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Preserving my Arab Self while Finding my Home in Canada: First Generation Recent  
Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and  
Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation

By

Riham Al-Saadi

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the School of Social Work  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2022

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Preserving my Arab Self while Finding my Home in Canada: First Generation Recent  
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Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation

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October 28, 2022

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the essence of Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation is a developing area of research and cultural studies in Social Work amongst other fields. Critical Race Theory (CRT) allows for contextualizing this phenomenon within the temporal and environmental structures in which it is experienced. The current study used qualitative inquiry; particularly psychological phenomenology was applied to arrive at the essence of acculturation. A total of 27 Arab immigrant emerging adults living in Windsor-Essex participated in this study and five themes emerged to inform how they understand the acculturation process. Arab immigrant emerging adults understand acculturation as a mutual dedication of both their Arab ethnic group and the larger Canadian society. Arab immigrant emerging adults engage in significant emotional processes to navigate polarized forces stemming from living through their Arab heritage culture and the dominant culture in the Canadian society. Respectively, Arab immigrant emerging adults navigate through structural and systemic practices that may challenge their acculturation and seek opportunities for equitable opportunities to become active citizens in their respective Canadian community.

## DEDICATION

My dedication is gifted to the souls that are inseparable from me; the ones that made this step possible. I dedicate my dissertation to the soul of my angel sister Sherihan whom I have never met but hear her voice in every prayer. I dedicate it to the soul of my great grandmother Khadijeh, Um Ahmed, a warrior woman who loved me in an inexplicable way, and favoured me in many ways, while also engraving in me qualities that I will eternally hold. I dedicate it to the souls of my grandfathers who engraved in me my Palestinian roots, my values, and principles that I will forever cherish.

I dedicate this dissertation to my idolized father who fought many battles to ensure I live this moment; to him this is an ultimate achievement. I hope I made you proud today dad. I promised you and fulfilled that I am unstoppable. I dedicate it to my mother, mama Bisso, whose prayers are determinant for every progressive step in my life, and whose warm heart fulfills my universe with love. Mama, I love you and now I can relieve you from listening to my consistent worries... until the next major duty hits! I dedicate it to my beloved sisters, Sama and Miram, who are the ultimate fire, the backbone, the source of motivation and belief that I can make this happen today and achieve more tomorrow. You both equally contributed to making this a reality. After all, you had to handle all my stress and my indefinite coffee supply the most!! We will remain the fire love triangle! Finally, little did I know that the name Ahmed will never escape me. I dedicate this dissertation to the unique soul of Ahmed. Your voice as you utter “I am proud of you”, made this dissertation possible. I sense your heart and how it is even happier than I am that I acquired my dream today.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate all my appreciation to every participant, every voice that made this dissertation a reality. I am hoping today I fulfill my promise: your voices are being heard. I am dedicated to continuing this journey and collaborate with you more until, one day, we can collaboratively say, our idolized Canada is a reality.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xv
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS.....	xvii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Canada's Multiculturalism.....	1
Arabs in Canada .....	3
Sociopolitical Implications of Identifying as Arab in Canada .....	3
Differences in Cultural Values between Arabs and Dominant Canadian Society .....	7
Dissertation Overview.....	12
CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	13
Critical Race Theory .....	13
Race as a Social Construct .....	13
The Origins of Critical Race Theory.....	15
Intersectionality.....	16
Racism and Oppression from a CRT Perspective .....	19
Critical Race Theory and the Education System.....	22
Further Applications of Critical Race Theory and Nondominant Groups .....	26
CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	29
Literature Review Outline.....	29
Overview of Arab Immigrant Literature.....	30
Defining an Arab.....	30
Ethnic Identity: Arab Ethnocultural Identity .....	32
Ethnic Identity Development .....	32

The Arab Ethnocultural Identity: An Overview.....	36
Arab immigrants in the U.S. ....	38
Arab Ethnicity and Racial Categorizations .....	38
Insight into Post-Immigration Experiences.....	43
The Sociopolitical Impact of September 11 and Beyond.....	47
Arab immigrants in Canada .....	50
Canada’s Colonialism: Canada as a White Settler Society .....	50
The Canadian Settler Society’s Perspective on Arab Immigrants .....	54
Parent-Youth/Emerging Adults’ Relations .....	55
Arab Immigrants in Canada vs. the United States: A Comparison.....	61
The Role of Religion.....	61
Social Support and Social Support Networks .....	65
Summary of Studies on Arab Immigrants in Canada and the United States.....	66
Acculturation.....	68
Two Levels of Understanding Acculturation.....	68
Host Society’s Role: Welcoming Communities .....	68
Emerging Adulthood.....	70
The Current Study and Research Questions .....	72
Research Question(s) .....	74
CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY.....	76
Research Methodology .....	76
Research Methods.....	79
Participants Inclusion Criteria.....	79
Sampling and Recruitment.....	80
Recruitment Strategies .....	82
Procedure .....	84
In-depth Individual Online Interviews.....	85
Research Assistant Training .....	90
Analysis Procedure .....	90
Coding Methods.....	93
Ethical Considerations .....	95
Trustworthiness.....	96
Researcher’s Positionality.....	98

A Life-long Refugee .....	98
September 11 at 14-Years-Old: Two Milestones.....	101
Contextual Influences .....	107
Active Participation in the Arab and Canadian Worlds .....	108
<b>CHAPTER V: FINDINGS- DEMOGRAPHICS AND THEMES .....</b>	<b>114</b>
Participant's Demographics Characteristics .....	114
Analysis and Organization of Themes .....	120
Theme I- Tensions Between Arab and Canadian Culture while Settling in Canada .....	122
Collective Decision-Making for Important Milestones .....	125
Family, Peer, and Community Relations: Within- and Cross-Ethnic Relations .....	127
Perception of the Canadian Society: Shared Values and Differences.....	133
Education is Valued in Both Cultures.....	135
Respect for Diversity & Decisions to Integrate in Canadian Society .....	138
Theme II- The Impact of Language on Sense of Belonging: Arabic as a Preservation of Identity and English as a Gateway to Settler Society.....	143
Bilingualism in English and Arabic as the Ideal.....	151
Theme III- Meeting the Challenges Created by the Settler Society.....	155
Cultural Differences and Respect for Diversity .....	160
Determination to Prove Worthiness.....	164
Theme IV- Maintaining an Intersectional Arab Identity in Colonial Settler Society .....	172
Intersectionality of the Arab Identity.....	172
The Different Perceptions of Arab Racial Identity .....	174
Maintaining a Religious Identity in Colonial Canada.....	181
Theme V- Perspective on Participation, Relationship, and Interactions with the Canadian Society in Windsor Essex .....	185
Participation – Is it Equitable? .....	185
Education System Experiences: Support for Newcomers and Segregation.....	186
Post-Immigration Mental Health and Emotional Challenges .....	192
A Focus on Challenges and Stressors of Immigration.....	193
Racism and Discrimination within Arab Ethnic Community and Canadian Society.....	199
COVID-19 Impact on Access to Equitable Opportunity .....	210
Acculturation as Understood by Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults.....	212
<b>CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>214</b>

Living through the Arab and Colonial Canadian Cultures.....	216
Language and Sense of Belonging: Arabic as Identity vs. English as a Gateway .....	220
Education System Experiences: Segregation and Challenges of Cultural Brokering .....	221
Meeting the Challenges of Colonial Society-Determination to Prove Worthiness.....	225
Within and Interethnic Racism and Discrimination.....	228
The Intersectional Arab Identity .....	235
Two Special Cases- Chaldean vs. Christian and Kurdish-Syrians.....	238
<b>CHAPTER VII-CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>241</b>
Study Contributions and Implications.....	241
Recommendations for Future Directions .....	243
Practice Recommendations .....	243
Policy Recommendations.....	251
Social Work Education .....	254
Scholarship and Research .....	255
Limitations of Study .....	258
Concluding Remarks.....	260
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>289</b>
Appendix A: Consent Package .....	289
Appendix B-Recruitment Flyer.....	294
Appendix C- Recruitment Email for Stakeholders .....	295
Appendix D- Recruitment Email for Participants.....	297
Appendix E-Social Network Recruitment .....	299
Appendix F-Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Guide .....	301
Appendix G- Definition of Terms.....	304
<b>VITA AUCTORIS .....</b>	<b>309</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Sample of Recruitment with Local Agencies, Community and Cultural Group Organizations	113
Table 2 The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis	121
Table 3 Overview of Participants' Demographics	132

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Religious Affiliation	141
Figure 2 Nationality	141



## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- Consent Package	292
APPENDIX B- Recruitment Flyer	297
APPENDIX C- Recruitment Email for Stakeholders	298
APPENDIX D- Recruitment Email for Participants	300
APPENDIX E- Social Network Recruitment	301
APPENDIX F- Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Guide	303
APPENDIX G- Definition of Terms	306

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

CRT- Critical Race Theory

BII - Bicultural Integrated Identity

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Canada's Multiculturalism**

Canada is known to be a global leader in welcoming immigrants and refugees, and immigration continues to contribute significantly to population growth. Overall, immigrants constitute 22% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Through its enactment of the Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and The Multiculturalism Act (1988), Canada was the first nation to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy and generate a framework that protects the rights of Canadians to preserve their cultural heritage while fostering active participation in the larger society (Berry, 2016; Ng & Metz, 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016). Further to the development of immigration-related policies, the Immigration Act of 1976 included refugees as a separate entity. This is an important milestone in the history of immigration and one that solidifies Canada's commitment to humanitarian goals globally (Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001, 2002).

Multiculturalism describes a society composed of diverse ethno-cultural groups and one that embraces *equitable* participation of *all* existing cultural groups (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Berry, 2016; Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Cvetkovska et al., 2020; Kubota, 2015; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). In terms of ethnocultural diversity, multiculturalism can be explored at three different levels: as a measure of demography, as an ideology, and as a governmental or policy response. Demographically, multiculturalism describes a society composed of diverse cultures, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, age, ability, class, gender, and sexual orientation among other demographic identifiers (Berry, 2006; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Xu, 2019). As an ideology, multiculturalism describes individuals and groups' attitudes on accepting or rejecting diversity. As a governmental response, multiculturalism describes governmental

efforts to develop policies and programs demonstrating acceptance and promotion of diversity (Berry, 2016; Xu, 2019), in addition to ensuring equitable rights are protected for diverse groups (Berry, 2016; Government of Canada, 2019; Koustova, 2013; Lagasi, 2013, Xu, 2019).

A common critique of multiculturalism is whether equitable participation among all diverse groups can, in fact, be achieved (Gillborn, 2015; Kubota, 2015). It is evident that some groups are more privileged than others in Canada. For example, policies in Canada are derived from the English and French bilingualism framework that require people living in Canada to establish fluency in one of the two official languages (Berry, 2016; Kubota, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Maisonneuve et al., 2014). Further, multiculturalism has been regarded as a means to divide citizenship and disrupt the sense of social cohesion (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). With the continued growth of diversity in Canada, the dominance of some groups' interests over others can become an obstruction to equitable citizenship of all existing ethnocultural groups.

In Canada, there continues to be a perceived reluctance from collecting racially based data under the notion of maintaining equity for all. However, studies on multicultural and multiracial communities have demonstrated that existing policies and practices governing citizens and residents of Canada are structurally shaped to promote and dominate White privilege and White ideals over others (Samuels-Wortley, 2021). For example, a study on racialized youth's perception of Canadian law enforcement has revealed that Indigenous and Black youth believe they are treated differently by Canadian police than their White counterparts. This resulted in their reluctance to engage as active citizens and collaborate with Canadian police in bettering their communities (Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Arabs are one of the ethnocultural groups in Canada that are subject to the dominance of the English and French bilingual framework and the Eurocentric approaches.

## **Arabs in Canada**

*Arab* is a term that represents individuals and groups whose ethno-linguistic identity is characterized by identification with one of the 22 countries of the Arab League (Masters & Sergie, 2020; Mir, 2019), who speak Arabic as their native language, and whose history of civilization generated a common Arab culture and identity (Masters & Sergie, 2020; Middle East Policy Council, 2020; New World Encyclopedia, 2008). Despite their common ethno-linguistic characteristics, the Arab culture is characterized by a complex and diverse composition that is tied to colonialism of European nations (Mir, 2019).

Canadians who claim Arab ancestry are close to one million, representing a population growth of 34% since 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Further, the recent resettlement of more than 40,000 Syrian refugees has factored into recent population growth among Arabs in Canada (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2019). Looking closely at these statistics in Canada reveals that this population is comparatively younger than the general Canadian population. As of 2016, 45% of Arab immigrants in Canada are below the age of 24 compared to 32% of their Canadian counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2016; Waseem, 2016). According to the data, Arabs primarily reside in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta; 43% have selected Ontario as their home, with the majority being of Moroccan, Lebanese, Algerian, or Egyptian descent (Canadian Arab Institute, 2019).

## **Sociopolitical Implications of Identifying as Arab in Canada**

Since the September 11 attacks in 2001, it has become important to acknowledge the sociopolitical implications of identifying as ‘Arab’ when examining Arabs acculturation experiences in Canada and the United States (Maira, 2004; Rasmi et al., 2012; Thomas, 2015; Zafar & Ross, 2015). The attacks had a significantly negative impact on all aspects of Arab

immigrants' experiences regardless of their length of residency and immigration status in Canada and the United States (Akram, 2002; Awad, 2010; Kumar et al., 2014; Matera et al., 2020; Wannas-Jones, 2003).

In both Canada and the United States, the larger/dominant society has attributed *terrorism* to specific cultural and religious affiliations, including Arabs as a cultural group and Muslims as a religious group since September 11 attacks. In turn, this has led to negative implications on Arab immigrants' adjustment experiences (Amer & Hovey, 2012; Awad et al., 2019; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015). Since the September 11 attacks, Arab immigrants reported a significant increase in their acculturative stress levels (Awad, 2010; Matera et al., 2020; Wrobel et al., 2009), and had difficulty adapting both psychologically and on a sociocultural level (Awad, 2010; Howell & Shyrock, 2003; Matera et al., 2020). The negative impact has been more severe for Arab immigrants identifying with the Islamic religion (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Kumar et al., 2015; Oberoi & Trickett, 2018; Wrobel et al., 2009). Psychologically, depression and anxiety levels have significantly increased among Arab immigrants in Canada and the United States (Al Wekhian, 2016; Amer, 2014; Amer & Hovey, 2012). At the sociocultural level, the larger society's perceptions of Arab immigrants as violent or dangerous resulted in the stigmatization of Arab immigrants and increased their exposure to discrimination, consequently leading to their social isolation. Establishing and maintaining connections with the rest of the community has become a serious challenge for Arab immigrants (Awad, 2010; Hamdan, 2007; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Mason & Matella, 2014; McCoy, et al., 2016).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has added unique restrictions and limitations that exacerbated immigration and refugee challenges in Canada. Discrimination and structural inequalities embedded in the increased health measures and policies governing border closures

has reinforced discrimination amongst refugee and asylum seekers (Abo, Alrob, & Shields, 2022). New considerations were implemented that created a hierarchy amongst refugees and asylum seekers that divided individuals who were deemed deserving vs. non-deserving. The introduction of new terms such as “essential,” “survival,” and “security,” has created some room to inequitably grant access to some refugee and asylum groups and not others. Increased poverty, social isolation, and mental health challenges are some of the common challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers during the pandemic (Abo, Alrob, & Shields, 2022). Accordingly, the uneven burdens created by the pandemic differently impacted migrant workers and resettled refugees (Abo Alrob & Shields, 2022) with Syrian refugees being of these groups (Rabiah-Mohammed et al., 2022).

Canada’s commitment to its humanitarian role has contributed to it being one of the prime resettlement sites for Syrian refugees globally (Government of Canada, 2019). Between the years of 2015 and 2016, Canada resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees, with Windsor being one of eight mid-sized cities that received the most Syrian refugees per capita (Oudshoorn et al., 2019). As of 2019, Canada has resettled over 54,000 Syrian refugees with most settling or moving to Ontario followed by Alberta as the second highest populated province (Bose, 2020; IRCC, 2019).

Syrian refugees, as an example, faced increasing challenges with their refugee experience. Essentially, Syrian refugees’ resettlement in Canada was not completely a voluntary decision. In addition to being forcibly moved out of their home country, Syrian refugees, especially those coming through the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) program, were given only a few days to make their decision to migrate to Canada and leave behind their family and community. Further, migrating to Canada and/or settling during the pandemic has resulted in a

significantly challenging experience. Like other recent immigrants and refugees, Syrian refugees faced multiple pandemic-related challenges. These included economic burdens and challenges finding employment, securing adequate housing, social isolation, inability to visit home countries, and increased mental health challenges. Moreover, the longer application processing and wait times for extended family members to join has further enhanced the stress levels and sense of social isolation (Rabiah-Mohammed et al., 2022).

Arabs, like other cultural groups, are expected to conform to dominant ideologies and cultural expectations as commonly dictated by the two-official language groups in Canada. This may subject them to inequities or barriers of a structurally oppressive system which could, in turn, complicate their acculturation experience (Berry et al., 2006; Niles, 2018; Rasmi et al., 2012). Arab individuals or groups experience systemic barriers differently by the intersection of their demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, language, cultural background, religion, and gender (Aroian et al., 2011; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Lagasi, 2013). Consequent to the barriers encountered, with language being a major one (Aroian et al., 2016; Mir, 2019), Arab immigrants lack equitable access to opportunities for active citizenship in mainstream Canadian society (McCoy et al., 2016; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Inequitable participation may subject Arab immigrants to a challenging acculturation experience and, in turn, negatively influence their psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry & Hou, 2019; McCoy et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). *Equitable participation* ensures that opportunities to progress academically, professionally, and civically are equitable for all existing cultural groups which includes both the dominant and immigrant groups alike (Hatch et al., 2016; Jelin, 2018).



## **Differences in Cultural Values between Arabs and Dominant Canadian Society**

Arab cultural values and principles tend to be different from values supported by the dominant, larger society in Canada. Mainstream Canadian society often encourages values supported by Eurocentric approaches which promote individualism; while, in Arab culture, values originate from a collectivist approach where the collective good is prioritized over individual interests (Awad, 2010; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Matera et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014). The Arab family structure commonly includes extended family members who not only cohabit, but also participate in decision-making on family matters (Britto & Amer, 2007; Daniel, 2013; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). As well, family relations take precedence over establishing peer relations (Britto & Amer, 2007; Daniel, 2013; Wannas-Jones, 2003; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012); an area commonly regarded as challenging for acculturating youth and emerging adults (Balaghi et al., 2017; Safdar et al., 2012; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2016). Other values commonly adopted in the Arab culture include obedience and seeking guidance from family for critical life decisions such as school, work, and personal relationships, among others (Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014; Paterson, 2008; El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012). Generally, Arab immigrants' adjustment period is influenced by the degree of acceptance or rejection of individualist and collectivist values, and this may consequently be more challenging for Arab youth and emerging adults (Abdulrahim & Ajrouch, 2014; Lagasi, 2013; Paterson, 2008; Rasmi et al., 2012). Individualist values promote focusing on self-growth and individual goals of advancement, for example in education or career experience. On the other hand, collectivist values encourage prioritizing collective wellbeing and growth over self-driven or individual goals (Abdulrahim & Ajrouch, 2014; Paterson, 2008; Rasmi et al., 2012).

Besides differences in cultural values, acculturation may further be challenged by differences in normative gender roles between the Arab and dominant cultures in Canada (Aroian et al., 2011; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014; Wannas-Jones, 2003). In Arab culture, men are socialized to be primary decision-makers, support their families economically and socially, and reinforce behavioural expectations of females in their families (El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012; Kumar et al., 2014; Matera et al., 2020; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). Alternatively, women's responsibility lies in preserving their family's honour and reputation in the Arab community, maintaining modest interactions with their Arab ethnic community and the larger society, adopting cultural expectations more firmly, and ensuring that their children adhere to these expectations. Arab women are subject to greater responsibility in preserving their family's reputation and honour than men (Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014; Paterson, 2008; Wannas-Jones, 2003). For example, Arab culture tends to oppose engaging in premarital sexual relationships and intimate dating (Aroian et al., 2011; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Goforth et al., 2015; Paterson, 2008). While this expectation is consistent for men and women, women are subject to greater restrictions by virtue of their responsibility in preserving the family's honour and reputation (Aroian et al., 2011; Cila & Lalonde, 2014; Goforth et al., 2015; Wannas-Jones, 2003).

As a nation, Canada's dedication to building a resilient, multicultural society requires defining its role as the host society in fostering the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees (Berry, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2016, 2017). The Canadian host society's role in immigration, settlement, and integration experiences has been addressed in two ways. First, some studies focus on illuminating immigrants and refugees' success stories and how the Canadian host society contributes to this success. Second, most studies have focused on identifying

systemic barriers and whether the Canadian government and host society respectively exerts an effort to reduce these barriers (Berry, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2019; Kubota, 2015; LeMaster et al., 2018; Xu, 2019). The present study focuses on understanding Arab immigrant emerging adults' perception of the Canadian host society's role in supporting their transition and adjustment in their new homeland. Immigrant and cultural studies on Arabs in Canada and the United States usually focus on children, youth, or adults. Studies specifically addressing emerging adults, ages 18 to 25, tend to be limited (Goforth et al., 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi, Chuang & Hennig, 2015, 2016; Tiflati, 2017) and this study aims to fill this gap. Additionally, studies on Arab immigrants' experiences in Canada tend to be deficit-oriented; they usually focus on gaps and challenges experienced in the Arab individual or group's acculturation (El-Geledi, & Bourhis, 2012; Hamdan, 2007; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2014). This study aimed to explore perceptions of Arab immigrant emerging adults regarding their acculturation experience, including what their immigration and adaptation as well as the role the Canadian host society plays in their transition and adjustment.

The purpose of this research study was to adopt a critical race lens to understand acculturation as a phenomenon experienced by Arab immigrant emerging adults. Applying the critical race lens allowed for contextualizing this phenomenon within the environmental and temporal factors in which it was experienced. Specifically, this study investigated acculturation as experienced within the local community of Windsor-Essex in Canada and within the past five years of immigrating to Canada. The study contributed to existing knowledge on Arab immigrants' acculturation and the role the Canadian host society played in fostering or challenging this experience. Immigrants tend to be subject to systemic barriers stemming from racial and power hierarchies that may result in a complex acculturation experience in Canada

(Berry, 2016; Kubota, 2015). Institutional and epistemological racism are two examples of hierarchies that remain as challenges facing non-dominant groups in Canada. These forms of racism are characterized by privileging the White-dominant group and supporting a Eurocentric approach to delivering knowledge that is deemed universal (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Hanley et al., 2018; Kubota, 2015). While there is recognition that the Canadian government supports immigrants by providing settlement and resettlement services through meeting basic needs, language services, and enhancing social networks (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Zaami, 2020), the role that the Canadian host society itself plays in fostering immigrants' engagement requires further investigation. It is important to distinguish the Canadian host society from the Canadian government.

In this study, the Canadian host society is defined as the joint effort of members of the dominant groups in Canada that are either stakeholders in the immigrants and refugees' sector, or members of the larger society with whom emerging adult Arab immigrants would interact (Amer, 2007; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Xu, 2019). It is the combination of the community at large as well as stakeholders and agencies that focus on facilitating immigrants and refugees' settlement and integration (Amer, 2014; Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Berry, 2016, 2017; Xu, 2019).

Further, the adopted definition of the acculturation phenomenon in this study was the process of psychological and cultural changes resulting from intercultural contact between two or more groups. It is a product of migration; the interaction between immigrant groups and the dominant group(s) in the settler society result in changes in both the immigrant and dominant cultures. As well, the intercultural exchanges results in changes at the individual level (Berry, 2019; Berry & Hou, 2016; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Berry & Sam, 2013). First, this study

explored equitable participation of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canadian society by identifying systemic barriers that may result in challenges in adjusting to their new society and their perception of what they imagined as an equitable and diverse society. Second, this study sought to understand the host Canadian society's role in fostering the adjustment of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canada. Third, the aim of this study was to highlight the significance of acknowledging diversity in the Arab world to combat presumptions that may result from assuming Arabs as a homogenous group. Finally, the study aimed to understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults process their acculturation and adapt in their new local Canadian community as they navigate their life milestones during emerging adulthood (age 18 to 25) within their Arab culture.

Recognizing the diversity in the Arab cultural group will also help us understand that a hierarchy may, in fact, exist within this ethnic group in their land of settlement (Awad, 2010; Kumar et al., 2015). For example, an American study of Arab immigrants noted that it is common for Lebanese immigrants, especially recent adolescents, and emerging adult immigrants to dominate the cultural hierarchy when compared to Yemeni and Iraqi counterparts, and that this is a partially accepted concept within the Arab cultural group (Kumar et al., 2015). As well, Arab immigrants in the U.S. who have mastered the official language in the country of settlement are placed higher in that hierarchy (Awad et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2015). As immigration policies and approaches differ between Canada and the United States (Amer, 2007, 2014; Berry & Sam, 2013; Kumar et al., 2015; Ng & Metz, 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016), this study will seek to understand Arab immigrant emerging adults' perspective on whether a hierarchy similarly exists here in Canada based on language proficiency and background or nationality.

To this end, this study employed qualitative inquiry through transcendental phenomenology to arrive at a rich description of Arab immigrants and refugees' understanding of the acculturation phenomenon within their first five years of living in Canada. Arab immigrant emerging adults, 18-25 years of age, from all immigrant and refugee routes, and diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, were recruited to contribute to the study. In addition to reflecting on their acculturation experiences and immigration/refugee stories, participants responded to questions that assessed how their Arab identity influenced the preservation of Arab culture and active engagement in Canadian society.

### **Dissertation Overview**

The next chapter (Chapter II) begins with a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guides the design and methodology of this study. A literature review follows in Chapter III where the experiences of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canada and the United States are discussed. Chapter IV includes a discussion of the methodology and research methods of this project. Chapter V Results will follow to present the participants' demographics and other important background information as well as the five themes that emerged in exploring participants' understanding of acculturation. Chapter VI Discussion fuses theory, literature, and research findings together. Chapter VII concludes the dissertation with recommendations for future research, teaching, and practice.

## CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Critical Race Theory**

#### **Race as a Social Construct**

Race is a discrete feature that has been used as a method of human classification, placing individuals into predetermined groups based on assumed biological predispositions of skin colour, as an example, and predetermined social hierarchies of different cultural groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2015; Kubota, 2015; Gupta et al., 2007). Subordination of one race in relation to another has been viewed as a product of a ‘given’ hierarchy (Gillborn, 2015; Gupta et al., 2007). Theorists and social scientists studying race in the 1930’s and 1940’s have argued that there is a biological disposition to having features of the white race, and that these features indicate dominance, provide better opportunities of survival, are related to intelligence levels, and that such “qualities” contribute to already established hierarchy (Gillborn, 2015; Gupta et al., 2007). Moreover, race and racialization theorists have asserted that behaviours, capabilities, and mental health are traits that descend from the biological composition of humans (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Gupta et al., 2007; Kubota, 2015).

In his writings from the early 1930s, Boas discusses the impact of social environments and the geographical regions on individuals’ biological composition as well as expressed behaviour (Gupta et al., 2007). He argues that race and behaviour are correlated, and that biological makeup can impact behaviour, IQ, mental health, and other outcomes (Gupta et al., 2007). The view of race as purely a product of biology was later challenged in 1962 by Montagu (Gupta et al., 2007) who theorized race through physical type, heredity, blood, culture, nation, personality, and intelligence. In Montagu’s view, epidemiology has been better understood by social scientists rather than biologists. Therefore, he encourages looking beyond a pre-existing

criterion for race, and toward an assessment of the similarities and differences in a population (Gupta et al., 2007). He recommends that researchers omit the term “race” and replace it with “ethnic group” or “genogroup” (Gupta et al., 2007). Montagu asserts that using the term “ethnic group” is preferable for several reasons: first, there would be a dissociation between one’s mental and physical characteristics and being members of a certain race; second, if the term race has been negatively defined in the past, then it should be redefined in a positive light; third, while recognizing that racism cannot be omitted, Montagu states that it’s not the word that should change, but rather its perception among people (Gupta et al., 2007). Montagu concludes his study by clarifying that he does not encourage omitting the word “race”; rather, the term “ethnic group” may be used more neutrally due to the associated negative connotations with the term “race” (Gupta et al., 2007). These early studies on the onset of studies on race and racial classification resulted in coining the concepts of “whiteness” and “white supremacy” (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Kubota, 2015).

While hierarchal classifications are no longer accepted explicitly, research and practical experience with individuals from different racial groups has led to the conclusion that hierarchal structures leading to the dominance of some racial groups and subordination of others still exists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard & Navaro, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Likewise, non-White racial groups are subject to ongoing racism, discrimination, and oppression; these experiences are shaped by unequal rights and systemic barriers that further contribute to their subordination (Berry, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Howard et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2016). Racialization has become a normative approach embedded in social and political systems resulting in some incidents of racism and oppression have been dismissed (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Gillborn, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).



## **The Origins of Critical Race Theory**

Experiences of racism and oppression over the years have necessitated re-examining the hierarchy of racial groups where it originated at the definition of race (Crenshaw, 1989). Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated from Critical Theory to deconstruct how race, racism, and the law interact in cultures and societies, and how racial power differences are maintained over time (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillbron, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Crenshaw was the first to coin the term Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Daftary, 2018; Patton et al., 2016). She applied Critical Theory with a focus on how race is factored into racism and oppression experienced by Black women in the United States. She urged researchers to consider how multiple factors intersect to sustain oppression and racism through examining the case of Black as the race and women as the gender (Crenshaw, 1989). The aim of CRT is to deconstruct the dominant-subordinate relations of different racial groups. Primarily, it seeks to explain how White supremacy is sustained, and advocates for supporting non-White racial groups to be free of their subordinate status (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Subsequently, critical race theorists have sought to redefine race to be a flexible term, conceptualized in accordance with sociopolitical influences that are shaped by the pressures of the political system (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018). Critical Race Theory stems from a postmodern way of knowing. It rejects modernist understandings and explanations and instead centres on perspective, experience, and context in understanding how knowledge is created (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In sum, race is a socially constructed phenomenon, and it should be contextualized according to the current sociopolitical influences of where it is defined (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015; Daftary, 2018; Howard & Navaro, 2016).

Accordingly, this study frames race as a social construct and CRT stresses the need to understand race and racism within social, economic, and historical contexts. This challenges neutrality as an approach that ensures the interests of dominant group are protected and supports dismantling overt forms of racism and patterns of oppression that have been sustained over time (Gillborn, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Discussion will now be dedicated to further deconstructing intersectionality as a complex phenomenon to aid understanding racism and oppression experiences.

### **Intersectionality**

An individual's identity consists of interlocking categories and perceived group memberships that generate one's complex identity. Intersectionality is a concept that explains how these multiple identity modalities and simultaneous group memberships intersect to shape one's identity and subject them to multiplicative levels of bias, oppression, and racism (Crenshaw, 1989; Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Intersectionality was first coined by Crenshaw in 1989 and 1991 as she analyzed, through CRT, the case of Black women in the U.S. and how their race and ethnicity intersect with their gender that led to multiple marginalization experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillborn, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Watkins Liu, 2018). Through an intersectional lens, Crenshaw calls for a more comprehensive examination of how the U.S. antidiscrimination laws should change to acknowledge "how cumulative vulnerabilities of Black women/immigrant women of colour were not accounted for in activism and campaigns against rape and violence against women" (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018, p.30). Intersectionality forewarns of CRT becoming an oppressive theoretical lens itself if it focuses on race as the only factor causing racism or oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Capper, 2015; Kwon, 2015). Hence, through the integration of intersectionality as a

primary lens, CRT advocates that a multidimensional analysis should be conducted so that patterns of oppression and racism are not replicated by focusing on one aspect only, where some forms of oppression may go unaddressed and even sustained (Abrams & Moio, 2013, Gillborn, 2015; Kwon, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018).

Intersectionality has two key elements: an empirical and an activist component. Intersectionality, as an empirical basis, affords a more in-depth understanding of how social inequities are initiated and what processes exist to sustain them over time. Correspondingly, through an activist effort, an intersectional approach supports coalitions between different social groups to generate a collective effort to resist and change the status quo (Gillborn, 2015). Commonly, demographic factors such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, immigration, or resident status underlie racism and oppressive experiences (Capper, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989), especially in countries where immigration is common (Berry & Hou, 2017,2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Rowe, 2019). Other categories such as culture, ability, wealth, class, and stage of social development are also identified as “characteristics of difference” (Lutz, 2002) that subject individuals and groups to experiences of oppression and racism (Lutz, 2002; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018).

Feminist and antiracist scholars have applied the concept of intersectionality to several empirical studies as an analytical approach, a perspective to analyze the experiences of marginalized populations (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018). An intersectional perspective provides an integrated analysis of how the sociocultural position of underprivileged groups leads to multiple levels of marginalization; for example, experiences of racism and oppression that result from the intersection of race, power, lived experiences, social location, and social cultures (Kaushik &

Walsh, 2018; Watkins Liu, 2018). In feminist research, intersectionality has been central to understanding how systemic dynamics and institutional power place women in a marginalized position via gender, class, and race (Crenshaw, 1989; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Watkins, Liu, 2018). Black women in the American system of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989) and analyzing Black women's role in the Civil Rights movements (Watkins Liu, 2018) offer instructive examples. Other studies focus on using intersectionality to examine social structural differences and categories of oppression through a specific demographic. For example, Gillborn (2015) uses intersectionality to explore the experiences of Black middle-class parents in England; Kaushik and Walsh (2018) deconstruct the complexity of diversity to understand the systemic oppressions encountered by skilled immigrants, and how these impacted their settlement and integration experiences; and, through a review of literature on social movements, Watkins Liu (2018) asserts that intersectionality and CRT are absent from academic scholarship on social movements of human liberation. She calls for intellectual contributions of people of colour, among other vulnerable groups to be more significantly integrated or rather historical accounts of human liberation movements (Watkins Liu, 2018).

Among other areas of social sciences scholarly work, social work research has also integrated intersectionality to enhance knowledge of multiple forms of oppression that underscore social problems that extend beyond race and ethnicity to include other social categories (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). Intersectionality is an effective tool for social work scholarship to understand how dynamic power relations generate oppressions encountered both within and among groups (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). Hence, cultural competence practices have been broadened to integrate intersectionality to advocate for groups undergoing other forms of oppressions, including

ageism, heterosexism, and ableism (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). Lastly, intersectionality is a lens that can help social workers in their advocacy and activism efforts to generate a more socially just society, and, in turn, work toward implementing social changes that minimize multiple forms of oppression and racism (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardo & McNeill, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018).

### **Racism and Oppression from a CRT Perspective**

Racism is an outcome of the belief in one group's superiority over others based on race (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillborn, 2015; Kubota, 2015). The dominant racial group exerts its institutional and social power to ensure they maintain their superior status over other racial groups (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Kubota, 2015). One simple representation of racism is in the equation where racism equals the combination of racial prejudice with social and institutional power (Kubota, 2015). Racism can be exercised in multiple forms; it can be cultural, through defining accepted norms, values, and beliefs; institutional, by ensuring that institutional structures, policies, and procedures continue to validate the superiority of the dominant racial group and suppress the rights of other groups; or personal, where assumptions are made that a particular racial group is inherently superior to another (Capper, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015). Racism is usually known to promote White supremacy (Crenshaw, 1989; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). Correspondingly, oppression is operationalized racism, where the oppressor group defines reality for oneself and others and dominates institutions or sociopolitical systems through dictating norms. In turn, this forces negative impositions on target group(s) that eventually both groups become socialized to accept their roles as normal (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Watkins-Liu, 2018).

Like racism, oppression is exercised in multiple forms (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Watkins-Liu, 2018). First, ideological oppression is the belief that one group supersedes another in its capabilities and social status. This is the approach within which ‘isms’ are created; ideological oppression includes racism and sexism among other forms of oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Watkins-Liu, 2018). Second, institutionalized oppression is another form of oppression; it is the act of ensuring that institutions, social and public policies, multiple systems, and the law reinforce the oppressive status of the dominant group over others (Patton et al., 2016; Watkins-Liu, 2018). The media, judicial and legal systems, medical, educational systems, and religion are examples of sources within which institutionalized oppression is practiced (Gillborn, 2015; Patton et al., 2016). Third form is interpersonal oppression, which is practiced when the dominant group justifies their mistreatment of individuals in the targeted or oppressed group. This form of oppression is exercised through stereotypes, incidents of harassment, mistreatments, threats, and acts of discrimination (Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016). The final form lays the responsibility of the sustenance and exercise of oppression on the oppressed rather than the oppressor: internalized oppression. This describes the process through which oppressed groups begin to internalize negative messaging and attributions of their limited abilities; hence, subjecting to their inferiority to the dominant group (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015). Internalized oppression primarily contributes to the sustainability of their inferior status and, in turn, sustain racism and oppression over time (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Watkins-Liu, 2018). Here, the oppressor does not have to exert further effort, rather the oppressed becomes a cooperator in the process of maintaining oppression (Howard & Navarro, 2016). In the process of assessing and identifying forms of oppression, it is critical to acknowledge that both the oppressor and the oppressed are socialized

to accept their roles as normal (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Stemming from this dominant-subordinate relation of groups, critical race theorists warn of the threat of colour-blindness and how it can maintain, rather than address, racism, and oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016). Colour-blindness assumes neutrality in that it supports adopting governmental policies and social practices by which everyone is treated equitably under policies and practices, irrespective of their race. The goal is to create a society that ensures racial equity (Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016). However, claiming 'race-neutral' practices puts racial minority groups at risk as the structural barriers, embedded in institutional policies and societal practices, would be dismissed (Capper, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

The difference between antiracism and anti-oppression is another important distinction to make when discussing race and privilege. While both concepts are similar in their approaches in identifying how the privileged status of the White dominant group is sustained over time, each has a different specific element of analysis. Antiracism uses the social construct of race as a central tenet to explain how the White dominant group maintains its status as a normative racial category over time. The White dominant group uses its ideological power to generate practices of racism and maintain exclusionary practices that are based on racial hierarchies over time (Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Anti-oppression, on the other hand, does not focus on race as the central explanatory element; rather, it supports identifying structural oppressions that lead to the exclusion of non-White, nondominant groups. It explains how these structural oppressions and exclusionary practices are justified and maintained over time (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Capper, 2015; Kubota, 2015).

## **Critical Race Theory and the Education System**

A significant number of empirical studies on CRT have been conducted within the educational system to understand the systemic challenges facing nondominant, minority groups in comparison with their dominant, White counterparts (Delgado & Stefancic, Howard & Navarro, 2016; 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002). “One of the realities that has become more apparent with the introduction of CRT is the importance of explicitly acknowledging race, racism, and the roles that they can play in educational opportunity, experiences, and outcomes” (Howard & Navarro, 2016, p.259). Empirical and conceptual studies using CRT as the theoretical framework focus on student experiences in kindergarten to grade 12 and postsecondary student experiences, respectively (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Rowe, 2019; Patton et al., 2016; Snoubar, 2017). Other CRT studies in education have focused on teachers’ experiences, either to understand their cultural competence in supporting a growing diverse student body, or to deconstruct the unjust hiring practices that generate lower representation of teachers from minority groups (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

Applying CRT to understand students’ educational experiences assists in identifying how race and membership of a nondominant, non-White group generate systemic barriers that impact minority students’ success (Berry & Hou, 2017; Gillborn, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, Patton et al., 2016). One primary challenge that newcomer students of nondominant groups face in Canadian and U.S. education systems is curriculum structure. The curriculum is designed from a Eurocentric approach (Kubota, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015); the teaching methodology, learning, and skills development required may be inconsistent with educational approaches in the newcomer student’s home country (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Rowe, 2019, Ledesma &



Calderon, 2015). Standardized tests are utilized in elementary and secondary schools as well as postsecondary educational institutions to evaluate student academic capabilities. They are built on standard measures, derived from a Eurocentric approach defining academic success (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Patton et al., 2016; Snoubar, 2017).

Additionally, the curriculum content, including histories and civilizations of different racial and cultural groups, is usually written from White-dominated perspectives and ideologies (Capper, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015). Therefore, adopting the content as “true knowledge” without presenting the alternate perspective of people of colour, is further oppressive to minority students (Gillborn, 2015; Kubota, 2015).

With the influx of newcomer students to common settlement countries such as Canada, the United States, or Australia, the challenges they face in academia should critically be addressed. Newcomer students face difficulties in language proficiency, learning about a new culture, maintaining peer relations, and other factors that may contribute to establishing their success in school as well as the social network in their new community (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Kubota, 2015; Rowe, 2019). In Canada, newcomer students have limited knowledge of either the official language (English or French) and may have to exert additional effort to progress academically and be on the same academic levels as their dominant peers (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Rowe, 2019). For example, Syrian newcomer students came to Canada from school systems that are Arabic-language based. Many enrolled in English-language classes to help enhance their use of Canada’s official language to better improve their academic standing. This has resulted in significant pressures that mutually impact the school systems and the Syrian newcomer students (AlAtrash, 2018). In many cases, Syrian students face delays in their academic progress, and they are often segregated from their Canadian peers.

Consequently, elementary, and secondary schools from both public and private school boards reformulated academic curriculum to support Syrian newcomers in progressing as quickly and as effectively as possible (Veronis et al., 2018). In turn, students' limited language capabilities can often restrict their ability to establish peer relations with their counterparts from the racially dominant group. In addition to the language barrier, the mere placement of newcomer students in language-based classes and resulting segregation from the rest of their peers further complicate the establishment of peer relationships (AlAtrash, 2018; Veronis et al., 2018). As well, students from the dominant group may develop preconceived notions or stereotypical views on the cultural or racial backgrounds of newcomer students. These views may complicate establishing peer relations with the newcomer student groups and may further lead to the disconnect and segregation between the dominant and newcomer groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Oberoi & Trickett, 2018; Patton et al., 2016; Veronis et al., 2018). In sum, the language barrier is a structural barrier for academic progress, establishing peer relationships, and enhancing Canadian cultural knowledge, that would contribute to enhancing newcomer students' social support system in their new community (Capper, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard & Navarro, 2016).

In addition to student experiences, CRT provides insights into teachers' experiences in two areas: teachers supporting a growing diversity of student body, and how principles of racism and privilege also impact teachers' hiring practices in settler societies (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Abrams & Moio, 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). First, teachers are required to modify their teaching practices and curricula to accommodate the different learning styles of newcomers. In their curriculum delivery, teachers are encouraged to use terminologies to match the English (or French) proficiency level of their student body to deliver content (Azzopardi & McNeill,

2016; Abrams & Moio, 2013; Capper, 2015; Muller & Boutte, 2019). As well, teachers are also integrating innovative practices that could address the language barriers using media and technology to deliver content in more of a visual and interactive environment (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Muller & Boutte, 2019; Veronis et al., 2018). They encourage multi-media and social media usage to support newcomer students in enhancing language proficiency and academic progress (Veronis et al., 2018). In addition to modifying teaching and academic deliverables' practices, the school board administers cultural competence training to better equip teachers to support a rapidly growing diversity of students (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016); although these training opportunities are arguably limited and provide only basic knowledge on diverse cultures and critical cultural competence skills (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Rowe, 2019). Critical Race Theory asserts that cultural competence is an integral skill to acquire; however, some studies suggest that current cultural competence training practices are quite narrow in their scope (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). More in-depth training is required to support teachers by addressing how the intersect of culture, race, religion, sexuality, and immigration experience among other factors shapes a more challenging student academic experience. In turn, such training should provide knowledge to teachers on specific strategies that directly meet those challenges (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Capper, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Muller & Boutte, 2019).

Additionally, issues of racism and privilege influence school administrators' hiring practices of teachers. In the Canadian and U.S. education systems, teachers of colour tend to be underrepresented (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Kubota, 2015). Implications of the social histories of the Canadian system continue to regard questions regarding racial backgrounds as highly controversial. Therefore, the underrepresentation of

teachers of colour in the Canadian system is imbedded in the implicit efforts of those in decision-making power to continue maintaining status quo and structural inequities to generate the unjust outcome of having a lower representation of teachers of colour (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Capper, 2015; Kubota, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Furthermore, such practices reinforce the imbalance of colour-representation and maintains current institutional oppression and structural inequities in the education system (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015).

### **Further Applications of Critical Race Theory and Nondominant Groups**

The explicit acknowledgement of how race, racism, and privilege interplay to further oppress nondominant groups is an important achievement of the CRT (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015; Gillborn, 2015). As well, using CRT as a theoretical lens has helped address various groups' experiences with racism and oppression historically, and the structural, institutional, and societal structures that continue to maintain these experiences today. Critical Race Theory has been applied to understand people of colour's experiences and subjugation to unjust treatment and ongoing oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Ledesma & Cameron, 2015). Critical Race Theory has further been utilized to support theories of feminism and gender-based discussions (Crenshaw, 1989). Some studies have addressed immigrant and newcomer groups from nondominant backgrounds and their subjugation to White-based norms (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Rowe, 2019).

Furthermore, CRT has supported discussions surrounding religion-based differences and experiences of racism and oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Gillborn, 2015; Rowe, 2019). One example is the application of CRT to understand the experiences of affiliating with the Islamic religion. There are rising concerns of the affiliation with Islam and Islamophobic attitudes

globally, especially following the September 11 attacks and later attacks by extremist Islamic religious groups (Akram, 2002; Kumar et al., 2014; Thomas, 2015; Zafar & Ross, 2015, Wannas-Jones, 2003). Critical Race Theory was applied to understand and evaluate Islamophobic attitudes in a study based in Australia. Australia's federal government provides significant funding to private schools, irrespective of their religious affiliations. Islamic schools have been expanding significantly and have the fastest growing student enrollment, doubling between 2009 and 2019 (Rowe, 2019). Islam, however, continues to be a minority faith in Australia, with Islamic schools constituting only 4% of the independent school sector. In an unprecedented case, between 2015 and 2018, the Australian government withdrew significant funding from the largest Islamic schools following an audit, stating the reasons as "non-compliance" and "misalignment" with Australian values (Rowe, 2019). Additionally, it has been noted that the surveillance and auditing of Islamic schools take on more restrictive measures in comparison with other schools. These are attributed to the continued association of Islam to terrorism and terrorist activities (Rowe, 2019), and this finding is consistent with previous studies examining Islam and labels attributed to Muslims associating terrorist attacks with cultural and religious beliefs (Akram, 2002; Awad, 2010; Kumar et al., 2014; Wannas Jones, 2003).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework used to explain how race, racism and the law shape cultures and societies, and how racial hierarchies are maintained over time (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillbron, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002). As Arabs' racial identity is not as clearly distinguished as Arab ethnicity or culture more generally, the conceptualization of race as a socially constructed phenomenon has helped scholars understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults would perceive and define their racial identity, and what roles race and ethnicity

play in their acculturation experience. Later in this study, Arab immigrant emerging adults will be asked how they define their racial identity in the Canadian context considering racial background is not usually an overt categorization in Canada. In terms of intersectionality, understanding how multiple factors such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other social identities intersect to shape the Arab immigrant experience has contributed to knowledge and insight into their acculturation process. This helped identify the social constructs that Arab immigrant emerging adults use to establish their racial and ethnic identities. From a critical lens, these factors are analyzed on how they intersect to shape success and resilience or impediments and barriers that may hinder Arab immigrant emerging adults' ability to thrive, integrate and be active citizens in Canada.

## CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Literature Review Outline**

Critical Race Theory offers a productive pathway to understand the structural oppressions, power imbalances, and inequities that continue to manifest themselves in the Arab immigrant emerging adult experience. The application of CRT to understanding acculturation and emerging adulthood helps to contextualize the experience and focus on structural factors that have influenced how the acculturation phenomenon is conceptualized and how it intersects with developmental milestones in the emerging adult.

This review will define an Arab, exploring ethnic identity and relevant identity constructs, as well as the Arab ethnocultural identity and how it is contextually defined in Canada and the United States. The review will unfold to discuss the experiences of Arab immigrants in the United States and Canada respectively, highlighting conceptual and empirical findings about these experiences. This chapter will then unfold with a comparison of the Arab immigrant experience in Canada and the United States, deriving similarities and highlighting differences in immigration, refugee, and acculturation experiences.

This chapter will conclude with literature overview on acculturation and emerging adulthood, respectively. Literature on the acculturation provides a basis to inform the research that has been conducted on the acculturation phenomenon. The theorization of emerging adulthood is also explored to understand the characteristics of developmental milestones during this phase. Overall, there is a significant gap in understanding how the acculturation process interacts with milestones experienced by the emerging adults group. Hence, this study explores how the acculturation phenomenon, as it specifically relates to emerging adulthood and focuses on the cultural group of Arab immigrants.

## Overview of Arab Immigrant Literature

### Defining an Arab

The term *Arab* refers to an individual or group who share a common ethno-linguistic identity. Arabs can be defined by means of geographic distribution, migration history, unified means of communication, history of civilization, and common culture. Arabs inhabit regions of Western Asia and Africa (Masters & Sergie, 2020; Middle East Policy Council, 2020). Arabs' ancestral background can be best traced to the 22 members of the Arab League, which was formed in 1945 to meet common interests of the Arab region and in response to colonial divisions of the territory. Members come together to address such matters as economy, culture, social welfare, and health. The Arab League consists of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mauritania, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Comoros (Masters & Sergie, 2020). The definition of the Arab League is adopted in previous research on Arab populations (Paterson, 2008; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2015, Rasmi et al., 2016). The Arabian Peninsula was formed through waves of migration as settlers sought resources to meet their basic needs. While the Arabian Peninsula is considered the origin of culture and linguistics of Arab ethnicity, today the Peninsula holds a critical geopolitical role due to its possession of vast reserves of oil and natural gas (New World Encyclopedia, 2008).

The Arabic language serves as the unified means of communication among Arabs. The language has its origins in Hebrew and Aramaic languages (Middle East Policy Council, 2020, Mir, 2019). All Arab nations share Arabic as the mother-tongue language; however, they speak it in different dialects. The difference in dialects is an outcome of a history of civilization and culture formation that resulted from European colonization of the Arab world primarily by



Britain and France; hence, English and French are commonly spoken languages in most of the Arab world (Mir, 2019).

Arab culture has integral norms and values that are expected to be adhered to at home and within the society of settlement. This may be challenging when these values are oppositional to the settlement society's values (Aroian et al., 2016; Awad et al., 2019; Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016). In turn, these challenges are known to have negative consequences on Arab immigrants' mental health, family relations, and social relations within the respective dominant society; indeed, the negative consequential impact is quite significant for Arab immigrant youth and emerging adults (Al Wekhian, 2016; Awad et al., 2019; Barry, 2005; Goforth et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2016). Some resilience factors that research has identified for Arab immigrants include parents supporting their adolescent and emerging adults children to establish their independence; parents supporting their children to actively interact with the larger society and establish meaningful relations; and, Arab immigrants being encouraged by both the dominant/host society and their ethnic communities to hold a strong sense of their Arab, ethnocultural identity (Aroian et al., 2016; Hamdan, 2007; McCoy et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015). Furthermore, research has identified fathers' education as a resilience factor; studies have found a correlation between fathers' higher education level and the support they, in turn, exert to family members to hold roles that go beyond normal gendered expectations (Hamdan, 2007; Hassouneh & Kulwicki, 2007). Highly educated fathers tend to support and encourage family members to achieve success in academia and professional fields, which in turn, have a positive impact on family relations (Aroian et. 2016; Hamdan, 2007; Hassouneh & Kulwicki, 2007).

## **Ethnic Identity: Arab Ethnocultural Identity**

### **Ethnic Identity Development**

Ethnic identity is a construct that was defined by multiple theorists. Phinney is a pioneer in the theorization and research of ethnic identity. In his theorization (Phinney, 1990) and one of her later studies with colleagues targeting ethnic identity, immigration, and wellbeing (Phinney et al., 2001), Phinney presents her definition of ethnic identity as an individual's sense of self in terms of membership to a specific ethnic group. The two elements involved are: 1) self-identification with commitment and sense of belonging to the identified ethnic group, and 2) a claim for a common ancestry and sharing of one or more of, culture, religion, language, kinship, and place of origin (Phinney et al., 2001). In early studies on ethnic identity and immigration, Phinney and colleagues (Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2007) assert that acculturation and ethnic identity were not as clearly distinguished and provide a basis for best conceptualizing the two constructs. Acculturation is the larger concept encompassing a range of behaviours, activities, and values, while ethnic identity is one aspect of acculturation pertaining to one's sense of belonging to a particular group or culture (Phinney et al., 2001).

Ethnic and national identities and their role in adaptation depend on the attitudes and characteristics of immigrants and the response of the recipient society (Awad et al., 2021; Eid, 2007; Naber, 2000; Phinney et al. 2001). Ethnic identity is strongest when immigrants place great value in maintaining their ethnicity/heritage and where pluralism is accepted. Host country's national identity is strongest when assimilation is encouraged and when immigrants feel accepted by the larger society (Phinney et al., 2001). Interestingly, holding positive attitudes toward both ethnic and host country's national groups encourage immigrants to start using compounded labels of ethnic and national identities (e.g., Chinese American) (Phinney et al.,

2001). In essence, individuals identifying with the same ethnic identity share both personal and group identities that are measured through unified values and beliefs pertinent to a specific ethnic group (Debrosse et al., 2020; Phinney & Ong, 2007). On the other hand, national identities are essentially identities supported by the settler society and are shaped by a sense of belonging and attitudes toward the respective larger settler society (Phinney et al., 2001). Individuals' ethnic identities are a representation of a social group membership tied with an emotional connection; hence, holding a positive ingroup attitude (i.e., attitude toward ethnicity) is a critical protective factor to combat experiences of discrimination in the larger settler society (Debrosse et al., 2020; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Bicultural identity represents the duality of immigrants' ethnic and host country's national identities, and the compatibility between the two (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001). Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) is a construct that informs how the perception of compatibility and oppositionality between the ethnic and national identities impacts bicultural individuals' psychological adaptation skills (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Bicultural individuals (individuals living between two different cultures) have complex lived experiences with both positive and negative outcomes, and their experience is, in turn, influenced by the acculturation strategy that they adopt (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry et al., 2006). A positive experience is marked by a sense of pride in their culture, strong sense of community, and sense of unique identities. Conversely, a negative experience represents identity confusion and a clash of dual cultural expectations and supported values by each culture (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Berry, 2019; Berry & Sam, 2013; Chen & Sheldon, 2012).

The difference between ethnic and racial identities is another important distinction to best understand immigrants or bicultural individuals' identity development and its influence on

acculturation experiences (Smith & Silva, 2011; Awad et al., 2021). Ethnic identity focuses on self-identification with a designate culture, religion, kinship, and race (Phinney et al., 2001; Smith & Silva, 2011). Racial identity extends to include unique experiences with a specific racial group; it includes the influence of societal oppressions illuminated through antiracism (Smith & Silva, 2011). This distinction was closely studied by Cross, a theorist who explored African American identities, and developed a holistic model inclusive of ethnic and racial identities. In essence, Cross identified that the overlap between the two identities' development pertains to lived experiences that connect to one's race and ethnicity. The distinction is that ethnic identity applies across multiple ethnic and racial groups, while racial identity is more descriptive of social structures and internalized stereotypes pertaining to their identified race (Smith & Silva, 2011). As race is socially constructed and changes with time in accordance with larger societal processes, racial identity is fluid and susceptible to change (Awad et al., 2021; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Liu, 2018). For example, in the case of Arab Americans, identifying with the White race was supported for US citizenship acquirement; however, it is no longer the case; Arab Americans are now fighting for identification as an ethnic minority (Awad et al., 2021; Habayeb et al., 2020; Samhan, 1999).

Language brokering is another opportunity for individuals to further understand values, beliefs, and practices of both the host and heritage cultures, for pride in holding a dual identity, and to understand how the mainstream culture views them and their ethnic culture (Debrosse et al., 2020; Fish et al., 2021; Guan et al., 2016). Further, bilingual individuals are almost automatically tasked with bridging cultural gaps as they tend to utilize language brokering to serve multiple purposes. First, language brokering plays a key role in dually enhancing the larger society's understanding of their heritage culture; as well, it supports engaging in effective system

navigation in the dominant society and embedded structures and systems (Guan et al., 2016). Second, language and cultural brokering support acculturating individuals to develop increased self-awareness and partake in decisions that protect them and their families against negative acculturation experiences (Debrosse et al., 2020; Guan et al., 2016). For example, as a means of protecting their family, bilingual individuals sometimes avoid sharing discriminatory perspectives with their parents/families; instead, they work toward enhancing a positive understanding of their heritage cultures' values and practices (Guan et al., 2016). Essentially, higher self-awareness and positive regard and lower self-discrepancy are associated with greater civic engagement, whether it is through successful engagements in career and school, allyship and citizen advocacy, or as culture brokers and promoters for a positive image of their respective ethnic culture (Debrosse et al., 2020; Fish et al., 2021; Guan et al., 2016).

Ethnic identity exploration also influences a sense of citizen advocacy, which promotes civic engagement and active participation in one's society (Fish et al., 2021; Pampati et al., 2018). In a study focused on Indigenous People and People of Colour (IPPOC) populations, Fish et al. (2021) explores the development of ally identity as a form of ethnic identity exploration. In an era of rising racial tensions and political divides, divisions are usually identity-based as they occur through a comparison of self to others. In turn, racial identity differences are usually related to adopted political ideologies; this supports the notion that "the personal is political" (Fish et al., 2021). Greater knowledge and investment in sociopolitical events impacting IPPOC is directly related to forming an ally identity; this formation requires significant identity exploration and solidification of one's worldviews and perspectives. Deconstructed through the same developmental approach of Erikson underlying ethnic identity development, the authors

describe an ally identity as a developmental stage that stems from awareness of privilege, oppression, and how power influences how individuals relate to one another (Fish et al., 2021).

Fisher et al. (2021) have also extended their thematic analysis to explain within-group (i.e., IPPOC ethnic and racial groups) allyship relations. Cross-racial coalitions develop when IPPOC or ethnic/racial groups work together toward a common goal; this usually demonstrates unity and an effort to combat oppression. Concurrent examples of such coalitions include Black Lives Matter, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and others. These coalitions form through similar experiences of oppression related to ethnic and racial identities. Hence, an effective ally identity development and consequent active civic engagement requires being involved in actions in response to concurrent sociopolitical events (Fisher et al., 2021).

### **The Arab Ethnocultural Identity: An Overview**

Arab immigration and refugee patterns to Canada and the United States have evolved with the changing attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in response to contemporary sociopolitical interests (Eid, 2007; Samhan, 1999). Arab immigration began in small numbers in the 1800s and continued to be limited until 1945, after which it consecutively increased (Arab Canadians, 2021; Eid, 2007; Samhan, 1999). From the 1960s to 1970s, immigration to Canada significantly increased especially from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq (IRCC, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016; Waseem, 2016). An immigration milestone occurred in the 1970s following the Lebanese civil war and the rising political upheavals in the Arab region; immigrants and refugees came from Lebanon and other Arab territories (Samhan, 1999). At one point, ethnicity and race were interchangeable; for example, Syrians were considered a racial group and Arabs were more commonly identified as “Syrians” (Samhan, 1999). Arabs’ immigration and refugee waves have not only changed in the national source of immigration, but also in terms of the religious

composition. Historically, Arab Christians dominated immigration waves; Lebanese Christians and Coptic Egyptians (or Christian Egyptians) represented a significant proportion of immigrants and refugees in the United States and Canada (Eid, 2007; Kusow et al., 2018; Samhan, 1999). Patterns have then changed from predominantly Christian to Muslim Arabs (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Eid, 2007; Kusow et al., 2018), with increasing arrivals from Syria and Iraq following the Syrian civil war and US invasion of Iraq, respectively (AlAtrash, 2018; Kusow et al., 2018; Mason & Matella, 2014).

Arab ethnic identity is best understood as the intersection of Arab ethnicity and heritage in the context in which it is developed and practiced (i.e., impact of the settler society), relevance of religious identity, and sociopolitical milestones that advocate for the increased presence of Arab identity (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Kusow et al., 2018; Samhan, 1999). First, the settler society's influence is practiced through the acceptance and promotion of active participation of Arab immigrants, and the facilitation of cross-cultural opportunities for communication (Awad et al., 2021; Samhan, 1999; Tastoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Second, when Arab identity intersects with Islam as the adopted religion, dynamics of the immigration and settlement experience change such that they are subject to increased discriminatory experiences or judgemental practices (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Tiflati, 2017). The pressure is primarily observed through opposing Arab Muslim immigrants to bring their cultural rituals and traditions to the settler society; this impact is sensed in both Canada and the United States (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). In fact, some Arab Muslims sought the need to suppress their Arab identity to avoid the cross-association with the discriminatory images of Arab Muslims, and minimize such negative acculturation experience (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Awad et al., 2021; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Finally, the pride and promotion of the Arab identity is demonstrated through advocacy efforts of Arab

immigrants in Canada and the United States. As an example, educationally, the fight for Arab identity continued through the advocacy efforts of Arab students and scholars for Arab, Muslim, Middle East issues to be included in multiculturalism frameworks in schools and on campus (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Samhan, 1999; Samuels-Wortley, 2021). Additionally, efforts of Arab immigrants, especially in the United States, continue in the request for change in the U.S. census for a different classification than “White.” These re-classification efforts can be attributed to the Arab American Institute (AAI), as they have generated successful outcomes to differentiate Arabs from non-European groups when it comes to the term “White” (Samhan, 1999).

Next is a discussion of Arab ethnocultural identity and Arab immigrant and refugee experiences in two North American societies: the United States and Canada.

### **Arab immigrants in the U.S.**

#### **Arab Ethnicity and Racial Categorizations**

One of the identified gaps in understanding Arab identity is that very few studies ask about racial identity and ancestral background (Awad et al., 2021). Studies on Arab identity in the United States reveal that patterns through which Arabs define their identity have changed with their perceptions and beliefs around racial associations (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Naber, 2000; Zarrugh, 2016). The biracial categorizations of White-Black racial identities are a norm in American society; hence, immigrants and refugees have generally been classified by means of the dominating perceptions of racial hierarchies (Mason & Matella, 2014). This is evident through ethnic and racial categorizations in the U.S. census (Awad et al., 2021; Mason & Matella, 2014). For Arab immigrants, the evolving association with the White racial category has been built on the notion of self-identified priorities, attributed meanings of



identifying as Arab, and general perceptions of U.S. society that denotes a specific “Arab” identity (Abboud et al., 2019; Awad et al., 2021; Zarrugh, 2016).

Historically, Arabs have fought for the recognition of White racial status as it was a prerequisite for acquiring U.S. citizenship (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007) as only individuals racially identified as Black or White were able to acquire U.S. citizenship (Naber, 2000; Samhan, 1999). However, while identifying as White, Arabs have been treated as non-White by virtue of established racial hierarchies. In fact, categorizing Arabs as White is demonstrative of structural oppression where practices of discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion result in the invisibility of Arabs’ needs and lived experiences, and, in turn, inequities in health outcomes (Abboud et al., 2019; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Pampati et al., 2018).

Naber (2000) asserts that Arab immigrants and descendants’ invisibility is centralized in the U.S. racial/ethnic categorization, and that Arab American identity can be best conceptualized using four paradoxical approaches. First, despite the complexity and diversity in Arab identity, the U.S. media tends to portray Arabs in a negative monolithic image; this image is portrayed in three approaches: the irrationally violent Arab male; the oppressed Arab woman without the capability of changing social inequities; and the absence of Arab women altogether in media. The second paradox is the simultaneous identification of Arab Americans as both White and non-White. Despite their phenotypic association as White, Arab Americans find identifying as non-White as necessary to distinguish themselves from European Americans. Additionally, they align themselves politically and historically with other racial and ethnic groups, and they aim to reclaim and redefine the negative media image of their identities as Arab, Arab American, and Middle Eastern (Naber, 2000). While historically meeting the need for acquiring citizenship, currently, White identity is associated with acts of White supremacy (Awad et al., 2021). Hence,

Arab immigrants actively seek to define themselves as an ethnic minority as a means of identity affirmation and distinction from the dominant White racial category in the United States (Awad et al., 2021; Habayeb et al., 2020; Naber, 2000; Samhan, 1999).

Naber's (2000) third paradoxical approach is important in understanding the shape of modern Arab identity in the U.S. In the United States, Arabs are subject to practices of "racialization of religion", where Arab identity is often based on religious affiliation (e.g., Islam) rather than biological perception (i.e., phenotype). Therefore, as Arab Americans are commonly assumed as Muslim (Abboud et al., 2019; Naber, 2000; Zaami, 2020), and Islam is considered a religion of uncivilization and cruelty compared with American perceptions of Christianity, then Arab Americans remain culturally and racially inferior compared to their White counterparts (Naber, 2000).

The final paradox presents an intersection of religion and race between Arab and American societies. In the Arab region, religion is a primary 'marker' for social structural differences (e.g., one is commonly asked about religious affiliation), whereas in the U.S., the system is built on racial/ethnic categorical differences (e.g., one is commonly asked if they identify as "White" or a "person of colour"). This overlap in conceptualizing identity between Arab heritage and U.S. settler society may contribute to identity confusion. Therefore, Arab immigrants in the U.S. tend to question the classification of White/Caucasian as a race.

Arab immigrants tend to differ in their level of association with their Arab identity. This association may change over time, and may also be influenced by changing family dynamics, intercultural relations within and outside of their religious and ethnic communities, and sociopolitical factors that may influence their relationship with the larger society (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Aroian et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2016). Arab immigrants more

closely associate with their Arab identity when they hold a greater sense of pride in their Arab heritage, and if their families hold a high value on maintaining Arab values and traditions (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Awad et al., 2021). Additionally, Arab immigrants' association with their Arab identity often stems from their desire to dissociate from "White" status as it leads to the invisibility of their culture and experience (Abboud et al., 2019; Pampati et al., 2018). They find more meaning in identifying as Arab as they associate more culturally and linguistically with the region (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2017; Awad et al., 2021; Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). This desire to associate with the Arab identity can change with time and with the individual's commitment and association with their Arab cultural heritage (Abu-Laban, 1999; Al Wekhian, 2016; Eid, 2003; Pampati et al., 2018).

Similarly, just as Arabs are driven by priorities and values that support identifying as Arab, there are factors that encourage them to dissociate from an Arab identity (Awad et al., 2021). First, Arabs tend to be erroneously classified by a religious identity as being Muslim. As a result, some tend to resort to identifying with their nationality rather than Arab as they attempt to distance themselves from the Islamic religion (Eid, 2007; Kusow et al., 2018). For example, Coptic Egyptians have identified a common misconception about their religious identity that they are erroneously classified as Muslim. Consequently, many Coptic Egyptians identify as Egyptian or Coptic Egyptian American to distinguish their religious identity (Awad et al., 2021; Kusow et al., 2018). Furthermore, some resort to using their nationality (e.g., Egyptian American, Iranian American, Chaldean) to signify that their heritage, ancestral, and ethno-religious backgrounds technically deviate from an Arab identity (Awad et al., 2021; Mason & Matella, 2014). In fact, some explain that speaking the Arabic language does not necessarily connect them to an Arab identity (Mason & Matella, 2014; Kusow et al., 2018). Moreover, these challenges are often

imposed by mainstream American society, giving Arab immigrants the responsibility for advocating for their own safety from structural violence (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Awad et al., 2021). Arab immigrants navigate multiple forms of structural violence that continue to precipitate the challenges faced and consequently complicate their adjustment and integration experiences (Amer & Hovey, 2012; Kusow et al., 2018). Finally, some are driven by sociopolitical reasons to avoid identifying as Arab altogether; in some sense, they wish to distance themselves from being labelled as a terrorist or suspicious, and they wish to dissociate themselves from negative portrayals of Arab identity and culture that arise from political regimes and conflicts in the Arab region (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Amer, 2014; Aroian et al., 2016).

The religious composition of earlier settlers of Arab immigrants and refugees to the United States were predominantly Christian (Kusow et al., 2018; Naber, 2000; Pampati et al., 2018). They immigrated from the Levant region, primarily from Lebanon and Syria and some from Palestine. Near the Canadian border, Dearborn, Michigan houses the largest Arab population nationally in the U.S. with 49.8% of its population identifying as Arab (Pampati et al., 2018). Demographically, the picture of Arab immigration has changed where Muslims dominated later waves of immigration. The demographic change of Arabs immigration coupled with the September 11 attacks have shaped a complex experience for the Arab American. The September 11 attacks served as an initiator for a series of sociopolitical changes that complicated the Arab American experience; indeed, the attacks placed Arab and Muslim identities in a “frame of suspicion” (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Habayeb et al., 2020). One of the most impacted areas is Arabs’ cross-border travel experiences between the U.S. and Canada. Identifying as Arab and/or Muslim has subjected travels across the border to significant questioning, hours of delay

and background checks, and degrading measures of security checks (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Fugikawa, 2018; Kruger et al., 2004). Travelers identifying as Arab and/or Muslim are routinely questioned and sometimes accused of associating with extremist groups. Not surprisingly, the experience has become complicated for Arab and Muslim travelers so much that some have become discouraged from cross-border travel (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Fugikawa, 2018; Kruger et al., 2004).

Despite the argument that Arabs and Muslims were inevitably racialized and viewed as a homogenous group even before the attacks (Awad et al., 2021), the subsequent war on terror (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007) significantly increased racism and discriminatory experiences for Arab and Muslim Americans (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Awad et al., 2021). Arab and Muslim Americans often found themselves having to defend their Arab and Muslim heritage. Calls for justice and freedom from suspicion became routine in the aftermath of 9/11 (Awad et al., 2021; Eid, 2003; Zaami, 2020). These circumstantial pressures of identity validation and misconception about the Arab and Islamic cultures have led some to suppress their Arab and Muslim identities (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Naber, 2000). The September 11 attacks and the war on terror were initial events that have significantly reformed the Arab and Muslim experience (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Ajrouch & Jaamal, 2007; Maira, 2004). An intersectional exploration of how this reformation reshaped the Arab immigrant and refugee experience is key to understanding decision-making in how Arabs experience acculturation and ethnic identity exploration.

### **Insight into Post-Immigration Experiences**

Arab immigrants and refugees come with pre-immigration lived experiences that can help inform the acculturation process, and concurrent emotional and social wellbeing, in the settler society (Guan et al., 2016; Pampati et al., 2018). Some intersecting factors that may significantly

impact the post-immigration and acculturation process include exposure to war, political conflict, and religious complications in home country, family relations, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and social group membership (Al Wekhian, 2016; Maira, 2004; Pampati et al., 2018). Of these factors, escape from political violence and religious persecution has the most adverse effect on mental health, resulting in the highest rates of reported depression and anxiety, thereby putting refugees at a greater risk of negative mental health outcomes (Pampati et al., 2018). Consequently, post-immigration experiences come with additional influential factors that may complicate the Arab immigrant and refugees' integration efforts; these include language barriers, exposure to xenophobia and islamophobia, discrimination in interactions with the larger/settler society, challenges maintaining social relations and consequent social isolation, and difficulties acquiring employment and meeting other socioeconomic goals (Maira, 2004; Mason & Matella, 2014).

Differences in Arabs' socioeconomic achievements in the United States are also attributed to language proficiency, gender, and regional differences. First, studies have revealed a positive correlation between English language proficiency and greater access to networking, employment, and social integration opportunities (Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Pampati et al., 2018). Second, there are noted gender differences between Arab immigrant men and women; Arab immigrant women tend to have higher educational attainment, represent the lowest labour force participation, and have lower earnings in general than Arab immigrant men (Hamdan, 2007; Maira, 2004; Pampati et al., 2018). The picture is somewhat similar when compared nationally, where Arab immigrant women tend to have lower employment rates and earnings when compared to their U.S.-born counterparts (Hamdan, 2007; Pampati et al., 2018). Finally, a regional perspective also provides interesting insights into differences in

socioeconomic success of Arab immigrants. In addition to the definition(s) of Arab thus far discussed, an Arab descent or ancestral background can also be understood as belonging to one of the three regions in the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries: Levant, Arab Peninsula, and North African regions (Kusow et al., 2018; New World Encyclopedia, 2008). This is noted to be a common approach applied in U.S.-based studies of Arab immigrants (e.g., Abboud et al., 2019; Awad et al., 2021; Mason & Matella, 2014; Pampati et al., 2018). Combining the regional and gender perspectives yield significant insights. Generally, Arab men who belong to the Levant ancestral region have the highest socioeconomic status; that Arab immigrant men from the Arabian Peninsula have the highest per capita income; that Arab immigrant women from the North African region have the highest earnings when compared to women from Arab Peninsula or Levant regions; and that Arab immigrant men earn significantly more than women, which mirrors, in turn, the image of American women being lower wage earners (Kusow et al., 2018).

Family relations have a significant influence on the post-immigration and acculturation experiences of Arab immigrants, and consequently impacts their mental health and adaptation experiences (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Goforth et al., 2015; Mason & Matella, 2014; Zarrugh, 2016). Generally, an increased sense of conflict between Arab and American cultures enhances Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth's acculturative stress and leads to challenging relations with their parents (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Chen & Sheldon, 2012). Arab immigrant parents differ in their acceptance and adoption of fostered cultural values in the Arab and American cultures respectively than their emerging adults/youth, prioritizing cultural values commonly adopted in Arab culture (Chen & Sheldon, 2012). Arab culture supports collectivist values, including obedience, prioritizing family relations over personal needs, and respecting the

hierarchical family structure with the father as the lead figure (Al Wekhian, 2016; Aroian et al., 2016). Alternately, the American culture supports individualism in encouraging prioritization of autonomy, individuation, and identity and worldviews exploration (Amer, 2014; Aroian et al., 2016; Chen & Sheldon, 2012). These conflicting patterns – collectivist vs. individualist – generate greater cultural conflict and leads Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth to elevated acculturative stress levels and viewing parents as more controlling, restrictive, and an opponent to their autonomy (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Arorian et al., 2016; Chen & Sheldon, 2012). The negative impact on Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth in the United States is rather exacerbated due to a combination of cultural conflict, enhanced acculturative stress, and perceived parental control (Amer, 2014; Chen & Cheldon, 2012; Goforth et al., 2014). This impedes their ability to exercise autonomy and explore their identity – two values that are widely supported in mainstream American society (Chen & Sheldon, 2012).

Alternatively, a positive post-immigration and acculturation experience is associated greater degrees of agreement in the perception and prioritization of Arab and U.S. cultural values between Arab immigrant emerging adults/youth and their parents (Chen & Sheldon, 2012). Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth who view their parents as more accepting tend to engage in ethnic identity exploration more actively; would have greater sense of belonging to their adopted American culture; would have enhanced emotional wellbeing and mental health; and place greater value in fostering relationships with individuals from the larger society. As U.S. society encourages a more assimilationist approach, a positive attitude toward American culture increases the likelihood for Arab immigrants to more concretely adopt values and practices supported by the dominant, larger American society (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Arorian et al., 2016). Yet how do significant sociopolitical events that impact greater Arab culture play a role in



the Arab immigrant immigration and adjustment experiences in the United States? This is where we turn next.

### **The Sociopolitical Impact of September 11 and Beyond**

Three large scale events have reformed the Arab and Islamic American identity in the United States: 1) The public and private reactions to Al Qaeda's September 11 attacks (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Mason & Matella, 2014) and the related war on terror (Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007); 2) The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003; and 3) The racially charged U.S. presidential election of an African American Christian with a Muslim father, Barack Obama. These events have markedly reshaped the Arab and Islamic experience and brought forth significant changes in identity formation, maintenance of social relations, and socioeconomic prosperity for the Arab and Muslim American (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Goforth et al., 2015).

Following the 9/11 attacks, many Arab and Muslim Americans questioned their identity through the lens of dominant-subordinate relations between "being White" and where that stands in the larger racial hierarchy of the United States (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007). To some Arabs, White status represents greater privilege and dominates the racial hierarchy. Since they were feeling less welcomed as Muslims (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019) and as Arabs (Abboud et al., 2019; Mason & Matella, 2014), they identified more closely with an "other, non-White" status (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). In essence, misconceptions about Arab and Islamic cultures have led some to suppress their Arab identity, preferring to distance themselves from identifying as Arab or Muslim (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Goforth et al., 2015; Wrobel & Paterson, 2014).

In terms of social relations, the drastic increase in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate crimes following the 9/11 attacks has made it difficult for Arab and Muslim Americans to sustain relations with members of the larger, American society (Amer & Hovey, 2012; Mason &

Matella, 2014, Pampati et al., 2018). Exposure to acts of racism and discrimination have led to the social exclusion of Arabs and Muslims in America (Abboud et al., 2019). In fact, Arabs and Muslims continue to be in a continuous battle of cultural defense to educate the public about their cultural heritage and religious identities in the hopes that greater exposure and education of Arab heritage and the Islamic community would minimize instances of racism and discriminatory practices (Guan et al., 2016).

Discriminatory experiences occur beyond social relations in the immediate public sphere and extend to political engagement and the use of force. Arab and Muslim citizens in the United States were subject to acts of detainment and scrutiny. It is estimated that approximately 1200 Arabs and Muslims were detained for minor crimes and anti-immigration violations; most detainees were of Pakistani and Egyptian descent (Mason & Matella, 2014). Furthermore, the post-9/11 racialization of Arabs led to increased screening practices, and at one point some suggested that Arabs should carry special identity cards (Zarrugh, 2016).

Discrimination including ethnic-based harassment, Islamophobia, exclusion and hate crimes created a severe complication for Arabs and Muslims, including immigrants and refugees, to establish socioeconomic status in their new home. Studies have shown that Muslims and Arabs in the United States were subject to exclusionary practices in employment opportunities and securing housing (Kusow et al., 2018; Pampati et al., 2018). Some Muslims and Arabs reported at times being encouraged to alter their name and physical appearance to avoid racially based suspicion (Guan et al., 2016; Samhan, 1999). These were assumed as protective practices against social isolation and exposure to acts of racial, ethnic, and religious-based experiences of discrimination or racism (Kusow et al., 2018; Guan et al., 2016; Zarrugh, 2016).

In summary, a complex relation exists between Arabs' racial identity, discrimination, psychological distress, and social wellbeing (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Awad et al., 2021; Pampati et al., 2018). Interestingly, some studies indicate that the more assimilated (US born, preference for English) that Arabs and Muslims are in the U.S., the more prone they are to experience discrimination (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Awad, 2010; Eid, 2003; 2007). One provided explanation is that immigrants usually maintain more ethnic relations within their own enclave and do not have enough exposure to the mainstream society; therefore, they are at a lower risk to experience discrimination (Abdulrahim et al., 2012; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Amer, 2014; Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016; Zarrugh, 2016) or they may be less aware of the discrimination occurring in the broader society.

## **Arab immigrants in Canada**

### **Canada's Colonialism: Canada as a White Settler Society**

Canadian critical race scholarship publications are important tools that can support exploring the relation between race and racism and acts of colonialism, imperialism, and empire (Dua et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2003; Park, 2017). Critical race scholars employ Foucault's concepts of discourse, power, and social construction of identity as means to investigate concepts of race and racism. Foucault's power and social construction of identity supports understanding race and racism in culture, Whiteness and how they relate to capitalist society (Dua et al., 2005).

Colonization in Canada has its roots in the historical land claim and initiation of the residential school system as an aim for European settlers to de-indigenize Canada (Dua et al., 2005; Thomas, 2014). Scholars have argued that Canadian White settler society maintains colonialism through the oppression of Indigenous peoples and through the subordination of migrants, racialized, and non-Indigenous settlers in Canada (Dua et al., 2005; Park, 2017). The Indigenous peoples' history with residential school systems has not ceased (Thomas, 2014). Violence is embedded in structural and political oppressive systems that continue to maintain the subordination of Indigenous peoples on their lands (Park, 2017; Razack, 2015; Thomas, 2014). In fact, history accounting residential schools or violence with Indigenous peoples is almost dismissive (Dua et al., 2005; Razack, 2015; Thomas, 2014).

Further, the relationship between settlers and colonized populations is crystalized through racial and spatial organizations where the law maintains the arrangement (Razack, 2015). It retains the necessary power differential to suppress the capabilities of the subordinate, in this case Indigenous, and maintain that of the social structures and political regimes in favour of this hierarchy with White settlers dominating this structure (Razack, 2015; Park, 2017). Canada's

colonial practices with Indigenous peoples is contemporary, and the discovery of thousands of children of residential schools is but one contemporary factor that reinforces the colonization of Canada as a White settler society (Dua et al., 2005; Park, 2017; Razack, 2015). Taking responsibility for our history as a White settler society is an integral progressive step towards implementing an antiracist, anti-oppressive, equitable system, a system that is truly equitable and inclusive for all (Razack, 2015; Snoubar, 2017). As one of the subordinate groups in Canada, Arab immigrants in Canada tend to be subject to similar practices of conforming to the dominant White settler ideals (Abboud et al., 2019; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Mason & Matella, 2014; Niles, 2018). Hence, deconstructing their adjustment experiences within the context of living in a colonial society enables the Canadian host society to take progressive steps towards committing then actioning an antiracist, anti-oppressive, and equitable approach to supporting the Arab immigrant in their local Canadian communities.

Colonialism is still a prime explanation that underlies continued influence on status of Indigenous peoples' involvement in the criminal justice system (Razack, 2015). Learning about the history is only the first step of acknowledging the impact of colonialism in Canada, and the integration of Indigenous Peoples' history and the ongoing impact of residential schools' discoveries is what can guide us to continue working toward a more socially just society (Lawrence, 2004; Park, 2017; Thomas, 2014).

Since colonization is an act of violence, then any story for the Indigenous People of Canada is a story of violence and terror (Lawrence, 2003; Thomas, 2014). Understanding colonialism in a nation that promotes and supports multiculturalism and one exerting effort to be inclusive of all is critical to integrate especially in understanding immigration and its role to the ongoing colonization of Canada (Thomas, 2014). Canada is presented as a welcoming country

for immigrants and refugees; however, their immigration policies support keeping new Canadians of color oppressed, under marginalizing social, political, cultural, and economic processes (Park, 2017; Thomas, 2014). Globally, Canada is known as the “peacekeeping nation”; this hides the history of colonization, slavery and through discriminatory immigration policies (Dua et al., 2005).

Like Indigenous Peoples, the rights of Black people are undermined and that in the colonized society their presence is secondary and where racial discrimination maintains the structure. Oppressive practices extend to all marginalized populations (Park, 2017; Razack, 2015). For example, the Razack (2015) discussed oppressive practices endured with the segregation of the homeless from the public under the notion of “protecting the public from the homeless” and that “homeless are intruders” (Razack, 2015). In this sense, it can be best described that colonialism is a foundation upon which Canada or the Canadian society is structured; colonization begins with the White settlers dominating social structures and political processes that sustain current structures (Lawrence, 2003; Razack, 2015). Colonization then extends to impact the Indigenous peoples primarily, racialized communities, homeless populations, and other marginalized populations by virtue of their socioeconomic status, racial identity, culture, status in Canada, and more (Dua et al., 2005; Razack, 2015). This drives me to consider whether immigration and the settlement of racial populations could be a notion of sustaining current system of power differential and social hierarchal structure maintaining the White settler in dominance and all other groups in subordination. This approach could be using racialized settlers and a drive toward fulfilling required labour in specific roles, and the leadership and dominance maintains the White settler in power.

The invisibility of contemporary colonization within a White settler society can inform how race, racism and empire are sustained (Dua et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2003). The discourse of race in everyday life became more significant in the post September 11 world and the racialization as means to sustain colonialism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and globalization (Dua et al., 2005; Park, 2017). For example, Canada joined military forces in Iraq and participated in political action in Afghanistan. It has also partaken in racist discourses of the Orient, Arab, Muslim, immigrant, refugee, aboriginal, and people of colour followed by an initiation of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Through this Act, there has been observed increase of systematic surveillance, profiling, and detention of Arabs and Muslims, citizens, immigrants, and asylum seekers (Dua et al., 2005).

Canada is built on transnational discourse of Whiteness. Canada's history is taught emphasizing that Europeans have built the nation, while the colonization, slavery, and genocide of Indigenous Peoples and people of colour has been disregarded and erased (Dua et al., 2005). Canada continues to be a White nation despite the changing demography through immigration and refugee policies. As some have argued, Canada was subject to criticism as being a haven for terrorists due to its accommodating border policies. This is perceived as another form of policies of oppression and racism that enforce the White settler practices upon which Canada is built (Dua et al., 2005; Park, 2017).

Structural violence describes the destructive forms of policies that are embedded in societies creating inequitable power relations; this, in turn, maintains Canada as a White colonizer settler society (Park, 2017; Razack, 2015; Thomas, 2014). Razack explains that Canada is founded on principles of colonialism where White settlers are considered the origin, Aboriginal or Indigenous communities as part of history, and that it necessitates the presence of

immigrants and refugees' to contribute to the colonization of the nation (Park, 2017; Razack, 2015). They refer to Wolfe and his famous statement of "settler-colonizers come to stay-invasion is a structure not an event" (Park, 2017).

### **The Canadian Settler Society's Perspective on Arab Immigrants**

In settler society, the dominant group's perception, and attitude of the Arab culture as one of the immigrant groups, is highly influential on the adjustment and wellbeing of Arab immigrants and refugees (Hamdan, 2007; Khattab et al., 2019; Shibuya et al., 2020). If the dominant society holds negative perceptions and stereotypical views of the Arab culture, this negatively impacts the emotional and social wellbeing of Arab immigrants and refugees (Hamdan, 2007; Khattab et al., 2019; Shibuya et al., 2020). Conversely, a positive attitude toward Arab culture supports a positive acculturation experience (Rasmi et al., 2016; Veronis et al., 2018). Besides the dominant society's perception, there are other resilience factors that contribute to a positive acculturation experience and, therefore, enhances Arab immigrants and refugees' social and emotional wellbeing (Khattab et al., 2019; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011).

Research on the Canadian host society's role in immigrants' and refugees' settlement and integration experiences has either focused on illuminating successful acculturation outcomes or identifying systemic barriers facing immigrants and analyzing the extent to which the Canadian government or host society has exerted efforts to reduce these barriers (Berry, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2017; Khattab et al., 2019; Kubota, 2015; Xu, 2019).

The current study focuses on understanding Arab immigrant emerging adults' experiences with the Canadian host society's role in supporting the transition and adjustment in their new homeland. Hence, literature was consulted to identify elements of the acculturation process that factor into the effective adjustment or challenges that Arab immigrant emerging



adults experience as they acculturate in Canada (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; LeMaster et al., 2018; Zaami, 2020).

### **Parent-Youth/Emerging Adults' Relations**

Arab immigrants in Canada often find themselves negotiating conflicting expectations from their family, peers, and religion, as well as the larger society (Goforth et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016). Family structure and socialization goals are different for Arabs living in Canada than members of the dominant/host group (Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Paterson, 2008; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmy & Daly, 2014). Interestingly, the family is the first unit of society where all cultural learnings and expectations initially occur (Rasmi & Daly, 2014) with extended family members playing a significant role in family decision-making (Goforth et al., 2014). Additionally, obedience, fulfilling family obligations over personal needs, prioritizing family relations over other social relations, and respecting a hierarchal family structure where the father is the head of the family are among other core cultural values in the Arab community (Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016).

Among Arab immigrants in Canada, Arab immigrant emerging adults have become a significant population of interest in conceptual and empirical research. Arab immigrant emerging adults are individuals of Arab descent who are 18 to 25 years of age; with some studies extending to include up to 29 years (Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). Studies of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canada remain relatively recent (Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016), and the term 'Arab youth' is still more commonly used than Arab immigrant emerging adults to represent this developmental/age group (e.g., Litchmore & Safdar, 2015).

### ***Arab and Canadian Identities: Arab Identity Impact & Formation***

Arab immigrant emerging adults tend to have a great sense of commitment to both their Arab and Canadian identities (Rasmi et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). Some studies indicate greater life satisfaction among Arab adolescents and emerging adults when they are more oriented toward their Arab heritage and culture (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Balaghi et al., 2017; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). In addition, religion has a unique role in Arab immigrant emerging adults' adjustment experiences. Being at a phase where exploration is key (Arnett, 2000, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2016), emerging adults may find their religion to be restrictive if it acts as a barrier to their aspirations to adopt some of the dominant, yet conflicting ideologies (Rasmi et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2016). Further, families may contribute to perceiving religion as restrictive especially if they have stricter imposition of religious values and practices (Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016).

Interestingly, in some cases, emerging adults' Arab identity becomes more solidified and their commitment to Canada is clearer when they visit their home countries (Rasmi et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). They assert that they have greater similarity with the Canadian culture and values in comparison with the culture and values adopted in their home countries (Tiflati, 2017). Arab immigrant emerging adults attribute their commitment to Canadian culture and values to the multitude of opportunities that Canadian society and government dedicate to support immigrants in enhancing their sense of belonging as well as identifying with their new Canadian identity (McCoy et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015; Tiflati, 2017).

Despite the opportunities fostered by the Canadian society, Arab immigrant emerging adults find it challenging to adopt a Canadian identity. A Canadian identity is one supported by the dominant society, one that entails accepted values and qualities (McCoy et al., 2016; Tiflati,

2017). One identified barrier is that Canada is not free of discrimination. Arab immigrant emerging adults are subject to discrimination, and these experiences are exacerbated when their Arab identity intersects with the Islamic religion (Amer, 2007; Awad, 2010; Balaghi et al., 2017; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015, 2016; McCoy et al., 2016). Arab immigrant emerging adults attribute discrimination experiences to negative media images of their culture and, if Muslim, their religion. They report elevated challenges in identity development, anxiety and depression, difficulty in establishing peer relationships, all consequently leading to their social isolation (Bae, 2019; Britto & Amer, 2007; Daniel, 2013; Howell & Shyrook, 2003; Wannas-Jones, 2003). Another challenge is that Canada is quite a diverse nation; hence, Arab immigrant emerging adults find it challenging to have a clear understanding of a mainstream Canadian identity (Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2016). As one participant said in Rasmi et al. (2016) study, “I guess it’s hard to draw the line here since Canadian culture in general is a mix of so many cultures” (Rasmi et al., 2016).

### ***Living between Arab and Canadian Cultures***

Research indicates that the primary influential factor on Arab immigrant emerging adults’ acculturation experience is that of living between two worlds: Arab heritage culture at home and within the ethnic community, versus the pressures from settlement society within the larger community. The settlement society and larger community are inclusive of school, work, and in other social contexts where pressures reside to adopt values and practices that may differ from ones within their own ethnic culture (Aroian et al., 2016; Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2016; Veronis et al., 2018). Inconsistent or contradictory cultural values and expectations between the dominant Canadian society and Arab communities would make the acculturation experience quite difficult for Arab immigrant emerging adults. The dominant

culture in Canada values self-direction, stimulation, and independence, which are in opposition to collectivist values that are encouraged within Arab cultures (Barry, 2005; Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014; Veronis et al., 2018). Arab immigrant emerging adults are most likely to be influenced by their parents' worldviews and the resulting parental relations they have (Aroian, 2016; Rasmi et al., 2012; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016). As for sources of community influence, knowledge of the dominant society's ideologies, values and principles comes from interactions within the school system and the community at large (Aroian et al., 2016; Barry, 2005; Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2014).

### ***The Parent-Emerging Adult Generational Gap***

In their study of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canada, Rasmi et al. (2016) examined the acculturation gap, parent-emerging adult relationships' influence on acculturation, and ethno-cultural identity conflict. The sample was 12 first-generation Arab immigrant emerging adults who moved to Canada in the last 10 years (Rasmi et al., 2016). In their findings, 11 out of 12 interviewees indicated acculturation gaps co-occur with intergenerational conflicts; that parents' beliefs usually strictly align with Arab background, while emerging adults were more accepting of different perspectives. Arab immigrant emerging adults valued traditions and obedience less than their parents, a finding consistent with Rasmi and colleagues' previous studies (Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2012). While some parents were strictly interested in promoting cultural retention, others also supported Arab immigrant emerging adults to explore their identity independently, thus resulting in a strong sense of ethno-cultural identity (Rasmi et al., 2016). In terms of balancing family relations and social activities and relationships, parents encouraged spending more time with them at the expense of time spent with friends and generally opposed cross-gender friendships (Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al.,

2015; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2012). Interestingly, in their 2016 study, one of Rasmi et al.'s participants reasoned that her father preferred limiting peer relationships as he feared that this friendship may negatively influence keeping their family and cultural values (Rasmi et al., 2016). As for dating and engaging in romantic relations, parents completely opposed dating, while Arab immigrant emerging adults viewed it as an opportunity for self-exploration. This has resulted in some challenges and conflicting relations between parents and emerging adults (Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2014).

The Arab parent-emerging adult relationship mediated the impact of perceived acculturation gap and intergenerational conflict; most have a close and supportive relationship with their parents, while some have a more challenging relationship that, in turn, results in negative psychological and sociocultural outcomes (Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2012). When experiencing challenges in their relationship with their parents, Arab immigrant emerging adults adopt one of three strategies to respond to these conflicts: re-addressing the gap; promising to submit to parents' wishes but not following through (or selectively sharing information with their family); or, obliging to parents' wishes (Rasmi et al., 2016). The perceived acculturation gap left Arab immigrant emerging adults torn between wanting to maintain promoting their positive relationship with their parents and seeking opportunities to establish their autonomy and explore different aspects of their identity (Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2012). Conflicting patterns of maintaining Arab ethnic identity as supported by their family versus exploring alternate identities and worldviews is a consistent challenge among Arab immigrant emerging adults in the United States. The experience is complex in the U.S. given the encouraged assimilation approach to acculturation (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Awad et al., 2019; Aroian et al., 2016).

In another study, Rasmi et al. (2015) had a closer examination of how Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation and ethno-cultural identity are influenced by their Arab and Canadian orientations as well as intergenerational conflict. Their sample consisted of 113 first-generation Arab Canadian emerging adults, where 76% were Muslim and 14% Christian. They found that strong parent-emerging adult relations alleviated the relationship between perceived acculturation gaps and maladjustment. A greater acculturation gap signified maladaptive adjustment, poorer health, mental health outcomes and acculturative stress. The study found that ethno-cultural identity conflict occurred when there was a "reversed" Arab orientation and "reversed" Canadian Orientation values, where youth are more oriented to their heritage culture and less oriented to their settlement culture than their parents (Rasmi et al., 2015).

In sum, when exploring Arab immigrant emerging adults and their identity development in Canada, it is important to adopt a holistic view in attempting to understand Arab immigrant emerging adults and their Arab identity development through examining how their Arab culture intersects with other factors of their identity including, religion, sexuality, class, and gender and identified race (El-Geledi, & Bourhis, 2012; Hamdan, 2007; Khattab et al., 2019; Rasmi et al., 2014).

## **Arab Immigrants in Canada vs. the United States: A Comparison**

This section bridges literature on Arab immigrants in Canada and the United States. A discussion of similarities and differences in the experience or conceptual and empirical literature will unfold. Generally, the literature review informed that Arab ethnicity spans over different races. In the United States, association with the White racial category has shifted with changing goals especially of citizenship. In the Canadian census, Arabs are identified as visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, Arabs' own perspective on racialization and ethnic categorization has not been extensively explored and it calls for an investigation. Overall, studies in the United States tend to focus on the Arab identity, race, 9/11 implications and some capture the parent-youth/emerging adult relations (e.g., Amer, 2014; Awad et al., 2021, Mason & Matella, 2014). Health outcomes are also common features in U.S. studies (e.g., Fellin et al., 2013). In Canada, studies on Arab immigrants tend to focus more on the parent-youth/emerging adult relations, the impact of living between the two cultures, and some targeted identity formation, refugee studies, and September 11 and media portrayal of Arabs and Muslims (e.g., AlAtrash, 2018; Maira, 2004; Rasmi et al., 2016; Veronis et al., 2018). Next, the discussion will explore similarities and differences in Arab immigrants' experiences in Canada and the United States.

### **The Role of Religion**

In the Arab cultural group, religion plays a vital role in shaping both Arabs' resilience and challenges; therefore, it is important to understand how Arab immigrants endorse their religious identity, and how that influences their acculturation (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2015). Studies on Arab culture in settlement societies, particularly in Canada and the United States, suggest that religion may have negative

implications on Arab immigrants' acculturation when it is perceived as a source of restriction and pressure (Amer, 2007). This perspective is more commonly associated with the Islamic religion (Amer, 2007; Awad, 2010; McCoy et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). The reason for this distinction is two-fold: first, in the investigated settlement societies, especially Canada and the U.S., Islamic religious values, practices, and rituals may conflict with Christian beliefs and ideologies that are dominant in these settlement societies (Amer, 2007; Awad, 2010; Goforth et al., 2014; Tastoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Secondly, Islam has been consistently associated in the media with negative stereotypes and images (Amer, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Kumar et al., 2015; McCoy et al., 2016; Thomas, 2015).

The implications of the intersection of Islam and Arab identification is evident in the experiences of Muslim youth seeking employment in Canada. Muslim youth in Canada tend to have a lower likelihood of securing employment, irrespective of racial and ethnic backgrounds as compared to other Eastern religions (specifically Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism) who do not seem to be as impacted (Shibuya et al., 2020). Lower employment opportunities continue to be a struggle even while gaining higher education (Debrosse et al., 2020; Shibuya et al., 2020). The impact with employability issues is exacerbated with immigrant youth especially in accounting for the credibility of education degrees and possible professional designations and experience in the Canadian labour market. Usually, immigrant youth are told that they do not have proper "Canadian experience" to acquire the desired employment opportunity (Debrosse et al., 2020; Shibuya et al., 2020).

Muslim youth are also subject to discrimination as they are automatically assumed to be associated with several Muslim groups identified as "terrorist groups," such as AlQaeda, ISIS, and others (Awad et al., 2021; Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). There is a common assertion that Canada



provides a “safe haven for agents who need to hide before and after the attacks”, an assertion and focus of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS); it is a proposed belief under the notion of humanitarian commitment (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). These assertions are known to complicate the Arab immigrant experience even further in Canada and the United States (Awad et al., 2021; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Shibuya et al., 2020).

### ***Media Portrayals of Arab and Muslims***

Arab and Muslim immigrants’ acculturation in Canada and the United States has been significantly influenced with the media portrayal of their culture and religion (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Kumar et al., 2015; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015). Identifying with their Arab cultural identity and religious identity are important elements of pride within the Arab community (Kumar et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016). However, following the September 11 attacks, associating with the Islamic religion has become a source of discomfort and complex lived experiences for Muslims and Muslim-Arab immigrants (Abboud et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2015; Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; McCoy et al., 2016). Hence, Arab, and Muslim immigrants’ acculturation has been significantly influenced with the media portrayal of their culture and religion (Amer, 2014; Awad, 2010; Kumar et al., 2015; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015). Media portrayals of Arab culture and Islamic religion has elevated experiences of racism and discrimination; these portrayals have further contributed to Arabs’ oppression leading to their social isolation (Akram, 2002; Kumar et al., 2014; Lagasi, 2013; Mason & Matella, 2014; Rowe, 2019; Zafar & Ross, 2015). Anti-Muslim hate crimes increased in the United States by 1700% in 2001 alone; and the rate continued to progressively increase over the years (Amer & Hovey, 2012; Matella & Mason, 2014). In a report by the Council of American-Islamic Relations (2006), 135 cases of hate crimes occurred in 2007, and approximately one in four Americans

reported believing that Islam is associated with hatred and violence (Goforth et al., 2014). Muslim American immigrant youth and emerging adults reported experiencing discrimination primarily in schools but also in their communities. They tend to face rejection from their American peers, and some have identified that teachers play a contributing role in these discriminatory experiences as they do seem to feed into larger society's stereotypes (Goforth et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2015; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015).

While Muslim women wear the hijab and niqab (face-veil) as a sign of modesty (Thomas, 2015; Wannas-Jones, 2003), Western society views the head coverings as signs of oppression and an affront to gender equality (Thomas, 2015). The niqab sparked an interesting debate, especially in 2011, when Canada passed a law banning wearing the niqab, or face-veil, to citizenship ceremonies (Immigration Canada, 2016; Lagasi, 2013; Thomas, 2015). The Muslim community was divided on this decision; some were in favour and others opposed the banning of niqab. Muslim Canadians in support of banning the niqab reasoned that it is a cultural rather than a religious practice; hence, it is not protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some also view it as burden to their inclusion in the Canadian society (Thomas, 2015; Zafar & Ross, 2015). The Muslim community's divided perspectives surrounding niqab banning in Canada demonstrates the importance of differentiating culture from religion to better understand the Arab immigrant experience. Furthermore, it reinforces the importance of recognizing the diversity in the Arab community (Akram, 2002, Berry & Sabatier, 2010; El Geledi & Bourhis, 2012; Kumar et al., 2014; Sabatier & Berry, 2008).

### ***Religion as a Source of Support***

Despite some challenges that may be associated with religious identification, religion and faith may be a great resource for moral and social support for Arab immigrants in Canada and

the United States (Goforth et al., 2014). Some Arab immigrants, including emerging adults, perceive religion as a source of strength and a guide for establishing and maintaining their values and principles. The perceived support from God and the religious community can function as protective factors against acculturative stress and other psychological disorders (Awad et al., 2019; Beitin et al., 2010; Kira et al., 2014; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015). In addition to moral and emotional support, religion may also act as a social support resource. For example, following Islam gives a sense of ethnic identity and community, along with greater association with heritage culture (Goforth et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). Furthermore, sometimes accommodations from the larger society for the Muslim community, such as providing halal menu options at school or restaurants, extending support to celebrate Muslim holidays at school or through work and providing prayer rooms at educational and other institutions, can also facilitate religion's role as a resilience factor (Beitin et al., 2010; Kira et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2015; McCoy et al., 2016).

### **Social Support and Social Support Networks**

For Arab immigrant emerging adults, it is integral to investigate how social context, shaped by social supports and host and heritage social networks, contribute to their acculturation experience (Awad et al., 2021; Kira et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016). The educational system is the primary context where Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth have most of their socialization with the host society (Balaghi et al., 2017; Kira et al., 2014; Zaami, 2020). Greater exposure to the host society may have positive and negative implications on Arab immigrant emerging adults' experiences. In terms of negative implications, first, the school system in Canada and the United States is different in its structure and expectations from the ones immigrants are familiar with from their home countries. This may elevate stress levels among

emerging adults as they try to adapt to the new system (Balaghi et al., 2017; Veronis et al., 2018). Second, due to the stereotypes possibly adopted in schools, greater exposure may also subject Arab immigrant emerging adults to greater levels of discrimination (Balaghi et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2015; McCoy et al., 2016; Veronis et al., 2018). On the other hand, like other immigrant groups, greater exposure and interactions with the host society can be positively influential, facilitating opportunities of peer interactions and social connections through which Arab immigrant emerging adults can gain cultural knowledge, and accept values and traditions of their new Canadian or American society (Balaghi et al., 2017; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Rasmi et al., 2015).

### **Summary of Studies on Arab Immigrants in Canada and the United States**

Studies on Arab immigrant emerging adults continue to grow in Canada and the United States (Awad et al., 2019; Awad et al., 2021; Chen & Sheldon, 2012; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017). As well, in some studies, emerging adults are more commonly labelled as “youth” (e.g., Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Rasmi et al., 2014), so future studies should target the definition of emerging adults and the growing body of work seems to be beginning to transition to distinguish emerging adults from other age/developmental groups.

Further, as some studies indicated (Awad et al., 2021, Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2015; Tiflati, 2017), research on acculturation and immigration- related experiences in general tends to focus on the adolescence/youth stage of the 11-17 age category (Aroian et al., 2016; Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Goforth et al., 2014; Safdar et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2015; Paterson, 2008). Most topical research areas on Arab experiences in Canada and the United States for the past 20 years have focused on the parent-youth or parent-emerging adult gap (e.g., Aroian et al., 2016; Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Rasmi et al. 2012, Rasmi et al., 2016) and post 9-11 impacts

including the negative impact of media portrayals of Arab and Islam (e.g., Litchmore & Safdar, 2016; McCoy et al., 2016; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015; Thomas, 2015; Zafar & Ross; 2015). Overall, research studies have generally been deficit-oriented, focusing on gaps and challenges experienced in the Arab individual or group's acculturation (El-Geledi, & Bourhis, 2012; Hamdan, 2007; Paterson, 2008; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2015). The current study aimed to further build knowledge and understanding of Arab immigrants' experiences, devoting attention to identifying positive and successful aspects despite the challenges experienced here in Canada.

## **Acculturation**

### **Two Levels of Understanding Acculturation**

As Canada continues to be a recipient of immigrants and refugees under the current government (Berry, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018), it is important to develop an understanding of acculturation and how it mutually influences both the Canadian host society and immigrant and refugee communities. *Acculturation* is defined as the process of cultural and psychological changes that immigrant, heritage groups, and dominant host groups undergo resulting from their interactions with one another (Berry, 2006, 2014; 2019; Berry et al., 2006).

Berry (2001) asserts that interactions among two or more cultural groups results in mutual changes occurring with the exchange of cultural knowledge among the participating cultural groups (Berry, 2014, 2016). The outcome of this cultural exchange depends on the attitude that these cultures have relative to one another (Berry, 2016, 2019; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; Kuo, 2014). For the dominant/host culture, the outcome is influenced by their attitudes toward immigration and diversity, and the impact these two phenomena have on their culture (Berry, 2016; Berry & Sam, 2013; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019). For the immigrant/heritage cultures, it relies on the value of maintaining one's ethnic culture, and the value and efforts devoted to establishing and strengthening interethnic interactions with the larger society (Berry, 2006, 2014, 2019).

### **Host Society's Role: Welcoming Communities**

Successful acculturation experiences depend on the mutuality between dominant cultures and nondominant or ethnocultural groups (Behrens et al., 2015; Berry & Hou, 2019; Juang & Syed, 2019; Kuo, 2014; Laxer, 2013; Sam et al., 2013; Xu, 2019). Of particular importance is the

role that the host society plays in fostering immigrant and refugees' success in settling in their new society (Berry, 2016; Berry & Sam, 2013; Sam & Berry, 2010; Sabatier & Berry, 2008). Immigrants and refugees thrive when the host society holds a positive multicultural ideology; this describes a host society supports and values diversity as an element of growth and advancement (Berry, 2005, 2006; Hui et al., 2015; LeMaster et al., 2018).

A welcoming community is generally defined as one that engages multiple sectors to reduce barriers that may face newcomers and adapt policies and practices to generate opportunities for active civic engagement, foster collaborations between newcomers and the larger society, as well as enhance the sense of belonging and security of newcomers in their community (Hanley et al., 2018; Hynie et al., 2019; McKee et al., 2019). Recent studies on welcoming communities in Canada have focused on the experiences of refugees who settled through private sponsorships (Reynolds & Clark-Kazak, 2019). A privately sponsored refugee is one who is granted refugee entry to Canada sponsored by an individual or group who assumes the sole supportive role of their settlement and integration in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019). Several studies present settlement and integration outcomes of privately sponsored refugees, and each of these studies provided their description of a welcoming and inclusive community. Overall, all these studies share common descriptive characteristics of a welcoming and inclusive community as one that modifies policies and practices to accommodate diverse groups, produce inclusive opportunities by supporting refugees to expand their social networks, and one where refugees self-report an enhanced sense of security and belonging to their community (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019; Good-Gingrich & Enns, 2019; Hanley et al., 2018; Hynie et al., 2019; McKee et al., 2019).

## Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a term that was coined by Jeffrey Arnett to describe the developmental stage spanning from late teens to early twenties. Arnett (2000) defines *emerging adulthood* as the developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood that is empirically and theoretically distinct from these two stages. Emerging adulthood typically represents individuals that are between 18 and 25 years of age and is a transitional stage that involves significant identity and role explorations. As well, it is “distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations” that characterize the adulthood stage (Arnett, 2000).

The primary characteristic of this phase is that emerging adults refrain from commitment and engage significantly in exploring their options in areas such as personal relationships and love life, education, and employment (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2007). Being a transitional stage, emerging adulthood is also a critical period for shaping or reshaping worldviews. As part of exploring their identity, emerging adults begin to revisit their conceptualization of their world and re-evaluate their values, morals, and belief systems (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2007). It is during this time that emerging adults may in fact deviate from the spiritual and religious belief systems upon which they were raised. Generally, it is not until they exit emerging adulthood and enter the young adulthood/adulthood phase that their worldview is solidified (Arnett, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Employment and educational experiences are relatively interrelated in the emerging adulthood stage. In contemporary societies, due to the globalization, emerging adults are exposed to a wide array of opportunities yet with greater expectations for education, training, and skills development (Arnett, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2005). Contemporarily, with the rising expectations



of job requirements and in the professional fields, the need for professional and skills development training is greater among emerging adults in higher education institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Arnett, 2000, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2005). Similarly, technological advancements and industrialization have generated a vast array of career opportunities that individuals can pursue. Furthermore, emerging adults are investing more time in exploring multiple job opportunities before they solidify their roles in a career that they would pursue in their adulthood (Arnett, 2003; Gilmore, 2019). The interrelation between acquiring higher education and advancing in employment leads to greater sense of accomplishment and is foundational in supporting the emerging adult in potentially solidifying their desired professional role in adulthood (Arnett, 2007; Gilmore, 2019).

Arnett (2000, 2007) asserts that emerging adulthood may not exist or may be defined differently in some cultures. Arnett (2000) refers to a study by Schlegel and Barry (1991) where, in researching developmental stages in 186 non-Western societies, they found adolescence to be universal, but emerging adulthood, or the stage between the end of adolescence to adulthood, existed in only 20% of the cultures surveyed in their project (Arnett, 2000; Schlegel & Barry, 1991). Interestingly, in their analysis, Schlegel and Barry (1991) identify Middle Eastern societies as ones where opportunity for role and identity exploration may be limited. However, their sample only included Egyptian society in their analysis (Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

In assessing developmental phases, it is important to note that some of the descriptive characteristics that were normally adopted through the twentieth century to describe identity formation (Arnett, 2000, 2007) may not be applicable today. Globalization, deviation from “cultural constraints” (Gilmore, 2019), and social movements or revolutions led to understanding developmental phases and identity formation in a more fluid manner. Today’s cultures and

subcultures call for the recognition that identity is not stable; rather, gender, sexual, racial identities and ethnicity among other factors are more fluid and can change over time and in different contexts (Gilmore, 2019). Therefore, adhering to heteronormative practices such as social constructs of marriage, sexual, and gender identifications is no longer an accepted societal norm (Gilmore, 2019). The current study expands upon the knowledge of the Arab emerging adult group in Canada and whether the characteristic developmental milestones of emerging adulthood apply to this group especially during the time they are living in an industrialized North American society, where such milestones that are sought after by Canada-born counterparts.

### **The Current Study and Research Questions**

In this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps explore how Arab immigrant emerging adults understand acculturation as a phenomenon they have experienced in their transition and adjustment in their local Canadian society. It also helps define race and ethnicity; how the intersectionality of social identities including gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and immigration backgrounds shape their adjustment and acculturation experiences in Canada.

To summarize, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the intersection among multiple factors usually investigated in acculturation and immigration studies to, 1) shape Arab immigrant emerging adults' perception of acculturation, and 2) foster a successful acculturation experience. Intersectionality supported the analysis of how Arab immigrant emerging adults' demographics and identifying with their Arab ethnic and the Canadian larger groups impact their acculturation.

As well, this research aimed to understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults perceive the Canadian host society's role in promoting opportunities of active citizenship and equitable participation in the larger society, as well as minimizing systemic barriers that could hinder these

processes. Equitable participation is defined in this study as the provision of equitable opportunities of all existing cultural groups including dominant and immigrant groups. It follows the approach of studies that applied this concept to understanding immigrant population experiences (Hatch et al., 2016; Jelin, 2018; Mupenzi et al., 2020). Considering that studies on acculturation tend to focus more on gaps and challenges that Arabs undergo (Amer, 2007; Awad, 2010; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015), this study focused on elements of success that support Arab immigrant emerging adults in achieving milestones during their acculturation despite life challenges.

Gaps were identified in the literature that investigated Arab immigration and acculturation experiences in Canada. First, there are no studies that clearly distinguished the Arab culture from religion, even though youth and emerging adults identified the interchangeable use of Arab culture with a specific religion as an acculturation challenge (e.g., Aroian et al., 2016; Amer & Hovey, 2014; Awad et al., 2021; Rasmi et al., 2016; Tiflati, 2017; Wannas-Jones, 2003). Interestingly, one study did not include the term ‘Arab’ in their title or key terms, although all Muslim participating emerging adults were of Arab descent (Tiflati, 2017). This may further contribute to the association of Arab with a specific religion (i.e., Islam) despite the diversity of religions in the Arab world. As well, the experiences of Arabs with a Christian religious background may be hidden (Amer & Hovey, 2014; Kira et al., 2014; Tastoglou & Petrinioti, 2011; Wannas-Jones, 2003). To address this gap in understanding the Arab acculturation experience, this study was open to Arab immigrant emerging adults from all religions. Further, studies of Arab immigrants in Canada focus on acculturation outcomes, including psychological and sociocultural adaptations (e.g., El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Hamdan, 2007; Paterson, 2008; Rasmi et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2015). According to the

consulted literature, there are no current studies that focus on examining the process of acculturation and how it is perceived and experienced among Arab immigrants in Canada, particularly the emerging adult group. Therefore, it is important to investigate Arab immigrant emerging adults' perspectives on their within-ethnic group relations, which are relationships within- their ethnic community (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Kumar et al., 2015), their interethnic relations, which are cross-cultural relationships with the larger Canadian society (Berry, 2019; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2014), and how their perceptions of ethnic, racial, and religious identities inform how they navigate the acculturation process.

Accounting for the diversity in the Arab community is integral to understanding the differences that exist in the immigration history and adjustment experience (Aroian et al., 2016; Awad, 2010; McCoy et al., 2016), and this is another gap that this study aims to fill. While generalizing claims are not the aim of this study, sampling efforts were devoted to increasing the demographic diversity of participating Arab immigrant emerging adults. The aim was to enhance transferability of experience in descriptions of the essence of acculturation to other Arab immigrant groups in Canada. Enhancing the transferability of the results could also extend the derived knowledge from this study to other immigrant groups.

### **Research Question(s)**

The study was conducted to answer the primary research question:

1. *How do Arab immigrant emerging adults understand the acculturation phenomenon?*

The following subsequent research questions supported a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon among Arab immigrant emerging adults:

- a) How does their Arab identity influence the degree to which they preserve their Arab heritage and, in turn, shape their decision to become actively engaged in the Canadian society?
- b) What factors intersect with the Arab culture to shape milestones that Arab immigrant emerging adults perceive as elements of positive acculturation and success?
- c) In Arab immigrant emerging adults' perspective, how does Canadian society influence their immigration and acculturation experience in Canada?

## CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

### **Research Methodology**

The study applied qualitative inquiry with transcendental/psychological phenomenology as its methodological approach. Qualitative inquiry stems from naturalistic approaches; it situates the observer within the world being studied (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It consists of interpretive practices that guide the researcher to understand how a social experience is lived, and what meanings have been ascribed to it by the individual(s) experiencing it (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The qualitative researcher seeks to understand meanings, processes, and derive themes or patterns through inductive means (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research emphasizes the “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13), reinforcing the “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13). Since the purpose of the study **is** to understand the acculturation phenomenon from the lived experiences of Arab immigrant emerging adults, phenomenological methodology is a natural fit to guide the project.

As a method, phenomenology can be applied in two approaches; hermeneutical phenomenology as theorized by van Manen (1990) and transcendental or psychological phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994) (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b). First, hermeneutical phenomenology is mobilized as a methodology when research is directed toward interpreting hermeneutics, or texts of life and lived experiences (phenomenology) (Creswell, 2013). Researchers consulting hermeneutical phenomenology identify a phenomenon of interest, reflect on the themes that constitute this phenomenon or lived experience, and then write a description of the phenomenon to maintain a strong relationship to it (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutical phenomenology, as theorized by van Manen (1990), is an

interpretive process where the researcher engages in mediating between different meanings of lived experiences to generate an interpretation of the lived experience or phenomenon of inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

Second, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology deviates from interpretations and focuses on arriving at a description of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals with the goal of arriving at the *essence* of a phenomenon. This study applies transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994) who utilizes the concept of the epoche (bracketing) process, through which researchers set aside personal experiences of the phenomenon to have a fresh perspective of this phenomenon of inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas uses ‘transcendental’ to mean where “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994). While Moustakas (1994) recognizes that a perfectly fresh perspective on a phenomenon may not be achieved (Moustakas, 1994), Creswell (2013) contends that researchers are able to embrace this idea of having a fresh perspective through describing their own lived experience and bracketing their own views first before proceeding with the data collection. The stepwise process that researchers undertake in conducting transcendental phenomenology is the following: (1) identify a phenomenon of interest to study; (2) bracket own lived experience of the phenomenon; (3) collect data from several individuals who have experienced this phenomenon; (4) analyze data through reducing significant statements or quotes shared; combine statements into themes; (5) provide textual description (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how they experienced the phenomenon within specific conditions, situations or contexts); and finally, (6) combine textual and structural descriptions to convey an overall *essence* of the lived experience (Creswell, 2013).

This study relies upon transcendental phenomenology as described by Mouskatas (1994), philosophically following Husserl's theorization of phenomenology for three reasons. First, this project does not interpret the acculturation phenomenon; rather, the intent is to arrive at an overall essence of how Arab immigrant emerging adults describe their lived acculturation experiences. Second, this project attempts to understand several common experiences of a phenomenon that I personally experienced. Consequently, this study aims to derive textual and structural descriptions of acculturation that can help produce an overall essence of how acculturation is experienced among a particular cultural (Arab) and age (emerging adults) group who has immigrated to Canada. Correspondingly, considering that I have personally experienced acculturation and that I identify as an Arab and immigrant, I have followed an approach that closely follows autoethnography to deconstruct my conceptualization of the acculturation phenomenon prior to engaging in data collection.

The section will provide my perspective and how I have processed my experience prior to engaging with the participants' stories. In this process, I deviated from the bracketing approach. I found that bracketing my experiencing may be quite limiting and restrictive. As well, bracketing my experience conflicts with the CRT lens that I adopt for this study. CRT and intersectionality liberate the researcher from investigating lived experience through a restrictive, singular lens, and reinforce looking at multiple elements of the self that shape the *wholeness* of one's experience. Part of that experience is me; my perspective and my lens that I shaped through my personal experience throughout the acculturation process. I have used approaches of an autoethnographic analysis to discuss my positionality and how I arrived at the essence of my experience. I was inspired by autoethnography scholarly work that integrated CRT, discussed diasporic and racial identities, and/or that discussed migration as a lived experience (Kennedy &



Romo, 2013; Ku, 2019; Miller, 2008). With this, I hope to provide a true account of how I have come to understand the essence of Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation.

Third, Moustakas (1994) presents two main general research questions for transcendental phenomenological research both of which directly match the research question guiding this study. Moustakas (1994) states that the two main general questions that should be addressed are: "what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) and "what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In addition to inquiring about what they have experienced in terms of acculturation in this dissertation research, participating Arab immigrant emerging adults were asked to reflect on what factors, contexts or situations have been influential in how they would describe and perceive their acculturation experience.

## **Research Methods**

### **Participants Inclusion Criteria**

Inclusion criteria for participants in this study were: (1) first-generation recent immigrants and refugees who have been in Canada between 2-5 years, (2) emerging adults (ages 18-25), (3) Arab descent representing Arab league 22 nations, (4) whose preferred spoken language is either Arabic or English, (5) residing in Windsor-Essex for up to five years, and (6) from any religious background. Participants came from several immigration categories (i.e., economic class, work permit, family reunification and sponsorship, and a study permit) and all refugee statuses (i.e., conventional, asylum seekers).

In terms of their cultural or ethnic background, participants identifying as Arab denoted that they come from one of the 22 nations of the Arab League and speak the Arabic language

(Masters & Sergie, 2020; Mir, 2019). This study targeted recent immigrants who have had enough time in Canada to begin establishing their perception of their acculturation experience. Christianity and Islam are the most common religions in the Arab culture (Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Wannas-Jones, 2003; Rasmi et al., 2014); however, participants were recruited regardless of their religious affiliation, including no religion. The study was open to all genders, (male, female or other), although gender is usually defined dichotomously in the Arab culture, thus it was anticipated that most participants will identify as either male or female (Britto & Amer, 2007; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Wannas-Jones, 2003; Rasmi et al., 2014). The study sample matched the gender identity results in the consulted literature. However, it is important to acknowledge that gender identity was self-reported, and that cultural or religious pressures may be influential on disclosure of diverse gender identities; this is further explored in the analysis.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

The sample size was decided based on a review of previous studies applying phenomenology as qualitative inquiry (Awad et al., 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b; Tastoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). For example, Tastoglou and Petrinioti (2011) released a study on the lived experiences of Lebanese youth in Halifax where they conducted in-depth interviews with 16 participants. As well, Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) indicate that the ideal sample size for a study applying phenomenology ranges from five to 25 participants in order for data to reach saturation. Hence, a sample of 27 participated in the present study exceeded the recommended range (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b).

For this study, I focused greater attention on recruitment and sampling to represent the diversity of the Arab world. My aim was to enhance the transferability of the study results to

derive lessons that could be applicable to individuals who immigrated from different Arab nations.

I applied three sampling approaches: purposive, theoretical and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is the approach where a researcher selects individuals or a group of individuals that have knowledge and experience of the phenomenon of interest, are willing and able to participate and reflect on their experience (Conlon et al., 2020; Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling strategies were applied based on the identified inclusion criteria and through partnership and access to community agencies who supported the study's recruitment. All supporting community agencies belonged to the Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP) Council and have received and supported the recruitment accordingly.

Theoretical sampling is where the researcher makes active decisions during the data collection and analysis of where to collect data next. It is commonly consulted in grounded theory studies because it helps generate theory and concepts from data through identifying emerging concepts and supporting the research in decisions of where to sample next (Conlon et al., 2020). In this study, I applied theoretical sampling through the data collection and concurrent analysis stage as it helped me identify emerging concepts in understanding the acculturation phenomenon. As I was progressing through the data collection phase, I started noticing patterns of experiences in education, community engagement, access to services, as well as discrimination and racism. For example, in terms of racism and discrimination, two participants shared direct exposure to racism and discrimination, while others addressed more subtle forms of racism in the form of structural barriers and oppressions. As well, I attended to intersectional demographics that would aid me in best understand participants' experiences, specifically religion, age, gender, and immigration status. My aim was to enhance the diversity of the sample

not to be representative, but more to arrive at a rich understanding of Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation process. Further, one goal of this study was to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Arab immigrant experience through acknowledging that the Arab population is highly diverse. As well, it assists in encouraging an understanding of the Arab acculturation experience to combat possible stereotypical views of the Arab culture and their acculturation experience.

Finally, to maximize recruitment to reach the target sample, I applied snowball sampling. This approach allows the research to reach data saturation and increases the success in accessing populations that may be difficult to access (Naderifar et al., 2017). Of the multiple purposes and roles, I used snowball sampling to help me reach data saturation and reach the target sample size. I asked participants to share the study information and flyer with others who may wish to participate in the study. Participants in this study came from all three sampling approaches.

### **Recruitment Strategies**

I adopted multiple recruitment strategies to support in securing the study sample. First, I generated a recruitment flyer and an email script to support recruitment efforts (please see Appendix B and C). I collaborated with Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP), the City of Windsor's Diversity Committee as well as local cultural community, and religious associations. WE LIP is a local multi-sectoral initiative representing over 90 local organizations and institutions and it is funded by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to facilitate services in support of long-term settlement and integration of immigrants and newcomers.

I followed a three-step protocol for recruitment with WE LIP, which I later followed with the City of Windsor's Diversity committee. First, I sent an email to the Community Connector and Communication Assistant to request their support with recruitment. This communication

provided study details, including honoraria and potential benefits to participants and the community, as well as the request for recruitment support and dissemination plan upon the completion of the study. Second, Community Connector sent an email to the WE LIP Council members on my behalf that included an email script that I wrote (see Appendix C) as well as the study flyer (Appendix B). Third, I requested that WE LIP send follow-up reminders to their members until the required sample size was reached. Then, I conducted a 15–20-minute presentation at a WE LIP Council meeting requesting to support study recruitment. I applied the same three-step protocol with the City of Windsor’s Diversity Committee and informed the committee members about the research. Members were asked to share the flyer with their respective communities. In addition, I contacted local Arab groups, community centres, and religious organizations by phone, email, and/or social media outlets. I reached out to online groups, mosques, and churches. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in 2020 and 2021, modes of communication focused on email and social network outlets. As well, the interviews all solely took place virtually, either via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. I also posted the study details to the University of Windsor’s School of Social Work Facebook and LinkedIn pages. Hence, I followed a two-step protocol for recruitment: (1) I sent email communications to the local cultural or religious group to their published email address to request support for recruitment (Appendix C) and included the study flyer (Appendix B); (2) I sent direct messages where possible to the respective group via social media (Facebook and Instagram) (see Appendix E for social network message and study-specific social media research pages) and the study flyer (Appendix B). For online groups, I asked them to promote the study using the social media messaging (Appendix E) and study flyer (Appendix B). I also created a Facebook and an Instagram page to communicate via social media and asked collaborating organizations,

including cultural and religious groups, to share the pages (Appendix E includes the pages' details). Table 1 below outlines a sample of recruitment parties.

**Table 1**

*Sample of Recruitment with Local Agencies, Community and Cultural Group Organizations*

<b>Organization/Group</b>	<b>Approaches to Recruitment</b>
Facebook Page Launch	Facebook page post was created, and page was launched; it was used as a medium to communicate and promote the study.
Instagram Page Launch	Instagram page post was created, and page was launched; it was used as a medium to communicate and promote the study.
Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP)	The study details were shared with all 90+ organizations, includes Windsor Police Department – study information has been promoted, all other agencies are promoting respectively. I presented at one of the WE LIP Council meetings briefly about the study and recruitment criteria and shared I will be presenting at a future WE LIP Council meeting the study findings.
Diversity Advisory Committee – The City of Windsor	The study details were shared with all committee members. I presented at one of the committee meetings and addressed study inquiries.
Facebook and Instagram Advertisement	I created an advertisement on both platforms. The ad was extended geographically across Canada and U.S. for possible networking connections and families who may have relatives here in Windsor-Essex.
Social Media – School of Social Work	Study details were shared on School of Social Work social media platforms.
Newcomer Support Program (NSP): The Multicultural Council of Windsor Essex.	Timpy (NSP Worker) shared study details with 367 contacts inclusive of all immigrant and refugee statuses. The contacts are inclusive of international student population.
MENA Women Canada Facebook Page	Natasha Feghali (page administrative) posted study details on MENA Women Canada page.
University of Windsor Muslim Chaplaincy	Study details were share via email; a request was made for social media posting. The study information was sent via email to members, posted on the website, and was discussed in a meeting.

## **Procedure**

An application was submitted to the University of Windsor's Research Ethics Board (REB) to obtain ethics approval. Upon ethics approval, I immediately commenced the

recruitment process. Prior to collecting data, I completed a section on positionality that resembled an autoethnographic approach that will be discussed following the discussion on trustworthiness.

### **In-depth Individual Online Interviews**

I collected the data using one-on-one in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to “capture, in the participants’ own words, their thoughts, perceptions, feelings and experiences” (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 52). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and possible health concerns, I conducted the interviews virtually. I used secure Microsoft Teams and Zoom links to conduct and record the interviews. I am securely licensed under the University of Windsor, and I have taken additional security measures (for example, providing a unique password and link to each interviewee) to maximize the safety of the participant’s confidentiality while conducting the interviews online. This online research protocol follows the University of Windsor’s REB guidelines to replace in-person data collection modalities with telephonic or virtual communication approaches (University of Windsor Research Ethics Board, 2020).

Conducting the interviews virtually has its advantages and disadvantages. Participating virtually was effective in that it allowed participants to complete the interview from the convenience of their own homes and avoided possible transportation cost and time. As well, the option to be off-camera increased confidentiality measures which encouraged participation from individuals seeking anonymity and privacy. A few participants stated that they feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives without the “stress of being there,” and appreciated the additional confidentiality that participating virtually and off-camera provides.

Despite its advantages, virtual interviews come with challenges especially for the researcher. Being off camera made it difficult for me to gather in-depth insight into nonverbal

cues that could have guided me to better observe and understand participants' emotional investment in the acculturation process. It also required spending more time building rapport. I worked on building rapport by showing myself on video, spending additional time to address privacy concerns, and when asked, shared insights about my personal immigration experience. I found this to be helpful in having participants relate to me and provide me with more insight into their personal stories.

Participants contacted me or my research assistant directly via phone, email, or direct messaging through social media to express interest in participating in the study. If the participant contacted me or my research assistant via phone, we reviewed the study details (e.g., provided an overview of the research study, including consent, interview procedure, honorarium, and volunteer withdrawal processes). We collected basic information, first and last name, and confirmed contact number and email address, all of which were necessary to set up the interview. We then set up an interview date and asked participants to share their email and forward the completed consent forms. If the participant contacted either of us via email or social media, we confirmed the email address and sent an email to set up the interview; we also included the consent package (see Appendix A) to be reviewed before the interview and overview of study details and procedure.

As I hold an active role in the Arab community in Windsor-Essex, it was necessary to assess the possibility of a pre-existing dual relationship. When a dual relationship existed, I extended the option to have the interview conducted by the research assistant. A research assistant two of the 27 interviews. These participants had specific scheduling requirements; as well, they found comfort in alternating between Arabic, English, and Chaldean.



When the interview was scheduled, the interviewer prepared a secured Zoom/Teams link (following participant's preferred medium) and sent an email reminder for the scheduled interview. Finally, in preparation for the interview, the research assistant prepared a Word Document with the Participant ID only and encrypted with a password. The Word Document was used in the transcription phase.

Among the information shared, participants were informed of the designated timeframe for the interview, which was expected to take 1-1.5 hours in duration. As well, participants were informed that they would be awarded an honorarium of a \$35-value electronic gift certificate for participating in the interview. The timeframe allotted to complete the interview followed the guideline of similar research studies using qualitative in-depth interviews to collect data (e.g., Hanley et al., 2018; Veronis et al., 2018). The designated timeframe was critical to allow the interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee; this supported in enhancing the interviewee's comfort with answering the interview questions. As well, the designated timeframe allowed for sufficient time for interviewees to think and reflect on the interview questions.

On the interview day, the interviewer was present on the Zoom or Microsoft Teams link ten minutes prior to the scheduled time to ensure that there were no technical issues. The interviewer welcomed the participant to the secure link, confirmed the receipt of virtual signed consent form(s) and obtained verbal consent for participation and audio-recording (Appendix A). The participant was also asked about their language preference, and the interview commenced in the preferred language, Arabic or English. To maximize confidentiality and security of information, the interviewer encouraged the participant to avoid using their name. The interviewer also avoided referring to them by name; and, if names were mentioned, they were crossed out on the transcripts. Once consent was obtained, the interviewer started recording.

The interview started by asking participants their language of choice for commencing the interview, with the two choices being English or Arabic (see Appendix F). The interviewer assisted the participant in completing a brief demographic questionnaire that includes language spoken at home, religion, gender, immigration background, place of birth and nationality, education, and employment backgrounds. The demographic questionnaire ended with questions 14 and 15 that targeted areas identified as evolving milestones of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2007). These questions were intentionally placed at the end of the demographic questionnaire and in transition to the in-depth interview questions. The purpose was to allow the participants to reflect on the concrete life tasks to deconstruct before engaging in more in-depth discussion about abstract concepts such as adjustment, settlement, and acculturation. First, I asked participants to prioritize the five key areas: education; career, having a job; romantic relationships; marriage, establishing a family; and civic engagement, which I defined as active participation and volunteerism in their new community of Windsor-Essex. Then, I have requested that they identify a person, or multiple individuals, whom they consider as having an important role in supporting their life decisions and how they would prioritize those five areas. The intent for asking these questions was three-fold: first, I was interested to derive from participants' reflections whether the contextual influences (i.e., living in an industrialized society) impacted the prioritization of these life goals, and deviated from commonly accepted norms of priorities in the Arab culture according to studies on Arab immigrants (Awad et al., 2021; Chen & Sheldon, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2014). To illustrate, some studies on Arab culture reveal that marriage and establishing a family may be prioritized over education and career opportunities (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2015) especially for young women. Second, in addition to living through the developmental phase of emerging

adulthood, establishing oneself and living in an industrialized society like Canada that supports goals of self-sufficiency and may, in turn, result in a shift of priorities. I assumed, based on consulted literature and common cultural knowledge, that parents would prioritize marriage and starting a family over other milestones (e.g., education and career), and that these priorities may differ by gender (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). I was interested to learn how the possible value differences in prioritizing the milestones would impact the parent-emerging adult relationship as some studies have identified (e.g., Aroian et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2016). Parents and families may have undergone some changes and their priorities were influenced by the priorities of the industrialized western society like Canada.

The interview proceeded with asking eight major in-depth questions that allowed participants to reflect on their acculturation and adjustment experiences. Some main questions had probes to help participants elaborate on their shared responses. Below is a sample of the interview questions:

- I. How do you describe your Arab ethnicity and heritage? What is your race/racial background?
- II. Please describe your immigration experience and adjustment process here in Canada.
- III. What is it like to be an Arab (\*insert participant religion/spiritual belief\*) here in Canada?

Please see Appendix F for the rest of the interview guide.

The interviewer took field notes during and following the interview to reflect on interview proceedings and record unique that may support the data analysis phase. Upon

completing the interview, the interviewer thanked the participant for their contribution to the study, provided the honorarium online via email and asked the participant for a virtual follow-up acknowledgement of receiving the honorarium for the researcher to keep in records.

### **Research Assistant Training**

Research Assistant Sally identifies as an Arab Canadian immigrant who identifies as Iraqi Chaldean, she is 31 years old, and holds a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and Professional Studies as well as bachelor and Master's degree in Social Work. Sally has worked with Arab immigrant newcomers in her research assistantship role in a previous study. Sally and I worked together in a previous project that targeted Arab immigrants and newcomers. In her research assistant role, Sally conducted interviews (open-ended questions / qualitative) with youth and newcomer families; transcribed and translated collected data and research documents from English to Arabic and Arabic to English; presented recommendations to develop a better interview guide; and participated in the coordination of research project to conduct meetings and recruit participants.

I trained Sally on all aspects of the study. First, I ensured that she understood the goal and purpose of the study as well as the research questions. We then resorted to discussing her role and the support she needed. Sally was trained on the data collection process; practice interviews were conducted, and Sally and I met on a weekly basis to address questions. Sally's primary tasks included transcribing the interviews and translation of all study documents, including social media posts, to Arabic

### **Analysis Procedure**

I used thematic analysis to generate codes, subthemes, and themes with the aim of identifying patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis aligns with

phenomenology as it allows the researcher to arrive at a rich understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of interest as experienced by the individual (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Creswell, 2013). In turn, a theme “captures something important in the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to recognize that a theme is not “necessarily dependent on quantifiable data;” rather it is evaluated by its relevance to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

I adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to guide my analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that a few decisions that the researcher should make before engaging in the data collection and analysis process: the type of thematic analysis (inductive vs. theoretical), epistemology (realist/naturalist vs. constructionist), levels of identifying themes (latent vs. semantic approach). I applied theoretical thematic analysis in coding the data as I mapped the relevance and connection of the data to my research question(s) to arrive at the rich description of acculturation as experienced by Arab immigrant emerging adults. My approach is informed by a critical race lens, which allowed me to view race as socially constructed and apply an intersectional framework to better understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults experience the essence of acculturation. A constructionist approach has been the epistemological underpinning for my analysis; a constructionist approach essentially asserts that “meaning and experience are socially produced”, it is the process of identifying sociocultural contexts and social conditions that shape lived experiences. Through the intersectional lens, I was interested in understanding the sociocultural factors that contribute to the lived experience of acculturation among Arab immigrant emerging adults. In terms of identifying themes, I used the latent approach in that I sought to identify underlying conceptualizations of how Arab immigrant

emerging adults theorize the acculturation experience. This has specifically supported me in the analysis process to identify the mutual dedication that Arab immigrant emerging adults identify as key to a successful acculturation experience between their Arab heritage group and the host, Canadian group. Furthermore, it helped identify what contributes to a ‘successful’ acculturation process with a goal to reproduce such experiences in supporting prospective immigrants and refugees.

In selecting Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis, I was inspired by their structured approach, their guide to integral decision-making prior to engaging with the data, support for flexibility, and their support for an active engagement with the data. First, Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a six-phase guide which outlines a stepwise process of how to conduct the data analysis. This greatly helped structure and organize my analysis. I explain how I approached each phase in Table 2. Second, they highlight the importance of flexibility in the coding process. The key is not a “quantifiable measure” of how many themes emerge, but rather coding is a reflective process that directly relates the themes to the research question(s). During my analysis, I continually engaged in this process as I progressed through the analysis phases. Third, Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that the researcher should adopt an active role when coding the data. They assert that themes do not “emerge” or “reside” in the data. Rather, themes are an active interpretation resulting from the lens we adopt in analyzing the data, and how we actively choose to make sense of it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Their promotion for an active researcher’s involvement with the data is a primary factor that encouraged me to apply their approach to thematic analysis.

. At the analysis stage, Sally supported with the demographic questionnaire results and reviewed the codes and categories generated early in the analysis process to cross-reference for

translation. I trained Sally on conducting the interviews by running mock interviews and providing feedback. I also listened and reviewed her first interview and provided feedback in preparation for the second interview to ensure consistency of data collection and analysis. As well, due to her Chaldean background and familiarity with the Christian vs. Chaldean distinction from her home country, Iraq, I consulted Sally regarding participants' religious backgrounds to better understand the context through which participants identify as Chaldean as opposed to Christian. This aspect of religious identification will be further discussed in the results and discussion chapters.

### **Coding Methods**

I selected MAXQDA as the data analysis program to complete the coding and analysis. The program allows for detailed, engaging, and descriptive approaches to qualitative data analysis. I used colours, visual codes, and memos to support me throughout the analysis phases. I imported each transcript and looked for patterns, themes, and subthemes throughout each interview. I started by generating overarching themes that best described the participant's shared stories and responses to questions. Then, I generated subthemes that would best fit under the overarching main themes; then, looked for patterns across the data and have flexibly moved through the generated themes and subthemes to assess whether some of the themes and subthemes could be combined. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guideline to conduct the thematic analysis. Please review Table 2 for a detailed description of each phase and steps taken to complete it.

### **Table 2**

#### *The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis*

*Note. This table describes each phase in alignment with Braun and Clarke (2006) and how I applied each phase. This process included Research Assistant (RA) Sally in some phases.*

Phase	Description of Applying Phase in Analysis
Phase I: Familiarizing with the Data	Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. After completing Sally's (RA) training, we met a couple of times to discuss the decision for transcription to be conducted directly in English. We discussed the use of Arabic words and how that could be integrated. Sally completed the initial data transcription. I then read each transcript while I listened to the audio-recording. I have then re-read all transcripts before engaging in the coding process.
Phase II: Generating Initial Codes	I transferred one transcript at a time into MAXQDA to start the coding process as I was looking to engage in greater depth with the data. My intent was not only to capture the surface/projected meanings, but also to understand underlying meanings within their shared responses. I focused on each segment and allowed myself to flexibly code the meaning or theme I understood with their shared response. Simultaneously, I used the Memos feature on MAXQDA to capture interesting meanings, pose questions to help me interpret the data including meanings I believe underlie the data, capture emotions sensed underlying the responses, and to highlight critical information to reconsider in the next phase of analysis. (e.g., memo 4: P1 (The Kurdish-Syrian- Use Quote-This is an extremely important section. She explains how she feels displaced with her culture, identity, and sense of belonging even back home. I wonder what made it different then to be in Canada? Lots of passion in her voice and description)).
Phase III: Searching for Themes	As I completed coding all 27 interviews, I generated a total of 45 codes (including a code for 'key statements' from all participants that best signified their experience. These codes had 2 levels to match a theme and subthemes structure. As an example, Role of Religion was a theme or the main code with two subthemes/subcodes: Restrictive and Supportive. Another example is Arab Culture's Insights as a main theme or code, with 6 subcodes: support others; collective wellbeing; other values; respect; family values/expectations; other cultures; image on Arabs in Canada. I have then started to collate the themes and subthemes into meaningful patterns to further generate more specific themes.
Phase IV: Reviewing themes	During this phase, I reviewed all themes and subthemes and was able to generate a total of 10-13 themes. The process of generating themes of codes involved that I proceed fluidly between phase III and IV and relate back to the research question(s). I sought to answer what can help me understand how the acculturation process is understood and lived: How does the Arab identity influence participation with the Canadian society and the preservation of Arab heritage? What are some experiences that participants identified as "successful" or demonstrated pride in engaging in these experiences? What were the participants trying to inform me about their interactions with the Canadian society through their immigration story and the essence of their acculturative efforts? The time



	commitment was significant in this process as I also went back between the transcribed data and the actual interviews to ensure that the essence of participants' experiences was not missed in translation from Arabic to English and that it was effectively captured through the generated themes. I generated a thematic map that included 7 themes which I was looking to further redefine in the next phase.
Phase V: Defining and naming themes	This phase interestingly coincided with a couple of academic events where I had the opportunity to present preliminary findings and 'emerging themes': the American Psychological Association, Division 52 Symposium, and the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood Conference. The preparation for these two presentations was an engaging, active process of consulting the data, which, in turn, helped me refine the themes to ensure that I captured the essence of the overall story of my participants. This phase involved significant active engagement to generate the final set of themes and subthemes. I have defined each theme as I captured its meaning through my participants' responses and, consequently, throughout the analysis process. The outcome was a final set of six themes with subthemes underlying each, and with supporting quotes for each theme/subtheme.
Phase VI: Producing the report	Stemming from the identified six themes and subthemes, I have generated the themes' report as a final phase of analysis. I have adjusted a couple of subthemes only, but the six themes remained the same. This final phase and the process of arriving at the themes is captured next in this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is imperative to make careful considerations when conducting research to maximize the protection of research participants. For the current study, in addition to providing an informed consent and letter of information about the study, I devoted greater efforts to assess and respond to challenges that may arise when dual relationships exist. Considering my active role both as a member and a professional within the Arab community, I asked participants additional questions during recruitment regarding possible previous professional relationships to minimize the possible impact of dual relationship. When a participant was interested in contributing to the study and had a pre-existing relationship with me as the Principal Investigator, I or the Research Assistant offered the participant to conduct the interview with the Research Assistant instead.

Participants were informed that we were committed to enhancing their comfort with sharing their experiences, and that they had an equitable opportunity to participate in the study. All participants with whom I had dual relationships were comfortable with sharing their stories. In fact, some attested that being familiar with me gives them more comfort and a sense of safety to share their stories openly and fully.

I was aware that, during the interviews, emotional distress could arise as an outcome of participants having recollections of negative experiences during their acculturation. Therefore, information about available resources for emotional support were provided to participants if they experienced emotional distress during or following the interview. Some of the emotional resources provided to participants included Canadian Mental Health Association-Windsor Essex County Branch, Family Services Windsor Essex. For more immigrant-focused support, participants were provided with settlement agencies' information such as the Multicultural Council of Windsor Essex and YMCA of Western Ontario. While the questions were not intended to pose more than minimal risk upon participation, I ensured that supports were readily available to provide to participants when required. Finally, the consent document informed participants of the confidentiality of shared information and who had access to their shared data, how data was deidentified, voluntary participation, and the right for withdrawal, as well as information about the dissemination of the study results.

### **Trustworthiness**

In this study, I applied different measures of trustworthiness to support in enhancing the credibility and quality of the shared data results. I have applied strategies recommended by different sources (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, 2003b; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For credibility, I have applied two strategies: member checking and investigator triangulation.

All participants consented to be contacted for future similar studies and when they completed the consent process before conducting the interview. As well, during consent signing at the beginning of each interview, I explained the process of member checking and how I wished to confirm my understanding of their lived experience. I affirmed that this would be part of the consent process to be contacted for future studies and that this has no impact on their rights to participation or withdrawal from the study. All participants agreed to be contacted for the member checking phase. Hence, upon completing my data analysis, I connected with several participants and presented data results including the themes I derived from their shared experiences. I selected a variety of participants from the database based on demographic information. I contacted 20 participants, but only 12 were able to support the member checking process. I offered a zoom, phone, and email as forums and presented the themes I captured and depending on the forum, participants shared their responses accordingly. Participants affirmed that I was capturing their experience accurately, and some added further context to elaborate on their shared stories. I have included an example in the data analysis chapter. In terms of investigator triangulation, I consulted with Research Assistant Sally on the data analysis in a couple of areas. First, I reviewed the transcripts while listening to the audio after she completed them, we met on several occasions and ensured our agreement on some of the translated words. As well, I shared the original codes and categories with her to discuss whether the categories I used are the best applicable, or if she had further recommendations. No further recommendations were provided by the RA. She has assured that the themes I derived match the voices she heard in the interviews through collecting and transcribing the data.

For transferability, I provided a rich description of acculturation after I completed my analysis, and I added contextual information that could support the meaningful application of

these experiences to outside observers. I added details about the importance of contextualizing acculturation in this study within a colonial Canadian society. I have also integrated insights where possible about participants' demonstrated emotions through their voices, which I aimed to give greater context about their passion to share their stories and the emotional investment they have in this experience.

For dependability and confirmability, I have integrated throughout the dissertation a stepwise process that has been applied from data collection to analysis, providing insight into the steps and decisions I have made throughout all phases of the study. Considering this, I provide a holistic, detailed picture of the study to make it applicable for future researchers to use as a reference to develop their research projects. Finally, throughout my study, I applied reflexivity to guide me in assessing my implicit and explicit preconceptions about the Arab immigrant acculturation experience. I used field notes to write down some thoughts and captured verbal data and nonverbal data with participants who decided to keep their cameras on. Seven participants of the 27 kept their cameras on during the interview. I also included myself in the process, where I explore my role as researcher and reflect on the relationship between myself as a researcher and the themes of interest, namely, acculturation, Arab ethnicity, racial identity, religion, and the perception of the Canadian society's role in the overall experience.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

#### **A Life-long Refugee**

As a researcher and explorer of identity and belonging, I often ask myself, "Who am I?" To answer this question, I sought guidance from my grandfathers, who were significant influencers on my upbringing to formulate a response to the question, "who am I?" My father offered further help in answering this question when it became more difficult to answer with

every contextual change and significant milestone. I came to learn that one simple phrase represents my journey thus far: I am a ‘life-long refugee’. To best describe my identity and deconstruct this phrase, I selected to adopt a theoretical lens that I find quite liberating for me to formulate a response that I align with at the heart of identity formation and acculturation practices. Intersectionality, a core tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT), explores the importance of recognizing that multiple factors intersect to shape an individual’s lived experience and identity. The intersectional self is usually defined with demographic factors, but other factors can also constitute as an aspect of identity.

Currently, I identify as a Palestinian Arab immigrant Canadian woman. I am Muslim, in my early thirties, a passionate social worker, and a doctoral candidate. This representation of my intersectional self is intentionally and carefully shaped. Allow me to introduce you to my intersectional identity as you travel with me through my journey of exploring my positionality. My Palestinian ethnonational background underscores multiple sociopolitical contexts that hold influence over the process of my individuation. Identifying as Palestinian has transcended over three generations following my family’s initial journey with refuge in 1948, when my family settled in Lebanon as Palestinian refugees. I dedicate the credit of preserving our Palestinian identity to my grandfathers as they divided the task of raising me as a Palestinian; one grandfather was responsible for teaching me the Palestinian region and family history, and the other taught me the geography and the cultural values that shape a Palestinian.

The second aspect of my refugee status relates to my ethnicity and citizenship. Ethnically, I am an Arab, but residing in the Arab region did not guarantee me citizenship. In fact, irrespective of our geographic location, we were considered Palestinian refugees. Living in the Arab region of both Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, we were neither citizens nor residents. We

were always refugees. By default, with our identification cards and travel documents that were issued by the Lebanese government, we were known as refugees in the Arab region. The only thing that differentiated us aside from being just a refugee was that we were Palestinians. Additionally, as I was undergoing important developmental milestones and attempting to shape my identity, the Palestinian case was quite active in the political arena. I recall the depth of investment of my grandparents, my family, and surroundings in our Palestinian sense of self, which is a side that never escaped me. I recall looking through our travel document and spotting a word that continues to strike me until this day; the fact that we were identified as ‘stateless.’ I remember running to my father in terror, asking what that means. I remember him gazing away and attempting his best explanation to my eight-year-old self of what is meant by this term. It was then that we spoke to his promise of this status not being permanent.

A primary reason for our decision to come to Canada is situated in our determination of changing that status; we wanted a citizenship. We sought some sense of belonging. Canada was not only the land of opportunities for educational advancement and professional growth; Canada was also an escape from the imprisonment of our stateless status. Canada was our homeland. Therefore, until I held the Canadian citizenship in 1997, I was ethnically an Arab, a Palestinian in nationality, and still had no citizenship. I would like to integrate an example to help better situate myself in the sociopolitical context I have lived with my changing status. I recall the sudden shift in our travel experience as we proudly held our Canadian passport and boarded our plane and landed, for the first time, in an international airport as *Canadians*. In preparation for our anticipated three-hour wait time, I sat down on my travel bag and enjoyed the snack I purchased during my flight. I recall seeing my father’s eyes, mesmerized, as he returned to us in the span of three minutes and shared that we are done, our passports were checked, and we could

pass through customs. We were not perceived as a threat to safety, and we did not require a prolonged investigation into every aspect of our lives. It was then that I realized that the *personal* is not only political, but also the personal is sociopolitical. Becoming Canadian citizens dismantled all previous perceptions of our identities: we became welcomed in a new society as we became marked as “safe to admit” to our desired destinations.

### **September 11 at 14-Years-Old: Two Milestones**

Canadian citizenship enhanced my sense of self-worth and provided me with steadier ground upon which I could continue to shape my identity. The greatest empowering aspect of becoming Canadian was not only supporting me to develop a sense of belonging to a land I can claim as my homeland, but also that I was not forced to dismiss my Palestinian identity and Arab culture. The goal of multiculturalism – the concept that Canadians are encouraged to preserve their heritage, while becoming integrated as active participants in the larger society – is, for me, the most attractive factor of becoming Canadian. Now, I acknowledge that the degree to which Canadian multiculturalism is applied as an ideology and a policy to support increasing diversity, requires further investigation. Therefore, I will identify areas where, in my perspective, multiculturalism has justly been applied, and where it remains an idealistic vision.

Even though my immigration status is technically as an economic immigrant, I consider myself as a refugee to Canada. I escaped that feeling of imprisonment of being a Palestinian and a woman living in Saudi Arabia. At the time I lived there, a woman was deprived of her rights to further education, driving, and establishing independence, among other rights. Similarly, as a Palestinian, I would have still been contained within the parameters of being a refugee and not allowed to move beyond these imprisoning parameters. Therefore, for my family and I to tackle progressive steps in advancing our quality of life, an escape was necessary. Being a father of

three determined, strong-willed girls and progressive thinkers, my father was left with only one decision: fleeing to Canada. Little did my father know that our settlement was going to coincide with one of the most significant historical and sociopolitical events that reshaped global views and attitudes toward the Arab culture and Islamic religion.

We arrived on the long summer night of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I still remember the smiles, excitement, eagerness to begin a new life, and the long sighs each of us let out when we arrived in Canada. Our excitement to begin our journey was palpable, but we were also anxious of what lay ahead to learn about this new culture and environment that we were eager to integrate in. As newcomers, or new settlers, we knew that we had a long way ahead of us to engage ourselves actively to learn about our new Canadian home, while sharing some of our preserved heritage as well. However, our opportunity to focus on our settlement and integration was very limited as another life-changing event was on the horizon. The attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, altered the entire equation. Our responsibility shifted from identifying and working toward goals of a successful settlement and integration experience to defending our community, heritage, and religion. Instead of enjoying our democratic rights and fundamental freedoms, we had the obligation of altering the perceptions of our new neighbours believing us to be threats to their enjoyment of these rights and freedoms; and by ‘their’, I am referring to members of the larger society who do not associate with being Arab and/or Muslim.

The obligated advocacy role was quite challenging for me to hold especially since I was establishing myself in another milestone as an adolescent. I was beginning my educational experience here in Canada by entering high school, that has its own stressors and challenges. In addition to learning about the new educational system, curriculum structure, school environment and expectations, and approaches to establishing peer relationships, I had a more fundamental



responsibility to carry as I was responsible to defend myself and affirm that I do not hold beliefs in terrorism, that I am a strong believer in peace and responsibility to humanity, and that my culture and religion have, in fact, taught me these values. I recall my inner frustration with observing the comfort of describing my heritage as a threat to safety and questioning if I came to the right place seeking my own safety. The larger community mirrored the views overheard at my school; the views of being a threat to safety, of being associated with terrorism, and a lack of care for humanity were significant barriers to any attempts of integration. The sociopolitical climate remained charged with these negative ideologies toward the Arab and Islamic worlds for years to come.

The adoption and promotion of the term *Islamophobia* following the September 11 attacks demonstrate the significance of issues of racism, discrimination, and oppression faced by Muslims in general has affirmed for me that the sociopolitical context for a Muslim (and possibly an Arab) living in Canada has permanently changed. It has assured that we are moving into an era where significant and focused efforts must be invested if we were looking to regain even a partial level of the peace that we had during the pre-9/11 era. However, this hope was challenged when the association between terrorist attacks and Islam continued to take place with the establishment and fame of ISIS. Once again, members of my community and I found ourselves in the most challenging position and at that time I posed a question to myself and my family and community respectively: With the repetitive association of our religion and the turning of “Allahu Akbar” from being a call for prayer to a sign of manslaughter how are we going to help dissociate this public image from our reality? At this time, I resorted to investigating the roots of some integral political, academic, and commonly known terms to help me better understand and, in turn, educate those from non-Arab, non-Muslim backgrounds about

my culture and religion. I invested more in learning the underlying meanings of multiculturalism in the Canadian context, extremism, racism, and oppression and how these ideologies are rooted in our communities. Today, as I conduct my doctoral dissertation on immigration and acculturation experiences of Arab immigrants, defining these terms and how I formulate my perspective on them will best situate my study contextually. Let us begin by turning to an integral aspect of our Canadian context, the notion of multiculturalism.

*Multiculturalism* is a foundational value upon which Canada's value system is shaped. As I conduct my doctoral dissertation to explore aspects of diversity, immigration, and Arab acculturation experiences in Canada, I believe it is integral to explore my experience with multiculturalism, reflecting on the different levels of understanding this phenomenon. Generally, multiculturalism describes a society composed of diverse ethnocultural groups and one that embraces equitable participation of all existing cultural groups (Berry, 2016; Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Cvetkovska et al., 2020; Kubota, 2015; Palmer, 1996; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). As a measure of ethnocultural diversity, multiculturalism can be explored at three different levels: as a measure of demography, as an ideology, and as a governmental or policy response.

Demographically, multiculturalism describes a society composed of diverse cultures, ethnic and religious backgrounds, age, gender, and sexual orientation (Berry, 2006, 2016; Berry & David, 2013; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Koustova, 2013; Xu, 2019). As a member of this demographically multicultural society, I am ethnically a Palestinian Arab who belongs to the Arab culture, I am a Muslim female, I am thirty-three years of age, and I am heterosexual. I see each of these demographic identifications as a separate entity; hence, I target each as a separate lens when I compare myself in relation to others in the community.

As an ideology, multiculturalism describes individuals' and groups' attitudes as accepting or rejecting of diversity (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011; Xu, 2019). From my perspective, I see the acceptance or rejection of diversity in Canada exists on a continuum. Acceptance or support to increasing diversity aligns with the global sociopolitical climate and active associations with each measure of demography, especially when it comes to culture, ethnicity, and religion. In terms of policy, multiculturalism describes governmental efforts to develop policies and programs demonstrating acceptance and promotion of diversity (Berry, 2016; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Koustova, 2013; Niles, 2018; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011; Xu, 2019). As well, multiculturalism as a policy ensures that equitable rights are protected for diverse individuals and groups in Canada (Berry, 2006; Government of Canada, 2019; Kubota, 2015; Lagasi, 2013).

In essence, the Canadian federal government demonstrates the promotion of diversity and inclusion through funding bodies such as the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to support newcomer immigrants and refugees through their settlement and integration process. As an example, IRCC has supported the development of Local Immigration Partnerships to promote the development of a comprehensive plan for service delivery for newcomers. The Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP) is a local example that was established in 2008. Further funding is also provided at the provincial level to support immigrants and refugees, called the Newcomer Support Program (NSP), which is provincially funded and is intended to support the social and economic integration of newcomers. Locally, in Windsor, Ontario, the NSP program is offered in partnership of three settlement agencies: Multicultural Council of Windsor Essex, Women Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor, and YMCA of Southwestern Ontario. Despite governmental support to facilitate newcomers' settlement and

integration, federally- and provincially- funded programs and services require specific criteria for newcomers to access these supports. Primarily, newcomers' immigration status in Canada dictates their eligibility to receive services and generally impacts even their knowledge and awareness of the existence of such services. For example, Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) are supported through a structured resettlement program that entails all aspects of meeting their basic needs as well as supporting their social and economic integration. On the other hand, Privately Sponsored Refugees' experience differs such that knowledge and access to settlement services is dependent on the private sponsor. What I have gained anecdotally from my practice experience is that privately sponsored refugees tend to lack awareness of services available to newcomers in the community. Therefore, these programs and services may need to be promoted more through targeting all immigrant and refugee categories. I recognize that the Canadian government's commitment differs among refugees that are governmentally sponsored in comparison with immigrants and refugees from other categories; however, stemming from a critical race theory lens, I partially see this as a form of institutional oppression and racism where structures and policies are validating the superiority of some groups and suppressing the rights and responsibilities toward other groups. You may ask how does race come into play here? I would argue that looking demographically at early settlers or Canadian-born individuals and comparing them to recent refuge-seeking individuals and other immigrants, racial categorization may be a critical, covert factor in continuing to contribute to a structurally unequal society that supports the superiority of some racial groups and ensures the inferiority of others. I believe that for us to commit to and identify ourselves as true supporters of Canadian multiculturalism, we need to ensure that we dedicate more efforts to reduce, or hopefully diminish, structural barriers that may result in different outcomes for newcomers on the sole basis of their immigrant and

refugee status. These efforts can come in terms of funding support, service provision, or promoting and enhancing awareness of existing programs and services that is truly inclusive of all immigrants and refugees in Canada.

### **Contextual Influences**

In processing my lived immigration experience, I find great power in using symbolism to help me deconstruct important phases that influenced how I chose to acculturate. In my exploration, I used the countries I lived in as symbols to represent how I processed and navigated through my personal relationships. Essentially, I processed how these relationships shaped my acculturation and experience. Throughout my journey, it is evident that my personal relationships have been integral to decisions that I made personally, professionally, and academically. My past romantic relationships are symbolic of the Saudi Arabia of my lived experience, while the current and only significant relationship is the “Canada” of my constructed universe. In my past relationship, I sensed that I was dominated by imprisoning cultural ideologies and expectations that brought me back to the phase I lived back in Saudi Arabia. As a woman deprived of her right to decision-making or even expectations that belittle her eagerness to grow professionally and academically, I felt confined to cultural ideologies that prevented me from reaching the self-actualization phase I have come to Canada to achieve. I had a short time to alter my priorities to avoid significant losses. For me, regaining the self I was eager to build and adopt outweighed any of these perceived losses.

In contrast, in Canada, my only significant relationship is symbolized as the “Canada” of my journey for it has liberated me from being confined to cultural values and principles that may not align with me and is a great balance between my two worlds, my Arab heritage, and my Canadian citizenship. Interestingly, the person with whom I built the only liberating relationship

with comes from another culture that is anything but free of rigid rules and expectations; that is, the military culture. Today, I am deconstructing and reconstructing three coexistent cultures: the Arab, the Canadian/North American, and the military culture. I believe that the liberation in this relationship comes from two aspects: first, an agreement on the importance of acknowledging contextual factors that could influence decisions surrounding our union; and second, the ability to effectively merge now three cultures such that we consolidate our decisions and perspectives on the values and principles we choose to adopt from each culture. To demonstrate with an example, the *military man* has portrayed great interest and value in my doctoral studies to the extent that he was open to delaying the start of our family until I complete the degree requirements. I come from a heritage culture that prioritizes for women to establish a family over engaging in higher education or progressing in their careers. Hence, the value that *the military man* had on supporting my individuation and development demonstrated a deviation away from confining cultural norms. I reciprocated his supportive and liberating actions by investing further into understanding his culture(s) and learning about the unique role and expectations that a military wife would be expected to hold. The mutual efforts we have undertaken enhanced my confidence in that our union, or what is symbolized in my perspective as the multicultural Canada, is representative of the mutuality I sought to live through maintaining my heritage and responding to contextual influences ascribed by the larger society to which I now belong. Hence, I have been able to actively participate and successfully engage in all three cultures; thereby enhancing my ability to integrate fully and effectively.

### **Active Participation in the Arab and Canadian Worlds**

One of the primary goals of settling in Canada was a commitment to maintaining my heritage, and a passion to engage in this new Canadian society. I have learned the most vital

lessons on skills that could help me achieve these goals from my guidance counsellor at high school and from colleagues and teachers that invested their time to support me beyond academics. Some of the skills and knowledge I acquired include the importance of maintaining effective communication patterns, establishing peer relationships and social networks and the importance of civic engagement. Through these skills and experiences, I was able to effectively integrate. One significant factor that influenced my journey and supported my active participation in both cultures is the change in my social status as my credentials have changed with academic or professional progress. With the recognition of my changing social status, I had to engage consistently in self-reflection to best differentiate between my personal connection to my heritage, the role I envisioned to hold with the larger society, as well as the academic and professional roles I hold with both my heritage culture and members of other cultures. I became devoted to advocate for the implementation of practices that support and promote respect for diversity, inclusion, and acceptance.

Professionally, I consider the Multicultural Council of Windsor & Essex County (MCC), one of the local settlement agencies, as a key milestone in my professional journey that helped me understand and further invest in multiculturalism. As well, at the MCC, I have learned more about holistic approaches to embracing diversity. The MCC's devotion to multiculturalism and diversity is demonstrated in its mission statement, "The MCC creates a welcoming community for all through education, community engagement and the promotion of diversity and equality" (themcc.com, Retrieved March 2022). I have embraced multiculturalism and respect for diversity through facilitating opportunities among refugees and members of the larger society in direct interaction, service provision, civic engagement, employment, and community collaborations. I have adopted case management and mentoring coach roles respectively through which I

supported refugees in Windsor-Essex in their settlement and resettlement process (please see Appendix G for definition of these terms). Being eager to contribute further to the agency's mission and fulfill my passion surrounding diverse clientele, I have collaborated with colleagues and the leadership team to engage in various opportunities. These include: delivering cultural competence and diversity training in a variety of settings including agencies and organizations in the settlement and orientation sector as well as members of the dominant, larger society; collaborating with the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor to write a book chapter that included three lived experiences of Syrian refugee youth and the role the MCC held in their settlement experience; collaborating with the Psychology Department at the University of Windsor to deliver a nationwide webinar on art therapy as an approach to support mental health needs of refugees; and collaborating with colleagues to engage key stakeholders in the community to exchange knowledge on refugees and refugee settlement, challenges experienced, and how we can best support their active participation in Windsor-Essex.

The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County represents another cornerstone of my professional journey that has allowed me to be in greater collaboration with members and stakeholders from White-dominated agencies. I applaud the Hospice's openness and receptiveness to enhancing their cultural competence through identifying gaps and challenges in supporting diverse clientele as the key factor in allowing me to merge my heritage and Canadian worlds. I found a great sense of fulfillment when I was encouraged to adopt my native Arabic language and my knowledge and background experience with diverse populations to support my work at Hospice. In addition to providing direct social work support to clientele whose native language is Arabic, I continue to be approached by colleagues to exchange insights into possible cultural and religious practices that may be influential on the plan or goals of care for the



respective clientele and their families. One key aspect of cultural knowledge exchange is the lack of knowledge on Hospice and palliative approach to care as concepts, let alone as supportive approaches to palliative and end-of-life care in the Arab culture. Some of the exchanged knowledge includes, the use of religion as a guiding principle for medical and healthcare decisions, hence explaining acceptance and rejection palliative care; the use of religion as a guiding principle for medical support and healthcare decisions; greater family participation in decision-making surrounding patient care; the difference between patient's right to know principle guiding western healthcare system versus practices back home where family may decide to disguise the nature of condition or information on prognosis for fear of impact of patient's emotions and response to care; and the importance of ensuring that hospice and palliative approach to care are clearly defined for families from Arabic culture who may lack knowledge and awareness. At the Hospice, I have co-initiated the Cultural Competence and Diversity Advisory Group through which I supported the development of an agency-level plan to ensure that the goals of cultural competence and the appreciation of diversity and inclusion are met. Through this role, I have participated in opportunities to share knowledge on cultural competence and diversity in the palliative care sector with Hospice staff and members of the larger community. I have applied Arab and Islam as prime examples of culture and religion, respectively, to demonstrate the importance of providing compassionate care that is respectful and inclusive of diverse individuals. I must affirm that the Hospice of Windsor Essex County's receptiveness and embracement of the importance of providing culturally competent care, and one that is inclusive of diverse clientele, is what made it possible to attain that sense of belonging to both of my worlds, Arab and Canadian.

Academia has also been an avenue where I am able to jointly participate with my Arab culture and Canadian society. I have participated in research groups, initiatives, and symposia that targeted the Arab populations and have integrated academics from other backgrounds. Additionally, through conducting this dissertation, I anticipate that I will gain further knowledge on Arabs' experiences with acculturation, settlement, and integration. I am devoted to fulfilling my goal of merging the Arab and Canadian world through dissemination of study findings. I am also and devoted to sharing practice and policy recommendations to further fulfill my commitment to participate in implementing multiculturalism and supporting a community that embraces diversity and inclusion.

In conducting this research study, I was attentive to how my social status as the researcher influenced how participants in my study can build rapport and feel comfortable to openly share their perspectives and lived experiences. As the researcher, participants may perceive a hierarchical difference on how we could socially relate to one another. I was attentive to dedicate efforts to minimize the possible perceived social hierarchy through sharing with them the goal(s) of conducting my study and my dedication to advance support and understanding of the Arab acculturation experience in Canada. I related to participants my Arab identity, immigration status, lived acculturation experience and, in some cases, my religious background and gender identity. I was very cautious to ensure that I did not impose any assumptions or biases by virtue of living through a similar experience. In cases of dual relationships, I dedicated greater effort to restructure my role as the researcher and how that may differ from previous roles (usually I related as a professional and Arab community member). Finally, I focused on empowering the participants through sharing with them my passion and dedication to ensure

their perspectives are not only shared, but also integrated in my future efforts of contributing to academia and professional practice.

Processing my positionality follows an autoethnographic approach as I have contextualized my migration and acculturation experiences, respectively, through a sociopolitical realm. This process enabled me to account for my experience of these phenomena within a socio-politically influenced transition from holding a refugee-only status to becoming a citizen. Further, processing how my intersectional identity interplayed significantly with all the milestones I experienced in my journey contributed to a turning point in how I conceptualize my personal and researcher self. This autoethnographic approach, in my perspective, is an integral research process as eminent in a sociopolitical realm that if escaped, it poses a risk to dismissing integral factors that can help understand a phenomenon especially cultural phenomena or processes such as acculturation.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS- DEMOGRAPHICS AND THEMES

### **Participant's Demographics Characteristics**

A total of 27 Arab immigrant emerging adults (18 females, 9 males), between the ages of 18 and 25 participated in this study. Participants came from four religious backgrounds and six nationalities, bringing with them integral perspectives driven by these demographics. The intersection of nationality and religious background brought forth interesting dynamics which are explored in the emerging themes and findings of this study. In terms of immigration and refugee statuses, most participants came to Canada through refugee programs of either Government Assisted Refugee, GAR, (62.96%) or Privately Sponsored Refugee, PSR (11.11%) programs. Three participants were Refugee Claimants, and two participants came as immigrants, one through an investment stream and one through family reunification.

The sample was relatively diverse in terms of religious/spiritual beliefs and national backgrounds; 15 of the participants identified as Muslim, five as Christian, six identified their religious background as Chaldean, and one participant identified as non-practicing. While Chaldean may arguably be considered a cultural background, rather than a religious background and may fall under Christianity, I followed my participants' self-identification of what constitutes their religious/spiritual background. This distinction proved an interesting aspect, especially to gain further understanding of Arab immigrant emerging adults' ethnic/cultural and religious identities. The analysis is further explored in the Analysis chapters. Please refer to Appendix F to review how the demographic questionnaire integrated religious, national, and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, participants came from six Arab nationalities. Figure 2 below presents the nationalities' distribution.

In terms of education, only three participants were not attending school in Canada. Two participants (Nesrine and Amani [pseudonyms], Participants 16 and 17) identified childcare as the core challenge impeding their ability to engage in the education system. One participant (Nihal [pseudonym], Participant 13) stated that her goal is to focus on finding employment; to date, she has earned a high school diploma. One participant (Michael [pseudonym], Participant 10) shared that he recently went back to school. Michael dropped out of high school earlier as he found it challenging to meet the academic requirements; however, he was working gradually on completing his high school education. Participants attending school in Canada were either completing their high school diploma requirements, or attending college, or university. Participants varied in their postsecondary education. The identified areas of study between college diplomas and bachelor university degrees were Business administration, Business and Computer Science, General Science, Social Service Worker, Mobile Application Development, Psychology and Criminology, Criminology, Interior Design, Mechanical Engineering, Biological Sciences, and Civil Engineering. For employment, 10 of the 27 participants (37%) shared that they are working in full-time, part-time, or casual positions.

For more in-depth details of participants' demographics including education and employment in Canada please review Table 3.

**Table 3 Participants Demographic Characteristics**

<b>Participant ID#</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Attending School in Canada</b>	<b>Employment in Canada</b>	<b>Immigration Status</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>
1	Ariman	Female	22	High school	Yes, University	Yes, PT	GAR	Kurdish-Syrian	Muslim
2	Yezda	Female	20	High school	Yes, College	No	GAR	Kurdish-Syrian	Muslim
3	Adam	Male	18	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
4	Ramy	Male	18	High school	Yes, College	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
5	Haifa	Female	18	High school	Yes, University	No	R. Claimant	Lebanese	Muslim
6	Kamal	Male	20	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
7	Laila	Female	19	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Iraqi	Christian
8	Hayat	Female	20	High school	Yes, College	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
9	Mikayela	Female	25	High school	Yes, College	No	GAR	Iraqi	Christian
10	Michael	Male	23	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	Yes, FT	GAR	Iraqi	Chaldean
11	Amir	Male	19	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	Yes, PT	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
12	Ali	Male	21	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	Yes, PT	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
13	Nihal	Female	23	High school	No	No	PSR	Syrian	Muslim
14	Rafca	Female	20	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Iraqi	Chaldean

15	Hashmat	Male	19	High school	Yes, University	Yes, FT	I. Investment	Iran	Muslim
16	Nesrine	Female	25	No Formal	No	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
17	Amani	Female	22	No Formal	No	No	GAR	Syrian	Muslim
18	Cyla	Female	18	High school	Yes, University	No	Other	Lebanese	Christian
19	Evan	Male	20	High school	Yes, College	Yes, PT	PSR	Iraqi	Chaldean
20	Georgia	Female	19	High school	Yes, University	No	Other	Lebanese	Christian
21	Adorina	Female	18	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Iraqi	Christian
22	Ahmed	Male	23	Bachelor	Yes, University	Yes, FT	R. Claimant	Palestinian	Muslim
23	Bissan	Female	19	High school	Yes, University	Yes, Casual	R. Claimant	Palestinian	Muslim
24	Dunya	Female	20	High school	Yes, University	No	PSR	Iraqi	Chaldean
25	Petra	Female	18	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	No	GAR	Iraqi	Chaldean
26	Madeline	Female	22	College	Yes, University	Yes, FT	GAR	Syrian	Non- Practicing
27	Shahnaz	Female	18	High school	Yes, completing Highschool	Yes, PT	F. Reunion	Iraqi	Chaldean

Table 3 Legend

*The following is a guide for Immigration Status in Table 3:*

GAR: Government Assisted Refugee

PSR: Privately Sponsored Refugee

R. Claimant: Refugee Claimant

I. Investment: Immigrant Investment

F. Reunion: Family Reunion/ Family Reunification

*Note.* All participants of a GAR or a PSR immigration status in this study are in Canada as a secondary migration site; this means that they fled their homeland to another country as refugees before coming to Canada.

*Working in Canada*

FT- Full Time

PT-Part Time

*Note.* Participants attending school in Canada and indicating “completing High school” are in grade 12.

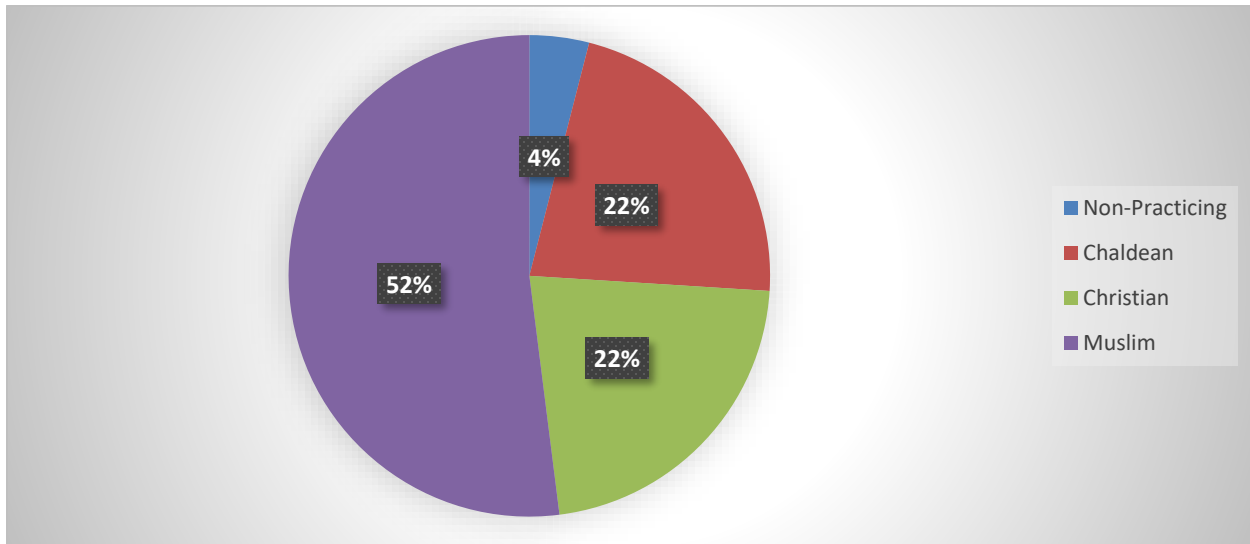


For the language of preference of conducting the interview, participants' language preferences were relatively equally divided between English and Arabic (14 in English and 13 in Arabic). Participants started the interview by responding to a demographic questionnaire, the results of which are summarized here. Participants dichotomously identified their gender as males and females (18 females, 9 males). The average age of this sample was 20 years. Most participants arrived between 2016 and 2019 and on average they lived in Canada for about 3 years, and their length of residence ranged from a year to 6 years. Interestingly, when participants were asked about languages most spoken at home, they identified nine different languages. While Arabic dominated, participants also identified English, French, Chaldean, Turkish, Kurdish, New Aramaic, Assyrian, and Farsi as languages spoken at home.

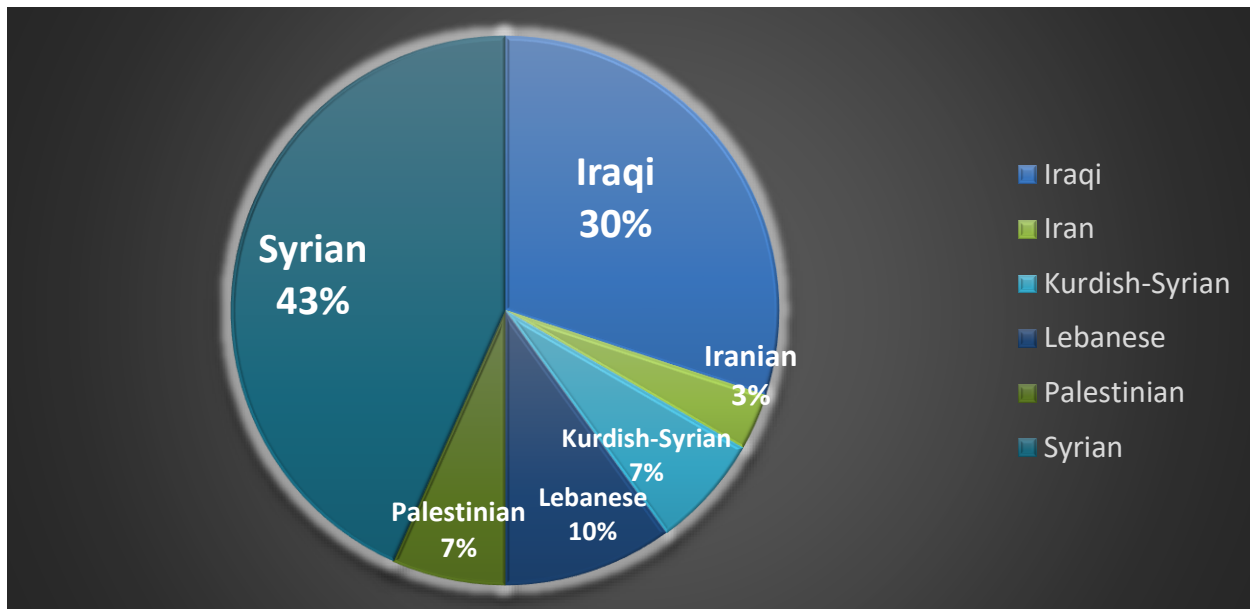
Participants came from diverse religious and national backgrounds. As for nationalities, participants came from six identified backgrounds, with most coming from Syrian (43%) and Iraqi (30%) backgrounds; with the rest of participants identifying as Lebanese, Palestinian, Iranian, and Kurdish Syrian. Demographically, all but one Syrian participant identified as Muslim; Kurdish-Syrian, Palestinian, and Iranian all identified as Muslim as well; Iraqi participants were either Chaldean or Christian; and Lebanese participants were mixed. There were no noted differences in the intersection of gender with ethnic identity and national identity along with religious identities in terms of demography or shared experience. For an overview of religious distribution, a little over half of participants identified as Muslim (52%); 22% of participants identified as Chaldean, 22% as Christian, and one person (representing 4%) identified as non-Practicing. Further analysis was devoted to deconstructing the distinction of Christian vs. Chaldean and will be discussed in the results and discussion sections, respectively.

Please see Figure 1 for religious background distribution and Figure 2 for Nationalities' distribution.

**Figure 1** *Religious Affiliation*



**Figure 2** *Nationality*



### Analysis and Organization of Themes

The themes emerged from this study represent the process of the emotional labour invested in merging their commitment to living through their Arab heritage and host Canadian cultures. Inevitable tensions stemmed from the decisions of what aspects to give up as part of their Arab identity to help integrate as well as navigate in the Canadian settler society. In explaining these assertions, I aimed to fulfill Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of a rich, in-depth, analysis as they encourage the researcher to be transparent about the interpretive lens and assumptions underlying the theoretical framework(s) that guide the analysis.

In integrating participants' quotes, I applied pseudonyms at the analysis stage. I have selected the pseudonyms according to ethnic-specific names without risking the participants' anonymity. In discussing the themes, I integrated as possible further demographic representations (e.g., nationality, age, religion, and immigration status) to provide greater context and depth to the participants' stories. The incorporated quotes in the data analysis were not only from the in-depth interviews, but also have come from embedded conversations that occurred as participants were concluding the demographic questionnaire. Further, I used field notes throughout the interviews to note significant elements of participants' stories that could help in analyzing their experiences. As well, I attempted to note nonverbal cues where possible virtually such as participants' gestures as they explained their stories, gazes, tone and expressed emotions through their quotes. I aimed to capture underlying emotional processes that were involved in living through their acculturation.

After consulting the literature and with colleagues who have applied qualitative inquiry in their work, I have decided to use participants' direct quotes, especially those who completed the interviews in English. As an empowering approach, half of the participants conducted the interview primarily in English and they had great passion and pride to practice their English. As

a result, some sentence structures may have grammatical differences, but I kept them as they are with additions in parenthesis to help the reader. As well, I was careful to ensure that the translation from Arabic to English did not misrepresent a concept or a theme that the participant wished to share. There were a few terminologies that risked changing the meaning or context, so I was cautious to avoid any misinterpretations. Research Assistant, Sally, transcribed the interviews first, then I reviewed the transcription while listening to the audiotaped interviews again. In fact, Sally and I had several meetings to ensure our translations describe the shared responses as directly and accurately as possible.

### **Theme I- Tensions Between Arab and Canadian Culture while Settling in Canada**

Settling in a new home country means having to navigate values and expectations between the heritage culture and the new host culture (Berry, 2019; Rasmi et al., 2014; Veronis et al., 2018). This theme presents Arab immigrant emerging adults' understanding of their Arab heritage and Canadian host cultures and their perspective on acculturation in Canada, specifically in Windsor-Essex. What both cultures share is a shift in their group composition and dynamics due to immigration, and how members of each group (local Arab and Canadian/dominant groups) relate to one another. The group dynamics and interactions were impacted by how Arab and Canadian/dominant group members chose to relate to one another.

Participants understood their Arab heritage as being dedicated to maintaining collectivist values and ideals through promoting harmony, unity, hospitality, and extending support to others. From their perspective, hospitality is an integral collectivist value that dually helped to preserve their family values as well as to bridge relations with Canadian society more broadly.

As 19-year-old Bissan, a Palestinian, shared: *"We have Arabs who are, so proud of the*

*hospitality, and kindness, and these things. So, whoever that does it more, it is better... [...]*

*...So, this is very important” (Bissan). Madeline, a 22-year-old Syrian, also explained:*

*“...because it's like the it's just the manners that you also with the hospitality that goes like...they go together I feel like that's one of the things that I first had to explain, why am I bringing food to you...[...] Like I am You know, I'm like (Dayefak) (Arabic word meaning welcoming you; participant added this Arabic word while conducting the interview in English)... Welcoming you as a guest/ showing you hospitality... you know? It's so normal to me that I didn't think about it" [...] then I didn't know that I had to explain that we like hosting people and um, like giving you know the... hospitality (Madeline).*

Collective concern and mutual support were other values that many participants believed were deeply rooted in their Arab heritage culture: *“Offering help, I think this is one the values from the Arab culture” (Ali). Further, Yezda described it as an unchangeable, integral value: “We need each other to lift each other up so this principle I can never change because I trust this thing” (Yezda). To some, support begins within the family unit as Shahnaz shared her vision of how all family members were equally responsible to support one another: “If one person only worked in the family, the other family members, they don't need to go and work. Here, we all work, and we all put some money on the side to invest in ourselves and buy a house, and to become better and better... you can barely afford it” (Shahnaz). However, support was not restricted to family or within their ethnic communities. Rather, participants who addressed this quality explained that support would be extended to anyone who needed help, and that it was an avenue to create harmony with others in their new community:*

*We really like help, like helping... We like to help others. Maybe we don't show it all the time, but like when we help, it comes from our heart and we, we don't hesitate with that like that if someone needs help that's right away happening like you don't need to ask can you please do that for me because we're going to do it (Dunya).*

In her description of her Arab heritage, Cyla alluded to generosity as a sign of support and concern for the collective being. *"I would say the most important thing is generosity. It is very important for someone to be generous. This is engraved in people, in Arabs"* (Cyla).

Further, like other participants, Cyla was determined to demonstrate her commitment to preserving her Arab cultural values. She asserted that she was unwilling to dismiss her Arab heritage and identity by virtue of living in a new society, as though she was fighting to maintain her identity and heritage and demanding that these are respected by Canadians. She explained:

*They [Arabs] value family a lot, and family norms. There is a lot of the values there is respect, traditions. All that is passed on from generations to generations to generations... these still exist. They are not going to fade away with time. It is always present like... for example, me I have come to Canada, but like I still act in a way, it is the same way I would act or behave when I was in Lebanon, there is no difference. Even with people that are Canadian, the way we were raised on, it is going to stay within us (Cyla).*

Interestingly, while participants endorsed the cultural value of maintaining concern for the collective and support, some have demonstrated that it brought upon challenges that risked their privacy. Maintaining close interethnic relations was an integral goal that most participants strived to achieve as they acculturate here:

*“Sometimes you can't find, and you will always find someone for you in your bad days.*

*There is always someone if anything happens. But sometimes it could take a little bit from your privacy, but you can set your limits if you want” (Bissan).*

For participants, supporting others was an avenue for establishing meaningful relationships with the larger, Canadian society in Windsor Essex. As well, participants wished to use their acts of goodwill and support as a source of validating their Arab culture. Participants who reflected on support for others specifically wished to combat ongoing stereotypes about their Arab cultural heritage. This constituted as a form of interpersonal oppression subjecting Arab immigrant emerging adults to unjust treatments built on negative stereotypes of the Arab culture or religious affiliation. Ahmed demonstrated how maintaining this respectful behaviour protected him from facing unfair treatment, as he stated, *“Thank God, everyone, foreigners\*, and Arabs, they deal with me with respect. They all deal with me with respect, no one treated me wrong, because I did not treat anyone wrong. Everyone respects me, I do not have any problems. Thank God” (Ahmed).* Kamal, on the other hand, asserted, *“To be respected among everyone, do not act as barbaric or someone who does not present themselves in a good way. Do not act in a way that would make foreigners have an impression about Arabs in a bad way. So, keep... respect everyone” (Kamal).* [\*A foreigner is a term frequently used by Arabs to refer to non-Arabs, it can apply to Canadians and other immigrants.]

### **Collective Decision-Making for Important Milestones**

There is usually great emphasis in the Western cultures on independence especially in decision-making for personal values and growth (Klodawsky et al., 2006; Tabatabai, 2020), and this may not be an effective approach to adopt in the Arab culture. In this study, all participants selected an important figure in their lives that they believed would support decision-making

around critical milestones. The fact that all participants identified an important figure that they would trust portrayed that collective decision-making is an important practice that does not threaten individuality in pursuing personal goals. Rather, the sense of collective support and wellbeing is important to achieve. As participants described their experiences, it was apparent that support for others was an important value to preserve, and the collective support in decision-making is yet another example of this cultural value. Furthermore, collective decision-making as a form of support was further invested as a cultural practice that was even practiced by parents. As an example, Nesrine and Amani were two participants that who were mothers and have who had established their own families. Despite that, both still sought the support of their families in decision-making and identified the family unit as a source of support. In terms of prioritization of milestones, Nessrine shared that the family would equally enforce marriage/establishing a family with education, while Amani shared that marriage would precede education as an important milestone to achieve.

In identifying important person(s), most participants identified their mother; a few identified family and parents as a unit; two identified a friend; sister, father, and teacher were each identified once; and one equally identified family with guidance counsellors at school and academic advisors at university as important decision-making figures. Although the question only asked participants to identify the important person to rank their priorities, participants were eager to share their insights and justification for how they arrived at that decision. They shared how they entrust the role that this identified person(s) plays in supporting them with important life decisions. To provide further insight for some of the participants' decisions for whom they regard as the "important person" to consult for life decisions, the following are some examples that demonstrate how participants have arrived at their decision:



Evan shared that honesty with friends would help them identify personal interests, and they would rank the priorities according to how the participant would rank them, *“Um... pretty honest with my friend so I guess they would know like I love volunteering and my second important education and then having a job at the same time, and they would know like they would order the same way I would do”* (Evan).

Georgia shared that the other important person is a parent (father). She shared that she and her father think alike, and that he tends to be the one that cares the most about her progress, stating, *“Uh, me, personally my dad takes care of things that are here... he is the most one that cares I’m in Canada and stuff... and always education comes first according to him. I think me and him, we think the same so I would think uh... Marriage and all the other stuff, it is not on my mind for a while...”* (Georgia). Further, Adorina selected her mother as the other important person and shared that her mom would rank the same priorities; *“Uhm, I think I would choose my mom and think she's going to order the same order that I ordered”* (Adorina).

### **Family, Peer, and Community Relations: Within- and Cross-Ethnic Relations**

Participants’ experiences in developing relationships with their Arab ethnic community and Canadian society differed. In terms of inner-ethnic relationships, most participants reflected on family relationships as the primary unit for socialization and labelled it as “number 1” priority of social relations. As Michael stated, *“According to us, the family in the Eastern culture is number 1 in everything. If you want to go into the community, you have to start from your family”* (Michael). When participants described their perception of Canadian society, they tended to emphasize values such as advancing education and pursuing career rather than focusing on maintaining family and community relationships. Participants learned that such neoliberal values of self-sufficiency and financial independence constituted an integral gateway

for participants to establish relationships with the Canadian larger society. Neoliberal values support prioritizing individualist practices and goals to supersede collectivist values some immigrant groups would otherwise prioritize (Klodawsky et al., 2006; Tabatabai, 2020). Shahnaz' description provided an overview of what the general perspective on values prioritized in the Canadian society of establishing work over maintaining social relationships:

*Each person is living their own life, busy, running after making a living. And there aren't gatherings here... like if it happened, we could say it will be by coincidence... or there must be an important event for you to have a reason to gather. Here, each person is living their own private life. This is how it is (Shahnaz).*

Further, Ali provided some insight I learned from some participants who identified education as a core cultural value in Canada and how the individual is encouraged to focus on self-advancement. Education will be explored further in the next theme, but Ali noted:

*I noticed that in the Canadian community, they care mostly about the person to get education. This is something very good and I really love it. It is different than Turkey. In Turkey, they do not care at all if you get your education, or you work... they do not care at all. But here they care about... you getting your education... so they can support you. For example, I study, and they support me financially... with the cost of the bus pass and stuff (Ali).*

Some participants signified the role of extended family members especially early in their settlement: : *“When we first came here, we had my grandparents here and my uncle's and my aunts,' my aunt's family they are all here, they came before us by 2 or 3 years; so, they helped us and we integrated quickly because we had people... and actually here is Windsor all Arabs, all the Chaldeans let's say we know half of them almost” (Rafca).* Shahnaz, on the other hand,

shared that to her surprise despite living here, her extended family were not aware of some settlement-related funding that could have supported her and family's settlement. She stated, *"We have not gotten a translator because as I mentioned when we came, we didn't know and we didn't even know about that there is a translator here, or someone else?"* (Shahnaz).

Interestingly, even her relatives who already resided in Windsor already were not aware of available language resources, *"Imagine that her daughter did not even know about these organizations even though, they have been here for more than 10 years"* (Shahnaz).

Awareness of services could be driven by the immigrant/refugee status because of the nature of government support to some immigrant and refugee categories in comparison to others. For example, in this study, participants who identified Government Assisted Refugees (GAR's) had greater awareness and more structured support to their settlement and integration process. This has, in turn, influenced not only their social integration within their ethnic communities, but also extended to enhance their awareness of existent supports and services that could help make the settlement and integration process to be more effective.

Most participants have developed significant relationships with their Arab ethnic community, and they spoke to the support received to facilitate their settlement and integration. As Cyla shared, *"Ok, um, I definitely say having the Arab community here is a very big relief for me since, it is familiar, something I am used to seeing."* (Cyla). Likewise, Ramy agreed that a strong ethnic bond combatted isolation, *"I didn't like felt here alone, but I actually end up... I was in communication with Arab people here"* (Ramy). Amani provided a prime example of how significant the community support was in ensuring she and her family are well-supported. She stated:

*There are Arabs here that are good. There is this woman who we met; she works as a taxi driver. She advised me about more than one thing. She was very helpful to me. For example, if I want to go somewhere, if she is free, she would come and pick me up and drop me off. She is an Arab taxi driver. If I need her for something or if I ask her about something... if I need her to translate something for me, she helps me (Amani).*

Some participants indicated that they felt isolated from their ethnic community, and that they wished to feel more connected or more strongly associated with their ethnic community. Petra shared her experience *“We feel that there is nobody, it is just us. It feels like there is no Iraqi race here... there is from other nationalities but as Iraqis, it is just us” (Petra)*. Further, Petra explained how connecting with her community was limited to the parameters of attending church, and that the community was otherwise isolated; she asserted, *“It feels like we are in Iraq but in a different way... the Church has a lot of Iraqis who go to it... But when the prayer is done, each person goes home and that’s it, you don’t see anyone after” (Petra)*.

Driven by the intersectional lens, I explored whether demographic differences could help inform differences in Arab immigrant emerging adults’ perceptions and experience with their Arab ethnic communities. Overall, Syrian Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) participants tended to report a more positive experience with developing effective relationships within the Arab ethnic community, and that has significantly supported their settlement and integration. In fact, Syrian GAR participants were more prone to report an effective relationship even with the larger society, with a primary exception being experiences in education. Interestingly, while six out of nine Iraqi participants were GARs, they tended to experience a more complex post-immigration experience; they tended to report greater challenges in building effective relationships within their ethnic community and with the larger society than Syrian; and were

more prone to report feeling isolated. For example, Laila shared, *"Here, I feel like there is no one that helps them a lot... so this makes it hard for them and they become isolated and lonely more"* (Laila).

### ***Within-Ethnic and Interethnic Peer Relationships***

Participants discussed establishing peer relationships as an important aspect of establishing and integrating in their new home community. For some participants, they found it easier and more effective to develop friendships with individuals within their Arab ethnic community as the shared values and perspectives would make it easier to establish connections with one another. Cyla reflected on her close friendship in her Arab community:

*Ok, I say that having the Arab community here is a very big relief for me since, it is familiar, something I am used to seeing; the language, the norms, traditions, everything. For example, my friend that I talked about, like I was immediately able to click with her, because we have like our backgrounds in common. Which is basically our Arab backgrounds (Cyla).*

For other participants, friendships had no cultural or religious borders, as 23-year-old Palestinian Ahmed asserted, *"You are Muslim, your brother is Muslim. You won't go to a Christian and hurt him. He is your friend, be his friend. You don't have to interfere with his religion"* (Ahmed). For these participants, it was integral to diversify their social network by developing relationships with the larger Canadian society locally as a pathway for exchanging cultural knowledge with one another. For example, Hashmat, a 19-year-old Iranian participant, explained how invaluable it was for him when someone outside of his religion and culture had an awareness of some religious rituals such as fasting the month of Ramadan: *"My friends who are non-Muslim like wish me like oh happy Ramadan, I hope it's good for you. You know stuff like*

*that, so I feel like it's a... It's a good experience"* (Hashmat). Hashmat was eager to feel that he belongs to his new community, and that he is not an outsider from individuals from the larger society.

One participant, Madeline, shared a unique case where she reflected about friendship formation, particularly with cross-gender friendships. Despite her family's trust and support in her growth through building social relationships, they worried that cross-gender friendships could turn into romantic relationships, a concern that supports consulted literature on family expectations and peer relations (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015). Madeline described her struggle with explaining how gender differences were not factored into forming friendships:

*I feel like my sister is somewhat the same and whenever I tell her that I want to go out with my guy friends, she was like their relationships, and our relationships, it leads to places you don't want them to go, and I'm like. It can't be like that. If I meet a friend, it doesn't, it's not that doesn't mean I like him. Do you know what I mean?"* (Madeline).

Besides Madeline's insights into cross-gender friendships, there were no noted gender differences in the experience of Arab immigrant emerging adults within their heritage culture. This contradicts studies that indicated some gender differences especially with family expectations (e.g., Kumar et al., 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). As 20-year-old Syrian Hayat asserted, *"As an Arab girl or an Arab guy, both at this time, they like to achieve their dreams and also succeed at work... education... anything"* (Hayat). She further shared that this *"equality"* between girls and boys/women and men is demonstrative of advancement within the Arab community:

*What I loved here the most is that the Arab community here started... they changed... they started teaching girls... we are talking about girl... teaching girls how to drive and teach them to go out and work... teach them that where we used to be living... that is gone. Now it is 2021... everything changed, yeah... They started realizing that things change... here females are like males; they can work and do anything that they want. There is no more like barriers (Hayat).*

### **Perception of the Canadian Society: Shared Values and Differences**

Participants reflected on Canadian society and what the term “Canadian” means in three ways: 1) qualities they appreciated about the Canadian society or what they perceived as “Canadian”; 2) values and traditions that resonated with them or opposed their Arab heritage values and beliefs; and 3) reflection on experiences and interactions they had with the members of the larger society locally. In their descriptions of experiences and interactions with the Canadian society locally, participants had two points of reference. Participants who immigrated to Canada directly used their home countries as their reference point to evaluate their experiences, while participants who refuted to Canada tended to use the country of asylum more as their reference point to describe their experiences.

Participants appreciated the qualities of the Canadian society that demonstrated acceptance, friendliness, and being welcomed. Haifa appreciated the optimism and friendliness, *“I know yeah... very... they love life. They are always optimistic. When you look at them, they keep on smiling... they really love their lives, no matter what” (Haifa)*; Bissan had a very similar descriptive, *“Very nice one. Like they are so nice, polite, they're friendly. The good thing is, when I came, I did not know anyone, I always felt like you are welcomed somehow” (Bissan)*; and Ali as well agreed that smile is comforting to have, *“Yeah these what I liked the most, sorry*

*and the smile... these were the best two things, I will take them, and I will not forget them” (Ali).*

Cyla described the Canadian society as focused more on advancing in careers than maintaining social relationships; she stated,

*I have noticed this: here in Canada, mostly people strive to achieve a comfortable life... like they live for life... they go for a stable job, a good payment, um, a house, the standards are a little bit different than Lebanon. Of course, you strive for this in Lebanon, but in Lebanon, there is more interaction between people like as a society, you see way more people than they do in here (Cyla).*

On the other hand, some participants, like Laila, believed the kindness lies in Canadians’ dedication to volunteerism and that familiarity with the person is not factored into building a relationship *“They are very nice and kind, they volunteer, and I feel that they always talk with each other and smile to each other, even if they do not know each other” (Laila).* Further, while participants described the Canadian society as supportive and as a promoter for personal growth, this growth and advancement is conditional on acquiring certain skills and meeting structural requirements. As Hayat demonstrated, while the Canadian society is supportive and understanding of her language struggles, improving her English proficiency is required to be able to support herself, connect with the community, and enhance her personal growth. This portrayed an example of internalized oppression where participants remained feeling inferior to the dominant/larger society due to English proficiency, and that English proficiency puts them into a secondary citizenship status. Hayat explained:

*The Canadian society is... you know they are very gentle, and they push you to do the hard thing you know. Like okay, we know you are Arabic, and you we know you can't speak English, but we will help you. They can understand your situation. They support*



*me very well because the first thing they teach me is how to speak English and how English will help me in the community. Because if I don't speak English, I can't help myself (Hayat).*

Some participants found it challenging to describe their understanding of Canadian society. They shared with me that Canada is a multicultural, multifaith society, and that some of the dominant values and traditions resonate with them, while others seemed to oppose Arab heritage values. These participants' insights demonstrate the key challenge to amalgamating in their new community. As Ariman noted:

*I see that Canadians, they were able to get somewhere, where there is a system that is correct, organized/developed. There is law that is fair to the person/human being. This is under the right things or there are morals that the law enforced, and people can get somewhere... that is why they are considered the first world country... somewhere where the humanity and respect is more... the justice is distributed equally among everyone. As traditions and values, I do not agree with everyone... because I feel that their traditions and values are a combination from different cultures. Meaning the Canadian society is a combination of different cultures/civilizations so that is how I see Canadines, it an advanced society in so many things and regarding their traditions and values, there are some things I agree with and some things I do not. They gathered it from the different communities that grew up here (Ariman).*

### **Education is Valued in Both Cultures**

All participants identified education as a core value in both Arab and Canadian cultures. In their Arab culture, advancing education is considered as a source of pride and a key contribution to the family. Petra, an 18-year-old Iraqi participant, explained how she prioritizes

education as a precedent for long-term success, and how she would later focus on areas such as establishing a romantic relationship and building a family. She shared:

*Because they consider the family important, they consider education more important than work because education is what gets you to the end... you get to get your diploma, and you become a doctor, or something good... not as if you are working as a retail job. Then work comes next for them, because if you are not going to have an education a degree, you will not be able to find a decent job. Then comes career and having a job, and then romantic relationships is not that important to them at all (Petra).*

Participants noted that Canadians place great value on education, and that it is an important goal that one should achieve. Ali, a 21-year-old Syrian refugee, compared how education is valued differently in his country of asylum and how support is available if one wishes to pursue education. Ali was just finishing his high school diploma when he was interviewed. Systemic challenges with education experience arose in participants' stories, and these will be further discussed in the next section. Ali commented:

*I noticed that in the Canadian community, they care mostly about the person to get education. This is something very good and I really love it. It is different than Turkey. In Turkey, they do not care at all if you get your education, or you work, they do not care at all. But here they care about you getting your education, so they can support you. For example, I study, and they support me financially with the cost of the bus pass and stuff (Ali).*

Ali's experience was not an isolated one. Amani, as well, reflected on her concern not only for her education, but also for her children's education as in Libya, her country of asylum, the structural challenges made it difficult to deliver quality education.

*Now Canada is very good... if we compare it to how we were living before, it is for sure better than Libya. Regarding education for me and my children, this is something very good because for them to get education and learn, this will eventually have them become something good in the future hopefully. For them to continue their education, this is the most important thing (Amani).*

Furthermore, the flexibility in joining and completing education, beyond age or field restrictions, were significant factors that resonated with 25-year-old Iraqi Mikayela as she described her future aspirations: *“Currently, the education in Canada is open... at any time. You can learn... and when you go to college, they give you loan and once you work, you can pay it back. This is something very nice. Ok, but the problem here is that you must, especially in Canada, you must learn/study and work at the same time” (Mikayela).*

When asked how they would prioritize important milestones, participants ranked education, career or having a job, and civic engagement or volunteering as their top three priorities. Most participants ranked education as their top priority, followed by career or having a job and civic engagement, respectively. Priority rankings did not change when participants assessed how an important figure that can support in their ranking would prioritize these milestones. Some participants shared that once they get their education and have a career, they will be able to focus on and engage in romantic relationships, marriage, and establish a family. Prioritizing the integral milestones influences how Arab immigrant emerging adults make sense of and experience the process of acculturation. Specifically, education was considered the gateway to everything else, not only in their perspective, but also important person(s) perspectives regardless of gender or any other demographic differences.

Despite the availability of education and support to engage with it, participants discussed systemic challenges that complicated their education experience, and these will be discussed further in the next theme. However, Dunya sought greater guidance, being a newcomer and lacking knowledge on important factors for decision-making on career and education:

*I would say maybe like an introduction to how the working life is... how the workplace is... jobs. If you want to go to university, how long that's going to take you? How much that's going to cost you? Or like you're going to college, how it's going to be? The jobs that you can have before you go to college before you. You decide to take a certain path, you decide to make a living of something like a career big career. There should be like more support or like more introduction to that” (Dunya).*

Together, Dunya and Mikayela’s shared their thoughts with some frustration. They portrayed that both were feeling confined to cultural expectations that both were open to adopt as though these as the only avenue for them to advance. Nonetheless, this further depicted how participants sought to follow dictated measures of success and advancement as a sign of either internalizing or performing Western-based approaches of neoliberal values of independence. They identified personal advancement as a necessitated step of contributing to the host Canadian society for providing these opportunities. It is as though personal growth are precedents to advancement and financial independence, and that demonstrating their appreciation through growing within education and work makes them more deserving of the opportunities provided and allows them to integrate with Canadian society more successfully.

### **Respect for Diversity & Decisions to Integrate in Canadian Society**

Arab immigrant emerging adults participating in this study overall greatly valued the respect and appreciation for diversity. Hashmat’s comments provided insight into a common

theme that participants learned about in their new Canadian community. Hashmat also alluded to feeling part of the community and not as an outsider to it:

*Very loving and respectful people. Very welcoming as well to anyone who comes there. I feel like we all very much respect people from all different cultures and religions. No one really judges people on based on what they wear or what they believe... [...] ...Honestly, it feels good because I never felt different here. No one, even people from different races and cultures never made me feel like I'm an outcast or I'm different than them. You know, I always felt welcomed and respected. Everyone respects... like even now during Ramadan, um... my friends who are non-Muslim like wish me like oh happy Ramadan, I hope it's good for you. You know stuff like that, so I feel like it's a. It's a good experience like everyone here is very nice and overall accepting (Hashmat).*

Respect for diversity was a value that they adopted and consecutively apply in their interethnic relationships as Laila shared, “*I do not mind that, this person. It's true that they have things I do not accept but as a person, I cannot reject and tell the person no... he is still a person and he still have a feeling*” (Laila). However, it seemed that inclusivity and respect for diversity was conditional on giving up some of their Arab heritage to be able to integrate and become part of their new community. Michael's perspective did not deviate far from the experiences of Dunya and Mikayela when they spoke to inter-ethnic friendship formation and as they described being confined to specific Canadian cultural expectations. He highlighted an important tension of fighting to preserve his Arab heritage, while also seeking the need to dismiss at least some of it so that he could fit in. Despite Michael's openness to adopt and learn Canadian cultural values and expectations, his insights demonstrated the significant emotional labour involved in the decision-making between preserving his Arab heritage and identity and

adopting those of Canadian society. Like Dunya and Mikayela, among other participants, Michael perceived that his effective integration is only achievable by dismissing some of his Arab heritage. This contradicts the goals of Canadian multiculturalism as promoted in the government's immigration and refugee policies and practices. Michael, 23-year-old Iraqi participant stated:

*I was saying that the Canadian community is different than Eastern community by 180 degrees. If I come and bring my Arabic culture with me... it will not work out here... not even. If I have to live in this culture, perhaps not like them but I'll try to be, we can say not 100% like them but like 50%. I'll try to learn from them little but little, I can provide them insights from the culture and tell them like this and that... this is how we start to have friends, relationships, and we can live a nice life (Michael).*

Additional common insights shared among participants addressed the differences between an individual's rights and privileges while residing in Canada. First, practicing religion freely and in their native language was viewed as a privilege, and something they appreciated being able to do in Canada. For example, Georgia shared while she is not actively attending church currently but is thankful it is available and in her Arabic language: *"Honestly, I am not practicing my religion a lot. Like I don't go to church and stuff, but like If I want to go to churches, they have in Lebanese churches, the service is Arabic. Also, there are churches in French, Chinese, for every culture... nobody here feels like they are not included"* (Georgia).

The policies and practices of inclusivity protecting and supporting diversity and freedom of religion would allow immigrants and refugees to practice their religions at places of worship as a right rather than a privilege. Another contention that was gleaned from participants is that being able to settle or refuge here is a privilege, and that they sought the need to extend their gratitude

to Canada by paying back and showing gratitude. In addition to adopting some of the values and expectations of the larger Canadian society, gratitude often meant becoming financially independent and contributing back to the Canadian economy. This was a dominant voice that bridges together their determination, hence resilience, to establish in a new homeland that they are just learning about and feeling responsible to demonstrate they deserve the opportunity of resettlement here in Canada. Hayat shared with great excitement her pride in holding a job, but also reinforced the need to demonstrate to Canadians that she understands this privilege, and that she can contribute equally to the economy. She saw the benefit in this for herself, but also as a gratitude to her new, Canadian, community: *“Like there are a lot of Canadians who get happy when they see an Arab girl working similarly to their job... their work that they love... they get happy. Like she is from a different religion, or a different country and she is working like us”* (Hayat).

Most participants described the Canadian society as a welcoming and supportive. Their reflections are exemplified in the support received from local settlement agencies in support of resettling and integrating in their new home community. Both Madeline and Ali shared that the support through settlement agencies is significant and that it targets addressing multiple systemic barriers. Madeline stated, *“Like whatever I've been doing either MCC [Multicultural Council of Windsor Essex] or like the YMCA is... was a great start for showing me how to deal with people here”* (Madeline). Ali further reflected on how the support extends to multiple needs, *“but here... also, it is really good because there is a lot of support. For example, organization that help with translation and things... even with school, there is an organization called NCC”* (Ali). Further, Ariman reflected on settlement agencies initiating new and creative opportunities to integrate and learn about the new community: *“W5 when we first came, it was new. It was a*

*shock. I remember they did camp for newcomers and every day they would do a new activity" (Ariman).*

The Canadian society's support and reflections of interacting and integrating with the Canadian society has also been exemplified through support received from neighbours. For example, Dunya shared how her neighbours were an integral support, *"Actually, like a lot of or like neighbors or people that we knew here, even not relatives. We just knew here or met here actually, they were very supportive, like if we needed something we would like without hesitation, tell them they will be more than happy to help" (Dunya).* Beyond this, Dunya described how this enhanced her sense of belonging, and feeling as a welcomed member in her new community. Moreover, as Adam described, neighbours did not avoid the opportunity to welcome them as newcomers with the present language barrier. Rather, they sought support from members from the ethnic community. He shared, *"They saw that we were new and stuff, but we did not know how to speak to them, so there was our neighbour from Lebanon. They called him to translate for us. 'Welcome to Canada' and they were greeting us. we are all one, no one is going to bother you... you will get used to here for sure... things like that" (Adam).*

When asked if she would change anything about her experience, Madeline shared that all aspects of support were critical for her settlement and integration experience. Madeline reflected on the significant support she received, from settlement agencies to friends from the larger community. She said:

*I can't think of anything because it got me to this point, right? Like whatever I've been doing either YMCA or like the YMCA was a great start for um Showing me how to deal with people here and...and make my first few friends and...um...the Windsor Frontier Bank was also a great way to learn how to deal with customers. And it gave me a lot of*



*connections. So, you know, on and on it just got me. I think it got me to where I am and had like helped me grow my personality so I wouldn't change a thing. And, hopefully for like the kids that are doing the youth program now feel the same way possibly that I felt when I first began, but to me right now it's different It's not the same. Do you know what I mean? Like they might be enjoying it and they might see it as a great support, but it's not to me anymore so. But it was at a one time of my life, so that's why I was. I wouldn't change anything to be honest because I feel like it just kind of pushed me into the community even more (Madeline).*

Participants identified similarities and differences between the Arab and Canadian cultures. Generally, the Arab culture values focus on collectivist values of harmony and support to one another, while the Canadian culture was understood as focused on self-advancement. Both cultures greatly value education. As well, participants derived that both cultures support diversity and promote interethnic relationships. The next theme presents perspectives on how Arab participants perceived the nature of relating to and interacting with their ethnic and the larger community.

## **Theme II- The Impact of Language on Sense of Belonging: Arabic as a Preservation of Identity and English as a Gateway to Settler Society**

Language proficiency and sense of belonging dually influenced participants' perspectives on their interactions with the Arab ethnic community and the Canadian community at large. All participants placed value on 1) maintaining their Arabic language as a feature of their Arab identity; 2) maintaining strong relationships within their ethnic community; 3) and worked to enhance their sense of belonging to their Arab ethnic community. All participants also spoke to

the importance of enhancing their English language proficiency. English was regarded as a tool for access and a gateway to their new community.

Participants described their progress with English language development and how this was ultimately reflected in their sense of belonging: *“I felt that I do not belong a lot to the community because of my language”* (Ariman); this 22-year-old Kurdish-Syrian participant then further elaborated, *“The second year when we came here, my language became better. I started helping myself by my own without needing a translator”* (Ariman). As I listened to her story, I sensed in her voice and statement the pride she had in developing her English and becoming independent and can support others who may require English translation.

To Nesrine, the language barrier challenged her ability to communicate and interact with the larger society. She linked the English *“Canadian language”* and integration together: *“It is not about it being as a barrier, but the thing is because I have not yet known English, Canadian language. This is difficult because you are not able to understand someone or explain when someone is speaking with you understand the person well when they are speaking with you”* (Nesrine). Nesrine’s experience was not an isolated one; Amani had a similar encounter. In addition to English proficiency being a barrier to community building and sense of belonging, Amani explained the presence of other barriers and obligations that obstructed her ability to continue to learn English. She identified caring for her children and the lack of family support here in Canada to provide childcare as significant struggles that prevented her from developing her English language skills. She explained:

*It was a barrier a little bit because I was not able to socialize with the community faster or be able to speak with... anyone who is Canadian very comfortably. Unfortunately, I do not know how to speak a lot of English yet. So, my Arabic language was a barrier,*

*because I do not know English language... perhaps if I had continued my education and had learned English language; this would have been easier for me (Amani).*

Other participants reflected on the relationship between English proficiency and integration in Canadian society. Some have sensed a great support from the larger society for their efforts to integrate, while others identified systemic barriers that challenged their ability of engaging in such experiences. As her English improved, Adorina was able to connect better with the rest of the community. She shared, *"So I started practicing and I started talking to people more and more. Then I started realizing I am fitting in"*. Further, she spoke to the support from the "Canadian" community, especially from teachers: *"They were giving me books to read in English and they were like talking to me a lot in English and they were like even if you make mistakes, don't be afraid of that" (Adorina)*. The statement *"Then I started realizing I am fitting in"* underlined how Adorina felt that she was expected to conform to perceived societal demand of language proficiency as a precedent to beginning to integrate in her new community. Additionally, Adorina shared an interesting perspective equating English proficiency with power, *"It's really great. I like when I speak English. I feel like I'm speaking the powerful language. I don't know why it feels like that." (Adorina)*.

Acquiring English language proficiency is not only related to their integration, but participants also shared that it helped establish their independence and contribute to greater opportunities for involvement. In other words, English becomes a gateway to access opportunities and being able to actively participate in their new community. Evan explained, *"I would say it opens more doors like you can help others like let's say older people who don't understand the language like you can help them translate. It's kind of like opens the doors you know" (Evan)*. Ramy also agreed, as he explained his experience: *"I learned a little bit of English*

*and I explored some places that I am going to do volunteer on those places, one like I have a good English and like, then year two, I just started to... to plan that I'm going to work hard and like get my courses and start like... start my volunteering" (Ramy).*

Participants presented several examples of how low English proficiency challenged their abilities to settle and integrate effectively and successfully. For example, Adorina shared how these challenges extend beyond community relations; lacking English proficiency could also translate into difficulties in meeting basic settlement needs. She stated, *"It is a really hard situation when you cannot speak English, you will not be able to integrate in the community, and you will also not be able to do things such as if you want to bring things, call a cab, this is a simple example, so it is really hard" (Amani).*

Challenges with English proficiency extend to navigating systemic barriers that may put Arab immigrant emerging adults' safety at risk. As Petra demonstrated her, her low English-proficiency posed a risk for addressing emergent situation:

*Honestly, it was not helpful because this is a foreign country so if you speak Arabic or other language other than Arabic... you still have to speak English so they can understand you... like if you have an emergency, you have to bring a translator because you speak Arabic, if you do not know English, you will not be able to know what to do even in emergency situations (Petra).*

Shahnaz further expanded on encountered systemic barriers to demonstrate that not everyone has the awareness of where interpretation or translation support can be accessed. She shared how she lacked the knowledge that such supports were available: *"We have not gotten a translator because as I mentioned when we came, we didn't know and we didn't even know about that there is a translator here, or someone else?" (Shahnaz).* Interestingly, even her relatives

who have been long-term residents of Windsor were not aware of the availability of interpretation or translation support: *"Imagine that her daughter did not even know about these organizations even though, they have been here for more than 10 years"* (Shahnaz).

More broadly, I learned about participants' perspectives on how Arabic equated their sense of Arab identity, maintaining their Arab heritage, and as integral to enhance their sense of belonging to their Arab ethnic community. Some participants discussed the importance of the support they received from their Arab community. They identified that having someone who speaks their language made their community navigation more effective. For example, Nihal explained how she did not hesitate to navigate the community for the presence of ethnic stores and her ability to communicate in her native language. She stated, *"It makes me a little bit comfortable here when you go to... we have a lot of Arabic stores so when you go into the Arabic stores. Sometimes they talk to you in English, but if you do not understand they switch to Arabic. So, they help you"* (Nihal).

Maintaining within-ethnic community relationships was a core value that participants addressed to support their choice of preserving their Arabic language. Shahnaz explained, *"Our language helped us a lot because if it wasn't for Arabic, how would I be able to function? No one would have been able to communicate with me if I didn't know Arabic, so it helped me to make friends and learn so many things about school... know places... yeah, these things."* (Shahnaz). Shahnaz and other participants placed great value on maintaining within-ethnic peer relationships. Language barriers were not necessarily factored into their preference of within-ethnic peer relationships. Cyla presented such a case. Cyla was fluent in English, and while she was able to effectively communicate in English and capable of establishing peer relationships with other ethnic groups, Cyla preferred maintaining close friendships with Arab peers. She

explained that she found it easier to communicate and relate to them in her experience: *"For example, the friend that I made, I told you about, she is from Lebanon. And it is way easier for me to talk to her in Arabic than it is for me to speak with someone who is Canadian in English because I have been speaking Arabic with my friends for 18 years"* (Cyla).

Michael emphasised that while proficiency in his native language provided him with a sense of community, it complicated his English language development: *"I was able to integrate fast, because currently Windsor has a lot of Arabs. It doesn't give you the chance to learn the language [English] because wherever you go you speak a little bit of English then it switches to Arabic"* (Michael).

Other participants demonstrated persistence to preserving their preference for using the Arabic language, as Hayat shared: *"The Arabic language here, it helped me to learn English... honestly from my own point of view. I used to translate vocabulary words on the translator, but if I did not know Arabic, I would have not been able to even learn English. This is from my own point of view"* (Hayat). Hayat further reflected on how she greatly valued preserving her Arabic language skills and how she, in turns, supported other Arabs' work to preserve it: *"I like [to] volunteer to teach young generations who do not know Arabic. Now a lot of people bring their kids here and they want for their kids to learn Arabic first, because Arabic is more important"* (Hayat).

Some participants presented examples on how secondary migration contributed to proficiency in multiple languages, and how this served as an asset in their acculturation experience. Secondary migration describes the process of immigrants and refugees seeking permanent residence in a different country than their first or original country of settlement (Tuzi, 2019). Hashmat explained, *"Also, the languages are something I like growing up around those it*

*was like speaking Farsi in the home and Arabic at school with my friends. I feel like I they've become an asset for me now that I know three languages instead of just knowing English and... it was like interesting learning " (Hashmat).*

Ali spoke to how he and his family learned Turkish before coming to Canada: *"I speak Arabic with my parents; with my sisters, my sisters speak Turkish. They speak Turkish a lot as Turkish for them is way better than Arabic" (Ali).* Interestingly, another participant reflected on how their Arabic mother tongue language almost suffered at the expense of Turkish: *"Yes, people with us are from Syria but they speak Turkish because they lived in Turkey; their Arabic is weak" (Adam).*

While proficiency in Arabic supported maintaining a sense of community, it became isolating for some participants in the Canadian education system. Kamal explained how his high school was dominated by Arabic-speaking peers: *"Now regarding the Arabic language, it was a challenging situation because we I got into Westview school, everything was in Arabic... the Arabs there, they are about 80% so I was encountering some challenges." (Kamal).* He also elaborated on how it challenged his efforts to establish effective inter-ethnic peer relationships:

*"I tried to be friends with/ or get to know foreigners... I could not have a friendship with them because they do not mix with Arabs. When I got into school, I connected with an Arab right away because my whole class was Arabs, it did not have foreigners. It is hard for them to put Arabs with foreigners unless if their English is really level E which is the highest then they would put us with them" (Kamal).*

Kamal's statement of *"they do not mix with Arab"* resonated with him and was shared with some observed sadness and hesitation in his voice. As he elaborated further, Kamal explained that the lack of opportunity for meaningful peer interactions made it difficult for peers

outside of the Arab community to initiate or maintain connections. Kamal has shared here that establishing meaningful opportunities for bridging peer connections is a goal that should be revisited in the education system.

Other participants reflected on how the Arabic proficiency was a supportive factor to enhance their academic experience. Ramy explained how mastering Arabic a “good thing” and how an Arabic-speaking counsellor’s support made his and his peers’ experience more fulfilling. He noted, *“I believe like it’s a good thing because like there’s a lot of Arabic here people for example, like one of my teachers she was Arabic like speaker. She speaks Arabic and she right now she is a guidance counselor. She like she helps a lot of students who don’t speak English”* (Ramy). Ramy added that this Arabic-speaking teacher/guidance counsellor gave him and his peers a sense of safety and security. He shared that coming from the same Arab background, she would best relate to and understand his needs and experience and was therefore in a good position to support him and his Arab peers.

Overall, participants considered the preservation of Arabic as an integral aspect of their Arab identity: it provided a sense of community, empowered relationships within their ethnic network, and was an asset that they wish to pass on to future generations. Perspectives varied on how it was a supportive factor to establishing within ethnic relationships and how it may have exacerbated challenges in developing their English language and establishing interethnic relations with the larger society in Windsor-Essex. A critical insight on maintaining Arabic language came from Haifa as she shared her beliefs in preserving her Arabic language. She attested that switching to Arabic is an inevitable and natural practice as Arabic is her native language. She considered maintaining Arabic as an important skill to have especially in her job search in future:



*If you meet with someone who speaks both Arabic and English, you will switch to Arabic more because you are more fluent with it. Let's say I have been talking this language for about 17 years. So, Arabic I would say it does have a big importance after. If you want to apply for a job, you need to deal... you are dealing with clients, with customers. If you want to work and they speak Arabic... this will be a big bonus for me (Haifa).*

Haifa's vision was further supported by Yezda who also reinforced that knowing Arabic is an asset: *"There were a lot of translators who were speaking Arabic to help us understand and translate to us what these things mean and help us a lot. I guess I was lucky to speak Arabic and understand Arabic" (Yezda).* Both participants were relatively proficient in English and in fact proceeded with the interview primarily in English. They switched to Arabic intermittently, especially when they spoke with detail about their experiences.

### **Bilingualism in English and Arabic as the Ideal**

To some participants, bilingualism in English and Arabic would lead to an "ideal" acculturation experience. Mastering their native language would enhance the preservation of their identity and sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Participants demonstrated that preserving their Arab culture, values and ideals is a key aspect of an effective acculturation experience, and that they refused to dismiss their Arab heritage and identity. However, Arabic also created a fundamental barrier that prevented participants from engaging with others from the larger society. Rather, they focused on exerting efforts to ensure that such values are instilled in future generations of immigrants and refugees. For example, Hayat shared her commitment to teaching Arabic to ensuring younger generations: *"It also helps, like I know Arabic, but I like volunteer to teach young generations who do not know Arabic" (Hayat).* By the same token, participants reinforced the importance of continuing to develop their English language skills as,

to them, this would enhance their sense of belonging, improve their opportunity to network with others from the larger society, and mastering English would also act as a gateway to support them in tackling opportunities in civic engagement and employment.

Petra presented her perspective on the mutual benefit of mastering English and Arabic to enhance her integration: *"Yeah, like almost do both, Arabic and English because this will help people who know English to understand it in English and people who know Arabic, to understand it in Arabic, so it will be both"* (Petra). Petra and other participants reinforced how bilingualism would be important to effectively enhance their sense of belonging and support others to successfully integrate. Dunya highlighted the importance of bilingualism:

*It does not help with my settlement here because like here they all speak English, but I helped others like in school I want like I always volunteered, like during lunch time or between classes if they needed someone down the office that speaks Arabic or Chaldean then I can go. I will just be more than happy to show any Arabic around like during summer, I spent two months welcoming the newcomers because they all like spoke Arabic or Chaldean, and then they know absolutely no English. So, I had to be there (Dunya).*

Participants wished to share a note of caution: if someone studied in English back home and was proficient in English, it would be important not to assume their academic performance would be the same as individuals who have been through the Canadian system. Haifa, a Lebanese immigrant who studied most subjects in English, explained how education as well as English language requirements in general, differed between the two academic systems. She shared:

*Yeah, so as an Arabic language to integrate, I would not say that it had a big role. It's the opposite, I had to work on my English language because in Lebanon it is not the first*

*language... meaning English was the second language, so we learned English in Lebanon; and almost all my courses, subjects, that I took. They taught them to us in English, but not the English that they teach for verbal communication. It is more focused on written English (Haifa).*

As well, accent and dialect could make a difference in the experience, as this Palestinian refugee claimant shared:

*The accent, I had difficulties with it. The Canadian accent. I know English, I understand English, but I have a hard time... the Canadian accent, I do not understand it. Ok if someone is speaking to me... I was telling people with me at work... when I was in Abu Dhabi, if we need water we say “water”, we don’t say “warrer” [demonstrating accent] (Ahmed).*

Bissan further elaborated on feeling that bilingualism is a unique skill and an asset to support cognitive processes, development, and commitment to support others. Bissan spoke to how she uses this unique skillset of English-Arabic bilingualism to extend support to others in her community. Correspondingly, she spoke to her identity as a visible minority as a sign of comfort to others to approach her for support. She stated:

*I like that I speak two languages. I have something special for at home, something for school so I feel like it is good; also knowing languages it is good for our brain... Or sometimes outside, maybe in stores when there is someone who is old... Arab, he might not know how to speak English, like I can help him sometimes... because I wear Hijab, so they know I am Arab, so they come and ask me, so I can help them sometimes. Also, I used to volunteer at a place, so this was one of my jobs, it was to translate (Bissan).*

English proficiency was a critical skill for school performance for Arab immigrant emerging adults to continue pursuing their educational goals. Essentially, participants described how English proficiency was a precursor for advancement, progress, and being accepted by the local larger society. Ali described that because of his high school's focus on English, he was able to develop his English language faster and more effectively. To Ali and other participants, it seemed that participants interpreted high English proficiency as a sign of advancement, progress, and success, as well as acceptance by the larger society. Ali stated, *"The reason I loved Kennedy high school because they speak English mostly... they do not speak Arabic unless if they have to, for example, if it first day for someone in school and he does not know how to speak English, you talk to him in Arabic. When it is conversations, it is all in English, there is not Arabic"* (Ali).

Hayat also described her pride in English language development throughout the trajectory of her journey, *"We started thinking and reflecting on how we were in 2016 and now, how we became what a big change, we never thought that we would be in Canada and study and learn and speak two languages; learn French and English. This this is nice... like Wow!"* (Hayat).

Adorina presented further examples of how enhancing her language proficiency enabled her to feel that she belonged to her new community, *"So, I started practicing and I started talking to people more and more. Then I started realizing I am fitting in"* (Adorina). Adorina continued to reflect: *"I had new friends, I learned a language, new language. I experienced a lot of different things like going to new school, taking driving license, speaking English most of the time"*.

In summary, participants identified reasonings that supported the value of preserving their native Arabic language while also enhancing proficiency in English. For each, participants identified factors of how each language effectively supported their acculturation experiences

while also presenting some challenges associated with each language. English proficiency was identified as a gateway and a source of establishing important inter-ethnic relationships yet was a precedent for feeling that they belong to their new community. Some presented other systemic barriers that obstructed their ability to develop their second language skills. Participants also addressed the importance of maintaining their Arabic language as a sign of pride and identity and maintenance of a sense of ethnic community. However, some participants identified how speaking Arabic could further isolate them from the larger society and may slow their progress in learning English. To almost all participants, bilingualism in English and Arabic was an asset, and a unique skill to maintain. Finally, they shared a note of caution against assumptions made associating having some proficiency in English with better school performance or community navigation: support is still required.

### **Theme III- Meeting the Challenges Created by the Settler Society**

The Canadian host society had a dual role in fostering participants' adjustment. First, Canadian society supported participants' sense of belonging through facilitating cultural knowledge exchange and promoting intercultural relationships. Second, it imposed cultural expectations and demands as well as perceived measures of successful integration. Both the expectations and preconceived measures of success presented significant challenges that made the acculturation experience difficult for some participants. Others have endured these as true values and measures of success that, as an immigrant, they must meet for their settlement to be effective. Some participants alluded to the expectations they sensed would be precursors to their success in their new home community such as learning about Canadian values directly from "Canadians". Participants defined "Canadians" in terms of settlement agencies and members of the larger society. For example, Yezda explained, *"Even though I am an immigrant, but I am*

*here, and I became part of this community, so they are teaching me how to be part of it” (Yezda).*

While Yezda reinforced how her community benefitted from workshops and sessions offered through the settlement agencies that target enhancing knowledge of the Canadian culture, values, the law and more, she reinforced the notion that success in the new culture meant adhering to “Canadian” cultural values. She stated:

*Educational sessions, what the law means; what is the law in Canada... is important to you. It is important to understand that I am an immigrant, but I am here, and I became part of this community, so they are teaching me how to be part of it... [...] ... So, this helped us become part of Canadians who are obeying the law. This helped us belong to Canada and does not mean (we are immigrants, we do not belong to Canada). So yeah; this thing helped us (Yezda).*

Interethnic relationships presented an integral opportunity for participants to engage with members of the larger society. Participants related their interest in establishing interethnic relationships as an important goal for enhancing their sense of belonging and as a demonstration of their dedication to integrate in their new community, *“I merged with the society, so I learned” (Ariman)*. Further, Haifa explained, *“Now personally is that I have a lot of goals in life, and I'm doing... I did some of them and socialize with a person the community; you know like, I have the courage now to socialize. I did not have the fear that I used to have” (Haifa)*. Hayat agreed that greater interactions with the larger society supported enhancing her ability to integrate in her new home community: *“I have the courage now to socialize; I did not have the fear that I used... actually, it is the opposite. I learned. In fact, life here is if there is no community, you will not be able to continue” (Hayat)*.

Interestingly, even at this stage in their settlement and integration experiences, a few participants demonstrated strong connections to their new community and found it difficult to adjust back: *“Got distanced a lot and I honestly cannot go back to Syria because I will not feel comfortable, perhaps I won’t be able to live” (Ariman)*. This signified the possibility that as a settler society, we have communicated expectations for newcomers to adhere to dominant Canadian cultural expectations that participating newcomer immigrants and refugees no longer found their cultural heritage relevant. In the process of conforming to Canadian cultural expectations, participants exhibited more of an assimilative rather than an integrationist approach. Participants had to possibly replace some cultural values and ways of living distant from their own that they no longer find their country-of-origin values and ways of living relevant.

The case of Kurdish-Syrian participants and their sense of belonging and adjustment to the new settler society presented a unique case that warrants further analysis and exploration. The two participants I had that identified as Kurdish-Syrian provided an exceptional outlook on the complexity of establishing their sense of belonging. The first participant (Ariman) explained how she felt displaced with her culture, identity, and sense of belonging back home, and that only in Canada was she able to develop some sense of feeling that she was part of the larger community. The participant reflects on her perception of her Arab identity, racial background, heritage and how her sense of belonging was challenged with her exceptional identity as a Kurdish-Syrian:

*This is the thing, like when I think about the heritage, like Assyrian, Chaldeans, and Sharkas, they are minorities. So, we usually say if we did not have countries because of war, we became minorities. Therefore, we tend to take care of our own heritage and*

*culture. When I was in Syria, I felt that I do not belong a lot to the community because of my language. The language is different. When you go outside, you see that people are looking at you in a way that they label you “You speak Kurdish” so the idea of belonging to me is confusing, when I was in Syria, I did not feel that I fully belonged there. I feel like a Syrian more here. In our small community, amongst our relatives, you feel that you are on one side and the Arabs on another side. The language makes a lot of difference. It was very hard for me to feel that I belong there 100%. It is hard when you are from a different racial background and live with majority of people who speak Arabic and you do not (Ariman).*

She described how she felt safe with differences in her identity because of the cultural diversity that underlies the Canadian society: *“Look, you feel like you are different here, but the idea here is that everyone is different. I feel that each family and each house have their own community, their own environment. for example, I am Kurdish-Syrian living in my own house. This is the same thing with Arab, and even Pakistani even some Canadians you see some of their values are not from here. I feel there is difference in treatment, but we are all equal on one line” (Ariman).* While she worried of the impact that the sense of belonging would have on her emotional well-being, she felt confident that with time, she would be capable of contributing to Canadian society in meaningful ways: *“Here, maybe in 5 or 10 years if you ask me the same questions, I will feel that I am Canadian. I will then feel that I can stand up for this country, want this president, that conservative... [...] ...this is not good for me” (Ariman).*

Ariman described how the cultural and language diversity here in Canada, specifically in her local community, helped her express her identity and practice her cultural values more effectively. Ariman highlighted how it was difficult to integrate as most of her home community



in Syria came from a different racial background and spoke Arabic primarily, while Arabic is her second language: *“It is hard when you are from a different racial background and live with majority of people who speak Arabic and you do not.”* However, the high level of diversity in her local Canadian community brought forth some comfort in that everyone is equally different, *“Look, you feel like you are different here, but the idea here is that everyone is different,”* and that inequitable treatment is a common experience as well, *“I feel there is difference in treatment, but we are all equal on one line”*.

Ariman noted that, despite the local Canadian society being welcoming and inclusive, there were instances where she was treated differently due to being a newcomer. In fact, she worked very hard to adjust to the living standards and cultural expectations so that she could gradually, and on the long-term as she noted, become an active and contributing citizen to her new Canadian community. In her perspective, contributing back is a goal that she targeted as she sensed it is required to extend and express appreciation to Canada for providing her and her family an opportunity to resettle and re-establish in a new community. Ariman’s perspective on the need to contribute to Canada to extend appreciated was not an isolated perspective. Several other participants shared the same perspective and reinforced through their interviews their commitment to meet this goal in the future.

The second Kurdish-Syrian participant (Yezda) provided further insights during the interview. She explained the history of Kurdish-Syrians as a group that has been living in Syria for thousands of years. She explained that they have a different cultural perspective, history, language and even clothing than Arabs; however, they hold the same values and principles as Arabs. Yezda expressed similar worries of expressing her identity as the first participant, sharing that they could not identify as Kurdish in Syria because they will be shunned and isolated. She

demonstrated to me her hesitation with even symbolizing their culture through clothing: “*I was shy with my mom’s clothing; I am worried about her; this used to make me feel very shy.*” The participant stated that in Canada, she could freely identify as Kurdish-Syrian: “*Canada made us feel proud to love our background and who we are and encouraged us to practice our values and cultural practices*” (Yezda). She educated me on an important Kurdish holiday that she and her community were finally able to celebrate in Canada:

*March 21<sup>st</sup> is a holiday that we were not able to celebrate; however, we used to do that, a 1000 of us for Newroz holiday. We used to light the fire to symbolize freedom and victory. I was able to practice it Newroz without the fire practice, which is forbidden due to community safety, but at least I can celebrate it here (Yezda).*

### **Cultural Differences and Respect for Diversity**

The intersectional lens on analyzing acculturation was particularly important in understanding participants’ perceptions of cultural differences between the Arab and Canadian cultures, respectively. I was interested to learn whether participants’ perspectives echoed what the literature reflected on the possibility of some demographics, such as Arab cultural background, immigrant/refugee status, age/developmental stage, and religious identity, impacted the degree to which one associates with Canadian culture (Kumar et al., 2015; Rasmi & Daly, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2015). For example, the literature noted that Christian Arabs may find it more plausible to relate with the larger Canadian society than Muslim Arabs due to an association with a more dominant religion (Matera, 2014). However, it appeared that, for participants in this study, demographic differences did not influence perceptions of Arab and Canadian cultural differences.

Participants described the Arab culture as more “conservative.” They shared that Arabs were more prone to preserve their adopted values and principles. Rafca, an Iraqi Chaldean participant, described her view thusly: *“They are more conservative... more than Europeans western communities... will put it that way”* (Rafca). Her view was supported by Haifa, a Lebanese Muslim participant who shared:

*Ok so the Arab heritage/culture, I would say, I feel it is a little bit conservative. I feel that they are attached to their values and principles.... they give... for example if there is a holiday...something very important to them, they give it a lot of importance. They have strong family relationships... and yeah... I think that is it* (Haifa).

Further, Ahmed, a Palestinian Muslim participant, demonstrated his worries about raising his children in Canada and having them adhere more closely to the Canadian cultural ideals than those of their Arab heritage. Ahmed stated: *“I am one of people who feels like if I get married, I feel afraid to raise my son here. I do not want that, I want my child to go to school, learn, and grow, and be mature; not to think like when you are 16 years old, you can live by yourself... that you can do a lot of things”* (Ahmed). Ahmed was very active socially and professionally, and he placed a great value on adopting and integrating some Canadian cultural practices and values. However, Ahmed worried that this may risk potentially losing some aspects of his Arab identity and heritage. Hence, he sought the need to work on balancing both his heritage and the host Canadian culture before starting his own family.

Supporting Ahmed’s view was Michael, an Iraqi Chaldean participant, who wished to have a greater opportunity to share his culture as he believed this help the host culture understand him and his family. Michael believed that a cultural knowledge exchange is key to help facilitate learning about societal values and ideals of each culture. Like Ahmed, Michael worked on

navigating the challenges of merging his desire to preserve his heritage while also being actively involved in the larger society. He stated, *"I can provide them insights from the culture and tell them like this and that. This is how we start to have friends, relationships, and we can live a nice life"* (Michael). Laila's view was not far from Michael or Ahmed. Laila, an Iraqi Christian participant, also called for the host culture to dedicate further efforts to introduce them to "Canadian" ways of living, as she described to me, in order for her to better integrate and flourish in her new community. She used the school system as an example to demonstrate her views on the challenges she experienced as she worked on navigating the structural barriers in the education system. Laila wished to prosper and integrate, but she thought further supports were needed to "succeed": *"Just at school, for example, when the person first comes... they should teach the person about the system, we have the system it is very...very different"* (Laila).

Georgia, a Lebanese Christian participant, reflected on a cultural difference that she experienced in social settings. She shared the example of paying for friends' dinner and, while for Arabs it is an expression of gratitude, Canadians may perceive it as a responsibility to pay back what they owe. Georgia shared that she hesitated at times to continue applying this heritage cultural practice because she worried about how Canadians (referring to non-Arab social contacts or peers) perceived her. She explained, *"So the one person pays, and they don't come back and tell me return the money or pay me back without anyone telling me, I just think that next time I will invite them for dinner you know. Here, I feel like they will make it a big deal"* (Georgia).

Cyla, another Lebanese Christian participant, brought forward another difference that she navigated as she was establishing her social relationships, and how the differences made it somewhat challenging for her; *"In Lebanon, there is more interaction between people like as a society, you see way more people than they do in here... like there is genuineness in Lebanon but*

*I cannot exactly pinpoint the society here, it is just how people act toward each other in Lebanon" (Cyla).* Her view was supported by a few participants who also shared missing social relations and friends back home. This included the views of two Iraqi Chaldean participants (Petra and Shahnaz), two Syrian Muslim participants (Hayat and Nesrine), one Syrian non-practicing participant (Madeline), and a Muslim Iranian participant (Hashmat).

Despite some challenges in navigating cultural differences, participants believed that respect for diversity and diverse cultures and beliefs were also important. To illustrate, Laila, an Iraqi Christian participant, explained how, despite disagreeing with some Canadian cultural practices and values, she continued to believe it was important to respect these values; *"First our religion does not accept it, uh... we can accept them as people, but not the thing they do"*. Ramy, a Syrian Muslim participant, further demonstrated the respect and support for difference; he equated respecting and *"following rules"* as a facilitative factor for enhancing his sense of belonging and integration in Canada. He stated, *"Right. Like we should follow the rules like not break the rules and like go over them...because we are showing like the Canadian people how we are respect like their rules their country like and training get like that ... our country, our land"* (Ramy). Ramy's statement of *"showing the Canadian people how we respect"* demonstrated another allusion that participants seemed to feel that conformity to Canadian values and ideals, which may come at the expense of giving up some of their heritage values, would be the best approach to be accepted by the larger society. In turn, this may have been perceived as the more effective approach for enhancing their integration within the larger society. However, these combative challenges of feeling the need to adhere to dominant ideals for a better acculturation experience was demonstrative of more assimilationist approaches to immigration rather than the

integrationist approaches that our system in Canada claims to adopt in supporting immigration and multiculturalism (Niles, 2018).

### **Determination to Prove Worthiness**

Arab immigrant emerging adults hold great passion and a strong commitment to establishing themselves in their new (Canadian) community. In the interviews, I heard voices of power, determination, and persistence to achieve their goals and aspirations. In addition to their determination to successfully reach their goals as signs of personal achievements and an establishment of their independence, participants also identified their success as a contribution back to the Canadian society. Participants shared that their contributions as active citizens and independence were key factors in demonstrating their ability to re-establish and build a safe, stable life in Canada. As well, this was a necessary step for them to gain the acceptance of Canadian society. Generally, participants reflected on opportunities for employment, educational success, and language development as some of the milestones they were determined to achieve.

Michael and Ahmed highlighted useful examples that signified their determination to advance their academic and professional achievements. Through these experiences, they portrayed the critical connection joining these achievements with their potentiality to independence and personal advancement, both of which are perceived as promoted qualities by the larger Canadian society. Michael discussed his commitment and aspiration to reach his goals, stating: *“There is nothing beautiful more than someone who keeps on trying... the best thing are challenges to help you reach the top. When you did your PhD, there were probably challenges, but you did not focus on the challenges, you focused on the goal”* (Michael). Further, Ahmed described to me his commitment to advancing his education and his outlook to acquire a higher

position in his career. Ahmed shared, *“Now my focus is on for me to finish my education, uh, do well at my job, that’s what’s important to me” (Ahmed).*

Dunya’s determination for success was exemplified in her focus on success in education. Dunya identified knowledge of the education system, curriculum delivery, evaluation methods, and language barrier as some of the experienced systemic barriers that obstructed her ability in achieving the best academic performance. However, Dunya was strongly committed to learning how the system works here in Canada for her to potentially achieve the highest academic grades possible. Her primary support in her education journey was her mother. She spoke to the importance of having her mother’s support and encouragement was key in continuing to drive her motivation. Dunya’s challenges in education was not an isolated voice; rather, both the systemic barriers encountered and her commitment to overcome these barriers were echoed in other participants. Some of these stories were shared in Theme II of this study addressing education experiences. Dunya discussed completing a standardized test and waiting to see if her academic performance qualified her to advance in school and her mother’s support as she awaited the results: *“Yeah, when I tell her, I told my mom, I had like to do a test and then let’s well see if I get accepted into that school or not and she goes like you are studying. You have good grades. Go ahead... I’m like, I am not making it a big deal, but this is how it works here” (Dunya).*

Dunya’s and other participants’ experiences with educational system challenges could be regarded as examples of oppressive practices that may obstruct their ability to prosper academically and professionally. As well, these experiences could be precursors to confining these immigrant/refugee emerging adults to limited opportunities for achieving potential. In Dunya’s example, being subject to a standardized test that is based on dominant evaluative

criteria and to a curriculum she was unfamiliar with could be considered an oppressive practice. Dunya, in this case would have to prove that her academic capabilities were equivalent to a comparative level to her Canadian counterparts for her to be able to progress with her studies. For Dunya and colleagues who may not pass this standardized measure, this could mean being confined to limited opportunities both academically and professionally, and it could lead to questioning of one's capabilities. This raised concerns that despite the persistence and determination encountered in these participants, such structural oppressions could risk the advancement, sense of belonging, and emotional wellbeing of participants, as well as challenge their ability from experiencing a positive acculturation.

Other participants also incorporated educational advancement as a key milestone while highlighting how they navigated these challenges. Madeline reflected on her introduction to dominant systemic standards and how she partially questioned her capabilities and knowledge when introduced to new systems, such academic writing standardization systems as dictated by APA, MLA, or other style guides. Her perspective evidently demonstrated the frustration she sensed knowing that other newcomer students like herself would equally be confused and challenged. Madeline stated that this necessitated greater efforts to be dedicated to orienting newcomers to academic standardized measures of success. Madeline was highly motivated and determined to progress; however, her sense of accomplishment was directly influenced by these imposed measures of success. To her, the “*biggest milestone*” was learning about the dominant academic systems. Madeline shared: “*Yeah, I'm writing in when I am like struggling with the APA or in MLA, I did not hear about them until last semester, believe it or not. And still, this is my biggest milestone, but at the same time I'm like, how do you expect the person here for this long to know what the ... you're talking about?*” (Madeline).



Likewise, Cyla expressed her pride in her education success despite facing some challenges. Cyla felt that quite isolated and somewhat pressured to establish her pathway independently. As Cyla was sharing her journey, I sensed the significant emotional labour invested in learning about multiple systems and subcultures within her new Canadian culture, where she is adjusting. Cyla discussed how she has invested significant efforts to best understand how the local Canadian society portrays advancement and success as she aspired to be accepted and integrated in her new community. Cyla's experience in education was that she was expected to learn how to progress independently. Cyla identified her independence and ability to succeed while being somewhat isolated as a success: *"Of course, the fact I was able to complete successfully my first year of university, and um basically on my own. Like with literally no contact with anyone. It has been hard for sure but I'm very proud that I was able to accomplish it with the current given circumstances"* (Cyla). However, Cyla later spoke of missing some of the social interactions and wishing that in the future as she advanced in her university career to be subject could have greater opportunities to feel accepted by and integrated in her new community. Cyla also spoke to the pandemic challenges being yet another structural obstacle to navigate. This did not seem to reduce her motivation from aspiring to be an active citizen in her new community; *"I wanted to participate in things, I wanted to be an active member of some group or whatever, but I haven't been able to achieve it because of the pandemic and hopefully once it's done, I'm going to see what I can do"* (Cyla).

Nesrine addressed support for families and childcare options as significant barriers for advancing her language and education. What Nesrine's story portrayed was that while education and language development opportunities were available, it would be important to address systemic barriers first that may challenge newcomers from advancing their language skills and

education. Nesrine explained how her family obligations and caring for her children were a significant barrier for her. Along with prioritizing family obligations, Nesrine's eagerness to advance her language and progress in education was evident. However, Nesrine called for greater efforts to address challenges especially facing women with family/children obligations. She noted, *"Learn the language, and other than the language, I also have my kids, I want to spend time with them. I cannot go to school and leave my kids at home because my priority is my kids to make sure they are safe. Then I can study"* (Nesrine).

Some participants shared that the Canadian host community was inclusive, motivating, and provided opportunities to support their aspirations. Hashmat shared his great pride in securing employment opportunities that met his goals and interests: *"Last year, I have been working in 4 different places for different fields and I got a lot of experience from that, so it is a great... great place to be free and do whatever your heart desires"* (Hashmat). Further, Dunya reflected on the motivation she sensed from the Canadian society to continue working toward her independence and aspirations in different work fields. She shared: *"I would do it by myself, live by myself there, work for myself and make a living for myself and provide everything for myself. We did not learn a lot about this back home because they were not available like there was no such a thing"* (Dunya).

Hayat also shared that the opportunities secured by the local Canadian society were open to everyone irrespective of belonging to a different ethnic or racial group: *"Like there are a lot of Canadians who get happy when they see an Arab girl working similarly to their job... their work that they love... they get happy. Like she is from a different religion, or a different country and she is working like us"* (Hayat). Hayat's statement, however, further portrayed the goal of conformity as the ideal value as expressed by the larger Canadian society, with her local society

as a reference, continue to be the only measures of success. Hayat seemed to be navigating internal challenges of having pride in success, showcasing her Arab heritage and present capabilities, while also conforming to ideals promoted or supported by the larger Canadian society. Hayat seemed to be seeking acceptance and potential integration into her new community, and she believed that this was only achievable through conformity and adopting the qualities as imposed by the local Canadian society as portrayed by “*and she is working like us.*”

Kamal spoke to the importance of actively interacting with the larger society and how it may lead to more effective connections and greater opportunities, “*I would want to for myself, such as if I want to get better, I need to learn here and adapt to Canada. If I need to work, then I must have connections or skills about the job*” (Kamal). Kamal’s interpretation of his experience also suggested a need for acceptance by the larger Canadian society. He learned how networking and being involved with others from the larger society opened more doors for opportunities and advancement.

As a demonstration of work being identified as an accomplishment, Nihal expressed gratitude for joining the workforce for the first time. Nihal’s comments seemed to reflect a combination of both an individualist goal of advancing herself in her career and a collectivist ideal of prioritizing a collective goal of purchasing the family home. She demonstrated her pride in establishing her independence and generating income; which is an individualistic value or goal, along with potentially securing money to buy a family house; which is more reflective of an Arab collectivist value.

*The first accomplishment I did was that in my whole life I never worked but I was able to work here. I was able to make money... [...] ... not many people that come here and work right after when they get here... when I got here, I was here for only four months, and I*

*started working for 6 months. So, I feel like this is an accomplishment for me because I never thought in my life, I would reach this point and be able to make money and help my dad... so we can buy a house (Nihal).*

Some participants navigated their determination for progress through advocacy. Bissan believed that her advocacy was the primary factor that supported her advancement. She highlighted in her story how she sought the need to transform the image or perspective of her capabilities as a newcomer. In her story, Bissan described how she was troubled by preconceived notions about her capabilities as a newcomer student, and how she had to advocate for that image to be restructured so she could be gain greater opportunities and achieve further. Bissan explained, *"It made me stand up... I came, I believed, I deserve to be there, and you are not putting me there so I advocated a lot, and I was telling them that I can. So, this thing made me stronger and stand up for what I believe is right" (Bissan).* Other participants also affirmed their determination to continue working toward goals that they established prior to immigrating to Canada. As Haifa explained, *"The things I grew up on were the importance of learning/knowledge. The importance of you developing yourself because you want to be a strong person" (Haifa).*

Ariman's advocacy was shaped in her desire to combat common stereotypical views of immigrants and refugees with regards to financial dependence on the government, and this is a form of interpersonal oppression that participants experienced. Immigrants and refugees of some categories in Canada are eligible for federal funding support. Some, as well, apply for available federal and provincial funding to meet their living expenses and demands. According to participants in this study, including Ariman, there was an ongoing stereotype that immigrants and refugees depended on financial support from the government to meet their financial demands

rather than actively seeking out work. Ariman shared that she acquired this determination for financial independence following the footsteps and motivation of her father. Ariman described the image she and her family were combatting with as they refuted here to Canada. She explained how they aspired to be independent “*just like everyone else here.*” With this statement, Ariman illustrated how she wished to deviate from the stereotype and prove her determination to be like others from the larger society. Ariman continued:

*When my father... he worked so hard. you know our community how when we go to Canada and specially refugees, the government will take care and give money... [...] ... When you come here, after new year, you know the law and system, you start thinking that I must work. I would always say to my father that we must work and depend on ourselves, we consider ourselves just like everyone else here (Ariman).*

I asked participants to envision a timeline of their journey here in Canada and identify significant events or milestones. My aim was to understand participants’ adjustment experiences further in both attainments as well as their efforts to meet the demands imposed by the settler Canadian society. Further I was looking to learn about the trajectory of their experience in Canada and assess what experiences they can derive as a success or an accomplishment. As well, I investigated how their local Arab ethnic community and the larger Canadian society contributed to these goals. As well, I sought to understand whether the structural barriers were exacerbated in supporting their settlement and integration experiences.

In their reflections, participants identified settling safely in Canada, enhancing English language proficiency, educational success, securing employment, securing a driver license, volunteering, and supporting others as some of the key milestones. Throughout the interviews, participants reflected on their pride in achieving these important milestones. A few reflections as

noted incorporated visions on the support received from their Arab community and Canadian society. Furthermore, participants processed how they navigated through systemic and structural barriers or imposed ideas by the settler society that they sought to meet. From their perspectives, meeting dominant values and ideals as set forth by the Canadian society could support them in being welcomed and accepted as well as help to enhance their integration and sense of belong to their local communities. They hoped that their determination for success and potential achievements could demonstrate their Arab culture(s), capabilities, and fulfill an imposed need of proving they were worthy of the opportunity to resettle and in their local Canadian community.

Shahnaz described her volunteering as a significant achievement: *“I was able to improve myself, and I was able to help people who are newcomers now just as I was before. I am happy with this thing. I have volunteered”* (Shahnaz). Finally, Adorina reflected on several achievements which she considered equally significant contributors to feeling accomplished, *“I had new friends, I learned a language, new language. I experienced a lot of different things like going to new school, taking driving license, speaking English most of the time, yeah”* (Adorina).

#### **Theme IV- Maintaining an Intersectional Arab Identity in Colonial Settler Society**

##### **Intersectionality of the Arab Identity**

Participants in this study incorporated multiple aspects of their identity as they reflected on their immigration and adjustment journeys and described their acculturation experiences. As described throughout each theme, participants resorted to articulating on their experience through an intersectional lens. They derived their perceptions of their acculturation experiences by reflecting on how the intersect of their Arab heritage and identity primarily, religion and religious identity, language, immigrant/refugee status, and in very few cases, their gender

identity. In some cases, such as discussing how they met the challenges imposed by the Canadian settler society locally, participants also resorted to discussing how their socioeconomic status intersects with their immigrant/refugee status to subject them to discriminatory practices and differential treatment. In a significant proportion of their discussions, participants identified the intersect of their Arabic and English language proficiencies with other identity aspects to shape their lived experiences. Participants ensured to derive both facilitative factors and impediments that enhance or challenge their acculturation experiences. Participants navigated tensions throughout their experience between their strong commitment to maintaining their Arab identity and heritage, as well as become accepted, welcomed, and active citizens of their new community.

Some of the supportive factors to maintaining their intersectional Arab identity included Arabic language proficiency, strong within-ethnic relationships, establishment of within-ethnic peers, commitment to their religious practices, and religious communities, and commitment to obligations and support of their families. Some of the impediments risking full exploration and maintenance of their intersectional Arab identity included English language proficiency, stereotypical perceptions of threats of immigrants and refugees presence by the settler society, systemic and structural barriers that either stemmed from discriminatory-based practices or from lack of available proficient support to immigrants and refugees, and limited opportunities for establishing interethnic relationships.

In this final section of exploring intersectionality and the Arab experience, I am focusing on how the intersectional Arab identity is influenced by two specific dimensions of participants' identities: perceptions of racial and religious identities. Studies on Arab identity revealed that Arabs tend to resort to their Arab ethnicity, nationalities, and religious backgrounds as common

reference points for describing their Arab identity (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Kusow et al., 2018; Samhan, 1999). The literature review did not reveal studies that directly asked Arab participants to not only identify their race, but also reflect on how they formulate their perceptions of their racial identities. I have noted that some studies especially those on Arab immigrants in the U.S. alluded to the racial identity factor, especially to highlight the struggles of Arabs in the U.S. as they attempt to separate their race from the White race (e.g., Habayeb et al., 2020). Further exploration was required to ask Arab immigrants and refugees to deconstruct how they would formulate their racial identity, and this is explored in the next section. Furthermore, in addition to ethnicity and nationality, Arab immigrants and refugees sometimes resorted to identifying their religious identities as a core aspect of defining their Arab identity. In fact, it is a common practice for Arabs in their home countries to be asked about their religious identity (Awad et al., 2021; Kusow et al., 2018). Hence, I asked if participants adopted this practice as they responded to the question(s) asking them to define Arab and their Arab identity (see Appendix F for Interview guideline).

### **The Different Perceptions of Arab Racial Identity**

Participants in this study were asked to define their Arab identity and how they would describe the term “Arab.” They were also asked directly how they conceptualize and describe their race and racial identity. In response to these questions, participants resorted commonly to identifying with their national backgrounds; some shared they were unsure of how to describe their racial identification; some used the term “Arab,” and others were more regional or city specific in their description. While participants were directly asked to describe their Arab identity, race, and racial identity, respectively, the Research Assistant and I did not probe further. For example, if a participant was to use a term that could arguably be an ethnic (e.g., Arab) or



national (e.g., Syrian) identification, the respective participant was not corrected or asked further. Therefore, participants' accounts on their identity are integrated in this section as specifically shared by the respective participant.

In describing her identity, Cyla applied an intersect among ethnic, national, and racial backgrounds to describe the different dimensions of her identity. She shared:

*Um, ok...so my ethnicity is definitely Arab, I'm Lebanese. But as a race, I mean... I suppose I am... my skin color is white, but I feel like Arab should have their own race because there isn't just white Arabs... there is black Arabs, there is... [...] I would say I am a white Arab based on my skin color (Cyla).*

Georgia reflected on her perception of citizenship and race. She viewed her identity from two primary aspects: as a biological disposition and a passport identification.

*I think there is a difference between citizenship and race [...] I don't know... I would consider myself Lebanese and I would consider myself Canadian, but this is according to my passport. If it comes to genes and everything, I'm Lebanese and both of my parents are born from... they are Lebanese people who were born in Lebanon. They do not have genes from outside. My mom has the passport because she lived outside and after, then she gave us the passport. She is not born Canadian; she does not have White genes at all (Georgia).*

Iranian participant Hashmat shared that his racial identity is, “*Uh, Middle Eastern I guess*” (Hashmat). While Iran could arguably be considered a non-Arab nation, Hashmat identified as Arab as he proceeded with the interview; he spoke some Arabic; and he associated with the Arab community. Interestingly, Syrian participant Ramy identified as White, stating, “*yeah, it's like white*” (Ramy), and his identity representation closely resembled that of Georgia

as she was describing the physical attribute of skin colour as one approach to identifying her racial identity.

Interestingly, Shahnaz shared that she felt more questioned about her ethnic, religious, and racial identity here in Canada as opposed to back home. She described how they cohesively existed in Iraq and there was no questioning of backgrounds like she had experienced since coming to Canada. She shared:

*You wouldn't have someone who would come and ask you, are you Christian or Muslim, there was no such a thing, we were all together whether we were Muslims, Sabias, Yazidis... whatever they are, they would all be together. I came here, and you... you can see that there are people that want to know what you are (Shahnaz).*

As she reflected on the questions, Shahnaz shared that she felt challenged by the questions surrounding her identity and wondered whether these could be described as discriminatory. As she further journeyed with her experience, Shahnaz discussed how her shared identity sometimes influenced how others treated her, depending on how they relate to her ethnic or religious background.

Madeline's reflections on her identity presented an interesting case. In a short timeframe of less than five years, Madeline had sensed some changes in her identity. She used the term “*originally*” to signify that the changes in her identity have changed sufficiently for her not to strictly identify with her heritage and nationality as specific identity aspects. She stated, “*So, I say I'm originally Arab or Syrian unless they ask me a direct question like where are you from? Like I say Syrian or Arab, you know*” (Madeline). Madeline explained her viewpoint of how she felt somewhat distant from her Syrian origins as she has integrated some qualities that she gained

through her interaction with the larger Canadian society locally. She described her insight stating,

*Right, because...I picked up a lot of things that are in my traits right now that are here like that are from the Canadian communities. And they made me who I am. Yeah, because I feel like if I go back there to Syria, I'm not Syrian. I'm the girl who was originally Syrian but went and lived outside for a while you know, so it works both ways (Madeline).*

When Petra reflected on her racial identity, she was more city specific. She identified just as she did in Iraq, in accordance with racial group differences. Petra specifically used the term “race” to differentiate the different groups and describe her identity. She stated:

*Each city, the people who are living there, their race is identified according to the city. For example, Baghdad, we call them Baghdadis, and Basra, we call them Bersanian [...] I am from Iraq, but I was born in Mousel, which is the city of Nenava so I am considered Maslawian just like me and my dad and my grandfather. My great grandparents lived in Mousel, and we consider our race Maslawian (origin coming from city of Mousel)” (Petra).*

The case of Kurdish-Syrian participants was unique, I sensed great confidence and a strong commitment to identifying their race as Kurdish. Both participants reflected on their Kurdish racial identity through comparing it to the Arab culture. Interestingly both were very fluent Arabic speakers and were closely attached to the Arab culture. However, their sense of belonging to the Arab culture and identification with it was influenced by the contextual differences of living in Syrian in comparison with living here in Canada. First, Ariman described the differences and similarities in her racial identity as Kurdish through describing how they

resonated with the Arab culture and its ideals in Syria. In further reflecting on her sense of belonging and adjustment as evidenced in earlier themes, Ariman's insights demonstrated that it seemed that with the increasing diversity here in Canada, that she was able to safely and freely able to preserve and proudly present her identity. She shared,

*Races... In Syria, we Kurdish people, we are very attached to that we are Kurdish and not Arab but the culture, we have that in common. The values and traditions we all have the same thinking because it is one community. There are some differences in certain traditions and values, but I see myself as Kurdish and I was raised in an environment and culture that is Arabic (Ariman).*

Yezda, the second Kurdish-Syrian participant also identified Kurdish as her racial identity. She informed about her perspective on how she relates her Kurdish and Arab identifications; she stated, *"Actually the Kurdish and Arabs... their background is not a lot different from each other, meaning same values, traditions... for example... the same holidays almost... everything is similar... you know... the same culture"* (Yezda).

One of the key findings in this study is the use of *Chaldean* as an identifier and the distinction between Christian and Chaldean for the Iraqi participants. The sample consisted of nine Iraqi participants, six of whom that identified Chaldean as their religion, while three identified as Christian. Chaldean could arguably be defined as a cultural background rather than a religious or racial background. Hence, Christian, and Chaldean religious representations could arguably be amalgamated. What I observed in this study is that participants routinely used Chaldean to describe their culture and religion. Some even used it as a reaction to the posed racial identity question to describe that this the only identity they know, like Evan shared when asked about his racial identity, *"I have no idea; I just say Chaldean"* (Evan).

To gain further insight, I asked my Research Assistant Sally to reflect on the Chaldean vs. Christian distinction since she identified closely with these identities. Sally explained some historical, religious, and geographical contexts that could explicate the usage of each term. She lent another lens on how being here in Canada also provided Chaldeans with an opportunity to present their identity more freely. It seemed that the increased diversity was a supportive factor for Chaldeans to freely preserve and openly share their identities, as participants in this study exemplified. She stated,

*Chaldeans are minority groups in Iraq, they are Catholic Christians. Some Iraqi Christians who speak Chaldean identify themselves as Chaldeans and not as Iraqi-Christian because Chaldean was not used as much as an identity in Iraq because this group was oppressed. Chaldean identity or nationality is more used here in Canada or in the United States because they are open to use this title/identity here as it is not as threatening comparing to how it was used or perceived in Iraq. Chaldean people come only from Iraq; you don't see this nationality from other countries (Sally).*

Furthermore, Sally's insights were supported by Chaldeans in the study. Dunya explained this with an example of her Chaldean community. She shared how the interaction with other religious and racial communities – Dunya identified Chaldean as religious and racial identity in this case. It seemed that the community was quite isolated, and/or that they did not cohabit with other communities. Dunya shared, “*Oh, not really. No. None like no we lived in a... actually, I was born and raised. I didn't leave Iraq until I was 15. So, we were in a village in a little town that was all Chaldean and like all of us there was like literally no Muslims*” (Dunya).

Arab and racial identities were uniquely conceptualized by each of the participants, and Haifa and Mikayela's views brought yet another perspective to the Arab identity and race. To Haifa, the term "*Arab*" comprised all dimensions of her identity as she explained:

*Racial background? I would say, like an Arab person... it could be a general term... it summarizes everything. To be more specific, I do not know if some people prefer to specify from which Arab country because Arabs are a lot so I could say Lebanese, more specific. But, if someone wants to ask about what your race is, at this point, I will just tell them Arab (Haifa).*

Some participants' reflections on racial identity presented a perspective that racial and religious identifications may in fact lend a pathway for racism and discrimination to take place. Mikayela favoured a more general term as she was concerned to be tied to any other dimensions than her nationality. To her, identifying with specific racial and religious dimensions could lend a pathway for divisions to take place. She explained, "*I would identify myself as Iraqi, just like everyone else. I would not differentiate between the white and black... or religions... no. I would not say that I am Christian... [...] ... I don't have that differentiation*" (Mikayela). Kamal's viewpoint also supported this notion that racial identifications could be a base for divisions and for racism to occur. He shared, "*I do not like to describe it in this way, to say it in a racist way*" (Kamal). Correspondingly, Hayat supported this notion that using race is a discriminatory, racist approach that does not align with her religious beliefs; "*Because no one taught us what we are. We have one word that we usually believe in that we are all God's creation. We are all one*" (Hayat).

## Maintaining a Religious Identity in Colonial Canada

Understanding Arab intersectional identity underlines the importance of deconstructing the role of religion and its influence on their acculturation process. Most participants placed great value on preserving their religious identity. Religion served as an integral source of guidance and support as well as an element of pride. However, in some cases, religion could be restrictive to their continued development, especially as they work on transitioning into and adapting to their new community in Canada. This section presents both aspects of religion and religious identity and the role participants in this study attributed to their religious identity in their adjustment period.

Hashmat reflected on how his Islamic religion was a supportive resource for learning integral values like respect, “*Respect. Our beliefs in Islam like that's something I never want to change*” (Hashmat). His vision was not an isolated one as Rafca, as well, reflected on how her Chaldean religion guided her to respecting others, regardless of cultural and religious differences:

*It is normal, it is a basic life... like anyone else, if I am Muslim, Canadian, just like anyone else. We are living, going to school, we read and eat, and drink. We are living normally, there is no difference. It is just that each person has their own religion. This is the only difference (Rafca).*

Adam and Ahmed both reinforced the critical role that their religious identity played in helping shape some integral values that they incorporated in their decision-making and interaction experiences in their local Canadian community. Adam provided a critical demonstration of how culture and religion intersect to influence participants’ experiences. Adam

processed how his religious background had more of an influential role on his decision-making. He discussed dietary restrictions as an example of an important Islamic value as he explained,

*Now because I am a Muslim is something, but because I am Arab, no there is nothing. Because I am Muslim, for example, we have it in Islam that we cannot eat meat unless if it is Halal... Halal food. Here the Halal food, the meat is different than the regular one... more expensive. Our religion is like that... we eat Halal food (Adam).*

Ahmed, on the other hand, reflected on how respect for other religions was an integral value that he adopted from Islam. This value helped inform his decisions regarding interactions with others in the larger society locally. Ahmed explained that respect for religious diversity was a key facilitator for an effective integration experience: *“You are Muslim, your brother is Muslim. You won’t go to a Christian and hurt him. He is your friend, be his friend... you don’t interfere with his religion.”* (Ahmed).

Further to Ahmed and Adam’s experiences, there seemed to be a strong commitment among participants in this study to adopting values and morals guided by their religious beliefs and practices. For example, Amani explained how she appreciated interacting in her community with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds; however, she affirmed that this would never risk her commitment to her religion. She shared, *“Now the first thing is I cannot get rid of let go of my religion or my hijab... [...] ... I like to be or connect with everyone, and socialize with different people from different religions, but each person like to grow on the things he was raised on, and I would raise my kids based on it”* (Amani). Dunya, a Chaldean participant, also reinforced her commitment to continuing to practice integral religious rituals as she shared:

*“Maybe being like one of the things that I like to keep doing, no matter what is going to church,*



*for example, no matter how busy I am, how my life is going. I don't care. Sunday, I go to church, I don't care. This is one of the things I want to do forever” (Dunya).*

Participants also valued the presence of religious institutions, which was regarded as an asset to the acculturation experience. They believed that this was demonstrative of the larger Canadian society’s acceptance, respect, and receptivity to their ability to freely practice their religion, and safely demonstrate their religious identity. They also reinforced the lack of difference between freedom of practicing religion in Canada and in their former homeland. Kamal demonstrated his appreciation in his quote, “*No, nothing changed as long as there are mosques here... we can pray here and practice our religion... nothing different happened. Everything is normal” (Kamal).* Ramy also reinforced his dedication to reciprocate the respect for diversity, including religious diversity. He explained his viewpoint thusly:

*Well, I felt like there was nothing different between the Muslims there and Muslims here, like because I still like can practice my religion and there's like freedom here in Canada. So, like we respect each others’ religion...This matters to me. If you are Christian or Muslim or Jewish. I believe I must respect every single one of religion every single like one color like white or black. So that's like what I believe (Ramy).*

Overall, most participants were strongly committed to preserving their religion; they held pride in their respective religious identities, and they believed that their religion served a critical role in their decision-making process, interactions, and overall adjustments to their new Canadian life. It is important to note that these shared perspectives were derived from participants who represent three of the four identified religious backgrounds the representative

religious background (Christian, Chaldean, and Muslim). One participant identified as non-practicing; hence, she did not have a close association with a specific religious identity.

In summary, through my investigation, I was interested to learn how the developmental milestones of emerging adulthood intersect with the Arab culture to shape Arab immigrant emerging adults' experiences here in Canada. Five themes were derived through participants' shared stories. First, participants identified values that were promoted by their Arab heritage and larger Canadian society. They shared that their Arab heritage supported collectivist values such as prioritizing family and social relationships, while the Canadian society promoted individualist goals of self-advancement in career and education. Both cultures considered seeking education as important and promoted engaging in interethnic relationships. Second, participants reflected on interactions with the Canadian society with most participants identifying segregation in social setting as a primary challenge. Some participants discussed their experiences with post-immigration stress of re-establishing with housing, work and education, and exposure to racism and discrimination. They considered freedom to practice religion as a pillar of safety from racism and discrimination. Third, participants related language proficiency with their sense of belonging. Generally, participants considered Arabic proficiency as a preservation of their Arab identity and heritage as well as facilitator for maintaining a strong relationship with their ethnic community, and English proficiency as a gateway to successfully integrate in their new community.

Fourth, participants reflected on the significant challenges they faced in meeting preconceived measures of success supported by the larger Canadian society. Some have endured these expectations as true measures of success and precedents for effectively settling in their new community. Finally, participants processed how they maintain their intersectional Arab identity

in the colonial Canadian society. Their perceptions were guided by reflecting on how different aspects of their identity impacted their acculturation experience. Participants described how they navigated the tensions of committing to their Arab heritage and identity, while also integrating with and being active citizens of their new community. As well, participants derived how they conceptualized their racial identity. Most commonly, participants defined their racial identities through their national backgrounds, describing themselves as Arab, or using regional or city-specific identifications. Reflections on the Arab intersectional identity derived two unique identities: using Chaldean as a racial or cultural background as opposed to a religious identity, and the Kurdish-Syrian identity being considered both an ethnic and racial identity.

### **Theme V- Perspective on Participation, Relationship, and Interactions with the Canadian Society in Windsor Essex**

#### **Participation – Is it Equitable?**

In the search for understanding the essence of acculturation among Arab immigrant emerging adults, I was interested in learning about the role of the Canadian settler society in fostering this process. Driven by the critical race lens, I was interested in understanding how Canadians foster equitable opportunities for Arab immigrants and refugees to successfully acculturate in their new (Canadian) community. To best conceptualize the next set of subthemes and supporting quotes, studies have shown that it is important to assess the degree to which equitable opportunities are attainable for all existing cultural groups, including the dominant (host) and immigrant (heritage groups) (Hatch et al., 2016; Jelin, 2018). Primarily, I was interested in how the intersection between Arab immigrant emerging adults' multiple identities, including ethnic, racial, religious identities as well as other demographics, intersected with and influenced their equitable participation in the Canadian society. Further, I sought to learn how

participants understood and described the role that Canadian society, whether it is the larger community or stakeholders, played in fostering their equitable participation.

Based on their experiences, participants described opportunities of equitable participation as their ability to engage civically through interacting with Canadian society, being supported to advance in education, and acquiring employment as opportunity of equity and inclusion. The next section is focused on participants' interactions within and experiences of the education system.

Participants shared their experiences with systemic and structural challenges and highlighted supportive elements in their education journey.

### **Education System Experiences: Support for Newcomers and Segregation**

One of the key milestones of the acculturation process is the opportunity to integrate with the larger community. Experiences within the education system are primary for facilitating interactions between newcomers and the larger society locally (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Rowe, 2019). Echoing literature on newcomer youth and emerging adults' experiences (Kubota, 2015; Capper, 2015; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015), this group shared that the primary challenge in education was their limited exposure and opportunity for amalgamation with their Canadian peers. This challenge more significantly impacted participants who were attending secondary school. Adam explained how in his high school, newcomer students were segregated from their Canadian counterparts due to English language proficiency level and were placed in one class. Adam explained, *"Yes, there are Arabs because the class I am in, it is all Arabs; we are all newcomers"* (Adam). Being isolated from their peers made it significantly challenging to establish peer relationships, develop their English language skills, and effectively integrate in their new community.

Most participants identified the impact of segregation from Canadian peers as primarily influential on their language development and establishment of peer relations. For example, Kamal, a 20-year-old Syrian participant explained how his class lacked diversity, which was primarily challenged by English proficiency. He shared:

*I tried to be friends with/ or get to know foreigners... I could not have a friendship with them because they do not mix with Arabs... When I got into school, I connected with an Arab right away because my whole class was Arabs, it did not have foreigners. It is hard for them to put Arabs with foreigners unless if their English is really... level E 1 which is the highest then they would put us with them (Kamal).*

Kamal also shared how his low English proficiency challenged his adjustment and, in turn, impacted his mental health. He reinforced the importance of greater mentorship opportunities and sought greater opportunities for interethnic interactions. He stated:

*I wish I had a friend that can understand me and who only speaks English because you will find that my Arab friend for example, if I speak in English with my friend, he will start to make fun of me and say that “Oh, look at you... you are speaking English” (demonstrated in a not encouraging tone). You find it awkward... embarrassing/ It mentally/psychologically prevents you like you do not want to speak English in front of him anymore (Kamal).*

It is important to note that segregation was not only impactful on Arab newcomer students. Rather, it seemed their Canadian or non-Arab peers, referred to here as “foreigners,” may have also struggled to make connections with Arabs. While language was a structural barrier, difficulty in forming peer relations may have had other underlying factors, including lack of familiarity with Arab culture and the nature of social relations, preconceived notions of

stereotypical views of Arab cultures, and Arab students' receptivity to establish peer and social relationships. Kamal's statement of "*they do not mix with Arabs*" signified that there may be reasons beyond language that would require further exploration, and which may be inhibiting the establishment of interethnic relations between Arabs and their counterparts from the larger Canadian society.

While the secondary and post-secondary education system do not exclude newcomers from registering and attending education institutions, the segregating practices, and structural barriers such as language proficiency, models of delivery, and opportunities to facilitate cross-cultural peer exposure, leave newcomers with a difficult adjustment experience. Newcomers would be subject to significant stressors that may challenge their ability to acculturate and actively integrate in the larger society. These challenges are further exacerbated when newcomers are given an optimistic picture of what to expect here in Canada, yet when they immigrate, the experience is drastically different. Nihal's insight represented a few participants who spoke directly to how the post-immigration experience left her feeling defeated when this experience did not align with the expectations. Nihal shared:

*In the beginning, when newcomers first come here. They tell them, we will open the schools for you, so you get your education and learn. I feel that if they want for someone to learn the language, they have to always let the person to be involved more with other people... and not be with Arab people so the person can learn the language (Nihal).*

Similarly, Laila explained how the support is rather limited and that she felt fortunate to have her relatives around so they would help her with significant decisions and steps to take; that without their support the experience would have been much more challenging: "*My friends... it is true that they have been here. They came after us by three months, but they have relatives*

*here. They talk to them... someone who graduated from high school and taught his relative about the process. So, she told me otherwise, I would have not been able to know” (Laila).* Laila’s experience demonstrated that immigrants and refugees have a greater responsibility to actively seek support and meet their needs in advancing their education.

Teachers had a significant role in participants’ aspiration to advance in their education and English language proficiency. Some teachers seemed to be more supportive and encouraging to participants to advance their education and English language skills to fulfill their aspired academic goals, while others seemed to be prone to encourage altering dreams and aspirations to fulfill more “realistic and manageable” goals. Evan and Adorina both described how their teachers were greatly encouraging and supportive to enhance their language and, in turn, their school performance without hesitation or shame. Evan described that practice was critical for him to continue enhancing his language and potentially effectively connecting and communicating with teachers.

*My school was like all the teachers were Canadians and I learned a lot from them I was like struggling with the language... since they are Canadians, they don't speak Arabic with me, so it makes my language stronger and at work I have the same thing it's like they're all Canadian so it's just; my language got stronger day by day... by just speaking to them (Evan).*

Adorina shared how her teachers went a step further with providing resources to help her improve her English skillset. The important aspect in addition to providing resources was the teachers’ motivation and trust of Adorina encouraging her to not cease the practice even if she made mistakes. She shared, *“They were giving me books to read in English and they were like talking to me a lot in English and they were like even if you make mistakes, don't be afraid of*

*that" (Adorina).* Teachers' encouragement and motivation to not cease practice until becoming proficient was a key facilitative factor to encourage and support Adorina until she would master the language and consecutively meet her education goals.

While some participants like Evan found benefit in having only Canadian, or English-speaking-teachers, others found great benefit in receiving support in their native language. For example, Ramy explained that receiving support through an Arabic-speaking teacher and guidance counsellor helped minimize the barriers and academic challenges amongst him and his peers. To Ramy and other students, knowing all possible options and academic routes to support them most effectively through academic challenges and important decisions in school would not have been possible without being able to communicate in Arabic. Ramy summarized this experience in his reflection on school experience: *"I believe like it's a good thing because like there's a lot of Arabic here people for example, like one of my teachers she was Arabic like speaker. She speaks Arabic and she right now she is a guidance counselor. She like she helps a lot of students who don't speak English"* (Ramy). He further shared with me that the presence of this Arabic-speaking teacher and guidance counsellor gave him and his Arab peers a sense of safety and security that language would not impede making the most effective decisions and knowing all their possible routes and options in education.

I heard in some participants' voices some discouragement to pursue their goals; they were encouraged to "settle" for more "manageable and realistic" education and career goals. This has echoed the stories I have anecdotally learnt through my practical engagement with immigrants and refugees. In an evidently frustrated voice, Bissan described that she was distraught with the presumptions that teachers and school staff made about her capabilities to



pursue her dreams just because she comes from an Arab country. She portrayed how structural barriers were essentially reinforced in the educational system:

*Yes, sometimes they think that just because I came from an Arab country, I am not as educated as them. Yeah, I heard this more than once. You came from an Arabic country, don't expect that we will put you into grade 12 directly, for example, they put me in grade 10. Without thinking, they just assessed me by "you came from an Arab country" so I went and told them... [...] In the school, when I got into grade 12, and the things that I told you...you can't, you came from an Arab country. This made me stand up for myself and advocated. No, I can! from the principle to the guidance office, from here to there (Bissan).*

Finally, participants shared a few unique experiences that they appreciated learning about. First, Michael described learning about the common practice of simultaneously studying and working. While it would create some pressure, Michael believed that it would be a practical success to simultaneously target his goal in career and education: *"However, if I want to specify it, I would say very beautiful... because I am continuing my education and working" (Michael).* He seemed to consider that mutually studying and working would be an approach that helps him integrate a "Canadian value" for seeking and achieving success. This demonstrated internalizing neoliberal notions of self-sufficiency as determinant factors of success. This may pose a risk for values supported by neoliberalism driven by individualist approaches to be superseded by collectivist values that Arab immigrants would usually prioritize (Klodawsky et al., 2006; Tabatabai, 2020). The other unique experience came from Dunya, a 20-year-old Iraqi participant, who described her appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism. To her, connecting with the larger society within the education system enabled her to meet peers from unexpected diverse

background. To her, this was a rich experience that living in multicultural Canada has allowed to happen. It was rather a rich experience she appreciated of being in Canada. She shared,

*I was talking yesterday to my brother, and we were like I had a friend in high school and when I was in high school, there was some classmate who was from Azerbaijan and I was like, huh? What I first like. I heard I started laughing because I never in my life imagined I will meet someone from there actually like never and he was a really nice guy like if I was not in Canada, I wouldn't have had that opportunity so like never (Dunya).*

### **Post-Immigration Mental Health and Emotional Challenges**

In terms of mental health, participants reflected on how they experienced greater adjustment and mental health challenges early in their journey. Nihal and Shahnaz shared how their mental health was challenged when getting accustomed to their new community. Nihal explained, *"It took us some time, about 1 year and a half to get used to the circumstances in Lebanon... our mental health was impacted. When we were able to settle and meet new people. I met new friends and got used to the environment... to the country" (Nihal).* Shahnaz spoke to how her mental health was at stake, and her adjustment challenges were rather exacerbated by the language barrier. She shared, *"The first days, I was just crying I do not know why. I was devastated, I was thinking, 'Oh my God' the teacher does not understand me, and I do not understand the teacher" (Shahnaz).* Furthermore, as a contributing factor to mental health, the "fear of the unknown" is demonstrated, *"it was very, very hard for me... after all this time that passed by. I have to go to a new country. I don't know anything about and start all over again. I felt like I was coming to the unknown and I was not sure whether I was going to be comfortable or not" (Nihal).*

Some participants discussed accessing mental health support to cope with emotional, settlement, and integration challenges. Although they openly discussed seeking support, participants attributed their decision to accessing support and openly discussing their experience to mental health support being accepted and promoted here in their local Canadian society. Georgia explained how her mental health challenges were overburdening and how therapeutic support enhanced her mental health and emotional wellbeing, *"It's been very, very stressful and depressing. I'm going to therapy like with the..., yes [participant's voice was shaking] with a therapist and I can't stand it anymore. So now like my business in is stopping... So, I am taking a break... But it's been good."* (Georgia). Similarly, Haifa reflected how mental health supports encouraged her to access help when things became overbearing. Haifa shared, *"Because I am stressed, I have anxiety, anything... they accept it normally, so It's normal. Maybe I would feel in an Arab country they would say no... not as accepting to the thing as much"* (Haifa).

In summary, it appears that participants were particularly challenged early in their immigration and settlement experience. Language played a key role in either complicating this experience or making it more manageable. As participants sensed that seeking mental health was more accepted here than in their home country, they seemed to be more open to seeking it. Georgia described how volunteering and seeking career goals supported her mental health, and other participants reflected on how their coping supports relieved mental health challenges.

### **A Focus on Challenges and Stressors of Immigration**

Participants reflected on various challenges that they experienced during their immigration journey. Some participants focused on post-immigration challenges such as finding housing, work, language, and education, and others spoke of their pre-immigration stressors and prior to immigrating to Canada. Shahnaz described difficulties in adjusting, and how she and her

family felt they were a burden by staying with the family. She stated: *“When we first came, we were upset, we did not like it honestly, because first thing is that you have to find a house in a short period of time, because you cannot take it anymore. And you feel that you are being too much on the person where we stayed”* (Shahnaz). Furthermore, Petra’s primary challenge was her challenge of securing employment, especially with the impact of COVID-19 pandemic challenges. She stated, *“I think it is not just me that I cannot find work, there is probably a lot of other people who cannot find work; so, it is normal. We must be patient until COVID is done. And then will see after what happens”* (Petra).

Dunya, an Iraqi refugee, described pre-immigration stress and trauma experience, *“Uh, yeah, we left Iraq after the ISIS thing and we actually lived in that. So, because... like my village was part of Mosul when this happened”* (Dunya). She also spoke of post-immigration pride and achievements:

*“There are lots of achievements like in like we were here, like three years and we bought a house we've been living in our own house for two years. It's kind of a bit challenging here too, like when you first come in. Like sometime after that you buy your own house, Yeah, so this is a like an achievement. We think of it”* (Dunya).

Similarly, Amani described her pre-immigration experience, and the difficult conditions were demonstrated by Amani: *“They are becoming homeless; they are not getting educated or civilized. There is marriage underage because they are living in refugee camps. They cannot go back to their home country Syria, and where they are currently living, that government, does not even make them feel welcomed”* (Amani).

Bissan shared her story of how her father had cancer prior to immigrating and later died in Canada. Emotional, she reflected on her story and the post-immigration challenges;

commitment to school vs. family health complications: *"Throughout my journey, my dad went through something was very challenging... I had to separate... I am at school, but I am thinking, I'm studying but I am thinking 'is dad okay?' what is happening with him", sometimes I would just fall apart and cry" (Bissan).*

Housing was an issue that arose for some participants, as Amani described: *"This is the only thing... the house situation. Moving to a better house. It was very difficult, but we were able to overcome it" (Amani).* As well, Nesrine stated that for her the delay in receiving support and services resulted in a more difficult experience, *"Everything was delayed, and it felt it was a little bit hard. I don't know, for me, I felt it was a little bit hard" (Nesrine).*

A significant post-immigration barrier that participants faced related to re-integrating in the education system. Some were unable to complete their education due to the traumatic situation in Syria; due to war, some fled and were unable to integrate in education in the first refugee site. This caused a breakage in their education experience. Some were out of school for a few years. Therefore, entering the education system here in Canada was more challenging for some, especially among Syrian refugee participants. Ali described this situation where he was unable to complete his education due to the war circumstances in Syria: *"Yeah other challenges with studying/school, is I am behind because of the circumstances in Syria. Years went by, and I was not able to be in school" (Ali).* He stated that one of the reasons was financial hardship and having to support the family: *"Yes if the person wants to study, they cannot study because there is not financial support. They have to work to be able to live and then study" (Ali).* As well, I heard a similar experience in Ariman's story as she spoke of how she focused on supporting her family through working rather than completing her education. She shared:

*In Syria, last thing when we left... we went to Turkey, we stayed in Turkey for 1 year and 8 months. So, there was no more work, no money, the savings were all finished... so we had to leave the country because there was no jobs/work for my father there... and there was war. We went to Turkey, and we stayed there for 1 year and 8 months... it was very hard/difficult. We had to work, and we stopped going to school, I and (sister's name), we helped our father at work. My other siblings were studying (Ariman).*

Ali continued to describe the separation in the educational system in Turkey, their first refugee site, due to their Syrian citizenship: *"Yes, in Turkey, there was... there were students who were immigrants; Syrian and from all other citizenships. They separate them during the school time and would not let them mix with the Turkish students"* (Ali). This was supported by another account from a Syrian refugee in Lebanon: *"I studied two years with the Lebanese, then a legislation/policy came out that the Syrian is not allowed to study with the Lebanese...the school became all Syrians... after that... I left school. I became in grade 8... so they did not accept Syrians in higher grades"* (Adam).

Participants reflected further on the challenges in the education system in Canada. Kamal, a 20-year-old Syrian man who missed some years in school, reflected on how returning back was an overwhelming experience:

*"This thing stressed me out because I missed a lot of things, that is number 1. so, once you get into school, you are responsible for everything, so you need to bring... help yourself understand, teach yourself. I know there was a lot of support from teachers but no matter what, you play a big role because they are not going to sit with you... They do not have you only" (Kamal).*

Ramy reflected on messaging in school that deters them from seeking skills trades' professions as it was presented in a negative light. He explained how was failing in school, decided to leave for some time, and join the skilled trades. He noted it was overwhelming for him to be in school at 16 years of age with no knowledge of the language and system. He shared:

*Yeah, it's like really hard, and when I came to Canada, I just like said I don't want to go to I almost like I was almost 16. I never like spoken English, so I decided like not to go to school and this like the forced me actually to go to school because I was like almost 16 but under 16 so I failed. I started school like November I failed music, English, and another class... I failed them on purpose because I didn't want to attend school (Ramy).*

He further reflected on the response he received from his teacher: *"Yeah, so yeah my teacher. She told me if you don't like if you don't like to learn here and like start your education here, you will end up again in the green houses, so I tried the greenhouses here. Actually, I found it like really hard"* (Ramy). He went back to school fearing he that he would not be able to establish himself in a profession without completing his education, as he aspired to join the Police Force or Canadian Border Services.

Participants further reflected on their wish for being entrusted with their capabilities. As Mikayela noted, she wished that her language barrier was overlooked and that she was entrusted with her ability to progress. She described how the language barrier can result in feeling unwelcome: *"One thing I did not like here in Canada is that when you speak and if they see that you cannot speak that good, their treatment changes"* (Mikayela). She further shared her call for newcomers to be trusted to demonstrate their capabilities and skills: *"It's like they leave, you get sad. It is like why are they not giving me this opportunity. I have been 1 year and half looking for*

*a job and I can't find. This is the reason. Also, because of COVID situation and these things"* (Mikayela).

Ariman identified her relationship with her parents as an influence on her post-immigration and integration experience. She shared that those challenges with communication was sometimes obstructive to her progress in bridging differences in perspectives between her and her family. Ariman shared: *"I feel the reason is because we do not discuss much or have conversation with our parents... even if there are things that are forbidden, we never discuss it having a conversation or talking with parents, it makes a change"* (Ariman). She explained how she navigated differences in perspectives between her and her parents, and that sometimes she was able to bridge the difference, while at other times it was challenging to convince her parents. Ariman explained: *"If I talk to them and convinced regarding certain things, they get convinced and change their mind. But it is me, I am the one that backs up."* She reasoned, though, that when her parents were more resistant to changing their perspectives, it was due to their worry about her and her siblings' safety and wellbeing. She shared: *"And also, within the family, there was always stress and instability because the father is always scared for his children, and the decision that he should make. So, the first year, there was a lot of stress... until we started adapting"* (Ariman).

Participants considered navigating through post-immigration stressors as a journey of progress. Almost all participants agreed that early phases in their immigration and settlement experiences incorporated greater challenges. They also agreed that with time, learning more about accessing resources as well processing the demands imposed by the larger society would help reduce stressors and barriers, and would allow them to settle and integrate more effectively. Ariman summarized this progressive process for all refugees, stating: *"I feel all refugees feel the*



*same feelings and emotions. We learn step by step about the things that exist in the country”*  
(Ariman).

## **Racism and Discrimination within Arab Ethnic Community and Canadian Society**

### ***Opportunities for Civic Engagement***

Participants were asked to share their engagements with local organizations, institutions, religious and cultural groups. The aim was two-fold: first, to understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults actively seek interactions in Canadian society. Second, to understand the nature of this interaction and whether positive relations or tensions arose between participants and larger society in their region. It seemed that there was a gap in awareness of volunteer opportunities. Almost all participants were involved in various opportunities, while some asked for greater mentorship on what opportunities existed for which to volunteer here. The two aspects of this gap in knowledge are underlined in Hashmat and Dunya’s experiences on one end, and Ramy’s on the other. Hashmat shared that he is involved in multiple volunteer roles: *“Last year, I have been working in four different places for different fields and I got a lot of experience from that, so it is a great... great place to be free and do whatever your heart desires”* (Hashmat). Further, Dunya explains how she sought this opportunity to learn more about her field of interest: *“I did a lot, and did I tell you I had a Co-op in a pharmacy, and there I loved...I loved people, especially the elderly. There I would help them like make it easier for them...”* (Dunya).

On the other hand, Ramy believed that greater orientation and mentorship was needed to secure volunteer opportunities. He seemed to consider volunteer opportunities as an important gateway to learn more about important values in the Canadian society, which, in turn, would help facilitate his integration within his new community. He described his perspective thusly:

*Yeah, for the newcomers like we should give them... tips for example like where should they volunteer and teach them about the Canadian culture and things like that. They like us to do like respect for example... respect their religion, respect their culture and like help each other support each other on our like hard time and like not give up (Ramy).*

Similarly, Michael demonstrated the importance of civic engagement in helping him to establish effective networks in his new community: *“Because if we are not... we are in a new community, if we did not know how to meet new people, how are we going to build relationships... in this new community” (Michael).* What I derived from his story is that networking is a natural and important product of civic engagement; however, the responsibility seemed to be more on him, as the emerging adult, to actively seek opportunities to integrate and establish relationships in his new community.

Civic engagement and the concept of contributing to a community through volunteerism was a novel concept to some participants and their families. Participants explained that working or dedicating time without payment was not a common practice back home. Hence, when asked to rate important milestones to achieve, civic engagement and volunteering was rated at a lower priority (please see Appendix F for rating questions, 14 and 15). In fact, Dunya explained how her mother was distraught with the notion that graduating high school was conditional upon volunteering hours, and that she was not supportive of the idea: *“Yeah like when I first told my mother and like you have to have 40 hours of volunteer like to graduate, she was almost having a panic attack, and was like why is that important so all these things” (Dunya).*

Both Michael and Bissan highlighted another important aspect about civic engagement: since volunteering was not prioritized back home, and in their primary migration site, the opportunities to participate there were relatively nonexistent. Michael explained:

*It is true that I am an actor, but I am also an activist in the community. I used to volunteer, I used to do it back home and in Lebanon... and in Canada sometimes like this. So, because when someone lives the stories... the person gets impacted, when things are repeated, you feel like it is just acting but it is real life. It's the reality that we live (Michael).*

Further, Bissan compared some opportunities exist here in Canada that may not have existed back home:

*Me, from the beginning, I like to help others and even if it is something small, I really like to think about the other people and if they are okay and stuff. So, when I came here, I felt I had more opportunities and ways to do that, more than back home. So, I found that there are many organizations, there is volunteering opportunities and this stuff. So, by doing them I developed the thing that I love (Bissan).*

Interestingly, while notions of civic engagement and volunteering may not be specifically promoted or supported back home, the values of caring for the collective good and giving without return are very common values in the Arab heritage (Awad, 2010; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Matera et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014). Further, precedence of the collective good over individual goals and the importance of prioritizing sense of community over individuality are also common Arab cultural values (Matera et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014). While dedicating time and effort to support one's community without expecting a physical or monetary return are at the root of volunteerism and civic engagement, none of the

participants seemed to identify the direct connection this has to their inherited collectivist heritage. In fact, participants appreciated being supported to engage in civic engagement only when in Canada.

### ***Experiences of Racism and Discrimination***

Most participants did not identify direct encounters of racism and discrimination. When participants discussed their interethnic and within-ethnic relationships, they largely believed that Canadian society was inclusive, supportive, and free of racism and discrimination. However, through their insights on both within-ethnic and interethnic relations, some participants discussed situations where they felt racialized or discriminated against through practices of isolation and segregation as a form of institutional oppression. Participants who stated they were safe from racism or discrimination identified the following as protective factors against such experiences: freedom to express their identity, freedom of religious practices, protection under the law, and being provided opportunities to actively participate in society despite low English proficiency. Being accepted and seeing the person beyond their identity is one attribute that Michael appreciated about being here: *“Everything that I am seeing is reality...no one asks you about your color... your religion. Until now, I have not encountered this thing... I am not saying that the Canadian community is ideal; of course, it has its positives and negatives”* (Michael). Amir shared a similar insight: *“Now, there is no discrimination at all, because my friends at school are from different backgrounds... different citizenships...”* (Amir). Amir’s quote on coexistence meaning lack of discrimination signified it may be early in his settlement journey that Amir experienced or understood how our Canadian society is racialized and that coexistence does not necessarily imply equal, free of discrimination, and fair treatment.

Ariman demonstrated her belief that equity and equality, together, are guaranteed rights in Canada, she states, “*Everyone is respectful, and they have the same rights*” (Ariman). She further reflected on the lessons she derived on how she, too, can contribute to equitable and equal treatment of all:

*If I say this to someone there, they will say that “oh Canada changed you” but it is not Canada that changed me. I feel that my mind from reading, there are a lot of Arabs that came to a realization that there has to be equality. This is just an example, because this is a popular topic, so they say (oh because Canada is like this) it is not because of Canada, it is because [in] my mind, I reviewed the idea, and I realized that there is inequality (Ariman).*

Both Cyla and Nesrine suggested they did not experience racism or discrimination by virtue of their Arab heritage or religious affiliations (Cyla is Christian and Nesrine is Muslim) nor did they have to defend their identities. However, both interestingly implied that they may not be permanently safe from racism and discrimination, and that they may experience it in future. In Cyla’s description, she did not have to defend her Arab heritage “up until now”: “*I have not been exposed to situations where I had to like to defend my Arab background or something... but for up until now, it hasn’t been like... I have not encountered it*” (Cyla). Likewise, Nesrine anticipated that wearing Islamic clothing may subject her to judgement in future: “*It did not happen to me but there might be for later... someone staring in a judgmental way... looking at the way I dress or my Hijab. It is something new to me, we are not used to this... but on a personal level, nothing like this happened with me*” (Nesrine).

As I reflected further on their statement to analyze possible explanations for anticipating exposure to such experiences, I derived a couple of possible explanations. First, participants may

have faced such experiences of racism and discrimination either back home or their country of asylum; although, according to Nesrine, facing judgement based on religious clothing would be a novel experience. Further, participants may have learned from other Arabs living in the community of their experiences of racism and discrimination, anticipating that they may experience the same.

For Michael, the intersection of the Christian religion made his experience more challenging back home in Iraq: *“You would go back to your normal life, that you are rejected by a community... excuse me... I do not like to speak about this story but like... you are Christian, you are a minority, you are... so many stories I do not like to go into” (Michael)*. He compared it to his experience here in Canada, where he was able to establish the meaning of safety in expressing his religion and freely engage in his hobbies and interests. Interestingly, Petra, another Christian Iraqi participant, had the opposite view. She felt isolated in Canada and reasoned that the connections in the Iraqi Christian community were much stronger back home. She noted, *“Because the Christian here, are Canadians, the Iraqi Christians, there isn't a lot. Even if there is, each person is in an area, they are not close to each other like when we were close in Iraq” (Petra)*.

Freedom to practice religion was another pillar that some participants believed demonstrated safety from discriminatory or racist practices. These participants enjoyed the freedom to practice religion without interference or judgement. They considered the availability of religious institutions is a sign of inclusion and respect for their respective religions. Ali shared with me how he felt safe and well-protected to practice his religion according to his personal beliefs without fearing discrimination. He compared his experience in Canada to those

encountered back home and in his country of asylum, where he had some incidents that forced him to modify his practices:

*“Regarding religion here, no one interferes with anyone. Each person is following their own religion. There are mosques if someone wants to pray, it’s normal... they can pray, no problem. There is no discrimination from religion aspect. No one asks anyone else, what is your religion for example. Like other countries... there are other countries, they have racism, or discrimination against religions. But here... there isn’t” (Ali).*

Ali’s vision was further supported with Adam’s views as he stated, *“Here they do not have discrimination... you are Muslim, you are Christian... you are a different religion” (Adam).* Interestingly, Nihal further elaborated on how she could freely and safely represent her religion through religious-symbolic clothing without feeling judged. She stated, *“No one looks at the other person and judges... oh this person did this, or ... This person is wearing this... this person said that... each person is minding their own business. They do not interfere” (Nihal).*

Overall, participants understood that their right to safety from racism and discrimination is protected in the Canadian legal system, as Ariman attested with her vision on equity under the law, *“here is law that is fair to the person/human being. This is under the right things or there are morals that the law enforced, and people can get somewhere” (Ariman).*

In terms of opportunities for active participation, Ramy explained his gratitude for being equitably provided with opportunities to volunteer despite his language barrier. He considered his equitable opportunity to participate despite his language barrier as a sign of inclusion. He explained:

*They were positive because they like welcomed us... they like didn't for example. Said when I went like to do volunteered and didn't say like “You don't speak English right now*

*so like we can't accept you on this program right now". So, like the early like welcomed us. They respect our like culture, our religion and yeah like they were like really good (Ramy).*

Ramy's experiences was echoed by Ali who also believed that the host society supported his development despite his language barrier: *"No, not at all. Here, there isn't. There isn't different treatment at all. Even if they see someone doesn't know English, they try to teach the person. Like they would not bully the person with comments."* Interestingly, Mikayela's experience was quite the opposite: she sensed that she was treated differently and experienced discrimination once the language barrier became apparent. She stated, *"One thing I did not like here in Canada is that when you speak and if they see that you cannot speak that good, their treatment changes"*.

Some participants experienced racism within their Arab ethnic community, and this made their integration experience more challenging. Ahmed contended that lacking support from his Arab ethnic community is a result of racism. Ahmed explained his experience with developing social relations with his ethnic community as he sought professional opportunities. He stated, *"Here Arabs I feel like that they are more racist... to be honest. This bothers me, they focus on if you are Suni or Shai. My whole life, when I lived in Abu Dhabi, I never focused on if the person next to me is Christian or Muslim. Our parents there, that's how they raised us"* (Ahmed). Further, Mikayela was frustrated for the lack of community support and difficulty in maintaining a successful work experience; she demonstrated that being "Arab" has subjected her to feeling as being manipulated: *"If I worked at an Arabic restaurant, he would make me wash dishes, make food, clean the floor, clean outside, and work on cashier, I become everything"* (Mikayela).



Even though direct experiences of racism and discrimination were relatively uncommon, some participants were subject to in their acculturation journeys so far. Bissan described an overt instant, *“I hated the idea that they thought about me... that I am not smart or aligned with their intellectual level just because they based it on from where I came from”* (Bissan). Kamal described more of a covert or “hidden” racism, *“Yeah, there are some foreigners [Canadians or other non-Arab immigrants] that are against someone who is Arab to hang out with someone who is a foreigner, but they do not say speak up; it is hidden. Yeah, I consider that as a success that I was able to get to know a foreigner”* (Kamal). His experience was not a sole incident; Shahnaz agreed on the hesitation of Canadians to interact with Arabs, *“I have been not engaged with the Canadian society or the people because they do not like to mix, they do not want to engage... this is regarding what I have seen, people that I have seen with me in school”* (Shahnaz). I have further investigated whether demographics speak to the exposure to racism and discrimination, but this does not seem to hold true. Kamal is a Syrian Muslim refugee male; Shahnaz is an Iraqi, Chaldean immigrant female; and Bissan is a Palestinian female Muslim refugee. The investigation into these instances do not project a relation between demography, such as gender, nationality, and immigration or refugee status, and exposure to discrimination.

In exploring participants’ reflections on interactions with and support from the Canadian society, there were no identified incidents of negative interactions within neighbourhoods. However, three participants spoke to challenges with housing; some were structural barriers and others stemmed from stereotypical views leading to discriminatory practices of excluding newcomers. Ali, Nesrine, Amani and Mikayela described how structural barriers imposed by virtue of process or policy restrictions may obstruct securing decent housing. Ali described how the government funding to support his and his family’s resettlement is insufficient to meet their

basic needs, including securing safe, decent housing. He stated: *“Regarding integration and settlement, the problem that we have here is housing. I wish here if there were here houses that are ready from the government, just for people who are newcomers. The problem here with housing is that rent prices are very expensive. So, people here... the financial support is not enough for people; they must work to afford their rent and basic needs, or expenses”* (Ali).

Nesrine and Amani highlighted another structural barrier, that while housing may be available, the housing conditions combined were sometimes unlivable. Amani shared, *“Everything is very nice in Canada, except for one thing... when I first came, I got a house... but then I cancelled the contract and went to another house. The house that I got was very old... [...] ... I did go and see the house, but at the time when I saw the house, I did not see insects coming out. It is common sense that the owner is going to clean the floor before I come and see it”*. Further, Nesrine’s voice demonstrated great concern posed to feeling forced to accept conditions she is uncomfortable with, even perceived threats to her family’s privacy:

*The only thing that we found challenging was that we could not choose the house right away. It was hard a little bit... [...] ... I did not imagine that I will be seeing something like this. I imagined that I would come to a house that is clean, a house... like I have kids, they need their freedom, their space, their privacy. At first, I did not find this thing until I found this house and moved in it (Nesrine).*

Both Nesrine and Amani signified how they felt obliged to be appreciative of the support received in securing housing, but they wished they were not obliged to move to unfavourable conditions under time and funding restrictions. Nesrine described:

*Now, there is support, and there is a lot of help... I am not saying... but yea there is support and there is help... but the only thing I commented on or the only thing I was*

*shocked... when I try and look for a house that I have in mind... my income is nothing if we compare it with the house that I want. So, they told me you cannot get a house that is not attached or clean... or as you want it. The rent is expensive, and income is very low” (Nesrine).*

Amani’s experience was very similar in challenges with housing: *“Everything is very nice in Canada, except for one thing... when I first came, I got a house... but then I cancelled the contract and went to another house. The house that I got was very old...they did not tell me that the old houses here in Windsor has problems... it has insects and... so they did not tell me about this, and I did not know because I am new here” (Amani).* Amani’s experience as a newcomer indicated that she was obliged to accept any living conditions and questioned whether being a newcomer obstructed her knowledge of her rights as a tenant to choose her favourable living conditions. To Amani, this meant a lot more than simply choosing an acceptable living condition, it also marked an important milestone in her adjustment here in Canada.

Finally, Mikayela presented a common experience that newcomers face as they seek housing. Some participants explained how newcomers were denied housing due to the stereotypical view of depending on government support for finances through government assisted funds and Ontario Works. Mikayela explained that landlords feared that newcomer families may not be able to meet the financial obligations for renting especially, in the long term. Mikayela shared her vision:

*Yeah, because we are new to the country, and once they hear that my parents are on Welfare, they don’t give a house. Also, they look at the income of the family, how much they get from Welfare, and how much my brother gets... there must be 3 or more people*

*working getting checks then... we went through a lot until we found this house*  
*(Mikayela).*

### **COVID-19 Impact on Access to Equitable Opportunity**

Participants in this study were significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions to secure, establish, and integrate into their new community. In addition to the significant demands that COVID-19 had on the larger society in general, newcomers were particularly challenged with having to acquire knowledge of the ‘new way of living’ and to learn about their new community and its parameters. Without that, it was difficult to settle and integrate. Hence, the additional barrier of lacking knowledge of their new community puts the participant newcomers at a deficit for securing meaningful, equitable opportunities. A key frustration that participants had was the limited, almost nonexistent opportunity of being able to socially integrate. As Georgia stated, *“Now of course with COVID, it is different. Most of my time, I’m mostly at home. I don’t know anybody. I did not have any plans unless my friends”* (Georgia). Georgia’s vision was further supported with Cyla who expressed great frustration in COVID-19 being a significant barrier to getting to know members of her new community and become an active citizen. She elaborated further on her experience:

*Like I said, I haven't been very exposed to like interactions, so I cannot give a definitive answer, unfortunately, this pandemic is like standing in your face... [...] ... I wanted to participate in things, I wanted to be an active member of some group or whatever, but I'm not like... I haven't been able to achieve it because of the pandemic and hopefully once it's done, I'm going to see what I can do* (Cyla).

COVID-19 impact on the education system was another significant barrier that prevented the participants’ ability from having a meaningful adjustment experience. The impact was further

exacerbated as participants did not only have to adjust to a new educational system, but also to a new modality: *“Second semester: COVID pandemic started... I barely was able to adapt to school... the second semester was online, so I had to learn how to adapt to the new setting... online” (Haifa)*. Inequity in educational experience was rather challenging especially with exposure to opportunities with school and extracurricular activities fully: *“COVID is very challenging... [...] ... Yes, online on zoom. When we were in-person... when there was no COVID we used to go, and this helps with integration. They even take us on trips” (Ali)*.

To Petra, COVID-19 limited her opportunity to pursue employment and find meaningful work. She understood that this challenge was not isolated to her alone: *“It is not just me that I cannot find work, there is probably a lot of other people who cannot find work... so it is normal, we have to be patient until COVID is done. And then will see after what happens” (Petra)*. However, Petra shared further that she was particularly hopeful that an employment opportunity early in her settlement in Canada would meet financial goals and be a gateway to establishing meaningful relationships in her new community.

Nihal’s worries extended beyond her own personal experience and affected her family as well. To Nihal, the implications on education and establishing advanced careers was more of a long-term effect:

*I really like this thing for them... because they also started school online, and they were not able to go like other people... our school was all online, because of COVID so when they go to look for a job, they are not going to put them in farms like they did to us... they will engage more with people so their language can get better... with their age, they will be able to learn faster than me (Nihal)*.

Most participants experienced structural and systemic barriers that resulted from COVID-19 restrictions. Participants who discussed the impact of COVID-19 on their adjustment experience have provided examples of how the pandemic restrictions impeded their ability to effectively engage in the educational system, securing employment opportunities, and establishing relationships within their local communities.

### **Acculturation as Understood by Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults**

Bridging the themes and goals of this study, I conclude this chapter by providing a description of the essence of acculturation as the lived experience as experienced by Arab immigrant emerging adults. Following transcendental phenomenology, my final step was to join the textual and structural descriptions of the acculturation process as informed by Arab immigrant emerging adults to convey how they experienced this phenomenon.

Arab immigrant emerging adults understood the acculturation process in Canada as a mutual dedication and a collaborative process of exchanging cultural knowledge between the Arab heritage group, and the dominant Canadian society. They perceived Canadian society's welcoming nature, acceptance, and support as key facilitators for a successful adjustment experience. Arab immigrant emerging adults engaged in significant emotional labour in resolving tensions between commitment to their Arab identity and heritage, while also seeking acceptance and effective integration with their new local Canadian community. Furthermore, most participants did not directly express instances of racism and discrimination. This could have possibly resulted from the dominant White settler narrative of Canada's welcoming and supportive approach to immigrants and refugees being the sole narrative to which participating Arab immigrant emerging adults were exposed.

Arab immigrant emerging adults perceive maintaining their determination to achieve goals and advance education; actively building relations with the dominant, Canadian society; the Canadian society reciprocating, in turn, with building relations with the Arab community; and, being accepted and safe from instances of discrimination/racism as some factors that foster equitable participation and active citizenship in the Canadian society. Respectively, they consider success and advancement as a contribution to the Canadian society, and as a tool to support other immigrants in enhancing acculturation success.

According to the derived description and meaning, I understand that Arab immigrant emerging adults embrace the acculturation process experience through cultural and psychological changes like the past acculturation research findings.

## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The adoption of some key structural elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) reveals fundamental processes of the acculturation phenomenon as experienced by Arab immigrant emerging adults. Adopting the CRT lens reveals hidden racism and structurally oppressive practices as evidenced by a variety of participant responses throughout this project. Canada promotes itself as a country that embraces multiculturalism and views diversity as a strength of a modern democracy (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Berry, 2016; Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Cvetkovska et al., 2020; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). However, CRT supports deconstructing how colonialism guards this nation against necessary social changes through precipitating or preserving structural and systemic oppressions that maintain social and racial hierarchies, and safely protects Canada as a White settler society. Further, intersectionality lends another supportive lens to understand the acculturation phenomenon through recognizing how immigrants and refugees' interlocking identities influence their acculturation experiences and, in some cases, lead to exposure to acts of racism and oppression. As well, intersectionality helps explain how these multiple identities and group memberships expose individuals to enhanced biases, oppression, and racism (Crenshaw, 1989; Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

This study was informed by 27 Arab immigrant emerging adults who provided their description of their acculturation experiences. Arab immigrant emerging adults understand the essence of acculturation as a collaborative process of interactions between their Arab heritage group and the Canadian host group. They reinforced that mutual dedication is a basis for a successful and effective acculturation process. Arab immigrant emerging adults also view acculturation as a process of resolving tensions between two forces: their desires to preserve their Arab heritage and identity, and response to the Canadian host society's demands to help enhance



their integration and active citizenship in their local Canadian society into their local community. Further, the essence of their acculturation experiences is shaped by the interplay between their intersectional identities and exposure to instances of racism and discrimination perpetuated by acts of oppression embedded in the colonial structure of Canadian society.

The integration of intersectionality with CRT led to a multidimensional analysis that uncovered patterns of oppression and racism that may otherwise be sustained (Abrams & Moio, 2013, Gillborn, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018). Hence, I explored the intersecting identities of Arab immigrant emerging adults to make sense of their experiences. As well, I investigated how these identities are subject to instances of racism and oppression through their interactions with their local Arab ethnic community and Canadian society. The intersecting aspects of identity that I explored in this study were their Arab ethnic identity; nationality; religious identity; and gender. Participants have come from various refugee routes, six different nationalities (Syrian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Palestinian, Iranian, and Kurdish-Syrian), and four different religious identifications (Muslim, Christian, Chaldean, and Non-Practicing). Of the ten Syrian participants, only one identified as non-Practicing and the rest were Muslim; Kurdish-Syrian and Palestinian participants were Muslim; Iraqi either identified Christian or Chaldean, and Lebanese were mixed between Muslim and Christian. In terms of gender, besides the gender distribution constituting mostly females, there no other noted intersectional differences between the two genders. There did not seem to be any gender differences among participants in their perception and understanding of acculturation.

In his theorization of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2007) identifies some milestones that help distinguish emerging adulthood from the adulthood stage. An emerging adult continues to engage in identity and role exploration and refrains from commitment to stable or long-term

roles (Arnett, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2005). In Arnett's and subsequent studies on emerging adulthood, the primary milestones that were explored were education, career development and employment, romantic relationships, marriage and establishing a family, and civic engagement (Arnett, 2000, 2007; Gilmore, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2005). Studies on Arab immigrants signified traditional roles such as maintaining family relations, marriage, and establishing families tend to be prioritized over other life aspects (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Hamdan, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2015). Studies also indicate a gender difference where females may be expected to adhere more strictly to these expectations (Rasmi et al., 2015; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). However, in this study, participants, regardless of gender, identified education and career development as their top priorities, and the ranking did not change when asked to think of how they would be ranked by someone whom they value as supporting their decision-making. This finding indicated that Arab immigrant emerging adults and their families were influenced by the contextual influences of living in an industrialized society such as Canada. In Canada, individualized goals of self-development are prioritized over other milestones such as marriage and establishing family. This signifies the imposition of colonialist individualized cultural beliefs, such as notions of self-sufficiency, on the lived experiences of Arab immigrant emerging adults and their families.

### **Living through the Arab and Colonial Canadian Cultures**

Arab immigrant emerging adults in this study demonstrated great pride and commitment to preserving their Arab heritage and their Arab identity. They shared some values they believe characterize their Arab heritage, including prioritizing family, hospitality, respect for others, prioritizing the collective good over individual goals, and maintaining a sense of community. These values are consistent with the Arab cultural values identified in the studies of Arab

immigrants and their experiences (Awad, 2010; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Matera et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2014).). Studies on Arab immigrant emerging adults and youth suggest that Arab families tend to prioritize maintaining family relationships over establishing peer relationship, especially interethnic peer relations (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2014). Studies have also shown that Arab parents and families may have reservations over forming peer relationships with individuals outside of the Arab culture for the risk it may pose on preserving values and traditions. Additionally, studies indicate that preservation also extends to cross-gender friendships between males and females (Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2015).

In this study, contrary to previous studies, participants did not prioritize family over establishing friendships with others from the larger society. In fact, they indicated that they were eager to form peer friendships, and that this was supported and encouraged by their families. Some participants explained this support by way of hospitality and the importance of committing to establishing stronger community relationships. Arab immigrant emerging adults asked for greater exposure opportunities to integrate and establish interethnic peer friendships in schools and opportunities for developing stronger relationships with the larger society.

One of the significant challenges faced by many participants was the tension between their commitment to preserving their Arab heritage culture, while integrating with the larger local community. Participants identified multiple factors that they deemed to be necessary to help facilitate integration. They include commitment to independence and financial independence, English proficiency, language brokering and cultural knowledge exchange, and their belief in the necessity of expressing gratitude to Canada for giving them the opportunity to re-establish in a safe land. These values primarily signify an individualist approach and fall

closely with neoliberal values of self-sufficiency and independence as prime indicators of progress and advancement (Klodawsky et al., 2006; Tabatabai, 2020). Arab immigrant emerging adults indicated they are challenged with believing that they must give up their collective self to gain access, acceptance, and inclusiveness in their new Canadian society. Some of the collective values that could be challenged at the expense of “fitting in” include family and building within-ethnic social relationships and networks relations. These findings are consistent with previous studies addressing the notion of cultural conflicts that are immersed in living between the heritage and host cultures and navigating through cultural value differences (Amer, 2014; Chen & Cheldon, 2012; Goforth et al., 2014; Niles, 2018). One noted variation is in regard to Arab immigrant emerging adults and their differences in acculturation from their parents and families. Previous studies indicate that acculturation gaps arise between Arab immigrant emerging adults and their parents/families because of different acculturation rates. One reason for this is that Arab immigrant emerging adults tend to integrate more dominant cultural values and are more receptive to adopting these values than their parents (Awad et al., 2021; Goforth et al., 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016). These differences can grow and result in a conflicting relationship between Arab immigrant emerging adults and their families (Aroian et al., 2016; Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Rasmi et al., 2016; Rasmi et al., 2014).

Stemming from the shared stories in this study, it seems that Arab immigrant emerging adults and their parents/families are in fact in agreement with the necessity of adopting some of these neoliberal values of self-sufficiency and independence as precedents for success. None of the participants in this study indicated any cultural disagreements. In facts, almost all participants provided concrete examples of how their families prioritized education, and employment or career advancement as important milestones to achieve. Arab immigrant emerging adults also

indicated that their parents greatly supported them and motivated them to achieve these goals. Their families have also highly encouraged them to target opportunities for enhancing their interactions with the local Canadian society as necessary for enhancing adjustment and integration. Further, emerging adult children's successful integration and achieving self-sufficiency would be considered family success because many of these families came to Canada for their children's education and for their future (Awad, 2010; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Matera et al., 2020).

There are two primary factors that could explicate the difference in findings in terms of consistency of goals between Arab immigrant emerging adults and their families. First, this study was conducted with recent immigrants who have been in Canada for five years or less. This may not have been sufficient time yet for families to predict any risk of losing Arab heritage cultural values at the expense of merging with the Canadian community. Hence, the picture may be quite different if the study was conducted with the same participants on the long-term. Effectively settling and adjusting in the new society may be the primary goal now, and once that goal is fulfilled, families may then be more concerned with retaining their Arab heritage and ensuring it is passed along to future generations. The second possible reason would be that families may be feeling pressure to adopt values from the dominant culture. This may be practiced by imposing specific colonially driven values that families are led to believe are prerequisites for their integration and inclusion in their new local Canadian community. Families may have been subject to segregating practice that may potentially leading to their isolation and marginalization from their local community. In fact, Arab immigrant emerging adults in this study allude to this fact especially as they spoke to English proficiency and its role in navigating their interactions with the larger society in multiple contexts, with education being a prime example.

## **Language and Sense of Belonging: Arabic as Identity vs. English as a Gateway**

Language proficiency has been identified in cultural studies on Arab immigrants and refugees as a primary barrier to acculturation and respective settlement and integration (Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Pampati et al., 2018; Rowe, 2019). Mastering the language in the region of settlement has been deemed as integral to a successful acculturation experience (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Pampati et al., 2018). English language proficiency serves a dual role for Arab immigrants and refugees settling in Canada and the U.S. First, English proficiency acts as a gateway to access systems and community resources that are essential for Arab immigrants and refugees' settlement and integration. As well, speaking English allows them to facilitate community connections and establish interethnic relationships with the local larger society (Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Pampati et al., 2018). The second purpose English proficiency serves is that it allows Arab immigrants and refugees to use it as a cultural brokering tool to allow them to inform and educate the larger society about their Arab heritage and culture (Pampati et al., 2018; Veronis et al., 2018).

In this study, Arab immigrant emerging adults present concrete examples of how English proficiency is a requirement for their effective acculturation. Some participants specifically addressed how mastering the English language opened doors for opportunities to work, to engage with civic activities, to navigate systems to help meet their needs and their families' needs, and to facilitate peer and community connections. Others have presented integral examples of struggles and barriers that challenged their experience.

The common languages spoken at home was one of the fascinating findings of my study. While, as anticipated, Arabic dominated the reported spoken languages, Arab immigrant emerging adults reported nine different languages spoken at home. Other than Arabic,

participants spoke the following eight languages at home: English, French, Chaldean, Turkish, Kurdish, New Aramaic, Assyrian, and Farsi. Some originated from their cultural or racial backgrounds and were native languages they used to communicate with their families and communities “back home.” Others were a product of their secondary migration. Arab immigrant emerging adults, especially coming through the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) route, migrated to a different country than their homeland before coming to Canada. Acquiring a new language was one positive implication of settling in a country of asylum; however, their experiences tended to be quite challenging in terms of their adjustments and emotional wellbeing, and this will be explored further with a discussion on racism and discrimination.

### **Education System Experiences: Segregation and Challenges of Cultural Brokering**

Research on Arab immigrant emerging adults’ experiences with the educational system asserts that greater exposure and socialization opportunities with the host society result in both positive and negative implications on their acculturation experiences (Balaghi et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2015; Veronis et al., 2018). Echoing the study of academic experiences of Syrian newcomer students in Veronis et al. (2018), Syrian participants in this study reported similar challenges of learning about the system, delays in education due to being out of school for some time, and having to exert extra efforts as their academic challenges were exacerbated with the lack of or low proficiency in English language. Overall, participants with low English proficiency shared their great concern for their advancement in education or their careers. They also worried that the current systemic division in schools as a form of institutional oppression may be factoring into these challenges. These participants explained that, in the secondary school system, they are segregated from their Canadian counterparts. They also shared their great concern that all newcomer students seem to be overpopulating one to two schools where, in some

cases, most of the classroom were Arab-native speakers. They questioned the effectiveness of placing newcomer students all together in a specific school in that it would continue to exacerbate the barriers of segregating them from their Canadian peers and that it would contribute to the lack of opportunities for them to establish peer relationships with their new diverse community. Another challenge that faced Arab immigrant emerging adults in schools was that participants who proficiently spoke English also warned that school officials and teachers should not make assumptions about their academic performance. They asserted that English proficiency does not directly translate to academic success; rather, that support in learning the new education system with novel standards and expectations warrants the need for additional academic support. While some of these findings were consistent with the literature on education systems and newcomer student experience (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Kubota, 2015; Rowe, 2019; Veronis et al., 2018), there is a growing concern that the Canadian community that supposedly promotes integration as an effective approach is, in fact, promoting more assimilative practices that are systemically and structurally embedded (Niles, 2018; Veronis et al., 2018). It appeared that, rather than practically supporting the diversity of the local community to develop effective interethnic relations, educational policymakers and stakeholders were creating silos for smaller minor communities that are segregated from one another not by virtue of choice, but by structurally oppressive and isolating practices.

In enhancing their educational experiences, Arab immigrant emerging adults requested a few changes that they believe would further enhance successful acculturation. The study participants requested revising and restructuring the current segregating educational practice in secondary school system. They asked for greater exposure to Canadian peers to be able to build peer relations and interethnic relations more effectively with the mainstream Canadian



community. Further, they reported that they are seeking greater investment in peer mentorship as they believe it would support them navigate the educational system. Finally, Arab immigrant emerging adults clearly expressed their belief, determination, dedication, and hope to excel academically and professionally. Yet, I heard in some participants' words some discouragement from pursuing their goals and aspirations in the desired fields of study. Some students shared that they were encouraged to "settle" for more "manageable and realistic" education and career goals. What they requested was that instead of being asked to "settle" for a particular level of academic performance or professional area, they ask to receive equitable support with their Canadian peers to achieve their desired aspirations.

All participants shared some reservations about having the English language take precedence over their Arabic native language. All participants seemed worried that, over the long term, this may be an expense that they or their families would pay, and they all affirmed their commitment to maintaining their Arabic language proficiency. Maintaining Arabic language proficiency means two things: first, a preservation of their Arab ethnic identity of which they hold great pride, and as an integral skill to have to maintain their Arab community within-ethnic relationships. Almost all participants expressed significant pressure in feeling polarized between two forces, preserving their Arab native language, therefore, their identity, and mastering their English language as a ticket to their active citizenship and inclusion in their new local Canadian society. The emotional labour that Arab immigrant emerging adults have engaged in as they aim to bridge the two polarized forces together is a prime example of consequences of colonialism. The colonialist practices upon which our Canadian society is built impose structural demands that are enforced on citizenships as necessary precedents to overall wellbeing and potential achievement (Dua et al., 2005; Lawrence, 2003; Park, 2017). In this study, Arab immigrant

emerging adults were subject to these demands such that they have felt that giving up a part of their Arab identity and the rich Arab culture they have come with was necessary for their successful acculturation. Therefore, this indicates how Canada's portrayed image of embracing multiculturalism, being inclusive, and committed to equitable treatment of all regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or any other element of demography is rather false.

Arab immigrant emerging adults were not treated equitably as their Arab culture, newcomer/immigrant or refugee status, language proficiency (among other factors) did not grant the same systemic accesses and community navigation opportunities as their Canadian born mainstream counterparts. Inclusivity was also problematic. Arab immigrant emerging adults were often excluded from opportunities of civic engagement, education, or peer relationship development. Finally, their diversity was rather underappreciated in that there were few opportunities to express their culture, and they sensed they had to give up some of their Arab culture to prosper here in their new Canadian mainstream community.

One more tension that would be integral to address was that Arab immigrant emerging adults viewed the Canadian society with the same portrayed notions of multiculturalism, being welcoming, and embracing diversity (Berry, 2016; Cvetkovska et al., 2020; Palmer, 1996; Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Participating Arab immigrant emerging adults were not aware of the history of colonialism of Canada characterized by displacement of Indigenous Peoples, dominance of the land, loss of lives or genocide, and efforts to dismantle the Indigenous culture and language through placing children in residential schools and forcing them to absorb the dominant White culture and English language respectively. Instead, they were presented with the white settler narrative of Canada being the land of opportunities, a welcoming and inclusive community, and one that embraces equitable treatment of all regardless of any cultural, racial, or

other demographic factors. Their short experience of being in Canada for less than five years may have denied them access to this counternarrative of the larger history of Canada in the context of white colonization.

### **Meeting the Challenges of Colonial Society-Determination to Prove Worthiness**

One of the integral contributions of this study was to reveal participants' perspectives on extending gratitude to Canada. On the notion of Canada being an opportunistic and welcoming land for settlement, all Arab immigrant emerging adults in this study believed it was necessary for them to express gratitude to Canada for giving them the opportunity to re-establish in a safe land. As well, they viewed their academic and career success as an essential contribution to Canadian society for granting what they described as equitable opportunities for them and their Arab community. As they described their success stories, Arab immigrant emerging adults in this study were adamant to prove to Canadian society that they were actively working to give back and become independent from government supports. Arab immigrant emerging adults asked specifically for their stories of success to be shared to demonstrate that they were worthy of being here in Canada.

One example was Ariman's description of her determination to become independent from financial supports. She shared that she and her father were determined to establish their financial independence quickly as she and her family were working on navigating interpersonal oppressions supported by virtue of stereotypical images on immigrants and refugees. Ariman wished to avoid being subject to the stereotypical image of refugees depending on the Canadian government's financial support in the long term. This is problematic because newcomers should not be discriminated against based on their immigrant/refugee status if their needs match the required criteria for accessing social assistance. Newcomer Arab immigrant emerging adults,

particularly the ones participating in this study, did not seem to be dependent on financial support. In addition to the commitment demonstrated with Ariman's example for financial independence, 10 out of 27 participants in this study had acquired employment opportunities to support their needs and their families' needs.

Overall, feeling the need to express gratitude for Canadian society's support poses a high risk for continuing to contribute to the inequitable, hierarchical social structures that are maintaining the dominant status of the White settler groups over other cultural groups here in Canada. One of the safety practices that dominant groups implement is maintaining structural oppressions to protect the privileged status of their group over others. The White settler society in Canada has dictated structural requirements that continue to subordinate other groups. These requirements are shaped through English language proficiency, curriculum structure and systemic requirements, status requirements for access to government's financial and settlement supports as some factors (Abboud et al., 2019; Capper, 2015; Pampati et al., 2018).

All these requirements consistently presented areas of tension that required participating Arab immigrant emerging adults to engage in significant emotional labour as they made sense of their acculturation experience here in Canada. Adding the element of expressing gratitude imposes that Arab immigrant emerging adults must continue to subject themselves to the White settler society for providing the basic human right of safety, a right that they have earned by virtue of their humanitarian case. It is critical to note that the Canadian immigration and refugee system could be considered as imposing discriminatory practices by virtue of distinguishing between the level of support, not only financial but also settlement support and awareness thereof, based on immigrant and refugee statuses. Some of the programs and services devoted to different categories of immigrants and refugees are outlined on the Immigration, Refugee and

Citizenship Canada sources as well as respective settlement organization providing these services (IRCC, 2019). The federal Canadian government distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary migrations to Canada to systematically dictate the level of financial and focused settlement supports that the newcomers receive. In turn, the immigrant or refugee category that newcomers arrive with influences the structured support they receive as they attempt to settle and integrate here in Canada. For refugees, Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) can be classified as the category with the most structured support as they receive financial assistance for up to one year of settlement in Canada, and settlement agencies are obliged to provide support until acquiring citizenship. However, the picture is different for Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) as their access to Canadian government programs tends to be limited, so is their awareness of the existence of these supports (Good-Gingrich & Enns, 2019; Hanley et al., 2018; Hynie et al., 2019). PSRs' experience can be deemed as more similar to other immigrant groups by virtue of access to settlement and integration programs as well as their awareness of these programs. While some programs exist to support almost all immigrant and refugee categories, such as Newcomer Settlement Programs (NSPs), there needs to be greater focus dedicated to promoting these programs for all newcomers irrespective of their immigrant/refugee status. In this study, while GARs dominated the sample, there was some sensed differences in the degree of support received and respective challenges faced. For example, Dunya, a PSR participant, denoted that she was not aware of the settlement support programs available and she faced further challenges in her settlement experience. Similarly, Shahnaz, an immigrant participant, interestingly shared that while her family has been in Canada for a significant amount of time, none of them were aware of the available settlement and integration support to direct her to seek help.

Finally, it is important to be cautious before making presumptions of the choice to migrate to Canada based on immigrant vs. refugee status. Immigrant status does not necessarily denote a voluntary migration. Some are forced to leave their countries to escape differential treatments, racism, discrimination, and inequitable treatment in their home countries or countries of asylum. This was consistent in this study where some immigrants explained that the choice to migrate to Canada was rather an involuntary decision, where they left their home communities, friends, and families behind to pursue education and financial advancement opportunities. Two Lebanese participants, Cyla and Georgia, shared how their social experiences quite differed, and that they favoured their friendships and social lives back home. Cyla spoke to how finding her favourite snack item, the Anika biscuit, made her feel closer to home, and she longed for the strong social and community connections back home which, in her view, were not possible to replicate in Canada. Ahmed, a Palestinian refugee claimant living in UAE prior to migrating to Canada, also spoke to missing his friends and social network back home. Interestingly, Ahmed shared that he was not exposed to racism based on his ethnicity or religion until he came to Canada, and that the racism occurred more significantly within his ethnic community.

### **Within and Interethnic Racism and Discrimination**

Studies on the acculturation experiences of Arab immigrants generally and Arab immigrant emerging adults indicate that they were subject to racism and discrimination mostly in their relationships with the larger Canadian society in their local communities (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Oberoi & Trickett, 2018; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2014). Studies of Arab immigrant emerging adults in Canada indicated that language proficiency was a significant contributor to instances of racism and discrimination (Akram, 2002; Amer & Hovey, 2012; Pampani et al., 2018). Further, Arab immigrant emerging adults identifying with the Islamic religion tend to

experience greater levels of discrimination, and this has been a product of sociopolitical milestones such as the September 11<sup>th</sup> events and, more recently, response to Syrian refugees' influx to Canada ((El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Kumar et al., 2015; Oberoi & Trickett, 2018; Wrobel et al., 2009).). Overall, a negative perspective on the impact of immigration on the recipient (host) community is associated with racism and discrimination such that if immigrants and refugees are perceived as a threat to the host community's economy or culture, the host cultural group may express this threat in the form of discriminatory practices or acts of racism against the respective immigrant group (Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Ng & Metz, 2015). Within-ethnic racism may not have as extensively targeted in the literature as that of cross-cultural racism and discrimination (e.g., Guan et al., 2016; Lagasi, 2013; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015). However, one study indicated the possibility of such within-ethnic racism by indicating the possibility of a social hierarchy among different Arab ethnic groups. The study conducted on Arab immigrants in the U.S. and indicated that individuals from the Lebanese national background and those who master the official language, English in this case, tend to dominate the Arab ethnic social hierarchy (Kumar et al., 2015). This study did not reveal similar results to Kumar et al. (2015) as there were no noted hierarchies specific to the Arab ethnic community.

Overall, participants in this study characterized their interactions with their Arab heritage community and local larger society as supportive, welcoming, and inclusive. Most participants provided examples of how their local Arab heritage community, local religious organizations, and the larger Canadian society supported their acculturation experiences. However, their acculturation experience was not free of racism or discrimination. Some discussed instances of racism within their Arab ethnic community. For example, Ahmed stated, "Here Arabs I feel like that they are more racist... to be honest" as he was comparing his experience here with living in

the UAE. As well, Petra outlined how she felt isolated from her Iraqi community. She stated that she received very limited support from her community, that she missed the social cohesion she had back home, and she wished for greater social integration and connection opportunities here in her local Canadian society. She shared that this would have greatly enhanced her sense of belonging to her local ethnic community, and that could, in turn, enhance her emotional wellbeing and effective adjustment here in her new Canadian society.

Many participating Arab immigrant emerging adults characterized the larger Canadian society as welcoming, inclusive, respectful, and appreciative of their diverse background. Some participants noted that they were treated equitably, and that racism was not tolerated in Canada. However, as the stories of acculturation unfolded, some participants highlighted significant instances of racism and discriminatory practices that challenged their adjustment and integration. There were three primary components that characterized Arab immigrant emerging adults' experiences with racism and discrimination and presented examples of multiple forms of oppression. First, almost all participants engaged in secondary school education have addressed their challenges with segregation practices as a form of institutionalized oppression that they believed posed a structural barrier to enhancing their social and economic integration on multiple levels: enhancing English proficiency, establishing cross-ethnic peer relationships, facilitating important professional networks for civic engagement and potential employment, and establishing as well as enhancing cross-cultural relationships with the local larger Canadian society. In fact, enhancing English proficiency as a requirement for advancing in their new community could contribute to a form of internalized oppression where Arab immigrant emerging adults would feel inferior to their dominant counterparts until proficiency qualifies them to actively participate in the new community. Second, participants addressed discrimination



in the housing experience. Nesrine, Amani, and Ali all presented examples of how discriminatory practices of denying them housing based on their refugee status and consequent assumption of their financial situation. All three participants spoke to how landlords were selective in their process of offering them houses, as landlords distrusted their ability to pay rent. This discriminatory practice in the housing experience left these participants feeling marginalized, unwelcomed, and portrayed negatively. Consequently, this experience had negatively impacted their sense of belonging and, in turn, challenged their ability to focus on their settlement and integration.

The third component of Arab immigrant emerging adults' exposure to racism and discrimination is the notion of feeling the need to express gratitude to Canada for granting them a safe land in which to immigrate. Despite being retraumatized to exert significant effort in attempting to fit in, participants were persistent that they must find ways to showcase their success and independence to demonstrate their gratitude to Canada for granting them their safety and ability to re-establish in their new community. To them, active civic engagement and securing employment were methods of expressing their gratitude to Canada by achieving success in education and employment, participating in civic engagement opportunities, and achieving financial independence. The continued focus on creating a positive self-image and proving capabilities remains problematic as it continues to maintain the Arab cultural group as an oppressed group, subordinating its needs and being dependent on the dominant White society. Furthermore, what makes this a problematic approach is that such sense of responsibility to create an accepted self-image results in significant psychological and emotional burden. In turn, this would negatively impact their overall wellbeing on the long-term.

Newcomer immigrant and refugees were only presented with the White settler dominant narrative of Canada as the multicultural, equitable, and racism-free society. The alternate narrative of Canada's responsibility for a history of genocide, land and cultural colonization, an attempt to an evasion of Indigenous cultures and languages within residential schools and continued active denial and lack of action to the Truth and Reconciliation did not seem to have been presented to newcomers participating in this study. Consequently, most described Canada as their safe land and the land of security of human rights and freedoms. Moreover, Canada was the secondary migration destination for all refugee participants in this study, meaning that Canada was the second country of refuge in which they sought permanent residence (Tuzi, 2019; Truth & Reconciliation, 2015). Refugee participants resided in a country of asylum for several years prior to immigrating to Canada. Therefore, the country of asylum was their reference point when describing their exposure to racism and discrimination here in Canada. In their asylum sites, participants were subject to direct forms of racism and discrimination, and some of these experiences were quite dehumanizing, as participants described. For example, some of the discriminatory experiences included having an interrupted academic experience as they were excluded from the school system based on their refugee status and/or national backgrounds, having to work at a young age to support their families' basic needs, and having to learn to adapt temporarily to the culture in their country of asylum until yet another transition (to Canada) was required. CRT is very insistent that we must honour and contextualize the experience in the space and place where it is directly taking place. Therefore, and stemming from this lens, CRT helps explain how it would be difficult for Arab immigrant emerging adults who participated in this study to identify directly and clearly the subtle, less obvious forms of racism and discrimination that they were subject to here in local Canadian society community of Windsor-

Essex. Their beliefs have therefore been shaped from a reference point where racism has taken a more obvious form such that their exposure to racism was validated on the notion that it could have been worse and more direct. This could explicate participants' persistence on feeding into the narrative of having to express gratitude, avoiding questioning discriminatory and racist practices, and feeling the need to prove themselves through actively engaging in and successfully contributing to the local Canadian society.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in April and May 2021, and they preceded by a very short time of two months to few days a significant event that shook the Islamic communities in Canada generally and in Windsor-Essex specifically. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, an Islamophobic-driven attack cost the lives of a Muslim family in London, Ontario, a city less than 200 kilometers away from Windsor Essex (Chaarani, 2022; islamophobia.io). This had a traumatic impact on the emotional wellbeing of Muslim and Arab communities across the nation. It elevated the fear that direct forms of racism and discrimination continue to pose a risk in a land that they otherwise have considered safe. Support programs and platforms were created by the Muslim community for expressing solidarity with the family and sharing remembrance stories. For example, the #OurLondonFamily, a social media platform of Islamophobia.io observed significant participation, where members of the Islamic community and larger Canadian society from citizens to government officials and academics shared their stories and messages of support to the family and Islamic community respectively. As the event occurred during the writing of this dissertation, I was eager to learn how this event might change the perspective on racism and discrimination among the participants. I was also curious to learn whether this would have elevated their fear and caution, and whether they would still describe Canada and their local community as a safe, racism- and discrimination- free community. It would be integral to

investigate whether contemporary events targeting Muslim communities could possibly alter their vision on racism and discrimination in their respective local Canadian communities.

Preceding the London, Ontario attacks, the Muslim community were also outraged by another attack. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Muslim community in Quebec observed a massacre at a mosque that cost the lives of six individuals during prayer time. The attacker was a White supremacist who clearly stated his intent was to target the Muslim community (Zine, 2021). While the incident took place in Quebec, the impact of it was quite severe on the Muslim community, triggering concerns of racism and discrimination nationwide (Jonas, 2022; Zine, 2021). A similar platform was created where over 100 supportive letters were received from the community and larger society, respectively, remembering and sharing their stories of experiencing the event. Messages of solidarity from academics, government officials, and citizens were also shared. None of the participants in this study addressed the events or expressed concerns of racism and discrimination, although all but six participants arrived in 2017 and later, around the time of the event. There are two possible explanations for participants being reserved from discussing these events. First, for most participants, Canada is a secondary migration site where their experience is significantly improved from their country of refuge with the limited exposure or absence of direct forms of racism and discrimination. Second, participants may have considered these as isolated events. Participants were newcomers who have yet to learn about structurally and systemically racist and oppressive practices embedded in Canadian systems. Consequently, lack of exposure to the counternarrative of Canada's colonialism may continue leading them to believe that Canada is a country safe from discrimination and racism particularly directly towards one's culture or religion.

Finally, despite the challenges imposed by virtue of resettling in their new community, Arab immigrant emerging adults demonstrated great determination and persistence to prosper in their community. Almost all participants were actively engaged in their communities: in settlement organizations, schools, the larger community, and within their religious communities and institutions. One of the interesting roles they carried was that of being language and cultural brokers. For example, Bissan described her role in cross-translating between members of her ethnic community and the larger society in her volunteer role. For her, the role extended beyond simple translation and evolved into an opportunity of cultural knowledge exchange. These active engagements could teach us that there could be significant resilience within individuals undergoing traumatic events and significant shifts in their lived experiences.

### **The Intersectional Arab Identity**

One of the key interests I had in conducting this study was to understand how Arab immigrant emerging adults conceptualize their racial and ethnic identities. As race is a socially constructed phenomenon that is not as clearly defined among Arabs as the concept of ethnicity or nationality (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Liu, 2018), I was interested to learn how Arab immigrant emerging adults would define their racial identities if asked. Participants varied in their responses to the question with most resorting to their nationalities, some using the term “Arab,” and very few defining it as skin colour. Some Chaldean participants used Chaldean to define their racial identity despite that Chaldean could conceptually be viewed as a cultural or religious background rather than a racial background as shared by the participants and by Sally, the Research Assistant who associates with the Chaldean background. In this study, the question was asked to convey how Arab immigrant emerging adults socially construct their conceptualization of race. The intersection of Arab immigrants’ conceptualization of race in a

colonial Canadian society is an area that warrants further investigation, and one would better support our knowledge on Arab immigrants in general, and Arab immigrant emerging adults, in how they transition through their acculturation. As noted, Arab immigrant emerging adults participating in this study do not know the counternarrative of Canada being a White settler society that is maintaining ongoing colonialism and subordination for other racial groups. Future studies could help greatly unpack this intersection of racial identity and the contextual influences of living in the colonial Canadian society.

Arab immigrant emerging adults in this study also had the opportunity to reflect on how their religious identity played a role in their acculturation experience and conceptualization of the self. The decision to integrate religious identity in deriving more knowledge on Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation stemmed from studies on Arab immigrants that denoted that religious identity was a relatively inseparable aspect of the Arab identity (Jabbar, 2019; Awad et al., 2021; Kusow et al., 2018). It is interesting to investigate whether being in Canada, where religious identity is not an overt identification category like most Arab countries (e.g., Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Kusow et al., 2018), has affected participants' utilization of their religious identities to conceptualize their experience. Further, as some studies indicate, the intersection of Arab cultural background with the Islamic religion could subject individuals to greater acculturation challenges, and greater exposure to racism and discrimination (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Kumar et al., 2015; Oberoi & Trickett, 2018; Wrobel et al., 2009). However, analyzing the Arab immigrant emerging adult experiences in this study did not reveal differences in terms of experiencing racism and discrimination among the various religious identities and spiritual beliefs. There may not have been accounted differences based on religious identities as the participants were newcomers so they may not have had enough exposure or interactions with

the larger society to contextualize their possible racism and discrimination experiences. In addition to time, participants indicated that COVID-19 restrictions limited opportunities to interact with the larger society. Hence, their exposure to racism and discrimination experiences where they could also decipher some underlying factors, like their religious identities, may have also been limited.

Similarly, despite studies alluding to gender differences in the Arab immigrants' acculturation experiences (Aroian et al., 2011; Lagasi, 2013; Maira, 2004), the intersection between the Arab cultural background and gender identity does not seem to generate differences in Arab immigrant emerging adults' acculturation in this study. As I have shown, gender was dichotomously identified as male and female, which is also supported in recent studies (e.g., Britto & Amer, 2007; Rasmi et al., 2014; Wannas-Jones, 2003). The lack of gender difference can be explained in two ways. First, it is a response to the developmental milestones of emerging adulthood especially contemporarily where educational success and career advancement require greater dedication and time commitment, with education being a precedent for establishing an effective career. Second, literature on Arab culture informs that the female assumes greater responsibility for the family unit, the preservation cultural values, and ensuring that effective family relations are maintained (El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2014; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012). In this study, the support mechanisms are portrayed slightly differently. While her nurturing role and support to family remain the same, her contributions to the family are projected through advancing academically and professionally so that she can better contribute to and support her family. Overall, the Arab immigrant emerging adult is helping their family meet their economic needs and concurrently becoming economically independent. These roles are assumed beyond presumed gender differences or cultural expectations. This could possibly

lead to Arab women holding double responsibilities of caring for their families while also working on prospering in their careers. While this differed from literature findings portraying gender differences (Hamdan, 2007; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012), they seemed to align with the overall sense of commitment and dedication to self-advancement in education and employment that I learned from participants in this study, irrespective of gender differences.

Finally, the intersection of Arab cultural background with emerging adulthood as a developmental stage yields similar milestones to the emerging adult counterparts, as theorized by Arnett and others (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2005; Gilmore, 2019). One difference I found among Arab immigrant emerging adults in relation to Arnett's theorization of this stage is that of anticipated questioning and possible change in their worldviews. Arab immigrant emerging adults may deviate from this in that there is significant persistence to preserve their morals, values, religious and spiritual beliefs that they were raised on, and that they wish to transmit to their own families in future. One participant, Madeline, shared that her family is Muslim but personally currently identifies as non-practicing.

### **Two Special Cases- Chaldean vs. Christian and Kurdish-Syrians**

I conclude this discussion with the summarization and analysis of two unique identities that I derived in this study: The Kurdish-Syrian identity and an amalgamation of race and ethnicity, and the religious identities of Chaldean versus Christian. First, the two Kurdish-Syrian participants presented great insights into how the intersection between their ethnic and racial identities and the receptiveness of the host community complicates their adjustment experiences. In fact, both identified Kurdish as their racial background and hyphenated with Syrian (i.e., Kurdish-Syrian) represented their ethnic backgrounds. In comparison with back home, where they felt isolated and oppressed by virtue of their identification as Kurdish, Canada was the first



host society that helped them present their identities safely and freely. As Yezda shared, *“Canada made us feel proud to love our background and who we are and encouraged us to practice our values and cultural practices”* (Yezda). As well, Ariman complemented her vision through reflecting on how this support and receptiveness helped enhance her sense of belonging; that she feels as part of the larger Canadian society, having Christianity and Judaism being part of White settler society’s dominant religion. To further understand their complex identities and how they intersect with their acculturation experiences, I asked Yezda and Ariman to educate me on how they perceive the relation between their racial identities as Kurdish and the Arab ethnicity. Both informed me that Arab denotes the cultural aspect and part of their ethnicity. They asserted that they are a small group of people, who primarily reside in Syria, and who share all cultural values and practices from the Arab culture with some additional practices and values that distinguish their Kurdish identity. They have a special style of clothing especially with women (Yezda’s mother continues to dress with that clothing style here in Canada); they have a special holiday to celebrate their identity, the Newroz holiday; and, they have specific linguistic and dialect differences that easily distinguishes them from the rest of their communities back home. The intersectionality lens supported my analysis in deconstructing the complexity of their identities and how its contextualization generates unique, yet complex acculturation processes. This area warrants further investigation; the intersection of other aspects of their identities (e.g., religious and gender identities) requires further investigation that is beyond the scope of this study.

The Christian vs. Chaldean religious affiliations presented another integral finding in this study. In their religious identification, the nine Iraqi participants in my study identified either as Christian or Chaldean. I followed specifically the participant’s selected identifier, and during the

interviews, I attuned specifically to how the Chaldean identifier is contextualized as arguably Chaldean could be regarded as a cultural rather than a religious background, and that religion would be identified as Christian in this case. Interestingly, I observed that participants have relied on Chaldean to describe their religious affiliations and their cultural backgrounds; some even used it as a racial identity classification. For example, when asked about his race and racial identity, Evan reflected that Chaldean is the only identity he associates with: *“I have no idea, I just say Chaldean” (Evan)*. Furthermore, Sally and I had an in-depth discussion to conceptualize the Chaldean/Christian distinction and she informed me that Chaldeans are a Catholic Christian minority group that experienced oppression significantly back home. Hence, their passionate association with Chaldean comes from their devotion to maintain an identity that was once a source of oppression and now, in Canada, is an element of pride. In sum, stemming from these two examples, I understand that the Canada has been liberating in its approach to minority groups that experienced oppression back home, and that their safe association with their ethnic, racial, and religious identities is a supportive element to their acculturation process. Future studies should be devoted to further enhance the understanding of acculturation of racial and ethnic identifications of minority groups, especially those experiencing oppression back home. Recommendations will be discussed for both special cases of ethnic, racial, and religious identifications in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER VII-CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter of the dissertation concludes with the study's contributions to knowledge and practice and some future recommendations for practitioners, academics, researchers, and for Social Work curriculum and education.

### **Study Contributions and Implications**

Arab immigrant emerging adults deconstructed their immigration and acculturation journey based on a few factors: a comparison with their migration site, the timing and journey of immigration, and through the dominant narrative of Canada being a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable society. Most participants in this study were refugees (17 Government Assisted Refugees, 3 Privately Sponsored Refugees) who sought asylum in a different country than their homeland prior to migrating to Canada. Hence, their conceptualization of acculturation was informed by their secondary migration experience. Their reference point for deconstructing their acculturation was their country of asylum, where challenges of immigration were very first experienced. Furthermore, refugee participants experienced racism and discrimination more overtly in the country of asylum, so covert forms of racism and discrimination here in Canada became more difficult to identify. Arab immigrant emerging adults' migration journeys were also influential on understanding acculturation. Refugee participants, for example, discussed leaving their war-torn countries and communities behind, and immigrant participants spoke to the challenge of separating from their extended families and strong social networks. As for the image of what Canada could offer, it was evident in the participants' shared journeys that they were only exposed to the dominant templated image of Canada as a multicultural, diversity-driven, equitable, and inclusive society. Participating Arab immigrant emerging adults did not seem to be aware of the counternarrative of Canada being a naturalized White -settler society

that is built upon colonialism. Therefore, while expressively, participants identified Canada as a country of rights and freedoms that is equitable and protective of all, they have presented numerous examples of segregation and an enforcement of neoliberal practices as the only measures of success and advancement.

The study spotlighted multiple tensions that Arab immigrant emerging adults have undergone that intensified the emotional cost of immigrating to Canada. In some cases, Arab immigrant emerging adults signified the fear of losing some of their Arab heritage and identity as a cost to successfully integrating here in Canada. This latter finding makes me question whether Canada, in fact, fosters integrative approaches to acculturation, or its approaches to immigrants and refugees are more covertly assimilative in nature. Just as structurally imbedded approaches to racism and discrimination are hidden behind the dominant narrative of Canada as a free and just country, so can be its agenda to implementing assimilation more in a hidden nature. As an example, in Canada, parties collecting demographic information refrain from collecting information about race and racial identities, and this is deemed as a practice to ensure racial equity (Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016). However, as we have come to learn so far from the Indigenous history, Black Canadian history, and more recently Anti-Asian racism as some racial groups, our country is far from being racially equitable. Racial discrimination and experiences of racism have been significantly imbedded, and for a very long time in our Canadian history that our effort would need to be multiplied to first courageously identify our nation as racially inequitable first, then to consolidate our efforts to effectively enact social change thereafter.

## **Recommendations for Future Directions**

Below are some recommendations that can be derived from this study and can be implemented in practice, policy and social policy, social work education, as well as in scholarship and research.

### **Practice Recommendations**

Social work practitioners and other helping professionals working with immigrants and refugees should help them establish culturally driven measures of success. In this study, Arab immigrant emerging adults believed their success was based on establishing their independence, financial independence especially from government sources, education advancement, and securing employment. All these goals are essentially driven from individualistic approaches (Klodawsky et al., 2006; Tabatabai, 2020). The emerging adult children's success in education and employment would also be considered as family success. However, this may come at the expense of replacing integral collectivist goals that stem from the Arab heritage, as a collectivist culture, for example with deviating from focusing on establishing strong family and social connections. Successful establishment of the self in the Arab collectivist cultures is measured through prioritizing the common, collective, good over the individual self. Consequently, success is measured by the strength of maintaining effective family and community relationships and establishing strong social networks. Therefore, social work practitioners should work with their immigrant and refugee clientele to celebrate their cultural heritage through collaboratively defining alternate measures of success than what could be derived as the norm here.

Furthermore, as part of the commitment and dedication to cultural competence in social work practice, social workers should advocate with their immigrant and refugee clientele for preserving their native language. As demonstrated in this study, the Arabic native language

serves more than a mode of communication, it is also an element of preservation of Arab ethnicity and identity. Accordingly, bilingualism should extend beyond proficiency in English and French. Social workers should promote and support multilingualism and the preservation of immigrant and refugees' native languages as a goal rather than a barrier. Social workers can attain this goal through encouraging their immigrant and refugee clientele to focus on maintaining proficiency in their native language. Social Workers should highlight together with immigrants and refugees the multiple benefits that maintaining proficiency in native language can accomplish. For example, in this study, Arab immigrant emerging adults provided ample evidence of the importance of their Arab language in helping maintain strong Arab ethnic connections and supporting their community consecutively. Some have also provided examples of how they used Arabic in their places of employment or volunteering and civic engagement. Social workers could similarly work with immigrant and refugee groups to recognize the importance of within ethnic relationships and help connect clientele to their local ethnic communities. Finally, social workers should acknowledge the importance of mother-tongue language proficiency beyond the practicality of using the language, and more as a measure of preserving their cultural heritage. Stemming from this study's findings, preserving the native language and heritage culture, respectively, are believed to have a positive impact on the individual's sense of belonging, therefore, social wellbeing, as well as emotional wellbeing stemming from enhanced self-confidence and a strong sense of ethnic identity.

Social work practitioners and others working in the immigration, refugee, and settlement sectors would need to work together to be more consistent in delivering the same experience to all newcomer immigrants and refugees to have more effective adjustment experiences. In preparation for the Syrian refugees' influx in 2015, multiple sectors in the Windsor-Essex region

worked together to create a welcoming community for Syrian refugees settling in the region. Syrian refugee participant responses demonstrated that these efforts were successful in attaining this goal as, generally, Syrian refugees have shared a positive outlook on their settlement and integration in Windsor-Essex. However, other refugees' shared experience did not seem to be the same. I sensed that there was less positive outlook and enthusiasm within their acculturation and adjustment experiences than the shared experiences of Syrian refugees.

Together, the enhanced politicized attention to the Syrian refugees' crisis in line with the cross-sector preparation to welcome Syrian refugees may have resulted in the increased positive image on support. As well, it may have resulted in the inequitable access between different refugee groups to existent resources. In this study, a couple of Iraqi refugee participants, for example, noted multiple post-immigration and settlement challenges. In efforts to create welcoming communities for all, cohesion among the multiple sectors would be integral. Efforts such as the collaborative network of Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP), an organizing body housing close to 100 members/stakeholders in Windsor-Essex, may pose a great venue for continuing to develop efforts and to extending support for all individuals and families from all immigrant and refugee routes. In fact, in 2021, an Inclusion and Anti-racism Group was established as part of WE LIP with the aim of solidifying commitment and enhancing efforts to combat racism and enhance inclusion and equity in Windsor-Essex. Such a group can become a good precursor for continued future efforts generating an equitable and inclusive community. Arab immigrant emerging adults highlighted essential challenges in the education system that, if addressed, would greatly enhance their education experiences. Few recommendations could potentially enhance the newcomer student experience and support educators in working with an increasingly diverse student body. Note that the following recommendations were developed

from research participants residing in the Windsor-Essex region but could be applicable to mid-sized communities with high diversity or settlement of immigrants and refugees. As well, the following recommendations are more applicable to secondary school education than other school systems.

### ***Curriculum Delivery and Structure***

Teachers can integrate various teaching modalities to ensure that diverse learning styles are well met.

- I. A good initial step would be to research the modes of delivery in alternate education approaches. For example, some international systems may depend more on memorization rather than visual learning. Teachers can then implement a familiar system to the newcomer system learning. Further, newcomer students should be provided with a structured learning experience over an extended time as the newcomer student may require additional time with their language barrier. Where possible, teachers should be provided by school administrators with an overview or open-access information about diverse curriculum modes of delivery as this would aid teachers in best preparing for and supporting their growing diverse student body. This would be an important cultural competence strategy to implement.
- II. Students can be provided with learning objectives each week to prepare for the consecutive week. The learning objectives should be accompanied with the skills required to complete the task: verbal or communication, written, critical thinking, creative thinking etc.
- III. Newcomer students can benefit from being provided handouts, where possible, in their native language. Teachers should look for opportunities of translation of supportive



learning handouts. If not available, students should be connected by teachers or schools to community agencies and their local ethnic communities, respectively, where such support can be provided.

- IV. While afterschool program support is generally available in secondary schools, teachers/educators should dedicate a personnel or volunteer student that can specifically be dedicated to support newcomer students. Newcomer students may be hesitant to seek support especially in group settings. Therefore, knowing that specific personnel or volunteer is dedicated to them may help ease their hesitation and, in turn, support their learning.
- V. The use of native language should be celebrated and supported rather than discouraged. Some participants indicated in their interviews that they were highly discouraged from speaking Arabic, their native language. They were advised that this may be an obstacle against enhancing their English proficiency. In fact, maintaining native language proficiency for the bilingual student supports their English language development as the bilingual person tends to process information, translate, and back-translate consistently. Therefore, if newcomer students can translate between English to their native language, their learning will be more effective.
- VI. Continue to implement and further promote cultural exercises for all students, newcomer, and mainstream students. This recommendation is applicable for *all* levels of learning: elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. This will provide an opportunity for teachers/educators to showcase their appreciation for the diverse backgrounds their newcomer students. As well, it will provide an opportunity for cultural knowledge exchange to happen between newcomer students and their counterparts. The exercise

could be in various forms depending on the age and level of learning: a creative piece of art, a presentation, or small group conversations to be shared with the large group. The exercise should include time for exchanging questions and teachers should highly encourage students to participate.

### ***Creativity of Curriculum Delivery Modality***

- I. The use of creative approaches to curriculum delivery is important to help navigate some structural barriers such as language, and to create a more engaging environment for students. Recently, teachers have been integrating the use of applications on the phone or computer to complete some class exercises. Anecdotally, I have observed how this has enhanced the engagement of students in the classroom. This practice should continue to be applied and should be developed further. For example, teachers can use their selected academic application not only to complete exercises, but also to deliver important concepts and knowledge. Key terminologies that may be more advanced for the newcomer student to understand should be highlighted and hyperlinked to a definition that newcomer students can click on and easily access. With practice and continued exposure, the newcomer student would be supported to concurrently expand their vocabulary and develop their knowledge.

### ***Mentorship Program***

*\*Note: Mentorship program recommendations can be applied to all levels of education: elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education.*

- I. Continue to implement the recently developed program where newcomer students are matched with peer mentors right at the beginning of the school year. The peer mentor should be educated first with some tips on how to help the newcomer student adjust to the

school experience. The peer mentor should be encouraged to focus on multiple areas such as academics and studying, school culture, creating friendships, and education on the teacher-student relationship. These would be integral orientation points for newcomer students to learn as they come from school systems where even the approach to communication, school structure and culture, as well as available supports may be different.

- II. Peer mentors and newcomer students should each be provided with a basic profile about one another. A recommended profile structure should include basic demographic information, cultural background, religious and spiritual background, hobbies and interests, and other relevant information. The peer mentor should be provided with the newcomer student's arrival date to Canada as this can also help them prepare for holding this role. This profile could be a great conversation initiator and could help enhance the peer mentorship relationship.

### ***Facilitate Intercultural Connections***

- I. Segregation has been identified as a significant barrier in education. Secondary schools should focus on generating opportunities for newcomer and mainstream students to have more integrated classroom experience. Students should all be joined together and to help the learning experience as well as enhance peer-to-peer connections, teachers should structure partnerships or small groups that involve a mixture of mainstream and newcomer students.
- II. As part of enhancing the school experience and support newcomer students with peer formations, schools should continue to integrate a regular event that could be conducted on a monthly or bimonthly basis that specifically targets intercultural connections. The

Greater Essex County District School Board recently held schoolwide events integrating an opportunity to show case one's culture and the event was highly successful in engaging students together. Hence, this event should be implemented regularly, especially with the beginning of school years, as this would respond to the many voices I heard calling for such opportunities. Students can be engaged in games where newcomer and mainstream students would be asked to work together to complete an activity or engage in a competition. The event should integrate social time where students can amalgamate and learn from one another. The event organizers should integrate a cultural exercise or activity, a linguistics activity, and activities that could target the school experience.

- III. In addition to the trauma and loss of family ties and communities, secondary migration causes a disruption in refugee newcomer students' education. Therefore, in addition to the language barrier and learning about the school system, these refugee newcomer students must be brought up to speed with their learning. In secondary schools, schools should create a bridging introduction course for those who were out of school for some time. The course can be delivered through an accelerated approach and can focus on primary subjects required for a high school diploma. The bridging course can involve a teacher or educator as well as student volunteers who could help their peer meet the learning goals. The school or educators involved should include an incentive to enhance participation of peer volunteers. The incentive can be a bonus point, a minor school scholarship, a day pass, or signing off volunteer hours.
- IV. Cultural events are common in the community. For example, the Carrousel of Nations in Windsor-Essex is a famous event where cultural villages create a homelike experience

through food, music, and social gatherings. As another example, a few churches in Windsor-Essex carry out Arabic and Lebanese festivals throughout the summer and these events tend to be an integral community gather. Information about such events should continue to be readily available and more directly promoted to students throughout the school year since these events happen in the summer and may not coincide with schooltime. Alternately, schools can implement the cultural villages idea at school by asking students to group together and develop a similar approach to showcase their heritage culture. Or students can be challenged to develop this village on a different culture than their own. This can be a small-scale, classroom activity, or can become a more frequent school day event, and both can integrate student volunteers that can help with the organization and encourage peer participation. Such events can also be excellent drivers for initiating leadership amongst students.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Policy recommendations entail investing greater efforts into unifying the supports for individuals from different immigrant and refugee routes. Furthermore, policies and social policies guiding education and civic engagement should be similarly revisited as it seems that the segregation of Arab immigrant emerging adults from Canadian counterparts is a systemic barrier that may hinder the opportunity to successfully acculturate in Canada. Some of the recommendations stemming from this study are shared.

- I. Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) should revisit the model of current settlement and integration services. Support programs and services should have an open access to all newcomers, irrespective of their immigration or refugee routes. Currently, the support is more directly structured for GARs, and

other categories may either be denied access due to status in Canada or may not be aware of existing programs and services

- II. There is some evident lack of awareness of existent federal (e.g., Settlement support) and provincial (e.g., Newcomer Support Program) programs that extend to support newcomers beyond the GAR category. Organizations and stakeholders in the immigrants and refugees' support sectors should dedicate greater efforts to target and promote available programs and services to newcomers. This may require a greater collaboration between federal representatives from IRCC such as Immigration officers, provincial and local leaders that may be first recipients of data on newcomers arriving in the region, and the respective local agencies and organizing bodies. For example, greater efforts are being dedicated locally to consolidate the support between secondary institutions and organizing bodies such as WE LIP to better support international students and enhance their adjustment experiences in Windsor Essex.
- III. The Windsor-Essex region readiness to support Syrian refugees' influx was an excellent example of how federal policies and local efforts should be in consolidation. Syrian refugees in this study reported more positive adjustment and settlement support experiences than Iraqi refugees, for example. This could be associated with the preparation and support received by the local community in preparation for this newcomer community. While the policies government practice with immigrants and refugees is more federal (usually funded and structured through IRCC), there should be similar efforts extended to local communities to enable them to similarly prepare for the arrival and support of

other newcomer groups. The Windsor-Essex region is a highly diverse region in cultural backgrounds, and there are multiple settlement and integration stakeholders eager to support the effective integration of newcomer groups. Local communities should be further supported with policies, additional funding, and IRCC-funded time and opportunity for preparation stage, before the actual arrival of the respective newcomer group. This seemed to have been effective for the Syrian refugee groups and such positive effect could, therefore, be replicated with other groups.

- IV. Pre-immigration program to newcomers is another area that can support their adjustment here in Canada, and specifically in Windsor-Essex. I have learnt from practical experience about a pre-immigration program that is delivered to refugees before arriving to Canada, but some have deemed it to be not effective, or that their experiences did not match what was learned. Making such programs more available and targeting the respective immigrant or refugee could be helpful. This program should be modified to focus on resettlement and settlement needs specific to the respective immigrant and refugee. It should include elements about Canada in general and the respective community they plan to reside in.
- V. Education policies should also consolidate where the Ministry of Education should dedicate greater opportunities for teachers to expand their cultural sensitivity and cultural humility. Considerations should not only be devoted to the nature of training or professional development, but for also integrating such opportunities structurally that teachers would be allowed to participate within their dedicated working hours. There should be greater support and guidance from

the Ministry of Education to make such training opportunities mandatorily be offered by school administration. These professional training programs should focus on cultural humility as a primary goal so teachers can best engage in self-reflection and identify competency as well as gaps in knowledge and readiness to support diverse students. These training opportunities should integrate conceptual knowledge as well as practical recommendations on antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion to best equip teachers to respond to issues pertaining to inequity and possible issues of racism. Further, teachers should be allowed to complete these training programs and opportunities within their designated working time. This could help support against the risk of teachers' burnout as they prepare to support diverse learning styles.

### **Social Work Education**

In social work education, there should be greater attention to better equip graduating social work students in supporting an increasingly diverse client base. As cultural competence and respect for cultural diversity is a core skill and one of the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, it is important to dedicate curriculum and class discussions that target this value. Conversations, however, should be extending beyond cultural competence to include concepts of cultural sensitivity, cultural humility, and other concurrent practical terminologies that are emerging from ongoing efforts to increase the effectiveness of supporting diverse clientele. Integrating CRT into curriculum could greatly help in helping students contextualize the structural challenges that could potentially be experienced at each level of practice (i.e., micro, meso-, exo- and macro levels of practice).



Social work students should also be exposed to intersectionality as a key element. This can support them in equitable and inclusive interventions to their clients, and this is where CRT can help best enhance both their assessment as well as potential interventions with their respective clients. As well, it is anticipated to better equip them to enhance AOP-driven efforts to identify and potentially advocate for change of oppressive practices that could be hindering to their clients' wellbeing. Moreover, supporting students through enhancing curricula that stem from authors from diverse backgrounds would be critical to include to enhance their exposure to sources of knowledge beyond the dominant perspectives.

Finally, facilitating and challenging in class discussions that require the student to apply a critical lens, a critical race lens, and an intersectional lens is anticipated to contribute to enhancing the knowledge and understanding of different forms of racism and oppression. Students could further be exposed to knowledge of diverse immigrant and refugee populations. Integrating opportunities for cultural knowledge exchange between students and members of diverse communities would further enhance the understanding, the allyship, and the devotion of social workers in future to advocate and potentially contribute to a more socially just Canadian society.

### **Scholarship and Research**

Studies on acculturation are emerging in the social work field. The current study expands on knowledge of acculturation through examining it from the critical race lens which helped inform how the perception of racial identity would inform understanding acculturation. As well, the application of the intersectional lens further builds on understanding the acculturation phenomenon as a product of interlocking identities, systems, and ideologies that inform the acculturation process as a lived experience among immigrants and refugees. Further, to my

current knowledge and as this study emerges, this study expands social work research and knowledge on acculturation through phenomenological approaches to understand the Arab immigrant emerging adult experience. As well, the study also targets the intersectional identities of an Arab immigrant to best understand how these are influential on their conceptualization of acculturation.

Future studies should also target the two unique cases of Kurdish-Syrians in Canada and Chaldean vs. Christian identification respectively. For Kurdish-Syrians, their experience presents a unique example not only with the acculturation process, but also with their quantification of attributes that constitute their ethnic and racial identities. Their identification with the term “Arab” and Arab communities despite their Kurdish origin should be further explored. Similar approaches to studying the experiences of Christian vs. Chaldean identification could also be applied. For both, it is recommended that a structural lens such as the Critical Race Theory lens be adopted to best contextualization the representation and understanding of these identities while also attuning to the time and context in which they are experienced. As well, CRT can help inform how race intersects with other factors to shape their experiences and identities, respectively.

Language and cultural brokering can be another area to be examined to help enhance understanding of the role it plays as it intersects with other demographics to shape the acculturation experience. Furthermore, this study took place a few days before the contemporary events that targeted the Muslim community in London, Ontario, Canada. As well, the Quebec City Mosque massacre took place on January 29th, 2017, costing the lives of six individuals and injuring many more. This event was, therefore, quite recently experienced. Interestingly, and in contrast to my assumptions, none of the participants referred to these attacks or brought them

forward as a demonstration of racism or discrimination. The concept of why such integral sociopolitical events that targeted the community would not be mentioned as an example of racism or discrimination should be further explored.

Future studies should target equitable participation as a concept to further understand acculturation and generally immigration and refugee experiences in Canada. For example, future studies could ask the question, “What does equitable participation mean to you?” In essence, equitable participation should be operationalized differently where participants should be asked what it means to them and what practices constitute as equitable opportunities for them. Future studies can also target racial identity and ethnic identity of Arab immigrants, among other immigrant groups. Further, future studies can consider individuals who have been living longer than five years in Canada for 10-20 years or an extended time- period as this may help inform whether they become acculturated and aware of how our Canadian society is in fact racialized and colonial, and investigate to whether they would, then, be more exposed to greater instances of oppression and racism.

Studies should also invest in understanding the two special cases of Kurdish Syrian and Christian vs. Chaldean identities respectively to formulate greater knowledge into how these identities are shaped and whether they are based on cultural, racial, or ethnic bases. Furthermore, gender differences were not sensed in the experience; future studies could investigate into this further.

Finally, future studies can be devoted to further enhance the understanding of acculturation of racial and ethnic identifications of minority groups, especially those experiencing oppression in their first migration country before coming to Canada. Consequently, experiences of secondary migration and how these inform the understanding of the acculturation

phenomenon for immigrants and refugees would also be an important element of study. Specifically, the studies should focus on further learning about the adopted roles that some emerging adults had to assume based on their needs and families' needs. Emerging adults may have had to leave education and focus on securing employment to meet their needs and their families' needs. The impact that this role had on their adjustment and a comparison between that and coming to Canada, where they were essentially forced to reintegrate back in the education system should be further explored. Future studies should have greater elaboration on the racial identity question. In this study, I specifically asked what race they would identify with, but I did not follow up to learn about the insights from which they derived this identity further. Future studies should focus on enhancing knowledge further on the Arab racial identity while contextualizing it with the respective community where they would be present at the time of the study. Studies can either target White settler societies like here in Canada or the United States, countries of asylum -where applicable-, and their home communities and examine whether their identification changes. One model that I have recently encountered and continue to learn about is the area of liberation psychology from which the racial-ethnic trauma has been derived to help explain experiences of oppressed groups, including Americans of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) descent. The racial ethnic trauma model has been supportive in explain experiences of the oppressed individuals and groups (Awad et al., 2019). Future studies could apply this model as a lens to enhance understanding of the oppressed and contributing sociopolitical structures that could sustain oppression across time.

### **Limitations of Study**

The study has a few limitations. First, the translation from Arabic to English could have resulted in some differences or limited derived messages despite all efforts were greatly devoted

to minimizing this impact. Further, the interviews were directly translated to English, but the transcripts were not back translated to Arabic. Second, while efforts were made to ensure the consistency of the data collection and analysis, and while the research assistant received extensive training and support, analyses may be impacted by the different lenses she and I adopt. We come from different intersectional identities and social locations, and this may influence the analysis and approach through which data were collected in the interviews that she conducted.

In the data collection, some questions may have been limiting to the participants' shared insights. First, the approach to asking about race and ethnicity may have been somewhat limiting. While I asked participants to specifically identify their ethnicity and race or racial identity, and while I encouraged some elaboration on their shared responses, dedicating further focus to understand how they formulated their ethnicity, and their race would further enhance knowledge on these dynamics. As well, relating it back to living in Canadian society could also further inform how their engagement with their ethnic and national communities may influence their perception of race and ethnicity and may in turn impact their acculturation experience. From the shared responses, I did not capture that Arab immigrant emerging adults believe that they live in a racialized Canadian society and expanding questions on race and ethnicity may better inform this aspect.

Similarly, the question on civic engagement being an element to define equitable participation could also have been somewhat limiting. The question should be improved to understand first how do participants understand equitable participation and what would it be like to them; is it voting, volunteerism, or being actively involved in the Canadian community? The question could then be followed to investigate further into the ways in which they are engaged in their new community, and what aspects of their involvements are more meaningful and

important to them. Further, specific to education experiences, immigrants could be asked to reflect on how equitable they perceived their opportunities in education when compared to their Canadian counterparts. Receiving support from their teachers or educators to pursue educational aspirations without discouragement that these may be “difficult” for the newcomer student could be an indicator of being provided equitable opportunities in comparison to their Canadian counterparts. Further, assessing efforts in school to amalgamate or increase integration with Canadian peers would be another key indicator of the Canadian education system’s efforts to secure equitable education journey for all irrespective of status in Canada.

Finally, due to COVID-19 restrictions and the need to conduct the interviews virtually, some of the nonverbal communications that could be derived from in-person interviews were relatively missed. I focused on the voice tone and used field notes to describe some of the emotions and passion I sensed in the participants. However, it would be more informative and supportive to understand the essence of this experience if I had the opportunity to be in person. As well, technological errors and connections were disruptive in some interviews. The challenges of attending to these in addition to focusing on investing myself as the researcher were somewhat difficult.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Applying Critical Race Theory (CRT) to understand the acculturation phenomenon amongst Arab immigrant emerging adults was a liberating step that enabled looking beyond the individual responsibility and onto systems and structures that are a product of colonization. Living through their Arab heritage and Canadian society forced Arab immigrant emerging adults into a journey of significant devotions to resolving tensions. Arab immigrant emerging adults were adamant to preserve their Arab heritage and identity and pass it onto future generations.

Concurrently, they were persistent to establish themselves as active citizens in their new local Canadian society. The cost of investing in enhancing their integration was of utmost concern as they sensed they had to give up part of their identity to merge successfully into their new community. In their view, successful Arab immigrant acculturation process would be only attainable through ensuring their equitable participation in the Canadian society. However, CRT has enabled the research to deconstruct how colonialist practices shaping the Canadian settler society were rather significant and embedded in structural and systemic practices, thus complicating the Arab immigrant and refugee experience. The acculturation process amongst Arab immigrant emerging adults should be contextualized with an intersectional lens and a critical deconstruction of the dominant (Canadian) – subordinate (Arab) relationship to enhance the understanding of and, in future, support altering the experience of this phenomenon. The Arab immigrant emerging adult brings a wealth of cultural heritage, determination, and eagerness to grow as an active, contributing citizen to their new Canadian society. However, they would be able to fulfill their potential and prosper only through committing to admitting the dominant-driven practices and minimizing the imposition of such practices on the newcomer Arab immigrant.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Consent Package



#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: **First Generation Recent Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Riham Al-Saadi, PhD Candidate and Dr. Wansoo Park, Associate Professor** from the **School of Social Work** at the University of Windsor. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. **The results will be contributed to a doctoral dissertation.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact **Riham Al-Saadi at (226) 345-8666, email: rihama@uwindsor.ca OR Dr. Wansoo Park at (519) 253-3000 ext. 3069, email: wansoo@uwindsor.ca**

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to understand your perception of your experience of immigrating to Canada, the successes and challenges experienced as you adjust here in Canada. The researcher is interested in learning about the degree to which you preserve your Arab heritage, and how does that influence your interactions with the larger, Canadian society. The researcher is interested in understanding what role the Canadian society plays to shape your experience as you establish your integration here in Canada.

#### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in an online interview using Zoom or Teams, both are online applications that allow video and voice meetings to take place. The interview will be audiotaped using Zoom or Teams application. If you are uncomfortable with using video, you will have the option to turn the

camera off. You will have the option to conduct the interview in your preferred language, English or Arabic.

First, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire with a couple of additional questions to learn more about you. The researcher will then ask you a series of open-ended questions which ask you to reflect on your immigration and adjustment experience in Canada, and the influence of your Arab heritage and interaction with the Canadian society on this experience.

The interviewer will be taking field notes during and following the interview, these notes will be used for data analysis. The researcher plans to use direct quotes from participants in writing the dissertation.

Upon the completion of the interview, you will also be asked for your permission to be contacted for future research studies that may target a similar research area.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences that are anticipated to arise in the interview. As questions are asking you to reflect on your experience, there may be some emotional or psychological discomforts that may arise. If that occurs, the researcher will have immediate resources for emotional support in both languages, English and Arabic. As the interview is conducted online, the researcher is dedicated to ensuring the risks to privacy of your responses are minimized. The researcher asks to ensure that you engage in the interview in a confidential space. As well, the researcher is taking additional measures of security of data collection and storage to ensure confidentiality of your responses.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, you may find it beneficial to tell your story, gain insights about yourself and connecting the events to your experienced emotions. As well, your contribution to the research study will support researchers and practitioners in understanding your acculturation experience and influential factors. In turn, this may help in enhancing supports and services for the immigrants from Arab culture group and your age group as an emerging adult to foster a positive experience and enhance a sense of belonging in the new, Canadian society.

### **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

If you choose to participate, you will receive a **\$35- value e-gift certificate** that will be provided to you online.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. The data will be virtually saved using a password-protected file to which only the researcher, faculty supervisor, and research assistant will have access. Data will be retained for five years. Only de-identified data and study results will be shared with community organizations and members to provide implications for understanding the Arab immigrant and refugee experience and enhancing existent supports and services to enhance emotional and social wellbeing of Arab immigrant emerging adults.

The video/audio file will only be accessible by the researcher, faculty supervisor, and research assistant. You will have the right to request review the tape at anytime up to one year following the data collection. The video/audio files will be erased five years after conducting the interview.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You have the right to withdraw at anytime during the interview. You will be able to retain the honorarium from the study even if you decide not to proceed with the interview. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so; for example, if information is retained where you do not match the criteria required to participate in the study.

## **FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS**

A summary of the research study findings will be available upon the completion of the study on the following University of Windsor research platform:

**Summary for Participants platform here is the link:**

Web address: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/>

Date when results are available: \_ June 2022 \_\_\_\_

## **SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

## **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: The Office of Research Ethics, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

I understand the information provided for the study **First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation** as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Name of Participant

---

Date

## **SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR (Virtual Signature)**

---

---

Signature of Investigator

Date



### **Consent to Participate and Audio Recording**

I, [participant name verbally shared] consent to participate in the study, **First- Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults’ Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society’s Role in Fostering Equitable Participation** and to have the interview audio recorded.

**Participant’s Name:**

**Participant’s Consent Virtually Obtained:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Name and Virtual Signature of the Researcher/Research Assistant:**

**Date:**

## First Generation Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults and Acculturation

**Are you 18 to 25 years of age?**

**Are you of Arab descent?**

**Did you immigrate to Canada  
within the last 5 years?**

**Do you speak English and/or Arabic?**

**If you answered YES to all of the  
above questions, then you are  
invited to participate in a research  
study!**

We are seeking your input on your immigration experience so far in Canada, and the successes and challenges of bringing your heritage and participating in Canadian society. You will receive a \$35 e-gift card upon participation.

If you are interested to join our research study, please contact Riham Al-Saadi, at (226) 345-8666 OR by email on [rihama@uwindsor.ca](mailto:rihama@uwindsor.ca).

You can also contact Sally Polus, Research Assistant at (519) 991-4771 OR by email on [polus@uwindsor.ca](mailto:polus@uwindsor.ca)

If you would like to learn more about the study, please contact Riham Al-Saadi on the above contact information. OR please contact Dr. Wansoo Park from the School of Social Work on the following information: (519) 253-3000 ext. 3069 or email [wansoo@uwindsor.ca](mailto:wansoo@uwindsor.ca)



University  
of Windsor

*This study has  
received  
clearance  
by the  
University of Windsor  
Research Ethics Board.*



## Appendix C- Recruitment Email for Stakeholders

**Recruitment Email(s) for Stakeholders for First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation Doctoral Dissertation**  
Principal Investigator: Riham Al-Saadi  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Wansoo Park  
School of Social Work, University of Windsor

*Note- This recruitment email will be altered with each party's information before sending, please see the general composition below:*

Hello,

My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor. I am currently conducting my dissertation study titled, 'First- Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation', under the supervision of Dr. Wansoo Park. It is a qualitative study seeking to understand the acculturation experiences (i.e., living between the Arab, heritage culture and the Canadian, host culture) of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults who have been in Canada within the last 5 years. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

I am hereby seeking to collaborate with you to support the recruitment for this study. I am targeting a total sample of 25 participants. The criteria I am seeking is immigrants or refugees identifying as an Arab descent; 18 to 25 years of age; living in Windsor-Essex for up to five years. The study is open to all genders and all religious backgrounds. Please find the enclosed recruitment flyer that best outlines participant criteria.

The recruitment process will be in two-fold; first, I would request that you share my study's information using the email script enclosed below and the recruitment flyer attached to this email with all the **[Insert Party Name] (e.g., WE LIP Council, Diversity Advisory Committee)** members requesting that distribute the study's information accordingly to their clientele/contacts. Second, I hereby request that you provide me with an opportunity within our next meeting to dedicate 15 to 30 minutes maximum to present about my study, share recruitment criteria and address inquiries accordingly.

Following the completion of my research study analysis, I look forward to collaborating with you again to identify the best medium for me to disseminate the study results. Through dissemination, I look forward to sharing the implications of my study with our respective community members to continue our integral efforts as the Windsor-Essex community in housing diverse groups and enhancing their active membership and successful integration in our community.

If you require further information or have the opportunity to set up a meeting to further discuss the study and requirements, please provide me with your best available time so I can coordinate to meet with you.

Thank you for your consideration and support,

Respectfully,

*Riham Al-Saadi*, MSW, RSW, PhD Candidate

### **Email Script to Forward:**

Hello,

My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor. I am currently conducting my dissertation study titled, 'First- Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation', under the supervision of Dr. Wansoo Park. It is a qualitative study seeking to understand the acculturation experiences (i.e., living between the Arab, heritage culture and the Canadian, host culture) of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults who have been in Canada within the last 5 years. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

I am hereby seeking your support for recruitment for this study. I am targeting a total sample of 25 participants. The criteria I am seeking is immigrants or refugees identifying as an Arab descent; 18 to 25 years of age; living in Windsor-Essex for up to five years. The study is open to all genders and all religious backgrounds. Please find the attached the recruitment flyer that best outlines the research study details for those interested to participate in this research study.

If you would like to learn more about the study or have further inquiries about participation, please contact me, Riham Al-Saadi, via email, [rihama@uwindsor.ca](mailto:rihama@uwindsor.ca), or contact number, 1(226) 345-8666. You can also contact my Supervisor, Dr. Wansoo Park on the following: (519) 253-3000 ext. 3069 or [wansoo@uwindsor.ca](mailto:wansoo@uwindsor.ca).

Respectfully,

*Riham Al-Saadi*, MSW, RSW, PhD Candidate

## Appendix D- Recruitment Email for Participants

### **Recruitment Email for Participants for First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation** Doctoral Dissertation

Principal Investigator: Riham Al-Saadi

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Wansoo Park

School of Social Work, University of Windsor

Hello,

Thank you for expressing your interest to participate in the study, *First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation*.

My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor.

**(If RA receives the email, update to RA name and as follows: My name is [insert RA name], I am a Research Assistant, working with Riham Al-Saadi, PhD candidate and Dr. Wansoo Park, University of Windsor).**

This study is part of completing my doctoral studies, under the supervision of Dr. Wansoo Park, Associate Professor, School of Social Work. It is a qualitative study seeking to understand the acculturation experiences (i.e., living between the Arab, heritage culture and the Canadian, host culture) of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

If you consent to participate in the study, you will be asked to conduct an interview online via Zoom or Teams. You will have the option to turn the camera *off* if you are uncomfortable with being on camera. The interview will take between 1-hour to 1.5 hours, it will begin with asking you to complete a demographic questionnaire then the interviewer will ask a series of open-ended questions to reflect on your immigration and adjustment experience here, reflecting on the impact of your Arab heritage and the Canadian society on your experience.

If you wish to participate, please reply to this email with your response to the following:

1. Please select the best day/date and time out of the following; if none work for you, please suggest a day/date and time.
2. On which online platform would you like to conduct the interview?
  - a. Zoom
  - b. Teams
3. In which language would you like to primarily conduct the interview?
  - a. English
  - b. Arabic

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me and I will gladly address.

Thank you very much,

Riham Al-Saadi, MSW, RSW, PhD Candidate

## Appendix E-Social Network Recruitment

### Appendix E-Social Network/Internet Posting

#### Social Networking/Internet Posting

Hello,

My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work, University of Windsor. I am currently conducting my dissertation study titled, 'First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation' under the supervision of Dr. Wansoo Park. It is a qualitative study seeking to understand the acculturation experiences (i.e., living between the Arab, heritage culture and the Canadian, host culture) of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

I am looking for your support with recruitment. I am requesting to post the following message and study flyer on your respective social media pages.

**\*Study Participation Alert\***

**My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor. I am currently conducting my doctoral dissertation to understand the experiences of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults in Canada. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. Please see the study flyer attached.**

**If you, or someone you know, are interested to participate, please connect with me on the email and contact number on the flyer. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out as well.**

**I look forward to hearing from you!**

***Riham Al-Saadi, PhD Candidate, University of Windsor***

If you require further information or have the opportunity to set up a meeting to further discuss the study and requirements, please provide me with your best available time so I can coordinate to meet with you.

Thank you for your consideration and support,

Respectfully,

*Riham Al-Saadi, MSW, RSW, PhD Candidate*

## Social Media Research Page(s)

Research study's **Facebook** page: <https://www.facebook.com/Arab-Immigrant-Emerging-Adults-Acculturation-in-Canada-Study-106884038156797>

Research study's **Instagram** page: <https://www.instagram.com/aicastudy/>

## Social Media “Welcome” Post

*Once the social media page is officially launched, post the following as a “Welcome” message:*

Welcome to Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Acculturation in Canada Study Page!

My name is Riham Al-Saadi, I am a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Work, University of Windsor. I am currently conducting my dissertation study titled, 'First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation' under the supervision of Dr. Wansoo Park. It is a qualitative study seeking to understand the acculturation experiences (i.e., living between the Arab, heritage culture and the Canadian, host culture) of Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults. The study has received clearance by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

Please find more details on how you can participate in the attached flyer (**\*attach flyer as a picture or a pdf. file**). Please share the page and study details with anyone who you believe may be interested to participate and have them contact me here!

Wishing you a great day,  
Respectfully,  
Riham Al-Saadi, PhD Candidate,  
School of Social Work, University of Windsor

## **Appendix F-Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Guide**

First Generation Recent Arab Immigrant Emerging Adults' Perspectives on Acculturation  
Experiences and Canadian Society's Role in Fostering Equitable Participation  
Doctoral Dissertation

Principal Investigator: Riham Al-Saadi

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Wansoo Park

School of Social Work, University of Windsor

### **A. Demographic Questionnaire**

1. Please indicate whether you would like to conduct the interview in English or in Arabic:
  - a. English
  - b. Arabic
2. What is your age? Please specify -----
3. What is your gender? Please specify -----
4. What is your ethnic background?
5. When did you come to Canada? Please provide month and year -----
6. Did you come as an immigrant or a refugee to Canada?
  - a. Immigrant. Please provide the immigration route you came through
    - i. Investment, alone or with family
    - ii. Study permit
    - iii. Work permit
    - iv. As a skilled Worker; for example, through express entry
    - v. Family reunification, joined the family by sponsorship
    - vi. Other, please specify -----
    - vii. Unsure
  - b. Refugee. Please provide the refugee route you came through
    - i. Government Assisted Sponsorship (GAR)
    - ii. Private Sponsored Refugee (PSR; through a Church, Super visa etc.)
    - iii. Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) (had both government and private sponsored support)
    - iv. Unsure
7. What language do you speak most often at home? -----
8. What is your religion? -----
9. Where were you born? -----
10. Is this the same country as your nationality?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
11. What is your highest level of education?
  - a. No formal education
  - b. High school diploma
  - c. College degree

- d. Bachelor's degree
  - e. Master's degree
  - f. Doctorate degree
  - g. Other
12. Are you attending school here in Canada?
- a. Yes
    - i. Please indicate what school/educational institution -----
    - ii. Level of study -----
    - iii. Field of study -----
  - b. No
13. Are you currently working?
- a. Yes
    - i. Full-time position
    - ii. Part-time
    - iii. Seasonal/Casual position
  - b. No

*Please answer the following two questions to help learn more about you:*

14. Please rank the following from the most to the least important to you:
- a. Education
  - b. Career, having a job
  - c. Romantic relations
  - d. Marriage, establishing a family
  - e. Civic engagement (volunteering, being active in your community of Windsor-Essex)
15. Think of someone or multiple individuals that you have an important role in your life and can help you in making life-decisions. If you would give this person/these people the same list, how do you think they would rank the items from most to least important for you?
- a. Education
  - b. Career, having a job
  - c. Romantic relations
  - d. Marriage, establishing a family
  - e. Civic engagement (volunteering, being active in your community of Windsor-Essex)

## **B. Interview Guide**

### Interview Questions

- I. How do you describe your Arab ethnicity and heritage? What is your race/racial background?
- II. Please describe your immigration experience and adjustment process here in Canada?



- III. What are some values that you carry from your Arab heritage that you consider are important to you?
- IV. What does “Canadian” mean to you? How would you describe the “Canadian society”?
  - a. What are some values that you would adopt, or have adopted, since immigrating here to Canada that you consider are important to you?

*For questions I to IV, ensure to ask the following probing questions. It is very important to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the **process** of acculturation. Attempt to gather as much detail possible about significance of the experience or event, a pattern, and the meaning different experiences hold for the interviewee.*

- a. *When did that happen?*
  - b. *Was it the first time this happened, or did you experience it prior to this?*
  - c. *Tell me more about...*
  - d. *What does that mean to you?*
  - e. *If I were to draw a timeline for that year in Canada, what would you put as significant experiences or milestones that you had. (use probing questions a-d to help gain more in-depth responses).*
- V. What is it like to be an Arab (\*insert participant religion/spiritual belief\*) here in Canada?
- VI. What does it mean to be speaking Arabic language in Canada?
  - a. *Probing question(s)*
    - i. *Please describe the role your Arabic language played in your settlement experience here in Canada.*
    - ii. *Please give some examples*
- VII. Please describe your involvement with local community centres, cultural centres and institutions, religious groups, and centres here in Canada. (**Addressing equitable participation and sociopolitical engagements**)
  - a. *Probing question(s)*
    - i. Please describe the level of your activity and involvement and what role did they play in your settlement and integration.
    - ii. Please describe similar engagements/involvements back home.
- VIII. What influence did your Arab community have on your adjustment experience here in Canada? What influence did the rest of the society, larger Canadian society, have on your adjustment experience?
  - a. What changes would you like to see for the Canadian society and your local Arab community to be of greater support in your adjustment?
  - b. *Prompt- look for instances of experiences of racism, discrimination or being oppressed due to their Arab culture or religion. If this wasn't indicated, then ask the following follow-up question: Have any of these elements that you listed led you to being discriminated against, treated differently, or negatively, due to being an Arab OR due to belonging to your religion (name participant's religion).*

## Appendix G- Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for clarity purposes for their use in the study. Both academic and government sources were utilized to define these terms.

### *Acculturation*

Cultural and psychological changes that immigrant heritage groups and dominant host groups undergo resulting from their interactions with one another; with changes occurring on both individual and group levels (Berry, 2006, 2014; Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Berry & Hou, 2016; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Berry & Sam, 2013).

### *Adaptation*

The term adaptation could be used interchangeably with adjustment to represent a positive outcome(s) of being in a new society or context Aroian et al., 2016; Berry, 2014; Berry et al., 2006; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; Paterson, 2008; Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012).

### *Adjustment*

The terms adjustment is used to represent positive adaptation in a new context. In this study, it will be used to explain the psychological and sociocultural adjustments of immigrants in the new, host society (Amer, 2014; Aroian, et al., 2016; Berry, 1997, 2014; Berry et al., 2006; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012).

### *Arab*

The term ‘Arab’ refers to an individual or group who share a common ethno-linguistic identity. Arabs can be defined by means of geographic distribution, migration history, unified mean of communication, as well as history of civilization and common culture. Arabs inhabit regions of Western Asia and Africa (Masters & Sergie, 2020; Middle East Policy Council, 2020). Arabs’ ancestral background can be best traced to the twenty-two members of the Arab League,

which was formed in 1945 to meet common interests of the Arab region and in response to colonial divisions of the territory. Members come together to address such matters as economics, culture, social welfare and health. The Arab League consists of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mauritania, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Comoros (Masters & Sergie, 2020). The definition of the Arab League is most commonly adopted in previous research on Arab populations (Paterson, 2008; Paterson & Hakim-Larson, 2012; Rasmi et al., 2016). Through migration within the region searching for resources and meeting basic needs, the Arabian Peninsula was formulated. While the Arabian Peninsula is considered the origin of culture and linguistics denoting the Arab ethnicity, today the Peninsula holds a critical geopolitical role that it acquires due to possession of vast reserves of oil and natural gas (New World Encyclopedia, 2008). The Arabic language serves as the unified mean of communication among Arabs; the language has its origins Hebrew and Aramaic languages (Middle East Policy Council, 2020, Mir, 2019). All Arab nations share Arabic as the mother-tongue language but speak it in different dialects. The difference in dialects is an outcome of a history of civilization and culture formation that resulted from European colonization of the Arab world primarily by Britain and France; hence, English and French are commonly spoken languages in most of the Arab world (Mir, 2019; New World Encyclopedia, 2014).

#### *Canadian Host Society*

The Canadian host society refers to the joint effort of members of the dominant groups in Canada that are either stakeholders in the immigrants and refugee sector, or that are members of the larger society with whom Arab immigrant emerging adults would interact (Amer, 2007;

Berry, 2016; Berry & Hou, 2017, 2019; El-Geledi & Bouhris, 2012; LeMaster et al., 2017; Xu, 2019).

### *Diversity*

Referring to a community or context, the term diversity is used to refer to variations in culture, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, and sexual orientation (Berry, 2016)

### *Emerging adults*

A recent theorization of the developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood. The term was coined by Arnett (2000, 2003, 2007) to refer to individuals between 18 and 25 years of age that are undergoing a transitional stage with significant identity and role explorations (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2007). Note that some empirical and conceptual studies have used the term youth to refer to this age group.

### *Host/ Dominant culture*

A host culture is the culture or society that accepts immigrants and refugees (Berry, 2016, 2019; Berry et al., 2006; LeMaster et al., 2018). Commonly, in Canada and the United States, a host culture may be White dominated; the definition may differ if utilized in other contexts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota et al., 2015). In this study, the terms host and dominant cultures may be used interchangeably to discuss immigration and acculturation experiences, depending on the context within which they are used in the reviewed empirical and conceptual literature.

### *Heritage culture*

A heritage culture refers to ethnocultural groups' own cultures. Heritage culture may be referred to as the immigrant culture, culture of origin, ethnic, ethno-cultural group or non-

dominant culture (Berry, 2006, 2019; Behrens et al., 2015, Ng & Metz, 2015; Rasmi et al., 2016; Sam et al., 2008).

### *Immigrant*

The term immigrant will be used to refer an individual or a group who have left their home country to live in a new country (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2020).

### *Integration*

Integration is the process where immigrant individuals and groups maintain their cultural heritage, while they seek to establish relations with the dominant/host society (Berry, 2001, 2005, 2014; Paterson, 2008, Behrens et al., 2015)

### *Islam*

Islam is the youngest of the major world religions, dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century; it started in Mecca, with prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Islam It is the second largest religion globally after Christianity. It started in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Islam means “submission to the will of God” (History Canada, 2019)

### *Muslim*

A Muslim is a follower or worshipper of Islam; they worship one God that they refer to in Arabic as Allah. Currently, there are 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide with the number of those joining the Islamic religion quickly growing (History Canada, 2019)

### *Oppression*

The act of operationalizing racism; the exercise of power and privileged status by an oppressor, superior group as it defines norms for oneself and others, as well as maintains a dominant role in institutions and sociopolitical systems. There are multiple forms of oppressions,

all of which potentially lead the inferior, target group to respond by accepting its role and social status as normal (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Waltnkins-Liu, 2018).

### *Race*

Race has been initially defined as a discrete construct and based on biological terms; genetics and physical features were used to allocate individuals to a particular racial group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gupta et al., 2007; Gilborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Kubota, 2015). Race has later been theorized again by critical race theorists; they defined race as a social construct that is shaped according to sociopolitical influences resulting from the political system (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018).

### *Racism*

Established ideologies and practices that are based on perceived superiority of one group over another on bases of race, colour, ethnicity, and cultural heritage (Abrams & Moio, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Racism is embedded in the social system; hence it is highly influential on our ways of thinking that it may become ‘invisible’ (Abrams & Mojo, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

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