

**Islam in the Hinterlands:  
Muslim Cultural Politics in Canada**

*Jasmine Zine, ed.*

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There have been few studies on Islam in Canada. Hence this publication is a welcome addition to the list. Its ten chapters, divided into four sections, examine diverse issues regarding Muslim cultural politics in the Canadian hinterlands. More specifically, it seeks to understand how they have been affected by the post-9/11 era of wars, domestic security policies, calls for reformation, and media sensationalism, as well as how these, combined with racial and re-

ligious profiling, have impacted Muslims in the Canadian diaspora. The book tries to construct multiple readings of Islam and Muslims by examining this community within its social, cultural, educational, and political settings and the integration of these diverse factors in the formation of the national Islamic mosaic.

The first section covers gender, race, the Shari'ah debate, and Muslim women's political engagement. Section 2 focusses on media representation and examines the construction of the "Muslim other" post-9/11, the politics of reform as articulated by two Muslim female journalists, and the representation of Canadian Islam in a popular Muslim sitcom. An important theme in section 3 is the civic engagement of the country's Islamic schools. The last section looks at security issues and the targeting and profiling of Muslims in post-9/11 Canada.

As Jasmine Zine correctly points out in the introduction, Muslims have been living peacefully in Canada since the middle of the nineteenth century and are proud to be Canadian. However, since 9/11 the debate on their integration into the mosaic and their appropriation of Canadian values has intensified, especially in Quebec, where discrimination and prejudice have increased due to the issue of veiling. Women who choose to veil are exiled from public services and space by means of Bill 94. In essence they are portrayed as victims of patriarchal violence.

In her first chapter, Zine makes the important point that Muslim women's bodies are controlled by the state in both the East and the West. In the former they are told what to wear; in the latter the state tells them what they cannot wear. In many ways, as she points out, the hijab is used as a tool to reassert racial boundaries and the marginalization of non-whites, both of which "otherize" Muslims. Although she does not explicitly state so, Zine's chapter suggests that Muslim women challenge the normative tradition in both the West and within the community by raising questions about religion and culture, thereby forcing Muslims to rethink many of their socio-religious axioms. On the other hand, they also challenge the limits of tolerance within the western secular tradition.

Itrath Syed's chapter on the Shari'ah debate highlights many of the points discussed by both sides on the issue. The author states that its opponents reduce Islam to a homogenized culture whose women need to be rescued from outdated patriarchal norms. A more explicit and nuanced discussion on the distinction between *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and Shari'ah would have made her claims more persuasive. In particular, a discussion on the current discourse on Islamic hermeneutics and the repositioning of women in the Shari'ah would have enhanced the chapter's quality.

Katherine Bullock expands the definition of political engagement to emphasize the diverse contributions of Muslim women in the Canadian public sphere. However, her definition of politics is open to dispute, especially as she defines anyone who seeks to challenge, resist, combat, or change the negative stereotypes of Islam or Muslims as politically engaged.

The media constructs rather than reflects on realities, focuses on insider dissenting voices, and frequently reproduces Orientalist constructions of Muslims and Islam. Restricting herself to two daily newspapers, *The Globe* and *The National Post*, Yasmin Jiwani shows how they define the stories and compares and contrasts how they covered and sensationalized the 9/11 tragedy. In particular, she explains how stories are distorted and skewed whereas some, like the CIA's role in arming Osama bin Laden, are conveniently forgotten. Jiwani stresses an important fact: The reasons for terrorism are not analyzed. Overall, her chapter presents a balanced view of the media and its role in constructing the Muslim "other" and influencing public opinion.

Meena Sharify-Funk compares and contrasts the roles of Irshad Manji and Raheel Reza in marketing Islamic reform. However, both women are hardly the most prominent proponents of Islamic reform, especially since they are considered peripheral figures within the Muslim community. The chapter omits the insider voices of the Muslim majority on Islamic reformation. The concept of *ijtihad* that Manji and Reza advocate is both undefined and quite shallow, as they have no exposure to Islamic legal theory and do not comprehend the principles entailed in a reexamination of this undertaking. As the author correctly points out, Reza is more moderate and guarded in her statements. It would have been intriguing if Sharify-Funk had compared their views with those of Tarek Fatah, another "moderate Muslim reformer." One other key element missing in this discussion is the need to establish local seminaries to train imams. So far, Canadian Muslims have depended heavily on imported imams whose views are shaped in (and by) the East and who are not engaged with Islamic reform.

In her chapter on the experience of veiling at a Canadian Islamic school, Zine premises her research on interviews conducted with female students. Her approach is phenomenological in that she lets the girls relate their stories, which allows their voices to be heard. However, as her sample is very small, her chapter does not present an accurate picture of their experience.

Chapter 9 examines the security certificate exception, the media's role in creating fear, and how this has resulted in arbitrary arrests and the denial of basic human rights to detainees, many of whom are locked up for years without charge. The program constructs a dichotomous relationship by framing

an either-or situation of what it means to be Canadian, since anyone who does not conform is deemed to be alien and a possible threat to the community.

As this book focuses primarily on the majority Sunni community, the experiences of minority groups like Shi'is and Sufis are neglected. Their experience in the post-9/11 world is distinctly different primarily because Sunnis do not experience the double marginality or the assiduous Wahhabi and Salafi attacks the way that Shi'is, Sufis, and the Ahmadis do.

Another important omission is the experience of Afro-Caribbean Canadian Muslims. Issues like the younger generation and the sectarian divide, the prominence of religion in identity construction, the clash between religious and ethnic identities, and the "war on terror" are also not touched on. The book clearly needs a more nuanced discussion of the experiences of different types of Canadian Muslims.

Furthermore, the book focuses on dissident voices and Muslim women. Thus, the voices and experience of men in the debate on Islamophobia, the impact that the Shari'ah rulings would have on them, the reformist ideas of male Muslims, their political engagement, and the experience of Muslim boys in schools are all neglected. The book also conflates immigrant, young, conservative, and liberal Muslims into a single category without differentiating between them. Tensions between immigrant and native-born Muslims and the views of Muslim converts on important issues like political engagement, veiling, and Islamic reformation are overlooked. Contrary to native-born Muslims, immigrant Muslims tend to carry cultural baggage that may impede a full interaction with and acceptance of the outside.

On a positive note, the book challenges the concept of monolithic, stereotypical Muslims. They do not fit into a commonly invoked category of Muslim thought. The book also suggests that many Canadian Muslims act as cultural mediators, as they protest the boundaries of Islamic discourse and contribute to the integrationist and anti-extremist discourse. At the same time, the youth often oppose the Islamic normative tradition and fashion a new identity as they experience less pressure to assimilate to or identify with the immigrant culture.

The book will add to the growing literature on the multiple voices of Canadian Muslims and highlights the many challenges that they encounter while navigating between the country's Muslim and non-Muslim communities.