Five Times Daily:

The Dynamics of Prayer Worship Among Muslim Immigrants in St. John's, NL

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ritual of prayer among Muslim immigrants in the city of St. John's, NL. Immigration across national, cultural, religious, and ethnic borders is a moment in an individual's life marked by significant change. My premise is that in such contexts the relatively conservative nature of religious ritual can supply much-needed continuity, comfort, and consolation for individuals living-through the immigrant experience. As well, ritual forms are often put under stress when transferred to a considerably different place and cultural context, where "facts on the ground" may be obstacles to traditional and familiar ritual forms. Changes to the understanding or practice of ritual are common in new cultural and geographic situations, and ritual itself often becomes not merely a means of social identification and cohesion, but a practical tool in processing change - in the context of immigration, in learning to live in a new community. St. John's is a lively and historic city and while Muslim immigrants may be a small group within it they nevertheless contribute to the city's energy and atmosphere. This thesis endeavours to better understand the life stories of ten of these newcomers to St. John's, focusing on their religious backgrounds and lives. In particular, this thesis seeks to better understand the place of prayer in the immigrant experience.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

St. John's is the oldest and most easterly city in North America. Settled primarily in the late 17th and 18th centuries, St. John's is the capital city of the province of Newfoundland, the last confederated province of Canada. Settled predominantly by English, French, and Irish peoples, the province itself has a rich Christian history, consisting of mostly Anglican and Catholic denominations.

After many lean years following the collapse of the fishing industry in the early 1990s, Newfoundland, and in particular St. John's, has seen a vast economic boom in the past two decades. This is due in large part to the global oil industry, with Newfoundland being home to significant off-shore drilling and oil production. This economic boom has increased prosperity and opportunity in the city; with that has come immigration. Individuals of the Muslim faith and cultural background are a small, but growing immigrant group relocating to the city.

St. John's is a lively and historic city; while Muslim immigrants are a small community they nevertheless contribute to the city's developing cosmopolitan and multicultural atmosphere. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand the stories of ten of these newcomers to St. John's, focusing on their religious backgrounds and lives. In particular, this thesis seeks to understand the place of prayer in the immigrant experience.

The interviews I have conducted with these participants serve as a snapshot of a particular community at a particular time, the challenges and prospects of life in a new city, focusing particularly on the ritual of prayer. The research documented here serves to contribute to an ongoing understanding of religious diversity in the city of St. John's; the study and analysis provides insight into the role of ritual in religious life, the ways in which ritual is a means of effecting change, and the function of ritual in navigating the immigrant experience. The intention of this thesis is to make a contribution to our

understanding of ritual, specifically the function, or functions, of prayer, while at the same time contributing to scholarly knowledge and understandings of contemporary religious diversity.

In *By Noon Prayer*, Fadwa El Guindi writes that "among the world's major religious rituals, surely the Islamic ritual of worship, the *salat,*[1] has been one of the most intractable to anthropological analysis."[2] Part of the reason for the intractability of analysis is the difficulty in generalizing about ritual, since ritual practice is highly localized, and Islam is a global religion. Moreover, much of the theoretical discussion of ritual divides over the question of the function of ritual: is ritual basically conservative, working to reproduce social order? Or is ritual more of a dynamic tool, useful to both individuals and groups in processing and effecting change? These broad questions in ritual theory inform this thesis, in the context of studying the meanings and functions of ritual prayer in the lives Muslim immigrants.

Most scholarship on ritual recognizes that features such as continuity and resistance to change are constitutive of ritual. Immigration across not just national but cultural, religious, and ethnic borders is a moment in an individual's life marked by significant change. My premise is that in such contexts, the relatively conservative nature of religious ritual can supply much-needed continuity, comfort, and consolation for individuals living through the immigrant experience. There are several studies suggesting as much, and my research builds on this theme.[3] On the other hand, ritual forms are often

1 As defined by Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine in *Glossary of Islam*. Edinburgh, GBR: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, page 152, *Salat* is "Ritual prayer made up of formulae and actions arranged in rak'as . – Performed alone or in groups five times a day at specified hours calculated from the movement of the sun but not coinciding exactly with the main moments of this path. They are: – after dawn (ṣubḥ); at midday after the zenith or ẓuhr; in the middle of the afternoon ('aṣr); before sunset (maghrib); during the night ('ish ā '). Performed after ablutions, privately on a prayer mat or in a group in a prayer hall or masjid such as those of a Great mosque (jā mi'). – A solemn ṣalāt called ṣa āt al-jum'a is held in the Great mosque at midday on Fridays when all the male members of the local community come together. It consists of: – an address (khuṭba), – an introduction in which the faithful stand with their hands raised to pronounce the formula All ā h akbar , "God is great", – two rak'as , – a formula of blessing on Muḥammad (taslīm). Other ritual prayers, sometimes optional or supplementary, are performed at particular occasions, either private or public.

2 Fadwa El Guindi, *By Noon Prayer: The Rhythm of Islam* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2008), 107.

3 Including: Mazumdar, Shampa, and Sanjoy Mazumdar. "The Articulation of Religion in Domestic Space: Rituals in the Immigrant Muslim Home." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18 (2) (2004): 74-85., Orsi, Robert A., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012., Guindi, Fadwa El. *By Noon Prayer: The Rhythm of Islam*. 1st ed. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2008.

put under stress when transferred to a considerably different geography and cultural context, where "facts on the ground" may be obstacles to traditional and familiar ritual forms. Changes to the understanding or practice of ritual are common in new cultural and geographic situations, and ritual itself often becomes not merely a means of social identification and cohesion, but a practical tool in processing change - in the context of immigration, that change is learning to live in a new community.

This thesis will demonstrate that when immigrating to St. John's, there have been significant changes (both conceptual and embodied) in the prayer ritual for Muslim immigrants, and that these changes are a means through which Muslim immigrants both adapt to and actively transform life in their new home. A central goal of this thesis is to identify, describe, and reflect on these changes, in order to better understand the complex and varied functions of and challenges to prayer in the Muslim immigrant context.

This research takes up the following questions: When and where is prayer conducted, and how are these times and places different in St. John's, compared with the immigrant's home? How is interaction between the individual and the local mosque different from their interaction with the mosques of their home country? How does working in a Western society, where an employer or co-worker might not be understanding or receptive to daily prayer requirements, impact individuals? Do secular places (such as work and school) meet hygienic guidelines, known as *wudu*, required for prayer spaces? What are the challenges of adapting prayer schedules to the demands of work and school? Does prayer reinforce a previous cultural identity while reconciling oneself to a new and changing cultural identity? How does the ritual of prayer ease both the immigrants transition to St. John's and their on-going lives in the city?

In *Crossing and Dwelling,*[4] religious studies scholar Thomas A. Tweed calls for more studies of lived-religion from "situated viewings." Interpreters and theorists of religion, he argues, never

4 Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

understand religion as such; rather "there are only situated observers encountering particular people in particular contexts." It is my hope that, in following the lead of Tweed and others like him,[5] this ethnographic approach to a case of contemporary lived-religion will contribute to mutual self-understanding. For my part an attempt to understand, to some degree, the religious lives of a particular group of people living in St. John's, NL at a certain time - their backgrounds, religious lives, personal beliefs and practices, and how prayer has and continues to assist in their navigation of immigrant life.

5 Most noteworthy for my study are the ethnographers Barbara Myeroff and Robert Orsi

Chapter 2 - Methodology and Literature Review

This chapter outlines the method by which I investigated the *salat* ritual. This chapter will introduce literature from the fields of lived religion and ritual studies, in particular the work of Robert Orsi, Fadwa El Guindi, and Thomas A. Tweed. At the close of this chapter, I will position my research in relation to the current field of "Islam in/and the West," and summarize the gaps and holes in the discussion that this thesis attempts to address.

2.1 Methodology

This thesis is an ethnographic study of ten members of the Muslim immigrant community of St. John's, employing the field-based methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of worship services and other ritual spaces in the home, workplace, and university. Data collection was conducted over a period of six months, from February to July, 2015. The data collected focuses on three areas:

(1) The life-story accounts of Muslim immigrants who have made St. John's their new home, focusing on their religious beliefs, values, and practices.

(2) The ritual practice of prayer among individuals from the Muslim community. Islam is a ritually oriented faith and this research provides a better understanding of the role of the ritual of prayer in the daily lives of Muslim immigrants in St. John's. The interviews and participant observations were focused on gathering data related to prayer practice, considering how prayer varies among individuals, and the extent to which prayer creates and develops a sense of identity for both individuals and a larger community of immigrants. As a participant-observer I documented the ritual lives of members of the city's Muslim community.

(3) The cultural exchange and relationship between Muslim immigrants and the city of St. John's. Here I took into account the cultural particularities that are unique to the Muslim immigrant community in a culturally distinct city. Of particular attention was how the prayer ritual is influenced and accommodated to reconcile members past lives with their newfound lives in St. John's.

Interview participants for the study were recruited through both personal and formal contacts. I work at “Mohammed Ali's Middle Eastern Cuisine” on Duckworth St., St. John's; two of the interview participants are people I met through our working side-by-side at the restaurant. I also recruited participants through Memorial University's Muslim Student's Association and the city's mosque, Masjid-an-Noor.

Four of the ten participants were interviewed twice; the remaining six were interviewed once, for a total of fourteen interviews. The initial interview was based on a question set developed in consultation with my supervisor.[6] The question set was designed to focus attention on ritual practices, to elicit biographical and cultural contexts, and to encourage story-telling. Follow-up interviews explored select topics in greater depth. Unlike a survey or poll, these interviews allowed for a more nuanced appreciation and understanding of an individual's views. In order to gain a broad spectrum of participants, I recruited participants from various age groups, genders, occupations, and cultural backgrounds.[7]

I approached the research, categorization of data, and subsequent theorizing using grounded theory (GT). This method involves the collection of raw data in a way that allows pertinent categories and themes to present themselves. Theories are derived from these emerged categories and themes. For example, in the process of interviewing, the topics of prayer as consolation and relief from anxiety emerged on several occasions. Research using grounded-theory is a developing approach, especially in religious studies. “There are relatively few studies that use GT to analyze religious phenomena,”[8] as much academic work, religious studies included, tends to shy away from highly localized and personally oriented research. Proponents of the grounded-theory approach, such as Steven Engler, argue the merits of grounded theory; highly localized research, when combined with meta-theories and

6 See Appendix A
7 See Appendix B
8 Steven Engler, “Ground Theory.” In *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Religious Studies*, ed. Steven Engler and Michael Staussberg.. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 267.

social and historical contexts achieves a more holistic understanding of religious life of a faith and/or the people in that faith. Engler writes:

> Because of its sensitivity to the context of specific elements of empirical materials, GT seems particularly useful to the study of religion, especially as researchers move away from rigid, preconceived notions of what constitutes 'religious' data.[9]

In keeping with this grounded-theory approach, as interviews were reviewed I clustered data into a number of emergent themes. In part, these themes were created by my initial interests and questions posed to the participants, such as what the effect the prayer ritual has on their emotional and psychological lives. But in the course of the interviews many topics which I had not anticipated came to the forefront and these too became thematic clusters in organizing the data, for example, the topics of "women in Islam" and "prayer and technology." I created thematic codes, used these codes to identify shared themes across the interviews, and charted the parallels and concordances of these issues and themes across various participants.[10]

2.2 Literature Review

The literature that informed this research is of three kinds: (1) the study of lived-religion, providing the conceptual and practical background for field-based research in religious studies; (2) ritual analysis and theory, in particular works examining Muslim rites; (3) the growing (and often contentious) body of academic literature on "Islam in the West," examining issues of religion and secularism, identity and culture, violence and terrorism, in the wake of 9/11 and the "war on terror."

9 Ibid, 269
10 See Appendix C

2.2.1 Lived Religion

The idea of "lived religion" was introduced into Religious Studies through the work of David D. Hall in the 1990s. Hall argued that religious studies ought to include not only historical and theoretically informed research, but also the investigation of the everyday religious practices of people, in their specific, concrete social contexts. In general, through the 1990s, there was a movement in a number of related fields and disciplines (religious studies, anthropology, sociology, performance studies, cultural studies, geography) towards studying and theorizing culture in terms of "embodiment," "performance," "materiality," and "locality." The sub-field of lived religion emerged in relation to these shifts in the humanities and social sciences.

Robert Orsi, one of the leading voices in the study of "lived religion," defines it as "religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places."[11] This thesis is informed by the approach of Hall and Orsi, as well as a number of other scholars. In the writing of this thesis particular attention has been paid to the works of, Thomas Tweed (religious studies) and Barbara Myerhoff and Michael Jackson (anthropology). These scholars present case studies of particular groups of religious people situated in unique environments and cultural contexts. Myerhoff, in her work *Number Our Days*, examines the lives and challenges of ageing Jewish residents of a retirement community in California. Orsi, in *The Madonna of 115th Street*, studies the Italian Harlem community's devotion to an annual Catholic festival. Michael Jackson's work, *Palm at the End of the Mind*, links together various experiences and encounters of the anthropologist with the others he studies in interpretive essays influenced by existentialism and literature. In some respects, these works have supplied models to emulate in the writing of this thesis.

11 Robert A. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950 , 3rd ed.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xxxi.

Thomas Tweed, in *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Mia*mi,[12] uses an ethnographic approach in studying devotional practices at a catholic shrine of significant importance to the Cuban catholic community in Miami. Tweed insists on and demonstrates a positional method of study. He encourages the investigator to approach religion in field-based case studies of particular instances of religious activity in which an active practitioner(s) of religion interacts and expresses their faith.[13] Tweed frames his investigations with both lived, daily social-historical realities and the larger religious traditions and doctrines informing the local tradition. What we have learned from such works is that while religion exists in churches and prayer books, it is also found in the everyday lives of religious individuals: on the streets; at work; or while cooking at home. These works provide models to emulate; moreover, many of the questions, themes and ideas they raise are applied in this thesis. Tweed insists that, in order to grasp a better understanding of what religion and ritual are to the participants of a faith, we must observe their lives and rituals in an immediate manner.[14] Observe someone praying, note where and when they are praying, record the artifacts used in this prayer, ask them why they pray, and on and on until exhaustive investigation leads to a better understanding of why and how prayer is performed by the individual.

A major theme explored in this thesis is how space and time create, influence, contribute to, and/or detract from, the sanctity of the rite of prayer for Muslim immigrants. Fadwa El Guindi, in *By Noon Prayer*, notes that "one cannot understand Muslim life without understanding, not Islam's structure, but Islam's rhythm - how Muslims weave in and out, from ordinary space and time to sacred space and time, throughout the day, every month, throughout the year for a lifetime."[15] In a new culture and environment, there are challenges and changes to established rhythms. Lived religious study has in

12 Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
13 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*
14 Ibid
15 Guindi, 20.

recent times begun to pay attention to spatial and temporal attributes of rites. In Islam, notes Guindi, "at prayer time, five times a day, a period begins within which a Muslim person moves temporarily out of ordinary time and space and into sacred time and space and back."[16] Prayer is a situated practice in which "meaning comes through each believer's experience of the past through the present."[17]

The study of lived religion allows for an intimate perspective on religious life through the close and meaningful observation of the participants of that religious life. This study also takes a cue from Clifford Geertz's efforts to examine the oddities and small particulars of religion through ethnography, to find what he called a "stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not in fact exist."[18] Likewise, in *The Palm at the End of the Mind,* Michael Jackson says that "our most illuminating glimpses into the nature of things emerge in the shifting *between* statements, descriptions, and persons, and in the course of events."[19] The point here is the need to ground observation at a very local and intimate level.

2.2.2 Ritual Studies; Muslim Ritual

Ritual Studies emerged in the 1980s, along with other "area studies," such as cultural studies and material culture. In part, the effort to study ritual was a corrective to the dominance of historical and textual study in the discipline. Ritual was a focus in early, foundational anthropological and sociological theory; ritual studies built on these works, but also took a "performative turn," emphasizing matters of performance, embodiment, agency, and efficacy in ritual.[20] For Catherine Bell,

16 Ibid, 134.
17 Peter Civetta, "Body/Space/Worship: Performance Theology and Liturgical Expressions of Belief," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 13 (3) (2008), 10.
18 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Book,1973), 7.
19 Michael Jackson, *The Palm at the End of the Mind: relatedness, religiosity, and the real* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009),, xiv.
20 Dwight Conquergood, "Poetics, Play, Process, Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology." Text and Performance Quarterly 1 (1989).

performance approaches to ritual "emphasize a type of event in which the very activity of the agent or artist is the most critical dimension."[21] Ritual and performance approaches to religion explore how individuals' actions "create culture, authority, transcendence, and whatever forms of holistic ordering are required for people to act in meaningful and effective ways."[22] Ritual is not merely confirmatory of received traditions and values, but serves a purpose as "people manipulate traditions and conventions to construct an empowering understanding of their present situation."[23] This thesis draws upon the ideas of various contemporary scholars of ritual, most notably Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimes, whose work aided in the observation and analysis of the seemingly obvious nature of formal ritualized activity. Grimes in particular, in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,* identifies and presents the investigator with a set of core questions to consider when investigating ritual in the field.[24]

In *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, Micheal Jackson poses a question to himself : "What is ritual...but a way of tapping into the extramundane world in order to augment or make good the degradation of being that accompanies the routines of everyday life?"[25] Similar to Clifford Geertz, Jackson points to the consoling and comforting power of ritual. This element, the psycho-emotional-spiritual, is one that is pursued throughout this thesis in order to grasp what transformative and comforting qualities the rituals of the Muslim immigrants hold in their lives. Saba Mahmood says that "ritual activity is where emotional spontaneity comes to be controlled."[26] If an element of emotional spontaneity is the "ups and downs," stresses and anxieties, felt by the immigrants, Mahmood's comment suggests considering the consolatory power of prayer, a topic investigated in this thesis.[27] Mahmood illustrates the way in which I approached the physiology-turned-psychology of ritual prayer,

21 Catherine Bell, "Performance," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* ed. Mark C. Taylor. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 205.
22 Ibid, 208.
23 Ibid, 217.
24 Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,* 3rd ed. (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, 2013)
25 Jackson, 41.
26 Saba Mahmood, "rehearsed spontaneity and conventionality of ritual: disciplines of salat." *American Ethnologist* 28 (4) (2001), 828.
27 See Chapter 8

when saying that, “ritual prayer is best analyzed as a disciplinary practice that complexly combines pragmatic action (i.e., day-to-day mundane activities) with formal and highly codified behaviour.”[28] Within this codified behavior lies a diversity of meaning and that “at different times, some meanings come to dominate, others recede and become less important, and still others may come to be rejected.”[29] Meanings change, evolve, move in and out of importance for the practitioner. Islamic studies scholars A. Rashied Omar and Mun'im Sirry argue, in their article *Muslim Prayer and Public Spheres: An Interpretation of the Qur'anic Verse 29:*45, that “the *salat* provides a protected space in which practitioners first disengage with their immediate social context and then engage with and commit to the foundational concepts of the Islamic tradition.”[30] Omar's idea and description of both the physiology and function of prayer can be likened to jazz music, where a moment of improvisation happens only within the confines of a clearly demarcated tradition and space. The improvisation in this case is a specific function and effect of prayer in the context of immigrant experience.

Saba Mahmood understands ritual as a way in which the doctrinal aspect of one's faith is performed in a communicative manner. “Mosque participants identified the act of prayer as a key site for purposefully molding their intentions, emotions, and desires in accord with orthodox standards of Islamic piety.”[31] Ritual provides the opportunity for adherents to “act-out” their faith in a performance that displays for both themselves and others their faith in a physical, visual, verbal way. Moreover, Mahmood, referencing Talal Asad, points to the phenomenon of “purposeful molding” as a unique characteristic of ritual in modern times; in the twentieth century “ritual lost its earlier meaning as 'a script for regulating' (ritual as manual) and came to be understood primarily as a *type* of practice, symbolic and communicative in character, and distinct from technical and effective behavior.”[32] Ritual,

28 Mahmood, 845.
29 Mun'im Sirry and A. Rashied Omar, “Muslim Prayer and Public Spheres: An Interpretation of the Qur'anic Verse 29:45,” *Interpretation* 68 (1) (2014), 40.
30 Ibid, 41.
31 Mahmood, 828.
32 Mahmood, 833.

in other words, is as much about negotiation as it is a rigid form and imperative.

2.2.3 Islam in/and the West

In the wake of 9/11 there has emerged a large body of scholarship examining the tensions between Islam and the West, and the challenges of being a Muslim in Western countries. Much of this work wrestles with questions of cultural identities, the place of religion in secular societies, politics and violence, and the status of women. There has been considerably less research on the lived-experience of individual Muslims in the West, and even less ethnographically informed research on Muslim ritual practice. Though not a focus of my research, aspects of the large meta-discussion on Islam in/and the West are certainly relevant.

A major theme of "Islam and the West" literature is the status and place of women. Again, ritual is one window through which to examine such issues and questions. At the outset, I did not conceive this research as contributing to the study of difficulties faced by Muslim women, but the theme emerged in the course of interviews. Women's religious lives have been effected by the women's rights and feminist movements and writings on the censorship of women in Islamic scholarly studies, Omid Safi notes that "as Muslims, we have a responsibility to transcend this historical limitation today."[33] Co-current with my own work, there is a wealth of research and writing on the rights of women to participate in prayer; topics such as women being permitted to pray in the same room side-by-side with men, and even to lead prayer and worship among both women and men. Omid Safi raises social and theological issues: "the idea that men have automatic spiritual authority over women is completely inconsistent with [the] fundamental Islamic conception of the relationship between God and human creation, and between people amongst themselves."[34] Her concerns are partly reflected in my

33 Omid Safi, "Shattering the Idol of Spiritual Patriarchy: Towards a Gender-Fair Notion of Prayer in Islam," *Tikkun* 20 (4) (2005), 60.
34 Safi, 60.

interviews through questions related to the status of women and prayer among the participants (both male and female) whom I interviewed.

2.3 The Need of this Study

Though there are many book-length studies of ritual action as part of lived religion, the study of Muslim rites is in its infancy - especially ritual as practiced by Muslim immigrants in Western societies. Shampa and Sanjoy Mazumdar emphasize the need for research examining the religious lives of Muslim immigrants, calling for "empirical investigation into the private, domestic, devotional aspects of religion that are not evident through the study of formal, institutional, public religion."[35] My research meets this need. In studying prayer, I am pursuing a question posed by Saba Mahmood: "how are scholars to analyze formal and rule-governed behaviour [ritual] so as to understand the radically different roles it plays under the different conceptions of self and authority?"[36] Historically, Islam has been a distinctly "performative" religion, focusing as much, or more, on what one does rather than on what one believes. And the "doing" of Islam is, in part, effected through prayer. Studying ritual among Muslim immigrants is a valuable way to investigate what Sigurd D'hondt refers to as the "strong inferential link between activity and identity"[37] that exists in the lives of Muslims. Thijl Sunier, writing about the situation in the Netherlands, states that "Muslims are the least integrated migrants,"[38] a recurring theme in the wider literature. Questions and tensions surrounding processes of adaption, integration, and multiculturalism are present in this research. The goal of this research is to better understand how ritual prayer facilitates or impedes integration. This research asks how ritual serves in

35 Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "The Articulation of Religion in Domestic Space: Rituals in the Immigrant Muslim Home," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18 (2) (2004), 74.
36 Mahmood, 834.
37 Sigurd D'hondt, "Referring to Islam in Mutual Teasing: Notes on an Encounter Between Two Tanzanian Revivalists," in *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performance and Everyday Practices*, edited by Baudouin Dupret et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 126.
38 Thijl Sunier, "Constructing Islam: Places of Worship and the Politics of Space in The Netherlands," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 13 (3) (2005), 323.

negotiating the changes from life in one particular Muslim geography to a new one in the West.

Chapter 3 - Muslim Prayer

This chapter provides necessary context, outlining the history, theology, and practice of prayer in Islam. One interesting paradox to emerge in the course of interviews is that almost every one of the Muslim participants that I spoke to on the subject of prayer was adamant about both the universal and unchanging nature of prayer. That being said, participants also admitted to slightly differing variations in their own prayer practice, as well as in the prayers of others. While nevertheless insisting upon the authenticity of these new forms there was an insistence on the unchanging nature of prayer while prayer was, to their own admission, actively changing slightly. Participants spoke to me of how prayer was taught by the Prophet Mohammed and that there is only one authentic way to pray; at the same time, they admitted to changing their own method of prayer when influenced by a friend, religious scholar, or popular media source such as a Youtube video. Surprisingly, to me, this awareness of change does not seem to deter an insistence that there is only one correct way to pray. It is perhaps appropriate to distinguish between the physical and spiritual dimensions of prayer: the physical dimensions may change, but the spiritual quality of prayer, the belief and supplication to the one God, *Allah*,[39] and the unchanging quality of this belief which is of greater importance, does not.

Prayer for Muslims is as old as Islam itself and the doctrinal basis and formal characteristics of prayer were taught by the Prophet Mohammed. While there is an ongoing dispute as to the precise form of prayer practiced by Mohammed, most Muslims believe themselves to be following a tradition of

39 *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L.: Oxford University Press, 2003 defines *Allah* as "God. Worshiped by Muslims, Christians, and Jews to the exclusion of all others. Revealed Himself in the *Quran*, which is self-described as His book. Defined in the *Quran* as creator, sustainer, judge, and ruler of the material universe and the realm of human experience. Has guided history through the prophets Abraham (with whom He made a covenant), Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, through all of whom He founded His chosen communities, People of the Book (ahl al-kitab). The *Quran* asserts God's omnipotence but allows for human free will. Muhammad called Muslims not only to belief in or worship of Allah but also to exclusion of all other deities, forbidding their association (shirk) with Allah."

prayer that extends back to the founding of the religion. As well, though this thesis will continue to explore evidence of variation and change in prayer, Muslims in general believe prayer to be unchanged and that the way they themselves perform prayer, regardless of its difference from how another Muslim prays, is the way it was performed and taught by the Prophet Mohammed.

Prayer is one of the Five Pillars of Islam,[40] and is perhaps the fundamental ritual action informing the Islamic tradition. Prayer (*salat)* is to be performed five times a day at regulated times, calculated using the sunrise and sunset, which of course change during the course of the year. Prayer is to be fully engaged on both intellectual and spiritual levels. Prayer is complete supplication to God and the actions of prayer mimic this surrender.

3.1 The Act of Praying

Muslim prayer can be described as a performance of complete surrender to the will of Allah (God). Prayer can be performed alone or with a group; an individual act of prayer requires a small personal space. Typically, but not required, Muslims use a prayer rug upon which to pray. The rug serves the functional and metaphoric purpose of separating the individual from that which is considered profane or unclean. This demarcates a temporary sacred space in which the ritual of prayer can be conducted.

Prayer begins with adherents standing, arms bent and hands raised to the shoulders, and the words "Allah Akbar," usually translated into English as "God is the greatest."[41] The person then stands with their hands open either at shoulder or ear height reciting the first chapter of the Qu'ran. There follows a series of prostrations.At the first prostration the adherent bends only at the hip, their upper body perpendicular to floor or ground, with hands on their knees. They return to standing position with the hands once again open and raised. The second prostration brings the practitioner fully to their

40 The other four are declaration of faith, charity, fasting during Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca

41 Sourdel et al, in *Glossary of Islam*, page 11, *Allah Akbar* is defined as "God is great". – Doxology repeated (kabbara in Arabic) by Muslims in many circumstances of daily life and reproduced in innumerable inscriptions. It also forms part of religious ritual, particularly in the adhān (call to prayer), during the ḥajj, and before battle."

knees, and the forehead touches the ground. Again, they return to standing position. At the end of one series of prostrations they will turn their head from one side to the other, symbolizing the peace between people. Depending on which of the five daily prayers are being enacted the number of these prostrations are different; in some prayers they prostrate twice over the course of the entire prayer, while for others it is three times. I asked one interviewee why there are different numbers of prostrations for different prayers: they did not know the doctrinal answer, but suggested that it had to do with how the prayer corresponded to the time of day in which it is required to be performed. For instance there are only two series of prostrations for the prayer first thing in the morning, and the interviewee hypothesized that this was perhaps because the individual has just awoken and should not be burdened too greatly by a lengthy prayer at such an early hour. The prayer in the morning then should only take a practitioner a few short minutes as opposed to the ten to twelve minutes it takes for the longer prayers in the evening.

Each of the five daily prayers differ slightly,[42] though the series and order of the prayers does not change and each prayer-day is a facsimile of the previous day. The conditions under which prayers must take place, provided they are in the correct times during the daytime, are that one must perform ritual ablutions before hand, *wudu*,[43] find a clean space or prayer rug upon which to pray, and be directed toward Mecca. There a few notable exceptions to these standard conditions under which one must pray, which include when a woman is menstruating, when an individual is traveling, or if a person is too ill to perform prayer.

Traditionally, the function of prayer is reverence to Allah. The adherent directs them self

42 See Footnote 1 of this thesis

43 Sourdel et al, in *Glossary of Islam,* page 2 – *Wudu* is redirected to *Ablutions* and is defined as "Necessary to obtain ritual purity which is required for ritual prayers (ṣalāt) and when making the Pilgrimage. – A state of minor impurity, occasioned particularly by the satisfying of natural needs, is cleansed by the ritual of wuḍū ' (lesser ablution) in an annexe of the mosque , the miḍa', or at a fountain of running water, the hawḍ, in the centre of the courtyard. – Major impurity, resulting mainly from sexual relations, is cleansed by a more extensive ablution (ghusl), a practice that led to a proliferation of baths or ḥammāms in Muslim towns.

toward God multiple times a day to reinstate their belief in Allah, their one God, and in Mohammed, the messenger of Allah. Not only is the adherent reaffirming their faith, but intrinsic in that reaffirmation is supplication, they are surrendering them self to God. The function of prayer becomes the cyclical affirmation and reaffirmation of their devotion and supplication in return for God's grace being bestowed upon them, that grace including the life they have, the success they hope for, the faith in Allah's guidance through events over which they have no control. We will see, particular in Chapter 8, that while reverence is the most cited purpose for prayer, prayer actually has a myriad of dimensions in the day-to-day lives of Muslims, and that for an immigrant Muslim in particular, prayer can at times function as a consolatory device, allowing the individual more ease integrating, and continuing to live, in a non-Muslim majority nation with different customs and religious lives.

3.2 Evolving Practice of Prayer

The individuals I interviewed, expressed a view common to Islamic scholarship: prayer does not change, and "the large majority of practitioners assume that they follow universally accepted guidelines."[44] Nevertheless, it is clear from my research that there are occasions when prayer does change. Some of these changes are slight, a difference in hand position for example; others changes are more significant, such as the current practice of younger Muslims turning to the internet, especially Youtube, as a means to ascertain authoritative religious knowledge. This can be convenient but also risks being misleading or spreading misinformation: how is one to be certain of the authority of the individual in the video and what they are saying, and is such an authority worth casting aside centuries of family and cultural tradition? Modern technology and a shrinking global village seems to be the main catalyst behind the ongoing evolution of prayer among the participants I interviewed. Alongside

44 Heiko Henkel, "Between Belief and Unbelief Lies the Performance of Salat: Meaning and Efficacy of a Muslim Ritual." *Royal Anthropological Institute* 11 (2005), 492.

facilitating slight variations in the actual practice of prayer, technology is also increasing the ease at which people are able to pray; prayer-times, proper recitations, pronunciations, can all be referenced instantaneously through a smart phone or computer.

Much of the discussion I was a part of on the changes in prayer were with students at Memorial University. There is a significant population of Muslim students at the university as well as a Muslim Students Association. The population of Muslim students is made up of individuals from a large array of Muslim countries, such as Nigeria, Lebanon, and Malaysia. Unavoidably, there is then a large mixing of cultural and religious traditions. Students from one country, accustomed to praying in a set way, may influence an individual from a different Muslim nation to follow their lead, insisting it is the doctrinally correct way. Many of the students I interviewed admitted to making slight changes in the way in which they pray upon being shown a more authentic[45] way by a fellow Muslim student. It was not clear what entitled certain fellow students the authority over other students in regards to authentic ways to pray; there was no indication of a cultural or religious hierarchy amongst the students. Perhaps it does not involve an embodied or obvious religious authority, but that some students are naturally more inclined than others in investing time contemplating religion in this way, and that this is recognized and respected by their peers. Or perhaps some students, who may have the same religious knowledge as their peers, are just skilled in their ability to persuade others to adopt their ideas.

While multiculturalism is influencing Muslim prayer practice in St. John's, so too is the influence and reliance on technology. Social networking and global data have greatly affected the way individuals process and attain information, and Muslims are no exception. Many Muslims I interviewed cited Youtube, the world's most used video streaming website, as a means to watch sermons, receive religious information, and even learn about more “authentic” ways to pray. One student from Lebanon explained in great detail her discovery that the way in which she had been praying her entire life had

45 Authenticity, when used throughout this thesis, is defined as a traditional manner most agreed on across cultural and religious entities, histories, and peoples. As well as any static condition of truth attributed to a person or artifact.

been incorrect. This discovery came after watching a Youtube video where a prominent imam explained, step-by-step, the appropriate way in which an individual was to pray, with each visual representation accompanied by a corresponding *hadith*[46] legitimizing its validity and authenticity. After this happened the student now only prays in the newly learned manner. She is so adamant in this new-found authenticity that she even confronted her parents, explaining to them that the way they pray is wrong, and that they should follow the new way she has learned.

Phone app technology is also changing approaches to prayer. For instance, when praying, one must be directed toward Mecca. There are now a host of phone apps that, with a push of digital button, automatically steer the individual in the direction of Mecca, superseding the need for a traditional compass or the use of the solar or astronomical directional methods of old. Similarly, there are apps that inform Muslims that prayer time is about to begin. These apps take the data of where you live, with the sunrise and sunset times updated daily, and alert the individual with a digital call to prayer. These apps are especially prevalent during Ramadan and when I inquired with one student as to how popular a particular prayer app was among her Muslim peers she replied simply, "everybody has it."[47]

3.3 Summary

Prayer is the most immediate act of worship for Muslims. It is the spiritual supplication to God, symbolized by a physical supplication in the form of a patterned series of bodily movements, emphasizing prostrations and recitations of prayers. Since prayer, as understood by Muslims, dates back to the time of the Prophet, to participate in it is to engage with an unchanged tradition initiated at the time of Islam's origin. As one interviewee put it, "the Qu'ran tells you to pray. The teachings of the

46 Sourdel et al, in *Glossary of Islam,* page 56, *hadith* is defined as "'Utterance' and, more particularly, the "word" attributed to Muḥammad . These Traditions, the "sentences" transmitted by the Companions , were first gathered together at the beginning of the eighth century."

47 See Chapter 5, section 5.3.1 which goes more in-depth on how technology is changing the ways Muslims in the West pray

Prophet tell you how to pray."[48] While there are slight variations in prayer from sect to sect and culture to culture, those within a particular tradition are generally confident (often adamant) that the way they perform prayer is fully authentic.

The physical act of prayer is done alone or in group and includes a series of bodily movements and prostrations that occur in repeated patterns. The number of prostrations in series is dependent on which of the five daily prayers the practitioner is performing. Except for the amount of repetitions performed, all the five daily prayers are alike in action and word. The bodily movements include the raising and holding of hands to the sky, bending at the hip, and falling to the knees with the forehead touching the ground.

In St. John's, most noticeably at the University, the cultural and religious exchange among people has effected the way in which individuals pray. While the mosque in the city is likewise made up of membership from varying cultures, languages, and backgrounds I have not evidenced in any interview any dramatic personal changes in prayer directly attributed to attendance at the mosque. Perhaps it is more evident among the students as that they are younger, more willing to adapt to change, as well as being university students, they are immersed in an environment of learning and critical thinking. For the students, as there are often times slight variations in prayer from individuals from separate nations and cultures, it is common that one individual will adopt the prayer of the other, accepting its "authenticity." As well, websites such as Youtube attract many people, especially student aged, who refer to videos by well respected imams as guides to achieve a more authentic prayer with authenticity in prayer is always linked to its origin— the way the Prophet Mohammed first prayed and taught to pray.

48 Mohammed, Interview 1, March 11, 2015

Chapter 4 - Participants of Prayer

For this research I recruited participants from the Muslim community in St. John's, NL. I received a warm response from the community, including the Muslim Students Association at Memorial University and the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, which runs the city's only mosque, Masjid-an-Noor. I was successful in finding ten participants, whom I interviewed over the course of several months, from February to July of 2015. Participants included both men and women, of various occupations and backgrounds, and ranging from ages 18 to over 50. Five of the participants were students, mostly at Memorial University, while others worked or held membership in the local mosque.

The participants all identified as being Muslim, at least at point in their lives, though from a variety of cultural backgrounds including Arab, Persian, African, and Indian. They were generally forthcoming in answering the questions I posed - questions on matters of their faith, biographical details, their home lives, their experience as newcomers to Canada, and their prayer practice. I conducted 60 minute interviews with ten participants, four of which granted me a second 60 minute interview. Below is a brief introduction to each of the individual participants, with a focus on thematic issues that emerged in the course of interviewing. I have divided the section into two parts, Group A and Group B. Group A are those participants from whom I requested, and was subsequently granted, a second interview. Group B consists of participants who participated in one interview.

Group A

Taqwa

At the time of the interviews Taqwa was an 18 year old student finishing up high school in the

city. She was older than most of her fellow students; due to her family's constant relocation she had to complete an extra year of high school to be eligible to graduate. She is of Palestinian heritage but, like many Palestinians, has never been to her home nation. Taqwa was born in Iraq, as were all her siblings. Her family fled the instability of Iraq for neighboring Syria until they moved to Malaysia, where Taqwa spent most of her youth. Three years ago the family relocated yet again, this time to St. John's. Taqwa works at “Mohammed Ali's Middle Eastern Cuisine” on Duckworth St., in the middle of St. John's' downtown core. Taqwa has recently been accepted into Memorial University's program in Pharmacy Studies.

Taqwa's prayer life is diligent and she, along with all the members of her family, performs her mandatory five daily prayers. At work, she will take advantage of a less busy period to pray in the restaurant's back room; at school, along with all the other Muslim students, she is allotted the time and space to pray. There are times, of course, when Taqwa has no choice but to miss prayer. At work, due to the nature of preparing food on-time and serving customers, Taqwa is not always able to pray at the exact time at which she is supposed to. In school, however, the administration understands and allows the Muslim students to see to prayer at the correct times.

Taqwa views prayer as an essential aspect of her day to day life, for her it is a duty to pray and revere God. What is more, she desires a connection and communication with Allah that only prayer can facilitate. She is a firm believer in the power of prayer, and her prayer is at times petitional, asking for help from God. That help could come in the form of assistance with school, family life, or dealing with stressful social situations. She also expressed to me the importance of both group and solitary prayer, citing the unique and positive features of both. Taqwa says that there is a particularly powerful quality to prayer performed with a large congregation, especially at the Mosque, and that prayers in such a context are more reliably heard by God. At the same time, solitude in prayer can be very important as it creates an intimate connection between the individual and Allah.

Taqwa expressed views that could be described as feminist. While I am fairly confident, through both my working with and interviewing Taqwa, that she has never delved deeply into any feminist theories or researched the topic, her freely formed opinions on the role of women in both the Arab culture she hails from and in Muslim life in general give rise to opinions that seem very progressive, especially when compared to stereotypes in the Western world about the place and role of women in Islam. For instance, Taqwa's older sister has recently married, at the age of 18. Marrying at what in the West is often seen as an early age is not uncommon in Arab Muslim communities; many young women are encouraged to marry at such an age. This comes from a culture that stresses the need for protection and taking care of women. What is more, while her sister seems expressively devoted and in love with her husband, the two knew each other only a short while before the marriage. When I asked Taqwa whether she believed a similar fate awaited her she was taken aback, rebuking me saying, "How am I to know who I'm going to marry?"[49] She said she would not marry until she was much older.

Taqwa has as well commented on the general status of women in Canada compared to that of other nations she has lived, such as Iraq, insisting that Canada is much better and more suited to her personally.When I asked her how she felt about living in Canada with its particular rights for women she said "Oh better, much better. Living here is much better as a woman."[50] This indicates to me that certain prevalent stereotypes about women in Muslim majority nations being *freely* repressed are not fully accurate. The idea that women's rights in such cultures are behind the times perhaps speaks more to the amount of freedom an individual feels they have in their own culture, but does not reflect the progression of rights and freedoms in other cultures. I think that a major stumbling block for the integration and accommodation of Islamic culture in the West, and in particular the role of women in that culture, is the West's imposition of its own cultural standards on such people. Any major cultural

49 In conversation with Taqwa at work one evening.
50 Taqwa, Interview #1, March 17, 2015

change in the roles and lives of women in Islam will most likely come from the moves women in that culture make and, while such moves are undoubtably influenced by the overall surrounding cultural attitudes, participants such as Taqwa have evidenced a stark opposition to the stereotypes of women in Islamic culture that prevails in some Western opinions.

Mohammed

Mohammed El Bakri has a similar heritage as Taqwa; he too is Palestinian, but lived his entire life in Lebanon before coming to Canada. He is in his mid-twenties and came to St. John's to pursue university, successfully obtaining a degree in Engineering to which he later added a Master's degree from a university in Montreal. Despite this formal education, Mohammed opted to follow a different path and recently opened up "Aladdin's Hookah Bar" on Water Street in downtown St. John's.

Mohammed is well spoken, insightful, and passionate about his faith. Using allegory to relate faith to secular activities such as eating and exercising, Mohammed often speaks of faith in a metaphorical manner,. I suspect that this manner was developed in part as a tool to explain aspects of his faith to Westerners, but also reflects a way he has come to understand his faith. He is refreshingly forthcoming on religious and political topics that are often controversial or misunderstood, such as the importance of Ramadan or the plight of the Palestinian people. Other participants tended to be more reserved when dealing with such issues.

In speaking on the importance of prayer, Mohammed likens it to health. In the same way that going to the gym keeps one's body healthy, so too does prayer keep the soul in good health. Ignoring the need for the healthy practice of prayer leaves the individual spiritually sick and wanting. Mohammed approaches the idea of prayer as a means of incorporating a meditative quality in one's day to day life. While he is steadfast in the belief of the importance of the words and movements of the ritual of prayer, Mohammed seems to be far more taken with the symbolism surrounding the entire

event as well as the positive psychological effects of prayer. The metaphor of psycho-spiritual health is further applied in specific areas of Muslim life, such as Ramadan, which Mohammed believes not only to be a ritual act of fasting as a means of supplication to God, but a way to detoxify the body and reestablish appropriate eating habits.

In speaking with Mohammed, it is clear that he believes strongly in a link between a transcendent Allah and the physical, material world, and that the main means to establish this link is through prayer. While he has strayed in his practice in the past, he has of late returned to prayer, insisting on its importance in order for him to live a balanced, stress-free, life. It is his belief that prayer has greatly reduced the harmful impact of any emotional or psychological troubles he has faced.

Zia

Zia is from Bangladesh. He is very pious and grew up in an equally pious household. The area of Bangladesh he hails from has a mix of faiths, and this religious pluralism sometimes created tensions between people from differing backgrounds. For example, Zia felt somewhat stifled at home in his ability to be publicly religious, for fear of drawing attention to himself as a Muslim in a religiously diverse and contentious area. Zia came to St. John's to study and is currently a student at Memorial University where he is very active in the Muslim Student's Association. In St. John's, Zia is alleviated from the anxiety he experienced in Bangladesh by being publicly Muslim. It was Zia who first invited and encouraged me to attend prayer at the Landing in the University Centre. Alongside being a student he often times works and volunteers at the MUN Counselling Centre leading workshops on meditation.

Zia was very forthcoming on the difficulties of being a Muslim in St. John's. He spoke of issues such as the lack of access to halal food in the city and the less than ideal location of the Mosque. Zia, like many other student participants, also discussed the challenges he faces as a Muslim in arranging his school, work, and prayer schedules. While he has grown accustomed to his new schedule and

practical obstacles to maintaining the rhythms of prayer, the difficulties in leading a proper prayer life bother him somewhat, leading him to feel as though he is not being the best Muslim he could be.

When we spoke of prayer, Zia went into great detail on the physicality of prayer, the words and prostrations. Like Taqwa, he also spoke of the power of prayer in group settings and how it is the ideal way in which a Muslim should pray. On the topic of women, Zia expressed great admiration for his mother and all women in general. He explained that it is the woman who is to be revered first after God. When discussing his own mother, who still lives in Bangladesh and with whom he remains in close contact, he had to stop so as not to become emotional. Though he holds an undeniably high esteem for women, he does not believe that they can become prayer leaders, a controversial topic in recent Muslim culture. Zia does not assert man's dominion over women or men's greater importance than women but bases his opinion that women cannot be prayer leaders on what he has read in the Qu'ran and *hadiths* and what he has learned from Islamic scholars and imams.

Mona

Mona, like Zia, is a student at Memorial University, and studies Social Work. She is the youngest child in an Muslim family from Lebanon, and was eleven years old when she came to St. John's. While she wears the *hijab* and has an unmistakable middle-eastern look and complexion, she often speaks with a slight Newfoundland accent, something she has picked up from her childhood here. Mona is heavily involved in the Muslim Students Association and active in Muslim life around the community. Mona is outspoken and forthcoming when expressing herself and her beliefs. She speaks openly and readily on the issues in her life, such as the difficulties she faced upon relocation to a new and very different cultural environment, as well as on the topic of her role as a woman in a male-dominated religion.

Mona says that St. John's is a good place to be a Muslim woman, because she is granted certain

freedoms she would not have in other, Muslim majority nations; she can be an active and protesting voice on issues she personally values. She does, however, seem to harbour some slight animosity toward the male Muslim population at MUN, specifically those students who sometimes use their male status in ways that frustrate Mona. For example, there is an allocated space for Muslim prayer in the Engineering Building at Memorial University that Mona and friends frequent (both male and female, but the two groups are not allowed to pray together). It is not unusual that when her group is praying a group of men will simply come in and also begin praying or make preparations to pray. Men and women are not allowed to pray together in public, so when this happens it is the women who have to leave. It is unclear as to whether or not men are knowingly taking advantage of the cultural norms of segregated prayer to get the women out of the room faster or if they themselves simply dismiss these norms and are content to pray alongside the women. Either way, for Mona and her friends, who are trying to do their diligence in praying, it is a distraction and frustration. When discussing her prayer life, Mona is very open about the inherent power of prayer to effect her emotional and psychological state. Mona explains in detail the physical requirements of prayer, as well as the transcendent connectedness one may achieve with Allah through the ritual act. When speaking of "The Night of Power"[51] during Ramadan, she recounted times that prayer led her to weep profusely.

Mona also spoke about how technology has changed prayer for her. She, along with most of her friends, now uses a phone app that automatically reminds her of an approaching prayer time, as well as other important times and dates in the Muslim calendar. Alongside this, Mona has used the internet (in particular Youtube) to augment her prayer as a means to ensure its authenticity. By watching online videos hosted by prominent imams and Islamic scholars she has reevaluated and changed her prayers in slight ways in order to match what she has subsequently come to see as a more authentic practice. As a result of these online teachings, she has even approached her parents, life-long Muslims, insisting that

51 See Chapter 7, section 7.1.1

they to follow this newly discovered authenticity.

Group B

Massoud

Massoud was born and lived in Iran until he was in his mid-twenties. In the 1970s he fled the country as a political refugee, first to Denmark, then to Newfoundland. Massoud came of age during the Iranian revolution in 1978 and was himself a revolutionary. The inability for the revolution to achieve his Leninist-inspired politics, coupled with fear for his personal safety, were the main factors informing his decision to flee the country. Massoud has spent the remainder of his life primarily in St. John's. He is an avid historian and reader and projects a wisdom rooted in his life experience; in conversation, he demonstrates a depth of historical and philosophical knowledge, acquired over decades of personal study.

Though Massoud grew up Muslim in a Muslim country, religious life at home was quite liberal, even lax. Growing up he believed his mother to be more superstitious than religious. Massoud does not identify as a Muslim anymore, yet his knowledge of Islam is deep. While not being religious himself, Massoud has much to say on the topic of religion and Islam. He believes very strongly in the freedom of religion and a personal approach to matters of faith. Massoud is willing to call himself "spiritual," and he associates spirituality with quiet, personal reflection, usually in nature. While he does not practice Islam or pray, he is not in any way anti-Islam, but he does confess to being perplexed about the religion. His perplexity stems in part from his personal history, which includes disillusionment about the human condition, and our inability to live together in peace. This led to years of personal reflection and study, with Massoud delving into philosophical, historical, and religious texts. Massoud has developed an objective, reflexive eye. He hails from a Muslim culture but stands outside of that culture. This positioning makes his views and opinions of particular interest and importance to this study,

providing a perspective of critical distance.

Mohsen

Mohsen[52] is Iranian and came to Newfoundland with his wife, a physician, seeking better opportunities for themselves, but, more importantly, for their children. Mohsen, in his 40s, is enrolled in a science-based PhD program at Memorial University. He has also recently started a small, but growing business. These two pursuits, on top of his responsibilities as a husband and father, lead to a busy life.

Mohsen was one of the first people to reply to my call for participants in this research. However, in the first few minutes of my interview, I learned that Mohsen is no longer a practicing Muslim. In fact he doesn't consider himself a "Muslim" in the common sense of the word. Nevertheless, Mohsen readily spoke about God and religion. In the interview, it became obvious that Mohsen has contemplated his religious life, but was either apprehensive to share it openly, or did not know exactly how to describe his religiosity.

Mohsen does not pray regularly, five times daily, but he is adamant in the psychological benefits of, and the need for, prayer. For Mohsen prayer is not contingent on God's existence, believing that the process of prayer in itself has a great psychological benefit to the practitioner. Noting that in particular times of great stress and anxiety he benefits from the practice of prayer while remaining apprehensive to give that prayer an affiliation, whether it be Allah and Islam, or some yet unidentifiable deity. Prayer becomes a mindfulness device.

Naji

Naji contacted me by e-mail to participate in the project after being referred to it by the Muslim Students Association.[53] I learned, however, that he was out of the country and would be for most of my

52 Not his real name

53 The MSA helped me greatly in finding willing participants for my research often through their internal e-mails and

research period. I expressed my apprehension in conducting an interview over the computer, but Naji was enthusiastic to participate and I agreed. We exchanged four e-mails, with me posing questions and he replying with his answers. While it was harder to get to know someone using an e-mail exchange opposed to face-to-face interviewing, the process produced valued material.

Naji is from Libya, where he was visiting at the time of our correspondence; he attends university at Memorial. Naji relayed to me that he comes from a moderate religious family and background and that he turned to religion on his own accord. In our e-mails, we talked on a variety of subjects such as the difficulty of being a Muslim in St. John's, finding worship space and *halal* food, the perpetual nature of improvement for a Muslim, including prayer life.

Amaya

Amaya[54] is a Master's student at Memorial University, and is originally from Nigeria. She has had a difficult time adjusting to the Muslim culture in St. John's; while she has many Nigerian friends, she has had little involvement with the local mosque or the Muslim Students Association. In fact, when she first arrived here she was unaware that there was any Muslim organization and initially attended services hosted by an on-campus Christian group, with the idea that at least she was still serving the Abrahamic God. Eventually she left this group, as she started feeling uneasy about attending services that could seem heretical to her own faith.

Amaya's own family is a mix of Muslim and Christian. While both her parents remain Muslim, two of her siblings have converted to Christianity. Her parents are not too concerned about these conversions and believe their children are still following the same God. Amaya herself admits that while she finds her siblings conversions strange, it leads more to friendly debate than tension or problems. Amaya recounts that she has always been pious and even as a young girl would attend

allowing me to post about my research on their Facebook page.

54 Not her real name

mosque much more than the other members of her family.

Amaya speaks very highly of the petitional power of prayer. She believes God hears and answers her calls. One example she gave was when she initially came to Canada and stayed with some family friends in Toronto. She prayed to God to make this transition easy and for the family to accept her. The family thought very highly of Amaya and treated her as one of their own, and for these reasons Amaya confirms her prayers were answered. Prayer also consoled Amaya during the dramatic events of her life, most notably in recent years by aiding in her numerous relocations to strange and foreign places.

Ibrahim

Ibrahim is one of the three acting imams at the local mosque, Masjid-an-Noor, located on Logy Bay Road. There is no permanent imam at the Mosque, so three distinguished figures from the Muslim community share the duties of leading the community in prayer and tending to members' personal matters. Ibrahim is originally from India and came to Newfoundland with his wife. Outside of mosque duties, Ibrahim works for Rogers Communications. Ibrahim greatly enjoys his role as imam at the mosque, though it does have its difficulties. It is his job there to keep the building running smoothly, to lead prayer, as well as counsel congregates in personal concerns.

In our interview, it quickly became clear that Ibrahim has been asked questions similar to my own in the past; his answers were polished and at the ready. While this was appreciated, it was also frustrating; I wanted Ibrahim's personal point of view, rather than what I perceived as rather formulated responses. As we delved deeper into conversation, however, Ibrahim began to open up more and more. He talked about what it is to be a Muslim, about a Muslim's reverence for parents, and how important women and mothers are in Islam. Ibrahim and I talked at length on prayer in the mosque and he explained that the mosque is the home of God on Earth and that the communicatory power of prayer is

therefore increased when performed there. He continued by speaking on how this communicatory power is further amplified by the sheer number of congregates praying in unison at the mosque during a given prayer.

Raya

Raya is originally from Iraq and comes from a very liberal family. While their religious life remains moderate, she described her family as free-thinkers, which she attributes to her father being a university professor. To illustrate this point, Raya recounts how, before she was married, she was desperate to marry as soon as possible; her father, however, was adamant that she should first get an education, a PhD even, before thinking of marriage. This is in stark contrast to ideas expressed by several of the other participants, or participants' family members. Raya is currently living alone in St. John's with her young daughter while her husband is completing mandatory medical residences elsewhere.

Raya believes very much in the power of prayer, which she describes as "magic."[55] When recounting many major life events such as her family's move and her marriage, she attributes the positive outcomes of all these things to the power of prayer. Raya believes in the positive psychological effect of prayer and that routine prayer prepares her mind for the calmness needed to get through the various daily tasks she encounters.

On the topic of women in Islam, Raya is very thankful to live in Canada. In St. John's she experiences a liberty that she assures me she would not have in a place such as Iraq. One example she gives is her ability to drive without a male passenger, especially at night, which would be culturally unacceptable in Iraq and most likely be met with shouting and degradation from other drivers. Here she has the liberty to drive alone whenever and wherever she pleases, a liberty she revels in.

55 Raya, Interview 1, July 20, 2015.

Chapter 5 - Issues and Themes in Muslim Prayer

Reflecting on the data collected through interviews in the context of secondary literature, I have identified several central themes, issues, and questions: gender roles and equality; hierarchy and decorum in prayer space; roles, requirements, and privileges associated with prayer; the nature and qualities of prayer space; the influence of culture on prayer. What are the physical and spatial requirements for prayer? Who gets to pray and in which places? Which aspects of prayer are cultural in nature, and how are these aspects changed in adapting prayer for life in St. John's?

The majority of the people I interviewed echo the attitudes, beliefs and practices of parents and family, along with the broader cultural traditions, including the views of others at the mosque and the *imam*.[56] Moreover, attitudes about prayer tend to echo a collective history of religious authority and etiquette.[57] The Western world, however, is in many respects quite different from the familial and social ideas and forms of traditional prayer in the home country; features of Western society come to be felt in the lives, including the prayer lives, of Muslims immigrants. In particular, issues of gender equality and the use of technology are emerging, both changing and supporting traditions Muslim practice. This section explores both how traditional and cultural religious practices are upheld and how they are changed to accommodate life in a non-Muslim majority culture.

5.1 Who Prays and Where?

The simple and normative answers to the questions, 'Who prays, and where?,' is 'everyone' and 'everywhere'. The devil, however, is in the details. Questions and issues around inclusion, exclusion,

56 At least to me, the interviewer. It is sometimes hard to really know what opinions an individual may truly harbour.

57 In contemporary Islam the proper form of prayer is heavily debated in various legal schools. See Brown (2014), who provides a thorough overview of the codifications of *salat* in the four legal schools of Sunni Islam.

accommodation, and negotiation are common. Speaking generally, both men and women of all ages pray. Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam and it is mandatory that a practicing Muslim pray at least five times a day. There are some notable exceptions to this rule. Persons who are traveling are exempt from prayer, as are women while they are menstruating. If physically possible, a Muslim will pray five times daily until death. If an individual is unable to perform the physical prostrations of prayer, if he or she is sick in bed for instance, if capable they are still expected to perform the prayer lying down, out loud or, if that is not possible, mentally.

The age at which one begins to pray seems to differ culturally, but once a child is old enough to follow some standard instruction they may begin participating in prayer, learning some of the movements and words, coming to understand the importance of prayer and their faith. At the St. John's mosque, there is no noticeable age divide between children not yet participating in prayer and those for whom it seems second nature - some children of around three or four laugh and play during prayer; others, of about the same age, perform the movements and mouth the words like faithful seasoned veterans.

Both men and women are encouraged to pray at the mosque, though for women it is not seen as mandatory due to their duties in the home. In contrast, men are strongly encouraged to attend mosque at least once a week, preferably during Friday Noon Prayer. While women are traditionally exempt from Friday Noon Prayer, one of my interview participants (Taqwa) says there is a significant difference to that tradition in St. John's.

> In any Arab country only the man goes [to Friday Noon Prayer] because the Prophet Mohammed said just that they let the men go to mosque and let women pray at home, because it is better. Well now here they think that 'why not all the women and men just go pray in the mosque?' Which is kind of different.[58]

58 Taqwa, Interview 1, March 7, 2015

Taqwa perhaps understates this significant difference in prayer practice. While men and women do not pray side-by-side at the mosque, they do pray at the same time, sometimes even in the same space, with men at the front and women at the back. At other times, men and women pray in separate spaces, the men downstairs on the main prayer space, with women occupying a room upstairs with windows overlooking the main prayer space.

Prayer at the local mosque is seen as important. The mosque is the house of God and a means of community building and socialization. Prayer at the Mosque is not, however, a requirement. People also pray in their friends' homes, at work, in school, and almost anywhere else that can accommodate them at a time when prayer is called upon. The preferred prayer location for the participants I interviewed was in their home, either in small congregation with family or, more commonly, alone in their room. For many immigrants the change of prayer space is from the mosques of their homelands to the living rooms and bedrooms of their homes in their new nation.[59] It was stressed to me multiple times that Islam is a very flexible religion and prayer location is one of the tradition's most flexible attributes. All that one needs to pray is a clean space and the direction of Mecca; even if these things were for some reason unavailable, one prays anyway. The conditions needed to perform prayer are simple enough to accommodate the multiple daily prayers whose mandatory times may come when an individual is not near a mosque or their home. Many participants I interviewed recount times when prayer took place in empty classrooms, storage rooms, or even outside. I was told stories of people in Arab countries, traveling longer distances to work or school, who would simply pull over on the side of the road, lay down a prayer mat, and begin to pray.

5.2 Requirements to Approach Prayer

59 More of prayer in the home in Chapter 6, section 6.4

As discussed briefly in the previous section, the requirements for prayer are minimal and flexible. One must find a clean space to pray, or otherwise lay down a prayer rug. Interviewees expressed little concern over the authenticity of a prayer rug. Prayer rugs generally hold little religious importance as objects; rather, their significance is functional, separating the body from the unclean during the act of prayer. Therefore, while beautifully woven and colorfully adorned prayer rugs are popular among Muslims to use during prayer, these can be substituted for any object that separates or elevates the body from a perceived unclean surface, such as a newspaper, tarp, or blanket. One need not even use a prayer rug if the space is deemed clean. One participant referred to a patch of unsoiled grass as a clean and appropriate space to pray. The importance here is that the sanctity of prayer is said to rest with attitudes informing the act itself, rather than its accoutrements. While research participants cited everyday objects, such as newspapers, as an appropriate device to pray upon, these examples, I believe, were made in an effort to exemplify the flexibility inherent in the performance of prayer and most acknowledged their use of a prayer rug, especially in the home. When I observed prayer at the Memorial University Centre during Ramadan, I witnessed the use of large tarps as improvised prayer rugs, providing a practical and convenient solution to students not having to transport prayer rugs from home.

The physical requirements in preparation for prayer is known as *wudu*. *Wudu* consists of ablutions, the ritual cleansing of one's body with water to prepare it for prayer. There are both practical and metaphorical reasons one must do this. Practically, it is important for the adherent to be clean when communicating with God, to wash away the residue of the secular world in order to engage with God as a clean vessel. This ritual cleaning is also a metaphorical action that signals the transition of the individual from the secular world into the spiritual world, in much the same way that the Christian Eucharist signals the transformation of bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. This maintains the ongoing separation of those things that are considered both metaphorically and literally unclean in

the physical world - such as dirt, blood, and gossip - and the cleanliness of the spiritual world.

Ablutions do not require the entirety of the body be washed, but only specific parts. The act is only partly functional in terms of hygiene; more important is the metaphorical dimension. The parts of the body cleansed in the act of *wudu* serve as moral reminders. For example, during *wudu* one cleans the mouth out with water. This is not only to clean and prepare the mouth for a spiritual encounter with God, but to remind oneself to speak kindly, to not curse, to not gossip. While its prescription to be performed prior to prayer implies the individual be literally, physically clean[60] for prayer, the hygienic aspect of *wudu* is minor. The *wudu* has specific guidelines that were taught by the Prophet Mohammed. These guidelines vary slightly from group to group, but the general performance of *wudu* must include cleaning of the hands and arms up to the elbow, the wiping of the head, washing of the feet up to the ankle, and washing at least a portion of the face.

The act of prayer is approached both temporally and intellectually. Again, the specifics are flexible, but individuals are to pray in a fashion that is not rushed. Many participants I interviewed warned against the dangers of rushing prayer, citing that prayer is not as powerful when rushed. There seem to be no guidelines as to what constitutes the rushing of a prayer, but is subjectively felt; one knows when they are rushing. There are obvious conditions in which a prayer may be rushed: an individual is hurrying to work; is in-between classes at school; a pressing is social engagement is happening. While it is prudent to try one's best to organize their day so as to not have to rush prayer, rushing is sometimes inevitable. Again, it is somewhat vague what the "sin"[61] of rushing prayer entails, other than its lack of "power." Many participants admitted, regretfully, to at times having rushed their prayer, yet insisting it is better that a prayer be performed rushed than not performed at all.

60 While the hygienic aspect of wudu is minimal compared to the metaphorical aspect, it is purposefully performed so that the participant be physically clean, at least in those areas ritually designated be cleaned; face, mouth, forearms, feet.

61 While the participants themselves do not use the word *sin*, but instead allude to a general spiritual negativity toward not praying, I use it here to denote what I have interpreted as an action, or absence of an action, that has obvious spiritual repercussions in the minds of the adherents with which I spoke.

During the act of prayer an individual is to be alert, aware, and actively engaged in the act. Prayer has an agency and intentionality informing it. Going through the motions of prayer is discouraged. The ideal is that the individual is fully engaged and aware in prayer, and yet also suspended or carried away by prayer. Awareness does not extend to the outside world, which must be consciously suppressed as to engage fully in the act at hand, the full gesture of reverence in communication with God. Many participants noted that failure to adhere to this suspension of secular time and space resulted in anxiousness, feeling incomplete or stressed, often understood as a spiritual lacking, and a strained relationship with Allah. The distractions of day-to-day life can make immersion in prayer, five times daily, difficult. Again, the participants I talked to would often say that while the ideal is complete concentration and engagement. Still, prayer from the most distracted mind is still preferred to no prayer at all.[62] Chapter 6 of this thesis looks more closely at how the places and spaces of prayer, the reception toward prayer, and difficulties of daily schedules in the West impact the adherents approaches to prayer.

5.3 The Cultural Dimensions of Prayer

Based on the interview data, it seems that the cultural dimensions of prayer are in flux. Prayer is conceived as being eternal, unchanging, as it was in the beginning; and yet, change is obvious. How prayer can be legitimately viewed as never changing yet still show obvious indications of adaptation and augmentation rooted in the participation of prayer has been something of a paradox in my research. Muslims do not just perform prayer, they participate in it. Changing features of the practice do not necessarily change any doctrinal truths. Prayer action may change, but the truth behind it, the truth it expresses, stays the same. This is how those interviewed seem to understand the dynamics between

62 Zia

change and stability. I would conclude therefore that prayer in fact does not change, at least not in the essential parts of it that make it prayer. The slight variations in the ritual surrounding prayer are not indicative of a change in the ritual itself, but a means to preserve the ritual. The performative element is elastic to ensure that the spiritual importance and essence of the ritual itself may be preserved through adaptation and augmentation to external influence. Participation in prayer evokes a sense of the timeless,eternal, absolute, unchanging nature of prayer. The origin and aim of the truth of prayer doesn't change, even if its surface or outward forms do. Slight changes and accommodations in prayer can make the practitioner a better Muslim as their prayers become either more traditional, authentic, or practical depending on the adherent you talk to, and which of these qualities they prioritize. Varying cultural components, including youth culture, degree of liberalism/conservatism, progressive vs traditional mindsets, are indicative of why different adherents hold fast to slightly different meanings and importances in prayer. An individual from one background may note the practical qualities of prayer and be more eager to augment an action of prayer than another adherent whose cultural tradition stresses complete and unchanging complacency in the movements and actions in the performance of prayer. Speaking generally of the participants I have researched, the words and actions of prayer may differ in slight degrees, but the intention and importance do not. This makes discerning what is cultural of prayer particularly difficult but worthwhile.

Thought on the role of women in prayer tends to distinguish between cultural variation, on one hand, and religious essence, on the other. As discussed in Section 4.1, the physical placement of women in the mosques varies in Muslim communities across Canada. When asked about the general separation of men and women in the St. John's mosque, my research participants typically replied that if women were to pray in front of or intermixed with men, the men would become distracted, both because women are beautiful and men are weak, and neither could pray with the appropriate concentration.

In Zarqa Nawaz's 2005 film, *Me and the Mosque*, the filmmaker visits several mosques in Canada. While a common misconception may be that female Muslims in the West generally have more rights than those in other countries, Nawaz discovered this is not necessarily the case. In visiting several mosques she paid special attention to the barriers placed between worshipping men and women.Some mosques dictate that men stand at the front, women at the back.Others have rooms apart from the main worshipping space in which women can pray. Others still, not only separate the women into these off-site rooms but construct blinding barriers between them so they cannot actually witness the worship in progress, but rather follow along through a video/audio stream of the prayer in action in the next room. What Nawaz discovered was that these barriers between men and women were actually growing in popularity in mosques in Canada. Nawaz's film attempts to refute these mosques' claims that separation is done on the basis of scriptural authority. She argues that segregation denotes inferiority and that "many people cannot separate tradition and the pure teachings of the Prophet."[63]

The fact that films such Nawaz's are being made is evidence of a movement in Islam, especially in the West, among female Muslims dissatisfied with their literal and figurative place in their faith community. The reasons for this may be various but a significant catalyst is no doubt the exposure of young Muslim women to pre-developed Western ideas of feminism and civil rights that are impacting the workplace, education, health care, and religious traditions. Some Muslim women reinterpret scriptural writings and the words of the Prophet Mohammed to argue their inherent feminist leanings. Sharify-Funk and Haddad cite Asra Nomani as a chief proponent of this movement, saying, "Nomani declares that to be a Muslim 'is to be a feminist', names the Prophet Muhammed as being 'Islam's first feminist,' and declares Islam to be a 'feminist religion.'"[64]

The cultural issue that arises here, especially in the West, of the place of women in Islam seems

63 *Me and the Mosque,* Online. Directed by Zarqa Nawaz. National Film Board of Canada, 2005.

64 Sharify-funk, Meena and Munira Kassam Haddad. "Where do Women 'Stand' in Islam? Negotiating Contemporary Muslim Prayer Leadership in North America."*Feminist Review N*o. 102 (11, 2012), 57.

more dramatic than ones that pertain to movement in prayer or the performance of appropriate ablutions. The typical, emic reasons given for separation in worship (including my interview subjects) is that the beauty of both a woman's form and voice can be distracting for the man while he is trying to pray. This reasoning, however, does not adequately explain the degrees of separation among various mosques, even within Canada. This issue has become something of a hot-topic as exemplified in the documentary *Me and the Mosque*.[65] It would seem that the level of segregation of women at mosques does not reflect so much various levels of authenticity, but rather the cultural assumptions of mosque officials. Often it is traditionalists who are sought after for roles of religious leadership and direction, perhaps as congregates find comfort and authority in that which has remained unchanged, and it is often because of their traditionalism they hold on to culturally familiar ideas that seem out of place in Western cultural contexts. A common mistake made by non-Muslims is the belief that within Islam men hold a position of superiority over women:

> The idea that men have automatic spiritual authority over women is completely inconsistent with this fundamental Islamic conception of the relationship between God and human creation, and between God and human creation, and between people amongst themselves.[66]

While some may use evidence from the Qu'ran and *hadiths* to support this position of superiority, these were written over a thousand years ago, at a time when women's rights were almost universally non-existent. This existed in almost every major religious, ethnic, and cultural group. As well, popular media, especially in the West, often portray Islam as a very male dominant religion. Here lies a dangerous area where stereotype and tradition get confused. While Islam does support claims that assert roles for both men and women, many of which may seem unequal or outdated to those accustomed to emerging standards of gender equality in the West, I have found no evidence, in either my research or interviews, that supports a sub-servant role of women to men or one of inequality.

65 Nawaz, *Me and the Mosque*
66 Safi, 60.

Surely, I have found evidence of preferred gender roles, but these are not the same thing as an inherent inequality. While segregation does exist, and at times to a degree that brings into clear question human/women's rights (such as identified in Nawaz's film) this is not necessarily indicative of a general status of women's rights and roles in Islamic life in the West. It is impossible for me to generalize on the rights of women in mosques globally or even nationally, as my research does not extend to these limits.

While I am aware of particular issues brought forward by women's groups in regards to women's rights in Islamic life, the research I have conducted with Muslim women in St. John's does not indicate any major issue with their rights and privileges as either women or members of an Islamic community. Of course, being an educated, white, Westerner, some of the practices of the Islamic community, such as the spatial separation of men and women during prayer at the mosque, may to me seem inconsistent with an equality among sexes in Islam, I have to accept a certain level of cultural dissonance between myself and immigrant Muslim peoples. Furthermore, some of the very issues brought forward in this section, such as how some Islamic women's groups are pursuing the goal of allowing women as mixed congregational prayer leaders in Islam, exist still within my own culture; the Catholic church, a dominant Christian denomination in Newfoundland, still does not officially sanction female priests.

If the previous topic discussed cultural issues of tradition continuing to effect the religious lives of adherents, the past influencing the outcome of the present, there is also coming to light a newer controversy, that which happens when Western cultural norms impress themselves on traditional Islamic doctrine. In a highly publicized event in New York City, for the first time in recorded history, a female imam lead a prayer in a congregation that included both men and women.[67] In Islam, it is highly disputed whether a woman can lead such a prayer. Specifically, it is understood and encouraged for

67 Allegra Stratton, "Islam: a woman breaks a taboo." *New Statesman* Vol. 134 (2005), 12. There is considerable legal debate within Islam on the question of women leading men in *salat*. See Elewa and Silvers (2010).

women to lead prayers for other women, but never to lead prayer when there are men attending. The argument by the group conducting this female led prayer was that it is said in one of the *hadith* that Fatimah, the daughter of Mohammed, lead prayer for a congregation that included both men and women. The counterargument to this was that the only men in attendance for Fatimah's prayer were slaves, a legitimate exception to the rule.

Opinions aside, what the above event and the ensuing controversy and debate display is what happens when the cultural climate of a nation, such as the U.S., with a highly developed women's rights agenda, imposes that agenda on a religion such as Islam, which is seeped in a different set of cultural standards and expectations. In doctrinal terms, Islam has a very high regard and respect for women. In practical terms, however, women are generally still not allowed to lead mixed prayer. The Western women's liberation movement opposes this on grounds of equality; but for many Muslims the issue is not one of equality, but tradition. It seems to me, however, that whether or not the issue is of doctrine or culture, the change must come from within the tradition itself. While Western ideas may influence this change, any real change must be initiated and conducted by the men and women of the tradition itself, and not outsiders or outside Western norms. As a feminist, I hold that women should be allowed to lead prayer. The Christian tradition has had its own struggles with this question, and the issue is now facing contemporary Islam as well.

It was interesting to talk to some of the participants on the above topic. I expected a more strained response, particular from women, perhaps hoping that they were themselves some sort of radical feminists. The comments I received from women, however, were more well developed and articulate responses against female led prayer than those comments I received from the men. Mona, a young Muslim originally from Lebanon and now studying Social Work at Memorial University, had this to say:

> That's not allowed, in Islam, [for women] to lead men [in prayer]. I can lead women, no problem. When its all women I can lead them but I can't lead men. A lot of people say 'Why? Aren't I equal?' I really don't know the answer to that and I don't question it, certain things I just don't know. [Mona continues with another example of a part of her religion that does not make sense to her] It's like why do I have to wash my feet if I pass gas? It kinda does not make sense. Certain things I don't question because I'm lacking the education but I've tried so many times and there is no answer. The closest I can get on why women cannot lead prayer is that it can be distracting. Most likely women have more beautiful voices than men and because of that they could be a sign of attraction, so when you're coming to pray you want to be completely away from distractions, devoting yourself to God. Lets face it, guys think in a certain way and thats just how we are, so imagine putting a woman in front of thousands of guys, and shes probably attractive and with her very nice voice, their prayer is not going to be good, I'll tell you that [laughs]. Their hearts are just not going to be as pure. So for the heart to be pure, they put a man in the front. And that makes sense to me.[68]

It is hard for me not to impose my own opinions on feminism and equality of gender roles when such issues arise in this research. What I have concluded is that there are two aspects to consider. One is the rights and privileges of women in Islam and the other is the cultural role of women in Islam. Often times one of these aspects will blur into the other, for example, the inability of women to pray alongside men at most mosques. While for me personally, this seems to denote an inequality among the sexes I have to understand whether or not such an action comes from a lack of rights for women or a cultural tradition of Muslim people. If I conclude, as I have in this case, that the reason for the separation is more cultural than a lack of rights, it is difficult for me to place a judgement on the activity regardless of my opinion, as I am but a witness to the religious practices of others.

5.3.1 Emerging Cultural Dimensions of Prayer

Alongside the thorny issue of the place of women in the mosque, there are other, less contentious, though significant cultural changes taking place among Muslims in the Western world. Many of these changes have to do with technology. Technology plays an important role in the day-to-day lives of most Westerners, and Muslim immigrants are no exception. While many immigrants are

68 Mona, Interview 1, June 3, 2015

exposed to similar technologies in their home nations; computers, smart phones, apps, these technologies are employed in a unique and developing way by Western Muslims. Many of the individuals I interviewed use technology to further their religious education. Often, the mediatized discourse received through modern technology on online environments is seen as a more authentic version of their faith.

In numerous interviews with participants on the performance of prayer, Youtube was cited as a method of obtaining authoritative information. Mona recounts one such instance when she herself used the website:

> I went on Youtube and found an actual video of the way the Prophet used to pray. That's as authentic as you can get to how the Prophet used to pray. And I started following that because there were certain things I used to do; I wasn't that far off - I used to do the main things, but there were certain movements that I was doing that the Prophet didn't do. So I changed it.[69]

Not only was the information deemed authoritative but it superseded the previous authority of her parents and religious leaders. As a result of her viewing an online video, years of religious knowledge, passed from generation to generation, was deemed by Mona to be lacking or incomplete. Muslim prayer, it seems, never changes until it does. Almost paradoxically, the reasons it does change generally seem to be for the purpose of a more authentic participation in prayer. The result for the participant is two-fold. First, they are more confident that the prayers and movements they perform are more authentic, with authenticity usually being gauged by how closely their prayers mirror the prayers of the Prophet Mohammed. This authenticity is "proven" through the Youtube video presenter's continual reference and citation of the Qu'ran and various *hadiths*. Secondly, in the immigrant context, more local and national identities (Lebanese Muslim or Malaysian Muslim) are subsumed under a broader category of "Muslim immigrant," which is a more universal notion, created in part through

69 Mona, Interview 2, June 12, 2015. Youtube videos on *salat* allow muslims to participate in a new global Islam, which some scholars refer to as "deterritorialized" Islam. See Roy (2002).

interactions with recognized Islamic authorities through globally accessible videos. These videos allows Muslim immigrants from a particular cultural and national context to participate in a community of Islam that goes above and beyond the culture of any nation state. They participate in a Islamic global village facilitated by the technology of the internet.

This engagement with technology was further exemplified in interviews I did with participants during Ramadan. Ramadan is the holiest month in the Islamic lunar calendar. During this period Muslims ideally make an effort to be more consistent and precise in their prayers and prayer times. As well, during Ramadan Muslims are required to fast from sun-up until sun-down. There are very specific times when one is to pray, as well even more specific times as to when one is allowed to break fast during Ramadan. For example, during one of my visits to the mosque the *iftar*[70] time was shown as being 9:01 p.m., not 9:00, not 9:05. This specificity adheres to centuries of tradition and in the past Muslims were expected to use the sun, analog clocks, or digital clocks to know the correct times for prayers and breaking fast. This second-sense is no longer required however as the vast majority of Muslims I interviewed during this period had apps on their smart phones that automatically alerted them of these important daily intervals: when to pray; when fast begins; when fasting is over. As Mona states, these apps are directly related to their cultural context of being Muslims in a Western society.

> If I lived in the Middle East I don't even have to have the phone-app because you hear it every-time in the mosque: they call for prayer, it's out loud, you remember. But because here nobody reminds you I have an app on my phone that every time the prayer comes in it buzzes.[71]

The devices were not limited to smart phones, and I learned that many Muslim households had their home computers synced up with a similar device and when it was almost time for prayer, instead

70 *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L.: Oxford University Press, 2003 defines *Iftar* as "The breaking of the fast every evening after sunset during Ramadan. Also, the breaking of the fast of Ramadan on the first sighting of the new moon on the evening of Id al-Fitr. According to the example of the Prophet Muhammad, the fast should be broken by eating dates or salt."
71 Mona, Interview 2, June 12, 2015

of hearing the call to prayer through your window as you would in Beirut, it comes blasting out of the computer speakers.

While modern technology seems to be helping a younger generations of Muslims streamline and integrate their faithful responsibilities with those of the secular world, I fear that the over reliance of such technologies could lead to a growing disconnect from the intimacy inherent in spiritual life. If people are using apps in order to remind them of prayer, they are disregarding the part of their faith that asks them to be diligent - to watch the times of the sun rising and setting and to understand directly when and why prayer times are what they are. As well, while it is a great solution to an unsolvable issue, the call to prayer that comes out of the computer speakers is not being sounded out to a community, which is its original intention. Therefore, the coming together of worshippers happens in a very impersonal way, one that lacks the immediate community of their home nations and which may lead to a further disconnect between faith and community. Religious actions then, such as the call to prayer, are no longer mediated through the physical and social worlds but through impersonal means such as apps and computer speakers detached from the environment of community and the natural world. When an adherent hears the call to prayer they are not hearing it called out through the air, from the community, but through digital speakers and smart phones. I believe that this loss of sacred connection with the physical and social religious surroundings pose a threat to the adherents continued sense of self in a faith community.

5.4 Summary

Prayer is, for Muslim's, the main vehicle for participation in religious life. Prayer is the means by which one both surrenders to and communicates with Allah. The five daily prayers are not a recommendation, but a requirement; they are stipulated, prescribed, and normative. As evidenced in

numerous interviews conducted for this research, there may be legitimate reasons for excluding prayer, but those who do often voice a deep regret.

There is precision to prayer; prayer is to be conducted in a specific manner. That specific manner is always thought of as the correct way, until such time as the discovery is made that there is a more authentic form. For the interviewees I talked with, authentication is always traced back to the way in which prayer was first performed and taught by the Prophet Mohammed. Of course, such "authenticity" is not necessarily rooted in historicism, but culturally mediated discourses.

There is a rhythm to prayer, a series of repeated acts and utterances constitute the form. First there is *wudu*, ritual cleansing of the body, followed by the physical activity of prayer which is accompanied by thoughtful, reflective and emotional engagement. This process repeats itself five times a day, every day, from an early age until death. The repetitive nature of both *wudu* and prayer act as constant reminders to the adherent, of both physical and spiritual health. *Wudu* in particular acts as a physical reminder of day to day morals: cleaning one's mouth with water reminds one to not gossip, for example. The prayers repeat at such times to ensure the adherent's attention is never far from God.

Women are granted almost all the rights of men in prayer and, in some instances, more. Women are held in a high regard in Islamic life, though often within domestic contexts; domestic duties often act as exemptions from having to participate in any congregational prayers, such as Friday Noon Prayer. Women pray the same amount as men, with the same words and prostrations. At home women and men pray side-by-side; in public spaces, such as the mosque, women are more commonly segregated from men, at least to a point where they cannot be directly seen by men.

Recently in the West, there has been a growing tension surrounding segregation of women in mosques and controversy over women as prayer leaders. As Islam blooms in the West, from both a growing immigrant population and an increasing amount of converts , it is susceptible to the imposition of pre-developed or developing ideas of feminism and gender equality. There have been several high-

profile instances were women have defied Islamic tradition to pray alongside men, or, even more drastically, to lead a mixed congregation of men and women in prayer. This is a developing phenomenon and has received considerable criticism within certain Muslim communities. The question here must be whether or not women are overcoming long-standing cultural biases or imposing their own ideology on a pre-existing religious tradition and if that tradition should or should not change. Some Muslims see the segregation of women and men in the mosque, as well as in roles of religious importance and scholarship, as a tradition that is obsolete: "as Muslims, we have a responsibility to transcend this historical limitation today."[72] It is difficult for me to make a value judgement on such issues: if I thought that the segregation of women or their inability to be prayer leaders was of a cultural nature, I would perhaps be less sensitive to any "Islamic" rebuking, but if it is indeed religious doctrine, and exists in the Qu'ran and/or *hadiths*, then it becomes much more difficult to make a value judgement.[73] Effective change of the current state of women in Islam would come most readily in a dynamic cultural shift: for Muslim women and their supporters to focus on those parts of the religion that segregate and exclude them as elements of culture that have been picked up throughout history and, while supported by interpreted scripture, are in fact not representative of the essence of the Islamic faith itself. It is evident that as Islam grows and spreads, especially in Western nations, it may be further challenged to meet pre-existing and changing social standards. It is important to note that Islam does change and differ across traditional Islamic countries. Through various interviews I have seen that the cultural norms of one Islamic nation effects, if not the doctrinal practice of Islam, the intellectualization of Islamic practice. Muslims from different nations, with different ideological climates, seem to understand Islam in different ways and though these differences are often incredibly slight they hold significance.

72 Safi, 59.

73 Elewa and Silvers (2010) argue that within Islam the issue of female-led prayer is less a culture versus religion question and more a matter of legal debate within Islamic jurisprudence.

Those I interviewed tend to maintain that prayer is unchanging, yet they also acknowledge the emerging role of technology in their prayer lives. A majority of the Muslims I interviewed all used technology in one way or another to assist their prayer life. Many students had mobile apps on their smart phones that reminded them of prayer times; some peoples' phones and tablets literally sang out the call to prayer to signal that prayer time was nearing. A Muslim can also connect to live video streams of massive mosque services taking place in Islamic holy spots such as Mecca and Medina. Islam is about ease and flexibility and in this regard many Muslims, especially young people, believe that technology has helped the religion and its practitioners in countless ways.

Prayer in Islam continues to change, as much as it continues to stay the same. As one participant, Zia, said:

> The physical activities have changed, not the internal things. I used to raise my hand until my ear, now I raise it until my shoulder because its more authentic according to the *hadith*. And also I prostrate differently than I used to do back in my country. I saw some programs where Islamic scholars referred to sayings of the Prophet, so I changed the way I used to pray.[74]

It seems to be important for Muslims that prayer remain unmoving, act as something of a religious, cultural, even personal anchor. Of most importance in what remains unchanged is the adherence to prayer, its intrinsic importance, and its dutiful necessity among the adherents as Islam begins and ends with prayer.

74 Zia, Interview 2, July 3, 2015

Chapter 6 - The Spaces and Times of Prayer

Muslims are required to pray at least five times a day. This makes it very difficult with work, school, and family life, for a Muslim to make it to mosque for each of these prayers, day in, day out. The basic answer to the question, "Where do Muslim's pray?" therefore, is anywhere and everywhere. The mosque is held in high regard and is felt to be the place of prayer having the closest connection to God, but it is by no means the only place one can pray. It is common for Muslims to pray at home, at work, and at school. Indeed, almost anywhere can serve as an acceptable place of prayer.

Prayer is mandatory and the window of time in which each of the five daily prayers occurs is small. Ideally, prayer will take place at the prescribed time of the day (the only exclusions to having to pray during specified times when an individual is traveling, a woman is menstruating, or an individual is too ill). The rhythm of prayer throughout the course of the day means that prayer intersects with and infuses various cultural domains. One prays at home in the morning, at work in the afternoon, and at the mosque in the evening, for example.

Simon O'Meara states that "Islam is a particularly spatially oriented religion,"[75] an observation relevant to understanding the nature of Muslim prayer practice. Both space and time are essential prerequisites for prayer and play a major role; the space in which one prays must be clean, calm, contemplative and the time in which one prays is prescribed, calculated on the basis of sunrise and sunset.[76] Once these prerequisites are met, however, time and space seem to come to a cessation, the individual who is fully engaged in prayer is no longer to think about their temporal or spatial environments; instead they enter a contemplative space and time, separate from the temporal/spatial

75 Simon O'Meara, "The Space Between Here and There: The Prophet's Night Journey as an Allegory of Islamic Ritual Prayer." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 15 (3) (2012), 232. .

76 See Footnote 1 of this thesis.

round of daily life. This is, of course, an expression of an ideal. According to the individuals I have interviewed, the ideal is not always, or even typically, embodied. Many cited years and years of prayer practice before one gets to a point of engagement where one is completely undistracted by thoughts and worries and the physical goings-on around them.

Thomas Tweed describes the religious life as "finding one's place and moving through space."[77] From this perspective, it is not surprising to learn that Muslims living in the West, and certainly in St. John's, have obstacles to the spatial and temporal requirements of prayer that are not present in predominately Muslim countries. St. John's is a traditionally Christian city, and while that religion may not be as prevalent among its citizens and city life as it once was, the cultural structures and patterns informing work, leisure, and education are often disjunctive with Islamic prayer requirements. One interview participant, Naji, put the matter this way:

> Life has been very good and productive in St. John's in terms of work and school. People are nice and things are easy. However, in terms of me as a Muslim, I was not satisfied. I was feeling I am not doing well as a Muslim, was not going to mosque as I was praying at MUN or home mostly. The environment is not Islamic so when specific Islamic events happen, such as Ramadan, Eid, etc, you don't actually feel it. Friday is a normal day in here, which used to be holiday (where family comes together) back home and we have Friday Prayer."[78]

The Western work day begins in the morning and ends around supper time or later, with just one major break at lunch. As well, Saturday and Sunday are the traditional days off in the work week. For Muslims in the city it is very difficult to perform the mandatory ablutions and pray multiple times a day if working or in school. As well, Friday Noon Prayer at the mosque, the main weekly gathering of Muslims in congregation, is difficult for individuals to attend, again largely due to the work and school schedules. These obstacles have forced many of the Muslims I talked to in the city to augment and allow flexibility to their daily and weekly prayer requirements.

77 Tweed, 74.
78 Naji, Interview 1, April 19, 2015

6.1 The Mosque

For Muslims, the mosque is the house of God, the place one goes to be closest to Allah. Mosque's themselves are generally beautifully ordained to reflect the beauty of the cosmos. St. John's has just one mosque, the Masjid-an-Noor, and in comparison to mosques of similar sized cities in Spain or Saudi Arabia, the St. John's Mosque is rather humble. The Mosque opens its doors five times daily to allow people the opportunity to come in to pray.

The mosque is the preferred place of prayer for any Muslim. It is the representation of Islam in the urban landscape and, as Thijl Sunier states, "places of worship, especially when they have been purposely built, *objectify* religious presence."[79] Many of the Muslims I talked with cited the increased value or power of prayer when it was performed in the mosque, especially if performed with a fellow congregation, or *ummah*.[80] Though all prayers are assumed to be heard by God, collective prayers performed in the mosque are considered especially efficacious. In discussing the accumulated congregational power of prayer, Taqwa expressed that, "I feel like we have more power [in a group] to speak with God than just me by myself. Being with other people just makes it easier for me or for us, its like if you [are] asking God something [and] you feel like He's going to do it for you because we're all together."[81] In the modern, secular West, religion is often conceived as privatized affair of the heart. In Islam, the religious life has an important collective and communal dimension.

Praying is easily facilitated at the mosque as all the essential accoutrements of prayer are laid out and available. There are ritual bathing stations to perform *wudu* and clocks on the wall with clear indications of when prayer is to begin. As well, instead of preparing a space to pray by ensuring that it

79 Thijl Sunier, "Constructing Islam: Places of Worship and the Politics of Space in The Netherlands." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 13 (3) (2005), 318.

80 *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L.: Oxford University Press, 2003 defines *Ummah* as "Muslim community. A fundamental concept in Islam, expressing the essential unity and theoretical equality of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings. In the *Quran*, designates people to whom God has sent a prophet or people who are objects of a divine plan of salvation."

81 Taqwa, Interview 1, March 7, 2015

is clean, the main prayer space of the mosque is at the ready and always in a state of ritual cleanliness.

Beside the physical attributes of the mosque being tailored to the needs of Muslim ritual life, the other main benefit is the presence of an imam. The imam may be either full-time or acting, the latter being the case in St. John's, and leads the congregates in prayer. As well as leading the main prayer, at certain services, such as Friday Noon Prayer, the imam will give a sermon that speaks to the congregates on special topics in spiritual matters, moral issues, or family life. While the imam is a well respected individual, he is not thought of as holding any spiritually hierarchical position over the congregates. While many imams train life-long in Islamic theology and scholarship any individual may be an imam, especially when a more qualified imam is not present. The Mosque in St. John's currently has three acting imams, but there is no permanent religious leader whose time and energy is devoted solely to the Mosque.

Most of the individuals I interviewed came to Newfoundland from predominantly Muslim countries, where mosques are plentiful and always nearby, which makes attending mosque for daily prayer a relatively easy task. With only one mosque in St. John's, located on the edge of the city, attending prayer is a practical challenge. Interestingly many of the participants I interviewed rarely, if ever, visited or prayed at the Mosque and cited its distance as their main deterrent, choosing instead to pray alone or in small groups, mostly at home or school. While the Mosque is still held in high regard by individuals it seems that the distance required to travel there is enough to keep them from attending prayer services.

6.1.1 Friday Noon Prayer

Friday Noon Prayer is the weekly prayer service of most importance for Muslims, and religious life in St. John's follows suit, with Friday Noon Prayer being the most well attended service. It is at this

service that the imam will generally give a sermon after leading the congregation in prayer. Most of my interview subjects say that prayer in group is more powerful than prayer alone. According to Ibrahim, one of the Masjid-an-Noor's imams, “It is very soothing when you see so many people chanting the prayer recitals. Saying 'Allah Akbar, God is Great'; everybody is bowing down at the same time, everybody raising and sitting at the same time, offering the prayers in a set manner. So it definitely has more effect when you do it collectively.”[82]

Weekly prayer service provides the occasion for the Muslim community to gather and it is here that friends and family tend to come together with one another to share and celebrate their mutual faith. The service has both spiritual and psycho-social dimensions as people revel in sharing their faith, while also updating one another on their lives, families, and work. This latter function is of particular significance in St. John's, where the Muslim community is small and spread out. For immigrants it is important to facilitate a time where not only religion may be shared but culture, language, and food. In St. John's, the Muslims who attend Friday Noon Prayer are the minority, a small group of religious outsiders who gather and share the experience of being, not only Muslims, but foreigners. The activities that take place there, though quite known to them, are almost esoteric when viewed by their fellow, non-Muslim, citizens. In their home countries they would be attending a ritual known by virtually everyone, but in St. John's they are an outlier of religious activity. I theorize that this has both a positive and negative effect on the adherent. In one regard, they are an outsider; misunderstood perhaps, separate, and different. On the other hand, the activity of attending Friday Noon Prayer, previously a massive event (one perhaps not even particularly noteworthy) becomes a defiant temporal and spatial statement regarding the adherents steadfast faith, despite the major geographical and cultural changes that have occurred. Friday Noon Prayer for the immigrant Muslim in St. John's is a statement of selfhood and community, the attendees are not only dutiful Muslims attending service but

82 Ibrahim, Interview 1, July 8, 2015

individuals who refuse to let geographical and cultural changes strip them of their identity. The deliberate continuation of the ritual gathering makes a statement of selfhood that only manifests once they have left their Muslim majority home nation: it creates a new religious identity for the individual as well as relegates them to being a religious outsider to the mass population.

An issue facing immigrants in the city is the difficulty involved in attending the Friday prayer. In Muslim majority countries people either have Friday free, or they are allowed, perhaps even expected, to leave work or school to attend. In St. John's noon prayer on Friday coincides with one of the busiest moments in the work week, where the past week's work is clued up and the next week's assessed. While commitments to work and school makes attending Friday Noon Prayer difficult and frustrating for some, especially those who are unable to attend, the effort and successful attendance also adds to its increased importance. Friday Noon Prayer now becomes not only the service that one should attend, but the one an individual strives to attend despite the secular obstacles. This attendance in spite of the busy work and school schedule of an average Friday in St. John's makes the attending of Friday Noon Prayer rewarding both spiritually and personally as it becomes an active pursuit rather than simply a routined obligation. The extra effort put forward by the individual to attend the service is statement of importance manifest through activity. In the home nation, Friday Noon Prayer is a special event, but is normalized into the culture; most people would have this day off, free from work or school commitments.[83] Friday Noon Prayer becomes extra-special in St. John's by the difficulty involved in attending, due to the fact that it comes in the middle of one of the busier work and school days of the week.

83 In much the same way as how people in Christian countries had Sunday off

6.2 School

The rhythms of university and school life in the West are not designed to accommodate five prayer times throughout the day. So Muslims have to become more flexible and creative with how they pray. For some the difficulties mean they basically give up daily prayer when attending school while others either try to consciously manage their schedules in such a way as to accommodate prayer or else seek special permission to perform their daily, mandatory prayers.

One participant, Taqwa, recalled her experience of attending a high school where most immigrant students attend, because of the school's English as a Second Language program. The administration of this school is used to accommodating the needs of pupils of various ethnic and religious backgrounds and their multiple cultural and spiritual needs. Taqwa therefore had very little trouble in attaining permission to leave class at certain times to go perform ablutions and then pray. In fact, due to the multiple Muslim students in the school, a separate room or empty class room was always provided for the students to use as an improvised prayer space.

Another interview participant, Mona, is originally from Lebanon but moved to St. John's as an adolescent, at the age of eleven. Even at a young age her religion was of paramount importance to her so her newfound inability to pray at school caused her increased stress and anxiety. The school she attended did not seek any information on possible religious needs and she was too shy to broach the subject with her teacher. Eventually though, the stress became too much and she mustered up the courage to talk to her teacher and demanded her requisite time and space to pray. The teacher was taken aback, not realizing that the girl had even required such an allowance, and promptly assured her that she was to pray whenever and wherever she needed. It is interesting here that for all the stereotypes that exist among Westerners about Muslim people this incident evidences the fact that the things that

should be known, prayer and food requirements for example, often times are not. Administrations, in particular in education and healthcare, should be informed and sensitive to the needs of people relocating from other cultures. Thankfully, in this instance, the school administration and Mona's teacher understood and accommodated her need to pray, but only after the need became so overwhelming for the girl that she forced herself to confront those in power. However, things could have gone very differently, which brings to the forefront the need for administrations to train those in positions of power to understand and adhere to the needs of their students, patients, and constituents.

For students at Memorial, the local university, there are also challenges to prayer, but being older and more confident in their need to pray, as well as knowledgable in the flexibility inherent in the religion, these issues seem less dramatic. For the most part, students at the University are capable of picking their own schedules and will often times select their courses around Muslim prayer times; even so, scheduling is often a challenge. Some of the participants I spoke to would leave class a few minutes earlier to attend to prayer, or else try and rush their prayer in the ten minutes between classes. Others skipped prayer entirely, again citing the flexibility of the tradition, secure in their knowledge that God would understand. Another route is to make-up missed prayer times later. Mohammed said in one interview, "the religion is very flexible in a way. [If] you have an exam or class, you go and do that if you can't skip it. So its not something that's black or white."[84]

Mohammed, again on balancing school and prayer times, spoke on the issue of praying during exam time at the University. He cited times when exams were in succession or in the middle of prayer times. He requested from professors that he write the exam earlier or later so as to not miss prayer. Some professors were understanding and granted the request; others would not. In cases where they would not grant this request Mohammed did not feel too bad for missing the prayer as he had attempted to the best of his ability to accommodate both his school and prayer requirements, again stressing the

84 Mohammed Interview 1, March 11, 2015

flexibility of the religion and God's understanding. When speaking of this situation Mohammed states, "I can say 'how about I show up one hour before?' If they would accommodate its good, if they don't well that's it man, you just go sit for your exam and you move on."[85] While Mohammed, and other students such as Zia and Mona, express an understanding of the inability for exam times to be altered to meet their prayer times, I worry that such an understanding may lead to an unneeded and unhealthy complacency. Why should Mohammed, Zia, Mona, or any other Muslim come to the conclusion that while prayer is of utmost importance to their spiritual well-being, it is only reasonable that they miss such a prayer in order to write an exam? It is in the University administration's power to alter exam times and they are aware of the population of Islamic students who attend the university and who are they to say that the sitting of an exam at a specific time is more pertinent than the spiritual well-being of their own students? What is more, by doing so the University is unconsciously distancing their own students from their personal faiths and asserting education as a more important priority. This likely has some effect on the psyche of the student, especially those who accept this situation, however regretfully. While I am unaware of any previous dialogue between the administration of Memorial University and the Islamic students, it would seen prudent for the students to assert swiftly that their spiritual duties are of utmost personal importance and that the administration must become sensitive and accommodating to those needs.

A situation such as Mohammed's is interesting in regards to how guilt and rationalization work within the faithful. It is difficult for me to know with any certainty, but I wonder if the word "flexibility" in describing Islam and prayer is used as much overseas as it is used here in the West. Is ritual flexibility inherent to the tradition or a product of necessity? I glean from Mohammed's retelling of his story about exams that he truly believes in the flexibility of the religion and ultimately God's forgiveness for the inability to change exam times to accommodate prayer. I suggest, however, that in

85 Mohammed Interview 1, March 11, 2015

part it is not just for God's sake, but his own. The flexibility inherent in the religion that Mohammed speaks of may often act as a direct response to an inherent guilt about being less than fully diligent Muslims. It is a device that is enacted often, possibly at times abused, to dismiss the self-consciousness of not fulfilling the Muslim covenant with God.

Many of the participants I interviewed were students at Memorial University, most of which felt very satisfied with the institution's relationship with the Muslim community there. For some interview subjects, the mosque is too far away to pray so coming to school becomes a religious trek as well, "I can't pray with a congregation unless I come to the University."[86] Prayer times are often accommodated, there is a Muslim Students Association (MSA), as well as space available solely for Muslim students to pray. During Ramadan, the MSA is given full use of the Landing, a large room in the University Centre, to conduct multiple Ramadan prayers as well as host large meals and gatherings that take place in the night during Ramadan, after breaking-fast.

6.3 Work

Many Muslims in St. John's must work within an environment and schedule that does not accommodate their daily prayer needs. In St. John's, like most Western cities, the standard work day is "9 to 5," Monday to Friday. During the work day there are generally breaks and lunch periods, but these may or may not coincide with the prayer schedule of a Muslim worker as the rigid schedule of five daily prayers is determined by the rising and setting of the sun and varies month to month. Beyond the work schedule, there are other obstacles facing Muslims in the work place. As Henkel notes, "the obligatory performance of the salat... poses the challenge of performing the prayer in indifferent or even hostile settings such as, for instance, many workplaces."[87] Many of my interlocutors mentioned

86 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015
87 Henkel, 494.

this as the main reason to seek employment with explicitly religious employers. Naji wrote me about working in St. John's as a Muslim and had this to say:

> I mention that in the first day of my work, that I [am] Muslim and I have to pray five times a day. I see nothing but respect and support, but [it] might not be as easy, such as no designated place to pray. During my work in the mall I pray in the warehouse. My co-workers don't understand what I'm doing and then they get it. But [it] feels weird to them, maybe. Also the timing, I pray in my breaks, but prayer time could have been passed already, so frustrating.[88]

In this passage, Naji intimates an awareness of being an outsider. He mentions to his prospective employer that he is a Muslim and must pray multiple times during working hours - perhaps to ensure his ability to do so, but also perhaps so as to submit himself right away to any possible scrutiny or backlash toward his religious duties. As well, in speaking of his co-workers reaction to his praying in the warehouse he says that they did not initially understand and when they did voice some measure of understanding, he still wondered whether his praying "feels weird to them, maybe." Naji believes that his prayer life makes his coworkers feel "weird"; Naji's interpretation may be as much a product of a self-conscious outsider status as an accurate perception of reality; it may be valuable to have some formal mechanism in place to try and develop mutual self-understanding in the workplace, rather than leaving people wondering and making assumptions about each other's attitudes.

6.3.1 Time

The standard work hours in the West means that a Muslim may be required to pray up to three times in the course of the work day. Inability to pray at the proper time, for the proper length of time, voids the prayer - it is missed and that cannot be changed, though often adherents who are unable to pray at a certain time will "make-up" the prayer at a later time.[89] Praying after a select time period has

88 Naji, Interview 1, April 19, 2015

89 The prayer is missed and this is unchangeable, however some participants will pray extra later to sort of make up the loss of the prayer, thought they are conscious that this does replace the missed prayer.

already passed to try and “make-up” for the missed prayer is an evolved practice among Muslims in the West; make-up prayer times are not part of traditional Muslim life.

The demands of daily prayer mean that an individual must be quite proactive in ensuring their daily work schedule allows time for prayer. In many cases the majority, if not the entirety, of break time is given to prayer. For Muslims I interviewed, prayer time is not “break time”; prayer is religious duty and though it may at times entail a relaxed mood, this is not always the case. If the individual uses their work break time to pray, they in fact get no break, simply switching from a secular duty to a religious one and back. While the process of praying itself only takes a few minutes, there is also the ablutions before prayer and finding a quiet, contemplative area. All of these factors take time and if a break is only fifteen minutes long, the entire process can be quite strained. As well, it is not the goal of the practitioner to just complete prayer in a rushed manner, but to allow oneself time enough to engage intellectually and spiritually. This makes proper prayer at work quite difficult for many of the Muslim's I interviewed. As with prayer at school, some end up skipping prayer times all together, while others rush their prayers, citing that a rushed prayer is still better than none at all. Again, as with praying at school and its rushed quality, the adherents I spoke with were adamant not only in the flexibility of prayer under such strained circumstances, but also the understanding of God. While they recognize that their prayers are not performed under ideal conditions, they are unable to make it any different. As this prayer flexibility is a new and emerging issue for the immigrants I spoke with, none of them had anything to say to the extent of its flexibility.

6.3.2 Prayer Spaces

A challenge Muslims face when praying at work is the lack of proper space and facilities. As noted above, prayer must be engaged both intellectually and spiritually. Therefore, prayer must take

place in an area without distractions. The Western workplace is typically not designed to accommodate Muslim prayer practice, or any prayer practice, for that matter. Ablutions, for example, must be performed before prayer can take place. With no predesignated space for ritual cleansing, many of the participants I interviewed spoke of having to perform *wudu* in the communal bathrooms at their place of work. This has two main disadvantages: the first being the self-consciousness one feels in performing such ablutions when co-workers or employers may walk in to witness them, the second being that communal bathrooms are not necessarily kept to the level of desired cleanliness to facilitate such a process. Metaphorically, washrooms, places for eliminating waste, are not sites of spiritual purification.

I spoke to two participants in-depth about the process of praying at work. The first individual, Zia, worked at a newspaper printing facility. Not being the only Muslim employee, the process of having to pray at work often became a shared one. Zia and a fellow Muslim co-worker would ensure that their breaks coincided as closely as possible to the required prayer times. They would then excuse themselves to the large communal bathrooms and perform *wudu* in one of the many sinks all in a row. Afterwards they would find themselves in whatever corner of the facility was the most quiet. There they would discreetly perform their prayers and upon completion return to work.

The other participant, Taqwa, had a similar experience. She works in a restaurant in downtown St. John's as a cook. For this reason, break times to pray are much harder to manage or predict . If it is busy at the restaurant, even if it is break time, she cannot simply leave her work to go pray. Once it does quiet down, however, she goes to the bathroom to perform *wudu*. Not able to discreetly perform her prayers in front of the patrons of the restaurant she then finds a space in the restaurants back room and prays surrounded by lettuce, boxes of tomatoes, and coolers full of meat.

In both of these examples the process of having to pray at work can be difficult, embarrassing, and possibly disheartening. While neither participant expressed any strong feelings of discouragement

toward performing prayer at work, both indicated to me a certain amount of dislike and uncomfortableness at having to do so. For the first individual there was the issue of embarrassment of having to perform *wudu* in front of Western co-workers and feeling judged, while for the second it was having to perform prayer in a less than ideal location, surrounded by produce and deep freezers. While it may not breed resentment, the duty of prayer under these circumstances may possibly take away some of the intimate nature of prayer. Even if there is no noise or distraction, the adherent is self-conscious and uncomfortable during prayer. The person fulfills their duty but has to do so under conditions that may make their engagement in prayer less than desirable as well as their engagement with the secular workplace more difficult, through embarrassment and self-consciousness. The issue becomes one of religious accommodation with temporal and spatial dimensions: the necessary allotment of time during a specific time period in which to perform prayer and an area that is required in which to perform prayer.

6.3.3 Reception & Understanding

Citizens of St. John's have the reputation of being friendly and polite, and most of the participants I spoke with on the subject of praying at work encountered no significant resistance or problems from their employers or co-workers. If anything, the response was curious interest with questions about their faith and prayer lives, not hostility. Still many of those I spoke with emphasized that performing such a vulnerable and personal ritual act in the midst of work can be a very self-conscious experience, especially if the workplace does not have an appropriate area to facilitate their prayers in a private manner. This lack of privacy and increased self-consciousness lead many of the participants I interviewed to choose not to pray at work.

For those who do choose to pray at work, while there is often a general atmosphere of sympathy

and understanding, the process can be awkward and is often experienced as very ostracizing. Zia recounted an instance when he and a Muslim co-worker were preparing to pray, performing ablutions in the workplace communal washroom:

> I particularly remember one thing that happened: There was another supervisor there and one of our colleagues, who was a Muslim, was doing his ablutions, we call it *wudu*. As part of it we have to wash our feet and that person, the Muslim colleague, he just lifted his leg up to the sink, which is not appropriate, but the way the supervisor...he kind of threatened him, he could have told him in a nice way and I thought that he could have dealt with it in a more proper way. But he just threatened him not to do it and [the other Muslim man] was very hurt.[90]

The non-Muslim co-worker chastised the man to an unnecessary degree. Subsequently the man became very embarrassed. These situations are not likely to occur in the Muslim majority nations many of these immigrants hail from and are an added anxiety to the already stressful job of navigating prayer life in a Western society, especially at work. Incidents such as this one undoubtably make working life for a Muslim an uneasy task at times. Alongside the commonplace anxieties of work that any individual might experience, Muslim workers are further stressed by the repercussions of maintaining a faithful prayer schedule. What is of most interest in incidents such as Zia's is that he expressed very little antagonism toward the situation or the Western co-worker who chastised his Muslim co-worker. Instead, this story was recounted as an incident of embarrassment, being caught and then subjected to scrutiny during a very private moment. The embarrassment also seemed to stem from his performing such a ritual in a workplace dominated by Westerners - that he was doing something almost deviant. Prayer then at times seems to become almost a burden to a worker such as Zia; a self-conscious practice that could lead to personal embarrassment.

90 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015

6.4 Home

For an overwhelming majority of the participants I interviewed the home is the main place in which prayer was conducted. For many the Mosque, the traditional place of prayer, is not accessible enough to attend multiple times daily or even weekly. In such a situation the home becomes the default place for prayer. Many Muslims I interviewed, like Mohsen, cited the privacy of home as a main reason for praying there, saying that "religion is something very personal and it doesn't need to be demonstrated in public or by appearance."[91] Mohsen did not elaborate on whether this privacy of religion at home was as important to him in Iran, his home nation, as it is here, but as the Western view of religion is something that is private, shared in homes and churches, perhaps this is a developed opinion that further allows for his integration into the secular Western society of St. John's. At home an individual knows the direction of Mecca, that the facilities they use to perform *wudu* are clean, there are prayer rugs to use, and, most importantly, there is the time and privacy needed to properly perform prayers.

As the Muslim population is a minority in the city, a Muslim home is unique and, for the immigrants in St. John's, acts not only as a home, but a cultural gateway. In the home. "immigrant groups, historically, have turned to religion to structure their new lives, to ease the alienation, pain, and stress of transition and transplantation, and to find meaning in a new social world."[92] Religion happens first at home, among the family, and the uniqueness of a Muslim home in St. John's places an even greater emphasis on religious education. For the most part, children cannot expect to learn about Islam in school or at the home of friends, at least not in the way they would in a Muslim nation. The home

91 Mohsen, Interview 1, April 20, 2015
92 Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 74.

provides the necessary structure and religious education to make the children grow into faithful and knowledgable Muslims. As the Mazumdars go on to say, "it is the everyday practices, mostly conducted at home, that help sustain immigrants and provide meaning for them in the new social world."[93]

There is also the use of modern technology in the home to further assist with prayer life. One participant noted that their home computer had a program that automatically rang out the call to prayer over its speakers for the entire household to hear. As well, many homes watch live video streams of prayers and sermons from imams in Islamic belief centers such as Mecca.

Many of the participants I interviewed, especially those of university age and younger, still lived at home with their nuclear family. In such cases group prayer is common. In this way, families of Muslims in the West create small, household congregations as a way to make up for the missed congregational feeling of attending mosque. This extends when family and friends visit one another's household. Often instead of waiting for the individual to leave to pray, the entire group will all pray together. While praying in groups at home is common, so too is praying alone at home, even in a multiple Muslim household. When I asked one participant why it is more common for her to pray alone in her room than with her parents and sisters she cited their different and busy schedules as making such a task impractical.

Praying at home then can also mean praying alone. This solo contemplation provides an atmosphere that allows the practitioner an intimate, one-on-one connection with Allah. While many of the participants I interviewed spoke of the importance of communal prayer, especially at the mosque, this was not to say that praying alone wasn't a powerful and important experience as well. On the subject of praying alone and in congregation, Mohammed said:

I think you need to pray alone, its that time between just you and God. You're not doing anything, you're

93 Mazumdars & Mazumdar,75.

> not being watched, you're just being yourself. But at the same time doing things in groups, just like praying, going to the mosque and all that, it also gives you that sense of support and at the same time belonging with a little bit of unity. When you go running you can run in a marathon or you can run alone – they both have different feelings.[94]

The manner in which an individual participates in prayer seems to be customized in regards to the needs and wants of the individual at a specific time. If the individual is yearning for community, or deems their prayer needs the power of a congregation for its expression, they will attend mosque, or pray with friends or family. However, if the individual feels the need for an intimate encounter with Allah, or a self-reflective spiritual moment, they may pray alone. Prayer mirrors familial relations; the individual at times craves the love and support generated in a group setting, but other times desires the intimacy afforded by a one-on-one encounter.

6.4.1 Women in the Domus

Inspired by Robert Orsi's study of the domestic religiosity of Catholic women (in *The Madonna of 115th Street*,) I wanted to better understand what special role women play in the home of the Muslim immigrants I interviewed. Unmistakably, Muslims hold women in very high esteem. Each participant cited their own mothers as the most important individual in their lives. As well, many participants cited the same scriptural quote: "heaven lies under the feet of your mother." (Ahmad, Nasai) Women, more than men, are given special exemptions in Islam. During menstruation women are not required to pray. The idea of women not having to pray in Islam is viewed as courtesy in one regard, but a courtesy granted due to the view that when a woman is menstruating she is unclean and therefore disallowed to pray. That being said, by Western standards the idea that women are unclean during menstruation and unable to be spiritual/pray during menstruation would seem outdated and an

94 Mohammed, Interview 1, March 11, 2015

affront to human rights.

Women are not expected to attend Friday Noon Prayer as strictly as men are. This is not done to segregate women but rather in recognition of their many domestic responsibilities may make attendance difficult. Within Islam a woman's missing Friday prayer is viewed as a liberty; the reasons for this liberty, however--their responsibilities at home-- are out of fashion by Western standards. Friday prayer is extra special, and a woman may feel unfilled in their spiritual needs (though I have no evidence of this directly from my interviews and it remains an issue that warrants further investigation). As well, Friday Noon Prayer being the main time of the week the Muslim community gathers together, women are missing out on vital personal relationships with other Muslims.

Most participants speak highly of the role played by parents in instilling a religious knowledge, but they regard their mothers as being the anchor that keeps the family functioning properly, religiously and otherwise. Most often, the reason given for this is that the mother spends most of the time with the children. Much of the religious education one receives during childhood comes from the mother. It is the view of the Mazumdars as well that women have become "custodians of the faith"[95] in their new homes by "integrating religion into their everyday mundane domestic responsibilities."[96]

Many participants stressed, however, that both their mother and father had been instrumental in their religious education. While both parents provide religious education, it is the women who curate the home, facilitating this ongoing religious life and education. The mother rouses the children for prayer time, makes sure prayer space at the home is clean and ready to receive the family, makes sure that *wudu* can be performed in sterile receptacles and bathrooms, and prepares the *iftar* meals at Ramadan. It would only be fair to call them the unsung heroes of the familial spiritual life if they were not already held in such high regard by their husbands and children and the faith in general. As one

95 Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 79.
96 Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 82.

imam, Ibrahim said to me, "in Islam, women are looked at as the backbone of the family. Women are the ones who can keep the family together, [Who] can contribute to the well being of the family more than [the] father."[97] There exists a division of labour in the ideal homes of the Muslims where the man goes to work and makes money while the woman is responsible for the domestic duties: cooking; cleaning; and taking care of children. While this division may seem out of date in Western society, it wasn't that long ago that this was the ideal scenario for the average family in the West. Much of the so-called American Dream built itself on this very model and it has only been in the past fifty years that women in the West have really begun to leave the homestead in favour of work, education, or other pursuits, and in modern times employment equality between men and women in regards to pay scale and position of status are still active and emerging issues in the West.

6.5 Improvised Places and Times of Prayer

Most prayer happens at a time and place known to the adherent, generally speaking the mosque, home, work, or school. However, it is not always known to the individual which of these places, or another place, they might be at any given prayer time. Work schedules sometimes change, people visit friends and family, go on trips. I have been told repeatedly by Muslims of the great flexibility of the religion that lets the practitioner easily augment and improvise in order to facilitate prayer. One individual told me that if you go to a predominately Muslim nation it would not be strange to see a driver pulled over to the side of the road in order to perform their prayers.[98] The prerequisites for prayer are simple and adaptable to almost any situation: cleanliness and location of the body; direction of Mecca; and a clean space upon which to pray. While all three of these factors are desired in unison, if only one or two of them are available that too is acceptable. Even more dramatic, if a practitioner

97 Ibrahim, Interview 1, July 8, 2015
98 The climate of many Muslim majority nations allow for this practicality, as they are generally warmer and see less rain.

cannot accomplish any of these factors in order to pray they may pray silently in their own mind. The prerequisites outlined above are ideals that are to be pursued to the best of one's ability at each prayer time, but what is of paramount importance is the prayer itself and if any number, or none, of these requirements cannot be met, prayer still goes on. It is for this reason that Muslims can pray outside in the park, in their own thoughts at work meetings, or in a bus full of strangers. In fact, one participant clears this up further when insisting that it is the "intention" of prayer that is of the utmost importance, not the location and that:

> God actually sees the intention. A person praying at the mosque may not have the clearest intention, unfortunately. On the other hand a person can improvise his prayer in a different place, which is not that clear [clear as in clean to pray upon] and his intention is clear so his prayer is likely to be more accepted.[99]

It was also interesting to hear from many participants on activities they considered worship. Though, it must be made clear that few participants spoke of non-traditional prayer activities as "prayer," many likened day-to-day activities as a form of worship. Some participants spoke of study and school as a form of worship or taking care of young children. Mohammed spoke of exercise and the need to take care of the body as a form of worship:

> [You] can go to the gym for the hell of it, but if you go to the gym and your consciously thinking that 'I'm actually going to the gym because I want to be healthy, because I need to be healthy to take care of my family,' because I'm supposed to take care of my family, because I want to take care of my body that is given from God, its not my own, and I'm asked to take care of it, its a habit. Going to the gym an hour every day just turned into worship.[100]

Perhaps then the ability for prayer to be improvised, changed, and conducted in accord with the social and environmental factors at a given time lead to the interpretation, by the adherent, of the pliable nature of worship. Prayer taken to its extremes becomes so flexible that one need not perform

99 Zia, Interview 2, July 3, 2015
100Mohammed, Interview 1, March 11, 2015

prayer in a traditional form in order to worship Allah. Secular activities such as exercise, art, and music may be reinterpreted as not just personal and pleasurable pursuits but as modes of worship.

6.6 Summary

Prayer happens in a variety of locations and the adherent must be adaptable and ready to pray in any one of these locations and when prayer does happen in an improvised location, or any location other than the home or mosque, "in the clearly demarcated time-space of the prayer, a person becomes a Muslim practitioner and ceases to be an office-clerk just as the office-corner is transformed temporarily into a mosque."[101] The mosque is the house of God and the preferred place of worship for any Muslim while still a large amount of prayer also happens in the home. Either way, the preference of prayer seems to be that it is done with others. As Zia says, "[it] is always more rewarding to pray together outside a mosque than alone inside a mosque."[102] To a smaller degree prayer takes place at school and work, often in improvised spaces. Improvised spaces are not limited to the workplace and school, but can be any space deemed acceptable for prayer. If no space can be found prayer may be performed simply in one's head. Prayer times are specific and exact, there is a period allotted within which a prayer must be performed and Muslims must try earnestly to pray within this period. The religion remains flexible, however, and if prayer cannot be achieved during this period, by no fault of the adherent, it is out of the their hands and of no grave consequence.

For Muslims in St. John's issues of time and space pertaining to prayer are harder to navigate than within the Muslim majority countries from which most of them immigrated. There is a mosque here, but just the one, and it is not as accessible as many people wish it would be. For anyone living more than a few kilometres from the Mosque it would seem nearly impossible to perform most, or

101 Henkel, 497.
102 Zia, Interview 2, July 3, 2015

many, of their prayers there. For that reason most prayer takes place at home where families form make shift congregations of their own.

Praying at school in St. John's seems to be less of a challenge from the administration than a challenge in scheduling. While most teachers and professors are understanding and accommodating of their Muslim students need to prayer, there are those who are sometimes unable or unwilling to augment the schedule of courses or exams in order for a Muslim student to perform prayer. Many students use the small amount of time in between classes to pray in a rushed manner while others miss those prayers entirely, feeling that they would not have the adequate time to properly perform them.

Muslims who work in St. John's have a similar issue as students. The workday schedule of the traditionally Christian city is not accustom to accommodating the spiritual needs of the Muslim worker. In these instances many Muslims will take what little break time they have to quickly pray, foregoing any real leisure or rest time. While, among the participants I interviewed, many employers and co-workers are understanding and curious about the religious needs of their Muslim co-workers, they are still sometimes met with a degree of misunderstanding or aggression that can be frustrating.

It is important to keep in mind how understanding Islam is in the minds of the adherents. Many of the participants cite how the religion is designed to make your life easier, not harder, and that Allah understands when things like prayer time and location are out of your hands. This idea of understanding in regards time and location is of particular relevance here for Muslim immigrants, as they are issues they would most likely not have faced in their home countries. On this Zia had to say, “Islam is super flexible. There is a very popular saying by Prophet (peace be upon Him) 'make things easy, don't make things difficult for people, just give them good news, don't give them bad news.' There are strict rules but it always considers the reasons which should be acceptable.”[103]

A point of interest here is all the above evidence of the flexibility in Islam, expressed by the

103 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015

participants in my research, counters a general assumption by the Western public on the rigidity of the faith. Many Westerners view Islam as a stoic, traditional, uncompromising religion, and in ways it surely can be, but what I have discovered is an element of improvisation and interpretation that points to a progressive nature to the faith, one which is not rooted solely in tradition but reactive and accommodating to the present.

Chapter 7 - Prayer During Ramadan & Eid

Ramadan takes place in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and celebrates the revelation of the Qu'ran to the Prophet Mohammed. The time is observed by a full month's fasting, steadfast prayers, and the abstinence from the daily indulgences of life. As one participant puts it, "during Ramadan you give up anything that gives you pleasure in your ordinary day-to-day life."[104] From sun-up to sun-down during Ramadan there is no eating or drinking of water; the individual is expected to abstain from sexual activity, smoking, lewd talk, and other vices for the entirety of the month.

The month acts as a reset or recharge for Muslims. Ramadan is said have health benefits - the cleansing of toxins, weight-loss, greater control of appetite - but is primarily for the benefit of one's spiritual life. During Ramadan an individual's relationship with God becomes intensified, as one concentrates on their religious life. Everyone - men and women, children of age, older Muslims - are all expected to participate in Ramadan, which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Eid directly follows Ramadan as a celebration and reward for the hard work and piety exhibited during the Holy Month. Eid is marked by charitable donations to the community (traditionally, money and/or meat) and colourful celebrations that are targeted at young children.

For Muslims in St. John's, Ramadan and Eid highlight the challenges of being a Muslim in the city, but they are also occasions for fellowship and and the celebration of cultural traditions. Muslims celebrate Ramadan here both as a mandatory religious practice, but also as a means to keep culture alive. Naji described the challenges of celebrating Ramadan in Newfoundland:

> There is a huge difference between spending Ramadan in NL and spending it back home. In terms of ritual life, I used to spend long hours in the mosque praying, reciting Qu'ran, discussing Islamic matters with friends. Long night prayers. Mosques would be full; food is served in the mosque. Everyone is

104 Mohammed, Interview 2, July 26, 2015

> fasting. As for geographic location, it does not feel different. You only have to know the direction to where to pray, but the lack of mosques, as dedicated quiet places to pray, is essentially different.[105]

Ramadan and Eid are celebrations with broad cultural influence in Muslim majority nations. During the month of Ramadan, spiritual observation is supposed to become the utmost priority for the majority of the population in Muslim nations. In St. John's, Ramadan and Eid come and go without much fanfare or even knowledge of its existence from the general public. Instead, a small portion of the city's population quietly observes, attends the sole Mosque, and meet for a comparatively quiet Eid celebration at Ramadan's end. It is difficult for a Muslim to observe Ramadan in St. John's; the workday does not allow for the multiple prayers as it would in a Muslim country and the general populace are not informed of, or sensitive to, an individual's need to fast. Still, Ramadan is a pillar of Islam and adherents do what they can do to observe the Holy Month in proper fashion. Eid in Muslim nations is marked by widespread celebration, food, visiting family and friends. It is a special time of the year, comparable in some ways to the Christmas season. The celebrations in St. John's are not as vibrant as in Muslim majority countries, as the Muslim population in St. John's is so small.[106] There are fewer friends and family to visit and fewer occasions for celebration to take place. While the scale of celebration is disheartening to some members of the Muslim population it may also be an instrument of community building, as the small population of Muslims grow even closer during Ramadan and Eid, sharing this special time with the only other people who understand its significance and importance.

7.1 Ramadan

Islam is very much a religion of rhythms: prayer in the course of the day; Friday worship in the

105 Naji, Interview 1, April 19, 2015

106 As of the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Population by Religion and Sex in St. John's (CMA), Newfoundland and Labrador, there were 1020 recorded Muslims living in the city.

course of the week; and fasting and celebration during Ramadan and Eid, in the course of the year. During Ramadan the prayer lives of Muslims intensify. Those who commonly miss *salat* prayers during the regular year are keen to complete all five of the daily mandatory prayers during Ramadan. As well, there is an extra prayer added in the middle of the night. This prayer can be said anytime (Ramadan or otherwise) but it becomes particularly important during Ramadan, especially for the pious. Furthermore, personal prayers, *dua*,[107] become more of a focus. One participant, Mona, states that during Ramadan one's prayers will be answered exponentially more than prayers outside of Ramadan: "In the month of Ramadan my prayers are definitely more engaged, I'm more mindful of my prayer because [during Ramadan], everything is multiplied. Any action that you do is multiplied, the reward is multiplied so [you] get as much as you can out of it."[108]

Prayers during Ramadan are not to be missed. It being the holiest of months, Muslim's believe their prayers are heard and accounted for at a much higher rate during Ramadan. Many of the participants I interviewed recounted feeling much more concentrated in their prayers and therefore much closer to God during this time. While all prayer time has the expectation of full psychological engagement, practically that does not happen, but during Ramadan there is a much greater effort put forward to engage in each prayer as fully as possible.

Ramadan occurs to commemorate the Prophet receiving the revelation of the Qu'ran and is rich with metaphorical significance. The fasting during the month reminds Muslims that there are less fortunate people than themselves and that food and drink are luxuries that are not to be taken for granted. In part, Ramadan is sympathy for our fellow person through prayers for peace, charitable donations to the poor, and visiting friends and family. There is also symbolism in the way one's body is treated. The body is considered a vessel for one's soul, so health and wellness must be a priority for

107 *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L.: Oxford University Press, 2003 defines *Dua* as "An appeal or invocation; usually refers to supplicatory prayers in Islam. These are often performed kneeling at the end of the formal ritual prayers (salat) and are accompanied by a gesture of out raised hands with the palms facing up.

108 Mona, Interview 2, 2015

such a vessel. By breaking the rhythm of unhealthy eating habits one not only physically, but spiritually worships that vessel.

For many of the Muslims I interviewed Ramadan acts as a tool to revitalize their faith, a way to begin a new prayer habit that is hoped to carry on through the following months. One participant, Mohammed, talked at length on the bodily health aspect of Ramadan:

> Ramadan is not just to starve. If it was to starve it wouldn't make much sense, whats the point of it? First of all, Ramadan has so many benefits; health wise its like a detox that our bodies require every now and then. You can look up 'intermittent fasting,' which is what Ramadan is. Its supposed to be a good recovery month, detoxifying time for your body, where your body takes a break from all the stuff we keep giving it on day-to-day basis, non-stop.[109]

The health benefits of Ramadan have been noted in the scholarly literature; one study concluded that fasting during Ramadan "caused significant reduction in weight, basal metabolic index, waist circumference in males as well as females," and that "neither systolic nor diastolic blood pressure changed significantly during Ramadan fasting [and] there is decrease in anxiety levels."[110] These findings directly corroborate Mohammed's anecdotal view.

7.1.1 The Night of Power

Many of this study's participants spoke of the "Night of Power" in reference to prayer during Ramadan. The idea is that there is a night during Ramadan in which whatever you ask for in petitional prayer will be rewarded. This prayer is not one of the five daily prayers, but one unique to Ramadan, and takes place in the middle of the night. After this prayer is recited, one says the *dua*, the personal prayer, at which time God is petitioned. For example, a single woman may ask God to provide a husband in the coming year. It is believed that if this prayer and *dua* are performed on this special night

109 Mohammed, Interview 2, July 26, 2015

110 Saiyad, Shaista, Mubassir Saiyad, Usha Patel, and Anita Verma. "Effect of Ramadan fasting on anthropological and physiological parameters." *NHL Journal of Medical Sciences* Vol. 3 (1, 2014), 59.

the prayer is certain to be answered.

During Ramadan no one knows when the Night of Power will be, though it always occurs sometime during the last ten days of Ramadan. Therefore, during these last ten days many people's prayers are intensified even further and many make special effort to pray at this late hour. The prayer time comes sometime after the final daily prayer, after sunset, but before the pre-sunrise prayer, generally somewhere between midnight and 3:00 a.m. This period is considered a very holy time, as angels descend and come close to us.

Mona recounted crying fits during one particular Night of Power. She spoke of a great emotional release and a feeling of intense closeness with God during prayer. One may not experience the "Night of Power" each year. Some participants told me that, try as they might by praying every night, some years they just did not have the experience. Mona commented on the emotional intensity of the Night of Power:

> In Ramadan there is a night, its called 'The Night of Power.' We don't know when it is. It is, based on the *hadith*, within the last 10 days; it will occur anytime within the last 10 days of the month of Ramadan. So it could be on the 20th or the 30th, or anything in between. When that night is happening you will feel it, thats the night where any prayer, anything you ask, will get answered. And you will know. Like I felt it many times, when you ask for a prayer and its that night you feel it. You can kind of feel the feeling go within you, your heart just becoming heavier and you're like 'I feel something.' And you know you're prayer is answered. When I felt it...you become super emotional, I was crying so much I was asking God for forgiveness, its kind of like some sort of power that hits you.[111]

One way to conceive the Night of Power is that it provides a much needed opportunity for the unexpected, for something magical to happen. Uncertainty is not a popular part of Islam, but the Night of Power is hedged with a mood of expectancy coupled with the uncertain. Muslims wait patiently during the final ten days of Ramadan in the hopes that they may experience the Night of Power, producing anticipation and a healthy anxiety of joyful expectation. The Night of Power allows for the presence of a mystical element within a religious life that is often quite regimented. It is no wonder

111 Mona, Interview 2, June 12, 2015

then that, as Mona mentioned above, the Night of Power can often times be met with an outward emotional response from the receiver. Experiencing the Night of Power is the fulfillment of the hope and hard work of prayer and steadfast observance of their Islamic faith.

7.1.2 Ramadan Prayer

During the month of Ramadan I observed prayer in two locations: Memorial University and the Masjid-an-Noor Mosque. The prayer at MUN was hosted by the Muslim Students Association (MSA). The MUN prayer took place in the Landing, a large room in the University Centre that can be rented out to various groups. There is no mosque on campus and the Landing is a room big enough to house prayer for a large congregation. The Mosque is located on Logy Bay Road, bordering the city in the East. It is the only mosque currently operating on the island. What follows are short accounts of what I observed on trips to both the Landing and the Mosque during prayer times.

The MUN Landing

I attended prayer at the MUN landing on July 6th, 2015, in the middle of the month of Ramadan. Initially I had some trouble finding the room, having never been there before, and there were no external markers, religious or otherwise, indicating the room. The prayer I attended took place immediately after breaking fast. On this particular evening 9:01 p.m. was when the congregation was permitted to break their fast.

When I found the Landing, I initially stayed to the side of the room in the hopes of simply observing. There were many warm greetings passed between various men in the room. It seemed to be that, while there was an obvious feeling of group cohesion, distinct ethnicities often tended to be grouping together. This does not seem strange as, while all those present share a faith, it is natural to gravitate toward people who speak the same language as you and with whom you may have befriended

at an earlier time through cultural and linguistic ties. There were no women in attendance; I later learned that they were involved in the same activity, just a few floors above us in the MSA headquarters in the University Centre.

The entire group of men sat on various tarps that had been thrown on the floor of the room. Atop the tarps were dates, yogurt, and juice. These are foods traditionally eaten at the beginning of breaking fast, a sort of appetizer before the prayer which precedes the main meal. As expected, most of the men were young looking, university age, from a distinguishable variety of ethnic backgrounds. A few wore traditional dress, generally long white robes, while most dressed in modern, Western attire.

At one point I was kindly invited to join a group of men on one of the tarps. Though I was reluctant at first, wanting simply to observe, the group insisted. I was greeted warmly by the men there, each in turn shaking my hand and introducing themselves. At the scheduled time a tall, young man stood apart from the group and commenced the call to prayer to signal not only that prayer was to start soon but also that the day's fasting was over. I was offered dates and juice which I accepted graciously. I was taken aback by the warm welcome and noted how I, surprisingly, did not feel like an outsider. Once the fast was broken, the men cleared the tarps, removed them, and laid down new, clean, larger tarps. These new tarps were to act as make-shift congregational prayer rugs.

The prayer was led by a man older than the rest of the congregates, most likely in his fifties, and obviously not a student. He commanded attention and respect, acting as the imam for the prayer that followed, leading the young men in worship as they prayed along with his words and followed his prostrations.

The prayer itself lasted approximately ten minutes. The *imam* lead the men as they moved up and down in unison quickly echoing the words and movements of their prayer leader. All heads stay bowed in supplication during the solemnity of the prayer. While the men prayed I sat off to the side and observed quietly, trying my best to be respectful of their privacy during the ritual.

After the prayer ended some people left the tarp to socialize and begin eating; others stayed to offer their *dua*, their personal prayers. Prayers during Ramadan are said to be rewarded exponentially more than prayers at any other time of the year so many individuals try and pray longer and for more personal wants and needs. Eventually, everyone was finished praying and I left the men to their much deserved meal and socializing after a long day of fasting and prayer.

The Mosque

I corresponded with Ibrahim Shaikh, one of the acting imams at the Mosque, and he invited me to attend a prayer service there as his guest. On July 8th, 2015, I went to the Masjid-an-Noor Mosque for daytime prayer, at around 1:00 p.m. I parked the car and waited for a while, unsure whether or not prayer had already begun and not wanting to interrupt. I was called to from the Mosque door by Ibrahim and he ushered me in quickly and found me a seat directly in the prayer space just as the prayer was about to commence.

Ibrahim then took his spot at the front of the room and began to lead the other two men attending in prayer. While prayer during Ramadan is expected to yield a larger amount of attendees to the Mosque, on this particular day there was, to my surprise, only two men in attendance for prayer. This prayer seemed to be performed more speedily than the prayer I had observed previously at the MUN Landing. I wondered whether this had to do with the time of day, in the middle of the Western work day, and thought perhaps the speed of the prayer reflected the need of those in attendance to hurry back to work.

Shortly after the prayer began another, younger, man joined. It is not necessary for prayer to begin and end at a certain time; there is an interval of allotted time within which one's prayer must be performed, but a prayer can begin and end at any time within this allotted period. This is evidenced by how the third man seemed to make up “missed-time” near the end, continuing his prayer after the others had already finished.

After the main prayer the two original attendees began their *dua*, retreating to separate corners of the prayer space in personal prayer and reflection. Their faces hinted at a great level of concentration and emotion in whatever prayers they were silently recounting in their own minds. Around this time the third man left for a brief moment and returned with his wife and infant son. His wife began her own prayer, not in the main prayer space, but behind it and off to the side. The man himself began his *dua* while the baby rolled and crawled around happily on the prayer rug.

Upon finishing his own *dua* Ibrahim rejoined me and seemed in high spirits and ready to answer questions I may have had about what I had just witnessed. As well, the two original men came over and greeted me kindly. All three seemed pleased to hear of my research, Ibrahim even mentioning Dr. Jennifer Selby, a professor in the Religious Studies Department, the high esteem she is held in and what a great friend she is to the Mosque. The prayer officially over, I proceeded with my formal interview with Ibrahim.

I returned to the Mosque later that evening for the 10:40 p.m. prayer, which Ibrahim assured me would be very well attended. I arrived a little while before prayer-time and once the doors were unlocked, I followed three men into the Mosque, exchanging only "*Salaams*." They proceeded to the main prayer area in preparation for the prayer.

Ibrahim showed up shortly after, this time dressed in a traditional long, clean, white robe. The colour contrasted starkly against his dark complexion and coal black hair. Again the gracious host, Ibrahim encouraged me to sit anywhere I would like, whether in the main prayer space or just beyond. I took a post just outside the prayer space in a small plastic chair.

More and more men begin filing in, exchanging greetings and jokes while intermittently checking their phones, anxious for prayers to begin. Just as at the MUN Landing, it was incredible to see the variety of cultures and ethnicities and to hear the accents and broken English of fellow Muslims

as they greeted one another. It is a rare sight to see people of different nations and cultures, perhaps even nations and cultures who are political enemies, come together for a commonality that transcends differences of opinion, language, and culture. At the Masjid-an-Noor Mosque, as with many mosques in the West, english is the common tongue though popular and religious words in Arabic are also often exchanged.

At 10:35 p.m. a young boy proceeded to the microphone at the front of the prayer space and began the gentle and melodic call to prayer. His father was beaming in obvious pride. Above the boy's head hung the Mosque's clock, an important fixture, front and centre for all to see. Symbolically, the clock signifies the importance of time to Muslim prayer practice. The precise attention to time perhaps signifies the desire to hold chaos and disorder at bay.

As more and more men showed up, I was somewhat self-conscious in witnessing people at a very private and vulnerable time. At one point, just before the prayer was to begin, an elderly man approached me and began motioning to me, moving with his hand rapidly up and down. I was unsure what he wanted until, in strained but very deliberate English he said, "I...Pray...Here," while pointing at my chair. I stood up, smiled and let him have the seat.

The Mosque was at capacity, just as Ibrahim assured me it would be, and the prayer began. The imam (not Ibrahim) lead with the voices of the congregation rising and falling at the traditional intervals. Bodies bend first at the hip, then to the knees, foreheads touching the ground in full prostration. If the prayer was enacted at a more rapid speed these movements would most likely look like some sort of physical exercise or yoga. The floor shook and you could hear the walls creak as the congregation of men prostrated in unison.

There were more men here in traditional or religious attire than at the University prayer but the dress was not overly formal. Hats, jackets, and hoodies were all left on during prayer. Except for the imam at the front of the congregation, there was little hierarchy to the service or the congregates

location in the prayer space - at least, none that I could detect.

The prayer ended and some left the prayer space while late-comers were given time to catch up before men began returning to perform their *dua* and special Ramadan prayers. The whole process took a few short minutes but would repeat itself in a matter of hours, then again and again, forever.

7.2 Eid

There are actually two Eid celebrations. One immediately follows Ramadan, and a second takes place a few weeks later. Both celebrate the end of Ramadan, and each acts as a celebratory reward for the hard work of fasting and religious service. Eid is generally marked by parties, feasts, and visiting with friends and family. A common custom during Eid is the slaughtering of lamb with which the meat gets divided in thirds, one for yourself, one for friends, and one for the poor. This custom is still in effect, though now it is also common to give money to the poor as opposed to meat.

It is worth noting the succession of charitable thought and action: during Ramadan one is to fast, a purpose of which is the recognition that there are those in the world who do not have enough to eat. The practice of fasting during Ramadan is coupled with charitable work during Eid, when Muslims are expected to give to the poor and those in need.

What follows below is an account of an Eid celebration I attended that took place the day after Ramadan ended.

7.2.1 Eid Celebrations

On the second day of the three-day Eid celebration the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MANL) held a celebration at l'Ecole des Grands-Vents, the Francophone school on Ridge Road in St. John's. The school was used chiefly because the Mosque is too small to

accommodate the number of people who attended, a fact indicative of the growing Muslim population in the city.

Upon entering the school the mood was noticeably quite jovial. There was considerable talking (even shouting), laughing, and, from the children, occasional screaming. The place was quite raucous, so loud that I had difficultly having conversations with the people I was meeting. In surveying the crowd, I suspected I was likely the only non-Muslim in attendance.

Cake, pop, and pizza were served and the event had the mood of a great birthday party. I did not see any traditional food being served and I remembered that Ibrahim had mentioned they would not bother cooking this year, but order out and enjoy their time with friends and family rather than be concerned with preparing food.

For the most part, men and older boys occupied one room while women and children were in another. This segregation was not strict, however, and many women or men passed from one room into the other. The separation was most likely a cultural or traditional divide rather than holding any religious significance. The separation of the sexes seemed no different than the stereotypical separation of the sexes that occurs at any get-together among families in the West, for instance Thanksgiving: men in the living room watching TV, women in the dining room preparing the table. Children of course ran from one room to the next, back and forth.

I spotted many familiar faces from both the University and the Masjid-an-Noor Mosque, and exchanged greetings; but for the most part, people were too involved in the party to notice me. One young man I spoke with described Eid as the "reward" for the hard work of Ramadan, an idea I was to hear repeatedly from my interview participants.

The whole event was oriented toward the children. There was a bouncy castle and face painting. Little girls ran around dressed like princesses and boys buzzed about in a sugar fit. Ibrahim forced some food into me. I wanted to capture the mood of Eid instead of analyzing it too much in the

moment, so we sat and sipped lemonade and chatted.

Eventually I left, rather unceremoniously, after saying a few quick goodbyes. I could still hear the noise of the party from the parking lot as I got into my car.

7.3 Summary

Ramadan is the most holy of times in the Islamic calendar and Eid, which follows, its most important time of celebration. Ramadan is a month of fasting and purification that has both physical and spiritual implications. It recharges the adherent, reaffirming the level of piety required to be a good Muslim. Ramadan reinstates prayer schedules, reinforces the appropriate purpose of food, and emphasizes the health of the body. Eid is the reward one receives after this ascetic month, the "pat on the back" for the expression of piety. The real reward is, of course, an increased awareness, a religious identity forged through proactive spiritual diligence, of oneself as a Muslim; the reinforced, or returned, intensity and importance of prayer.

It would not be fair to say that Ramadan and Eid are misunderstood parts of Islamic life in the city, more accurately, they are virtually unknown parts. Muslims in St. John's observe Ramadan and Eid, but these rites lack the cultural pervasiveness found in Muslim majority nations. One effect of Ramadan and Eid being culturally marginalized is a feeling of separation between the Muslim population and the general population of the city.

One positive outcome of this isolation is the Islamic community building a wider ethnic tolerance between Muslim peoples; I myself evidenced in my visits to the Mosque, the MUN Landing, and the Eid celebration Muslims of various national and cultural backgrounds uniting in religious observance and celebration. In their homelands Ramadan and Eid are most likely large and widespread celebrations, now these celebrations are relegated to one mosque and one Eid party celebrated by the

Muslim population of St. John's as a whole, without division among language and ethnicity. Among the Muslims in St. John's I have witnessed a battlefield camaraderie: they are small and culturally segregated group, and it is only in their coming together that they exist as a group at all. They depend on one another in order to form a community. What is more, this is a community that is chosen - the individuals in St. John's are not forced to go to mosque by social pressure, but do so because of their faith. This ties them together as believers unwilling to allow a geographical and cultural change affect their faith. In line with this, the Muslim population in St. John's is far too small to support multiple groups of Muslims of varying ethnicities. So in the Mosque, during Ramadan, and Eid celebrations, in each others' homes, Muslims of various languages and ethnicities, former strangers (and sometimes enemies) are united for the common goals of Islam and community. This phenomenon is not unique to Muslims immigrating to the West, but to those immigrants who live in smaller to medium cities, such as St. John's. As larger cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal may have the population to further sub-divide immigrants into ethnic majority mosques.

Chapter 8 - The Dimensions of Prayer

While the main purpose of prayer in Islam is reverence of God, this chapter will approach Muslim prayer in light of a number of its different dimensions and functions. When participants were asked about the purpose or function of prayer, several common notions emerged; prayer is about communication and connectedness, and also has a formative role in shaping one's moral life. In the words of Naji, "we [are] asked to do so [pray] as Muslims, so we can be in constant connection with Allah. Praying also makes you a good person in every aspect. Its like invisible discipline. You cannot be a bad person and praying [at] the same time."[112] What are the implications of the experience of prayer as an opening up of lines of communication with God? What does prayer do in a person's life? As, "at different times, some meanings come to dominate, others recede and become less important, and still others may come to be rejected."[113] As a personal activity, prayer is rooted in the particulars of individual lives at one time. Prayer may play a role in riding oneself of guilt and shame stemming from a bad personal decision. At other times, it may function to console someone over the loss of a loved one.

From my research it seems clear that prayer helps the adherent in various ways. It is not simply a mandatory, mechanical series of actions and words, but akin to a spiritual therapy. Beset by the limits to our reason and will to understand and work on the world, people engage in ritual. Many interview subjects commented on the calmness they feel while performing prayer and how that calmness radiates throughout the day. For immigrant Muslims in St. John's, prayer often transpires in the context of the anxieties and stress of relocation, acculturation, and living in a Muslim-minority city.

112 Naji, Interview 1, April 19, 2015

113 Mun'im Sirry and A. Rashied Omar. "Muslim Prayer and Public Spheres: An Interpretation of the Qur'anic Verse 29:45." *Interpretation* 68 (1) (2014), 43.

The primary stated purpose of *salat* (prayer) is to embody reverence. Muslims perform prostrations and recite from the Qu'ran as acts of supplication and signs of devotion to Allah in the tradition of the faith. In return a Muslim believes their prayer will be rewarded by God likewise, with love, protection, and good blessings. Prayer is both reverential and petitional. On the one hand, it is Muslims' duty to pray in a way that reveres Allah, states their belief and their love for God. On the other hand, prayer is also petitional in that a Muslim's relationship with Allah allows them to ask of God.

Practically, prayer provides the adherent with the means to encounter the secular world with calmness and divine reassurance. Prayer provides a tranquil space in which an individual reenters the world with a perspective reinforced by the presence of Allah. Peter Civetta says that "*salat* prepares the believer to deal with the world, to live out the path prescribed by Allah."[114] While the point of prayer may seem simple, the reverence of God, I believe that prayer is also both a means to temporarily exit the physical world and a utility to relieve stress and anxiety and provide consolation. This points to what Civetta's argues: alongside reverence, the ritual has calming and centering functions.

8.1 The Suspension of Time and Space

Contemporary spirituality is informed by the idea that both the body and soul need periods of renewal. "Turning off" has become a popular phrase in modern times, referring to the periodic need to disconnect from fast pace of contemporary life, including the constant stream of socializing and technological mass communication. Through a variety of means such as yoga, tai chi, mindfulness, retreats, and enjoying nature, many people today seek out activities that suspend the hectic daily rhythms of modern life.

114 Peter Civetta, "Body/Space/Worship: Performance Theology and Liturgical Expressions of Belief." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 13 (3) (2008), 8.

The ability to escape from the secular world, with its stresses and deadlines, provides adherents entrance into a dimension of prayer that exists outside the secular spatial and temporal world. Therefore, Muslim prayer lends itself to the suspension of time and space: "the salat provides a protected space in which practitioners first disengage with their immediate and social context and then engage with and commit to the foundational concepts of the Islamic tradition."[115] I make the claim that in this way prayer is for Muslims a traditional and ongoing form of mindfulness. As Siegel writes in *Mindfulness: What is it? Where did it come from?*:

> Mindfulness is not new. It's part of what makes us human—the capacity to be fully conscious and aware. Unfortunately, we are usually only in this state for brief periods of time and are soon reabsorbed into familiar daydreams and personal narratives. The capacity for sustained moment-to-moment awareness, especially in the midst of emotional turmoil.[116]

This condition is essential to the efficacy of prayer, both in its petitional value and its practical benefits. In this way, when entering upon this sacred time, the clock stops and the walls no longer exist. The adherent is no longer at work, in a cubicle at 12:40 p.m., but simply praying. In ideal forms of prayer Muslims are not supposed to think about work or where they are, or what they have to do next but instead become unaware of such thoughts. Raya makes the point clear: "[in prayer] you feel like you don't know what's happening around you."[117] Mindfulness and other forms of meditation borrowing from Eastern religions and philosophies have become popular in recent years in the West. Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the world's leading scholars of mindfulness, defines it as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment."[118] Prayer, for Muslims, acts as its own form of mindfulness. The adherent is to be so directed and concentrated on the task at hand that he or she exists

115 Sirry &Omar, 47.
116 Ronald D. Siegel, Christopher K. Germer, and Andrew Olendzki, "Mindfulness: What is it? Where did it come from?" in *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness,* ed. Fabrizio Didonna, New York: Springer (2009), 17.
117 Raya, Interview 1, July, 2015
118 Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10 (2) (2003), 145.

only in the moment. Zia states that this mindful quality of prayer is rooted in its proper execution, stating;

> It depends when I pray properly. Praying properly is very crucial in Islam. Not all prayers will be accepted, as God said. To make sure that your prayer is accepted you have to be a hundred percent devoted to God. Its kind of like meditation. You have to understand every single word you are saying, you have to be completely absorbed in it, otherwise your prayer might not be accepted.[119]

For Muslims the amount of concentration required for prayer is a unique benefit which in itself functions as just that sort of mindfulness practice; they are forced to shut off in order to attain communication with their God, their most prized possession. According to Amaya, "some people even go into the spirit and totally forget where they are. They just fall off and they are in another realm entirely."[120] Because of the repetitive structure of daily prayer times, the opportunity to experience this state of suspension occurs five times a day, everyday. When prayer is over, the adherent is spiritually satisfied and benefits from a re-contextualized outlook on future activity and time - viewed by a much more spiritually grounded participant.

In *The Space Between Here and There: The Prophet's Night Journey as an Allegory of Islamic Ritual Prayer,* Simon O'Meara describes *salat* in terms of a tripartite structure:

> Ritual prayer involves the following stages. Initially, there is the preparatory stage, namely, the making of ritual ablution, or wudu Then there is the stage of departure, namely, the pronouncement of the consecrating 'Allahu Akbar.' Then there is the journey proper: the liminal, in between stage. This stage necessitates the execution of the prayer itself, including the recitation of the prescribed number of Qur'anic verses. Finally, there is the stage of return, namely the pronouncement of the deconsecrating 'al-salam alaykum' at prayer's end.[121]

O'Meara speaks of "the liminal" in the above quote. This concept is defined by Kevin Hetherington in the *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*:

119 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015
120 Amaya, Interview 1, July 22, 2015
121 O'Meara, 235.

> *Liminality* is a term associated with rites of passage through which a person's identity and status is transformed at different times in his or her life. First systematically studied by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in the book *Rites of Passage* (1960), rites of passage were noted to have a three-stage structure. The first stage, *separation*, saw the person about to undergo the transforming rite have all previous markers of his or her identity removed. In the second stage, *liminal*, that person, removed from his or her community, would undergo some form of ritual ordeal or initiation ceremony before in the third phase, *re aggregation*, being returned to his or her community with a new identity. Such rites are often associated with the passage between key life stages including transition from childhood to adulthood or marriage or with the rites associated with the death of a person and his or her burial.[122]

Muslim prayer has the characteristics of liminality—a place and time where the normal rhythms and routines are set aside. Prayer allows for a purposeful connection and communication with Allah, followed by return to secular time and space.

As several interview participants discussed, to completely suspend time and space in prayer is an ideal not easily reached. Distraction from prayer comes in many forms: environmental sounds, reoccurring thoughts, the needs of children. Despite these distractions, Muslims must perform *salat* and employ various methods to achieve proper prayer conditions. Niloofar Haeri's *The Private Performance of Salat Prayers* explores the the prayer practices of Iranian women. The author notes that during private prayer the women are "in their bedroom at home, they lower the lights, partially draw the curtains, close their doors, and are left alone by others who know they are praying. They whisper their prayers, but the whispering is audible. People hold off on calling each other at prayer times."[123] It would be fair to note here that the suspension of time and space is not a challenge unique to Muslims living in the West. Logically, Muslims living anywhere would have issues with concentration and distraction during prayer; a man praying near a busy street in Alexandria would have to try and ignore the sounds of traffic, children playing, and merchants selling goods. The environmental factors that hinder concentration in prayer may actually be less in St. John's, a relatively small and quiet city

122 Kevin Hetherington, "Liminality," in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*. Edited by Dale Southerton, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications (2011), 868.

123 Niloofar Haeri, "The Private Performance of *Salat* Prayers: Repetition, Time, and Meaning."*Anthropological Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2013), 16.

(especially compared to the largest Muslim city centres), though the cultural understanding of the conditions needed for the individual to engage properly in prayer (easy access to mosques, the rhythms of the work day and week, the support of a vibrant religious community) are somewhat lacking. That is to say, though Alexandria is a much larger, busier, and noisier city than St. John's, when the call to prayer is announced through its streets, the population is, in the least, alerted that they are entering a temporal period in which many, if not most, of its citizens aspire to pray in a calm, undistracted way.

8.2 Prayer, Anxiety, and Consolation

We tend to divide our experiences into different domains, including emotional, psychological, spiritual. In prayer, each of these various domains are active. Mohammed stressed that "the best feeling [prayer] gives you is the relief. I'm not worried about anything now, I'm within the hands of God and I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, I'm in complete harmony. This is the ultimate feeling that you will get."[124] Another participant, Amaya, explained clearly: "most times when I feel very stressed out, unhappy, or somehow depressed and I pray, I find peace."[125] Though psychological benefit is not the doctrinally stated purpose of prayer, many of the participants in this study mentioned the psychological efficacy of prayer: prayer addresses the experiences of worry, anxiety, and stress. It also has social and psychological implications in the form of consolation. In *Religious Consolation Among Men and Women: Do Health Problems Spur Seeking?,* Ferraro and Kelley-Moore define religious consolation as:

> Seeking religious or spiritual meaning, comfort, and/or inspiration when faced with personal problems or difficulties. Religious consolation is a form of coping with stressors that incorporates religious, spiritual, or transcendent meaning systems.[126]

124 Mohammed, Interview 2, July 22, 2015
125 Amaya, Interview 1, July 22, 2015
126 Kenneth F. Ferraro and Jessica A Kelley-Moore, "Religious Consolation Among Men and Women: Do Health Problems Spur Seeking?" *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 39, no. 2, 221.

Prayer practice is ordered, regulated, and patterned. Grounded in centuries of tradition, it has formal and universal dimensions. The ordered nature of prayer can be understood as a counterweight to chaos, uncertainly, and burdens that "ordinary" life often imposes. In the immigrant context, uncertainties and anxieties are often amplified. As Amaya says;

> Prayer helps in dealing with everything. There is no problem prayer cannot solve. So prayer is the 'master key.' If you are confused about anything, you don't know what to do, just pray. One way or another you feel positive about doing it, or negative. God will guide you either way, 'do it' or 'don't do it.' The ultimate thing is when you pray, and you know you pray sincerely, you find peace. So prayer works for everything.[127]

By repetitively and rhythmically revisiting foundational values and beliefs in and through prayer, the stresses and anxieties in the adherent's daily life are placed within a container that can hold, smooth and support life's challenges.

Speaking about how prayer assists in his on-going transition from Bangladesh to St. John's, Zia pointed to the practical benefits of prayer. "I think [prayer] did [help]. It is still helping me to cope with the environment. As long as I can concentrate in my prayer, as long as I find the prayer is being meaningful, it helps me a lot."[128] Zia discussed school, work, marriage, and children. In each case, he viewed prayer as playing a significant role in managing these circumstances. Prayer is also an aid in the immigrant context. Zia did not leave Bangladesh, so much as flee; his friends and family were concerned for his safety. While Bangladesh is by large majority a Muslim nation, there is division among the two major denominations of Islam, Sunni and Shia, as well as opposition between Islam and Hinduism, Bangladesh's other major religion. These divisions, especially between Islamic and Hindu groups , have resulted in issues of social inequality and violence. Zia was very public with his faith in Bangladesh, wearing his clothes and facial hair in a way that signified his Islamic faith, and those close

127 Amaya, Interview 1, July 22, 2015
128 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015

to him feared this public display would bring unwanted attention and possibly make him the target of a violent physical attack. On the advice of friends and family he applied for a student visa which is how he came to study at Memorial University in St. John's. Though not a refugee, the experience of leaving is made all the harder due to it being somewhat imposed on him. He feels particularly sorrowful about having left his mother behind. In one of our interviews, Zia had to stop talking about his mother for fear of becoming emotional. We were discussing how important women are in Islam, especially mothers. Zia's mother is very dear to him and he directly links this respect and admiration for her, not only with his own love for her, but with the love, respect, and admiration for mothers inherent in the faith.[129] Prayer is a way in which Zia both confronts the stresses of his relocation and feels closer to his mother.

Some of the participants, Mona, Amaya, and Zia, expressed a need to return to prayer during difficult times in their lives. Others were adamant that during difficult times, if not for prayer, they would have felt lost, even defeated. This loss or defeat is felt most readily in individuals who had a developed prayer practice, but then, for various reasons, stopped praying. In such cases, individuals found their way back to prayer in order to deal with the anxieties and stress of day-to-day life. Mohammed, recalls such an experience:

> At some point I [stopped] pray[ing]. I just neglected that for different reasons. You can see that in the quality of your life. Its nothing like magic, but I think the fact that we are a body, if someone passes away you look at it, the body didn't change, its just missing the soul which no one knows what's the secret behind that. The soul is gone the body is dead. So my point is as much as we take care of our bodies and we feed it and we make it to the gym and we do enjoy the time that we go dining outside and doing activities I think we need some spiritual feeding too. And if we keep that balance I think thats the key to a happy life. Whether that be in praying or having a relationship with God or whatever you believe in. It makes a big difference and I've tried it.[130]

Ibrahim, speaking of his congregation at the local Mosque, noted that “some people find peace

129 Zia, Interview 2, July 3, 2015
130 Mohammed, Interview 1, March 11, 2015

in prayer; in difficult times, they turn to prayer."[131] While prayer looks toward the blessings of God, in life not everything is experienced as a blessing, and hardship is inevitable. It is not the adherents' prerogative to question God about life's challenges and disappointments. Rather, God is sought after for consolation. Mohsen's words in this regard are paradigmatic. Speaking directly here of consolation, Mohsen says, "[there] are many times in your life you are feeling desperate or you're feeling you need some sort of help from someone who is so powerful: that's mentally needed at the time. Even though its not being answered, still you feel its going to be answered and [it] give[s] you a relief at the time."[132]

Thameem Ushama, a professor of Islamic studies, in his article "Is Islam a Religion of Ease or Hardship,"supports the above claims , saying that not only is God a source of consolation, but that Allah understands the limits and fallibilities of man in this need:

> Islam recognizes man as a unique being. Of course, he is not an animal; he is not an angel; he is not a Satan or Devil or Demon. Islam takes a holistic view of man. It admits his weaknesses as well as his strengths. It looks at the nature of man based on his creation. It treats him as an integrated being. It realizes that man has a physical aspect with instincts, impulses and natural drives, a discerning intellectual power and a soul with spiritual passions. It requires man to perform such tasks that he is able to fulfil. It does not impose on him something he cannot do or carry out in his life. It inspires him to maintain the balance between obligations and abilities, with fairness and without stress, satisfying the needs of body, mind and soul in harmony.[133]

Salat should not be conceived merely as a crutch to see a person through a difficult time, though an element of assistance certainly does exist, but rather as a tool in working through life's unfortunate, yet inevitable, occurrences.

Mohsen says that "when I'm facing a big problem which I don't have an answer for I think, 'okay, that's a time for prayer'."[134] Seeking consolation through religion or prayer is not a method to turn away from the world or utilize an ineffective or archaic device to grieve, rather a way in which to

131 Ibrahim, Interview 1, July 8, 2015
132 Mohsen, Interview 1, April 20, 2015
133 Thameem Ushama. "Is Islam a Religion of Ease Or Hardship? an Analysis of the Muslim Scripture and Patterns of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him)."*Asian Social Science* 11, no. 1 (01, 2015), 65.
134 Mohsen, Interview 1, April 20, 2015

take comfort in, not only something that holds the possibility of some sort of transcendent comfort, but an object of affection and familiarity. Such objects may act as tools to realign emotional stability. Dennis Klass, speaks of the psychology behind such a method in *The Nature of Religious Consolation for the Bereaved*:

> Most adults can easily identify a solace- filled object to which they repair when they need soothing: a memory of a special place, a person who is no longer physically present, a piece of music or art, an imagined more perfect world, a sense of divine presence. It comes in those moments when we know that which consoles us, not just know about. It comes when we hear the music, not just listen to it.[135]

Klass goes on to say that this "solace- filled connection with something that transcends our usual plane of living can be as concrete as God as an ideal father or mother, or as abstract as the architecture of a Bach fugue."[136] Adherents do not "fall back" on such objects as music, art, or, in the case of this thesis, prayer, as a respite or retreat; rather, prayer allows individuals to find comfort and grounding as a means to be consoled and and reconciled to circumstances.

It is important to emphasize here that I am not conceptualizing prayer as a kind of infantile security blanket, a notion found in some theories of religion as consolation, "as consolation soothes and alleviates the burden of grief, but does not take away the pain."[137] Rather, prayer is a method, a map, a way through challenges and difficulties. As one participant, Raya, said:

> Each one of us in our life [goes] through difficult times and difficult periods. What I found, [in] Islam [and] my relationship between me and Allah, during this period of time, [a] difficult period of time, [was] I really experienced how good a Muslim I am, how my relationship [is] with Allah. Because when my relationship with Allah is very good, during [a] difficult time I feel myself safe and very calm and I can go through all the difficult periods in peace and in good mood and try to get over it.[138]

Sometimes bad things happen, and sometimes these are not simply stumbling stones, but

135 Klass, Dennis. The Nature of Religious Consolation for the Bereaved. *Academia.edu,* February 22, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/2247617/The_Nature_of_Religious_Consolation_for_the_Bereaved, 10.
136 Ibid, 11.
137 Ibid, 18.
138 Raya, Interview 1, July 20, 2015

boulders that are impossible to lift. Through prayer, one accepts the limitations of such an event and instead of removing the rock, must learn to go around it or live under it. Prayer facilitates an engaged and hopeful encounter with life's obstacles. Zia said, speaking of the role of prayer in helping his life since immigration, "[prayer] been a comfort for me since I have arrived in Canada."[139]

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, anthropologist Clifford Geertz explores in-depth the symbolic nature of religion. In doing so he notes the uniqueness of the religious symbol system saying how religion "moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them."[140] Ritual is the imaginative performance of the link between those wider realities and the human experience. These rituals in turn play a consolatory role for the individual or group by allowing the negative aspects of life to be "sufferable, capable of being lived through without serious emotional disturbance and even, if possible, with a bit of mirth."[141]

In *The Bare Facts of Ritual,* Jonathan Z. Smith, a scholar specializing in ritual studies, says:

> I would suggest, among other things, ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables (i.e. accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things...[Ritual] relies...for its power on the perceived fact that, in actuality, such possibilities cannot be realized.[142]

Here Smith highlights an important distinction between ritual and everyday reality: the ritual of prayer for a Muslim is an ideal that cannot be precisely met in their day-to-day activities. No one can be in communication with God all the time, nor can anyone supplicate and give full surrender to God. There is work to be done, food to be eaten, children to raise. And while all these activities can be

139 Zia, Interview 1, April 23, 2015
140 Geertz, 112
141 William C. Shephard, Book Review of "The Interpretation of Cultures." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1975), 635.
142 Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual". *History of Religions* 20 (1/2) (1980), 124.

interpreted as a form of worship, they lay distinctly outside the liminal period of prayer that is entered upon during *salat*. Instead, the prayer ritual is a time and space in which a person enters a dimension of ideality, one that entails the imagination and production of life as it ought to be - the individual in complete concentration and surrender to Allah, focused on the words and movements of prayer, distinctly separate from all that is secular. The ritual itself stands in contrast to the secular, but also provides a model for everyday life. *Salat* therefore is the production of what should be, or could be, in life lived outside the ritual frame.

Suspension of space and time in particular are crucial to achieve consolation through prayer. Despite the inevitability or interchangeability of a circumstance, the time and space to pray remain constant. As long as one has the faculty to pray, they are engaging in a performance unalterable by forces of the world. From this suspension one is able to gather the calmness and gravity needed to, if not change their situation, at least accept it. Therefore, prayer is an activity that a Muslim immigrant can carry with them regardless of geography or secular environment. Faith and its personal expression through prayer are items of cultural and religious self-identity that cannot be left behind or forgotten, they are ingrained in the individual. This makes prayer a powerful device for Muslim immigrants wading through the troubles and anxieties of relocation, helping them to connect with Allah, calm their minds, and feel closer to their homes, their people, and their cultures.

8.3 Prayer Function and the Immigrant Experience

For many of immigrants, departure from their homeland, friends, and family is not entirely a free choice, but is compelled by dire circumstances, such as political unrest and war. Often, when someone leaves home under such conditions, they do so knowing they will likely never return. Such contexts informed the emigration of several of the participants in this study. The dynamic of emigration

often creates strains on one's self-identity. Massoud, who left Iran knows this experience well: “Back home I was somebody for myself. You arrive here and then before you know it, all of a sudden now you got no past and you got no future, and the present is not that attractive either. You are just a guy on the street, a total stranger.”[143]

In such circumstances, the consolatory attributes of prayer are most valuable. Of the participants I interviewed Mona, Zia, Amaya, and Raya all cite prayer as the main tool used to reconcile their mixed emotions upon their relocation. Some left home by choice, others by necessity, but all of them say prayer helped enable them to handle such a dramatic relocation. Mona explains how pray helped her with coping with the stresses of immigration:

> Honestly at the beginning I was just praying because I had to, I was not thinking about it. For me, I wasn't in that much of a culture shock, I kind of like fit in and if I didn't, I didn't care. I didn't mind if I was going to get bullied by people because I could defend myself. I was always very outspoken and if someone said something I would tell them off. So I never went to prayer as a way to take me away from my sadness or from my trauma, at the beginning. But then afterwards, after being here for three years I kind of missed it [home], I became homesick. I was like 'I wanna go back, I'm homesick' and I couldn't go back at the time. So I just went to God to kind of give me ease, to make it easier on me, to make me forget a little bit about Lebanon.[144]

Changes to the ritual practice and religious lives of the immigrants I interviewed tended to move in two different directions. First, for some individuals there is a tendency to be less observant, followed by the recognition that something was missing in their spiritual lives, and an effort to return to their former practices, often times with more emphasis and commitment than in their initial religious life. On the other hand, some people, upon relocation, immediately grew more religious, stronger in their convictions, and more steadfast and observant in their prayers and other rituals. Mona, who exemplifies this latter case, said:

> We were kinda modern in Lebanon. When we came here it became more strict. It wasn't that my family became strict on us. It became that this is all that we got here. It's a Western society, your religion is not

143 Massoud, Interview 1, February 19, 2015
144 Mona, Interview 2, June 12, 2015

> dominant, you don't have mosques everywhere reminding you of prayer, you don't have people everywhere wearing headscarfs. So for me, and my other two siblings that were following the religion more, we felt that this is what's going to keep us Muslims. If we hold on to our religion, if we practice more and know more about it, we're going to stay in this religion, but if we ignore it and just pray or fast, and do the regular five pillars, we felt like we were going to lose our faith. That's why we became more...not strict, that's why we started following more.[145]

In the process of relocation to St. John's, many things happen and change. The language is English, the dominant religion is Christianity, the food is strange, and the people are, for the most part, the descendants of white Europeans. What control does the immigrant have to reinforce their own identity in such circumstances? One way is through prayer. Prayer may be said to never change, but in situations of irrevocable difficulty such as flight from one's homeland and relocating to a new country, prayer takes on different dynamics. Mohammed articulates the importance of prayer in navigating his own immigration experience:

> When you are praying for something and are consistent, you will get it. I've seen it happen to me, even, I believe, coming here. Its not easy coming here, you have to get a Visa, so there's a big rejection probability. But back then I prayed and prayed and my prayer was 'if this is going to be a good step for me then I pray for God to make it happen, if not I pray to God he wouldn't make it happen.'[146]

8.4 Summary

This chapter endeavours to show that prayer serves functions that go beyond both the performative and explanatory purpose of prayer. Many adherents will testify that the purpose of prayer is reverence toward God. I am willing to admit that of course this is true but I also assert that while this is the most easily explained purpose, prayer also serves other primary functions. Among the participants in this study prayer has practical, pragmatic functions, relieving anxiety and stress, as well as serving as consolatory device.

The suspension of space and time works very closely with the reverence of God. If one feels the

145 Mona, Interview 1, June 3, 2015
146 Mohammed, Interview 2, 2015

impulse to pray and revere one's God he or she could do so at anytime that this need is insisted upon. For Muslims, prayer is performed five times daily, whether or not one is in "need" of prayer. The rhythmic nature of prayer provides a 'built-in' space and time for worship, a side-benefit of which is opportunity to process new experiences and receive some measure of comfort and consolation in the context of difficult changes. Prayer is most certainly, for the emic point of view, about reverence, and has a meditatively quality. Amaya, in speaking to me on this particular quality said, "when you are praying, I believe, you should be in a meditative mood. Its a spiritual thing, you shouldn't be distracted with worldly things. Just concentrate, you are communicating with God. It's a meditative spiritual process, it's different from when you are going about your daily things."[147]

But related to this more religious or spiritual dimension are the psychological and social functions--prayer's consolatory powers and its ability to relieve stress and anxiety. In separating oneself from the distraction of secular life, the individual, engaged fully in their spiritual performance, is allowed the requisite psychological/emotional space and time to reinforce the primary values of one's existence. Mona speaks about these more functional aspects of prayer:

> In prayer you kind of disengage yourself from this world. So when you're praying its your time with God so you're trying to disengage yourself from this world, you try to relax your mind as much as possible and just get the worries of daily life and you're having out of your way and just focus on what your doing because if you're struggling through something it is through that prayer that you might get an answer to that struggle.[148]

These functions of prayer become most evident in its consolatory properties. The adherent is capable of processing the disappointment of impossible situations or life circumstances, not by ignoring or overcoming them, but through acceptance of them, as a plight with which God will assist and provide consolation, as Klass emphasizes:

> Within the dialogue between sufferer and helper, a shift in perspective evolves as the wound is seen

147 Amaya, Interview 1, July 22, 2015
148 Mona, Interview 2, June 12, 2015

> within a pattern of meaning. Because suffering is alienation from self, others, and the larger world, consolation is experienced, they say, as a homecoming.[149]

Consolation is a particularly evident aspect of prayer, especially prominent in those interviews with immigrants who have come to St. John's not entirely by choice, but due to some necessity. While their relocation is, for the most part, irrevocable, the unchanging nature of prayer consoles them as their connection with God remains unbroken. They benefit further still from prayers ability to help relieve stress and anxiety.

These psychological functions of prayer lay below the surface of the performative quality of prayer. Simply observing prayer, one might miss the role of prayer in dealing with what might be called "mental health." But speak with individuals about their experience of prayer, and it is clear that salat also entails this dimension, and is integral in processing some of the difficulties that constitute the immigrant experience.

149 Klass, 9.

Conclusions

This thesis has explored the Muslim ritual of prayer, *salat*, and has investigated what change prayer practice has undergone by Muslim immigrants in St. John's. This investigation yielded results that confirm that prayer practice undergoes changes, in the context of immigration. There are variations in the physical performance of prayer, but even more important are the changes and dynamics that take place below the surface, the psychological and emotional domains. Prayer for many of my participants plays a key and expanding role in dealing with the emotional stress of change brought on by immigration and has taken on a distinctly comforting and consolatory quality.

This thesis endeavoured first to understand the Muslim ritual of prayer, its movements, words, and meanings. This was achieved by both investigating select scholarship on the subject as well as approaching prayer in its lived religious form through the words and lives of the participants interviewed. One of the more notable catalysts for this change has been the informed sharing of traditions among various cultures of Muslims in the city, most notably at the University, as well as the utilization of the social media (especiallyYoutube) as a means to seek out “authenticity” in prayer practice.

Alongside the investigation of “how” prayer is enacted by the participants was a thorough look at where and when prayer is enacted. This was an investigation into the ritual lives of immigrants, most of which came from Muslim majority nations. For this reason, the spatial and temporal attributes of prayer have undergone a necessary and sometimes dramatic transformation. In many of the participants' home nations it was easy to pray: work and school schedules were organized around mandatory prayer times; there were Mosques around every corner; and, prayer was an integral part of the mass culture. In St. John's this is not the case, and many Muslim immigrants have to augment their

own personal and professional schedules in unique ways; improvising prayer around break times, or trying to select courses at school where time slots would fit with their prayer schedules. Prayer spaces in particular require flexibility and improvisation. These improvised prayer spaces include empty classrooms, secluded corners of a newspaper office, or the backrooms of restaurants. Prayer now requires elements of improvisation and, especially in issues of prayer location, spontaneity. This ability to adapt, whether by choice or necessity, acts a means by which an immigrant can more immediately integrate their new and past cultural and religious lives; while the individual's surroundings and social norms are all new and changing, prayer cannot halt for an acclimation to these changes, and in this way facilitates much needed a continuity for the adherent from past to present.

With time and space for prayer being elements to be reevaluated for Muslim immigrants, so too are other cultural and religious paraphernalia. The role of women in the West varies dramatically from the home nations of many of the participants whom I interviewed. For many, most notably the women, there is a great liberation in coming to Canada. They express how many more rights they have here and how much more free they feel. Even something as seemingly insignificant as driving at night, an activity looked on unfavourably in some of the home nations of these immigrants, is a new and embraced freedom. However, some conflict occurs as women grow more accustomed to their new society and with its greater emphasis on the equality of the sexes. For instance, in almost all Mosques in Canada men and women are segregated, and in some this segregation is more radical than others. As women come to expect the equality they are granted they have begun to question this segregation, or at least its limits.

Ramadan and Eid are further examples of cultural traditions that are forced to change for the Muslim's in St. John's. In Muslim majority nations Ramadan is month in which whole cities virtually shut down completely. The vigilance of prayer and reflection is at its highest during this Holy Month. For the Muslims in St. John's, Ramadan is not culturally recognized by the majority of the population,

and comes and goes relatively unnoticed. Muslims are still forced to operate in the city as normal, going to work, to school, and writing exams, and this poses challenges to the desire to closely observe Ramadan. It presents a challenge to a Muslim to work in a hot kitchen all day, not allowed even the smallest sip of water, in observation of Ramadan fasting.

Through all these changes, personal and cultural, spatial and temporal, if there is one item the people I interviewed cherish it is the practice of prayer. When they do find the time and procure a quiet and appropriate space, they can pray. When they do so, the concerns of secular life are, for a time, set aside. When an individual participates in prayer they are participating in something unchanged and transcendent, that suspends time and transfers them from their physical space into a liminal spiritual space. Prayer is prayer no matter where it takes place; in a mosque, on the side of the road, in the backroom of a restaurant. The actions, intentions, and concentrated presence of the adherent are accessible in any location. Prayer in Lebanon is the same as prayer in St. John's.

The activity of prayer is possibly the one unchanging cultural and religious artifact the immigrant carries with them. Despite evidencing the variations in physical performance of prayer, the idea of prayer and its immediate, attainable access, makes it the sole activity that is no different for the Muslim at any time or location in their lives. Prayer cannot be taken away from the individual. What I have endeavoured to highlight in this thesis, is that prayer takes on some new dynamics or functions relatively unique to the immigrant Muslim.

This new role is involves matters of comfort and consolation. The performance of prayer links the practitioner immediately to their tradition, history, culture, and ultimately themselves, especially the part of themselves they developed in their home nation and do not wish to lose in their new surroundings. The practice has a mindfulness quality by its necessary concentration and present effort. It contains a meditative quality that provides, not only a link with Allah, but the quality of clearing one's mind of all other things so as to be directed to that of most importance, God.

Many immigrants experience the shock of relocation and Muslims are not exempt from this phenomena Immigrants often times attempt to hold on to elements of their former culture and religions as comfort; things such as language, literature, music, and food. Muslims likewise do this, but are especially diligent in their holding on to prayer. The added benefit here is that prayer can be performed anywhere, with little or no secondary requirements other than the individuals presence. What is more, prayer is not just words or movement, it is a process by which the individual partakes in their most basic duty, reverence to God. It provides the basic need of comfort and consolation in times of stress and anxiety, a role which is magnified by the requisite need of the immigrant to condition themselves to a new and very different cultural and religious environment. Prayer is an active tool for the consolation of the immigrant. As Heiko Henkel says:

> The salat inserts a sequence of practice into everyday life, prompting practitioners to assert and enact belief as the unequivocal commitment to Islam while at the same time enabling both changing interpretations of the Islamic tradition and the affirmation of Muslim community across different interpretations of Islam. The Muslim ritual of salat is thus important for the reproduction of a particular collective representation, but not necessarily in the form of a shared classifactory system, and ideology, or common projects of political and social reform.[150]

There are still questions that persist beyond the scope of this thesis: How is prayer changed in immigration of Muslims in other non-Muslim, but non-Western nations, such as parts of Asia of Eastern Europe? How is prayer performed by the children of immigrants and what role does it play in their integrated lives and cultures? Can Muslim forms of prayer be further utilized in any systematized way asa source of mindfulness training for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike? As well, there are issues that have been touched on in this thesis but are still emergent, and it will be interesting to watch their development in the coming years and research: the role of women in prayer, and how technology influences the prayer lives of Muslims, are two key issues.

150 Henkel, 489.

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Appendix A - Sample Interview Question Set

1. Could you state your name, date of birth, and nationality of origin?

2. Where did you grow up Muslim?
- What was that upbringing like?
- Would you consider your religious life at home to be strict or formal?
- What sorts of religious routines and practices happened at home with family during this time?
- If you identify as a Muslim immigrant, do you identify by the nationality of the country from which you came or are you a displaced persons? For example, are you a Palestinian who was living in another country beside Palestine before coming to Canada?

3. Was the transition to Newfoundland dramatic, easy, necessary?
- Was this change brought about by religious factors, politcal, personal, cultural, economic? Or perhaps more than one?
- What is different, if anything, about being a Muslim in Newfoundland than the place from which you initially lived, or places you have been?
- In what ways has the physical geography been a factor in changing your ritual life? For example, during Ramadan and the slight variations that might exist between your sun up and sun down and the meal times between here and your former home. As well, the geographical distance between here and important holy sites of pilgrimage, such as Mecca?

4. What does it mean to you to be a Muslim?
- Do you consider yourself a practicing Muslim?
- What are your most foundational beliefs?
- What ceremonies are most important to you? What is your role in them?
- What times are religious? Prayer times, calender dates?
- What religious roles are there (in family, work, community)? And which ones to you find yourself playing?
- In a diaspora community such as Newfoundland, do you find yourself taking a more active role than you would at home? For example, providing religious guidance and advice? Or help in general?

5. How public or private is your spirituality?
- How do you feel about the overall kinship and organization of the Muslim Community in St. John's?
- What is different, if anything, in the feeling and practices of being a Muslim in Newfoundland than the place from which you initially lived, or places you have been?
- In what ways do you hope that future generations of your family will benefit from your relocation? What things will be gained? What things might be lost?

6. What aspects of your day to day life do you consider religious?
- Is work religious? Cleaning? Eating?
- Are there experiences you consider non-religious?

7. What are some typical Muslim ritual activities?

- Do you perform rituals or actions that you consider religious? Even those not done in a religious context? Could you describe some such rituals?
- What ceremonies or traditions are especially significant to you?

8. How often do you pray?
- Why do you pray?
- In your opinion, is there a power to prayer?
- How is praying at home here different than at home in your native land?
- Do you ever pray in a group setting? Such as at the Mosque? How is that different than praying alone?
- How do you negotiate your work schedule and prayer schedule? Do you pray at work? What are the difficulties of this?
- Can prayer be selfish?
- How is prayer different at home, the Mosque, and at work?

Appendix B - Interview Participant Database

Taqwa Mahmood

18 yr old student/ lived in Iraq, Syria, and Malaysia/ of Palestinian heritage/ employee at Mohammed Ali's

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-03-17	Audio Recording
Topics	*immigration, role of women, prayer and worship, family life, prayer space, the mosque, solitary vs group prayer*	
Interview #2	2015-07-07	Audio Recording
Topics	*prayer during Ramadan, the 'Night of Power', the Mosque, the direction of prayer, women in the Mosque*	

Massoud Kashefi

57 yr old employee at Mohammed Ali's/ born and raised in Iran/ moved to Newfoundland after revolution/ philosophical but not 'religious'

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-02-19	Audio/Video Recording
Topics	*tradition vs modernity, immigration, revolution, religion as action, freedom of religion, solitude*	

Mohammed El Bakri

25 yr old owner and operator of Aladdin's Hookah Bar/ born and raised in Lebanon/ Palestinian heritage/ came to Nfld to study engineering

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-03-11	Audio/Video Recording
Topics	*immigration, Palestinian plight, superficiality of relocation regarding religion, prayer and health*	
Interview #2	2015-07-26	Audio Recording
Topics	*Ramadan, fasting, prayer mindset, relief from prayer, challenges of being a Muslim in NL, power of prayer*	

Mohsen

Middle aged owner and operator of small business/ Iranian immigrant/ came to Nfld as wife is a doctor/ finishing PhD

	Date	Method	Topics
Interview #1	2015-04-20	Audio Recording	
Topics	*religion vs secularism, adaptation and lifestyle, necessity of prayer whether there is an outcome/God or not (psycholoigical)*		

Naji Mahmoud

29 year old student at MUN/ originally from Libya/ a moderate religious family and background/ came to religion on his own

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-04-19	E-mail Correspondence
Topics	*prayer by choice, purpose of prayer, difficulty of finding Halal food, perpetually becoming a better Muslim, public Islam, praying at work*	

Md. Ziaur Rahman

Student at Memorial University/ originally from Bangladesh/ very pious/ works at MUN Counselling Centre/ leads a meditation group

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-04-23	Audio Recording
Topics	*immigration, struggles of Muslims in St. John's for halal food and access to Mosque, negotiating work and prayer, true Islam*	
Interview #2	2015-07-03	Audio Recording
Topics	*physicality of prayer, group prayer, power of prayer, intention, female prayer leaders, mothers, women's religious knowledge, innovation*	

Mona Shannir

Student of Social Work at MUN/ moved to NL when she was 11/ very devout and vocal in her beliefs/ lots of involvement in MSA

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-06-03	Audio Recording
Topics	*physical act of prayer, school schedules, suspension of time and space, Ramadan, changes to her prayer, Mosque vs. Home*	
Interview #2	2015-06-12	Audio Recording
Topics	*power of prayer, Ramadan, engagement in prayer, Women in Islam, Youtube and Phone Apps, 'Night of Power'*	

Amaya

student at MUN, originally from Nigeria, some siblings who have converted to Christianity, very liberal upbringing

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-07-22	Audio Recording
Topics	*power of prayer, God's direction, consolation of prayer, Christianity, 'the spirit', hypocracy in Islam,*	

Ibrahim Shaikh

Imam at the Mosque, originally from India, works for Rogers

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-07-08	Audio Recording
Topics	*being a Muslim, prayer in the Mosque, parents, women and mothers in Islam*	

Raya Majid

Originally from Iraq, from a moderate religious family, hoping to go into social work program, husband a physician, father a professor, mother of an toddler girl

	Date	Method
Interview #1	2015-07-20	Audio Recording
Topics	*the function of prayer, the positive effect of daily prayer, asking of God, fasting, Eid, Ramadan, magic and supernatural*	

Appendix C – Thesis Interview Coding Chart

	Prayer (Salat)				
	History/Practice	*Home*	*School*	*Work*	*Mosque*
Amaya Int #1 (Jul.22)		17.25, 19.50,			
Raya Majid Int #1 (Jul. 20)	7.00,				6.20,
Ibrahim Shaikh Int #1 (Jul. 8)	19.35,	20.40,			46.30,
Taqwa Int #1 (Mar. 17)	8.00, 8.55, 12.45	26.48, 27.40	31.15,	10.45, 31.15	12.45 (1), 32.00
Taqwa Int #2 (Jul. 7)	7.10 (41), 9.45, 10.15,				19.10 (42), 20.55,
Mohsen Int #1 (Apr. 20)	7.30,	5.00,			
Massoud Int #1 (Feb. 19)	2.14,				
Zia Int #1 (Apr. 23)		1.32,	9.15 (11),	34.55, 35.55, 36.25 (12)	26.00,
Zia Int #2 (Jul. 3)	18.45,				2.55, 34.15, 48.00 (49),
Mohammed Int #1 (Mar. 11)	25.20 (19),	22.15,			42.20 (23),
Mohammed Int #2 (Jul. 26)	15.45, 16.10,				
Mona Int #1 (Jun. 3)	45.50, 49.10,				
Mona Int #2 (Jun. 12)	3.15, 22.35 (38), 32.50 (39),		51.45,		51.30,
Naji Int #1 (Apr. 19)		Q. 4,		Q. 38 (29),	

Space & Time		
Changes	*Difficulties*	*Differences*
	17.45,	35.40 (62), 36.45
26.25 (59),		
3.20,	5.3, 20.14	7.3, 26.48
3.30,	11.00,	12.40 (5)
	17.40 (8),	33.55 (9),
20.45 (44),		12.15 (43),
14.00, 15.45,		16.30 (17),
4.55,	8.45,	5.50 (30), 9.00,
11.45 (36),		
	Q. 11 (25),	Q. 27,

The Power of Prayer		
Negotiation	*Effect*	*Function/Consolation*
(63),	24.50 (60), 26.40,	26.25, 26.50 (61), 41.40
18.45 (57),	14.50 (56),	8.25 (55), 24.15 (58),
	22.35 (50), 27.30 (51),	29.50 (52), 33.45 (53),
25.55 (2),	30.15 (3), 36.50	32.55 (4),
14.50, 22.50,		
25.40,		35.15 (6), 43.45 (7)
23.30,	12.11, 101.10,	52.48 (10),
30.10, 31.05, 45.20 (13)	14.10, 52.45 (15)	47.50 (14), 55.00 (16),
29.15, 35.45 (47),	31.00 (45), 31.35 (46),	
20.30 (18), 36.00, 37.20 (20), 37.50, 38.30 (21), 46.30, 48.40 (24)		40.50 (22),
	14.30 (68), 36.10 (70),	19.10 (69),
27.20 (31),		51.30 (35),
9.15,	19.00 (37),	41.15 (40),
	Q. 24 (27),	Q.35 (28), Q.36,

Special Topics	
Women/Gender	*Ramadan/Eid*
49.50 (65),	
42.00,	32.20,
50.30 (54),	
7.3, 12.45	
24.50 (43), 27.50,	3.10,
18.15,	
40.15 (48), 41.50, 45.25,	8.00,
	16.30, 22.15
	0.45 (66), 2.45 (67),
28.50 (32), 35.40 (33), 49.10 (34)	25.35, 59.00
42.50, 57.50,	21.40 (42), 46.00 (41)
	Q. 11, Q. 13 (26), Q.20

Appendix D - ICEHR Approval Statement

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Office of Research - IIC2010C
St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 Fax: 709 864-4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	**20150148-AR [Resubmit]**
Approval Period:	November 12, 2014 – November 30, 2015
Funding Source:	SSHRC **[Sought]**
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Barry Stephenson Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Title of Project:	*Religious life story research with individuals from the Muslim immigrant community in St. John's*

November 12, 2014

Mr. Scott Royle
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Royle:

Thank you for your email correspondence of November 12, 2014 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project.

The ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* to November 30, 2015.

If you need to make changes during the course of the project, which may raise ethical concerns, please forward an amendment request form with a description of these changes to icehr@mun.ca for the Committee's consideration.

The *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual update form to the ICEHR before November 30, 2015. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide the annual update form with a final brief summary, and your file will be closed.

The annual update form and amendment request form are on the ICEHR website at http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr/applications/.

We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Gail Wideman

Gail Wideman, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research

GW/lw

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Barry Stephenson, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Director, Research Grant and Contract Services