Journal of Culture and Values in Education

https://cultureandvalues.org

E-ISSN: 2590-342X

Volume: 7 Issue: 3 2024

pp. 27-42

Reclaiming Narratives - Muslim Women Navigating Activism in Educational Research: Implications and Recommendations for Educators

Zainab Zafar[a] & Aurra Startup*[b]

* Corresponding author:
Email: startup@yorku.ca
a. University of Toronto, Canada.
b. York University, Canada.

Article Info
Received: April 23, 2024
Accepted: August 25, 2024
Published: September 10, 2024

10.46303/jcve.2024.26

How to cite
Zafar, Z. & Startup, A. (2024). Reclaiming Narratives - Muslim Women Navigating Activism in Educational Research Implications and Recommendations for Educators. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 7(3), 27-42. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2024.26

ABSTRACT
This chapter delves into the intricate dynamics of activism within educational research within the context of resistance and justice within settler-colonial states from Turtle Island and beyond. Drawing inspiration from Eve Tuck's (2010) concept of shifting from damage-centered research to desire-based research and Sara Ahmed's (2010) work on embodying what it means to be a killjoy, we endeavour to confront and address prevailing tensions we face as visibly identified Muslim women researchers and educators. We position ourselves to navigate the complexities of our lived experiences and advocate for justice in the current climate. We come together from Pakistani and Palestinian familial lineages to share our lived experiences and specific testimonies of 'othering' in educational research and activism. Using an anti-colonial and desire-based framework, we explore the framing and tensions of Orientalism and the struggle against it. We also contemplate our identities, positionalities and stances within educational research. Drawing strength from Indigenous cultures and Islamic philosophies, we seek to advocate for disruption, refusal and subversion, which are essential to activist research. We conclude with implications for educators, universities, researchers, schools, communities, and beyond. We aim to illuminate the paths we navigate as activist researchers, harnessing our collective experiences and reframing the research approach through a desire-based approach.

KEYWORDS
Activist research, anti-colonial framework, desire-based research, Muslim women researchers, Islamic philosophies.

INTRODUCTION

> I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw, in theory then a location for healing.
> (hooks, 1991, p. 1)

The passage by bell hooks resonates deeply with our journey as two Muslim women coming to theory while grappling with pain and a deep desire for change. We are tired. We are determined. We are united– in our pursuit of a better world. Our experiences of othering, discrimination, and anti-Muslim racism intensify as we navigate our paths, seeking an understanding of the world around us. Our venture into academia, delving into theory, books, and articles, continues to be driven by a longing for belonging and a space where we will not only survive but thrive. Our souls find solace and resonance through the profound works of authors including bell hooks (1991), George Dei (1996, 2017; Dei & Kempf, 2006), Paulo Freire (1968), Frantz Fanon (1963), Sara Ahmed (2017), Eve Tuck (2009; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and many others.

Yearning for change, our research delves into exploring transformative possibilities to consider what engaging in research as activists means for our paths forward. Our vision of research as activists is an unquenchable hunger for a world where we can finally breathe freely, where the cruelty we witness is no longer the norm. Amidst the ongoing genocides in Palestine, Sudan, and Congo and the pervasive conflicts affecting Black, Indigenous, Muslim, and Racialized communities worldwide, our research activism is a call for justice. It is incumbent upon researchers to demand a shift away from hegemonic ideologies that perpetuate harm onto the bodies of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized individuals, mainly as we speak from the standpoint of our Muslim identities. In this article, we rely on anti-colonial and desire-based frameworks and bridge the works of Ahmed (2023), Tuck and Yang (2014) and Portelli and Eizadirad (2018), to assert that three overlapping elements should exist in an activist research orientation, which include the practices of disruption, refusal, and subversion.

Knowledge is not neutral; instead, it is a form of power that shapes social norms and influences what is accepted as truth. As Foucault (2008) emphasizes, knowledge and power are intertwined, shaping and reinforcing one another. Power plays a significant role in shaping research, determining whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced and disregarded (Choudry, 2013; Purkayastha, 2021). Historically, research has served as a tool for surveillance, control and dispossession (Smith, 2021). As such, the construction of knowledge benefits those in power and has rarely been a neutral, objective process (Patel, 2015; Smith, 2021).

Research in many equity-seeking communities has played a "deleterious role in perpetuating and refreshing colonial relationships among people, practices, and land" (Patel, 2015, p. 12). Under the guise of discovery, pseudo-scientists conducted research to legitimize

violence and subordination against equity-seeking communities, including slavery, genocide and the eugenics movement (Gould, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Western knowledge in science and the humanities has been rooted in colonialism and has served as a tool to oppress and manipulate broader society, reinforcing the notion that racialized communities are deemed inferior to the European race (Okeke, 2012). This type of colonial knowledge and belief led to the implementation of eugenics, involuntary sterilization, and forced institutionalization, all of which had devastating consequences for racialized communities in all domains, including immigration law, education, and healthcare and criminal legal system (Western States Center, 2003; Ihenetu, 2019; Rosman, 2020; National Human Genome Research Institute, 2023). Fostering an awareness of the foundations of colonial research allows us to critically analyze ongoing harmful practices and call for accountability to transform research practices that involve and honour those most impacted by research findings.

In the realm of educational research, activism plays a crucial role within settler colonial states where historical injustices and ongoing marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and Racialized people are prevalent (Zine, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008; Battiste, 2013). As Twitter influencer Karim Wafa Al-Hussaini, a historian, academic and Palestinian Indigenous poet, states, “They made us believe that our ancestors were barbaric so that it could be easier for them to erase our history and culture ” (Al-Hussaini, 2024). The dominance over Indigenous practices and the occupation of their land resulted in the suppression of Indigenous peoples, their culture, language, and way of life (Simpson, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Dei, 2017; Styres, 2017; Smith, 2021). Activism in research seeks to challenge, question, and transform these structures that are built to perpetuate colonial legacies and harm Black, Indigenous, and Racialized peoples. We urgently demand activism in research that seeks to decolonize and unsettle hegemonic norms to subvert the status quo through anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and pro-Indigenous philosophies.

Eve Tuck and other critical Indigenous scholars emphasize moving beyond mere recognition of colonial injustices toward meaningful actions that center Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Styres, 2017). Tuck's concept of “settler moves to innocence” highlights how settlers often engage in gestures or actions that appear to acknowledge colonial histories but ultimately serve to absolve themselves of responsibility or maintain the status quo (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 1). This is evident in other Indigenous communities, such as in Australia, Palestine, and various regions of Africa, where Indigenous groups continue to face exploitation and dehumanization at the hands of colonial powers (Dei, 2018; Parkin, 2021; Zalloua, 2023). Research in activism urgently calls us to confront this exploitation and listen to Indigenous voices, challenging their ongoing silencing by walking alongside their demands and collective efforts. Drawing inspiration from Tuck (2009) and Ahmed (2012), activism within educational research in settler-colonial states aims to question Eurocentric narratives, center marginalized voices, and work toward the decolonization of research. This involves critiquing existing systems, actively engaging in practices that promote

equity and justice, and revitalizing Indigenous knowledges and cultures within educational contexts.

This article investigates the intersection of activism, educational research, and settler colonialism. Using the experiences of visibly identified Muslim women researchers and educators, it argues for a shift towards an anti-colonial and desire-based research approach that disrupts, refuses and subverts colonial, Orientalist and oppressive practices. Instead, it centers alternative ways of knowing, such as Islamic philosophies and Indigenous knowledges. Additionally, the chapter provides opportunities for educators and institutions to act as agents of change by challenging the status quo in research and embracing alternative research methods. As such, this article becomes relevant for K-12 and beyond. It includes implications for researchers, educators, and policymakers.

Defining Activism in Research

Activist research fundamentally reimagines the role of academia and knowledge production to subvert existing power structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression and contribute to social change (Speed, 2006; Choudry, 2013). It necessitates paradigm shifts away from conventional research practices to align knowledge production with the goals of liberation, justice and transformation (Tuck & Yang, 2014). In Hale's (2001) view, the term "activist" should be understood as an adjective for taking action in ways that directly impact how research methods are conceptualized and practiced. Activist research involves a critically engaged academic with an "overt commitment to an engagement with our research subjects directed towards a shared political goal" paired with deep, critical analyses of the conditions we study to conceptualize practical steps toward transformation (Speed, 2006, p. 71). This approach should be driven by deep ethical and political beliefs, challenging the notion of objectivity in traditional research methods (Hale, 2001). Bevington and Dixon (2005) further suggest that "the researchers' connection to the movement provides important incentives to produce more accurate information" due to the internalized motivations (p. 190). This orientation encourages the use of collective organizing to transform oppressive conditions, particularly involving those directly affected by research findings (Choudry, 2013; Hale, 2001).

Speed (2006) argues that the research questions and critical analysis are more indicative of activist research than the methodologies implemented for the study. Hale (2001) contends that research as activism is a collective process alongside research participants and community members. Smith (2015) denotes the vitality of the research process rather than the outcome to create space for educating and healing community members, where the central goal of research instead "respects and enhances community processes" (p. 149). Through engaged and curious dialogue, activist research advocates for a model where research is conducted with communities rather than on them to address real-world needs (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Speed, 2006; Smith, 2021). Another essential goal within activist research is the prioritization of relationships and reciprocity, where those involved can "take an active role in the process of knowledge creation" by learning the relevant skills as they "contribute to data collection" and

offer the narrative from their lived experience to shape the process of knowledge production (Hale, 2001, p. 14). As a researcher, it begs the importance of ongoing reflections towards the responsibilities and impact of research related activities and encourages community engagement to collaboratively identify the most pressing topics from their perspectives and to consider unique analytical lenses and practical steps for moving forward.

Positionality

Zainab

As a visibly identified Muslim woman of South Asian descent, my research has always centered around activism. Throughout my time in the education system, both as a student and now as an educator, I experienced high levels of anti-Muslim racism. Unfortunately, schools have become sites of discrimination and alienation for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized students (Dei, 2000; Zine, 2001; James & Turner, 2017). I became aware of the absence of my identity in the curriculum, textbooks, and classrooms, which made me question my sense of belonging. As educators, we must transform and interrogate existing practices, challenging the status quo that has become normalized. Activism and research are inseparable for me, forming an essential part of my identity as a Muslim. My research in activism is rooted in my identity and lived experiences, which involve disrupting the existing power structures, amplifying marginalized voices, and advocating for systemic change. I seek justice and equity through activism, drawing strength and resilience from my faith to resist exclusion. I hope my research aims to transform educational practices and policies, fostering inclusive, equitable environments for all my students.

Aurra

As a visibly Muslim woman, I find myself steeped in resistance against Western philosophies to subvert imposed narratives and othering we experience in academic institutions. My baba, a product of the Palestinian diaspora, imbued activism and resistance against oppression within my siblings and I from our earliest conceptions of the world. In tandem, my mother continually directed these passions toward pursuing higher education to gain knowledge, tools and a voice for subversion in academia and at the grassroots level. My parents' influence has been instrumental in shaping my orientations through teachings on the importance of justice, empathy and resilience based on Islamic teachings, which continue to be a guiding light throughout my journey. Activist research is not only about speaking out and writing against injustice but also about listening, learning and building bridges. It is about creating spaces where equity-seeking communities are heard and valued and can share counternarratives from their perspective. Our refusal to shy away from centering Islam as an activist knowledge system means the embodiment of refusal, subversion and disruption against Eurocentric, standardized research approaches. We find solace and unity together in (Su-mud) صمود – the willingness to resist – which means taking risks of rejection, negative perception and creating discomfort in academia (Marie et al., 2018).

I remember meeting Zainab for the first time at an academic conference presentation, in which she fore fronted and unapologetically proclaimed the strength derived from her religious and cultural communities. Witnessing her presentation with the word insha'Allah (God Willing) on the slide deck was the first time I felt the simmering joy and power of her representing an identity that is central to my visible identities. Witnessing our shared passion for building a community for Muslim women in academia, we have come together to conceptualize and reimagine the futurity of activist-oriented research to pave an alternative path forward, drawing strength and lessons from the collectivist communities from which we emerge.

Navigating Tensions as Muslimah Academics

Within the Western academic sphere, Muslim women face several forms of oppression, including anti-Muslim racism, misogyny, sexism, and pervasive racism associated with white supremacy (Zine et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the perpetuation of these stereotypes through academic research and media depictions continues to strengthen, leading to increased marginalization and invalidation of Muslim women, portraying them as lacking agency and intelligence (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Satia et al., 2024; Satiti, 2017). Visibly identified Muslim women are frequently portrayed as a monolithic image of being submissive, oppressed, and voiceless (Irfan, 2023; Issaka, 2021; Ghumman & Ryan, 2013). Often reduced to our hijab and religion, this results in the neglect or dismissal of our intelligence and capacities for social change (Hoodfar, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge the diversity among Muslim women—with various backgrounds, encompassing different nationalities, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, and perspectives (Hamdani, 2004; Yousif, 2008).

As Muslim women scholars, the depiction and representation of our visible identities are often analyzed in relationship to the rise of Islamophobia in the West (Zine et al., 2007; Hoodfar, 2020; Zempi, 2020). The term Islamophobia normalizes an inherent fear of religious identity by those external to the community and a damage-centric discourse that positions Muslim women as oppressed and in need of saving - as such, we agree with a shift towards the terminology of anti-Muslim racism to deconstruct harmful perceptions of these communities (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mohamed & Zafar, 2021). Amid the rise of overlapping social justice movements, we turn to theory as a vital space for examining oppressive dynamics and collaboratively envisioning and fostering alternative practices for activist research in education.

Despite the diverse voices among Muslim women, research consistently underscores the absence of their differing perspectives in academic discourse, often creating a monolithic image of Muslim women; more research is needed in academia (Khosrojerdi, 2015; Ramadan, 2020; Irfan, 2023). We acknowledge and recognize the efforts of those who have written and countered such narratives, such as Jasmine Zine (2001; 2007), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), Dalia Mogahed (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007) and many more. However, despite the increasing counter-narratives posed by Muslim women, many continue to experience alienation in academia (Khosrojerdi, 2015; Ramadan, 2020). While featured in specific contexts, such as

billboards and university ads promoting diversity and inclusion, they simultaneously become invisible and overlooked for opportunities within research, academia and employment (Khan, 2018).

Research has the power to counter prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding Islam and can pave the way for a more nuanced and accurate understanding of Muslim women's lived realities. By centering the voices and experiences of Muslim women in research, we can refuse and disrupt hegemonic and Islamophobic narratives. Our research must strive to center anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, pro-Islamic, pro-Black and pro-Indigenous perspectives and practices. We turn to the work of an Indigenous scholar, Eve Tuck (2009), to unpack from a damage-based to a desire-based framework in research activism. We center this work through an anti-colonial framework serving as a guidepost for anti-oppression activism within academia and society, centering on Indigenous and traditional knowledges (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001).

Framework - Anticolonial and Desire-Based

Activism in research demands a framework that addresses our oppression and enables us to voice our concerns against injustices in our communities. In this pursuit, we delve deeper into the two frameworks including an anti-colonial framework and a desire-based framework.

An anti-colonial framework allows us to examine the historical injustices committed against people of colour and explore the agency of historically oppressed groups (Dei, 2017). It plays a critical role in discussions of activism in research, recognizing the ongoing impact of the white supremacy system on Indigenous, Black, and racialized bodies. This framework teaches us how our ancestors and elders formed alliances and solidarity to fight for liberation (Dei, 2018). Anticolonial framework questions the concept of the coloniality of power as described by Quijano (2000), and critiques power dynamics within the education system, particularly in terms of knowledge production (Dei, 2024). It does not center on the experiences of one group over another; instead, it allows us to recognize the existence of multicentric knowledge beyond Eurocentrism alone (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dei, 2018). This framework directs a critical analysis of multiple layers of oppression resulting from class exploitation, colonialism, imperialism, and the exploitative functioning of global capital (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). It incorporates knowledge of emancipation and liberation and offers hope for the future of the oppressed and colonized (Dei, 2017).

On the other hand, a desire-based framework opens space for the oppressed to voice not only their stories of pain but also their stories of wisdom and hope. Desire-based research, as Tuck (2009) discusses, is concerned with understanding the complexity, contradiction, and self-determination of lived lives. It opposes the pathologization of communities impacted by colonialism and instead gives agency to these communities to shape their narratives (Tuck, 2009). These two frameworks are potent tools in activism in research. After all, our research speaks to our experiences, is rooted in justice, and must raise our voice against oppression.

Framing and Resisting Orientalism

Edward Said's work is essential in understanding how Islam, particularly Muslim women, are portrayed in research as marginalized, passive, weak, oppressed, and in need of saving (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Satia et al., 2024). In contrast, we argue activist research should necessitate critical examination of how knowledge is produced, circulated, and utilized to subvert oppression and promote social justice. Said (1978) underscores this, by stating, "the Orientals were viewed … not as citizens, or even as people, but as problems to be solved or confined or— as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory— taken over" (p. 207).

To comprehend the complexities faced by Muslim women, one must delve into Said's conceptualization of Orientalism. He defines it as the West accepting a fundamental division between East and West, where the latter is seen as civilized and liberated (Said, 1978). At the same time, the former is deemed uncivilized and exotic, a distorted view perpetuated through various means, including knowledge production and colonial discourse (Said, 1978; Mohanty, 1988; Zine, 2002). This narrative becomes highly problematic as we have seen Western interventions in Muslim-majority countries often justify themselves by positioning Muslim women as victims in need of rescue from Muslim men and their cultures (Kumar, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Hussein, 2013). This narrative not only reinforces stereotypes but also imposes Western ideals onto non-Western societies.

Razack (2008) sheds light on how this colonial lens perpetuates a discourse where there is a distinction between a good and a bad Muslim. She notes, "Good Muslims hence did not present a threat to the West because they were already modernized and Westernized. But since bad Muslims were antimodern, they had a profound ability to be destructive," (p. 49). This narrative of rescue and imposition of Western ideals constitutes a form of violence against Muslim women, eroding their agency and perpetuating their vulnerability.

Transitioning from Orientalism to neo-Orientalism within research activism requires a nuanced understanding of evolving forms of oppression and resistance inherent within these communities. Tuastad (2003) describes Neo-Orientalism as 'new barbarism'—a context where hegemonic and dominant strategies legitimize ongoing colonial violence in economic or political pursuits by creating an image of the enemy. This is evident in the dehumanization of the Palestinian people (Samiei, 2010; Tuastad, 2003). Neo-Orientalist perspectives may manifest in research agendas that perpetuate stereotypes or prioritize certain narratives, potentially silencing marginalized voices (Samiei, 2010). Research activists must navigate these complexities by centering the agency and perspectives of marginalized communities and interrogating power dynamics within their work. Thus, Edward Said's work becomes relevant in activist research in disrupting and dismantling the power structures rooted in Orientalist ideologies. The disruption becomes crucial for ensuring the reclamation and accurate representation of Muslim women to resist oppressive associations imposed by colonial narratives.

Activist Research: Disruption, Refusal and Subversion

Based on the work of Ahmed (2023), Tuck and Yang (2014) and Portelli and Eizadirad (2018), we assert that three essential and interconnected components should be included in activist research orientations: disruption, refusal, and subversion.

Disruption

As Sarah Ahmed (2023) describes disruption is an integral part of feminist killjoy practices. It entails questioning established norms by actively revealing myths within oppressive systems, asking uncomfortable questions in pursuit of necessary truths and voicing dissenting perspectives (Ahmed, 2023; Varma, 2022). In activist research, disruption is a strategy for highlighting systemic issues as the root causes of individual problems, which are mere symptoms of these larger systems of oppression. Ahmed (2023) emphasizes critical components of being a killjoy, including embracing discomfort, expressing unpopular perspectives and pushing conventional research boundaries to promote inclusive and justice-oriented practices. Muslim women use disruption to challenge and change oppressive systems. They engage in disruption through political, legal and social activism and advocacy. For instance, Malalai Joya, a political activist, was dismissed from her seat at the National Assembly of Afghanistan, where she voiced herself against the US occupation and stood up for women's rights in Afghanistan and their right to education (Saba & Sulehria, 2017). Asma Jahangir, a human rights lawyer in Pakistan, served in legal advocacy for women's rights and marginalized people in Pakistan (Masood, 2018). Another example is Hala Al-Karib, an activist and a research practitioner from Sudan. As a director of a strategic initiative for women in the Horn of Africa, she focuses on women's rights and challenges the misogyny in Sudan (Yoshida et al., 2021). We see multiple examples of Muslim women continuously disrupting oppressive systems that exist internally within their communities or Western institutions. Muslim women are known to disrupt through visibility and activism in public spaces; they counter the stereotypes of being passive and oppressed.

Refusal

Tuck and Yang (2014) advocate for the role of refusal in the analysis and dissemination of qualitative research, which is foundational to framing counternarratives. Refusal is a "generative stance" at all levels of interpreting research data to offer alternative perspectives to dominant narratives (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 812). This requires a shift away from pathologizing Black, Indigenous and Racialized communities and requires a shift towards learning from the experiences of equity-seeking communities without feeding into the settler colonial gaze of sensationalizing pain and suffering (Tuck & Yang, 2014). By choosing what data to collect, share and disseminate, researchers can assume an act of refusal against the trope of reinforcing damaging narratives around marginalized communities.

Palestinian activist Ahed Tamimi embodies refusal through her resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Ahed was arrested and imprisoned as a result of confronting and slapping two Israeli soldiers in 2017; her act was a direct rejection of the

oppressive forces and systemic oppression encountered by Palestinians (Abu Abdo, 2021). Her refusal to accept the norm of oppression was internationally recognized, highlighting her resilience as a young Palestinian woman in the face of systemic oppression.

Subversion

Subversion is a critical ingredient in assuming a research-activist paradigm. Portelli and Eizadirad (2018) describe subversion as "subtle mechanism(s) of resisting abusive forms of power that create and/or maintain oppression" (p. 54). This approach is essential for critically questioning and challenging the established knowledge and beliefs upheld by dominant institutions. It is d riven by an ethical commitment to address the needs of oneself and others, subversion services to confront oppressive research practices. It plays a vital role in dismantling dominant narratives perpetuating inequality and oppression.

Lila Abu-Lughod's work critically examines Muslim women's representations in Western discourse and exemplifies subversion by challenging the Western narrative of Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2013). She argues that these racist and Islamophobic archetypes reduce Muslim women's humanity and construct them as objects in need of saving. Through her research, Abu-Lughod subverts the simplistic and reductive portrayals of Muslim women, highlighting their diverse experiences and the complexities of their lives (Abu-Lughod, 2013). This subversion not only counters dominant stereotypes but also promotes a more nuanced understanding of Muslim women's realities.

In sum, disruption, refusal and subversion practices are necessary for research activism. Muslim women have illustrated the use of all three of these components in their actions, activism, and critical scholarship. Through their courage, they continuously challenge hegemonic narratives and unsettle systemic norms. Building on these practices, we must draw strength from alternative approaches, such as Islamic philosophies and Indigenous teachings, which become relevant and necessary for counter-narrative.

Drawing Strength from Islamic Philosophies and Indigenous Teachings: Alternative Approaches

Islamic philosophies and Indigenous practices facilitate and support our strength, which serves as the guiding compass as we situate ourselves as activist researchers to afford us agency, hope, and resiliency. We echo the sentiments of Muslim equity workers, Satia et al. (2024), who reflect on the centrality of courage drawn from Islamic philosophies, reinforcing the foundations of our moral, spiritual and ethical obligations to advance activist research. Satia et al. (2024) shares similar experiences to our own, denoting the role of Islam in our ongoing reclamation of justice in academia. We believe in the importance as researchers of "(1) acting if we witness injustice and oppression, (2) speaking out against such abhorrent experiences, or (3) silently resisting" (para. 3). This is reflected in the teachings of Islam, through a passage of the hadith narrated by in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (49), Abu Sa'id al-Khudri who is reported to have said Prophet Mohammad ﷺ (may peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever among you sees evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot do so, then with his tongue. If he cannot do so, then with his heart,

which is the weakest level of faith" (Elias, 2012). This hadith encourages Muslims to actively respond to injustice upon becoming aware of it rather than passive acceptance of oppression and waiting for change to occur. Activism, in this context, entails a collaborative endeavour through the shared belief that all Muslims must refuse, disrupt and subvert acts of injustice by those in power.

Islamic wisdom provides an alternative framework for resilience, guiding people to remain steadfast in adversity while advocating for action against injustice. The concept of resilience in Islam encompasses enduring hardships, actively seeking justice, and resisting oppression (Ramadan, 2007). Palestinians, predominantly Muslims, have exemplified this resilience by drawing strength from the teachings of the Quran and the life example of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Palestinian youths are deeply influenced by their Islamic faith and spirituality; they demonstrate a remarkable commitment to their cultural heritage and ancestral land, which is integral to their identity and faith. (Marie, et. al, 2018). By adhering to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and upholding their connection to their land, Palestinians showcase how Islamic wisdom informs their resilience in the face of adversity. Palestinians embody a powerful example of resilience rooted in faith, culture, and justice through their unwavering determination and reliance on Islamic wisdom.

Islamic wisdom emphasizes the significance of being hopeful in adversity. The people of Gaza embody these virtues, showing resilience in facing challenges and refusing to be defeated. It is difficult to remain hopeful when faced with continuous harm, destruction, displacement, oppression, and losing your loved ones. Islamic teaching encourages us not to carry all the burden but to believe in a power bigger than us. To give ourselves hope. Islamic teachings encourage us to make dua (prayer) so Allah's assistance becomes imminent, providing us with the comfort and security we need to navigate our struggles. Research and activism are deeply intertwined with Islamic teachings, as they involve documenting injustices, speaking out against oppression, and advocating for justice.

Implications and Recommendations

The following section will discuss implications and recommendations for educators, schools and policymakers concerning research and activism across various contexts. Accomplishing activist research through an anti-colonial and desire-based lens requires patience, courage, and resiliency. We advocate for a re-evaluation of researchers' core philosophies and paradigms to consider the value in participatory methods, building reciprocal relationships and investing in the growth of diversifying the membership within various research communities.

Many of us are called to research equity-seeking communities to understand systemic challenges and push toward transforming the community spaces we call home. One step to cultivating this within the research process involves redefining research objectives and core paradigms to conducting research to center on what communities aspire and collectively work towards rather than the lacking areas. One example of an activist orientation includes the integration of a transformative that seeks to address social inequalities by centering

marginalized voices, challenging power dynamics, and promoting social change through the integration of critical, participatory, and action-oriented methodologies. Furthermore, shifting paradigms requires also the shifts in what is valued as knowledge, such as wisdom from Indigenous elders and alternative ways of knowing.

Activist research begins with trusting relationships between individual movements communities and organizations are established rather than a traditional approach of entering spaces with a predetermined hypothesis (Choudry, 2014). Research methodologies should engage community members as subjects and co-researchers. This includes collaborative design, data collection, and analysis processes that respect and incorporate the voices and expertise of those being studied. This might involve questioning who guides the research agenda, what knowledge is legitimate, how research findings are used and who benefits. For instance, Indigenous and marginalized communities' knowledge systems, philosophies, and methodologies in research should be acknowledged and cited in meaningful ways.

In seeking social change, research practices cannot exist in isolation. It involves intentional action and reciprocal relations to shift away from notions of research as time-bound and outcome-focused. For instance, findings might be closely tied to identifying actionable outcomes to address the root causes of injustice and inequality based on the goals of a community, helping them to build skills throughout the process and expand their capacities to continue the work forward without an external party (McGregor & Marker, 2018; Fahlberg, 2023). This approach ensures that research becomes a continuous process, not only a one-time study. At a macro level, research findings must be used to advocate for grassroots, national and international policy changes. This involves translating research into accessible language, engaging with policymakers, and leveraging media to amplify their messages and disseminating findings accessible and engaging to broader audiences. Practical strategies might include community workshops, social media campaigns, public lectures, and collaborations with artists and storytellers to bring research to life, ensuring communities are not merely subject of study but active participants in driving meaningful, lasting change.

Diversifying the research community is essential for representing a wide range of lived experiences and perspectives and allowing for fresh, critical approaches to research as activism beyond traditional Western frameworks. Building strong, ethical relationships with community members is key to planting ideas in the fertile soil of community. Such partnerships should be rooted in mutual respect, transparency, and a shared commitment to justice and equity. Addressing complex social issues should be a collaborative process to understand and address these challenges from multiple viewpoints, creating spaces for dialogue between researchers from different fields and between academics and practitioners. Additionally, onboarding researchers should have access to mentorship opportunities to strengthen their confidence and capacity for practicing research as activism, particularly for Black, Indigenous and racialized researchers who have limited mentorship opportunities. Supported by mentorship and

supportive supervisors, these students are more likely to publish meaningful research and succeed in their academic endeavours (Brusma et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

Research as activism can be likened to planting seeds of equity and liberation, dedicating time to cultivating and nurturing these budding concepts with compassion, community, and radical love. It involves embracing alternative ways of knowing, such as Islamic philosophies and Indigenous practices, which invite us to tend to our work with dedication and intentionality, similar to caring for a garden by remembering how, as communities, we have fostered gardens in the past and can continue to do so in the future with the appropriate toolkits and collective efforts. We can bring about social change where every individual and community can thrive in a climate of justice and equity against those who have set up oppressive structures.

We offer these sentiments and reflections as an invitation to consider orienting the ethical-political-spiritual facets to consider the tools in our activist researcher toolkits (i.e., disruption, refusal, subversion). We draw strength from Islamic and Indigenous philosophies that have founded our core beliefs by reclaiming our experiences, identities, and knowledge as visibly identified Muslim women in academia. Long-standing traditions of research that position equity-seeking communities as subordinate and incapable inspire our intention to build upon the need for anti-colonial and desire-based orientations when claiming an activist stance. Rather than acknowledging the inherent strength within various sovereignty-seeking communities, research practices have historically emphasized damaging narratives focused on pain, loss, discomfort, and trauma, thereby positioning these communities as needing to be rescue from the very systems that perpetuate the ongoing cyclical violence, dispossession and grief we experience. In our humble effort, we seek to rewrite the narrative, to focus on the unwavering strength and steadfastness our communities pour into us which allow us to continue to survive, unite, love, care, share, and cherish each other despite the oppression, genocide, erasure, and deplorable conditions that our loved ones near and far find themselves in - yet; they move forward in grace.

We subvert. We disrupt. We refuse.

REFERENCES

Abu Abdo, N. (2021). *The Impact of Palestinian Women in the Diaspora.* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim women need saving?* Harvard University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2023). The feminist killjoy handbook: The radical potential of getting in the way. Seal Press.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit.* Purich Publishing.

Bevington, D., & Dixon, C. (2005). Movement-relevant theory: Rethinking social movement scholarship and activism. *Social Movement Studies, 4*(3), 185–208.

Brunsma, D. L., Embrick, D. G., & Shin, J. H. (2017). Graduate students of color: Race, racism, and mentoring in the white waters of academia. *Sociology of race and ethnicity, 3*(1), 1-13.

Bullock, K. H., & Jafri, G. J. (2000). Media (mis)representations: Muslim women in the Canadian nation. *Canadian Woman Studies, 20*(2), 35-40.

Choudry, A. (2013). (Almost) Everything you always wanted to know about activist research but were afraid to ask: What activist researchers say about theory and methodology. *Contention, 1*(2), 75-88.

Choudry, A. (2013). Activist research practice: Exploring research and knowledge production for Social Action. *Socialist Studies (St. Albert), 9*(1), 128–151. https://doi.org/10.18740/S4G01K

Gould, S. J. (2012). *The mismeasure of man.* Routledge.

Dei, G. J. S. (2000). Removing the margins: The challenges and possibilities of inclusive schooling. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Dei, G. J. S. (2017*). [Re]framing Blackness and Black Solidarities Through Anti-Colonial and Decolonial Prisms: An Introduction* (pp. 1–30). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53079-6_1

Dei, G. J. S. (1996). The role of Afrocentricity in the inclusive curriculum in Canadian schools. *Canadian Journal of Education, 21*(2), 170–186. https://doi.org/10.2307/1495088

Dei, G. J. S., & Asgharzadeh, A. (2001). The power of social theory: The anti-colonial discursive framework. *Journal of Educational Thought, 35*(3), 297–323.

Dei G. J. S. & Kempf A. (2006). *Anti-colonialism and education: The politics of resistance.* Sense.

Dei, G. J. S. (2018). "Black like me": Reframing blackness for decolonial politics. *Educational Studies, 54*(2), 117-142.

Elias, A. A., (2012, February 26). Hadith on Munkar: Whoever sees evil should change it if possible. *Daily Hadith Online.* https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/02/26/whoever-sees-evil-change-it/

Esposito, J. L., & Mogahed, D. (2007). *Who speaks for Islam? What a billion Muslims really think.* Gallup Press.

Fahlberg, A. (2023). Decolonizing sociology through collaboration, co-Learning and action: A case for participatory action research. *Sociological Forum, (38)*1, 95-120.

Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum.

Ghumman, S., & Ryan, A. M. (2013). Not welcome here: Discrimination towards women who wear the Muslim headscarf. *Human Relations, 66*(5), 671–698. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726712469540

Hale, C. R. (2001). What is activist research? Social Science Research Council, 2(1-2), 13-15.

Hamdani, D. (2004). Muslim women: Beyond perceptions. *Canadian Council of Muslim Women.*

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b43ad2bf407b4a036d27f06/t/5f19916d352e140aab5a4102/1595511152883/Muslim+Women+Beyond+Perceptions+-+Over+Educated+and+Under+Employed+-+Factsheet+2014+-+Report.pdf

Hoodfar, H. (2020). The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women. *In The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (pp. 248–279). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822382317-010

hooks, b. (1991). Theory as liberatory practice. *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism, 4(*1), 1-2.

Hussein, S. (2013). From rescue missions to discipline: Post-9/11 western political discourse on Muslim women. *Australian Feminist Studies, 28*(76), 144-154.

Ihenetu, E. (2019, Aug 5). Race is fake and racism is real: Analyzing the race construct.

Issaka, B. (2021). *Alienating: how the portrayal of Muslim women in US media affects Muslim women's social identities* (Doctoral dissertation). https://krex.k-state.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/fa2f9c92-4fb5-43a6-bc28-f66edf141631/content

Irfan, A. (2023, March 30). Muslim women are reclaiming the narrative. *Non-Profit Quarterly.* https://nonprofitquarterly.org/muslim-women-are-reclaiming-the-narrative/

James, C., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area.* https://edu.yorku.ca/files/2017/04/Towards-Race-Equity-in-Education-April-2017.pdf

Khosrojerdi, F. (2015). *Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada.* (Doctoral Dissertation). https://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/muslim-female-students-their-experiences-higher/docview/2701131947/se-2?accountid=15182

Kumar, D. (2012). *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire.* Haymarket Books.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Donnor, J. K. (2008). Waiting for the Call: The Moral Activist Role of Critical Race Theory Scholarship. *In Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (p. 61–84). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385686.n4

McGregor, H., E., & Michael M. (2018). Reciprocity in Indigenous educational research: Beyond compensation, towards decolonizing. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 49*(3), 318-328. https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12249

Mohamed, R. & Zafar, Z. (2021). *Anti-muslim racism beyond islamophobia resource guide. Center for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies.* https://assets.tcdsb.org/communityrelations/2375261/anti-muslim-racism-beyond-islamophobia-resource-guide.pdf.

Mohanty, C. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review, 30*(1), 61–88. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42 Masood, S. (2018). Asma Jahangir, Fearless Pakistani Rights Activist, Dies at 66. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/11/obituaries/asma-jahangir-fearless-pakistani-rights-activist-dies-at-66.html

National Human Genome Research Institute. (2023, April 14). *Eugenic and Scientific Racism.* National Human Genome Research Institute. https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/fact-sheets/Eugenics-and-Scientific-Racism

Okeke, J. C. (2012). Towards a Theory of African Science: Methods and Justification. IOSR *Journal of Pharmacy and Biological Sciences, 3*(1), 33-41.

On Canada Project. (2024, March 21). *Definition: Feminist killjoy.* On Canada Project. https://oncanadaproject.ca/blog/feminist-killjoy#:~:text=Feminist%20Killjoy%20is%20a%20term,does%20not%20stand%20for%20them.

Parkin, S. (2021). The Exploitation of Culture through Fake Aboriginal 'Style' Art and Craft Products in the Australian Market. *Journal of Art Crime, 25*(1), 13-20.

Patel, L. (2014). Countering coloniality in educational research: From ownership to answerability. *Educational studies, 50*(4), 357-377.

Patel, L. (2015). *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to answerability.* Routledge.

Portelli, J. P., & Eizadirad, A. (2018). Subversion in education: Common misunderstandings & myths. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 9*(1).

Purkayastha, B. (2021). Knowledge hierarchies and feminist dilemmas: Contexts, assemblages, voices, and silences. *Advances in Gender Research, 31,* 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620210000031002

Ramadan, I. (2022). When faith intersects with gender: the challenges and successes in the experiences of Muslim women academics. *Gender and Education, 34*(1), 33–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1893664

Ramadan, T. (2007). In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad ﷺ. Oxford University PressRosman, R. (2020, April 4). *Racism grows as French doctors suggest a virus vaccine test in Africa.* Al-Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/4/racism-row-as-french-doctors-suggest-virus-vaccine-test-in-africa

Samiei, M. (2010). Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the West and Islam in our globalized world. *Third World Quarterly, 31*(7), 1145-1160.Saba, S., & Sulehria, F. (2017). Afghan women: Beyond binaries. South Asian Survey (New Delhi, India : 1994), 24(1), 20–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523118783155

Satiti N.L.U. (2017). Representation of Muslim women in the Western media. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, 14*(2), 189-202.

Satia, A., Rakie, K., & Anjum, S. (2024, March 5). *Centering the voices of Muslim women doing equity work in the academy.* University Affairs. https://universityaffairs.ca/the-many-faces/centering-the-voices-of-muslim-women-doing-equity-work-in-the-academy/

Simpson, L. (2004). Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of indigenous knowledge. *American Indian Quarterly, 28*(3/4), 373–384.

Smith, L. T. (2021). Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Speed, S. (2006). At the crossroads of human rights and anthropology: Toward a critically engaged activist research. *American Anthropologist, 108*(1), 66-76.

Styres, S. D. (2017). *Pathways for remembering and recognizing Indigenous thought in education: Philosophies of iethi'nihstenha ohwentsia'kekha (land).* University of Toronto Press.

Styres, S., Haig-Brown, C., & Blimkie, M. (2013). Toward a pedagogy of land: The urban context. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne De l'éducation, 36*(2), 34–67.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409-428.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). Unbecoming claims: Pedagogies of refusal in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(6), 811-818.

Tuastad, D. (2003). Neo-Orientalism and the new barbarism thesis: Aspects of symbolic violence in the Middle East conflict (s). *Third World Quarterly, 24*(4), 591-599.

Varma, I. (2022, March 2). *Who is a feminist killjoy?: Accusing those who question of 'killing joy'. Feminism in India.* https://feminisminindia.com/2022/03/02/who-is-a-feminist-killjoy-accusing-those-who-question-of-killing-joy/ Western States Center. (2003). A history: The construction of race and racism dismantling racism project. [PDF Report]. https://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/conference_websites/2017/documents/construction-of-race-and-racism.pdf

Yoshida, K., Kezie-Nwoha, H., Holvikivi, A., Nkinzi, S., Sabrie, A., & Tabbasam, E. (2021). *Defending the future: Gender, conflict, and environmental peace. [*PDF Report].

Yousif, A. F. (2008). *Muslims in Canada: A question of identity (2nd ed).* Legas.

Zalloua, Z. (2023). *Solidarity and the Palestinian cause: Indigeneity, Blackness, and the promise of universality.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Zempi, I. (2020). Veiled Muslim women's responses to experiences of gendered Islamophobia in the UK. *International Review of Victimology, 26*(1), 96–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758019872902

Zine, J., Taylor, L. K., & Davis, H. E. (2007). Reading Muslim women and Muslim women reading back: Transnational feminist reading practices, pedagogy and ethical concerns. *Intercultural Education, 18*(4), 271-280. doi:10.1080/14675980701605139

Zine, J. (2002). Muslim women and the politics of representation. *American Journal of Islam and Society, 19(*4), 1-22.

Zine, J. (2001). Muslim youth in Canadian schools: Education and the politics of religious identity. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 32*(4), 399-423.