

Sifting, Negotiating and Remaking Religious Identities: A Redefining of Lived Religion among Muslim Migrant Women

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Abstract

The concept of lived religion is used to describe the way religion is lived out amongst migrant Muslim women in Brisbane, Australia and provides a new lens in viewing the concept of lived religion among diasporic Muslim women in the Western world. The Turkish and Iranian women in this study discuss the way they have adapted to life in a secular country, and how this has influenced their religious beliefs and practices. In some cases, as the women have adjusted to the new society, they have become more religious, attending the mosque and being involved in religious and cultural affairs, while others have shifted their religious understandings through devising their Islamic practice to suit themselves, or changing or blending their religious involvement. Some have become more secular, some spiritual, while others blend Islam with Christianity or New Age beliefs. We term this process “sifting, negotiating and remaking” their religious identities and their lives. Using the framework of lived religion, we show how the women have adapted their Muslim practices to suit their changed circumstances, or have embraced new forms of religious expression, and how they live out these changes in their daily lives.

Keywords: lived religion, migrant Muslim women, religious identity, diaspora, Turkish women, Iranian women

1.1 Introduction

The concept of lived religion has come to the forefront of religious studies in the last two decades through the works of Orsi (1997) and Hall (1997), and more recently McGuire (2008) as a way of viewing religion practised outside the institution and in individuals' daily lives. Although this concept has been discussed widely, the term lived religion has predominately been examined in respect to Western individuals, often in Christian contexts (Bender, 2010; Neitz, 2010, 2012). This paper challenges this narrow use of the concept of lived religion by reference to migrants' diasporic experiences and applies the concept in the context of examining the life journeys of migrant Muslim women from their Iranian and Turkish homelands to living in contemporary secular Australia. The specific focus is the examination of the place of religion in their daily lives and how the women have negotiated their religious identities over time.

The research presents a longitudinal study of changes in Muslim women's religious identity following migration to a secular country, Australia. In the context of a wider study that examines the fluidity of the women's cultural and ethnic identities, we investigate the way women sift, negotiate and remake their religious identities in and through their daily lives. This article focuses on changes to the women's religious practice as they maintained their religiosity or became more or less religious over time, and examines the ways they view their religious lives.

The women's practices and identities, as voiced by the women themselves, exemplify the concept of lived religion. The women recounted their experiences of living out their religious beliefs in a way that makes sense to them. As the women began to settle down in their new country, engage with their diasporic and local communities and establish themselves in the workplace, these changes affected their religious identities. Their religious practices also have changed, as well as the ways they now regard the religious institutions and religious expressions in their homeland. The women are actively sifting, negotiating and remaking their religious identities and observances in their daily lives. Their practices and experiences of sifting, negotiating, and remaking their religious lives are described and analysed below.

The study was conducted in two stages. Research began in 2003, as a broader study of the women's religious, cultural and ethnic identities and practices, and how these identities and observances were affected by the act of migration, and then by making their home in a Western, secular, multicultural society such as Australia. Initially 62 women were interviewed in 2003-2005. Seven years after their first involvement in the study, nine women were re-interviewed in 2010 to examine changes to their identities while living in Australia. This time period spans dynamic changes globally following 9/11 as well as shifts in Australian society in the way the community perceives Islam and the increasing number of Muslim refugees who have arrived seeking asylum in Australia. Muslim women from Iran and Turkey were chosen for this research because these countries demonstrate strongly contrasting modes of incorporating Islam into society. One is a strict Shi'a Islamic state governed by Shari'a law (Iran) and the other is a secular Sunni majority society (Turkey). It is significant to analyse how the women's religious identities are affected in multicultural, secular Australia where religious freedom is legislated, particularly in light of their Shi'a and Sunni majority homelands and the different constraints dictating their religious identities. It can be seen that the influences of the women's homelands on the women's religious identity, their religiosity, and the way they live their religious lives in Australia can be ongoing.

2.0 Lived Religion

Focusing upon the lived religion of the Muslim women in Australia has meant attending to the ways they express, honour, and conduct their religious beliefs and practices in their everyday lives, attending to "the religiosity of individuals and groups as embedded in the contexts of life-worlds and biographies" (Streib et al. 2008, p. x) abandoning the classical dualism of sacred and profane (*cf* Durkheim, 1965, 1995). Similarly Orsi (1997, p. 7) argues on the basis of his research of individuals participating in organised religion, that the study of religion is best observed by focusing on men and women in their daily routine "in all spaces of their experience". The theorists of lived religion see the sacred amidst the ordinary. McGuire (2008, p. 4), for instance, poses the question: "What if we think of religion, at the individual level, as an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy - even contradictory - amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important?" She observes a distinction between institutionalised religion and the way an individual adapts and changes religious practices to meet their needs and lifestyle. Just as traditional religious values and practices change over time and adapt to cultural, political and temporal circumstances, people's religious practices also shift. Religion is not static, either in the institution or the individual's life.

People change and adapt over time, through stages in their life, their social relationships and through the different social and cultural settings they encounter. In the process, religious practices are tailored to meet the demands of people's everyday lives and responsibilities such as family and work. Some may strengthen their religious traditions and cultural connections over time. Some move beyond institutional structures and develop a more personalised practice of their faith, while others combine their religion with practices from other mainline faiths, blend their traditional faith with New Age beliefs and practices, or reject the faith of their upbringing altogether via conversion or adopting atheism. These personalised modifications of belief and practice are enshrined in the notion of lived religion. From a similar perspective, in examining 'lived Islam' in Europe, Dessing et al. (2013, p. 2) state, "Our aim is to shift the gaze from 'hypervisible' forms of institutional religion which currently dominate social and discursive space to the less visible forms of religion that also deserve attention." Shifting the gaze of enquiry means examining forms of religiosity that go largely unnoticed outside institutional settings. Jeldtoft (2013, p. 33) expands this idea, explaining that to uncover the multiple ways people practise Islam involves investigating the "everyday lived-life trajectories of Muslims" and how meaning is made daily in their lives.

McGuire, Orsi, and others (Ammerman 2007, 2013; Bouma 2006; Woodhead 2010) further highlight the significance of personal biography when examining lived religion.

For example, Ammerman (2013) explores the interplay of religion and spirituality in the everyday lives of North Americans in her book *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. She points out that the academic focus on personalised religion is a response to a shift where the realms of religion and spirituality have moved from the domain of institutional control to the realm of the individual. Through such personalised constructions, practitioners embody their religious and spiritual understandings in a way that makes sense to them. It helps them find purpose and meaning in the world and their lives.

Ulrich Beck (2010) refers to this shift from institutional to personal realms of control as the rise of the “sovereign self”. He argues that in the 21st century individualization in the religious sphere has had a profound effect on the religious identities of Muslims, stating that “the individualization of religious practice is fast becoming a dominant feature of Muslim religiosity in Europe.” Tietze cited in Beck (2010, p. 34) argues that:

...we can scarcely speak any longer of a ‘Muslim existence’ as a stable condition. Instead, we are dealing with Muslim experiences arising from an ongoing process of adapting the elements of the religious tradition to meet the challenges of constantly changing social circumstances.

Tietze’s description of changing circumstances embodied in the lives of Muslims in the diaspora has a particular relevance for understanding the religious identities of migrant Muslim women in this study and the way they respond to their religion and religious practice. Migrant Muslim women, like many other women, have the responsibilities for raising children and maintaining family cohesion, however, they also are confronted with conflicting moral and religious values when living in a secular, multi-faith country (Yasmeen, 2010a). Studies have shown that as a result, religious identity is often re-evaluated when facing these challenges (Humphrey, 2010; Jeldtoft, 2011; Saeed & Akbarzadeh, 2001). This re-evaluation can be either passive or active. For example, religious belonging can intensify in importance and value in a migrant’s life through the process of settlement and adjustment, especially among Muslim women who may be viewed as “the Other” by different members of society (Bowen, 2004; Connor, 2010; Yasmeen, 2010a; 2010b). Or religious belonging and identity may change, where the women may remain Muslim but become more secular in their practice compared to their homeland or conversely adhere more strictly to their Muslim identity in belief and practice. In the process, they may also adopt an additional belief system (McGuire, 2008) or develop their own individualised practice outside of formal Islamic traditions (Jeldtoft, 2011; 2013). Moreover, religious identity often plays a crucial role in the reconstruction or reaffirmation of their ‘migrant’ identity.

Shanneik (2012:81) in her study of Algerian Muslim women living in Ireland found that religion is used in the daily lives of the women to “construct a clearly defined essentialized understanding of identity in the diaspora”. She found that, in order to feel a sense of security from the dominant culture, many Algerian women segregate themselves from Irish society in order to preserve their *Salafi* identity. They attempt to actively maintain their religious, cultural and ethnic identities by differentiating themselves from Irish society. Dobson (2012) in New Zealand examined changes in Muslim women’s personal faith through Homi Bhabha’s (1990, 2004) concept of the “third space”. She found that when faced within the stresses of daily life, the women reinterpreted and developed new meanings (coping mechanisms to deal with the discrimination and/or loneliness of adjusting to a new country) within their individual Muslim faith shaped by their personal histories and current life context.

Also drawing upon Bhabha’s (1990, 2004) theorization on the third space and the concept of hybridity, Mishra and Shirazi (2010) found in their study of 26 Muslim women living in North America, that the women interpret their personal understanding of Islam in the context of their individual circumstances and needs. The authors concluded that the stories and experiences of these Muslim women showed that they “subverted and transgressed dominant meanings, while negotiating new ones through their everyday lived experiences” (Mishra & Shirazi 2010:191). These studies demonstrate the ongoing negotiation of religious identity experienced by migrant Muslim women in relation to the experiences they face in a new culture, and their reflections on personal histories and their own lived culture. This phenomenon is also clearly evidenced in this research where women often draw on personal religious experiences from their homeland and local district in their interpretation of Islam in relation such areas of dress, reading the Qur’an and mosque attendance and they contextualise these aspects of their religion in their new homeland as they outwork their religion in all areas of their lives.

3.0 Methodology

The main focus of the research is investigating the women's lived experience through narrative, where the women talk about their lives in Australia and in their former homelands, their belief systems and the way they observe their religion, culture and ethnicity in Australia. This was the reason for choosing a semi-structured interview strategy, so that the voice of the study participants would not be extinguished. Qualitative methodology enables the researcher to examine the context of people's everyday lives in the environment where decisions are processed and chosen, and life is lived. It enables one to learn "how people understand concepts", and also why people act out certain behaviours (Barbour, 2008, pp. 12- 13).

Consequently narrative research was used as the theoretical underpinning of the methodology of this research in conjunction with a process of inductive analysis guided by the methods of grounded theory. The women's own narratives, views and opinions remained central throughout the research. Life experiences area major theme, described by Bruner (1991) as the true form of narrative because all individuals have experiences to convey.

At the time of the first interview, Iranian women ranged in ages from 18 to 52 years. The oldest Turkish woman interviewed was 62 and the youngest was 20. The average length of time living in Australia for the Iranian cohort was 8 years and 2 months, with a time span ranging from 5 months to 19 years. For the Turkish participants, the average length of time dwelling in Australia was 11 years and 10 months, with a time span ranging from 1 year to 34 years. Seventy-three per cent of the Iranian women had a university degree compared to 32% of the Turkish migrants. All the women entered Australia as migrants, refugees, students, tourists, while one Iranian entered on a marriage visa. The term "migrant" will be used to describe the interviewees' first generation immigrant status in Australia despite their initial status on arrival in Australia.

The interview process for the Iranian community relied on the snowball and network methods to contact informants, initially through the Iranian Association of Queensland (IAQ). In reality, the process was of a multitude of snowballs, for after one set of contacts ended a new round of leads were pursued. Similarly, for the Turkish community the interview process was a combination of snowball sampling and networking but with the added component of meeting new contacts via independent research. For instance, many of the Turkish interviewees run businesses such as kebab shops with their husbands, and were located by visiting various businesses around Brisbane. Interviews were then arranged with the women in their lunch-break or after work.

Initially a semi-structured interview schedule was used to investigate the women's experiences via self-assessed changes of religious, ethnic and cultural identities and practices. Seven years later follow-up interviews were conducted with nine respondents (five Turkish and four Iranian women), in order to more deeply examine the emerging categories of identities that arose since the first set of interviews, and to explore any shifts or changes in the women's religious, ethnic and cultural identities over a longer time-frame.

All the interviews were transcribed and coded into major categories or themes (trees) which were then divided into different levels of sub-codes or branches. After the codes and sub-codes were analysed, the broad research question examining religious, ethnic and cultural ethnic practice and identity was addressed and then narrowed and redirected through in-depth analysis of the data (Glaser, 1998).

4.0 The Participants

All the Iranian interviewees migrated after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. When examining the Iranian diaspora, the Islamic revolution of 1978-1979 delineates the contemporary large-scale emigration. From 1980, countries such as United States, Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and Australia have had a dramatic increase in Iranian migrants from the upper-class and educated middle class, and political and religious minority groups. In Australia, three waves of Iranian migration can be identified over the last forty years. The first wave migrated before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and comprised mostly service workers in the oil industry seeking a brighter economic future. The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) define the second wave of migrants, where predominately middle and upper class educated professionals were escaping the newly established Islamic regime and/or the massive human and economic cost extracted through the Iran-Iraq war. The majority of these individuals migrated through the humanitarian visa program and a minority came to Australia as refugees (Jupp, 2001; McAuliffe, 2008). The third and most recent wave of Iranian migrants to Australia, the majority of whom arrived on skilled migration visas or student visas, consists of young couples or individuals seeking a better economic future, employment prospects and education. The third wave, like the second, is predominantly middle and upper class Iranians; a minority of these are also refugees (Jamarani, 2009; 2012).

The Turkish women on the other hand, migrated from a secular country with relative political stability. The Melbourne Turkish Migration Survey also identifies three distinct periods of Turkish migration to Australia: 1968-74, 1975-80, and 1981 onwards (Icduygu, 1994). During the first period, migrants were predominately young couples from villages with little formal education, with the intention of temporary migration. The period 1975-80 was characterized by chain migration and family reunion, with migrants having comparable socio-economic backgrounds to the first period. The third period, 1981 onwards, saw the continuation of chain migration and family reunion, but was also demarcated by a large number of single, urban, university students and skilled migrants, due predominately to immigration policy changes by the Australian government (Icduygu, 1994; Hopkins, 2011; Saeed, 2003). Additionally, within the Turkish Muslim majority secular state, there have been a number of religious, political and economic tensions which caused some interviewees to migrate over the last few decades. Most of the Turkish women in the sample are from the capital Ankara and identify as middle class.

4.1 Islam in Australia

When examining Muslim women in Australia it is valuable to gain a broader insight into the Muslim community in Australia which is an active and diverse community. Islamic migrants are one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in Australia and Islam is ranked as Australia's third largest religion. According to the 2011 Census, the largest religious affiliation is Christianity (61.1% of the population), followed by Buddhism (2.5%), and Islam (2.2%), representing an increase in the Muslim population of 40.3% since the previous census in 2006 (ABS, 2011a). The number of Muslims in Australia reported by the 2011 ABS Census is 476,291. Of these Muslims, 61.5% were born overseas which is an additional factor surrounding their cultural and religious lives in the context of Australian society (ABS, 2012). In the greater Brisbane area, the field of study, the census recorded 24,990 Muslims, which is an increase of 72% since the previous census in 2006 (ABS, 2006; 2011b) and represents five percent of the total Australian Muslim population.

4.2 The Muslim Women Interviewees and Self-Assessed Religiosity

When the women arrived in Australia, all identified as Muslim. At the time of the first interview, however, six of the Iranian women had changed their religious practice and no longer identified as Muslim. Therefore 31 Iranian and 25 Turkish women continued to identify as Muslim. Of the six Iranians who had changed their religion, two had converted to Christianity, one became a Baha'i, another was investigating Buddhism, one was following her own religious philosophy, and the other adhered to the philosophies of the New Age movement.

The women's understandings of what it means to be a religious person and their perceptions of religiosity were imperative to explore because these perceptions shaped their religious identity and practice. The question was asked of the women: "Do you consider yourself a religious person?" Over two-thirds of Turkish women (72%) and one-third of the Iranian women who responded to this question (39%) claimed to be religious (one Iranian woman declined to answer the question). These results may indicate more of a secular orientation among the Iranian respondents, an assumption substantiated by research undertaken by McAuliffe (2007b) who describes a large number of Iranian migrants in Australian, North America and Europe, as being secular.

5.0 Lived Religion Reflected in the Women's Lives: The Processes of Sifting, Negotiating and Remaking Identities

After the first interviews it was found that many of the women are actively living their religion, culture and ethnicity. Words such as "sifting", "negotiating", and "remaking" describe the process of meaning making and the practices that underline the changes to the women's identities. Many other studies have documented the fluid and hybrid nature of migrant Muslim women's religious, cultural and ethnic identities which are influenced by the context of pressures and stresses of life, working out what it means to be a Muslim in their new homeland and among other things, dealing with how they are treated and viewed as the Other (Dobson, 2012; Ehrkamp, 2005; Ewing, 2008; Gentles-Peart, 2007; McAuliffe, 2007a, 2007b; Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Shanneik, 2012).

The Oxford Australian Dictionary's definition of the term "sift" is to "examine and analyse facts or evidence etc., carefully" (Oxford Australian Essential Dictionary & Thesaurus 2008:388). It was evidenced that many of the women interviewed were re-evaluating their lives on a number of different levels. The women describe in various ways the process of sifting that is taking place in their religious lives. Several women expressed their delight in living in a multicultural society where freedom of religion was enshrined.

The sense of religious freedom as well as coming into contact with people of different religious beliefs, and those who have no religious belief enabled them to learn about different religious worldviews, which for many, led them to re-examine their own Islamic faith.

The term negotiate is defined as “bargain or discuss with others in order to reach an agreement”, and also to “get over an obstacle or difficulty” (Oxford Australian Essential Dictionary & Thesaurus 2008, p. 277). The term is used in this study to describe the inner bargaining process that women reach within themselves in regard to each decision about the ways they live their religious, cultural, and ethnic lives. Among the areas observed from the first interviews where religious identity and practice were negotiated were: (i) the question of fasting through Ramadan; (ii) the number of times per day the women prayed; (iii) the format and language used to pray; (iv) the decision to wear or not wear the hijab; (v) and the frequency in attending the mosque. The women explained that these negotiated spaces of their religious lives were due to internal and external decisions, circumstances and choices surrounding their new life in Australia, such as work pressures, time constraints and mixing with non-Muslims friends.

The sifting process for others led the women to remake aspects of their cultural, ethnic, and religious lives. The term remake is defined as reconstructing, recreating and/or restructuring, and is used specifically in relation to the women’s identity. For some women, this process meant changing their religious identity and following another religious worldview such as Christianity or Buddhism. For other women, it caused a strengthening in their Islamic worldview and religious practice, where for the first time in their lives they began to wear a headscarf and observe *salat*. Many women developed a sense of belonging and attachment to Australia as their new homeland. This was expressed with several women commenting that when they returned to their homeland for a trip they longed to return to Australia. They commented that they had changed as a person and now did not fit into their homeland society. However, some Sunni Iranian Muslim women stated that they would never feel a sense of cultural belonging in Australia because the culture does not honour Allah.

The concept of lived religion is central to understanding the process of sifting, negotiating and remaking identities and the changing habitus of the interviewees. After the first round of interviews many women embodied the concept of lived religion, such as Laleh from Iran (19 years old), who states that she is a very religious person. She prays devotionally and according to Muslim traditions, however, not in Arabic but in Farsi because she says that it is fundamental for her to understand what she is praying about. Islamic religious prescripts state that Islamic prayers are to be spoken in Arabic. She also does not read the Qur’an because she does not understand Arabic and finds it hard to read even in her own language. Nasrin (37 years, Iranian), when asked if she fasted, replied: “*The God don’t need that, so I don’t fast.*” She felt that Allah did not need her to endure hunger in order to follow him. Gulka (Turkish, 42 years) decided that instead of fasting she would give alms to the poor, which is a central component of Islamic tradition. She was happier with her decision to help others and it was still within the beliefs and practices of Islam to give alms. This was a better decision to her because it helped people, and because she worked full-time, she did not have to go through what she perceived is the discomfort of fasting.

So while some women have negotiated issues of cultural and religious customs, others have broadened their religious knowledge and practice by exploring other concepts of religion. Bengu (Turkish) in her late 50s, and who migrated to Australia in the mid-1980s, comments: “*I have become more religious because I have become more spiritual. You change over time.*” Bengu does not read the Qur’an, pray, or fast, but said that she has become “more religious”. She acknowledges that when other Muslims look at her life, they may not judge her as a Muslim but she explains: “*I would say I am a very spiritual person. I’ve read a lot about Christianity and Buddhism and Hinduism and did a personal comparative study. Initially I did it for the sake of knowledge. You sort of do your own synthesis and believe something that is unique and personal.*” Additionally, Zhina (Iranian, also in her late 50s and who also migrated in the mid-1980s) clarifies that she does not embrace all of the Muslim rituals, only those elements that are helpful in her life: “*Now I practise that which suits my common sense. I don’t want to practise the whole of Islam, only parts that suit me.*” For Zhina, this means praying in Persian rather than in Arabic so she can understand what she is saying, as was the case for Laleh from Iran (noted earlier).

These women are highly educated. Zhina spent her life working as a vet, and Bengu has a Masters degree and is one of the highest qualified women of the Turkish cohort. All the issues the women discussed aptly demonstrate the concept of lived religion - for they observe Islamic rituals and their own religious practices in a way that makes practical and cognitive sense to them. Bengu has shifted from solely observing Islam to drawing truths from a number of religions and describes those elements as the spiritual aspects she observes in her life.

These are her spiritual truths which include accepting each other and treating individuals with respect. Through this process Bengu has rejected elements of Islam such as the unequal way she perceives women are treated by Shar'ia law. These shifts in religious observance are exemplified by McGuire (2008, p. 15) who explains that "religion-as-lived" needs to make sense in the daily life of the individual. It is centred less on religious ideology and more on religious actions, such as praying in a way that is understood by the individual.

As Orsi (1997) clarifies, lived religion is observed in an individual's daily routine. For some women, lived religion is expressed through a modified interpretation of Islam, while for others, their daily religious routine has become a more rigid observation of Islam. Some of the women who labelled themselves religious were careful to strictly abide by Muslim religious laws and regulations, in which personal interpretation is limited. This group of women tended to be tightly integrated into local Islamic religious and cultural communities and reported feeling accountable for their own personal religious conduct. Indeed several Turkish women recounted that when they first came to Australia other religious women strongly encouraged them to wear a head covering. This expectation was and is constant and also relates to the women having regular prayer times and participation in Qur'anic studies. Therefore, ethnicity and cultural belonging also have a strong influence on the daily lived religion of the women interviewed. However, the Iranian women did not experience the same religious and cultural expectations to observe and strengthen their Muslim religiosity. Indeed the opposite was the case. In Brisbane, the local Iranian ethnic community is mainly comprised of members with a strongly secular worldview, with active Muslim observance being discouraged. This negative attitude to the practice of Muslim rituals appeared to influence some of the interviewees.

6.0 Follow-Up Interviews

To examine the fluidity of identities over time, it was decided to re-interview nine women in the study in 2010 in order to gain further insight into the sifting, negotiating, and remaking processes that shape the women's identities. The nine women selected represented a spectrum of different engagements with their religious, cultural, and ethnic identities from the initial interviews. The follow-up study was chosen to enable a deeper analysis of the shifting positions of religious and cultural identity and practice in women's lives. The intention was also to ascertain if the women's lives reflected or were affected by changes that have occurred in their homeland over the previous seven years. These interviews also aimed to reveal if the changes were influenced by, among other things, trips back to Iran or Turkey, phone calls and emails from the home country, and hearing news of current events and experiences of loved ones.

The accounts of these women exemplified the process of assessing and deciding what parts of their homeland traditions and religious practices they would keep, reject, blend or merge into their lives in Brisbane. The process clearly demonstrated the ongoing continual sifting, negotiating and remaking of the women's lives and also shaped how they positioned themselves in society, especially in view of the way the wider society perceived them. Table 1 depicts the self-assessed religious identity of the interviewees and shows the changes over the two time periods of interviews. In the first interview the women were asked if they were a religious person and to explain their answer. The women were then asked how they would rank themselves on a scale of one to ten on being religious. In the follow-up interview the interviewees were again asked to self-assess their religiosity. In the timeframe between the first and second interview it was found that of the nine women who participated in the follow-up interviews, two Turkish and one Iranian interviewee increased their Muslim identity and practice, two Turkish and one Iranian woman maintained their weak Muslim identity and practice, one Iranian interviewee converted to Christianity, one Iranian (who became a Christian after migration) maintained her strong Christian identity, and one Iranian interviewee rejected her Muslim identity and has no belief in God.

This section examines the stories of four of the women, two Turkish and two Iranian, who participated in the follow-up interviews. These interviewees were chosen because they represent three women with a moderate to strong Muslim identity, two Sunni (Faize and Zeyney both Turkish) and one Shi'a (Azar, Iranian) who were wrestling with aspects of their religious identity and practice. In the past seven years two of these women had and were undergoing major life changes. The fourth interview focuses on an Iranian interviewee, Soraya, who had converted to Christianity shortly after migration and follows her journey. In the first round of interviews, Faize (Turkish) was 24 years old, married to her first cousin when she was 19, had been in Australia for four years and had a three month baby son. She wore a headscarf, prayed five times a day, read the Qur'an daily and fasted through Ramadan. She was also active in Turkish cultural activities.

Her dream was to work hard in Australia so that she and her husband could own a kebab shop. Seven years later, she also had a daughter of four years and was now living in her parents' home after separating from her husband a year earlier. She was still fervent in her devotion to Islam and explained that she had become more religious since coming to Australia, and this observance had increased after her separation. She comments: *"This is because the religious community is not around [as in Turkey]. Sometimes when I feel lonely and can't feel anyone around me, or angry, I practise my religion."* She still prays five times a day and rises between 4.00am-4.30am for the first prayer. Even at her part-time employment she stops to pray at the required time. Since her separation, she also reads the Qur'an more often. Clearly Faize has had to negotiate her religious identity in the midst of a turbulent personal life in her adopted country. As a result her Muslim religious identity has strengthened.

Another Turkish interviewee, Zeyney, was first interviewed seven years ago when she had been in Australia for one year and was 27 years old at the time. She was single and involved in a Qur'anic study group organized by a strongly religious Turkish Muslim who spent her time encouraging Turkish Muslim women to be more committed to Islam. Zeyney had an internal conflict about wearing the hijab and had made a decision not to wear it. She was strongly engaged in the Turkish culture and was proud of her identity as a Turk.

Seven years later, Zeyney's big news was that she was engaged and getting married. She remarks that she is more religious now: *"I am 27 years now and the more you get older and have experienced life, the more important religion is. Recently I have had a family member overseas get cancer and you see how unimportant material things are."* She prays two to three times a day, fasts through Ramadan and regularly reads the Qur'an. Last year she learnt to read the Qur'an in Arabic – she read the entire Qur'an through Ramadan. She did not understand what she was reading however, so she has a Turkish translation of the text. When she was in Turkey she bought 30 DVDs that taught her how to read the Qur'an in Arabic. However, Zeyney was still in conflict over not wearing the headscarf:

I would love to do it [wear the headscarf] but I haven't got that feeling or confidence. I have been waiting for the right feeling since I have been here. I wonder how will I carry it? I want to be so sure. I don't want to take it off in six months and people say, "She used to wear the hijab." I think I should – maybe when I get married. I wish I could - I don't feel I am complete [because I am not wearing the veil]. I can't make eye contact with other Muslim women in the street because they don't recognize that I am Muslim. My fiancé is okay with what I do – if I do not cover it is alright, and if I do cover it is fine. I am going to be a better Muslim with him [her fiancé].

This inner conflict has not stopped Zeyney in strengthening other aspects of her Muslim religious identity, and in the seven years that have elapsed, she is living her religion through gaining a stronger spiritual dimension of her life.

After the first round of interviews Azar (Iranian, 40 years old) stood out as the most committed Shi'a Muslim Iranian among the participants. She prayed five times a day, fasted through Ramadan, and read the Qur'an regularly. She had worn the hijab until 9/11 but stopped wearing it when she saw fear in people's eyes. Her husband also strongly encouraged her not to wear the hijab because he maintained it did not fit into Australian culture. She was also committed to the Iranian culture and had integrated with the Persian community. It was important for Azar to maintain her cultural social ties but her religious identity helped build resilience by being able to share life issues with other religiously devoted Muslims.

After six years, Azar had an even greater commitment to her religion and had included two days of fasting into her weekly routine but still had not recommenced veiling, although nine years had elapsed since 9/11 and the heightened fear of Muslims brought about by 9/11 had substantially decreased. Azar acknowledges: *"I do not wear it now [the hijab]. Sometimes I feel guilty – I don't care anymore, I don't want to think about it."* This was clearly an area of contention and pain for Azar, and a subject that she appeared to push to the back of her mind. Was she torn between the wishes of her husband and the responses of the local community, which were seemingly in opposition to that of her friends in the religious community and her own interpretation of Qur'anic texts? When asked if she had become more religious since the first interview, Azar opened up a bit more about the veiling issue. She replied:

It is different [my religiosity]. My religious practices have changed since I came to Australia. I was a Muslim when I came to Australia but my view was different. I found out there are the same rules in every other religion. I follow Islam more here. In Iran I wore the veil for protection but I follow the majority here in terms of veiling – most people don't veil so I feel I don't need to veil.

Azar attends a Sunni mosque once a fortnight in Brisbane, where she meets other religiously devoted Iranians. She says she attends the mosque more often in Brisbane than she did in Iran, stating: “In Iran the people go to Mosque to show off and pretend that they are religious. Here you don’t have to go if you don’t want to go, so only the committed go.” Surprisingly Azar now also believes in the Bible and goes to a Christian church regularly (once every two to three weeks), because her son is involved in a local church. Asked if this conflicted with her Muslim beliefs and practices, she replied: “*I don’t find any difference between what they [Christians] do and Islam. Every religion says the same thing.*” This is a further example of lived religion, where as McGuire (2008:4) asserts the outworking of religious (beliefs) are “often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices...”

When Soraya, an Iranian and medical doctor of 18 years was first interviewed she disclosed that she converted to Christianity a year after migrating to Australia. She was very devoted to her new found faith and prayed and went to church regularly. She was also actively involved with social and cultural activities of the local Iranian association. Seven years later Soraya now was living in a very remote part of Australia with her partner, working as a Medical Superintendent at the local hospital. When she was asked what role religion now plays in her life she explained:

I actually have a very close relationship with part of the [Catholic] church which suits me. I am in phone contact once a week with one of the nuns. There is no one here at the moment to conduct services, the Priest is too old. My faith is getting more practical in my daily life. That comes from growing older [she is 50 years old]. One of the main reasons I am here is because of this – to help people who actually need it. I am much more comfortable when I do what I think is right. It is a blessing that I can work where I am needed. Thanks God my job is very close to praying. My daily life is close to spiritual healing and helping people’s pain.

Soraya’s life demonstrates lived religion in a very tangible way. She actually lives and breathes her changed religious worldview and identity through providing compassion and helping, to the best of her ability, each patient she comes in contact with. She is also selective in maintaining certain relationships with the Catholic Church that suit her, and which she has discerned are valuable for her life. She thereby expresses the “logic” of lived religion as outlined by McGuire (2008, p. 15) where McGuire explains that “religion-as-lived” is centred less on religious ideology and more on religious actions which need to make sense in the daily life of the individual. These religious activities also need to be seen by the individual as being “effective” and achieving a desired result, such as meeting a spiritual or practical need, feeling closer to God or experiencing a spiritual presence.

Soraya was asked what the word “religious” means to her? She replied:

The way of practising faith – more and more I am interested in spiritual experiences rather than a specific religious order of doing things. I take part of the Catholic traditions – the part that makes sense to me. The other part I put aside. I am more spiritual rather than religious. This is because of my age and life experience.

Soraya further exhibits the concept of lived religion in the way she defines being religious. She has chosen to be “more spiritual” which to her means establishing a deeper connection to her Christian faith through performing acts of social justice through helping others. She has chosen this way to express her religion rather than adhering to some religious acts that have little meaning to her and do not benefit others in a practical way. This process of disposing of some and selecting other religious practices is related to Soraya defining herself as spiritual as opposed to religious, thereby justifying to herself that she is no longer constrained by religious boundaries. She also explained that she finds God everywhere, not just at church but in the mosque and in the temple. So for Soraya, lived religion is incorporated everywhere and in everything she does, whether through her work and life.

The modifications of the Muslim women’s identities both in the initial and follow-up interviews illustrate how the process of sifting, negotiating and remaking is shaped by two main strands: the women’s life experiences, and their stages in life. Relevant life experiences that the women spoke about which caused an adjustment to their identities include: preparing to get married; a death of a close relative; buying a kebab business (which propelled the Turkish interviewees into the public space); opening a café; becoming divorced, or not passing medical exams. Such positive and negative life experiences influenced the sifting, negotiating and remaking process at a religious and cultural level.

The second strand of the sifting, negotiating and remaking process is shaped through stages of life. This is demonstrated particularly through the life experiences of Soraya who was in her fifties when participating in the follow-up interview and had begun to reflect on her life, explore spirituality more deeply, and was reviewing and weighing up the important values and practices in her later years, such as spending more time helping people in need. This process can also be seen in Azar's life, who in her late forties is now embracing other aspects of spirituality such as Christianity while also maintaining a strong Muslim identity.

7.0 Conclusion

When the women arrived in Australia all identified as Muslim. Most of the Turkish and some of the Iranian women were practising Muslims, and for many, their practices and belief systems changed the longer they stayed in Australia. The modifications and alterations of the women's religious identities are reflected in the way the interviewees adjusted, negotiated, and re-created their religious lives in Brisbane. It can be seen that the women live in a diasporic space and their active participation in religious community life or a waning or changing of their intercultural and intra-religious links within this space affects the women's religious identities. Diasporic space relates to the relationships and interactions the women have with their ethnic communities, the absence or presence of relatives and friends of the same ethnicity and religion, and their relationships within their religious communities, including with influential devout Muslim women. It is evident that this space is fluid and has changed in diverse ways through the interviewees' experiences of migration and living in Australian society. It can also be seen that for many of the women, the sacred and profane are blurred in their daily lives and practices. Such blurring of boundaries can be seen through the life experiences of Soraya, the Iranian doctor who converted to Christianity. She demonstrates the concept of lived religion through her work, where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane have merged together in her care for others. Her profession has become an extension of her strongly held religious beliefs and values. Other women are crossing the boundaries of the sacred through other various expressions of lived religion, e.g. by incorporating their religious practices through social interactions or performing acts of social justice among vulnerable groups.

When examining the women's narratives of their lives it is significant to observe evidence of lived religion through the process of shifting, negotiating and remaking which alters and even remakes the known world of these Muslim women. Orsi (2003, p.172), in a speech entitled "Is the Study Of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?", explains that, "the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas – all as media of making and unmaking worlds." He continues to expound that it is the way individuals use religious ideas and practices to shape and remake their current world that is of interest. For migrants, he notes this process is of particular interest because they are in the midst of working out and adapting to their new worlds, a practice which demands a combination of their new and old environments, social situations and interpersonal relationships.

Lived religion is embodied in the lives of the women in the ways they sift, negotiate and remake their religion. A focus on lived religion in this study has demonstrated the hybridity and fluidity of the women's identities which are outworked in their lives. The study has shown how lived religion is woven into the way the interviewees express or live out their daily religious beliefs while adjusting into Australian society on many different levels, socially, professionally, economically, and within overlapping diasporic and religious spheres. It has been shown that interviewees are constantly examining what aspects to keep, discard, adopt and even embrace illustrated especially in the shifts of the women's religious and cultural identities. In and through intricately linked and continuous processes of shifting, negotiating and remaking their religion, the women position themselves in relation to dominant 'others' in the new society.

Table 1: Religious Identity in the First and Follow-up Interviews

Interviewee (pseudonym)	2003-2005 Interview	2010 Interview
Faize (Turkish) *Int. 2003, aged 24 years	Strong Muslim identity and practice	Deepened Muslim identity and practice
Zeyney (Turkish) Int. 2003, aged 27 years	Moderate Muslim identity and practice.	Strong Muslim identity and practice.
Sevda (Turkish) Int. 2003, aged 34 years	Very weak Muslim identity. Did not practice any religious observances.	Very weak Muslim identity. Did not practice any religious observances.
Melek (Turkish) Int. 2004, aged 41 years	Weak Muslim identity and practice.	Weak Muslim identity and practice.
Nasrin (Iranian) Int. 2003, aged 35 years	Weak Muslim identity and practice.	Weak Muslim identity and practice.
Shima (Iranian) Int. 2005, aged 30 years	Weak Muslim identity and practice. She was attracted to a Christian worldview.	Converted to Christianity with her husband. Strong Christian religious identity and practice.
Azar (Iranian) Int. 2004, aged 40 years	Strong Muslim religious identity and practice	Stronger Muslim religious identity and practice. Has also embraced aspects of Christianity and attends church every two to three weeks.
Soraya (Iranian) Int. 2003, aged 43 years	Converted to Christianity a few years after migration. Has a strong Christian identity.	Strong Christian identity has mellowed and is outworked in her profession as a doctor.
Mina (Iranian) Int. 2003, aged 43 years	Weak Islamic identity and no religious practice.	Rejected her Muslim identity and has no belief in God.

*Interviewed

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