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## *Curriculum as Planned: Who Is Affected When Difference Is Marginalized?*

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### **Abstract:**

How does a minority mother explain to her Canadian children the meaning of “exclusion”, “religious stigmatization” and “discrimination” when she sees her children’s identity being shaped by “structured silences” (Greene, 1993) in curriculum? Curriculum, in any time and place, is a contested site where debate occurs regarding whose values and beliefs will achieve legitimation through acceptance in the national discourse (Klieberd, 1995). My children live in liminality, as holders of hybrid identities, multiple languages, beliefs and cultures, juxtaposed against a social story of Canadian classroom teaching. Experiences such as theirs “challenge the conceptualization of curriculum as a prefabricated plan” (Wilson, Ehret, Lewkowich, & Kredl, 2017) and foreground the “blind impresses” (Rorty, 1989), gaps and silences of ideology, perceptions and practices (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). What are the implications when difference is censored or marginalized? By using autobiographical narrative inquiry and poetic representation, I interrogate my children’s experiences with the Canadian curriculum from the positioning of a minority parent. I explore “encounters” (Greene, 1967) through my unique lens, and propose positioning parents integrally in curriculum conversations in order to move curriculum conceptualizations from a place of binaries defined by “us” and “them”, by “dominant culture” and “minorities”, to a place of shared hope and responsibility, to a just and democratic society.

**Keywords:** autobiographical narrative inquiry; minority mother; ethnicity; inclusive curriculum

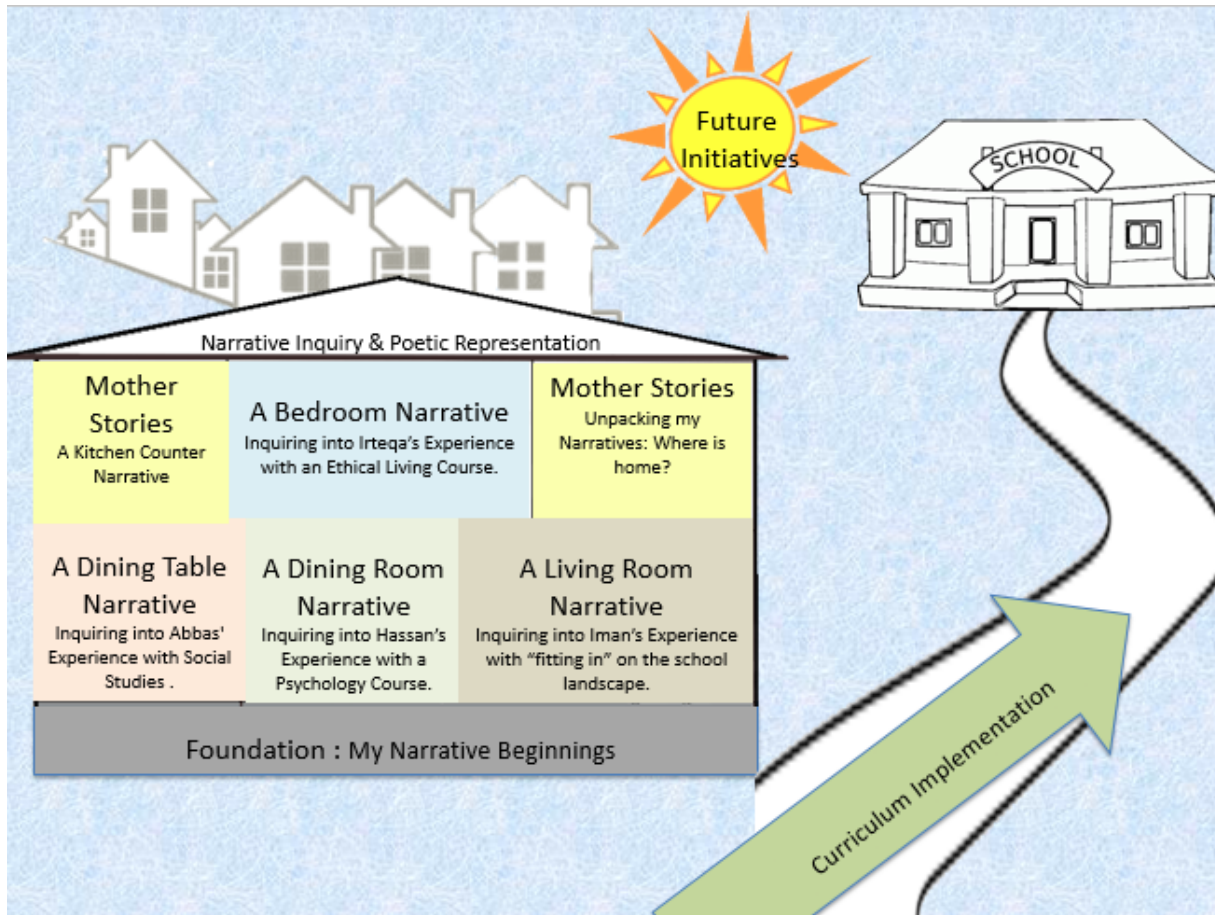


Figure 1. Poem and art by author.

## My Narrative Beginnings

### A Kitchen Counter Narrative

As I sit at my kitchen counter writing, I notice that my husband has turned on the television. The breaking news on CBC flashes disturbing scenes which go beyond the typical worries that may flit across a traveler's mind before taking off for a flight. I am frozen by an image of a security officer forcibly removing a passenger from his seat and dragging him, screaming, off the plane. Watching this extremely troubling video—seeing the airport, the plane, the mistreatment, the fact that the passenger is of Vietnamese-American heritage and a doctor by profession—brings back many memories of my own lived experiences. I am flooded with emotions and swirled in images, taken back to the time when my husband, who is also a doctor, worked as a porter and baggage handler at Pearson International Airport in Toronto. He took the job within six months of our arrival to Canada as Pakistani immigrants. The airport is a place of significance: one that unites and separates me from my loved ones; one that I enter with new hopes, dreams and aspirations; one where I feel pride in my importance as an individual who has been allowed to immigrate to Canada. At the same time, it is a place where I learned how dreams shift, twist and are challenged, where I learned what othering means, and one that marked my journey from passenger to complete stranger in a new country.

Muhammad's first job at the Toronto Pearson airport began with him making a new resume to remove many of his degrees in order to get accepted as a luggage loader. His job became a constant reminder for us of our arrival, living experiences and positioning in Canada. Loading and unloading baggage and seeing planes flying back and forth everyday became a regular struggle as it caused us to ponder our challenges of beginning a new life in a new home.

One bright morning, we turned on the news to witness something that horrified the whole world. Not only did 9/11 change the American nation and the lives of all those who lost their loved ones, but it also changed the lives of every single Muslim living on this planet, especially those living in the West. When terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre—the icons of capitalism, the towers which seemed to represent the very neo-liberal ideas that have come to be the very foundations of the United States (and thus the West itself)—the worth and value of different lives were altered permanently (Baliko, 2014). On the very day in which 9/11 smeared Muslims with a new identity in the world, my husband received a phone call from his employer at the airport. He was told not to come to work anymore as his services were no longer needed. My husband's journey from racial to religious discrimination happened faster than the unfolding story of 9/11. He was no longer an immigrant, a Pakistani, a doctor, or a porter, he was only a "Muslim" in Canada. Shaking away this memory and returning to the coverage on my television screen of the Vietnamese-American doctor being forcibly removed from the airplane, I am struck by how significant position and positioning are to identity formation. I believe it is imperative for all of us to "recognize and critique how one is positioned and how one positions others in social structures" (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 37).

A Furnace Room Encounter

urge to emerge  
from East to West  
from West to Quest  
from Alif to Ye, from A to Z  
from unknown to known, from learn to unlearn  
search for a room continues  
rushing to find a room  
the only option, running upstairs  
I reach the quietest room in the house—an Attic  
pin drop Silence  
for me, it begins in the East, an insider  
singularity of identity, similarity of beliefs  
familiarity of land, particularity of being  
repeated rhythms, homogeneity of voices and choices  
living among family, sharing same stories  
knitting vibrant cloth, cooking together in the kitchen  
nostalgic aroma of spices, eating naturally grown fruit  
sun feels warmer  
the sounds so familiar, the chanting of Adhan  
wrapped in the softness of humility, love, and longing  
yelling of vendors selling spicy goods  
the cheering voices of kids playing cricket in the streets  
the honking noises of rickshaws  
tapping of barefooted beggars on gilded gates  
heavy quilts of smog powdering the horizon  
cobble streets forming blinding storms of dust  
a loud bang, a familiar sound  
a bomb blast in the corner

my city then another city  
Now in the whole country  
it can't be true, hard to sleep  
to the sound of my country's cacophony  
quest for change begins  
a challenging journey ahead  
things becoming louder, messier, hot and unsafe  
deliberation extant  
chaotic contemplation in peace  
*Now, I can hear the echo of my breath.*

Across seven seas, now in the midst, of  
a difficult journey  
rushing to find a room  
the only option, running down stairs  
I reach the loudest room in the house—the Furnace Room  
ear-splitting Noise  
in the West, an outsider  
plurality of identity, multiplicity of beliefs  
unfamiliarity of land, universality of being  
sporadic rhythms, heterogeneity of voices and choices  
truly a flight of fantasy, this is not real  
colossal buildings stationed closely to each other  
seem to stretch all the way to the clouds  
structures so tall, immaculate  
foreign air rushes through my lungs  
feel so purified and distilled  
urge to question  
freeze on the spot  
awed by how the sun seems so bright

## *When Difference Is Marginalized*

beautiful fair faces, tolling of church bells  
this new world painted with shades of white  
deeply and utterly different from the one  
I just came from  
questions tossed faithfully  
"Where are you from?" and "Where is home?"  
identity negotiation, a new beginning  
what makes me different  
me or my colour, custom or costume  
culture or ethnicity, race or religion  
values or beliefs, language or accent  
reflecting self in relation  
to self and others  
a minority in a majority  
things becoming louder, messier, cold and insecure  
deliberation extant  
peaceful contemplation in chaos  
*Now, I can hear the echo of my soul.*  
emerge to submerge  
becoming fully human  
seeing by feeling  
speaking by listening  
receiving by giving  
reliving  
*Reborn*  
from a silent epiphany

### **Unpacking My Narratives: Where is Home?**

For over 17 years in Canada, I have learned that the simple question, "Where do you come from?" is a conversation starter. It is like a script everyone feels required to deliver when they come across another face with inscriptions of colour, accent, attire, ethnicity, or race. The notion of *home* is

not easy to define: the sense of home, regardless of its meanings, migratory status, or spatial aspects, is part of a human process of identity construction and it is tied to emotions, relations and behaviors. People have the need to attach themselves to a context for which they have ownership in ever-changing associations of place, society and time (Terkenli, 1995). The notion of home is predominant in our understanding of diaspora because it is from the notion of home that we draw our identity (Lord, 2011, p. 7). Both Hall and Radhakrishnan (2003) describe how lost homelands mingle with new homelands, and how a sense of identity and the notion of home arises from the interaction between the lost and found homeland. While the word *home* is multifaceted and combines different concepts, for me “home has less to do with a piece of soil than with a piece of soul” (Lyer, 2013). It is ironic, then, that when we arrived in Canada filled with new hope and promise, the airport was the very first place that greeted us, and the very first place that informed us of our place and positioning in Canada. When a qualified doctor with an American degree works at the Pearson International Airport as a bag-handling, cart-steering porter, teaching itself happens. Sitting here at my kitchen counter, my questions, wonders, puzzles, experiences and stories sculpt my journey from soil to soul and make me ponder, “Am I really in my home?”

### **Sculpting a Home Away From Home**

Home is where our story begins. In the effort to create a new home, my family and I went to a furniture store one afternoon. As my four children were frolicking, the sales associate asked me if all four of them were mine. As I smiled and replied, “Yes,” she joyously responded, “You have a two-million-dollar family!” My curiosity persisted and so, when I returned home, I googled the idiom. A “million-dollar family” is one in which there is one boy and one girl, while a “two-million-dollar family” is comprised of two boys and two girls. At that time, settled in Saskatchewan in our own home, with Muhammed now working in the medical field, albeit on a special license where he was only allowed to practice in Saskatchewan and no other province. With our pre-school aged children safe, happy and growing, I did feel the joys of being a “two-million-dollar family.” I cooked our traditional foods, read, spoke and sang in Urdu to the children, dressed at home in my Pakistani clothing. As I spent my days and nights in the cozy and comfortable environment of our home, with my children in my lap, full of warmth, love, familiarity and belonging, life felt rich and complete.

### **The Bumping up of Home and School Contexts**

The years passed and it was soon time for my eldest daughter, Irteqa, to begin school. It was when she embarked on her journey to school that new stories began to enter our home. Stories created by the context of school bumping up against our home context included a refusal to take traditional food I had cooked for lunch, and English becoming the preferred language spoken among my children. As time went on and more of my children entered school, these kinds of new stories continued. My children wanted to dress up as ladybugs, unicorns and tigers for Halloween instead of wearing traditional gowns, and they waited excitedly for Christmas: memorizing carols, pleading to go to the mall and to purchase a Christmas tree, and asking when Santa would come to deliver presents. My perception of our two-million-dollar family began to change. Just as my children

did in these moments, I began to see our family as “other” (Bedard, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Kumashiro, 2000; Mackey, 2002; May, 1994). As Madrid (1998) details, “[o]therness means feeling excluded, closed out . . . it produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, of disconnectedness, of alienation” (as cited in Turner-Vorbeck & Miller Marsh, 2008, p. 2). I began to ask questions and to reposition myself as a mother, and this caused me to embark on a new journey, full of wonders about the values and beliefs by which I should raise my children in their new home of Canada. I wondered, “How do I as a mother make sense of the hybridity of my children’s identity?” I also wondered how my children’s teachers were making sense of their multiple worlds on the school landscape. Were they awake to them too? How were my children being reflected in school curriculum, language, literacy, pedagogy, history and celebrations?

### **A Series of Encounters**

As a first-generation Canadian, I call two countries home: Pakistan and Canada. As a mother raising four children with multiple identities, cultures, nationalities, languages and beliefs, I have experienced (through my lived stories) how complex the process of integration, blending and balancing identities can be. I have diligently followed the social, political, institutional and dominant stories presented to me. Faithfully following along led me to practice “structured silences” (Greene, 1993), founded upon my feelings of wanting to seem grateful to Canada and Canadians because Canada welcomed us as immigrants. While the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) assured us of equality, cultural pluralism, inclusivity, and our fundamental freedoms, it did not take long for the clear gaps between policies and practices to appear. When I silenced my questions, the contradiction between what I felt internally and what I acknowledged externally rendered my realities blurry and made me feel all the more vulnerable. My children’s experiences of being coloured and “multicultural” Canadians on the school landscape, and in the school curriculum, shaped my mother story, a story that bumped up against my silences. It was in that bumping up that my silences began to tremble and shift, eventually causing me to awaken my voice to the possibility of new and competing stories. Wiebe and Johnson (1998) affirm that to begin a story, someone must break a particular silence. As a mother, I came to realize that I cannot compromise my conscience by passively accepting the official stories presented to my children through curriculum. Instead, I determined that, as a parent researcher, I would critically analyze and interpret my mother story in an attempt to provoke consideration of how curriculum can legitimate the identity of diverse children who are Canadian “born and raised”.

I have been deconstructing the terms assigned by policies, persons, groups and institutions to define my children’s identity as Canadians. Expressions such as *hyphenated Canadians*, *multicultural Canadians*, *naturalized Canadians*, *racialized Canadians*, *minority Canadians*, *new Canadians*, *diasporic Canadians*, *settlers of colour*, *non-Indigenous peoples*, *migrant Indigenous populations and migrant people* suggest that their identity and positioning in both school landscape and in the Canadian landscape falls outside of hegemonic notions of what it means to be Canadian. What does it mean, in identity-making, to recognize yourself as positioned on the outside looking in (Clarke, 2014, p. 117)? What happens when children’s sense of themselves is under attack by a dominant



curricular narrative that does not fit coherently with their own? As a narrative inquirer, I ask: What imagined possibilities have the potential to shift curriculum conceptualizations from a place of binaries to a place of shared hope and responsibility for a different future for all Canadians?

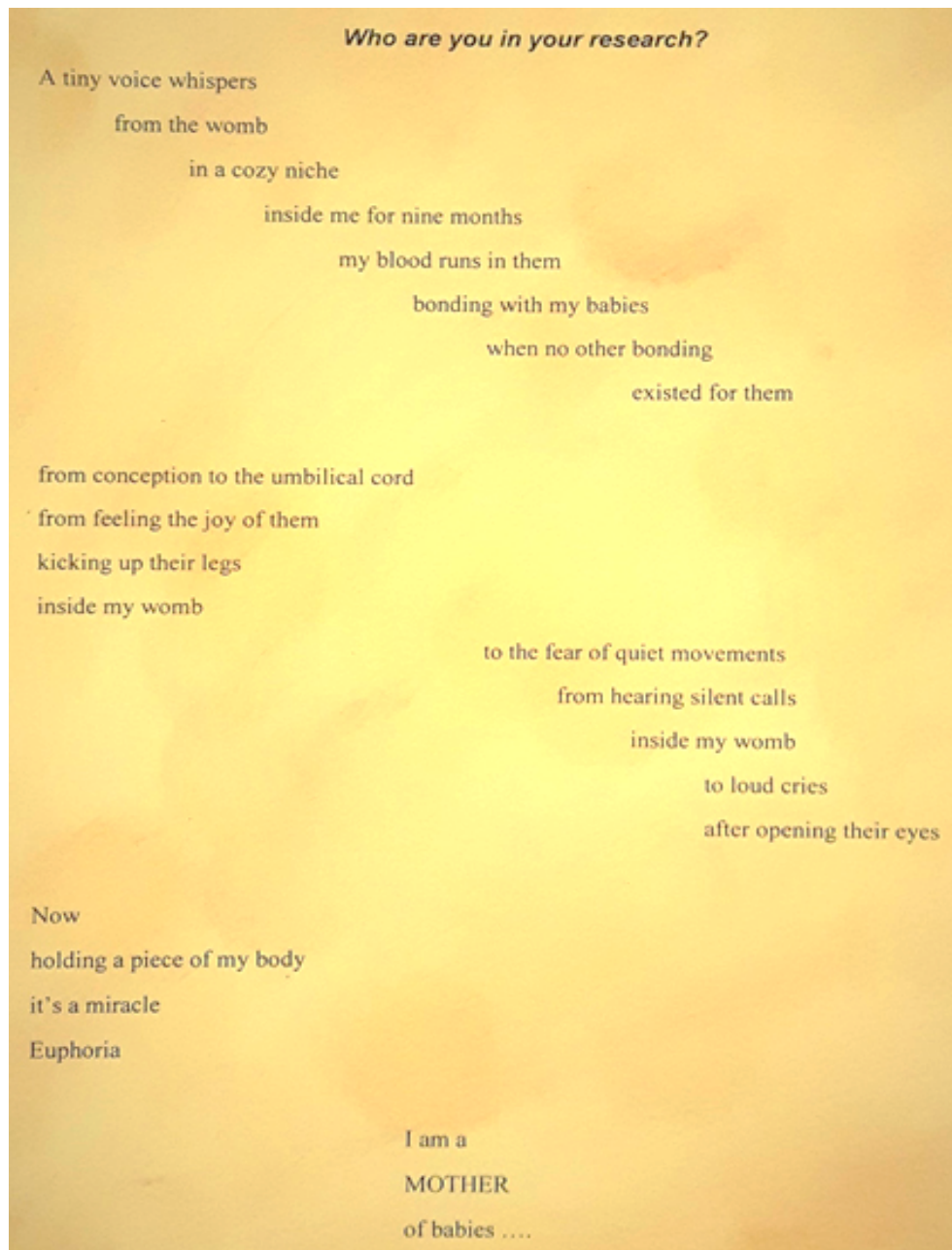


Figure 2. Poem and art by author.

When I immigrated to Canada in 2000, my oldest daughter Irteqa was three and a half years old, my son Hassan was two and a half, my youngest daughter Iman was one and a half years old, and my fourth and youngest child, Abbas, was born in 2001 in Toronto. Now, 17 years later, three of my children have graduated from high school and my youngest child is in Grade 11. For the past 15

years, my children have come home from school with stories of moments and experiences that have shaped, shifted, questioned and confronted their sense of identity and belongingness. Their stories of experience have shaped my mother stories, calling me to interrogate the privileged Eurocentric and dominant stories that have been presented to my children through school curriculum.

### **Mother Story 1: A Bedroom Encounter**

*Inquiring into Irteqa's experience with an ethical living course.* As the troubling news continues to play on the television in my kitchen while I am caught up with recollections and concerns for my family, I am interrupted by Irteqa's voice. Her words bring me back to the present as she asks if I would like my bedding changed to a nice floral fabric. I agree with her choice and leave the kitchen to go upstairs for evening prayers. The floral fabric, lying smoothly on the bed, reminds of the time Irteqa told me about her ethical living class.

One evening, a little after supper and during our family homework ritual, Irteqa (who was in Grade 9) asked, in a whisper, if she could talk to me in private. In my bedroom upstairs, we sat comfortably together. When she spoke, she sounded puzzled. As a mother, my spontaneous and natural reaction was to ask, "Is everything all right?" She explained to me, all the while juggling her words and feelings, that in her Ethical Living class, as part of a required subject, they were taught "Sex Education" (precisely, male anatomy and its functions) to male and female students together. She felt trapped and disturbed. She expressed that she felt she was doing something wrong and unethical by sitting in that class. Being a young Muslim-Canadian girl, it was against her religious and moral values to be part of the conversation about explicit sex and male anatomy which was occurring in her Canadian school landscape. Irteqa felt caught between the dynamics of dominant white culture and her religious and ethical values, which disrupted the foundations of her identity.

What occurs in the classroom influences a student's overall schooling experience and, similarly, what occurs outside of the classroom influences a student's curricular experience (Bigelow, 2008; Haw, Shaw, & Hanifa, 1998; Kassam, 2007; Sarroub, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2007). High school is a time when Muslim girls are subjected to tough decisions related to negotiating between their religious and secular worlds, and when they have the agency to make their own choices. Why, in an Ethical Living class, was a student positioned to experience unethical feelings? Gay (2002) has argued that it is important that teachers' knowledge of different cultures goes beyond a basic awareness and respect for different cultures. To be truly effective in teaching diverse students, Gay has suggested, that it is imperative for teachers to learn about the particularities of each group present in their classroom so that they can tailor the curriculum to them in meaningful ways (p. 107). When we avoid the encounter, and fail to get close enough to face others, we judge them from afar by reading the other as a sign of the universal. (Ahmed, cited in Watt, 2016, p. 32). How might curriculum making with parents—laying parent knowledge alongside teacher knowledge—enable the attainment of defined curricular outcomes and, at the same time, honour the diversity of families' beliefs and values?

## Mother Story 2: A Dining Room Encounter

*Inquiring into Hassan's experience with a psychology course.* Alone in my bedroom, I perform my prayers and make a special duaa for my children for them to have a peaceful and equitable life in Canada. I fold up my prayer mat and rise with hope. I leave my bedroom and return to the kitchen to check on the food that I had begun to cook earlier. Hearing the door chimes, I look up from the stove to see Hassan entering after a long day at work. Seeing his face, I offer him a milkshake and, as I watch him drink, I can see there are stories and experiences etched on his face today. I remember another afternoon, when he came home from school, hungry and inquisitive. While eating his meal, he started talking about the debate that students in his psychology class had had that day. Hassan described to me how his white, male teacher had stood at the front of the classroom, settled his gaze on raised hands, and granted individual students permission to add their voice to the discussion. The class was talking about the attacks, by Islamic extremists, on the employees of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical magazine that had published controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. He said that the majority of the students felt sympathetic for the victims and strongly disagreed with the killing of human beings as an outlet and reaction to the "freedom of speech" policy. When this discussion was occurring in the class, he expressed distaste for the killings as well and noticed, amongst all the angst and anxiety, one female Muslim student with a neatly wrapped hijab around her head who had been sitting quietly for quite a while. She suddenly spoke up angrily, saying that Islam condemns the killing of human beings but, on the other hand, a human being does not have the right, in "freedom of speech", to mock and create caricatures of a very focal figure, prophet, or entire religion. She told them that in Islam, the killing of one innocent is equivalent to the death of humanity. Immediately after she expressed her views on "freedom of speech", a heated discussion ensued among the students. Hassan recounted that it appeared that the teacher was not prepared to handle this delicate situation, and so his immediate response was to quickly end the conversation. After the class was over, the teacher pulled the Muslim student aside and apologized to her, in the event that she had felt offended. On a moral level, the teacher did the right thing to protect the Muslim girl's right to speak but, on an ethical basis, why was this incident not discussed openly and in such a way that all the students in the class received validation of their opinions and identity? What strategies might the teacher have used to enable students to agree to disagree instead of escaping the binaries of offensiveness and defensiveness?

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of individuals, so we cannot remain silent on this vital topic and still claim to educate (Noddings, 2008, p. 386). Noddings and Brooks (2017) have asserted that pedagogical neutrality should be the vantage point from which educators facilitate the hard talk about critical concerns, discussions of controversial issues, and matters concerning contested spaces. Instead of telling "students what is right or wrong," they suggest, the starting point is to encourage "them to think on each issue critically and to listen carefully to opposing views" (p. 33). How might parents support teachers in challenging students to ask what has not been said—by the student, by the teacher, by the parent, by the text, or by society (Ellsworth, 1997)? What controversial issues are we neglecting to bring into the conversation and why?

### Mother Story 3: A Living Room Encounter

*Inquiring into Iman's experience of "fitting into" the school landscape.* After Hassan went to his room to shower and return for supper, the food continued to broil and cook, Muhammad switched the news off and went upstairs, and I approached my computer with all my fragile feelings and stories spinning inside my head. I began to write my younger daughter's story. My daughter, Iman, who first set foot on Canadian soil when she was one and a half years old, is now an adult of 19 years. With angry tears in her eyes the morning of the tragedy in Paris, she asked me a question, "Mama, what should we do as Canadian Muslims?" With the television flashing with relentless updates from Paris, we were in a state of shock. My daughter's question made me speechless, not because of what to present to her as an answer, but because of how to present an answer to a daughter who is simultaneously a patriotic Canadian and a devoted Muslim. As a nation, and particularly as Muslims, we are trying to make sense of what is taking place all around us. Why is it that whenever my children watch the news and learn of the inhumane incidents going on around the world, instead of their hearts beating in sadness and lament, they want to focus on finding out who committed or contributed to the incidents? Why does "who" matter more than "why" or "how"? Is it because "who" is exclusive to the conscience of Muslims who are expected and asked to justify the actions of "Islamic" fundamentalists? The linking of Islam to violence and holding Islamic doctrine accountable for terrorism and violent extremism perpetuates a vicious cycle of anti-Muslim hatred. This not only creates more divisions in society, but also ultimately fails to protect people. The more these horrific incidents have intensified over the years in the name of Islam, the more Muslims in the West are living in a climate of fear.

My daughter's question compels me to ask, what role do educational institutions and school communities have in all of this? Will I have to answer this question alone, as a parent? Or must we unite as one community within society to answer it? As a parent, I am raising "Muslim-Canadian" children. What is the role of Canadian society in this? I would be able to answer my daughter if I were raising only a Muslim, but I am raising a Canadian Muslim. How am I to answer now? Where does my knowledge as a minority parent stand on the school landscape and in relation to the curriculum unfolding there?

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) guarantees fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, as well as thought, belief and opinion. However, the interpretation of such freedoms, and the extent of accommodation within the context of secular public schools, is not always clear (Shariff, 2006). This lack of clarity may lead to tension between "recognizing religious differences, respecting individual rights, and maintaining the social continuity of the Canadian society" (Maxwell, Waddington, Donough, Cormier, & Schwimmer, 2012). Growing up between two cultures, and balancing cultural identities and a sense of belonging, is a highly complex process. What part can parents play in helping to create counter stories to the current stories of curriculum making on school landscapes? How can parents, working together with teachers and children, help to create a more inclusive and affirming space which bridges the gap between home and school landscapes? History has taught us, time and time again, that "the silence of thoughtful people

creates a vacuum filled by extremists" (Wheatley, 2007, p. 227). It is through laying the knowledge and experiences of parents alongside the knowledge and experiences of teachers that it becomes possible to ensure no vacuum remains open in the lives of diverse students.

#### Mother Story 4: A Dining Table Encounter

*Inquiring into Abbas's experience with social studies.* Supper is finally done. After we have cleaned up the kitchen, everyone heads in the direction of their rooms. Since Abbas has not finished his schoolwork, he reopens his books. I, too, sit in front of my computer with my work. As I watch Abbas, I am drawn back to the fourth day of his new school year. Convinced that my son had found a place of belonging in his new classroom amongst his Grade 8 classmates and teachers, I recall asking him how everything was going. I remember how, in such a tired voice, he replied, "I almost fell asleep in class today." As he was saying this to me in the evening, I proposed that he go to sleep earlier from now on in order to further himself from his summer sleeping patterns. He said, "No. It's not that. It's because of the movie that they show us repeatedly in Social Studies class."

"Which movie?" was my curious response.

"A movie about Aboriginal people," he stated.

I asked him what he saw in this movie and he said, "All about residential schools, how their land was taken and what we did to them."

In a highly cautious and alert voice, I inquired, "Who did what to them?"

"We, the Europeans," he replied.

That was a profound moment for me as a parent in regard to the identity formation of my children as "multicultural" Canadians. The moment these words escaped my son's lips, I recognized identity choices my son had made regarding "us" versus "them" and "winner" versus "loser." Why was my son relating himself to the White oppressors and not the Aboriginal oppressed? Was he taking the blame because he is non-Aboriginal? Yet, as a son of Pakistanis, he is not White either. So why, then, was he considering himself a part of the colonialist regime? Was it because of the white dominance, Eurocentrism, and power and authority that still exists in Canadian society (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2004; Thobani, 2007)? Or was it because he understood that a great injustice had been done to Aboriginal people which he had not personally suffered, leaving him with the only option of associating himself with the Europeans? In what ways had well-intentioned curriculum and/or curriculum implementation compelled him to become part of, or take sides in someone else's legitimization battle, at the expense of negating his own right to a unique identity, culture and beliefs?

I remember being flooded with a host of other questions following this incident. How might the provision of curriculum to children containing explicit information on residential schooling widen or lessen the gap between the "Oppressed" and "Oppressors"? How might it cause "multicultural" students to get trapped in a history of conflict between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans, and be forced to take one side? How might repeated exposure to deep historical violence lead non-

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Aboriginal students to become desensitized, both to violence and compassion? And how might it lead Aboriginal students to become hyper-sensitive to their historical oppression, capable of seeing themselves as no more than victims, and non-Aboriginal students as no more than oppressors? And lastly, how might the continued realities and messages of inequity in our society and the world negatively affect White children's sense of self and attitudes toward others?

I question why my Canadian children must be reminded regularly that "our home and native land" is not theirs. It is the "Native Land" of the Aboriginal people and the "Home" of the white dominant culture. What then is left for my Canadian children who are born and raised on this land? Is it only their home built on someone else's land or is it their homeland? Or neither? How can they construct and shape their identity and a sense of belonging without a land and a home? How can they develop their sense of responsible citizenship in such a scenario where curriculum is inappropriately inculcating their dispositions as Canadians? Does it mean our national anthem insults half of the Canadian population? Does it mean that my son begins every morning at school with hypocrisy by singing, "O Canada, Our Home and Native Land"?

Identities are usually produced within the play of power, representation and difference, which can be either constructed negatively as exclusion and marginalization or celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity (Bhabha 1996; Butler, 1993; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1996; Laclau, 1990; Woodward, 1997). Dei (1995) has stated, "Students do not go to school as disembodied youth. They go to school with bodies that have race, religion, colour, class, language, gender, and sexuality" (as cited in Kelly, 1999, para. 65).

Clandinin et al. (2010) have acknowledged that "[w]ithin the institutional landscape, claiming an identity can be more challenging than passively accepting one" (p. 473). I agree that in school, social, political and economic landscapes, identity making remains complex, contested and questioned. In our ever-changing classrooms, educating about the notion of diversity, liberated from the false dichotomy of "us" versus "them," is central to educational goals. Grelle and Metzger (1996) have argued that social studies curriculum and teaching practices overwhelmingly support a standard socialization approach that discounts the realities of cultural pluralism (as cited in Tupper, 2007, p. 263). By bringing multiple narratives into the classroom, grand narratives are interrupted and space potentially opens up for difference. It is only when this work is realized that Canada becomes a "home" and a "native land" for all Canadians.

## *Back to the Kitchen Counter Encounters*

As the day comes to an end, I hold on to my mother stories, while I shut off the lights in our home, double check the locks, tug the curtains closed and head towards my room to perform the last prayer of the day. As I kneel on my prayer mat and am swept away in duas for my children, I am no longer a mother but a prayer. My dua expresses my wishes: that my children in their home, Canada, will have equal rights and the same treatment as any other privileged citizen of Canada; that when they use their voices, they will be treated as the voices of Canadians; that, in such a time of terror, they feel comfortable in their own skin and religion; that society treats them not as a guest or

immigrant or outsider or new Canadian but as a valuable part of society. My final prayer of the day ends on the wish that my children will gain enough strength that they may successfully carry all of their identities and maintain a balance between them.

Before drifting into sleep, I think about what will happen the next morning, and the morning after that, and the morning after that. Will these coming mornings show any change towards the responses and questions I pose? As Canadians, we take pride and often congratulate ourselves on the fact that we are one of the most “multicultural” countries in the world. The ground reality is a little different: We have colour, race, gender, religion, and identity-related issues, and we are far from being the racially harmonious country we like to tell ourselves we are. My narratives of experiences remind us that we still have a long way to go if we intend to champion our values of pluralism, tolerance and inclusion on the world’s stage. They open critical possibilities to see different perspectives, share frustrations, work through conflicts, and collectively explore controversial and provocative issues in respectful ways by bridging the gap between story, theory and practice. With these thoughts, I sink into slumber, hopeful and optimistic that such a reformation of curriculum, as theory, policy and practice, can positively impact the lives and identity formation of all students because our children are the most valuable asset of our nation.

What affects our children affects us all.

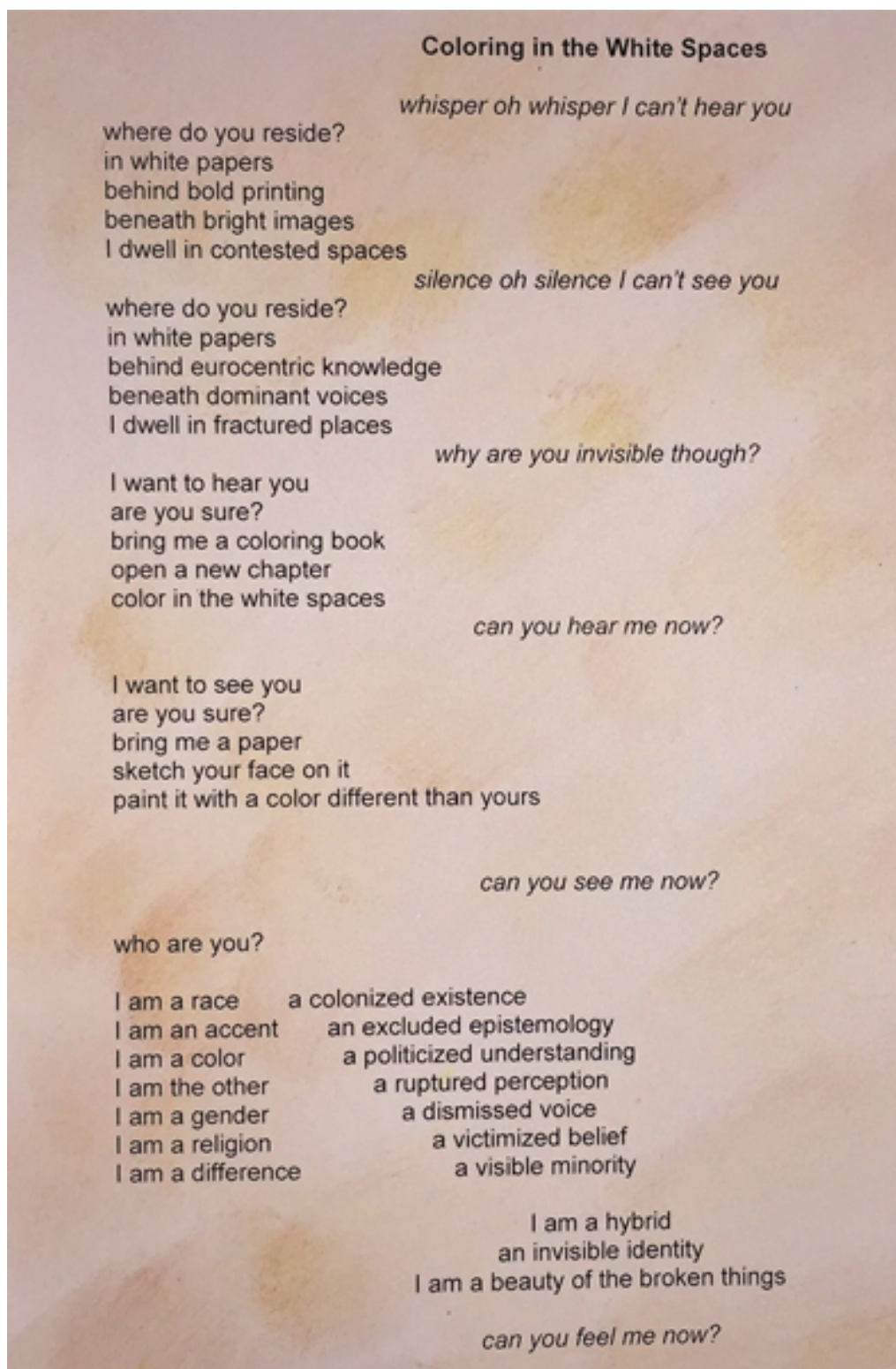


Figure 3. Poem and art by author.



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