

Ironic Acceptance – Present in Academia Discarded as Oriental:  
The Case of Iranian Female Graduate Student in Canadian Academia

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of first-generation, highly educated Iranian women who came to Canada to pursue further education in a ‘just’, ‘safe’, and ‘peaceful’ place. The research has revealed that these women who were fleeing from an ‘oppressive’ and ‘unjust’ Iranian regime face new challenges and different forms of oppression in Canada. This dissertation examines some of the challenges that these women face at their place of work and/or at graduate school.

The research findings are based on narratives of eleven Iranian women who participated in in-depth interviews in the summer of 2008. These women, whose ages range from 26 to 55 and are of diverse marital status, all hold an academic degree from Iran. They were also all enrolled in different graduate schools and diverse disciplines in Ontario universities at the time of the interviews. The research findings indicate that their presence in Canada became more controversial after the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade centers in New York.

Historically, the social images imposed on Middle Eastern women derive from the Orientalism that arose following the colonization of the Middle East by Western imperialists. The perpetuation of such images after the 9/11 attack has created a harsh environment for the participants in this research. After 9/11 most immigrants from the Middle East were assumed to be Muslim and Arab, which many North Americans came to equate with being a terrorist.

In order to analyze the participants' voices and experiences, I have adopted a multi-critical theoretical perspective that includes Orientalism, anti-colonialism and integrative anti-racist feminist perspectives, so as to be equipped with the tools necessary to investigate and expose the roots of racism, oppression and discrimination of these marginalized voices. The findings of this research fall under six interrelated themes: adaptation, stereotyping, discrimination, being silenced, strategy of resistance, and belonging to Canadian society/graduate school. One of the important results of this research is that, regardless of the suffering and pain that the participants feel in Canadian graduate school and society, they prefer to stay in Canada because of the socio-political climate in Iran.

## **Dedication**

To my remarkable husband, Pooya, who has sacrificed a great deal to  
support me throughout my graduate studies

To my wonderful sons, Hanif and Masih, who have both been very  
patient and understanding

And last, but not least, to  
all whom I love dearly,

Zahra

## **Acknowledgements**

In the name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

Human beings are members of a whole,

In creation of one essence and soul.

If one member is afflicted with pain,

Other members uneasy will remain.

If you have no sympathy for human pain,

The name of human you cannot retain.

~ (Iranian poet; Saadi, 12th century)

As an immigrant graduate student, my history, education, and experiences have shaped and impacted my academic journey here in Canada tremendously. Despite the many obstacles and hardships I have faced while conducting my research, I have been very fortunate to have a wonderful support system. For this reLeilan, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to those in Iran and Canada who have been inspirational, influential and motivating forces to my academic pursuits.

Moreover, throughout my studies I have relied heavily upon my meaningful and spiritual relationship with Allah and all that He has created in order to cope with all the challenges and pain that I have encountered as a result of my own diaspora. Without this devout connection to Allah, nature and people – especially those who have shared their struggles with me – this academic journey would have been most unbearable for me.

Special thanks to my amazing husband, Pooya, for his unconditional love, support, and patience. He has served as a catalyst for my inspiration and dedication to social justice for racialized immigrant women. Without his hard work and devotion to me and my dreams, this academic journey would not have been possible. Also, special thanks to my precious sons, Hanif and Masih, who have been wonderful blessings from Allah. They have also been extremely encouraging to me and understanding of my role as a graduate student pursuing my education while they were also hard at work with their own jobs. Their presence in my life continues to encourage me to re-examine my sense of self, knowledge, and my capabilities.

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After 16 years of being apart, my father's patience, kindness, forgiveness, and support have nurtured me. Since childhood, he has encouraged me to learn the English language among other foreign languages. He used to tell me, "The more languages you can speak, the more people you can communicate with, and that is the beauty of life." His interest in education has always inspired me to be tolerant of the difficulties and challenges that come with learning. He, in praxis, has deconstructed the stereotypical image of power relations that I have witnessed between both genders.

When, as a newcomer, I entered the Theory and Policy Studies in Education (TPS) department, the first professor who was empathetic towards me and who conscientiously helped facilitate my smooth integration in a new environment was Dr. Qazi. His role was more than that of a faculty member, he was like a godfather to me. God bless his soul; his kindness to me will never be forgotten. My appreciation also extends to Dr. Berta Vigil Laden whose brief presence at the TPS department brought great help and guidance to all students there regardless their race and gender. God bless her soul. I am also grateful to my kind, understanding, critical and supportive supervisor, Dr. Njoki Wane. Her spiritual education and behaviour encouraged me to work hard on my thesis and to utilize the challenges and disparities I have encountered in Canadian society as a source of motivation for taking on this research issue. Dr. Wane mentored me throughout my thesis writing and I knew that she cared about my progress at every stage. As a member of my thesis committee, Dr. Jamie Magnusson's knowledge as a critical feminist visionary helped foster my academic understanding of various feminist theories and how some of these theories applied to the experiences of my subjects and myself. A thank you to Dr. John Portelli whose guidance went beyond his role as a member of my thesis committee; his knowledge, critical thinking skills, and compassion for others definitely makes him an asset to the TPS department. Thank you to Dr. Majid Malkam for introducing me to most of the participants involved in this research. To all other faculty members in the TPS department whose names have not been previously mentioned (Dr. Linda Muzzin, Dr. Skolnik, Dr. Reva Joshee, Dr. Blair Mascal , Dr. Nina Bascia, Dr. Glen Jones, Dr. Dan Lang, Dr. Maureen Ford and Dr. Cecilia Morgan) and who have taken the moment to acknowledge and demonstrate kindness to students such as myself, please know that your humanity has made a lasting impression on our minds and

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## **Chapter One: The Importance of Research**

### **1.1. Contemporary Women's Situation in Iran**

Nine years have passed since the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Towers in the United States and Middle Eastern people are still thought of negatively by some North American people (Osman, 2001). They are denounced as terrorists and are sometimes physically attacked by people (Osman, 2001). Although their presence in North America is not new (migrants from Iran have been coming to North America in increasing numbers since the Iranian revolution in 1979), their presence was not as noticeable as it is now after September, 11 2001. Throughout these years they have established their own businesses and contributed to community life (Ahmed, 2007). However, Oriental images of Iranians as backward and tradition-bound (Arat-koc, 2005; Hoodfar, 1992; Said, 1979, 2003) still persist. Some of the questions that are explored in this thesis are, Why are Iranians discriminated against and marginalized at both intuitional and personal levels? Why did they originally immigrate to Canada?

Historically, the Oriental people have been perceived as Muslim and Arab and in the minds of the Western society this has translated to mean inferior (Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). The establishment of a new regime under the name of Iran's Islamic republic government did not help at all because; Iran became situated within the Muslim world. The outcome has been that Iranians have become associated with the word terrorist, a stigma that was not readily applied before the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Iranian people before the revolution were associated with their nationality, Iran, and the Aryan race. Before the revolution, the official religion was also Islam, but it did not interfere with the state of power. The American hostage situation in 1980 and war

between Iran and Iraq in 1980-1988 shifted the gaze of North American society from other racialized bodies to the Iranian people. Foreign policy differences between Iran and the United States caused Iranians, especially those outside of Iran, to suffer from this increasingly negative gaze. Stigmatizing the Iranian nationality alongside the religion of Islam is the primarily mode of oppression over all Iranians, and dismantles their diversification in terms of their religion and ethnicity. In this research I want to examine how Iranian immigrant women who are accepted in Canadian graduate school are not fully included 'accepted' in the entire school body. They experience pseudo-inclusion in their graduate programs, which creates an ironic feeling toward academia. From one side they are present in academia but from the other side they are excluded from the knowledge production of Canadian graduate school. In order to become fully aware of this stigmatization and marginalization, it is necessary to investigate the concept of nation-state for Iran and for Canada.

To address the situation of Iranian women in Iran and the reasons for their immigration to Canada, I will investigate power relations with regard to the social construction of gender in both Iran and Canada, and, more particularly, I will address the social construction of Iranian women's oppression in Iran.

After one year of bloody protest against the patriarchal monarchy with a history of 2,500 years domination in Iran, this regime was replaced by an Islamic republic state in 1979. Although different groups ranging from the left to right were involved in the protest against the king (Shah), the establishment of a new regime resulted in an Islamic republic because Islam was the most popular religion in Iran. The establishment of a

religious state was less about wanting religion to be part of the state system than it was a desire for people to attain social justice in society.

Half of the population consisted of women and they strongly supported the revolution and during and even after war with Iraq (1980–1988) by filling men's roles in all aspects of life, industry, agriculture, education, health and also doing housework and preparing food and clothes for soldiers (Kousha, 2002). Unfortunately, after the victory of the revolution and gradually by end of the war, they were excluded from certain rights and benefits such as the right to have custody of children, divorce, work, and leave the country independently, and limitations were imposed on the programs they could study at university (Afshar, 1994; Kar, 1999; Mir-Hosseini, 2004; Moghadam, 2004). Token inclusion of women was seen everywhere and the state has enforced segregation based on sex, gender, class, religion, and loyalty to the state since 1981 (Afshar, 1994). In general, patriarchy, which has had a long history in Iran and was integral to the monarchy system, continued being perpetuated now with a distinctly Islamic flavour, the state legitimized and institutionalized male supremacy within the society.

On the other hand, in terms of higher education and women's role in it, the Cultural Revolution happened in 1980 and all universities were closed for two to three years depending on the disciplines taught there. The explicit purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to free academic education from Western domination because most universities were affiliated with Euro-American universities. The covert reLeilan was to silence opposition to the state from faculty, students, and administrators within academia. In addition, the status quo established during war time (Mojab, 1998, 2000) whereby war

soldiers both during and after the war gained admittance to university without having adequate grades for admission has continued for this group up to now.

Moreover, in this sexist and class-structured society where religious discrimination is common, women were also excluded from certain disciplines which were seen as male domains such as agriculture and mining. Meanwhile, men were prohibited from disciplines such as midwifery and other related disciplines. Women also had limitations imposed on their advancement into certain jobs such as middle and top management or being a judge. My personal experience as a registrar at the university shows that some promotions were not allowed to women because men could not tolerate women's ability, talent and skills (Dworkin, 1983, p. 37; Starr, 1991, p. 194) neither at work nor at home and in general in a patriarchal society. As a result, discrimination and injustice were legitimized under the name of Islamic rule. These rules were interpreted by clergy from the Islamic holy book – the Qur'an. The interpreters were men and they considered their desire without giving any value to input from women in the society. Women were forced to obey and accept such discrimination. Under the name of Islam and religious discrimination, injustice within the society increased and women felt more oppressed than before the revolution.

In this ambiguous situation, women found education as a way of liberation (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Freire, 1970; Wollstonecraft, 1970). Even traditional families felt comfortable sending their daughters to far away cities for study because of the sex segregation that is a part of Iran's Islamic society. Higher education, which now has a participation rate of women at 60%, has led to an increase in women's involvement in social activities and opens the possibility for social

consciousness leading to social change. But the fundamentalist regime prohibits any social change and justice and equality for women. It is officially seeking to limit women's participation in certain disciplines and to legitimize polygamy, which endangers the nuclear family's situation in the country. As women become more educated, they are more conscious about inequality and are looking to assert their rights. As a result, when women activists are imprisoned, more educated women are willing to immigrate to safer countries. For example, in this research one of the participants – Leila, who holds a master's degree from Iran, immigrated to Canada to continue her studies at a Canadian graduate school where she was offered a scholarship to pursue another master's degree. When asked about her reasons for immigrating to Canada, Leila says, "I hate patriarchy more than anything else in my culture and in Iran. Although patriarchy exists here in Canada as well, I appreciate the fact that, as a woman, I have more rights and respect in Canada than in my home country" (Interview, summer 2008). This statement is echoed among all eleven female graduate students in this research, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Moreover, Canadian statistics show that since 2001, Iranians make up one of the largest groups of immigrants to Canada (Jedwab, 2008). The number of educated women immigrating to Canada has increased since 1996 and there are two times more Iranian women studying in Canadian universities than in 1986. So, one of my inquiries in this research is how educated women, who have been deprived of their social rights in Iran and never had the opportunity to raise their voices, negotiate this challenge in Canadian school and society. Does Canadian higher education provide opportunities for minority Iranian women to integrate their education and experience in its domain? Do they really

belong to the Canadian society? Thus, the purpose of this research is to underline the often silenced and invisible voices and experience of Iranian immigrant women in graduate studies. This is, in fact, a resurrection of silenced voices in the hopes of offering a document that can become part of the dialogue on social change and justice in Canadian society and universities.

## **1.2. Canada and Evolvement in Immigration Policy**

“You are from a country that your experience is not valued here (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Compared to the 2,500 year history of Iran, Canada is a relatively young country. The first European involvement can be traced to 1534, when Canada was first occupied by French adventurers. The French government encouraged French people to immigrate to this country for two centuries (Knowles, 1997, 2007). In 1759, the British military won the Battle of Plains of Abraham and the power from the French colonizers was transferred to British colonizers (Heller, 1999). Indigenous people who had lived for centuries in Canada did not have any voice or priority (Murray, 2008; Smith, 2005).

As an immigration-based country, British Canada has encouraged immigration for its economic prosperity since the second half of the 18th century. Canadian immigration policy consistently favoured people from northern and Western Europe as well as the United States; white British and American settlers were privileged over people from eastern and central Europe and black American settlers (Knowles, 1997, p. 82). As M. P. K. Anderson claims in his speech in House of Common in 1923, “I would say that immigrants should be preferably of British stock and that they should be sound physically

and sound mentally. These are the chief desiderata in an immigrant” (Knowles, 1997, p. 108).

Notwithstanding this strong desire for attracting Canadian citizens from British descent, one would imagine that a culture predominantly involved in nation-state building would not value the point of origin of others. But is this what happened? Professor Harold Troper (1999) claims that “Ethnicity does not replace Canadian identity; it is Canadian identity” (p. 3). Dissolving in Canadian identity and culture is a crucial goal that immigrants through their life in this society must achieve. As Knowles (1997, p. 107) continues, Ukrainian people “maybe put into the melting pot, but they refuse to melt; and unless we are careful in this country we shall have a Balkanized Canada.” The same discrimination was applied to Oriental people such as the Chinese who built the railway in Vancouver. A head tax was imposed on them in 1885 after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Knowles, 1997, 2007).

In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act was passed to restrict the entry of Chinese people to Canada except the diplomatic corps, anyone already born in Canada, students, and merchants with savings of \$2500 or more for three years and an investment of \$2500 in a business in Canada (Knowles, 1997, p. 107). This act was not repealed till 1947. So until the mid-1960s, the implicit intention of an ‘all white’ policy was enacted in Canadian immigration policy.

After the Second World War and fall of European powers, liberal-minded Canadians started to change immigration regulations in 1962. The “point system” came into effect in 1967. It symbolized a response to the economic needs of nation building

and Canada started welcoming diverse peoples with certain skills and qualifications in spite of their ethnic origins.

In response to an aging society, the development of the information technology industry, globalization and the necessity for Canada to compete in a global world, a new immigration law came into effect in June 28, 2002. In addition to the occupational factor, applicants were awarded certain points in accordance with their age, education, and working experience. The focus shifted from occupation to education and an English test came to count as a criterion for the ability to communicate in Canadian society (“India Abroad,” 2003).

In 1996, among the one hundred and sixty five countries whose former citizens received Canadian citizenship, 51.6% of the ten top countries were from Asia such as Hong Kong, India, China with Iran listed last at only 2.1% (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007). The statistics show how the demographics of immigrants changed from Europeans (who immigrated mainly after the Second World War in the 1950s, 1960s, and increasingly slowly in 1970s) to Asian immigrants after the 1980s (CIC, 2005b). Asian immigrants started arriving in large numbers in Canada because of political instability and, specifically in the Middle East, most people moved from the region to a safer place such as Canada to escape war and conflict.

Over the period of 1996 to 2001, 43% of all immigrants in Canada moved to the Greater Toronto area. Nine out of ten new immigrants are able to conduct a conversation in English, and can make a better contribution to the labour market because of their education (CIC, 2005c). Their ability to speak English is 94% greater than among immigrants before 1986 (CIC, 2005c).

Before 1996, Iran had never counted in the ten top countries whose citizens immigrated to Canada. After 1996, Iranian people ranked seventh on the list, constituting 4% of the immigrant population at that time (1996–2001).

University education is two times greater for immigrants of both genders than prior to 1986, and immigrant women hold a greater number of university degrees compared to those who are Canadian born (33% to 24%) (CIC, 2005d). Also, within the 25–44 age bracket with a university degree, immigrant women in 2001 were 68% compared to 67% Canadian-born.

Moreover, school attendance is nearly twice as high for very recent immigrants (1996–2001) compared to Canadian born in the 25–44 age group and nearly three times as high in the age 45–64 age group (CIC, 2005e). So, an analysis of this quantitative data brings our attention to the fact that most immigrant (women) are willing to pursue further education. The question then arises, what accounts for this willingness to pursue further education in spite of the extreme financial and emotional cost? Is it simply for curiosity and extending their knowledge or is it as a result of labour market pressures and/or the lack of recognition of international degrees obtained outside Canada? It is needless to point out that pursuing further education generates more money for academic institutions, but what does academia give those immigrants? As an example, in this research, Seema, who is undertaking studies for a doctoral program and also holds a master's degree from a Canadian school, discloses that the only reason she could tolerate all the challenges she encountered at school was her interest in study. She states the following,

I can say *it is only [because of] my interest to study* that [I] could tolerate all those pressures. But sometimes you go to the border and ask yourself whether it is

worth it to tolerate all those pressure? And my response is I do, because *I am interested in learning*, not for taking a better job, in fact, no, because with my master's I could get a job. It is only [my] *passion for learning* that draws me to finish it, because I can work with my master's. So anyone who asks me, "Do we continue to take our PhD?" I say it is only one's interest to get [a] PhD, there is no other reason for taking it ... *only personal interest can help you go through it* [italics added]. (Seema, interview, summer 2008)

Seema's (2008) emphasis is a passion for learning. She had the privilege of having obtained her master's here in Canada and this provides her with the chance of finding a job. But, in another example, Negar who is in a master's program said the following,

I need to go to graduate school for updating myself and my knowledge and get Canadian education. I also need to know with whom I have to compete in the job market. I worked as a volunteer in a big company and my supervisor liked my work but they did not hire me and so I decided to continue my studies in graduate school and obtain a Canadian degree. (Interview, summer 2008).

Moreover, Canadian statistics show that immigrants in recent years (1996–2001) are more educated than they were in the 1980s but they are employed in lower-paying jobs due to increased competition in the job market. Because of various reasons, as more educated immigrants come to Canada, their job opportunities become less and less than those who are Canadian-born. Before 1986, 85% of immigrants could get a job; this decreases to 70% (1996–2001) compared to those Canadian-born whose percentage was 87% in 2001. Women immigrants' income is 66% compared to Canadian-born women, and immigrant men are 60% of Canadian-born men. In other words, one third of

immigrants between 1996 and 2001 are in a low-income job, more than two times the rate of Canadian-born. Also, 37% of them live in crowded conditions compared to 3% of Canadian-born (CIC, 2005f). As a result, recent immigrant women (1996–2001) experience more unemployment (16%) compared to Canadian-born women at any level of education (4%). Unemployment among university educated immigrant women is four times higher than Canadian-born, and also four to three times greater compared to 1986 (4%) and 1995 (6%) and for educated immigrant women (4%) (CIC, 2005g). For example, in this research Maheen, who studies in a master's program, has to work to support her family as well as pay the cost of her university education. Moreover, she has to handle her mothering duties. She states the following,

I usually work at night and then in the morning immediately go to school. At noon I return home to have time with my children. I want to be home when they come back from school. So it is really tiring and stressful handling everything, school, work, and family for me as an immigrant woman. How much time do I have to handle my school work as a second language or how much do I get from work that makes me happy? It is really hard (she talked in a sad tone) (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

The context in which we can analyze the above statement is neo-liberalism. I will explain the philosophy of neo-liberalism and its justification as globalization in Chapter 3, "Theoretical Framework," but here I would like to explore in brief how neo-liberal ideology sees the nation primarily as a business firm. The nation-firm sells itself as an investment location, rather than simply a depot for the exportation of goods. When, a neo-liberal government is in power, it will pursue policies designed to make the nation

more attractive as an investment location. These policies are generally pro-business, and are perceived as such by their opposition (Treanor, 2005). Hence, in a Canadian context, the liberal government's neo-liberal perspective attracts more educated immigrants while there is not enough social support for them. Even though policy makers impose more limitations to accepting privileged new immigrants and select the best ones among many. These limitations include adding an English test in 2006, cutting off any financial support for international students, increasing minimum investment requirements for investors, and, more specifically, putting restrictions on giving visas to Iranian citizens visiting their families in Canada (Shahrvand, 2008). All of these policies are part of the neo-liberal philosophy that the Canadian state and its institutions are following (Magnusson, 2005; Treanor, 2005). One of the main reasons for vast immigration as indicated earlier is global political instability in many countries, insecurity and violence as the result of the neo-liberalism perspective following globalization. Accordingly, immigrants, especially women, try to find a safer place to live and Canada is one such desirable place.

Moreover, it is significant that recent immigrants with a university degree do not get the same level of skilled jobs as those of Canadian-born persons with a university degree (CIC, 2005h; Preston et al., 2010). Job opportunity for Canadian born women is 70%; however, it is 40% for non-Canadian women. The job situation for educated immigrant women has become even worse since 2001 – 42% compared to before 1986 (it was 62%) to 1985–1995 (48%). Moreover, this job opportunity decline applies to both genders since 1986, 1995, and 2001, from 68%, 54% to 48% respectively. The consequence of such imbalance between job opportunity and education can cause mental health issues among immigrants. This issue may impact immigrant women's feelings

towards belonging to Canadian society. As a result, the role of Canadian state and government in shaping its nation/immigrant is important to consider, as Ng (2005) believes that immigrant women are made not born.

So, in general, Canada is counting more on educated immigrants (two times greater) compared to 1986 (CIC, 2005e), and immigrants are also willing to pursue higher education. In this regard it is important to consider the Canadian society and academia's preparation for immigrants. Immigrants bring their education, experience and money into this country, but rates of unemployment as well as the number of immigrants pursuing higher education is twice than it was before 1986. This obvious discrimination, evidenced in the imbalance between job opportunities for and level education of 'racialized' immigrants, is a common experience among all immigrants (Galabuzi, 2005; Hojati, 2006; Matas, 1996; Ng, 2005; Samuel, 2005).

In contrast to the Asian population, Iranian people have never had a documented report about their history because they were mainly counted as Arabs or Western Asians (Japanese, Chinese, and people from the Philippines all have independent categories). In this context it is significant to note that while Iranian people have made tremendous contributions to Canadian nation-building, they have never had any specific status in general Canadian statistics (Ahmed, 2007). Generalization is the theme of this kind of category. There is no specific identity for them to count as Iranian or persons of Persian background (Lalani & Lalani, n.d.). There is a lack of information from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada Agency except the broad claim that Middle Eastern people are increasing in number. This draws our attention to the necessity of statistical data as a primary source of knowledge about people from this region in terms of their nationality,

gender, and language. This data will prevent any generalizations and give weight to each nationality.

Furthermore, Oriental women are perceived as backward and tradition bound (Hoodfar, 1992; Mohanty, 2004; Said, 2003). Therefore, when educated Iranian women enter a socio-capitalist society, their status is under suspicion. Because their historical background is not presented in a positive light, they encounter oppression and subjugation. In this context it is important to investigate the way they define their identity and belonging in the suspicious environment. For example, in this research Sarah, who studies in a master's program, wears a hijab, an Islamic head dress. During her studies, she finds that wearing a hijab is a barrier in school and at work. It leads to oppression, marginalization, and disrespect from some professors in school and some colleagues at work. She does not have the power to change the situation. Sarah states the following,

In my school they don't like different religions, they don't like us who are different; because of my hijab, they don't like me. For example, I was in a class where there were other students who could not speak English, even basic English, and at that time my English was better than theirs, but those students did not have scarves and I did. I was oppressed more, because I had [a] scarf. One day something happened that I will never ever forget, and I feel it with every fibre of my being. It was in the critical thinking course. After I had submitted the first assignment, the professor came to the class and stood in front of me but looked at the whole class, and said, "People who do not have critical thinking have to leave this school." It was really hard for me, *she damaged me, in a way that I lost my self-esteem; I was ruined and I think I will never overcome this damage.* Although

I did a good job in that course, I don't have enough self-esteem. It is always with me that anyone who does not have critical thinking skills should not stay in this school. *What she did is with me, that damage is with me, I can't forgive that instructor* [italics added]. (Interview, summer 2008)

This stigma placed on a Muslim woman by an instructor can contribute to the negative Oriental image of Muslim women as the “other.” Clearly, the instructor herself was not applying critical thinking in her generalizing of all Muslim women as not being capable of having critical thinking. How can one have critical thinking but ignore and marginalize diversity among her students? In the above scenario, the “other” is constructed based on a racist perspective, which privileges the White race and non-Muslims over the “others.” The instructor’s comment stayed with Sarah throughout the semester, and the hurt caused by the instructor’s negative stereotyping remained with Sarah forever. Hence, Sarah, as an immigrant, had a duality of feelings at school; on the one hand, she was happy to be continuing her studies, but on the other, she was feeling oppressed.

By immigrating to Canada, Iranian women – like all other visible minorities who look for a job or pursue higher education - encounter multiple oppressions similar to the one we read in the above quotation. Marginalization and isolation which are mainly visible for minority students (Acker, 2001; Mazzuca, 2000; Murray, 2008; Samuel, 2005; Thomas-Long, 2006; Xu & Zhang, 2007) can be more complicated for students with an Oriental background because the society has stigma over their bodies. Thus, it is central and crucial that if Canadian society and academia claim to be guardians of justice and equality, there must be dramatic changes in their structural systems in order to avoid the

discrimination of minorities within their domains. The main point is that the Canadian nation state is based on white supremacy and has an Oriental imagination about Middle Eastern women rooted in racism (Asgharzadeh, 2005; Said, 1979, 2003). Specifically, after 9/11, this imagination has expanded to include Iranian people as part of the “axis of evil” (Bush, n.d.). This stigma attaches itself even to educated Iranian women, who experience the dualism of being accepted in society but rejected as Oriental. This dualism becomes problematic for these women in terms of their continuation and attachment to the social-political-cultural sphere of the Canadian school and society. Thus, contextualizing Iranian women’s voices like other minority voices helps policy makers to realize the impact of Canadian racist, sexist, ethnocentric structural institutions on minority women, and to then effect social change and justice. If Canada wants to have healthy and happy citizens, it must provide a safe environment for all people within its domain –an environment that appreciates their race, gender, class, religion, culture, ethnicity and language as well as their contributions to nation –building.

### **1.3. 9/11 and Its Impact on Middle Eastern Immigrant Women/Higher Education**

The attack of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 had a tremendous impact on the socio-political situation in the world. The United States used the event to expand its hegemony over other countries. The main target was Middle Eastern countries and among them mainly three countries which were not directly under the United States’ control named “axis of evil”, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Bush, n.d.). However, following the release of the names of the 9/11 hijackers, none of them was a citizen of any of these three countries. It is crucially important to consider how, with such great power and technological advancements at its disposal, the United States was incapable of preventing

this attack on its society. The consequence of this attack was that the United States was able to occupy Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of liberty and importing democracy to those countries to help free people from their autocratic rulers (Abbas, 2004). Although it is important to know the consequences of war in those areas, it is also vital to consider the Canadian nation state in a global context to understand how the situation of people in the host society is shaped by occupations and wars.

Britain and Canada are also alongside with the United States in this scenario and they have also perpetuated negative images of Muslims within their societies. The negative image of Oriental people (Hoodfar, 1992; Said, 1979) is stimulated through the media in the United States (Yenigun, 2004). Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States, but since 9/11 it has been portrayed in the media as a fundamentalist, terrorist organization against liberty, freedom, and democracy (Yenigun, 2004, p. 40). The media presents the image of Muslims as fundamentalist but not progressive; Muslims are named in the media as irrational terrorists, airplane hijackers, and suicide bombers who are against “civilization” and “democracy” (Yenigun, 2004, p. 40). So, the fundamentalist segment is portrayed in the media not the progressive one.

This negative image contributes to the Orientalism of North American, neo-liberal policy, which creates a new policy under the ‘war on terror’ in the Middle East. Consequently, Middle Eastern people feel unsafe and insecure and as a result many are moving to countries they perceive as safer, such as Canada and the United States. Then, since North American society has a negative image of people from those regions, they experience discrimination and marginalization within the society.

In this context, Muslim citizens also question their identity and the idea of belonging to the host society. As an example, in this research, Maheen, who is a team leader at work while she is also a master's student, talks about racist behaviour by customers and/or her colleagues at work, "...about belonging you don't belong to a society when they reject you sometimes even one time. It is not about me it is for every single immigrant, man or woman. When a racist action happens to you, you ask yourself why am I here and do I belong to this society? If I belong to this society, why do they do this to me?" (Interview, summer 2008).

Abbas (2004) claims that most Muslims who are of South Asian descent in Britain have questioned their belonging to the society they live in. Even third generation British people of Muslim descent are seen as not integrated into British society. They are looking to find their true self and belonging to the country in which they live and were born. It is a "nomadic consciousness" (Braidotti, 2000) that appears in Maheen's reflection and among most South Asian people as well. They are searching to finding their true identity in the society in which they live and it is as a result of discrimination and racism.

In the research which was done by Zine (2004), she also notes discrimination and disrespect toward other people who profess the Islamic faith. Young school girls are stoned, men are forced to change their name from Muhammad to a 'seemingly innocent' name, a car hits a woman pedestrian, Muslims are called terrorists, (Zine, 2004, pp. 110–111) and many more examples clearly show that post 9/11 has had a negative impact on regular Muslims or those from the Middle Eastern region. This dualism for Muslims, being accountable to their faith which is not welcome in the Canadian society and being

Canadian citizens, causes identity fragmentation within so many Middle Eastern people who want to keep their identity as Muslim and also as Canadian. In this regard, in this research Maheen who wears a hijab has to struggle for acceptance at her work and school. She states the following,

My appearance is important, in the work place, others ask me are you a (professional job)? But they could not accept it and asked several times, although I have a tag, but they suppose I am not more than very low position and I could not be a team leader..., they ask me did you go to university? They could not accept it.., it is a pre-judgment and stigma about Muslim women.” (Interview, summer 2008)

It is important to state that institutionalized Orientalism within Canadian structural system through education, and the media, perpetuates such stigma about Muslim women.

In addition, it is needless to say that the impact of 9/11 and the consequential occupation of two countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, on higher education is not an open debate, especially in the United States academia. Academic freedom is limited to a certain pattern of thought; Kevin Barrett (Jaschik, 2006) is an example of this because when he openly criticized American foreign policy, he was labelled as leftist and slated to be fired from a Wisconsin school (Jaschik, 2006). Immediately, a handbook of “Academic freedom and professional responsibility after 9/11” (Jaschik, 2007) was produced to give direction to professors for conducting debates around Middle Eastern society and the 9/11 event. The word “occupation” was felt to be inappropriate. The term “political climes’ was suggested to be replaced with the term “disputed territories” (Jaschik, 2007). Instructors have been encouraged to type their lecture notes in class,

which can then be used as a means to control course content. Controlling the content and pedagogy of teaching challenges academic freedom in higher education. Moreover, Iranian students are also facing limitations on the disciplines that are seen as acceptable for them. This is especially happening in the sciences, but there is no literature about Iranian women students in academia that addresses their challenges after 9/11.

In general, 9/11 brings more research and debates around the Muslim world, because according to “the culturological view” (Yenigun, 2004) “any event is not just a happening in the world; it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system which is provided by power holders” (p. 42). Who has power over whom? 9/11 conferred legitimacy to the United States’ efforts to control the world and especially the Middle East, and questioned the presence of the Middle Eastern citizens in its domain. This unwelcome attitude toward people from the Middle East expanded throughout Europe (especially in France, by prohibiting the ‘hijab’ in public arena) and North American society such as Canada. Islamophobia (Zine, 2004) - not narrowly defined as a fear of Islam, but as an ideology which states use for domination - becomes an important discussion in marginalizing and subjugating Muslims. In this regard, women who are from those regions, if they also practice their faith, are more disadvantaged. Take the example of Sarah who, as a Muslim student wearing a hijab, is not fully respected by some of her instructors in graduate school, and she also experiences this in the workplace. She speaks of her experience in the workplace,

They looked at me and asked me, “Are you in a master’s program?” And I said, “Yes, I am,” and they said, “Oh, oh, YOU, YOU!” with a surprised tone. Again

they asked, “Are you in a master’s program?” And I said, “Yes, I am.” And they said, “It is impossible” (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

The negative image that Muslim women cannot be highly educated is much internalized within society. Sarah is rejected and marginalized at school and in the workplace. Thus, it is important to explore the situation of Iranian women in higher education. Do they feel alien or comfortable in the academic circles of North American society? Or is it simply that being women of colour, Asian, Middle East and/or Muslim, is a reLeilan for the marginalization?

This research contains different chapters. Chapter two is the literature review that specifically look at the historical role of Iranian women in the construction of Iranian higher education which this focus is different from chapter one. Moreover, in this chapter, women’s minority role is also examined in North American context. As the nature of this research addresses the complexities of women’s experiences, in chapter three I draw on multiple critical perspectives to assist me in data analysis. In chapter four I examine methodology and the method of the research. The findings of this research are examined in chapter five and six. Finally, chapter seven is the summary and discussion of the research.

#### **1.4. Summary**

This introduction has provided an overview of aim of this research that has examined the experience of first- generation Iranian immigrant graduate women in Canadian higher education and society. I am interested in examining this subject through both micro and macro lenses. In my micro lens, I have been a witness to the educated Iranian immigrant woman’s experience and suffering in Canadian graduate school and

society. From the macro perspective, I have wondered why they are emigrating, and staying in the host society with all the suffering and pain.

People's past experiences dramatically influence their current decisions and their future. From the macro lens women in Iran - regardless of their education and experience - are deprived of their social rights. Patriarchy and dictatorship at the state level also function in all institutions in Iran and through its legislation over women. It is one of the important factors that motivate some educated women to immigrate to a country where apparently they can recover their lost rights. In addition, Iranian people are known as Middle Eastern people who historically are labelled as Oriental people (Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). They are portrayed and perceived in a negative way. Taking a socio-cultural view, the individual is political, women are judged based on political issues. In this regard, the media, publications and institutions such as higher education that are mainly governed by a racist and discriminatory agenda contribute in producing a specific image of people. In this analysis, Oriental people who historically are portrayed as an inferior people compared to Western people are, after the attack of September 11 in 2001, dramatically devastated by such historical hatred and inferiority. Iranian people/women are not separate from such lens.

Adding to the above factors, the situation of immigrant educated people through the decades 1980–2000 was bleak as the Canadian labour market was in decline. Considering the evolution of Canadian immigration policy, it shows that Canada opened its doors to educated people to access more cheap labour in order to be able to compete in the global market. However, according to recent Canadian statistics, the situation of

Iranian and Pakistani people in terms of job opportunity is the worst among all other immigrants.

So, from one side educated Iranian women suffer from patriarchy in Iran, and from the other side they immigrate to a country such as Canada which has a hegemonic perspective and uses them as a cheap labour while disregarding their ethnicity, religion, nationality and so on. Then, a dualist, ironic feeling appeared in such women. This thesis research attempts to contextualize their negotiation of these challenges for knowledge production in Canadian higher education and the public sphere for change and justice.

The next chapter will examine the literature about Iranian women's situation in Iranian higher education, along with Canadian higher education construction and minority women's situation in its context.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Iran is an old society with a long history of change, the state has varied from independent monarchy governments to directly dependent monarchy to an Islamic republic regime. It is therefore important to look at the social construction of Iran using a historical lens. I will examine two bodies of literature in order to consider how political systems directly affect and cause changes in nation building and systems of education. The first concerns the historical system of higher education in Iran, how it is shaped and the role of women in it. The second body of literature discusses the structure of higher education in Canada and the status of women minorities in its sphere. Taken together, these sources allow us to examine the structure of the systems of higher education both in Iran and in Canada in terms of how they are shaped and influenced by the state. The other reason for this bifocal approach is that these two countries have completely different structural societies, one is an Islamic republic and the other practices socio-capitalism (Magnusson, 2005). As a result, it is important to examine the impact of these two systems of governance on Iranian women's experiences in Canadian higher education. In addition, it is worthwhile to know how Iranian women's experiences can contribute to theory and discourse in Canadian higher education system.

### **2.1. Country Profile of Iran**

The word 'Iran' evokes at once the image of an ancient land with a rich cultural heritage and that of the present situation in the heart of Asia. Known to the West as Persia until 1935, Iran was settled by groups of closely related Aryan tribes as early as the 9th

century B.C. The Medes, who first established an empire, were superseded in 550 B.C. by the Persians, who eventually gave the official name of Iran to the country.

Since then, many empires and kingdoms have come and gone through the 2500 years that ended in the Iranian Revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. The system of governance changed from monarchy to the Islamic Republic and Iran became officially The Islamic Republic of Iran (“History of the Islamic Republic,” n.d.).

The population of Iran is about 72 million, half of whom are women. 72% of the population falls within the age levels of 15–64 while about 25% percent of the total population is under 15 years of age; two thirds of the population is under 30 years old (“Demographics of Iran,” n.d.). Considering age composition, the population of Iran is one of the youngest among the countries of the world. Having one of the world's youngest populations, the Islamic Republic of Iran bears the responsibility of educating more than 18 million students at segregated schools. The rate of literacy is above 80%, general education and universities governed by the state are free, and parents are obliged to enrol their six-year-old children in schools. General education comprises five years of primary, three years of lower secondary (guidance school), three years of high school and one year of pre-university education. There are 267 higher education institutions (“Higher Education in Iran,” n.d.) including public, private, Azad (Free), and long distance learning is available even in remote locations. 60% of women participate at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Esfandiari, 2003). The official language of instruction is Farsi; there are diverse languages and religions in country, but the Farsi language and Muslim Shia religions are privileged and dominant.

## **2.2. Historical Evolution of Higher Education and Women's Role in Pre-revolution of Iran**

The structure of higher education in pre- and post-revolution Iran and women's positions within it can reveal their current situation. Higher education in Iran has an old history. It was originally established in 241 AD in Riv Ardeshir and Jondi Shapour (now it is called Ahvaz, a city in the south of Iran). With the influence of Islam in Iran, the Persian Minister (Nezamolmolk) of the Turkish leader (Iran was then a state governed under the Ottoman Empire) established a series of colleges named after him as Nezamiyesh in the eleventh century. While theology was the main focus in the curriculum, other subjects such as philosophy, astronomy, and medicine were included. Traditional schools called "Maktab" or Madresas" or "school" as well as other forms of mosques, clinics, schools of philosophy and observatories were the most comprehensive modes of ancient higher education in Iran.

Through centuries these forms of schooling were practiced in Iran. In 1834, the modern schools were introduced to Iran by Christian missionaries (Fereshteh, 1994a). The first higher education institute was named Darulfunun or polytechnic colleges which were established by European and Iranian educators in 1851. The primary goal was the training of civil servants and military personnel. During the next century, the graduates of the missionary schools and the Darulfunun and its successors became Iran's educational, political and economic leaders. Widespread modernization and westernization of Iranian higher education began in 1925 when a faster wave of cultural change was initiated by the Pahlavi dynasty. The second institution of higher education, called Daneshsara-ye Ali now called the Teacher's Education University was established fifty years after the first

one in 1851. The Western modernization manifest for Iran by Europe coupled with the strategic location of Iran, brought about a need for a transformation in the social structure (“History of Higher Education,” 2010). All schools in the capital city of Tehran merged into a central university named Tehran University in 1934. This university was based on French models, and, in 1935, women were officially admitted to centers of higher learning for the first time. Subsequently, other centers of advanced learning began operating, some of which were also absorbed into the University of Tehran after August 1941 (“History of Higher Education,” 2010). After the establishment of Tehran University, the development and growth of similar institutions took place at a fairly slow pace until the decades of 1970s and 1980s, when, after 1974, Iran’s income from natural resources rapidly increased. By 1979 when the revolution happened, Iran had 243 institutions of higher education, 21 of which were major universities. As modern Iranian higher education was growing, the traditional Iranian higher education institutions, the *madresahs*, continued to function. They received little attention from government but more children of the poor and the working class attended these institutions. These schools were financially supported by religious people and Bazar, and also accepted exchange students from other Muslim countries, such as Iraq and Egypt.

Following the establishment of the modern university and the Qajar monarchy period (1900), the necessity of sending Iranian young students abroad to acquire knowledge, particularly about technology, began. During the Pahlavi period (1921–1979) this economic, military, and cultural transformation started by sending students to Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, France) and the United States as well as inviting foreign experts to teach in Iran.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that while part of the national income was spent to send students abroad for advanced training, the students were studying a particular discipline chosen for them by the Ministry of Science. Efforts toward modernization and restructuring in Iran were unorganized and not carried out systematically. Hence, the graduates faced many problems on returning to the country. In this respect, Peter Averi noted the following,

Iranian state officials have made the strange assumption that anyone educated abroad can be appointed to any job regardless of their specialization. Since the administrative system and the social structure of the country were incapable of absorbing these new occupations, the simple solution was to hire them for service in government. Their education and what they learned corresponded to the social and political environment of the country where they were educated, and the influential officials of the country could not understand them. (“History of Higher Education,” 2010)

So, this is a challenging notion that in the history of Iran there has been great effort to send students abroad to study science and technology, but there was no strategic planning to use such expertise. In this regard Bagherian (1994) states that, “The need for Western technological expertise is always recognized but how the expertise could enrich their society and how they can be fitted to all sectors of society, is a major question that always is challengeable in Iranian society” (p. 255).

These ambiguities in the social construction of Iranian society continued until after the Second World War. When the United States tried to replace the European empire by imposing its domination over their territories, Iran was one of its preys. The United States directly influenced a *coup d'état* in Iran that overthrew its independent prime minister, Dr. Mossadeg, in 1953 (Kinzer, 2003). This direct involvement of the United States in the shaping of the Iranian state can be called “hidden colonization” or

“indirect colonization” which began the exposure of Iran’s government to new imperialism.

As a consequence of the coup d’état, the king of Iran was directly influenced by the U.S.A. In 1962, a new development in Iranian higher education took place (Fereshteh, 1994b), the Pahlavi University was formed in Shiraz (a city in the south of Iran) along American guidelines. This university offered many courses in English and its teaching staff included a number of foreigners. An American, Issa Sadig, provided much of the early guidance in the establishment of this university. A research-oriented journalist, Forbis, notes (Fereshteh, 1994b) that other Western countries in addition to the United States contributed to establishing universities in Iran. France guided the building of Hamadan's university (west of Iran); Germany contributed to university of Gilan (a city in the north of Iran) and in Mazandaran (province in the north of Iran); and Harvard University was in charge of redesigning research opportunities for graduate and post-graduate students. Before the 1979 revolution, 59 American universities were guiding Iranian institutions, universities and/or governmental entities (Fereshteh, 1994b). Higher education was a main priority in those days, and in the 1976–77 budget, total allocations to education amounted to about \$2.5 billion, which was 8.5% of the total budget and 37% higher than the figure for the previous year. In 1975 there were 10 fully functioning universities, and four more opened in the 1976–77 academic year. By 1979 there were five more at the functioning stage (“Education,” n.d.). The quality of teaching was very high and graduate students from Iranian universities, especially from Pahlavi (Shiraz) University, had a strong reputation all around the world and especially in the United States.

In terms of women's roles in pre-revolution Iran, women could start enrolling in higher education in 1935. Until 1935, the privilege of gaining expertise in different fields was limited to men and women were only admitted to the School of Midwifery.

Following the modernization and westernization enforced by the United States, the government under Reza Shah, first king of Pahlavi, abolished traditional Islamic cover and enforced a Western dress code in 1936 (Afkhami, 2002). Women's associations were also established and the female members of society began to be allowed to take part in public ceremonies.

The first to accept women were the Faculties of Literature and Science and the School of Education ("History of Higher Education," 2010). In addition to these opportunities inside the country, some, mostly wealthy families sent their daughters to study abroad, but the government did not sponsor any woman for foreign study. In 1934, nine women were studying in Germany, France, Belgium and Beirut, and, in 1935, 10 were enrolled as students in those countries, as well as in England. While the government encouraged women to study, the number of male students exceeded that of women three-fold. Unfortunately, the literature is silent about other aspects of women's academic situation in pre-revolution Iran. Their quantity and quality of work is not documented even though monarchy system seemed to give weight to women's presence in academia. This is a significant point, although westernization provided women with more opportunities for public presentation and to attend universities, still the status of women was not fully contextualized. This point can be analyzed in the light of the structural patriarchy in Iranian society. The history of higher education before the Iranian revolution is silent about women's roles and status. Nevertheless, my personal experience

in university for a short time before the revolution and all my family and friends' experience in universities attest that Iranian women university students had a good reputation within the society and were valued as educated and intellectual women who could make changes in their life and public sphere.

### **2.3. Higher Education in Post-revolution and Female Roles**

Two years after the victory of the revolution in 1979 two major factors influenced the quality and structure of higher education in Iran, the Cultural Revolution (1981–84) and the war with Iraq (1980–88). The consequence of these two major events was more power for the Islamic state to effect social injustice and women's oppression.

The increasing number of women in academia provides a liberating opportunity for the women, and reflects changes in family structure, gains in social respect, delay in marriage and birth control (Esfandiari, 2003). Statistics shows that the pre-revolution population of women in higher education compared to post-revolution population increased from 20% to 60%. Private universities gave women more opportunities to study, but did not ensure them financial independence since finding a job could be difficult (Esfandiari, 2003).

The official unemployment rate was said to be 12% compared to non-official accounts of 20%–30%. Unemployment for women was really higher than this because in a sexist society men are privileged in the job market (Esfandiari, 2003). Nevertheless, job discrimination did not lead to women's exclusion from academia for the following reasons,

A) The Islamic state brought protection for families because their concern was for the safety and security for their daughters. In pre-revolution times, it was difficult for most

families to send their daughters out of their hometown. After the Islamic revolution, families had more trust in the safety of the Islamic state, and this was the main reason that girls were allowed to leave their homes. In being able to leave the family home, a new phase in women's life started, they could enjoy life without the assistance from their family. In this regard Peyvadi notes the following,

The modern middle-class families who sent their girls to school even before the revolution continued to do so after [the revolution]. And the traditional families who had not sent their girls to school before – because the teachers were men or the school were not Islamic – these were the girls who took the greatest advantage from the Islamization of schools, or the fact that schools were no longer mixed, as a way of justifying their presence out of the home (Esfandiari, 2003).

This resulted in the increased number of women in higher education from 20% before the 1979 revolution to 60% by 2005 (Khaz Ali, 2010). The other reason for this increase was the establishment of private universities such as Azad university (a non-profit university), and long distance universities, which were established in most cities, towns, and even in very remote areas since 1982 (“Islamic Azad University,” n.d.). As a result, enrolment increased and more space was created for girls. However, the tuition at these private universities was high so only a certain class could provide this education for their daughters; because of this the class inequality within society impacted gender differences. In general, segregation based on class, gender, and loyalty to the state increased within the society (Afshar, 1994).

As a result of having more educated women in the society, women began to question the traditional Islamic state in terms of equity and social justice. Several women's magazines were established and women's issues received more attention than before. The ministry of education proposed a quota system to limit women's presence in certain disciplines such as medicine, because their presence was rapidly outnumbering

men's. Even conservative and reformist parties in Iran were behind such limitations because they believed education played a significant role in women's awareness. They tried to use economic excuses for imposing their perspective (Peyvand cited in Esfandiari, 2003). Ghaed (as cited in Esfandiari, 2003) also adds, "There are no jobs for university graduates, they have no income – it's not even possible for them to earn the bare minimum they need to live. This problem, with its unpredictable consequences, has worsened over the last 10–15 years" (Esfandiari, 2003). It is made clear by this quotation that local states have taken advantage of such inflation within the society and encourage women to stay at home to protect their family, although they are educated and can contribute to economic prosperity.

Educated women, however, find more opportunities to increase their social awareness and to question the patriarchy than before the revolution. With an increased presence in all spheres of the society, women have also found opportunities for emigration to other parts of the world to release them from the prevalent patriarchal atmosphere and to continue their studies. In this research, all eleven participants mentioned that the main reason for coming to Canada was to continue their studies while at the same time escaping the constraints of an autocratic state. In this regard, Maheen states the following,

I came to Canada for continuing my study. I have lived before in Canada for my husband's study continuation but at that time (1990), we did not want to live in here and came back to Iran. But gradually, by increasing pressure on women and more restriction at work and school, I prefer to come to Canada for providing a better opportunity for my kids and also for myself. For example in Iran at work

place I could not dress up in the way I like or even have a long nail ....for any simple things I had problem. (Interview, summer 2008).

Although educated women who were willing and capable of leaving Iran immigrated to Canada, a majority of those who stayed in Iran try to contribute to social change. The main evidence for this contribution is the difference in educated women's social status between the time I wrote my thesis proposal in 2007 and the present time, 2009. Women university students have actively participated in the Green Movement in Iran. This movement began in June, 2009 as a response to the tenth presidential elections in Iran. Young people including women objected to their vote, which appeared to have been stolen by the current president in order to establish a more backward and dictatorial society. Neda Agha Sultan and Taraneh Mousavi were university female students who were killed/ raped in this movement; they are symbolic of the Green Movement in Iran and worldwide for democracy and freedom (Ferani, 2009).

#### **2.4. Construction of Canadian Higher Education**

“It is a place in the world, the university too is a place in the world and the world is in it” (Brecht cited in Bannerji, 2000, p.114).

Academia is the state apparatus for shaping society and making specific nations and citizenship, it is a state's ideology in an intelligent structure.

Since the 1960s, Canadian higher education has followed the United States' structure, which was influenced by the scientific management principles set out by Fredrick Taylor in 1911. These principles advocate scientific thinking and method as the way to improve productivity in favour of industry and market (Barrow, 1990; Mackinnon, 1989; Magnusson, 2000, 2005, Nobel, 1977; Shahjahan, 2004, Williams,

1992). It was through the investment of science with capital (money, resources, business) that American higher education became involved in industry and in the market economy. Academia became an enriched source for scientific improvement (Barrow, 1990; Nobel, 1977), while students and faculties became intellectual labourers through their work in such areas as research and publication. This work was mainly used for industry and for the fiscal benefit of investors (Axelrod, 2002; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Shahjahan, 2004; Shiva, 1993). This perspective in general has been adopted in academia in order to make it more efficient. The quality of work is viewed as less important than quantity, and knowledge based on curiosity and enquiry in academia has shifted to knowledge and research based on industry and job-market needs. As a result, knowledge and the products of research are commodified and sold like stocks on Wall Street (Axelrod, 2002; Barrow, 1990; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Magnusson, 2005; Shiva, 1993).

As part of the North American society, Canadian higher education adopted these criteria. However, Canada is largely publicized as a multicultural welfare society and is proud of this distinguished image (Galabuzi, 2005; Hojati, 2006). Gradually, Canada has moved away from the the policies of the welfare state that contributed to this image by reducing healthcare benefits, increasing higher education tuition, and cutting student services in universities as these become an increasing part of the industrial centre that is embroiled in capital accumulation (Itwaru, 2008; Lee, 2004; Magnusson, 2000; Shahjahan, 2004). As a result, it is important to analyze the situation of immigrant women students from a political-economic point of view, since they participate directly in the profit cycle of higher education. Thus, these questions need to be asked, What is

the benefit of higher education for them? Is there an actual fair exchange of learning for social and economic mobility? Moreover, in this exchange, is the immigrant woman student allowed to fully participate in the institutional structures that she is supporting?

Considering the above notion, it is important to examine the situation of immigrant women graduate students in this country and to investigate if their gender, culture, language, religion and nationality can be counted in Canadian higher education. The inquiry for this research will be whether their voices can be included in the structure of Canadian academia for social change and justice.

## **2.5. (Minority) Women Graduate Students in North American Higher Education**

This section will address the situation of minority graduate women (micro perspective) in the macro level of the context of Canadian higher education. Since the second wave of feminism in 1970s, the concern of critical feminists has been the way society shapes and defines its citizens. This concern leads critical feminists to see systemic discrimination in the way Canadian institutions perpetuate racism and sexism among its citizens (Arat-Koc, 2005; Bannerji, 1992, 2000; Das Gupta, 1995; Dei, 2005a, 2005b; Dua, 2003; Ng, 2004, 2005).

Women in graduate schools in North America between the years of 1950 to 1960 were primarily white. Most research conducted or articles written about graduate schools focus on faculty members (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Caplan, 1993; DeSole & Hoffmann, 1981; Simeone, 1987) operating in a chilly environment. Many challenges inhibit their progress on the tenure track, so the main objective was to assert their presence through male domination. It is significant that women's presence was taboo in academia and was not welcome at the time. In general, the main challenges for

mainstream white women who desired to study/work in academia included breaking from the traditional thought (Hartley, 1994) that women were only fit for the kitchen and making babies, a lack of family support (Smith, 1994), and searching for an appropriate supervisor (Acker, 2001). In other words, gender exclusion was the main focus, and the andocentric atmosphere was the primary condition that white graduate females tried to change while supporting each other. In this process white women were constructed as ‘the Other’ in a boy’s academic network. In contrast, Berkeley University is an exceptional example of a welcoming school to minority (women) graduate students in the 1960s.

Years passed and, with increasing women’s presence in American graduate schools, minority women such as blacks also entered the scene. Due to an increase in immigration and instability around the world, others including so-called Third World women entered academia. The intersection of gender with race increased discrimination in academia and, as hooks believes, when “it is talk about black it is about black men and when it is about women, it is about white women” (Wright Myers, 2002, p. 37). However, for some blacks, race was more important than gender in the discrimination that they experienced. In most literature that depicts how white women endured a chilly environment, finally a white man became their supervisor who supported them to get a job. This did not apply to racialized minority women whose enrollment had been increasing since 1980. On the other hand, in a multicultural society such as Canada, the increasing women’s presence in academia (Preston et al., 2010) and the intersection of gender with race, culture, language, and religion caused a more complicated atmosphere for minority women in pursuit of higher education.

Alongside the growing women's population in the society, the second wave of feminism in the 1970s questioned the sexist culture, patriarchal atmosphere, and women's rights in all aspects of their lives. Women's status in the society called to question the source of power and domination. This social change was mainly attributable to Western white feminists who tried expose their real status and standing in the society. The majority of women's literature and experience talked about the oppression within society, or specifically academia which was dominated by mainstream voices. However, there is a crucial question that needs to be asked, while mainstream white women were also victims of the patriarchal system, how was the minority women's situation in this atmosphere? The intersection of gender with race, class, religion, nationality, language, culture, and ethnicity exacerbated the oppression of minority women. Accordingly, alongside mainstream voices, minority women's voices also came under debate.

Graduate students consciously pursue their studies to further their own personal goals, be it for better job opportunities or in response to their internal wishes. Regardless of their race and gender they are frustrated by a lack of financial support, supervisor compatibility and rigid curriculum in their institution of choice (Bannerji, 2000; Braden, 2000; Hutt, 2000; Meadow-Orland, 1994; Samuel, 2005; Thomas-Long, 2006; Wallace, 1994; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). These issues become more crucial when race and gender are added to the students' characteristics (Acker, 2001; Bannerji, 2000; Braden, 2000; Hutt, 2000; Samuel, 2005; Willie et al., 1991, Zu & Zhang, 2007). Take the example in this research of Ashraf who achieved her masters in a male dominated program and is continuing on to a doctoral program. She states the following,

I can say *it is only [because of] my interest to study* that [I] could tolerate all those pressures in school, supervisor compatibility and financial problems. But sometimes you go to the border and ask yourself, is it worth it to tolerate all the pressure? And my response is I do because *I am interested in learning*, not for taking a better job, in fact, no, because with my master's I could get a job. It is only [my] *passion for learning* that draws me to finish it, because I can work with my master's. So anyone who asks me, "Do we continue to take our PhD?" I say it is only one's interest to get [a] PhD, there is no other reason for taking it ... *only personal interest can help you go through it* [italics added] (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Literature shows the same struggle (according to an Ontario Research Council funded study) in some universities in Ontario (Dagg, 1989; Ella, 1989; Filteau, 1989) through the 1980s. Although the number of women at the undergraduate level increased from 1970s to the 1980s as compared to men, women earned less than men with the same education and experience when they entered the workforce (Dagg, 1989, p. 28). Meanwhile they were not inherently welcome to the graduate level but were encouraged to stay at home and wash dishes (Ella, 1989, p. 34). This perspective has hardly evolved in the 21st century and, even though women's presence has increased, patriarchal institutions remain stable. The androcentric atmosphere in Ontario universities persists in the discrimination of various disciplines based on budgetary responsibilities (life science and hard science usually were /are better funded than humanities and social sciences) and the difficulty these universities have supporting students who fulfill multiple roles such as being a mother and a wife as well as a student. Furthermore,

women face other issues in a male-dominated institution such as financial disparity where women's programs were/are less funded than men's, isolation from a "boy's network," and a lack of attention to race and feminist issues as critical perspectives in the classroom. Surprisingly, the situation of women in disciplines such as humanities and social sciences was harder than in hard or life sciences. In the latter disciplines, women graduate students can quickly achieve publication, get scholarship, do their research and finish their program, whereas such academic activities are fraught with problems and competition in humanities and social sciences, especially where women graduate students lack departmental or mentor support (Ella, 1989, p. 35). It is a complicated issue that, as a result of market-oriented institutions, disciplines such as the humanities and social sciences are more constrained by institutional structure than other disciplines.

Due to increasing immigrant numbers in Canadian society, more women gradually entered graduate school (refer to chapter one immigration policy in Canada). Through York University stories, Bannerji (2000), Braden (2000) and Hutt (2000) we realize how Canadian academia's structure is biased towards gender and race. As time passed not only did the bias not improve, but, as a result of the increase in numbers of racialized immigrant people /women into this society, students encountered more severe regulation and disadvantages. According to research conducted by York University in 2000, there were no significant improvements in the challenges faced by women graduate students nowadays than those encountered by women from 1980–1990. The situation was similar amongst black graduate students in the U.S.A. (Wright Myers, 2002, p. vi). In York's stories, graduate students criticized the lack of financial support (however, they have TA, or GA), emotional support by their supervisor or department, and opportunity

to raise their voices which are not part of the mainstream white, male, middle class (Bannerji, 2000; Braden, 2000; Dowdy, 2008; Hutt, 2000; Willie et al., 1991). Moreover, any critical thinking protest such as anti-racism, feminism, post colonialism, and /or Marxism is not welcome in that environment. Therefore, in such an oppressive atmosphere, women graduate students are not able to relate the program they are studying or the research they are doing to their real life. They think it is useless to be in academia and as a result they try to leave school or transfer their program to other university for more liberty in a different location.

From another perspective, the presence of minority women students and faculty in the Sociology Department at York University is a token boon. However, there is no opportunity for them to take advantage of this diversity, even in terms of having an anti-racist class or discussion (Hutt, 2000, pp. 61–63). This ambiguity of being accepted in the system but not truly included in knowledge production is as a result of systemic racism at the institutional level of (Canadian) higher education (Henry & Tator, 1994).

Academic pressure such as doing course work within certain times, publications, and participation in conferences and family pressure such as childbearing put women graduate students more under pressure for excellence (Hutt, 2000, pp. 82–89). For someone with multiple identities, the situation is even more atrocious, because having, for example, an Italian or Asian background and being born and raised as a Canadian causes complicated identity questions in terms of “who one is”. Academia cannot help one with this integration, so stress and lack of self-confidence, can cause one to question one’s position in academia (Hutt, 2000, p. 72; Mazzuca, 2000; Samuel, 2005). It is significant to note that while mainstream women graduate students have difficulty

integrating their life with their education, that this proves increasingly complex for racialized minority women, especially, in this case, Iranian ones. Contextualizing their voices can lead us to investigate this complexity. The research mentioned above does not examine the role of immigration and, specifically, the intersection of race and gender with culture, religion and language in the context of academia. Therefore, the following paragraphs will attempt to address this issue.

According to Rezai-Rashti (1995), since the 1980s, the Canadian policy of state sponsored multi-culturalism has come under considerable criticism by educators and social scientists (p. 87). Henry Giroux explains that “multiculturalism should mean analyzing not just stereotypes but also how institutions produce racism and other forms of discrimination” (Rezai-Rashti, 1995, p. 88). Racism is embodied in the normal individual interactions and institutional practices of school. Samuel (2005) has researched the challenges of South Asian students (international – first or second generation of immigrant mainly from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) in undergraduate and graduate schools in Ontario. Samuel desired to examine any racism and discrimination due to the participant’s class, language, accent, and skin colour. According to Samuel citing the work of Razack in 1998 and Burney in 1995, Canadian historians have not dealt extensively with the background of minority groups, leaving “established knowledge” unchallenged (Samuel, 2005, p. 43). Established knowledge refers to a Western body of knowledge that, through colonization, is normalized in both the colonized and colonizer society. Moreover, Li in 2003 (cited in Samuel, 2005, p. 43) states that multiculturalism policies have not fully incorporated newcomers into a democratic process of participation. These policies emphasize getting immigrants to conform to the prevailing

values and beliefs of the dominant group. Samuel (2005) in her research identified immigration and nationality as contemporary sites of migrant's struggles against colonialism (p. 51). Canada's immigration and nationality laws are racialized, classed and gendered, e.g. the point system is rooted in systemic racism, classism and sexism that adversely affects immigrants from developing countries (Samuel, 2005). This sexist, racist structural system shows itself in institutional structure. As South Asian students found out, it is difficult to obtain university work as teaching assistant or research assistant. Their skin colour, non-Canadian accent and cultural background are factors that hinder them from getting jobs quickly (Samuel, 2005, p. 53). The unemployment rate for immigrants during their first year was two to three times greater than for someone Canadian-born (Samuel, 2005, p. 53; Preston et al., 2010). Moreover, lack of proficiency in the English language and a 'foreign' accent contributed to their difficulty. A student mentioned that because of that "I felt alone and stupid at times, not being able to join with the others and have fun" (Samuel, 2005, p. 57). One participant says that even though "I could speak English, it was my accent that may have contributed to this. The feeling of seclusion can be very disturbing and inhibiting" (Samuel, 2005, p. 57). White students are given more guidance than students of colour in regard to assignment format. So, this reinforced minority students' feelings of marginalization. One student in Samuel's (2005) research mentioned, "Definitely there are racist practice followed in guidance given about written assignment. The professors don't tell you everything you need to know about writing an assignment, and sometimes they try to confuse you and do not give clear-cut answers. Regarding questions also –more explanations are given to white student questions than minority students" (p. 71). The lack of explanation for new

students causes many female South Asian students to get lower marks because they fail to meet instructors' expectations, and when a new student asks for it, the instructor often unwilling to provide the information (Samuel, 2005, p. 76). Teacher's evaluations affect the academic success of minority students. When they are biased and the marks do not represent the student's work, these evaluations can alter funding as well as future plans. With resources strained and emotions stressed, minority students may find themselves in a challenging position. For example, a doctoral student in Samuel's research explained succinctly how her B+ average in a master's program prevented her from getting into a PhD program, and how, two years later, she could still not get any financial funding or a research assistantship. She is absolutely convinced that her race as an Indian woman was the basis for this discrimination (Samuel, 2005, p. 76). In terms of gender discrimination, participants in Samuel's research believe that sometimes instructors are supportive of you and understand you and at other times they are rude and look down on you and your work. An Indian girl could not be understood by the male faculty members and her peers, while another participant says her faculty members "just talk to me, forget that I am female" (Samuel, 2005, p. 80). She continues that most men think I don't know anything because I am in the arts and I am an Indian student (Samuel, 2005, p. 80). Mixed signals cause students to distrust male professors, which has a harmful effect on interactions with them. Several studies on gender have found that professors' behaviour and attitudes have a strong effect on female students (Samuel, 2005, p. 80). In another scenario, one graduate student felt humiliated when a white male supervisor told her to seek out a female supervisor. This supervisor never answered her phone calls or emails (Samuel, 2005, p. 81). Such cases of gender exclusion together with racism illustrate the

complexity of identity and a student's sense of belonging to Canadian society and academia. The sentences "where are you from?" and "where are you really from?" indicate that, for some people, Canadian means only white people and excludes people of colour. Shadd (1994) says except for native people, the rest of the people are immigrants to Canadian society anyway (Shadd, 1994, p. 135).

The 9/11 tragedy in 2001 increased this exclusionary feeling among South Asian Muslim students. In other words, after 9/11, Islam became the most hated religion in the world and students who believe and practice it became marginalized in mainstream Canadian society (Samuel, 2005; Zine, 2004). Samuel found that female Muslim students who wear the *hijab* feel low self esteem, alienation, exclusion and depression. One of the students says, "I was avoided, ignored and excluded from social and even educational circles simply because I happened to look a certain way and belonged to a certain ethnic background. I became 'different' because I looked it by wearing the hijab or the veil. Some avoided me like the plague. Others had a nickname for me, 'Hanky Girl.' For this to be happening in a university of all places was unbelievable. I always viewed university as a place where only the brightest minds would gather, where people would be seen as individuals and judged on the basis of their intellect" (Samuel, 2005, p. 137). University is a reflection of society, however, and, as Bannerji, claims they are intertwined. Being rejected and marginalized based on religion, gender and skin colour can cause identity crises for students. According to Phinney and Rosenthal in 1992, an identity crisis generally involves "conflicts and contradictions posed by a minority status in society" (Samuel, 2005, p. 132). There is usually a triggering experience or entry point – possibly a racist incident, an ethnic awareness program, or an incident relating to school or work

that causes a minority to feel an identity crisis. After this crisis, the student uses hybrid culture. One of the side effects of this identity crisis among South Asian students was suicide. According to Samuel (2005), suicide is a distressing trend among young South Asians. In 1999, Wadhvani found that 30% of the 104 participants in her study had considered suicide and that racism was a significant factor (Samuel, 2005, p. 137). The literature documents that even for second-generation immigrants exclusion and marginalization will result in identity crisis,.

Following minority women's experience in graduate school, Mazzuca (2000) addresses in her thesis the situation of Italian women graduate students in academia. She claims that numerous studies have shown how students from immigrant backgrounds struggle to adjust to a school system in a culture different from their home one. The educational system in turn, "rarely incorporates the languages and cultures of its students within the mainstream curriculum" (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 11). Women from a minority culture who pursue a higher education often have experiences and concerns which are distinct from those of other students, and even from men with whom they share an ethnic background. However, the culture that is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system reflects the culture of the dominant class (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 12). Schools reinforce particular types of linguistic competence, authority patterns, and curricula. Children from higher socio-economic backgrounds acquire these cultural resources. She adds if we conceptualize academia as a "borderland", we can see how the crossing of this "border" may be difficult for those who do not possess the appropriate cultural signs. So minority women will be one of the "less formal intersections" (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 22). Some of these barriers, according to Obogue (as cited in Mazzuca, 2000, p. 14), are the

“cultural discontinuity hypothesis;” “universal discontinuity,” which is similar for all minorities; “primary discontinuity,” which is adaptation for new immigrants; and “secondary discontinuity,” which means resistance to change. Given these barriers minority women graduate students still pursue their studies. Thus, it is important to know their strategies for overcoming these barriers.

On the other hand, in examining the concept of “cultural discontinuity” it is significant to address the concepts of “assimilation” and “identity,” because they are related to belonging to a society or to a certain culture. According to Mazzuca (2000, p. 24) citing Weeks’ work, the concept of assimilation is related to issues of identity. Weeks in 1990 provides following definition,

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 88).

Multiple roles such as being a mother, daughter, sister, wife and a graduate student induce this complexity especially in the context of societies that focus on individualism. So among those diverse roles women are looking to find their real self and location. In another research study, Xu and Zhang (2007) observe that national identity is a crucial starting point for a theoretical framework. They quoted from the American sociologist Alex Inkeles, and psychologist Daniel Levinson who theorized that national identities affect the following four elements, relationship to authority, conception of the self and conception of the relationship between the individual and society, conception of masculinity and femininity, and expression of feelings and ability to resolve conflict. National identity in addition to cultural and religious identity make immigrant women’s

situation harder in a host society. According to Hull (1998, as cited in Xu & Zhang, 2007) who examined overall feelings of non-American students in three American universities, 70% of all foreign students have problems with adaptation because of the degree of dissimilarity between their cultural backgrounds and American culture. Their ability to adjust was dependent on the similarity of their background to the American culture. Nevertheless, Western culture is closer to white Canadian mainstream culture than non-western culture, but in Mazzuca's (2000) research, female participants who are of second-generation of Italian background still struggle to adapt to white Canadian culture.

Xu and Zhang (2007) state that "loneliness" among Chinese graduate students in U.S. academia is one of the most important factors that isolates them from mainstream students. They are alone because of their English language ability and more time spent studying in comparison to American classmates. Thus, it is crucial that higher education in a host society provides facilities for immigrants' integration and adaptation. Although Canadian higher education follows American standardization, normalization and testing (Barrow, 1990; Nobel, 1977), the way students with diverse backgrounds can integrate in the institution's climate remains an important issue. Moreover, the university's policy for encouraging multicultural students to achieve academic productivity in roles such as teaching and research assistantships is important to know when considering immigrant (women's) nationality, culture, ethnicity, interest, language, and skills in their academic achievement. As a result it is significant to examine the nature of Canadian higher education and its capacity for accepting immigrants. This ontological perspective gives rise to an epistemological approach to the possibility of Canadian academia empowering

minority groups within its domain. Whether Canadian academic capitalism (Magnusson, 2005, Magnusson & Bischooping, 2005; Muzzin, 2008, Shahjahan, 2004) is capable of enriching minority women voices should be further explored. The intersection of gender with race and culture, language, ethnicity, religion make a complex debate around the position of “minority women” in a society which claims to have social justice. Pseudo-inclusion perspective is everywhere; Middle Eastern, Asian, black, and other minority students all are token in the society and academia. It is an important issue in this research to examine if their identity with all its characteristics can be valued in the institutions in which they are studying. This integration impacts their belonging to the host society. If immigrant women and, in this research specifically Middle Eastern/ Iranian graduates, do not fully involve themselves in the society, their participation in Canadian development will be under question.

## **2.6. Summary**

Racism is a root of discrimination and marginalization for all minority women students in Canadian schools and society. This exclusion manifests itself among immigrants of African, European, Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern background. Gender intersects with racism, language, and religious discrimination to exacerbate the immigrant’s feelings of exclusion and alienation. The significant point is that at any historical moment when Canada accepts more immigrants, the complexity of adaptation for immigrants creates more imbalances in society. This complexity can be a result of systemic racism in the state level of Canadian society. Diverse students with various ethnic, religious and national backgrounds encounter an identity crisis that impacts their contribution to social activities. Thus, contextualizing their voices will help policy

makers to take action for the inclusion of all citizens in Canada's domain. The following chapter will discuss the multi-critical theory for investigating the roots of oppression and racism over racialized minority women.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

As a part of the Middle East, Iran is known as a Muslim country. However, this perception gained strength after the establishment of the Islamic regime in 1979. Before the Iranian revolution, nationalism was an important factor for Iranians who desired to identify themselves as part of the Aryan race rather than having a religious identity. The dualism in labelling Iranian people not as Arab but mainly Muslim, and Aryan but not European, puts them in an inferior position in Western representation, especially after the victory of the 1979 revolution and the incident of 9/11 in 2001. This dichotomy of nationalism and religion makes for a very complicated situation for Iranian women. For example, in this research Fatemeh states that, “the first reaction of my supervisor was, ‘you are Iranian but you don’t have a hijab!!’ It is a reaction that everyone here asks me because they suppose all Iranian women have to wear the hijab” (Interview, summer 2008).

The representation of Middle Eastern (Iranian) people as backward in the media, texts, and in public sphere marginalizes them as well as other Orientals. Events such as the Iranian revolution in 1978–9, the American Hostage Crisis (1979–1981), war with Iraq (1980–1988), and the 9/11 Twin Tower Bombing in New York in 2001 perpetuate the Euro-American colonized perspective that defines Orientals as terrorists. In essence, this generalization looks at Middle Eastern people in a political way that subjugates and freezes them in their space, time, history, and culture; more specifically, Iranian women are distinguished from this generalization, stigmatization and pre-judgment (Arat-Koc,

2005; Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Hoodfar, 1993; Mohanty, 1988, 2004; Mohit, 2009, Razack, 1998; Said, 2003).

Accordingly, to examine the situation of immigrant Iranian women in Canadian academia, one needs a number of complex theoretical frameworks to arrive at a critical, social, and political analysis. Given the complex nature of the study, I have used multiple theoretical/discursive frameworks to assist me in dealing with the subject matter. This study is important in bringing different interpretations and insights to the discussion. Because it is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in nature, it is necessary to examine the interconnections between race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality in identifying the complex situation of Iranian female graduate students in Canadian academia in the context of Canadian nation state. As it is, Iranian people are known as Middle Eastern people. Orientalism is, therefore, an appropriate paradigm to investigate the way these people have been presented in the Western knowledge, literature and institutions. Since both countries, Iran and Canada, were colonized indirectly and directly, it is important to examine the role of colonization and neo-liberalism in the social construction of higher education. In addition, as the focus of this research is about “women,” and also according to Yegenoglu (1998) the essence of Orientalism is its women, I use a feminist perspective from critical race theory. In other words, an integrative feminist perspective has helped me to examine the integration of race and gender with religion, ethnicity and nationality. As a result, the use of multiple theories is quite appropriate. The following pages offer a brief account of each theory and explain its importance for this work.

### **3.1: Orientalism (Post-colonialism Perspective)**

#### **3.1.1. Social Construction of Orientals/Others**

One of the most important perspectives in defining Middle Eastern people/women is 'Orientalism' (Hall, 1998; Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). The root of Orientalism, colonialism (Said, 1979, 2003) racism (Dei, 1999, 2005a, b) and 21st century globalization (Chomsky, 2006; Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Magnusson, 2000, 2005; Perkins, 2004; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006) is the same, racism. Racism is part of the agenda of imperialism's hegemony (Amin, 2003; Chomsky, 2006; Mohit, 2003; Perkins, 2004), which asserts the superiority of the West over the rest of the countries of the world to exclusion of particular groups or individuals from social, cultural and economic agendas. The goal of the imperialist hegemony was and is simply the control of economic resources. Over time, there have been different rationales for racism, in the eighteenth century, it was based on skin colour that led to the enslavement of African people. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was based on scientific production, modernity, civilization, the integration of knowledge and power (Foucault, as cited in Rabinow, 1984). In the twenty-first century, it is based on globalization and the general agreement on tariff and trade (GATT) for wider cultural assimilation and control of the global economy (Chomsky, 2006; Gills, n.d.; Lechner, 2006; Lee, 2004; Mohit, 2009). In all such historic hegemony, economic benefit has been the main agenda for imperialism; to control and to exploit resources and people locally and globally. This exploitation is also the characteristic of a capitalist society which practices racism and follows neo-liberalist ideology.

Furthermore, in this particular section, I argue the primary notion of Orientalism as discussed by Edward Said (1979, 2003), a scholar who questioned the supremacy of the West over the Middle East over time. Orientalism is linked to colonialism, which Said says expands the Foucauldian concept of power/knowledge to how Western knowledge uses its domination over others (Said, 2003, pp. 14–15). Said interrogates the ways through which Western scholarship and the West in general has for centuries misrepresented the East and the Orient, through its discursive, intellectual, literary, as well as economic and colonial power. Said's (1979, 2003) work helps us to better understand how colonial powers colonize human imagination and understanding by their misrepresentation of the Other through literature, media, presses, and various discursive methods. Due to this misrepresentation, freedom from the material and physical conditions of repression will not, in and of itself, lead us to desired liberation. In order to obtain any kind of liberation, "one has to; first and foremost, free oneself from mental, ideational and perceptual bondage" (Asgharzadeh, 2005, p. 75). In other words, Said's (1979, 2003) work directs us to see how dominant groups colonize our imaginations and influence the way we interpret our world, view ourselves and identify our colonizers. In order to do so, one needs a process of decolonizing one's thought from imperial hegemony. Therefore, considering this paradigm allows me to see how Iranian immigrant women graduate students perceive Euro-American Canadian schools and society, and reflect their challenges within it.

In examining historical evidence about how the East came to the West, Hoodfar (1992, 1993) and Said (1979, 2003) explain that from the nineteenth century the East was defined by West as Oriental, barbarian and backward in order to legitimize Western

colonization. Anthropology was an academic discipline created, as Hoodfar (1992) states, for the purpose of defining non-Western white races as the Other. Following the colonization of Eastern society, Euro-American imperialism needed academic institutions and intellectuals to produce new knowledge to define the East as the 'other' for the purposes of controlling and dominating them. According to Said, British and French colonizers with their alliances from 1815–1914 expanded their colonized areas globally from 35% to 85% (1979, p. 40). Every continent was affected, and none more so than Africa and Asia. So, a newly defined 'inferior' people was created for Euro-imperialism in order to occupy their lands, extract their resources and establish centers for European production without questioning its "superiority."

According to Said (2003), Western proponents of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West, occupied themselves with ideas about the biological basis of racial inequality. The ideas of Darwin in 1859 about natural selection and genetics informed latent Orientalists, who used a scientific argument to validate the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental-African (p. 206). Said continues that if an Oriental went to the West, it was seen as a mission to improve their knowledge. In contrast, the West was positioned as an authority on the East; there were 60,000 books written in the West between 1800–1950 by Western soldiers, merchants, and travelers that portrayed Oriental people (women) in an inferior manner (Said, 2003, p. 204). Moreover, people of the Orient were barely seen as people or citizens by the Orientalist; instead they were seen as a problem to be solved or confined (Said, 2003). This was happening as the colonial powers openly demanded their

territory (p. 207).<sup>1</sup> The association of the West with modernity, progress, development, and freedom and the East with the opposite features is indeed a phallogocentric gesture that portrays the Orient negatively as the Other which is different from the 'norm' of the white race (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 104).

Through this process Orientalism becomes a generic term that is employed to describe the Western approach to the Orient. Orientalism is a discipline that has topics of learning, discovery, and practice, and it has dreams, images and vocabularies from the Western perspective (Hall, 1998; Yegenoglu, 1998). According to Hall (1998), until the late 1980s Western writers were still representing Middle Eastern and Muslim women without consulting them. The voices were still Western voices.

Therefore, Orientalism is shaped by Euro-imperialism (France and England first, and then America) to legitimize supremacy of the West over the East; it started from India and the Bible lands to, by some American accounts, as far as China and Japan (Said, 1979, p. 5). However, Orientals were definitely not a homogenous community of people. Arab countries are completely different from non-Arab countries such as Iran, India, China or Japan in terms of language, culture, habits and tradition. Generalizing all Middle Eastern people will mislead us in our critical social analysis because their diversity is ignored and their voices also will not be distinguished and heard.

Said (1979, 2003) claims that anyone who studies Eastern and Muslim people (Oriental) is an Orientalist who draws negative and backward pictures of them. This inferior portrayal of Oriental people was consistently presented in Western society in the 20th century. According to Said (1979, 2003) there are two main factors for the

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<sup>1</sup> The same situation is happened in the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of liberating their women by the United states and its alliances

perpetuation of this continuous hegemony. One is the role of universities, modern learning, the professional societies, and industry, all of which gave prestigious authority to the pioneering scholars, travelers, and poets whose cumulative vision had shaped an ideal Orient. This Orient Said named Latent Orientalism, which owed its existence to power over the Orient. In this way, Orientalism was able to survive revolutions, world wars, and the literal dismemberment of empires (Said, 2003, p. 222). The second factor is that for decades Orientalists had spoken about the Orient, translated texts and explained civilizations, religions, dynasties, cultures, and mentalities as academic objects. They were experts to do so, and it was mainly done from a distance. But since the 19th century, the commercial, political, and other existential encounters between East and West increased, and each traveler felt himself to be a representative Westerner who had gotten beneath the obscurity of modern Orientalists (Said, 2003, p. 223).

As a result, the Orient did not have a role in establishing its ideology over others; it is Euro-American thought which produced an Oriental image through its institutions, arts, and media and enforced it within its society (Said, 2003). After 9/11, the United States took advantage of the tragedy to consistently project negative images of those nations. According to Said (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 17) the definition of Oriental which West gives to Orient is not something of its own “nature”, rather it is essentialized by the nature of ‘Islam’ and ‘Arab’ character from the Westerner’s view. Because this perception is generated from a position of power, Western knowledge of the Orient creates the Orient and his world. On the other hand, it is crucial to examine Orientals in their own historical circumstances and conditions to achieve a real definition about them,

to understand who they are and why the West consistently through history wants to dominate them.

In conclusion, Orientalism mostly deals with Arabs and Muslims (Said, 2003, p. 17), the largest territory of Euro-American hegemony. How are Iranian women defined in Western society - women who are not Arab but may be Muslim, are of the Aryan race but are not European? Especially after 9/11, they are counted as the devil's excess (Bush, n.d.). With Iraq and Syria as part of Arab region, it seems that the dominant Iranian religion (Islam) has more weight than their nationality and culture in Western societies. In this research, we will listen to the voices of Iranian graduate women in this context.

### **3.1.2. Oriental Women from the Lens of Imperial/Colonial Politics**

In order to address the position of Oriental women from a European colonizer's view, I would like to raise two scholars' perspectives, Said (1979, 2003) and Yegenoglu (1998), from a post-colonial (feminist) perspective. This is an important section of theory because the process of the Orientalization not only has impact on the way Oriental women are presented in European society, but it also impacts Oriental people themselves in the way they have internalized Western perceptions of their identity.

According to Said (1979, 2003) Latent Orientalism encouraged a male conception of the world. It is a male province; it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. In the writing of travelers and novelists, women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing (Said, 2003, p. 207). Although, Said (1979, 2003) offers a Western gaze toward Oriental women, he does not address the process by which this representation is institutionalized in Western context.

Yegenoglu (1998) believes that Said shows the way the West defines and brings the Orient into the literature of the West and brings the concept of the Other in a binary system of itself (p. 14). However, Said's work lacks enough gender perspective to address the way Oriental women came into contact with the literature, science and knowledge production of the Western perspective. She believes that according to the Western travelers to the Middle East the core of Orientalism is its women. They are known to be veiled and masked so it is a mystery for the Western masculine perspective to discover this creature because they cannot see her but she can see them (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 14).

In defining and visualizing Oriental women, Yegenoglu (1998) talks about latent Orientalism in a different context than Edward Said. She believes that Said never elaborated the process and mechanism by which latent Orientalism works to define Orientalism (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 23). In Yegenoglu's (1998) work she explains that latent Orientalism refers to "an almost unconscious and untouchable positivity" meaning it is about dreams, images, desires, fantasies, and fears (p. 70). Thus, according to Yegenoglu (1998), Orientalism simultaneously refers to the production of a systemic knowledge and to the site of the unconscious – desire and fantasies; it signifies that the Orient is at once an object of knowledge and an object of desire (p. 70). Moreover, latent Orientalism provides individual travelers with an enormous capacity; it is by its "unanimity, stability, and durability" that the Orientalist hegemony maintains its consistency (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 206). Latent Orientalism concerns the image and perspective of Western travelers about Orient, the way they see and interpret Oriental people. This interpretation has cultural and political factors following the development of

Western science since the enlightened era. Western science needs for its improvements subjects to be observed, explored and interpreted by naked eyes. No subject should be masked or hidden, as the information would not be complete. The subject must be naked and transparent to be identified. According to Yegenoglu (1998), Western eyes cannot see and understand veiled women. Western knowledge relies on a naked subject for understanding and obtaining pure facts about it, but this procedure cannot apply to veiled women, as “the veiled woman can see without being seen” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 43). So, the power will shift for this veiled subject, “The veil attracts the eye, and forces one to think, to speculate about what is behind it” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 44). It is through the wearing of the veil as a mask that the Oriental woman is turned into a mystery, and it brings the assumption that the real nature of these women is concealed. Their truth is disguised and they appear in a false, unreliable manner. So, “they are therefore other than what they appear to be” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 44). It is cultural inscription of the “prices political doctrine” of encountering the women of the colonized country. Veiled women are not simply an exterior target or treat, but an object or subject who are engaged with epistemologically, literally, and metaphysically. It is this textual engagement which turns the veiled woman into a metaphor for the Oriental culture. We have also seen that this engagement reveals another figure, that of the author, “the European patriarchal subjectivity which is obsessed with the veiled woman” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 51). The Western subject occupies a masculine and colonialist position in relation to its Oriental others (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 66). The voices are Western, not veiled women’s voices.

Due to the lack of information and imagination about Oriental women, Western ladies enter harems in order to fulfill the Western, masculine desire to discover Eastern

women. In this regard, European ladies in the harem supplement Western knowledge and desire by bringing the information for their male counterpart. According to Mary Harper, “the Orient is its women for many of these travelers” (as cited in Yegenoglu, 1998, p.73). In this imagery the inquiry into the Orient always includes a need to investigate its women. The Orient is comprehended in feminine terms, and this interlocking representation of cultural and sexual difference both feminizes and orientalizes the Orient. In another Oriental journey, Jean Jacques Ampere states that, “Oriental life is only found today in all its splendour within the house, where travelers cannot enter” (as cited in Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 203). Ampere also believes that to discover the Orient, one must discover its women.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, one man line of inquiry concerns what is a real representation of an Oriental woman, what is authentic? Ampere locates the “essence” of the Orient in the space of the woman, the place that men cannot enter. Thus when Western men say, “the Orient is for me, today, like a masked woman who has revealed only her face” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p.74), he cannot acquire the full knowledge of the Orient without knowing and understanding its essence, that is, its women. The witness and reporter of the Oriental women are Western, not indigenous women. Even Western women subscribe to the patriarchal agenda to expose Oriental women’s identity to the public. Western patriarchy cannot penetrate the resistance of inner space. Western male travelers believe civilization cannot enter into the inner space of the Oriental or into the essence of Oriental that is women. In this context, the Oriental will always remain mysterious.

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<sup>2</sup> Keeping in mind the focus of travelers for discovering Oriental women can be an ideology of Western patriarchy to invade those nations such as Afghanistan and Iraq for liberating women.

Furthermore, Yegenoglu (1998) and Lewis (1996) argue that, although Said mentioned in his “Culture and Imperialism” (1993) that Middle Eastern people have been dominated by Western masculinity, it is the work of critical feminism that plays a significant role in undermining this hegemonic attitude by demonstrating the “diversity and complexity of experience that works beneath the totalizing discourses of Orientalism and Middle east nationalism” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p.68). These scholars criticize Said (1979, 2003) for not fully integrating his analysis toward Orientalist perspectives of women of Middle East (p. 68). However, Yegenoglu’s (1998) criticism can be seen as the result of second wave feminism and more attention being paid to the matriarchic domination of Western colonizers over the East by critical, minority feminist scholars. In the late 20th century, feminist minority scholars expanded Said’s (1979, 2003) work in terms of genderism and sexism. Reina Lewis (1996) mentions that Said (1979, 2003) presented a “unified colonialist subject.” Lewis criticized Orientalism for its inability to address the conflicts inherent in colonialism and for lacking a sense of either the Orient’s resistance or the internal splits within Orientalism. Sara Mills cited in Yegenoglu’s (1998) book also suggests that colonialism should not be seen as a unified phenomenon, for there are diverse elements at work within Orientalism such as genderism (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 69). Therefore, feminist discourse cultivated a critique of the unified, male colonial subject.

Moreover, Yegenoglu’s (1998) work on Orientalism investigates the intersection of post-colonial theory and feminist criticism, focusing on the persistent Western fascination with the veiled women of the Orient. Because Middle Eastern women are associated with being Muslim and being veiled, they sustain inquiry from both critical

lenses. In other words, the category of Western subject is a process that constitutes identity, refers to a position or positioning, to a place or placing, and to a specific way of inhabiting a place (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 3). In this imaginary place and understanding members are constituted as subject to the Western perspective. These subjects are discussed and discovered by Western scholars, novelist, and poets in the 20th century in different institutions (Said, 2003, p. 213).

By adapting the above notion of Orientalism, I can investigate the way Iranian immigrant women graduate students challenge the hegemonic Oriental stereotype and manifest their identity using their own voices not Western voices. The challenges they encounter and solutions they offer are illuminated by examining the role of the North American nation state in portraying the Other. The minority women's perspective about Canadian society and higher education impacts how they define their identity. According to Bhabha, the issues of identity, nationality, nation state and their correlation with culture, language, discourse and narration are important to an examination of one's identity (Asgharzadeh, 2005, p. 77). Therefore, the way participants define their beliefs, culture, identity and nationality in Canadian academia has a historical background. It is significant to see how the participants integrate those parameters as part of their identity into a new environment.

### **3.1.3. Shifting in Power: From European to American in Defining Orientals**

After the Second World War, the United States of America became a key imperial power. The designation of people in the world as "Other" was replaced by the concept of the 'Third World.' This concept included Middle Eastern people, but it was extended to African and South American peoples as well. Because the war caused a new geopolitical

division in the world, the power shifted from Europe to the U.S.A., but the subjugation of Third world nations or Orientals continued in the light of the neo-liberal perspective. This perspective is more market oriented and advocates no social welfare for average people.

Chaliland (n.d.), while presenting a history of the definition of Others, claims that after World War II, leaders of the world began to speak of NATO (Western European countries, and U.S.A. and Canada) as developed and industrialized countries and the Warsaw Pact countries (the Soviet Union and its allies until 1991) as two major blocs. It was eventually pointed out that there were a great many countries that did not fit into either category, and, in the 1950s, this latter group came to be called the Third World. It then began to seem that there ought to be a "First World" and a "Second World".

Eventually, Western anthropologies and dictionaries defined Third world countries as the economically underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America.

These countries are considered as a single entity with common characteristics, such as poverty, high birthrates, and economic dependence on the advanced countries. Moreover, these countries are defined as the poorest countries in the world (Chaliand, n.d.).<sup>3</sup>

However, it is clear that the Middle Eastern countries with vast lands of oil, gas, and crucial geographical borders, and Africa with its rich mining resources, gold and jungle forests are not poor at all; rather, they are kept poor by providing the First World's needs. These countries are thus the victims of imperialist wishes.

Therefore we can see that the terms "Oriental" and "Third world" people reproduce and function interchangeably in the imperialist agenda because colonialism and racism foster a continuous perspective of neo-liberalism for capitalist imperialism.

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<sup>3</sup> This definition is supported by the imperialism, the United States, in 21 century for legitimizing its invade to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the United States of America has become an absolute imperial power over the rest of the world with its political, cultural and economic hegemony. Middle Eastern countries like, most of African and South American countries, falls under its colonial hegemony. In this light, we can investigate social construction of Iranian and Canadian society under this imperial hegemony.

### **3.2. Anti-colonial Perspective**

In any colonial country, colonialism and colonization give rise to local resistance. Therefore, this study makes use of an anti-colonial discursive framework. This framework effectively enables one to read, critique, analyze, and interrogate a combination of racist, hegemonic and colonial relationships between a colonized society such as Iran (which was indirectly colonized by France, England and the U.S.A. ) and Canada (which was directly colonized by France and England), and colonizers such as the Euro-American hegemony. This perspective deals with power relations, domination, racism, and injustice (Foucault, as cited in Rabinow, 1984), Said (1979, 2003), Bannerji (1991), and Dei (1999, 2005a, b). Who is dominated by whom? Who becomes privileged over Others and why?

Dei in 1999, offers a definition of the colonial concept, which is not simply “foreign’ or “alien,” but rather “imposed” and “dominating” (Asgharzadeh, 2005, pp. 63–64). Dei goes further for this definition and states the following,

The anti-colonial framework is a theorization of issues emerging from colonial relations, an interrogation of the configuration of power, embedded in ideas, cultures, and histories of knowledge production. The anti-colonial approach recognizes the production of locally produced knowledge emanating form cultural history and social interaction/daily experience (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001).

Thus, anti-colonial perspective encourages us to question knowledge production in society and to interrogate the nature of systems of power and domination, how dominance is produced, maintained and reproduced and how the disempowered are subjugated and kept under constant control (Asharzadeh, 2005, p. 64). In addition, important factors in power relations are racism, genderism, sexism and ethnocentrism. Race is the most effective entry point to this study. To analyze women's experience, I will integrate the anti-colonial paradigm applied to imperialism with patriarchy, which is a predominant perspective in both Middle Eastern and capitalist society. In this context, I will look at higher education as a construct of colonized institutions to produce certain knowledge and elites in both Iran and Canada.

As mentioned earlier, an anti-colonial framework also provides a common zone of resistance and struggle against the oppression and hegemony of imposed orders. It reinstates certain aspects of indigenous culture and knowledge that, as a result of colonization, have vanished. The way Iranian women graduate students integrate their culture and identity into the challenges they face in Canadian academia and society will be explored in this context. Canadian academia and society look at Oriental women, or so-called Third world women, from within a colonialist and racist paradigm. In this context, it is important to investigate participants who left a Western-dominated autocratic society such as Iran and to explore their experiences living in a dominated society such as Canada. Using this anti-colonial framework, I inquire into the power relations that historically have built Canadian society and also their implications for higher education.

### **3.2.1. Imperialism: North American Social Construction of Higher Education**

Scientists contributed to the construction of a social order based on Darwin's ideology of natural selection and fitness (Barrow, 1990). This ideology bases race differences on biology. The application of this theory to social order recognizes the white (especially) male race as superior to Others. Blacks were constructed as an inferior race and women as the inferior sex. Any race which did not fit in the superior society was excluded and marginalized. Thus, Western knowledge is produced based on the supremacy of white privilege over other races (Battiste, 2005; Das Gupta, 1995; Dei, 2005a; Fanon, 1967; Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Harding, 1995; Hoodfar, 1993; hooks, 1984; Miles, 1996; Mohanty, 1988). Needless to say, science could not advance without the help of capitalism to provide money and resources for scientific improvements. Since the mid-twentieth century, these dramatic improvements occurred through the combination of neo-liberal ideology and globalization, and became institutionalized justifications for this ideology (Apple, 2006; Barrow, 1990; Magnusson, 2005; Mohit, 2003; Nobel, 1977; Treanor, 2005).

When the United States became liberated from its colonizer Britain in 1783 ("Thirteen Colonies," n.d.), it began to adopt its liberal capitalist ideology for asserting its power over Others (Treanor, 2005). The United States started to eliminate the Church's influences from state institutions, and to integrate capital with science in order to control society and increase power (Battiste, 2005; Nobel, 1977). The industrial revolution was a motivating factor, which began in the 19th century in England and expanded throughout Western societies. To grow as a capitalist society, the United States needed power and industrial monopoly. It could not tolerate distribution of power, so American corporations

were formed and the Bank was in the core of this financial group (Barrow, 1990, pp. 12–30).

Morgan as a big investor pressured several major railroads to form cartels, so manufacturing in mining and transportation happened in a decade. 1,200 mergers took place from 1897–1905. More than 5,300 industrial firms were merged into only 318 corporations such as Standard Oil and U.S. Steel. In other words, 26 Trusts controlled 80% of industry production. Since then, cartels and trusts have increased control of business and capitalism as small businesses merge together and create an “ideal corporation” as a strategic solution to the global accumulation. This state ideology for monopolizing manpower and resources gave legitimacy to neo-imperialism, enabled the transfer of power from the church to industry and also continued the colonization of other countries from Africa to Asia. Transporting black people from Africa to the United States and colonizing their lands followed the imperialist justification of their supremacy over other races. For economic benefit, imperialism needed an ideology – neo-liberalism - to legitimize its actions. According to Treanor (2005) one of the main tenets of liberalist ideology is the inequality of talent among people, and this principle legitimizes the supremacy of one race or gender over the other. However, liberalism in its origin believes in social and human rights but because people and nation are different one is, no doubt, capable of dominating the others. This ideology was stimulated in the middle of twentieth century by the neo-liberalist perspective. Natural Science, anthropology and social science as examples of many other disciplines provided this legitimacy for subjugation over Others as inferior citizens and higher education was a construct for producing such hegemony. Thus, new citizenship is shaped through the world based on hierarchy in race,

class, gender and ethnicity (Bannerji, 1991, 1992; Cainkar, 2004; Carty, 1991; Collins, 1998; Das Gupta, 1995; Dei, 2005b; Dua, 2003; Galabuzi, 2005; Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Hoodfar, 1992, 1993; hooks, 1984, 1989; Matas, 1996; Mohanty, 1994, 2004; Ng, 2004, 2005; Pantin, 2001; Razack, 1998).

Thus, labelling and naming non-whites as Others turned into part of the literature, and provided the justification for the domination of the West over others. In the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, the Other is primarily Oriental and, specifically from the Middle East, Arab Muslims. These people were re-labelled Third World people and people of colour, and these marginalized people are not counted as actual citizens (Mohanty, 2004). As Rezai-Rashti (1995) states, in Canada's 1993 Ministry of Education Policy Memorandum 119 claimed that educational structure, policies and programs have been mainly European in perspective and have failed to take into account the viewpoints, experiences, and needs of aboriginal people, and many racial and ethno-cultural minorities (p. 89). This claim in twentieth century witnesses the continuation of racism and discrimination.

Following Rezai-Rashti (1995) who questioned the exclusion of non-white people in Canadian institutions, Henry and Tator (1994) investigate this exclusion as the result of the existence of "democratic racism" at the Canadian structural level (p. 1). They identified the conflict between social rights constitutions about people of colour (people of colour can be interchanged with Third world people) and their daily experience of racism and discrimination. Henry and Tator (1994) called this contradictory behaviour "democratic racism" (p. 1). They explain that democratic racism describes how a democratic society governed by liberal values is motivated by egalitarian values of

fairness, justice, and equality that conflict with a negative perspective towards people of colour. (p. 1). This negative image exists at an individual, organizational and systemic level. (p. 2). The Canadian government does research about those contradictory issues but the result will not make any changes in other levels (p. 9). The result of this conflict is lack of support for policies and practices designed to recognize the status of people of colour. In addition, racism – or the ways in which it constructs and manifests itself in society at any particular point in time – is fluid, dynamic and ever changing; it is affected by the social context in which it develops (Henry & Tator, 1994, p. 3). Therefore, in order to effect dramatic change there is a need to change the social, political, and economic order in the nation. The most important agent of change, however, is people's attitude. People's perspective should be changed so that they do not define non-white as the Other. People who hold such opinions must decolonized their perspective in order to end racism within the state and within the experience of people of colour or so-called Third world people.

### **3.2.2. Globalization and Its Impact on (Canadian) Higher Education**

Before addressing the globalization concept and its impact on Canadian higher education institutions, I will explore the ideological perspective behind globalization, which is neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is a popular ideology that critical writers examine to discover its effect on their different subjects (Chomsky, 2006; Magnusson, 2000, 2005; Perkins, 2004; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006).

Since the 1990s activists use the word 'neo-liberalism' for global market-liberalism (capitalism) and for free-trade policies. It is a general term that is used widely. As mentioned in previous chapter, neo-liberalism does not just apply to economics, it is a

social and moral philosophy, and in some aspects qualitatively different from liberalism. The ultimate effect of neo-liberalism is that as the rich grow richer, the poor grow poorer around the world (Treanor, 2005, p. 1).

Neo-liberalism is a philosophy that operates between 'the state' and 'the market'. This new connection is demanded by liberalism, it was a political demand and it was enforced through the state (p. 2). The philosophy of neo-liberalism is that defending the state and defending the market are not contradictory actions (Treanor, 2005, p. 3). Neo-liberalism follows liberalism, which was shaped in eighteenth century. Liberalism is a universal ideology that liberals seek to apply to entire planet and to the entire human population (Treanor, 2005, p. 4). Until 1850, there was no distinction between political and economic liberalism. After 1900, classic liberal political philosophy continued to develop as a purely conservative philosophy (p. 3). Despite these developments, for a long time the free market was considered the only cross-cultural and exportable element of liberalism. Only recently in late twentieth century have liberals advocated that African and Asian societies should become 100% liberal-democratic (p. 4). Liberals believe that the form of society should be the outcome of processes. Distribution of wealth is the result of the market, and they reject the redistribution of wealth as a goal in itself. Therefore, they reject any design or plan for society, religious, utopian, or ethical (Treanor, 2005, p. 3). As a result, they are inherently hostile to competing non-liberal societies, such as a Communist or Islamic state. Liberals define liberalism itself as 'freedom', so they rarely think consent is required for the imposition of a liberal society. According to many liberals, a war to impose a liberal-democratic society is inherently

just (p. 4).<sup>4</sup> Classic political liberals reject the idea that there are any external moral values and accept that there are only opinions that people should express in public that they term ‘market of opinions’ (p. 4). They support human rights, and leave both good and evil to express themselves. There are, however, innate differences between people due to biological theories of inequality.<sup>5</sup>

Since late twentieth century, neo-liberalism extended beyond belief, claiming that all social life should be determined by the market. Neo-liberals believe the market produces the best design for society, and it is wrong to substitute any other design. In the ideal world of market liberalism, no goods or services exist that are not the product of market forces. In addition, in the philosophy of neo-liberalism all human and social life is the product of conformity to market forces. So, there is no distinction between a market economy and a market society. There is only the market, market society, market culture, market values, and market persons marketing themselves to other market persons (p. 11). In a sense, neo-liberalism has returned to the position of early liberalism, which also combined culture, values, and ethics with economics. Therefore, neo-liberalism is the desire to intensify and expand the market by increasing the number, frequency, repeatability and formalisation of transactions. The ultimate goal of neo-liberalism is a universe where every action of every being is a market transaction, conducted in competition with every other being and influencing every other transaction, with transactions occurring in an infinitely short time, and repeated at an infinitely fast rate (p. 6). So it is, a new expansion in time and space of the market and nothing less than 24 hours activity will satisfy them. They constantly expand the market at its margins.

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<sup>4</sup> Occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan can be examined by this ideology

<sup>5</sup> This cause the continuing of racism over people of colour/Third world people

Contract maximisation is typically neo-liberal; privatization is also the same. Fewer public services, more part-time jobs, continuous work evaluation, wage cuts, less money for public services and less tax on the rich are also typical (pp. 7–8). Some employees in some work places must take psychological tests before being hired. Take an example of one of my participants in this research, Behnaz, who has studied at a masters program in Germany, applied for a job in Toronto before taking admission from one the graduate schools in Canada. Her voice is as follows,

Even you want to work in payless shoe, they asked me do you have Canadian experience? I did 3 times interview for the job in that store with different level of managers and I did an in written exam (psychological test) and finally got the job. Because I applied for university admission and I was waiting for the acceptance so I need a job for handling my life. (Behnaz, Interview, summer 2008).

The speed of trading is increased, and maximising competition and market forces are also increased. In order to minimize time spent away from the terminal, an employer measures an employee's time in the washroom, infringing on that person's right to privacy (p. 7). So, as the result of controlling and managing human life, information technology expands dramatically. Therefore, neo-liberalism is not simply an economic structure, it is a philosophy. This is most visible in attitudes to society, the individual and employment (pp. 8–9). In brief, neo-liberalism has answered philosophical questions such as 'why are we here' and 'what should I do'? We are here for the market, and you should compete (Treanor, 2005, p. 10). Consequently, a neo-liberal government

will almost certainly appeal to ‘globalization’ as a justification and legitimisation of its policies (p. 12).

When addressing the definition of globalization, most authors take it for granted that everyone knows what is it, and then they start to see its effect on their subject matter (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Magnusson, 2000; Treanor, 2005). As a general term, I adapt the definition below and then will critically expand it through my analysis,

Globalization is the system of interaction among the countries of the world in order to develop the global economy. Globalization refers to the integration of economics and societies all over the world. Globalization involves technological, economic, political, and cultural exchanges made possible largely by advances in communication, transportation, and infrastructure (“Definition of Globalization,” n.d.).

Through globalization, imperialism’s ideology since the late twentieth century, neo-liberalism, seeks to control (human) resources worldwide, including Middle Eastern countries. Globalization cannot be neutral and it enforces its political, economic and cultural hegemony over Others (Chomsky, 2006; Gills, n.d.; Lechner, 2006; Magnusson, 2000, 2005; Miles, 1996; Mohit, 2003; Morrow, 2006; Perkins, 2004; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006; Roza, 2003). It is, therefore, important to examine its role in nation building widely as well as specifically in North American society, and the impact of globalization on the structure of Canadian higher education.

As mentioned earlier the core ideology of globalization is neo-liberalism, so the contemporary debate about neo-liberalism and its agenda for dominating human resources is the foundation from which international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) are moving forward. The core idea in this post-industrial ideology (GATS over view document, n.d.; Magnusson, 2005) is that free trade and investment are supported by

WTO. Giving more power to the private sector and reducing states' power is leading towards increased oppression of low income people and especially women.

The phenomenon of corporate globalization is based on the logic of capitalism – it is the process of maintaining and expanding the process of capital accumulation.

Economic development is the core idea in the process (Chomsky, 2006; Dhruvarajan, 2004; Gills, n.d.; Lee, 2004; Magnusson, 2000, 2005; Magnusson & Bischooping, 2005; Perkins, 2004; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006, “Definition of Globalization,” n.d.). Higher education (h.ed) in its traditional form could not provide this economic development (Apple, 2006; Nobel, 1977). Modern higher education institutions are training manpower to have the technical skills to meet the demands of the market and increased competition resulting from globalization. This new strategy which started in the twentieth century in the U.S.A. expanded after the Second World War. Geiger (1993) talks about the role of globalization and privatization in American institutions turning more to privatization in 1980s, which increased tuition to reduce labour costs (p. 310). Student aid, graduate study, and the social sciences were all scaled back, and basic research barely held its own. Universities could not look to Washington for relief from their ills (Geiger, 1993, p. 311).

Universities could no longer rely upon enrolment growth, state government or federal agencies to find the additional resources needed to accommodate the expense of their intellectual activities. So universities increasingly turned to the private sector. In the 1980s, funds from the private sector were three times more than those from the public sector for educational expenses (Geiger, 1993, p. 312). Moreover, the expansion of military research which was begun under President Carter and accelerated by Reagan (in

1980s) focused on more pragmatic programs and research. They established Engineering Research Centers. In 1984, there were 14 of these centers; the purpose was to cultivate interdisciplinary research on generic topics through a relationship between universities and industries. Industry was required to contribute support, which quickly amounted to about a third of Center budgets. Smaller programs for “Industry University Cooperative Research Centers” and for “Sciences and Technology Centers” were established with the same end. Gradually, universities demonstrated their willingness to perform research for industry by establishing organized research units expressly for this purpose.

Microelectronics, biotechnology, manufacturing process, material sciences, and artificial intelligence underlined their programmatic emphasis (Geiger, 1993, p. 316). As a result, an inherent tension nevertheless existed between the commercial activities into which universities ventured and the disinterested pursuit of teaching and learning for which they ineluctably stood (Geiger, 1993, p. 320). Academic research grew more in the 1980s than before, from \$7 billion to almost \$12 billion in 1982 (Geiger, 1993, p. 320).

One university president said, “ever more massive fund drives seemed to be needed simply to maintain existing programs at satisfactory levels of quality” (Geiger, 1993, p. 325). According to Geiger, there was a contradiction between liberal education and market education in terms of curriculum and the goal of education. Students should obey market needs and the number of doctoral students doing research increased in relation to the university and industry connection. From 1960–1970, university education emphasized accessibility as well as research in order to teach people such as women, minorities, and the disabled (Geiger, 1993, p. 334). According to Geiger (1993), two paths started to develop in universities by the end of 1970s, one for research and another

for social responsibility (Geiger, 1993, p. 334). The research model was based on a national struggle for economic competitiveness, and social responsibility was for high cost, high quality education for society. Geiger continues that contemporary American research universities are sustained by society more for the usefulness of their educational and research roles than for any claims to moral leadership (Geiger, 1993, p. 336).

From Geiger's analysis we can understand that the goal of higher education shifted from curiosity and knowledge to the characteristics of capitalist education such as market interest and industrialization (Axelrod, 2002; Barrow, 1990; De Sousa Santos, 2006; Dhruvarajan, 2004; Magnusson, 2005; Reay, 2004; Rhodas & Slaughter, 2006). GATS has had an effective influence on this marketization since its creation in 1995.

The important effects of GATS are on education and health given that they are looked upon as "trade" issues. Looking at education and health issues as "trade" provides more power to the private sector and reduces "local state's power" by exceeding capitalism and putting more pressure on vulnerable people. Thus, the private sector wields more power over countries in need to establish universities, colleges, and health centers. Among the 144 members of WTO, 22 members including Canada agree on GATS, and only Japan questioned the quality of people's life, higher education and health issues in host countries (GATS over view document, n.d.). Moreover, Morrow (2006) claims that \$2 trillion is invested globally for education; however, it is not invested to educate poor people and women, but to expand technology and production through online education and online marketing. De Sousa Santos (2006) sees this hegemony in higher education as transferring power from the faculty to the

administration, and reducing face to face communication and cultural assimilation by establishing higher education in foreign, local regions.

De Sousa Santos worries about the cultural assimilation that will happen through globalization. Morrow (2006) and Lechner (2006) argue about the direction of globalization which cannot be without representation nor can it be neutral. “McDonaldization”, or “Americanization” is a fast influence of global education which is supported and applied by free trade through GATS. As a result, local culture and indigenous knowledge is invaded by GATS (De Sousa Santos, 2006; Shiva, 1993). Consequently, when local states in other countries are unable to establish higher education institutions, factories or industry, the World Bank gives them loans, and puts those countries in debt. Because they are unable to repay the debts and default on the loans, their country becomes occupied by capitalism and imperialism<sup>6</sup> (Amin, 2003; Mohit, 2003; Perkins, 2004).

From a critical political approach to analyzing the intersection of market and state interests, we realize that 80% of foreign investment in the U.S.A. is invested in 850 zones in so-called developing countries. 500 corporations in the U.S.A (Amin, 2003; Mohit, 2003) dominate internal and external markets and the World Bank also helps so-called developing countries to obtain loans for economic improvement in their local region. Many corporations have also shifted their industry from Indonesia and Singapore to poorer countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Mexico and so on, in order to pursue cheaper labor (Amin, 2003; Ault & Sandberg, 2006; Dwyer, 2006; Harrison, 2006; Mohanty, 2004; Salzinger, 2006). As cheap labour, women are more vulnerable in those zones because of the lack of insurance, holidays, and sick days. Women are oppressed

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<sup>6</sup> The occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan can be analyzed in this light.

because they fulfill multiple roles; they must provide care for children and older parents, necessitating that they work part-time, which is more beneficial for employers (Roza, 2003). According to Bakker (1994), while globalization is silent about power relations and women's experience, there is vast oppression of women through this economic, political and cultural domination. This is leading many women's organizations to resist globalization.

Magnusson (2005) in her article about the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on Canadian higher education institutions, undertakes the ideology of neo-liberalism through GATS, which applies the concept to education and health in order to commodify them and compete in international markets (p. 119). She explains that the impact of ICT is not just the expansion of technology through globalization, but is based on "the knowledge society" (Magnusson, 2005, p. 120). Higher education must adapt to the age of digitization in which the numbers of internet users continue to grow, creating new markets for good and services. In Magnusson's view, higher education is an integral aspect of new economy from "the industrial age" to the "information age," in which education and higher education play an important economic role (Magnusson, 2005, p. 120). In this regard, according to Department of Trade and Industry in Britain, "the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominate part in the creation of wealth" (Magnusson, 2005, p. 120). The marriage between "information technology" and "educational reforms" results from this perspective. GATS causes the re-education of the state's control in each local location and instead privatization gets more power to control different institutions. Thus, education as a public good has been changed to an understanding of education as a

privatized global business (Geiger, 1993; Gills, n.d.; Lee, 2004; Magnusson, 2000, 2005; Reay, 2004; Rhodaes & Slaughter, 2006). In June 2000 Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning (OKNL), which is an office of the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Community Services; and IT Cluster, adapted the “knowledge society” (Magnusson, 2005, p. 122). The main goal of OKNL is giving the world leadership to Ontario higher education institutions to produce research, support ICL and tighten the connection between education and business. In this discourse, the knowledge society overlaps with the dominant discourse in economics, sociology, management, sciences, information technology, and so on to construct a “knowledge economy” (Magnusson, 2005, p. 122). This “knowledge economy” will be replaced by the importance of local knowledge and investment in human capital. In this regard, all public sectors such as health and education must be controlled and managed by private sectors. Merrill Lynch claims that capital growth in education has been exponential, showing one of the highest earning rates of the market, 1000 pounds invested in 1996 generated 3,405 pounds four years later for an increased value of 240%; however, the London market stock exchange rate accounted on the same period was 65%. Moreover, GATS implies that commercialized education generates 365 billion dollars in profits worldwide in 2004 (Magnusson, 2005, pp. 125–126). According to the Conference Board of Canada, global demand for international higher education is set to grow from 1.9 million international students today to 7.2 million international students by 2025. In order to compete in this emerging global market, Ontario higher education “must increase marketing efforts, in joint partnership with the private sector and the federal government to ensure that Ontario remains an important educational destination for international

students” (Magnusson, 2005, p. 131). In terms of attracting international students, the United States of America have the largest percentage at 30%, then United Kingdom and Germany with 12%, Australia 10% and France 9%. By contrast Canada’s total share of postsecondary international students is less than 1% (40% of which come to Ontario institutions). Within the 30% international students in the U.S.A., 500,000 are from Asia, and 45,000 from India, but less than 1000 American students go to India (Magnusson, 2005). The misuse of international students in the host society is also evident in my current research. For example, Naheed, who is an international student and studies in a male-dominated program, states that, “In my school, professors misuse international students, I am lucky that my supervisor is good but I know most of the students in here work hard but get a little money for their work. They are under pressure for doing lots of research by their supervisor” (Naheed, Interview, summer 2008).

This is as the result of a change in the social construction of Canadian society and education from a Keynesian welfare state to neo-liberal ideology (Magnusson, 2000, 2005). Canadian higher education attempts to compete in national and international markets. For example, under the conservative government in 1995s, Mike Harris called a “Common Sense Revolution,” (CSR) which at the core of this revolution is a macro-level policy focusing on reducing the deficit through a major decrease into the size of government and government expenditures. These cuts include a 15% reduction in total allocations to higher education and a 10% increase in tuition in universities in 1995, and the CSR policy gave colleges and universities leeway to increase tuition and accept more international students paying higher tuition (Jones, 1997). As a result of the reduction in government funding for higher education, institutions put more pressure on students and

families to shoulder the extra expense. In 35 years, tuition fees have increased twice as fast as inflation (Graduate Student's Union, 2009–2010). In this regard, if for example a student in 1980 worked 40 hours a week over the summer at minimum wage (\$3.50) to pay his fees (\$698 in law school tuition fees), the same student if studying in the same discipline in 2008 would have to work at a minimum wage job (\$8.75) all year and could still not afford his/her tuition fees (\$20,155). Thinking about this small example gives us the sense why 70% of potential students in Canadian society cannot attend higher education (Graduate Student's Union, 2009–2010).

In addition, in capitalist higher education, the quality of work is not much important than quantity. For example, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate schools, conference presentations, publications, etc. are much important than the student's life, experience, quality of knowledge and skills in higher education. However, as the number of students increases services are decreased and tuition is increased.

Following the expansion of WTO and GATS agenda, Iran is also forced join to WTO and GATS as a Middle Eastern country (Aslan & Bhala, 2010). Gradually, Iran allocated 80% of its industry to the private sectors. The privatization process caused tremendous debate among Iranian intellectuals and activists and prevented the state's leaders from joining the WTO and World Bank in this regard. However, more private higher education centres were established but, because of excessive tuition and extreme censorship in universities, people preferred to study abroad and spend their money in Western societies. Iranian women as the second gender oppressed in their culture and religion are also more subjugated under free trade; addiction and prostitution increases as

well as the education rate. So, Iranian women are not an exception in this global exploitation. According to Bakker (1994), when examining a local situation we have to observe global and macro perspectives as well. Thus, Iranian women encounter multiple forms of oppression from their own sexist and patriarchal society as well as from a worldwide global oppression of women as Other.

Alongside globalization, imperialism needs war and violence to secure resources necessary for economic imperialism (Amin, 2003; Chomsky, 2006; Lee, 2004; Miles, 1996; Mohanty, 2004; Mohit, 2003; Roza, 2003). This agenda can bring economic profit even in deconstruction and reconstruction of countries. For example, United States corporations have contributed to the deconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 and 2001, respectively, and also contributed in building schools for them. The consequence of this vast invasion is the degradation of Middle Eastern people in the media and public representation. With the increased proliferation of Orientalism in the post-9/11 era, imperial interests and alliances have worked to vilify Muslim people and perpetuate a negative image of them in the media (Mohit 2009, 2010; Yenigun, 2004; Zine, 2004). Indeed, Iran is widely understood as belonging to the “axis of evil” (Bush, n.d.). It should be of no surprise then that in the midst of these neo-Orientalist discourses circulating with increased vigour, the presence of Iranian women in Canadian society is met with suspicion and racism. The deployment and reinforcement of these neo-Orientalist and racist constructions have influenced citizenship and assisted in the creation of an institutionalized barrier based on state-supported racism and other forms of oppression. For example, in this research Maheen, who studies in a master’s program, complains that when she brought up her experience in Iran in her graduate class, the instructor told her

“You are from a county that your experience is not related to here and to our subject” (Maheen, Interview, summer 2008). Obviously, this exclusion in academia exemplifies the racism and discrimination faced by the participants. According to Dei (Samuel, 2005) we need to understand that racism is a structural problem, and furthermore that everyone is implicated in it. Racism, as Giroux (Samuel, 2005) notes, is “reproduced through multiple acts of exclusions, inferiorization, or marginalization that are sustained by an ideological system and by a set of attitudes that legitimate difference and dominance” (p. x). For a concrete example, the rising unemployment rates among racialized groups raise serious questions about how our educational institutions can prepare bodies for social participation and true citizenship. Dei continues that we must always connect identity and knowledge production with power. The ‘success’ that academe is enjoying in marketizing education constructs student bodies as mere commodities for the globalized economy. This is rooted in the degree to which students are able – and willing to – physically, emotionally, and psychologically negate their difference in order to pass for what the culture declares to be ‘normal’ (Samuel, 2005, p. xi). This statement gets more significant attention when we examine it in the context of neo-liberal capitalist higher education as the result of GATS and globalization.

If we adapt Dei’s analysis about racism and expand it in the era of globalization, we realize that globalization increases global insecurity and, as a result, global immigration increases. As the number of immigrant people increases, higher education becomes more involved in treating those people as a site of training and education. It is sad to see educated and well experienced women who emigrate from the Middle East continually see the hegemony of the Orientalism paradigm within their home country

(such as Iran) and host country (Canada). In this context, immigrant Iranian graduate women constantly question their own identity and belonging in new environment.

### **3.3. Anti-racist (Feminist) Perspective**

Because “racism” is integral to the creation of an Oriental and colonial perspective, in this section I want to explain my definition and understanding of this important notion in order to clearly connect it to feminism, colonialism and Orientalism. Additionally, the focus on women’s issues in terms of social justice and equity leads me to use a feminist anti-racist paradigm. Without a feminist perspective, this research would be incomplete. The following pages outline the integration of a feminist perspective to the anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives in order to achieve a comprehensive analysis. Without having an anti-racist perspective, feminism falls into a liberal analysis that the majority of Western feminists fall into (Caplan, 1993; Dua, 2003; Razack, 1998; Yegenoglu, 1998). Moreover, using integrative analysis helps us to see the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity and so on (Dei, 1999; Ng, 2004; Wane, 2004). Moreover, it also helps us to see the integration of education and experience in women’s awareness, oppression and liberation. It is an important distinction from other theorists that I am using an integrative, anti-racist, feminist perspective to contextualize and give voice to Iranian women’s experience and education.

Anti-racist feminist pedagogy has always recognized the importance of racialized experience in the classroom and public sphere. Questions of the politicization of individuals along race, gender, class and sexual parameters are at the very center of knowledge produced in women’s and ethnic studies programs (Bannerji, 1991; Hoodfar, 1992). So, this critical pedagogy supports the idea that the “individual is political”

(Bannerji, 1991; Pantin, 2001) in the sense that the way that we treat each other is influenced by our social location.

Race, as Dei (1999, 2005b) has argued, is a social relational category that may be defined “by socially selected physical characteristics,” whereas ethnicity is defined more in terms of socially selected cultural characteristics. In Ng’s (2005) definition of ethnicity she explains that, in the Canadian context, any non-British or French culture counts as an ethnic group. Moreover, race has relational, physiological, internal, external, and interactive components. Each of these components maybe regarded as a site for domination and oppression on the basis of their real, perceived or imagined distinctions. Lopes identifies four important features through which race is socially constructed,

First, humans rather than abstract social force produce races. Second, as human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that included gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly. Finally, races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation. (Asgharzadeh, 2005. p. 72)

So racism can change quickly from one marker to another marker. Racism may be defined as injustice toward one group from another group in terms of class, gender, religion, languages and so on; it varies from one subject to another and from one location to the other places. Dua (2003) in her quotation of Stasiulis questioned the analytical use of skin colour as a demarcation of racism. She says it limits the concept of racism. Dua (2003) adds if we limit ourselves to the definition based on skin colour we ignore the structural location of the particular groups of women in concrete social relations; it ignores different kinds of racism, especially those built on language, religion and other cultural markers. This also treats women of colour as a homogenous category, so it fails to address that women of colours are located in a variety of class positions. (Dua, 2003, p.

20). In addition, Dua (2003), like Magnusson (2000, 2005, Magnusson & Bischooping, 2005), adapts the political economy approach to examine the process of discrimination on the intersection of race, class, and gender in analysis of nation state.

Adapting the definition of race followed by Lopes (Asgharzadeh, 2005) and Dua (2003), I will go further in my definition of racism like Asgharzadeh. Asgharzadeh (2005) identifies domination from individuals, groups, communities, and institutions based on cultural and physiological differences,

Skin color; racial heritage, hair texture,  
Cultural differences; language, customs, behaviour, clothing, eating  
Ideological difference; religion, political affiliation,  
Belief Original nationality; place of birth, and labelling as third world people,  
Oriental, Indian, African, Arab, Iranian and so on (Asgharzadeh, 2005, p. 72)

As a result, an anti-racist feminist perspective provides us with a framework to examine women's exclusion from various aspects of society. In other words, anti-racist feminism as a body of writing attempts to integrate the way race and gender function together in various shapes of structuring social inequality. Canadian anti-racist feminism stems from women of colour's willingness to strive for equality within a racialized society and the feminist movement (Dua, 2003, p. 9). The following pages use an (integrative) anti-racist feminist perspective as a basic and fundamental discourse that examines how the Other is shaped in Canadian society and higher education.

### **3.3.1. Integrative Anti-racist Feminist Perspective toward Others**

The imperial concepts of Others is criticized by feminists such as Arat-Koc (2005); Bannerji (1991); Caplan (1993); Hoodfar (1993, 1992), hooks (1984, 1989); Lord (1984); Mohanty (1988, 2004), Ng (2005); Razack (1998), Shiva (1993) and others in terms of the necessity of space for the production of new kinds of knowledge and for

deconstructing imperialist definitions. Local people should be aware of the power of naming of their cultural assimilation, as well as their identity integration (Bannerji, 1991). We have to be aware of colonial role in assimilating the indigenous knowledge of Third world countries (Caplan, 1993, Razack, 1998). However, this has also happened in Western countries by state domination of the market over people. Western people are also colonized by the state in order not to question the state's strategy for hegemony over Others. This has to happen because in the absence of cultural assimilation, no country or people could become a good consumer for Western imperialism. Assimilation happened through devaluing indigenous knowledge and local cultures (Shiva, 1993).

During colonization, white, male, middle-class people got control and domination over other people. In any colonized country fossils of colonialism lay everywhere since they are so effectively internalized (Bannerji, 1991). This internalization is so strong that the identity of local people is changed in the direction of Westernization without consciousness toward it. Consequently, Others are socially and politically made not born (de Bouviour as cited in Condrary, 2001; Ng, 2005, Razack, 1998; Spelman, 1988).

Following the critiques of Western thought in defining and subjugating Others, Amos and Parmar (1984) argue that some Western feminists claim that imperialism is progressive for "underdeveloped nations." By this statement Western feminism "looks at third world women as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism" (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Razack, 1998; Yegenoglu, 1998). This view is rooted in the Orientalist perspective that most Western feminists apply when analyzing the racialized minority body. Amos and Parmar (1984), however, criticize Western feminism for not being familiar with traditions outside of their own

cultures; feminism is rooted in Western women's superiority of race, class, religion, language, tradition, and culture over Other women (Razack, 1998). The privilege is constructed based on the perceived superiority of the white over non-white races. According to hooks (1984) in the book "from center to margin," much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the centre, whose perspectives rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a result, Western feminist theory lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences. Although feminist theorists are aware of the need to develop ideas and analysis that encompass a larger number of experiences - to unify rather than polarize, such theory is complex and slow in formation.

In order to contextualize marginalized voices, we must consider who are representative of the margin. How do we know the feminists who raise excluded voices do not interfere by adding their interest or desire to marginalized voices? From one side Western feminists criticize the margin based on their white privilege, and from the other local scholars should have anti-racist and anti-colonial perspectives to avoid ignoring true voices. For example, observing the work of Iranian scholars such as Mojab (1998, 2000) and Moghissi (1999) shows that the main concern of Iranian women is criticizing political Islam - a dominant ideology within that region; however, the interconnection between political Islam and Imperialism is absent in their work. Furthermore, the characteristics of Middle Eastern women - their identity, desire, culture - are mainly absent from their work, and how these identifications are constructed and reconstructed historically is also ignored. Mojab (1998), however, analyzes the presence of British imperialism in the Arab region and its influence on adult education and literacy. She did

not go further to analyze Iranian society, and the influence of the Euro-American perspective toward Iranian social construction before revolution and after. In light of the war between Iraq and Iran, the Gulf War, 9/11, and recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, analysis of the interconnection between the American empire and political Islam is crucial to a discussion of how religious patriarchy and empire work hand in hand to subjugate women. According to Wane (2004), we need to engage in self-critique and encourage the examination and evaluation of our social status, values, beliefs, privileges and oppressions in order to observe the source of oppression. Thus, it is necessary for domestic scholars to examine their own privilege as representatives of their local people. Without having an anti-racist theory even domestic scholars fall into liberal and imperial analysis.

Mohanty (2004), a well-respected anti-racist feminist scholar, foregrounds Third world women as an analytical and political category because of the histories and struggles of Third world women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism and monopoly capital. By considering this definition she states that scholars often locate Third World women in terms of the underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and overpopulation of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries. These analyses freeze Third world women in time, space, and history. A number of scholars in the U.S.A. have written about the inherently political definition of the term “women of colour” (a term often used interchangeably with Third world women, especially in England and the U.S.). This term is a socio-political designation of people of African, Caribbean, Asian and Latin American descent; native peoples of the U.S.A ; new immigrants; and in the last

three decades, Arab, Korean, Thai, and Laotian. However, the socio-political definition of each of the terms Western feminists use (“women of colour” or “Third world women”) carries the questions of gender and race that took on a new significance at the turn of the century (Mohanty, 2004, p. 47).

Western feminists categorize all Third world women in five specific ways in which they are powerless and victims of particular socioeconomic systems. Women are viewed as victims of male violence (Fran Hosken), victims of the colonial process (Maria Cultrufelli), victims of the Arab familial system (Juliette Minces), victims of the economic development process (Beverley Kinsday and the liberal WID School), and finally, victims of the Islamic code (Patricia Jeffery) (Mohanty, 1988). However, in this analysis none of the authors analyzes the complexity of imperialism, patriarchy and tradition in women’s oppression. While Bannerji (1991) criticized the influence of colonizers in the colonized area and the internalization of cultural assimilation on people’s lives, she is silent about “cultural indoctrinate” by media in Western societies. So, Western people are absorbed in their state’s ideology and reproduce the hegemony over Others. They claim the Others cannot protect themselves and are in need of help, so colonizers occupied regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq in twenty-first century to import “liberty and freedom”. This hegemony is in keeping with Mohanty’s (2004) observation that the colonial notion of the “English Gentleman” - an imperial ruler who is a white, male, self-disciplined protector of women and morals - gradually transforms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries into a Euro-American protector who rules and defines colonized men and women incapable of self-government. This neo-liberal ideology transformed the face of North American society from a welfare society to a

capitalist one, especially after the Second World War. Consequently, people/women in American society as well as in Canada have to live without questioning the state's strategy. It is an ideology that legitimizes the exclusion of non-white people from particular areas of social and economic life, simultaneously promoting a tolerance of these inequalities on the part of the ruling class (Magnusson, 2000; Mohanty, 1988).

This ideology shapes a new form of citizen locally and globally who is a good consumer for capitalism. Then, citizenship and immigration laws, and social policies connect to economic agendas in the search for cheap labour. These state practices are fixed in the institutions of slavery, capitalist neo-colonialism, and, more recently, monopoly and multinational capitalism. Thus, racism is often the product of a colonial situation, although it is not limited to it. Blacks and Latinos in the U.S., Asians and West Indians in Britain and Canada, and North Africans in France all share similarly oppressive conditions and the stature of second-class citizens (Mohanty, 2004, p. 74).

By this new strategy the notion of citizenship created by bourgeois liberal capitalism which is predicated on an impersonal bureaucracy and a "hegemonic masculinity" organizes around the themes of rationality, calculation, and orderliness (Mohanty, 2004, p. 74). Through this social process the concept of the Other is institutionalized within the colonial society.

Therefore, it is a shift from racism in imperial territory, from nineteenth-century slavery to twenty-first century indirect or invisible slavery in the name of citizenship. In other words, race is a primary consideration in the definition of ideas of "citizenship" and the regulation of citizenship through immigration laws. According to Ng (2004) it is naïve to investigate women's status as an immigrant category than as a non-immigrant. It

is a gender relationship that is indicated by a social process whereby people are transformed –made into immigrant women. Through this social process, racism and sexism and other “isms” are normalized in the society such that no one thinks it is racism anymore (Bannerji, 2002; Henry & Tator, 1994; Razack, 1998; Ng, 2004). We need to critique stereotyping and common sense racism. According to Henry and Tator (1994), Lawrence uses the term “common sense” for the first time in 1982. Henry and Tator (1994) continue that “Common sense racism” does not have any theoretical support it simply indicates “the practical struggle of everyday life of the popular masses” (p. 4). In Canada, the question “where are you from?” is typical, but is this question asked because of supremacy of white race over the Other races? Because of the privilege of white normalcy in comparison to Others’ ethnic groups?

According to Ng (2005) the term ethnic group is used primarily to refer to immigrants from non-British and non-French backgrounds (p. 6). From an anti-racist feminist perspective this terminology is used in a so-called multicultural society such as Canada in order to show minority culture is a sub-culture of the dominant white culture.

Moreover, the concept of citizenship and belonging to a host society will be highlighted through the immigration process. A woman’s identity is not limited to one aspect of her personality, it varies with her race, class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and so on, all of which are embodied in her identity. In order to address the challenges of women’s experiences given all these parameters, integrative anti-racism will, according to Dei (2005a), Ng (2004), Wane (2004), be a more comprehensive theory.

According to Dei (2005a), our multiple identities and subject positions affect our existence. Dei adds that Russo quotes Evelyn Glenn that our individual “histories and

experiences are not just diverse, they are intertwined and interdependent” (p. 17). Integrative anti-racist studies address the problem of discussing the social constructs of race, class and gender as exclusive and independent categories. Integrative anti-racism is an activist theory and analysis that must always be consciously linked to struggles against oppression. It acknowledges our multiple, shifting and often contradictory identities and subject positions. Its effects are multiplicative, rather than additive, analyses of social oppression because additive analysis denies the complexity of experiences that can and must be examined, explained and addressed. Razack (1998) asserts that it is important to explore in a historical and site-specific way the meaning of race, class, disability, sexuality and gender as they come together to place women in different and shifting positions of power and privilege. Razack continues that white feminist artists feel they are perceived as inferior in the world of European art due to their gender and believe that they subvert the patriarchal perspective, meanwhile they are themselves a cultural producer for colonizing the Other. According to Razack (1998) these complex operations of hierarchies of gender and race in hegemonic systems illustrates the central importance of understanding how various systems interlock to produce specific effects. For example, in this research Sarah, who studies in a master’s program, has challenges at her work place due to her multiple identity. She identifies herself, as Muslim, Iranian, woman, practicing hijab, with certain accent, and culture. She finds this identification very challenging at work and school. She states the following,

In my work place, my colleagues looked at me and asked me, “Are you in a master’s program?” And I said, “Yes, I am,” and they said, “Oh, oh, YOU, YOU!” with a surprised tone. Again they asked, “Are you in a master’s

program?” And I said, “Yes, I am.” And they said, “It is impossible.” (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Integrative anti-racism provides an understanding of how different forms of social oppression and privilege have been historically constituted, and how forms of social marginality and structured dominance intersect and shift with changing conditions in society. In the above quotation Sarah is a victim of a racist structured work place that includes white women who also produce racism over racialized body. Such interactions also occur between minority ethnic groups and the other racialized ethnic groups who do not have privilege. So, based on hierarchy of privilege and condition, racism, genderism and other forms of “isms” are reproduced.

As a result, we need a space for the critique and the production of new kinds of knowledge. This knowledge should be part of an anti racist feminist ontology and epistemology which can be called “communities of knower” or “alternative vision” in actual epistemic practices in society (Bunch, 2002; Dua, 2003; Miles, 1996). Moreover, according to Ng (2004) for eliminating racism and sexism and other “isms,” we have to reflect on how we unwittingly participate in courses of action that implicate us in the perpetuation of acts of oppression. This reflection must be situated in a larger collective vision of an alternative social arrangement to the one we have at present (p. 16). In this research, Iranian women graduate students’ experience and knowledge can be part of this knowledge production that can be examined and analyzed through integrative anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist perspective.

### 3.4. Summary

In this research, I do not study Iranian women graduate students as a simple identity and location. Multiple facets of identity have been examined. To analyze the research questions, I have used complex critical theoretical frameworks. From one side, Iran is known as a Middle Eastern country and, especially after the revolution, as a Muslim country, so it is considered in Western societies as an Oriental society. However, a socio-capitalist society such as Canada also has to be analyzed based from an anti-racist and anti-colonial perspective. Because of the Canadian social structure, it is important to see the construction of Others in its domain. Integrative anti-racist feminist perspective has been used to focus on women's issues, their historical subjugation and the linkages between imperialism and patriarchy in marginalizing them. Without considering the micro perspective (Iranian graduate students) in a macro one (combination of theoretical framework), the research is oversimplified because the multiple factors in women's subjugation are not investigated. A global understanding of how race is constructed and applied historically is useful for understanding how citizenship through immigration law is shaped locally and globally. Investigating this process of nation-state formation helps us to see the roots of racism and oppression over racialized bodies.

Because of the increasing number of Iranian educated immigrant women in Canadian society, it is essential to understand the Western concept or construct of Oriental women and the genesis of this "Western worldview" through two centuries. Spivak in her post-colonial critique in 1990 very aptly points out that if you are constructed in one particular kind of language, in this case, the "language of Orientalism", "what kinds of violence does it do to one's subjectivity if one has to move

into another language and suppress whatever levels or subjectivists were constructed by the first?" (Keshavjee, 2004, p. 40). So the crucial point for Iranian women graduate students in this context is how they can mitigate challenges in a new environment. Is their historical background in Iran in terms of education and socialization compatible with Canadian education and society? The way they see this process will be heard by their own voices in this research.

Following chapter will discuss the methodology and the methods of this research. The importance of qualitative research is examined following the theoretical framework for supporting the methodology and method of this thesis research in chapters four.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods**

### **4.1. The Importance of Qualitative Research**

I employed qualitative research methods to study the lives of women graduate students who came to Canada either on their own or with their families as immigrants or international students from Iran. Since this is a multidisciplinary study about Iranian women in terms of their culture, ethnicity, religion, language, and nationality, qualitative research is the most appropriate paradigm to address and preserve this complexity. A qualitative research procedure produces people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour, and lends itself to individuals in their settings holistically, without violating their experience and life (Keshavjee, 2004, pp. 118–119). The other advantage of a qualitative method lies in its ability to produce depth, complexity and roundedness to social explanation, rather than broad survey patterns. In addition, this method allows participants greater freedom and control in the interview than is permitted with structured approaches (Thomas-Long, 2006, p. 74).

Furthermore, narrative inquiry allows participants to explore their ideas while the researcher interprets their understanding. This storytelling by participants also helps them to find their identity and gives meaning to their experience and education.

The experience of Iranian immigrant women graduate students in a Canadian educational setting and environment is a fundamental aspect of the research process. Their past education and experience can enhance their present and future life, so the role of Canadian graduate school is significant in this context. Qualitative research emphasizes the fact that any phenomenon has meaning only within a context that illuminates its past, gives its current location, and indicates its future trends (Keshavjee,

2004, p. 125). Qualitative research also portrays a phenomenon's main relationships to its environment, its history, its development, and its underlying assumptions, all of which directly relate to the nature of this research. This method also makes it possible to reflect on my position as a graduate student in Canadian graduate school and society.

#### **4.2. Standpoint Theory**

The methodology of this research is “standpoint theory,” which is a critical feminist approach for validating marginalized and ignored women's voices advocated by Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Hilary Rose, Alison Jaggar, Sandra Harding; and bell hooks (Harding, 1995, p. 103; Thomas-Long, 2006, p. 68). This methodology addresses the issues of whose questions are being asked and whose problems have been resolved? bell hooks in 1990 and Dorothy Smith in 1987 started from the local and everyday experiences of their subjects (Thomas-Long, 2006, p. 69). To this practice Dua (2003) brings Bannerji's idea in 1995 that in standpoint theory we have to go beyond women's inclusion. Bannerji claims that, in order to know the culture of advanced capitalism, we have to start from ourselves, “once again I must begin from myself. From my body as a political signifier” (Dua, 2003, p. 18). Through this approach, a new form of knowledge is constructed which is insightful for policy makers interested in social change and justice.

Moreover, the integration of experience and knowledge is a key concept that can lead to women's liberation. Since a major struggle for marginalized women is to voice their experiences publicly, this process according to Harding is a “cry for survival” and liberation (1995, p. 104). To evolve from survival to social justice demands social political change, which is desired both locally and globally in Canadian society. Like

anti-racist theory, standpoint theory also questions the role of state and societal institutions in producing and reproducing inequalities with specific emphasis on gender. According to Dei and Calliste in 2000, universities produce labour forces through a process of gender, race and class positions (Thomas-Long, 2006, p. 69). Thus, it is a crucial ontological and political act for marginalized women to voice their experience; an act that makes them into the kind of people who can make knowledge and history for social change.

Standpoint theory opposes mainstream thought which is rooted in supremacy of Western women over Others. This theory can be analyzed in a larger picture of anti-racist and anti-colonial perspectives because both countries, Canada and Iran, directly were colonized by France and England, and the United States, respectively. Furthermore, similar standpoint theory, the anti-racist feminist paradigm locates investigators alongside the investigated, taking into account their social, political, racial, economic, and sexual situation, power and privilege (Code, 2002, p. 426). Thus, in this research I, as an investigator coming from the same location as the subjects investigated, will adopt standpoint theory for contextualizing Iranian immigrant women graduate students' voices in Canadian academia.

### **4.3. Selecting the Topic**

There are some factors for choosing the topic. As I am studying in an interdisciplinary program for higher education and women's studies, I decided to take this opportunity to research women's place in higher education. But who are these women and where are they living? After two years researching the subject, encountering huge difficulties finding an appropriate supervisor, and becoming familiar with critical

feminist theory and methodology, I suddenly looked within myself and listened to my heart. I asked myself, “Why not examine the experiences of graduate students like myself? Of women who can easily connect and feel and understand their own voices? Of first-generation immigrant women from my own nationality? Women like myself!” I realized that this research is one of the best opportunities for me to contextualize Iranian women’s voices. Meanwhile I can learn from my participants while sharing my own experiences with them, thus releasing and liberating myself from all the oppression I had in graduate school.

The other reason for choosing the topic was the increasing hatred towards Middle eastern people/women (Zine, 2004) in North American society after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. I did not wish this to be a distant issue in my research; I wanted to feel it with all my being, to explore it with the full impact of my education, capacity and interest. By fully realizing this intention within the research topic, every aspect of the work became valuable to me as part of my growing and learning, which is the main purpose of education (Axelrod, 2002). Moreover, statistics of Canada show the increasing number of female immigrants enrolled in graduate schools. Thus, contextualizing their voices has two benefits, one is for future graduate students to hear the experiences of past students. Mahvashin her interview states the following,

My feeling now is I did not have balance in my academic life. If I could have controlled it, it would have been much better. If I could have spent much more time with my daughter, it would have been much better. If I had a chance now I would approach graduate school differently. My life was imbalanced for at least nine years and more. It was not good for any of us, my daughter, my husband and

me. Even if everything is fine now with my husband and daughter, *but my feeling is that I lost something*. I would have liked to have spent more time with my daughter. From when she was 2 years till 11 years, I was not fully with her. I could not fulfill my role as a mother (italic added) (Interview, summer 2008).

Although Mahvashis employed in a top position and has outstanding income, the impact of graduate school on her entire life was remembered and uncompensated. She says that if she were to do it now, she would use a different approach to ensure balance in her school and personal life. This is an important point in Mahvash's words that recall hooks notion of the way we can achieve balance in our life. hooks (1989) states that "feminist pedagogy helps people/students look at themselves and the world around them, critically, analytically for providing unity of heart, mind, body and spirit." She adds, "Our experience is not a real world, if it oppresses us we have to change it, we have to make a revolutionary feminist pedagogy where we focus on phenomena around us, see them and critiques them" (p. 49). So, we need a space for the critique and the production of new kinds of knowledge. Thus, sharing women's experiences is a way of producing knowledge for future students to be more conscious about their challenges in graduate school and to take appropriate action for success and balance in their life. The other benefit is for policy makers. They can use such testimony for the effective inclusion of racialized minorities and to institute change and justice within school and society.

#### **4.4. Researcher's Role**

To address the question of where do we stand and from what location do we look at this phenomenon (Spelman, 1988), I will look at Iranian immigrant women's experiences in Canadian graduate school and society at the present time, but I will not

fragment them from their past. This research will be analyzed in a micro and macro perspective because as a critical feminist I have to look at their challenges from a macro level in the context of social construction of Canadian society and higher education.

I see the location of Iranian women in a historical process spanning their own history, tradition and religion from home country to Canadian society. Western or secular feminists outside of Iran homogenize all Iranian women as uneducated, illiterate, and victimized (Arat-Koc, 2005; Hoodfar, 1993; Mohanty, 1988), stereotypes that constitute a prolonged subjugation for them even after immigrating to Canada. In addition, women's location in each society is fully integrated with nation state in that era. The ontological perspective of the nation state has tremendous influence on women's "identity," "location," and the feel of "belonging" to the society. In this complex process we can examine how women's identity and location is socially constructed (Spelman, 1988), because social representations and symbols that derive from gender differences are numerous, widespread, and powerful. Moreover, the opposition between individualism and collectivism, secularism and the religious state generates more complexity for Iranian immigrant women graduate students as they adapt to a new environment.

My location as an insider and outsider in the research is both problematic and significant. From one side, I am part of this population and can feel their challenges and struggles, I am within them. I am not like a stranger who does not feel what they are saying (Said; 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). As a researcher, however, I am equipped with academic theory and paradigm for social analysis. I can use anti-racist feminist perspective to see the roots of oppression and marginalization, and integration or assimilation inside and outside of Iran and Canada.

The complexity of qualitative research allows a researcher to control her data analysis ethically, to be honest with herself and others about her own preconceived notions (Thomas-Long, 2006). Subjectivity is not negative, because it helps you to process your interview and analyze it. For example, if a participant was hesitant to talk about being discriminated against based on her religion, language and so on, when I shared my own experience in Canadian graduate school, she would feel comfortable and disclose her own pain. So, coming from the same background, my personal experience of graduate school put me in a much better position to generate trust, sharing and emotional expression than if the interview was conducted by an outsider (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 96; Thomas-Long, 2006, p. 82).

My location in this academic journey is complex, I am an educated Iranian woman who has experience and education in Iranian society, was witness to the Iranian revolution and war, left my home country to find a “safe zone” (Collins, 1998), and also am a mother and student with English language as a second language. My goal was to look at this “safe zone” in order to find my “identity” and my “location” in this world. Having a very positive image of Canada led me to move from a so called Islamic state to a socio-capitalist society to achieve such goal. In this academic research I can see myself much more realistically through contextualizing Iranian immigrant women graduate students’ voices.

#### **4. 5. Research Design and Method**

I conducted eleven semi-structured in-depth and open-ended interviews with Iranian immigrant women graduate students in the summer of 2008. These women were in Canadian graduate schools after 2001, the date of attack of the Twin Towers in 9/11 in

New York City. The interviews were conducted while the women were still in graduate school or had recently finished and started working their own professional jobs.

The forum allowed women to talk freely and to raise their ideas about the challenges they encountered in Canadian graduate school and society as well as from family and community. I recruited participants through the snow ball technique using academic networks. The data collection included cities in Ontario province of Canada. To recruit in other cities, contact was made by email or telephone call, and then the interview was conducted by phone. Further correspondence was done by regular mail or email.

#### **4.6. Participants**

Interviews were conducted with eleven Iranian immigrant women graduate students who already held a degree from an Iranian university. In order to preserve confidentiality, I state their personal information in general terms. These immigrant women students were between 26 and 55 years of age. They differed in marital status from single to (re)married to divorced, with and without children. Five out of the eleven women graduate students were studying in a doctoral program while three of these doctoral students had started a master's program and then continued on to a doctoral and post doctoral program. So, six out of eleven women were studying in a master's program. In general, in this research the women were studying a variety of subjects ranging from education, health, humanities, science, to engineering. In contrast to the notion of a shortage of women especially Middle eastern ones in engineering programs, five out of the eleven participants were studying in an engineering program – master's or Ph.D. All the married couples were living together. The husbands had at least a master's degree or a doctoral degree, or they were also a graduate school student in a Canadian institution of

higher education. All of the participants were from a middle-class family and they were still connected to their families in Iran. These women started graduate school at minimum immediately after entering Canada to maximum after thirteen years.

Participants in this research came to Canada as international students or landed immigrants. Their status as international or immigrant students did not conflict with the purpose of the research, as after a short time these international students also applied for permanent residence in Canada. Although they chose to pursue their education in Canadian graduate school, they were keenly aware of lack of Canadian experience and education which stopped them from working in their chosen professions. In this regard Eli says the following,

One of the main problems in Canada is the demand for Canadian experience. And I noticed it at the beginning of my entry into Canada. Even if you want to work in a place such as “Payless Shoe”, they asked me if I had Canadian experience. I did 3 interviews for the job in that store with different level of managers and I did a written exam (psychological test) before finally getting the job. Because I had applied for university admission and was waiting for the acceptance letter, I needed a job to financially support myself (Interview, summer 2008).

These women were from the first generation of immigrants. The story of first-generation immigrants who are not familiar with North American school and society is more complicated than that of second or first and half generations. Mazzuca (2000), in her research about the experiences of second-generation Italian women graduate students in Canadian academia, investigated the challenges of these women whose their parents were not familiar with the Canadian educational system. She describes how the lack of

adaptability and integration of parents into the Canadian educational system impacted their children on their educational journey. The situation becomes even worse when it is the story of a first generation immigrant in the Canadian educational system, as is the case of the Iranian women in this research. First-generation immigrants who are not familiar with the system and come from Eastern society which does not have many similarities with Western society encounter an even more complicated situation. The negative image of Middle Eastern women compounds this complexity. In this research, among the eleven interviewees, only one of them spent her adolescent schooling in Western society. So, she did not have much difficulty with the Western academic atmosphere and her problem, in her own opinion, was more theoretical than administrative. Ashraf says, "I was familiar with the system, my only challenges was my excitement in learning. Challenges for me was mainly ideological than administrative" (Interview, summer 2008).

As a result, this research with its diverse participants in terms of program, marital statuses, ages, and perspectives can be a starting point for contextualizing first-generation, educated Iranian women's voices in Canadian graduate school.

#### **4.7. Designing Questions**

The significant point in this research is that my own characteristics matched those of the participants. Moreover, because I am active within the Iranian community and involved in lots of gatherings that include Iranian graduate students, I knew the major questions and challenges facing these women. Therefore, in designing the questions, I used my own experience as the basis for the pilot questions and I applied a holistic approach to know women's experience in Canadian school and outside of it. I identified a

main theme and then established other themes based on it. The main theme was the experiences of Iranian immigrant graduate women students in Canadian school, the way they got to know the school and any issues related to it such as choosing courses; relationships with classmates, teachers, supervisors; and more. The focus was if they felt part of the school system and that the school was not taking advantage of their money and their ethnicity as tokenism. In order to address this main theme we had to know who these women are. With what education, experience and reLeilan did they come to graduate school? How did they negotiate different dimensions of their lives such as family relationships, Canadian society, Iranian community and so on and what was the impact of these factors on their school life? Following those themes, we can analyze what was their feeling toward school, and what was their sense of partially becoming Canadian citizens? Did they feel a sense of belonging to the society? What is their strategy for surviving and coping with the negative, Oriental image of women as passive in both school and society? Appendix A contains the interview questions.

#### **4.8. Ethics**

In this part, the main point is keeping participants' information confidential in order to avoid their personal information being released within and outside of the school. As there are not many first-generation Iranian women in specific programs in Ontario graduate school, stating their personal information even under a pseudonym is still problematic. If I refer to the program a participant is studying in and the school she attended, I might make that person recognizable. Thus, general information is provided in interviewees' information section of this chapter and pseudonyms are used for the final report. Furthermore, the other challenge was creating a safe space in which participants

could talk freely about their experiences, struggles and difficulties. Thus, in this regard I encountered a participant's hesitation to express herself, mainly because she assumed she is the only person who had such problems. For example, in one case the participant at the beginning could not talk about her difficulties. She assumed that they might reflect badly on her, so she tried to jump to another issue or became silent. In this case, I talked about my own experiences as a graduate student who had had lots of challenges and difficulties, and also offered other participants' stories without telling their names in order to provide a safe space and a comfortable level of speech for the interviewee. According to Collins (1998), we need a safe space to find ourselves, our needs and our desires and finally our identity. Thus, by telling my own experience, I created a space in which the participant could feel I am part of her story and she is not alone in this challenging life. She could then share her experiences with me freely without any shame and hesitation. In social studies research, the investigator and the investigated can feel they are connected when the researcher articulates and represents their shared voices. It is for this reason that Oriental scholars who are themselves not Oriental cannot feel and understand the culture, language and ethnicity of the Oriental and picture it from their own Western lens and present those people in inferior situations (Yegenoglu, 1998). The hesitation to express one's experience as a racialized minority is emblematic of the need for research that allows racialized minorities to raise their voices rather than lose them within the mainstream.

#### **4.9. Interview Process**

In order to conduct the interviews, first I had to recruit the participants. As I mentioned in section 4.1., I used the snow ball technique. Through this method I had the

phone number and email address of the participants. I emailed or telephoned them and explained the purpose of the study (Appendix B). Then, if they agreed, I would send the information, research questions, and consent forms to them (Appendix A and C). Without hesitation, all of them were happy to take part in this research when they realized their voices would be contextualized at an academic level and would contribute knowledge for social change. The language of interview was mainly the Farsi language, the participants' first language. However, at the beginning, some of them preferred having the interview in English; then I gradually realized they had problems in expressing their emotions, and feelings, so I suggested it is fine for me to talk in Farsi; I would translate it to English and they accepted it. Interestingly, one of the participants who is fluent in English suggested that talking in Farsi is much more comfortable. So, I learned that even when a person is fluent in a second language, their first language comes in handy when it comes to an emotional and challenging conversation. As a researcher every stage of this research has a practical lesson for me. The interview was done face-to-face if participants were in Toronto or it was done by phone for cities outside Toronto. The average conversation was two hours, with the shortest interview being an hour and the longest 4.5 hours. As the participants had more experience and older age, their conversation also took longer; age in this process was also significant in terms of degree of satisfaction and integration into Canadian school and society. Two of the participants liked to read the transcription and they did some editing on it. However, a few of them also answered the interview questions in written form and it helped me to know their highlighted points for different questions. As a whole I collected the data from open-ended questions through interview, keeping a journal and field notes.

#### **4.10. Collecting Data: Transcribing and Keeping a Journal**

After finishing each interview, I tried to transcribe it while looking for the next. By doing this I became more involved in the discussion and also aware of the interviewee's speech and tone, which enhanced my understanding of their story. Thus, I used field notes and kept the information as a journal to help me fully connect to the interviewees' voices. Keeping a journal was an integral part of this research process (Mazzuca, 2000). It enabled me to not only document ideas and information about the research, but to keep track of the direction of the interview.

By keeping notes, I could pay constant attention to the theme and main points of the interview and, even after the interview, I could easily refer to my notes rather than listening to the tape. Having journal notes also allows an investigator to stay in the interview's climate (Thomas-Long, 2006). By referring to my notes while I was transcribing the interview, I could understand the story in detail and it provided me with ideas that I could add to my transcription for further analysis. Keeping a journal as a method for documenting and analyzing information in any process of research makes me more connected to my data. Thus, going back and forth in transcribing the interviews provided me an opportunity to go in-depth to an interviewee's thoughts and words. After finishing the transcription, reviewing my field notes and journal provided me with more information about the interviewee (Mazzuca, 2000, p. 99). Moreover if after the interview and even in the process of analyzing data, I felt I needed more explanation I could email or phone the participants and ask for more clarification so written answers by some of the participants also enhanced the understanding of their thoughts and words.

#### **4.11. Coding**

After finishing the transcription, I reviewed all interviews with my field notes and journal. The first stage was reading the whole transcription in order to get the general idea and also to have a holistic recognition of the participants. I put some notes by the side of the transcription about any major issue raised in the interview and I also used my journal as well. The second step was extracting the themes of the interview based on the integrative anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist theoretical framework. Moreover, Orientalism which is also a predominant discourse in analyzing Middle Eastern women's oppression, was another perspective for me to highlight in the transcription. By putting all the highlighted themes on the transcription together (where I used different colours to identify different themes), I ended up with six major themes which were, the difficulties in adaptation, stereotyping, discrimination, silencing, resistance and belonging of the participants.

#### **4.12. Summary**

In this chapter I examined the necessity of using a qualitative research method to bring to the center the marginalized voices of Iranian immigrant graduate students. Standpoint theory supports this methodology for the deconstruction of white supremacy over the Other. My location as a researcher was the same location as my participants. This location included country of origin, gender, language, culture, and religion. These similarities helped me connect to my subject matter. Having the same background and being equipped with critical perspective and research ethics make the findings of this research more realistic than examining it from an outsider's lens.

In addition, when I review two years of interviews and writing my thesis, I find them more informative. This is not only because of the findings of the research, but also because research is a process of knowing, learning, growing, and maturing as a researcher. In the process of doing the actual research, literature review and theoretical framework, I found the tools for generating ideas and roots for analyzing the findings. The act of doing the interview, engaging with the participants, and contextualizing their voices is a process of learning that you are contributing to producing new knowledge for social change. This critical and dynamic academic journey gives a researcher a sense of “who she is” and also a sense of being more effective person as an activist. Nevertheless, in doing an actual research, researcher is trying to discover, explore and identify an unknown perspective on her subject matter. This research produces information and generates analysis of a subject that contributes to knowledge production and social change. Moreover, the research allows both researcher and research subject to grow following their enquiry. For example throughout this research process I was living with my participants, listening to them, sympathizing with them, and becoming part of their story. I was not separate from my participants. I could not feel they are coming from another solar system and do not belong to this part of the world. I could feel responsible for raising their voices, pain, sorrows, and also appreciation toward Canadian school and society in order to examine the roots of our oppression and to have a healthier society. I could learn from them, the way they look at their problems and the strategies they adopted for resistance. From the other side, I could help participants find a safe space to explore their experiences. They were surprised that finally their voices can be contextualized and enhance academic knowledge. One participant realised how much

discrimination she had suffered that she had not been aware of before reviewing her experiences. This point recalls the notion of Bannerji (1991) that most of time in a colonial society the colonized is not aware of “being colonized” by colonizer. S/he supposes s/he is a free person. Thus, this project was an opportunity for both me and my participants to know much more about themselves, and to think about our location in Canadian higher education and society. However, this research also provided an opportunity for further connection between me and some of the participants as they are close friends in this journey.

The next two chapters are allocated to findings of this research.

## **Chapter Five: Findings I: Adaptation, Stereotyping, and Discrimination**

While transcribing the interviews, I realized that each woman's story could be the basis for an individual chapter. All eleven have unique voices, and they all reveal something unspoken and yet very insightful. "Her" story is a new chapter, a lens through which alternate contexts for justice and change may be viewed. This experience gives me a deeper understanding of Mohanty's (1988) notion of the difference between the words "woman" and "women." In her article, "Under Western Eyes," she states that when we use the word "woman," each woman's characteristics including race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, and religion are "unique" and "special" for that individual. However, the word "women," generalizes about the identity and experience of all females. I find Mohanty's (1988) analysis significant for this research, although some general themes and situations are common among Iranian women graduate students, each woman experiences the immigration process, Canadian society and graduate school differently. When analysing social relationships, theory and praxis intertwine.

It is interesting to note that when the interview questions begin to probe each woman's identity, all participants react silently and thoughtfully. I found this reaction profound because it demonstrated a deep sense of personal reflection. According to Mohanty (1994), subjectivity and voice concern the effort to understand our specific locations in the educational process and in the institutions through which we are constituted (p. 148). While I strive to include as much detail as possible in this study, it has certain limitations that I must acknowledge. Interviews are an effective research technique for drawing out the experiences and thoughts of subjects. However, they are

brief encounters and can only capture the subject's thoughts at a specific moment. Follow-up conversation and reflection cannot overcome the fragmentation of the experiences – and the identities – of the subjects. I hoped to approach each individual holistically, but I acknowledge that much of what was exchanged in these encounters is expanded through interpretation. This methodology risks exposing the presumptions of the researcher. I am not sure this can be avoided, so there is a crucial, self-critical aspect of this project that allows me to reflect on my role as researcher. My theoretical excursions and expositions include moments of self-criticism. I have incorporated this into my method as I discuss each of the interviews in later chapters. Nevertheless, in order to bring some interpretive clarity to the information collected during the interviews, I have categorized what was said into a series of specific themes. The pretence here is that, while detecting consistencies and similarities between the subject's voices, I have risked collapsing them into one voice - a voice that expresses an integrative anti-racist and anti- colonial feminist perspective following the Oriental paradigm. I have attempted to make this voice loud and clear in following.

Clearly the themes are limited to one issue; however they do focus quite a bit on “stereotyping” and the consequences of it. For example, when stereotyping is prevalent, its victims experience discrimination. The victims may be rejected and marginalized by professors or peers, leaving them to engage in tactics of avoidance and wilful ignorance marked by refusing encounters with anyone who might discriminate against them. Such tactics have a destructive impact on a person's engagement in school and society and ultimately prevent the feeling of belonging to Canadian academia and society. This dynamic calls for further examination, especially in terms of its social impact.

Another issue is the specific location of the researcher and her influence on the proceedings and conclusions. I have already stated that my analysis entails organizing the voices of the subjects into a single, cohesive body of research. What this reveals about my own bias as well as about the subjects themselves will be a point of interrogation throughout this work, I acknowledge that the idea of a ‘value free’ analysis is problematic. I will reduce this ambiguity by quoting the participant’s words exactly within the theoretical framework. In this way, the interpretation and analysis that is offered can be examined by the reader.

The other point is the inclusion of my own voice as an immigrant graduate woman in the research. I struggled with how I could include my own voice as one of the graduate students in the research. I found that there is a strong connection between the researcher and participants, when research findings are related to the researcher’s own experience. The researcher can find herself in her research subject. I decided that my experience could be added to the women’s points where it was related.

I examine six interrelated main themes in this research, (1) challenges adapting to a new environment – school and/or workplace; (2) the stereotype as “Oriental” women; (3) discrimination; (4) being silenced or ignored at school or in the work place; (5) strategies of resistance; and (6) the feeling of belonging to Canadian society and school. The following pages will explore these themes.

### **5.1. Adaptation**

One of the immigrant’s main challenges is adapting to a new environment. For women who are interested in continuing their graduate studies at university, adaptation requires the effort to become involved in a new culture generally, but also to understand

the culture of their new school – its programs, courses, supervisors, etc. Obtaining useful information and insight into Canadian culture can be a difficult process for a person who does not have prior experience in the Canadian school system. In a scenario in which navigating public transportation and shopping centres can be stressful, it is even more difficult to pursue an education. In this regard, Maheen states the following,

I had to write TOEFL and also a professional exam. It was a really hard exam. My problem was unfamiliarity with the Canadian system. How should I apply for graduate school? I did not have any clue how to do my work. I did not even know where to go ask questions about graduate school. I was not familiar with the streets. I could be getting off the bus when I see the street's name and still looking for the destination for about an hour. Everything was so confusing. There was no one to tell me where to go get approval for my degree, or how to apply for my intended program so on and so forth (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

The transition from a Middle Eastern society to a North American society that is dissimilar in terms of its cultural, educational, economic, and political structures causes anxiety for Iranian women. Hall (1998), in her research about the cultural differences between non-American and American students in American universities, claims that 70% of foreign students have trouble adapting to mainstream culture. Especially if minorities come from a completely different culture, this gap will be more pronounced. Maheen entered Canada as a skilled worker; both she and her husband are educated and have lived in Canada previously. They still have problems integrating into the mainstream culture. In other words, it is significant that when newcomers enter Canada, there is no organization to guide them in the pursuit of an education or to answer their questions.

This dilemma when an immigrant first comes to Canada is expressed by Negar, “My feeling is that in Iran we knew how to proceed to the school, I was familiar with the system but here I was like a stranger and did not know what to do” (Interview, summer 2008).

Similarly, Seema states,

I did not know what I had to do for continuing my study. I had a lack of information and I did not know that at first for graduate school I needed to find a supervisor and besides that, I thought the only university is Toronto! So at the beginning of my entry to Canada, I only focused on the University of Toronto, and this issue bothered me a lot and postponed my entry to university for two years (Interview, summer 2008).

Being lost and confused are feelings that an immigrant woman may experience during the entry stage of her immigration. Seema spent two years of her time and a lot of money to get information about universities. When a woman enters Canada, her previous information and knowledge influence her vision of the new environment but it may not equip her for the reality of an unfamiliar system of education. Lack of adequate information leads to lost time and money in the new society, where the process they need to follow is hidden for educated immigrant women. Fatemeh states the following,

Immigration for me was like a big storm... like being in a military service. This made me stronger and helped me get to know myself more. It is not only about financial issues, it is cultural and emotional as well. Here, even finding a friend was a challenge. When I came here my old friends were not like how they used to be. They had changed a lot... or they don't have time for me. They had to work

hard. Living alone is very difficult. Sometimes, I would find myself just making noises at home by turning on the TV and radio – just to make me feel I am not alone (Interview, summer 2008).

As a socio-capitalist country, Canadian society emphasizes the individualistic part of people over collectivism, which forces people to work hard on their own. This dichotomy – individualism vs. collectivism – puts more pressure on Middle Eastern female immigrants who grew up in a collectivist society. Fatemeh tries to use this contradiction as a source of strength. She wants to use her agency to overcome her barriers. In other words, immigrant women overcome loneliness by raising their own “active being” (Lord, 1984). They do not want to be passively absorbed into mainstream culture, but desire an active and meaningful adaptation process. As Fatemeh said, most of her old friends were absorbed into mainstream culture and were focused on their own survival. One of the main characteristics of a capitalist society is that individualism is highlighted. Although Fatemeh has friends, they appear to only think about their own challenges, leaving Fatemeh to look after herself. This is difficult for a newcomer in a completely different cultural environment. Fatemeh continues as follows,

To me this country is great in terms of getting information but the problem is how do you get the information? From who? When? Where can you use it? No one is there to take your hand and inform you about what you need. There are different resources for taking information like skill for changes, YMCA... but how you use it, is so tough. It is like cooking; maybe all the ingredients are there but it is not clear how to make the food (Interview, summer 2008).

As Fatemeh feels loneliness in all aspects of her life – entertainment and school, it is necessary to mention that the nature of a capitalist society is that every citizen must spend time and money and work for her/his accomplishments. Competition is part of this capitalist society following neo-liberalism, and an individual regards other people as their competition rather than a potential source of support. This kind of thinking means that no one wants to help others. In the case of Fatemeh, there is also no organization to actively orient newcomers to the new school environment. As Fatemeh mentioned in her interview, even when a newcomer gets the information, the process is a challenge. In another interview, Neda shares a similar experience,

The problem was that there was not any exact guidance for what we have to do. Lack of information, what to do. And how. Those things make our work difficult. I suppose we can't work at all in Canada, but after two years I found out that I could work as a \_\_\_ not \_\_\_ but it was too late. And the other problem was my language, English, I had to learn how to speak, how to adapt to new environment, I did not have enough information..., so I decided to gradually achieve my goals while continuing my education. But we are under stress in here and we have problems with adaptation in the society and those difficulties affect our children as well (Neda, interview, summer 2008).

Clearly, such experiences illustrate that the need for a guidance system is crucial for prospective students in graduate schools. Although there are students' services in universities, they do not cater to the interests of prospective candidates. Students' services at universities are established mainly for serving their own students who pay tuition to the school. There is an inconsistency in the citizenship and immigration

procedure. When educated women are accepted into Canada through the immigration point system, there is a lack of an organization to provide them with further assistance. Information for newcomers who are trying to pursue post-secondary education is hidden. In effect, Canada has only “pseudo-inclusion” of immigrant people/women. This is not limited to information; it includes help for cultural integration. Neda did not know that she could use her previous education to gain employment in the Canadian labour force because she was not familiar with the system. Neda has two children, and she feels the process of adaptation for herself impacts her children as well. The cultural value of time she spends with her children was also a source of concern.

Fatemeh also had issues with cultural adaptation. She explains as follows,

To me, in practice, mentoring in here is so important. Immigration has lots of ups and downs, it is not only language. I don't want to say it is a cultural shock, either. I experienced visiting many times foreign countries and living in Canada is not a new thing for me. And I also have a stable and firm personality so I cannot easily accept some values from another culture because I respect my own values. So, for a person that has a stable personality it is hard to assimilate into a new system. If we grew up here and our personality was shaped here adaptation to school would be easier, but for me adaptation was really so hard (in a sad tone) (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

There are some points for discussion in Fatemeh's interview. The first one is the need for guiding newcomers who are potential candidates to graduate school. It is significant that Canadian secondary schools have an effective and institutionalized information process that prepares their students for entry to undergraduate education.

High school students become familiar with a variety of universities and attend university fairs, but the same resources are not available to a person who does not have any educational experience in Canadian schools and wants to pursue graduate studies. This is one of the reasons that an immigrant feels s/he is not included in the Canadian education system.

The other point in Fatemeh's interview is mentoring. Mentoring is a major issue in graduate school. Graduate students often suffer from a lack of mentorship to help them to pursue their studies successfully (Acker, 2001; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Carty, 1991; Dwyer, 2006; Ella, 1989; Filteau, 1989; Hartley, 1994; Mazzuca, 2000; Wallace, 1994; Willie et al., 1991). While a Canadian-born student suffers from this inadequate service, it can be even more challenging for racialized immigrant women.

The other issue that Fatemeh talks about regards integration or assimilation into a new culture. She wants to hold onto her identity as an Iranian woman, and this resistance makes her adaptation much more difficult. The resulting exclusion becomes an important issue when female graduate students have children as well. Neda mentions that, as a graduate student and a mother, she faces challenges in adaptation and her family also feels the effect of this. Acculturation is a psychological dimension of adaptation. In this regard, Berry in 1997 states that acculturation is the psychological adjustment process involved in moving to a new culture (Samuel, 2005, p.127). Berry incorporates cultural change, acculturation and psychological acculturation into his integration framework. Cultural change is internal and takes place through dynamic internal events such as creativity and insight; acculturation is external and happens through cultural contacts; and psychological acculturation involves a change in emotional qualities. The process of

adaptation transforms the individual's identity, values, attitudes and behaviours (as cited in Samuel, 2005 p. 127).

Berry talks about four acculturation strategies. Assimilation takes place when the migrant group fully adopts the cultural values of the dominant group. Fatemeh, for example, hesitates to assimilate and leave her values behind. Separation (or segregation) occurs when there is little contact with the broader society. Integration involves maintaining cultural cohesiveness during the gradual process of becoming part of mainstream society. This process requires the full inclusion of the racialized minority in mainstream culture. When racialized immigrants are not practically involved in mainstream culture, integration cannot be fully achieved. Marginalization takes place when confuse identities within migrant groups prevent contact with dominant groups (p. 128). In Samuel's research about South Asian students' experience in Canadian school, one student experienced culture conflict through an identity crisis. As an adult, she had to make choices about her values and live in a hybrid culture. Continually transforming yourself within a culture can be really stressful (p. 132). This experience is consistent with Neda' when she does not know how to transfer her values to her children. On the other hand, Fatemeh (Interview2008) claims that if she grew up in Canada, she could easily integrate in mainstream culture. This contradicts Yenigun (2004) who mentioned in Britain even third-generation South Asian people have difficulty adaptation in mainstream Britain culture. Clearly, the experience and expectation of cultural integration varies from person to person.. However, as Samuel, (2005) cited in Phinney and Rosenthal (1992), suggests, if one encounters racism, one starts to question one's position in the host society, which can lead to identity crisis . They state that an identity crisis

generally involves “conflicts and contradictions posed by a minority status in society” (p. 132). They state that there is usually a triggering experience or entry point – possibly a racist incident, an ethnic awareness program, or an incident relating to school or work – that causes a minority feel identity crisis. After this crisis the student uses hybrid culture. According to Minha-ha in 1992, hybridization involves ‘translating’ or ‘grafting’ more than one culture onto a body that is continuous, fluid, and sometimes turbulent (cited in 2005, p. 133). Adapting Phinney and Rosenthal’s 1992 analysis, we can conclude that immigrant women’s exclusion from mainstream school culture enhances their identity crises and causes them to question their presence in the host society. The same concept will be important to other parts of my findings, especially the discrimination, and marginalization sections.

Tellingly, Fatemeh’s suggests that “entering graduate school and facing all the challenges to do so is like going through military service” (Interview, summer 2008). In military service, there are many restrictions and disciplines that everyone has to obey without question or objection.. The comparison between the immigrant experience and military service is not limited to the period prior to entering graduate school. When an Iranian immigrant woman is accepted into graduate school, she has faced all the challenges for entry to university, but will encounter tremendous new challenges. Interaction with other students, professors, administrators, and colleagues can be challenging. Since they come from a Middle Eastern country like Iran, the way other people think about them and react to them would be under scrutiny. Is there any stigma towards them? How do they integrate their previous knowledge and experience into the Canadian graduate classroom and is it acknowledged by instructors and classmates? In

the next theme, I will discuss the pre-judgment and stigma towards Iranian immigrant graduate students based on their religion, nationality, culture and so on.

## **5.2. Stereotyping**

“Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged”

~ (Iranian poet; Mevlana Rumi, 13 century)

As mentioned earlier in chapter three, Orientalism is a discourse introduced by Edward Said (1979, 2003) for appraising the perspective toward Middle Eastern people – people who are mainly known as Arab and Muslim. In a continuation of the historical imperialist hegemony Europe held over Middle eastern people in 18th and 19th centuries (Said, 1979, 2003) and neo-liberalism in 21st century, the United States wields hegemonic power over Middle Eastern people under globalization and global movement (Ault & Sandberg, 2006; Dwyer, 2006; Harrison, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In order to legitimize its hegemony, new empire needs a new enemy in every moment of history. According to Chomsky (2006), the pretext of the imperialist agenda changes, but the strategy remains the same. Previous pretexts include war with communism and fighting drug-trafficking, and now Islamic fundamentalism and the war on terror motivate the imperialist agenda (Chomsky, 2006; Yenigun, 2004; Zine, 2004). The new colonization brings global insecurity. September 11 in 2001 is the consequence of this prolonged hegemony. 9/11 created more hatred towards Middle Eastern people in North American society and universities (Cainkar, 2004; Yenigun, 2004; Zine, 2004). This tragedy perpetuates the image of Middle Eastern women and men as the Other in the Euro-American society. Stigma towards these people has caused more isolation and exclusion

for them. Women in Euro-American countries practicing Islamic code – whether wearing the headscarf, the hijab or not – have encountered stereotypes and stigmatization. Zine (2004) in her research about the image of the Muslim's body in Canadian schools after 9/11 describes extensive negative treatment towards them. Women who practice the Islamic clothing code in public are viewed with suspicion and become objects of exclusion. As a result, the effect of foreign policy on domestic sphere became the predominant discussion in academia (Cainkar, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Specifically, Canadian policy, which is in keeping with the United States', has caused more isolation for people from Asia and the Middle East (Arat-Koc, 2005; Ng, 2005). Iranian people are marginalized in terms of their Islamic religion, Iranian nationality and their ethnicity which do not match with the dominant culture of white Western Christianity.

In this regard, the participants in this study have had numerous negative experiences both in and outside of school in Canada. Ashraf is a participant who grew up in a Western society (England) and she never felt she is an immigrant in Canada. She states the following,

9/11 brought me to a PhD program. Society changed a lot after that accident. I thought I wouldn't be affected by such tragedy, because I was completely involved with and familiar with Western system and culture. I never considered myself as an immigrant. I grew up in this society. After 9/11 I witnessed how other's views and values changed, and how they expressed their attitude towards Others. Simultaneously in the past 2 years of my work I commuted to U.S.A and after 9/11 my commute got worse because of my nationality. I got tired of this traveling and also the way the U.S.A. treated Middle Eastern people. My view

towards society changed in the same way society's view changed about people like me (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Local people are affected by a state policy. Cainkar (2004) states that foreign policy impacts the domestic sphere and causes violence on local people. The way the United States treated Middle Eastern countries and counted Iran, Syria, and Iraq as an axis of evil, created a harsh environment for Iranian women in Canada. Ashraf commuted to U.S.A. for many years without any problems, but after 9/11 the scenario changed and people were treated as potential terrorists. The foreign policy between Iran and the United States worsened, and Canadian society continued its pressure on Iranian women in its domain. One consequence of this negative relationship between the foreign policy of Canada and Iran is that there has been no diplomatic relations between these two countries since the death of an Iranian-Canadian woman journalist, Zahra Kazemi, in Iran in 2003 (Kazemi, 2007). Moreover, Citizenship and Immigration officers also prohibited easy entry of Iranian immigrants' families in order to visit their relatives in Canada (Shahrvand, 2008). This made Iranian-Canadian immigrants force the Canadian government to separate international policy between both countries from domestic violence against Iranian-Canadian people. In this context, Leila states the following,

Being an Iranian woman creates two sorts of conflict for me. I have to fight what Iran offers me personally, as a liberal woman, as well as how Iran is portrayed in the world, so both personal and political challenges. Iranian president! I hate to be realized as a defender of Ahmadinejad, as a supporter of nuclear power. Being accused of spying by a young man, all pierced and tattooed whose smell of beer and smoke early in the day and in a computer lab, was obvious from a long

distance [and] ended in a bitter laugh for me, but my other experience broke my heart. One day when one of my friends and I were walking by the riverside, two gentlemen offered to let us fish. The man beside me asked me where my accent belonged to. “Iran,” I said and smiled, still impressed by his generous offer and his teaching me fishing. “I don’t like my kids being bombed while they are going to school!” His naive and innocent look while he was almost pleading me not to kill his kids made my eyes tearful. “I won’t kill your kids,” I handed back the fishing tools and walked away with a lump in my throat. I don’t like to be put down because of the president. “Should I deny my nationality,” I wondered. But, *I want and like to identify as a proud Iranian woman and break all the stereotypes* [italics added] (Interview, summer 2008).

Most Canadian people both in and out of school generalize the Iranian woman with negative images drawn from media representations. They consider these women as representative of Iranian policy and not as individuals trying to make their way in the world. The image of Leila portrayed by the white male Canadian is based on the Euro-American media and knowledge, which is a colonized knowledge. Leila is a woman who does not believe in Islam or the hijab and politically she is against Iran’s state policy, but she is still regarded as the Other. She continues as follows,

My look and accent show I am a second-language speaker. In fact, Canadian people do not obviously express their hatred towards me. I remember one day in a computer lab one of the students, when he realized I am an Iranian student, asked me, “*Are you a spy or a terrorist?*” “Both,” I said. “You better watch out!” He said he is an —Canadian and that his country is close to Iran, so Iran can send a

bomb to his country easily now that he has recognized me. His absolute ignorance made me laugh at him. “I don’t care how idiots think of me,” I said. “Oh, I don’t think like that,” he said. “But I know most people sitting in this computer lab have this kind of image of you.” “Yeah, right!” I said. “You don’t think like that. Everyone else does!” That conversation happened one week after I entered Canada [italics added] (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

I then asked Leila what her feelings were after this conversation, and she continued as follows,

Not a good first impression of Canadian people. Accusations like this really hurt. I’m not sure how many more people think like that but are not as blunt about it. Why am I always in a position to prove myself innocent of all the guilty images as a woman, as an Iranian, inside and outside of Iran? Where would I go to get rid of bias and ignorance? I am tired! (Interview, summer 2008).

All Iranian women are generalized as hijab-wearing Muslims and, hence, that they are terrorists and/or spies. This Oriental image has been perpetuated historically about Iranian women, and Canadian people have internalized this image of them. As Leila’s voice shows, the negative image of Iranian woman was not limited to only one person in her school. According to the opposed person, “most people” in that institute shared this image as a result of discussion about Iranian people on the university campus. The way those Canadian students construct their knowledge is not free from bias; their knowledge is colonized by Euro-American education. Clearly, this negative image is more pervasive than Leila’s white-dominated graduate school. We can analyze this internalization in light of the role of media; television, newspapers, radio, books, and,

according to Said (1979), Western institutions produce the image of Middle Eastern people as inferior. It is important to note that Leila does not wear hijab, so her clothing does not show she is a Muslim woman, but her accent shows she is not Canadian born and that she is the Other. Fatemeh's case also demonstrates generalization about Iranians. Fatemeh also does not practice Islamic dressing. She talks about her experience in this regard, "The first reaction of my supervisor was, you are Iranian but don't have hijab!!" Fatemeh said with laugh, "it is a sentence that everyone here asks me because they suppose all Iranian women have to wear the hijab" (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

A woman's body and appearance are important, and most interviewees mentioned this. The way a viewer interprets a woman's body relates to her/his knowledge. The image that is internalized within an individual, her knowledge, and her background all affect her interpretation. An Iranian woman's body is treated as the Other because it is not identified with the mainstream body. The differences can be based on race (skin colour), ethnicity (language, accent), nationality (Iranian), religion (Islam) and so on. Moreover, if she has a hijab, she is more suspicious because her body is clothed differently than the mainstream body. This Oriental image brings multiple pressures to bear, especially on women who wear the hijab. In this regard, Maheen, with a sad tone says the follows,

My appearance is important. In the work place, others ask me are you a \_\_\_\_ (professional job)? But they could not accept it and asked several times, although I have a tag, but they suppose I am not more than very low position and I could not be a team leader...., they ask me did you go to university? They could not

accept it..; it is a pre-judgment and stigma about Muslim women (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

The dominant discourse of Western superiority includes a negative image of Muslim women as being somehow immune to the attractions and benefits of education. The occurrences of professional negativity towards women who wear the hijab expose the prevalence and consequences of this image. Clearly such projections of negative images involve stereotyping of Muslims and women, and are indications of the power of institutional racism. The mainstream internalized Oriental image is that Muslim women can neither be educated nor professional, so many Canadians disrespect Iranian women who wear the hijab. This stereotyping when integrated with power relations in school settings causes racist behaviour by professors towards Iranian Muslim women. As Maheen with a sad tone continues in these words,

About diversity, when I looked at it I can see racism in school. There is racism and stigma in school. Society and policy give the mainstream the power to do this. Some professors talk about the war in Iraq and how Iraqi people are poor and incapable of doing anything and the U.S.A must be there for their survival. Although, I am not from Iraq but I am from the Middle East and I felt uncomfortable. All the students in class supported the professor's view and I could not say anything. These professors and students pointed at me and told the story of Iraq (Interview, summer 2008).

Yegenoglu (1998) explores the diversification of Middle Eastern people which is not much elaborated in Said's (1979, 2003) work. Middle Eastern people, although mainly associated with being Muslim, are different regardless of their religion (whether

Christian, Jewish, etc.). Their nationality, language and culture are diverse. This diversification is not recognized and valued in Western culture. Thus, Maheen's interview brings out some important points. First of all, Iraq is an Arab country and Iran is a Persian country, so their languages and cultures are completely different. Because both countries practice Islam and are known as Middle Eastern countries, however, other features that distinguish them are not recognized. A complicating factor is that Maheen feels sympathy for people in her country's neighbourhood – Iraq. Maheen is not Arab, but, as a Middle Eastern woman, she suffers from the degradation of Iraqi people as incapable of making their own decisions and in need of Western help. This is a neo-liberal perspective, Third world people are not capable of managing their life and are in need of Euro-American help. Moreover, the stigma and generalization of Iranian women prevents them from raising their voices in classroom discussions.

Therefore, wearing the hijab excludes an Iranian woman from defending her beliefs, ideas and opinions in school because there is no safe space to present her distinct perspective. Women need to have a safe space in which they can acknowledge their culture, herstory, religion and so on. This helps them to find their own identity and location in the world much more effectively (Bannerji, 1991; Collins, 1998; hooks, 1989; Mohanty, 1988). How can Maheen, as a graduate student, enhance her critical thinking in a racist environment does not welcome her? This kind of feeling is also evident in Mahvash's scenario. She states the following,

I shared my feeling about the hijab with one of my Canadian classmates. She told me at first when I saw you and your husband in school I thought wow, this woman is under her husband's influence and control, but after a while I realized

that this is a stigma that I was projecting onto you, and that you have your own voice (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Following the above interview, I would like to explore the image of Muslim (Iranian) as women under their husband's control in Western eyes. Adapting the Oriental perspective described by Said (2003), and Yegenoglu (1998), I will expand this theory in terms of the patriarchal imagination of defining Middle Eastern women. This colonial-patriarchal imagination derives from a hundred years old stigma and results from not being able to see and understand veiled women. For more clarification, I cite my own personal experience. I recall an incident where two Canadian women who lived in our neighbourhood asked my husband, "why do you push your wife to wear a hijab? Why are you forcing her?" My husband and I were surprised not just at the questions, but also at the fact they were asking my husband, not me. Why did they take it for granted that women wear hijab by force and not by choice, and that a woman with a hijab has no control over her body and her life? I expressed my perspective about their question frankly. This also reminds me of Mohanty's notion (2004) that stereotyping so-called Third world women as primitive and under control prevents these women from attaining dynamic life and change. Such stereotyping is institutionalized within Canadian society to the point that majority of Canadian citizens consider it legitimate to question racialized minority women whose bodies do not fit within the mainstream image. It is also a result of the power and superiority that the white race has in a racist multicultural society. Being aware of this stereotyping creates a difficult situation for the immigrant women within academia. Referring to Mahvash's quotation, although the student studies in academia, still she was occupied by her Oriental image. This indicates that academia is a

projection of public sphere or vice versa. In both my scenario and Mahvash's, we can interrogate whether a racialized body in Canadian society has the right to cultural distinction from a white race body. Furthermore, in my personal experience and Mahvash's, white women perpetuate the Canadian patriarchal perspective over non-white women. This is consistent with Yegenoglu's work (1998) that Western women were /are helping Western men to depict a negative image of Oriental women by entering to their harems. So, the depiction of Oriental women is transferred by Western women who are contextualized in arts and text and in general media.

Accordingly, the image of Muslim women is also explored by Negar. She states that,

The hardest thing for me was the first meeting with my supervisor. I was always afraid what would he think of me when he sees me? I always thought when I got into Master's program my challenges will start, acceptance in the program is not absolutely acceptance it is conditional. Others think when they get a job or school admission, they are done because they have to study and follow the school and work but for me it was just a start and therefore very stressful. Because I thought I was different from others... because of my appearance. I was different from others... I was always suspicious of other's perception of my behaviour..., people are staring at me in any gathering....in work place I can't easily go everywhere (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Why did Negar have such suspicions? Why did she feel her acceptance would be different from that of others? Is it as the result of an Oriental image that she also internalized? Is it because of others' behaviour that she is afraid of participating in any

gathering? When a person understands her body to be different from others and not fully accepted and respected, she feels she is under suspicion. She cannot pursue a normal life. She is the Other. Being under another's eyes causes one to work harder to make up for the difference and the marginalization. Negar continues as follows,

In general, in society not even work place, when people realize I am a professional in \_\_\_\_\_, their first reaction is silence and gaze... , this makes me think that in the first reaction people are surprised..., the second image was negative and put me in a heavy atmosphere. I felt my appearance did not match them and I felt bad, and it gave me this sense that I have to work harder to prove myself. I felt I shouldn't make any mistake because it would be interpreted as the other issues such as my religion, gender, language, and culture so I have to be careful. It is so hard to be always extra careful about what you do at work related or in general. For example, in the first interview for my volunteer job, it was such a shock for the interviewer that I was an Iranian professional. He was surprised that I had managerial position in Iran and men had to report me! He could not believe it..., he could not think a Middle Eastern woman studied \_\_\_\_\_ has hjiab, and wants to work. I think only God helped me to take those jobs...., I always saw doubt in an employer but I don't know how I could take the job, it was only God's help I could improve (Interview, summer 2008).

The mainstream point of view cannot associate coming from a Middle Eastern country with being a woman, mother, highly educated, professional, manager, and familiar with English as a second language. The presence of a woman such as Negar deconstructs the negative image of Middle Eastern women in Canadian society and

workplace. Although Negar claims it is the spiritual part of her life that helps her follow her desire, still we can interpret that ultimately her supervisor sees a strength, knowledge and skills in her because God will not change any situation without one's own activities and will<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, in the graduate school, Negar fears encountering her potential supervisor. She recalls her experience in a sad tone,

For the interview in graduate school all the old stresses that I had overcome to some extent again came back to me. I was wondering how my supervisor will interpret my appearance? Will he judges me? It was so surprising for him that I was from Iran! I was the first Muslim woman with hijab in such a male dominated program in 2004. At that time I could not participate in the orientation event because I was conscious that I would not match with the mainstream, only my husband's presence made my situation easier (my husband majors in the same program). People rarely said anything in my face, but they were asking with their eyes what I was doing there. Their behaviour told me I did not belong. I always have to prove myself. *Those negative images put lots of pressure on me* (italics mine) (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

The exclusive climate in academia is a circumstance created to question the presence of (racialized) women in academic institutions. Women's ability, skills and talent are under suspicion (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bannerji, 1991, 2000; Caplan, 1993; Hutt, 2000; Simeone, 1987; Smith, 1994; Wallace, 1994). Negar was surrounded in a male-dominated program. She studies in an andocentric academic climate that forces (racialized) women to have to work hard. Her talents and capabilities were questioned

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, Soureh, Gesas ayah 5, God will not change any nation only and only if they themselves want to make changes

because of her gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity and language. Her supervisor could not believe a Muslim Iranian woman could be a professional. He was surprised to learn that she studied a male discipline in Iran. Moreover, although people do not openly criticize her, Negar could feel through their eyes that she did not fit into their academic environment and this feeling bothered her a lot. She always had challenges convincing others that she is not a strange, that she is a woman who came from Iran and is able to study and work in a male dominated program. Negar was a manager in Iran, men had to report officially to her and she was professionally able to manage, coordinate and guide them. These images are not as an internalized in the North American psyche because their image of the Orient is colonized through their institutions, media and education (Arat-Koc, 2005; Hoodfar, 1993; Said, 1979; Yegenoglu, 1998).

Twenty years ago after taking my bachelors degree and while working as a computer specialist, I held a position as a manager in a medical school in Iran. I managed more than twelve departments and, although some men in the andocentric university were not happy with my presence, I could handle the job. Patriarchy in Iran is not much different from Canada, but well-educated women try to question the superiority of men over women in Iran. In Iran nowadays, 60% of students in universities are women, even in male dominated programs such as engineering. Following Negar's notion of encountering pre-judgment as a Muslim, Iranian female she continues as follows,

My ethnicity, nationality and religion along with my gender keep me unsure of how I'm perceived in the society to the point that I forget my role as a graduate student. During the two years in graduate school I had lots of pressure, but the result was amazing, My thesis was accepted with excellent compliments and the

professor whose TA I was, gave me a very excellent reference letter. But in general, even in the class I was afraid of asking a question. I thought maybe it is not a good question and then they will judge me not based on my merit but based on my religion, nationality, language, and other things...., I had anxiety in my reading, I was afraid of getting a bad mark, so I decided to put lots of efforts into school work. I, as a Middle Eastern Muslim woman with hijab, have to work harder to present a positive image of myself... so all those things put lots of pressure on me (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Consequently, immigrant women student's academic journey is influenced by their nationality, language, religion, and ethnicity. In other words, gender integrates with race, ethnicity, culture and language to add to the oppression. Thus, racialized minority female students have to put much more effort into their academic work in order to eliminate all those negative images. As a result, they have less interaction with mainstream culture, and it causes their isolation in Canadian schools. This result is the same result when Xu and Zhang (2007) explored the situation of Chinese students in American universities. They found out that Chinese students have less communication with the mainstream because they spent more time studying as a result of their lack of language expertise. This caused more isolation from the mainstream climate and culture. If the problem for Chinese students was mainly the language barrier, for Iranian women other factors contributed as well. When they both studied in the same program in the same school, Negar found her body to be more subject of suspicion than her husband's. Her appearance isolates her from the mainstream culture while her husband's body was acceptable regardless of his language barrier. Thus, gender intersects with body and leads

to further isolation for the visibly marked Muslim woman. Negar continues, “My husband only had a language barrier, other things did not apply to him, my pressure was not only because of my gender and language, the pressure was because of my appearance, my hijab” (Interview, summer 2008). Negar husband’s situation is like the Chinese students’ struggle in American higher education. Gender does not affect them much; it is the language which requires more effort to study and also affects their communication. In order to distinguish between gender differences and other forms of oppression such as religion and ethnicity, Negar notes that the attitude towards her was mainly because of religion and not a gender issue. It means the integration of racism in terms of religion and language causes more oppression towards such women. As a result, Negar that does not feel she is a graduate student and cannot enjoy the academic journey. She continues as follows,

The school was so stressful, I did not have a normal study in school, if others do regular things and only study I had lots of pressure for removing negative image by doing hard work, even I was worried about my supervisor that I did not want him to regret choosing me and say look at this Middle Eastern woman in this program, she is incapable of handling this program.., so my responsibility was not limited to being only a student (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Negar is under pressure to deliver a good reputation of herself as a Muslim and an Iranian immigrant graduate student. She does not want her supervisor to regret having chosen her. This kind attitude prevents Negar from feeling fully that she is a graduate student and from benefiting from her academic journey. She also has the role of mothering at home, but for two years she could not fully engage in family life and her

husband had to support her. Internalizing Orientalization within colonized societies such as Iran and Canada causes both people like Negar and like the Canadian students to have a negative perspective about Oriental people/women. Western perspectives exist historically and deeply in the mind of both nations.

This stereotyping about (Muslim) Iranian educated women is not limited to the school. In Fatemeh's case, her body does not show she is a Muslim woman because she does not wear hijab. She expresses her feeling as follows,

Here there are lots of negative images about Iranian people and I am sensitive about them, although, I say I am not attached to the land of Iran but I have a bias towards Iran.....one day I was shopping in an ethnic store and when one of the customers realized I am from Iran, he got so angry, his posture changed and I saw dislike in his eyes (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

As I mentioned earlier in chapter three, the domestic sphere is influenced by foreign policy and the state's image of immigrants. Because immigrant people are treated based on the political relationship between Canada and their local state, foreign policy affects local people either positively or negatively. After 9/11 the hatred against Iranian people increased and when the new Iranian president came to power, the negative image got worse. In Fatemeh's case her body is suspicious because of her nationality and language. In this regard Fatemeh quickly adds the following,

In any places that someone knows I am Iranian, s/he starts bad mouthing the president and it is always the same in different places and situation. There are lots of reactions about the president's speech about holocaust, nuclear bomb and other

issues....all are negative. They say your president is so fanatic and dogmatic, he says lot about holocaust (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Fatemeh was upset about how the mainstream judges her based on the Iranian government's policies. Taking for granted that all Iranians resident in host societies agree with Iranian policy again is a form of oppression. Average people are not the representatives of their home state's policies as opposed to what mainstream supposes.

Naheed, who does not wear a hijab and is attracted to the Canadian school and society, raises her point in this regard as follows,

At the beginning of school when other students realized I am Iranian they asked me huge questions....such as "do you really have a nuclear bomb?" What could I say? I said I don't know....but they continued asking more questions, "Do you want to vanish Israel? How about the holocaust? Why does your president say this or that...?" Every time there is a new question and I keep saying I don't know. I don't know....Even when they don't ask any questions, their first reaction once they realize my nationality is surprise which they express through a "Wow" (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

This "wow" is meaningful. It seems mainstream people think Iranian women are representative of Iran's state and government and have to answer their questions. As mentioned in earlier pages, domestic violence appeared as a result of global political issues. Canadian students mostly generalized Iranian female students' perspectives towards politics based on their own negative image of the president of Iran. However, Iran is not the only country which claims to have a nuclear bomb for peace or in times of defence. The United States of America was the first country to its nuclear bomb during

the Second World War. Besides the Americans, other countries such as Russia, England, France, and China are officially equipped; Israel does not deny or confirm it (“List of States,” n.d.). The common link among all these countries is that they are the United States’ allies, so the media is silent about them. As a result, the problem is not really the nuclear bomb or other issues that are attached to Iran’s policy. It is about the conflict between the Euro-American perspective and the Iranian state’s perspective towards different issues that influence Iranian immigrants. According to George Bush (n.d.) in 2002 any country which is not allied with the U.S.A. is a terrorist. The Euro-American media, which is also under imperial hegemony, has a tremendous impact on stimulating these images. In other words, media is a capitalist’s tool for expanding its perspective and higher education is an intellectual site of such discussion. When I asked Naheed how she reacts to such question, she continued as follows,

Well, I don’t feel bad about my nationality as an Iranian. What bothers me is why my government does something that I have to be responsible for? It is not a good feeling. Another thing is that when president makes stupid remarks in public image, I can’t defend it in here and even I can’t say it was stupid because to me it means disrespecting my country and bringing it down... I wish I could defend my country but I can’t. I disagree with Iran state’s policies... Students came to me, repeat the president’s words and ask if this is what all Iranian people believe in? That embarrassed me, my government causes me disrespect, but in any case I can’t deny my nationality (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

Naheed is surrounded by political questions and it is not within the scope of this research to answer them. But does academia provide a critical perspective and safe space

for investigating such questions? Do the graduate students that I have interviewed show their perspectives and are they (de)colonized toward Middle Eastern people/women? When students in academia mimic the media's imagination about the Other we can make this statement, there is a crisis in the academy and in Canadian society as a whole that people are far from offering a critical analysis and perspective. However, we have to be cautious of any generalization.

According to Neda, the other participant in this research who wears a hijab, there is a negative image of Oriental women. She states that, "In my department, from their eyes and body language, I can feel they are not happy with my presence. From their eyes they say why I am here?" (Interview, summer 2008). There are two points in Neda's opinion, first of all 'they,' in Neda's voice, refers to white Canadian students and professors in her department; the second point is the reaction which Neda feels, without any direct verbal contact. This notion may seem to be contrary to truth and merely a result of Neda's low self-esteem. But this feeling was also reported by Negar (Interview 2008) about the initial reaction of her supervisor. The same was true for Naheed (Interview, 2008). As a result, we can think that it is not the participants' low self-esteem; it is a fact that they feel unwelcome.

Thus, being embarrassed and not completely attached to the school setting brings emotional distress for Iranian immigrant women students. A student's feelings in the class setting are another issue that Sarah (Interview, summer 2008) talks about. Sarah studies in a program with a white-dominated female population, in a school with a very good reputation. Sarah explains,

In my school they don't like different religions. They don't like people who are visibly different. For example because of my hijab they don't like me. I was in a class that there were other students who could not speak English, even basic English while at that time my English was better than other minority students that did not have scarf and I did. But, I was more oppressed, because I had hijab. One day something happened that I never ever forget it and I feel it in my every single cell; it was in one of the courses that was highly critical. After submitting the first assignment, the professor came to the class and stayed in front of me but looked at the whole class, and said, "People who do not have critical thinking have to leave this school." It was really hard for me, and she damaged me, in a way that I lost my self confidence. She ruined me and I think I never overcome this damage. Although, finally, I did a good job in the course but I don't have enough self confidence. This saying is always with me that "people who do not have critical thinking should not stay at this school." What she did to me is with me, that damage is with me, it was the first assignment, I can't forgive that professor (Interview, summer 2008).

The internalization of the Oriental image by the professor became discrimination against Sarah. This is happening because such a professor does not apply critical thinking to herself. Thus, critical thinking in this case is a pseudo-concept. Apparently, it can be adapted for the oppression and rejection of any hated person. The critical course should have been a horizon, a window for opening a graduate student's eyes to the sources of oppression and racism. The professor in the class assumed a veiled Muslim woman did

not have the ability to think and to write a paper critically, because she herself is nurtured and colonized by the capitalist racist education in a racist and discriminatory society.

This perception is stated in Samuel's research (2005) regarding South Asian student's experiences in Canadian schools. According to the Samuel's (2005) research, some professors have high expectation of those students at subjects such as mathematics and the same time marginalize and oppress them at subjects such as humanities, social sciences and arts. The professors assume that all South Asian students are good at mathematic and are bad at other disciplines. This perspective over South Asian students puts lots of pressure on them and creates oppression and marginalization in the classroom. So, South Asian students and Sarah encounter the professor's domination in the classroom. According to Fromm's idea about the instructor's domination in class, Sarah in this scenario loses confidence in her quality of life, her freedom of speech and thought. Her self-confidence gets shattered as a result of the professor's domination (Freire, 1970). Fromm continues that in the heart of a person, "(t)he pleasure in complete domination over another person (or other animate) is the very essence of the sadistic drive. Another way of formulating the thought is to say that the aim of sadism is to transform a person into a thing, something animate into something inanimate, since by complete and absolute control the living loses one essential quality of life - freedom." (Freire, 1970, p. 41). In this context, the person is not an individual who can be involved in dialogue. So, critical thinking would not flourish in that climate as the main factor that encourages critical thinking a safe space to have dialogue and active interaction (Freire, 1970). Hence, Sarah has had great difficulty overcoming the drama which happened to

her. The result of pre-judgment and stigma over a Muslim woman's body in a racist society can ultimately prevent such women from engaging in change and improvements..

Regarding the Iranian female immigrant's body, Mahvash also explains her experiences as follows,

In general, I think until I had a hijab all action was negative but since I removed it even in academic I got released from all the negative images. I thought by wearing a hijab I was more under questions, putting down and even cannot achieve a position that now I have. With hijab I never could get this job, I am sure about it. If I compare myself to the beginning of my study, I know my English is improved and also my skills but if still I had hijab with this improvements in skills, I could not improve and get this professional job (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash, at the time of the interview, had recently finished her graduate degree and held a high position in a reputable institution. She strongly believes that if she had kept her hijab, even though she would be the same person in terms of knowledge and skills, she would not have achieved such a position. In a racist society it is important whose body accompanies the knowledge. Racialized bodies are mostly rejected and put down even if they are equipped with knowledge and skills. This exclusion is not limited to academic environments; it also applies to the workplace. Sarah in this regard claims the following,

At my work place they stare at me, are you are in Masters Program? And I said yes, I am..... they can't believe it and say ...oh, oh,..YOU, YOU (with a surprising voice) are in Master's program? And I said, yes, I am. And they say it

is impossible. But in other words I am a source of encouragement for them. When they see a second language Muslim woman is in a Master's program some of them started to continue their study (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

In this scenario, Sarah is discriminated against based on the stereotype that a Muslim woman cannot be a professional (Negar and Maheen encountered the same stigma). In Sarah's story, the mainstream could not accept her as an educated and professional person, and perhaps her colleagues are hesitant to have a racialized body leader. According to Sarah, this encourages white female/male colleagues to continue their study in graduate school so as not to be left behind by a racialized body. However, the unanswered question remains why, at the workplace, people show their racist behaviour towards Sarah. Is it as the result of racist and capitalist education that is imposed in Euro-American society? It has become evident that while we are living, studying and working in a so-called multicultural society, racist behaviour is still prominent in our daily life. In other words, democratic racism exists as a result of multiculturalism in a racist society, and it manifests itself in various sectors (Henry & Tator, 1994).

Sarah has two different jobs. One of them is academic and the other one is non-academic. She thinks she receives more respect in an open academic environment compared to the non-academic one. Even though people in both environments were the same in terms of their level of education, Sarah explains as follows,

I worked as \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ in two different places. It is different between the two jobs. In open minded academia I have more respect. One of the colleagues who I knew from university and respected me, saw me in the work place and she did not

treat me nicely, and when I told her, I am Sarah, she told me “she did not recognize me, because I had changed my scarf”. I said “but I am the same person”. If I wear different scarves and cloths, your perception of me will change? One time I am accepted and the other time rejected? I am the same person, but that opposed person changed her behaviour, she has been changed. I love my job in academia as I have more respect than in the workplace (Interview, summer 2008).

Sarah works in academia and cooperates with her colleagues. Her position in academia gives her more power and respect, but this same respect does not apply to her in the work place. If she really is committed to her non-racist behaviour, the other colleague who ignored Sarah at her work place should show the same respect everywhere. People like this person censor themselves in the context of the “university” and in public sphere they show their racist behaviour. Such people did not internalize non-racist behaviour – they do not believe in it but in academia cannot show it. This is the reLeilan that we see continued racist behaviour and democratic racism, in every place where people are not under watch.

Being stereotyped and rejected is not limited to a veiled Muslim body. Even if you are Muslim but do not wear a veil, one still is viewed with suspicion. Elli who does not wear a hijab and is highly interested in mainstream white culture explains as follows,

I had a memory about one person treated me in a bad way as I am a Muslim however, I do not wear hijab. He disrespected the prophet Mohammed about his polygamy. I responded him in a polite way. But I have a very bad feeling that why always we have to convince others for our belief? So I am not a non sensitive

person that do not respond to people if they devalue my religion, but I am not happy in such environment (Elli, interview, summer 2008).

Religion in this case has a strong influence on women's feeling. Racialized immigrant Muslim women regardless of whether they wear a hijab or not are treated negatively to some extent. However, according to Negar, Maheen and Sarah who wear hijab in most of the time, they encounter more negative behaviour. In this context, Mahvash, who was in graduate school for twelve years and wore a hijab at the beginning of her studies, states her feeling, "I felt a heavy eye on myself. I always felt it, even in shopping store when I wanted to return an item it was not easy for me although it was a usual thing in this society. I would always think of what mainstream thinks about me as an Iranian Muslim woman" (Mahvash, Interview, summer 2008). It is important for an individual to feel s/he is part of a society that s/he lives in. Mahvash's fear of mainstream reactions to her body is so embarrassing that she cannot use her rights as a citizen even for shopping. It is the fear of exclusion and marginalization that makes Mahvash denies her rights in Canadian society. It is the same fear that Negar always has about her studies in graduate school. Both interviewees assume that when they do something that does not conform to the white mainstream, it is not them (as people) who are judged but rather their nationality, ethnicity, and religion that are on trial. Thus, Mahvash is reluctant to exercise her rights in Canadian society and Negar has to put lots of pressure on herself to do well in academia. In other words, there are multiple pressures for racialized minority women either in society or school.

The reservation that Mahvash has about exercising her rights, Sarah also experiences with regard to financial aid in academia. She states the following,

I did not use any financial aid in school; it was always hard for me to follow something that I do not hope to get. Because there is no positive picture about us so I prefer to only continue my study and not request any other things (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

In this case, the Oriental image causes an Iranian woman not to seek help in school and to focus only on finishing the program. In terms of accepting help financially, the case of Sarah is similar to Maheen, Fatemeh, Negar and Seema's. Some students have financial support in school, but it seems the Oriental image internalized within some Iranian students causes them to have a negative image of themselves. As mentioned before, Bannerji (1992) believes that colonizers effectively colonize the so-called "third world people" to the point that they themselves continue this colonization. The image of Middle Eastern women that the Euro-American perspective perpetuates through literature, media, and institutions (Said, 1979, 2003) consciously and unconsciously belongs to both white and non-white races. This is one reason some Middle Eastern women have a negative image about their own bodies. As Mahvashadd, "For out of school I did not wear hijab and I got the job. And I feel more comfortable without hijab" (Interview, summer 2008). Mahvashhad to wear hijab in school because she was a bursary student from Iran and the Iranian government wanted her to wear a hijab. When she had the opportunity to remove it she felt more comfortable at work and out of school. This comfort can have two sides, one from inside of herself, and the other one the image of outsider. Because Mahvashdid not personally believe in hijab and it was enforced by Iranian policy, she felt more pressure on herself compared to other women who desire to keep their hijab as a choice.

Parallel to preceding pages about negative image of (Muslim) Iranian immigrant women, the perception of Middle Eastern women as “male dominated” renders them dependent and incapable of managing their life in the eyes of the West (Kousha, 2002; Mohanty, 2004; Said, 2003). However, according to the critical feminist perspective, gender difference leads women to be oppressed universally by male domination (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006; Hammonds, 2004; Lord, 1984; Ng, 2005; Pantin, 2001; Rice, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006), so women’s historical, geopolitical, and cultural dimension for approaching this analysis should be taken into consideration. From a critical feminist perspective we cannot bind women to this oppression, they have agency over their life. They can make changes and/or choose a compatible partner who is also pro-feminist (alongside with the feminist issues). According to this research, husbands or fathers support their wives and daughters, is in contrast with the Oriental image that all Middle Eastern women are subjugated by men. Seema has a helpful husband in terms of scholarly and domestic chores. Seema’s husband is also a doctoral student in a different school, but he is sympathetic to Seema’s work and school. In this regard, Seema says, “...my husband helped me in all aspects. He helped with my work as much as he could and also in house work he helped me. In fact for all my vacation I did my school work and he handled all the other stuff” (Interview, summer 2008). In addition, when Seema encounters huge stress throughout her period of study and feels she is oppressed, it is again her husband who is her supporter and the one who listens to her pain. This kind of mutual support is ignored by all male and female Western writers. Seema could not continue her studies without her husband’s help. She continues, “In reality all oppressions impacts me. Believe me, the pressure is huge. Sometimes it is intolerable and painful but

fortunately my husband helps me for handling such pressure. He can understand me, so at least there is a place and a person that I can talk with” (Seema, Interview, summer 2008).

Deconstruction of male domination is not only explored by Seema, Sarah also explains the following,

I share my pain in school with my husband, and at night when he comes home, I was crying and complaining.., and he tries to console me, he is a strong support for me. He worked a lot and when comes home and I am in pain, he is a good strong listner and supporter (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Sarah has a professional husband who also struggles at work. Both are immigrants and have their own problems in school and at work, but the husband is a good listener for Sarah in terms of listening to her problems and encouraging her for continuing her study.

Fatemeh, the other participant, is a single woman who shares her difficulties with family including her siblings, mother and father in Iran. She strongly believes that her father is an influential supporter who encourages her to stay in Canada and overcome barriers. She explains the following,

Any time I encountered a problem, I phoned my parents in Iran. My dad is very supportive. He also studied in the U.S.A and he tells me I have to tolerate everything in here. He tells me nothing has changed in Iran for good, so it is better I tolerate and overcome barriers. My siblings also encourage me to stay (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

It is needless to mention that the crisis situation in Iran made participants stay in Canada and even tolerate injustice. The role of family and sympathetic husbands are constructive to decreasing mental health disorders, soothing upset feelings and giving

hope to the oppressed person. I do not want to generalize that all Iranian husbands are so supportive of their female partners, but we must support the notion that it is not a fact that all Iranian females are under male domination. As Hall (1998) states, until the late twentieth century the voices of Middle Eastern women were Euro-American voices; they were not native voices. This research tries to show to some extent how Iranian female immigrant graduate students break from hegemonic stereotyping and raise their voices. The following pages explore stereotyping within the Iranian community in Canadian society. How do Iranian people oppress each other as the result of colonization of their thought and mind?

### **5.2.1. Orientalism within Iranian Community**

Stereotyping is not limited to Canadian school/and or communities; it is also internalized within the Iranian community. Most of the interviewees in this research regardless of practicing hijab hesitate about having active interactions with the Iranian community. Thus, this hesitation is not limited only to Muslim Iranian women. To some extent all of them do not like to connect actively with their Iranian community. We have to analyze this phenomenon from a political, cultural, and ethnic background. I want to raise the question of why the Iranian women in this research suffer from the exclusion of their own community. The way our knowledge and experience are constructed directly effects our image of people within or outside of our community, and we judge them based on our imagination toward them. Hammonds (2004) questioned the exclusion within the black community because of her sexuality. This pseudo-presence is not a new concept in the social reality within distinct racial or ethnic communities. The people who have authority within a community have power over others who do not fit into its values.

This detachment within Iranian community can be historical, political, cultural and religious; generalization occurs within the Iranian community as well.

The social construction of the Iranian community is, like all other communities, mostly a reflection of its country of origin. The way Iran as a country is influenced by the West completely shapes its culture and values. As mentioned in chapter three, Orientalism is a concept that Iranian people (un) consciously adopt over their own culture and reproduce among their own people (Thobani, 2008). The roots of Orientalism are colonialism and racism and the superiority of the West over the East (Arat-Koc, 2005; Hall, 1998; Razack, 1998; Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). It means the underlying factor in colonizing a nation is racism, the perceived superiority of the white race over other races and, consequently, white Western European culture over non-Western. The reLeilan that the East was influenced by the West according to Said (1979, 2003) and Yegenoglu (1998) concerns the concepts of modernity and progress. Because the East could not accept its colonization by the West, they followed West if only under the name of modernity and progress. Said elaborates this notion as follows,

The association of West with modernity, progress, development, and freedom and the East with the opposites of these features is indeed a phallogentric gesture, which associates the Orient with negatively, simultaneously construes it as that which is Other –than the established norm. (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 104).

With the above concept in mind, Yegenoglu (1998) discussed the essence of Orientalism is its women. So, since eighteenth century, the West has wanted to discover this creature, and, even in the twenty-first century, “women’s freedom” is one of the motivating slogans for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. In this context literature shows how Western feminism continuously devalues Oriental women’s identity and culture. For example, Woodsmall, in her publication in 1936 about “Women in the

changing Islamic System,” states that, “It is the West which can provide the desired model in Oriental women’s liberation, social life in the harem defiantly follows the European model” (Yeegenoglu, 1998, p. 98). Juliet Minces in 1980 in her work states that while other women around the world are experiencing liberation, in the Muslim world “women are totally subordinated under supremacy of men so there is more desire for modernization” (Yeegenoglu, 1998, p. 99). Woodsmall in 1936 and Minces in 1980 have the same oppressive analysis about Oriental women despite 40 years of Western feminism study. They conclude that the ability of the Orient to become modern lies in a radical break from its tradition (Yeegenoglu, 1998, p. 99). As the essence of Orientalism is its women, so “unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the Orient signified the transformation of the Orient itself. The relation between tradition and women can explain the continual obsession and the fundamental weight given to women’s’ unveiling as the privileged sign of progress” (Yeegenoglu 1998, p. 99). In other words “the veil is taken as the sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire tradition of Islam and Orient cultures and by extension it is used as a proof of oppression of women in these societies” (Yeegenoglu, 1998, p. 99). Therefore, the way to modernize this culture is to remove its hijab. There is no compatibility between being Muslim, and modern and progressed. According to Woodsmall in 1936, the role model for Oriental women can be Western women because “Eastern women have received much from the West. Social freedom, educational advance, economic independence, political privilege and participation in public life, the widening range of interests and activities of Eastern women in short the whole forward movement towards a free life for women has been inspired by the advance of women in the West” (Yeegenoglu, 1998, p. 101).

Nicki Keddie and Louis Beck in 1978 states “.....something lacking in the lives of most Middle Eastern women.....What they lack when compared either with their wealthier and better educated compatriots or with Western women of many social classes, is freedom of choice regarding basic life decisions.” (cited in Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 103). The ideological justification of colonial culture is that the cultural practices and religious customs of Oriental societies are monstrously oppressing women (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 98). Then, lifting the veil is the sign of modernizing the woman, one of the central elements in the Oriental, colonial perspective. Thobani (2008) called this method of colonization “domesticated Orientalism.” Even after the Iranian revolution, many middle-class people assume anyone who has hijab is backward. This perspective was observed in all Iranian movies before the revolution and, nowadays, among Iranian people in diaspora. Why Iranian people are colonized and have the same Oriental perspective as the colonizer should be examined using Memmi (1991), Freire (1970) and Bannerji (1991, 1992, 2000)’s analysis.

According to Memmi (1991), there is a process of cultural assimilation through which the colonized adapt the colonizer’s ideology in order to justify colonized values. In the process of assimilation, the colonized hides his past, his traditions, and all the origins that have become undesirable under the colonizer (Memmi, 1991, p. 122). As the colonized distances himself from his own origins, he adopts the colonizer’s values and culture. For example, the colonized attempts to change his condition by changing his skin, hair colour, clothing, furniture, habits and architecture (Memmi, 1991, pp. 120–121). By adapting the colonizer’s appearance and gestures, the colonized supposes he has progressed and feels he has power over other people who do not embrace the colonizer’s

values. Freier, in his 1970 book “Pedagogy of Oppressed,” explains the way the oppressed identify themselves with oppressors in order to dominate the Other, he says “oppressed get power and transform the oppression over others” (Freire, 1970, p. 25). Therefore, in the relationship between colonized and colonizer or oppressor and oppressed, violence is embodied inherently, and the colonizer/ oppressor does not love the colonized/oppressed, but only loves himself (Freire, 1970, p. 37).

Adapting the above analysis we can observe why all participants in this research show how the Iranian-Canadian community is colonized by the West and disrespects its own people, and especially women who do not conform to the Western norm. For example, if a woman practices her faith and has hijab, the Iranian community labels her as a supporter of the Iranian regime or identifies her as someone supported by the state of Iran. Then, the community legitimizes itself by rejecting such a person within the local community. This is the idea of “personal is political” (Bannerji, 1991; Pantin, 2001). The way people judge one another is not neutral. The Iranian community hates the state in Iran, so they reject and disrespect all the religious Iranians whose bodies show they are Muslim. This generalization is part of the Oriental image that, according to Bannerji (1992), the local people are also colonized by the colonizer and they produce oppression over their own nationality. In this regard, Sarah explains as follows,

I don't go to the Iranian shopping stores, because they suppose I am a spy from the Iranian government. I saw many Christian that admire me for my hijab, and in contrast Iranian people that hate my hijab. I don't want to fight with them, I ignore them. I have a neighbour who is Iranian, and when for the first time I moved to the new house, I cooked halva, and offered her. Her reaction was so

cold to me like I am a ghost. The only reason Leilan could be my hijab. And after that she never came to me which I suppose should be due to my hijab. In Canada, we have liberty and the same privilege as anyone else, like a lesbian or a gay. So, we have freedom, and I want to practice my faith, why others don't respect me, ...I don't care how they judge me (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Sarah states that she does not care about this outsider image, but when she is sharing her experiences with a sad tone she shows that she does care. It is an emotional dualism in one's feeling and belief. Sarah suffers from her neighbour's behaviour because she did not receive and return her respect according to Iranian culture. In Iranian culture, the neighbour should acknowledge Sarah's favour and not doing so has a definite meaning for Sarah. The other point that Sarah makes is the comparison between respect from some mainstream people and Iranian people. I will argue that the way an average Christian in Canada looks at Sarah's hijab is different from the lens of the local community. The local community has internalized an Oriental image of their own religious people while some Christians respect Muslim women in Sarah's experience. However, in Sarah's case, some Christian people decolonized their thoughts in order to respect a Muslim woman. In another case for Fatemeh who does not wear hijab, the experience is as follows,

I don't like Iranian community and when I see them I have a very bad feeling. I hate shopping in Iranian plaza, everyone wants to prove he/she is right and others are wrong. When they cross each other they don't say hi to each other and even they don't want to show they are Iranian! Although they are parts of a minority

group and it seems they have to be tight, they are not. There are lots of negative things that I can't say about my community (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, Fatemeh suffers the hypocrisy that most Iranian people have within their own community. Although, Fatemeh does not practice hijab, still she is not welcome and happy within her community. She adds that "if in Canadian society some Iranian people practice respect, and obeying rules it is not internalized within them, it is superficial. Mostly, we cannot see such respect, and obeying the rules in Iranian places in Canada". According to Bannerji (1991), this has happened because people who are colonized internalize oppression, and they unconsciously produce it over other people. Because most people do not evaluate the source of oppression, they never see it within themselves but only outside of themselves in a cultural, political, economic lens. Feeling like the Other within one's community is a negative emotion that marginalizes some critical Iranian women and prevents them from active participation within their own community. Negar in this regard adds the following,

I got the worse behaviour from my Iranian community...even at the beginning of my entry to Canada. So it really disappoints me and I told myself I never go to this kind of gathering. They were completely against anyone who has hijab and thought it is connected to the state in Iran...In university I saw the coldest behaviour from the Non Muslim Iranian students in school and it took time they understand me and separated me from the politics in Iran (Interview, summer 2008).

And Maheen's attitude towards Iranian community is as follows,

Because of hijab you don't feel you belong to the Iranian community but without hijab maybe you feel belonging to the community. But to me in general, because some people don't like Iranian regime, in shopping store, in Iranian store, they can't accept us, and I can't feel comfortable. For example, one day I took my cousin to an Iranian doctor and when I was introducing her to the doctor, he objected me why I am introducing her, "she has tongue and can talk!!!" doctor said. The doctor welcomed her but not to me, even ignored me in the last stage and said a cold goodbye without looking at me. He could not see me because of my hijab (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, being ignored by a professional physician shows the power relations within a community. Even the doctor whose professional ethics should make him treat his patients nicely and equally is not fair in his behaviour due to a stigma about Muslim women. The doctor shows his ignorance through not looking at the patient. hooks (1984) in her experience in graduate school describes similar racism by a professor who devalued black women in the class, but it is much more painful to observe such oppression and ignorance within our own community.

In another scenario, Mahvashis distressed about hiding her changing idea (removing Hijab) from friends. She explains the following,

I did not go to convocation because at that time I did not wear hijab and it was difficult for me showing up in front of the familiar faces without hijab now. I am always upset for missing an important event in my life because of hijab. So adaptation to the new form was again difficult for me, how others (familiar face) react to me. (Interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash's hesitation to show up in a new posture within the academic community causes her to miss one major event in her life. Mahvash's perception of herself and her interaction with the community has a negative impact on her life. As a result, the Oriental image and domesticated Orientalism is internalized within both the Euro-American white racist society and Iranian local community. As a result, the exclusion of (Muslim) Iranian women from the Iranian-Canadian community generates marginalization for the critical-minded, educated, and visibly marked (Muslim) Iranian women.

The following pages will examine the impact of the stigma over Iranian (Muslim) women graduate students in the context of discrimination and marginalization. We will hear women's voices in these themes.

### **5.3. Discrimination/Marginalization**

"You are from a country that your experience is not related to here and to our subject" ~ (Maheen, interview, summer 2008)

Being treated as the Other is not limited to Middle Eastern women; it also applies to anybody who does not fit in the mainstream in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and so on. The Other means someone is not normal that s/he is different.

Ng (2005) articulates the marginalization of Indian and Chinese immigrants through the immigration process in Canada and indigenous women were marginalized through the colonization of Canada (Das Gupta, 1995; Murray, 2008). Murray (2008) researched the narratives of eight First Nations female educators in terms of their experiences as students and /or members of a faculty to ascertain how Euro-Western educational practices contributed to, or interfered with their learning process and cultural beliefs. She

discovered that the cultural misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes about First Nations people that permeate Euro-Western society contribute significantly to these women being marginalized and oppressed (Murray, 2008, p. ii). If you are Canadian but not of British decent, then you are marginalized in the society. According to Ng, those minorities suffer from being oppressed and marginalized in favour of mainstream agenda. Integration into the white-dominated culture is problematic for their ethnic group because the Eurocentrist perspective considers “immigrant women” as the “outsider” (Ng, 2005, p. 14). This linguistic structure is used even for Canadian-born women of colour (including First Nations women), women who do not speak English well, and immigrant women from the so-called Third World. Mahtani (2004) in her research among faculty members and students in geography department in the United States, Britain and Canada found out that minority women are marginalized in social and class activities. The devaluation of minorities present in white, male-dominated programs forced graduate students to change their discipline. Moreover, minorities use Affirmative Action for entry, but, according to Mahtani, this policy is not a credit for minorities. Minority women have to work harder to prove they have enough talent and ability to stay in the program (Mahtani, 2004, pp. 94–96). I argue that one of the important reasons for the occurrence of discrimination towards minorities is the power relation within academia. Literature shows that instructors have more power than their students, and that the institution is on their side. Even though admission to school requires certain criteria, ultimately it is the professor who has power over his/her students. So, his/her characteristics and culture affect her/his behaviour towards the students.

Alongside the power relation, one of the most important issues at the graduate level is, as mentioned in chapter two, the role of supervisor. Each graduate student needs to find a supervisor. It can be a significant decision in her academic life. Fatemeh (Interview, summer 2008) has a hard and sad experience in this regard. She thought that she was the only student who had had such a negative experience finding a supervisor, so speaking out was stressful. In the interview, she thought if she talked about the difficulty of finding a supervisor it would denigrate her academic achievement; as a result, she wanted to skip this part of her experience. To address this issue, I argued that refusing to share the pain and experience with others hides the source of the problem, which is a form of self-oppression (Ng, 2005) and self-policing (Pantin, 2001). Making changes without being conscious of the source of oppression is not possible. Therefore, I used this method for excavating the source of oppression as a ground-breaking point in my research. I shared my challenges in the same circumstance that my interviewee had. I started with myself, and I talked about my difficulties and challenges in finding a supervisor. I explained that it took me two years to think, to search, and finally to find the appropriate supervisor. This process had financial and emotional costs for me. I suffered as there was no one in school to help me heal my broken heart. I did not want to transfer all the pain to my family, so it was all on my shoulders. One of the positive points that helped me tolerate the hardship was my conscious connection to my spirituality and my passion and enthusiasm in coping with challenges. I analyzed those difficulties as part of the academic capitalist structure that a racialized minority is not privileged to belong to. I told myself I have to dig and identify the source of oppression, I do not have to renounce and allow oppressors to bury me. Therefore, during my interview with Fatemeh, I shared

my experiences with her and then she noticed that she was not alone in these academic challenges. bell hooks (1989) states about sharing our experience in graduate school that sometimes we cannot change anything, but at least by sharing we feel we are not alone. In this regard, I can add that we can make alliances that strengthen us. I told Fatemeh about the literature about the mentoring role of graduate school supervisors that shows this is a crucial issue in graduate school regardless of race, class and gender; however, racialized women's bodies suffer more in this regard. Sandra Acker (2001) states that the problem of minority students in academia is much more than that of mainstream students, because the integration of gender with ethnicity becomes a predominant analysis in this regard and causes further marginalization for minority students.

By providing the above analysis I could convince Fatemeh that the problem is not due to a student's lack of ability in academia. The problem is endemic to an academic structure that allows for such oppression of its students. Graduate school does not control nor does it have a valid evaluation system for investigating the relationship between faculty and graduate students, so the oppression has continued as the result of democratic racism within the liberal capitalist society (Henry and Tator, 1994). Fatemeh spoke about her experience as follows,

Let me go back to my first experience in one of the first graduate schools that I attended which had an Iranian faculty member. So, I thought it would be a great opportunity to work with a person from my own nationality and culture. At the first meeting, he thought I was from Italy or some other European country. So, he was nice, friendly, funny and helpful. When he realized I am an Iranian he changed his behaviour. Completely changed in a negative way and I was shocked!

His attitude changed to a bossy way and he made obstacles between us and I felt I could not approach him anymore. The second experience was about another ethnic group. At first he told me he has only five minutes to meet with me ... but later he talked a lot....he told me about his story and his immigration process.... Then he talked about the negative image of Iranian community. Not about Iranian professors, but about Iranian community in university which all were negative....he knew I am Iranian and told me negative things about this community, ... it was annoying. I was really bothered and did not have a good feeling because he was telling me bad things about my community in here at our first meeting (Interview, summer 2008).

To analyze Fatemeh's interview regarding the two potential supervisors, let me first talk about the Iranian one. In my discussion of Orientalism within the Iranian community, I described the way the Iranian community adopted the colonial perspective and perpetuates it among its people. In this light, we can examine the Iranian professor's behaviour when he realized Fatemeh is an Iranian student; before that, the professor was open-minded, funny and friendly, but this image was for outsiders to his community and not those within it. The professor is still colonized by the Western patriarchal perspective, and the Canadian educational environment could not effect any dramatic change in his perspective or actions. The other professor who was from another ethnic background exposed Fatemeh to his negative image of Iranian school community, enforcing pre-judgment on Fatemeh's thoughts. Although Fatemeh herself visited a dictatorial Iranian supervisor in her first attempt, could she generalize that all Iranian professors would be like that? In general, we can see how a professor's race, culture, ethnicity and so on

directly affect his perspective towards a graduate candidate. Samuel (2005) brings an important notion from Bock in 1997, who states, “Faculty members play an important role in influencing the overall campus climate and in creating a culture conducive to learning” (Samuel, 2005, p. 63). Fatemeh ultimately chose a supervisor in another school. She explains as follows,

I never objected to my supervisor why you did not financially support me while you support other students? I don't know although I say I don't attach to a certain location, Iran, or Canada but some certain values are within me that it is always with me regardless of the land. I did not want to bring a negative image of my nationality, or religion into the eyes of supervisor. In any case I always try to show a good picture of my nationality and religion... (with laugh) ... (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, accepting discrimination becomes a tactic for some minorities because, to use the above case as an example, Fatemeh does not want to present a negative image of herself. But why did Fatemeh assume that if she raised her voice to demand her rights it would reflect badly on her nationality or religion? Is it the result of stereotyping of Middle Eastern women? Fatemeh again talks about the way she finally chose her supervisor,

In terms of finding the supervisor, I chose this one because I thought he is close to my culture so it will be great working with him while I did not have any course with him. But he treated me like a child, he was so dictatorial. He forced his ideas upon me (with sad tone)... to me

dictatorship is within this culture even as a friend or a professor (Fateme, interview, summer 2008).

Finally Fateme could not cope staying with the dictatorial supervisor, and she decided to change. But at what cost? She continues as follows,

Sometimes I saw the negative personal behaviour and academic attitude by my supervisor. Finally, I felt if I continued working with him I would lose my interest in continuing my study and also my personality would be ruined. My supervisor put me down. At the beginning I could tolerate it but after several months I could not cope with it any more. When I approached my supervisor in terms of switching him to someone else he was shocked and became angry at me ... he told me “you are disqualifying me and ruining my reputation”. In response I told him if I worked with you, I will ruin your reputation because I am not interested in your research ...I also talked to the program director and she told me “there is no barrier but if you can work with him it is better and you are so brave for changing your supervisor”. (Fateme, interview, summer 2008).

Fateme with laugh continues the following,

When I changed my supervisor at the end he put a negative letter on my file. My supervisor forced the committee by telling them that if I wanted to change him, the committee needed a written letter of approval from him... (it is not a regulated law in the university but he forced the committee requesting that)... it means I wanted to change him and so he wrote a negative letter for me and questioned my academic ability...he wrote that I was not able to handle challengeable work so I

was weak and needed to change my supervisor (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Forcing graduate students to remain with the same supervisor must be seen in the light of power hierarchy in academia and of the existence of democratic racism in Canadian higher education (Henry and Tator, 1994). The supervisor changed the administrative regulation in order to transfer his anger to the student who did not want to work with him anymore. In this case, I like to bring the idea of Calliou in 1995 (as cited in Murray, 2008, p. 170) in terms of how racism applies in producing legislation for oppressing others. He explains that racism is not concerned with the promotion of right relations or harmony, but becomes an instrument to justify disrespectful, harmful and oppressive actions rendered by force or by more gentle methods like legislation. In Fatemeh's case, the supervisor changed the school regulation in his favour, and all other faculty members remained silent. Moreover, the program coordinator in this school did not support her own student. Androcentric school provides brutal circumstance for its students; even though the coordinator is a woman, she does not support the student's rights. Systemic oppression continues because racialized minority female graduate students do not have privilege and agency and also because racism exists at the structural level of institutions in different dimension and shapes. In this case, the coordinator is also an agent of this racist and discriminatory action.

Seema has a similar experience. She explains as follows,

I had to deal with two professors. At that time I did not notice how difficult it is to work with two supervisors. Both my supervisors were new in the university and each was an expert in one part of my work but they did not have much funds so

none of them could handle completely a PhD student, so they shared students between themselves. But as they have completely different personalities and somehow are dictatorial, they put me in lots of trouble, after a while I realized this was an immature decision that I had made. None of them was flexible and it was going to compromise my work (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

The second wave of feminism in 1970s started questioning patriarchy and the androcentric climate in (Canadian) society and universities (Acker, 2001; Caplan, 1993; Dua, 2003; hooks, 1989). The findings of this research also show that after four decades, a discrimination still exists in Canadian academia that results in (racialized) women's marginalization. It is the same as the experience of York University in 2000. Bannerji (2000) talks about the racist culture in the school as the same as it was in the decades of the 1980s. Canadian institutions are structured in favour of white race privilege (Dua, 2003). Even minority professors who adopt racist and patriarchal behaviours are using white mask on their ethnic face to dominate non-privileged students. In both Fatemeh and Seema's cases, the supervisors used their power to dictate to the students. Their attitude directly impacted the graduate students' academic journey. Dehumanization is enforced by them, and graduate coordinators are silent in this regard. So, the question is why does the school allow for the continuation of patriarchy, racism and other "isms" towards graduate female students? We can analyze the existence of this systemic racism and discrimination (Henry and Tator, 1994) as the result racism which is established and maintained conceptually at the structural level of the Canadian higher education system.

Seema continues her talk regarding these supervisors as follows,

I really kill myself, a gradually suicide... I try to make both of them happy with my work. This challenge also from the other side, benefited me because it forced me to put much more effort on my project and also improved my communication with others; this was a positive result of it. My supervisor doesn't know how to guide and direct his students. They don't know how much time must be spent for work, so their expectation is not realistic. They are from other ethnic groups and came from U.S.A to Canada. Both are so young and *dictatorial*. *We could not understand* each other, and maybe the problem is because of language that they are not native too. It also refers to their personality, age, and culture. They can't define the relationship between students and themselves. Democratic definition does not have any meaning to them, they say "*it is only my words, I don't care about your idea, it is only my call*"...so I can't explore my idea through my words. Believe me putting all these professor together is killing me. Sometimes I don't want to see them (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Androcentric universities privilege men's interests. Professors who follow this patriarchal perspective cannot tolerate a democratic atmosphere. According to Seema, "we suppose Canadian graduate school is prepared for hearing graduate students' voices especially when it is about academic work" (Interview, summer 2008). But in this scenario supervisors have their own cultural value that conflicts with the democratic climate. They use their power to force students to accept their ideas. What is the school's viewpoint for encountering such dictatorship within the school setting? In this regard, I continued to talk with Seema regarding the school's strategy for dealing with supervisor-student conflict., Seema continued as follows,

[S]everal times I went to the coordinator of department and said my problem is not financial, or about the work, the problem is we can't understand each other's language, it is about their behaviour with me as a graduate student. They don't know how to behave and they disrespect me, and *I really got upset and frustrated*. Although, it is told schools are on the side of students but schools prefer to support their teachers. The coordinator told me "although we witness their behaviour but it is not the worst one, we have already seen worse than their behaviour and finally you have to deal with them". "If you don't want to deal with them, again you have to do your comprehensive exam so two years will be behind". The coordinator told me "I can go and talk to the dean but I think it is not going to be beneficial". I agreed with her that talking to the Dean also is not beneficial, because at the first attempt that I talked to coordinator and she talked to supervisors, they pushed me back more and more and bothered me a lot. So, finally I have to deal with them...there is no other option, you have to tolerate them...there is no other option (In this moment Seema talked in a sad tone) (Interview, summer 2008).

Conflict in the relationship between professors and students in academia will usually end in triumph for the professors' side, as the school is on its employees' side and not the students'. Students are victims in the academic battle. The role of consultant in academia is superficial as they do not have agency to change; they only encourage graduate students to tolerate and continue their study. Hence, the capitalist academic structure uses graduate students' money, talent and skills to produce knowledge that they can sell on the market, but the real producers of that knowledge are discriminated against

and oppressed. According to Mohit (2003), these people in academia are intellectual labourers. Universities are established for the production of knowledge, curiosity and public good (Axelrod, 2002; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006), and the agents of this production are the students. In a capitalist society, these intellectual labourers, students, have to pay high tuition to the universities, take loans, spend lots of time in university, (Acker, 2001; Caplan, 1993) and sacrifice their families (Mazzuca, 2000; Murray, 2008) but, in return, what they achieve is a problematic issue. I name this oppressive process of intellectual labour in the globalization era “new slavery”. Furthermore, Henry and Tator’s (1994) argument about democratic racism also indicates that school administrations also cannot provide justice for racialized minorities because there is a conflict between the school’s interest and the interest of racialized bodies.

The power of faculty members that is supported in capitalist androcentric academia can also be examined in (de)/valuing immigrant women’s experiences in the class. Devaluing professional immigrant experience is not now a subject in Canadian society (Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative) (Preston et al., 2010); in this present research, I examine it among eleven Iranian educated immigrant women. Sarah states the following,

We did a miracle in Iran. Any article I read here when compared to the work that was done in Iran, I say, wow, what did we do in there, we did a lot, however, in here they do not accept us, and tell us stay outside..., they are not okay with our past-experience ... we did miracle in home country, with less equipment we did a lot ....., so now I say I know what I have to do in home country, if I return there I’ll change lots of things in there (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Discrimination based on devaluing an immigrant's experience is the result of the supremacy of white Western knowledge and experience over that of racialized minorities. Eurocentric society and institutions cannot accept other forms of knowledge and experience. According to Said (1979, 2003), European empire brings the ideology of Middle Eastern people's inferiority into its institutions, literature, school, and media. This perspective is internalized within society and school, which then cause discrimination against women from those regions. Maheen shares her experience in this regard as follows,

You are from a county that your experience is not related to here and our subject” (these words are by a professor in the class). However, I knew my knowledge and experience is completely related but the professor wanted to ignore it and even my classmates were surprised and upset at the professor's behaviour. And they told me she wants to put you down. Why the professor did so to me (asks the question with a sad tone?) (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Nationality, religion, body, language, and accent in above interview become factors for rejecting one's experience. According to Mohanty (1994) the politicization of gender and race in class often involves the “authorization” of marginal experiences and the creation of spaces for multiple, dissenting voices in the classroom. The authorization of experiences is thus a crucial form of student empowerment – a way for them to enter the classroom as speaking subjects. However, this focus on the centrality of experience can also lead to exclusion. It often silences those whose “experiences” seem to be that of the Other (Mohanty, 1994, p. 153). However, I have to add that the politicization of gender and race will also be integrated with ethnicity, religion, nationality and so on, as

everyone has his/her own individuality. An appreciation of “difference” is the main core of an anti-racist perspective. So, every student has a right to a forum for active and meaningful dialogue that produces and accepts diverse knowledge. While Maheen is deprived of such an opportunity, she is aware of her situation and questions the power and authority of the instructor in the class. Her subjectivity becomes a significant point; according to Freire, the (1970) “oppressed concretely must ‘discover’ their oppressor and in turn their own consciousness” (p. 42). But how can the oppressed achieve this consciousness? Freire (1970) continues that true education is an active relation between learners and the teacher. Moreover, teaching is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibility for the production or construction of knowledge. According to Dewey, students must be engaged in dialogue and be able to relate the subject to their own experience (Freire, 1970; Green, 2000). Moreover, Green (2000) elaborates the idea from Dewey that “experience become fully conscious only when meanings derived from earlier experience enter in through the exercise of the imaginative capacity, since imagination is the only gateway through which these meanings can find their way into a present interaction, or rather conscious adjustment of the new and the old is imagination” (p. 272) and it is a way for finding ourselves. When the teacher in Maheen’s case separates Maheen from her past experience and education, she causes fragmentation in Maheen’s identity and brings complexity in her life. Maheen does not have privilege and authority over her experiences because her body is politicized in the class. An individual is interpreted by the political climate (Bannerji, 1991; Pantin, 2001). The point is, can we depoliticize our bodies in the classroom? Do we have to?

To be discriminated against because of nationality was not only limited to “devaluing experience.” It can be seen through students’ grades as well. In this regard Maheen continues as follows,

In one of the classes, the professor did not give attendance mark to me, because she changed it to participation mark. And in the last class she told everyone, it is better we changed attendance to participation, because sometimes a student cannot come but she has a good participation. I realized she wanted to reduce my mark. When I objected that I have participated in all classes, she told me, “you got the mark that you have to take”. When I shared it with the guidance counsellor, she advised me to ignore it, and told me “you also can follow it, but my suggestion is, it is better you ignore it, it is your last class and course”. Most of the students got perfect mark for attendance, only I did not get any, yet those students did not come to the class. I think my hijab was a big problem, she was from an ethnic religious background and always, supported the war in Iraq and said American soldiers are killed in Iraq. Moreover, in terms of any subject in class she always fought with me and rejected my idea...(even I used the theory that she says in class – Freud theory about war – but if I raised it, she rejected it and even when we talked, she did not look at me). All Middle eastern students were ignored by this professor (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Applebaum (2000) states that the importance authority places on control and power betokens its association with masculinity and patriarchy. Applebaum cited the idea of Farber that, “the classroom offers an artificial and protected environment in which they can exercise their will to power. Your neighbours may drive a better car ...your wife

(husband) may dominate you; the state legislature may shit on you; but in the classroom by God, students do what you say – or else. *The grade is a hell of a weapon*. It may not rest on your hip, potent and rigid like a cop's gun, but in the long run it is more powerful" (Applebaum, 2000, p. 309). So, the traditional notion of authority is strongly focused on power and control, and it is such authority that is in direct opposition to maternal nurturance. The strong focus on control and power, even when implicit, is oppressive because it may silence and ignore students's voices and, thus, may not be conducive to learning" (Applebaum, 2000, p. 310). Moreover, Applebaum (2000) cites Neiman's idea that students accept the teacher's authority when they accept his or her superior knowledge (p. 310). However, as shown in Sarah, Seema, Maheen's interviews, it is not teachers' knowledge that give him or her the power to dominate; it is "racism" and all other "isms" that authorize the supervisor to discriminate and marginalize racialized bodies. The instructor changed the attendance mark to a participation mark because she wanted to exclude any racialized minority that she wants to from academic success. She used her power as agency for change but to the exclusion of the Other. It is everyday common sense racism in Canadian society that minority women experience (Bannerji, 2001; Henry & Tator, 1994; Ng, 2005). Bannerji (2001) analyses that this every day discrimination and racism is not seen by Canadian people as they are used to it and they have internalized it. In another analysis about the mechanism of racism among white people of privilege, Henry and Tator (1994) explain that "racism is sometimes visible only to its victims. It remains invisible to others who therefore deny its existence. This sublet nature of racism helps to explain its persistence over time" (p. 4).

Samuel (2005) in her research about the experiences of South Asian students in Canadian schools revealed that interviewees noted repeatedly that an instructor's bias was bringing down their marks, especially in the social sciences, where grading is somewhat subjective. Students mentioned that "in a group project that we did , all of us were from ethnic group 2 Chinese and 2 south Asian, and we did a great job and our instrument function 95 % while others came up to only 25% of the implementation. All groups got 90–97 % and we got the lowest mark. It is obviously racism which applied over our group" (Samuel, 2005, p. 74–75).

In another scenario Mahvashis also discriminated against because of her language, nationality and ethnicity. She explains her experience as follows,

I have a negative memory of one of my classes regarding marking the paper. I can say clearly because of language the professor gave me a low mark. It was a research course and we were allowed to write our proposal or critique some papers. I chose to give my master proposal. My supervisor approved my proposal and the second reader who was a big name approved it too. So, I submitted the already approved proposal to this professor and he gave me B+. The only other B in that class was another ethnic girl, minority and second language like me, who also had submitted her proposal. Then, I noticed all Canadians got A. The professor did not make any comments on my work to explain the B+. It was discrimination against me because of language and hijab. It was I and the other minority student who offered a very good work. (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash presented work that had already been approved by two other instructors. How could it be rejected by the third one? So we can see how racism is powerful in a student's future and life. Taking an excellent grade is important to graduate students not only for the sake of their academic future, but also in terms of a student's confidence in her ability to do excellent academic work which gives her increasing self-esteem. When a minority student does not get the grade that she deserves, she assumes that she is not included in the school and she is discriminated against. The same struggle can be seen in Yali Zou's (1998) article about a Chinese student in American university. A powerful Chinese professor feels hopeless and frustrated in American university because of her language, and, in this case, she is not judged based on other factors that can empower her such as knowledge, skills and experience. Although Yali is teaching the Chinese language in the same university, her feeling and agency varies in different classes. When teaching Chinese, she has agency and power but at the same time feels disempowered and weak as a student in the American education system. This shows that American education cannot integrate students' experience, education and background into new learning.

Thus, the pre-supposition that minority students are incapable of doing excellent work because of language is oppressive. According to critical feminist pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Hoodfar, 1992), each individual has her own characteristics, and comparing minority students with mainstream students who are familiar with the education system and whose first language is English is not reasonable and fair. How can we judge two persons who do not have the same background in terms of education, experience, language, culture and other factors? Forcing minority students to be like the mainstream

results from a racist perceptive of what is the “norm” in school and who is normal. Although the focus of capitalist academia is individualism, minority students are evaluated compared with the mainstream and held to standards based on white normalcy. Peshkin and Colon- Consalez in 1998 (Samuel, 2005, p. 64) believe that cultural and personal backgrounds influence how professors nurture critical thinking skills and how male and female students interact in classes. It follows that, for students, stresses such as racisms in the classroom can hinder the learning process. Racism can impede personal growth and the cognitive maturation of students of colour.

After listening to Mahvash’s experience about not getting the mark that she deserved, I recalled a similar story about myself. In one of the first classes of my graduate program I had a course that required plenty of critical reading and thinking, and the professor had high expectations for presentations and critical paper writing. Throughout the one-year course, she complimented me on my contribution to class discussion and other academic activities. The professor was pleased that I did not miss class and actively participated like the “mainstream”. She also complained to me about some mainstream students who were not prepared in the class and only “talked” because they knew how to do so fluently; they knew how to paraphrase minority thought and expand and present them as their own (Braden, 2000). At the end of the year, I got an A- and the professor told me, “Zary, your thoughts are ahead of your language.” I was marked based on my language not thoughts. I was shocked for not only my mark but also for her judgment which was only based on my language ability. I wonder if she compared my writing skills with a native speaker. However, I never submitted any work to her without having them edited first. I was honest enough to let the professor know I had editors to go over my

papers. When she saw my shocked eyes, she continued, “I know how difficult it is to talk and write in another language. I personally cannot do it and you are doing a great job”. Did the professor have any pre-judgment about me as a second language student? Why did she acknowledge my creative academic analysis but not give me an A? Does my language, religion, nationality factor in this discrimination? I wondered if she knew that there are lots of first-language students who are not capable of writing well academically and they also get help for their writing. Because of this, there are workshops in the institutions for native speakers to improve their academic writing abilities. It is also important to know that we can pay to have our work edited, but that we, as graduate students, cannot pay for critical thought. Moreover, the existence of ads for editing in all institutions shows that it is prevalent need in the university. Moreover, she might know that even professors before publishing their work need proofreading and editing. What I learned from such behaviour was that, in an academic racist institution, discrimination will be shown even by radical and apparently anti-racist scholars.

Samuel (2005) also related her painful experiences of being devalued because of her language. She explained that, “one of my professors felt compelled to inform me that I would never publish because of my poor writing skills. I perceived him to be cross-culturally incompetent because he was arrogant enough to predict what I was incapable of learning. I wonder what she thinks now that I have published a book and several articles” (Samuel, 2005, p. 73). So, although language is a barrier for non-native speakers, minority graduate students can overcome it.

Sarah explains her experience in the same theme as follows,

I could get B++, but not A-. If I want to take A, Canadian students should get A++. I have to go to a writing clinic and do a lot. I did my best but I can't do anything for my mark. I have experience in one of my classes. In the first assignment, I got 89 and the TA told me 89 is good, but it was an easy assignment, my expectation was higher and she told me I don't have critical perspective. For the second assignment, I tried my best, and asked others for help, and I got 79. The TA again told me I don't have critical thinking. The third assignment I got help and consultation from academic writing. In writing center the consular told me my work is great! But in the class the TA again rejected it and told me "you did not get the concept; you got completely wrong concept". How can I believe I was totally wrong? I have even used former student's advice who got A++, and she liked my work and now my TA says I am completely wrong! And the TA did not offer any comment on my work!! After all these efforts for writing a good paper how I could be completely wrong, and how I could convince her? (she says with upset feeling) (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

The Teaching Assistant did not give any clear responses and feedback to Sarah for her improvements, she only rejected them. How can Sarah achieve critical thinking when she does not get any constructive feedback? Do race, ethnicity, and language intersect in this discrimination? If in my case I had critical thinking but still did not get an A or A+, in Sarah's case her work is rejected without any documented reLeilan. Thus, having or not having critical thinking is not important because, for a racialized minority, that will not result in a good mark. I argue that this notion exposes the existence of

discrimination in a racist academia. The academy cannot produce and support an effective evaluation process that prevents discrimination.

Braden (2000) related about her experience in Canadian graduate school that “language is a strong barrier for silencing students” (p. 51). However, in Sarah’s and my case, this barrier intersected with religion and nationality for more oppression. The negative impression that remains with Sarah after this experience still affects her academic decisions. She never wanted to continue her studies in the same school. She continues as follows,

If I want to follow my studies it won’t be in this school even though this school has a good reputation. If somebody tells me Sarah there is no problem in this school, still I never go there again. If you ask me I say from my heart I will go to other university for continuing my study not stay in here. (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

In York University’s research about the experiences of minority graduate students in 2000, the finding shows some of the graduate students are willing to leave the school because of lack of critical curriculum, sympathetic supervisors, and the domination of white race in the class. Thus, minority women are under pressure to tolerate discrimination and as a result they leave the school for better climate when they get the opportunity. This is true in Sarah’s case when she does not consider continuing her education as a doctoral student at the same school.

Leila is another master’s student who also has held a master’s degree from Iran. Her proficiency in English is high due to her teaching this discipline for many years in Iran. Her major at the undergraduate and graduate level was English, and she was a

translator in Iran and has publications in this regard. Still, she states that her work receives discriminatory evaluation. She states the following,

My department, I think like most Canadian schools, is extremely product-based. Professors believe that they have to evaluate everyone based on their final results to be fair. I respect their ethics but I think that is not a fair policy. Language barriers are like a handicap. Canadian system takes physical disabilities into consideration (to some extent), why do they ignore the other types of handicap? English is my third language while other people in my program are native speakers except for one who has immigrated to Canada as a kid. I put extra efforts in my studies and I ended up disillusioned and disappointed. I studied in the library from eight in the morning to midnight. Other people in my program work way less and have better grades. Also, my program is only two years and it took me a year to figure out the Canadian educational system all on my own. International students need workshops to get familiar with the system, their roles and expectations as graduate students. The school charges us extra money (three times as much) but totally ignores our challenges. That's so unfair, so unfair. (Leila talked in a sad tone) (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Leila with all her ability and experience still suffers from discrimination in school. With whom is she compared and why? Is she compared with her work (her first paper as opposed to her midterm and end of the term paper), or with mainstream English-speaking students? As mentioned before, discrimination is the result of adapting standardization and normalization in a capitalist higher education from industry (Barrow, 1990; Nobel, 1977). In this context people are treated like machines. Higher education as

a space for the market does not care about its students, and the productivity such as publication and presentation is more important than the producer and at what cost the work is produced. Normalization and standardization is based on mainstream ability and expectation, so minority ability and compatibility are not cases that school wants to consider. According to the critical feminist perspective, the individual is ignored and her/his ability is dissolved in the process of standardization and normalization.

Moreover, the role of the school is important in this discrimination that students feel, Leila believes there is not a significant help from the student services in her school. She says the following,

The school has a “Students Counselling Service,” where I referred to disappointed by my grades. The counsellor was more like an indifferent listener, well not even a listener. *I felt I was talking to a wall.* The only sentence she spoke was when she looked at her watch and told me I have only a few more minutes! If school cannot provide me with a counsellor, a listener, they definitely do not care about bigger issues such as the financial ones. All they know is to have a certain number of international students to make money and make their profile look good. There’s absolutely no academic support (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Leila explains that she also has a position in the department as a Graduate Assistant as well as a scholarship, but they all go towards her tuition fee. She has to struggle to meet her living expenses. It is interesting to hear that her GA position is at the Writing Development Center where she edits English-speaking students’ papers. Amazingly enough, Leila teaches English to native speakers, and edits and proofreads their work, but cannot easily compete with the English speakers in her class. Is it pseudo-

judgment about her ability in the academic setting? If she is knowledgeable and skilful enough to work in students services helping native speakers for academic writing, why can not she get a good mark in her graduate class? Do other factors such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion matter in evaluating her work? Leila's situation conveys the idea of inclusion and exclusion at times of social political reality but also the personal ambiguity in her inclusion in Canadian school and society. Ultimately, Leila's work is discriminated against because she is the Other.

Mahvash shares her experience in another context as follows,

In one case I did the entire job for a paper publication, from the idea, analysis and writing the whole paper and in times of publication instead of putting my name as the first author I was the second and my supervisor was the first author (in Ph.D program). Can the supervisor treat a Canadian student like that too? They would tear her into pieces. All she did was editing and she mentioned her name as the first writer and I as the second one!? I could not do anything because I was weak. I could not object to this obvious discrimination as I thought this is the only professor I am working with and maybe I could not find any other opportunity for publication. (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Presence of minority (women) students in academia is an advantage for professors who develop their work on the shoulders of minority women who desire to improve without causing any "trouble." Naheed explains as follows,

Typically supervisors take advantage of international students. Mainly they know all international students have been very smart to be able to get admission to a Canadian school and get into graduate school so they want to take maximum

advantage of them. But I was lucky that my supervisor is a fair person so I didn't go through what my friends went through (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

Pseudo-visibility of Iranian (minority) graduate students provides an opportunity for instructors' academic achievement. Mahvash could not object to the discrimination because she fears losing the co-authorship and trying to find other faculty members to work with. This lack of opportunity forces women minorities to work with the discriminatory situation in Canadian academia without objecting it. Thus, Others become silent and this perpetuates the continuation of oppression over them. Mahvash continues as follows,

In most papers, I did everything and my supervisor was only the presenter.

Because of language and appearance I think she presented the work but I expected her at least to acknowledge my efforts in the research. She was not familiar with statistics and data analysis, I did everything. In a presentation she did not acknowledge me, she mentioned another person that did not have any role in that research. In the event, I was extremely upset. Why did she mention another person's name that was not involved in her research? I gave myself a few days to recover and then I went to her and asked why she did so? I told her you are ashamed of telling my name because of my hijab and other things or because I am a girl and he is a boy, he can do it but I can't? Is it a sexist and racist perspective? That boy is not your student. She responded "I told his name without intention I am sorry", I responded, why you mentioned his name without intention but forgot my name when I did everything, why? At this point the instructor was silent. So I reached to this point that in private sphere that I am working with her she is happy

because she does not have knowledge about any statistic analysis and I do it for her but in public sphere she ashamed of telling it to others that a woman with this posture (hijab) from Iran is doing all those things for her and she did not have this knowledge. And finally she apologized but did not take any specific action. Even at that time, the other student was surprised why his name was mentioned in a big presentation, and also wondered why she did not mention my name?! (at the end Mahvashtalked in slowly and sad tone) (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Although, Mahvash's supervisor is a first-generation of immigrant from an ethnic background, the Oriental image is internalized within her and she cannot or does not want to deconstruct this image. Her thoughts are colonized in a way that causes discrimination over Middle Eastern educated woman. By marginalizing Mahvashin public, the instructor contributes to the mainstream image about Middle Eastern women's inability to achieve high academic accomplishment. Mahvash's ability to use professionally quantitative analysis is not a simple skill that everyone can do. Mahvashis doing professional work in a male-dominated program that most wo/men are not capable of doing. This Muslim woman's strong academic skill is not accepted in a colonized, mainstream, racist and sexist culture. Thus, discrimination is not limited to a supervisor's Oriental image of the students, but it is also produced through the hierarchical power relations in academia and a catch 22, the hidden regulation that cause discrimination over minorities (Caplan, 1993). In this regard Mahvashcontinues as follows,

In general I worked harder but my result was less. Even last year in post doctoral research it was only me and my supervisor working on the paper, she was the first author and I was the second. This was research ethics that at the beginning we

determined who is the first and second author and when I am the first author I let others know their situation and work but this procedure did not happen to me. In a paper publication in my post doctoral again I encountered this discrimination that in the last minute I realized I went to third rank and another person that had a slight contribution got the second rank. When I objected to this displacement, my supervisor's response was not logical as she said that person also had contributed. To me I had 1000 kind of those contributions in other's research but my name never showed up anywhere because they called me a minor co principal investigator. The supervisor hid this displacement and academic cheating to me, until I asked for a copy of work and then I realized! Otherwise she did not say anything to me (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

When I asked Mahvash did you have a hijab that cause this discrimination she adds the following,

At this point, I did not have hijab but I think it is a policy in academia that might happen to everyone. We have to be aware and at the beginning of our work determine it, I learned it after I was discriminated against (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

However, Mahvashtakes this experience for granted and as a lesson to be more conscious about academic policy; thus, she transfers her experience to others in regard to catch 22. It is significant that in order to stop discrimination we need to become aware of its root, and that catch 22 is a hidden regulation in academia that many minority women are not aware of. As Henry and Tator (1994) state, this kind of regulation is the nature of a liberal society that applies democratic racism within its domain. In Mahvash's recent

case, the academic structure, the competition, and the power of the (minority) faculty member caused the discrimination over her. Thus, being oppressed and discriminated against is a relativistic concept depending on who has power over whom and the situation in which this power is enforced.

In addition, Mahvash's case, she has studied in Canadian graduate school from the master's to post-doctoral level. She had hijab until the end of the doctoral program, and, after a long time in graduate school, she should have had more chance to integrate into mainstream culture. After many years, she is an academic professional, her English is improved but she is still not completely included in the mainstream society. In this regard Mahvash says the following,

Still I feel with all skills that I have if I were a first language my status would be higher, but I see the barriers inside myself not completely in outside. Because I cannot really speak English like them or completely am not familiar with the culture. It is a combination of culture and language that makes you more integrated in the society. To me, people who immigrate bring their culture which affects Canadian culture! However, the dominant culture is mainstream culture that sometimes may deny you certain rights (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash has a professional job and is completely attached to the Canadian educational system. Her academic skills and English are strong enough for her to work as a professional researcher, but still she does not feel completely attached to Canadian culture and society. The ability to communicate is more than the ability to speak in English. Mahvash still struggles to attach to society by knowing the culture, absorbing, digesting and practicing its norms. According to Mahvash's experience, she is excluded

professionally from speaking publicly to the media and newspapers because she does not match the mainstream culture. However, it is noticeable that Mahvash sees her exclusion as the lack of “cultural integration” and something inside of herself, not “outside” of social reality. The extent to which this exclusion results from Mahvash herself or from the social reality outside of her is a controversial issue for critical social scholars. However, we consider that both the individual and society contribute to the exclusion of racialized minorities from the media.

In another interview, Maheen, who wears a hijab, experiences intolerance from the mainstream. She states the following,

To me multiculturalism is a racist concept. At my work some colleagues are biased and pre-occupied and because of my language and my accent they push me and manipulate my thinking. For example; one of my colleagues pushed me and even changed my words to the manager and when I noticed and revealed his tendency, he told me *I can put a ring around your neck and kill you*, I laughed and told him you can do it but then you won't have a team leader. (Italic mine) (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Maheen could feel by her experience that multiculturalism is a concept that applies racism and discrimination. In a multicultural environment there is always a dominant culture and an Other culture. So, the Other is inherently structured in multicultural linguistics. In addition, Henry Giroux in 1988 (as cited in Rezai-Rashti, 1995) states that “... multiculturalism should mean analyzing not just stereotypes but also how institutions produce racism and other forms of discrimination” (p. 88). Then we would realize the power of bringing native voices for change in a multicultural society.

But the problem is how can a multicultural capitalist and racist society structure itself to include diverse people?

Returning to Maheen's interview, language and accent are related to the first-generation immigrants who came to Canada in adulthood. The mainstream image of these immigrants relates directly to the political image of their first country. Does a French, British or Italian accent incite the same hatred in mainstream society as an Iranian, Chinese or Indian accent? Is it because the reputation of political Iran is not like France or Italy? Maheen is a professional and a team leader, but even she is threatened to be killed in a professional atmosphere. How can Maheen feel secure and safe in such an environment?

Fatemeh also talks about her experience as follows,

One important thing is communication, we know English language but using slangs and other words that we are not familiar with is tough and sometimes we can see the heavy eyes on our face. They make fun of our accent and it is really annoying and hard to tolerate. (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

According to Fatemeh, Maheen and Leila the accent of a racialized minority body transform a person to the Other. This stigma over Middle Eastern women is not limited to Canadian school. When the society adopts the Euro-American perspective towards Middle Eastern women in all aspects of its institutions, the same racism, discrimination and ignorance can be observed in the work place as well. Maheen continues,

Even some particular person is racist, says a word about your background, accents, pronunciation, and country e.g. "I never go to Middle East or Iran because it is not safe" (words by one staff at work) so I felt uncomfortable

because I am from there. Then, I complained at work but nothing changed, that person reduced its disgrace and insolence, but still continued. I wanted to go to HR and document it, after that he got better but did not stop. I think the main reason is that we are not familiar with culture, and don't know how to deal with this cultural fragmentation. This kind of pre-judgment has impact on us, and we lose our self-esteem, and we suppose something is wrong inside of us, however, we were so strong. So this pre-judgment and stigma ruins us. And we get upset. After my colleague's action at work I got sensitive to everyone, before his behaviour I was ignorant about them, but after that I felt this discrimination and stigma, I try to ignore them, because I could not do anything (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

There are some important notes in the above interview. First of all, Maheen noticed racism and disrespect in her interactions with others, and became aware that racism exists in Canadian society where before she did not have such a perspective. Maheen had lived in Canada 20 years ago during her husband's graduate studies, but at that time she did not communicate actively with diverse people. She never thought Canada was a racist society, and this was the reason that she with her family immigrated to this country. Maheen's experience has a theoretical perspective that is supported by anti-racist feminist scholars. They believe that any racist action in the society causes an individual to become sensitive to the existence of racism. The other point in Maheen's talk is encountering subjects in the classroom or workplace that she was not comfortable with. Samuel's (2005) research examines a similar experience in which one student explored her discomfort and unease when mainstream professors

discussed Third world issues, “They did so to make minority students feel comfortable in class, but in fact made matters worse by singling her out and asking for her view on the topic. They really make me feel uncomfortable (Samuel, 2005, p. 71). The way mainstream culture questions minority culture prevents minority students from actively engaging in dialogue with the mainstream, causing racialized minorities to feel isolated from the society and school.

As a result, Mahvash, Maheen and Fatemeh’s experiences show that cultural adaptation or integration is much more than the ability to talk in English. Being under scrutiny because of your accent, nationality, and religion affects one’s identity and self-perception. When participants do not grow up in the Canadian system, lack of familiarity with the system causes more oppression and discrimination against them. They do not know how to react, how to talk back and how to follow the discriminatory subject. So, sometimes they prefer to ignore the oppressor. Sarah’s experience shows discrimination over her because of her religion, body, and nationality. She explains as follows,

My scarf is one reason for discrimination. When I registered for a course the professor was not present at the registration procedure, so at the first class she looked at me and objected why I was in that class? I told her I was taking the course, and she replied “No, you are not taking this course and should not be in this class”. *I was in the stage of crying, I was shocked, why she did it to me?....at the end of course I did not learn anything, only my spirit was damaged...., you can’t believe if I go to the campus it is fine for me except my faculty, I hate them. It is bad feeling for me, it is offensive. (italics mine for emphasis) (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).*

Yegenoglu (1998) states that dress is one of the most important cultural implements for articulating and territorializing human corporeality (p.118). The veil is dress, but a mode of dress that articulates the very identity of Muslim women. If we see the veiling of woman in Muslim culture as a unique cultural experience, we can then learn what it means to veil or unveil its women, rather than simply re-setting the liberal scene and repeating commonsensical and clinched standards in the name of universal emancipation (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 119). So, when Sarah is put down because of her hijab and religion, it is not only her dress or hijab that is under suspicion but her identity, religion and culture. In a colonized society, to unveil articulates itself as a universal and politically and morally correct task (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 120) so it is difficult to challenge it. An unveiled person easily legitimatizes herself by questioning a veiled person.

So, it is an important to understand that we notice how graduate students suffer from discrimination, disrespect and devaluation of their presence in Canadian school. When Sarah is disrespected in the class how can she learn in dialogue with others? In practice the classroom offers a racist not a critical methodology of teaching and learning. Moreover, when she feels she is not accepted and included in the class, this feeling cannot be far from the degree of her attachment to the Canadian society. When a person is discriminated against, they can react in two ways, one is getting silent, ignoring the subject and/or internalizing the anger, and the other is motivating herself to survive in school and society by increasing her resistance and empowering herself. Sarah says the following about her experience,

When I got my Master's, I applied for a job, they wanted me by phone and told me you have great CV and . . . , but when they saw me, told me "we need a person for teaching managers, we need the level of professor". The requirement for professor was not written in the job posting; even on the phone interview they have already had my C.V. so they knew I had masters and not PhD. I think when they saw me they changed their minds. Because they didn't like me, they came up with an excuse. I could tolerate that. Because if you have a destiny in your life no one can get it from you because of God I believe in Him. (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Clearly Sarah encounters a racist reaction because of her religion and body. Sarah does not internalize the discrimination that would isolate her from the society. She counters it by empowering her identity and increasing her resistance. It is the essence of a colonial society that resistance increases among conscious people, people who decolonized themselves and use their identity as a strength not weakness. So, being conscious about the source of oppression will increase resistance and causes a stronger connection between an individual, her beliefs, and her identity.

As a result, the intersection of religion, language, nationality and culture causes minority women's oppression. Negar believes if she does not practice her religion (having hijab) her situation at school and work improved. She says the following,

Yes, definitely my hijab is an issue, although I see a very good behaviour from my supervisor, but even other minority students who have language problem even more than me, are more comfortable in school. It is my assumption that in any work place the employer wants to match people. . . . if I am different from others I

have to have other things to cover this detachment. In here I have two problems one is language and then hijab... if I had a perfect language my problem would be less. If I could communicate easily, my hijab would become a less sensitive issue. Now because I can't talk perfect maybe they assume it is because of my religion and culture that I can't communicate. And because they are not aware of our challenges and difficulties, such as language barrier so they put all those problems on my culture or religion but it is only because of my language. So all things come together and bring a negative picture of me (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Negar thinks it is her weakness in English that causes the lack of active public participation, not her religion that limits her from public attendance. She also worries about outsiders' interpretation of her body. I argue that her issue about language and lack of communication contrasts with Mahvash, Fatemeh, Maheen and Leila not only because of ability to talk in English but because the challenges she faces might be cultural integrity and closeness. Cultural similarity and differences are issues that are beyond the ability to talk in English. These issues encompass multiple factors about Western culture and Eastern culture. The presence of Iranian women in Canadian society and academia will facilitate the process of the integration of both cultures.

Thus, according to this research, Iranian immigrant women graduate students encounter discrimination based on their religion, culture, body, nationality and language. Although literature also shows a language barrier among South Asian, African, and Chinese students (Braden, 2000; Samuel, 2005), religion and nationality impact Iranian women more fully. Moreover, the important factor in the process of discrimination and

marginalization is the way minority women become familiar with the source of oppression and racism in Canadian school and society. They can increase their inner self, their resistance and make themselves stronger in order to continue their studies. The next chapter is the continuation of these findings. The way racism causes participants to be silenced and ignored will be analyzed following their strategy for resistance. Participants' belonging to Canadian graduate school and society will also be examined.

## **Chapter Six: Findings II: Silence, Resistance, and Belonging**

### **6.1. Being Silenced/Ignored**

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

Anti racist-feminists critique the social, political and cultural implications of their construction as the Other. Women are treated as the Other in contrast to men, but discrimination is not limited to gender relationships alone. It is also reproduced through racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and all other “isms” that marginalize women of colour or so-called Third World women. Murray (2008), a native Canadian, talks about the process of becoming the Other through Euro-American colonized education. She explains that “my experience at university challenged my beliefs, my identity and my colonized reality. I was shunned in public school by the parents of other White students, and openly confronted at high school by the vice-principal about my identity, and challenged at university by non-white students in the women’s s studies program. Interestingly, enough, I had become the ‘other’ in a classroom of marginalized women, whereas the reverse had been true for the other women. I remained on the outside and, for the most part, silent” (p. 174). In this section of my thesis, “being ignored/marginalized” applies to the participants due to any discrimination that has happened to them whether they are ignored by the others or prefer to “ignore” the problem themselves to avoid conflict. Both possibilities will be raised in this section. In addition, all themes explored in this research are related and, while the focus of each theme differs, they all concern racism.

In this section, I begin with Sarah whose body represents that she is a Muslim woman. She explains the following,

I try to find similarities between my work in Iran and the course in here.

However, when I talked about my experience in Iran and my feeling in class, the instructor rejected my experience and said “it belongs to forty years ago and now it does not work.” It was strange to me. I thought in Iran with old instruments we made miracle in the \_\_\_\_, but in here with all these new instruments they do not do any specific action. Because I was rejected, I never tried to talk about my education and experience from back home in Canadian school and society. Even when my Iranian friends ask me about our pre-education and experience, I tell them don’t tell anything, only keep it for yourself because it is not valued in here. I did not express any thing and did not talk about my feelings any more in class (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

According to the instructor, Sarah’s former experience and education is not compatible with Canadian education so she is rejected and becomes silent. The instructor claims that the only knowledge and experience that is accredited is Canadian. Her rejections causes fragmentation within Sarah in terms of her past to present time. Can we fragment ourselves from our former education and experience, bury them, and start again with only Canadian education? Is it the philosophy of Canadian capitalist education to devalue minorities’ education and experience? Isn’t it racism? In order to succeed, must Sarah start a new life, education, and learning at 35 years old, and is this possible? The role of critical education is the integration of our daily life to our education, skills and experience. That way we are able to apply our knowledge practically and shape who we

are and what we do. If we can learn from it, our experience in the past gives us the opportunity to build a better life in present and future (Mojab, 2000). So, one ignores one's past education and experience and devalues them because of a racist perspective that one has. When an individual is forced to be silent, however, she does not fully connect to the society in which she is studying or working. This marginalization directly impacts one's emotions towards society and school, how can such person tolerate such a climate? Sarah continues as follows,

I can't, I can't (with an upset tone). Sometimes I am sitting half an hour and staring at somewhere, a point .....and I can't cope with marginalization and ignorance in school. Still when I go to the department I can't stay there and cope with it. I never forgive them. I came to Canada in order to continue my education. I have not gone to any other places, however I had chance to go to European countries or other cities in Canada. The pain I have gone through in Canadian school is intolerable and unforgivable. (Interview, summer 2008).

Sarah's marginalization and ignorance in school causes stress. It is important to ask how Sarah can become an active and happy citizen while she encounters disrespect toward her past education and experience. In this regard, Freire (1970) states that individuals must have agency to be able to change their history. In the context of marginality, one is not involved in the class context in order to make changes. So, in this context, agency is ignored, and students transform from subjects into objects in mainstream culture. In other words, Sarah's full engagement in Canadian societal development will be problematic. When she has become alienated from her experiences,

Sarah must remake her life without connection to her past. What kind of identity might she have?

In another case Leila talks about the force and pressure by her supervisor as follows,

Since I already had a Master's from Iran, I did not want to spend lots of time for a Master's program in Canada, so I picked the first professor I met in my program as my thesis advisor. But gradually I realized it was not the right decision and we were not compatible as an academic couple. But a professor in one of the main courses gave me a low mark and after my objection he told me "it is better to talk about your proposal first and then talk about the mark." That sentence had the implication that if I stayed with him he would increase my mark otherwise, it was unchangeable. As he was not a popular professor in the department he insisted on having me, so I did not have any other option and stayed with him (Interview, summer 2008).

Leila was disempowered in school due to a lack of information and academic support. She does not have the agency and privilege to change her situation. According to Freire (1970), she was transformed from subject to object. The power of the advisor dominated her and she had to be obedient and submissive. In another scenario, Maheen explains as follows,

I spend more time in work, compared to school. My policy is "no confrontation" with anyone who is against me and wants to put me down as a Muslim woman because the society and school has stigma over me. I go home as soon I'm done my classes on campus. After six months being in school I knew my rights and

could answer back but before that I did not have any idea. My goal is finishing my school so I try to ignore professors. I don't want professors and students think Muslim woman are problem. My goal is continuing my study. I came here for this purpose and have to finish it (Interview, summer 2008).

If Maheen ignored oppressors, it is a remedy for herself. By separating herself from anyone who oppresses her, she distances herself from hardship and discrimination. She is also depriving herself of an active academic journey. She can not integrate with others in school, so her role to study without any additional public or school participation. For this reLeilan, marginalization is not limited to the classroom setting, but it also applies to graduate school as a whole. As a result, the concept of multiculturalism enriching Canadian culture is under question when racialized minorities are not willing to participate in public gatherings.

The other issue that is important in graduate school is the school support. Most Canadian universities have a graduate students' centre that provides financial and emotional support. I discuss below whether these centres are effective. Maheen explains the following,

Yes we have a counsellor to address our issues, but if I complain, the counsellor tells me "don't say anything, only study and finish your school, you cannot change anything". Even good professor, only listen to you but don't do anything for you and say we are sorry to hear that (Interview, summer 2008).

The counsellor also confesses that minority women, do not have any agency to effect change and to achieve justice. They come to the conclusion that the best policy would be ignoring discrimination and staying silent. Even a sympathetic professor only

listens to the students, but cannot provide support for change and justice. The same experience is seen in Samuel's (2005) research among South Asian students. She states that "the human co-ordinator on campus, who liaised between students and instructors and who was constantly alert, felt that many students were afraid to lodge complaints of any kind. Through her interaction with students on campus she realized some instructors were mean and treated minority students shabbily but most of the students did not want to complain, they just bore it silently because they belonged to the minority group" (p. 89). So, we can argue that the school structure contributes to the perpetuation of discrimination. When there are counsellors to solve and mediate the challenges between faculty and students, why do they encourage students to be silent and obedient? As a result of democratic racism, capitalist higher education inherently practices patriarchy and racism toward its students.

Negar also shares her own story as follows,

In fact, in my job and school, I thought in my condition as a Muslim woman it is better *to avoid any conflict*. If I were in my home country, I'd follow my rights, but in here, I think if my situation is routine it is fine. But if it is not routine as I know how others negatively think about me, I have to avoid any interest conflict. One of my challenges with a Canadian classmate was that he put lots of stress on me and when I wanted to complain it was not only me, it was my culture, religion, nationality and other factors that impacted my complaint and made the main problem lose perspective and the situation got worse ....so I preferred to ignore it....., even at school or work (italics added for emphasize) (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

The same scenario happened for Negar in the work place as well because the people she encounters professionally are educated and trained in a colonized Canadian school. So, capitalist education does not prepare its citizens to live in a democratic and open-minded society. In other words the nature of capitalist society is patriarchal, controlling and dominated by those who have power and privilege over the disempowered. This is the nature of a society that practices democratic racism (Henry and Tator, 1994). As a result, society and school are two faces of one coin in applying racism and discrimination. It is relevant to note that Negar is employed in a male-dominated profession. She states as follows,

In my work I have also experienced being put down. In my recent work I felt someone wanted to interfere with my work .....his purpose was taking away my tasks and my position to show the supervisor that my work is devalued and he is an expert and is faster than me. So it was a challenge for me to prove again my work and ability, I had to convince my supervisor that I could do my work and my colleague intentionally took it over. My supervisor told me “I will also listen to him”.... although, my supervisor understood me but told me “I am worried about those employees who can’t work together”.... This taught me to stop complaining. If my supervisor wanted to choose one of us, for sure he would choose that person because he is a Canadian white man, first language and he has more experience in that company than I did.....So it was stressful if my supervisor did not support me what can I do? Because he asked me why that person interfered with my work, and not someone else? So it was my feeling that when we complain, it is not just the subject that is under review but it is other

issues as well, everything comes under judgment, maybe my religion, hijab, nationality, and language. Huge issues came to my mind as maybe my supervisor thinks I am different from others and cannot culturally match them. Or, maybe my supervisor thinks it is only me who complains and others don't do that and for my case it goes back to my culture and other factors. Finally, my supervisor accepted my rationality but that person again interfered in my work and always professionally bothered me but I cannot complain again.....so now I got a lesson *never complain in Canada* .....(Italic added by mine for emphasize) (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Negar was ultimately the winner in the above challenge. but the lasting lesson for her is “no more complain” in Canadian society. This happened to Negar because in a capitalist society the product is more important than people. People's relationships are not important because they are treated as tools in an industry. In the white male dominated work place, racialized minority women do not have the agency and privilege necessary to break the discrimination and marginalization. Thus the question arises, if racialized immigrant minority women have to be silent and obedient how will social justice apply in Canadian school and society?

Being neglected or mistreated by other minority groups is another challenge that happens in the work place. Minority against minority. In the following case the main conflict is between two minorities. How does one achieve more power and privilege over the other? This privilege can be based on religion, class, profession, language, and so on. Sarah explains as follows,

At work place, other colleagues who are professional and are from ethnic minorities, dislike me! They hand in the reports to other colleagues while they have to submit it to me and it is really embarrassing. Is it because they dislike me personally? As long as I do my work well who cares. I thank God that we have good laws in here that supports us. They can't do anything wrong with me because social and union laws make people respect each other and I am happy. (With a sad tone Sarah says I am happy) (Interview, summer 2008)

There are contradictory feelings in Sarah's words. She cannot ignore disrespect and ignorance from other minorities at her workplace; however, she says that she does not care. Talking with a sad tone about "good law" in Canada shows she is upset about how other minorities treat her. If she is happy with the supportive law, why can she not pursue it and achieve her rights? So, we realize that laws are written and documented in words but it is people who must apply it. People should decolonise themselves in order to practice anti-racist behaviour. This framework must be internalized within racist people for change and justice.

Mahvash's silence in school has other reasons as she explains as follows, My big problem in class was language, how to express myself. Always my ideas were great. I was confident enough about the nature of the ideas I wanted to present in classroom but I was afraid making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes. So my contribution in class was minimum, and also my connection with others. I was afraid of talking, although I could talk very well because I was an English teacher in Iran but I was afraid... (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash might have low self-esteem to speak in class; this is like Yali Zou (1998) who states that Chinese students in American university hesitate to talk in class. If a professor employs critical pedagogy in her/his classes, his/her students never feel marginalized and do not hesitate to bring their thoughts and perspective into dialogue. So, in the above case language barriers merge with religion and body to produce a more complicated climate for Mahvashto talk in class and the instructor is not able to engage her in the discussion. Although Mahvash mentioned earlier that she does not believe in her hijab, because it was forced upon her by the Iranian government that had provided her a scholarship, it worried her. So Mahvash was under pressure from inside and outside of her “self”. We can conclude that in a colonial education the students are also colonized and cannot see the source of discrimination and marginalization in an effective way.

Mahvash continues as follows,

It was my assumption that if I did not wear hijab I was more acceptable in school. If I did not wear hijab my self confidence was higher and I could talk more. In the first five years of my graduate studies I was not very close to anyone. When I was in class I had different challenges. I was not similar to others. I think maybe the first thing was that I had problems within myself. I had challenges with myself.

Those difficulties affected me. (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008)

Mahvash has problems finding similarities with mainstream culture because she feels that she is the Other. Because she also has conflict within herself, these differences bother her. She thought she was not normal and could not be included in the mainstream class climate. She is aware that an acceptable woman in Canadian society does not wear hijab, is fluent in English without any accent, and is compatible with the mainstream

culture; Mahvash does not have any similarities with this model woman, so she feels marginalized in school. Mahvash finds her hijab, language and culture barriers to active communication with her classmates. Burney in 1995 states that class, culture, and language are part of students' learning in the classroom (Samuel, 2005, p. 57). Samuel (2005) continues that differences in language, accent, and cultural practices can lead to cultural shock. Insensitivity and "structured ignorance" are insidious forms of racism (McVeigh, 2004, cited by Samuel, 2005, p. 57). Therefore discriminatory classrooms can differently affect students of diverse background.

In another interview, Maheen shares the same feeling about marginalization, but her hijab is by her choice not force. Still she has a struggle,

Not only me, but international students also to whom English was a second language, if the instructor says anything to one of us, got upset. And one of the students says, only finish the school and ignore them. Because you can't always talk back to all professors, you have to ignore them (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

What agency and privilege do minority women have to talk back to professors who discriminate against them? Maheen in another scenario clearly explains about some professors' perspective towards the war in Iraq, safety in the Middle East and Iran, and sympathy with American soldiers made Maheen feel oppressed in the class.

In the case of Fatemeh, she is also upset because she is always under scrutiny because of her nationality. She does not practice hijab and explains that,

I limited my communication with others in order not to present a negative image about Iran and issues related to it. One day one man asked me your oil is still

private and I said no (with a strong and long No) it is national, I mean white Canadian people are really far from the fact about other countries (Fateme, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, being ignored and silenced in Canadian society and school leads to the continuation of oppression among minority women. Taking an example of myself shows how minorities are deprived of agency for change and justice. My financial support was taken away from me as a minority, Muslim, second-language student. No doubt that at that time, the people in charge – the administrators – could have been more flexible if they were not racist. Forcing one to follow the administration's standards and regulations is a tool for marginalizing minorities. Rules must be compatible with the diversity of students' status.

Justice should be the core of each regulation and people in charge should decolonize their thought in order to be able to apply fairness and equity among students. This could happen only if every student was considered as a "unique" person (Dei, 2005a). In this section, some participants are ignored in the classroom/work place because of their diversification, and /or they became silent because they were not a privileged person and are disempowered.

In the following pages, I will elaborate the way participants cope with their struggles and challenges in Canadian academia and society.

## 6.2. Strategy for Resistance

Rice (2005) in her definition of resistance brings up the idea of de Laurentis in 1999. The term resistance is an ambiguous one, “meaning diverse things, translating into different practices and strategies that must be assessed and developed each in its socio-historical situation” (p. 326). “Resistance can be lived privately or practiced publicly; it can be open and confrontational or quietly subversive; it can be humorous and playful or serious and painful; it can be individually motivated or socially organized in group action. Different forms of resistance are counted as making connections with alliances, talking back if there is opportunity and freedom to do so, and rebelling through the body; appear against the norm” (p. 326). Rice (2005) offers a liberal definition of resistance such as “talking back if there is opportunity and freedom” however, the oppressor usually does not provide opportunity for the oppressed to talk and to complain and to resist. From the other side, Mohanty (1994) looks at this concept in a critical way. She states that resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of opposition analytic and cultural spaces. Resistance that is random and isolated is clearly not as effective as that which is mobilized through systemic politicized practices of teaching and learning. Recognition and reclamation of subjugated knowledge is one way to lay claim to alternative histories. But the knowledge needs to be understood and defined pedagogically, as questions of strategy and practice as well as of scholarship, in order to transform educational institutions radically. And this, in turn, requires taking the questions of experience seriously (p. 148). In Mohanty’s analysis, the oppressed has an active role in using her experiences and knowledge to identify the source of oppression and, in praxis, to

question the oppressors. This conscious behaviour causes the oppressed to decolonize her/ himself and take action for change. So, in this case resistance becomes a continuous decolonization by the oppressed.

In light of Mohanty's analysis, I examine the different resistance tactics by individual participants. Each participant has her own personal experience that teaches her to do a certain action. In addition, most of the interviewees do not only have the one role as a graduate student; they have multiple roles such as mother, wife, daughter, sister and employee. These roles interconnect with immigration challenges, adaptation into new environment and culture, compatibility with work environment and school setting. Thus, striking a balance among all these roles becomes a crucial challenge that requires the interviewees to have a strategy to cope with difficulties. Thus, the kind of strategies these women devise to survive in graduate school while conducting their personal and family lives is really important. Mazzuca's (2000) research findings also show that second-generation Italian women graduate students who have family responsibilities have struggled while studying in institutions that do not care about family. So, it is important that we disclose participants' strategies for adaptation and integration into the new environment and school.

In this regard, Neda states the following,

We, I mean my family and I, have problems with adaptation in the society which affected our children. Freedom is always a challenging concept for me in dealing with my daughter. There is difference between the society value and my family's value, and it is a challenge for me that also affects my study. My daughter is nineteen years old and I offer her complete freedom to be able to do my work! I

told myself she is nineteen, and she has to learn and accept responsibility...., it is my strategy; the other strategy is I try to convince her that my responsibility towards her is finished! And it is her job to take care of herself, but still I am not mentally comfortable about her. In reality I have stress about my children. I told her you have to understand me and my study, or I am like you a student...., I don't know... (Neda was upset when answering this question and she was not clear in her response to this question) (Neda, interview, summer 2008).

The immigrant mother giving complete authority to her young daughter so she can have more time for her study is a subject that should be examined in the light of cultural social discourse. The compatibility of the Iranian and Canadian cultures for young immigrant women cannot be an easy concept to deal with, and this can become a serious worry for a mother who is busy with her school work and cannot guide her young daughter's life. She is aware that she cannot release herself from stress by giving authority to her daughter. This absolutely non-mentoring authorization raises the issue of securing safety in society. Neda feels this unconsciously; she cannot feel peace for giving this authority to her daughter and she has stress and anxiety. According to Neda, her values are different from Canadian values, and she is worried about this cultural transition/ integration for her nineteen-year-old daughter. Because she is under pressure at school, she cannot properly think about her daughter. It is the reason why she is not clear in responding to this question. So we can see in the case of Neda she has a problem in handling all her roles. How can she achieve balance in this regard?

The story of Neda,' challenges at home and school is similar to my experience with academia and family concerns. To my knowledge, emigration itself was a

problematic subject and if I could not handle my role as a mother and wife appropriately, I knew in future I would have more problems with the cultural adaptation of my children. However, I knew I had to work for my family's financial support, and also I had to spend time completing my graduate degree. Moreover, I was not free of family challenges in Iran; any issue related to my close family and friends directly impacted my work and study here. So, I tried to prioritize my roles, I told myself I came here for a better life so I do not have to lose anything that I cannot recompense. I can pay tuition which is a financial not an emotional cost, but I cannot compensate for a lack of attention to family and my children. Once my children have grown up, I cannot return to the past and do what I had not done. So, I decided to spend enough time with my family, and then focus on work because I have to bring money home. School, therefore, turned out to be my last priority although this is not what I would like it to be. This strategy made me spend a longer time at school. That does not mean I forgot about conferences and publication. Moreover, I considered my academic journey as a process of growing and developing my knowledge and awareness. It was a journey not a point that I quickly had to reach. Even then, I considered how I could integrate the tasks of mothering, working and any other activity together. So, my children's challenges adapting in school and my husband's difficulty in finding a professional job contributed to my understanding of immigration and citizenship in Canadian society. Hence, in general, I handled all the various tasks by prioritizing my roles, and strengthening the spiritual side of my personality. I imagine myself as a creator; an agent in the world that should bring change. I always remind myself the goal of our immigration to this society. Needless to mention, anti-racist feminist framework theory helped me to notice the source of oppression, decolonize

myself, increase my passion and enthusiasm for coping with challenges and bring changes in myself, my family and community. Moreover, teaching undergraduate courses increased my connection with youth and allowed me to distinguish how the society and school are colonized and the need for us to expand our social and political awareness.

On the other side of the coin, Ashraf, who does not consider herself as an immigrant since she has lived in Western society for most of her life, explains the way she balances her school and family life in these words,

Hummmm.... (thinking) My dad always said everything should be in moderation...., (laughing) maybe because my thought is very systematic and for everything I have a goal and a deadline. I try to achieve my goals and for doing so I put much effort in it. In addition, I have a clear goal (again thinking and slowly talking)... Uhhmm.... Also, maybe *I am really open and flexible* to any *unexpected subject in my life. I can change my direction easily*. That doesn't mean I'd breach my ethical roles to achieve my goals. I am more flexible, despite many principles that I have. In general, because *I am thirsty for learning* maybe all ways are open for me to achieve it. (Italics added for emphasize) (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Ashraf in response to the procedure for having balance in life continues as follows,

Quality of life in general becomes more important for me than productivity. Maybe before coming to graduate school productivity in life was important for me and I think I reached the peak in terms of my professional job,.. maybe because of ageing and general conditions I have the privilege to think like this. .... Now my values are more clear to me. At the end anything that I want to do or follow, I

consider my values and by this I will think better and know better what I want to do and in what direction (in this part Ashraf talks very slowly and thoughtful...).

So, certainly in many cases there are lots of interruption in school work ...

(Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

The effects of ageing, family financial comfort and the length of stay in Canada bring different perspectives for Ashraf. For Ashraf, who has lived in Canada for about thirty years, has a completely comfortable life, and is not worried about her children's lives, the quality of graduate school is much more important than productivity. According to her, in this stage she is trying to stay true to her values, and go back to her Iranian roots. In this case, maybe Ashraf is not a typical immigrant woman who has challenges adapting to school and society. Thirty years after emigrating to Canada and with her own professional career, coming back to school for Ashraf is only to upgrade her knowledge and achieve her unfinished dream. So, age, financial consideration and the length of residency have an impact on Ashraf's feelings. But in general, Ashraf has a systematic approach that helps her manage her tasks.

From the other side, Behnaz is a single young woman who has been in Canada for almost three years. Behnaz's response towards how she handles her school is as follows,

Pressure in school makes me more focused on my work and my efficiency gets high. Because my goal was finishing my study as soon as possible so I try to focus on my work (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

Behnaz's goal is finishing school and finding a job. So, it means she is a more productive person. Family, Iranian community and other factors do not have much effect on her study. In her talks, she also mentioned that her parents are divorced and Behnaz

tried not to let this issue affect her life and schoolwork. Behnaz's goal is focusing on her life and her personal interest so she does not get sidetracked by an issue such as her parents' divorce. Hence, she is completely goal-oriented with a focus on her life.

In another scenario, Maheen has two children and also a professional job. She has concerns about her school and mothering. She wants to have enough time to spend with her children. She states the following,

I work at night and immediately after work in the morning I go to school. Then at noon I come home to have time with my children. I wanted to be home when my son came back from school. So it is really tiring and stressful handling everything (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Having commitments to family, work and school is very challenging for an immigrant woman. Maheen feels stress about doing her tasks appropriately all the time. Her flexibility at work (night shift) and school (morning classes) helps her to handle her roles as a mother, student and employee, but she gets really exhausted.

Working and studying for Mahvash who has a child was tough as she says, "as a graduate assistant, sometimes I was in school until 10pm. It was like an ice mountain in front of me. If I did not have enough passion for continuing my study I could not tolerate it" (Mahvash, Interview, summer 2008). Her passion for finishing school was a motivating factor for Mahvash. She was in school for eleven years and, according to her, her daughter was affected by her missing mother. Enthusiasm and willingness to learn were factors that caused Mahvashto stay in graduate school. In Sarah's case she uses this passion to fight back a colleague who oppressed her at work. She explains as follows,

I told myself they don't believe in me, by my progress they will believe in my capability if I work hard. In my work place, one of the senior colleagues did not accept being my mentor, because I was a second language, and also wear hijab (I was told this fact by the other mentor). And when I finished my school, that person was the first one who said congratulations to me, however, I knew she wanted to kick me out from the workplace. Those colleagues were angry at me, but did not say anything, I could feel it from their faces. They won't change, I have to change my perspective. I can't change the environment, but it is the environment that I have to work in and be happy with but I am not. I know I have to do my work well, but I can't change all people, I can only do my work well (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

Sarah used the strategy of "doing excellent job" without expecting others' admiration. In her situation, the mainstream supervisor does not support her at first, but later she shows her approval of Sarah's improvement and successful completion of school. Sarah knows her racist colleague's happiness is superficial, but she learns that to prove herself she has to work hard. Although this strategy of "hard work" is important for everyone, as Negar in previous section says it gives minority women much more stress. They always have to prove themselves and be cautious not to make any mistakes. This strategy reminds me about my potential supervisor who told me "we as minority always have to work harder to prove ourselves, we cannot produce a weak job, and we have to be perfect". Her perfectionist attitude involved putting down the students, pressuring them and never admiring their efforts and academic accomplishments.

Maheen's strategies for tolerating this problem include disregarding the discrimination and also sharing her pain with a sympathetic person. She says the following,

We can't talk back to all people who discriminate us, only we have to ignore them..., it is my idea that if I want to keep my hijab I have to tolerate.....and I have to pay for it. Another strategy is talking about it with a person that maybe can feel it. My husband always tells me you are wrong! So I can share it with a person that feels such discrimination (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

There are some points in Maheen's talk. First of all, she ignores the oppressor like Sarah who says we cannot change people, so it is better we ignore or tolerate them. "Tolerance" will be strategy for coping in a racist society, but what is the cost of this tolerance and oppression? How long can a person remain a witness of injustice and discrimination and ignore or tolerate it? Although, I cannot follow up on the participants for many years after these interviews, it is clear that tolerance brings psychological pressure on minority women. This issue was like Negar's point in the stereotyping section that because of being judged based on her religion, body, nationality, she prefers never to complain. So, ignorance and silence transform a subject to an object, or someone from being an active person into a passive and obedient person. The other point in Maheen's interview is sharing pain with a sympathetic person. This sharing will release minority women's stress and they can feel they are not alone. It is the point that bell hooks (1984) states in her article about the struggle of black women in graduate school. But in the case of Maheen, interestingly, her husband looks at Maheen's problem from a male lens. He cannot see the problem and even the roots of problem such as genderism

and racism at work and school, so his patriarchal lens does not let him understand his wife and her struggle.

Study persistently and never “give up” is the strategy taken by most of the interviewees in this research. Negar is a very hard working person and does not like her family in Iran blaming her for immigrating to Canada. Regarding coping with stress in school, she says the following,

The only strategy for me is coping with the difficulties for reaching the peak. I am a hard working student. I knew when I see the result it is enough for me....so I never thought I can quit, I only have to finish my study. I thought if I fail it is a credit for my family in home country that our immigration to Canada was a wrong decision. So, if I cannot study and work in here it will be a failure for me... so all those things were pressures on me in school. And the good thing is I can share my problems with my sympathetic friend and my husband (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Negar’s challenges in school and work are not limited to the Canadian environment; they also relate to the image of her family about her immigration. So, there was not any way for her to share her difficulty in school and work with her family in the home country because they were against her immigration. In order to prove to her family that she had made the right decision for immigration, Negar put extra effort into her work and never complained about it to her family back home. Her strategy was working harder; however, talking with a sympathetic husband and friends is also a source of release for her. Thus, Negar , Sarah, Maheen and Mahvashall adopted hard work to

produce an excellent job. All of them were goal-oriented compared to Ashraf who was more quality oriented.

Fatemeh talks about her strategy for coping with the challenges in school and society in two different ways. For overcoming pressure in school she says the following, sighing,

First of all I trust Allah, I learned to increase my spirituality as part of my life to survive. Then, I try to be patient ... not rush ... and the third thing was having a close friend who told me “don’t try to please anyone, try to please yourself”.... The other thing was my family’s support from Iran. I am in contact with my parents, and siblings and they helped me a lot. My dad told me don’t give up, do your best, you have to increase your patience and tolerance. In addition, I learned to go to cinema alone. I learned to live alone. Shopping is like a fun for me now. I focus in school, going home and school. Everything is in school, my supervisor is like my older sister ..... (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Increasing spirituality, being patient, sharing with sympathetic person, and family support were main strategies for Fatemeh. The other significant point in Fatemeh’s quotation is the role of her supervisor. Because she has a supportive supervisor, the academia becomes a second home for her and she is happy studying there. In this regard, Willie et al. (1991) researched the role of race in American graduate schools among 147 black scholars in 1977–1985. The findings of this research show that “the success of students in graduate level was mainly because of strong relationship between individual and faculty member, mentor, or supervisor and fellow students” (p. 79). Therefore, we can conclude that when a graduate student has a supportive and understanding supervisor,

school becomes a pleasant place where s/he is more likely to succeed. Moreover, Fatemeh also learned from her friend “focus on your desire not other’s desire”. I want to question where the border lies between following our desire and oppressing or discriminating against others. It is a very complex notion that we can pursue our interests while not sacrificing our relatives, family, friends and so on. To me this argument can connect to the individualist and collectivist factors in a society. The balance between these two factors is important, otherwise, we will miss one factor in favour of the other factors. In Western culture the focus is on “individuality” so competition becomes predominant; in Eastern-style collectivism, one’s interest is sacrificed for the sake of others. Accordingly, it is important we know how to pursue our interests while not discriminating and neglecting others. We need to integrate both sides. For example, in this research Ashraf mentioned her individualist side helps her to pursue her dream, but her collectivism side helps her to connect with her family and friends.

In addition, in my interview Fatemeh tries to increase her tolerance and patience through her studies, and the spiritual part of her identity helps her in this regard. She continues with the following,

I had challenges with my previous supervisor while I had a course with him. I was so stressed about what would happen to me in this course But finally I passed it maybe not with the mark I deserved. But in general, I learned a lot from him. I believe even from a negative relationship we can also learn something... I thank this supervisor as well. I could learn a lot (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Fatemeh efforts to think about negative actions in a positive way were really impressive, and I asked Fatemeh what is the practical situation of this transforming

action. She explains, “when you say hi to someone and he does not respond you, you learn to be patient and forgiving, and be good. That makes you more being” (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Fatemeh could cope with pressure in school by increasing the spiritual part of her identity, as well as learning from negative behaviours and being patient. I was impressed by her interpretation of negative behaviour. It was also a lesson for me to understand how we could learn from every single negative behaviour in our school’s process. We need only to change our perspective and our lens. Then we can increase the spiritual part of our identity. Moreover, Fatemeh explains the following,

I never had a good feeling about Canadian media. I look at it in terms of entertainment. When I watched it and heard bad things about Iran, I got upset and lost my temper. And even I say if a war happens in Iran I will leave the school and go to my family, even if it is in the middle of my school. I got nervous of the media’s image. In one serial on TV it was about Arab terrorists and in one scene they showed Iranian newspaper! I was shocked when it is about Arabs why they showed Iranian newspaper? Or the film 300 they try to show a negative image, and it is not new, the negative image has always been there..... (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

When I asked her what her feeling about these images is, she continued as follows,

I become upset and nervous anyways it is my country. So I try to use the internet and send facts about Iran to many. I want to show that we as Iranian are practicing democracy and we did not have chance to write our rules, now we are trying to do

that. You as Canadian had chance to be born here and have rules, but we as Iranian have to learn it and build it (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, global awareness is a strategy that Fatemeh uses to counter the hegemonic Oriental image about Iran. Although the movie was about Arabs, according to Said (1979, 2003), Western knowledge over Muslim body historically perpetuate a negative image. Moreover, showing Iranian newspaper in an Arabic movie also shows the homogenization of Middle Eastern people that neglects their diverse culture, language, nationality and religion.

As I mentioned earlier, having a supportive supervisor is the first and most important factor. Seema is deprived of this support. She is under a huge pressure and explains as follows,

Definitely pressure in school affects me. When I talked to the coordinator about my difficulty with both supervisors; I told her this kind of behaviour makes me hate the graduate school, and she responded “no you don’t have to hate it”...so I can say *it is only my interest to study* that could tolerate all those pressures. But sometimes you go to the border and ask yourself is it worth it to tolerate all the pressure? And my response is I do because *I am interested in learning*. Not for taking a better job, in fact no, because with my Masters I could get a job. It is only passion for learning that draws me to finish it, because I can work with my masters. So anyone who asks me do we continue to take our PhD, I say it is only one’s interest to get PhD, there is no other reason for taking it... *only personal interest can help you to go through with it*. In other words, I also learned a lot even in my interaction with supervisors. But I also missed a lot. This pressure

causes me to lose my strength and power. In fact I become more independent because most of the times I did not have their support. So it is good that you can work independently. In general I succeeded; at the end I can say I achieved my goal (*Italic added for emphasize*) (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Seema's self-interest and passion for learning help her tolerate pressure in school. Through oppression by dictatorial and patriarchal supervisors, Seema learned to work harder and be more independent. It is the positive side of her academic journey but at what price was this independent academic accomplishment achieved? Is there any enjoyable time in academia for a graduate student like Seema to recall later? As Seema mentioned, she lost her strength and power through pressure, but she has become an independent scholar. How can a scholar who misses the balance between her emotional, spiritual and bodily health work effectively in Canadian academia and society? Thus, Canadian schools should be aware that students are people who have minds, bodies and spirits. At what cost are they producing knowledge in academia? This cost can be emotional, spiritual, mental, physical and financial.

Leila uses other techniques to overcome barriers. She says the following, For sure, barriers impact me. I have to trust my abilities and support myself since I have absolutely no one to rely on. I analyze the problems and try to solve them by myself. I have to overcome my problems. One of my strategies is writing therapy. It helps me a lot. I write down my problems and try to reflect on them and come up with a solution. I also have walking therapy. Walking and/ or biking by the riverside and thinking through the issues that I have to handle. I might ask a friend to listen to me. I try to improve my condition as much as possible and get

along with those that have no solution or I can't find one for. Although as an Iranian-woman I come across distrust and discrimination, I am still proud of myself and my nationality and enjoy it when I see I break the stereotypes that the media shapes in people's mind, which I overcome hesitations and can function properly in a White-dominated program (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Standing on her own feet, trusting herself, and finding relief through writing, walking and sharing her problems with sympathetic people are the tactics taken by Leila. She empowers herself to deconstruct the Western image of Iranian woman. As she could not find any school support (which she mentioned in another part of her interview) she relies only on herself. She critically and logically thinks about the problem and tries to reach a solution. In doing so, she uses "sports therapy" as a strategy to release stress. During her exercise, energy will be released in her mind and she can think effectively and productively.

Fatemeh concentrates on schoolwork and isolates herself from distractions, Challenges and barriers affect me and their impact also remain on me. In all those ups and downs I try to focus on my study. The other strategy I use is isolating myself from anyone who bothers me. There were people who considered themselves as my friends however, they didn't hesitate to tell me why after eleven years you are going back to school? They asked me can you understand the concept? Will you be able to continue? So If I complain about my problems with someone out of school and from my community, they would keep blaming me instead of encouraging and supporting me by saying that 'we warned you not to

go.' If you don't understand the courses why you are continuing your study?

(Fateme talks with a sad tone) (Fateme, interview, summer 2008).

It is clear that we must share our pain with a sympathetic person, otherwise, we re-oppress ourselves. According to Fateme, some people in her community instead of being a source of encouragement and support underestimate her academic ability by asking miserable questions. This can be analyzed in a socio-cultural lens. As a result, Fateme's strategy is isolating herself from any disturbing issue. This technique can be effective, however, it is painful for an immigrant graduate student who needs support from her community.

Comparing Iranian women's situations in Iran and Canada in terms of education and social political reality causes the students to tolerate the difficulties in Canadian school and society. Moreover, some of them are conscious of the roots of their problem. For example Leila explains her idea in these words,

I can manage my work only by organizing my thought. Biking, swimming, writing and reading therapy help me take care of myself and not to give in to depression. I have had overwhelming moments; I have been sick and depressed. I remind myself that despite all the difficulties, displacement and loneliness, I still have many things that I can be happy about. Although, I am alone, poor, unemployed and although I am judged by the virtue of stuff that I had no control over such as my gender and my nationality, although I constantly have to compete with the students who have privileges that I lack, I am still healthy and strong. In addition, I have achieved a freedom in Canada that I didn't have back home (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

According to Leila, she is poor; she does not have a job and school's financial support is not enough for her daily life. She is also alone, like Fatemeh, Naheed, and Behnaz who are all single. She tries to use a positive lens to overcome those negative issues. She compares her situation to when she was in Iran; however, in Iran she had a job, money, social prestige, house and family but she did not have cultural freedom and security. All Iranian women in this research had a degree from Iran and their lives there were of a high standard. It was the patriarchy and dictatorship in Iran that compelled them to immigrate to Canada. So, policy makers in academia can benefit from this issue that causes Iranian women to tolerate challenges in Canada. It means immigrants from dictatorial and patriarchal societies are ready to be hard workers and know the value of their opportunity in Canadian society. Therefore, policy makers can use this enthusiasm to have more productivity and efficiency in school and society. Leila continues as follows,

One afternoon, when I only had one egg to eat for lunch, I breathed deeply and felt that I am so lucky! I am lucky that now I can make my decisions, that I don't have to accept any male domination anymore. I am poor and alone but I am happy, I can breathe, I can feel the wind through my hair. Now I know I have to be very careful about my thoughts in here not to fall in depression for immigration challenges. For example, when it comes to submitting the term papers and I see that I am compared to native speakers who major in English and I do not get what I deserve despite the amount of effort I put into school work I feel down! Canadian education system is a nightmare! Other people in my program know how to trick the system, I don't. They know how to make a regular idea sound

brilliant, I don't. They know how to sound smart, I don't. And, I suffer because I have always been the top student in my life and now I am not. Not because I don't have the capabilities or talent but because I am still not entirely familiar with the system. But, hey ....this is life and it is not always fair. I mean, what can I do? I have to deal with ups and downs. (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

From one perspective, it seems good that minority female immigrant graduate students have a better life in terms of social-political freedom than in their original home country. However, they suffer displacement because they no longer have the position and social prestige that they used to enjoy in their home country. They are pseudo-visible in Canadian society and school,, from one side they are included in school and from the other side they are excluded. As school is not prepared for non-privileged students, the cycle of oppression will continue in the higher education system.

So, in general all Iranian immigrant graduate students had passion and enthusiasm about pursuing their education, and these factors made them tolerate discrimination in school and society. They use different strategies such as working hard, ignorance, isolation, patience, spirituality, sharing with sympathetic person, and different forms of therapy such as biking, walking, and writing. None of them mentioned that university student services helped them cope or to follow-up on the racist behaviour. In addition, one important point for all those women is the cultural, social, and political situation of Iran. In fact, all of them compared their situation here to when they were in Iran, so, they do not have any other option. We have a saying in the Farsi language that when a person has to choose between two conditions – between worst and the worst – she will choose worst. Or between “death” and “fever,” she will choose “fever” not “death”. It is Iranian

minority women's condition in Canada. Canada is like a "fever" compared to Iran which is "death". So, educated immigrant women have to tolerate discrimination and racism in Canadian school and society because compared to their situation in Iran it is better but not ideal.

The next section is a concluding section of this chapter about belonging. With all those challenges the interviewees had in this research, I wanted to examine what is their feeling toward Canadian society and school. Do they feel they belong to Canadian school/society?

### **6.3. Belonging**

After contextualizing women's voices with regard to their experiences in graduate school and society, the question of women's belonging in Canadian society and school is important. This question is decisive because both good and bad experiences affect women's feelings towards the society they are studying and living in. Most of these women, regardless of their status in Iran, stated that their main reason for immigration to Canada was the social, political, and cultural patriarchal hegemony in Iran. Continuing their studies at graduate school was the other reason for immigration. According to hooks (2009) "it is impossible to talk about belonging without thinking of the politics of race and class" (p. 3). I would like to add that talking about belonging is not only about politics of race and class; it is also about the politics of gender, ethnicity, religion, and language. Since our racialized body is globally distributed in the world, politics of place would be more a challenging notion.

Thus, in this section it is crucial to investigate Iranian immigrant graduate students' overall view towards Canadian society and university, and if they feel they

belong to it. Moreover, the Iranian-Canadian community is also part of this society that can help an Iranian immigrant's integration into the new society. Because the indigenous community is usually a reflection of the home society, it helps minority people to integrate quickly into a local community, and not feel isolated in mainstream culture. So, both Canadian society and the Iranian community are under investigation in this research. But, whether these women feel a sense of belonging to this society and/or community was not easy to address. Belonging to a place is connected to our definition of "identity" – who we are and how this identity is constructed. It connects us to our past and present, the way we have grown up, to our ancestry, history, culture and so on. Belonging and identity are intricately interrelated.

In this section I did not want to limit participants by offering a definition of belonging to them. Through a free dialogue, different questions were asked to elucidate participants' understanding and feeling of belonging to Canadian society and school. So, I approach this central question of belonging through other questions such as, if you have a child how would you nurture him/her? This question is asked because women nurture their children based on their values, and cultural and traditional principles. Also, the women's satisfaction with the society they are living in impacts their families' decision to stay there. In another sample question, I asked, if you want to label yourself due to your nationality, religion, citizenship and so on how would you name yourself and why? Or I would ask, what do you like or dislike about the Iranian and Canadian communities? What is your feeling about the Iranian community in Canada? Explain? So, it was a dialogue between me and them. However, the women's diverse responses clearly demonstrate how their views differ and that generalization should be avoided.

Before addressing the findings in this section, I would like to discuss an idea from bell hooks' recent book (2009) called, "Belonging, a culture of place." After thirty years outside of Kentucky, hooks takes a journey across the United States that leads her back to a place that she can call home with a sense of belonging. Her origins are in the land, her connection with her grandparents, and the black community. She is connected to her roots and ancestors. She belongs to a place where she feels secure, safe and inspired, and it is meaningful for her; it stimulates her inner self, self-determination and resistance. She used her past as a resource and a foundation to revise and renew her commitment to the present – to making a world where all people can live well and where everyone can belong (p. 5). Thirty years ago when she moved with her family from the country to a town, she got far from the black community and encountered white privilege with racist behaviour. The new town was a place of uncertainty for her (p. 12), A place where she encountered exclusion and disrespect. White people suppose that they know everything about blacks' hearts and minds – that blacks do not want change, that they are powerless (p. 65). After experiencing all those challenges and returning to her home, bell hooks finds that, she is able to reclaim a magnificent understanding that living in harmony with the earth renews the spirit. She claims her attachment to her original land, ancestors, and family are main sources for her soul's peace and relaxation. So, focusing on the land is crucial in her analysis. Interestingly in this research, we can see some similarities and disparities with hooks' claim that I will discuss in following pages.

In addition, Mazzuca's research (2000) shows that immigrant women have difficulty mixing their original culture with the mainstream and this complicates the definition of their identity and sense of belonging. Having a solid definition of identity

and feeling connected to the society allows immigrants to integrate into Canadian social development. Needless to say all of the participants in this research mentioned some positive characteristics of Canadian society such as respect, honesty, and freedom of expression that make the women happy to have such fundamental human courtesies and rights in their daily lives. The existence of these factors makes them happy; however, there are other issues such as discrimination and racism which fundamentally affect their sense of belonging to Canadian school and society. They also mention the characteristics of Iranian culture such as kindness, collectivism, hospitality, respecting the elderly, sense of humour, and caring that are important for them to be identified with. These cultural differences cause some participants to think deeply about their stay in Canada, especially when added to consideration of their struggle in Canadian school and Iran's social political cultural policy. Are they happy living in Canada? Do they feel they are included and accepted in the system? In this regard, I did not offer any fixed definition of "belonging" as I did not want to limit participants to any definition. I started with a simple question about whether they felt they belonged to Canadian society. Maheen says, "I came here because of some benefits, education, and a more comfortable life. Even one racist sentence bothers me and makes me feel I don't belong to Canada" (Maheen, Interview, summer 2008). In another interview Negar states the following,

I feel comfortable in here but I do not feel I belong. My heart is not beating for here still I am following problems in Iran but don't care about here. Of course, if it affects my situation yes, I care... In Canada, I try to work and have a comfortable life, that's all... (Interview, summer 2008).

The above expressions expose the idea that pursuing higher education and having a comfortable life does not mean your heart beats for that society. In other words, educational opportunity and economic comfort do not foster a deep attachment to the land you are living in; it is a mechanical attachment, not a dynamic and meaningful attachment. I asked Negar under what conditions would she care about the society? She added the following,

Maybe in all parts of Iran I have someone who I care about. I think maybe it is because of our families, relatives, friends in home country whom I am attached to..., but in here, there is no one that I know for me to be sensitive towards her/his life. I don't know any familiar face for me to worry for her/him. So I think having family in here is so important. Issues for parents, seniors, kids, cause you to have a relationship with others in different ages so you care about different issues and politics in this regard. So, to me, dependency and belonging is related to the subject, related to you or your relatives and family so when you don't have those people in here then all your focus is only working and having a comfortable life. You don't feel any governmental action or other changes affect you... I don't have specific connection to this society, I am not connected. So to me having family in here is so crucial and would make me feel more dependent ..., without that we always suppose we are like passengers who every time can pack their luggage and leave the country (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

So attachment can be mechanical when we analyze it only in terms of economic comfort, and it can be dynamic when it comes to caring about your relatives, friends, and society in all its aspects. Negar finds fulfillment in her attachment to her family and any

issues related to it. So, she follows problems in Iran as all her family members are living there. Her expectations in Canada are limited to work and a comfortable life. However, following our talk Negar mentioned that, as her daughter grows up, issues relating to her daughter will cause Negar to care about some subjects in Canada, but that the question of belonging will still remain a challenge for her.

In another interview Fatemeh was surprised at the question of belonging and stated the following,

Uhhh...it is really an interesting question. I feel I don't belong either to here or to Iran. When I am here I miss my family in Iran and when I am in Iran I miss here. But when I am here I don't feel I belong to this society and when I am in Iran I can't tolerate lots of issues there either... (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

When I asked in-depth what her definition of belonging is, she continued as follows,

Belonging does not have any border... It is rooted to your family... I belong to them. My roots are my family, siblings... any place you are happy you belong to that place. I feel my roots do not belong to any land it is rooted to my family. I was born and lived in Iran. I love some ethnic minority groups in Iran such as Gashgae... I miss my residence in Iran. Sometimes I miss the traffic in Iran or the smell of the trees in there... I really miss it but when I am there nothing is changed that I want to go back. But on the other side, if I have a problem in Iran I can find a person to help me...with all those problems living there is much easier than here.... We are happier there than here. It is a sense that I am telling. With all those problems still if we shout in a street in Iran someone will come and ask to

give us help.... there is something there....(Fatemeh talks slowly and thoughtfully), there is dignity there but it is not here.... In Canada If you are in need no one helps you, it is really a materialistic society (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Fatemeh's opinion is close to Negar's perspective. In their view, belonging is related to their ancestors, to their family. These connections make their lives meaningful. In the adaptation section, I explored the concept of collectivism in Eastern society in contrast to individualism in Western capitalist society. Some participants find this cultural divergence problematic both in their adaptation and sense of belonging to Canadian society. For example, as an immigrant woman, Fatemeh states she cannot find any emotional or economic support in this capitalist society in times of need. As a result, her loneliness and helplessness affect her sense of belonging in Canadian society. However, she is successful in terms of academic work. Fatemeh adds the following,

Whatever we do in here, we will always be foreigners... it is really clear and transparent for me. It is a hidden feeling even in school. I feel native students are more successful than we are... although I am good at language still the first language students are more successful than I am... here we have a sense of being alone, but maybe some don't...and they are happy. Diaspora is a very hard thing... it is a negative thing in here (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Although Fatemeh defines success mostly in terms of acculturation, the way a person can dissolve in mainstream culture, still the intersection of belonging and identity is a difficult concept for her. Fatemeh defines "who she is" as follows, "(with a

thoughtful tone)... I am a Muslim, Iranian educated woman. And I am successful". When I asked where the Canadian part is, she continues while laughing,

Everyone goes back to her origin and roots still I am Muslim Iranian one, who is Canadian person? Who is pure Canadian? It is only native people. I feel I have roots in that land.... Maybe because of this I say my root is my family... I don't belong to the land in Iran or Canada I don't feel I belong to the land... I belong to my family...I don't know, I don't know.... it is a strange sense (Fateme, interview, summer 2008).

Fateme defines her identity based on her religion, Islam, and nationality, Iran. Although she does not practice Islamic dressing, she emphasizes her religion as important to her spirituality. Fateme's identity is related to her roots, to her family, her religion and nationality. She identified all these factors earlier as sources of strength to overcome oppression in Canadian school, so they are indicators of her resistance. Thus, we realize the connection between identity and belonging influences a person's agency, power and resistance. However, the Canadian part of Fateme's identity is undefined because she is curious about what the definition of "Canadian" is. Who is Canadian in origin? This is a true question as, in one line of thinking, only native people are Canadian in origin and all others are immigrants. In contrast to Fateme and Negar whose primary attachment is to family, hooks focuses on the land in her belonging book. She goes even further to connect the spiritual part of her identity to a geographical place (p. 68), a place of her childhood and her memory (p. 65). Scott Russell Sanders says, "When you belong to a place you have commitment to that place, if it is not your home, there is no commitment" (hooks, 2009, p. 68). He continues, "I cannot have a spiritual center without having a

geographical one, I cannot live a grounded life without being grounded in a place.”

Connecting home to spiritual peace, he reminds hooks that “in belonging to a landscape, one feels a rightness, at-homeness, a knitting of self, and world’ (hooks, 2009, p. 68). I would like to argue that although our childhoods and memories are important to our belonging to a place, the host society’s nature makes belonging more or less difficult for newcomers. The extent to which our beliefs, values and so on are merged in the mainstream culture impacts our degree of attachment and belonging to that society. bell hooks and the participants in this both research encountered racism and discrimination in white patriarchal culture and question their presence in that society.

In another interview, Maheen also found the question of belonging a hard question. She explains as follows,

About belonging you don’t belong to a society when they reject you sometimes even one time. It is not about me it is for every single immigrant, man or woman. When it happens to you, you ask yourself why I am here and do I belong to this society...? If I belong, why do they do this to me? (At this moment she is very upset and talks in a sad tone) ...I’ll tell you an example in my workplace. In my workplace, a Canadian black staff member came to me and was crying because one of the clients told her, “*you are nigger and you know your history. You have to clean my room for me. Your ancestors were slaves and you have to clean my room now*”.....the staff member could not work anymore at that time and I gave her a rest for the day. And that person told me *I should not come to Canada; here is not my country, my home*. When I reported to the top manager and that staff again explained the subject, the manager told her, “you have to tell people black

slavery was a story and it is not anymore, it is just a story and it does not exist anymore” (at this time Maheen was so angry and with a very angry tone continued) ...I got upset from manager’s foul talk, even if it is a story *it is about our ancestors and we belong to them, we cannot separate ourselves from our ancestors*. And people don’t have to talk about our ancestors like this. So, as I understand the way I approached it was different from the manager’s approach (Italics added by me for emphasis) (Maheen, interview, summer 2008).

Similar to Fatemeh and Negar, Maheen also believes that belonging is a sense of connection to our ancestors, to roots from which we cannot separate ourselves. However, this important and crucial notion is ignored and abused in Canadian society. When racialized immigrant women are marginalized and oppressed based on their history, religion, language and so on it causes them to feel that Canada is not their place and home. Such a woman will also question her immigration to the host society. In this regard hooks (2009) quotes from Paulo Friere’s 1997 book, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, “suffering exile implies recognizing that one has left his or her context of origin, it means experiencing bitterness, the clarity of a cloudy place where one must make right moves to get through. Exile cannot be suffered when it is all pain and pessimism. Exile cannot be suffered when it is all reLeilan. One suffers exile when his or her conscious body, reLeilan and feeling – one’s whole body – is touched... To have a project for the future, I do not live only in the past. Rather, I exist in the present, where I prepare myself for the possible return” (p. 219). So in exile people are not fragmented from their past and their history. They learn from their past and acknowledge it even as that past forces them into exile and to change for a better future. So, when Maheen and her colleagues encounter

racism they question their presence in Canadian society. It is the nature of a capitalist patriarchal racist society to question immigrants' (past) history and devalue them. A racist society such as North American society causes people ranging from well-known scholars like bell hooks to an average person like Maheen to question their belonging to the home/host society.

From the other side, women like Behnaz and Naheed are single graduate students and are younger than the other participants. They did not have the opportunity to start their adult lives and careers in Iran; it is Canada that gave them this independence. As this independence is very important for them, they do not feel much attachment to Iran. At the time of their interviews, they had been in Canada for about three years, but their happiness was greater compared to Sarah, Maheen, Fatemeh, and Negar who had lived for four to seven years in Canada. Behnaz and Naheed believe Canadian society has given them a good life so they feel they belong to it. Behnaz explains as follows,

Through these seven years that I am out of Iran (she was in Europe, and then immigrated to Canada); I don't feel I miss it... I like Iranian music. For example when I go to a traditional Iranian concert the whole time I am crying but I don't like to go and live there. Not at all. But I really feel I belong to this society and I barely miss Iran (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

Behnaz does not have a positive experience of Iran, so she does not want to live there and does not feel any belonging to Iran. The patriarchal climate in Iran provides an extremely negative image for her so, although she feels connected to Iranian music and remembers her school in Iran fondly, still Behnaz would not want to live there. In contrast she can live freely in Canada and enjoy going to the library, recreation and other

things that make her life easier here than in Iran. The same sense is seen in Naheed's words. These two women are single and had full financial support for their education, they have good supervisors, and a respectful environment at school. All these factors influence their satisfaction living in Canadian society. In continuing our discussion about Behnaz's definition of belonging, she adds the following,

To me "*all my parts say I want to go there it is belonging*". So, I don't have such feeling for Iran. I miss all my childhood, alley, street, and my childhood house. But if I think all my parts belong to that country not at all. I am not happy about the news of Iran. All youth are addicted to some drugs, so how can we want to nurture our next generation there? (italics mine) (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

Behnaz unconsciously is talking about her worries about Iran, the cultural corruption that leads to the misguiding of youth in Iran. Hearing about political and cultural corruption makes Behnaz feel there is not a safe space and security in Iran, and it impacts her feeling of belonging to Iran. The political, economic and cultural situation of Iran does influence one's feelings, but does it cause one to feel that s/he does not belong to that nation? Or make us think about how we can change it? This kind of analysis goes back to one's personal analytical lens and also to one's personality.

Behnaz's train of thought can be seen in Naheed's words,

I feel I belong to Canadian school and society. I feel it. I did not have such feeling until a while after I returned from a visit to Iran. If I wanted to talk about my home I feel it is in Canada. It is in here, because before coming to Canada, I did not have any independence in Iran. I lived there with my parents, so I felt that my

home is in Canada. And it is one of the best things I got from Canada – having no dependency on anyone and standing on my own feet (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

Clearly when the institutions can provide for students' financial and emotional comfort, the students in return feel they are included in the school culture and in society in general. This inclusion and integration enriches Canadian society as well. Naheed did not have the opportunity for an independent life in Iran; although she studied in a highly reputable university, she was dependent on her family. It was a significant issue in her life and because she could achieve independence in Canada she would rather live in this society than in Iran. Naheed says her idea of belonging is as follows,

Ahhhhh, I don't know, maybe it is kind of feeling comfortable, when you are walking in the street you don't feel you are from the moon, you feel comfortable, you are one of the members of that city. You don't feel people don't want you, it is kind of peace that you feel it. In other words, I am like others because most people are immigrants I feel I am like them and from the other side I am not like them in terms of my views about religion, ...or politics, ...we are so sensitive and don't believe anything simply that the media tells us... people in here are more relaxed and calm and easily accept any news from media (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

Naheed has a scholarship from school and she is not worried about managing her life. In addition, her perspective towards multiculturalism is a liberal in way that makes her life much easier than that of people like Maheen, Negar, and Fatemeh who are more critical. Naheed feels she is like the others, so Canada can be her home. However, she

also talks about her cultural, religious and political differences in this society. She did not encounter racist behaviour as a result of these differences, however, so her experience in Canadian school and society is positive and, as a result, she adopts a positivistic attitude toward the Canadian society and school. All critical feminists believe experience plays a role in our knowledge production. Even bell hooks (2009) states that when she encountered racism, she could feel how difficult it is living in a society and community where you are not respected.. I believe it is not necessary that we ourselves encounter racism for us to feel that it exists. If we hear, see, or read racism directed at other Others, we understand that it exists even if we are not impacted directly by it. As June Larking says, “we are not free when others are oppressed”. People form a chain of humanity and are connected to each other. We are free when others also can be free.

In further discussion, Naheed explains how her Iranian identity impacts her identity in general. She explains as follows,

Past and future time of Iran is important to me, I grew up with that atmosphere. When I see another Iranian person I feel more comfortable with him/her, and in addition Farsi is my language that I feel more comfortable with...anyways, I feel you grow up with a culture to define who you are... (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

In terms of how she defines her identity, Naheed explains, “I consider myself an Iranian woman. Because I was born in Iran and grew up there, I grew up with Iranian culture. My parents are there and attached to Iranian culture, so my culture is Iranian” (Naheed, interview, summer 2008).

Culture, heritage, and language impact people's feeling and their sense of belonging. Because people are different and have different perspectives, the way they negotiate the impact of these factors on their feeling of belonging also differs. Naheed feels attached to her family and culture, but she feels she has a more comfortable life in Canada. This comfort defines her belonging to Canadian society, and she connects materialistic life with personal happiness. Negar, Fatemeh, Maheen, and Sarah have the opposite experience, their comfortable life is not enough to satisfy them and make them feel they belong to Canada. So, I wonder if age and life experience can change Naheed's perception about Canada. Moreover, Iran's cultural, social and political agenda constantly impact Iranian people/women. Patriarchy and dictatorship in Iran cause women to leave the country and feel happy living in other countries regardless of racism and discrimination against them. In this regard, I remember my life back home; we had a completely comfortable life but we left our possessions because of the social, political and cultural hegemony. So, I am happy living in Canada and benefiting from its education, but I am aware of the injustice and racism that are not just limited to this land but are universal. I am a Canadian citizen and carry a citizenship card, but I have some values that are not respected either in Iran or here. My history, background, and also my childhood were in Iran, but I like Canada. I am connected to my past in Iran, but I am living in the present time which becomes a past for my future. I am also connected to good citizens everywhere in the world, so how can we separate ourselves from others when we as people are interconnected? For me, belonging is a complicated and relativistic concept. If for example, there is a competition between Canada and the United States, I would like Canada to win the game, but if it is between Canada and Iran, I would

like Iran to win the game. Our perspective toward everything impacts on our feeling of belonging. Our perspectives on nationality, culture, religion, and ethnicity impact us, so too does having a racist, liberal, or critical perspective make us who we are and shape how we see the world around us.

In another interview, Ashraf also explores her idea towards being Iranian/Canadian and her feeling of belonging to Canadian society,

My children grew up in the West but they are Iranian and have Iranian culture, and know how to integrate in other culture. They talk Farsi and respect the family's culture and values. From psychological view it is really important people can keep their culture and also integrate into other cultures..., keep their own culture and also allow other cultures to influence them as well (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

When I asked what do you like and dislike about Iranian culture and also what do you like/dislike about Canadian culture, she laughed and continued as follows,

Lots of things.... Iranian culture is important from emotional side. The security I feel within myself is from Iranian part. Not from Canadian part. If all things go to zero, my Iranian culture will not end and I am attached to it. My anchor is that, because in relationship with all my siblings and parents we have unconditional love. The point that Iranian culture can be a barrier again is dependency on each other. .... I am myself a model of this thought..... I followed my individualistic part of my desire and I am very independent person and Canadian culture allows me to follow this part, but Iranian culture allows me to see the consequences of my individualism. So I can integrate these two cultures together. If I only were

Iranian I never moved on and stayed in Iran and took care of my siblings and parents or if I were completely Canadian I wouldn't care about them and only follow my individual part of my needs but the combination of both allows me to follow my needs and also connect to them. (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Ashraf is aware of her emotional and logical cultural transformation. She is aware of the impact of her cultural interactions upon her identity. She deduces that, if she has passion in her life and peace between her mind, body and spirit, it is because of her attachment to her past, her culture and her family. She can be an independent person, standing on her own feet as part of Canadian/ Western culture. This perspective is, like Naheed and Behnaz's perspective, the result of the individualistic Canadian society. The integration of two cultures empowers these women to take advantage of both sides, as Ashraf does when she cleverly sees both the positive and negative sides the collectivist and individualist parts of a person. In addition, her attachment to her origin gives her strength to increase her tolerance. Maybe this is the concept that bell hooks (2009) states when she describes that to increase the spiritual part of her identity, she needs her geographical land of origin. In this research, however, although families and ancestors are mentioned, the land is not a main factor.

In response to how do you define yourself, are you Iranian /Canadian, Ashraf says the following,

If I want to define myself I say Iranian Canadian, but I don't need to define myself. But if I want to label it I say firstly I am Iranian, uommmm... (with laugh) ....Iranian English Canadian meanwhile I feel...very much ...very much....belonging to Canada , in fact before 9/11/ 2001 I felt it more ....

(laughing)... from 2001–2003 I had a big emotional struggle .....but now... yes yes...very much (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

After many years living in Western society, Ashraf struggled with her identity after 9/11 in 2001. As a consequence of the 9/11 tragedy, Ashraf questioned her belonging to Canadian society for the first time. Before that, she did not feel that she was an immigrant, but that she was a British-Canadian citizen. Then, after the 9/11, Ashraf questioned her identity and belonging, “after 9/11 the society’s perspective changed over a person like me and my perspective also changed over the society”. For two years she struggled to reconstruct and redefine her identity, and to determine her place of belonging. Finally, she could see and analyze each segment of her identity - the Iranian and Canadian-British parts. All those struggles along with ageing helped her to review her background and establish a firm personality. She is proud of being an Iranian person who could integrate with British and Canadian culture. Graduate school transformed her perspective from liberal to critical, opened her eyes to discrimination and racism and finally Ashraf is searching to become a citizen of the world, like Mahvash. In addition, we notice “meeting adversity with perseverance and learning how to cope with difficulties shaped the content of one’s character. And one’s character determined one’s fate” (hooks, 2009, p. 207). Ashraf, by looking back and analyzing her hardships, could reconstruct her identity and resistance.

In another interview, Seema responds to her feeling about belonging to Canadian society as follows,

With all this annoying time ... when I put all good and bad together I feel in general I can accept the system. I cannot separate myself from Canadian society. I

was also in Europe and worked for three months but I never felt I belonged there. And it was not because I was there for a short time, I think when there are lots of native people in a country you cannot feel belonging to that society. I think this multiculturalism in Canada has negative thing and positive, anyways we can feel we are part of this society (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Seema looks at multiculturalism in a liberal way as diverse face and race. Seema is a positive person and says she can feel she is part of Canadian society when she compares her situation with that of her mother and sister in England,

My mom has been living in England for thirty years but does not feel she belongs there. English people treat you as a stranger. But in here multiculturalism is propaganda .... When I am walking I thought it is my country.... I think more than get negative things from multiculturalism, it brings more positive things from this society (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

I pursued a discussion about how Seema defines multiculturalism. She explained as follows,

To me this country is willing to accept foreigners, and it is good. This country does not have natives or they are marginalized... so you don't feel you are isolated and are a stranger. You feel you are also making this country. Apparently, this country says we don't care about your race, religion, ethnicity... this kind of thought is good, maybe there are lots of layers below it... But on the surface it says you cannot hate someone else and do something over him, it is a hate crime (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Seema's quotation shows how our perspective towards our pain is important to our analysis. Seema suffers from patriarchal supervisors and a lack of emotional and financial support, but still feels she is connected to Canadian society. Thus, a woman's perspective and expectation are important to her degree of attachment and happiness in society. She mentions hate crime, but how she could use this legislation in her androcentric school to assert her rights? How does a capitalist graduate school ensure the effectiveness of school legislation for its racialized students? Seema's analysis towards being accepted in the society is problematic when we consider her story from both a micro and macro perspective. From a micro perspective Seema suffers in school; she does not have agency or the privilege to assert her rights. In a macro lens, however, she is happy living in Canada. She also mentions one important point about her appearance that she is often mistaken as a French woman. She has white skin, light-coloured eyes and does not wear Islamic dress, so society perceives her body differently in comparison to her husband, who is a brown-skinned man. Moreover, we have to analyze Seema and Naheed's notion of the positive side of multiculturalism in Canadian society; they believe there are no native people, or if there are they are marginalized, so everyone is an immigrant and they feel good in the society as a result. Seema and Naheed are ignorant about native people in Canada. The impact of colonial legislation on native women's status in Canada is not their concern. According to Das Gupta (1995), native people and particularly native women were deprived of their rights in Canadian multicultural society since European colonizers first occupied this country. This prolonged colonization still exists over native people/women. Murray (2008) in her research examined the role of Euro-centric education in dehumanizing Canadian native indigenous knowledge. So, if

we adopt the liberal perspective we cannot see our situation in a critical way, and we oppress ourselves and others. Bannerji (1991) states that the blindness of colonized or oppressed persons prevents them from seeing the role of colonizer. Thobani (2008) labels this kind of person as a “domesticated Oriental.” Domesticated Oriental people are Oriental and define themselves through Western eyes; we are happy to come to Canada and become free. Seema sees her husband’s marginalization in the society but she is as ignorant about it as she is to the status of native people. Naheed does not sympathize with other international students who experience pressure from their supervisors and the androcentric school system to do an excellent job without reward. Seema continues as follows,

When we are passing a street, the way people look at us, my husband and me, is different. Mostly they say hi or laugh to me but ignore my husband, (with laugh) I think because I am blonde with coloured eyes but my husband is brown... he suffers from this contradictory behaviour... (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, the way we are treated impacts our feeling towards the society. But looking from a macro perspective we cannot see only our situation and ignore Others who are marginalized. If the system were just and fair, skin colour, religion, nationality would not matter; while Seema is privileged because of her skin colour, this privilege shows that racism is alive but does not apply to her in this context. In general, despite all the discrimination and racism Seema observes around her, her feeling towards Canadian society is positive. She also talks about her feeling due to her nationality and culture as follows,

I am not ashamed of being Iranian because I feel this society respect it. On the other hand, I don't say I am proud of being Iranian, because I don't feel it is superior to any other nationality. I feel we are not superior or inferior compared to other nationality. In terms of my nationality, I say I am Iranian. But my being Iranian does not separate me from my Canadian part. Why I say I am Iranian not Canadian means Canadian culture does not add anything to my identity. I got my culture from somewhere else, I grew up somewhere else, the characteristics of my culture is shaped and defined somewhere else. I am different from a 4 year old kid who grows up here. I learned a lot from here and also from other cultures in here but my cultural base that made me who I am is not from here (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

Seema's interview shows her interest and belonging to Canadian society but she is influenced by her cultural values and identity from her home country. In this regard she is conscious about her own character, values, identity and tries to integrate with other cultures rather than assimilate into mainstream culture. When I emphasized that you say you learned a lot here, but you distinguish between these things and your identity, Seema says "yes...yeas... (with a strong tone again said yes) ...although I don't feel I am a stranger in this country but I am an Iranian person, because whatever made my culture and identity was not in here" (Seema, Interview, summer 2008). Factors which make us "who we are" are related to our past, but is this a fixed identity or can it be changed? Seema and all other participants in this research mention attachment to their past and happiness being an Iranian person, but this background is not disconnected from their present situation.

In another interview, Leila's defines being Iranian from another point of view. She says the following,

I am not completely an Iranian person who follows all cultural things. I also learn something from Western Culture. So I am in between. In general I am Iranian. But as a child I always was critical about my culture. I am an Iranian woman who thinks and criticizes the environment around herself (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Leila has a critical perspective towards her culture and environment. She goes further, defining belonging to Canadian society as follows,

I don't feel isolation from society and from the other side I don't feel completely at ease with them either." My value and lifestyle are not like theirs, but I can deal with them. I can live with them, without being exactly like them. I don't know what the definition of 'belonging' is. When I have been asked 'Are you Canadian?' I say 'No, I am not. I am Iranian Canadian.' What does nationality mean? To me when I am passing the river with my Iranian friends and suddenly all of us sing a childhood song, it makes us feel like Iranian folks because we have a memory about that song. And it is an Iranian feeling that we have. But if I pass the same river with Canadian persons I don't have such similarity with them. I don't know their hero, their important events, and many other cultural things that make me different from them. I don't have much to share with them, but I have things to share with Iranian people. So these things make more me Iranian than Canadian. Even some freedom in this society is not appropriate for me, and I call it immoral (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Leila talks about having a common history and memory with people that affects her attachment to a nation. But I wonder if, as racialized immigrant women stay a longer time in the host society, they feel a greater attachment? The quality of memory and history is also important for one to stay attached to a land. At the time of the interview, Leila had only been in Canada for one year. So, it seems it is not only length of staying in a society, but also the “inclusion” and “attachment” of a person that helps her to be part of a society. People’s background, history, culture, and memory contribute to attachment to a society. In general, analyzing any contributing factor such as culture or, in Leila’s case ethnocentric value, to the social or political values of Iran or Canada depends on each woman’s perspective, which in turn impacts her degree of acceptance or rejection of these two countries. According to standpoint theory each woman has her own lens which is influenced by multiple factors – race, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

In another interview I asked Sarah about her feeling towards Canadian society. Sarah, who tends to answer all questions quickly, thought for a comparatively long time before she replied to this question. In general, I noticed that in order to address this question the participant needs to think from a macro/micro lens to figure out her overall feeling towards Canadian society. This question requires a more comprehensive and holistic approach which requires more time to think and respond. Sarah responded as follows,

Do I feel I am Canadian/ Iranian?...(pause)... I really like this society and want to do lots of things for it. But it is a question to me, do I feel I belong to it?.... (pause, thinking).... If something happens, in here, I prefer go to home country and do something in there...(still thinking and speak slowly) I want to transfer my

knowledge to there. I can't forget Iran, however I like Canada. I have peace and I have a comfortable life in here ..., and I want to continue my education. But I can't say I am Canadian / why? (She still continues thinking)... I was born in \_\_\_\_\_.(a Western country), and grew up in Iran, Tehran, and now I'm a Canadian citizen. I always have a sense of my background that I born in \_\_\_\_\_ (Western country), and I never wanted to be a European person. I don't have a good sense of belonging there. But for Iran, I want to do some changes (Sarah's voices raised up and got strong in this moment). I am always Iranian, if you ask me, I say.....yes... I am Iranian, I am not Canadian. But if you ask me am I a Canadian citizen, I'd say yes, I am (Sarah, interview, summer 2008).

When Sarah was talking about her feelings about Iran, she again started talking fast. However, Sarah makes a distinction between being a citizen and belonging to a country of which she is a citizen. She can be a Canadian citizen on paper, but she identifies herself as Iranian person. It is a problematic notion and I want to argue that people can be citizens of a country based on legislation and paperwork, but that this does not necessarily show they are attached to that land. Attachment and belonging are beyond a piece of paper and citizenship card. In an example from Iran, every single man who marries a non-Iranian woman can quickly obtain an Iranian birth certificate and passport for his wife, but women cannot do the same for their husbands. So, by only marriage (similar to Canada but for both genders) a person can become a citizen of that country. But what condition enables that person to feel that s/he is attached to that land?

Mahvash relates her sense of belonging to her residence at school, which attracted her to Canadian school and society. She explains as follows,

Maybe because I was in school for a long time, as I worked and studied I really felt I belonged to the school. I have post doctoral which means I never left school. I felt I am there. With all those challenges with settling, job, language and other issues I really felt I belong to school. Even after finishing my post doc still I am in touch with them for any further research (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

In Continuing the discussion about belonging to school and society Mahvash adds the following,

Belonging for me means not feeling out of space and picture. You feel you are part of that atmosphere; you are included in the system. After many years being in Canadian school I don't know the system in Iran and it is weird to me. I am a stranger there but not here. Here I have good feeling and I have a sense of belonging (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash stayed in Canadian graduate school for about twelve years, and even longer for her postdoctoral work. During those years she felt that her knowledge and skills contributed to the school's improvements; she could find her academic space and feel she is part of the school. This inclusion in school causes her to feel she belongs to the society. In addition, belonging may have different dimensions in terms of academic, culture, tradition, religion and so on. Mahvash defines her academic growth as follows,

From academic view, and research area I completely fit with the Canadian system... (Mahvash talks in a strong and firm tone) ..... It is the place that works for me, it is a place that makes opportunity for me for being an expert researcher and improve.... and it is what pleases me and makes me happy.... I can improve and grow. Here is a place that can give me a sense of being a person. It is a place

that I could improve in and it is really important for me...., when I go back and see myself since I came here and the improvements that I have made, it means a lot to me. To me in any place if a person thinks she is stopped and cannot improve, then it is not a good feeling. It is like marriage (laughing)... that if we feel growing, it is a good feeling of marriage. So in school I am happy that I can improve and find my location, as I knew maybe others were not so successful and left the school.... But for me Canada is a place that I could improve and grow..... But we have to see conditions as well... So it makes me happy that this society provides opportunity for my growth. So I always like Canadian society and culture. I don't mean there is no racism..... but even at my school it is less than in the whole society (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

When one can see achievement and improvement, it causes a better sense of belonging to the society and school. Thus, it is important that school and society can provide this opportunity for its racialized immigrant women to improve their status. Having the opportunity to find their real self and can feel they are contributing to knowledge production helps to shame immigrants into happy citizens. However, it is a naïve analysis if we suppose all immigrant educated women to feel that they belong to the school and society because of the academic success they have had. Leila, Negar, Sarah, Maheen and Fatemeh are successful in school but also consider multidimensional factors of belonging such as academic, economic comfort, family, ancestors, nationality, culture and so on. Hence, from one dimension one may be successful and happy but from other dimensions one is not, so the integration of those factors contributes to full attachment and belonging to a society. It is the reLeilan that people emigrate from their

home country to other places. They lose integrity and oneness in their homeland and are looking for that in another place. In new places some of their needs are met while others are not. However, in general, the global movement of people indicates that those who feel lost in their home and host societies are looking for integrity, balance and harmony in their lives. Unfortunately, by expansion of neo-liberalism and global capitalism, injustice, patriarchy and discrimination are also prevalent in all nations. People both gain something and lose something in different locations, and, as a result, they feel fragmented.

After listening to Mahvash's interview I was interested to consider what a person who feels comfortable and attached to Canadian school can do as a citizen? In this regard, Mahvash explains as follows,

Not really. I only worked in diabetic community, (because of some family problem she has concern for this community, added mine) otherwise, I am not involved in any other activities. Because, I work and in weekend do my family jobs. I know something is lost in this point. I only have mental commitment to my academic and professional work. Maybe one reason is that I don't know what I have to do? I am not from this culture and still am not familiar with the cultural issues within it. One of my friends went to the countryside for a volunteer job; for building some houses she knows what is the process and how she can get involved, but it is hard for me to find this kind of information (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash has lived in Canada for about seventeen years. She is completely happy living in Canadian society and school, and she still has problems with cultural integration

and adaptation. According to her, this fragmentation is a barrier that prevents her from becoming completely involved in Canadian social development. Thus, a person who is completely satisfied living in Canadian society is still not involved in social activities; she limits herself to academic improvements. Therefore, it is noticeable that happiness and satisfaction are relativistic concepts and do not necessarily engage educated female immigrants in social activity. So, at the micro level Mahvash is happy with her position in academia, but, from a macro perspective she is not involved in the rest of Canadian society. Mahvash's discussed another dimension of belonging, culture, as follows,

I think a culture that a person grows up somehow becomes her internal culture. And when it is internal so any action she does is based on this culture... (Mahvashtalks slowly). Value and emotional part of a person is also part of this culture. In addition, I think good values all around the world is the same like be a good person, don't lie, help people in need....they are universal values. But I think the mixture of these values cause us different, like Iranian, or Chinese, or African. Combination of one past history is completely different from each other. In this term we are different. But I believe definitely my values are more practiced in here than in my home country..... If someone is in need of help, others will help.... Everyone cares about each other. I feel people in here are nicer, kinder and do volunteer work without any expectation. I feel my values applies in here otherwise, I could not stay in Canada. But with all those things I can't say I am Canadian. The way I grow up in Iran, my parents were Iranian, I grow up in that land good or bad anyways such background makes me an Iranian person (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

Mahvash's analysis of Canadian's society is completely different from that of Fatemeh, Negar, Sarah and Maheen. This is the beauty of applying a critical feminist perspective to avoid generalizing one's experience and applying it over other women. Our knowledge, experience and perspective impact our feelings. Moreover, if one can articulate his/her micro experience in a macro perspective s/he will achieve a more comprehensive analysis. For example, when Maheen, Sarah, and Negar have a negative perspective of human relationships in Canadian society and Naheed, Behnaz, Ashraf and Mahvash have a positive one, this difference shows how their perspectives depend on the circumstances in which all these women study, work and live. How women's knowledge and experiences are constructed will shape their 'perspective' and 'values'. Having a 'critical' or 'liberal' or 'Oriental' perspective also leads to having a different analysis of the subjects around us. When you are discriminated against and marginalized in school and work your situation is different from a person who is privileged not to encounter these challenges. A critical (feminist) perspective shows us that structural level racism and discrimination are inherent in multicultural society (Bannerji, 1991, 2000; Das Gupta, 1995; Murray, 2008; Ng, 2005; Samuel, 2005). However, in a personal level people can act and be treated or react differently. We have to have the insight to see discrimination even if it is not applied to us, but to non-privilege people, the Other. We have to be aware of power relationships in any context. Who has the power to manage a job? In other words, when graduate students in this research have a positive attitude toward the society and school despite their challenges, how can this happiness make fundamental changes at a structural level?

In her analysis, Leila talks about the patriarchal climate in Iran that creates increasing interest in Canadian society. She explains it in this way, “I hate patriarchy more than anything else in my culture. Although patriarchy exists here as well but I enjoy the fact that as a female I have more rights and respect in Canada” (Leila, Interview, summer 2008).

Political Islam supports patriarchy in Iran. The culture of Iranian society is mainly based on sexism and racism (Afshar, 1994; Asgharzadeh, 2005). Women from ethnic groups in Iran such as Leila are under dual pressure, state patriarchy and the domination of their own ethnic group. It is the reLeilan that Leila suffers from patriarchy in Iran. She is from an ethnic group. Her pain is not just limited to the state regulation which applies to all women, she also suffers from sexism and genderism within her own ethnic group. As a result, when women are surrounded by a patriarchal climate some of them try to immigrate to other countries to achieve freedom. This escape from the home country to a land where they can easily choose their lifestyle, clothing, speech and hobbies is enough for them to tolerate discrimination and injustice in the host society. As I mentioned earlier, the domestication of Orientals contributes to the continuation of racism and all other “isms” in the host society. It means that when Iranian immigrant educated women encounter discrimination in Canadian school and society, (un)consciously they recall their situation in Iran and as a result fall silent about their rights in school and in society at large. In other words, global insecurity and global movement cause racialized minorities to remain silent in the host society and accept their present situation. As their home society oppresses its people, so too does the host society take advantage of those people in its domain. In each situation people are victims of the nation state. This

perpetuates racism and discrimination in the host society. As a result, criticizing the host society does not devalue its positive side, but we have to analyze the origins of discrimination, racism, and marginalization over racialized minority women in order to prevent injustice and achieve a fair society. Otherwise, everyone can compare her past situation to the present and become silent without being involved in activity for change at home or in the host society.

About being happy living in Canada, Mahvash adds the following,

At the end I am happy with my choice to come here. Even the regime in Iran changes but I prefer to stay here. I don't have such commitment to my land in Iran, to me any place we can serve to all human is good. I don't limit myself to any land (Mahvash, interview, summer 2008).

This statement by Mahvash is the same as Ashraf. She also believes she likes to be the citizen of the world. In this regard humanity is borderless, as discrimination and injustice is everywhere. Mahvash, Ashraf and Fatemeh do not feel attached to the land. Here, I explore the idea of bell hooks (2009), who referred to Scott Russell Sanders in 1997 regarding attachment to the land and commitment to the humanity. Sanders believes that these two factors are interrelated – attachment to the land, and feeling committed to your home. I wonder if people like some interviewees in this research – Ashraf, Mahvash and Fatemeh – go beyond “their only land, Iran” and feel committed to the society in which they are studying and working. I want to argue that we can go further than commitment to only our land. Even though we live in a racist and patriarchal society, our commitment to producing good actions can be unlimited and a higher degree of our humanity. If we limit our commitment to the land and home, it is like we are

trading with others; this commitment is a business transaction not behaving like a good people. It is kind of racism, but in a 'geographical' context. By way of clarification, we belong to a land in terms of our history, memory, culture and so on, but our commitment to humanity is beyond the land. When a person feels good in society, s/he has more passion and enthusiasm to do well in that society. Feeling a sense of belonging empowers us and creates agency, but we need to be a citizen of the world.

In general, Mahvash is a person who defines herself as a professional woman in Canadian society and is proud of this achievement. When the discussion is about how she defines her identity and does she feel she belongs to Canadian society, she explained as follows,

I am an Iranian. I know 100% I am an Iranian woman. Sometimes I am in the U.S and from security point if I'll be asked I say I am Canadian because I don't want to look like a stranger and be met with surprising faces, but in general and from my personal view I am an Iranian woman. Excluding documental citizenship that I am Canadian I don't feel I changed after I came here. And I am Iranian.

(Mahvash, interview, summer 2008)

Mahvash believes she belongs to Canadian society but her identity and culture are not dissolved in the mainstream. Although she has lived in Canada for seventeen years, she still follows her cultural identity. She is happy being in Canada because she pursue her desired professional identity, but, she retains the cultural identity built in the past in Iran. On the one hand, a woman is happy living in Canada and feels it is her home, but on the other she remains attached to her original culture and values that which is different from the mainstream. How, then, is identity shaped? Do society and culture impact it?

How and why does a person say I am Iranian or Canadian, Muslim or non-Muslim and so on? Is it the power of labelling? Does it empower a person? A label or name becomes a part of her identity when she becomes attached to the concept or image that it represents, whether that be her nationality, religion, ancestry, etc.. In this regard, Negar states the following,

Because I am a Muslim, people pitied me and thought I'm so marginalized. I tried to present a positive image of Islam in public. In Iran I was mostly Iranian, but here I am more Muslim. I think Islam is left behind (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Negar shows how we shift among our identities. According to Dei (2005a) our identity is multilayered – our race, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and language are layers of identity that coalesce in a single person. Sometimes our religious part is most prominent, and sometimes our nationality, culture, or ethnicity; in any case, under different conditions we question certain aspects of our identity, but everyone desires identity integration. Our identity cannot be fragmented; all parts are in one self. Perhaps in a different geopolitical condition it shifted but ultimately all those parts cohere to make a person who s/he is. If one part becomes too definitive for a time the person will feel detached from society because she could not achieve the integrity of her identity. This is the point that we observe among all participants in this research. For example, they are happy in terms of educational opportunity but they are discriminated against, which feels ironic. They are stereotyped based on their nationality and language but they are happy choosing their lifestyles, clothing and hobbies (except the women who practice hijab). This evidence shows fragmentation in their identity and desire. This issue is also evident

in hooks' (2009) perception of the role of exile in allowing people to think about their home from another angle. She says that "the role of exile causes one to think more deeply about home. This is what experience of exile can do, change your mind, utterly transform ones perception of the world of home" (p. 13). A person can find integrity among her identities when she becomes attached to her original land, to her ancestors and to her childhood home. We assume a home is a place for "resting our soul" (hooks, 2009, p. 152). A true home is the place – any place – where growth is nurtured, where there is constancy (p. 205). This constancy takes place when the place provides the opportunity for nurturing and growth. In order to achieve such constancy some mistakenly try to dissolve themselves in mainstream culture. Nevertheless, if they want to practice their values, they should be different, the Other from mainstream, but this is not what they want. So, most participants in this research feel ironically about home, land and belonging.

Following our talk about satisfaction and attachment in the host society, Behnaz states the following,

(with a few minutes thinking) .... I like the freedom in Canadian society ... I can talk about whatever I want ... I am free to wear what I want, whatever life style I want I can have. No one can force me to do this or to do that.... I am free to do whatever I want to do... Around me there are lots of activities that can entertain me even in the small city that I am in, I can go to a book club, dance class. I can go hiking.... It is really very good ...in Iran you don't have such opportunities (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

It is also about the connection to a society and identity, the way people define themselves. Elli continues as follows,

I am not ashamed of being Iranian, if someone asks me I'll say I am Iranian. And when I get citizenship I'll say I am Iranian-Canadian. I like Canada because it gave me opportunity and I thank it for all good things that it has given me. I respect both countries Iran and Canada (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

All the opportunities that Behnaz has had in terms of continuing her studies with the financial support, having a good supervisor, easily finding a job, etc. provide her with a smooth life that impacts her feelings towards Canadian society.

Behnaz is happy to be able to pursue her desire which she was deprived of in her home country. In this regard, she likes to follow mainstream culture. This opportunity makes her life easier and more enjoyable and, as a result, she feels greater attachment to Canada than to Iran. State regulations constrain people's actions and desires in Iran, causing discontent. Hence we see that people's past impacts their present time. The way women are treated in Iran impacts their expectation and satisfaction in new life. Even simple requests such as the freedom to choose their clothing and hobbies become issues for some Iranian women, who finally cannot feel attachment to their home land.

Interestingly, women like Behnaz can choose their clothing in the host society because it is the same as mainstream culture, but if they wanted to practice hijab, they would have difficulty doing that. Satisfaction in society is different for Maheen, Negar, Sarah and Neda who practice hijab and for women like Mahvash(after removing hijab), Ashraf, Behnaz and Naheed. The Oriental image projects onto their happiness about the society and school.

Behnaz is so positive that everyone is free to do whatever she wants. When she was asked her feeling about the degree of democracy in the society to practice Muslim principles, she says “it is not good to be different from others, even put on bikini in a place that you don’t have to or having hijab in a place no one does. We don’t have to be different from others” (Behnaz, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, as mentioned earlier being like mainstream is an acceptable behaviour for Behnaz. She does not want to be different; she is looking for constancy but through mainstream culture. People who think in this way are domesticated Oriental who are Westernized without questioning the hegemony of the Western colonizer. So, in this context we realize how the racialized body dissolves in mainstream culture in order to avoid isolation and marginalization and because she is looking for acceptance. This is the reLeilan that Behnaz speaks of flexible behaviour. I wonder if flexibility in this concept applies everywhere, such as Iran. Could Behnaz practice Islamic dress in Iran because it was the norm and the mainstream does it? If a person like Behnaz in Canadian society likes to follow the mainstream and not to be different why should such person not follow mainstream culture in Iran? So, we can see it is not only mainstream culture that enforces us to follow it, but it is also our desire to be like mainstream or not. External and internal factors intertwine when following mainstream culture in the host society. Outside pressure but also one’s own identity, consistency, decolonization, faithfulness and much more are important to our behaviours in the host society. In response to the degree of freedom for practicing religious principle, Behnaz says the following,

It depends on the way we want to practice. If I want to pray at home I can do it.

But for fasting if I want to do fasting while keeping my hijab, it is not a good feeling that I practice it .....I can't do it... (Interview, summer 2008).

Therefore, if Behnaz is happy practicing her desire by following mainstream culture then she does not encounter any challenges to her assimilation. When she is asked if she wants to practice her belief, she explains that she will be excluded from mainstream so she will not practice it publicly. Thus, examining the sense of belonging to Canadian society/school from the point of view of minority women who assimilate in mainstream culture is different from women who follow their own values, beliefs and so on.

Ashraf's responses towards the inclusion of minorities in Canadian society is as follows,

I think Canadian society does not include all other cultures ... Canadian culture is not easy because we have shifted from our culture, there are lots of changes in here in terms of culture, religion.... I hope Canadian society can go back to what it was. I think still there is racisms, biases..... And I hope in somehow they solve in this society (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Ashraf is silent about explaining her idea about racism in Canada, however, she hopes Canadian society can accept more diverse culture and practice justice among diverse people. Ashraf's cultural evolvment was influenced by 9/11. Foreign policy impacts local people/women (Cainkar, 2004). According to Ashraf, it was a significant moment in her life that allowed her to know herself much more realistically by going back to her roots. It causes her to go back to graduate school to discover the roots of discriminatory social behaviour in a capitalist society. Graduate school was a place where

she encountered a radical perspective, anti-racism, which was different from her liberal perspective in the past. So, she looked at her location in society and school critically. Moreover, she talks about the role of media on her perspective, identity and much more as follows,

Media has 100% influence upon my emotional feeling consciously or unconsciously. My reaction can be very emotional and then I intellectualize it and show a negative or positive reaction. Media have a negative or positive impact. But I try to manage my aggressive reaction, emotional reaction, and my anger. I mean anger, aggression....is not in my spiritual side of my identity. I look at that anger in dimension of peace, collaboration, being together rather than looking at it from power relation, and domination..... If I am angry, I try to look at roots of my anger and deal with it and transfer it to peace....and it is my spirituality.... I always know how to deal in society, why this anger comes and what I have to do (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Ashraf uses her intellectual analysis in the time of crisis. When she gets angry with media for perpetuating an Oriental picture of Iran, she tries to analyze this anger by going to the roots of her anger and then converting it to peace within herself and in society. Ashraf's awareness of the roots of oppression helps her to decolonize her thoughts; Sandra Harding (1995) believes that women's experience and knowledge bring more liberation for them and this is a significant point in standpoint theory. This peace within Ashraf can be based on love, as hooks (2009) believes that 'Love' is an essential element in minority's life to resist and maintain a peaceful climate (p. 178).

Thus, women's awareness of their identity and the society in which they are living helps them assimilate or integrate intellectually and consciously in that society. This integration helps them to know how to deal with institutions in society, how to deal with other people and finally how to make it easier to belong to the society.

Neda explains her feeling towards Canadian society as follows,

I think the society accepted me, yes,... I like Canada. ..., yeah (with a thoughtful face she says)..... In terms of education yes I could find my location. In terms of belonging, yes I feel I belong. But I can't say I am like others, I am not like others..., I have different values and perspective. Sometimes I regret why I could not start my education earlier from B.A. I mean maybe in educational level yes I feel I belong to the school however, I bother a lot for adaptation, and I don't know how to deal with it. In terms of education the native students also have challenges but they usually know how to deal with it or handle it or where to go for that problem but for me every single point is a big problem..... (slowly talking with a sad tone....) I don't know how to deal with it. Sometimes the class talks about a cultural event or memory that does not match with my background, because my history and memory in Canada started from 2002 so I can't share with them from the past, and it bothers me. They can't understand me or I can't understand them. But in individual level, I have a firm personality. I have an identity for myself and I don't have any difficulty with my identity. To me it does not matter I am from Iran or Iraq, my religion is more important than my nationality. To be a Muslim is more important than my nationality for me. I am a Muslim woman and I am a successful woman in here (Neda, interview, summer 2008).

Neda's satisfaction like Mahvash's is focused on school achievement regardless of her difficulties. She finds her location in graduate school and it is one of the defining factors in her life; however, she is aware of her challenges in adapting both in school and society as a whole. She is more attached to her religion than nationality and, since she has a strong personality and knows the definition of her identity, she can place her identity in Canadian school and society. This is a significant point that when immigrant educated women have a stable personality and definition of themselves, they have a greater ability to tolerate discrimination and stand on their own feet. They know the value of their positive characters and draw on them to survive and fight any unpleasant situation. They stimulate their resistance, it is part of having anti-colonial thought. hooks (2009) reveals that our firm identity and character allow us to resist racism. However, in this regard we ask how Canadian society and school can benefit from all these firm and mature graduate students and bring about change and justice in its domain? Needless to say, if professors in graduate school can apply critical (feminist) pedagogy to engage immigrant students in class discussion, they can profit from their various knowledge and experience and develop their subject. Using critical (feminist) pedagogy will fulfill this gap in Canadian higher education. But does the capitalist academic system allow the practice of this pedagogy?

By putting participants' experiences together and also considering hooks recent book, we can conclude that to fully belong anywhere one must understand the ground of one's being, and that understanding invariably returns one to childhood (hooks, 2009, p. 220). Childhood is influenced by one's interaction with family, community, culture and nature. In this process of growing, one is looking for consistent identity. S/he is looking

for a place where all aspects of her/his identity can be fulfilled. Her/his race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, religion can all be in harmony for her/his improvement. S/he is looking for this spiritual harmony within herself and outside of herself. If she encounters disharmony and dissatisfaction she tries to move, to migrate or to relocate in order to find a safe space to achieve such dream; she is looking for a true home and belonging. So, true home is a place where “wounds were attended to. Home was the place where the me of me mattered. Home was the place I longed for it was not where I lived (hooks, 2009, p. 215). It is a place of pain and hope, sore and sweet, but it is the place of attachment to humanity and growth to become one with others.

As a result, in this section of the research each woman has her own definition of home and belonging. Their knowledge and experience of their pasts influenced their present feeling in Canadian society and school. Although they continuously deconstruct and reconstruct their identity crisis through the migration process, they are happy to live in Canada despite school challenges when they compare their new situation to the one in Iran. Most of them are connected to their land of origin, culture and roots, so firstly they describe themselves as, but they also identify the educational opportunities they have in Canada as one of the important factors for their migration. The second factor is the social, political and cultural circumstances of Iran, which force them to accept their present situation in Canada regardless of discrimination and racism. Some of them have an ironic feeling about liking to live in Canada.

The following section will examine participants' feelings towards their own community. Integration with the Iranian Canadian community can help participants deal

with their challenges in the new location, Canada. So, it is important to know the participants' experience in the Iranian Canadian community.

### **6.3.1. Belonging to the Iranian Community**

The role of community everywhere is crucially important because it can make one feel that s/he is not isolated from mainstream culture but also because a properly functioning community can help everyone integrate more effectively in the host society. Belonging to Canadian society is an extension of belonging to the Iranian community. This means that both communities help a person feel attached to the society in which s/he lives. The purpose of investigating participants' reflections on their own community is not to trivialize or stimulate an Orientalist perspective about Iranian culture. Rather, the purpose is to examine the role of the Iranian community in educated immigrant women's integration into host society. The Iranian community is influenced by its original culture and also it exists within a larger, Canadian community. So, how can these two communities integrate to better serve Iranian immigrant people? Below is the participants' perspective on the Iranian community.

Leila who also has an ethnic background in Iran states that, "Within Iranian people if I want to be honest..... to me ..... there is kind of racism. I think Iranian people have also a racist community..... (slowly talking). As I have many big problems and challenges in school I try this kind of image does not effect on my life and study" (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Leila complains about pre-judgment and stigma within the Iranian community, and also the power hierarchy within it. Class, ethnicity, religion and Westernization which are all part of being colonized (Fanon, 1967) are also factors that cause Leila to

limit her interaction with the local Iranian community. She does not want any issues interfering with her study, so she prefers to avoid any disturbing communication.

Seema states her perspective towards Iranian community as follows,

I don't separate this community from other communities. I don't like to be in the center of Iranian community. The bad thing is if we attach with this community we cannot hang out with other communities. Besides, it is my feeling that Iranian community does not support Iranian people..., and because I did not see such support so I did not like to go there..... For example buying a house by an Iranian real state bothered my family a lot... . It is my feeling that some Iranian lost their good things from their own culture meanwhile do not learn good things from here. We don't learn democracy from here, we don't learn how to have a healthy relationship with others .... But we easily learn how to go to a club...for example this system educate its people don't lie.... Always tell the truth... but Iranian people have problem for telling the truth..! Mostly they lie to each other. So I cannot trust them..... (Seema, interview, summer 2008).

To some, the Iranian community has become immersed in the individualist atmosphere of Canadian society, and has departed from the collectivism that is a defining character of Iran. Detachment from the local community causes women to feel more fragmented within Canadian society. Iranian people are deprived of practicing the values that would help them attach to the local community. It is a sad concept that Seema noticed. To Seema, the Iranian community not only does not practice its own cultural values but it also limits the extent to which it learns ethics from mainstream and other

cultures. Although Seema also encounters bad behaviour by other ethnic groups and the mainstream, she expects support rather than inconvenience from her community

In another interview Fatemeh explores her ideas in this regard, (with thought she answers) ....When I entered to this country I did not hear that there is a strong community that I can get involved with and get the information...and other things , it was YMCA not Iranian community. We have diverse Iranian clubs and other things but it is not systemic and centralized and truly helpful. (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008).

Thus, for immigrants community support can be a starting point for adaptation into the new environment. This support often cannot be provided within Iranian community. A systemic and well-organized community can help an immigrant to adapt smoothly in her new environment. A conscious and sympathetic community can help save time and provide appropriate information, and newcomers expect that their community will help them to settle down.

Negar shares her experience with Iranian community. She explains as follows, I feel others accepted our values and culture maybe because our presence is much highlighted and transparent. I think within white Canadian it is more acceptable but my problem is more about other minorities and even our community. In fact, they are part of emotional pressure on my study. For example, in Iranian gathering I felt they don't wish success for me in school and then it was a pressure for me to be successful in school, so it was ....kind of isolation from my community....., then it was my goal that I want to show them freedom is not only removing hijab and do a low level job, I wanted to prove I can follow my

study as a Muslim woman ....and do outstanding work...and I did ...(Negar talks with a sad tone and she was not happy when she explained her reflection) (Negar, interview, summer 2008).

Being rejected by one's own community causes more dislike of the Iranian-Canadian community. When a person does not have healthy communication with indigenous people, she cannot feel attached to them as a part of the Canadian society. In reference to Negar's case, I will examine her point about receiving more respect and understanding from the mainstream than from the Iranian community from a cultural-political lens. Throughout her interview, I noticed that Negar also sees discrimination in school from white racist professors and classmates and even at work, but her experience with her local community is more painful. Negar suggests that the way the mainstream looks at a Muslim woman differs from how her own community looks at her (I expanded this notion in Orientalism section, chapter three). Looking from a negative lens, people in the mainstream have learned to hide or mask their hatred toward others; they are aware of hate crime and apparently respect it. On the positive side, some mainstream people see a Muslim woman as a person who has committed to her religion; they respect her for this, so they do not interfere with politics (as Negar mentioned in above quotation). However, we know that the "individual is political", so how we can be neutral in our behaviour depends on our 'self critic' and perspective. The Iranian community typically analyzes everything in a political and religious lens. In the Diaspora, when they see a veiled woman they connect it to the state of Iran, so they give themselves the right to disrespect that person. As a result, we can see the way our experience is shaped and the way we interpret it reflects on our behaviour.

In previous pages, Leila also mentioned racism and discrimination in connection with the Iranian community. Ethnocentrism is strong within the Iranian community because people from different cities in Iran try to marginalize the other ethnic group; this exclusion can be based on ethnicity, religion, and ideology within Iran or /and outside of Iran. Leila continues her talk about the Iranian community as follows,

Iranian community saves me from loneliness but does not help me much to solve my problems.... (it is about Iranian student's connection). For connection to Iranian immigrants I don't have any connection with them because mainly they settled and easily provided their needs, they have house and car but I don't have so I am not in the same level of class and economy so I prefer not to have any connection with other Iranian immigrant people (Leila, interview, summer 2008).

Iranian immigrants who settle in Canada should be a good resource for new immigrants regardless of their class, education, religion, or ethnicity but often this does not happen. Although every immigrant has difficulty adapting and settling down, once they pass through those processes they cannot provide help for newcomers. The community which is colonized by the Euro-American gaze internalizes historical patriarchy and racism within itself even in Canada (Fanon, 1967). Power relations within the community cause everyone to try to dominate others.

From the other side, Behnaz is completely happy with the Iranian Canadian community. She states, "I felt comfortable within Iranian community and my feeling is the same with Canadian one. Maybe it is because I easily can adapt myself to mainstream, and maybe it is not good but I am like this" (Behnaz, Interview, summer 2008).

Behnaz does not wear hijab, she has a flexible personality and easily dissolves in the mainstream atmosphere, all of which helps her to adapt and integrate into the mainstream culture painlessly.

Ashraf due to her communication with Iranian and Canadian community explains as follows,

(with thoughtful tone she responded).....Iranian community is really a new phenomena. *And I really like this community learn that we are not upper or lesser than other culture!* There is no need to be all Canadian or insisted on being Iranian. *As the dominant race is white, and it is a superior race most Iranian want to become Westernized and it is not right.* On the other hand, some others suppose we have 2500 years history and are very proud and think it is a superior culture again, it is not right .....We have a lot to pass ..... and I think Canadian society is a new society and can learn a lot from us and we also can learn from it. So it is very important we keep our identity while respecting other's (italics added by me for emphasis) (Ashraf, interview, summer 2008).

Cultural integration is an important concept in a multicultural society. People's satisfaction is affected by the dominant culture and how minority cultures can merge into it. However, merging cultures cannot take place without producing a power hierarchy. Ashraf is aware of an ironic feeling within the Iranian community. In order to avoid any connection with the Iranian state, some Iranian people call themselves Persian (an old name for Iran, refer to chapter two country profile of Iran). These Persian people are not aware that this name does not only include modern Iran, but goes back to Persian empire which included Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, some southern regions of Russia and

much more. On a contemporary geopolitical map, Iran is limited to a certain area. In order to avoid Western hegemony and the negative image of Orientalism we do not have to connect ourselves with what we are not; we have to learn from our past in order to have a stronger community. We have to learn from our 2500-year-old history, but to make a stronger and happier community and not to devalue other communities. Ashraf also mentioned in her quotation that Iranian people try to connect themselves to 2500 years ago in order to win approval from mainstream. Or from the other side, they do not accept mainstream culture as they suppose the Canadian society is a new phenomenon and does not have a history. In any case, if we suppose we have either an inferior or superior culture it causes us to become oppressed or to oppress others. What the Iranian community needs is to decolonize itself – to see the role of colonizer in its country of origin and also in North American society. The Iranian community needs to see the role of dictatorship, patriarchy, and censorship in Iranian culture, tradition, and religion, and deconstruct them based on true meaning of freedom, respect and social justice for all. The Iranian community needs to see the positive and negative sides of its community; it needs a ‘self community evaluation’ following ‘community consciousness’ in order to know how to integrate with other cultures and strength its own culture, and how to help its people for a better integration into the host society.

#### **6.4. Summary**

Both chapter five and six analyze the findings of the research. These findings are categorized in six interrelated themes, adaptation to a new environment; being stereotyped, discriminated and silenced; resistance strategies, and the issue of belonging to the host society, including Iranian-Canadian community. All these themes are analyzed

in the light of Orientalism, anti-colonial and the integrative anti-racist feminist perspective.

The core analysis is based on the Orientalist hegemony over Middle Eastern women; Oriental women are inferior to men and to Western women. Interestingly, genderism, racism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism are coherent with this research finding. Predominately, all struggles that participants had in Canadian schools and society were based on being stereotyped as Oriental women. In this homogenization, participants' education and work experience in Iran is devalued and their bodies – especially if they practice hijab – were disrespected (even among their own community, as the result of having a colonized community). The participants' nationality is hated as the result of Iran political representation, and their religion, Islam, causes the mainstream and other ethnic groups to marginalize and oppress them. Putting all those oppressive experiences together while coming from an Eastern society with all its characteristics, will end in a crucial question “how should participants feel towards Canadian graduate school and society?” The complexity of multilayered identity – gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and language – in an individual creates complex feelings when living in a racist society. Hence, the sense of belonging to school and society becomes a problematic notion, and individuals experience different feelings. In general, if participants are connected to Canadian society, their integration and contribution to social, cultural, and economic development is enhanced. However, the hegemony of white racist male institutions authorizes to what extent racialized bodies are allowed full engagement in Canadian system and institutions. Thus, this chapter integrates this dynamic with other themes in a contextualized argument for change and justice.

The next chapter will provide the discussion and the conclusion of the thesis research. It also will provide suggestions for further research and describe the limitations of the research.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

### **7.1. Discussion and Conclusion of the Research**

#### **7.1.1. The Significance of the Research**

In the previous chapters I have outlined the issues that plague educated Iranian women who immigrate to Canada in pursuit of a graduate degree. Many of these women flee because their home country is torn by revolution and war, and therefore an unstable social, economical, political and cultural climate. In choosing to do so, they sacrifice a great deal to come to Canada; they leave behind financial and emotional support, and hope that they will find a society that is peaceful and just. Contrary to these hopes, these women encounter a different form of oppression that stems from being the subjects of a prolonged historical Oriental oppression stimulated by the unfortunate events of 9/11. So, the focus of this research was to shed light on the struggles and injustices encountered by first-generation of Iranian immigrant women attending graduate school in Canada.

This research is a significant contribution to academic literature concerning the status of racialized minority women in graduate schools, especially as concerns the projected idea of Iranian nationality. Individuals who are categorized as being of Middle Eastern decent and who are supposed to support the happenings of 9/11 are seen as members of the Axis of Evil (Bush, n.d.). This viewpoint immediately establishes a dichotomy between the Eastern and Western cultures, Middle easterners are depicted as wicked, malicious and irrational people, whereas Westerners seen as virtuous, blameless and progressive. This way of thinking creates unfair stereotypes and bias towards a group of people who have no control over the actions of a few discontented individuals or over national and international policy. The results of this attitude have been made apparent by the

participants of this study through their vocalized experiences as first-generation immigrant women studying in graduate schools in Canada. However, the education they have received and the experiences they have had living in Iran has also impacted the way they perceive and experience their life as immigrants attending graduate school and living in Canada (refer to chapters 5 and 6). Considering these points in an intersectional relationship and through a multi-critical, micro and macro perspective provides more significance to this research.

Literature about the experiences of racialized minority women in graduate schools has failed to provide a structured forum in which fundamental issues regarding school structure's system can be discussed. For example, in the various research studies examined earlier, Berkeley in 1960–1980, Ontario undergraduate and graduate school in 1980, Bannerji, Braden and Hutt's outline of York University's story, Mazzuca in 2000, Samuel in 2005, Xu and Zhang in 2007, and Murray in 2008, the sources of racism and discrimination experienced by women visible minorities in the hierarchy of higher education institutions were not analyzed at the structural level. This social structure within the academic community is the result of the neo-liberal perspective in a capitalist society. The authors of the above-mentioned research studies did not notice the issues of their studies in the grand scheme of the academic circle. They did not examine the pain and difficulties faced by racialized minority women in relation to the state and its institutions as a whole. For this particular reason, I sought to conduct an in-depth examination of each participant's experience, not only at the micro level which focuses on the marginalization and discrimination of these women, but also to analyze their suffering in a structural and institutional context. Moreover, is the racism revealed by the

subjects of this research a microcosmic reflection of the fears and concerns of North Americans after the events of 9/11? I argue that these fears and concerns are the result of Western society's failure to acknowledge its role in oppressing others or perpetuating images of dominion over others; Westerners fail to realize that they are the creators of their own fears and that they project these fears/concerns onto innocent people who they use as scapegoats in order to justify their behaviours/action.

Another point that I explore in my research is that the structure and institutions of North American society support democratic racism and continue to perpetuate racism in various ways, forming a complexity of interrelationships. For example, the Iranian nationality integrates with other factors such as the Islamic religion, Eastern versus Western culture, the collective body versus the individual, adaptation through immigration (for which the impact is much greater for first-generation immigrants in comparison to one and a half, and the second-generation decedents) and language barriers for first-generation immigrants. All of these factors affect participants' ability to adapt to a new society and its social standards. As witnessed in the academic experiences recounted by the participants of this research, the result is a constant struggle between self, community, and dominated cultural differences. Predominantly, their Iranian nationality provides more challenges for the participants than other factors. The effect of this is more problematic for Iranian participants than suggested in other literature reviews. For example, in Berkeley University during 1960s, the challenges for women in graduate school stemmed from gender inequality. By the 1980s, this challenge began to incorporate racialized bodies and the issue transformed to racial (based largely on skin colour) issues. Gender and race issues were the primary subjects of many heated

arguments, but according to bell hooks (Wright Myers, 2002, p. 37), when skin colour is the subject of a debate, the persons who are being referred to are generally black men, and when the issue was about gender differences, the subjects in mind were white women. Black women and other women of colour remained marginalized entities who lacked social rights. In York University's story (2000), the struggle was centred on gender and race issues (concerning differences in skin colour). The main challenges that women students faced in the 1980s Ontario collection were gender issues, and a school curriculum that devalued the social humanities and placed greater emphasis on science and engineering. In Mazzuca's (2000) research, she investigated the second generation of Italian women attending graduate school whose cultural background is one of Western European descent and whose religion is Christianity. This population does not reflect the experiences or issues of women who belong to "racialized visible minorities" or different religious backgrounds who have undergone the greatest form of oppression. This exclusion can also be seen as a form of racism because the experiences of coloured women are omitted, which suggests that their struggles are unimportant. Exclusion of their experiences limits our ability to obtain a true picture of these issues because women of colour are not placed on an equal playing field with white women. Therefore, Mazzuca's research reproduced ethnocentric views that impose European values on non-European groups, thereby neglecting to take the latter groups' cultural values/experiences into consideration.

Samuel's (2005) research explored the struggles that South Asian students encounter in Canadian higher education institutions. She found that language (more specifically, having an accent), race (skin colour), gender, and religion (Islam) were all

influential factors for this social group. Veiled Muslim students encounter more marginalization and disrespect as the result of Orientalist perspective. In the study conducted by Xu and Zhang (2007) regarding the ability of Chinese students to adapt to American institutions, these researchers found that Chinese students suffered as result of their lack of ability to communicate using the English language, which impacted their ability to integrate with mainstream North American culture. Race, gender, and ethnicity as broader concepts are absent in this research. Murray (2008) considered Native Canadians and their experience as a group of indigenous people who were forced to adopt a Eurocentric education system that tries to eliminate indigenous knowledge. In her research, Murray does not encounter the same difficulties with the English language, religion, her nationality, etc. as compared with a racialized immigrant woman. In considering all of these points and weighing them with the nationality of my participants, it is not enough that they are Iranian women who belong to a visible minority. They are marginalized because of their nationality which is associated with political Islam and are constantly under a watchful eye in Canadian society and schools. This is a common feeling among most Iranians in North America. The Iranian nationality, which is associated with threats of nuclear bombings and other acts of terrorism, belongs to a neo-Orientalist perspective that is intertwined with religion and various other factors that I have mentioned earlier. This research is, therefore, very significant to literature about the experiences of educated Iranian women. In the following pages, I will explore some of these factors in the light of the multi-critical perspective that I have adopted throughout this study.

Another important point that I would like to mention is that while we are living and studying in a multicultural society such as Canada, ignoring and marginalizing racialized bodies is in fact a discriminatory policy employed to deliberately exclude the rapidly increasing population of visible minorities. According to Census Canada, 75% of immigrants after 2001 were visible minorities from non-European countries and 46.9% of these individuals lived in Toronto (Fenlon, 2009). First-generation racialized bodies are increasing in number but because they are dominated by a white supremacy culture, their voices are ignored and do not contribute to the production of meaningful knowledge. This meaningful knowledge can provide a comprehensive picture of the issues affecting racialized immigrant minority women who are studying at postgraduate institutions in Canada. This research is important because it looks specifically at a single group of first-generation of immigrants whose numbers are growing exponentially; focus on Iranian women allows us to see more clearly the impact that neo-liberalism and neo-Orientalist ideologies have over such women.

### **7.1.2. Summary and Discussion of the Research**

As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, global insecurity and changes in the 21st century have caused a global migration from the South to the North more rapidly than ever before. The tragedy of 9/11 in 2001 brought about a hate-filled image of Middle Eastern people in North American, white-dominated society. Iranians are a part of this large-scale migration to North America and are also the focus of resentment and hate by North American society. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, an eight-year war with Iraq (1980–1988), the American hostage situation (1979–1981), the Cultural Revolution (1980–1983), and other social, cultural and political factors in Iran motivated women

from Iran to seek a safer, better life abroad. According to Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative Preston et al. (2010), a recent Statistics Canada survey, Iranian and Pakistani people are those who, among other immigrants, have a lower status in the Canadian work force despite their education and experience. This statistic is in line with the hypothesis of this research, that Oriental images of Iranian women present a more difficult and challenging life for this group.

Neo-liberalism, and its expansion of the war-on-terror agenda in the 21st century, has stimulated neo-Orientalism by reproducing negative images that depict all Middle Eastern people as Muslim, terrorist, and insignificant. These perceptions of Middle Eastern people, including Iranians, are institutionalized by the media and higher education institutions (Hojati, 2009; Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998; Yenigun, 2004; Zine, 2004; Samuel, 2005).

Moreover, as an immigrant graduate student myself, I question my own immigration to Canada. On the one hand, I was aware that the immigration system in Canada was structured to allow educated people easier entry into the country; the immigration process was much easier nine years ago when I entered Canada than it is at present (see chapter 2). On the other hand, the education, experience, skills, ability and other credentials of immigrants are not validated and respected by the system. The feeling is paradoxical for immigrant Iranian women. Despite being accepted as immigrants or international students in Canadian society and its various institutions, they feel isolated and marginalized in mainstream Canadian society. Taking these feelings into consideration, Henry and Tator (1994) explored the philosophy of continuous racism in a democratic society. By adopting Henry and Tator's analyses in the context of

discriminatory immigration policies, we are able to see that immigrants are welcome to legally enter Canada, but their education, experience, culture, language, and nationality are not; these factors are seen as inferior to white supremacist ideals. These issues are evident for most racialized bodies as observed through the experiences of the women who participated in my research. As mentioned in the chapter discussing my findings, Sarah (Interview, 2008) is blatantly ignored and disrespected when she offered to share her experience as a national from Iran with her class because of her religion, language, and nationality. Her instructor said to her, “[Y]our experience does not fit to our subject” (Sarah, Interview, summer 2008). Through a racist viewpoint, the “Other” is evaluated according to the ideals of a white culture. From this point of view we are able to see how the ‘personal is political’ is a true fact that people are judged based on their physical appearances. Middle Eastern bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are a source of exclusion. This hegemony by white racist supremacy inspired me to investigate the roots of the dehumanization of racialized immigrants in Canadian society, and particularly those attending graduate school, by listening to the accounts of each participant and attempting not to represent them as strangers, but as real people with real experiences.

In order to provide context to the voices of Iranian educated women who immigrate to Canada, I used qualitative research methods. More specifically, I utilized standpoint theory as the methodology of choice for this research by conducting interviews with eleven women between the ages of 26–55 years old. Standpoint theory provided an opportunity for the participants to speak openly, broadly and in depth about their challenges in Canadian graduate schools and, on a larger scale, Canadian society. This focus on marginalized women’s voices is supported by critical feminists such as

Bannerji (1991), Harding (1995), Hoodfar (1992), hooks (1984, 1989), Mohanty, (1988, 2004), Ng (2004, 2005), Razack (1998), and Wane (2004), just to name a few.

Marginalized voices must be disclosed by the indigenous people who are marginalized. In order to discuss indigenous voices in the context of Canadian higher education and to be able to discover if racism and all other “isms” are applied to these forgotten voices, I used multi-theoretical perspectives. Orientalism, anti-colonialism and integrative anti-racist feminism were utilized as the framework to decolonize myself in order to conduct this research without bias and also to be able to examine the roots of oppression and racism in interrelated ways.

For the participants of this research, their character was predominantly shaped by their Iranian culture, educational background and experience. As a result, their presence in a Euro-American environment comes under suspicion. Because they are from the Middle East, Orientalism serves as an important theory for explaining the roots of connection between the East and the West. Orientalism is a theoretical framework that is defined by Edward Said (1979, 2003) in describing the roots of imperial hegemony over Middle Eastern people. Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) focuses on how Middle Eastern women, as the essence of Orientalism, are defined as an inferior creator in the Euro-American gaze through the lens of media, art, publication and higher education institutions. The origins of Orientalism are rooted in a colonial perspective that is founded on racist beliefs and a sense of superiority by the West over the East. This colonial hegemony has two main parts, domination and control which are enforced through the domains listed above. As a result, Western knowledge is accredited and privileged over non-Western production of knowledge through this hegemony. According

to the findings of my research, both Said (1979, 2003) and Yegenoglu's (1998) perspectives correspond with my analysis of stereotypes of Middle Eastern women. In addition, I was able to develop their perspectives further by adopting an integrative anti-racist feminist perspective in order to examine the relationships between nationality and religion (which are highlighted in both authors' work) with other factors such as language, non-Muslim cultures, immigration processes and even indigenous community. In addition, I was able to examine Iranian women's status in a socio-capitalist society, Canada, not out of it in their home country.

The second theory that I used was the anti-colonial perspective, whose meaning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is connected to globalization and neo-liberal philosophy. Neo-liberalism supports market-oriented society based on competition between people, organizations, and countries. The global market expands through organizations such as WTO, GATT, GATS, and NAFTA. Through globalization, the hegemony of white supremacy pervades the economies, cultures and politics of many countries worldwide (Amin, 2003; Chomsky, 2006; Magnusson, 2005; Mohit, 2003; Razack, 1998; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2006). Therefore, colonization goes beyond the occupation of land through means of physical domination; it is the global occupation of the mind, culture, and spirit by way of new technologies and new ideologies such as the neo-liberal perspective (Bakker, 1994; De Sousa Santos, 2006; Dwyer, 2006; Magnusson, 2005; Rhoades, & Slaughter, 2006). When Middle Eastern women immigrate from the East to Western countries such as Canada where the dominant viewpoint is guided by Euro-American perspectives (refer to chapter 2), Iranians are once again surrounded by neo-liberal perspectives; neo-Orientalism is the war on terrorism that came about after the 9/11 attack in 2001.

Consequently, host countries continue to dominate and control of immigration through various policies enacted over racialized immigrant bodies. At this new phase, the oppressed is situated in oppressor and colonizer's home, not outside of it.

Furthermore, according to Dei (2001) and Wane (Cordoba, 2004), resistance generates deconstruction of imperial hegemony through colonization; so, this anti-colonial perspective allows us to see how women in this research cope with domination, racism, and all other "isms." Wane (Cordoba, 2004) states that, "When people acclaim their own indigenous knowledge and identities, they actually engage in counter hegemonic discourse, it is a way for survival" (p. 96). For example, in this research all of the participants' strength for overcoming oppression came from their inner selves. Their connection to their culture, nationality, religion, family and their spirituality helped them to survive in a racist, discriminatory androcentric academic environment.

As mentioned in chapter 3, women's identity is only their gender and/or sexuality; it is multi-layered. Race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, language, and religion all contribute to women's struggle in colonial regions. For this reason, an integrative anti-racist feminist perspective provides a meaningful lens to examine this multiplicity of women's identity that encounters racism and discrimination in the Canadian context. For example, Leila, who was fishing by a riverside, was asked what her nationality was by a white Canadian man who heard her accent. When she stated that she was Iranian, the man said aggressively, "I don't want you kill my children while they are going to school" (Leila, interview, summer 2008). Consequently, we can argue that if Leila had a European or North American accent, she probably would not have encountered this racist attack. In this scenario the interactions of language, accent, body

and nationality created a difficult situation for Leila. The influence of neo-Orientalism following the effect of 9/11 shaped the man's white, racist perspective through different institutions and media in the Canadian context.

The cultural upbringing of women who were born and raised in Iran dramatically influences their acceptance or rejection of Canadian society and schools. The shape of their background, experience, and knowledge of social relationships in Iran, as well as their expectations of the host country, determine the way they view Canadian society. Moreover, their perspective – liberal or critical – also impacts the way they interpret their pain. The findings of this research reveal several key issues that were common among all participants regardless of their liberal or critical views. First, they are stigmatized by the Oriental image. Second, they all suffer from patriarchy and a system of dictatorship in Iran that has forced them to immigrate to Canada. Thirdly, they were passionate about continuing their study at the graduate level and did not immigrate to Canada for only financial concerns. Lastly, they acknowledged and liked the educational opportunity they would be afforded in Canada. Considering the above points as a whole caused participants to tolerate racism and discrimination in graduate school and society.

Two of the participants mentioned that their reason for continuing their studies was to upgrade themselves in order to compete in the Canadian labour market. These two individuals' reasoning was the same as Mazzuca's (2000). Mazzuca mentioned that among second-generation Italians, the purpose for continuing graduate school was "to achieve something of themselves," "to attain a position that without graduate education they cannot achieve it" (p. 206). She also mentioned that having a higher education would result in a higher social standing for second-generation Italian families (p. 207).

Italian women graduate students knew that the more education they had, the more opportunities would be available to them. The potential benefits and the love of learning were not the only reasons that Italian women gave for pursuing a graduate degree. For second-generation Italian women, completing a graduate degree gave them the opportunity to “surprise” themselves and those around them (p. 207). In contrast to Mazzuca’s findings, based on findings of this research, the majority of participants (9 out of 11) mentioned that, despite the necessity of having a Canadian education, the internal desire for personal growth was a reason that they considered important for continuing their studies. They claim that 6 out of 9 participants were able to find a job by obtaining a license or a master’s degree only, instead of continuing on to PhD program.

The findings of this research were categorized into six interrelated themes, adaptation, stereotyping, discrimination, being silenced, strategy for resistance and belonging to Canadian and Iran-Canadian society. The predominant theme is the stereotype that all Middle Eastern women are inferior to men and Western women. They are seen as trivial, uneducated, easily dominated by men and very passive. For example, some participants discuss how the pre-judgments of Muslim Iranian women in Canadian graduate schools and /or society greatly impacted their sense of marginalization in the classroom and restricted them from actively participating in Canadian life. This marginalization and exclusion from schools and the public sphere is not limited to mainstream culture, but it is also evident in the Iranian community itself. Muslim women’s bodies are rejected and disrespected by the Canadian community, as well as their local community which also practices neo-Orientalism and colonization among its people (Bannerji, 1992). Westernization is effective and internalized within the Iranian

community and, therefore, prevents solidarity and courteous interactions among its people.

Generalizations of Oriental women are grounded in racism and colonialism. Racism, which also manifests itself in discrimination, is based on any factor such as religion, nationality, language and culture. Racism is also stated in other research such as the York University stories by Braden, Bannerji, and Hutt in 2000, Samuel (2005) and Murray (2008). However, since the 1960s, gender issues and racism are contextualized in American graduate school. This research, while encountering racism in its broader sense, finds the integration of religion, nationality, language, and body of immigrant Iranian women oppressive. The integration of those factors results in a colonial perspective, neo-Orientalism, over participants of this research. Stereotyping of Iranian women based on their religion and nationality has resulted in their marginalization and the silencing of their voices. These factors overlap with gender, language, and ethnicity to cause women to feel oppressed and this interaction is analyzed in light of integrative anti-racist feminist perspective.

Consequently, based on a critical feminist theory, the grass roots of marginalization and discrimination are colonization by a society that practices racism and patriarchy through the domination and control of Others. For example, based on the findings of this research in graduate school professors and supervisors who are equipped with knowledge and authority exert their power over Iranian immigrant women in academia. In this research, the experiences of Negar, Fatemeh, Mahvash, Seema, Maheen, and Sarah vividly show this type of domination. This finding is coherent with

the experiences of students in Berkeley during the 1960s; York University in 2000; and in Samuel's research conducted in 2005.

As mentioned earlier, when immigrating from a collaborative society (Eastern society) to a socio-capitalist society, individualism becomes a major problem for the adaptation of racialized bodies to North American culture. Referring to Treanor (2005), individualism is a driving factor in neo-liberal ideology which is practiced in a capitalist society. The result of giving weight to individualism is the generation of competition among people/ students. Focusing on 'oneself' and one's own desires can cause people look at each other as a market enterprise. It is the reLeilan that Fatemeh mentions, "I have to turn on TV, or radio for making noise at home, because even my old friends do not have time to spend with me, I am alone" (Fatemeh, Interview, summer 2008). This incongruity might be less if one comes from another Western culture to Canadian society. However, in Mazzuca's (2000) research, cultural adaptation is still an issue for second-generation Canadians of Italian background. In addition, the combination of differences such as ethnic background, language, religion and social-cultural climate makes it a hard for Iranian immigrant women who are studying to adapt in Canada. Although these barriers should be similar for all other minorities, what makes this research significant is the overlapping of cultural adaptation with religion, nationality, language, and appearance in the experience of Iranian women's subjugation.

To be a Muslim and/or Iranian after 9/11 means being subjected to distrust and suspicion. In this research, Maheen suffered in most of her classes where instructors rejected her ideas because of her religion, her nationality and the fact that she wore a hijab. When the instructor spoke about the war in Iraq, she tended to look at Maheen

most of the time and questioned the innocence of American soldiers who were killed by Iraqi people. This research has shown that these negative images make for an unpleasant climate that the participants must study in. Therefore, dissatisfaction in their lives has also impacted their degree of participation in social activities while consistently questioning their status in Canadian schools and society.

The language barrier was a significant factor that affected the experiences of my participants. English was a second or third language for all participants, except for one of them who grew up in Western society and could speak English fluently. This factor is so important to the participant's self esteem and degree of integration into the new environment. Fatemeh and Mahvash, in their analysis of adaptation, go beyond the ability to speak in English. They state that adaptation is not being only fluent in language it is cultural adaptation, dissolving in mainstream culture and feeling attached to the society. My findings about the language barrier resemble Mazzuca's thesis in 2000. Mazzuca (2000), in examining the challenges in Italian graduate students, concluded that language and cultural capital were the two main factors in the struggle for surviving in academia. However, her participants were second-generation immigrants of Italian background and still the English language was a barrier for them. Participants in Mazzuca's (2000) research mentioned that since their parents were first-generation immigrants to Canada and were unable to overcome language barriers, they could not help their daughters make a smooth transition in the school setting. While Mazzuca's research provides evidence of problems caused by language barriers for second-generation women of Italian background, it is more significant for first-generation Middle Eastern (non-Western) women. Moreover, Samuel's (2005) research about South Asian second-generation

immigrants also mentioned the accent barrier for university students, Hutt (2000) and Braden (2000) talked about the marginalization of black bodies who suffered from paraphrasing/ censoring their thoughts in a graduate school dominated by racist white students. In Xu and Zhang's research (2007), they found that English barriers for Chinese students in American universities caused isolation from mainstream culture. These findings about language barriers show that language is a powerful instrument in mainstream culture and can be used to exclude those who are deemed "Others", the "personal is political" also manifests itself in this dimension.

Surprisingly, the role of program coordinators and student services as a source of support for graduate students was not mentioned in one of the related literature reviews. This important issue raised by my investigation of the lack of support by institution administrators indicates continuous racism at the structural level of higher education system. As Henry and Tator (1994) elaborated, the system continues to perpetuate racism because, in a seemingly democratic society or institution there are laws and regulations in place that are supposed protect people and, in my case, there are student services and program coordinators for guiding and supporting students. However, according to my findings, program coordinators encourage students to be silent and obedient to their supervisors. Because the students do not have the privilege and agency to speak, they cannot change anything. As a result, democratic racism allows the continuation of racism in Canadian institutions.

Through the anti-colonial perspective, the strategy of women for resisting and empowering themselves is scrutinized. These strategies are self-interested and include the passion to continue studying, empowering themselves, increasing their spirituality,

sharing their feelings with sympathetic friends and family, and different kinds of therapy such as sports, music and writing therapy. Sharing experiences with sympathetic friends and support from family members is also found in Samuel's (2005) research for South Asian students. In addition, bell hooks (1989) also mentioned it was a valuable experience through her graduate school.

The last theme of my findings is a sense of belonging. There are complexities in the notion of belonging, especially in belonging to a host society and living in a multicultural country such as Canada. In terms of educational opportunities, the majority of the participants are happy to be living in Canada. From a cultural adaptation perspective, some are happy and some are not. Some, regardless of racism, nationalism, and all other "isms," still like living in Canada and attending school, while others have struggled to find a way to integrate into a racist society. As a result, this mixture of findings is what makes a qualitative anti-racist feminist perspective beautiful; it is that we do not generalize women's voices.

According to Mohanty (1988), there is difference between the concept of woman and women. In using the word "women" we are still homogenizing their experience and their life, but when we use "woman," the uniqueness and individuality of every single woman is acknowledged. Each woman has a unique experience in both the past and present, but the way she interprets these periods in her life also depends on her perspective of life, be it liberal or critical. In any case, all of the participants in this study mentioned their Iranian nationality and culture prior to identifying themselves as Canadian. What makes them who they are and their identity harmonious is their Iranian background, and what makes their resistance and passion to tolerate racism and

discrimination is their Iranian roots. For one of the participants, her religion, Islam, was superior to her nationality. 3 out of 11 do not believe in Islam as their faith, and the rest of them prefer to integrate their nationality and their religion. Despite this recognition, these women still enjoy living and studying in Canada. The host society does not broaden their original identity; however, it gives them the opportunity to continue their education. Still, they are attached to their Iranian culture and all of its characteristics. They are attached to their ancestors, families, and relatives. I can argue this in the light of having taken a holistic approach to defining solidarity, identity and a sense of belonging. As Dei (2005a) and Wane (2004) mentioned, people/women's identity is multilayered, so the satisfactory integration of those layers provides solidarity of attachment to a land, nation, culture and also one's happiness of life. Fragmentation within one's identity and personality causes detachment from any society. In contrast to bell hooks (2009) who claims that an individual's homeland is a place where they form all attachments and commitments, this research found that the participants ranging from ages 26–55 who had stayed in Canada for 1–30 years did not mention their attachment to the materialistic definition of land. They spoke beyond the land, discussing their love for their home country. In all other research –York University's Collection in 2000 by Bannerji, Braden and Hutt, Mazzuca in 2000, Samuel in 2005 and Murray in 2008 – about the experiences of graduate students, the concept of attachment and belonging to a host society was not the focus of that research.

Another important factor that also contributes to women's sense of belonging to Canadian society is women's interaction with their own Iranian community. Having active and positive interaction with indigenous community facilitates integration into new

host society. According to the participants of this research, Iranian communities could not play a positive or significant role in this regard. If Iranian immigrant people/women are successful in the academic sphere, according to Fatemeh, “it is not based on community work it is mainly based on an individual effort, her past education and experience” (Fatemeh, interview, summer 2008). The Iranian community is also colonized by Western perspectives, it is domesticated Oriental. Domesticated Orientals (Thobani, 2008) cause indigenous people to devalue their own culture and be impressed by Western culture. The Iranian-Canadian community absorbed the images of Orientalism and treated their own people as inferiors. According to my findings, veiled women are more marginalized and disrespected within their own community than unveiled women, but in general terms, none of the participants were happy to participate in the Iranian community.

As a final word, the findings of this research on the integration of gender, nationality (Iranian), religion (Islam), language, immigration, Iranian community, and coming from the East has had an impact on the oppression these participants experience. In addition, the socio-political image of Iran in Canadian society fostered the racism and discrimination that caused them the greatest pain. In terms of (Muslim) men and women, gender can become significant because men do not appear as different from the mainstream, and women who wear Islamic clothing encounter more oppression.

The following pages will offer some suggestions for further research.

## **7.2. Practical Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions and Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

The following suggestions arise from a lack of improvement with regard to my subject matter. As participants in this research are racialized immigrant women, one of the primary recommendations is to establish a strong and meaningful connection between higher education institutions and the citizenship and immigration agency (CIC). The other area of suggestion is specific to graduate school for creating an efficient space for (prospective) immigrant graduate students. However, the primary question is how can dramatic and effective change happen on a structural level when we are surrounded by a global capitalist andocentric atmosphere? Maybe by decolonizing our thoughts and applying critical anti-racist perspective on an individual level we can produce better communication in classroom or workplace. But, to change the structure of graduate school or the work place would require global counter hegemony of all individuals regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and language. We need a global solidarity that uses our diversity to apply justice globally. Power relations should be critiqued in a personal and structural level and we have to start from ourselves (Wane, 2004). Self-critique is a practice for examining outsiders' power and domination. We need internal and external observation and evaluation in order to produce justice. The society outside is a reflection of our inside, so if there is no peace and justice in society it is because we do not have it within ourselves. Therefore, the following are suggestions for the higher education system to produce more integration within its institution for justice and equity.

### **7.2.1. Suggestions for higher education institutions:**

- 1) Decolonizing methodology of teaching; graduate school needs critical pedagogy not only in its content, but also in the method. A critical (feminist) approach allows diverse students to contribute their history or background to knowledge production. And this process of decolonization brings change in the academic environment.
- 2) Creating strong, active, and meaningful connections between faculty and graduate students. This is not limited to white students; racialized minorities should be encouraged to participate, and they can do it when they see that dominant culture is willing to integrate with their experience, knowledge, and values. Specific meetings should be arranged and supported with all racialized body and not only, for example, with blacks or South Asians. All racialized bodies should be encouraged to participate by their supervisor's invitation and encouragement.
- 3) Bhopal in 1994 states that recognition of "difference without deviance" (Mazucca, 2000, p. 227) is necessary for racialized body in knowledge production. Dua (2003) also talked about the community of knower for change. As a result, we need a community of diverse knowledge and experience for the inclusion of Others. Otherwise, power hierarchy reproduces oppression from one group over another group.
- 4) Providing a system of evaluation for assessing students' services and /or graduate consultant. According to this research's findings, none of the above centers was helpful for graduate racialized body, but also those resources

encourage students to tolerate discrimination and injustice and not to complain. Thus, students should see the effectiveness of evaluation.

Nowadays, any evaluation causes the reduction of services to students as the result of more market-oriented institutions.

- 5) A system of effective evaluation is needed to examine the student-supervisor relationship. Filling a piece of paper is not enough for a comprehensive assessment and analysis. This system should be mediated by a third party so that both sides feel safe expressing their ideas. My friends in graduate school continuously express that even when concern about some faculty members persist over many years, still those faculty members reproduce their hegemony over others, and also receive promotions in their administrative roles. This shows that current methods of evaluation are superficial and insufficient. How can most students regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality be oppressed by some faculty members but nothing changes in the school? Seema, Fatemeh, Negar, Maheen, Sarah, Mahvash, and Leila are victims of the power hierarchy in the supervisor-student relationship, but they cannot raise their voices in their school, or if a few of them did, they were encouraged to be silent and obedient. This atmosphere will continue as the result of the systemic structural racist and androcentric climate in Canadian higher education.
- 6) Following the above evaluation, self-assessment also should be completed by graduates students as well as supervisors. Each side should do and discuss it quarterly. I hope the power hierarchy will not prohibit such evaluation.

- 7) Organizing graduate school fairs for prospective immigrant students in each university/department. It can also be posted on a website with the collaboration of CIC and higher education institutions. This introductory information would provide more realistic information for prospective students. They can get involved in graduate departments, and become familiar with faculty members and other graduate students. They can pose their questions to actual people and in person. However, follow up can be done through the website.

### **7.2.2. Suggestions for Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)**

The link between the CIC and higher education institutions is significant. One of the important findings of this research is the lack of adequate information for newcomers. When immigrants enter the society and are willing to pursue their studies, they have already gone through CIC for their immigration process, so through that website they should be able to get primary information about higher education. So, one of the main resources for newcomers to Canadian graduate school can be the conjunction between this agency and higher education institutions.

Some suggestions are as follows:

1. One of the important findings of this research is the inadequate social services for immigrant people. For example, the language barrier is an important issue that CIC with cooperation with higher education institutions can address for a smoother transition for potential graduate students. ESL class and the 'Link' agency are not adequate for educated people, as participants in this research mention. The integration of immigrants in new society can be achieved by

having a real connection with their future institutions. Hence, establishing English classes with subsidies from the government in different colleges and universities would provide a better connection between prospective graduate students and the place they are willing to study in future.

2. The CIC/higher education website should provide email addresses of alumni based on discipline and academic experience in order to help prospective graduate students contact potential mentors.
3. We have to see immigrant women in a holistic approach. They are women who left their own country in order to establish a new life in the host society. Their connection with family and relatives in Iran help them to be a happier and efficient citizen. But as a person identifies with political and cultural issues, any political global subject impacts local people. The image of Oriental people in Canada is so negative that it causes Iranian people to have difficulty visiting their families. This discrimination over them presents a racist picture of Canada to Iranian people. No country encounters the same hateful situation as Iran. Consequently, CIC must decolonize itself from the image of political agenda over local people. When local people are affected by foreign policy (as shown in this research especially by all participants), their feeling toward Canadian society and institutions is under question. In addition, belonging is mainly mentioned by participants as attachment to extended family, so CIC can provide facilities for the extended family to visit their relatives in Canada in order to reduce their loneliness and isolation.

4. A longitude research with the cooperation of CIC and graduate schools about participant's feeling towards belonging to Canada would be pertinent. This research can investigate how with diverse experience participants' feelings will change. People are not static, they are dynamic and their feelings also can be changed. Any further research in this regard will help policy makers to make better decisions to engage immigrants in Canadian social development.
5. Conduct research into CIC political strategy in order to analyze the disparity between the literature and its policies.

### **7.3. Recommendations for Further Research**

1. The participants in this research were only first-generation Iranian graduate students. Because Iranian immigrants are a new phenomenon in Canadian society, it was difficult to locate second-generation immigrants but 1,5 is possible in order to examine how they negotiate their challenges in graduate school. As the findings of this research shows, most challenges for participants were in the adaptation/ integration process and involved being stereotyped by Oriental image; as a result, it is important that we examine such factors in 1,5 generation, to see if they have the same feeling and experience.
2. This research can follow up by doing the same research for Iranian immigrant males in graduate school. In this regard, the integration of gender with other factors such as nationality, religion, langue, can be more controversial.

3. Further research can be conducted of other racialized bodies in the Canadian context. We have lack of literature about the experiences of racialized students in the context of Canadian higher education.

#### **7.4. Limitation of the Research**

I discuss this section in a personal and structural institutional level, as well as from a micro and macro critical perspective. In any analysis we have to have a comprehensive and holistic approach in order to see the subject in a broader perspective. An integrated micro and macro perspective helps us to achieve such analysis. Moreover, the limitations of this research will also expose the avenues of further research that I expressed in previous section. In the pages below, I will explore these limitations in terms of inside and outside of myself as a researcher.

On a personal level and in a macro perspective, I as a researcher have to have a balance in my personal and family life in order to be able to produce good research while not sacrificing others to my wishes. In a micro perspective, I have multiple roles such as being a mother, wife and a support for family and relatives in Iran, and also being a social political feminist in Iran and an activist in Iranian-Canadian community. In addition to all those roles, being a second-language immigrant and also continue my education as a graduate student requires me to be more focused, self-reliant, and self determinate.

Any decision I made to manage all those tasks was not limited to that time, it definitely affected my future life and all my family and relatives. So, it was really significant for me to prioritize my various roles and dedicate my time and money in a reLeilable way. Among the different roles that I defined for myself being a responsible mother was in the first rank. The future of my children related to having a good and

meaningful transition from Iran to Canada. Hence, adaptation and integration into new environment requires having a firm and meaningful definition of our goals for immigration to Canada. It was my main objective not to sacrifice my family emotionally and financially while continuing my study.

I was not a funded graduate student. In addition, the cost of study was something that for a newcomer is really difficult. In contrast, to the Oriental image that men from Middle Eastern dominate their families and wife, I have been fortunate to have a sympathetic husband who works hard to provide for his family's comfort and wishes. But being a graduate student for whom English is a second language requires spending more time on any school work. As this research shows and as is also evident in Mazzuca (2000) and Samuel (2005)'s findings, second-language students spend more time to produce good work, and even spend more money to have their work edited. Even students services in institutions cannot fully help them in this regard. So, it is a reciprocal system of education that you spend more time in school so you have to pay more money for staying in school, as a result more stress will come to such students. As a whole, this kind of pressure will remain with graduate students if they cannot find any remedy for it.

From the other side, looking from the institutional level, the system of education as explained in chapter three practices capitalism and androcentrality. It is market-oriented, so the system looks at the students as knowledge producers. Because the nature of school is based on racism and patriarchy, we can see the results of this research connect to this issue. So, how we can achieve justice and fairness within a system that is far from it? Even when we read the story of York University in 2000 by Bannerji, Braden and Hutt, we can see the same racism but in a larger context applied over other racialized

bodies. I agree with Mazzuca (2000) that the school does not look at students through a holistic lens. Institutions expect graduate students to produce publications and present at conferences in order to increase the institution's prestige. I do not want to disregard the importance of such academic work, as my experience shows how all those activities enriched my academic knowledge, and also increased my self-confidence. The question is how an institution and/or faculty member can help its students to achieve such academic excellence in a low stress environment. How can school support racialized minorities to publish, present at conferences, and accept teaching assistantship positions such that these students do not feel they are left behind mainstream students? However, by competing globally, higher education institutions reduce their students' support while increasing the tuition and other expenses (refer to chapter 3). Moreover, literature by Acker (2001) shows any regulation in higher education system is established based on mainstream students, and racialized body do not have the same privilege in school setting (refer to chapter 2). So although the duration of graduate school is the same for all students, comprehensive exams and students' services do not consider diversity among students. Is everyone the same so that we can apply the same regulation to them? Here, I have to address the differences between equality and equity; we have to look for equity. Based on gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion, everyone should be treated differently but just and fairly.

As a parting word, it is the graduate student who produces work in collaboration with faculty members and other services in the institutions. Therefore, it is worthwhile to listen to the main producer in order to include him/her for change and justice.

To appear on OISE letter head

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Part One: Iranian Women's Graduate Student's Education and Experience**

- 1) What is your educational background in Iran?
- 2) What is your work experience in Iran?
- 3) What is the main reason for coming to Canada?
- 4) What is your main reason for continuing your study?
- 5) What are your challenges in Canadian academia? In terms of choosing course, supervisor, connection with other students, faculty members, and in general the atmosphere of your school?
- 6) What kind of support do you get in academia in terms of financial, emotional, and intellectual? And in what ways?
- 7) What is the impact of Iranian education and experience on your success in Canadian school and society? Explain it
- 8) What is the family support for your study?
- 9) Do you have any connection with Iranian community? In what ways?
- 10) What is your experience as an Iranian woman in Canadian society?
- 11) If you feel any pressure in school, family, Iranian community, and society as a whole, what kind of strategy do you use for coping with?
- 12) How do you define yourself as an Iranian woman? Do you have a sense of "belonging" to the academia and society? Explain it

**Part Two: Participant's Information**

- 1) What is your Name?
- 2) What is your email address?
- 3) What is your age?
- 4) What is your marital? Relational status? What is your partner's occupation/education?
- 5) Do you have children? If so, how many and what are their ages?
- 6) What University did you attend in Iran?
- 7) What program did you study in Iran?
- 8) What degree did you receive in Iran?
- 9) What Year did you come to Canada?
- 10) What Year did you start your Canadian graduate school?
- 11) What is the name of the school and program?
- 12) What Degree will be offer to you?

## **Appendix B**

### **Telephone script / Short email to the network**

Hi, there (name of the network)

This is Zahra, You know I am a Ph.D. student at OISE/U of T in the Higher Education/ Women's Studies program. I am currently conducting a research study on the experiences of female Iranian graduate students in Canadian academia under the supervision of Dr. Njoki Wane a professor in Sociology department at OISE/U of T. I am looking for participants who have a B.A/M.A. degree from Iran and have enrolled in Canadian university after 2001. If you know anyone who is eligible and interested in volunteering to participate in a 1–2 hour interview (audio-taped) for this study please give her my contact address. All the data collected for this project will be kept completely confidential and the participant's names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used for any work resulting from this study.

Dear friend (or the name of the network) can you please forward this email to anyone you feel would be interested in participating in this study.

Thanks for your time and help,

Zahra

E-mail, zhojati@gmail.com

Tell, (905)-883-3621

To appear on OISE letter head

## **Appendix C**

### **Information Letter/ Consent form**

Dear participant,

My name is Zahra Hojati and I am a Ph.D. student in the Higher Education/Women's Studies program at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am presently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis entitled "Ironic acceptance, Presented in academia discarded as Oriental the case of Iranian women graduate students in Canadian academy" under the supervision of Dr. Njoki Wane, from the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This is the first academic research to be done around the experiences of Iranian graduate women students.

The purpose of this study is to explore your educational and work experience in Iran and its impact on your success in Canadian school and society. You will also be asked about your Canadian educational experience in terms of any emotional, financial, and academic support that you may get from your school. You also be asked about family support and your relationships with your community as well. And finally you will be asked how you define your identity as an Iranian woman and your view about belonging to the Canadian society. The participants in this study will be graduate students from any academic institution across Canada.

The benefit of this study is that you will be contributing to producing new knowledge that may improve women minority graduate student's life in school and society as a whole. By sharing your experiences with a member of your community you may feel good and also feel good that you are contributing to helping me do academic research that will bring your voice into Canadian academia.

Your involvement would entail participating in a 1–2 hour interview. You have been selected for this study as one of the 15 volunteer participants because you have a Bachelor or Master degree from Iran and you enrolled in a Canadian graduate school after 2001. Your age, ethnicity, marital status, language and religion does not matter.

The interview will be audio-taped with your consent and later will be transcribed. You may refuse to answer any questions, stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty. Your information will be kept confidential. For confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used and your name and your school's name will not be identified in any direct quotation, report, presentation, or any articles that may arise from this study. The information will be kept in two pen drives (data storage). Then the interview will be transcribed and the transcription will be sent to you for any modification or clarification via email and you can return it by email by three weeks. The pen drives and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. The information will be kept for five years after the completion of the study and then will be erased. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the information collected during the study. At no

time and no stages will you be at risk of harm and no value judgments will be placed on your responses.

You can have access to a summary of the research findings and it will be sent to you upon your request by email. You will also have access to the entire thesis once it is published and you will be informed about its accessibility by me via email.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please email or phone me at the address below then we can set up an interview at a mutually agreed date and time. If you live outside of Toronto, I will conduct the interview on the telephone.

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study and that the purpose of the study has been explained to you, all your questions were answered, you agree to participate in the interview, you have received a copy of this letter and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

University \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion, \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio-taped, \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me and/or my supervisor or the ethics office at [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca) telephone number ,(416) 946-3273

Thank you for your cooperation

Sincerely,

Zahra Hojati

Ph.D Candidate, Higher Education/Women's Studies

Theory and Policy Studies in Education

OISE/University of Toronto

Telephone, (416) 821-9503

Email, zhojati@gmail.com

Dr. Njoki Wane

Professor, Sociology and Equity Studies in Education/ OISE/ University of Toronto

Telephone, (905)-883-3621

Email, wanenjoki@yahoo.ca

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