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Building an Ignatian Ummah: The Experience of Muslim International Students at an American Jesuit University

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my parents, Attila and Ildiko Samay, who came to America as immigrants seeking freedom and a better life and instilled in me the value of education that they never had the chance to pursue themselves. I wish you were here to celebrate this accomplishment with me.

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ABSTRACT

Building an Ignatian *Ummah*: The Experience of

Muslim International Students at an American Jesuit University

by

Csilla V. Samay

In 2020, over a million international students enrolled at universities in the United States. A significant percent come from Muslim-majority countries whose governments sponsor their education abroad. As overall international enrollments decrease, recruiting this population remains attractive to U.S. institutions. International students face the challenge of entering higher education in a foreign country and culture, navigating their education during a time of political battles over immigration and issues of diversity. Muslim students face prejudice and exclusion due to Islamophobia in the U.S. Universities have a responsibility to understand and fully support students from whom they benefit financially.

This study examined the experiences of 11 Muslim international students and alumni at one American Jesuit university, exploring how being at a religiously affiliated institution influenced their university experience. A qualitive approach was utilized to understand their experiences through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Findings confirmed that Muslim international students experience multiple challenges and demonstrated the importance of community and impact of institutional interfaith identity on supporting and shaping their experiences. The framework of Community Cultural Wealth and spiritual capital highlight the tools and strengths students engage to successfully navigate their

time at the institution. Findings supported the opportunities universities have to push back against Islamophobia by providing opportunities for all to engage with and learn from one another, and showed Jesuit universities' institutional interfaith identities and educational pedagogy as critical in helping students fully develop themselves and influence the good of society.

CHAPTER 1

In the days leading up to the start of the spring 2018 semester, I received a frantic phone call from Khaled, a second-year student from Qatar. He was calling from the Doha airport, where he was prevented from boarding his flight to Los Angeles. He explained that his passport was taken, and his F-1 student visa cancelled without explanation. He was concerned that he would not arrive back to our university on time to begin his classes the following week. In my role as Assistant Dean overseeing the Office for International Students and Scholars, I am the primary university contact for international students when they encounter any problems. Over the next several days, we remained in close contact as we both tried to get information on what had happened and attempted to secure him a new visa. The days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months, and Khaled was still unable to return for the spring semester. We stayed in frequent contact discussing his situation and our strategy to facilitate his return, making full use of any contacts we or anyone we knew had at the U.S. Embassy in Doha, the Department of State, and with officials in the Qatari government. I made countless phone calls to colleagues, friends, and friends of friends and wrote several letters of support from our institution to the U.S. Embassy visa and consular sections. Khaled visited the U.S. Embassy on multiple occasions and would send me screen shots of any communication he received. As the summer semester began and he was still unable to return, our frequent phone calls and WhatsApp (https://www.whatsapp.com) conversations took on a tone of desperation and a depression about not being able to return to campus. Throughout this process, I found myself moved that Khaled had such a sense of belonging on our campus and in our community, remaining determined to solve this problem and return. I also found myself asking questions: What was it about his experience, as a Muslim

international student at a Jesuit university, that was so meaningful to him? What gave him this sense of community and of home? Did our other Muslim international students feel the same way at our institution? If so, what was it about this environment that contributed to these feelings?

Background of Problem

While Khaled's situation is not the norm, international students face a growing number of challenges when pursuing higher education in the United States. Most students face challenges when entering college in their home country; international students face the additional challenge of entering higher education in a country and culture which is foreign to them. Problems may include language barriers, difficulty making American friends, academic challenges, and difficulties in psychological and sociological adjustment to their new environment (Telbis et al., 2014). Geary (2016) pointed to the differences between U.S. learning environments, which use a different style of instruction and testing compared to other parts of the world. As a result, international students are faced with many questions on how to approach their studies and do not have clarity about what is expected of them when it comes to learning in this new academic environment. In addition to these challenges, international students in the United States are also navigating their education during a time of political battles over immigration and issues of diversity, which have long been contentious in American society, but became increasingly divisive after the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2016. An increase in visa revocations starting in 2018 fed concerns that the government, through policy and practice, was making it more difficult for international students to come and study on American campuses (Fischer, 2019). These concerns were magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the

Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) announced that international students at universities that were providing only online classes would not be able to remain in the United States. This rule was rescinded on July 14, 2020 (Treisman, 2020), but the uncertainty that international students face regarding their status in the United States remained. Even without this restriction in place, international students faced other challenges due to the pandemic, including navigating online courses from their home countries in different time zones, losing opportunities to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), which allows for up to 3 years of work experience in the United States after graduation, and feeling disconnected from their campus communities.

While the political climate in the United States is a challenge for many international students, Muslim students from the Middle East face additional prejudice and exclusion due to pervasive Islamophobia in the United States. Islamophobia has been defined as "the fear of and hostility toward Muslims and Islam that is rooted in racism and which results in individual and systemic discrimination, exclusion, and violence targeting Muslims and those perceived as Muslim" (Green, 2019, p. 38). The author posited that Islamophobia is structural, with fear and suspicion of Muslims on the part of government institutions and actors. This is manifested and enforced through the enactment and advancement of laws, policies and programming and build upon the presumption that Muslim identity is associated with a national security threat. In 2015, President Trump advocated for a ban on Muslims coming to the United States, proposed the establishment of a registry for Muslims in the United States and called for the surveillance of mosques (Potok, 2017). Revealing that anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by 67% in 2015 according to the FBI, Potok connected this increase to the anti-Muslim rhetoric from Trump during his campaign for the U.S. presidency as well as news reports of the horrors committed by

the Islamic State (2017). Islamophobia was operationalized in the United States through the January 2017 executive order which barred noncitizens from seven majority-Muslim nations from entering the United States. Popularly known as "the Muslim ban," the discussion and rhetoric around this order has had a profound effect on how welcome and how safe these students feel in the United States. In my professional context I have seen several cases of student deportations, cancellations of visas, and denials of requests for OPT since 2017 with most of these cases involving students from Muslim-majority countries, even if they do not appear on the list of banned countries. These issues appeared to affect international students at other colleges and universities as well. For example, in September of 2019, a Palestinian teenager about to start classes at Harvard was detained for hours after landing in Boston and then deported, reportedly because of his friends' social-media posts (Redden, 2019). While this student was eventually granted entry to the United States, concerns persisted about the impact of harsher visa and immigration policies on international students, many of whom are Muslim.

Recent studies addressed the Trump administration's use of anti-Muslim rhetoric and its potential impact on Muslims. One study explored the experiences of eight undergraduate Muslim international students on three campuses in the western United States using the concept of Islamophobia and the Campus Climate Framework (Dimandja, 2017). Various forms of discrimination by gender, ethnicity and religion were reported by participants. Studies of international Muslim students (Anderson, 2020; Dimandja, 2017) found that President Trump's ban on individuals from Muslim-majority countries as well as general anti-Muslim sentiment caused feelings of marginalization, fear, and discrimination.

Less explicit forms of anti-Islamic sentiment may also be present in the classroom; as universities encourage debates concerning politics and religion, corresponding classes on these topics coupled with the current political climate can make discussions in the classroom a difficult one for Muslim students (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Recent work looking at the experience of international Muslim students showed that they "experience academic and social challenges, and the campus climate may not be favorable to them; still, the United States continues to recruit them" (Dimandja, 2017, p. 30). As U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to recruit students from the Middle East, institutions must also develop robust support services and culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure the success of these students inside and outside the classroom.

Despite the many challenges Islamophobic policies pose for students, the overall number of international students in the United States reached an all-time high in 2020 with 1,075,496 international students enrolled, the fifth consecutive year with more than one million students studying in the country. Despite a slight decline of 1.8% from the previous year, international students currently represent 5.5% of the total U.S. higher education population (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2020).

Many universities across the United States enroll a significant percent of international students among their total student body. This significant increase in the number of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education has increased cultural diversity on campuses across the country. However, for many institutions, the reason for increasing international student enrollment is financial (Rabia, 2017). As international students are ineligible for many of the financial aid awards accessible by U.S. citizens, they often end up

paying full tuition and fees for their education, making them a lucrative segment of the student body.

While overall numbers remain strong, the number of international students enrolling at a U.S. institution for the first time in fall 2020 declined by .06%, continuing a trend which began in 2017-2018 with a 6.6% decrease (IIE, 2020). The drop in new students signals potential financial difficulties for some universities that have come to reply on revenue from international students, who provided an infusion of $38.7 billion into the U.S. economy in 2020 according to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce; this represented a loss of $1.8 billion from the previous year, the first decrease in revenue seen since data on international student economic impact started to be collected 20 years ago (NAFSA: Association of International Educators [NAFSA], 2020).

The downward enrollment trend is also reflected in the number of students from the Middle East region, defined as Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Yemen (IIE, 2020). In 2019/2020 65,343 students enrolled from the Middle East region, a decrease of 11.9% over the previous year (IIE, 2020). Most of these students were fully funded through government scholarship programs providing them with full tuition, a stipend for living expenses, health insurance, and airfare back to the home country (Leggett, 2013). Although enrollments from the Middle East have been in decline, at a time when overall international enrollments are decreasing recruiting this population is still very attractive to U.S. HEIs who will continue to target reliable sources of full-pay international students.

Muslim Students

It is important to explore the experience of international Muslim students in the larger context of Muslims in the United States. In 2015 there were 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, nearly a quarter of the world's population; while only 1.1% of them resided in the United States as of 2017, that number is expected to grow to 2.1% by 2050, making Muslims the second-largest faith group in the country (Lipka, 2017). As Muslim students generally make up a small minority of the student body at most colleges and universities, their unique needs often get overlooked in larger conversations about diversity (Stegmeir, 2017).

The Arabic word *ummah* means "community" and is commonly used to refer to the Muslim community as a group of people from diverse backgrounds, ancestry, locations and nationalities, united under the guidance of the One God (Stacey, 2021), wherever in the world they may be.

Muslim Students at Catholic Colleges

Although comprising a relatively low percentage of students at all schools, Muslim student enrollment at Catholic colleges has increased significantly since 2010 (Daniels, 2016). A 2017 article in the *Chicago Tribune* noted that the two prominent Catholic universities in the city have sizeable Muslim student populations and staff positions to accommodate those students. One of those institutions, Loyola University Chicago, a Jesuit university, maintains 7% Muslim student enrollment (Gregory, 2017). An administrator at another Catholic university with increasing Muslim enrollment noted that Muslim students

> Can appreciate being here and faith is something that is cherished and honored and respected and something you share and talk about…students have told me they feel very comfortable here as Muslims because they don't feel judged by their faith and that's a really important thing-to feel comfortable and welcome. (Daniels, 2016, p. 12a)

According to the President of the American Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (AACCU), the charters of many Catholic universities and colleges state that they welcome students of all faiths (Gregory, 2017). This is consistent with the "apostolic constitution," *Ex Corde Ecclaesiae*, which Pope John Paul II issued in 1990 to explain the common characteristics of Catholic colleges and universities worldwide. The document noted that

> The university community of many Catholic institutions includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities and religions, and also those who profess no religious belief…their initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs are to be respected. In interreligious dialogue it will assist in discerning the spiritual values that are present in the different religions. (no. 39-47)

While *Ex Corde Ecclaesiae* (1990) discussed the characteristics and obligations of Catholic colleges and universities in general, the actions of individual institutions are often guided by the charism of their founding order. One such group is the Society of Jesus.

The Society of Jesus

The Society of Jesus is a Roman Catholic order founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. The Jesuits, as the society's members are called, are known primarily for being educators, despite their primary purpose having been global evangelization; from the time of their founding until their suppression by Rome in 1757 they established more than eight hundred colleges around the world (Zupanov, 2019). Jesuit schools were opened in Catholic and non-Catholic countries alike due to their excellent reputation. They were known for positive encounters with indigenous peoples in the Americas, Africa, India, the Middle East and the Far East requiring intercultural understanding from the Jesuit side, involving use of linguistics, ethnography, and sciences to evangelize (Casalini, 2019). When the Society was restored in 1814, their

international network of schools and universities was reinvigorated and continued to grow, including in the United States, where they still run some of the best universities in the country (Casalini, 2019; Seferta, 2016). Today there are 27 colleges and universities in the United States operated by the Society of Jesus. (See Table 1).

Table 1

Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States

College/University Name	Location
Boston College	Chestnut Hill, MA
Canisius College	Buffalo, NY
College of the Holy Cross	Worcester, MA
Creighton University	Omaha, NE
Fairfield University	Fairfield, CT
Fordham University	New York City, NY
Georgetown University	Washington, D.C.
Gonzaga University	Spokane, WA
John Carroll University	University Heights, OH
Le Moyne College	Syracuse, NY
Loyola University Chicago	Chicago, IL
Loyola University Maryland	Baltimore, MD
Loyola Marymount University	Los Angeles, CA
Loyola University New Orleans	New Orleans, LA
Marquette University	Milwaukee, WI
Regis University	Denver, CO
Rockhurst University	Kansas City, MO
St. Joseph's University	Philadelphia, PA
Saint Louis University	St. Louis, MO
Saint Peters University	Jersey City, NJ
Santa Clara University	Santa Clara, CA
Seattle University	Seattle, WA
Spring Hill College	Mobile, AL
University of Detroit Mercy	Detroit, MI
University of San Francisco	San Francisco, CA
University of Scranton	Scranton, PA
Xavier University	Cincinnati, OH

The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus took place in 1995, resulting in the issuance of 26 decrees. The Jesuit mission was described as "service of faith that does justice in dialogue with religions and cultures" (Padberg, 2009, p.537), with the 5th decree offering guidelines for how Jesuits can foster dialogue between different religious cultures, specifically, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It concludes that the Jesuits' "heritage of creative response to the call of the Spirit in concrete situations of life is an incentive to develop a culture of dialogue in our approach to believers of other religions" (Padberg, 2009, p. 134).

The scholar Father Thomas Michel, S.J., is an excellent example of the continued work of Jesuits to promote interfaith dialogue among all religions in modern times, particularly between Christians and Muslims. His reflections on encounters with Muslims through his years living in Indonesia, Turkey, and elsewhere highlighted that Muslims and Christians do not know very much about each others' faith traditions, and the negative image of Islam that is portrayed by the media results in the stereotypical view of Muslims often held by Christians (Michel & Omar, 2010). In his writings on the commitment of the Society of Jesus to forming a culture of dialogue, Michel noted that "it is a slow process of study, planning, pastoral decisions and choices, communication among members of the institute, and, most of all, a question of changing attitudes" (Michel & Omar, 2010, p. 8). He went on to discuss the importance of building trust and an emphasis on dialogue leading to the mutual enrichment of all in the context of a shared life (Michel & Omar, 2010). One can view Jesuit Universities, with their enrollment of students from many faith background as places where this culture of dialogue among different religions can be seen in action.

Statement of the Problem

Universities' efforts to recruit students from the Middle East have resulted in an increase in Muslim students on university campuses. These universities benefit financially from these students, who typically pay full tuition (Leggett, 2013). At the same time, however, universities have not done enough to ensure that Muslim students get the support they need to be successful, nor have they taken a stand against Islamophobia (Dimandja, 2017).

It is critical to explore the question of what social and academic support universities can provide to Muslim international students to promote their cultural adjustment and academic

success, and how universities can design curriculum and programming that encourages interactions and promotes dialogue between them and American students, resulting in a transformation of the current Islamophobic narrative present in the United States. While there is a robust body of research on the experience of international students in the United States focused on challenges with language, academics, cultural adjustment and practical matters, there is still work that must be done on the experience of Muslim international students in particular, especially with regards to their experience in the current political climate. Further, there is limited research focused on the experience of Muslim students at Catholic colleges and universities and almost no research about their experiences at Jesuit institutions. For Catholic colleges and universities including the 27 Jesuit schools in the United States, inviting and including people of other faiths is a longstanding mandate from the Church. This study aimed to uncover some ways in which this mandate is enacted through the inclusion of Muslim international students on the campus of one Jesuit university.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is it like to be a Muslim international student on the campus of a Jesuit university in the United States?
2. How does being at a religiously affiliated institution influence their U.S. university experience?

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of Muslim international students at WJCU, a Jesuit university in a large metropolitan area on the west coast. A qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted with Muslim international students (undergraduate and graduate) and recent alumni of WJCU. Interview questions explored the ways in which Muslim international students participated in daily life on campus, including academic, social, cultural, and spiritual experiences, and what role religious affiliation played in their higher education experience. The study was situated within a cultural context of political and social turmoil arising from the contemporary anti-immigrant and Islamophobic climate in the United States, and therefore had the added purpose of describing the impacts of Islamophobia on students' experiences in higher education.

Significance of the Study

This study was important because American institutions of higher education have an increased focus on the recruitment of fully sponsored international students from the Middle East to maintain or grow their international student enrollments, in many cases for the financial benefit such students provide the institution. Universities have a responsibility to understand and serve students from whom they benefit financially. Universities also have an opportunity to push back against Islamophobia by changing the culture of the school, increasing faculty and staff awareness of Islam, and pursuing public scholarship in this area.

Catholic and Jesuit schools have the extra lever of religion to use as a mechanism for change. Muslim international students will benefit from institutions having more understanding of their experience and need for support and developing the appropriate resources to ensure the

success of this population. Non-international Muslim students may also benefit from the findings of this study, as institutions will be more aware of any needs related to the faith tradition of Islam, not related to country of origin. Institutions will benefit from this study by learning what support is essential to provide to these students, thus increasing the enrollment of students through their positive reputation and increasing the retention of these students. International students overall will benefit as many of the resources universities develop as a result of this research will benefit other, non-Muslim international students. Faculty will benefit from learning more about the experience and needs of these students and be able to better teach in an international and intercultural classroom. American students will benefit by the increased diversity on their campus. The 27 Jesuit universities in the United States will benefit by knowing how their unique educational methods and environments affect the experience of international Muslim students. Finally, there is an opportunity for all universities to be levers of change against Islamophobia.

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the experience of Muslim international students at a Jesuit university in the United States and identified the support that the university has in place to effectively serve a population that is very different from the majority socio-economic and cultural groups found on these campuses. In order to help understand the particularities of Muslim students' experiences at an American university, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) was used alongside Yosso's (2005) framework for community cultural wealth. Taken together, these theories are useful tools for understanding the resources and values students bring to and gain from their university experiences.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities acquired and carried on by privileged groups in society. He argued that these norms and forms of knowledge reflective of the middle class are mirrored in educational standards of evaluation that create an advantage for students who are able to conform to and meet institutional expectations. His theoretical insight has been translated as a reason why academic and social outcomes of non-White, middle or higher class individuals are lower than outcomes of economically privileged White people. This assumes that non-White lower class individuals do not have the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. This concept has been a mainstay of researchers in the field of education interested in the cultural correlates of educational achievement (Davies & Rizk, 2018) and schools often work from this assumption when creating support for students seen as disadvantaged. This deficit theorizing blames the underachievement of ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies relating to the minority students themselves, their families, and their cultures (Hogg 2011). Utilizing a critical race theory lens, Yosso (2005) challenged traditional interpretations of Bordieuan cultural capital theory and outlined the alternative concept of community cultural wealth. This framework provided context and structure to exploring the experience of the participants in this study.

Community cultural wealth includes six types of capital that educational leaders can use to frame their interactions with students. *Aspirational capital* is defined by Yosso (2005) as the "hopes and dreams" students have. Muslim international students, their families, and their sponsoring governments have high educational aspirations despite the challenges of studying in a foreign country and language. *Linguistic capital* refers to the various language and

communication skills students bring with them to their college environment. Yosso argued that because storytelling is a part of students' lives before them arrive on college campuses, they bring with them "skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme." (2005, p. 79). *Familial capital* refers to the social and personal human resources students have in their precollege environment, drawn from their extended familial and community networks. *Social capital* is defined by Yosso as students' "peers and other social contacts" and emphasizes how students utilize these contacts to gain access to college and navigate other social institutions (2005, p. 81). *Navigational capital* refers to students' skills and abilities to navigate "social institutions," including educational spaces (2005, p. 81). Yosso (2005) noted that students' navigational capital empowers them to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments. *Resistant capital* has its foundations in the experiences of communities of color in securing equal rights and collective freedom. According to Yosso (2005), the sources of this form of capital come from parents, community members and an historical legacy of engaging in social justice.

Park et al. (2019) further developed Yosso's (2005) model, expanding on Pérez Huber's (2009) identification of *spiritual capital*, which they used to describe capital, assets, and resources linked to spirituality and/or religion, or as articulated by Pérez Huber (2009), "a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself" (p. 721).

Research Design and Methodology

This research arose from a transformative worldview, calling attention to the marginalization of this population and advocating for change in structures if necessary. I used a qualitive approach to understand the experiences of Muslim international students at a Jesuit

university in the United States. Through semi-structured interviews, participants provided their points of view of themselves as Muslim international students, described their experiences, and shared their understanding of their positionality and their interpretation of events. The methodology for the study drew from aspects of phenomenology, which aims to identify commonalities in shared human experiences in order develop a deeper understanding of a particular experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

This study employed in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses or to evaluate, but instead to understand the lived experience of others and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). Data gathered through semi-structured interviews allowed themes to emerge related to how students struggled, how their needs were met, how comfortable they felt in the university environment, and what contributed to their success. Interviews with students focused on academic and social experiences, while interviews with key staff explored what they saw as their challenges and how they successfully worked with this population. Data were analyzed thematically using both a priori coding derived from the study's theoretical framework and emergent codes revealed through the data analysis.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations

The outcomes of qualitative research and its validity depend heavily on the context through which the data is obtained. The engagement of multiple points of view from participants themselves, and not only what might be found in a literature review or what the researcher believes to be true, is necessary for the validity of the research. Limitations of this study included

the gathering of data during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a videoconferencing version of maintaining intimate face to face interactions with participants. One of the more important tenets in ethnographic research is the ability of the researcher to become embedded in the culture that is being studied (Fusch et al., 2017). I believe that my being embedded in the culture is explicit due to my relationships with many students, professional role as liaison between sponsored students, their sponsoring agencies, and our university, and having served as the advisor for the Kuwait Club. However, I was not as explicitly embedded with student groups from other countries with smaller student numbers. Another limitation was the small number of participants in this study; this led me to focus on gathering rich data, interviewing participants for a longer length of time. An additional limitation was the use of the concept of culture as an interpretive lens-I needed to be very knowledgeable of the cultures the student participants came from to better understand what they shared.

An additional limitation was the political narrative regarding Muslims and international students in the United States at the time of this study in 2020. The transformative worldview sees inquiry as being intertwined with politics and a political agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Creswell, 2014). The goal of this worldview is to call attention to marginalization and advocate for change in power structures, thus the focus is on marginalized groups or inequities found in society today. Restrictions of government sponsors and student visa policies impacted students' abilities to participate in this research, given the time difference that was present between their home countries and the United States, where the researcher was located.

Delimitations

As international Muslim students at the research site come from several different countries, this study focused only on those who were from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. While the cultures of these countries have similarities, they also have unique features which were reflected in the experience of students from each country. Most of these students were sponsored by their governments, each with a unique list of requirements students must meet in order to continue sponsorship. The different rules and regulations of each sponsor affected the experience of students in different ways, particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic. Tensions between students from different countries also affected their experience and it was important to be aware of this. All participants were enrolled at one Jesuit university on the west coast of the United States, and taken with the limited countries and research site, there were threats to transferability, and an impact on generalizing the findings of this study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are often more explicit in qualitative work. I had assumptions of my participant group as one for whom the religious aspect of the institution they attend was important. There was an assumption that they viewed the campus's services for Muslim students positively. There was also an assumption that they had needs unique to them as a larger cultural group, and I assumed that I had an adequate understanding of the cultures from which they came.

Positionality

What brought me to this research was my over 20 years of working with Muslim international students through my career in international education, my frequent travels in the

Middle East, and the relationships I developed with students, families, educators, and university alumni in the Gulf. In my role as Assistant Dean overseeing the Office for International Students and Scholars at my institution, every day I witnessed first-hand the successes and struggles of this population. Our institution founded the Office for Muslim Student Life three years ago and worked in close collaboration to ascertain what our Muslim students overall may need to be fully supported at our Jesuit university. During my career I had witnessed a shift towards an Islamophobic narrative in the United States, and in the last three years had seen a growing number of students from the Middle East affected by the Muslim Travel Ban, denied visas and entry to the United States, had student visas revoked, and subjected to biased treatment in classrooms and off campus. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, students were further challenged by restrictions from government sponsors, emergency evacuation from the United States mandated by their governments, and changes in student visa regulations that forced many to navigate online education from home with a significant time difference and a disconnectedness from their communities. Through this time, our offices worked to keep students connected to the university and showed international students they were welcome in and important to our community.

Definitions of Key Terms

International Students: Individuals studying in the United States on non-immigrant, temporary F-1 student visas that allow for academic study at the post-secondary level. This includes both degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking students. Immigrants, permanent residents, citizens, resident aliens, and refugees are excluded from this definition (IIE, 2019).

Islam: Islam is the religion of Muslims of the world, as well as their way of life. It means submission to the will of God and to Muhammad. The Islam religion believes there is no deity except Allah and that Muhammad is His last prophet.

Muslim International Students: Students who adhere to the Islamic faith who are in the United States studying on non-immigrant, temporary visas.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries: A political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries which include Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. In this study, participants who hail from this country are referred to as students from the Gulf.

Jesuit university: A university which is run by the Jesuit order of Catholic priests, founded in 1534 by St. Ignatius of Loyola. There are 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, which are a part of a network of approximately 188 Jesuit institutions of higher learning in the world. Jesuit institutions are known for their focus on teaching and imparting skills such as critical thinking in their students through rigorous academic standards. Though they adhere to basic Catholic principles, they center on training learners to become free thinkers.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study, including the background/context that motivated the study and the research questions and design for the research. In the next chapter, I examine the research literature related to the topic of Muslim international students' experiences at U.S. colleges and universities, including investigation of the challenges and supports students experience. In Chapter 3, I will return to the study design and provide detail on the methodology for the study, including plans for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 will present the findings

of the research, with Chapter 5 providing discussion of the findings and offering recommendations for future research and implementation of the findings from this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review has been divided into three sections, each examining an important aspect of Muslim international students' experiences in U.S. higher education. The first section considers literature about the experience of international students in the United States in general, including academic, financial, cultural, and social challenges faced by students regardless of their religion or country of origin. The second section highlights experiences specific to Muslim students, Muslim international students, and Muslim international students from the Gulf countries. The final section provides a brief history of Jesuit relations with Islam and explores how Jesuit universities in the United States serve Muslim students on campus.

International Students in the United States

International students pursue education abroad and in the United States for various reasons that may include improving English language abilities, economic factors, a desire to experience American culture (Eder et al., 2010) and an increase in opportunities (Zhou, 2015). The perspectives of two often-applied theories in international student mobility, push-pull (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and human capital (Becker, 1993) focused primarily on private perceived benefit to the individual and public benefit to the home country. However, there are other reasons for individuals choosing to study abroad which are culturally specific and influence not only the choice to pursue education abroad but also the choice of institution. Student decisions are not only made at the individual or family level but can also be motivated or even propelled by governmental entities (Yakaboski et al., 2017).

Recent research in international student mobility has explored the influence of study abroad scholarships funded by governments and found that they increase student participation in international education and play a role in student decisions concerning study abroad (Perna et al., 2015). Many students from GCC countries are fully sponsored by their governments, who maintain lists of approved U.S. educational programs and institutions and highly regulate their choice of institutions and programs of study. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) sponsors thousands of its students through its King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (KASP), in operation since 2005 and managed by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the United States (SACM). SACM allows for students to study in specific majors at specific institutions and stipulates in their scholarship programs that students cannot change their majors without sponsor approval and justification (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission [SACM], n.d.). Other governments including those of Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates maintain similar, highly regulated scholarship programs whose rules and procedures both students and universities must adhere to.

A recent study examining the decision to pursue United States study among 18 Saudi graduate students at a mid-sized research university found that a perception of U.S. institutions as prestigious and providing quality education, an absence of quality programs in Saudi Arabia, influence of government sponsors, institutional ranking, influence of home country alumni of the institution, and cultural and religious expectations of family and gender all played a role in their decision to enroll at the U.S. institution. These Saudi students made study abroad choices based on culturally specific social processes involving various actors, both in and beyond their home country as well as intermediaries such as SACM (Yakaboski et al., 2017).

As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the number of students from overseas studying in the United States has increased dramatically, with enrollments of international students increasing by more than 85% over the last decade (IIE, 2020). International students add value and diversity to educational institutions around the world (Andrade, 2006; Kwon, 2009). These students who come to U.S. campuses from around the globe can play a vital role in providing opportunities for global engagement and supporting campus internationalization efforts at universities and colleges (Shadowen et al., 2019). Many scholars have explored the academic and social challenges international students face as they pursue their education in foreign countries; various studies focused on experiences of these students in the United States in particular (Kuo, 2011; Kwon, 2009; Li et al., 2010). International students come to the United States in order to pursue their aspirations for higher education and career opportunities (Lin, 2012). Pursuing higher education outside the home country is not without significant risk; international students can experience multiple challenges as a result of language and cultural barriers, difficulties with academics, financial concerns, racial discrimination, culture shock, and home sickness. One study analyzed the impact of community acceptance/comfort, language mastery, academic preparation, and financial solvency issues on international students' confidence towards completing their academic program. All four issues were found to be valid difficulties significant enough to have a negative impact on completion of studies, and the authors concluded that academic success is greatly dependent on a student's confidence in his or her abilities and resources (Telbis et al., 2014).

Academic Challenges

Several studies suggested that international students devote considerable time and energy to their academic performance, and those who are successful are more likely to persist (Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012). Many factors were found to contribute to the academic challenges of international students in the United States, including proficiency in English, understanding the culture and expectations of the U.S. classroom, and previous educational experiences in the home country.

English Language Challenges

Much of the literature focused on English language proficiency as vital to the success of international students. For international students who are studying in a second language of English, their proficiency plays a crucial role in successfully completing their studies in an English-speaking learning environment (Li et al., 2010). Proficiency in English is critical for understanding and completing assignments, writing papers, and interacting with professors as well as being able to fully understand what is expected of students academically and otherwise. This understanding and communicating with professors, staff, and other students is vital to student success; indeed, one study identified listening comprehension and oral proficiency as major language barriers to international students (Kuo, 2011).

Many students begin their studies in the United States in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program, gaining proficiency in English prior to enrolling at a college or university. A study of 165 international students in the eastern region of the United States found that students who had been in an ESL program were more likely to report feeling isolated or even intimidated in classrooms than those who had not (Kwon, 2009). Lack of proficiency and

confidence in English may prevent some students from participating in class discussions for fear of their accents being different-this lack of participation may lead to lower grades in courses and learning outcomes (Andrade, 2006; Kwon, 2009). One study identified a lack of full English proficiency as potentially the single greatest barrier experienced by international students, as it affected both their ability to succeed academically as well as their ability to engage socially with other students (Yeh & Inose, 2002).

Classroom Environment and Expectations

Understanding academic expectations and participating in the classroom can be affected not only by proficiency in English but also by international students' previous experiences with academics in their home countries and cultures. Studies have noted that international students from certain cultures including Asia and the Middle East may not be accustomed to the pedagogical environment that U.S. universities typically showcase, which may include class discussions, debates, and other more participatory activities; such students may be trained to take notes, listen submissively, and memorize materials (Rao, 2017). Instructional strategies that focus on classroom participation may prove challenging to international students whose prior educational experience was passive, not requiring their active involvement with constructing knowledge (Akanwa, 2015). Students from collectivist cultures which prioritize the value of the group may seek a higher degree of direction from their professors, as in their native countries they are taught to seek a closer connection with faculty. Lastly, students from these cultures may not be trained to critique content and fully grasp critical concepts in Western academic environments such as citations and expectations of academic integrity, leading to consequences

that could impact their academic performances. Writing styles may also be vastly different, forcing students to relearn how to write appropriately in the U.S. context (Rao, 2017).

Financial Challenges

To secure an F-1 student visa to study in the United States, international students must be able to show adequate financial resources to support themselves for the duration of their studies. Most international students fund their studies through their families' financial resources; according to the Institute of International Education in the 2019-2020 academic year 56.2% of total international students in the United States were funded through personal or family sources, with 83.9% of undergraduate students reporting this funding source (2020). Students are impacted by currency fluctuations, economic and political changes in the home country, and transitions in their families' financial fortunes, which can cause stress and financial insecurity. Many students are fully financially dependent on families back home, and experience financial anxiety as they pay their high tuition costs (Kwon, 2009; Lin, 2012). Unlike students with citizenship or permanent residency in the United States, international students are limited to working on-campus for the first nine months of their student status in the United States and after the nine-month period can only work-off campus in positions that are directly related to their course of study.

Sponsored Students

A smaller number of international students in the United States reported being sponsored by their government or government agencies, with 3.5% of total students and 5% of undergraduate students indicating this source for the 2019-2020 academic year (IIE, 2020). Foreign governments provide scholarships so that local students may experience education in

western nations, and students are expected to return home with their knowledge and skills gained abroad in order to contribute positively to their communities (Rao, 2017). Those who are sponsored by their governments are subject to the rules and regulations of that sponsorship, having to navigate university systems to provide proper documentation as required by the sponsors in order to pay tuition costs and living expenses. Government sponsored students are directly affected by changes in government funding levels. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program out of Saudi Arabia is the largest scholarship program in the Arab world, and was impacted by the country's transition in leadership, reducing the number of scholarships provided. The number of students sponsored in the United States by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) dropped by 15.5% from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (IIE, 2019). Sherry et al., (2010) found that international students experience very real financial weaknesses as they try to create a successful future for themselves.

Social Support

Coming to the United States typically means that students leave behind their strong network of social support back home made up of extended family, friends, and community. Students who are from more collectivist cultures may experience social anxiety as they miss familiar surroundings and strong family ties (Rao, 2017). It is not uncommon for international students to seek out others from their home countries or cultures at least initially, to help them feel more comfortable and supported. Several studies have explored students socializing with others from their native countries (Andrade, 2006; Lin, 2012). Literature has shown that support from the host community could be the difference between a smooth transition and one plagued with challenges and difficulties. One study which paired 30 international students with 30

intercultural communication ‘buddies’ at an institution in New Zealand found that international students making the transition to a foreign university have the added stress of living in an unfamiliar cultural environment and studying in a different educational system and language (Campbell, 2012). There can very well be a disconnect between international students and a fully immersive American learning experience, which may include things like attending social events, religious celebrations, community dinners and sporting events, being exposed to regional foods and cultural pastimes as well as spending time with an American family (Geary, 2016).

Cultural Adjustment

Even though the world is more interconnected than ever through technology and social media, and globalization has engulfed the world, creating an international culture that can be found in all corners, there are still differences among the way different cultures and countries live life. As a result of this, those who transition to new cultures and environments must still navigate different ways of being in the world and are challenged to make sense of their new location as experienced though their own cultural lenses. Several scholars have developed and expanded international transition adjustment models. Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) described stages of cultural adjustment applicable to international students as (a) the honeymoon stage (b) culture shock (c) adjustment and (d) mastery or adaptation. They proposed that acculturation is a process that happens over time, usually following a U-shaped curve. Different stages may be experienced more than once, and the process is rarely linear. The author noted that while adjustment may initially appear easy, it is regularly followed by a crisis in which one feels less adjusted, lonelier, and unhappy. Eventually, the sojourner begins to feel more adjusted again, resulting in a more integrated individual.

Rajasekar and Renand (2013) described culture shock as the anxiety and stress that is caused by being in a new and foreign environment without the familiar symbols and signs of the home country. Exploring the experience of expatriates in the gulf country of Oman, they identified 14 factors that contribute to culture shock: communication, dress, ethics, individualism/collectivism, food, language structure, perception, power distance, religion, rules, time orientation, traditions, and weather.

Discrimination

International students come to the United States from around the globe and can experience discrimination differently depending on their country of origin. One study of international students in the United States found that students from different countries reported different rates of discrimination, with White students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand not having reported experiences with racism, while those from Asia, India, the Middle East, and Latin America emphasized racism as an important component of their experiences (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Sherry, et al. (2010) found that international students feared that the historical and political relationship between their countries and the United States could lead to feelings of prejudice against them. A recent study examining the prevalence and correlates of depressive symptoms among international students at one U.S. university campus used perceived discrimination as one of the measures in their quantitative study. The results demonstrated that perceived discrimination is prevalent and important even more so than general acculturative stress, another measure that was used. This suggested the important role perceived discrimination can play with regard to negative mental health outcomes (Shadowen et al., 2019). While the

average age of participants was 24 years, which may indicate respondents being primarily graduate students, who may not be as engaged on campus, the findings were still relevant to all international students.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality provides a useful framework to discuss how success and marginalization exist on university campuses. Intersectionality theory argues that multiple systems of oppression overlap to shape the experience of individuals (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, female Muslims of color can face simultaneous oppression based on their gender, religion, and ethnicity in addition to their immigration status and sexual orientation. Crenshaw (1991) posited that structural, political, and representational intersectionality are all important dimensions-all are relevant for investigating the experience of marginalized groups on college campuses. One study noted that universities should identify intersectional differences and develop targeted approaches to effectively support students in and outside of the classroom and invest in support structures such as student resource centers and student clubs and organizations, that promote students' sense of belonging on campus (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2019).

Experience of Muslim Students on Campus

Literature showed that Muslim students in the United States have been researched as a homogenized group of students, with fewer studies focused on international Muslim students. Although this study looked specifically at Muslim international students from Gulf countries, it is useful to include research pertaining to the experience of international students from any region who are Muslim or Arab as well as Muslim American students in the United States during the last several years. This is critical as the racial and religious dynamics in the United States

during this time meant that Muslim international students, despite their immigration status, could share some similar experiences with Muslim American students (Anderson, 2020).

Shammas (2015) conducted research focused on 753 Arab American, Muslim American, non-Arab American, and non-Muslim American students from 15 community colleges in two states, Michigan and California. Findings included that the Arab and Muslim American students were at least twice as likely to perceive ethnic or religious discrimination than non-Arab and non-Muslim students. The study also found that the students' sense of belonging on campus was lessened as a result of the perceived discrimination.

Another study exploring the experience of Muslim students across U.S. universities shared students' opinions that the political climate in the United States was negatively affecting their educational experiences. Participants voiced that they were challenged in the current climate as their First Amendment rights were restricted and they were subject to actions such as the Muslim ban. Enforcement of these laws and the general rhetoric of Islamophobia impacted the educational experience of these students, and colleges and universities are in a position to ensure socially just and inclusive environments for them as they navigate stigma and stereotypes. While only 17% of the respondents were international, the findings provided valuable insight on the experience of Muslim students on college campuses overall (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

Challenges of International Students from the Middle East

International students from the Middle East, large numbers of whom come from the Gulf countries, experience the overall challenges that face international students, as well as experiencing challenges with their transition unique to their region and culture of origin. One study in which 55% of the international participants were from the Middle East found that the

main challenges encountered by international students were inadequate writing skills, not being able to participate fully in class, and having difficulty in being understood (Rao, 2017). Time management was also a challenge, as the Middle East is considered to be a polychronic culture, defined by Hall (1955) as one which attends to multiple events simultaneously. Individuals from this culture are often late to meetings, conduct personal and professional errands simultaneously, and typically struggle to meet deadlines (Rao, 2017). There are several unique cultural practices international students from the Middle East may hold that can pose challenges on a U.S. campus, such as a more leisurely sense of time, an assumption that grades and deadlines can be negotiated, and a preference for face-to-face or personal communication (Leggett, 2013). University policies requiring first-year students to live on campus make it challenging for practicing Muslim undergraduates as they are considered unwelcoming due to both males and females living together, the drinking of alcohol and smoking that often take place in student housing (Seggie & Sanford, 2010). They also noted that as Islam requires its followers to pray five times a day, having to go off campus or pray in common areas between classes makes it very difficult for practicing Muslims. Some Muslim students observe dietary restrictions consistent with their religion, and several Muslim holidays include fasting, both of which can be an issue for students.

One mixed-methods study of 219 international students from the Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) explored their writing challenges while at U.S. universities. The study was significant as very little research has been done on Gulf-region students' scholastic endeavors. It found that many of the students expressed their linguistic challenges in their writing affect their language socialization process in the classroom, and the

majority were less comfortable in doing writing assignments, preferring to work with native English speakers for class presentations and writing projects (Al Murshidi, 2014).

Arab international students in the United States encountered difficulties adjusting to a north American educational system as it differed from their home systems, where they could pursue a major that was aligned with their academic strengths (Abu Khattala, 2013). Gulf students who are sponsored by their governments are typically restricted to particular majors at their university which are approved for sponsorship and may not be the student's first choice or area of interest.

A study exploring the adjustment process of 16 Arab international students from the Middle East at two institutions in the United States revealed multiple factors obstructing their academic success and limiting their socialization within the context of their postsecondary institution, their host community and host nation. Prevailing themes included culture shock, language barriers, cultural differences and isolation (Rabia, 2017). Students from the Gulf countries are also faced with successfully adapting to their new environments without their families, which is a major element of support in their lives back home (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Without this network of support, the culture shock experienced by Arab students may be more pronounced and leave students feeling helpless and lost. Students from the Gulf may be best assisted in their adjustment when the host university offers meaningful opportunities which provide academic and social support, providing opportunities for the community to learn about their home cultures outside of the classroom (Abu Khattala, 2013; Rabia, 2017,).

While more research is emerging on the experience of Muslim international students in the United States, there is a need to explore this topic further, starting with an examination of

how those of diverse backgrounds and experiences, particularly underrepresented groups, experience these institutions in relation to identity and social position on campus. Investigating how the cultures and structures of colleges and universities assist or hinder campus group members' academic and social endeavors and identifying institutional efforts to support people from different backgrounds to lessen inequalities serves as a good beginning.

Support from Institutions

Given that international students may encounter several challenges that impact their educational performance, a responsibility lies with hosting educational institutions to work collaboratively towards student success by implementing strategies to ensure student success through meeting students' academic and social needs (Akanwa, 2015). Offices that support international students on campus play a critical role in helping students adjust to and thrive in their new environment. These offices should be staffed with colleagues who have adequate intercultural and international experiences to be able to understand and relate to the challenges of international students (Rao, 2017). One study revealed the importance of campus resources to international students and noted that international centers must reinforce their efforts of connecting informing students about the resources available to support them, as this information will facilitate an easier adaptation and reduce their challenges (Banjong, 2015). Akanwa noted that working with international students can be challenging, however getting the appropriate skill level knowledge base, orientation and training that could help university administrators, faculty and staff to better service their students must be of strategic importance. Equally, international students have a responsibility to develop their full potentials by taking advantage of the many opportunities and resources available to them at their host institutions of learning (2015).

Anderson's qualitative study of international Muslim students at a midwestern university recommended that institutions address the needs of Muslim students in a variety of ways such as building in accommodations on major religious holidays in order to eliminate the need for students to have to choose between their education and their faith (2020). One study resulted in recommendations to lesson discrimination on campus which included universities actively engaging both American and international students around ideas of tolerance, appreciation of diversity, and intercultural learning (Shadowen et al., 2019).

Jesuit Colleges and Universities

One study explored the issue of cultural and religious challenges for an international Muslim group at a Catholic institution in the United States and provided recommendations for their support. This support included culturally sensitive practices, teaching focused on individualized learning experiences, and inclusive purposeful campus programming (Razek, 2015). Initiatives such as offering religious support through providing a prayer room helps students feel comfortable and feel at home and with no pressure noticed against their faith (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). While the sample in Razek's (2015) study was limited to 21 students, all from Saudi Arabia, it provided valuable insight into the experience of international Muslim students and important information for administrators at Catholic institutions to be able to better serve the growing population of Muslim students at American Catholic universities.

Jesuit Commitment to International Education

Jesuit universities in the United States and abroad continue to enroll diverse students from around the world, and are called to "uphold values such as compassion, hope, generosity, mercy, and reconciliation in a world that often finds such principles as wishful thinking"

(Michel, 2016, p. 57). These values were echoed in the 1989 address at Georgetown University by then-superior general of the Jesuits, Fr. Hans Kolvenbach, as he spoke about the Jesuit's continued commitment to internationalization:

> Our mission is global…in response to this rapidly shrinking world, we seek education for responsible citizenship in the global village. Will we really help to form men and women for others in the world community of the twenty-first century if we do not adapt to the changing international culture?
>
> In the recent past education has sometimes focused exclusively on self-actualization of the individual. Today it must be the world community that forms the context for growth and learning. Curricula must be broadened to include major world cultures. Especially encouraged is diversity of cultural backgrounds in our student bodies and more international exchanges of both teachers and students. Efforts at internationalization are signs of the impulse to incorporate a global dimension into our educational programs-not as occasional special events, but as part of the fiber of what it means to be Jesuit colleges or universities. I ask you to intensify these efforts. (Kolvenbach, 1989)

The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), which is the network of Jesuit universities in the United States, maintains a special international education conference comprised of international educators at AJCU institutions. The group meets several times a year to discuss the importance of international education at their institutions and seeks opportunities for collaborative activities in the context of international education (https://www.ajcunet.edu/international-education).

Brief History of Jesuit Relations with Islam

Exploring the relationship between the Jesuits and Islam is critical to developing understanding of the experience of international Muslim students at a Jesuit university. Ignatius of Loyola recounts in his autobiography a story of an encounter with a Muslim during his travels soon after the society was founded. The two men spoke of theology and came into disagreement over the Virgin Mary, with Ignatius letting his mule decide the fate of the Moor-if the mule went

in the same direction, Ignatius would follow and kill him-but as the mule went in the other direction, the man was spared. This story illustrates Ignatius's complex relationship with Islam, with him advocating a bellicose approach to Islam in general, but also adopting throughout his life a strong missionary and pastoral approach towards Muslims (Colombo, 2019). Ignatius established centers in Italy where Jesuits could study Arabic, encouraged acceptance of Christians of Muslim origins into the order, and dreamed of taking missions to north Africa. Later in the society, other Jesuits maintained this desire to interact with Muslims, such as the Italian Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1533-1611). While early on he offered a harsher portrait of Islam, he later helped direct missions to Muslims in eastern Europe and wrote of the shared beliefs of Catholics and Muslims, the importance of learning Arabic, and the cultural worth of several Islamic scholars (Colombo, 2019). Throughout the history of the Jesuits, there were individuals who contributed greatly to the Society's understanding of Islam, including some who were Arabic speaking Christians or even came from Muslim backgrounds. The Jesuit approach to Islam and Muslims in early modern Europe, while marked with an attitude of negativity which came out of historical developments, was also full of personal encounters with Muslims and opportunities to study Islamic culture.

These opportunities to engage with Muslims continued into the modern era. Recounting the story of Jesuits founding schools in Iraq in the early 20th century, Seferta (2016) revealed that the Jesuits had an extraordinary impact on Christians and Muslims alike, encouraging tolerance and better understanding of each faith tradition, and being seen as excellent educators and as religious men of great integrity and extraordinary dedication. Speaking about the Jesuit Al-Hikma University in Baghdad, the author noted the university attracted students and scholars

from all over the world, with an objective of creating an academic atmosphere that would increase the understanding and friendship among people of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds (Seferta, 2016). Beyond the founding of educational institutions in Muslim countries and interacting with followers of Islam, the Jesuits had an important role to play in the overall approach of the Catholic church towards Islam in modern times.

The Second Vatican Council, also known as Vatican II, took place from 1962 to 1965 and produced 16 documents on various topics related to Catholicism and Christian unity. Perhaps the most relevant document to this research is the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, recognized more briefly from its Latin title, *Nostra Aetate* (*In Our Time*). This was the shortest of all the documents of Vatican II, and likely its most controversial (Borelli, 2016). Several Jesuits participated in Vatican II, with Fr. John Francis Long serving on the staff the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the body responsible for *Nostra Aetate.* Under Fr. Long's leadership, a small group authored the statement that eventually became the approved passage representing an important beginning in modern Catholic-Muslim relations:

> The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God . . . who has spoken to humans; they strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam is gladly linked, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, his virgin mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. Moreover, they look forward to the day of judgement when God will reward all those who raised up. For this reason, they value the moral life and worship God, especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting. In the course of centuries there have indeed arisen not a few quarrels and hostilities between Christians and Muslims. But now this Sacred Synod pleads with all to forget the past, to make sincere efforts for mutual understanding, and so to work together for the preservation and fostering of social justice, moral welfare, and peace and freedom, for all humankind. (Second Vatican Council, 1965)

Jesuits embraced this call to make real efforts for mutual understanding and working together all humankind through their commitment to interreligious dialogue, declared as central to their mission in the General Congregation 34 of 1995 (Padberg, 2009).[1]

Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue

Jesuit universities have strong commitment to interreligious dialogue and to larger interfaith work. Interfaith dialogue presents an opportunity for increased cooperation and understanding, and interfaith work should involve the participation of non-Muslims at Muslim rituals and celebrations as well as the attendance of Muslims at non-Muslim religious ceremonies (Hussain, 2016). Several Jesuit universities maintain interfaith spaces where students from different faiths come together; one university describes their multi-faith meditation room as "providing a sanctuary where people of all faiths and religious traditions may retreat for prayer, meditation, and spiritual activities" (University of San Francisco, n.d.). Many of the 26 Jesuit universities in the United States provide similar spaces, and others may also have formal offices or associations that provide support for students from other faiths and opportunities for all students to learn more about different beliefs. Table 2 below lists the support that is currently offered at Jesuit universities in the United States to Muslim students and spaces that serve to bring students of different faiths together in prayer.

[1] Certainly the global reach of the Jesuits has been vast, and not all positive with regards to understanding and working within different cultures. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss this history fully—interested readers may refer to *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits* by I.G. Zupanov (2019).

Table 2

Support for Muslim Students at Jesuit Universities in the United States

		Type of Support		
University Name	Active Muslim Student Association	Type of Dedicated Prayer Space	Muslim Chaplain	Muslim Student Support Office
Boston College	yes	Multi-faith Center	no	no
Canisius College	no	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
College of the Holy Cross	no	none	no	no
Creighton University	yes	Muslim prayer room	no	no
Fairfield University	yes	Muslim prayer room	yes	no
Fordham University	yes	Muslim prayer room	no	no
Georgetown University	yes	Masjid	yes	yes
Gonzaga University	no	Muslim prayer room	no	no
John Carroll University	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Le Moyne College	yes	Muslim prayer room	no	no
Loyola University Chicago	yes	Masjid	yes	no
Loyola University Maryland	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Loyola Marymount University	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	yes
Loyola University New Orleans	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Marquette University	yes	Muslim prayer room	yes	no
Regis University	no	none	no	no
Rockhurst University	no	none	no	no

Table 2 (continued)

Support for Muslim Students at Jesuit Universities in the United States

		Type of Support		
University Name	Active Muslim Student Association	Type of Dedicated Prayer Space	Muslim Chaplain	Muslim Student Support Office
St. Joseph's University	no	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Saint Louis University	yes	none	no	no
Saint Peters University	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Santa Clara University	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Seattle University	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
Spring Hill College	no	none	no	no
University of Detroit Mercy	yes	Muslim prayer room	no	no
University of San Francisco	yes	Interfaith prayer room	no	no
University of Scranton	no	Masjid	no	no
Xavier University	yes	Interfaith chapel	yes	yes

Students spending time together in prayer and reflection provides opportunities for them to get to know more about one another. A review of the literature showed that very little is known about interfaith formation and the influence of friendships across religious and worldview differences. A recent study exploring the "interworldview friendships" (Rockenbach et. al, 2019) that form through opportunities for interaction among those of different faiths followed a cohort of students attending 122 diverse college students and universities between 2015-2019. The study explored changes in interfaith learning and development, formation of friendships, and

effects on student attitudes and personal growth as they progressed through college. Findings showed that students who identified as Muslim were the most likely to have five or more interworldview friendships, and students who increased these types of friendships not only experienced a welcoming and diverse environment, but also had enriching encounters that encouraged them to rethink stereotypes and assumptions about their own and others' beliefs (Rockenbach et. al, 2019). Encounters that promote these friendships could conceivably include cocurricular activities which invite students to attend religious services from other traditions, allow for collaboration with diverse students on projects, and provide opportunities for events which encourage conversations. The report noted that institutional factors such as a welcoming campus environment, institutional support, campus climate, and opportunities for meaningful interactions with diverse peers challenged students to rethink stereotypes and assumptions about their own and others' beliefs (Rockenbach et. al, 2019).

None of this important work would be possible if Muslim students were not enrolling at Jesuit universities.

Muslim Students at Jesuit Universities

Muslim students attend Jesuit colleges in part due to their excellent reputation for both education and social justice in Jesuit and Marymount colleges (Hussain, 2016). During the traditional marking of the start of the academic year, Loyola Marymount University's then-president Fr. Robert Lawton, S.J., said in his Mass of the Holy Spirit homily:

> Non-Catholics and non-believers are not here at this university simply because we need you to pay our bills or raise our grades or SAT scores. We want you here for a deeper reason. By helping us to doubt, you help us get closer to a deeper understanding of God, this life and the world we share. (Hussain, 2016, pp. 67-68)

The author further noted that "Muslim students can help us to understand more about faith, and we should recruit them because they can help us to be the best we can be. (Hussain, 2016, p. 68)

In reflecting on Vatican II and the future of Muslims in Jesuit universities, Michel wrote that if we are to uphold the teaching of the bishops in the Council, we must approach Muslims in our universities not as a problem to be solved or as solely a part of our diverse American society, but as brothers and sisters who have been joined to us by God for God's own purpose (2016). This approach extends to Jesuit universities outside the United States, as well—at Georgetown University in Qatar, where most of the student body is Muslim, Michel (2016) noted that the interfaith encounters there, both inside and outside the classroom, "speak to Jesuit educational values that support students from diverse backgrounds learning to live together, called to that task by the faith commitments and common missions of Christians and Muslims" (pp. 9-10).

Wherever the Jesuit university may be in the world, they have an opportunity to be seen as laboratories where students of multiple ethnic, religious, racial, and social backgrounds can learn the art of living together well in pluralist societies. They can be places where students can come to know each other better, face and overcome misunderstandings, study and reflect together on life's challenges, and arrive at deeper levels of interaction and cooperation. Respect, hospitality, curiosity, and conversation can be the keys to the next step in encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims at a Jesuit college or university (Shore, 2016).

Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature related to the experience of international Muslim students at universities in the United States and addressed the relationship of the Jesuit

order with Islam. The purpose of this study was to build upon current literature to better understand how Muslim international students are challenged and how they feel welcome and a part of the campus community. Although the literature is rich with studies about the international student experience, and there is a growing body of research pertaining to Muslim and Muslim international students, there is very limited research regarding these students' experiences at a Catholic university and none that explored their experience at a Jesuit university. In the next chapter, I present the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

International student enrollment in the United States was at 1,075,496 in 2020, the fifth consecutive year with more than one million students studying in the country. Despite a slight decline of 1.8% from the previous year, international students represented 5.5% of the total U.S. higher education population (IIE, 2020). While overall numbers remained strong, the number of international students enrolling at a U.S. institution for the first time in fall 2020 declined by .06%, continuing a 3-year trend which saw an overall decrease of 6.6% (IIE, 2020). Many universities in the United States enroll a larger percentage of international students, the majority of whom are paying full tuition and fees. A significant percent of these students hail from Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East whose governments fully sponsor their education abroad.

The literature review presented in the previous chapter demonstrated that while there is a robust body of research on the experience of international students in the United States, focused on challenges with language, academics, cultural adjustment and practical matters, there is still work that must be done on the experience of Muslim international students in especially with regards to their experience in the U.S. political climate under the Trump administration (2017-2021). Further, there is limited research focused on the experience of Muslim students at Catholic and almost no research about their experiences at Jesuit universities. It is worthwhile to explore how being at a faith-based institution impacts a Muslim student's experience with U.S. higher education, and how the Jesuit educational environment in particular impacts their experience. As U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to recruit fully-funded students

from the Middle East, institutions must also develop robust support services and culturally relevant pedagogy to ensure the success of these students inside and outside the classroom.

Purpose

It is critical to explore the questions of what social and academic support universities can provide to Muslim international students to promote their cultural adjustment and academic success, and how universities can design curriculum and programming that encourages interactions and promotes dialogue between them and American students, resulting in a transformation of the Islamophobic narrative present in the United States over the last several years. To this end, this study explored and attempted to understand the experience of international Muslim students at WCJU, a Jesuit institution located in a large metropolitan area on the west coast of the United States. Of particular interest in this study were those experiences and interactions that contributed to students successfully acclimating academically, socially, culturally, and spiritually at WCJU. Attending college in a context that is culturally and religiously different from one's home country is a significant challenge; attending college in a country with a strong anti-immigrant and Islamophobic climate, as was the case in the United States at the time of this study, added an additional level of challenge. Engaging in this study during the COVID-19 pandemic which brought so many challenges to international and all students provided an additional context through which to view participants' experiences.

How the Study Was Conducted

I conducted this research through connecting with students from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of the Middle East currently enrolled at WCJU as well as interviewing two alumni of the institution. One administrator who worked closely with this population in the

university's office supporting Muslim students was also interviewed. After identifying participants based on personal relationship and recommendations from participants, all were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study through video conferencing via Zoom (https://zoom.us/).

Data Gathering

Participants in this study had to meet two requirements: be an international student or recent alumni who enrolled at WCJU utilizing an F-1 student visa and be a citizen of a GCC country raised in the Muslim faith tradition. When selecting the participants, I aimed for a mix of students from several different countries within the GCC, to have both females and males represented, and to interview students from both undergraduate and graduate levels of education and a wide variety of majors of study. I was careful to also select students who came to WJCU as transfer students, or if graduate students, enrolled after completing a previous degree at another American university, to allow for a comparison of their experiences at the two institutions.

Once I identified participants, invited them for an interview, and received a response in the affirmative, I set up a time to do the interviews, accommodating for a 10-hour plus time difference. Interview questions were open-ended enough to capture the experience of students broadly, but also were also based on the Community Cultural Wealth framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed using Zoom software. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on the participant. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant for review and accuracy and were edited to correct the often-erroneous transcription by the software of responses by non-native speakers of English.

Clarifying questions were sent to individuals via text or other messaging applications or by email when necessary.

Given that my period of research was delayed due to the availability and mindset of students navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, the timing of data collection was compressed into a 7-week period. Between October 2020 and November 2020, I interviewed 12 individuals.

Data Explication and Analysis

These semi-structured, qualitative phenomenological interviews were explicated through Dedoose software (https://www.dedoose.com/), a web application for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research. The results of using Dedoose allowed me to recognize recurring codes that called for further analysis. This helped me to code excerpts from transcripts that formed groups of meaning and discover recurring themes. I determined major themes through code application information. For example, sense of community was coded in 134 excerpts in the 12 interview transcripts. An inductive approach to data analysis was used first to see what themes were emerging. After two rounds of inductive coding, I then coded all transcripts to capture themes that aligned with the theoretical framework of Community Cultural Wealth with the addition of spiritual capital. Memos were made for excerpts to note context, reactions, and nuance of the way the interviewees responded to the questions. Significant statements were organized and analyzed by themes and subthemes. They were connected with other significant statements to build up each theme.

Restatement of the Research Question

I engaged in the process of interviewing 12 individuals, all either students, alumni, or university administrators. I followed the demands of qualitative research design to explore the

phenomenological topic of Muslim international students at a Jesuit university and answer the research questions:

1. What is it like to be a Muslim international student at a Jesuit university in the United States?
2. How does being at a religiously affiliated institution influence their U.S. university experience?

These research questions were intentionally broad, which is appropriate for this phenomenological study. Framed in this manner, the term "experience" is defined as how students adjust academically, socially, culturally, and spiritually to their environment.

For the purposes of this study, Muslim international students were defined as students who adhere to the Islamic faith and are in the United States studying on non-immigrant, temporary visas. A Jesuit university is one which is operated by the Jesuit order of Catholic priests, founded in 1534 by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Participants

Of the 12 individuals interviewed, 9 were current students, 2 were alumni, and one was an administrator at WJCU. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 25 years. Of the student and alumni participants 3 were female, 8 were male, and 9 were undergraduates or completed their undergraduate degrees at WCJU in the last 3 years. 3 participants came to WCJU from another institution in the United States as transfer students or after completing an undergraduate degree. Undergraduate students represented all four class years, and of the 2 graduate level students one was in their first year and one was completing their final year of graduate study. Ten participants were fully sponsored by their governments to study at WJCU. The group represented several

different majors across the fields of engineering, business administration, and the liberal arts. Participants were all citizens of the GCC countries, representing Kuwait (5), the United Arab Emirates (3), Saudi Arabia (1) and Qatar (1). All participants were ethnically Arab, with the exception of the university administrator, who was half Arab and half Central European.

Confidentiality

The protection of subjects was a critical part of the study. The number of Muslim international students from GCC countries at WCJU was not large enough to where some of them could not be identified by some demographic descriptors. I employed pseudonyms for all participants names and did not provide any identifiable information beyond what was listed here. Students disclosed their experiences not only at the university at large but with individual faculty members, and many also discussed experiences with their government sponsors who funded their education and had expectations of their representation of their country of origin. This demonstrated the potential risks of participating in a study of this nature.

The table below lists participants by pseudonym with the participants' gender, level of education they were pursuing during the time of their interview, class year, college, citizenship, and age.

Table 3

Research Participants

	Demographics					
Name	Gender	Academic Level	Class	College	Citizenship	Age
Zoya	Female	Undergraduate	Senior	Science & Engineering	Kuwait	22
Omar	Male	Undergraduate	Senior	Liberal Arts	Qatar	22
Fahad	Male	Undergraduate	Sophomore	Liberal Arts	United Arab Emirates	20
Rabia	Female	Graduate	First year	Business	Kuwait	21
Egab	Male	Undergraduate	Junior	Science & Engineering	Saudi Arabia	24
Hamad	Male	Alumnus		Science & Engineering	Kuwait	25
Nour	Female	Undergraduate	Freshman	Science & Engineering	Kuwait	20
Ali	Male	Graduate	Second Year	Science & Engineering	Kuwait	24
Shaheen	Male	Undergraduate	Junior	Liberal Arts	Kuwait	23
Dhari	Male	Alumnus		Business	United Arab Emirates	23
Sayf	Male	Undergraduate	Senior	Business	United Arab Emirates	23
Abbas	Male	Staff			USA/Syria	25

My professional role provided me with much interaction with the group I studied, however, all data was collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. Interview transcripts were shared with participants and clarifying questions were asked when needed. I also had the opportunity to discuss preliminary findings with select participants. This triangulation of the data helped to ensure the validity of this research.

Context

Among the more than 4,000 institutions of higher education in the United States, 260 are Catholic (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2019). Of those, 27 are Jesuit colleges and universities, which are a part of a global network of approximately 188 Jesuit institutions of higher learning. Jesuit institutions are known for their focus on teaching that builds students' critical thinking skills through rigorous academic standards. Though all institutions within Catholic higher education are grounded in a fundamental relationship with

Christ, at Jesuit universities this relationship leads to a respect for all people and is the basis for good teaching and close faculty-student relationships. This leads to an institution that should be inclusive and deeply respectful of cultural and religious diversity, which can enrich a basic core identity. Jesuit campuses today offer programs to foster the life of Christ in those who follow the Catholic tradition but also offer a range of interreligious programs to nourish the faith life of other students (Currie, 2010). Many of the Jesuit institutions provide support to Muslim students ranging from providing prayer spaces and/or engaging in interfaith work to maintaining staff members who specifically work with this population to support their success.

WCJU enrolled 937 international students at the undergraduate and graduate levels in 2020 with GCC students making up 19% of the total enrollment. The university began targeted recruitment of students from the Gulf in 2010, traveling to the region to visit high schools and participate in college fairs as well as working closely with their sponsoring agencies and governments. By 2016, students from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were in the top 5 countries of origin for international students enrolled at the university, and in 2020 students from Kuwait made up the largest group of international students enrolled. Their enrollment is anticipated to remain steady and possibly increase over the coming years due to the strong reputation of the institution in the region, the success of alumni back in the home country, and the continued strong relationship with the Kuwait Cultural Mission who handles their placements and scholarships. In 2016, WJCU opened a community prayer and reflection space, and within a year began to organize regular Friday prayers for Muslim students. The Office for Muslim Student Life (MSL) was established employed a coordinator part-time who was responsible for developing programs and events that build community among all Muslim students at the

university. The unit works in collaboration with several other departments in Student Affairs, Campus Ministry, the International Student Services office, faculty and Muslim scholars, and other units across campus.

Recruitment

Student and alumni participants were identified using records kept through the international student services office at WCJU. Students indicating citizenship from GCC countries were invited via a personal email. Leaders of the international Muslim student community were also asked to identify and encourage additional students who would be willing to participate; much of the recruitment occurred through purposive sampling. Given that the cultures the students come from are highly collectivist and place a high value on personal relationships, this combination of invitations both via email and via personal connections resulted in a good number of participants Interviewees were notified that participation was voluntary and all interview data remained confidential. Participants were selected based on their availability and informed consent.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in pursuing this research was directly related to my professional experience working with international students over my 20-plus-year career in international education. I provide leadership to the international student services unit at WCJU and am well aware of the benefits of having international students on campus as well as the challenges that these students can face. In previous professional roles I had traveled extensively through the Gulf countries and have a familiarity with their educational systems, culture and traditions which has helped me connect with students from the region. I have strong relationships within the community of

international students from GCC countries, serving as the advisor to a student organization representing one of their countries from which the university enrolls a large number of individuals. I serve as the university's liaison to these students' sponsoring agencies and am often working closely with those agencies and our students to resolve large and small matters concerning their continued sponsorship. These experiences have allowed me to build strong trust among students from this community, who I believe know they can come to me with any issues or problems they are facing. These experiences helped me in gaining access to this population for my research and identifying key informants for the study. These key informants were leaders within the GCC student community and were critical for me recruiting additional participants to the study.

Students with whom I shared my dissertation topic were typically pleased that my focus was on their experience and expressed an enthusiasm for participating. The roles I hold as an administrator could have had an impact on what students shared with me in interviews; it was possible that participants without a previous close personal relationship with me would not have been comfortable expressing criticism of the United States or the university, or dissatisfaction with the level of support they received as students-but I did not find this to be the case.

My positionality at the university helped me sustain my fieldwork as it provided many opportunities for interacting with this community, particularly during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought a host of challenges connected to sponsor requirements, student visa regulations, travel restrictions, and the difficulties of navigating education online.

Data Analysis

All data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with participants. In order to facilitate coding and analysis of my qualitative data, I recorded and transcribed the interviews and produced highly detailed analytical memos from these conversations.

A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used to categorize excerpts from the transcripts. This hybrid inductive-deductive method of analysis employed both using a process of thematic coding that involved a balance of deductive coding derived from the theoretical framework of Community Cultural Wealth and inductive coding which allowed for themes to emerge from participant's discussions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Dedoose research software was used to facilitate coding.

Coding

Emergent Codes

Several overarching emerging themes were identified through the inductive coding of interview transcripts, including (a) the challenges of Muslim international students at U.S. universities; (b) the importance of community; (c) the significance of religious identity; and (d) the perception and impact of institutional support. These themes emerged after two rounds of inductive coding. Other clusters of meaning included gender, social class, encountering different cultures, cultural fluency of the institution, preconceptions of Muslim students about the United States and Americans, experience with Islamophobia, influence of sponsors, and impact of COVID-19, and these are woven into the themes.

A Priori Codes

Following the inductive coding approach, deductive or a priori coding was also employed using the Community Cultural Wealth framework which included aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital, with the addition of spiritual capital as an additional code to utilize.

Credibility

Ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the critical pieces of ensuring credibility includes gaining adequate understanding of an organization and establishing a relationship of trust with the participants (Shenton, 2004). I believe the length of time I have worked with Muslim international students in general, as well as my pre-existing relationship with several participants facilitated my prolonged engagement with the group I studied in this research. The amount of time I spent with these students in conversation and the level of intensity of this research also ensured reliability of this data. Triangulation is at the core of ethnographic validity, testing sources of information against other to not only test the quality of the information but to understand the data more completely (Fetterman, 2010). Frequent check-ins with participants to clarify their statements and share preliminary findings allowed for this triangulation. Another form of triangulation involves the use of a variety of participants (Shenton, 2004). It was important to collect data from participants of different genders who are from different countries across several majors at different levels of education so that a robust picture of this culture could be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people. Looking for patterns through the data also helped ensure reliability and form the analysis. This careful analysis led to

recommendations for institutions of higher education in supporting international Muslim students on their campuses.

Limitations

As a researcher, it is important to note that I have spent most of my career working with international students, and in the last several years have worked very closely with a growing number of Muslim international students from the GCC at the research site, serving as the head of the international services unit that oversees their compliance with federal regulations concerning international students. In addition, I am the university's liaison with their sponsoring governments and agencies. This did not prove to be a limitation with respect to participants not being completely forthright in their interview responses. My attempt to overcome this limitation was to be very clear that this research was for dissertation purposes only and would not be used for any matters pertaining to participants' compliance or relationships with their sponsoring organizations. My personal experience and relationships with the population I studied did inform and perhaps introduce bias into my interaction with research participants and my interpretation of data.

Limitations of this study included the gathering of data during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a videoconferencing version of maintaining intimate face to face interactions with participants. As participants were taking all courses online and engaging in co-curricular activities all online, there was a level of videoconferencing fatigue that was present, although the personal relationship with participants helped to mitigate this through the pleasure of being able to see one another and share conversation. One of the more important tenets in ethnographic research is the ability of the researcher to become embedded in the culture that is being studied

(Fusch et al., 2017). I believe that my being embedded in the culture is explicit due to my relationships with many students, professional role as liaison between sponsored students, their sponsoring agencies, and our university, and serving as the advisor for their prominent student organization. Another limitation is the small number of participants in this study; this led me to focus on gathering rich data, interviewing participants for a longer length of time. An additional limitation was the use of the concept of culture as an interpretive lens—I needed to be very knowledgeable of the cultures the student participants came from to better understand what they shared.

An additional limitation was the current political narrative regarding Muslims and international students in the United States. The transformative worldview sees inquiry as being intertwined with politics and a political agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Creswell, 2014). The goal of this worldview is to call attention to marginalization and advocate for change in power structures, thus the focus is on marginalized groups or inequities found in society today. Restrictions of government sponsors and student visa policies through the COVID-19 pandemic impacted students' abilities to participate in this research, given the time difference that was present between their home countries and the United States, where the researcher was located.

Lastly, as the scope of this study was limited to the experiences of Muslim international students at a Jesuit university, this affected the transferability of the research findings to other Jesuit universities in the United States. As the study was limited to students who are from GCC countries, findings only apply to this subset of Muslim international students and are not transferrable to the experiences of those coming from countries outside the GCC.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to better understand the experience of international Muslim students at WCJU, an institution located in a large metropolitan area on the west coast of the United States. Of particular interest in this study were those experiences and interactions that contributed to students successfully acclimating and thriving academically, socially, culturally, and spiritually at WCJU, in an educational context culturally and religiously different from their home country at a time of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic climate in the United States.

Presentation of Findings

In exploring the experiences of Muslim international students at a Jesuit university in the United States and how being at a religiously affiliated institution impacted their experience, many of the themes that emerged related to the different moments of their educational journeys and spoke to different identities that participants hold. In order to answer the research questions, the data is organized by their timelines as students, beginning with arrival and adjustment to the university, continuing with their experience as students progressing towards their degrees, and ending with their experience as graduating seniors and recent alumni. The first timeline relates predominantly to their identities as international students, while the second emphasizes their identities as Muslims from the Gulf, with the third timeline focused more on the impact of their religious identities. Taken together, this chapter aims to understand and describe the experience of these students through their educational journeys.

Emerging Themes of the Research

Several significant statements were extracted from 12 interviews totaling about 15 hours. These statements have been categorized into four overarching themes that describe the lived experiences of international Muslim students at a Jesuit University. As students and recent alumni of the institution, they reflected on their entire experience at a Jesuit university from arrival, through their experience as a student, to their hopes for the future, or in the case of alumni, the influence of their education on their personal and professional endeavors.

From the significant clusters of meanings in the transcript, these four themes are: (a) the challenges of Muslim international students at U.S. universities; (b) the importance of community; (c) the significance of religious identity; and (d) the perception and impact of institutional support.

Narratives Along the Journey

This chapter is organized by significant moments that mark developmental milestones in Muslim international students' journeys from arrival and induction at the University through graduation and becoming alumni. These moments emerged from students' stories of their experiences at WCJU. Looking across the data from the student participants, the same experiences were described by multiple students as significant moments in their college journeys-some positive, some challenging. Many of the themes identified go beyond the confines of the particular moment and are present throughout the student experience. One of the things I noticed as I was collecting data was how much students talked about institutional support when telling their stories. I will be using both the lens of the student experience as well as the view

from the institution, with data provided by my interview with the university administrator to support examples that students identified. All participants were interviewed at least once.

Arrival and Adjustment: Challenges of Muslim International Students Beginning Studies at U.S. Universities

Given all the planning and challenges involved in coming to the United States to pursue an education, students typically must possess a high level of motivation and aspirations for their future. Coming to the United States as an international student involves many steps, from navigating the admissions process to obtaining a student visa, deciding to matriculate, undertaking international travel, and settling into a new environment in a different country and culture. At WJCU, the International Student Services office works with other campus partners to create a seamless arrival and orientation to the university. Once students pay a tuition deposit, indicating their commitment to enrolling at the university, the process of obtaining a student visa begins. Students are led through this process using a checklist created in the university's database that communicates with the government's Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and begin to fill out electronic forms and upload official documents in order to obtain form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status), which students then take to their visa interviews with proper supporting documentation. The office collaborates with any government sponsors to receive the appropriate guarantees of financial sponsorship and works with students to request the various documents that sponsors require. After students obtain their visas, first-year students are invited to arrive 10 days before the start of classes for a special international orientation to welcome and orient them to the university. The orientation is led by other international and American students, who are carefully selected to reflect the majors of

study, countries, and cultural backgrounds of the incoming class. Upon arrival, students are invited to take an individual photo with the flag of their country, then join orientation sessions focused on cultural transition, understanding American university and classroom culture, and accessing university resources for academic support, as well as for social, psychological, physical and spiritual well-being. The sessions are interspersed with opportunities encouraging social interaction and the formation of community. International student orientation extends over five days and flows into the university's larger orientation program for new students.

The university offers new international students a variety of supports during their arrival and throughout their time at WCJU. For Muslim international students, however, university supports did not meet all their needs at the moment of arrival and orientation to the United States; in their interviews, participants described a number of challenges they encountered in the process of arrival, adjustment and beyond across several sub-constructs of immigration, language, culture, academics, and sponsoring agencies.

Arrival: Logistical and Immigration Challenges

Preparation for arrival to the university is marked by multiple tasks to complete, including filing for immigration documents, applying for an F-1 student visa, registering for courses, and securing housing. While some students have months to prepare for this moment, others may receive admission decisions closer to the date of arrival and find themselves scrambling to take care of everything that they need. Shaheen, a junior from Kuwait, described his first days arriving to WCJU as a chaotic start to his experience:

> For me personally, it started off really difficult. I applied late and then I was accepted very late, so everything with me was kind of last minute. I had to fly out to the United States from Kuwait on the same day my I-20 paper arrived. That's a

> really long flight, and then I actually missed about three days, if I'm not mistaken, from the orientation.
>
> So even when I arrived and I attended the rest of the orientation, I was still jet lagged and I was still, you know, unclear what is going on, like all the other students were getting an idea of this building is for that, and this is where you go. I didn't even know about the cafeteria until like the second month of classes.

This feeling of being unclear during early days was echoed by Ali, a second-year graduate student from Kuwait, even though he had recently completed a degree at another institution in the United States:

> I'm not gonna lie, I did feel a bit scared and at first, I wasn't sure if this is what I wanted to do. I had one week before the last day to drop classes to decide whether I'm going to go back to Kuwait or stay here for my master's studies. After graduating with my bachelor's I had the urge of coming back to the States but I was unsure. My previous experience was in a small city in the Southwest, and now I was making this big jump into a big city and I didn't drive so I knew I'd have to learn how. I dedicated my four months at home between institutions to learning how to drive, you know, using my mom's car, My sister's car and my father's car.

The transition to independent living away from family was highlighted as a challenge by several participants, including Zoya, a graduating senior from Kuwait, who noted that "we're not used to like being completely alone" and highlighted how students are "used to living with our whole family" back home. She observed that the transition to living by oneself or with a few roommates was significant, noting that she thinks international students coming to WCJU from the Gulf states "get really lonely."

Dhari, a recent graduate from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), went on to explain that "coming to the States, you are alone-you don't have your big family from back home. You need to do things for yourself-finding an apartment, getting furniture, a car, insurance-you have to be your own man or woman. Which is a good thing. Egab, a junior from Saudi Arabia, noted:

> My mom would tell me: "Do this. Do that. Don't do this. Don't do that." But now I'm in the raw real world where nobody's going to help guide me, so it's either I guide myself or I'm just going to be astray.

Several participants described challenges related to preparing for and entering the United States and remaining compliant with student visa regulations. Shaheen, who arrived late for International Orientation due to a delay with his I-20, shared that in his first experience passing through customs and immigration upon entry to the United States, he felt "glad that I made it to this university I really wanted to go to…I'm just glad they let me in. I was worried that if I missed the entire orientation that would jeopardize my legal status and everything." Fahad, a sophomore from the UAE, shared his own story of entering the United States for the first time as a student:

> I've only been stopped [at Immigration] once. When I first came, they asked me what school I am coming to attend. When I told them, I had problems as they said the system shows I'm already going to another school. There was another person with the same name but it took a while to figure this out. They told me it would happen again if I left and came back but it never did.

Dhari talked about the challenges of understanding the process of obtaining his school documents for the visa application and maintaining that status, even though he had previously attended another U.S. university. He shared, "The process for the I-20 paper was different than my other schools, so I had to figure that out." He also "didn't know I needed 12 credits to be legal. I had to sign up for a class I didn't even want. I felt different than American students because of this." Shaheen also remembered that in his first days, he was visiting the international student office "every day, more than average students because I had to get all my papers in order to sort everything out." While he recalled spending extra time attending to requirements unique to international students, his interactions with the international student office were positive. As

he noted, it was during that time that "my opinion was first being formed of WJCU [and] I was like, 'this is a very friendly environment'."

While stress related to gaining initial entry to the United States was experienced by all participants, some reported they continued to experience difficulties maintaining student visa status and traveling between the United States and home for the duration of their studies. Omar, a recent graduate from Qatar, identified his biggest challenge in making the trip from home to the United States each time:

> Immigration. It's the thing that every student hates. They are so, so, so-with all due respect-racist. Whenever they see this [skin] color, they're like, "Sir, you've been randomly selected for screening" and they take me to the room, and I stay there for three to four to five hours-sometimes six hours. Until they call your name, they ask you some questions. Sometimes they let you in the country. Sometimes they don't let you in the country. I've had friends who never came back-they arrived and were told to go on the next flight back home. We don't want you. It happened to me as you remember, when I couldn't return for eight months. I thought I'd never be able to come back.

Egab described similar experiences with entering the country and going through immigration through the duration of his education, feeling like "you get treated like a dog, really, you don't get treated as a human being." He related a recent experience of coming back into the United States from a school break:

> Whatever European in front of me, right, they get their papers, they check them out all, "you're good, have fun!" they smile at them. "Take care!" When they saw me, especially since I didn't shave my beard, I got stopped. He was like, "you're hiding something." I was like, "I'm not hiding anything. Sir, you have my papers. I study at WJCU, civil engineering." He took my papers and then took me to this room where there was a huge amount of people-predominantly Muslim. They checked everything again and then started yelling my name-eventually they threw my papers at me, not really giving them to me by hand. I took my papers and I walked out. That's just one experience I had of many.

He went on to relate several other experiences, including one that happened in 2019, after some political issues the United States had with Saudi Arabia, which he believes influenced this experience:

> When I came from Abu Dhabi last time, you know, Abu Dhabi has the U.S. border control there. Before I actually boarded the plane, they took me to a special room with all these cameras are pointed at me. The guy was asking me so many strange questions and finally asked "did you get trained by any militia?" I was like, "What? No, no." [He asked,] "Did you get trained by the U.S. military?" [I replied,]"No, I never got trained." He's like, "Did you get trained by the Saudi military?" He's writing something and then he gives me a paper, [and said] "write your roommates names and numbers." Eventually he told me I was free to go. Honestly, I got used to it.

Part of the challenge for students appeared to be not knowing what to expect. Egab confirmed that "it's a weird situation every time; you always feel like something's going to happen but you aren't sure."

Mr. Abbas, the WJCU administrator who was interviewed for this study also highlighted the experience he knew students often had with arrival to the United States and their expectations of or experience with Islamophobia:

> [Students] come to America with this fear-they'll tell you, like, "yeah, I got kind of bad treatment from customs when I arrived." They'll pull them aside to a room and question them for two hours. Basically, they are racially profiled because they're Arab and Muslim so they're nervous about that. So, I think that that's one thing that causes challenges for them and how they sort of kind of adapt to this new life when they come here as students.
>
> This is the common theme that I've identified, and a lot of people have told it to me. They're worried about Islamophobia. They've heard stories about how Arabs were dealt with post-9/11 with the War on Terror, with the Patriot Act, how they were dealt with, especially when they would arrive in American airports, held by the FBI and questioned. So, some of them will have this concern of needing to keep a totally low radar when they come here…some of them will take it so far as to, I don't even want to go to the mosque, because if I go to the mosque, that could mean that I become you know a person of interest and they want to surveil me.

Omar told a story of his arrival in the United States that reflects the Islamophobia Mr. Abbas described. Omar said,

> In one of my first moments in the United States, I got called names at a signal on the street; [they called me] "terrorist," other things and told [me] to "go back to my country." That was one of the biggest challenges. Not just me, but also other Muslim students especially some girls with the hijab, you know, were involved in those kinds of harassments, like hate crimes. I don't know what they're called, but we never said anything.

Both Omar's and Egab's stories of arrival also reflect the low profile Mr. Abbas mentioned students wanting to maintain. Egab's comment "honestly, I got used to it" and Omar's admission that "we never said anything" about the harassment they experienced reflect students accepting problematic treatment as part of being in the United States While WJCU strived to welcome Muslim international students through their orientation and support programs, this work stands against a larger cultural backdrop of Islamophobia and xenophobia.

Adjustment: Language and Culture

International students hailing from non-English speaking countries are required to meet the university's language proficiency requirement, measured by various instruments including the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing Services (IELTS), and other test options. Some students come from international or other schools abroad where English was the language of instruction, while others come from local schools educating in their native language. Many of these students who are government sponsored will first attend a language academy in the United States for up to a year before beginning their university studies. WJCU does not have an English as a Second Language program but does offer an "English for Academic Purposes" course in the first semester for students identified through the admission process as benefitting from the extra support. The tutoring center on

campus also has a special writing support course that is popular among international students. While all students accepted to WCJU must meet the language proficiency requirement, currently scoring a 90 on the TOEFL or 6.5 on the IELTS or equivalent scores on other tests, many still struggle in this area. Participants focused on the overall challenges of being in a foreign language environment, with an emphasis on the effect on their academic experience.

Omar began his story by sharing "to be honest, at the beginning [college] was difficult for me-it was really difficult because of the language difference." Zoya expanded on this, noting that at WJCU "people who don't have a strong English background struggle a lot-you have to have a very strong vocabulary to make it through here." Similarly, Fahad explained that:

> Maybe some of the teachers didn't understand it's the first time we get taught at that level-we are used to English, of course, and we speak it, but if you have like an essay to do in an hour it isn't enough time for us, you know, since it's not it's not our first language, you know, not like the Americans or others who studied English all their lives.

Fahad's description is consistent with the preference Gulf students who apply to WJCU have for taking the IELTS exam, which includes a speaking component which is generally the highest score they obtain on the exam. While students are typically confident in their oral skills in English, they do not always have the same confidence or ability in written English.

Cultural adaptation is a process that can be different for each individual and is influenced by the types of differences encountered between home and host cultures. Interviews with Mr. Abbas mentioned the influence of culture and social class on student expectations and experience; he believed that much depended on the student's social class and family background. He found some of them to be "very open and willing to interact with their new environment in America", wanting to engage with people of different backgrounds and have a "real sort of an

American experience". Others he felt may be "more exclusivist, in that they only want to hang out with those that they know and those who are from their country". He felt that those students with parents who may have themselves studied abroad were more willing to interact with others of diverse backgrounds, while the ones whose parents "were probably more localized to their GCC country and educated there weren't as willing to interact". He noted that these types of students "will only socialize with Arabs" even at their American college; he thought that "because they're coming from a culture where they're not exposed to the concept of student life, they may not necessarily engage with the campus community".

Being away at an American college was found to present a very different type of life that students had to adjust to; Ali discussed the notion of independence and freedom as a cultural challenge when coming to the United States, sharing that:

> For the first time you are living away from your parents and are really free to do whatever you want to, even in terms of buying alcohol or inviting whoever you want into your apartment or doing whatever you want. So, if you're going to have guidance it's not going to be because your parents told you so it's going to be like a self-guidance where you know what's right, you know what's wrong and you have the right to choose between doing the right and doing the wrong.

Zoya noted some specific challenges that come with coming from a more conservative society to one that is more open:

> I think the biggest challenge is for them to accept that people can be different, or they have a different mentality than they do. For example, two students come from Kuwait, one is more conservative or religious and the other is more liberal and not very religious. Let's say person A drinks and person B finds that wrong, they may judge them so hard that they wouldn't even give them a chance. So actually, there is no acceptance of a different mentality, or being open minded to, like, okay, you can agree to disagree. But you have to respect that each person has their own principles that they live by.

She goes on to suggest that the previous educational experience of students has an influence on the cultural adjustment to the United States, observing that:

> People who are in a local school, if all their classmates are from the same country, they have a different mindset. At my international school people came from different countries, religions, social backgrounds. Not everyone had the same mentality or prospective and that helped me later on. I saw some other Gulf students struggle more because they didn't understand new mentalities, but over time they adapted-it just takes time.

One mentality from home that all female participants identified as persisting in their new environment was related to relationships between men and women. These findings may be related to the specific culture of their home country, as all of them hailed from Kuwait. Alsuwailan (2006) noted that in the past, Kuwaiti society had restricted values regarding gender social roles, emphasizing certain roles for both sexes which assigned women to the private realm and men to the public, with limited opportunities for interaction with those of the opposite gender outside of the family. Nour, a first-year student from Kuwait, related that because of the culture and tradition back home, "it's very unusual to see a male talking to a female randomly, and if he did, all people around are going to talk about them, maybe even lie about the situation they are in." She noted that even when those conversations are about academics, like asking for help with homework, others "will think they are doing these actions for another intention. I think it makes Kuwaiti students more protective when talking to others." Rabia, a first year graduate student from Kuwait, made similar comments, believing that "especially for the men, there is a huge stigma between guys and girls, so Kuwaiti guys and girls don't mix much." She was referring to this notion of women being more limited to the private sphere in her culture as opposed to the public sphere that males occupied; this contributed to a culture that tends to segregate the genders, not allowing for or encouraging much interaction outside the family.

However, she spoke about how at the same time the men "give attention or talk normally to Saudi girls and hang out outside campus with them" and it feels like they "look down upon us [Kuwaiti women]." She shared that many other females from her country at WJCU did have good friendships with "other Arab boys-they feel that the rest of the Arab boys aren't judgmental or they don't see themselves above Kuwaiti girls." Zoya related some of this behavior back to social class and previous experience, sharing that it was easier to interact with males who also came from mixed gender private high schools, as she had, but with those coming from "the government schools, it's like so hard to make conversation with them without them thinking like I'm into them, or I like them or something like that." She spoke of the challenges she had in her college of engineering at WJCU, which has a large enrollment of Gulf students, particularly with students coming as transfers or at the master's level of study, who almost always came from public institutions, sharing that "when they see us like hugging each other or like a mixed group sitting together, they just stare like so surprised, stuff like that."

Sayf, a senior from the UAE, gave a male perspective on the issue of gender relations, sharing his view that "guys gossip more than girls, I'll be honest with you." As an Emirati, he felt that when "Kuwaiti guys see me walking with [Kuwaiti girls] l feel like I get looks of hate…but when Kuwaiti guys talk to Kuwaiti girls, they're not as friendly as us." He continued, sharing how lucky he felt to have had close friendships with several girls from the Gulf, and that they "have a group on Snapchat, we traveled to Hawaii together, it is really nice-the girls feel safe with us because with guys from their home it always has to be a relationship thing."

Interviews with Mr. Abbas, the university administrator, mirrored the experiences students shared, with him commenting that those "who came from very religious households and

a gender segregated society including their schools" may have more of a challenge in the United States, where not only is there no gender segregation but they also "may have female professors for the first time, and that can take some time to adjust to."

Cultural beliefs and preconceptions about the beliefs of others, a lack of understanding about the college experience in the United States and other factors like social class can manifest in ways that prevent students from having a richer encounter in their new environment. Shaheen believed that "honestly it's the lack of awareness and like the ignorance of how a college experience should go; some of the students that I encountered here come from very like rich backgrounds that influence their experience."

He further elaborated on how this phenomenon can affect one aspect of university life-living on campus:

> Students have enough money to live off campus, but then you're missing out on a lot of things that are happening every day. I skipped out on living on campus my first year because it's a difference in the culture-back home dorms are not really a thing, so they don't exactly understand the experience. They have that image of having a roommate who is not Muslim, he's gonna bother me because he's going to do this and that. So, you know, the notion that they have is like bad already. That's not necessarily true. The people I met here, they're very accommodating, they like to meet international people. When I lived in the dorm, I told my roommates, I can't eat pork or can't drink alcohol, but you guys can put that in the fridge or the kitchen. I don't mind but like don't cook anything for me that that has those two and they respected that and my experience in the dorm was really nice. I'm glad I did it, and I wish more people did it. It's not very luxurious-it's a freshman dorm, and that's the kind of grounded experience that you need. It's not exactly as I imagined, it's actually working well, you know, maybe that will be a first step towards something different for them. You're not going to spend all of your time in your room, you're going to be out like meeting people in the library. Go to class and then like go to the cafeteria, doing something new.

Mr. Abbas echoed this observation of living on campus and interacting with the community, believing that because of their financial privilege, Muslim international students

from the Gulf are more likely to live off campus, and thus not stay on campus and socialize the way the average American student will. He believes this is related to them "not understanding the sense of student life at a university because culturally, they're not coming from a place where they know that."

Another cultural challenge present in the adjustment to university life for students was the celebration of Muslim religious holidays during the academic year. As a Catholic institution, WJCU structures its calendar around Christian holidays, for example, providing a few days off to all students during the Easter holiday. In recent years the university has made efforts to acknowledge and celebrate the holidays of other religions, such as creating a Diwali celebration that included faculty and staff in planning and implementation, or notifying all faculty about Ramadan and making them aware that it fell during final exams in a particular year. Shaheen shared that "Ramadan was very difficult because like the university has the classes and finals scheduled [during that time]." He noted that "Muslim students are fasting, but I can't show up to the final or say something to my professor, like, oh, I'm fasting, can you go easy on me?" Zoya also shared students' hesitation to mention fasting or the holiday to professors, saying that "even if the class had more Arabs or more Muslims that are fasting, I never wanted to mention it."

Adjustment: Academics and Experiences in the Classroom

The adjustment to a new academic level and American classroom culture is one that begins on arrival but can continue throughout a student's university experience. While all university students must make an adjustment to a higher level of learning and expectations, international students often do so having come from significantly different educational systems at the secondary level and pedagogical approaches. Depending on the type of high school a

student came from, they may be more or less prepared to make the transition to U.S. higher education. Some students pursue their education at international high schools, which offer international curriculum such as the International Baccalaureate Program (IB), or American or international high schools offering the Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum. Others may attend British or other schools patterned after foreign educational curriculum, attend local schools offering courses in a mix of Arabic and English, or attend purely local schools, often government-run, which instruct in the native language and use national examinations. Zoya made a connection between the type of secondary school students enroll from and their level of adjustment, noting that:

> Certain students from certain schools do better than students from other schools. I guess because they've been exposed to the AP [Advanced Placement] programs or the IB [International Baccalaureate] program and have an idea of what the content is going to be and how to study for it. They are more challenged if they haven't seen something similar in high school. So they have to learn from zero, and I see them struggling more.

Not only those students who came to WCJU as first years, but also those who transferred from another institution in the United States, shared their experience of academic transition and challenges. Sayf disclosed:

> I was afraid at the beginning; it was a while since I'd been in a class that has 30 students or less. At my community college there were like big, big classrooms, so the professor does not have to know your name, your face. It's the exact opposite at WCJU. It's a good thing if you're a good student, a bad thing if you are a student that does that does not attend class, even though you're smart and good at the subject if the professor does not see your face and does not see you interact in the class, it's gonna affect your grade.

Sub-themes of academic challenges that emerged through the research involved student motivation, classroom interactions and perceptions of Muslim international students by their faculty. Egab reflected:

> Sometimes we have challenges with like assignments; some professors expect a lot from a student, but they don't see like every student isn't the same-some people excel super-fast and some people are like, bumpy. I'm not the best student, but I like to work hard, so sometimes I'm struggling with classes. But I feel like some professors might be like, you know, this guy is not working hard, which is the opposite.

Zoya identified two types of students who come to university in the United States and their motivations for doing so, sharing that one group is made up of "people who want to learn, and they're working really hard." These are students she feels who "reach out, for example, to someone who already took the class and asks them, 'what was your approach on this?' for example, in engineering on solving this problem or like how to study." The second group who comes, she feels "just want the easy way out. They don't want to do much work." She believed that both types of students were represented at WJCU, and felt there was an influx of those students who did not "want to do much work', which then negatively influenced the reputation of all the Muslim international students from the Gulf. She described how her college had a large enrollment of Gulf students, and talked of some of the challenges she perceived: …what's going on in our department now with cheating and stuff like that-it's a huge, huge deal right now because they caught so many people cheating and they're all Arabs. So now [faculty in the college] are stereotyping every single Arab student even though, for example, they know I'm a hard worker. They'll still like be looking at me at a close eye because they caught other Kuwaitis or Arabs cheating.

Mr. Abbas also touched on this observation of different types of students who come to study in the United States, sharing that in his view, some see this time as "a sort of vacation-they can come and have fun here." He believed this had to do with their priorities, "education versus having fun; this may be the first time they're living alone, away from their parents." He spoke of

his own time as a student at WJCU as a bicultural Arab-European American before beginning his career working with students, remembering how he saw some of the students behave in the classroom:

> Sometimes showing up late, how they would interact with some of the professors- like I said, not all of them are the same. There are some who are really here to get a quality education and they worked their tail off. They were some of the best students I ever knew, with top notch grades who went on to get certifications or to graduate school. Really, they did their best, they had good relations with the professors. So they really made the most out of their time here. Others were not so serious. I think it depends on who they are, what schools they are coming from, and what their family background is.

Some participants spoke of the issue of representation in the classroom, especially when they were in majors that did not have large numbers of Arab or even international students in them. Rabia noted that in "most of my classes I was literally the only Arab." She described one class where "the whole class, I think, was White but we had five international people and all from different continents in the world. That was pretty cool." She went on to share that while the professor in the class would ask the other international students regularly how "the ethics in their countries were on the topic of the day," over the course of several weeks "he would never ask me, so, that felt like personal." She noted that after a discussion about oil production and disasters, she was "reminded of my country, like with the Gulf Iraq invasion, Operation Desert Storm and like how they flamed the oil rigs. . . I approached him with this connection but I felt like he brushed me off [rudely]." It made her wonder if there were some preconceptions of Arab students professors had; this question was echoed by other participants as well and influenced classroom interactions with peers and with professors.

Egab talked about these interactions, expressing his perception that other students

> Have an idea or mentality [about you] like "they're barbaric people, they are weird. Their culture is weird, they oppress women you know a lot of other stuff." Some female students that I met in my classes when they know I'm from Saudi Arabia, some of them look at me like, oh yeah, he's one of those guys and they oppress women. But the others who actually went to Dubai, or Abu Dhabi, they went to these areas, they're like "oh you're from Saudi, that's really cool., I went to Dubai this summer" and they interact with me. So some of them have a preconceived notion, some of them have a good notion. So it depends, but thankfully I saw a lot of positivity more than negativity.

Nour also spoke of not being fully comfortable to be herself in the classroom environment, saying that "to be honest, I'm open minded and I respect all viewpoints but sometimes it's hard to listen to something and not be able to fight it or reply to it." She related this discomfort to being a foreigner, that the ideas being presented in the classroom "are what most people know and study here but for us it's something else." She wanted to "respect the country I'm in" and felt that sharing opposing views would "grab attention from the other students, and you never know, who is sitting by your side, what is going to happen." She felt that she "just wanted to make friendships. I didn't want to make people feel like, 'Oh you are a Muslim with some weird thoughts'. . . I didn't want to feel awkward."

Mr. Abbas believed that students could face "micro aggressions in the classroom," noting that he had heard cases of professors who "would just say stupid things or put their foot in their mouth and sort of insult" these students. He went on to note that while:

> I don't think it ever felt good for them when they would go through that. But then again, because we live in this day and age, I don't think it was like shocking or surprising. I think they know that there will be people who are not friendly to them, you know, who may have Islamophobic views themselves. So I think sometimes they're careful around that.

Interviews showed that students believed that during their interactions they were representing not only themselves as individuals, but also their countries, cultures, or even

religions. They were conscious of their interactions casting any negative views onto any of these identities. This feeling was influenced by these students largely being sponsored by their governments, adding an extra layer to them being mindful of their interactions, given the expectations and requirements of these sponsors.

Adjustment: Government Sponsors

The majority of students from the Gulf are fully sponsored financially by their governments in pursuing their education in the United States or elsewhere abroad and can be seen as representatives of their countries' cultures. In order to host their students, universities must be approved by each sponsoring agency and are typically limited to enrolling students into specific majors, often based on the country's workforce or economic development needs. WJCU is currently approved to host students through sponsorships from the Kuwait Cultural Mission, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), several sponsoring agencies of the government of the United Arab Emirates, and one scholarship managed through Qatar Airways. Sponsors pay universities directly for tuition and fees and provide students with a monthly stiped ranging from $2000 to upwards of $8000 per month for living expenses. Interviews with Mr. Abbas revealed a perception of these students that is sometimes held on campus by others, noting that these students who "are on government scholarships and get a government stipend [are] living a much more privileged life than a lot of other students who are American; there's a sort of wealth disparity there-you can tell from the luxury cars you can see them parking on campus."

While government sponsorships can support students living privileged lifestyles, meeting sponsors' requirements can be challenging for students. If students do not comply with sponsor requirements, their living stipends can be suspended for months on end while students work to

respond to their requests. Typical sponsor requirements include verification of enrollment at the start of each semester, as well as a report of academic progress at the conclusion of the academic year, or at any time the sponsor requests it. Students are restricted to studying in certain majors, limiting their choices, and it is not uncommon for sponsors to request special letters from the institution providing additional details on students' plans of study, academic progress, or other matters. During the COVID-19 pandemic, sponsors were also involved in the evacuation of their students back to home countries, and placed restrictions on returning to the United States to engage in online-only education. Many participants in my research spoke of various challenges and complications that arose not only during their education generally, but also related to their experiences with sponsors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Omar observed that the relationships between the university and sponsors were critical in navigating sponsor-student interactions. He identified "a lack of communication between my Ministry of Education and our school" because of the low numbers of students from his country enrolled at the university, given that WJCU is not on their approved university list for all sponsoring agencies. This means that students coming from Qatar would have to enroll at the university without sponsorships, covering the cost of their education from family funds. For this reason, he noted that the university "is not going to have Qatari students unless [their families] will pay-okay, most people can afford it, but if the ministry would pay, why should I pay, you know?" The ministry paying for his education was a big factor in him enrolling at the university, and he felt that if that relationship was expanded to other scholarships available to students from Qatar by his government, it would increase the number of students who enrolled. He compared that relationship with WJCU's close connection with the Kuwait Cultural Mission, who sponsor

what is actually the largest group of international students at WJCU. He noted that he saw the close relationship the university enjoyed with the sponsors, and "that's why WJCU is very popular in Kuwait-[they participate in] conference events, I remember that I attended the Kuwait National Day event hosted [by the Kuwait Cultural Mission, who invited university administrators to attend] and saw the close personal relationships our school has with this specific community."

Egab spoke about some of the internal pressures of being a sponsored student, sharing that "we represent our country, so we have to be in a good manner, [the campus community] see me and think I represent all of Saudi Arabia." He felt it was very important for both his peers and his sponsors to "see me doing well, you know, going beyond the minimum GPA, helping people, being a part of the university community." Other tensions he identified included academic requirements, noting the double pressure of having "to have a certain GPA we can't go below" as not only a sponsored student but also one on an F-1 visa. He related that this can cause "a difficult time for us, especially like when we tell the professors that if we do really bad I'm going to lose my scholarship and visa-some are understanding, but others, not really." He spoke further about the challenges of working with his sponsor over various issues regarding changes in his academic program, sharing they were "just some of the trials that I had to endure, it took me six months to actually fully get the acceptance from them and get my stipend back." He felt that being on a government scholarship can "add way more anxiety because your mind gets cluttered thinking about school and who's going to pay, what if my scholarship cancels me?" He identified structure and support from the institution as vital for helping him manage processes, recalling a time when he asked for support from the office of international student services, "when I told

you [the researcher, in my role as Assistant Dean] about my situation, you immediately responded and you told me how to direct myself and it helped a lot. That's what I love about WJCU-everything is very clear…everything is in tip-top shape."

Not only are there sponsor requirements for grades and courses of study but also on ability to take online courses or modify academic plans, for example, students taking a leave of absence for a semester. Nour experienced challenges when she was barred from re-entering the United States after a visit home, due to a traffic violation and pending court case being reflected in the SEVIS database. She was forced to take a leave of absence for the semester to be able to apply for a new student visa from home, which resulted in her sponsor demanding her to pay tuition owed from personal funds. She described that "it was like $15,000…I said what should I do?" Luckily, a woman she spoke with from the financial department of the cultural mission intervened and spoke with the Minister, telling her "I don't usually do this, but you are a good girl and deserve this chance." The cultural mission ended up paying her tuition, but "are deducting from my stipend each month for a year. At least I'm home [without having the pay the living expenses the stipend is meant to cover]." At the time of this writing, Nour has remained home for over a year, as student visa regulations were modified by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) during the COVID-19 pandemic, barring students in the "initial" visa status (of which Nour is one) from returning to the United States to take classes online. Nour's example highlights the dual impact of U.S. student visa regulations and sponsor expectations particularly during the unprecedented period of COVID-19. Zoya recounted the current experience of some of her friends, who are sponsored students from a different country in the Gulf, sharing that while she was able to remain in the United States, they remain back home: "no one came back.

They were forced to evacuate and now they have to have approval from the scholarship to come back and since everything is online, they didn't get it. They all want to come back."

Even in normal times, sponsor expectations can impact the student experience beyond academics and travel, having an influence on how they interact on campus and with whom. Sayf disclosed that his scholarship is through the military in his country, and not only required a year of military service for him to eligible, but also held him to other rules, such as a paper he was asked to sign that forbid him from practicing religion in public. As Sayf recounted, "You can go pray, but it's safer to pray at home to avoid any problems or any actions from people." Because of this regulation, Sayf does not participate in shared prayer on the WJCU campus, even though he feels "safe" at WJCU. He noted "I can pray there, [but] it's against the rules…I don't like to get questioned…I follow rules."

Mr. Abbas confirmed these barriers to students fully engaging in community, noting that some students would "not be willing to interact with a Muslim organization on campus, because it could draw attention to them from authorities". While he believed a lot of these feelings were unfounded, he acknowledged the time of "living in this War on Terror era, that could draw attention to them" and felt that they have "heard horror stories from some people [back home]."

Summary: Arrival and Adjustment

Muslim international students face a myriad of challenges in arriving and adjusting to universities in the United States, many of which are connected to the multiple identities that they hold. While the logistical, linguistic, and some academic challenges relate to their identities as international students, their identities as Arabs influence other difficulties such as immigration, living independently, gender relations, and preconceptions of their culture, with their identities as

sponsored students presenting its own unique set of challenges. As they move through their educational experience, their Muslim identities also begin to have a larger impact their educational journeys, shaped by the current political and social narrative of Islamophobia in the United States

The Student Experience: Muslim International Students Pursuing an Education in the United States

As students advance through their education, ideally they become more comfortable navigating their new environments and the host country and institutional cultures. While early trials may fade, challenges remain, related to making academic progress, living independently, meeting the expectations and requirements of government sponsors, and maintaining federal regulations concerning F-1 student visa status, such as maintaining progress to degree, changing academic program, and being granted permission to travel between the United States and the home country. During this phase students are also encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities and professional development to extend their learning beyond the classroom. The university provides support for students not only for maintaining their compliance with regulations, but also for their academic, personal, professional, social, and spiritual growth. Beyond the university's efforts, participants noted the sense of community, cultural knowledge, and reliance on one another to navigate the institution. The themes that resonated most heavily in this stage of their education were the formation of community and the opportunities to practice their Muslim faith as well as engage with and learn about the different faith traditions represented at the university. These opportunities allowed participants to rely on and expand

their communities, explore their identities, and integrate themselves into the fabric of the institution.

The Student Experience: Importance of Community in El Ghorba

Participants discussed the importance of building and sustaining community during their time at WJCU, describing important relationships with other people from the Gulf, with the larger community of international students, and with faculty and staff at WJCU. For participants, building and participating in these communities were key to coping with being away from home and feeling included within the campus community. Rabia shared the concept of *El Ghorba*, which she described as a term used "when traveling abroad-It's like you being in a foreign culture and missing spending time with those you love." She explained that at these times:

> It's nice to say hi to familiar face or like it's customary if you see someone you know is from your culture but you don't know, to say "*Salaam Allah,*" like the peace for God, also translated to saying "this hi is for God," you know, not for that person, but you are acknowledging you are both here in the same situation.

Knowing that there was a community of students at the university who shared their culture had a significant impact on how welcomed and integrated into the larger community participants felt during their time on campus. All participants in the study discussed the positive impact that the formation of a strong sense of community had on their experiences and mitigated concerns they may have had prior to joining WCJU. Omar shared some of his preconceptions of how he felt he might be seen on campus, recounting that "before coming to the UNITED STATES, it's a stereotype that people are gonna hate you. Because you're Arab people are going to attack you." Students were comforted by the presence of others from their culture and religion as well as visible signs of inclusion on campus. Nour recalled seeing her flag as she arrived to the university, noting: "to be honest that's a huge thing. The first thing that made me feel

welcome. It showed me they knew I was coming and I got to hold my flag and take a picture. I almost cried at that time. I remember." She went on to speak of her first days at the university, sharing that the things that made her feel welcome were "the students from my nationality-Kuwaiti students, the campus, and even you [the researcher] too. It was good to have this support, especially when it was my first semester and I was so confused on how things work here." When talking about their sense of community, so many of the participants first identified their connections with other students from the Gulf as critical to them making a successful transition to their new surroundings. The importance of these close relationships was echoed by Dhari, who noted that "It definitely helps, things become easier because you have a friend who is looking after you and you are looking after them. You grow together and understand each other more." Mr. Abbas confirmed the feelings of comfort and safety student participants shared about having a community of other international Muslim students to engage with:

> You see students, you know, a three-day weekend comes by, they are traveling all over the region with each other. A lot of them only socialize with fellow Arabs; you see them going to other schools here in our area, where it's known that there's a lot of GCC Arabs, and they'll socialize with people they know there. And if they have relatives there, they're going to go and socialize with them.

He went on to again make mention that the differences in national origin and social class among international Muslim students influences them getting to know one another and forming community:

> I think those who didn't have a global experience growing up weren't as exposed to people of other cultures, even within Arabs, because Arabs are definitely not a monolith. They will not want to socialize with someone who's Syrian or Lebanese or Palestinian, because they're not then Kuwaiti or they're not Saudi. There can be a kind of distinction and sort of tension sometimes that exists there. There's a common Arab identity, but still. Not a lot of socializing between those groups if they weren't exposed to them.

In thinking about the formation of community among a larger group of other international and American students, Mr. Abbas noted that religion may play a role in how comfortable students may be with such interactions:

> Particularly if they're coming from family backgrounds that are more religiously conservative, they may not be willing to socialize and interact with non Muslims at first. So I think, again, the culture clash there. Some are open minded they're willing to maybe put aside some of that cultural bias that they grew up with and make the most of the experience and to learn from it, others not so much because they've been reared a certain way. They don't know how to handle it. So they retreat into their safe Arab Muslim identity.

When describing the experience of international Muslim students pursuing an education in the United States, Zoya talked about why having other students from this background makes such a difference, sharing that "it's a huge support to know that they're connected to at least one other person from the same country or who speaks the same language; they feel safe and not scared to ask questions or ask for help." She went on to describe that while this search for community begins at the time of admission to the university, finding it contributes to their successful transition and experience:

> I think I speak for everyone in this case, or most of the people. When we got admitted to the university, the first thing we did is ask, who are the Arabs here, so we can ask questions. I don't know why, for us it's easier to ask Arabs then ask, like the internationals or Americans for help or guidance. The first person we go to is someone from the same country, because we feel like they'll help me more. So we always want to be like kind of close, not necessarily next to each other, but around each other, just in case we missed something.

Dhari felt that "Gulf people need to find a group-that might be the main thing. I knew my group from before and had people transfer with me so it was easier for us. We planned on coming to WCJU together." For those participants who did not come with a group of friends or family they already knew, it was even more important for them to form connections to other

students from the Gulf. One of the early ways these relationships were created was through the international orientation program facilitated by the International Student Services office. Fahad recounted forming a close relationship with one of his orientation leaders, a young woman who grew up in Abu Dhabi, recognizing that "I don't think I would have stayed at WCJU if not for her helping me since the first day-if I didn't understand something, she was my go-to. Without her, I don't think I would have enjoyed it as much."

For many of the participants, coming to the United States was their first experience encountering people from truly diverse backgrounds. Zoya felt that "orientation was a big, big factor-we're coming to a completely new, very diverse place for the first time. We met so many other people who were also scared and I felt so welcomed and started getting a hang of things." Being with other international students and Americans with international experiences seemed to be a positive first step towards expanding the sense of community beyond other Gulf students; Fahad reminisced positively about his first encounters with other international students:

> From the first day of the international orientation, we [group of new international students] just felt overwhelmed with everyone introducing us to WCJU and everyone just being friendly. After the first couple of days, we realized that our orientation was led by other students- everyone was our age and understood our experience of the first year, that we shouldn't feel scared and it's a new chapter for everyone. But I mostly clicked with anyone that was international rather than American first; you know, because I feel like the more like the outsider you are, the easier that we connect because we kind of understand each other you know, because like we all came from Europe, or the Middle East, or from China.

Participants were excited to continue to build relationships with Gulf and other students after the initial orientation experience, through meeting friends through others, in class, or at social gatherings. Nour identified the coffee shop on campus as a place to make new friends, sharing that "when I know my friends will be sitting there, I go to say hello to them, and by this

I'm getting to know the new people who are sitting with them." Fahad talked more about connections made in the classroom, sharing:

> One friend I met was because we started talking in class, I found out he is a friend of my cousin who used to go to Boston University and used to live with friends of my cousins in like Washington; no matter who you know or who you link up with they would know of someone at least from your friends or family. It was like, it's a very small word in a certain way, you know, and that makes me feel comfortable.

Shaheen spoke about the importance of pushing students out of their comfort zone to "change the mindset of students from the Gulf because they already applied to this school with friends, take classes with those friends and have an idea that they are going to a different country with the same group of people." In thinking about how they became comfortable in a new setting, participants spoke of signs they encountered that helped in the transition from home culture to host culture.

Seeing visible signs of inclusion and welcome and connecting with other students from the same region opened the door to participants beginning to feel comfortable interacting with those outside of their cultures. Omar reflected on his first day of international student orientation, recalling seeing the director of WCJU's international student service office holding the Qatari flag while waiting for him, the only student from his country that semester, to arrive and take a welcome photo as is customary during orientation for international students. He recalled:

> There was a group of new students from Kuwait and Saudi who came over and said "okay, we're just going to join you in the photo- we don't want you to be alone." That was the first moment where I felt very welcomed…as the days went on everyone, the Asian students the American students, were talking to us like, where you guys from? What do you guys do?

Hamad, a recent alumnus from Kuwait, noted that the ability to "meet these strange people is really the backbone of WJCU." He was thinking in particular of his "Dutch, German,

and Mexican American friends I met at orientation" with whom he is still in touch with as an alumnus, participating in their weddings, and visiting with around the world. He marveled that he "randomly met them because one of you [international student services staff] was like "hey go sit on this bench" and then suddenly I'm sitting on this bench with these people that I don't know, but bonded with for life.

While thinking back to their encounters with other international and American students, some participants shared the preconceptions they discovered others had of them. Omar divulged that:

> It is an experience, to see what other people think of us. Some of the Americans were like, "you guys have oil money and live like nuts!" One girl asked me if we live in tents or ride camels, and I remember there was another kid who was like "no, they drive Ferraris and Lamborghinis back home-they don't ride camels, girl!"

Though some preconceptions existed about Gulf students by the Americans, several participants talked about their initial interactions with the larger university community as positive. Shaheen described talking with American classmates about his home country, saying that when he told students where he is from,

> They'd always be excited and show positive emotions like, "oh that sounds really cool. What is it like over there?" It's like an exotic experience for both, when international students and the local students get together and talk. "Oh, this is how we do things back home." We talked about the language or the food or any kind of conversation like that. It's a fun kind of experience and I think that, you know, a lot of people here at least are welcome to that experience, you know, having an international student and learning from them…having international friends.

For many participants, the sense of community extended beyond the student body. Omar spoke of his relationships with faculty adding to his learning experience, reiterating his view of the university as very diverse, also in terms of "the professors-some had Arabian backgrounds.

Through them it was interesting getting to know the Arabian community living in the United States." He felt that "every class was different and special because the professors came from different places." Omar talked about the importance of his visits to office hours with professors, "which was great because sometimes you know I don't understand something, and I can go to them and they just explain it to me." He felt that "we're blessed because we're a small community, so the professors have time for eight students and they get to know us." He compared this to other universities, where the "professor probably doesn't know some students names or faces." Similarly, Rabia spoke of the importance of relationship with the professors for students from the Gulf, noting that "the thing about Kuwaitis is they like to have a relationship with the professor, like Arabs in general I think, so that the professor could know them." However, when asked why she thought that was, she shared that "honestly, it's to further personal interests, to get like the best grade possible." While building and maintaining these personal relationships between students and professors may have been complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when education at WJCU was completely online, students noted a strong sense of connection. Sayf said, "even right now through zoom, like every single day I get at least two emails from a professor. They want to interact with you. They want to be in contact with you." Egab shared that several specific professors "actually helped me immensely with my life as a student at WJCU and I thank them till this day."

Several participants spoke of the importance of their sense of overall community that grew in them during their time at WJCU. Ali recounted his experience attending a gathering to honor the victims of the New Zealand mosque shooting in the spring of 2019. He remembered getting an email about it that did not come from his Muslim community, but from the community

at large at WJCU "letting us know we would all gather and read verses from the Quran in front of the church-the main church." He had just finished a class, and

> Had full intention of actually going. I found myself being joined by some Kuwaiti students and even my professor, who's a fellow Muslim. So yeah, we saw ourselves just going there holding candles and reading verses of the Quran with people, there was a priest and a Rabbi too, we were preached about knowing such a thing has happened and we're not proud of it-this was a true act of inhumane terrorism that happened, and we have nothing but to pray spread love within each other.

Fahad also spoke of this same memorial event and the impression he had of the interconnectedness of the larger community:

> A lot of the international students came and especially the Arab students. But then when we went there, we realized that it was literally everyone. It's not only the internationals but American people-just like mix from every single side, you know. I remember seeing you [the researcher] there too. I felt like that just showed so much respect and value. Because like honestly, I didn't really expect other people to show up you know. I feel like they came maybe to show respect for the people who died-but they came to show that "we are here for you guys, we don't support whatever happened" and like they are there for us too, you know.

Ali also spoke about how much his WJCU community impacted him personally. In comparing his life prior to coming to the university with his educational experience there, Ali expressed that:

> In the past, in my free time, a book or a movie would be a perfect companion. But now I think of a saying in Arabic. I don't know if it leaves the same impact in English, but we say that "*heaven without people is just an empty house.*"

Beyond their pre-existing relationships, meeting other Muslim international students through friends or classroom interactions, and forming connections with international and American students, faculty and staff, one of the consistent ways participants identified as helping them feel a part of the institution was connected to their identities as Muslims.

Student Experience: Spiritual Connections

In speaking about their experiences, participants often mentioned resources that were rooted in their spiritual connection to something greater than themselves. Several participants expressed how they believed their Muslim faith actually connected them to their Catholic institution, which they typically did not anticipate upon their arrival. Some participants were not even aware of the institution's religious tradition at the time of application; Hamad recounted his college application process, remembering that:

> What is funny is that I was applying to universities one of the main reasons I didn't apply to another school in the area was because it was known for being a Christian school. And so my friends were like, Oh, you're going to go to a Christian school as a Muslim, and I was like, does it matter? But I didn't apply. I did not know at the time that WJCU was a Jesuit school. I didn't know what Jesuit meant until I came and found out Jesuit education is really bettering yourself through faith, service, and education, which is a beautiful concept.

Rabia stated her surprise upon enrolling at the institution, which was not surprise "that they had other faiths, but I was surprised how they supported other faiths." Nour talked about being "shocked" upon learning about the on-campus prayer room available to students, which is designated for Friday prayers and used predominantly by Muslim students, though it is open to students of all faiths.

> Seeing the church in the middle of the campus, you know it's a Catholic school. And then suddenly I saw a prayer room-I felt understood. Maybe I wouldn't feel that safe if I went to another school. It showed this Catholic school will respect people from different religious and they would provide them with the thing you need. My previous school was different.

Shaheen spoke of feeling valued by the existence of the prayer room: "It made me feel like they think about us and value our religion or spirituality…it's not just something that we

have to carry ourselves." Omar connected the availability of the prayer room to the overall orientation of inclusion he found after joining the university:

> In the beginning I felt like wow, we're in a Catholic university and they actually did that for us. Like they really do respect other cultures and religions; there is a Muslim community, the Jewish community. The school is a very democratic place, everyone feels welcome there regardless-Middle East, Black people, LGBT people. I remember seeing special needs people in the classes and they all felt welcome.

He did note, however, that having the prayer room was "just OK," as in his home city of Doha, "at Georgetown the Jesuit university campus they have an actual mosque on campus, but I know in the United States, it's kind of rare to see that." He went on to explain his perception that in the United States, while he has encountered an Arab community, he did not get a sense that there was a cohesive and public community of Muslims. Ali spoke of the prayer room as a space leading to the building of such a community:

> I always felt welcomed or accepted by other students who are not classmates, or colleagues in my research, people that I would normally find whenever I'd go to the Friday prayers. When we were like, tying our shoes outside or having coffee after. You just greet them with *assalamu aleykum* (peace be upon you) or hello at first, and then like the next time you would know them by name. And then the third time you would ask them about how they did in the test to the point where you're exchanging numbers, you're seeing them outside campus, you're asking about, their well-beings, their families well-being. I didn't feel that back in my other institute.

Nour shared that she had just been speaking of the prayer room to her grandmother, and it:

> Made her feel so safe. You know she was so scared, even with her visa, last December, because she wanted to come with me. And I was telling her, "I have a prayer room on campus. We have Friday prayer." It made me happy [and] also it made my grandmother happy. She felt so safe, like okay-the university is thinking about us, when sometimes it's too late to go back home and have my afternoon prayer, I can go to the prayer room with my friends.

In addition to the prayer room, all participants spoke of the existence of the Office of Muslim Student Life (MSL) as another marker of support and inclusion, as well as a place to meet others who shared their religion and perhaps even expand their understanding of it. Mr. Abbas, who works in this unit, noted that the students from Gulf may be coming from cultures where there is much sectarianism, which could result in "tensions if they're being taught a certain interpretation of Islam that may be a bit more intolerant or exclusivist. This may not help them when coming to the American environment where [others] don't match them in their religious identity." Students from all different Muslim backgrounds interacted through the MSL office; Zoya shared that its environment made her feel comfortable though seeing more people from the same religion and even expanding her understanding of it:

> It was nice to see other Muslims from different countries because with us, we think Muslims equals Arabs. There are so many different types of people that practice the same religion, not necessarily the same way. It's really interesting to talk to them and see their mentality and their culture.

Fahad appreciated the regular emails he would receive from MSL, promoting various events and gatherings for the Muslim community, and especially during the time of Ramadan. He felt that they were advocating for students during this period of fasting, and felt supported when the university café was open before sunrise during that time so that Muslim students could eat.

Egab also shared that Muslim Student Life "helped us as students as well as Muslims, because it was very welcoming every time I went to Friday prayer-it's like a flashback to home." He spoke about how these moments of prayer often resulted in broadening his understanding of religion,

> Especially like when a Muslim theology professor comes in and does his sermon, then we have a discussion with the campus Rabbi and a Jesuit, or we have a talk with another professor about Islam and Christianity or something like that. It's very eye-opening to see how much we are together and not really against each other.

Hamad stressed how important the existence of an office that supports Muslim students is, stating that the office:

> Has a legitimate position, and [embodies] my understanding of Jesuit values of service through education and faith. In Arabic we say *al ta'ayush,* which is a sense of coexistence. I feel like it's a natural extension of the Jesuit mission to give people a voice to pray. The Jesuits were persecuted in like Japan and other areas for trying to get the voice to pray and so I find it fitting that a Jesuit institution gives a voice to pray in a place that didn't have it before.

Other participants had similar experiences of not only gaining more insight into their own religion, but also being able to incorporate their religious knowledge into their learning experience and learn about other faith traditions through their educational journeys. Fahad talked about how his Muslim faith enabled him to keep up with early course requirements in Theology, sharing that when he took a Judaism class his first term, he had more context than other non-religious students may have, and while "it was not easy, it's like I know what he's saying, I understand because it's kind of the same thing." Rabia also reflected on her academic experience, specifically the requirement for all students to study theology, sharing this made her "feel like they respect all kinds of faith because I took Buddhism and Hinduism as well as history that covered Islam, Christianity and Judaism, so I just learned a lot about religion."

Outside of the academic study of different religious traditions, Dhari mentioned opportunities for worship and co-curricular programming as expanding his knowledge. In speaking about his observation of Ash Wednesday, an important Catholic celebration marking the beginning of the Lenten season, Dhari shared:

> What I liked at WJCU was that students would go worship in the chapel and then go to class, explaining about the [ash] marks that they had on their forehead. I think it was on a Wednesday. I learned more about what that was and why they did it. I liked to learn more about their religion, not to compare with Islam but just to see the common things.

He went on to speak of other religious traditions, remembering the university's celebration of the Hindu holiday of Diwali, noting that "I had to go to it for a professor's class; I was already familiar with it because in the UAE we have a lot of Indians, but I learned much more about it then." Fahad recounted Friday prayers during Ramadan, when people "from other religions came to learn about Islam." He described enjoying the experience because of the interactions that followed time for prayer. "After we finished up our prayer, some would ask us, what were you doing? how do you feel? and some other questions." Egab spoke of how meaningful he found opportunities to have "meetings with Rabbi and some of the fathers from the Jesuit community. I loved that, I felt like I was a part of a big family."

Beyond religious services, academic learning, and opportunities for co-curricular learning around religion, several participants talked about their interfaith interactions with non-Muslims on campus and their interfaith friendships. Hamad believed that

> Having the ability to participate in an interfaith dialogue is absolutely tremendous. We might not add much to the conversation, but at least our voices are being heard. The Muslims have a voice and some type of representation.

Sayf related that "here you can practice whatever religion you have, nobody's going to question you or judge you." Dhari divulged his impression that "Jesuit university students are aware of religion, and they have heard about Islam—that is a good thing." This awareness of other religions influenced some of the positive interactions they had with non-Muslim students on campus; when describing one such experience, Sayf opined that "it's not even like they don't

care if you're Muslim or whatever you are but it actually feels like they appreciate what you are- I feel respected as a Muslim here." He went on to share that he enjoys it when people ask him about his religion, feeling that:

> It's not like, "Oh, he's a Muslim, stay away from him. Don't ask him these kinds of questions, he's going to feel like you're asking him these questions to make him feel like uncomfortable. They're so friendly about it; I was talking to this girl at the library and she was like "Oh, so you're Muslim, you guys pray five times a day, right? Why is that?" Like, they're curious to know.

Rabia spoke of the close friendship she enjoyed with two girls she came to know during her undergraduate experience, revealing that:

> I love it, like we always talk about everything, talk about culture, religion, ethics, and justice, what's right and what's wrong. We are a Christian, a Muslim and a Jew so all different religions and it's, like, fine. We don't judge and like even when I'm explaining to them about Islam and all that, I talke about it with pride and like seeing the similarities from our cultures. It's like really, really interesting and I like that my closest friend is Jewish—she's like really my soul sister.

Egab reinforced this concept of the similarities he believed existed among all religions, now that he learned more about them, feeling that "technically, every one of these books is saying one thing, you know, believe in God and pray to Him, pretty much that's the main idea."

Commencement: Impacts of Jesuit Education

Most international students stay at the university for four years during their undergraduate studies, with those coming as transfer students staying for at least two years. Graduate students stay for the duration of their programs, usually 2-3 years depending on degree. During this last phase of their educational journeys, students are focused on completing final requirements for degree, as well as planning for their future. This typically involves them using career services at the university, completing internships or other opportunities to build professional skills. International students who maintained F-1 student visa status throughout their

education are eligible to pursue Optional Post-Completion Practical Training (OPT) after graduation, which allows them to work in the United States for at least 12 months in all fields, with an additional 24-month extension granted to those studying in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). In the case of students from the Gulf at WJCU, many have career opportunities facilitated by their sponsoring governments or their family connections, and plan to return home without taking advantage of OPT. Others will be inspired to continue onto other graduate and professional degree programs. In additional to their planning for next steps professionally or academically, this period of graduation and early post-graduate life also provides space for reflection on how their overall experience of studying at a university in the United States led to personal growth and change.

Changing Worldviews

As participants prepared for graduation from the university and their future career paths, or as those who were alumni thought about how their education influenced their orientation to professional roles held since completing their education, several shared how they felt their time at WJCU influenced these areas. Ali shared that he "knows what my goals are," disclosing that he plans to be "working in an international company, meeting a lot of international people." He believed that his experience at WJCU "prepared [him] for the real world." Zoya shared the impact about her professors teaching her how to take her studies in engineering and "apply it to real life, to what I hope to achieve in my career." Her experience, including her lab-based and field work made her realize that she does not aspire to "a desk job" in the future. Instead, she noted, "I'm more interested in continuing to pursue a graduate school degree and then go back

home. It [her experience at WJCU] changed what I want to do with my life, I guess." Dhari spoke about how his experience not only "prepared me academically" but also for his career:

> I [learned] how companies are and what their effect on the world is. They taught us about those who are trying to be better in the world, like for example Tesla, innovating to be better to the world. Companies that are giving back to the world, or harming the world, like Dove in Indonesia. If you really want to be a good person give back to the world-don't take a lot of it and not give back.

He went on to talk about carrying this attitude and learning into his work as a future leader of his country, sharing that he plans to focus on "green solutions" in his field of business administration and entrepreneurship upon returning home. As he noted, "It will be expensive, yes, but we have to do it.We need to do business in a more ethical way, for other people."

Hamad also spoke about the influence of his education on his career trajectory since his graduation as a civil engineering major:

> Many things influenced me going into more of a construction design route. . .the concept of being a builder as opposed to just modifying—I really like the concept of leaving a mark on society. So, the physical mark that I leave as a construction site engineer is a landmark or a building or something. Some of the things that shaped this perspective were philosophy classes I've taken at WJCU or people I met who led me to an internship at a construction site, where I was exposed to a lot of different types of nationalities and personalities. A lot of Kuwaiti construction has international consultants, so that opened up a lot of doors for me professionally.

Hamad went on to work for a major Kuwaiti government entity, then worked in Europe, and is currently back home working with larger international teams on various major projects. He understands that his experiences as an undergraduate helped him to develop the skills he needed to communicate and collaborate successfully with diverse colleagues.

As participants reflected on their overall educational experience at WJCU, all of them remarked on how their Jesuit education shaped and changed them, academically,

personally, and in their orientation towards others. Shaheen believed that not everything he learned at WJCU was learned in the classroom: “I encountered good people who inspired me, [staff members] who cared about the students and that made a difference”. Omar was so grateful that he “knows a lot of people from all over the world now.”

Hamad earned his degree in engineering but revealed that his academic experience “created a love for philosophy and psychology that I wouldn’t have otherwise had.” He went on to speak of how his philosophy and theology courses, as well as the heavy presentation component of his core classes, made him “very comfortable with public speaking and more courageous.” He noted, “it’s easier for me to ask for what I want, because I didn’t really have that stage fright anymore.” Dhari expressed that at WJCU, he “was more aware of what is happening around me in the world, as well as things happening within me.” Omar summed up his experience as changing him “a lot in every way: the way the way I speak; the way I think; the way I read things; the way I see things.” One of the things he noted was the way he felt others saw him. He described an experience taking a course on modern Israel, and upon sharing this with a friend he was told “oh, they [students enrolled in a class focused on this topic] probably hate you [because he is an Arab from the Middle East]”. He realized through his interactions in the course that “When you’re in real life, you will see that people are just people. They don’t hate you because of what you are or where you came from.” This led to him “changing the way I see things about other people.”

Looking inward, participants described profound changes in how they understood themselves and their places in the world. Ali described his experience as “so powerful and transformative,” while Rabia shared that her experience “made me into the person I want to be.”

Egab expressed that his experience at WJCU "taught me patience, and to be relaxed when that storm comes in in your life. Rely on your community, you'll find help, you'll find what you need if you ask around, you're not going to get lost." He believed that his time at the university truly "changed my perception of life—I must choose to be a failure or be successful. Even if I'm struggling with my classes I'm grateful for them, because you know with that tension, that pressure, coals will turn to diamonds."

Fahad believed that his experience made him "realize that I am here to like learn more than just school, more than just to get a certificate and just leave—like I'm here to make my connections of a lifetime". Speaking of the influence of his own relationships, Hamad believed that if not for "some of the stuff that I did-like stand-up comedy, or random road trips with my American friends, I wouldn't be who I am today without these connections that you forced us to make from day one." He felt that because of these connections, he was "more open and more communicative and able to present myself better".

Several participants focused on changes to their approach to and openness toward others. Sayf felt that he greatly expanded his circle of friends, believing that his experience led him to "talk to a lot more people." He shared that he now has "a lot of American friends, international friends, it doesn't have to be someone from the Gulf or someone who talks in Arabic." He realized that his friends "don't have to be Arab for me to communicate with in the United States; before I used to just hang out with Arabs, with my friends like my crew, but WJCU made me look at it a different way." Zoya also spoke similarly about getting "rid of social anxiety of like approaching anyone from the Gulf—or anyone, really. I learned I need to initiate this first and they'll keep the conversation going." Hamad felt that this exposure and forming of community

with others made him "more of an open person—more of an empathetic and understanding person."

This notion of growth in open-mindedness and understanding was expressed by participants in several areas, including orientation to religion and other identities. Omar disclosed that:

> To be honest, I've never said this before, but I'm saying this for the interview; before coming to WJCU I did not respect the LGBT community. But when I came and got to know these people and heard their stories, it changed my perspective. And the way I see things, you know, I accept people's beliefs, religions and backgrounds and all of that, you know.

Hamad shared similar experiences, recognizing that prior to his studies, most of the people he knew "were Muslim and from a homogenous society." After his time at the university he believes he is "much more understanding of different lifestyles, understanding of differences just in general. You realize that different lives are equally as valid, equally as deserving of love and respect." He recounted his conversations with an atheist friend, and shared:

> At first for me it was like "how could you not believe in God?" But now, it's like, if God exists, God loves us all equally. Really my own understanding of myself and my own religion has expanded greatly; before I felt that I must do things just as I grew up. It's like, no, the interpretation of the Quran taught to me by someone says this, not the Quran itself. Before you just take it as face value—this is how you go to heaven, or go to hell. But once you once you meet other people in different mentalities different mindsets you see that is just one interpretation of life. Out of infinitely many, who is right and who is wrong does not matter. All that matters is you live your life the best you can with what you're given, chips fall where they may. I wouldn't have come to that conclusion had I not gone through [my education at] WJCU.

Ali believed that his time at the university was "a major influence of actually constructing my personality and changing it to the better." He noticed that he "became more hopeful and tenacious with what I want to do and what I want to achieve." He expressed that being in this

environment "is the best thing that has happened to me since I moved to the States, including my undergraduate years and my English program." He knew he would take what he "learned during my time here back with me to Kuwait, and continue being a helper to others, listen to their struggles and their needs." Thinking back to his first week on campus, when he had to make the decision to stay or return to Kuwait, he said "I've traced it all back to that time, when I wondered if I should continue—thank God I did."

Rabia ended with some advice for other Muslim students coming from the Middle East: "come here with an open mind, you know, be ready to listen and learn new and insightful information about *everything* they can think of."

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the experiences of 11 undergraduate and graduate Muslim international students and recent alumni from the Gulf attending a Jesuit university on the west coast of the United States. The findings were based on personal interviews with all student and alumni participants and an additional interview with a university administrator working closely with this population. The findings suggested that this group of students and recent alumni face a myriad of experiences on campus that influence their academic and social integration as well as their overall worldviews and professional endeavors post-graduation. Specifically, they were challenged by logistical and immigration issues, living independently, meeting expectations of their government sponsors, and navigating spaces in a different language and culture. They faced preconceptions of them in the classroom and on campus and encountered attitudes of prejudice due mostly to their religious identity. Although they came to the United States with an attitude of uncertainty around how they will be welcomed and accepted, they perceived a sense of support

on campus. They drew strength from their strong sense of community, across their networks of fellow Muslim and Gulf students, other international students, and the university community at large. Finally, they viewed the religious and interfaith identity of the institution as one that included and supported them in their educational journeys.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings presented through the Community Cultural Wealth framework and an exploration of how religion, spirituality and spiritual capital serve as key resources for Community Cultural Wealth. This discussion helps in understanding the essence of how Muslim international students' identities, communities, and the support of the institution influence their social and academic integration on American university campuses and provides recommendations to other universities for developing appropriate support for this population. Finally, Chapter 5 considers the relationship of the findings to that of the literature discussed in the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of Muslim international students at WJCU, a Jesuit university in a large metropolitan area on the west coast. Aiming to understand the essence of these students' racial/ethnic, religious, social class and gender experiences and the influence of these experiences on their academic, social, and interfaith integration and success, I conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study with Muslim international students (undergraduate and graduate) and recent alumni of WJCU. Interview questions explored the ways in which Muslim international students participated in daily life on campus, including academic, social, cultural, and spiritual experiences, and what role religious affiliation played in their higher education experience. The study was situated within a cultural context of political and social turmoil arising from the contemporary anti-immigrant and Islamophobic climate in the United States, and therefore had the added purpose of describing the impacts of Islamophobia on students' experiences in higher education.

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is it like to be a Muslim international student on the campus of a Jesuit university in the United States?
2. How does being at a religiously affiliated institution influence their U.S. university experience?

Findings showed that Muslim international students faced numerous challenges through the processes of their arrival, adjustment, and pursuing their education. Muslim international students experienced challenges related to making a transition to their education in a new

language and culture, meeting the expectations and requirements of their government sponsors, negotiating customs and immigration when traveling to and from their home countries and others' perceptions of their academic performance based on their racial identity. The importance of community was found to be critical in students navigating their way through these challenges and through their overall experience in the United States The impact of their own religious identity alongside the religious affiliation of their institution contributed to their feelings of being welcome and integrated on campus. The national political climate also caused feelings of intimidation, marginalization, and fear of discrimination. Students felt that they received institutional, peer, and faculty support, with strong support from the international student services and Muslim student life units on campus.

This chapter first examines the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework for the study, Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), with the addition of spiritual capital (Park et. al, 2019; Pérez Huber, 2009) as an additional category. The impact of Jesuit values through institutional support and the importance of the interfaith identity of the institution provides further understanding of the essence of Muslim international students' experiences on campus. Next, I provide a discussion of the study's limitations as well as recommendations for further research. Finally, I provide recommendations for effective supporting of Muslim international students based on the study findings; these recommendations are targeted to institutional leaders, international student practitioners, student affairs professionals, campus ministry departments, and U.S. higher education in general.

Significance of the Study

As institutions of higher education in the United States continue to recruit sponsored students from the Middle East, it is vital to explore the questions of what social and academic support universities can provide to Muslim international students to facilitate their cultural adjustment and promote their academic success. Colleges and universities must design curriculum and programming that encourages interactions and promotes dialogue between this population and American students, resulting in a transformation of the Islamophobic narrative present in the United States. How to best support these students is a problem of practice for institutions of higher education, and in particular, for those offices on campus that are responsible for facilitating a positive international student experience.

This study is important because American institutions of higher education have steadily increased their international student enrollments, and as the United States experiences a downward trend in these enrollment numbers, universities may have an increased focus on the recruitment of fully sponsored international students from the Middle East to maintain or grow their international student populations. In many cases, these students are recruited for the reliable financial revenue and economic benefit they provide the institution (Rabia, 2017). Universities have a responsibility to understand and serve students from whom they benefit financially. Universities also have an opportunity to push back against the current Islamophobic narrative in the country by changing the culture of the school, increasing faculty and staff awareness of Islam, and pursuing public scholarship in this area. Catholic and Jesuit schools have the extra lever of religion to use as a mechanism for change; the primary mission of Jesuit universities is

the education and formation of their students for the sake of the kind of persons they become and their resulting influence for good in society in their lives, professions, and service.

Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the concept of Community Cultural Wealth developed by Yosso (2005) in response to the traditional interpretations of Bordieuan cultural capital theory long applied to educational standards and the evaluation of students. In the case of Muslim international students from the Gulf who study at U.S. universities, it is important to note that students generally possess both the traditional (material) forms of capital as well as cultural capital as identified by Bourdieu, which includes an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities acquired and carried on by privileged groups in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). These students largely come from families of economic means and are in addition fully sponsored by their governments for the duration of their studies. Many of these students complete their secondary education at international or American schools and are thus familiar with international educational standards and practices. They have mostly likely traveled overseas, including the United States, before coming to study as international students, and have been exposed to American culture through media, American brands, or companies present in their countries, and perhaps parents who themselves studied in the United States They are proficient in English, having completed their secondary education wholly or partially in English, or having attended an English language academy prior to their enrollment. They are desirable students for U.S. universities because they come with all these types of traditional capital, with universities then accommodating their cultural differences to encourage their success.

Choosing Community Cultural Wealth as the framework for this study shifts the focus from these traditional forms of material and cultural capital to the forms of capital students bring (and develop) as bilingual students of color and religious minorities in their educational contexts. Community Cultural Wealth reinforces tenets of Critical Race Theory, emphasizing that communities of color are indeed places with multiple strengths and critically examines the role of race in students' experiences while at U.S. institutions, working with the strengths they bring from their own cultures and communities to the classroom. Within this framework, Yosso (2005) identified six types of capital that educational leaders can use to frame their interactions with students. Park et. al (2019) further developed this model, expanding on Pérez Huber's (2009) identification of an additional, seventh type of capital, spiritual capital. These frameworks provided context and structure to exploring the experience of the participants in this study.

In Chapter 4, I presented findings drawn from thematic analysis of the interview data. The major themes identified included the challenges of Muslim international students, the importance of community, the significance of religious identity, and the perception and impact of institutional support. I organized the themes according to three salient moments on the timeline of a typical international student's educational journey-arrival and orientation, pursuing an education, and commencement. These analytic steps identified places of articulation between the data and the theoretical framework; some data were closely aligned with elements of the framework, while other data indicated aspects of the framework that were just emerging.

The sections that follow discuss the study findings in light of the theoretical framework, highlighting areas in which the data from this study reinforce, challenge, or augment the types of capital posited by Yosso (2005), Pérez Huber (2009), and Park et al. (2019). The types of capital

are grouped according to the salient moments in students' educational journeys, although many are present throughout the student experience.

Arrival and Adjustment: Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital is defined by Yosso (2005) as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of real or perceived barriers. For Muslim international students, these barriers include logistical, financial, and cultural challenges, including the threat of Islamophobia and maltreatment in the United States as they are not part of the White Christian majority. Given all the preparation required to enroll in a U.S. university and the challenges involved in traveling to the United States to attend it, aspirational capital was essential, supporting and sustaining students through those processes. Dhari, a transfer student from another U.S. university., shared, "[my] family wanted me to act as my own man, and get my university diploma from the United States; that's why I transferred to WCJU, to get a better education." Dhari was already at another U.S. university but took the initiative to transfer to WJCU because of the perception that it was a stronger, more reputable institution. Muslim international students, their families, and their sponsoring governments have high educational aspirations despite the challenges of studying in a foreign country and language. Aspirational capital was woven throughout the participants' stories about their decisions to come to the United States for their higher education and particularly through their time of arrival and transition. For example, Egab recounted his early experiences of struggle after an unsuccessful first semester, visa challenges, and his return a year later:

> Well, during my first time [in college] I wasn't in the right mindset. I wasn't really thinking about school and stuff like that. I was even obese. I wasn't in a situation where I wanted to get myself in a better position in my life, you know. So, after I went back home [for a while] after my visa was denied and was able to

> come back [the following year] with a new visa, I felt like I had the right mindset- I wanted to do well, I wanted to get my degree in engineering.

Egab's description of his experience is consistent with Telbis et. al's (2014) findings that academic success is greatly dependent on a student's confidence in his or her abilities and resources. It further evidences aspirational capital as part of a "mindset" that can help students maintain (or reinvigorate) motivation in the face of challenges.

Ali described his first days at WJCU as "not knowing anyone and always sitting alone trying to discover myself or what do I want at this graduate student chapter of my life. The graduate part of my life." As he began to make connections with faculty, other students, and the institution, he described his process as:

> Gazing around in the lab, seeing what type of research they are conducting and figuring out where I want to go from there. I really felt happy. I started putting down a mental schedule of "I'm going to do this, and from doing this, I'm going to discover this thing that has been opened to me". Any opportunity for me to participate in anything, I would take it and that includes not just the mechanical engineering part but also the social part. My main goal was stepping outside of my comfort zone.

Ali's comments correlate with Yosso's (2005) finding of the "resiliency that is evident in those who allow themselves to dream of the possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (p. 78). While he was unsure of his direction when he arrived, he was inspired to create a plan for himself to be open to all opportunities and challenge himself to be uncomfortable, understanding that it would lead to growth. Ali concluded that through this process, he "became more hopeful and tenacious with what I want to do and what I want to achieve." This represented aspirational capital in participants' hopes for the future at the conclusion of their university education.

Arrival and Adjustment: Familial Capital

Familial capital refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, or cultural intuition" and "engages a sense of community well-being," expanding "the concept of family to include a broader sense of kinship" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The concept of familial capital was perhaps the most strongly represented branch of the framework in this research, consistently appearing through all the student moments in all the themes, most heavily in the finding related to the importance of community. For example, Egab confirmed that "Gulf students, we support each other, I might say we act as a big family away from family." He continued by noting that all their families are back home, and often "the only way for us to feel connected with back home is to connect with each other." Dhari acknowledged that being away from home for the first time "was an experience…we would gather with friends, organizing ourselves and helping each other".

Utilization of familial capital aided in students' cultural adjustment, particularly in the culture shock and adjustment phases discussed by Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960). Culture shock can be identified by the anxiety and stress students may experience in the absence of familiar symbols and signs from home (Rajasekar & Renand, 2013). In the present study, participants came together to recreate those familiar elements while away from home. For example, Nour talked about creating a sense of home with her friends, sharing that she felt they offered her support "emotionally-sometimes like we all miss home and the food we used to eat there, so we all gather and cook some traditional food together." Similarly, other participants described cooking, praying, and observing holidays together, allowing the community of Muslim international students to stand in for their families while studying abroad. By utilizing familial

capital, students were able to create a sense of home that eased their adjustment to the foreign culture they would be living in for the foreseeable future.

Hamad reflected on the influence of his culture in students' tendencies to stick together, noting that "we're a very homogenous society. We're very tribal in many ways. Historically speaking, as well as culturally speaking, we tend to gravitate towards each other and we like to be in this bubble, because it's safer." Zoya echoed these comments, observing that who she spends time with "socially, it's mostly like people from the Gulf, because I feel like they understand what culture I'm coming from, so they're easier to talk to." Friendships among students extended beyond the borders of their home countries; Dhari talked about differences among students with backgrounds from the Middle East, emphasizing that "there are differences—we used to think before that we were way different, but at WJCU after being together for years we notice it is mostly the same." This strong sense of cultural knowledge that students maintained while away from home was an aid in their successful transition to the United States

Institutions can utilize familial capital through the creation of spaces for students to engage in cultural traditions and feel a sense of connectedness to their new environments. Participants often referred to these spaces on campus, which facilitated them connecting with their communities in ways similar to how they might have connected at home. Beyond the prayer room mentioned by many participants, the coffeeshop located in the university library was identified by Sayf as "the chill zone—I love it because everyone is arguing and talking about random stuff." He noted that cafes are a part of his culture; in his home country of the UAE, "like every corner is a coffee shop; we like to sit and talk and talk some more." He described the

typical scene on the patio as "filled with students from the Middle East but everybody's like from six different countries, there are Saudis, Kuwaitis, Emiratis all sitting together. There's the Turkish table." And while the students are largely sitting at different tables, "we all talk and laugh and argue together, that's a nice thing." Fahad also identified this space as important, saying, "honestly, it was mostly outside the coffeeshop when I would see other Gulf students after class." It was within this space that Fahad was comfortable introducing himself and initiating conversations about home, classes, and life. This interaction among students from many different countries, often with long and contentious histories with each other and the United States, highlights their identities as non-White, non-American students who are connected through their Muslim identities and cultures. This identifies Islam as another type of "family" to which students belong, in the same way that the Catholic Church considers itself one body.

Having a larger group of students from the Gulf enrolled at WJCU but providing smaller classes to encourage them to know one another was beneficial in students' forming familial capital. Ali talked about the group of fellow Kuwaitis he befriended while at WJCU, due to the small classes and close sense of community at the university in general, feeling like "had I been at another university, I think that I might not feel the same."

All these findings are consistent with Smith & Khawajas' (2011) research showing that students from the Gulf countries are faced with successfully adapting to their new environments without their families, which are major sources of support in their lives back home. Utilizing familial capital by forming strong connections to each other, by continuing traditions from home, and by expanding their notion of family across borders to include other Muslim students not only

provided a sense of family and home, but also enabled students to better navigate their new environments.

Pursuing an Education: Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to students' skills and abilities to navigate social institutions, including educational spaces, and connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through spaces and places (Yosso, 2005). As students arrive to the United States and to an American institution, being able to connect to social networks that assist them in navigating new systems and places is critical to student success; Muslim international students have the additional burden of navigating the Islamophobic culture of the United States This study found that they relied heavily on their navigational capital, which was closely tied to the finding of importance of community and their ability to respond to the challenges Muslim international students identified as a theme.

This framework emerged as participants discussed their journey through their educational experience, not only during the arrival and adjustment period but also through the duration of their time at the university and even in thinking about life after their studies. In recounting his early experiences at WJCU, Dhari confirmed that "having a community helps you navigate." Omar remembered that he "had real difficulties at the beginning; I didn't know how the system worked. But then when my friends told me and advised me and helped me it became easier." This advisement ranged from help with the practical matters of settling into a new country, to understanding their American institution, to successfully navigating academic issues and culture. Dhari remembered his community of Arab students helped him with "finding a place, getting a car with insurance, with places to eat, things like a barber. On campus, they showed me where

buildings were and helped with choosing classes." Zoya echoed this experience, sharing she felt her fellow students from home would "guide me more because I'm from Kuwait, or because we know each other all from the same schools." These examples showed the strong navigational capital that Muslim international students utilize, understanding that they can successfully navigate their new environment through utilizing trusted networks of those who came before them.

While Yosso's (2005) discussion of navigational capital was focused on the educational experience, participants indicated that the support they received from the community and the institution was much broader than simply navigating their education, but also could influence their path beyond commencement. Professors were mentioned by several students as being of help in navigating the institution, with Zoya discussing her relationships with faculty in her engineering major, where "we have the same professors every semester and they teach us different things, so you like build the relationship. I'm not scared to go and ask them for advice outside like academic things." Fahad spoke about staying in touch with students ahead of him who graduated, sharing that "they work now or do their own things and are [still] helping me." Speaking in the context of the current global pandemic, he divulged that "since COVID happened they are telling me I should think about changing my major as they see the future more than I see it, since they finished already." This study showed that the navigational capital students use is closely connected to their wider social networks.

Pursuing an Education: Social Capital

Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate

through society's institutions (Yosso, 2005). Through participant interviews, I found that these peer and social contacts often superseded the support available at an institution, initially and often into the academic experience. Nour shared the early academic assistance she received from her peers, saying, "the Kuwaiti students helped me in choosing the classes and the professors and enrolling in the classes." Sayf noted that fellow students were "like my academic advisors. In the beginning I never went to my official advisors–I would look to those a year ahead of me so I can get help with what classes I should take for the next semester." He went on to reveal that "academic-wise, I would never go out and ask anybody for help who's not from the GCC. If I wanted like real help, I would go to someone else from the GCC and specifically girls, because they love to help." This comment echoed the findings of gender as having an influence on the experience of Muslim international students, with girls being perceived as existing more in a private sphere, thus being seen as more nurturing and providing the instrumental and emotional support found through social capital.

Like Sayf, several participants expressed the importance of seeking guidance from students a year or more ahead of them; Fahad stressed just how critical they were in his being able to complete his first year successfully:

> If it weren't for my junior and senior friends that I made at WCJU maybe I wouldn't have even passed my classes—if I didn't understand anything in any class, I would ask one of my friends, and he would ask the other 20-30 guys and at least one would have information or one would be like, hey, that you have to study this or like just read this book or go through this paper—I feel like they were trying to help each other as much as possible to succeed.

Not only did peers help with course selections or understanding course material, but they also played an important role in navigating academic culture through their own cultural lenses. Egab talked about his relationship with recent graduates, and how they advised him to "go to

office hours. Ask the professor questions and try to interact with them so they know you are a student from the Gulf trying your best to do well." Ali also noted he found the professor with whom he did his engineering thesis research through other Gulf students:

> I was the new kid, and I never took a class with him, I went to him based on a student who was before me. I asked the student if I could just, you know, absorb what he does in the lab daily and he and the professor welcomed me with open arms. They could simply have said, "you know, we're really busy with our thesis, like we cannot answer your questions-stop harassing us!" but they were fine with me observing them or coming near the machine and just asking questions…and I ask lots of questions.

All these examples highlight the strong social capital that existed among the Muslim international students in this study, who, even being the "other" in the United States due to their ethnic and religious backgrounds, were secure in their identities and leveraged them into a tight social network that served as a critical resource for support. They did not attempt to assimilate to the dominant culture, but rather utilized the strengths that they brought from their own cultures, including a strong sense of responsibility to the GCC community at WJCU.

Bolstered by the strong sense of community identified in Chapter four, participants were able to build and leverage social capital throughout their educational experiences. Moreover, this social capital developed in a different way through leadership experiences. Students first received support, then transitioned to providing support to others, helping them navigate through the institution and campus spaces. Ali spoke about his leadership experience within his college as a teaching assistant, which enabled him to "offer a helping hand not just to Kuwaitis but also the Saudis, or really all the undergraduates who were working with me." His conversations during his time teaching the labs led to:

> [More than] just talking about where our research was going-I got to know about their families to the point where one of them called me to say his father was in the hospital and I found myself driving there and checking up on him to help. He was shocked and it meant so much to him that I came.

Egab reflected on his own positive experience working in the international student services office assisting students with a wide range of issues, which he identified as a central part of his experience: "I love it, because everybody is helping me or I'm helping them and we're like helping each other with whatever is needed, whether it's paperwork, classes, or anything else." This was an example of the social capital that was not only used by or offered to Muslim international students within their specific countries, but also crossed over to a wider network and was extended to others. This social capital that they developed benefitted other students and the institution as a whole.

Taken alongside the finding about the importance of community to students' successful navigation and persistence within the university, it is clear that the exchange of social capital-not just the accumulation of social ties, but the opportunity to leverage those ties in service of others-was a key element of participants' experiences at WJCU.

Pursuing an Education: Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language (Yosso, 2005), which students bring with them to their college environment. Yosso argued that because storytelling is a part of students' lives before them arrive on college campuses, they bring with them "skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme." (2005, p. 79). This storytelling was evident in my interviews with participants, as they recalled their experiences in detail, using a great deal of humor and dramatic

pauses to make their points, which I greatly enjoyed and which evidenced their comfort and confidence in our relationship. In previous interactions with people from the Gulf, I have noted that their communication style is not so much linear but more circular, connecting experiences and details across different stages of their experience, and this was very present in these interviews. Another instance in which this linguistic capital was evident was in Hamad's experience at WJCU, where he used similar linguistic skills while doing stand-up comedy at open mic nights at the student center.

Participants in this study were all bilingual in Arabic and English and were pursuing their education at WJCU in a non-native language. Several participants had taken the additional step of successfully completing an English language program prior to their enrollment at the university, applying this new skill towards earning a university degree. While several participants identified language as an early challenge they faced in their education at WJCU, they did, by virtue of their preparation for study in the United States, hold linguistic capital that differed from that which other international students bring to the experience of studying in a non-native language. More than most groups of international students, those from the Gulf countries are often mandated to go back to their home countries by their sponsors, expected to utilize these language skills to work in leadership positions collaborating with international management teams while guiding work with local employees. Bilingualism remains valuable to them in their careers and places them in a position of professional privilege.

Linguistic capital also appeared within the study finding of the importance of community; being in a community of other Arabic speakers while at WJCU allowed students to continue to exercise their skills in their mother tongue, while also navigating their education in a foreign one.

It also provided students an opportunity to express their identities through language and signify who they are. Throughout the interviews, participants used terms in Arabic to express ideas or concepts that they applied to their experiences. This ability to layer concepts from the home language to capture thoughts or feelings in a new language was a skill that allowed for students to create meaning. They also felt comfortable in using Arabic terms with me as the researcher, as they are aware of my past travels to the Gulf and awareness of common phrases. Arabic has been used in signage on campus and communication through social media from several departments, an institutional effort to signal WJCU's commitment to inclusion, which may have contributed to participants' feelings of safety when using words from home on campus.

Commencement: Resistant Capital

Resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality; Yosso noted that it has "its foundations in the experiences of communities of color in securing equal rights and collective freedom" (2005, p. 80). The sources of this form of capital can be parents, community members, and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice work.

This study found that resistant capital was present in the ways that students participated in interfaith and diverse communities. Although being discouraged by others such as sponsors from participating in Muslim religious activities on campus or having a narrative about not being welcome in the United States as Arabs, they maintained and even celebrated these identities on campus. Students regularly participated in Friday prayers, were present and engaged in interfaith activities, and utilized opportunities to build awareness of their cultures on campus, such as forming cultural student organizations, gathering in large groups to socialize in public spaces like

the coffee shop on campus as they would at home, sharing their experiences and perspectives in the classroom as students from the Gulf.

Resistant capital was also found in the experience of female participants in this study, in the ways that they interacted and formed close friendships with males freely, despite coming from a gender-segregated society. It was interesting to note that these intra-gender relationships were not as present among females and males from the same country, however, and thus this capital can also be seen as emergent. These women also pursued their education with gusto, often being top students in their colleges, challenging assumptions about women's roles as existing more in the private realm.

This study found that resistant capital was emergent related to the finding of challenges students encounter described in Chapter 4; Muslim international students do not yet have the resistant capital to push back on systems the way that American students would, but in their own way see persistence in obtaining their degrees as resistance. Omar recounted an experience with one professor in a course that led to him being told to "drop the class because there is no way [he] will pass." Omar pledged to continue the class, saying that he intended "to study and pass and prove them wrong. And I got a C on the final, but he gave me an F, and I did not say anything." Although Omar took the initiative to stay in the class and do his best, when he still failed, he did not push back on the professor at that moment. He divulged that he encountered the professor in his final semester of study who said "Oh, you're still here," to which he replied, "yes I am still here and graduating in four months, even though I remember you told me I wouldn't make it." In this example, Omar developed increased resistant capital, which gave him the

confidence to stand up to this professor, and this intersected with his aspirational capital that pushed him to persist.

This study found that there are many layers of cultural and societal pressures present around preconceptions students feel Americans may have about them, identities as "other," experiences with Islamophobia, and maintaining requirements for student visas and government sponsorship that prevent students from challenging perceived inequalities. Egab described that:

> People from the gulf, in general, especially Saudi Arabia, they're very prideful. So, if they get the idea that someone is looking at them and being like "yeah, this guy's not working hard" they get really agitated, feeling like [others] think they are beneath them-in that sense, they take it that way.

Yosso noted that resistant capital also includes challenging assumptions of cultural inferiority and encouraging actions of resistance. In my experience as a university administrator, I am seeing more examples of resistant capital in this population as students better understand the policies and procedures of an institution, and as our own institution commits itself to becoming an anti-racist university. These developments however are very recent, connected in part to the discourse on dismantling systemic racism that universities have undertaken considering the racial justice movements gaining momentum in 2020. For these participants at the time of our interviews, these changes had not fully begun to take hold.

Commencement: Spiritual Capital

Park et. al (2019) further developed Yosso's (2005) model, expanding on Pérez Huber's (2009) identification of *spiritual capital*, which they used to describe capital, assets, and resources linked to spirituality and/or religion, or as articulated by Pérez Huber (2009), "a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself" (p. 721). Park et. al (2019) further noted that this form of capital is a thread that is often woven through

other types of capital in communities of color. This research confirmed that spiritual capital influenced all other forms of Community Cultural Wealth found among Muslim international students.

As in Pérez Huber's (2009) study, when discussing challenges faced in college, participants in this research identified hope and faith as resources used to maintain aspirations and persist through institutional barriers and the challenges presented in Chapter 4. While recounting her story of being barred from the United States due to her pending court case for a traffic violation, resulting in her taking a leave of absence, which then left her unable to return for online classes due to international student visa regulations through COVID-19, she remained positive, sharing that "nothing was as I wanted, but *hamdullah* [praise be to Allah for his blessings]-I would say this." Her faith in God and belief that all would work out sustained her through this very difficult time when she could easily have paused her education instead of continuing online from home with a 10-hour time difference.

In the case of Omar's struggle with his professor, spiritual capital influenced his resistant capital as he recounted his experience in the classroom with an atheist professor when discussing the "Big Bang Theory and that God does not exist". He replied that "everyone can say what they want, you know, everyone can respect each other's opinion, but if God did not exist, how would we be here? Like how would the sun rise and go down, you know?" He utilized his religious beliefs as a lens through which he challenged the assumptions of others.

As Ali summed up his experience at WJCU, spiritual capital was evident as strengthening his aspirations not only to succeed in his studies but also influencing how he wanted to live his

life, in turn influenced by the familial, social, and navigational capital found through the theme of community:

> When someone approached you with faithful words or emotion you know nothing but to then give it back. It would implement an idea in your head that you'd like to see in yourself, giving back that light when you see that person later. I saw it with you [the researcher in my Assistant Dean role] and I feel it whenever we stop to chat, we exchange hello and I'm asking about your research and you're asking me about how I am and we leave it off with a good luck or take care…these kinds of things really matter. People come into our lives, asking about what we're doing in our job rather than how we feel. It's the question of how you feel that for me overshadows how you are finishing the task. Do you need help—WCJU made me feel not afraid to ask for help, while at the same time offering a helping hand as well. In my mind, it feels like it's a full-on cycle.

He went on to refer back to the memorial he attended for the victims of the New Zealand mosque shooting, sharing that at that event, he "really felt spiritual—you could say that was the major turning point for me when I realized that yeah, this is a place of spirituality and faith that I'm a part of. I did not feel that at my previous university." Ali's example highlights the spiritual capital that was present not only among the community of Muslim international students, but in the institution itself.

The connection Ali felt to the institution is not unexpected, given the orientation of Jesuit universities such as WJCU to being communities of faith that go beyond Christianity. I discuss this orientation, which I have termed *institutional interfaith identity*, as a key characteristic of Jesuit education in an upcoming section of this chapter. Although spiritual capital was not a part of Yosso's (2005) original model of Community Cultural Wealth, in this study, it proved to be an essential form of capital, in many cases acting as a link between other forms of capital-for example, familial and social capital.

In the next section of this chapter, I transition from this exploration of forms of Community Cultural Wealth to discuss the impacts of Jesuit education, including the specific types of support provided for Muslim international students during the key periods of arrival and adjustment, perusing their education, and commencement. The previous discussion of Community Cultural Wealth focused on student experiences from the students' point of view. This section examines student experience from the institutional point of view, examining it in terms of what WJCU provided for students and how that links to the Jesuit charism.

Impact of Jesuit Education Through Institutional Support

The primary mission of Jesuit universities is the education and formation of their students for the sake of the kind of persons they become and their resulting influence for good in society in their lives, professions, and service. Jesuit education is guided by several core values, which were present throughout this study in the experiences of Muslim international students. C*ura personalis*, or care of the whole person in Latin, is the fundamental principle at its center and was shown through the support the university offered to respond to the multi-faceted challenges students encountered, the opportunities it created to form community, and in the cultural fluency of the institution.

The university's orientation program for international students, which was consistently identified by participants as addressing their challenges and providing opportunities for Muslim international students to form community with one another, while also encouraging their interaction with others outside their own culture, is an example of cura personalis. The attention shown in crafting this orientation program is important because it anticipates the different challenges and needs that international students have and responds to unique challenges present

for groups of students. In addition, the careful selection of orientation leaders to represent different student groups and cultures provides opportunity for students to build their familial capital and engage a sense of home. This provides students with a strong foundation upon which to continue to build for a successful and connected student experience.

The cultural fluency of the institution was highlighted by Zoya as she shared a message of condolences to the Kuwaiti community that the international student services office posted on social media when the Emir of Kuwait passed away. This made her feel like the university was "acknowledging us, knowing what was happening at home." She went on to note that during the early chaotic days of the COVID-19 pandemic, she was getting emails addressing the most current information on travel, student visa regulations, safety, and mental health, which made her feel that the university was aware of all ways in which students were being impacted outside of the academic.

In addition to offices on campus that support international students specifically, participants also mentioned other spaces and symbols that spoke to the value of *cura personalis*. Nour talked about an early experience she had of meeting the Director of the Office of Muslim Life, and shared that she "could see the Qu'ran on his shelf beyond his open door. The way he looked, I knew that he was Muslim and could tell he had some Arabian blood." She also noticed the sign in Arabic near the office that introduced her to the existence of the prayer room. Seeing people that looked like people back home, and seeing signs of her culture displayed prominently, was important to her feeling a part of the institution, not just as a visitor to it. It also contributed to students' navigational capital, guiding them to places and people they recognized as resources in their journey.

Almost all participants mentioned the availability of a prayer room as a way they felt supported by the institution. Sayf mentioned it while talking about some of the visible signs he saw around campus that made him feel like the institution thought of students like him: "I see papers and posters for the prayer room in different places; it makes you feel like you're still at your country—like, you're not an outsider." Other students mentioned different spaces on campus that connected them to their culture; beyond the university's coffee shop, Nour spoke of the traditional Arabic tent that was erected on campus during an event, reminiscing that "Sometimes, you know, they bring Arabic coffee to the campus and Arabic sweets, we used to do this, you remember in the Diwaniya [traditional Arabic tent used to gather community] the university made." These spaces and places provided this care for the whole person and allowed students to continue to exercise their familial, social, and spiritual capital, welcome others into spaces they considered to be theirs, and educate others in the community about their cultures.

The institution supports students in forming clubs and organizations based on mutual interests or cultures, and as the population from Kuwait grew, encouraged students to form a Kuwait club. Zoya was a leader of this organization and acknowledged that it "really made us come together." Ali provided leadership to this club, and felt as though the support he received from other Kuwaiti students at WCJU was like "a support that I've never seen anywhere else . . . I've never seen one big helping hand being assembled into targeting one goal of hey, we're all going to graduate or hey, we're all going to achieve this." The encouragement of student groups not only supported students in exercising their familial capital, but also bolstered their aspirational capital, enhancing their will to persist and succeed despite their challenges and to be hopeful for their future endeavors.

Cura personalis is also demonstrated by personal attention in the classroom, a deep respect for diversity and difference and an emphasis on holistic care for the mind, body, and spirit. Close relationships with faculty and staff, respect for students' diverse identities and understanding their differences, and providing pastoral care in their own faith tradition were all examples of the Jesuit care of the whole person.

Through programs and initiatives offered by the university, opportunities abound to exercise the concept of *generous encounter*, represented in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as presuming the good will of another, encouraging one another, considering the other's interests, and being open to growth. Hamad recommended that the orientation program must continue to be required for all international students, with special encouragement given to students from the Gulf to participate, as "the more they are exposed to these different types of people, the better they will be in the long run".

Outside of the orientation and other programming, participants appreciated the opportunity for dialogue with others about their different faith tradition through social interactions, although this was not always present in the classroom.

*Magis***,** in Latin meaning the "more," is the value of striving for the better, striving for excellence. As described in the theme of challenges in Chapter 4, as participants moved through their education, not only did they persist through their challenges, but they experienced much personal growth, and grew in their aspirations for the future. Some of this personal growth can be seen in the leadership opportunities they pursued and their orientation to helping others.

A final Jesuit value highlighted for this study is the concept of *being people for and with others*,[2] (Arrupe, 1973) which embodies a spirit of giving and providing service to those in need. Egab recounted his experience working on campus sharing that "helping the students. I felt like I had a position and loved staying there and grabbing students and being like, "hey, you know, we have a Friday prayer, we have this, we have that you can come by whenever we're doing anything." This value was evident in the ways that participants described their work on behalf of others, and the satisfaction and even joy that this provided them.

Institutional Interfaith Identity

As described in Chapter 4, Muslim international students appreciated the opportunities that were provided to practice and grow in their own faith tradition. Beyond these opportunities, however, the institution's interfaith identity was found to facilitate the strengthening of all types of Community Cultural Wealth for participants and can be seen because of the Jesuit values present in the education offered at WJCU. Being at a religious institution-and particularly a Jesuit institution-was found to positively influence the student experience overall, contributing to students feeling welcome, being served in the spirit of *cura personalis*, and seeing themselves as part of a larger community of faith. The interfaith identity of the institution provided opportunities for students to not only practice and grow in their own faith and see visible signs of their religion on campus, but also to have their faith traditions included in dialogue and creating opportunities for others to learn about Islam. This is important because Muslims students at WJCU see themselves on equal footing with students from all other religions, whether Catholic,

[2] While the traditional terminology is *Men and Women for Others*, based on Fr. Arrupe's original call to be "Men for others", *People for Others* is being used in an effort to be more inclusive of all across the spectrum of gender identity.

Christian, Jewish, or another faith. They are not only tolerated, or given a small corner to practice their religion, but they are supported in their faith journey by an entire office dedicated to them, and are included in university gatherings and traditions, with Muslim blessings often given alongside Catholic ones at public events.

Another example of the impact of this institutional interfaith identity can be seen in the way the university responded to the religious holiday of Ramadan; several participants noted moments where accommodations had been made for them during the holiday that made it easier to navigate the challenges.

Ali described that during the semester in which Ramadan occurred, all his professors were non-Muslim, and his graduate-level course finals took place in the evening, when he and other Muslims in the class would be breaking their fasts. They chose to inform their professors, who all understood and allowed the Muslim students to do their presentations first so that they could briefly leave to pray, eat, and return for the other presentations. Ali remembered that "one of them was really so kind that around 7:30 PM he had a TA proctor the test, and he took all of us down to his office where he had like biscuits and dates." This experience had a profound impact on his feeling of being a part of the community. Zoya also shared that when professors would be aware of the holiday "they'd be really understanding and would not keep us in class for too long after sunset or would give us a break to eat." She went on to note that this acknowledgement that "we haven't eaten all day and our sleeping schedule is like upside down" made her feel that they "work on our schedule." These examples highlight both the institutional and the individual responses as an interfaith institution. While the university notified all faculty of the Ramadan holiday falling during finals, sharing that students would be fasting and praying

throughout the day, it did not mandate that professors make accommodations for students. Despite this, professors took it upon themselves to work with the students, with some going to greater lengths than was expected, such as providing appropriate foods to break students' fasts, or making sure that presentations were timed to coincide with prayer times.

Outside the classroom, support from the university at large also made a difference in how students balanced their religious holiday with their school schedule; Fahad described that the cafeteria was open before sunrise during the holiday "for us, which I really respected and never imagined." This occurred during his first Ramadan in the United States, and he felt like "it was a wonderful experience—actually I really enjoyed it especially with the help of our school. It didn't make me feel so far away from home, you know." Ali echoed this pleasant experience, remembering that the international student services office:

> Had a big part of bringing all of us together during Ramadan for dinner during our reading weeks when we had the time and need to attend….we got to know some people that we didn't share classes with or were not [in] the same major.

Institutional interfaith identity resulted in the larger university community participating in the traditions and holidays of Islam and other religious traditions. The traditions from other faiths become part of the larger fabric of the institution, where the community is not only aware of them, but celebrating them together.

Beyond the support offered to students in practicing their religion and opportunities created for interreligious dialogue, celebrations, and chances for members of different or no faith traditions to learn from one another, institutional interfaith identity was found not only to impact students on campus, but to also influence their lives after leaving the institution. Hamad's comments about differences he encountered in the sermons delivered during Friday prayers at

the university as compared to back in his home country, where he currently resides, highlighted this connection he still feels to something greater than himself even now as an alumnus. He shared that the mosques were recently re-opened after being shut during the COVID-19 pandemic, and he first went to pray during a holy night in Islam, where "[The imam, leader of the prayer] was just talking, not referencing coronavirus or current events, not talking about maybe using the power of prayer for the people who need it right now-no real call to action, nothing." He went on to describe feeling very disconnected from the service, upset that he "zones out every single time I go to the mosque and hear random sayings of the Prophet with no type of like actionable intelligence." He believed that the sermons given "should be relevant, [I should be] left with some type of knowledge or call to action." He felt that this knowledge and action is "one of the things that MSL did really well at their Friday prayers—it [always] tied into something." Hamad continued by remembering his last visit to campus, when:

> MSL brought a speaker who honestly gave me one of the best *khutbas* (sermons) I've ever heard in my life. And it was right after the New Zealand massacre. The speaker said we should be ashamed of ourselves as a Muslim community because we say that we are the best we say that we are the most advanced religion-there's a lot of rhetoric, obviously-but we don't practice what we preach because when a shooter came and killed a few Muslims in New Zealand, which is a tragedy, the entire world mourns and the Prime Minister wore the hijab and there was like a call to solidarity and it was very profound and very moving. But when the bombings happened in Indonesia, no one from the Muslim community came out and condemned them or said anything. We just stayed kind of quiet. There were friends, people here and there that said something, but as a whole, no one from Saudi no one from Kuwait no one from anywhere. He said what we do, basically, is take the sayings of the Prophet or the religion in general, and it's like a prescription. When a doctor gives you a prescription, you're supposed to fill it out and take the medicine. Instead, what we do is we take the prescription, we memorize it, we frame it on our walls, we recite it to anyone who will listen, but never once do we actually take the pills. And so how can we say that we are an enlightened people if we don't even practice what we very loudly preach.

Hamad's comments highlight how the institution's interfaith identity influenced students' orientation and reaction to, and expectation of the messages and teachings of their own religion, and how that stayed with them after leaving the institution.

Limitations

The outcomes of qualitative research and its validity depend heavily on the context through which the data is obtained. The engagement of multiple points of view from participants themselves, and not only what might be found in a literature review or what the researcher believes to be true, is necessary for the validity of the research. Limitations of this study included that it was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020, which brought multiple challenges for students, including forced evacuation from the United States by their governments, changes in student visa regulations and travel restrictions preventing students from returning to the United States This presented a challenge to recruiting participants for the study and then maintaining intimate face to face interactions with participants, with all interviews needing to be conducted via videoconferencing applications.

An additional limitation was the political narrative regarding Muslims, immigrants, and international students in the United States, which was very much at the forefront during the time of this study, which happened during a global pandemic, a presidential election, and a sweeping movement calling for racial justice.

Lastly, this study was conducted at a Jesuit institution with an established and sizeable population of international Muslim students who predominantly enrolled from one country in the Gulf. The size of this population created the opportunity and the need for the institution to respond to student challenges and create the support necessary for their success. Secular

institutions, universities with fewer Muslim international students enrolled or with Muslim international students drawn predominantly from different countries could find their students having a different experience than the ones in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research were derived from the study's findings and conclusions.

1. A future interview-based studies could explore issues related to those included in the present study. For example, a future study might examine the socio-economic background of Muslim international students to see how it influences student academic success and social and cultural adjustment; a study focused on individual countries' cultures could identify where different students may struggle in their acculturation process; or research on persistence and graduation rates of Muslim international students and patterns in performance in core curriculum courses could be impactful in identifying roadblocks to students' success.
2. Future quantitative research could examine the level of Muslim international students' cultural acceptance of American culture, comparing beliefs and attitudes at the beginning of their sojourns to after they completed their studies. Such studies might reveal the impact of living in the United States on Muslim international students' identity development and measure the changes in their worldview and acceptance of values and customs of other societies.
3. Research focused on comparing the experiences of Muslim international students at religious versus secular institutions could uncover important information about the

influence and impact of Institutional Interfaith Identity on student experience and individual religious formation. Such research could ask questions like "what was the impact on students for whom religious life was not encouraged, supported, or even present on campus?" or "From where did students draw support for practicing their faith when it was not an integrated part of campus life/culture?"

4. Turning attention to non-Muslim international students, future research can explore the impact of exposure to Muslim students and the Muslim faith on the attitudes and world views of American students, exploring whether this changed any Islamophobic attitudes or negative orientation to Arab culture that students held. This type of study could yield important findings for countering the Islamophobic narratives present in the United States

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations for practice were derived from the findings and conclusions of this study. They are organized according to the timeline of the student experience.

Arrival and Adjustment

1. Prior to travel to the United States, sponsoring agencies and governments should provide predeparture orientation to all Muslim international students, introducing them to elements of American culture and academic practices. This would lessen their degree of culture shock and ease transitions regarding social and academic adjustment.
2. Universities of higher education should create specialized orientation programs for Muslim international students that advise them on the academic and cultural challenges that they may face, as well as allow them to begin to form community with one another,

with other international students, and with Americans. Programs should provide comprehensive sessions on American classroom culture, academic expectations, policies, and procedures, and American definitions and expectations of academic integrity. This would clarify for students what is expected of them and what resources are available to navigate challenges, thereby better preparing them for their experiences in the classroom. Demographics of orientation leaders should align with the countries of origin of the incoming class. This will ensure that students see others like themselves in leadership roles, and trust that they understand their experience and have valid advice to offer them. These programs should be mandatory for all Muslim international students enrolling in the university.

3. Universities must adequately inform and educate faculty regarding the adjustment process that many Muslim international students face, alongside training on implicit bias to mitigate microaggressions in the classroom. By creating a more comprehensive understanding of students' challenges and fears of experiencing Islamophobia, faculty can more effectively connect with and teach their Muslim international students. Additionally, faculty should be evaluated on their ability to teach and serve international students in the classroom.

Pursuing an Education

1. American universities should consider the extent of cultural differences encountered by Muslim international students, take active steps to respond to the difference between their cultures and the host culture, and work to increase their institution's cultural fluency. Muslim religious holidays should be acknowledged, and students provided necessary

accommodations so as not to disrupt their education. Additionally, the university community should be informed about the culture of the Gulf, including relational orientation-the importance of relationships and status among Gulf families-and gender dynamics. If both Muslim international students and the community are informed about the cultural norms of the other, it can lead to a higher degree of mutual acceptance.

2. American universities should leverage the close communities that Muslim international students form and the familial capital they utilize, identifying student leaders and creating opportunities for peer-mentorship programs and formation of cultural clubs. This would help for students to navigate the institution through trusted networks of peers and support student success. Students should also be given opportunities for interaction with other international students and Americans. Muslim international students who form strong communities will have better chances for academic and social success and be more comfortable interacting with the wider university community.
3. University officials should work closely with sponsoring governments and agencies, expanding access to a wider array of majors and aligning university systems to meet sponsor billing and reporting requirements. International student services offices should be aware of regulations and expectations of sponsors and maintain direct contact with sponsors to be able to discuss student issues. This would lessen the challenges that students face in obtaining necessary documents from the institution and in meeting expectations and requirements of sponsors, thereby increasing student retention.
4. U.S. institutions with a religious affiliation should not only provide space for Muslim students to pray but should also have offices staffed with full-time, trained professionals

that provide pastoral care to Muslims, build community, and serve as equal partners in the university's religious life. Most Muslim international students come from countries with very little diversity, and opportunities should be created to engage them in interfaith activities, enhancing their understanding of being in a multicultural, multifaith country. Programs should be developed that encourage informal interactions among students of different faiths. All students at a religious institution would benefit from participation in formal and informal interfaith activities to better understand other beliefs and people.

5. Religiously affiliated universities who require students to complete theology courses should expand course curriculum to include more teaching on Islam and other religions. This would not only make Muslim students feel more included at the institution and have the opportunity to grow in their understanding of their own faith, but also provide all students at the institution to expand their understanding of other faiths. Additionally, universities should consider developing courses such as Islamic studies or Islamic finance to help all students form a better understanding about and connection to the Middle East.

Recommendations for Commencement

5. U.S. universities should build their alumni network of Muslim international students, providing opportunities for prospective and current Muslim international students to seek advice and support from those who had a successful experience at their institution, thereby encouraging their abilities to navigate their education. This would also increase the university's reputation in their country and bolster recruitment efforts. Additionally, the development of an alumni network can be leveraged to support fundraising to build support for Muslim international students.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of 11 undergraduate and graduate and recent alumni Muslim international students experience at an American Jesuit university. The literature review showed that Muslim international students face many academic and social challenges during their sojourn to the United States related to their intersectional identities as both international students and as Muslims. Further, the importance of institutional support, the commitment of Jesuit universities to international education and interreligious dialogue and the relationship of the Jesuit order with Islam was reviewed. This research has shown that while the experiences of international Muslim students may be similar to that of non-Muslim international students, or non-international Muslim counterparts, their racial/ethnic background, religious affiliation, status as sponsored students and gendered identities affect their experiences and make them unique.

The concept of Islamophobia was framed within the current climate in the United States during the Trump administration and was structural through the enactment and advancement of laws, policy, and programming build upon the presumption that Muslim identity is associated with a national security threat. This Islamophobic climate was found to have an influence on how students approach their time in the United States, forming close relationships with other students like them and being careful in their classroom and other interactions with non-Muslims, not necessarily advocating for themselves as some other student groups might.

The findings of this study confirm that Muslim international students experience logistical, immigration, linguistic, academic, social, and cultural challenges as well as difficulties in maintaining expectations of government sponsors. They struggle with their perceptions of the negative ways that American faculty and peers and the wider U.S. community view their

academic abilities and belief systems based on their culture. Findings clearly demonstrate the importance of community and the impact of Jesuit education and institutional interfaith identity on supporting and shaping their experiences. The framework of Community Cultural Wealth and spiritual capital highlight the tools and the strengths that students engage to successfully navigate their challenges while at a U.S. institution.

U.S. universities have a responsibility to understand, serve, and fully support international Muslim students from whom they benefit financially, particularly when this group of students is marginalized and subject to bias in American society. Universities have a unique opportunity to push back against the current Islamophobic narrative in the country by increasing faculty and staff awareness of Islam and providing opportunities for students of all background to engage with and learn from one another. Catholic and Jesuit schools have the extra lever of religion to use as a mechanism for change; Jesuit universities are well positioned to use their institutional interfaith identities and educational pedagogy to help students fully develop themselves and influence the good of society in their lives, professions, and service.

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