new vocabulary for naming an experience” (p. 21). Bhabha writes:

We knew it, so in a way the whole process of productive, engaged reading is an uncanny one, because nothing is more challenging than when what is familiar is renamed and therefore displaced into another discourse. If you take reading as that kind of process, not simply looking but having the vocabulary of a work *retool* what is familiar, it is a very productive thing. . . I’m suggesting that there has to be an interesting form of alienation where the work also produces a screen, where you see yourself also projected in that work, but at a distance from yourself. It is not the mirror: mirroring can be so supporting and you feel you have participated, but there has to be a screen where you are aware of what you are projecting, the values that you are also projecting and the resistance to those values. (p. 21)

Working with auto/ethno/graphy may interrupt our practices of othering through looking. Cracks form in the sedimented layers of my own subjectivity as I glimpse fleeting moments in the continuous “bricolaging” of the self. To rethink the self as bricolage “allows you to hold on to a moment of transition” (p. 24). What new language might arise by dwelling in-between “the familiar” and “the strange,” midst *sonare* and *videre*, as we engage in homework as fieldwork (Visweswaran, 1994)?

Three meditations on strange/r identities

- #1: I define the ‘stranger’ not as some-body that we do not recognize, but as some-body that we recognize *as a stranger*, a form of recognition which relies on differentiation between the familiar and strange (hence being a stranger easily slides into *being strange*). The process of recognizing strangers – those who do not belong in a given social space – involves techniques of differentiation through reading the bodies of others (Do you look as though you belong here? Are you familiar or strange?). The different value given to social spaces suggests that ‘being a stranger’ is not simply a relativisable condition of the world: some bodies are read as stranger than others precisely because of restricted ‘ownership’ of valued spaces. (Sara Ahmed, 2000b, p. 96)
- #2: Great generosity and extreme gratitude within sharp hostility; profound disturbance for both newcomers and old-timers: the experience of exile is never simply binary. It’s hard to be a stranger, it is even more so to stop being one. . . The one named ‘stranger’ will never really fit in, so it is said, joyfully. To be named and classified is to gain better acceptance, even when it is a question of fitting in a no-fit-in category. . . One is made to understand that if one has been temporarily kept within specific boundaries, it is mainly for one’s own good. Foreignness is acceptable once I no longer draw a line between myself and others. First assimilate, then be different within permitted boundaries: ‘When you no longer feel like a stranger, then there will be no problem in becoming a stranger again.’ As you come to love your new home, it is thus implied, you will immediately be sent back to your old home (the authorized and pre-marked ethnic, gender or sexual identity) where you are bound to undergo again another form of estrangement. (Trinh, 1998, pp. 12–13)
- #3: To take a stranger’s vantage point on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place. The homcomer notices details and patterns in his environment he never saw before. He finds that he has to think about local rituals and customs to make sense of them once more. For a time he feels quite separate from the person who is wholly at home in his in-group and takes the familiar world for granted. Such a person, writes Alfred Schutz, ordinarily “accepts the ready-made standardization scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world.”

The homcomer may have been such a person. Now, looking through new eyes, he cannot take the cultural pattern for granted. It may seem arbitrary to him or incoherent or deficient in some way. To make it meaningful again, he must interpret and reorder what he sees in the light of his changed experience. He must consciously engage in inquiry. When thinking-as-usual becomes untenable for anyone, the individual is bound to experience a crisis of consciousness. The formerly unquestioned has become questionable; the submerged has become visible. (Maxine Greene, 1973, p. 268)

Having spent nearly eight years living in places where modest codes of dress for women and men were the norm, when I returned to Canada to live in 1999 I was particularly sensitive to the degree to which dress codes for women in the west were very revealing. Everywhere I looked – in store windows, in magazines, on the street, or on television – I was shocked by the way that many women and girls were dressing. Young women, in particular, seemed to be wearing less and less. This may have been partly due to the influence of pop stars such as Brittany Spears. Soon after our return home, while standing in a check out line at a large grocery store, I was appalled by what I saw and read on magazine covers. I was so outraged that I actually made a formal complaint to the store manager. Why did my seven-year-old daughter have to be exposed to the explicit, highly sexualized portrayal of women every time we turned around? I found the stories headlined on magazines covers - on how to please your man in bed, how to make yourself sexier, how to look like a movie star, how to lose ten pounds in ten days - utterly degrading for women. I was also astounded by how much explicit sex was now being shown on T.V. compared to before we went abroad eight years earlier. I had come home more sensitized to what was going on in my own culture and did not like what I was seeing. Is this what freedom for women in the west means - freedom to be exploited as sex objects? The relentless focus on the importance of physical appearance - the impossible standards of beauty - made me feel that I had entered into a time warp. The familiar world I had spent most of my life in had been made strangely unfamiliar by all those years away. Trinh (1999) observes the “more one looks into one’s own culture, the more one sees there is no such thing as a place that one can return to safely” (p. 22). (Watt, Personal narrative)

Bodies midst the strange and the familiar: Muslim girls negotiate Catholic schools

Three participants had experiences with Catholic high schools. Visibly marked as Muslim by the Islamic covering they chose to wear, they negotiate their identities in-between the familiar and the strange, belonging and not-belonging, *sonare* and *videre*.

“Just for your own safety”

When they reached high school age, two good friends – Tina and Sahar – decided they wanted to attend their local Catholic school. Both girls preferred not to go to the public school in their neighborhood because they felt the values espoused in a Catholic school fit more closely

with their Islamic values. However, when they met with the principal of the Catholic school, he was concerned their visible difference might create problems. The black hijab they both wear as a sign of their devotion to Shia Islam visually marks them as Muslim and the principal asked them to consider taking it off. He stressed being Muslim wasn't a problem, but wearing hijab could be.

Tina describes their meeting with the principal:

We talked to the Vice Principal, and he told us – just for our own safety – that we had to take off the hijab ... for our own protection, so that we don't get critiqued a lot from people over there. And then we talked it over with him ... cuz no other hijabi girl was allowed in that year or even before. And then we told him that we would never take off our hijab because it's who we are, and we'd never take it off for any reason. And we told him that we would deal with the criticism from the students. And then he was really friendly about it. . . He accepted it and so then we went there . . . It's funny because everybody was looking at us [at first] ... and we felt uncomfortable... Even Arab [students] who were Muslim, themselves, stared at us. We didn't understand why they were looking until finally one girl approached me:

-*"How come you guys are allowed in?"*

-And I'm like, *"What do you mean?"*

-*"Well, in years before any girl wearing the hijab was not allowed in this school."*

And I thought, well that's funny because the VP was very comfortable with it once we explained our position to him . . . [Later] we were called "the pioneers of St. Mary's."

Tina and Sahar were questioned about whether their visible difference could be compatible with being a student in a Catholic school and ended up being revered as pioneers in this school. What conditions existed so that this could this happen?

Their principal was initially concerned about Sahar and Tina. He was trying to protect them from their visual unfamiliarity in that setting. That he assumed it would be no problem for the girls to simply uncover suggests a lack of understanding of the meanings the practice has for women who cover, but he did meet with Tina and Sahar, and he listened. At the same time, the girls were eager to explain and defend their position. This principal heard what they had to say and changed his position; he allowed himself to be affected by their point of view. Springgay

(2008a) theorizes a “pedagogy of corporeal generosity for education,” which encourages “interpersonal, affective relations” (p. 122). As Ahmed (2004) contends “[t]o be emotional is to have one’s judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than anonymous” (p. 3). This administrator may have had his assumptions disrupted. These two Muslim teenagers were perhaps other than what he had first imagined, as were the staff and students at the school. By permitting difference, educative opportunities opened up for all members of the school community via the ensuing complicated conversations that emerged. How do we remain open to the possibilities of surprise in our social relations?

While putting together these stories about Muslim girls and Catholic schools, I was listening to the CBC radio program, As it Happens. Julius Grey, a human rights lawyer and professor at McGill University was being interviewed about issues of “tolerance” and “accommodation” in Quebec. I was struck by the way his words echoed the concerns of Sahar and Tina’s principal at the Catholic school. Grey asserted it was much more dangerous for a woman wearing neqab to face the “I-don’t-want-you” than to just take off her covering. Who is out of place in a supposedly open, democratic society: the women who wish to wear neqab or those telling them how they may or may not dress?

(Watt, Personal narrative)

“We can handle ourselves”

Sahar also told me her version of the story of how the two friends negotiated their entry into their local Catholic high school. Like Tina, she stood firm with regards to her decision to wear hijab at school. While both young women remember experiencing an uncomfortable beginning at the school – including curious looks from students and staff – they welcomed questions from others about their religious customs and beliefs and were also eager to learn about others. Here is Sahar’s story about the meeting with the principal:

-When we first met the principal he told us: “Oh, you’re going to have to take off your hijab because people might not accept it” . . . and so on . . . “because we’ve never had hijab before in this school.”

-And then he said: “The reason I’m saying to take off your hijab is just so that you guys will feel comfortable. No one will harass you.”

-But I was like: “*Don’t worry about it, we can handle ourselves.*” You know what I mean? You know, you can handle yourself . . . Even if you don’t wear the hijab you’re always going to be harassed. So the first few days it was a little bit awkward because people would look at us . . . They wouldn’t give us dirty looks or anything. They would look at us in maybe a curious way, like, “*Wow, I’ve never seen these girls before.*” We were the only ones wearing the black hijab. Our teachers talked to us, and they never treated us differently than the other students . . . maybe a little bit more special, but it was actually always in a good, positive way. And we clicked with the teachers, and we clicked with the students. And the interesting thing about it is that the students, themselves, became interested in us and learning more about us and why we were wearing the hijab, why we fast, why we pray. And then our Chaplain started . . . [to] make announcements in home room and say something about Islam. And it was very nice. I thought it was the best experience ever. I liked it.

The visual difference of Tina and Sahar’s head covering drew concern from an administrator and curious stares from staff and students. When a black hijab evokes curiosity or discomfort in an Ontario high school, how might educators respond? Do we avoid potentially risky encounters with the unfamiliar, or do we engage them? What might we lose by censoring and/or marginalizing difference? Tina and Sahar explain most people they met at their new school claimed to know very little about Islam. Do we leave it to Hollywood and the corporate media to educate our young people about difference? About who belongs and who does not? What might be the personal and the societal, and the local and global implications of doing so?

“I’d feel really out of place”

After an initial, difficult period, Sahar and Tina participated in a remarkable intercultural exchange during the years they spent at St. Mary’s Catholic High School. The culture of the school and the open personalities of these young women may have made it possible to engage in conversations unlike any that had taken place before in that school. Noor also considered attending the Catholic school in her neighborhood, but decided against it. She explains:

When we first moved to Springfield there was a Catholic high school up the street, and my parents did everything they could to convince me to go there: “*Noor you should go here. It’s close to home. You could come home for lunch.*” . . . And so I went to the

school to get an interview. You had to interview to get into the school for some reason, and I thought, okay I'll give it a chance. If there are other Muslim students in the school I don't mind going, but I wondered about a hijabi girl going to a Catholic high school.

So we met with the principal and I was asking him:

-*"What's your Muslim population in the school?"*

-He's like, *"Oh, we have lots."*

-He then took out a year book and flipped it open to, like, kids with turbans on, and was like: *"This is Hardeep and we have Mandip right here. She's a nice girl."* And I'm thinking, these are not Muslims! So anyway, I ended up telling my parents, *"I am so sorry but I would feel uncomfortable and out of place, being clearly not a Catholic."* Not that you have to be Catholic to go to a Catholic school. . . I'd feel really out of place. So instead, I ended up doing a fifteen minute commute to the closest public high school.

The principal at this Catholic high school seemed unable to discriminate between a turban worn by Sikh males, and hijab worn by Muslim females. Perhaps—caught up in dominant humanist assumptions of identity—his response suggests a reliance on a binary categorization of the social world into “us” and “them,” effectively erasing difference in the process.

Another possibility is that he categorized Noor according to her visible, racialized features. Abdurraquib (2009), a racialized, black, Muslim woman points out that her racial identity obscures all other aspects of her identity (p. 137). She observes:

Because my racial identity looms large in people's minds, my Muslim identity is, for the most part, obscured. I cannot count how many times strangers have asked me where I was from. (p. 137)

Abdurraquib argues that Muslim identity is mostly equated with an Arab/Middle Eastern identity, and contends “this alignment ... leads to a conflation between religion and race that constrains the potential connections between other racial identities and Islam” (p. 135).

This may be due to the fact that vast majority of representations of Muslims we see in the mass media are of Arabs. Abukhattala (2004) observes,

Western writers and news anchors use the terms *Arab* and *Muslim* interchangeably, although they are not necessarily the same: not every Muslim is Arab, nor is every Arab Muslim. In fact, Arabs comprise less than 15 per cent of the whole population of the Islamic world, and considerable numbers of Arabs are Jews or Christians. The largest Muslim country in the world is Indonesia, with around 95 million non-Arab Muslims.

Futhermore, Iran is not, as commonly thought in the West, an Arabic country. Iranians are Persians, and they speak Farsi, an Indo-European tongue closely related to several European languages. (p. 160)

Whether the principal was reading Noor's identity according to racialized or religious markers (or something else), he seemed unaware of the implications of lumping difference into one huge category. Noor's response suggests that thinking identity in this way may have material effects.

As Alcoff (2006) asserts, "[t]he reality of identities often comes from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them" (p. 5). Visuality defines identities and where they fit into the existing social order. Noor was put off by the principal's apparent lack of cultural sensitivity and this lead her to reject the Catholic school. She felt invisible and excluded – perhaps sensing her place in that school would be as a marginalized body. To disrupt our practices of looking means to disrupt the imaginary social order.

Many pre-service teachers in my courses express concern about their lack of knowledge of the many cultures they may face in their classrooms. Some see this aspect of teaching as an "add on" beyond the mandated curriculum documents they are required to work with, and they question whether responding to difference is part of their job description². Others worry about how they will find time to learn about all the differences of their students. However, this presupposes an instrumental view of learning as the acquisition of a body of authoritative, pre-existing knowledge. What if we were to view our roles as educators through the more engaged and active lens of curriculum-as-verb – remaining open to learning *with* and *from*

² In addition to statements on diversity in Ontario Curriculum documents, the province has mandated the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009). It continues to use humanist language of "diversity" and "inclusion" which silently assumes a normative "center," rather than the language of "difference." Teacher educators and student teachers must navigate conflicting discourses as the language of humanism dominates curriculum language in Ontario.

students? Moments of discomfort are unavoidable if we view identities and knowledges as relational and always in process. This can never be easy, for it inevitably involves risking the self. However, if learning is understood as an embodied relation, don't we need to learn how to dwell in-between comfort and discomfort to prepare students for democracy-to-come?

More requests to uncover

Niqab Gets 2nd Quebec Student Expelled
Last Updated: Monday, April 12, 2010 | 2:38 PM ET CBC News

For the second time in the space of a few months, a Quebec woman has been thrown out of a French-language course after she refused to remove her Muslim veil. The woman, who wants media to refer to her only as Aisha, is a 25-year-old permanent resident from India. She was enrolled at the Centre d'intégration multi-services de l'Ouest de l'Île in the Montreal suburb of Pointe-Claire, which works with the province to integrate new immigrants.

Jardine (2008) meditates on a conversation he had in a grade ten social studies class about British Minister Jack Straw's request that Muslim women should unveil in his presence, and that their refusing to do so is nothing more than a way of cutting themselves off from British culture. And a Canadian Muslim girl in that class observes that covering is often seen as "hiding something" (p. 4). She wonders if this might help to explain "the hushed conversations and stares on the bus on the way to school"(p. 4). I have seen similar stares and heard hushed conversations while riding on buses in Ottawa with Muslim female students who wore hijab and spoke Arabic amongst themselves.

As Shanaz Khan (2002), and Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) contend, young Canadian Muslims have to negotiate an extremely complex discursive terrain. To appreciate the nature of these difficult negotiations in schooling contexts, educators might remain attuned to the broader political, cultural, and social scene. Rizvi (2005) asserts that if we wish to understand what

Muslim students face in schooling contexts we need to make connections to what is going on outside of school, in-between local and global contexts. Differentiations are repeatedly imagined between an “us” and a “them” in the mass media, constituting our subjectivities in ways that seep into our sense of ourselves and in turn, our social relations. The reiteration of humanist binaries fuels the notion that those who are not “us” do not belong “here” (Hamdani, 2006; Jiwani, 2005; Rizvi, 2005).

Cooke (2001) asserts “[i]mages of covered women epitomize Islam. These women’s bodies serve as icons of Muslim otherness . . . Such images fit into and exacerbate our preconceptions. All of these women represent something other than themselves” (p.131). Many scholars have written on the complex practices of veiling.³ Lewis and Mills (2003) suggest, “to look for a singular meaning to the veil would be an error of Orientalist proportions” (p. 18). Shirazi (2001) similarly discusses the “semantic versatility” of the veil, insisting that “to delimit the meanings of the veil is indeed a challenging if not impossible task” (p. 176). It is “a simple garment that millions of women deal with in their daily lives as a matter of habit, without a second thought . . . just another article of clothing” (p. 180). At the same time, the veil is “an enormously important symbol, as it carries thousands of years of religious, sexual, social, and political significance within its folds” (p. 180). Bahramitash (2004) explains:

The wearing of a hijab can assume multiple meanings that are shaped and reshaped through symbolic actions and interactions between people, collectively as well as individually. The veil can symbolize something very personal or it can represent a highly political act, or it can refer to both at the same time, or to neither. Sometimes it is more just a matter of ‘that’s what people wear,’ something taken for granted without any special personal or political significance. Moreover, the meaning and intentions behind the veil can be very different for the woman who wears it as opposed to those who see her in it. (p. 193)

³ See, for example: Alvi, Hoodfar & McDonough, 2003; Bodman & Tohidi, 1998; El Guindi, 1999a; 1999b; Hargreaves, 2000; Heath, 2008; Lewis & Mills, 2003; Shirazi, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 1997.

Macdonald (2006) describes the capacity of images of the veiled Muslim body to provoke intense reactions and “eclipse Muslim women’s own diversity of voice and self-definition”

(p. 7). She also argues a fixation on veiling inhibits debate on the social, economic, and political positioning of Muslim women.

Given the persistence of Orientalist associations with practices of veiling, it is difficult for many to imagine *why* a young woman or girl would voluntarily cover in Canada and it is often assumed that anyone who does so is being forced. Trinh (1988) suggests if the practice of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, on how and where women see dominance. She asserts difference should neither be defined by the dominant sex nor the dominant culture. On the one hand, when “women decide to lift the veil one can say that they do it in defiance of their men’s oppressive right to their bodies” (p. 3). On the other hand, “when they decide to keep or put on the veil they once took off they might do so to re-appropriate their space to claim a new difference” (p. 3). How might the category “*Muslim woman*” open up if practices of veiling were viewed from the perspectives of the women who cover? Under what conditions might the voices of these women be invited into curricular conversations?

There are days when I am tired of the battles, when I feel demoralized to the point of wanting to abandon the scarf so that I might be invisible again, not a symbol or a pawn.
(Taylor, 2008, p. 123)

As a Muslim woman and academic who specializes in the study of gender issues in Islam, I have a well-developed response at the ready whenever I’m asked about the veil: I plead battle fatigue. I’m just really, *really* tired of talking about it.
(Ali, 2008, p. 281)

What is it about a veil that poses such a threat to Western women? Once symbolizing reverence or mystery in Western culture, veiled women today signify tyranny, and lifting the veil has become a metaphor for freedom and democracy. As liberated women, we identify covered faces and bodies as constrained, but we fail to question how or why we see them that way.
(Zeiger, 2008, p. 266)

As much as the veil is fabric or an article of clothing, it is also a concept. It can be illusion, vanity, artifice, deception, liberation, imprisonment, euphemism, divination, concealment, hallucination, depression, eloquent silence, holiness, the ethers beyond consciousness, the hidden hundredth name of God, the final passage into death, even the biblical apocalypse, the lifting of God's veil, signaling so-called end times. When veiling is forced – then enforced – it is repression. Yet, as we see increasingly today, the veil is also a symbol of resistance – against ethnic and religious discrimination. When the veil is forcibly stripped from its wearer, that too, is subjugation, not emancipation.

(Heath, 2008, p. 3)

Ironically, in the beginning, Christian women wore the veil, like their Jewish and Greek predecessors. In every illustration, particularly those of Mary, mother of Jesus, the Christian saints wear head coverings.

(Stephan, 2008, p. 195)

Deconstructing “veil”

In their work on dress in the Middle East, Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham (1997) inquire into “how clothing construes social identity” (p. 3) in particular settings. They argue that “the rhetorical power of the imagery of the veil lies in its vacuity; everything depends on who is describing the phenomenon of veiling, for whom and to what end” (p. 14). They point to Reza Shah's dress reforms in Iran, which followed similar moves by Attaturk, in Turkey. By outlawing the practice of covering, the Shah assumed to be “capable of automatically transforming identities from those which were seen as ‘eastern’ to those associated with the ‘west’” (p. 2). All these years later, Canadian Muslim females are faced with having to negotiate efforts to impose dress codes upon them, whether being asked to cover or uncover.

By equating dress codes with religion we obscure the fact that clothing worn by Muslims is as varied and culturally specific as clothes worn by Jews, Buddhists, or atheists.

(Fox Shaheed, 2008, p. 303)

The “veil” may spell trouble for some identities. The Cambridge Dictionary (2010) defines the secular meaning of the verb, *to veil*, as a means to hide or cover something so you can't see it clearly. As a noun, *a veil* is something that prevents you from knowing what is happening. The religious meaning is that of a piece of cloth that covers the head and shoulders, especially of

women. As the young Muslim woman in Jardine's (2008) grade ten Social Studies class suggests, given the non-religious meanings of veil and its associations with secrecy, it may seem logical to assume that women who choose "to veil" are hiding something. In other words, the secular meaning of a word can conjure up associations that bring suspicion upon the body of the covered woman. Lewis and Mills (2003) explain that in Orientalist discourse the veil is privileged as proof of the Orient's "inimical difference from the West" (p. 14). Chatty (1997) points out it "sets women apart and creates a barrier around their person" (pp.142–43). In an interview, Noor explains that she decided to cover in part to signal her Muslim identity to others. For her, wearing the hijab sets up certain expectations for social relations – especially between women and men – and she is frustrated when this message is ignored or misread. She gives the example of how men still sometimes reach out to shake her hand even though she wears hijab.

Miriam, as an Alawite, practices a form of Islam in which women do not cover. She explains during an interview that she is puzzled by some aspects of the practice of covering:

The whole thing about wearing the hijab is that you don't want to attract attention. So you cover up your hair because I guess you can style your hair and then you cover up your hair to avert attention. But most of the hijabis I know wear fancy hijabs and their clothes are fancy clothes...And I think, in my opinion that attracts more attention than showing your hair.

This concern with appearances came across in the following article in the newsletter of the

Muslim Student Association at the University of Western Ontario (2006):

What hijab to match my outfit? – possibly the greatest dilemma of my day. Yes brothers, I know this dilemma seems so trivial and petty, but I'm quite certain that almost every single hijabi sister can sympathize with my struggle. It's bad enough trying to find decent and respectable clothes in this day and age, but also adding, well, not the subtlest of accessories, doesn't make this calamity any easier. (Al-Noorwi, p. 3)

Practices of covering are indeed highly variable, fluid, and dependent on individual and contextual circumstances, including ethnicity, culture, politics, aesthetics, and religious sect.

“Unveil” means *to reveal* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2010). Implied in this word may be a certain honesty, exposure, or openness. In North American society, the practice of covering is widely assumed to be oppressive, so freedom may be equated with uncovering (Khaf, 1999). A Muslim friend describes herself as being “trapped in veiling discourses,” for people who don’t know her often relate to her based on assumptions they have about Islam and covering. Veiling has become affixed to her body as a defining feature of how others view her, even though she doesn’t cover. Some are confused when they hear her slight Iranian accent and see her olive skin and dark eyes and hair. They assume living in Canada means she has throw off the oppression of veiling. A posting on a BBC News site in response to the Dutch burqa ban, and Abukhattala’s comments on media portrayals of hijab, invite women to think about how we are all caught up in dominant meanings related to bodies and dress codes:

I really cannot understand what all the fuss is about. Why is it always considered ok to wear less, but if someone likes to cover up everyone becomes alarmed?”

(Anna from Tehran, Viewpoints, Nov. 2, 2005, p. 5)

The media portray Islamic *hijab* as outdated and oppressive. For these ethnocentric Westerners, full entry in the public domains and other indicators of liberation are reflected in Western styles of dress. Do Muslim women really need to dress in skimpy clothing and use their sexual charm to get them to higher grounds? Should they wear scandalous clothing that is very provocative to be seen as liberated? Do Muslim women lack sophistication because they do not walk around topless? Do women want men to ignore their personalities and minds and be attentive only to their appearance and physical attributes?

(Abukhattala, 2004, p. 162)

Halima, a participant in Bullock’s (1998) research with Canadian Muslim women, describes wearing hijab as a symbol of a woman’s “power to take back her own dignity and her own sexuality” (p. 1).

We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or be present at everything and ‘know’ everything.

(Nietzsche, in Lather, 2007, p. 16)

The issue of veiling and fashion also came up in conversations with my research participants. Teenagers tend to be very conscious of their appearance, and this may be especially the case with girls. Noor talks to me about wearing hijab in an environment where you are likely to be judged by whether or not you are wearing the latest brand name fashions:

For girls, everything is how you are dressed and, you know, like wearing loose clothing has never been really “in.” And, you know, in high school girls want to show off their bodies, show off their curves, and you’re automatically different as soon as you walk in and you’re fully covered. (Noor, Research participant)

Springgay (2008a), in theorizing a bodied curriculum suggests educators generally “neglect to inquire into the conditions that produce particular appeals to clothing and the emotional, tactile, and comforting experience of clothes” (p. 60). Adolescents express who they are through the body in the form of piercings, make-up, hairstyles, jewelry, tattoos, and dress. Springgay argues that as “a mode of inquiry, clothing allows ... students to change what they wear and thereby fantasize about who they want to be” (p. 61).

I recently heard a teacher say she hopes we won’t have any students wearing “one of those face covering things.” (Watt, Personal narrative)

Almost daily I am reminded of the conditions that first led me to do this research. The phone rings and it's a friend. We briefly talk about the assumptions many people have with regards to Muslims. She tells me that she has no problem with Muslims it's just that she finds “some of those things that they wear scary” and wishes they would “just take them off.” (Watt, Personal narrative)

In the city of Maaseik, in Belgium . . . a ban on wearing the hijab is already in place. Mayor Jan Creemers said he brought it forward because old people were afraid and children cried when women started appearing in long black robes with their faces covered. (Mardell, BBC World News on-line, Jan. 16, 2006, p. 2)

My Canadian friend and I went to watch, “*Looking for Comedy in the Muslim world*.” As we were waiting for the movie to start we talked about what it meant to be veiled. She said that women in black veils, especially if they are wearing a Neqab, are scary. I was surprised . . . not so much because she was scared of veiled women (that I expected; it is in my system now), but because of the color black. Veil to me is pink, red, any color but black. It is sky blue to my friend Mona. But Mona also says if veil is “Roosary”, it is white and sky blue; however, if it is chador, then it reminds her of the color black. And I close

my eyes, and I remember my best friend Soheila, in Iran. In a black chador, she looks incredibly beautiful. The black color contrasts with her skin tone and that accentuates her beautiful eyes. Wearing Chador was compulsory at Garmsar University, a branch of Islamic Azad University, where I did my Master's degree for a year. Since I never thought I looked particularly good in Chador, I had to come up with a solution . . . wearing more make-up, a red lipstick . . . With a black Chador, it looked gorgeous.

(Hasan, in Watt & Hasan, 2006)

Balasescu (2003) theorizes how dress is entangled with the modern/non-modern binary. He observes the use of designer headscarves as hijab among middle-class Tehranian women complicates the simple discursive construction of modern as secular and non-modern as religious. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2006) emphasizes veiling should not be confused with a lack of agency or even traditionalism. She contends western feminists who take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of oppressed Muslim women assume individual desire and social convention are inherently at odds. Abu-Lughod argues this is not borne out by the experience of Islamic societies. In the west, stereotypical images of Muslim women in the mass media have a “deadening effect . . . on our capacity to appreciate the complexity and diversity of Muslim women’s lives.” McDonough (2003) asserts dualistic thinking characterizes the representation of Islamic covering in much popular journalism. Two different realities (Muslim/non-Muslim) are opposed to each other. “On the one hand, there is reason, intelligence, democracy, equality of the sexes, and, on the other hand, religion, stupidity, violence and oppression” (p. 106).

Fashion as resistance in Iran

Moaveni (2006), in her memoir as an American-Iranian living in Tehran, recounts a story of veiling resistance. She describes a well-known Iranian fashion designer as “a foot soldier in the struggle against the regime’s assault on beauty” (p. 159) because of the colourful and stylish Islamic coverings he creates for women. Moaveni also comments on her aunt’s refusal to wear any of his designs. She writes:

He wanted to reclaim the *roopoosh* [the full-length, dark, baggy coat that many Iranian women wear because of the law which forces them to cover], make it exquisite and flattering, turn the Islamic uniform into a garment of aesthetic resistance ... Fashion as resistance. What an intriguing concept, and how heartening to find style in the land of everything-must-be-as-ugly-as-possible-at-all-times. . . [My aunt] couldn't be bothered to have a *manteau* made for her. For her part, she had worn the same shapeless, navy-blue *roopoosh* every day for the last four years. It looked atrocious the day she bought it, and four years later, it resembled a worn grocery sack. Am I *khar* (an ass), she said each time I nagged her to buy something new, that I should spend money on the regime's uniform? The wardrobe she had accumulated throughout her life, the piles and piles of silk scarves acquired during two decades in America, reposed in her vault-like closet, wrapped in tissue. Many of her friends were similarly disinclined to prettify their *roopoosh* wardrobes, as this meant engaging with the Islamic Republic, something they avoided at all costs. (p.160)

Moaveni views these fashionable coats as a form of resistance to the dark and dreary *roopoosh*, while her aunt refuses to wear them because she views it as a form of complicity with the Islamic regime which forces veiling on all women. The story of those in positions of power deciding what women should wear or not wear has been present throughout history. In spite of feminist efforts to take control of our own bodies, it continues into the present.

If (man) orders us to veil, we veil, and if he now demands that we unveil, we unveil... (man may be) as despotic about liberating us as he has been about our enslavement. We are wary of his despotism. (Malak Hifni Nassef [1886-1918] Egyptian feminist, writer, and activist. In Fox Shaheed, 2008, p. 20)

Yes, I'm against, yes, yes I am. Against those who prescribe the veil and other such things, and against those who forbid it too, and who think they can forbid it, imagining that this is good, that it is possible and that it is meaningful. (Derrida, 2001, p. 77)

Playing at being the other

I admire a photo of my daughter wrapped from head to toe in a small, black chador, recalling the joy we experienced that day on our visit to Shiraz. To get into a holy shrine I had to put on a chador and the female attendants noticed her standing at my side. At six years old, she did not need to cover to visit this shrine, but the women made a big fuss over her and, smiling broadly, asked if she would like to wear a chador like her mother's. They soon produced a kid-sized garment identical to mine and helped her to put it on, making her feel grown up and special. After our visit, we posed outside to take some photos. I positioned my daughter in front of the building so I could include the Farsi script on the wall into the picture. I thought it would add another layer of exoticism to the content of the photo.
(Watt, Personal narrative)

...[I]n order not to be confused with the tourist, the traveler has to become clandestine. He has to *imitate* the Other, to hide and disguise himself in an attempt to inscribe himself in a counter-exoticism that will allow him to be a non-tourist – that is, someone who no longer resembles his falsified other, hence a stranger to his own kind. (Trinh, 1998, pp. 22–23)



Kathleen Watt in front of a holy shrine.
Shiraz, Iran.
Photo by Diane Watt (1997).
Reprinted with permission

This treasured family photograph is a souvenir of a memorable trip we made. It now takes on more complex and contradictory meanings looked at from postcolonial perspectives. Dressing up in a black chador was a moment of family fun. This garment had no religious meaning for us – it was just a swath of black cloth, easily shed at the end of our visit. The women who offered it to my daughter were participants in our dress-up play, and they giggled heartily as they helped to wrap it around the body of this foreign little girl. In dressing Kathleen as the exotic other, I thought little at the time about the processes of othering we were caught up in and the broader implications.

Steet (2000) analyzes the appearance of images of Westerners dressed like Arabs in *National Geographic Magazine*, suggesting “this colonialist cross-dressing produced and an interesting, if not ridiculous image” (p. 105). She draws on the work of Kabbani, who writes, “shedding European clothes for Oriental garb became a pleasant pastime for the traveler . . . making a journey East more exotic, and it seemed to allow the traveler a deeper access to a cloistered world” (p. 105). Steet also compares putting on the clothing of another culture to the way an actor might put on the costume of a character he or she was portraying as a way to gain access to the thoughts and behavior of that character.

Covering and Canadian Islamic Identities

“I knew who I was now”

Noor was born, and has lived her whole life, in Canada. She talks about her decision to start covering in grade 12 and how this influenced her sense of identity. Her family had moved to a new city after grade 11, and after a period of investigation and reflection, she felt this was the perfect time to start wearing hijab. Here is part of our conversation:

Diane: Is fair to say that deciding to wear the hijab in grade twelve somehow helped you to assert your identity as a Muslim woman?

Noor: It has helped. It’s definitely been like a sort of growing, like a struggle along the way. And there’s the everyday things that come up . . . like certain situations will happen in every Muslim’s life even if you’re not hijabi necessarily . . . that put you on the defensive. And this binary that you speak of, like why should there be an “us” versus a “them,” why should there be the categories of non-Muslims versus Muslims, I think as a Muslim, my opinion is that I have become very defensive about being a Muslim because I feel like we’ve been attacked so many times on a personal level and on an international level because of the political state that continues to go on. So, I think for me, it’s definitely been, like I feel very defensive and sometimes I feel very attacked by non-Muslims.

Diane: It seems to me something changed when you switched schools after grade 11 and started wearing hijab . . . the part of your identity associated with Islam.

Noor: Definitely, and even my thinking . . . I started to gain more confidence because, I mean, you have to be confident to put it on, I think. You have to have a certain level of confidence to put it on. Islam was one thing I was willing to stand up for.

Diane: So, what was it like when you started to wear hijab? Did you feel different?

Noor: Yeah, everything changed. I think it helped me find out about myself. Like, I knew who I was now. I knew where I came from. I could answer with confidence. And with a hijab everyone knew I was Muslim and I was avoiding a lot of the problems I had before. You know, like if my friends had asked previously to go drinking before I started wearing hijab I wouldn't tell them it was against my religion. I don't know why. Maybe I didn't think they would understand, or I thought they'd make fun of my religion. So, I just used to say, "*I can't tonight.*" Or my mom, I used to blame it on my mom a lot. And then when I started wearing hijab, it's like, no – now they know I'm Muslim and this is it. It's against my religion. It gave me more confidence as a person, actually, to stand up for what I believed in. But for my parents, they were like: "*We're moving to a new city and that's hard enough. Are you sure you want to start wearing hijab because that might make it even harder, because wearing it is new for you?*" No one in my family had ever worn it before; I was the first one in the family. . . I've never thought about taking it off since. It's never been an option.

"I tried the veil for a while"

Jana, on the other hand, had a different response to covering. She decided to try it after grade 12. Like Noor, she explains it was easier to do when starting at a new school.

Jana: I tried the veil for a while. My parents were pressuring me for a while to do it. There's a verse in the Koran that says that it's a sin to wear it by force or to wear it when you don't believe in it, because the reason you're wearing it – even if you don't understand why you're wearing it, you're putting your trust in, this is what God wants, so because this would please my God I'm going to do it. So, by wearing it because your parents are forcing you to – because whoever is pressuring you to do it - you're not doing it for God, you're doing it so they don't get angry with you. I didn't want to do it, and then I went to university and I was like, it's now or never ... You're starting new. It's a lot easier starting new and having it on when no one knows you than to be around the same people and suddenly start wearing it. It makes the transition a lot easier. So it was like, it's now or never, I'm going to go for it. So I tried it, and you know the comment I got the most? And I think you know something about my personality by now, the comment I got the most was: "*This so doesn't suit your personality!*" . . . which is the stereotype of . . . I'm supposed to be a subdued little goodie-goodie.

Diane: You mean that somehow that piece of cloth makes you a different person?

Jana: Yeah, it's going to make me a different person. But I was, like, I made it kind of my own personal mission to make my behaviour even more outrageous than before (laughs). And people were like, "*What are you doing? What's wrong with you?*" I just, I hated the fact that because now I was wearing this piece of cloth on my head I had to adjust my personality to fit it. So, I would find crazy ways to purposely rub it in their face that, like, no, I'm still going to say stupid things, I'm still going to yell out stuff in class. Like, this is who I am, I'm the person who will do the thing

that, if you tell me to do it and I think it's funny, I'm going to do it, and I'll deal with the consequences later.

Nefertari (2005) writes about women who “fiercely assert Islam even though they have felt American hands tug at their clothing, especially since 9/11” (p. 47). They “are obviously Muslim even though non-Muslims hurl offensive epithets or gestures at them. They do not cower” (p. 47). She believes it “takes a warrior to be a Muslim woman” (p. 47). This view counters the dominant narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman circulating in the curricular contexts of schooling and visual media cultures (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2006; Kahf, 1999). For Nefertari, women who choose to cover “undeniably act out real life resistance to the hyper-sexualization of girls and women in the West . . . [W]omen who cover express the power of intellect over silhouette, of mind over matters of flesh” (p. 46). She asserts that there is no doubt that some men are still using women to assert a political agenda via Islam, and that she knows women who cover themselves and their daughters for the wrong reasons, but also reminds herself that she knows “some women who wear push up bras for the same wrong reason: to please men” (p. 47). Nefertari questions the simple binary, free/oppressed as it applies to women. She hears too many of her fellow feminists focus on hijab, “urging complete unveiling as the key to unleashing an authentic liberation. For them, scarves strangle any movement toward Muslim women's emancipation” (p. 46). She recalls generations of women who have worn “bustles, hoops, garters, bustiers, corsets, zippers, pantyhose, buckles, belts, pins, and super tight micro-minis” (p. 46) while men wear comfortable shoes and slacks.

At the age of six, my daughter asked me when she could start wearing a long coat and headscarf. She had lived in predominantly Muslim countries all her life and we were living in Tehran at the time. For her, it may simply have been a garment she associated with being an adult woman. Even though she obviously knew that we were not Muslim, she saw me covering to go out of the house and wanted to do what the women around her were doing to feel grown up. How do we come to assume what is “normal” in any given social

context? Why have I made the decisions that I have over the years to dress in particular ways and not in others?
(Watt, Personal narrative)

The Muslim Canadian Congress Wants to Ban the Burka

Top Egyptian cleric says niqab has nothing to do with Islam / Oct. 8, 2009

TORONTO - The Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC) is asking Ottawa to introduce legislation to ban the wearing of masks, niqabs and the burka in all public dealings. In a statement, the MCC said, not only is the wearing of a face-mask a security hazard and has led to a number of bank heists in Canada and overseas, the burka or niqab are political symbols of Saudi inspired Islamic extremism. The MCC dismissed the argument that wearing of a face-mask by Muslim women is protected by the Charter's guarantee of religious freedom. The MCC said, there is no requirement in the Quran for Muslim women to cover their faces. Invoking religious freedom to conceal one's identity and promote a political ideology is disingenuous. (Muslim Canadian Congress, 2009)

Preoccupied with un/covering in Iran

During the three years we lived in Tehran in the late 1990's, I was fixated on the issue of Islamic covering. At the time we were there, this seemed a natural preoccupation and many other foreign women I knew were similarly interested in this practice. It was confusing because I met Iranian women who greatly resented being forced to cover and others who embraced it. Looking back on my obsession through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory, I now view this obsession in terms of how I was positioning myself in relation to Iranian women. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2006) report that when preservice teachers looked at images of covered Muslim women they imagined Muslim women to be oppressed while they imagined themselves to be free. Is this what I was imagining? Tracing my shifting readings of the veil through auto/ethno/graphic readings of personal photographs helped to interrupt the colonial gaze that situates me in the social world (Kuhn, 2007; Kuhn and Emkio, 2006).

While living in Tehran, a Canadian acquaintance (whom I will name Susan), hosted a small gathering to talk about women's issues. The guest of honor, Nazita, was a western-educated Iranian woman who held a high position in the Iranian government. Nazita arrived in the Islamic covering she normally wore in public. Once inside the privacy of Susan's home she took off the outer layers but kept her hijab on. Susan assured her that no

men were present and insisted she take off her hijab as well. Nazita declined at first, but not wanting to offend her hostess, finally gave in to Susan's suggestion that there was "no need to wear that here." Once the hijab came off, positive comments were made by some of the women present about how different, how beautiful, Nazita looked without it. Then Susan's husband unexpectedly walked into the room. He was introduced and reached out to shake Nazita's hand, which she reluctantly offered.

(Watt, Personal narrative)

Years later, I wonder what violence that was committed in these moments. Did we assume Nazita would throw off her "oppression" in the "western" spaces of Susan's home? Spivak (1993) has been vocal in her calls for white, western feminists to find out more about the rest of the world, so they might challenge their own ignorance about the situations of women in other countries, rather than assuming that they are all oppressed and need to be saved.

I have heard Canadian Muslim women tell of similar entreaties to uncover. Complete strangers they meet on the street or in the supermarket feel obliged to let them know that "there is no need to cover like that here in Canada" – even though many of these covered women were born in Toronto, Saskatoon, Vancouver. Why are Muslim bodies seen as out-of-place?

Although Islam in Canada is associated with the Middle East and South Asia, it is a Canadian religion. The native-born Muslim women are the single largest segment. Accounting for one-quarter of the Muslim population, they outnumber those Canadian Muslim women who were born in the Middle East or South Asia. (Hamdani, 2004, p. 2)

Is a refusal to uncover a refusal to be free? Were Tina and Sahar refusing freedom and a willingness to be part of the community when they refused their principal's request to uncover so they could attend the school of their choice? What motivates some in positions of power – school principals, lawyers, politicians, journalists – to assert that covering signifies an unwillingness to fit in? From what position of authority do they speak?

On any given day, my attitude about being forced to wear hijab was a barometer of how I was coping in my new home in Iran. When daily life was going well I felt positive, and wearing the coat and scarf symbolized my adjustment. When I was homesick or in the throes of culture shock, or when aspects of life in Tehran were trying, the hijab could feel oppressive. When unhappy or stressed, the binary mind-set could rapidly

take over. In these moments, my own culture seemed natural and right, while much about Iran was found wanting. The binary oppositions of humanism represent “very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates” (Ashcroft et al, 1998, p. 24). (Watt, Personal narrative)

On not covering: “*Why don’t you wear hijab?*”

The emphasis on image is so strong
that if you don’t look like a
caricatured Muslim,
you simply cannot be one. (Masood, 2008, p. 225)

One might expect covering to draw attention, but even choosing not to cover may be an issue for Muslim females both inside and outside of schooling contexts. When Leila and I had the following conversation, she had not yet decided to cover, but it has been an issue she has not been able to avoid. In high school, she was often asked about veiling.

Diane: During your high schooling years, did anybody ask you why you don’t cover?

Leila: That was generally the first or second question: “*Why don’t you wear hijab? Why don’t you wear that? Why don’t you wear the scarf? You’re not Muslim. What is this?*” That always, always came up.

Diane: What would you say?

Leila: I usually just gave the answer: “*Well, you know ...*” At first it was: “*I just don’t wear one.*” And then it got more detailed: “*I never grew up wearing one and my mother never grew up wearing one.*” ... I have two aunts – one actually married a convert, and one married another Somali guy, and the one who married a convert doesn’t cover. The one who married another Somali guy, her husband encourages it, so she covers, but we don’t in my household. So then it was: “*My mother doesn’t make me, so I don’t do it*” (laughs). And then it got more to: “*Well, it’s a choice and it’s not the choice I’ve made at this point in my life, to cover. Maybe later I will. I’m not discounting that. It’s something I have to be sure of. I’m not going to do it just because everybody else is doing it.*”

“*It comes from both sides*”

For Miriam, the questioning came from many sources, including from her Muslim friends. Since she belongs to a minority Islamic sect that does not practice covering, she often found herself having to justify why she does *not* cover.

Miriam: Sometimes they [Muslim friends and acquaintances] ask: “*Are you Sunni or*

Shia?” Well, I’m not either. So you have to clarify that. So they ask me why I’m not wearing a hijab and that gets really uncomfortable sometimes, where you have to explain your entire religion to them just so they can understand that you don’t have to wear the hijab ... I had a few [Muslim] friends that were trying to get me to wear the hijab. They wore the hijab and I guess when they ask me why I didn’t wear it I told them that in my branch of religion we don’t wear it. And then they were like, “But it’s right in the Koran that you have to wear it.” Among us Alawites, we can talk among each other about what’s written in the Koran but then they understand it differently, so I didn’t really know how to explain it to them. So then they took it as, “Oh, your grandma didn’t wear hijab, your mom didn’t wear the hijab, you’re not wearing a hijab. Are you a follower or something like that?” So it comes from both sides.

Not only are there differences between communities, there is a great deal of difference within communities. In addition, communities are fluid and are constantly undergoing change, yet the tendency is to view them as fixed and singular.

Uncovering for my camera in Peshawar

One of the photographs I took in Peshawar depicts an uncovered woman standing beside her young son. She smiles broadly for me. For years I have wondered about the circumstances surrounding this particular photo:

When I asked this stranger – by pointing at her and her son and then at my camera because I did not speak much Urdu – if I could take her photo, she was completely covered under her blue shuttlecock burqa. It was her, under that burqa, that I wanted to photograph. She enthusiastically agreed to a photo by nodding, and then, to my complete surprise, she pulled up the burqa and smiled for my camera. At the time I wondered if she was affording me a special privilege – to photograph her uncovered face on this busy Peshawari street. Perhaps she was thinking the obvious – that to take a photo of her burqa would be a photo of her burqa, not of her, and thus ridiculous. I had wanted another exotic photo and had not expected this woman to uncover her face. If, as Springgay (2008a) contends, “[e]ncounters do not reveal; they create” (p. 105), what were we creating in these moments of exchange? (Watt, Personal narrative)

Unfortunately, I can’t ask my photographic subject what this exchange meant for her.

I was obviously a tourist and her friendly manner is certainly not surprising. Everywhere I traveled in this part of the world, I was met with unhesitating hospitality. I must question

my own motives for wanting another photo of a covered woman. What does that suggest about who I thought *I* was standing there with my camera on that Peshawari street?

The layer of cloth that had been between us now seemed a social barrier that had been lifted. I tried to converse using the few words of Urdu I knew. We smiled at one another and there were warm feelings between us, but I also felt uncomfortable about having asked for the photo in the first place. I was puzzled about the meaning of an exchange I had not planned on. I had set out on a photographic adventure, content to use my camera to collect the people around me as souvenirs. This encounter was something altogether different, and it completely threw me off. My position as “seer” was decentered when this woman decided to look directly back at me and my camera. (Watt, Personal narrative)

Springgay (2008b) proposes an ethics of embodiment for education, which is a process of responding to the other on exposure. It encompasses ways of knowing that are not merely cognitive, but relational and intercorporeal, where learning is a relation and not an object. In a similar vein, Sara Ahmed (2000a) asserts that when we refuse to encounter, to get close enough to face others, we are left with judging from afar by reading the other as a sign of the universal (p. 166). Chandra Mohanty (cited in Ahmed, 2000a) charges that western feminists have read the veil as a sign of oppression because they have refused to engage with the historically specific contexts in which the veil acquires meaning. There is little attempt to get close enough to see the contradictions and ambivalence which structure how the veil is lived at different times and places. Lama Unu Odeh (cited in Ahmed, 2000a) describes a veiled woman as “neither this nor that,” arguing that she “could shift from one position to another” (p. 166). A refusal to enter into a relationship with a veiled woman is a refusal to recognize the multiplicity of the veiled woman’s subjectivity. Ahmed suggests the other becomes fixed as an object and sign by the refusal to get close.

Reading postcolonial and cultural theory has interrupted my practice of photographing and displaying “exotic others.” In Orientalist discourse the notion of an “exotic other” reinforces the centrality of the so-called “first world.” As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000) point out, during

the nineteenth century the exotic and the foreign increasingly gained the connotations of a stimulating and exiting difference throughout the empire. People or things considered exotic in the metropolises were “a significant part of imperial displays of power and the plenitude of empires” (p. 95). Sontag (1977) writes, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and therefore, like power” (p. 4). Before reading postcolonial theory during my graduate studies, I hadn’t thought about the colonial past, and certainly never considered how it lived on in the present in my own mind and body. In my own experiences of the school curriculum, colonialism was confined within history courses. We never considered how it continues to frame how we view our selves and others (Pennycook, 1998). Asher’s (2002) concept of a hybrid consciousness shifts our attention from an exclusive focus on the other, to the self. We strive to understand the other in relation to – rather than apart from – oneself. Simply accommodating or including a marginalized other in curriculum and society is insufficient if we, ourselves, remain absent.

Four moments of questioning

#1: “*There’s always been the questioning*”

Diane: For you, wearing the hijab has helped you to assert your religious identity. But in your social life outside your family and Muslim communities, it’s not necessarily seen as a “positive” thing to be wearing it, I mean in terms of how people view you. So, how do you negotiate that? Like you were just saying, people talk to you as if you were an immigrant or as if you’re oppressed.

Noor: Exactly.

Diane: So aren’t you still having to do the same kinds of identity negotiations?

Noor: Well, I think that’s what it is. That’s what I mean when I say you’re always on the defensive. I’m always ready – and this sounds really bad – but I’m always ready to be rude because I know that I have to now or some people will just walk all over you. So I think I’m always ready to be rude or prove myself, and be like, “*I’m not what you think I am.*” You know, I’m not an idiot, and I can speak English. I’m actually very highly educated ... Yeah, I feel very much on the defense. There are even people – Muslims – who say to me, “*Why do you wear the hijab?*” And there have been family friends who have said it to me, “*Sure dress*

modestly but why . . . why bother [with hijab]?" There's always been the questioning.

Diane: You're getting it from everywhere?

Noor: Yeah, it's not just the non-Muslims but at least with the Muslims you don't have to explain yourself as much. You don't have to feel as defensive because it's such a common thing now, like so many girls are starting to wear it that you can just say, *"Well, it's my choice and I feel really strongly about this."* Because they know the background, they're not going to ask you, they don't ask you why do you wear it, they more ask like, why do you wear it *here*? Why do you choose to do it this way? My family is from Pakistan and it's really common just to take your dupatta out of your shawl and just drape it over your head, but that's just not practical with the everyday outside world. I mean it would be falling all over the place in the winter and stuff, which is just not practical. So, it's much more convenient and easy for me if I have it secured in place.

#2: "Ask a question, ask a question"

Diane: Did you ever get tired of answering people's questions about Islam and covering?

Tina: No, I was always looking forward to people asking me things. I was like, *"Ask a question, ask a question,"* you know. If you want to teach people about your religion, then they will have greater understanding of it and will value it more. At school we would come together and everyone would defend one another. You know, if I saw a person attacking Christianity, I'd stand up, you know? So, in the same way that I'd want others to stand up for my religion so that we can all live in peace and harmony, you know, and understand one another and respect it. I'm gonna respect you just for the fact that you're a Christian. I shouldn't hate you just because you're a Christian. Or, you know what, you're a Christian Anglican, or a Christian Catholic. It's the same. I don't get why people still fight over this. We're in 2008 and there are still wars and people are so afraid that it's going to be World War III. My Mom's always worried about that. I'm like, *"Mom, honestly, like be optimistic."* She's like, *"But the media, it's just so, so horrible the way it portrays all these bad images."* But honestly, there are media that are portraying something positive about us...

#3: "I'm not necessarily the representative of the entire religion, you know."

Leila: Teachers for the most part were very, very understanding but . . . it's funny because often you're not sure whether you want people to be accommodating of your religion and your race or whether you want them to just sort of treat it as another fact about you and move on. I think I like it sometimes if people just accept it and move on and don't necessarily treat me differently. And I find that, sometimes teachers, because they're so worried about being open and accepting and they want to make sure that you feel comfortable, they try too hard too include your perspective. So it was almost like you were being singled out unintentionally. Sometimes that would happen. People would ask me questions because I was the

sole Muslim girl in my class, and they would say, “*And what’s the Muslim perspective?*” And I would just be like, “*Well, that’s a great question*” (laughs). You can’t ask that question. So I would just come up with an answer and smile because, I don’t know, it was just very hard. At times that got a little tedious.

Diane: Did this happen often?

Leila: There were some teachers who didn’t do it that often. There were some who, you know, would bring it up and ask me to give little blurbs about Eid. It’s nice, but I think there are other outlets where it could happen rather than call on me to do it (laughs). I’m not necessarily the representative of the entire religion, you know.

Diane: You feel like you were being asked to speak for all Muslim people?

Leila: Exactly. So it was hard that way. It happened, not often, but often enough that it did tick me off a bit.

#4: “*Its just questions.*”

Diane: Based on the questions that people asked at school what assumptions do you think they had about you or about a Muslim woman who covers?

Sahar: You see, there were other Muslim kids at the school too, but they never wore the hijab. So, I think because they’re in a Catholic school they found it weird or odd, like this is something new and they’re curious to find out, “*Why do you wear that? How come? Is it true?*” Because you know how you hear some little bits of stories and then you are curious to find out, is that true? So I found that their questions were cute and funny. It’s nice, you know, they’re like, “*How come you wear hijab? Do you actually have hair under that?*” And our teachers were hilarious. I loved that experience. I wouldn’t change it for anything.

Diane: People asked you about the hijab?

Sahar: Yes, like, “*Why do you wear hijab? During Ramadan, why do you fast? Why do you pray five times a day? Why, why, why?*” So it’s very interesting because you teach them and they become more knowledgeable.

Diane: Where do you think they got their ideas about Islam from, the knowledge that they did have?

Sahar: Maybe from the news, maybe from other people talking. You know how sometimes you sit down with someone from another religion but this person doesn’t really practice it. And then you see another person from the same religion who practices it, so they start wondering, why? “*How come you wear the hijab and these other girls don’t?*” That’s when the questions arise because when you see a lot of people are from the same religion but some people don’t follow it as much, and some people do follow it, and some people are extremists, they start wondering, “*Well okay, don’t you have to wear the hijab? Why doesn’t she wear it? Why don’t you do this? Why don’t you do that?*” Its just questions.

Bringing an “ethics of the field of vision” into curriculum theorizing

Noor describes her first day of grade twelve at her new high school. She had just decided over the summer to start wearing hijab:

Noor: I started wearing hijab the year I moved to Springfield for grade twelve. School started the day after Labour Day and then September 11th happened, and that was how everyone in the school learned about Islam.

Diane: What timing.

Noor: Exactly ... I remember my first day of school, this girl coming up to me and I didn't know her or anything and she was like, "*I just want you to know that if you have any problems with bullying we have a really good program for students who are bullied.*" And I was really surprised. Why would she assume that I'd be bullied? Even though I was a minority in the city I had grown up in, I was very active and was a popular student. I was involved in everything, and would never even imagine that I would be bullied. So now, I'm the same person just going to a different school but I'm wearing a hijab, and this girl would assume that I would be bullied? And there were many times when comments were made. Like while I was walking by students would joke to each other – "*Oh, there goes your girlfriend,*" and that would be funny. I mean, it was an insult that I was someone's girlfriend. So when I went to Springfield that was everyone's lesson on Islam.

Noor was new to the school and did not know anyone. She was singled out as someone who might be bullied because of her physical appearance. In the immediate aftermath of the events in New York City on September 11, 2001, the hijab marked her as Muslim and this fact about her identity led a concerned classmate to worry she might expect to be the target of harassment. Whatever meanings the hijab evoked in this context, were now attached to Noor's body. Ahmed (2000a), in *Strange Encounters*, describes encounters as meetings "which are not simply in the present: each encounter opens past encounters ... The face-to-face encounter ... cannot be detached or isolated from...broader relations of antagonism" (pp. 8–9). Given Noor was one of few visible Muslim students in the school community we might assume most of her classmates had only ever met Muslims via mass media representations.

[T]o read does not obligate one to understand. First it is necessary to read . . . [A]void understanding too quickly. (Lacan, in Ulmer, 1985, p. 196)

Seldom do we consider what our relations of looking suggest about our selves and the meanings circulating in broader cultural contexts. Interested in how bodies are constituted and materialized through visual encounters, Springgay (2008a) suggests a need to bring inter-

embodied experiences into curriculum. In working toward more complex practices of listening, could we examine our looking habits to disrupt the screen of signs we are born into?

Silverman (1996) proposes an “ethics of the field of vision” (p. 3), which may disrupt habitual practices of looking. Drawing on Lacan, she maintains “the look is under cultural pressure to apprehend the world from a pre-assigned viewing position, and under psychic pressure to see it in ways that protect the ego” (p. 3). Silverman (1996) explains that even before we are aware of having seen something, perception has already been processed in all kinds of classificatory ways which help to determine what value that object will take on. According to Silverman we don’t ever look “once and for all, but within time” (p. 3) and this time has two dimensions, one conscious and one unconscious:

Although we cannot control what happens to a perception before we become aware of it, we can retroactively revise the value which it assumes for us at a conscious level. We can look at an object a second time, through different representational parameters, and painstakingly reverse the processes through which we have arrogated to ourselves what does not belong to us, or displaced onto another what we do not want to recognize in ourselves. Although such a re-viewing can only have a very limited efficacy, and must be repeated with each new visual perception, it is a necessary step in the coming of the subject to an ethical or nonviolent relation to the other. (p. 3)

This resonates as I reflect on how working with auto/ethno/graphic bricolage is transforming my own sense of the complex processes of becoming in relation to difference, amidst *sonare* and *videre*. To extend Wolfreys’ (2000) notion of “reading to avoid having read,” what if we were to practice seeing to avoid having seen, and listening to avoid having listened?

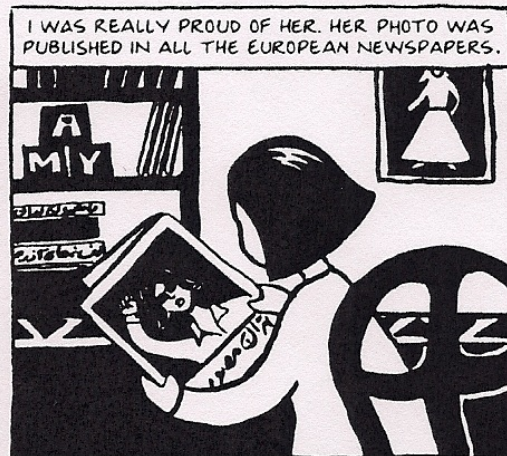
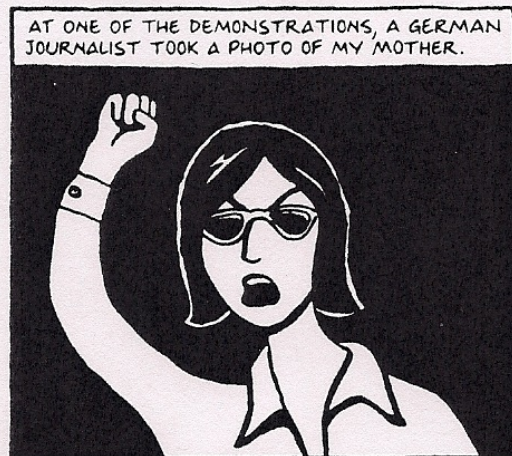
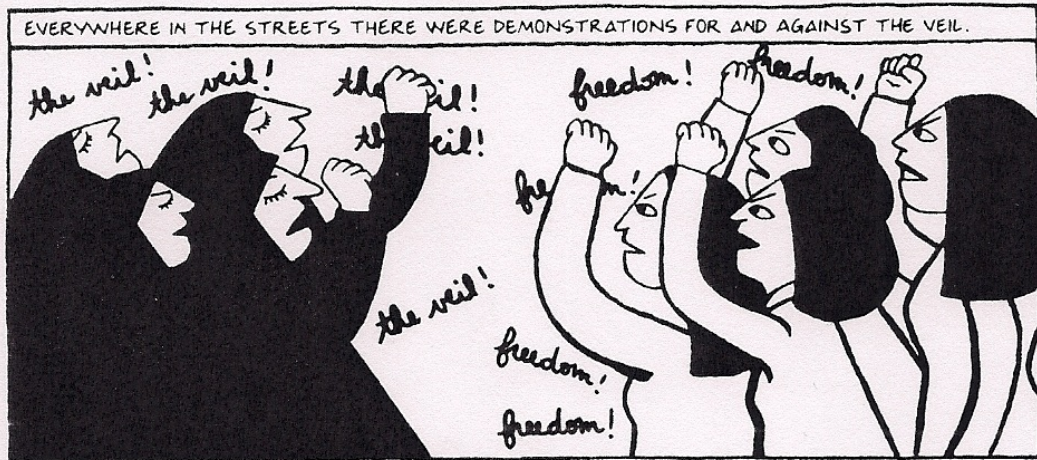
Visual interlude....

On the following pages, I include two visual interpretations of veiling. The first is entitled, *The veil* from Marjane Satrapi’s (in Heath, 2008) *Persepolis*. The second is a cartoon by Sarah Bell (in Heath, 2008), *Nubo: The wedding veil*.

16 The Veil *From Persepolis*

MARJANE SATRAPI

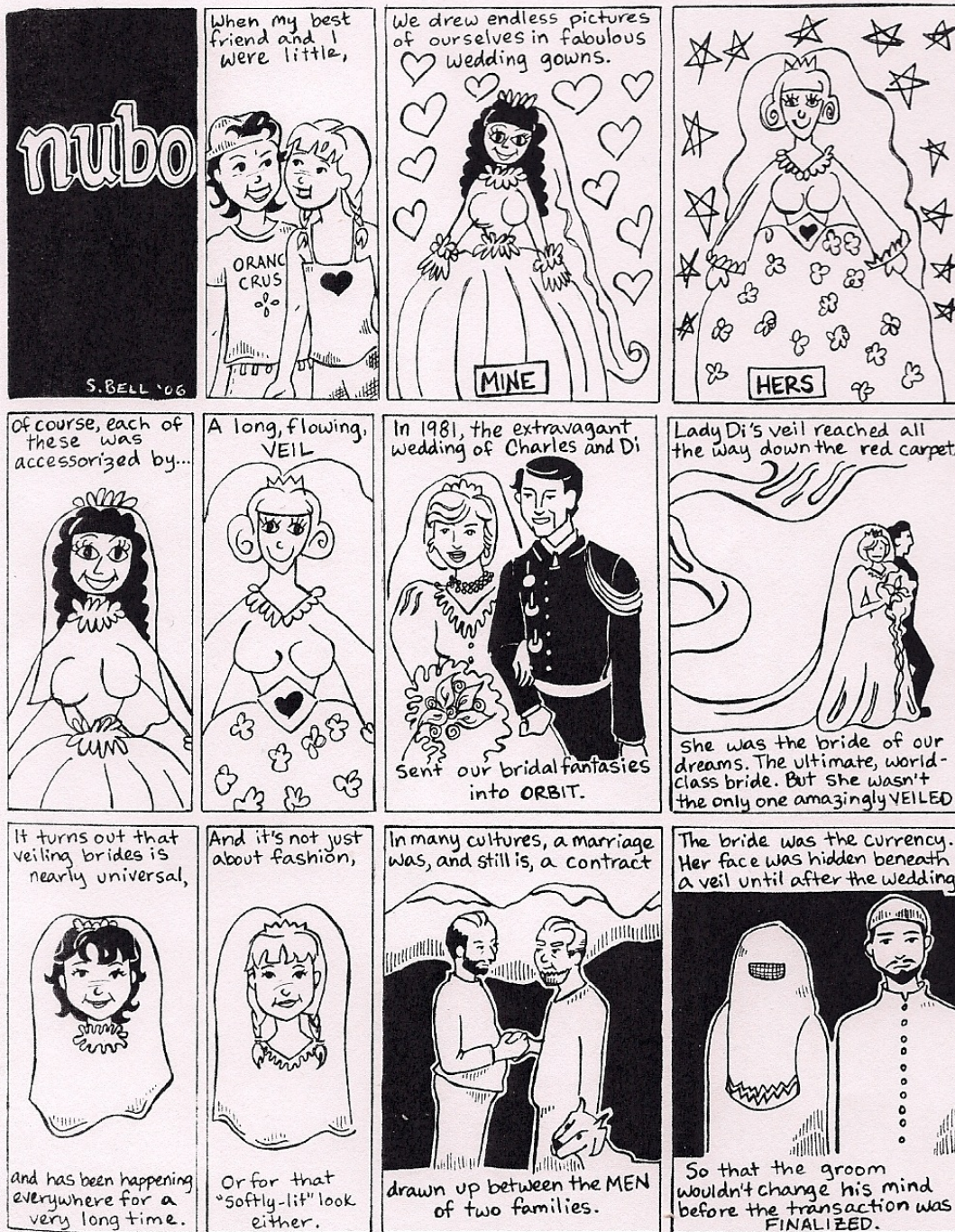




From *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi. Translated by Mattias Ripa and Blake Ferris. Paris: L'Association, 2003. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House.

10 Nubo The Wedding Veil

SARAH C. BELL

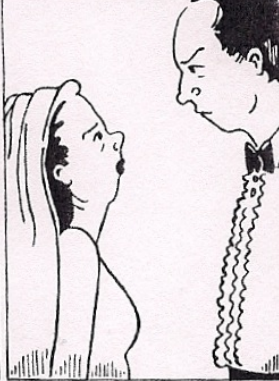


It turns out that Di was like a lot of brides.



She was property, chattel, a royal bargaining chip, a brood mare.

And what happens if neither spouse likes the MERCHANDISE?



Maybe that's where the tradition of the SHEER VEIL came from.



After all, in the Bible, Jacob was tricked into marrying his beloved Rachel's sister Leah,



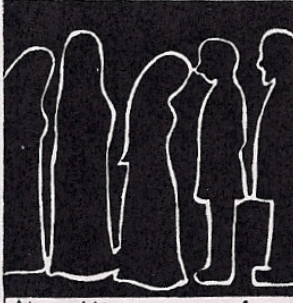
Who was hidden under a full veil.

When we were little, we had no idea



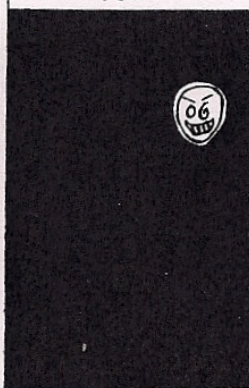
how many different ways women have, and do, veil themselves for marriage.

Unmarried women often wear veils to show modesty.



At wedding ceremonies, the bride wears the veil as a sign of submissiveness to her groom.

But there are more reasons than that ...



Many cultures believed that a bride was vulnerable to EVIL SPIRITS



This was the belief in Ancient Rome, China, and the Far East.



Apparently, EVIL SPIRITS inhabit much of the planet



AND THEY ARE AFTER OUR WOMEN.

Ancient Chinese held a sacred umbrella over the bride...



to protect her from these nasty BUGGERS.

In the Far East, the veil disguised the beauty of a bride,



that might attract the attentions of unwanted entities.

In Ancient Rome, they even fashioned the bride's hair into a **LARGE SPIKE**



to ward off horned demons and keep her pure for her husband.

In Japan, brides wore horned headdresses



to veil the "horns" of jealousy, ego and selfishness (demons for her husband)

Anglo-Saxon & Anglo-Norman brides wore their hair as a sort of veil,



flowing down their backs as an emblem of their virginity.

The wedding veil is still seen as a symbol of **PURITY**



It is worn throughout the ceremony and removed at the end to prove that the bride is **PURE**.

But after that veil comes off, boy, it's



NO HOLDS BARRED

Maybe the veil is a throwback from a time when



a potential groom tossed a blanket over the girl he liked and carried her away.

The veil even shows up in **MYTHOLOGY**



Ishtar, ancient Goddess of Love, came from the depths to her intended, vapors from the earth and sea, covering her like a veil.

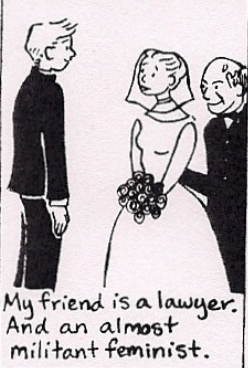
Even the word "NUPTRIAL" comes from the Latin word "NUBO," meaning,



So why is it that we "liberated" Western brides still wear the **VEIL**?



My friend recently got married. She wore a lovely veil, and her father "gave" her away.



My friend is a lawyer. And an almost militant feminist.

Maybe the veil, for us, is just a fashion choice. Or maybe we are



Sometimes Sentimental about belonging to our daddies, or nostalgic about being currency.

There is a rich history behind veiling at weddings, and many reasons for it.



But I think it's really the **EVIL SPIRITS...**

Chapter 7: Negotiating the curricular spaces of high school

Muslim youth in the West wherever they are on the continuum of secular to orthodox, continue to struggle in negotiating intersecting, and sometimes dissecting, meanings of self – their religion, race, ethnicity, culture, way of life, community and knowledge. This struggle occurs alongside the current War on Terror political climate, the multitude of media entertainment images, a news media and a schooling system that consistently and systematically represents a homogenous and myopic Islamic faith, Muslim culture and people. (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009, p. x)

No matter how hard I would try to fit in, I don't think I could ever fit in...even before I started to wear hijab. I never felt like I fit in, but I felt like I made a big attempt to fit in. And there were times where I maybe did a good job of fitting in because, you know, in a crowd I wouldn't be as noticeable because I was just like a non-Muslim.
(Noor, Research participant)

She who knows she cannot speak of them
without speaking of herself, of history without
involving her story, also knows that she cannot
make a gesture without activating the to and fro
movement of life. (Trinh, 1988, p. 6)

As young students in Canada's public schools...it was not uncommon for us to have to answer to the expectations others had of us. We did not fit the stock characters nor the plot templates that were imposed upon us by the master narratives our teachers, classmates, and other "everyday" Canadians had of us. (Stonebanks & Sensoy, In press)

Recent Research on Muslim Students and Schooling

Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) observe that Muslim students negotiate their identities within an extremely complex and shifting discursive terrain. This study inquires into how identities play out in the midst of these competing and contradictory discourses by focusing on the particular contexts of schooling and the mass media. When I began this project in 2006, little work had been done with Muslim students in Canadian educational sites. Since that time a body of work is emerging (e.g., Alvi, 2008; Diab, 2008; Kincheloe, Steinberg & Stonebanks, 2010; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Stonebanks & Sensoy, in press). Imam (2009), an American scholar asks: “What is it like to live in the shadow of what the mass media teaches the world about Muslims and Islam” (p. 43)? Abo-Zena, Sahli, and Tobias-Nahi (2009) argue Muslim youth today “face qualitatively different identity tasks than do many of their peers” (p. 3), suggesting they may feel defensive and under attack or scrutiny because of their religion, and that they “negotiate their religious identity and religious practice in a context that often includes explicit or subtle themes of misunderstanding, fear, and marginalization” (pp. 6-7). Ali-Karamali (2008) suggests the attacks of 9/11 provide “a blanket justification for anything negative anyone might possibly dream up to say against Muslims” (p. 215). She contends very “few people realize what it is like to be the subject of daily socially acceptable lies, slander, defamation, and distortion” (p. 215).

At the same time, Shaza Khan (2009) emphasizes Muslim students are not passive victims, but actively transform marginalizing factors in their own environments. Her research participants “construct a Muslim space” for themselves in their schools. Khan describes, for example, the manner in which young women use hijab to respond to the challenge of educating others about Islam. She writes, “despite the absurd questions they received about their religion and scarves” (p. 28) some of the girls feel that wearing hijab gives them an opportunity to teach their peers

about Islam. As we saw in chapter 6, Tina and Sahar's narratives similarly describe how the curiosity aroused in others by their visible difference (marked by the black hijab they wear), served as an opportunity to engage difference in their Catholic high school. However, Noor found that wearing hijab set her apart socially when she had to adjust to a new school in grade twelve. Even though Leila, Sarah, Jana, and Miriam choose not to cover at this point in their lives, as young Muslim women they still had to negotiate their own and others' entanglement in veiling discourses. Based on the live(d) experiences of these young women, we might say that wearing hijab incites and hinders social contact and inter/cultural conversations. In her study of the perspectives of Muslim girls and their public high schooling experiences in Windsor, Ontario, Diab (2008) concludes that her research participants had "positive schooling experiences" in part due to wearing hijab, which helped the girls to validate their Muslim identity. Alvi (2008) examines how hijabi youth view the social activities offered by their high schools. She asserts that these girls "feel they are leaving high school with a less fulfilling experience than their peers" (p. 107), largely because many social activities offered conflict with their religious beliefs and thus exclude their participation. These studies offer important insights into the experiences of Muslim girls in Ontario high schools. Taken together, they highlight the complexities of living as Muslim females in Canada at this time.

My contribution to this growing scholarship is from a different perspective—that of a non-Muslim woman working with poststructural theory through an auto/ethno/graphic lens. This chapter writes my understanding of how participants represented themselves and their high schooling experiences "in relation to the categories laid on them" (Shaza Khan, 2009, p. 40). Auto/ethno/graphy (Morawski & Palulis, 2009), as a methodology of doubt (Bhabha, 2002), engages the spaces in-between texts, bodies, and subjectivities to complicate conversations related

to curriculum and educating for social justice. Assuming a fragmented, postmodern subject, I tentatively map the complications of living Muslim, female identities and in the process I am re/writing my self. What opens up when identity is not seen as fixed but becomes a site of contestation and negotiation, “in transit among a plethora of intertexts” (Russell, 1999a, p. 9)? Auto/ethno/graphy challenges imposed forms of identity by opening to the discursive possibilities of subjectivities (Russell, 1999a). Rather than ordering, and in the process essentializing the experiences of participants, I dwell in the tense inter/texts of academic theory and our live(d) experiences to rethink how subjectivities become caught up in language.

In the last chapter, questions were raised about the ways we are entangled in veiling discourses, inside and outside of schooling. Here, I shift to stories of experiences of the official curriculum and social aspects of schooling. Bringing Muslim bodies into my curriculum theorizing implies bringing in my own body, for all bodies are connected to other bodies given that subjectivity is a relational matter (Gannon, 2006). Britzman (1995) writes:

I wanted to warn them that all I could offer were partial truths and my own guilty readings of other people’s dramas (p. 233).

Narratives of my experience are “one discourse among many” (Russell, 1998a, p. 12). Working with auto/ethno/graphy is a decolonizing move against the “othering” processes associated with traditional ethnography, and acknowledges that as we read and write the other, we read and write our self. Working with cultural and postcolonial theory – including Bhabha’s (1990) notion of hybridity and Asher’s (2002) theorization of a hybrid consciousness – is not a solution but may put cracks in research as colonization. Asher is critical of multicultural approaches to curriculum which maintain the status quo by reifying the center/margin binary. She suggests a need to deconstruct such binaries in an ongoing attempt to “understand our own implicatedness in the very systems of oppression we are attempting to change” (p. 82). In reference to Bhabha’s work,

Gray (in Jungen, 2006) explains “hybridity does not occur when one culture simply absorbs another, but only when there is an ongoing process of entanglement between cultures” (p. 11). It is these moments of entanglement that I tentatively represent in this research text, by evoking embodied, hybrid curricular spaces in-between *sonare* and *videre* (Aoki, 1990a). I negotiate the risky intertexts between remaining silent and representing people’s stories, for the act of representing “almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation” (Said, 2001, p. 40). I agree with Denzin and Giardina’s (2007) assertion that “silence is not an option” (p. 10), that “it is our moral *and* professional obligation to make our voices heard” (p. 9). As Smith (2009) writes, this is a complicated situation given that curriculum and teaching are now situated in globalization:

Human self-understanding is now increasingly lived out in a tension between the local and the global, between my understanding of myself as a person of this place and my emerging yet profound awareness that this place participates in a reality heavily influenced by, and implicated in, larger pictures. This calls forth from me not just a new sense of place, but also a new kind of response to the world. It is a response I may feel uneasy about making given that so much about what seems to be going on is experienced preconceptually precisely because no one, no authority, can tell me exactly what is happening. (p. 369)

In our complex world, rather than to rely solely on instrumental reason we might also respond to the call to storytelling, which brings people together. Trinh writes that “the story circulates like a gift; an empty gift which anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess” (Trinh, 1989, p. 2). As Rapaport (1995) suggests “a story is not reducible to the mere closure of information” (p. 101), for it is the listener who controls what gets picked up or not. Britzman (2003) suggests that, “[o]ne begins not in certainty, or with the pretense of any guarantee. Rather, one risks the self to engage the other” (p. 35). As we witness the stories the young participants in this study generously share, what stories of our own might be provoked?

To understand the curriculum as deconstructed text is to tell stories that never end, stories in which the listener, the ‘narratee’ may become a character or indeed the narrator, in which all structure is provisional, momentary. (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, p. 7)

[W]hat is clear from a Middle Eastern experience of growing up in Canada and the wider North American context, is that the “stories” that circulate in mainstream society about us are typically ones not of our telling nor control. (Stonebanks & Sensoy, in press, p. 1).

We’re all from different countries, different backgrounds, different religions. And it’s interesting because we all learn from each other, we all share stories. It’s interesting.
(Sahar, Research participant)

Negotiating absence in the school curriculum

Kincheloe (2004) contends that in addition to the unofficial curriculum of the mass media, the classroom is “a central site for the legitimization of myths and silences about non-Western and often non-Christian peoples” (p. 2). He argues very little effort is made to historicize and contextualize the Islamic world and its relation to the west (p. 3). Like media representations (Seaton, 2003; Shaheen, 2003; Watt, 2008), school representations make little space for complexity (Kincheloe, 2001; Sensoy, 2007b). In stark contrast to the regularity with which certain Muslim, female bodies appear in the unofficial curriculum of the mass media, the participants in this project seldom saw their own bodies represented in the official high school curriculum. Three participants said when they were attending high school they didn’t notice Muslims were largely excluded from the curriculum and at the time it wasn’t an issue for them. Only after graduating did this become apparent to them, and they began to reflect on possible implications in retrospect.

Diane: Do you remember Muslims represented in your high school courses, and was it an issue for you at all?

Noor: To be honest, I never noticed it. And it wasn’t until university and taking certain courses that made me reflect back and realize that, no, there was never any Muslim, or hardly any minority in general, represented in any literature course or any curriculum course overall. But at the time I never noticed it. I just didn’t have the knowledge then, you know. I never thought about it because it had always been that way. I’ve always learned that stuff and I thought, okay, these are the people

who make history. If anything I probably thought that okay, they're probably predominantly white because they had the resources and the opportunity to go and do these things...But I never thought that there must be Muslim people out there, and there must be other minorities who helped establish the world as it is today. But at the time I don't think I ever noticed this. (Interview).

The following narrative of Noor's high school memories suggests difference was not highly valued. She downplayed the Muslim parts of her identity, and remembers feeling invisible:

I feel like a lot of the time I ... just fade into the background, I feel like I'm not noticed. I feel like when I talk no one really hears me a lot of the time. I feel like if I start talking – I don't know if I talk quietly or what it is – I feel that if someone else starts talking at the same time that person will get the attention over me ... And after a while ... it becomes very hurtful because you feel like you don't get noticed ... And partly it's because you don't want to be pointed out: *"How come you don't do this? How come you don't do that?"* ... I feel like I'm not taken seriously.

Not seeing oneself represented in the official school curriculum may foster a sense of alienation, of not quite belonging, of being an outsider (Dei et al. 2000; James, 2000; 2007; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Stonebanks & Sensoy, in press). This feeling may be reinforced intertextually through mass media representations of Muslims as "other." In one interview session, Leila states she distinctly remembers wishing she were "more normal" during her middle school years, which she describes as a more difficult period for her socially than the high schooling years. Britzman (1998) asks: "What makes normalcy so thinkable in education?" (p. 80). She laments that it is "the great unmarked within classroom sites" (p. 80). How might pedagogy "admit to the unthinkability of normalcy and to how normalcy is being constituted again and again" (p. 87). Lather (1997) asks: "what is made possible when normatively fixed categories and identities are disrupted" (p. 234)?

Sensoy (2007), a Turkish-Canadian scholar in education who immigrated with her family to Canada when she was a child, offers the following account of her own experience of the Social Studies curriculum and her interpretation of how that impacted on her sense of identity:

In school, I hated socials the most because they taught me to hate myself – or maybe they taught me to hide myself. We (Middle Easterners) were clearly not significant enough in the course of world history to be mentioned in textbooks. However, on the rare occasions when we were mentioned, it was clear that the contributions of the Palestinians, the Iranians, or the Ottoman Turks had frequently been, and perhaps in the minds of some still often are, the cause of trouble for “the allies,” and thus have been an impediment to peace in the world in general . . . I hated the Middle East. (p. 594)

Whose histories do we acquaint ourselves with, whose have we chosen to ignore, and how does this impact on local and global relations? These are compelling questions, especially in the context of the post 9/11 “war on terror.” Stanley (2002; 2006) writes that grand narratives – which are the most widely circulated “common sense” representations of the past – underlie public memory in Canada, and do not make especially good history. They impose a particular order on the past and often fail to put particular events in historical context. Grand narratives represent certain perspectives and exclude and/or marginalize others. For these reasons, Stanley argues for a rethinking of the history curriculum and its purposes.

Diane: You said there weren’t many visible minorities, and almost no Muslim students at your high school. So, did you get the sense that difference was respected?

Jana: It was respected. I never felt like I was an outsider, but then again, I’m very social and I can adapt to any group.

Diane: To what degree did you feel you could just be yourself at school?

Leila: Sometimes I felt that I couldn’t just be myself but I did it anyway... Sometimes I felt like it’s not necessarily going to be welcomed – the fact that this is my identity and that the choices I make are very different from you. You can be in a situation where people are talking about stuff that you don’t relate to, like sex or going out, and it’s sort of a hostile environment I guess. In that sense it’s tempting to just go along with it and not assert the fact that, no, this isn’t me, this isn’t my particular personality. I’m sorry. I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes and I never tried to alienate anyone but at the same time I never tried to be anyone who wasn’t me even in an environment where it would have been easier. Sometimes I would not say something to avoid provoking a fight because I am not especially confrontational, but I never withheld a crucial part of myself just to fit in, just because it was too much work trying to have a different identity for each person. How are you supposed to figure out what each one expects? You can’t do that. In the long run you are going to crash and burn, so why do that to yourself?

Abdel-Fattah (2007) captures in fiction some of the complexity of negotiating Muslim identities in schooling contexts through Jamilah, the main character in her adolescent novel, *Ten Things I hate about me*. She portrays a Muslim girl's high schooling experiences growing up in Australia. Jamilah adopts a more Aussie-sounding name – Jamie – when she's with her friends as a means to negotiate her school and family identities. In the following excerpts Jamilah describes some of the complex identity issues she feels she faces at school:

I was born in Oz but people still assume I was born under a camel in a cave in a desert in the Middle East to parents who belong to a tribe with Osama bin Laden genealogy. (p. 90)

Keeping your distance from your friends is exhausting. It means you're constantly acting, constantly choosing your words and thinking about ways to avoid exposing yourself. I can't afford to show them the real me. They wouldn't understand my culture or my religion. I've done everything I can to dissociate myself from being identified as a wog. Amy likes me as Jamie. She doesn't know about Jamilah who speaks Arabic and goes to madrasa and celebrates Ramadan and plays the *darabuka* and can cook Lebanese food and has a strict dad. I wish I could talk in capital letters at school. Use exclamation marks and highlighter pens on all my sentences. Stand out bold, italicized and underlined. At the moment I'm a rarely used font in microscopic size with no shading or emphasis. (pp. 91-92)

How might we create the conditions in curriculum theorizing and in the material spaces of schools so all students feel they can *talk in capital letters* and *use exclamation marks* and *highlighter pens ... bold, italicized and underlined*?

A teacher candidate told me she had been concerned about not being able to connect with her Muslim students on practicum because of her lack of knowledge of Islam. Her associate teacher suggested she read Abdel-Fattah's (2006; 2007) novels as an introduction to Muslim female youth culture. This student teacher enjoyed reading these books and the way they introduced her to a range of issues Muslim female students may face in a school setting, and plans to use them with her own students in the future. However, simply bringing in such books does not guarantee normative understandings of Muslim girls will not be reproduced in the classroom.

Bringing a postcolonial lens to our readings of youth literature with Muslim protagonists may disrupt dominant meanings in circulation in the mass media. The need to complicate our readings is highlighted by Melinda, a columnist for *Muslimah Media Watch* (Dec. 19, 2007). In her review of Abdel-Fattah's (2006) *Does my head look big in this?* Melinda brings a critical eye to the portrayal of the Muslim heroine, Jamal. On the one hand, she applauds the fact that when the book first came out in 2005 it was "the most overtly Muslim book" in young adult fiction, with Muslim protagonists who are "average high school girls" rather than "terrorists" or "child brides" (p. 1). Melinda writes that Abdel-Fattah "tries to tackle every issue facing Muslim teenage girls" (p. 1). However, by including so many issues—including hijab, boys and dating, the image of Islam in the context of modern-day terrorism, sexism within the Muslim community, and Islamophobia, to name a few—Melinda finds the book "rather heavy-handed" (p. 1). She also criticizes Abdel-Fattah for too strictly defining what it means to be Muslim, pointing to "the huge emphasis on hijab" and the main character, Jamal's, abstinence from romantic relationships until marriage (although she is not portrayed as asexual). Melinda suggests that while these are "pretty mainstream Islamic ideas" (p. 2) they "may leave the non-Muslim reader with the firm belief that no 'real' Muslim ever considers dating or sees hijab as not obligatory" (p. 2). The main strength of the book, according to Melinda, is that it "normalizes" Muslim girls by portraying them as something other than "exotic others."

Difference is not difference to some ears, but awkwardness or incompleteness.
 Aphasia...you who understand the dehumanization of forced
 removal-relocation-reduction-redefinition,
 The humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice – you know.
 And often you cannot say it. You try to keep on trying to unsay it.
 For if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.
 (Trinh, 1989, p. 90)

In their examination of popular cultural texts being used in mainstream school contexts, Sensoy and Marshall (2009; 2010) also ask whether young adult fiction about Muslim girls builds understanding or reinforces stereotypes. Since September 11, 2001, a number of popular titles have appeared which portray the lives of Muslim girls in the Middle East and Central Asia, and teachers may wish to bring these into their classrooms as a means to expose students to the lives of girls living in these parts of the world. Most of these books have been written predominantly by white women, and include such titles as *The Breadwinner* (2001/2004), *Parvana's Journey* (2002/2010), and *Mud City* (2003/2010), by Deborah Ellis; Suzanne Fisher Staples' *Under the Persimmon Tree* (2005); and Kim Antieau's *Broken Moon* (2007). Sensoy and Marshall (2009) point out these stories feature young heroines "trapped in a violent Middle East" from which they must escape or save themselves and others. These Muslim girls are depicted as "characters haunted by a sad past, on the cusp of a (usually arranged) marriage, or impoverished and wishing for the freedoms that are often assigned to the West, such as education, safety, and prosperity" (p. 1). Such literature cannot be separated from the post 9/11 context in which it is written, published, and marketed. Sensoy and Marshall (2010) argue these texts rely on colonial discourses to represent girls and women in the East as "poor, uneducated, constrained and in need of rescue from those in the west" (pp. 1-2). Through such portrayals, imaginary boundaries between an "us" and a "them" reinscribe Orientalist (Said, 1978) relations between the peoples of the so-called east and west.

As Sensoy and Marshall (2010) argue, "colonialism relies on the (re)telling of the colonized stories by the colonizer" (p. 4). They recall Mohanty's (2003) classic essay, "Under Western Eyes," in which she argues that so-called "third world" women have had their stories told *for* them for generations, so that a composite, singular "Third World woman" is constructed "with

the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse” (p. 19). The effect has been to silence their voices and also to “de-contextualize women from their identities as subjects with particular geographical, historical and political genealogies” (Sensoy & Marshall, 2010, p. 5). Sensoy and Marshall argue Ellis similarly creates “a composite, monolithic girl” in *The Breadwinner*. For example, they point to how women’s oppression is simplistically equated with the burqa through the main character in this novel, Parvana:

“How do women in burqas manage to walk along the streets?” Parvana asks her father.
“How do they see where they are going?”
“They fall down a lot,” her father replied. (Ellis, 2001, p. 17)

It is hard to imagine an eleven-year-old Afghan girl who had grown up in Afghanistan where the burqa is a regular feature of daily life asking such a question, and her father’s response is just as ridiculous. This is Afghanistan as seen through the author’s “western” lens. Sensoy and Marshall (2010) suggest educators need to engage critical questions around “who represents whom, for what purposes and with what results” (p. 15) as part of the pedagogical approach with such a text. These novels could thus be used to trace how knowledge about Muslim girls is constructed, as well as a means to engage “complex questions about oppression, patriarchy, war, families, displacement, and the role of values (imperialism or faith-based) in these questions” (p. 15). Bringing young adult fiction about Muslim girls into the classroom provides an opportunity to raise questions about “the politics of storytelling” (Sensoy & Marshall, 2009 p. 2). “Who tells whose story and in what ways” (p. 2)?

Rereading Jamilah’s fictional life experiences in *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (Abdel-Fattah, 2007) sent me back to the interview transcript for something Leila had said. I saw parallels between her real-life observations and Abdel-Fattah’s fictional character. Leila explains:

The thing to know about the Canadian Muslim identity is that the kids growing up here, especially kids whose parents have not grown up here, are very, very much in two worlds.

Even though at times they will seem to relate more to one than the other, and a lot of Muslim kids will seem like they've got the old school home values, it's still very much a struggle for them to keep their home life and their school life and make some sense of that, and try to be one person in face of all that. . . Like you'll get girls who wear cover at home and then take it off and go hang out with their white boy friends... It's always, always a struggle for people, even if they don't necessarily say anything about it. Or, if they seem very devout, it's still hard to be surrounded by such a radically different view of things . . . It's hard going from one world at home to another world outside—very, very hard.

As Leila's assessment suggests, negotiating the identity inter/texts between home, school, and popular culture is an extremely complex process. How might rethinking identity as multiplicity change the way such students view their shifting and complex positioning? Jiwani (2006) asserts acceptance and belonging are achieved through "fitting in," but she also asks, "fitting into what" (p. 120)? The notion of *fitting in* which underlies multicultural discourse, assumes a normative center with bodies and stories on the margins vying to get in. This is a one-way process which places all responsibility on anyone deemed to embody difference, where the postmodern subject and relationality remain unthought.

In the following narrative, Sarah describes how she "compartmentalized" her home and school identities. She was not visibly marked as Muslim since she does not cover and she saw no reason to bring her Muslim identity into school. However, when another Muslim student shows up at her high school negotiating her identity becomes messier:

Sarah: What ends up happening for me is the compartmentalization I was talking about becomes threatened when other Muslims enter the picture. And (laughs), maybe that sounds a little odd. So, it was really easy to keep everything separate, but then . . . this guy just turned up in grade twelve and he was Muslim, too. That was when it first started to cause a bit of trouble for me in terms of identity because now I didn't really know how to define myself in relation to him. Before I had it very easy... I actually didn't talk about anything related to Islam . . . at school.

Diane: Do you mean that before the arrival of this fellow you just kept the Muslim part of your identity out of school and that was what made things easy?

Sarah: Well, there was really no reason to bring it in. I mean like for things that were very obvious, like if I was fasting, people [at school] responded in a way that showed

they obviously didn't know much about it. If I asked for time off they weren't negative, they'd be kind of vaguely interested and, like, oh, what's that about? . . . Or something like that, a kind of benign tolerance I guess (laughs). But they definitely didn't know anything about it. But then this guy obviously did because he was another Muslim and that just created some problems... There are lots of different groups of Muslims and you can't just assume that people who are Muslim are just going to be unified because a lot of the fighting is actually between Muslim groups, right. So there were a number of issues that arose. The thing with this guy was ... his Muslim identity... was really a big part of who he was... He was very outgoing. So he'd be sitting there in class advocating to the teacher, different kinds of schemes. And I don't know... it really became a problem because first of all, I knew that I was a different type of Muslim from him. But because I'd never dealt with Muslims from other groups I didn't know how to vocalize that at all. He learned that I was fasting because one of my friends told him, so he came over excitedly (laughs) because I guess this made him feel like there was someone else to sort of identify with... So I just sort of went along and just kind of ... [offered] support, I guess. But I knew that this was kind of dishonest because I felt something different between me and this guy and I wasn't really being up front about it. But then... it came out at this one point when I asked for time off from Eid and I consciously used the Eid to get his attention in class, even though I could have used an alternative term from my language. So the teacher just responded in the usual way - *Oh, sure, what is that, that's very interesting* – or something like that but then this guy came over after me to talk to me about it. He went and asked his parents and they told him it was on a different day for him. So then he was like, “what kind of Muslim are you?” (Laughs). And that was really awkward.

Trinh (1988) suggests difference “is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness ... for there are differences as well as similarities within the concept of difference” (p. 2).

It is not only Muslims students who live with being largely absent from the school curriculum. However, given recent world events they currently have a starring role in mass media representations of otherness. An imaginary dominant culture continues to be given the lion's share of representational space in the school curriculum to the exclusion of other voices. A good number of teacher candidates in my Bachelor of Education courses say they are unsure about how to work with students who come from backgrounds different from their own. Many grew up in communities where there appeared to be very little ethnic or cultural diversity. We tend not to see the difference that exists within the imaginary category of “whiteness” which continues to hold a

privileged position in our society. As Stanley (2002) contends, school continues to be “about and for white people” (p 2). It is not be surprising that Leila finds herself imagining what it might have been like to be born “white.” Stonebanks (2010) writes:

[T]o a great many pre-service teachers and teachers who enter the profession with the noblest of intentions, the idea that they could reproduce any kind of bias related to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc...seems a repugnant thought. (p. 41)

Caught up in common sense assumptions about the neutrality of schooling and humanism’s discourses of equality and universalism, it may be difficult to convince some teacher candidates that the curriculum is a highly contested cultural document. That doesn’t mean we can’t make cracks that may gradually open up further with time and experience.

Reading Noor’s narrative about her sense of feeling invisible during her high school years provokes a now-painful memory from my own schooling during the 1960’s and 1970’s. Every year, one or two First Nations students from the local residential school would be assigned to each class. My impression is they got shifted around from school to school. What stands out is the silence that surrounded their bodies, for I have few memories of hearing them speak. They seemed so apart from the daily life of the classroom as to be almost ghostly apparitions, barely existing at the back of the class. It would almost come as a shock to see these quiet souls in the annual class photo, for although they had been physically present, their presence was simultaneously a non-presence. What can be learned from silence? Do we take it as utter defeat, as resistance, or as something else? How might we become more attuned to it? Trinh (2006 in Trinh & Kobayashi) writes that “[s]ilence is not accidental, it is fundamental” (p. 164). She describes it as a language in itself, and maintains that we:

...spend our whole lifetime either avoiding it or widening our ability to listen to it. Those who are aware of its deep vibrancy also turn their whole attention to the single sound, to intervals, relationships, movements, and dynamics – in other words to both the undoing and the doing of silence as the basic utterance of sound. (p. 164)

Trinh also cautions, “when it becomes so much part of our identity, it can turn out to be a place of deep confinement and repression” (p. 165). How do we learn to listen to the stories silence tells? Trinh (1989) writes: “You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in awhile, but you may also be me while remaining what you are and what I am not” (pg?). Given curricular absences and silences, how do we bring student stories into the classroom as more than an optional add-on to the official school curriculum? McCarthy (2003) observes:

This is our misbegotten response to a globalizing world of multiplicity and difference, an Anglo-nativism that desperately tries to place the cork back into the bottle even as the genie has fled simple-minded measures of containment. What connects us all to the agents of 9/11 is this overwhelming feeling of displacement and loss of meaning and control over the fundamentals of inheritance and place. It is precisely in our moment of revulsion and terror that we find ourselves knotted together with the rest of the world and its illuminated peripheries. (p. 138)

The wisdom Aoki’s (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005) meditations become ever more meaningful as I work with bricolage toward becoming attuned to *sonare* and *videre* by theorizing in-between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-live(d).

Stanley (2002) reminds us Canadians “do not have a common history, and no single narrative will ever make it so” (p. 2). He advocates enabling “each student to explore his or her past, to construct a narrative that explains how it is that they came to inhabit the common space of the classroom, and to allow other students to see and engage with this narrative” (p. 2). For Sahar and Tina, this frequently took place informally in spaces outside the official school curriculum. None of the other participants in this study mentioned being provided with opportunities to bring their personal stories into the classroom. Beyond sharing stories, Stanley identifies a further challenge as having students see “how this personal history intertwines with those of the multiple communities that the young people inhabit” (p. 2). He stresses students should be provided “with a sense of how the spaces they inhabit have been constructed by people who went before” (p. 2).

DiAngelo and Sensoy (2010) similarly argue for “need to understand the history, struggles, and perspectives of [other] groups in relation to [our] own” (p. 99).

In Dr. Stanley’s graduate class I experienced the unsettling effect of looking at one’s past through a postcolonial lens when he brought an atlas¹ with maps of the Fraser Valley to class one day. The place names so familiar to me were gone, and in their place were pre-European names in the languages of the First Nations peoples. To see the aboriginal names literally written back onto the landscape where I had grown up was an unsettling experience. Reading about the “artifacts of genocide and white supremacy” on the Vancouver landscape (Stanley, 2009) similarly disrupted the sedimented layers of my own mis/education (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004; 2010) growing up immersed in a colonial geography. Although knowledge of the past may be available, “it is not what circulates in popular culture” (Stanley, 2009, p. 144). Colonialism is not simply events that happened in the distant past, but “continues as processes of cultural production through which power legitimizes itself by silencing the memory of its own unilateral construction, at the same time that it seeks to fix and re-fix meaning” (p. 144). Boler and Zembylas (2003) explain:

Difference is produced not only through an explicit naming but also through the power of silence and absence . . . Identities are also produced through normalized assumptions and the active process of *not* naming silence itself as a productive practice. (p. 120)

By bringing “multiple narratives into the classroom” (Stanley, 2002, p. 2) dominant meanings are interrupted as embodied understandings emerge in-between bodies, the school curriculum, and stories of live(d) experience in the messy text of the classroom (Palulis & Low, 2000).

Stonebanks and Sensoy (in press) write about schooling identities and the construction of knowledge about Islam, Muslims and Middle Eastern peoples in Canadian schools. Drawing from their personal experiences, they reflect on how the unofficial curriculum of the mass media

¹ Carlson, K. (Ed.)(2006). *A Sto:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre.

impacted their own lives in Canadian schools as children with family connections to Turkey and Iran. They describe how popular cultural representations of Muslims played out in expectations teachers and fellow students had by sharing experiences of being “the other” in school:

We can individually recall many instances from our childhood when we were asked if at home, our families ate with our hands, whether our moms walked behind our dads, along with the surprise that is still expressed when I (Özlem) refer to “modernities” such as cell phone or computer use while in Turkey, or the bank machines on the corners of streets in Istanbul, or when I (Christopher) in my youth had to convince adults that yes indeed, there were clean toilets in Iran. (p. 11)

These educators argue that normative discourses about Muslims that gave rise to their experiences “are still an active part of Canadian culture and schooling” (p. 2) and are reinforced in schools.

However, Kincheloe (2004) writes “[i]f educators who value the power of difference were to teach about the history of Islam, they would have to rethink the canonical history of the West.

Indeed, when school texts distort the history of Islam, they concurrently distort all history” (p. 2).

Following is Miriam’s description of the curricular content she experienced in her high school English and History courses, including a paper she wrote on the war in Iraq:

Diane: How would you describe the content of the high school curriculum you experienced?

Miriam: We read some *Shakespeare*, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Diane: *To Kill a Mockingbird*? (laughing)

Miriam: Yeah, we read that in grade nine. But yeah, pretty much they were all like that.

Diane: So there was no international or intercultural literature?

Miriam: No, but we had a Canadian literature unit. There was nothing international.

Actually, now that I think about it . . . Yeah, it was all mostly European, United States, Canada. It would have actually been really nice if we had read something, like a book about different cultures. I actually read a good book, *The Kite Runner*. It’s a very, very nice book. It takes place in Afghanistan I think, or is it Pakistan? And that book actually would have been great to read in English.

Diane: You read these books because you had to, like everybody else, but did you ever think: “I don’t really feel connected to this?”

Miriam: Well, I don’t think I connected to it, but I really did like English. I love reading and I love literature but it never hit me that there was nothing international in there. I don’t know, I guess it wasn’t much of a problem.

Diane: Did you ever see yourself in the curriculum... as a woman, or any other parts of your identity? Did you ever see Muslims represented anywhere other than in *World*

Religions?

Miriam: I can't think of anything right now. Maybe in Science or Math, like Arabs who invented the numbers, but other than that I guess there wasn't anything.

Diane: Did you take any History classes?

Miriam: Oh, right. I did do History. History is a passion of mine. I did history in grade ten but it was mostly about the World Wars. I remember that the only mention that they ever made of an Islamic country was Iraq and how Hitler wanted to go around into Iraq to get their oil in order to continue on to Russia. So, it was, I think, the only one that stands out...

[Added to transcript later: I took American History the year after but we didn't get to touch on the war with Iraq or any of the newer issues. We did mostly material about what went on, on American soil. We had to write a paper at the end of the course, however. And I remember I got a really high mark. My topic was about the war with Iraq, and I remember that paper was the most research I ever did. I tried to take both sides of the story but it was really hard to find any information that would support the Iraq side in the war or why the war is a bad thing. Also, there was barely any information that I found on the actual conditions of Iraq after the start of the war, about how the country is worse off than ever. I know that the Americans got rid of Saddam, but for the Iraqi people, they care about food and shelter the most, and for them it was choosing the lesser of two evils. They are left without either now].

A highly prescriptive, standards-based curriculum steeped in discourses of rationalism and instrumentalism leaves few spaces for difference. At the same time, teachers working with the Ontario Curriculum are expected to connect content not only to the broader outside world, but also to the backgrounds and interests of students. Teacher candidates in their curriculum course are often understandably concerned about the sheer volume of content they are responsible for and often question their ability to carve out time and space to bring student identities and interests into the classroom. Miriam's history teacher provided an opportunity for students to investigate a topic of personal interest. Teachers might expand the curriculum to include a variety of perspectives by introducing students to alternative resources and challenging students to find and share their own. Miriam and her classmates may also have developed a more complicated view of more recent world events by reading a work such as *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* (Riverbend, 2005). Riverbend is a young, female Iraqi blogger who began reporting her experiences living in

the war zone in Baghdad in August 2003. Flanders (back cover) writes that after you read this book you'll "never watch the news in the same way again."

The Oprah Magazine: A mother and daughter negotiate tense spaces

The June 2010 issue of *The Oprah Magazine* features the story of a ten-year-old American girl who recently decided to start wearing hijab, told from her mother's perspective. We may discount such popular cultural sites, but according to Wikipedia, its average paid circulation was more than 2.7 million copies in 2004 and Oprah is a powerful voice in America. A photo of Krista Bremer and her daughter, Aliya who is wearing a bright green hijab accompanies the piece. It reminds me of my own treasured photo of my daughter wrapped in an ill-fitting black chador, taken on vacation in Esfahan a decade ago under entirely different circumstances. Here is the photo of Krista and Aliya:



Photo credit: Ismail Suayah
The Oprah Magazine On-line (May 27, 2010)

I decided to include this family's story in this bricolage of narratives, images, and theory because their live(d) experiences are deeply entwined in the discourses swirling on the pages of this thesis, and such inter/textuality enlivens my curriculum theorizing and classroom practice.

Bremer (2010) describes her ambivalence when Aliya announces she would like to start covering. American citizens living in North Carolina, Bremer's husband, Ismail, was born in Libya. When their daughter was born they agreed they would raise her "to choose what she identified with most from our dramatically different backgrounds" (p. 121). Bremer quietly assumed that her daughter would identify more with her own background and values. She writes:

I secretly felt smug about this agreement-confident that she would favor my comfortable American lifestyle over his modest Muslim upbringing...Not once did I imagine her falling for the head covering worn by Muslim girls as an expression of modesty. (p. 121)

As we have seen, it may be difficult for those who don't cover to imagine why anyone would choose to do so. Bremer's assumptions also remind me of a recent conversation I had with a colleague about a difficult situation in an ESL class where students routinely work in small groups. Two adult Muslim women who had just arrived in Canada as international students requested that they be exempted from working with men. They were very devout and their own educational past did not include experience in co-educational classrooms. Other Muslim women have told me that covering makes them feel comfortable working in the company of men. When deciding how to deal with the situation, my colleague suggested that in a few years we will not have to worry about such issues because nobody will be wearing hijab. He assumed covering was backwards and over time would simply disappear.

The first time Aliya appears in her newly-purchased hijab Bremer (2010) writes that "from the waist down, she was my daughter: sneakers, bright socks, jeans a little threadbare at the knees. But from the waist up, this girl was a stranger" (p. 122). She reports asking Aliya if she was really "going to wear that" out of the house. Bremer is incredulous when her daughter replies, "yeah." On their way to the store, she steals glances at an "aloof and unconcerned" (p. 122) Aliya in the rearview mirror. She writes:

I wanted to ask her to remove her head covering before she got out of the car, but I couldn't think of a single logical reason why, except that the sight of it made my blood pressure rise. I'd always encouraged her to express her individuality and to resist peer pressure, but now I felt as self-conscious and claustrophobic as if I were wearing that headscarf myself. (p. 122)

Bremer is surprised by her daughter's choice. Even though she knew Aliya could one day decide to cover, she did not think she would actually choose to do so.

Bremer (2010) then reflects on the uneasy ambivalence she felt as a girl the first time she wore a two-piece bathing suit in public. On one hand there was the promise of feeling attractive and powerful, and on the other, an unspeakable vulnerability. She contemplates her own daughter's decision in light of her own embodied, female experience:

I imagined Aliya in a string bikini in a few years. Then I imagined her draped in Muslim attire. It was hard to say which image was more unsettling. (p. 124)

Bremer worries about how Aliya will manage at school in her new attire. As her mother, she naturally feels a strong desire to protect her and is concerned "that her choice would make life in her own country difficult" (p. 127). This young girl is living her complex identity – memorizing verses from the Qur'an and learning Arabic from her father while also becoming "an agile mountain biker who rides... on wooded trails, mud spraying her calves as she navigates the swollen creek" (p. 127). What spaces will open up for Aliya's difference at school? How will her experiences of the school curriculum intersect and/or clash with her negotiation of the unofficial curriculum of the mass media as a visibly Muslim female? The following story of covering and parental angst comes from the Canadian context:

When Ms. Kassem began wearing the headscarf in Grade 10, she felt ready and thought it would clarify to her peers her moral values. Her father discouraged her, worried that it would complicate her life, especially on the soccer field. She has experienced the stereotype it carries: While struggling to understand a verse of Shakespeare in class, a new teacher suggested she take a course in English as a Second Language. "I was born in Saskatchewan," she said. (Anderssen, June 6, 2009)

During her high school years, Sarah Kassem often found herself defending Islam in an effort to counter the assumptions that many people had of Muslims, especially related to the rights of women. She and some of her Muslim classmates felt that wearing hijab also meant being an ambassador for their religion.

Bringing religious discourses into curriculum theorizing

Most of the tensions surrounding Muslim religious practices are not exclusive to Muslims. People of other faiths face similar challenges in balancing their constitutional right to freedom of religion with other rights. (Siddiqui, 2008, p. 13)

Boudreau (2009) points out the scarcity of discussion in public education of “the impact of religions on cultures, and vice versa” (p. 297), and expresses concern over what he terms “widespread religious illiteracy” (p. 301). He suggests the “fruits of neglecting the importance of religion are ignorance and intolerance” (p. 301). McGrath (2004) argues some believe secularism,

...will bring unity and strength to our country by removing from its life the divisiveness of religion...This kind of thing, I think, would prove to be not only a suppression of the pluralist reality, but also a folly of the worst sort for society. If we think we can achieve unity by the suppression of knowledge of, and respect for, religious diversity, then we will never understand our world...Imagine telling Sikhs and Muslims that their culture is respected in this country but the society has no place for their faith. Faith and culture are intimately connected. (p. 268)

Religious discourses are part of culture and society and McGrath questions whether the secular state can afford to ignore this fact if it is to uphold the rights of all citizens.

Quebec’s new *Ethnic and Religious Culture* program became compulsory in 2008 and is an effort to bring religious discourses into curriculum. The goals are to have students reflect on ethical questions, demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, and engage in dialogue (Ethics and Religious Culture Elementary, 2007, p. 7). The overall objective is “the recognition of others and the pursuit of the common good” (p. 7). It has been criticized from both

secular and religious quarters, but Boudreau (2009) argues the relevance of this program should not be dismissed. Jackson (in Boudreau) calls for pedagogies that encourage “a view of religion which adequately acknowledges their complexity, internal diversity, and their varying interactions with culture” (p. 305), and argues that there should be an “emphasis on the personal elements in religion, seeing religion as part of lived human experience” (p. 305). At the same time, Jackson cautions against a relativistic approach with regard to truth, in favour of “epistemological openness” and acknowledgment of “varying and often competing truth claims” (p. 305).

According to a decision handed down on June 18 by the Quebec Superior Court, Jesuit Loyola High School of Montreal will be dispensed from teaching “the Ethics and Religious Culture course” imposed by the Quebec Ministry of Education in the fall of 2008. The Jesuit school administration asserts that the course’s contents conflict with the institution’s Catholic values. (Documentation Information Catholiques Internationale, July 12, 2010)

Our biggest strength in Canada is that we have an open society where ideas can be debated and discussed and those who hold extreme views have to be challenged, especially within the community. (Sheema Khan, in Chua 2009, np.)

The Ontario Ministry of Education offers an optional course, *World Religions*, as part of the Grade 11 and 12 *Social Sciences and Humanities Curriculum* (2000). Given it has not been revised in a decade and takes up only 3 pages (pp. 126–129) in the curriculum guide, the Ministry does not place a high priority on this course. Teachers depend on commercially produced textbooks as course content, and given our modernist habits of thought there may be a tendency to emphasize differences and similarities between religions as separate entities without also engaging the hybrid processes at play within and between religions. They are not static and homogenous but are constantly negotiated and recreated (Bramadat, 2005). In Canada, people from various ethnic and national backgrounds come together to practice their religion in this new context. Muslims have come from all around the world, and “wear different kinds of clothing, speak different

languages, inhabit different continents, and eat different foods, so there is no point in speaking about one Islamic ethnicity” (p. 12). In addition, there are several distinct forms of Islam, each of which may appear different “depending on the gender, class, or ethnic backgrounds of the people expressing it” (p. 12). Modernist categories can prevent us from seeing that religious traditions are internally diverse and subject to change over time (Bramadat, 2005). Bhabha’s (2006) conception of hybridity captures the notion of active process:

[H]ybridization does not simply assume two given cultures coming together. Rather, for any culture, practice, locale, space, or site that we might consider as unitary, I wish to emphasize that it, too, is the product of a range of hybridizations. . . Hybridization, then, should not simply be seen as a way of thinking about cultural differences. It has to be understood as an ongoing process through which questions of difference and discrimination are being negotiated. (p. 12)

In our age of technology where the mass media are powerful educators, don’t students need to have meaningful experiences that compel them to become more engaged citizens? What if current, controversial topics were routinely admitted into the classroom and engaged? Our youth are exposed to the real world online and are then often required to endure sanitized material at school via a bland, unappetizing standardized curriculum imposed by adults far from the particularities of the classroom it its participants. Youth are able to deconstruct dominant meanings circulating in the mass media and need opportunities to consider themselves and the world through various critical lenses. A curricular and pedagogical liveliness keeps meanings open to the ongoing processes of hybridization within and around us.

The relatively small numbers of students taking *World Religions* in Ontario high schools may end up being taught by non-specialist teachers who have perhaps themselves been “miseducated” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004) by the mass media and absences in their own education, potentially reproducing dominant meanings. Miriam recounts the following story:

Miriam: I remember I went to this one *World Religions* class when they were talking about

Islam. The teacher ... started talking about the whole covering thing and how “*they’re all covered*.” Then it came to the topic about abuse, and so here’s the entire class talking about women abused in, or the abuse of, women in Islam. And from how she described it, she gave the idea that all women in Islam were being abused and that’s really not true.

Diane: Did you say anything back to that?

Miriam: I didn’t know what to say. I mean here was the teacher talking about it like she knows everything about it.

Diane: And do you think she was misinformed?

Miriam: Yeah, it was leading students to think something else. And I think the teacher even believed what she was talking about so it was hard to change everyone’s ideas. There were a few Muslim people in the class and we tried to argue against it but I mean, it was even written in the course materials. And she showed us some videos of the oppression of women in Muslim countries. . . The videos were basically saying, here was solid evidence of oppression, that kind of thing, and you couldn’t really argue . . . How were you supposed to change the minds of thirty five people around you with words when they just finished watching a video that was saying something else?

A similar incident took place in my own teenage daughter’s *World Religions* class. She spoke up in response to classmates who were expressing the belief that all Muslim women who cover are oppressed. Only one boy, who she later realized was Muslim, supported her counter arguments. She found the discussion frustrating because even though the teacher was knowledgeable and had presented readings and videos that challenged stereotypes, students were not at all receptive. She felt their minds were already made up.

As we acquire language, we learn to give meaning to our experiences and understand them according to particular discourses which pre-date our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness by offering various subject positions with which to identify and structure our sense of ourselves. We grow up within particular systems of meanings and values which we may find difficult to resist because they are taken for granted as truth. Felman (1987) suggests that teaching has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. It is “not a simple lack of information but the incapacity – or the refusal – to acknowledge one’s own implication in the information” (p. 79). Britzman (1998) similarly asks

how we come “to attach ourselves to as well as ignore certain ideas, theories, and people” (p. 16). She contends that reading practices might be educated into recognizing the potential proliferation of one’s own identificatory possibilities and to allow for undecidability and unknowability. This would be a “means to exceed – as opposed to return to – the self” (p.85). Rather than maintaining or closing down identifications, such a reading practice opens them up. For Britzman, dissonance marks the beginning of pedagogy. It is a question of engaging one’s own alterity, remaining in the space of difference, so that multiple subject positions are potentially available to the self and the other outside the constraints of a binary system of language. This is a reading practice that questions the impulse to normalize.

Media literacies: *Holy Islamophobia, Batman! & Bugs Bunny Pedagogy*

From a Cultural Studies perspective media literacy can be connected to social justice issues by deconstructing narratives on offer in the unofficial curriculum of the mass media. Critical readings of the media provide real-world insights into how inclusions and exclusions are structured in public discourse (Luke, 1999), and how this impacts everyday social relations. In this project I focus mainly on images from the print media, but there are endless cultural sites teachers might engage to examine how meanings are constructed and subjectivities constituted intertextually in popular culture.

Dar (2010), for example, analyzes what he refers to as “the demonization of Muslims and Arabs” in mainstream American comic books. He asks: “Where are the positive images? Where are the everyday Muslims?” and calls for more “accurate” representations. I question the existence of an ideal, essentialized Muslim that we can measure representations against to determine their “accuracy,” but Dar’s readings are valuable in the way they demonstrate how meanings about Muslims are constructed in everyday texts such as comic books. He critiques familiar comics such

as *Batman*, and also introduces Naif Al-Mutawa's new comic book series, *The 99*, which "presents Muslim women and men as three-dimensional characters and heroes" (p. 109). Dar writes that these characters "have stories, families, and character flaws, and their identities are not limited to the context of terrorism and misogyny" (p. 109). The characters are also "from multiple racial and religious backgrounds, which promotes Al-Mutawa's aspirations for dialogue and coexistence" (p. 109).

Sensoy's (2010a) readings of *Bugs Bunny* through a Cultural Studies lens also critiques how the informal curriculum of popular culture teaches about otherness. She describes *Bugs Bunny* as one of the "key tutors" (p. 113) in her own education about Muslims, and situates this cartoon in mainstream western discourses about Muslims and people of the Middle East. Sensoy calls for a recognition in educational contexts that identities are shifting and relational and argues that "to understand one's own, and other's identity, we must help students see, talk about, and understand this complex relational aspect of group identities and identifications" (p. 127). She also suggests a need for educators and students to understand how representation works to produce meanings, for as Kellner and Share (2005) point out, they may not be aware of how sexism, racism, ethnocentrism and other forms of othering are reproduced through media representations.

Media Literacy is now a key strand in the *Ontario Grades 1-8 Language Curriculum* (2006). At the secondary level, in grades 9-12 the media studies component also comprises one quarter of the *Language Curriculum*, and an optional *Grade 11 Media Studies* course is also offered. As explained on the *Media Awareness Network Web Site* (2010), "identifying media education as an essential curricular component is an important first step in developing this

subject area, but much work needs to be done to bring media education into the classroom.” In addition, the cross-curricular potential of media education has not been fully exploited.

The two main components of Media Education are critical interpretation and media production (Buckingham, 2003). The latter has proven the most difficult to implement even though it is mandated in the Ontario Curriculum, due to the requirement for equipment and teacher expertise (Orlowski, 2006) and therefore remains under-developed and under-theorized in Canadian educational contexts. This is unfortunate, for experts contend that democratizing media production is an important means to produce counter-narratives which challenge those typically on offer in public discourse (Stack & Kelly, 2006). In his book on teaching youth media, Goodman (2003) advocates the development of oral and visual literacy through documentary film-making. Williams (2006), also creates videos with youth:

To most of my students, watching television was like looking out the window and waiting for something to happen. They couldn't decipher the TV world from reality. (p. vii)

He incorporates media literacy into discussions about video production “because one is useless without the other” (p. vii) and contends that learning about the process of making documentaries “is a first step to becoming media literate” (p. viii).

Jenkins (2006) similarly argues that we “rethink the goals of media education so that young people can come to think of themselves as critical producers and participants and not simply as consumers, critical or otherwise” (p. 259). Given that changes in technology have an enormous impact on the way we think and act in the world, his words take on an urgency educators cannot afford to ignore. Share (2009) asserts in our “global information society, it is insufficient and irresponsible to teach students to read and write only with letters and numbers” (p. 1). Media literacy is central to citizenship and an understanding of the contemporary world, and when schools fail to engage the media “schools fall even further behind cultural and

informational change” (Tobin & Kincheloe, 2006, p. 11). Information has “lost its borders, it moves and flows in ...non-linear and instantaneous ways” (p. 12).

Creating Muslim spaces in schools

I have found that despite being troubled by their challenges, most Muslim youth are able to resist, encounter, or overcome their obstacles. (Shaza Khan, 2009, p. 28)

In her work and research with Muslim students, Shaza Khan (2009) observes that Muslim students are not passive victims, but actively construct a “Muslim space” for themselves in their schools. These take varied forms including school-wide efforts to establish a prayer room, organizing Muslim Students’ Associations, and holding girls-only alternative Proms. Khan also discusses actions taken on a personal level such as the use of humour “to address stereotypes held by peers in their schools” and joking with non-Muslim peers “in an attempt to avoid otherwise confrontational scenarios” (p. 34). In the following narrative, Noor describes her involvement in the school community and challenges she faced as a Muslim female:

Diane: You said you always felt part of the school community. At your first high school, you were involved in everything – sports, social activities, school government, academics...

Noor: Yeah. At my new school I wasn’t because I was only there for a year, so in my mind I didn’t have any emotional connections to that school. But at the old school, yeah, everyone knew me. I was part of student parliament. I always organized the semi-formals and I helped organize the proms . . .

Diane: And you participated in all of those activities?

Noor: Yeah, I participated in everything that I could. I mean, I was never allowed to wear revealing clothing but I would wear my long skirts and a three-quarter top, or I would wear a half-sleeve back then. And I participated as much as I could, you know, *anything to fit in*.

Diane: Were you ever uncomfortable at the dances? Like, the boy-girl aspect is often important at these events.

Noor: Right, it was hard squeezing out of the whole, *oh, sorry, can’t dance with you*. But yeah, I used to dance once in a while, like with one of my friends or somebody I felt really comfortable with, I would dance. Then I would tell my mom, and that would upset my mom. But my dad was okay with it, so it would be something I would feel really, really guilty about. I’d have a lot of guilt, I felt like I betrayed who I was. Why can’t I just say, *no, I don’t want to dance with you?* Why did I feel this need to be, like, be one of *them*?...

Diane: So you just managed to avoid certain things, in a quiet way.

Noor: And you know, I think back to it now and I'm like, *how could I survive high school?*

I could have gone the opposite way because there are people who went the exact opposite way. They had boyfriends, they did the drugs, they wore the clothes, they did everything. The only reason I probably didn't fall into that is because my mother was very strict and she was like, you cannot go out after this time, you cannot go out every weekend with your friends doing something I don't know about. Like I don't want you wandering the streets with your friends, I don't want you wandering in the malls. So, I thank my mother. It's because of her that I am the person I am today. Otherwise, it's so easy in high school I think, to just fall into the trap of wanting to be cool and doing all the silly things . . . Now when I think back to it I think why did I even want to do those things?

Diane: So, did you at times feel that you wanted to do them, but couldn't?

Noor: Definitely, yeah, I did. I mean, like, everyone does them. All your friends are doing it, after a while they stop inviting you because, you know, "*She never comes.*"

In her study with Muslim students attending public schools in Toronto, Zine (2006) describes her participants' involvement in Islamic organizations such as Muslim Student Associations (MSA). She suggests this was one way to resist peer pressure that might have led them to compromise their Islamic values. Khan (2009) describes how some research participants became involved in MSA's as a way to "resist peer pressure, address stereotypes, and educate others about Islam" (p. 35). She argues Muslim Student Associations "helped Muslim youth become more confident in their beliefs and practices while providing a convenient source of peer support in the face of challenges associated with their religious identities" (p. 36).

Jana describes how she negotiated the social scene at her private high school. Although she was one of the only Muslim students in her school, she never felt excluded and established her own approach to negotiating the social spaces of schooling:

Diane: Do you think people at your school looked at you as "the Muslim girl"? Did you ever feel different or feel you were treated differently because of your Muslim background?

Jana: Not particularly, because my approach with those girls – because, like I said, they had already made their friends – my approach was just ... I was kind of the trouble-maker or the rebellious one. So I got automatically accepted because I was doing all the stuff they wished they could do.

Diane: Would you describe yourself as "the cool girl"?

Jana: Yeah, because [at that school] everyone knows each other, it's a close community. My parents don't speak English very well...my mom, none at all. My dad can understand it, can speak it slightly, but they're not involved in that community. Whatever I do, it's never getting back to them. And if it does, I can easily twist it around to make it like, no, no, they're just calling [the school authorities] to let you know that I'm doing great. You know? (laughs).

Jana has a strong personality and she uses it to her advantage. In the following exchange, Sahar and I discuss the role her personality played in her schooling life:

Diane: I'm wondering what role personality played in your experiences at your Catholic High School, because both you and Tina come across as very dynamic and outgoing.

Sahar: You know, it's true. Personality does play a role because there are a lot of hijabis who are really, really shy or not really that approachable, you know what I mean? Like when you see a person looking at you and you just smile at them, that will probably encourage them to come talk to you. And me and Tina are always laughing and smiling ... So, you have to be very simple and nice when you talk to [people]. You can't be all mean and like: *Why should I tell you this, you should know...* because if you think about it, we immigrated to a foreign country as children. In our [parent's] home country we're all Arabs, we're all Muslims, so we're used to it. Here, it's different. They're all used to being Christians so you can't expect them to know about you. You have to introduce yourself to them, and to make yourself noticed you have to be a nice, approachable person so that someone can talk to you. And when you are this nice person, that person's going to be very curious about you and is going to like who you are and like where you come from. If you're just like, away from people and isolate yourself, just stick with your own group [it won't work].

Miriam was the only participant who had the option of participating in a Muslim Student Association at her school, but they are increasingly common now. She was on her school's MSA for all four years of high school.

Diane: Did you feel part of the school community?

Miriam: We had a Muslim Student Association. We organized Ramadan dinners and we had a multicultural dinner. For grade twelve I was part of the MSA, I was an exec., and we had this multicultural dinner and everybody turned up. We had the cafeteria to put it up and everything. We had tables all around and food from everywhere. And all the teachers turned up, all their families turned up, and most of the students turned up so it was a success.

Diane: Was it in the evening?

Miriam: Yes. It was in the evening. So I thought that was pretty good. And the MSA, you know it's a Muslim Student Association and had multicultural things to do. We

organized multicultural activities. There was also a multicultural show where everybody turned up in their cultural clothing. We were part of the school. . .

Diane: Do you think your school life would have been different without the MSA? How important was it to you?

Miriam: Well it certainly brought all the Muslim people together I guess. I was a part of it for all my high school years, all four years. I was only an exec in grade twelve. So without it we would not have had the multicultural dinner or all those things, or the multicultural show. So I guess it did make a difference. I mean, if those weren't going on then I guess people wouldn't be too aware of the fact that there are so many different cultures there. I mean when we had the dinner there were tables with information and tables set up with food from different cultures. When you came in you knew that, "Oh my God, we have so many different cultures here at our school." It did make a difference.

This is not to say that MSA's are tension-free zones without potential challenges, for a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups may fall under such an umbrella group.

Miriam and I also talked about ongoing struggles to establish a room where students could pray at her school. It was a fluid situation as there was apparently no district-wide policy. A suitable space had been set aside but when a new administrator was appointed to the school he took away the space they had been using and instead offered a much smaller area that was not large enough. This administrator told students if he catered to Muslim students he would have to cater to all religions and he wasn't willing to do that. A teacher on staff quietly opened up her classroom for prayers at lunch hour. Miriam said students were very appreciative of this kind act on the part of this teacher.

Alternative Prom: "*We want to party; we want to have fun!*"

Miriam was the only research participant who experienced an Islamic prom in her school, but these have become more common. *The Globe and Mail* (Anderssen, June 6, 2009) featured an article on "The Sister's Prom," which has become an annual event among Toronto's Muslim communities. Anderssen describes the event as "a symbol of the balance that defines the lives of modern young women...born and raised in Canada, faithful to Islam." Girls dress up, dance, and

have fun but without alcohol or boys. Miriam describes the prom or “brom” she helped to organize at her high school:

Miriam: There was an Arabic prom at our school that was organized by us. In an Arabic accent they can’t say “prom,” but they say “brom.” So, it was called “the brom!” (laughs) There were about 250 people that turned out. We went to the hall, and it was just girls, so we could wear the gown. And the hijabis didn’t have to wear the hijab because it was just girls. Everybody brought in music they liked. There were traditional dances that you probably couldn’t do at prom. Arabic girls, we want to party, we want to have fun. But we can’t do it in the same environment that other people do it, so we do our own thing.

Diane: Was the dress code the main issue with the school prom?

Miriam: Yeah, but also the whole thing about dates and alcohol . . . We weren’t comfortable in that environment... So we decided to have our own prom.

Eighteen-year-old Sarah Usmani, who was interviewed by Anderssen, wants to be an oncologist.

When asked whether she feels she might be missing out on “that most famous of date nights,”

Sarah replies: “I don’t need a boyfriend to have a good time... And my parents won’t be freaking out when I am exiting the front door.”

Beyond inclusion: Admitting new knowledges

Britzman (1998) works with psychoanalytic theory to reconceptualize curriculum and pedagogy. For her, inclusive education is not enough – just adding voices onto those that are already there does not get at the problem of humanism’s assumptions about language and representation. The liberal strategy of inclusion assumes and perpetuates an unmarked normative order. The other might be invited into the curriculum, but “not because they have anything to say to those already there” (p. 87). Britzman asserts the only two subject positions permitted are “the tolerant normal” and “the tolerated subaltern,” or the familiar old us/them binary. The other problem is the assumption that by adding information about the other to the curriculum will somehow lead to more “tolerant” attitudes, that teachers and students will “rationally accept new thoughts without having to grapple with unlearning the old ones.” (p. 88). In this concept of

learning, no account is taking of affective investments in a certain point of view.

Even though feminist theorizing disrupts masculine discourses of knowledge, Stone (1994) posits that, “schools are still bastions of traditional, masculinist epistemology” (p. 2). The knowledge on offer remains rooted in the binary terror of humanism’s “natural” ability to divide and exclude. Discourses of educational knowledge imply a unitary subject at the center, logic, stability, rationality, and scientific reasoning as the path to a singular truth that is necessarily disembodied, neat, tidy, and measurable. As poststructural feminist theorists have shown, this view of knowledge excludes the possibility of other kinds of knowledge, and it fails to admit to its own implication in exclusionary practices. Women and other marginalized groups on the inferior side of the binaries have shown how language exceeds the boundaries that humanism has worked hard to maintain. Britzman (1998) refers to education as currently conceived as “category-maintenance work” (p. 51), and contemplates “what education would be like without its categorical imperatives”(p. 43). Poststructural theory proliferates other kinds of knowledge – embodied knowledges, the affect, the unknowable – toward more ethical theories of education.

Britzman (1998) argues “for there to be a learning, there must be conflict in the learning” (p. 5). She sees it as a problem, but a problem that has to do with something other than the material of pedagogy, and thus suggests “we might begin to pry apart the conditions of learning from that which conditions the desire to learn and the desire to ignore. We might wonder how one becomes susceptible to the call of ideas” (p. 5). Learning is imagined as the learning of one’s own history of learning rather than as a repetition of one’s own history of learning. New kinds of thought need to be admitted into education. Learning becomes something other than a linear, progressive accumulation of information. Britzman is interested in how we come “to attach ourselves to as well as ignore certain ideas, theories, and people” (p. 16). Educational discourses

of knowledge and mastery cannot “tolerate the unconscious and hence the flaws in any perception” (p. 29). This is a learning for which there are no experts, a learning that admits “conflicts, disruptions, mistakes, controversies” (p. 19), a learning that *lets things emerge*. There is a need to abandon narratives of control and mastery, and the quest for a rationality “that can settle the trouble that inaugurates thought,” for thought is “not reducible to finding the proper data” (p. 32). Britzman asks whether education can be a site where the learner must confront “the fragility of all knowledge and the meaning of the wish for mastery” (p. 35), a site where the unitary subject of pedagogy is unsettled. She searches for ways out of the logic of official knowledge, and dreams of an education that opens to the world and the possibilities of community, stressing the only condition of community is difference.

Chapter 8:
Pedagogies of tension and epistemologies of doubt:
Toward embodied curriculum as lively dis/comfort

Why is not the school curriculum a provocation
for students to reflect on and to think critically
about themselves and the world they will inherit?
(Pinar, 2004, p. 187)

‘Doubt’ is a hermeneutic of truths: it is a social practice that consists in self-inquiry, critical intelligence, ethical-political deliberation, and social interlocution. It is the (p. 15) process through which we test the truth-conditions, and the practical, pragmatic consequences, of our acts as agents in the world. Global doubt is crucial to our sense of what is at stake in claiming to be a global actor. Doubt as a practice *preceeding action and agency* is a powerful third element in the dialectic of transfer and transformation that creates the ‘global’ metaphor.
(Bhabha, 2007, p. 16)

Perhaps it is unavoidable that the class be so fraught. Not only are the tensions it produces inevitable but they manifest the internal pull between desire and fear. Thus, on the one hand, students *want* to encounter the Otherness of Islam. On the other hand, when they do, they don’t quite know what to make of it . . . the encounter brings into focus the internal fragilities of the self. (Barlas, 2007, p. 370)

This openness to and awareness of movement, rather than fixity, potentially brings with it an openness to difference, to movement, to new ways of thinking. (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1157)

How are curriculum scholars helping to prepare educators to respond to the volatile situations of the real world? (Malewski & Sharma, 2010, p. 366)

In-between theory and practice: Teacher as bricoleur

This research text is a provocation that invites the reader into complicating moments midst *sonare* and *videre* to interrupt humanist discourses. These confine us in normative understandings that have effects in the material world. Voices from a variety of social locations and disciplinary backgrounds are brought together, to create a layered, hybrid text designed to trouble our taken for granted assumptions. Dwelling here – midst the messy intertextuality of our everyday lives – how might we respond as curriculum theorists and educators?

The reader may be unsettled by an experimental text. Part of the project of this bricolage is to push against dominant academic epistemologies. I write from the perspective of a woman (Cixous, 1991, 1994), while not wishing to confine myself to that single identity category, either. Alternative forms of representation in academic scholarship are well established¹, and less familiar textual strategies may require that the reader rethink his/her own theories of reading and writing. He/she may be confronted with “something different from what they think they want from a text” (Malewski, 2010d, p. xiv), but “juxtaposition and not knowing as a way of knowing become the very force of learning” (p. xiv). If writing, itself, is to be a political act, we need to write ourselves into the very spaces of possibility we envision so we might break through the confinement of the status quo. We dwell in-between tradition and innovation so that new knowledges might proliferate. Bhabha’s (2007) notion of “interlocution” speaks to such spaces. He describes it as,

the recognition of communication – talk, conversation, discourse, dialogue – as it comes to constitute the ‘human right to narrate’ which is essential in building diverse, non-consensual communities. I designate it as a ‘right’ because I see interlocution as part of the process of freedom of expression, and the liberty of dialogical debate and interaction, that creates complex communities and polities. The state of ambivalence – whether it is an

¹ For example see: Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2007; 2008; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Lather, 2007; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Malewski, 2010; Morawski & Palulis, 2009; Springgay & Freedman (forthcoming).

individual, psychic condition, or part of a larger group dynamic – is a situation that requires that there be political and cultural institutions that protect and propagate the ‘right’ to narrate and the complementary right to be heard. (p. 3)

How do we set up the conditions necessary so that the “right to narrate” might flourish in-between the corporate media’s pedagogies on otherness and instrumental curricular discourses that exert their dominance over us? As bricoleur, to compose this research text I draw from the epistemological bazaar and the field of cultural studies, which eschews “academic limits [while]...using and developing the resources we find there” (Johnson et al. 2004, p. 25). Bricoleurs “expand the research beyond itself to a multitude of contexts” (Berry, 2006, p. 105). Writing through juxtaposition is a way to engage in-between, hybridizing spaces, for “[t]here is especially the potential that opens up necessarily, whether one wishes it or not, from one text to another, a kind of chemistry” (Derrida, 1995, p. 117).

The rapid rate of change and increasingly complex nature of curriculum studies... requires giving up on knowledge we can grab hold of in any complete sense to embrace proliferations, tensions, and discontinuities.
(Malewski, 2010d, p. xiv)

In times of coercive politics and transnational terror, slowing down to listen anew is a necessity...[T]he question is not so much to produce a *new image* as to provoke, to facilitate, and to solicit a *new seeing*. (Trinh, 2005, p. 13)

How might the theoretical sensibilities of the bricoleur find their way into the everyday life of the classroom? What if Bhabha’s (2007) concept of “interlocution” and Derrida’s notion of a generative chemistry between texts, could be brought into the local scene of schooling so these ideas might trickle out into the wider world? As Malweski (2010e) notes, in the field of curriculum studies many continue to view “traditionalism as the terrain of practice (and therefore relevance) and reconceptualization as the terrain of theory (and therefore of nonrelevance)” (p.

214). In this chapter I turn to issues around pedagogy and practical concerns of the classroom to disrupt the theory/practice binary.

In the everyday life of the text, in the text of the everyday, a bricoleur works with what is at hand: a word, a pause, a spill, a stain, a silence, a gap, a spatial punctuation...whatever is close at hand.

(Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p. 17)

Reilly (2009) suggests that the intellectual activity of the bricoleur “requires flexibility and the capacity to work with what is given while being responsive to emerging understandings” (p. 376). The teacher as bricoleur works with complexity and the lived experiences of students to create a hybrid third space in-between students, teacher, and curricula. Dwelling in the inter/texts of the school curriculum, the mass media as curriculum, and students’ stories of lived experience, the messiness of the world and of our lives is engaged via complicated conversations that never end. This is curriculum as verb – where thinking is kept alive, and personally meaningful and relevant knowledge is generated in relation with others. As Reilly explains, the teacher as bricoleur “constructs opportunities that open spaces of possibilities, not destined certainties” (p. 383). Learning is “collaged and juxtaposed and made with students along the way” (p. 383). Conceptualizing the teacher as bricoleur, may offer a means to negotiate prescribed curricula and external standards, while remaining attuned to the here and now of our students’ lives.

Block (2010) insists that education “lead students out and away from home...and not draw them back to that familiar address” (p. 9). His assertion offers both opportunities and challenges for those who take seriously education’s promise to prepare students for democratic citizenship in a diverse society, continuously bombarded with the mass media’s curriculum on otherness. Rather than think only in terms of preparing students for the future, for an imagined democracy to come (Derrida, 2005), what would it take to more fully engage them in the here-and-now, in-between local and the global contexts? Working with *différance* (Derrida, 1968),

through auto/ethno/graphy and bricolage could we trouble and unsettle the sedimented layers of our knowledge? Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue we “cannot afford the stubborn refusal we sometimes encounter from students [and educators] who prefer their own comfortable worlds to confrontation with other, startlingly different worldviews” (p. 274). However, this work of challenging assumptions is fraught with difficulties many prefer to avoid.

Within and outside educational contexts, we are immersed in discourses of multiculturalism with their unspoken “center” and “margins,” where binaries proliferate and maintain the status quo under the guise of harmony, inclusion, tolerance, sameness, and consensus. Post-reconceptualist curriculum theorizing (Appelbaum, 2006; Malewski, 2010) works the spaces of *différance* to keep epistemologies and curriculum lively through an interminable openness to the other. Bringing difference into pedagogical practice requires a willingness to stay with inevitable tensions – to dwell in-between comfort and discomfort – for in spite of the continued search for them, there are no simple, stable solutions in the contested terrain of education. Pillow (2003) theorizes an “uncomfortable reflexivity” as one “that seeks to know while at the same time situates that knowing as tenuous” (p. 188). She describes knowing our selves and others as uncomfortable and uncontainable:

This is a move to use reflexivity in a way that would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning. (p. 192)

Wang and Yu (2006) similarly caution that even though our pedagogies may play a role in disrupting the status quo, no single approach offers tidy, one-size-fits-all solutions to the issues we face. There is “no discourse or practice inherently liberatory or empowering” (p. 35). Nevertheless, “our pedagogical desires, discourses, and practices are complicated along the way” (p. 35). As we push at borders, alternative paths may open up but the process is ongoing, for

language, life, and subjectivities are dynamic. Conceptualizing curriculum in-between verb and noun may nurture liveliness of thought, but there are no guarantees.

The question is not of putting two cultures together, or one next to the other. What is at stake in this inter-creation is the question of boundary and the very notion of the specialist and the expert. To cut across borders is to live aloud the malaise of categories and expertise. These would have to be thoroughly questioned and pushed to their limits so as to resist the comfort of belonging and of fixed classification. The boundary zone then takes on its full function as the zone of transformation ... When work is carried out across and in between domains, on that very boundary zone, the latter inevitably undergoes change. The encounter should lead to a transformation. This is a challenge most prefer not to take up because it is so much easier to continue to be an expert in our own field and consult another expert. It's difficult to let go of the barriers and let the challenge transform us.
(Trinh, 2005, p. 16)

Engaging difference in the classroom: The example of Islamic covering

The desire for sameness is authoritarian.
(Bouchard & Taylor, in Siddiqui, 2010)

Arguing against “visual homogeneity” (Ruitenbergh, 2008, p. 26) in school communities, Ruitenbergh asserts a law or policy that prohibits the wearing of Islamic covering in the context of public schools would be a form of censorship. She considers the choice to cover a discursive act:

Where the wearing of clothing and symbols on the body is, perhaps, not a language in the narrow sense of the word, it certainly is discourse, where discourse is taken as speech, writing, and other semiotic practices that do not merely represent the world, but that produce effects in the world. A law that makes wearing a *khimar*, *burqa*, or other forms of head, face, or body cover illegal in the context of public schools is thus a law that makes certain discursive acts illegal in the context of public schools; it is a form of censorship in educational contexts. (p. 20)

Ruitenbergh argues censorship is miseducative in the sense that it impedes the achievement of important educational goals. She uses Dewey's (1938/1963) term “miseducative” to describe any experience “that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25), while her conception of education entails an “openness of knowledge and discourse” (p. 21).

Drawing on the work of Derrida (1994) she argues that, “in initiating students into traditions of

knowledge and discourse, the goal is not the faithful replication and continuation of tradition, but rather a participation in tradition understood as internally heterogeneous, composed of sedimented change, and necessarily open to subsequent change (p. 21). In her call for epistemological and discursive openness, Ruitenberg advocates a deconstructive approach to education consisting of “invitations and initiations into knowledge and discourse in such ways that the knowledge and discourse remain open to questioning and critique” (p. 21). All fields of knowledge are approached as translated rather than transmitted. She explains, “the structural openness of knowledge and discourse result from translation upon translation of the tradition, each of which adds to heterogeneity” (p. 21).

Ruitenberg (2008) contends public education should help students examine discursive acts, including those they are “likely to encounter in the public sphere [which]...may be similar or different from discursive acts that they hear in the private sphere of the home” (p. 21). Disallowing difference into the curriculum prohibits contact with otherness, which forecloses on educational opportunities. She identifies three miseducative effects in particular when difference is censored. First, the examination of discursive processes is severely limited, including how social norms are produced. Second, “the critical uptake of the banned discourse by female Muslim students themselves is foreclosed and their agency hindered” (p. 17). Thirdly, censorship gives rise to a metadiscourse that misrecognizes individual discursive acts by translating them into essentialized terms, without noticing what might be lost in translation. Barrento (in Bhabha, 2007) asks: “Will thinking...again be accepted in the *polis*, and gain a new home in language that can be heard and in a space of dialogue” (p. 5)?

Pedagogies of tension and epistemologies of doubt

I teach a course in the Teacher Education Program at a Canadian university where

students consider schooling and its social contexts. In particular, we look at the roles of teachers in reproducing and challenging social inequalities, which includes a personal examination of teacher identities. During the semester we discuss various forms of social oppression. Teacher candidates are asked to become more aware of their own social locations so they may work to challenge rather than reproduce social inequalities in educational contexts. This is my favourite course to teach, but also the most difficult. Learning about realities such as Canada's legacy of Residential Schooling, and the ways sexism, racism, poverty, and homophobia inhabit our social spaces is difficult knowledge, and as teacher I find myself having to negotiate a great deal of resistance and tension. At times, when I have felt threatened and discouraged, I seriously doubted whether complicated curriculum conversations were even possible in most classrooms given our immersion in language and our fondness for familiar and comforting pedagogies. My mistake was in thinking that working through such difficult knowledge with students could or should be painless and trouble-free.

In my Schooling and Society course, pre-service teachers are asked to conduct a class leadership session based on the weekly readings². All semester we deal with challenging issues related to race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and so on. One week before it was their turn, the three students who had the topic, "Muslims and Schooling," told me they were at a complete loss regarding what to do during their session. They said they know this is an important area because there are Muslim students in our schools, but stressed that they were extremely uncomfortable leading a discussion with the class on this topic. They said they didn't know enough about Muslim students or about Islam. I recommended that they could lead a discussion based on ideas from the weekly reading, but they were still very hesitant. Why are Muslim students such a difficult topic to talk about in my pre-service classroom? (Watt, Personal Narrative)

² I offered my help, but the students wanted/needed to be in charge. They showed the film *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people* (Jhally, 2007) as a starting point. This proved a good starting point as most students were familiar with the movies depicted and hadn't realized how Muslims were being represented across texts. A highly engaging discussion followed. Although students were uncomfortable at first, they worked through it in their own ways and it led to one of the richest educational encounters I have ever witnessed. I learned to have more faith in my students' abilities to work through difficult issues on their own terms as a result of these events.

I have spent most of my life seeking harmony in my social relations and teaching practice, having an aversion to discord of any kind. On an intellectual level I believe in the productive capacities of difference and our need to engage it. However, there are no simple answers on how to deal with unavoidable emotional tensions that inevitably arise. This is the course I most want to teach – one I believe could make a difference in our lives and those of students (although these critical lenses need to be engaged across the teacher education curriculum). However, I feel very much like Barlas (2007), who describes her experiences teaching Islam at the university level in this way:

My dilemma is that even as I desire this encounter, I also fear it . . . I have too much invested in the class to “allow” it to fail . . . It is hard not to feel implicated if a class doesn’t work. (p. 370)

How do we move away from the success/failure binary in reference to our pedagogical actions toward reconceptualizing curriculum and pedagogy as building communities “without consensus” (Miller, 2010)? The bricoleur might keep in mind that whatever takes place in a classroom in-between students, teacher, and curricula extends beyond the time of the pedagogical event. The knowledges generated together in these contexts are carried off to other places and times via the minds and bodies of our students who may not yet know, themselves, what they have un/learned.

As teachers, we inevitably risk our selves through the pedagogical choices we make or don’t make. Can we expect our students to risk themselves if we only half-heartedly do so? And what might risking one’s self entail? I recently realized the extent to which I want students to like me, and am struggling to let this go. Hongyu Wang (in Wang & Yu, 2006) writes:

Teaching multicultural education . . . no longer allows me a space to be *both nice and intelligent*. My pedagogical, intellectual, and moral position of anti-racism, anti-(hetero)sexism, and anti-classism requires me to be assertive and to be comfortable with confrontations. Being nice no longer comes in handy. With the realization of my own niceness both socially and self-imposed, may I learn to allow the assertive and aggressive part of the self to come forward in a less violent way? (p. 33)

Wang recalls reading Mary Doll and her reflection on “first being a nice girl and then being a nice teacher.” Wang identifies with Doll’s encounter with “an obnoxious male college student” as her own “imagined nightmare” (p. 33). We all have our own imagined nightmares. How far are we willing to allow our selves to be challenged? What won’t get said if we play it safe? What hurt might occur if too much is said? How might the classroom truly become “a space of conversation more than a space of instruction” (Aoki, 2003a, p.3)? How might a paucity of tension-filled, complicated conversations in educational contexts impact the landscape of our democracy-yet-to-come (Derrida, 2005)?

I am generally so focused on the object of teaching – the course content, pedagogies, the students – that I sometimes overlook the presence of my own body and subjectivity in the classroom. I recall being invited by Dr. Morawski to engage her graduate class in a discussion on media representations of Muslim women . . .

I showed the class an image on the cover of a Canadian magazine, of Muslim women wearing black chador, and asked them to share whatever narratives the image evoked. Nobody said anything. I reworded my request, but again, silence. Eventually we did get the discussion going but afterwards I wondered why people were reluctant to offer their comments publically. In searching for answers, all of my questions focused on the students at first and I did not think to interrogate my own actions. By presenting myself as “knower,” as “expert” on media literacy, was I positioning the class as passive receivers of knowledge? Were they afraid there was one “right” answer to my question and that they might somehow get it wrong? (Watt, Personal narrative)

The following quotation often appears on my course outlines for students, but recently I have thought more about how it also applies to me, for becoming a teacher is ongoing:

Learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one’s past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming; a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become. (Britzman, 1991, p. 8)

DiAngelo and Sensoy (2010) write that “[s]tarting with oneself takes a lifetime of practice, reflection, and personal courage” (p. 99). They point out nobody can tell us how to teach in tense spaces. Learning how to bring difficult areas of knowledge to our students is a “complex, life-long process rather than...an event” (p. 98). There is no formula because these pedagogies involve challenging “our worldview and our sense of ourselves in relation to others” while being asked to “connect ourselves to uncomfortable concepts” such as sexism, Islamophobia, exclusion, and privilege. As teachers we need to “develop stamina and courage to talk about issues that [we] and [our] peers have been socialized not to talk about” (p. 99). Challenging our comfort zones takes time and practice (p. 100), as does being able to throw certainty to the wind. As we work *toward* Asher’s (2002) “hybrid consciousness” – the decolonization of our bodies and minds – we understand that this work by definition has no end.

I am experimenting with examining my life, with charting the course of my feelings, with giving my work purpose and direction, through remembering where I have been.
(DeSalvo in Miller, 2005, p. 2001)

The authority to speak

When I engage the topic of schooling and Muslim students in the teacher education classroom, I ask students to consider multiple intersections, such as racialization, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and sexuality. As part of the course readings I once included an article by Jasmine Zine (2003) entitled, *The challenge of anti-Islamophobia education*. Each week, students write their response to the weekly readings in a journal. One term, after reading the Zine article, rather than focusing on the issue of Islamophobia in Canadian society and in educational contexts in their journal response, a number of students questioned the credibility of the author and her assertions about the existence of Islamophobia. They were concerned Zine may be biased because she is Muslim, herself. Students did not necessarily find me a more suitable source of knowledge

about Muslim students in our schools either, since I am *not* Muslim. Barlas (2007) writes her undergraduate students' views of her as a teacher shifted, depending on what was going on in her course on Islam:

There is then the issue of what to make of someone like me who doesn't fit the image either of an oppressed Muslim woman or of the exotic 'Oriental'. Some students ascribe my 'powerful' and 'aggressive' personality to the fact that I live in the U.S. where I enjoy the gift of freedom. Others, meanwhile, think I represent an authentic essence of Muslimness that can provide them with personal access to other Muslims. Although this opens up crucial 'teaching moments' for me – it allows me to call attention to the tendency to brand Muslims with the 'mark of the plural' – I can't help but feeling a bit objectified at the end of it all (p. 368) . . . Then, too, some of the students who begin the course rather euphorically because a Muslim is teaching it start to get uncomfortable with my speaking about Islam authoritatively. In fact, some have even said that they would rather learn about Islam (and religion in general) from a person who doesn't have a stake in it, like an atheist. In effect, the same students who suspect that Islam is being 'sold' to them also feel that it should be made more palatable to them! In other words, the site from which Muslims speak must reflect the needs of the non-believers. This isn't true of all students, of course. Those who have had a religious upbringing, even if they are not actively practicing believers, are often the most able to 'understand Islam.' (p. 369)

As someone who is not Muslim, I am constantly trying to work out how to engage issues related to students from backgrounds other than my own in ways that are not colonizing. I am learning how the insider/outsider binary is unstable, depending on who the teacher and students are, as well as on the topic under discussion. The teacher as bricoleur knows each situation is fluid and tries to respond to the unique conditions he/she is faced with in each pedagogical context.

Deconstructive pedagogies

The poststructural turn in feminism has had an enormous impact on how we think about education. Todd (1997b) explains that by decentering the subject and conceiving of it as contingent, multiply determined, and constantly shifting, poststructuralism has "occasioned an awareness of the place of indeterminacy in thinking about oppression, identity, and social location which earlier, more stable views of subjectivity did not account for" (p. 3). Fixed locations and

standpoints, and romanticized views of experience are limited in their ability to account for “complex relations between power, pleasure, pain, and systems of meaning” (p. 3).

Any easy equation between knowledge and agency has been cast in doubt.

[Readers] must be willing to construct more complicated reading practices that move them beyond the myth of literal representations and the deceptive promise that ‘the real’ is transparent, stable, and just like the representational. Poststructural theories of writing and reading may allow readers to challenge and rearrange what it is that structures the reader’s own identity imperatives, the reader’s own theory of reading that produces boundaries of the credible and the incredible. One’s own structures of intelligibility might become open to readings not yet accounted for, not yet made. (Britzman, 1995, p. 237)

Given the untidiness of knowledge and interpretation, what if we were to open to pedagogies whose object is “not so much to pull ‘the’ meaning from the text as . . . to endlessly challenge the text” (Willinsky, 2001, p. 74)? Lather (1991) describes pedagogy as undecidable and open-ended, an inquiry into “what makes our knowledge both possible and problematic” (p. 41), a foregrounding of “the ambiguities of how texts make meaning” (p. 42). Deconstructive pedagogies encourage a multiplicity of readings “by demonstrating how we cannot exhaust the meaning of the text, how a text can participate in multiple meanings without being reduced to any one, and how our different positionalities affect our reading of it” (p. 145). The bricoleur dwells midst the shifting discourses circulating in schooling and popular cultural contexts to ask why we might be reading in particular ways. Pollock (2007) speculates on the possibilities “for practicing new subjectivities . . . through writing what theories of hybrid, multivoiced, engaged, and embodied social subjectivities have encouraged us to imagine” (p. 242).

[Deconstructive] pedagogy becomes a site not for working through more effective transmission strategies but for helping us learn to analyze the discourses available to us, which ones we are invested in, how we are inscribed by the dominant, how we are outside of, other than the dominant, consciously/unconsciously, always partially, contradictorily. (Lather, 1991, p. 143)

To conceptualize curriculum and curriculum studies as text now implies understanding curriculum tensions created by local, national, and global struggles over different and

differing representations of content, self, and other – produced by the contact between and among language, culture, history and the discourses used to represent.

(Miller, 2005, pp. 246–247)

Socially performative reading practices incapable of closure

Teaching...has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. Ignorance, suggests Lacan, is a passion. Inasmuch as traditional pedagogy postulated a desire for knowledge, an analytically informed pedagogy had to reckon with “the passion for ignorance.” Ignorance, in other words is nothing other than a *desire to ignore*: its nature is less cognitive than performative ...[I]t is not a simple lack of information but the incapacity – or the refusal – to acknowledge one’s own implication in the information.

(Felman, 1987, p. 79)

Both Britzman (1998) and Felman (1987) draw on the reading practices of Freud and Lacan to suggest how education might open to difference. They link reading practices to forms of sociality, conceptualizing them as socially performative. Britzman warns that part of this performance may be the production of “normalcy” – a type of hegemonic sociality – if the techniques of reading “begin from the standpoint of refusing the unassimilability of difference and the otherness of the reader” (p. 85). A *desire to ignore* may arise when “the other” is deemed unintelligible, or “a special event, never every day.” (p. 85). Britzman contends reading practices might be educated into recognizing the potential proliferation of one’s own identificatory possibilities and to allow for undecidability and unknowability. This is seen as a “means to exceed – as opposed to return to – the self” (p.85). Rather than maintaining or closing down identifications, such a reading practice opens them up. For Britzman, dissonance marks the beginning of pedagogy. It is a question of engaging one’s own alterity, remaining in the space of difference, so that multiple subject positions are potentially available to the self and the other outside the constraints of a binary system of language. This is a reading that questions the impulse to normalize.

Britzman (1998) explains such a reading practice first of all involves reading for alterity. This means to acknowledge that difference is the precondition for the self, and to recognize that no category is final or total, nor can it be mastered or known. Secondly, reading is assumed to be provoked in dialogue. This implies seeing the other in relation, beginning “with a supposition of difference, division, and negotiation” (p. 93). The point is to think through “the structures of textuality as opposed to the attributes of biography” (p. 93). In this way, the interpreter / interpreted hierarchy is disrupted. Thirdly, as a practice, reading provokes a theory of reading, not simply a reworking of meaning. “How one reads matters” (p. 93). Uncertainty is seen as a condition of possibility, and by being attentive to where one’s reading breaks down, we undertake a study of our “own theoretical limits” (p. 93).

This is a move away from identity associated with mastery and certitude, and is about “confronting one’s own theory of reading, and engaging one’s own alterity and desire” (p. 94). If we read the social as constructed, it may be possible to read identity as a relation, a situation in which both the self and the other are unintelligible. Britzman (1998) explains queer pedagogy begins with an ethical concern “for one’s *own* reading practices and their relation to the imagining of sociality as more than an effect of the dominant conceptual order,” and contends that “reading the world is always about risking the self” (p. 95). Learning thus takes place from the “self’s relation to its own otherness and to the other’s otherness” (p. 95). Reading in this sense is a question of being open to difference and refusing closure.

[A]ll that we can do is practice acts of strong reading
which will be, inevitably, misreadings. (Wolfreys, 2000, p. ix)

Cultural Studies after 9/11 in a globalized world

If there is anyone who still resists the ideas of globalization, transnationalism, postcolonialism, and their implications for how we live with each other in the modern world, their implications for the taken-for-granted organizing categories such as nation, state, culture, identity, and Empire – the idea that we live in a deeply interconnected world in which centers and margins are unstable and are constantly being redefined, rearticulated, and reordered – then, such a person must have been awakened from his or her methodological slumber by the events of 9/11. (McCarthy, 2003, p. 134)

Denzin and Giardina (2007) maintain that after the events of 9/11, we need more original and complex ways to do Cultural Studies so links between the local and the global are accentuated as scholars try to make sense of what is happening in the world. Those committed to projects of social justice might work to “create a morally centered, critically informed dialogue focused on history and politics as they unfold in front of us” (p. 3). According to Denzin and Giardina, a repositioned Cultural Studies attempts to keep pace with our complex and rapidly changing world. They identify four directions to pursue. First, they propose that research begin with the personal and the biographical to connect our own locations to, and within, the world around us. Linking the personal with the political and the cultural may push us to think critically, historically, and sociologically. The second direction for scholarship they recommend is critical analysis of discourse at the level of the media and the ideological, for “[w]e do not have a press that imagines a world where race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation intersect” (p. 5). This is potentially dangerous given that we have “a media that can instantly produce a sea of violent images” (p. 5). Thirdly, they emphasize the importance of initiating critical international conversations on what is happening in the world and the creation of “a coalition across the political, cultural, and religious spectra” (p. 7). Finally, they stress there has never been a greater need for critical, interpretive methodologies that can help us “make sense of life in an age of the hyperreal, the simulacra, TV wars, staged media events...[to] undo the official pedagogies that circulate in the media” (p. 8).

Since “culture exceeds the terms of any one discipline” (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 23) the bricoleur’s work necessarily becomes interdisciplinary, drawing on existing resources and mixing them in new ways. This applies not only to research, but also to our pedagogies. We dwell in-between theory and practice, tradition and innovation. As Smith (2009) reminds us, our world is rapidly changing, and researchers and educators must find ways to keep up with the transformations taking place at both the individual and societal levels.

[G]lobalization does not refer simply to such things as trade between peoples and groups, or other kinds of intercultural exchange, because these have been part of human experience from the earliest of times. Instead, globalization has specific reference to fairly recent developments that may in turn be acting to form a new kind of imaginal understanding within human consciousness. As a species, we may be imagining ourselves in new ways, especially with respect to issues of identity and citizenship.

(David Smith, 2009, p. 368)

Reflections on my research questions

I now return to my research questions to consider how they played out in this doctoral dissertation. The questions were:

- 1) What subject positions were made available to the young, Muslim, female participants in the complex discursive sites of schooling and visual media cultures?
- 2) How did they negotiate these subject positions in their daily lives?
- 3) How is my shifting subjectivity entangled with the subjectivities of the research participants in the discursive spaces of schooling and visual media cultures?

Multiple possible responses to these questions are woven throughout this layered, hybrid text.

These research questions provided direction and focus for this study, but my concern is to provoke, not to provide specific, bounded answers. Through the engagement of these questions, I set out to proliferate meanings about Muslim women to disrupt the binary categories that confine us in our daily lives.

Given my ontological, epistemological, and theoretical commitments, I avoid drawing conclusions or reporting “results”. Rather, this work is designed to challenge assumptions and provoke the unthought by creating an open text into which the reader might enter and be affected by what he/she finds there. This work is an educational, political, cultural, and epistemological intervention into the language circulating in schooling and popular cultural sites. I propose some pedagogical approaches for consideration, which educators and researchers might pick up and adapt to their own contexts and areas of concern. In the spirit of Derrida, I struggle to remain open to the other and to what is yet to come.

The reader ultimately brings his/her own meanings to the text, and I endeavor to create a challenging, engaging text that leaves spaces for his/her own subjectivity. If the reader gains some sense of what it might be like to live as a young, Muslim women in Ontario, in the post 9/11 context ... if the reader stops to reconsider his/her own relation to otherness ... if the reader contemplates what complicated practices of listening and seeing might entail... I will feel content in the knowledge that this text had a small impact in the world, toward living ethically with one another.

As a racialized white woman who grew up in the west, this text represents my efforts at decentering the self – especially my own privilege and practices of othering. Through my interactions with the participants I learned a great deal about my own assumptions as part of my ongoing work towards a hybrid consciousness. These young women helped me to see my own seeing as they offered their own readings of media representations of Muslim women. From our conversations about their high schooling experiences and sense of identity, I gained an appreciation of the need to listen more attentively. My work with participants confirms that Aoki’s call to dwell midst *sonare* and *videre* is even more relevant today in our post 9/11, image-

saturated world, than when he first made it. To become more attuned to the other requires a willingness to read slowly, patiently, and with care. This is indeed a challenge in our fast-moving, wired world, but what are the consequences of failing to do so at this historical moment?

After a lifetime immersed in the colonizing language of humanism, it remains difficult to avoid thinking in binaries and imposing my own meanings upon others. The work of decolonizing my mind, my body, and my social relations has no end point. With Silverman (1992), I am drawn to the notion of an ethics in the field of vision, which asks that with each encounter we look beyond first impressions. With Munro Hendry (2007), I am dedicated to an epistemology of listening which focuses on turning our attention toward receiving and listening while holding our own assumptions in check. As bricoleurs, how might we work with what is at hand to create open spaces where complex practices of *sonare* and *videre* become everyday events in our complicated curricular conversations?

For me, ethics deals primarily with the relation of the self to the other. My claim is that the self does not exist without an other, or others, with whom there is an elemental or basically constituting relationship. Moreover, I follow Derrida's line of thinking, that attempts to generalize ethics by way of metaphysics threatens the sort of ethical demands made upon us as curriculum scholars. When we make generalized claims that lose their singularity, we lose the very features we need to uphold. What I sense should be preserved is "the otherness of the other." The singular strangeness, unintelligible, and nonidentity with the self is what ethics should seek to nurture. (Malewski, 2010e, p. 523)

Research effects

When we undertake research, we do so with good intentions. However, it is impossible to predict how our work will be read and received by various audiences. How will it be received in academia, in Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and by teachers in the classroom? I have a strong obligation to the research participants who contributed their time and their stories to this project, but will the young women in this study consider their participation worthwhile?

Some of the stuff that I told you, I would not say in the presence of another Muslim. (Miriam, Research participant)

I'm very glad that you're doing this research. It's very, like Islam in general is kind of misinterpreted, you know what I mean? Like when people look at me they're like, "Why are you wearing the hijab? Aren't you oppressed? Isn't your family like this, this, this?" And I'm like, "No. I wear this on my own." And the funny thing is my parents are so open-minded, sometimes more open-minded than my friends who are non-Muslims, you know what I mean? And they're surprised. "Wow, your parents let you do that?" I'm like, "Ya, we're actually open-minded." It's just that, you know how in each religion you have extremists and then you have people who don't really follow their religion. And the thing is, even in Christianity and Buddhism, there are some people who don't practice and some people who practice it to the max, some people just follow, you know what I mean. But when it comes to Islam, if somebody does wrong they think, "Okay, that's Islam." And I am like, *why is that?* We're actually a very peaceful religion. We love all other religions. So, hopefully people will start to realize. (Sahar, Research participant)

When participants read this text will they recognize themselves? Where might they feel their experiences were fairly represented and where might they feel I got it all wrong? Given the nomadic epistemological spaces I engage here, will participants recognize this as a contribution to complicated conversations in curriculum, see it as a frivolous academic exercise, consider it helpful in some way, and/or view it in ways I can not yet imagine?

Although I believe in this work, I can't be certain what it might set off. As Bhabha (2006) suggests, the practices of bricolage allow you "to hold on to a moment of transition" (p. 24). In such moments "you *know* you don't know" (p. 24) where things are going. For Bhabha, to evaluate the experience of these transitory moments is to say:

In my fragility, in my incompleteness, I also represent the ground on which people's feet will have to uncertainly balance. And from which they will observe the world, and from which they will have to create, and from which they will have to write. (p. 24)

And, from Derrida (1995), in conversation . . .

Q: You have often repeated that deconstruction is not a method, that there is no “Derridean method.” How, then, is one to take account of your work? How do you evaluate its effects? To whom is your work addressed and, finally, who reads you?

J.D.: By definition, I do not know to whom it addressed. Or rather yes I do! I have a certain knowledge of this subject, some anticipations, some images, but there is a point at which, no more than anyone who publishes or speaks, I am not assured of the destination. Even if one tried to regulate what one says by one or more possible addressees, using typical profiles, even if one wanted to do that it would not be possible. (p.199)

And from Trinh (1991) . . .

Inevitably, a work is always a form of tangible closure. But closures need not close off; they can be doors opening onto other closures and functioning as ongoing passages to an elsewhere (a-within-here). Like a throw of the dice, each opening is also a closing, for each work generates its own laws and limits, each has its specific condition and deals with a specific context. The closure here, however, is a way of letting the work go rather than of sealing it off. Thus, every work materialized can be said to be a work-in-progress.
(p. 16)

Epilogue

An Aokian invitation to linger in-between *sonare* and *videre* . . .

Perhaps there is something healthy about claiming the right to ambivalence. Or at the very least, there may be something deadening about having to renounce one's own ambivalence too soon, on someone else's terms. If resistance is always the sign of a counter-story, ambivalence is perhaps the state of holding on to more than one story at a time. (Johnson, 1998)

[S]pectacle itself is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life. (Kellner, 2006)

Globalisation, I want to suggest, must always begin at home. A just measure of global progress requires that we first evaluate how globalizing nations deal with “the difference within” – the problems of cultural diversity and redistribution, and the rights and representations of minorities. (Bhabha, 2007, p. 9)

Let's say I was trying to produce texts that produce other ears, in a certain way—ears that I don't see or hear myself, things that don't come down to me or come back to me. A text, I believe, does not come back. (Derrida, 1988, p. 156)

And I am captive
in the fantasy
of thinking the unthought of difference,
of imagining that communities are something to do,
something to make. (Appelbaum, 2006, p. 17)

Knowledge that knows only certainty is little more than what Pinar (1992) points to as a ‘tissue of lies’ (p. 100) that seeks to transcend human embodiment and the changes that the passage of time brings (Malewski & Rishel, 2010, p. 415)

Five years ago, an image of an Iraqi woman with a tear in her eye provoked me to inquire into my shifting subjectivity, my entanglement in language. That single image set off this postcolonial project to trouble and decenter my self; working toward a hybrid consciousness is interminable. Since beginning this study, an endless barrage of texts and images relating to Muslim women continues to circulate in-between local and global contexts. As bricoleur, I set out to collect and rearrange images and narratives in ways designed to trouble personal, social, political, and cultural assumptions. As Butler (2005) reminds us:

When the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, and account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. The reason for this is that the “I” has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms. (pp. 7–8)

For me, dwelling in tense spaces to engage border epistemologies means slowing down my looking, my listening, and my reading practices to consider more complexly my relations to otherness – whether on the street, in the classroom, in the school curriculum, in the mass media, or within myself. As we struggle to give an account of ourselves – by mapping our entanglement in language – we are conscious that work requires constant diligence as the discursive scene shifts endlessly in confusing and contradictory ways...

In January 2010... all main political parties [in France] expressed their rejection of the burqa: the main opposition party, the *Parti Socialiste*, said it is ‘totally opposed to the burqa’ which amounted to a ‘prison for women.’ (Zizek, 2010, p. 1)

[Sheema Khan (2009) contemplates] “the right to flash some veil” (p. 142), asking: “Dare we deny them full rights” (p. 144)?

Today I heard Julius Grey interviewed on CBC Radio. A Quebec human rights lawyer and professor at McGill University, he referred to the neqab as a “personal ghetto.”

(Watt, Personal narrative)



France Has First “Burka Rage” Incident

A 60-year-old lawyer ripped a Muslim woman’s Islamic veil off in a row in a clothing shop in what police say is France’s first case of “burka rage.” (Allen, May, 18, 2010)

The Burqa Barbie Brouhaha

Everyone from NOW to Fox News has been foaming at the mouth with rage over the doll, and every concern, ranging from fake feminist concerns to terrorism issues, has been played out. (Azra, *Muslimah Media Watch*, Dec. 3, 2009)



Fashion Designers Bust Burqa Stereotypes

A Mideast influence was noted in Givenchy’s Fall/Winter Paris fashion show last year. The show, which included couture abayas (head-to-toe dress), came shortly after French President Nicholas Sarkozy’s pledge to ban Islamic veils, a move passed this month. (Kielburger & Kielburger, July 19, 2010)

Does NiqaBitch Enrich the Burqa Ban Debate?

With articles in *Der Spiegel*, *Rue89*, *The Telegraph*, and a YouTube video in recent weeks, the two self-described web-activists called Niqabitch are making a splash in the French (and European) media landscape. As they said themselves in the *Rue89* article, throwing on a burqa in protest of France’s burqa ban would be “too simple.” They wanted to see what would happen by mixing things up a bit and throwing together a niqab with a miniskirt. (Fatemeh, *Muslimah Media Watch*, Oct. 5 2010). [See at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GmYRTTbN7g>].

Given the dominance of technologies in our everyday lives, there is a proliferation of representational sites where the othering of Muslim women continues. Given meanings are never singular or static, they are difficult to track and make sense of. Post-reconceptualist curriculum theorizing attempts to embrace these new epistemological realities by attending to flux and change, hybrid spaces, different contexts, reading differently, understudied histories, and divergent perspectives (Malewski, 2010). In reference to social justice inquiry, Denzin (2010) argues “original work challenges existing understandings and arguments and offers new insights.” (p. 49). As our world transforms, so should our approaches to research, theory, and pedagogy.

Hoechsmann (2008) observes that, “the young people in our classrooms are no longer positioned as passive receivers of an inherited tradition, a cultural past entrusted to them by its previous guardians, their teachers” (p. 69). As societies become increasingly technological, new epistemologies take their place alongside more traditional forms of meaning making. Not only have the forms of communication changed dramatically, but “the relationship of author and reader has also been transformed” (p. 69), for “authorship is no longer the preserve of the educated elite” (p. 69). Given this is the world where researchers, educators, and students now live “it is senseless to carry on with schooling practices as if nothing [has] changed” (p. 69).

In terms of lessening violence toward our selves and others, what difference does curriculum theorizing make to education and to the world? Texts that function as a political intervention have the capacity to spur people to think in excess of common thoughts and practices. They account for the unknowability that resides at the crossroads of discursive challenges (within a particular episteme that cannot fully reveal itself) and the need to take action informed by our doubts and uncertainties. Here our not knowing becomes way of knowing. (Malewski, 2010c, p. 535)

APPENDIX A

Consent Form for Participation in Research Project

Title of Study: Juxtaposing sonare and videre midst curricular spaces: Negotiating female, Muslim identities in the discursive spaces of schooling and visual media culture

Diane Watt, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa
Phone number here
Email address here

I have been invited to participate in the above mentioned research project conducted by Diane Watt, who is a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa. I understand that the purpose of this research is to study the high schooling experiences and sense of identity of young Muslim females in Ontario post 9/11, and to contribute to curriculum conversations on schooling, Muslim women, and the influences of visual media cultures on the identities of students and teachers, Muslim and non-Muslim. My participation in this research could contribute to the advancement of intercultural, media, and anti-oppressive education, as well as to curriculum studies.

The researcher is interested in my high schooling experiences in Ontario and my sense of identity as a Muslim female at that time. She will also ask me to discuss issues related to visual print media representations (i.e., photographs) of Muslim women with her and other research participants. The researcher would like me to provide my own readings of a number of images which have recently appeared on the covers of magazines such as *Maclean's*, *Newsweek*, and *Muslim Girl*, as well as photos which have featured prominently in various Canadian news papers such as *The National Post*, *Le Devoir*, and *The Ottawa Citizen*. I understand that the researcher is interested in my perspectives and that she would also like me to respond to her perspectives and possibly to the perspectives of other participants in the study, if I am able and willing to do this. This project will take the form of a complicated conversation in which many voices will be placed alongside one another so that meanings about *self* and *other* are multiplied towards disrupting monolithic assumptions.

All research activities will take place in private rooms on the University of Ottawa campus in order to make my participation in this project as convenient as possible. The researcher is willing to meet in another location, or interviews could take place over the telephone if this is what I would prefer to do. Following are the specific research activities that I have been asked to participate in as part of this project during the next few months:

- 1) Two or three individual interviews with the researcher (45 minutes each);
- 2) Two or three focus group sessions with other research participants (1 ½ hours each);
- 3) Write in a reflective journal during the research period (as often as I wish);
- 4) Review and/or respond to (as often as I wish):
 - a) transcripts of my own interviews and focus group sessions,
 - b) the researcher's written narratives,
 - c) the researcher's written re/presentations of my narratives,
 - d) the final research report.

I understand that my participation in each of these activities is optional and that I can choose to participate in some parts of this study and not in others. It is my right to ask the researcher about any aspect of the study, at any time. During interview and focus group sessions I have the right to refuse participation and answer questions. I understand that consent is an ongoing process and that I can withdraw from the study at any time. If I withdraw, all data gathered up until that time will be destroyed.

I also understand that I have control over whether or not the information related to me will be included in the research data. I will be asked by the researcher to read over all of the transcripts from my interviews and from the focus group sessions, as well as what she writes as part of the research document. I will also be asked to read and comment on a draft of the final research report. If information that I have provided has been included that I do not agree with, or feel uncomfortable about, I can either respond to it in writing and have that included as part of the research document, or I can ask the researcher to remove it completely from the study, without suffering any negative consequences.

I have received assurances from the researcher that the information I share during interviews, in my reflective journal, and in my written or spoken responses to transcripts and the written research report will remain confidential. My identity will not be revealed to anyone. My real name will never be used and any information that could identify me will be excluded. There is only minimal risk associated with these parts of the study. I could experience stress and/or discomfort from talking and/or writing about memories of my high schooling experiences if some of them were negative in any way.

If I choose to participate in focus group sessions I understand that my identity will be known to other participants in these sessions. Even though the researcher will ask participants to keep the content of these sessions confidential, the researcher cannot guarantee that everyone will comply. Therefore, I understand that my confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed if I choose to participate in the focus groups.

Recordings and transcripts of interviews and focus groups sessions, reflective journals, and any written or recorded responses that I offer will be kept in a secure manner at all times. It will be stored in a locked filing cabinet either at the researcher's home or in the thesis supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa. No other individual will have access to these items. The researcher will keep them for a period of five years after the completion of the research. At that time recordings will be deleted and paper documents will be shredded.

The researcher describes a number of possible benefits of this study:

- 1) Numerous Muslim organizations have expressed concern over how their communities are represented in the media. Research confirms that this is a major challenge for Muslim communities in North America. Many of the researcher's own Muslim students, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances assert that Islamophobia and media representations are serious issues for them in their educational and personal lives. This study attempts to contribute to conversations in education related to how the media serves as a potentially powerful curriculum which powerfully affects the lives of Canadian Muslims in general, and girls and women in particular. I understand that if I take part in this research I will do so because I feel that it is important for me to add my own voice to such conversations.

- 2) Educational researchers interested in social justice issues (e.g., race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, etc.) may benefit from the knowledges generated through this study. There has not been much research done in Canada with Muslim student populations but there is compelling evidence (e.g., the recent Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students published in Ontario in March of 2007) that discrimination against Muslim students in educational contexts and in the broader society is widespread. It is therefore important that research documenting the actual experiences and diversity of this population be made available.
- 3) Researchers and educators interested in issues related to media literacy and/or intercultural education may benefit from the knowledges and issues that emerge from this study. Research has demonstrated that much of what we think we “know” about others we learn from the media, which are extremely influential educators. This reality needs to be more fully engaged in educational and research contexts and this project may make a small contribution towards promoting that message.
- 4) The Ontario Ministry of Education has recently (2006) added a media literacy stream to the Elementary Language Curriculum. As of September 2007, classroom teachers are required to teach media literacy at every grade level. Given that the new curriculum is in its infancy teachers will have had little (if any) opportunity for professional development related to this new curricular area. Studies such as this one could potentially be used as a component of professional development initiatives/programs.
- 5) Discrimination against minority groups is much more widespread in Canada than many realize or would like to believe. This research sets out to engage Muslims and non-Muslims in conversations around these issues towards finding ways in which education might respond.

The researcher believes that the potential benefits of this research outweigh the possible risks. While it may be painful for participants to talk about memories of their high schooling experiences if they perceive any of these negatively, to remain silent may also be difficult and/or harmful. By sharing stories and offering readings of visual print media representations of Muslim women, I may be making a small but important contribution toward positive change.

I will be given a copy of the final thesis if I want one. I also have the option of being notified by the researcher if and when research results are published in journals, books, or other publications.

Funding for this doctoral project has been provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This project has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through the Protocol Office for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa.

I, _____
(name of participant)

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Diane Watt, who is a PhD student in the Faculty of Education, at the University of Ottawa. I understand that by accepting to participate I am in no way giving up my right to withdraw from this study.

One copy of this consent form will be given to the researcher and a second copy is for me to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher:

Diane Watt
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa
Phone number here
Email here

Any questions about my rights as a research participant, or any concerns I have about the conduct of this research project, may be addressed to:

Protocol Office for Ethics in Research,
University of Ottawa,
Tabaret Hall (room 159)
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
613-562-5841
ethics@uOttawa.ca

Questions or concerns may also be directed toward the researcher's Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Patricia Palulis
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa,
Lamoureux 421
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier,
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5
Phone number here
Email address here

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Juxtaposing sonare and videre midst curricular spaces: Negotiating female, Muslim identities in the discursive spaces of schooling and visual media culture

Diane Watt, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa

I take a decolonizing approach towards the interviews by decentering my own authority as researcher. When we meet for the first interview, I will review the details of the study and make it clear to participants that I welcome their input with regards to what we talk about during the interviews. I conceptualize these encounters as conversations, and therefore I see them as a two-way process. The following questions are to serve as a general guide for our interviews. Participants will also have interests and concerns related to the research topic that I have not thought of, and I will include these perspectives.

Where did you go to school? When?

How would you describe your high schooling experiences overall?

To what degree, and in what ways, did you feel you were a part of the school community?

In what ways do you think the curriculum and the atmosphere of the school signaled that difference was respected/not respected, valued/not valued?

Did you see yourself in the curriculum? If so, where?

Did you see yourself represented in any way in the school building? (i.e., photos, posters, languages, symbols, objects ... in classrooms, hallways, etc.).

Did you ever find you were treated differently because you were a Muslim female? Did you ever perceive yourself as being the target of discrimination/exclusion? Did you ever discriminate against or exclude others? Elaborate.

Describe some of the ways you think teachers and other students viewed you as a Muslim female.

What assumptions do you think Muslim and non-Muslim teachers and students might have had of you? At what times did you feel “understood” by your teachers and/or by fellow students? Did you ever feel you were misunderstood? Explain.

What assumptions did you have about your teacher and fellow students? Talk about any specific incidents that stand out in your mind that support what you are saying. What specific situations, conversations, or incidents lead you to think this?

To what degree do you think your teachers were well informed about Islam and what it means to be a Muslim? How do you think they viewed religious and cultural differences? Each teacher is different, so think of those who stand out for you for some reason.

In what ways might your experiences as a Muslim girl have been similar to and/or different than that of a Muslim male?

What support systems did you have as an adolescent (family, friends, teachers, mentors, etc.)? Describe.

Describe your friendships. Why do you think you choose these particular individuals?

What meaning does Islamic covering have for you, if any? During these years, did you cover or not? What led to this decision? What do you think were the implications of covering/not covering on your sense of identity? On your social relations at school?

What challenges did you experience as a Muslim girl in high school? In what ways was your Muslim identity empowering? To what degree did you feel you could “be yourself”? How did you negotiate being a Muslim female in this context?

How would you describe what it meant for you to be a Muslim Canadian during your high school years? What factors in school (in terms of relationships, social life, curricula, activities, etc.) do you think enabled/challenged your identity? What factors outside of school do you think were an influence on the way you saw yourself?

Did you prioritize any part of your identity as an adolescent (e.g., as a student, ethnic and racial identity, religious identity, gender, athlete, etc.).

What, for you, is a Muslim Canadian identity? How confident did you feel about your identity as a young woman during your high school years?

How do you perceive yourself as a Muslim female living in Canada post 9/11?

What recommendations do you have for making high school a welcoming and validating place for Muslim girls?

APPENDIX C

Questionnaires for Focus Group Session

Muslim female identities, schooling, and the mass media

Focus group session: Images from the print media

Diane Watt & Participants

~Before we begin, please think about, and briefly comment on, the following:

- 1) What are your overall impressions about how Muslims are portrayed in the mass media (e.g., on television, in films, on the Internet, in magazines and newspapers)?

- 2) To what degree (if at all) has the portrayal of Muslims in the mass media been something of personal interest and/or concern to you? If it is of interest and/or concern to you, briefly explain in what way(s)?

~Some questions to stimulate your thinking as we look at images together:

What are your initial reactions to the image? What is your reading of the image?

What types of knowledge do you think are being constructed with the image?

What stories do you think the image evokes?

How do you position yourself in relation to the image? Do you identify it in any way, or not?

How do you think non-Muslims might read the image?

Include anything else that comes to mind as you look at the image.

Feedback on the focus group session

~Please provide feedback on this focus group session.

How do you feel about the focus group session? Did you find it worthwhile in any way? What suggestions do you have for future sessions?

~Future participation:

Would you be interested in any of the following?

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----|-------|
| 1) A session similar to this one (a small group with 3 or 4 participants) | yes | no | maybe |
| 2) Look at and commenting on images via email | yes | no | maybe |
| 3) Meeting with Diane alone to look at and talk about images | yes | no | maybe |
| 4) Other suggestions: | | | |

_____ Please check here if you would prefer NOT to participate in any further activities related to looking at and responding to images.

~Thank you for participating in this activity.

APPENDIX D

Individual Questionnaire on Media Images

Muslim female identities, schooling, and the mass media

Reading Images from the print media

Researcher: Diane Watt, PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Many argue that the mass media has become a more influential curriculum than what is on offer in the official school curriculum, especially when it comes to learning about those different from ourselves. In other words, the media plays a major role in producing understandings of *what Muslims are like*. I am therefore interested in your thoughts on the issue of the power of the mass media as educator – specifically, how Muslim women are portrayed visually. Attached in Power Point are a number of images that have recently appeared on the covers of magazines and newspapers and on the Internet.

PART A:

Before looking at the images, please think about and respond to the following questions.

- 1) What are your overall impressions about how Muslims are portrayed in the mass media (e.g., on television, in films, on the Internet, in magazines and newspapers)?

- 2) To what degree (if at all) has the portrayal of Muslims in the mass media been something of personal interest and/or concern to you? If it is of interest and/or concern to you, briefly explain in what way(s)?

PART B:

As you look at each image, please describe your reactions, thoughts, and impressions. Below are some questions that may help to stimulate your thinking. Remember that our audience will include educators, so you might want to talk about what the potential impact of such image might be on the identities of Muslim and non-Muslim teachers and students, if any.

What are your initial reactions to the image? What is your reading of the image?

What types of knowledge do you think are being constructed with the image?

What stories do you think the image evokes?

How do you position yourself in relation to the image? Do you identify it in any way, or not?

How do you think non-Muslims might read the image?

Do you have any questions about the image?

If you had control over the ways Muslim women were portrayed in the media, what would you like to see? Explain.

Include anything else that comes to mind as you look at the image.

a) Image #1: Cover of *Maclean's Magazine*. October 2006.

b) Image #2: This is the original image, which was cropped by the editors at *Maclean's*. This photo was taken in Istanbul.

c) Image #3: Cover of *Maclean's Magazine*. March 2007.

d) Image #4: Cover of *Newsweek Magazine*. December 2006.

- e) Image #5: Front page of newspaper, *Le Devoir*. The story is about the journalist's recent trip to Iran.
- f) Image #6: Front page of, *The National Post* during the Iraqi elections.
- g) Image #7: Image of women lined up to vote during Iraqi elections. *The National Post*.
- h) Image #8: Cover of, *Muslim Girl Magazine*. Muslim girl in colours of the American flag.
- i) Image #9: Online photo from CBC's TV series, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.
(from the program's Website)
- j) Image #10: Cover of the magazine, *La Vie en Rose*.

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