Immigrant Women and Religious Social Networks

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Abstract Canada has one of the highest rates of immigration per capita in the world. This has led to a highly diverse population, particularly in large urban centres like Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. However other parts of the country, or what are referred to as non-traditional receiving societies, are working to attract more immigrants. Statistics Canada data reveal that the Maritimes is a region with low levels of ethnic and religious diversity, but that is beginning to change. Increasing levels of ethno-religious diversity in the population can be a challenge in terms of social cohesion. This chapter explores the role of immigrant women's social networks as they settle into Maritime society. Based on qualitative data, the analysis compares the roles that Christian and Muslim immigrant women's religious social networks play in the development of social capital. Social capital can contribute to immigrant women's self-confidence, well-being, and ability to fulfill their dreams for a better life. Ethno-religious social networks can also assist immigrant women as they individually and collectively negotiate their religious identities and practices, deciding which aspects to emphasize, reshape, and let go of in the Canadian context.

Keywords Social networks · Social capital · Christians · Muslims · Immigrant women · Maritimes · Gender · Ethno-religious diversity · Intersectional

1 Introduction

This chapter is based on sociological research conducted with Christian and Muslim immigrant women who live in the Canadian Maritime provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (PEI)[1]. Using qualitative methods, the research explores the role of different social networks, including religious ones, in the lives of two groups of immigrant women during the settlement process. While considering the

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multiple social networks that immigrant women access, the spotlight here will be on the role of religious social networks. Unlike the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario, the Maritimes are a non-traditional destination for immigrants and have relatively low levels of ethno-religious diversity. In the last decade however, this has begun to change as provincial governments in the region look to immigration as a strategy for population stability and economic growth. A myopic focus on the economic contributions of immigrants, however, has blinded public officials to the importance of considering other factors that contribute to social cohesion. Confronted with anti-immigrant political rhetoric and policies (Vitali 2017) as well as numerous media reports on acts of violence against Muslims (Globe and Mail 2017), education concerning the lived religious practices of immigrant women and their families is of heightened importance in Canada. Through the use of story, statistics, and online resources, this chapter will assist readers in learning about the important role that social networks play in the lives of Christian and Muslim immigrant women—particularly when facing challenges during the settlement process—and the individual and collective strengths drawn upon in overcoming these challenges.

2 A Real-Life Story from Qualitative Research

As you will learn in greater detail in the chapters by Barras and Selby that highlight Muslims (see Chaps. 9 and 10), regular weekly attendance at the mosque is not as an important religious practice for Muslim women as it is for men. Women do take part in public religious practices but for many, the heart of their religious activities takes place in the home. In Muslim majority contexts, women need not go to the mosque in order to be part of religious social networks. However, following migration to the Maritime region where Muslims make up less than one per cent of the population, they discover that mosques play a different social role than in their countries of origin. There is only one mosque in each of the large cities in New Brunswick and PEI, and they are meeting places for Muslims of different ethnic groups, economic classes, and theological perspectives. In recent years, women in the Maritime mosques have begun reaching out to new Muslim immigrants and families with young children. By paying attention to the needs of their faith community and reflecting on their own experiences as immigrants, Muslim women are aware that members of a religious minority group need to provide social support to one other.

One woman speaks about how her regular participation in the local mosque helps her to assist other Muslims. Through the mosque, she has become aware of the needs of Muslims in her city:

> If somebody in the community needed help with making food because they were sick, I would make food for them. I would take care, like go to their house and sit there for a while just to make them feel better. Or if I found out about someone that they're in the hospital, I would go visit them.. . There's always [an Auntie]. . . when I came here she was there for

> me. So when I came here we found out about the mosque and we go directly to the mosque. So the whole community sort of helps the new immigrant. .. Our mosque is not just Pakistani. They're from Africa, people are from the Middle East and you know, the European Union – everywhere. So if the students need help, we would give money, we would give food, we would give clothes (Muslim #13).

A mother with a young daughter explains why she attends the same mosque regularly:

> We have a mosque here and we do every Friday over there. Every Sunday we have Qur'an class. All the children start three years and four years [old] and people, like parents, volunteer work and read Qur'an and tell about our religion.. . I read the Qur'an in Arabic but I translate in my mother language, in Urdu.. . [During Ramadan] every Saturday we have a fasting dinner at the mosque. Every Saturday everybody goes there because we try to sit together. Yes, because it's hard [to break the fast with friends at home] – everybody's working and children go [to school] early in the morning (Muslim #19).

Through the religious social networks at their local mosque, these Muslim women have found ways to put into practice their religious values of care and charity. Mothers take care of the religious education of their children, and women have the opportunity to practice charity or the payment of *zakát* (Anderson and Dickey Young 2010, p. 209) to members of the Muslim community who are in financial need.

3 Key Concepts

Social networks consist of the interpersonal relationships people develop and maintain in the situations, organizations, and institutions of which they are a part through the course of daily life. Social networks usually begin in the family—the primary institution in which most individuals are socialized. Socialization includes the transmission of patterns of communication, belief systems, and actions from older to younger generations in families. Families are embedded in larger social networks in geographical locations such as neighbourhoods, villages, cities, and countries as well as through the institutional processes of education, the provision of public social services, employment practices, and political participation. Social networks are developed through regular face-to-face interactions and virtual connections using email and social media like Facebook. Interpersonal relationships within social networks differ in their quality. Some consist of strong emotional bonds such as those with friends, family, and co-workers. These are referred to as strong ties. Other social bonds or weak ties exist between acquaintances, members of a community organization, or employees in different divisions of a large company.

It is in social networks that individuals create *social capital*. The concept of social capital was developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Similar to the way in which economic capital is exchanged by people for labour, goods, and services, social capital is the currency of interpersonal exchanges. In getting to know people and interacting with them, trust develops. Then when opportunities for further social

interaction arise, people connect or reach out to people they know and trust. For example, many new immigrants get their first paid jobs through immigrant social networks. An established immigrant employer will hire a relatively unknown newcomer based on ethnic commonalities and word-of-mouth within ethnic social networks. Let's say that there is a job opening as a cashier in an Asian grocery store in Charlottetown, PEI and a Korean immigrant woman successfully applies for it. She gets the job because of the social capital she has created within Asian social networks. With this first Canadian job, she has the opportunity to start creating social capital beyond her ethnic networks as she interacts with coworkers, customers, and suppliers.

Bourdieu developed the concept of social capital in order to explain the social structuring of class and how class structures are reproduced. Social networks tend to be largely class-specific and homogeneous, since people tend to socialize with others who are similar to themselves. Robert Putnam (2007) further explains the concept of social capital by distinguishing between two types—bonding and bridging. *Bonding social capital* is the emotional support that comes from strong interpersonal relationships and is critical for overall well-being. It is most likely to be developed through social networks that are homogeneous, such as those among immigrants who share the same ethnicity or country of origin. In contrast, *bridging social capital* develops in social networks that are diverse in terms of ethnic origins and class. Heterogeneous social networks can assist immigrants in social mobility, or in other words going from having nothing in the new society (no place to live, no job, no friends) to becoming settled and productive in their new home. Immigrants need to develop both bonding and bridging social capital in order to have a positive experience living in a new society.

In applying the concepts of bonding and bridging social capital to the rapid growth of ethno-religious diversity in the United States, Putnam suggests that the development of social networks for the creation of social capital in the early stages of immigrant settlement can result in increased tensions and divisions between native-born citizens and newcomers. This is because immigrants tend to support one another and native-born citizens are unfamiliar with and suspicious of minority cultures. However, over time, as bridging capital between the two groups is created, social cohesion will improve. Portes (2001) argues that the situation is more complex, depending on a variety of factors associated with immigrants from different ethnic and class backgrounds. His research highlights the process he calls *segmented assimilation*, in which second generation immigrant youth from some ethnic backgrounds integrate very well socially in the US while youth from other ethnic backgrounds drift towards the margins of society, unable to realize their immigrant parents' dreams for a better life in a new land. Portes asserts that social cohesion in an ethnically diverse society depends on effective social policies rather than on social capital. Strong social policies can mitigate ethnic segregation and ensure equality of opportunity (Portes and Vickstrom 2011).

Based on statistical data in Canada, Kazemipur has explored the social capital that immigrants develop through multiple dimensions of social life including participation in voluntary associations, political engagement, religious involvement,

membership in labour or professional organizations, volunteering, informal associations, and subjective feelings of trust (2009, p. 13). In contrast to the situation in the US, he argues that Canadian immigrants are generally less socially segregated and have greater trust in their neighbours and in social institutions. In regards to the ability of immigrants to create social capital, Kazemipur finds that Canada's multicultural policies are working. Nevertheless, Muslims are struggling to create bridging social capital largely because of mistrust on the part of native-born citizens (Kazemipur 2014).

The *intersecting structures* of gender, class, and ethnicity contribute to complexity in a multicultural society (Walby 2009). Gender, class and ethnicity are social structures—creations of human society. The structures of gender, class and ethnicity exert directional pressure on individuals to act in particular ways. People can choose to resist or conform to these social pressures. In terms of gender, while biological differences lead to the assigning of male and female genders at birth, much of what we have come to expect of male and female behaviours depends on the society in which we live. In Canada and other Western societies, the problematizing of gender binaries has resulted in gender diversity (see Chap. 4) but in many parts of the world gender continues to be structured by patriarchy. Patriarchy is a hierarchical system in which males are assumed to be independent providers and women are expected to be dependent care givers. Class differences are based on the ownership of capital (natural resources and financial investments), the control of the physical means of production, and the control over the labour power of others (Satzewich and Liodakis 2013, p. 150). Regarding the structuring of ethnicity, there is no biological basis for distinguishing "race" yet ethnicity is often differentiated based on people's geographic origins. Ethnic majority and minority groups differ according to country or regional contexts.

Some social differences based on gender, class, and ethnicity are valued while others lead to inequality. Religious groups and the public perception of religion also influence the structuring of gender, ethnicity, and class relations, complicating things even further. This chapter will highlight the opportunities and challenges that the intersection of gender, class, and ethnicity present for Muslim and Christian immigrant women in the Maritimes. In what follows, the phrase *ethno-religious diversity* will frequently be used in reference to the intersection of ethnicity and religion. This is because they are often so closely intertwined in the lives of immigrant women as to be practically indistinguishable (Bramadat 2005).

In the process of migration and settlement, immigrants who come to Canada leave the social networks of which they were a part and enter into, or create, new social networks. The social capital that they relied on before immigration no longer has the same value in their new society. For some immigrants, the social capital that they had in their countries of origin was, to some extent, inadequate to meet their needs. That is why many people migrate internationally in search of better lives for their families. They seek opportunities and living conditions available to them as immigrants that they did not have in their home countries. Immigrants have to invest time and energy into the creation of new social capital in order to get emotional support and information, and to access opportunities for education and employment. In

the initial days, months, and years of settlement, they are most likely to become part of social networks with those who share their language, ethno-religious background, or the experience of being a new immigrant. Because social interactions are often influenced by cultural norms, many immigrants also have to adjust some of the ways in which they socialize in order to create bridging social capital with Canadian-born people.

Research on social networks and social capital creation indicates that these are gendered processes (O'Neill and Gidengil 2005). Women find it easier than men to become a part of social networks and they use them differently. From a young age, women are socialized into emotionally close relationships, especially with other women (Chodorow 1999). This is quite evident for the immigrant women in my research. Many immigrant women come from societies with *collectivist values*—the individual's identity is secondary to the collective identity. Immigrant women understand their identities first and foremost in relationship with others. An emphasis on belonging to a community or considering the common good are also religious values for many of these women. This is in contrast to the values of individualism and autonomy promoted by Canadian society and liberal feminism. Collectivism and interdependence are values associated with what Mahmood (2001) refers to as non-liberal feminism or religious feminism (Fernandes 2003). This emphasis on the collective coupled with women's traditional role as care givers means that many religious immigrant women are adept at creating bonding social capital through *informal social networks*. They simply invite newcomers over for dinner or strike up conversations in the grocery store—telling other women where to shop for specific foods and housewares. When it comes to their engagement in *formal social networks*, research shows that women's use of social networks usually focuses on their care-giving responsibilities (Lowndes 2004). For example, immigrant women will become part of educational or extra-curricular social networks in order to take advantage of opportunities for their children. Or, as entrepreneurs, they will form a catering co-operative in order to promote and strengthen their ability to contribute to family incomes. Whether immigrant women are engaged with informal or formal social networks, the social capital that they create in these networks contributes to the collective well-being of their families and communities. This is an important consideration for the integration of immigrants and social cohesion—one often overlooked by governments and employers who focus only on economic factors (McLaren and Dyck 2004).

Social capital is an integral part of immigrant women's *agency* in the face of the dominant social *structures*. Every day social life is a continual encounter between the agency of individuals and groups and the pressures of social structures. In many instances, most people are not even aware of the pressures that social structures exert on individual thoughts and actions. However, with awareness comes the opportunity for individuals and groups to choose to resist these pressures or go with the flow. New immigrants encounter the pressures of the unfamiliar social structuring of gender, ethnicity, and class upon arrival in Canada, which often put them at a disadvantage compared to native-born citizens. Yet immigrant women are not without choices about how they will act, or exercise their agency, in the face of structural

inequalities. This is why this research takes a *lived religion* approach. Rather than focusing on what Christian or Muslim teachings have to say about women, it focuses on how the women understand and live their religion on a daily basis. The remainder of this chapter will provide numerous examples of the kinds of social networks that immigrant women become part of in the initial years after arriving in Maritimes, and how they utilize them to take advantage of opportunities to create social capital and overcome the challenges that they face. But before turning to the research findings, it is important to understand some of the contextual factors of the Maritimes, in particular, the population's ethno-religious and immigrant diversity.

4 Statistical Data

Table 1 below provides data from the 2011 National Household Survey on the immigrant, ethnic origins, and religious diversity of the province of New Brunswick. At that time, immigrants only comprised four per cent of the provincial population. This is considerably lower than the national average which is approximately twenty per cent. Sixty-seven per cent of the New Brunswick population claim some form of European ethnic origins, followed by Aboriginal peoples at five percent, and those with any kind of Asian ethnic origins at only two per cent. Over eighty per cent of the provincial population identify as Christian, compared to sixty-seven per cent of

Table 1 Demographic profile of New Brunswick

Variable	Count	Percentage
Population		
Total	735,835	100
Non-Immigrants	704,235	96
Immigrants	28,465	4
Ethnic Origins		
Aboriginal	37,900	5
European	489,975	67
African	4435	0.6
Asian	14,535	2
Caribbean	1620	0.2
South, Central and Latin American	1650	0.2
Religion		
Buddhist	975	0.1
Christian	616,910	84
Hindu	820	0.1
Jewish	620	0.08
Muslim	2640	0.4
No religion	111,435	15

Source: Statistics Canada - 2011 National Household Survey. Catalogue Number 99–010-X2011032.

the national population. Less than one per cent of New Brunswickers identify with non-Christian religions, and fifteen per cent do not claim any religious affiliation.

Compared to the New Brunswick data, the province of PEI is even less ethno-religiously diverse. Data from Table 2 below indicates that in 2011 less than one per cent of the PEI population were immigrants. Seventy-seven per cent of the people in PEI claimed European ethnic origins and only three per cent were of Asian ethnic origins. Religiously speaking, the majority of Islanders identify with Christianity (84%), and fourteen per cent indicate that they have no religious affiliation. Even though Muslims are the largest non-Christian religious group, they comprise half of one per cent of the total population in the province. But keep in mind that overall, Muslims made up only a little more than three per cent of the entire Canadian population in 2011.

These statistics highlight the fact that new immigrants in the Maritimes encounter societies with very low levels of ethno-religious diversity. This situation changed somewhat in 2016 when the region accepted thousands of Syrian refugees. New Brunswick accepted more Syrians per capita than any other province in the country (Jones 2016). Syrian newcomers are religiously diverse, claiming Christian and Muslim religious affiliations.

Table 2 Demographic profile of PEI

Variable	Count	Percentage
Population		
Total	137,375	100
Non-Immigrants	129,390	99.05
Immigrants	7085	0.05
Ethnic Origins		
Aboriginal	4460	3
European	105,530	77
African	500	0.04
Asian	4360	3
Caribbean	310	0.2
South, Central and Latin American	445	0.3
Religion		
Buddhist	560	0.4
Christian	115,620	84
Hindu	205	0.1
Jewish	100	0.07
Muslim	655	0.5
No religion	19,815	14

Source: Statistics Canada - 2011 National Household Survey. Catalogue Number 99–010-X2011032.

5 Similarities and Differences Amongst Muslim and Christian Immigrant Women's Social Networks in the Maritimes

Eighty-nine women took part in my research on the role that social networks play in the settlement experiences of immigrant women in the Maritimes. Fifty-eight of the women identify as Christian, come from twelve different countries, and belong to five different ethnic origins groups, according to Statistic Canada's categories (2008). The Christians are Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Mormon. On average, the Christian immigrant women had been living in the Maritimes for about two and a half years in 2012. Thirty-one of the women are Muslim, originating from fifteen different countries, and belonging to six different ethnic origins groups. The Muslim women are Sunni and Shiite. The Muslim immigrant women had been living, on average, a little over four years in either New Brunswick or PEI. More than half of the Muslim women (52%) and sixty per cent of the Christian immigrant women, are mothers.

Despite the tremendous ethno-religious diversity of the sample, analysis of the social networks of Muslim and Christian immigrant women shows that they share similarities. All of the women are impacted by globalization, there is heterogeneity within the women's ethnic origins groups, most are members of visible minority groups, and they've experienced shifts in the structuring of gender between their countries of origin and the Maritimes.

The women in this study are truly global citizens—some are social elites and some are doing what they need to do in order to survive—but all are seeking a better future. Their reasons for migrating to Canada can be categorized between those who migrate from stable social contexts because they have the economic resources to do so and those who have the means to migrate from countries of origin where there are situations of political turmoil and socio-economic instability. More people are on the move around the globe today than ever before. Globalization has had the dual effects of cultural homogenization as well as solidifying particular cultural identities (Meyer and Geschiere 2003). In terms of the homogenizing effects of globalization, the diverse Christian and Muslim immigrant women were all attracted to the Maritimes by governments seeking young workers. The Filipina Christians, for example, are part of well-developed, global social networks of Filipinos looking for work. Through the use of social media, the Filipinas, many of whom had been working in electronics factories in Taiwan, became aware of employment opportunities in New Brunswick, and procured temporary work permits through immigration brokers. Most of the women work in seafood and fish processing industries in coastal communities, while some are working as live-in caregivers. They stay in touch with family members in the Philippines, to whom they send regular remittances. Filipina workers stay connected to one another throughout the Maritimes to keep informed of further opportunities for work once their temporary permits expire. Their religious social networks are an important source of emotional support. As one Filipina said, "As long as we have a church service, a church where we belong, we feel very comfortable and we are really very fast to adjust ourselves, that we are very

welcome to any kind of country.. . and we feel not alone, so we overcome the homesickness. Especially because we are very far from our families" (Focus Group #3, Participant #3). Some of the Filipinas had not seen their children in years, but through faith they found the strength to keep on working abroad in order to provide them with a good education. The Filipinas are part of local Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches as well as a missionary church from the Philippines—*Iglesia Ni Christo*. The diversity of their Christian identities is secondary to their national identities as Filipinas. As Filipinas, they actively support one another in strategically negotiating the local and global labour markets. They use bonding social capital to help one another find work, housing, transportation, and social support.

This is not the case with the majority of immigrant women seeking high skilled jobs in the Maritimes. Many well-educated Christian and Muslim immigrant women are unable to find work commensurate with their professional expertise and feel forced to take low wage, service jobs in order to help support their families. Their inability to procure work for which they were assigned points in the immigration system and then admitted into Canada is an indication of the segmented assimilation of immigrant women into the Maritime labour market. This can be interpreted as either the result of their lack of bridging social capital or the need for provincial policies that address ethnic inequality in the workforce.

The ethnic origins groups of the Christian and Muslim immigrant women are heterogeneous. The Christians are East/Southeast Asian, East European, African, South American, and Western European. The Muslims are West Asian, Arab, South Asian, African, East/Southeast Asian, and South American. Most of the ethnic groups are comprised of women from different countries of origin. The largest Christian ethnic group is East/Southeast Asian women originally from the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, and China. West Asians are the largest ethnic group amongst the Muslims, with the majority coming from Iran. The Arabic Muslim immigrant women are highly diverse in terms of their home countries, originating from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, and Morocco. Because there are relatively few immigrants in the Maritimes, the density of any particular ethno-religious group is low. Nevertheless, many Muslim and Christian immigrant women become part of or form social networks with others who share their ethno-religious backgrounds. A Muslim mother from Jordan, for example, knows the names and contact information for the only other two Jordanian families in the entire province of New Brunswick!

Heterogeneity is also present within religious groups. Some of the immigrant women share the same ethno-religious background, but have different religious practices. For example, one Muslim woman originally from Chad had been looking for work without success. Her husband suggested that she not wear her head scarf or *hijab* to the next interview. She took his advice and got a job at Tim Horton's. She went to her first day of work wearing a headscarf underneath her uniform cap. Her co-workers ask about her Muslim identity but her boss does not comment. She is happy with her job. This is in contrast to the perspective of a Muslim woman who came to PEI from Somalia. She also finds it difficult to find work because she refuses to work in a restaurant or store that sells pork or alcohol. The Muslim woman from Chad is willing to make compromises with her religious practice to get work

while the Somali woman is not. This is not to say that one woman is more or less religious than the other, but it does highlight an aspect of heterogeneity or differences in the religious practices of women who share a common ethnic origin. These women do not live in the same city, but if they did, they could potentially be part of the only mosque or the African cultural association. Moving to the Maritimes sometimes leads to the first experiences of living with ethno-religious diversity for many Muslim and Christian immigrant women. In their countries of origin, they associated with people who shared their particular beliefs and practices. Immigration to the Maritimes gives them the opportunity to build bridging social capital with Christians and Muslims who have different class and ethnic backgrounds.

As part of its employment equity legislation (Government of Canada 1995), the federal government defines visible minorities as people who are not of Aboriginal origins, non-Caucasian in race, and non-white in colour. Almost forty-five per cent of immigrants living in Canada are members of visible minority groups (Statistics Canada 2013). With the exception of those with European ethnic origins, all of the Muslim and Christian immigrant women in this research transitioned from being part of the ethnic majority in their home countries to being members of visible minority groups upon their arrival in the Maritimes. As already mentioned, there are proportionately few immigrants in the Maritimes and only two to three per cent of the population are members of visible minority groups. Thus, visible minority women are highly visible in contrast to the rest of the local-born population. Their visible minority status makes social support networks even more important because the women and their children face subtle and not-so-subtle acts of discrimination on a regular basis. An example of this is shared by Yun,[2] a South Korean Christian woman from New Brunswick featured in Figs. 1, 2, 3, and 4 below, one of several

Fig. 1 On the Outside, photo credit: Denise Rowe

[2]Yun is a pseudonym.

Fig. 2 On the Outside, photo credit: Denise Rowe

photo essays developed as online teaching resources for the Religion and Diversity Project. In the creation of the photo essay, Yun chose the door as a symbol of the barriers she faces as a member of a visible minority group. When she encounters a doorway she never knows what awaits her on the other side. Will the people there be welcoming and helpful? Or will she experience misunderstanding and discrimination because of the way she looks, speaks English, her foreign education, or her lack of Canadian work experience?

During an interview, Yun shares this story:

> When I was driving one day, somebody yelled at me. A guy and his girlfriend—they were young people with a nice car—they were laughing and yelling. I didn't do anything wrong but they said, "Oh stupid Asian!" How do they know I'm stupid? They don't know that I have three degrees—maybe they don't even have one degree. That is inappropriate and

Fig. 3 On the Outside, photo credit: Denise Rowe

those things are so discouraging. On that day I couldn't do anything. I have a strong personality—I like challenges to break through. On that day I couldn't do anything. I just returned back home and laid down on the sofa and until sunset I couldn't concentrate on anything and that made me so discouraged. Sometimes it leads to depression.

Yun is a devout Christian and like her, other Korean Christian women receive support from social networks in churches in the Maritime region. In particular, they use opportunities in Bible study or faith sharing groups to speak about their struggles against racism in light of the narratives of the Christian tradition—they understand their suffering as part of their journey with Jesus, who was also misunderstood and persecuted. They are comforted by their faith that suffering for the sake of their families' future is making them stronger in the present and that God is by their side. Like the hand on the other side of the door that Yun grasps in Fig. 4, members of visible minority groups, Christian or Muslim, tend to support one another because they share painful experiences of discrimination due to their visible minority status.

Fig. 4 On the Outside, photo credit: Denise Rowe

In sharing their experiences of adversity, immigrant women create bonding social capital with one another.

Both Christian and Muslim women have experienced shifts in gender roles as a consequence of the immigration and settlement process. Practically without fail, immigrant women speak about becoming more independent after moving to Canada. This independence is the result of very pragmatic changes in their lifestyles. Many of the Christian women are living alone in the Maritimes, either as migrant workers like the Filipinas described above, or, like many of the Koreans, parenting their children while their husbands continue to work in South Korea. Korean women say that before immigration they relied upon their husbands for help with the day-to-day tasks of life, and their gender roles in the family were quite traditional. In the circumstances of their new home, they find themselves responsible for looking after all aspects of the household including repairs, car maintenance, yard work, and dealing with the ice and snow removal during the winter. Because of these very pragmatic concerns, they immerse themselves in their neighbourhoods and cities and become

part of the religious and cultural social support networks. They learn English and develop stronger self-confidence and autonomy. If their husbands come to visit or decide to immigrate and join their families, the Korean men are sensitive to the change in their social status in Canada. They are unable to communicate in English in public with the ease that their wives or children possess. The social respect that the men gained amongst their peers from their careers in Korea is also absent. The men have lost their traditional gender role within the family as well as their higher social status outside of the family. This often results in conflicts in the family (Holtmann 2016). For those with access to social support networks, like the evangelical Christian immigrant women, they use relationships with other women in their social networks to process these changes and develop strategies for dealing with conflict. For those without access to social support networks, like some mothers with young children, they can feel isolated and lonely. This creates a situation of vulnerability for the women which can lead to mental health problems (Holtmann and Tramonte 2014) or exacerbate the problem of family violence. For more details on the unique vulnerabilities of women and faith in situations of family violence see Chap. 3.

Gender role shifts also occur in Muslim immigrant families, but in ways that differ from the Christians. Most Muslim women immigrate to the Maritimes with their whole family. Several of the Muslim research participants are graduate students, and their stories of gender involve their changing relationships with their fathers and brothers. In accordance with their ethno-religious backgrounds, these Muslim women were taught that they should not associate with non-relative males in public. As graduate students, it is novel for them to be in a co-ed atmosphere and their brothers tend to keep a close eye on them while at university. An engineering student finds the constant scrutiny of her behavior by her three brothers hard to take. She describes her brothers as controlling and insists that she is above reproach. She sought help from student counselling services because she was becoming depressed about the situation.

> I saw them once and then I just stopped, 'cause I didn't feel comfortable. Like ok, what's the point in going and telling them, and they can't do anything for me? Because I understand it's a cultural thing and in my point of view it's a very wrong culture, but I have to live with it because it's my culture right? Like either I can run away from the house and live my life independent but then I am going to lose my family, right?. .. but I wouldn't leave home for sure, like my parents are the most important thing in my life (Muslim #10).

Her brothers' control over her is lessening somewhat the longer the family is living in Canada, but she believes that ultimately, her independence as a Western-educated Muslim woman depends on her future husband. She wants to marry a Muslim man "who is really good, who is open and not controlling. .. but if I get a guy who is another version of my father and brothers then it's going to be terrible." This student became the president of the Muslim women's association on campus in order to provide opportunities for women to support one other as they deal with these conflicting gender expectations. The association organizes social gatherings, exclusively for Muslim women, and schedules regular access to the university pool. Although only a few women are taking advantage of these opportunities for

supporting and creating bonding social capital with other Muslim women experiencing the pressures associated with shifting gender roles at this particular Maritime university, it is a start.

There are four important differences between immigrant women, depending on their ethno-religious origins, which have consequences for their participation in social networks and creation of social capital. The experience of migration between religious contexts differs for Christians and Muslims; the density of Christians from some ethnic origins groups in the region is higher than that of any Muslim group; Muslim women deal with a wider range of ethno-religious diversity than Christians; and the religious differences between Christian ethnic origins groups have structural support in the Maritime context while those between Muslims do not.

Canada is a Christian majority country and the proportion of the Maritime population who identify as Christians is even higher than the national average. People in Atlantic Canada are also more likely than Canadians elsewhere to indicate that they are religiously engaged (Clark and Schellenberg 2006). Thus, Christian immigrant women are moving from one Christian majority context into another. This contrasts with Muslim immigrant women who move from Muslim majority contexts to one in which they are a religious minority. Although there are many cultural differences to be negotiated, in a Christian majority context, even secular public social networks are sensitive to the religious beliefs and practices of Christians. For example, Christmas and Easter are religious as well as public holidays in Canada. Immigrant Christian workers and students get legislated time off to celebrate religious holidays with their families and friends. Even though many people must work on weekends, the regular work week runs from Monday to Friday, with Saturday and Sunday for leisure and voluntary activities—which is conducive for being part of Christian churches. In contrast, the Muslim day of public prayer is Friday, and it is practically impossible for a business owned and operated by Muslims to shut down on a Friday afternoon so that the owners and workers can attend the mosque—Maritime customers are at best unaware or at worst insensitive to this religious practice.

In addition to being part of the Christian majority in the Maritimes, Christian women also belong to immigrant groups that have a higher density than any single Muslim immigrant group. For example, there are relatively large numbers of Chinese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants living in New Brunswick. Once immigrant groups reach a critical mass, they begin to develop more formal social networks and institutions. Breton (1964) has theorized the process in which immigrant groups create businesses and services that support their cultural practices and are infused with their cultural values, the goal of which is what he refers to as institutional completeness. For example, a Chinese immigrant woman in the research, who came to Canada as an international student, became part of an evangelical Protestant church with a sizable Chinese population through the invitation of her friends. In addition to attending worship services, she is part of a Chinese-language Bible study group that meets weekly in the home of an elderly Chinese couple. For the regular church suppers, she joins other Chinese women for a day together to make hundreds of egg rolls with ingredients purchased from a local Chinese grocery store. The church is also home to the Chinese Cultural Association and hosts its

annual New Year's celebrations. This woman is working in her first job in Canada as an administrative assistant for the Association, which not only organizes cultural events but supports networking amongst Chinese business owners. This example illustrates how it is possible for Chinese immigrants in this city to feel part of Maritime society while maintaining aspects of their cultural identity. The low density of Muslim ethnic groups in the Maritimes means that a degree of institutional completeness is not yet evident.

Even the fact that it is possible to identify Chinese evangelical Protestants as a sub-group of Christian immigrant women with their own cultural organization in this study is evidence of a major difference between Christians and Muslims in the Maritimes. Despite their ethnic and religious heterogeneity, Muslims are more likely than Christians to be perceived as a single group by the public. This is partly due to there being only one mosque in each Maritime city. Yet there is considerable ethno-religious diversity amongst the Muslim population. This diversity presents opportunities and challenges for Muslim women. For many, living in the Maritimes is the first opportunity in their lives to associate with Muslim women from other class and ethnic backgrounds. This was evident during an Eid al Fitr celebration which I attended at the end of Ramadan. A potluck dinner was held at a community centre in which the men and women gathered in separate rooms. The long buffet table in the women's room had a vast variety of foods—a colourful (and flavourful!) symbol reflecting the ethnic diversity of the participants united to share a collective religious feast. However, the women from different ethnic groups sat at separate tables. Differences were evident in the different ways that they dressed (the majority wore *hijabs* but some did not) as well as in their languages. Linguistic differences are a considerable challenge for Muslim women on several levels. At the Eid potluck, announcements to the group were made in a couple of different languages but it was apparent that not everyone present understood what was being said. This was not likely a problem, since there was not a lot at stake in terms of misunderstanding. But one research participant indicates that there are problems when it comes to decision-making in the mosque. There is no imam and the mosque leadership falls to the largest ethnic group by virtue of them sharing the same language. Public discussions are dominated by men of the Muslim ethnic majority and this puts those from ethnic minority groups at a disadvantage.

One issue over which there was misunderstanding amongst the women was that of veiling. Muslim women in the same city did not understand the reasons behind different choices concerning veiling practices. For example, because Iranian women had been forced by law to veil in their home country, some women from Iran had chosen not to veil in Canada. One woman is perplexed that in a context of religious freedom, some Muslim women choose to veil.

> It doesn't really matter what is your religion in Canada. No one asks you what is your religion or no one asks you why you have hijab or you don't have hijab. Even when I go to the mall and I see a woman with a burqa, I look at her more than people from Canada! No one cares that she covers her face or her hair (Focus Group #6, Participant #1).

This particular Iranian woman's perspective indicates that her understanding of religious freedom springs from her experiences of having been forced by the state to conform with a religious dress code. Religious freedom for her means not having to conform to standards set by the Iranian government and likely by any external authority. She is free to not be a practicing Muslim in Canada. But religious freedom can be exercised in different ways by other Muslim women, like those who choose to wear a burqa. Another research participant chose to wear the *hijab* after 9/11 to increase her visibility as a woman of faith and use people's questions as opportunities to promote Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion. She believes that the *hijab* enables Muslim women and men to interact honourably with each other in public (Muslim #6). The lack of opportunities to discuss and understand the diversity of women's religious choices can become a problem amongst Muslim women when majority ethnic groups exert pressure on minorities to conform to particular norms for religious practices. Formal ethno-religious social networks might offer more opportunities for this kind of discussion and understanding to take place among Muslim women.

Gender segregated networks can play an important role in helping Muslim immigrant women negotiate their identities and practices in a new social context. With migration to a religiously pluralistic society like Canada comes the opportunity for Muslim women to choose which aspects of identity to maintain and/or heighten and which to let go (Bramadat 2005). Nason-Clark and Fisher-Townsend (2005) draw attention to a trend towards "gender inerrancy" in the rhetoric of contemporary conservative religious leaders, which influences the public perception of patriarchal religious groups. Through their rhetoric, some religious leaders give the impression that women's religious identities and practices are fixed. This puts pressure on religious women to conform to a narrow set of gender norms. Yet empirical studies highlight diversity in women's lived religious practices. In their study of Christian women in the US, Winter et al. (1995) found tremendous diversity of beliefs amongst theological conservatives and liberals accompanied by a consistent sense of discomfort with their tradition's gendered teachings. Gallagher (2003) has shown that despite professing a belief in gender traditionalism, many evangelical Protestant couples in fact practice gender egalitarianism in their families. The traditional social structuring of gender is being challenged collectively by women (and some men) in a variety of Christian denominations through organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality and the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (Holtmann 2015). Differences in gendered religious practices and beliefs amongst individual Muslim women have been highlighted by empirical studies (Hoodfar 2012; PEW 2012; Zine 2012) and collective resistance is occurring through organizations such as the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and the Federation of Muslim Women. Problems arise when state attempts to assist Muslim women's emancipation actually curb their religious freedom and impose secular gender norms (Selby 2014).

Differences of practice and belief within religious groups are historically common. This is what led to the division between Sunni and Shia Islam, the schism between Roman and Orthodox Catholics, and the Protestant Reformation. Mosques may be few and far between, but Christian differences in practice and belief are

supported structurally in the Maritimes. Cities and villages have multiple Christian churches and organizations. This is not the case, however, for Orthodox Catholic women. There are very few Orthodox churches in the region, making Orthodox immigrant women reliant on informal social support networks. As with all ethno-religious groups, difficulties in accessing social networks for the creation of bonding or bridging social capital with other Orthodox Christians means that Orthodox immigrant women may lack emotional support and information that can help them as they integrate into Maritime society.

6 Future Opportunities

Globalization has increased the flow of immigrants to non-traditional receiving societies like the Canadian Maritimes in recent years. The low density of all immigrant groups and the low levels of ethno-religious diversity in the region present challenges for immigrant women, especially when it comes to their involvement in social networks. Like the financial capital needed for housing, food, clothing, and transportation, the social capital that is created through social networks is an essential component in fulfilling immigrants' dreams for a better future in their new society. The substantial ethno-religious diversity amongst immigrants in the Maritimes means that for some, social networks are informal and this presents challenges in terms of immigrant women accessing support and information during the settlement process. Immigrant women must rely on word of mouth to find support from others who share their ethno-religious backgrounds. The local-born population lacks understanding of religious minority groups and this can be a problem amongst public service providers when social workers or public school teachers are insensitive to the ethno-religious practices of immigrant families (see Chap. 5). Racialization of members of visible minority groups, which can lead to acts of discrimination, has a negative impact on immigrant women's self-esteem.

Nevertheless, ethno-religious diversity presents opportunities for Christian and Muslim immigrant women and for the local-born population in the Maritimes. For the most part, evangelical Protestant churches in New Brunswick and PEI are welcoming of the new immigrants in their midst. Not only is immigration seen as an opportunity for the growth of congregations, but many churches have opened their doors to non-Christian and non-religious immigrants to participate in opportunities for language learning and fellowship. This contributes to social cohesion as Canadian-born Christians get to know and assist new immigrants. Other Christian churches have the opportunity to follow this example.

Christian and Muslim immigrant women have opportunities to create bridging social capital amongst the diverse immigrant population in the Maritimes, within the ethnic and class diversity of their religious groups, and with members of the local-born population. The language learning and employment counselling services offered by immigrant settlement agencies throughout the region are where many women start to become part of social networks of other immigrants who share

common experiences. Women in the mosques in the Maritimes are beginning to reach out to newcomer Muslims and families with young children, encouraging them to become part of public religious social networks, even though this may not have been something they did in their countries of origin. Opportunities for creating bridging capital with non-immigrants in the region are the least available to immigrant women, according to those in this particular study. Many of them long to make more meaningful connections with their Canadian neighbours, coworkers, and classmates. Social policies that address ethnic and gender segregation in the labour market are needed. Social networking opportunities between Canadian-born citizens and immigrant women can help to break down barriers of misunderstanding and fear. Women from diverse backgrounds are potential allies in overcoming discrimination and social inequality. There is much that Maritimers can do in order to deepen appreciation of ethno-religious diversity and the values and practices that immigrant women hold dear.

7 Questions for Critical Thought

1. Which social networks (family and friends, education, employment, religious) are most important to you at this time of your life and why? What kind of social capital (bonding or bridging) are you creating and what return do you expect on this investment?
2. What is the difference between how you use virtual and face-to-face social networks in your life? Which of these are more important in terms of your education or your career plans?
3. Proposed state bans of full or partial veiling for public servants (teachers, day care workers) and in the courts in Canada and France are controversial. Do you think this is a violation of Muslim women's religious freedom or a move to ensure the equality of all women?
4. What are some of the advantages of studying women's lived religious practices as opposed to the teachings of religious institutions? What are some of the disadvantages?

8 Online Teaching and Learning Resources

There are several photo essays and accompanying materials (interviews, commentary, questions for students, and suggested readings) on the Religion and Diversity Project website, including the one used in this chapter called "On the Outside." For essays on the intergenerational transmission of ethno-religious identity see "Mother Daughter" and "Food and Family."

http://religionanddiversity.ca/en/projects-and-tools/projects/linking-classrooms/photo-essays/

Several scholars speak about their research on religion and immigrants in short video clips including Peter Beyer, Helen Rose Ebaugh, Vivian Lee, and Michael Wilkinson:

http://religionanddiversity.ca/en/projects-and-tools/projects/linking-classrooms/linking-classrooms-videos/

Moving People Changing Places is a website based on a major research program in the UK led by Dr. Kim Knott. It features information, stories, images and learning resources, with links and further reading to follow up.

http://www.movingpeoplechangingplaces.org/

The Religious Studies Project is a collection of podcasts from the leading scholars in the scientific study of religion:

http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University has a plethora of information on ethno-religious diversity in the United States. It includes a Case Study Initiative which shows how the case study method can be creatively applied to teaching and learning in the religious studies classroom. Topics range from inclusiveness in city-sponsored prayers to a controversy over bringing the kirpan to school.
http://pluralism.org/

9 Suggested Further Reading

Beyer, P. & Ramji, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Growing up Canadian: Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists*. Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press.

This book is based on data from interviews conducted with hundreds of university students from three urban immigrant-receiving contexts—Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. The research highlights the process of religious change in the lives of second generation and generation 1.5 non-Christian immigrants. It offers comparisons of the dynamics of young adult religiosity from the perspective of each of three minority religious groups. Several chapters have a focus on gender.

Breton, R. (2012). *Different gods: Integrating non-Christian minorities into a primarily Christian society.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Based on the results of smaller scale studies carried out by other researchers in Canada and the United States, this book investigates the place of religion in the lives of non-Christian ethno-religious minority communities and its role in their members' integration into a predominantly Christian mainstream society. Breton's analysis focuses on processes: the experience of individuals being uprooted from one

social world and transplanted to another; changes to individual immigrant identities, beliefs, and practices; challenges to minority religious institutions; and the changes experienced by individuals and groups in mainstream society.

Kazemipur, A. (2014). *The Muslim question in Canada: A story of segmented integration*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

This is an empirical study using quantitative data from three surveys conducted by Statistics Canada as well as two surveys conducted by Environics. Qualitative data from interviews with 12 Muslims from the Prairie provinces are also analyzed. Kazemipur's work provides an overview of the situation of Canadian Muslims as a whole as well as a comparison with the non-Muslim population in Canada. He advocates for an increase in the levels of social interaction among people of different faiths in Canada at the level of neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces and claims that improvement in social relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims could lead to improved economic experiences and a stronger sense of belonging for Muslims in Canada.

Lee, B. R., & Tak-ling Woo, T. (Eds.). (2014). *Canadian women shaping diasporic identities.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

This collection of essays explores how women from a variety of religious (Christian, Jewish, Mormon, Bahai, Hindu) and cultural backgrounds contribute to Canada's pluralistic society. The contributors show how religious women both conserve and transform their cultures and collective identities. A focus on women's informal and unofficial activities within their religious traditions provides new perspectives on religion, gender, and transnationalism.

O'Connor, P. (2014). *Immigrant faith: Patterns of immigrant religion in the United States, Canada and Western Europe*. New York: New York University Press.

This book is based on the statistical analysis of large data sets and offers an overview of general patterns concerning the role of religion in the immigration process. Without focusing on any particular religious group, O'Connor summarizes these patterns as the moving, changing, integrating and transferring of the religions of immigrants. The book offers a comparison of the contemporary dynamics of immigrant religions in the West.

Zine, J. (Ed.). (2012). *Islam in the Hinterlands: Muslim cultural politics in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

With this edited collection Zine convincingly shows that Muslim women are not a singular entity and should not be essentialized. Through critical essays and empirical studies of media content and educational settings, the researchers contributing to this book challenge some of the prevailing generalizations about Muslim women in Canada.

10 Researcher Background

Catherine Holtmann has spoken with over a hundred immigrant women from across Canada about their lived religious practices in the last decade. Her work highlights their stories of resiliency in the face of challenges. She co-produced the documentary, "Breaking Barriers Moving Forward" in 2017 to showcase some of these stories from immigrant women living in New Brunswick (https://youtu.be/I1ciRp-o9aA). She is currently working on a project using photovoice as a method to facilitate Muslim-Christian relationships. Catherine is Associate Professor in the Sociology Department and Director of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

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