



# Trends and Themes in the Study of Muslims in Canada

A Composite Picture of a Diverse Set of Communities

Literature Review

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## Introduction

Societal, political and media discourses surrounding Muslims in the West have attracted much attention, especially since 9/11, and not always for the right reasons. Discussions on Muslims in the West have overwhelmingly centred on the (in)compatibility of Islam and Western environs, extremism, or anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia, centring the non-Muslim gaze and leaving common Muslim narratives and an overall picture of complex, interrelated Muslim communities across the country ambiguous. Even in these thematically limited discursive environments, much of the academic research on Muslim communities in English-speaking Western countries has focused on populations outside of Canada. (Adam and Ward, 2016; Ahmed, 2009; Ahmed, 2009; Al Deen, 2017; Al Deen, 2018; Al Jawdah, 2020; Goforth, Oka, Leong and Denis, 2014; Aroian, Templin and Hough, 2016; Aroian, Templin and Hough, 2014; Chowdhury, Glenwick and Mattson, 2015; Franceschelli, 2014; Herzig, 2011; Herzig, Roysircar Kosyluk and Corrigan, 2013; Khan, Soyege and Maklad, 2019; Lowe, Petty and Young, 2019; McCreery, Jones and Holmes, 2007; Miller and Butt, 2019; Pitcher and Jaffar, 2018; Rosli, 2014; Stuart and Ward, 2018; Suleiman, 2017)

While the argument can be made that there is some benefit to examining communities in similar Western, Anglo contexts, Muslims in Canada, by definition, reject homogeneity and are primarily defined by their diversity in almost all areas of demographic measurement. (Janhevich and Ibrahim, 2004) Canadian Muslims shape

their communities and identities through a number of converging factors that are demonstrably particular. Further, not only is the Canadian Muslim population comparatively understudied, especially considering it represents the second largest religious grouping in the country (and the fastest growing one) (Stewart, 2022) a significant portion of the existing literature or organic research on these communities tends to be siloed along disciplinary lines.

This review aims to examine much of the trends and issues in the field of studying Muslims in Canada in the existing literature. The overview is for the purposes of developing a composite picture of what is a diverse set of communities, its trends, and issues. To complete this review, library databases and publication platforms such as private academia.edu pages, Google scholar, and others were searched using key terms including “Muslim,” “Canada,” “Islam\*” as well as combinations of these words and others. Feed-forward processes were also used, including investigating the bibliographies of existing publications relating to the topics and ensuring that searches were taking place across different disciplines so as not to miss them. Overall, over 200 resources were accessed to complete this review.

Before beginning, it should be noted that the division between quantitative and qualitative work on Muslims in Canada is significant, with the former being significantly less due to the availability of data resource pools, which will be covered below. Partially as a result of the lack of national-scope, statistical data on Muslims in

Canada, qualitative work has flourished. An argument for how we can appropriately use the amalgamation of such research in the most meaningful manner in the absence of data pools will be made in the coming sections. It should also be noted that the themes and emerging images found herein are not necessarily conclusive for understanding the current primary foci and issues of Canadian Muslim communities at the grassroots or even institutional level. Critical engagement with these sources going forward is a crucial part of this study, recognizing that researcher interests, funding and potential biases impact and shape not only the research which individuals conduct, but also how it is conducted. The themes found in this review are to be built upon, challenged, and in collaborative discourse throughout the duration of the rest of this study in research design, as well as its coming phases of inquiry.

Before delving into the overall themes and trends found in the existing literature, an overview of the types of quantitative and qualitative data on Muslims in Canada is provided below. The review takes a holistic approach in consideration of the work of all types of data in the field of Muslims in Canada. The review then concludes with a discussion on the gaps in the research and the silences of other important themes in the data.

## **Large-Scale Quantitative Data on Muslims in Canada**

The current state of data on Muslims in Canada is limited by a number of converging factors, inhibiting what quantitative research work is possible. Some schematic work has been done with the limited pools of statistical resources to date. (Edmonston, 2016; Hamdani, 1999, 2015; Janhevich and Ibrahim 2004; Kazemipur, 2014; Kelly, 1998) There are, however, large-scale projects underway that will significantly change what is available to researchers in the short-term future. This section's overview is indebted to the work of Professor Abdie Kazemipur with the University of Calgary and Sarah Shah from the Islamic Studies Institute at the University of Toronto, in particular their presentation on behalf of the Muslims in Canada Data Initiative (MiCDI) from March 2, 2021.

Firstly, until recently, there have been no comprehensive, large-scale attempts for archivists to accumulate and acquire documents and artifacts related to the history of Muslims in Canada. In fact, it is unclear whether Muslim organizations at national and local levels have done much by way of independent or organizational archives on their own, or if any other grassroots initiatives for mass archiving about Muslims in Canada exists anywhere in the country today. In 2021, the Islamic Studies Institute at the University of Toronto launched a SSHRC-funded initiative that would begin the first large-scale archives about Muslims in Canada to date. The Muslims in Canada Archives (MICA) aims to “acquire, organize, preserve, and make accessible records of

and about Canadian Muslim individuals and organizations that possess enduring value for the preservation of the history and documentary heritage of Muslims in Canada.” (MICA website, 2021) As will become apparent later on in this literature review, the deficiency of archival resources have severely limited historical work on Muslims in Canada in more recent decades. Even larger projects, such as Earl Waugh’s profile of the Al-Rashid Mosque in Edmonton (2018), rely quite heavily on community interviews and heritage-based work, as an example.

The second major area where data acquisition about Muslims in Canada could be is in statistical data work - unfortunately, another stream of severe limitation until recently. The major sources of such data on Muslims in Canada are three: Statistics Canada census data, IMBD (longitudinal immigration database) and large-scale surveys of Muslims in Canada, such as the Environics Institute, which will be elaborated on below.

### *Census Data*

The first resource pool- census data - has a number of key advantages and also limitations. Firstly, long-form Canadian censuses capture a very large sample size (approximately 20% of the Canadian population), giving researchers a massive number of responses to work with - many more than any independent or even institution-affiliated research team could hope to acquire on their own. The long-form census itself also consists of a couple hundred questions which each become specific



data points for those who answer them. Drawbacks, however, include the fact that the question related to religious identity is only included in the census as it is conducted every ten years. This means that the most current census data available on Muslims (that we can verify) is from 2011. Further, the Harper Government at that time made it optional (rather than mandatory) to respond to the census - something that was not reversed until 2015. But why is this important to note in such a literature review? It's crucial to note not only because the data from the 2011 is now dated by a full decade, but the fact that the data that *is* there was answered in a voluntary manner meaning that it is very likely skewed to favour less representation of marginalized groups and more people with privileged social locations. Fortunately, 2021 is a long-form census year that will be mandatory and will include the religious identity question (despite this question, in itself, being limited - ie. not showing sectarian/denominational diversity and not showing any attitudinal data). The raw census data will be available and accessible to researchers by early 2022.

*IMBD: Longitudinal Immigration Database*

In conjunction with census data, researchers on Muslims in Canada doing quantitative work have also used the longitudinal immigration database (IMBD) from Statistics Canada (which provides access to data from immigration and taxation files from 1980-2017) as well as a longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada (LSIC) (which followed statistical changes in immigrant groupings after they arrived between 2000

and 2001 for five years). The former resource is currently a minimum of four years outdated and does not include religious identity variables, making it challenging to determine which data corresponds to Muslims exactly. The latter resource has been useful but is significantly outdated by 15 years. Later work connected both of these resources for even more complex data sets without changing the raw data sources. It should be noted that the use of these sources has had its benefits, however, it focuses entirely on immigrant populations, excluding work on Muslims who have settled over several generations. Because of this oversight, the numbers on Muslim socio-economic integration, for example, simply cannot be generalized to the entire population of Muslims in Canada, but only immigrant counterparts. Finally, other statistical data-based work is currently mainly done by linking Statistics Canada data with administrative data from different governmental agencies and departments.

### *Large Scale Surveys*

The second major resource pool for statistical data is large-scale surveys of Muslims in Canada, with data being pulled from Statistics Canada's General Social Surveys and those conducted by Environics Institute. The primary issue with both of these resources is that the last General Social Survey was conducted as far back as 2013, although there is another one current underway, along with an increase in the size of the Muslim sample in the survey. The Environics surveys on Muslims in Canada were conducted in 2006 and 2016, and were developed in collaboration with scholars,

community leaders and Islamic organizations. Of course, the data available therein is now five years old, with the latter survey only assessing the attitudes of 600 self-identifying Muslims across the country. It still represents an important contribution, many themes of which are reflected in the existing literature below.

It should be noted that similar to a recent push to address the archival deficiencies about Muslims in Canada, there have also been moves made to address the statistical data deficiencies as well, also through the Islamic Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. The Muslims in Canada Data Initiative (MiCDI) has launched as of early 2021 with the intention to build upon coming census data from 2021, as well as supporting a future Environics survey that will be developed in the wake of that data for 2022-2023. Once that study has been conducted, the intention is to have post-doctoral research fellows produce a series of reports on the findings of the study and its accompanying processed datasets; however, the possibility for other research groups to conduct larger-scale quantitative survey studies remains to be explored.

### **The Importance of Both Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

It is worth noting here that data is power. There is a reason that security around raw data from Statistics Canada is safeguarded with some of the tightest security measures in the country. Data helps raise awareness of what is happening on the ground, and in developing an overall social picture that can be used for advocacy and policy-making endeavours. At the same time, it is not true that key policy makers and strategists are

the only audience intended in the production of research about Muslims in Canada. Islamic organizations and institutions involved in Muslim community work being a major priority to consider as an audience for future research - even going so far as to shape research in a different manner because of this difference in anticipated audienceship.

Further, as will become apparent following the themed literature section below, often when the vast array of qualitative work is taken together as a “composite picture” (or even, as Marshall McLuhan might say, a kaleidoscopic one), it yields similar findings and analyses as the limited quantitative work does, with the added rich depths of Muslim community story-telling and narrative building that statistical data simply cannot convey alone. For these reasons, the research to follow from this literature review does not prioritize quantitative work over the qualitative, but rather strives to take a holistic approach in consideration of the work of all researchers in the field of Muslims in Canada.

### **Themes and Trends in Existing Literature**

An overview of the existing literature on Muslims in Canada focuses on a number of important and interrelated themes. There are four themes: integration, identity and Islamophobia; mental health, youth and family wellness; schooling and education; and gender. Each of these themes will be explored below and the literature expounded

upon. While this review strives to be exhaustive, it should be noted that outdated literature has not been prioritized for exploration.

### *Integration, Identity and Islamophobia*

Much sociological research in this subject area has focused on how Muslims in Canada parse their identities, as well as exploring issues of social, economic and cultural integration. The question of integration is often understood as being about the success of Canadian multiculturalism or, in a more sinister sense, even implicitly, an assessment of whether or not there is congruence between “Western cultures” and “Islamic-Muslim identities.” Following from this, some research has been conducted for the purposes of assessing the impact of structural and overt Islamophobia on Muslims in Canada.

The question of **integration** arises frequently in the literature, each piece with its own criteria for understanding what integration of Muslims in Canadian society looks like. In older works, the question of integration is openly parsed as a matter of survival (Abu-Laban, 1983; Barclay, 1969; Hamdani, 1984), with survival referring to the maintenance of religious identity and its transference to coming generations. This notion of passing on one’s Islam as a sign of survival or integration is less emphasized in newer literature, if at all. In instances where it *is* found currently, it is posed as a question about the future of Muslims in Canada, meaning again, survival of religious identity. (Dib, 2006; Khelifa, 2017) One piece in particular argues for the crucial role of

the Canadian government in promoting Muslim integration through the support of mosques as sites of congregant intergration and service to the wider community.

(Bullock 2010)

In the work of Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman (2009), the notion of integration as a superficial rhetorical device is critiqued, contesting that “host countries” (a problematic term in itself) must be ready to remove barriers that prevent social and economic participation for immigrant communities. Selby (2019), however, points out that because “reasonable accommodation” of religious freedoms in Canada privileges Christianity, minorities, including Muslims, become the ones responsible for requests for accommodations, despite an obvious power imbalance. Additionally, Selby noted that such negotiations are not limited to high-level political advocacy work but rather, take place in the everyday social interactions of Muslim Canadians. The impact of geo-political and national events on the belonging that Muslims in Canada experience seems to point to an ever-shifting sense of integration. (Bakht, 2008)

Similarly, Zine (2012) argues that Islam and Muslims are still considered within the Canadian hinterlands, meaning outside the bound of national discourse. She notes that there is a need to allow subaltern Canadian Muslim voices to be critical shapers of the Canadian cultural and political landscape. This very question of political participation as integration or as Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking (2013) phrase it,

“becoming holistically indigenous” is also explored, including in Muslim youth (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking, 2011; Moosa-Mitha, 2009; Nesbitt-Larking, 2007).

In *The Muslim Question in Canada: A Story of Segmented Integration*, Kazeempur (2014) makes an argument that contrary to above assertions, the integration of Muslims is not problematic in institutional and media domains, especially compared to the situations of Muslims in Europe and the United States. Rather, serious issues continue to persist in economic and social integrations, which must be addressed to avoid re-creating the situation as it exists elsewhere. Such questions have been undertaken prior by other researchers, particularly as it relates to Muslim Canadian economic links with their countries of origin (Husaini, 1990). These assertions are in tension with the findings of work by researchers like Roshan A. Jahangeer (2014) whose study of the lack of both political and social inclusivity of Muslims in Québec in particular points to governmental and legislative failures. Similarly, the work of Bakshaei and McAndrew (2012) on the failures of Muslim integration in Quebec point to regional and local differences in policy, culture and political climate that are worth exploring more and through comparison. More comparative studies of Muslim integration in Europe and North America have been examined recently. (Liebert, 2020) While some researchers argue that research should not fixate on religion and instead study the economic and social challenges faced by Muslims in Canada, it should be noted that such a push is often contrary to how Muslims themselves self-identify and also how their religious

conviction and practice mitigates the challenges they face with regards to socio-economic integration. The examination of differing degrees of integration based on complex and intersecting social locations of Muslims such as racial/ethnic identity, gender and immigration status in light of economic, social *and* religious issues remains to be seen. One area where some intersectional work has been done on this question is in the study of integration and settlement of Somali communities across the country. (Arte, 2013; Bokore, 2013; Bokore, 2016; Hussein, 2016; Jibril, 2011; Kusow, 1998; Mohamed, 2017)

**Identity** as a topic is often framed as a study of Muslim groupings divided by geopolitical regions and/or ethnic backgrounds. The tendency to conceptualize Muslim identities as tied to specific cultural identities creates limitations about how points of inquiry can be generalized, how they can supercede ethnic divisions within Muslim communities, and also tends to take precedence over how many Muslims define their own identities in a primarily Islamic sense. Nonetheless, work has been done on the life satisfaction of Arab youth in Canada (Paterson, 2012), alongside the challenges of Pakistani immigrants (how they pass down the religion intergenerationally and the dual identities of their children) (Khan, 2020), religious identity in Palestinian and Harari communities in Toronto (Gibb and Rothenberg, 2000), the role of Islamic teachings in developing an Arab Muslimah identity (Hamdan, 2007), religious and ethnic identities of Indonesians in Canada (McLaren, 2000), the influence of Western



education on traditional knowledge of Muslim Uyghur immigrants (Mahmut, 2020) and notions of identity and belonging among Canadian members of the following diasporas: Arabs (Abdel-Hady, 2008; Abu -Laban and Abu-Laban, 1999; Hayani, 1999; Rothenberg, 1999), Iranians (Chinichian, Maticka-Tydale and Shirpak 2011, Garousi, 2005, Goodman and Moghissi, 1999; Hamdan, 2009; Moghissi, 1999) South Asians (Israel, 1987, Leonard, 2008; Nazneen, 2005; Qureshi and Qureshi, 2005; Qureshi and Qureshi, 1983; Qureshi, 1991; Ralston, 1991, 1995; Shuraydi and Zaidi, 2002), and Somalis. (Mendes, 2011; Taylor, 2012)

Research on Black Muslim ethnic groups in Canada is dominated by studies of Somalis, accounting for approximately 97% of published and unpublished academic material on Black Muslims in Canada. (Jackson-Best, 2019) According to Jackson-Best (2019), the majority of this literature “explores the experiences of 1st and 2nd generation Somalis in Canada...the negative impacts of their immigration experience... and a continuum of violence... result[ing] in intergenerational trauma.” (7-8) Other themes of exploration include policing, aging and schooling. (Ibid.) While there has been some work done on East African Muslim communities in Canada, especially Sudanese groups (Makwarimba, Stewart, Simich, Makumbe, Shizha, & Anderson, 2013), Jackson-Best notes that this is a key identified gap in the literature on Black Muslims in Canada in general. The disproportionality of Somali representation in the literature is also almost exclusively qualitative-based work pointing to a need to explore the

diversity of Black Muslim communities in Canada, and to do so through quantitative data collection as well. These are all examples of how religious and ethno-cultural identities intersect in the existing research, among others.

Older examples also abound as the primary category for study appeared to be ethno-cultural groups, rather than religious identity - something which is, in itself, telling about early sentiments and an implicit reluctance to foreground Muslim identities in academia and the fields of history, religious studies and sociology. (Abu-Laban, 1980; Barclay 1968; Garousi, 2005; Hayani and Ohan, 1993; Kashmiri, 1991; Paterson 2012; Paul, 2007; Synnott and Howes, 1996) In a noted instance, religion and ethnicity are actually parsed as in conflict with one another as it pertains to labour market outcomes in Canada. (Chen and Kerr, 2018)

Looking strictly at questions of religious identity in Canada, Aziz (2015) demonstrates the plurality of Muslim identities in a Canadian context, particularly where non-Muslim lack of understanding about Islam hinders integration. Some structural incongruencies between the Canadian state and Muslim practices, as well as negative stereotyping, media bias and overt racism are seen as contributing inhibitors to Muslim integration. (Waugh, 1991) According to Nagra (2017), race relations and the historical context of the post-9/11 era affect how Muslim-Canadian identity is formed through religion and culture. Elsewhere, multiculturalism is critiqued as a failure of Muslim integration. (Nagra and Peng, 2013) Similarly, there is tension with ideologies of

national belonging and racialized institutions in Canada, particularly the concepts of citizenship and belonging. (Zine, 2009) In some instances, racial integration is deemed as more of a challenge than religious integration. (Reitz, 2009)

Some of the work on Muslim identity building in Canada is precisely regional, as it arguably should be. While large-scale pictures are important, they should not be conducted at the expense of important geographically and situationally-bound contexts, offering the later opportunity for wider comparison when observed in tandem. Work has been done on Muslim identity in Regina (Habib and Habib, 2015), Winnipeg (Hameed, 2015), Toronto (Danso, 2002; Lewis, 2008), Kitchener-Waterloo (Elsayed, 2009), Montreal (Jamil, 2014; McDonough, 1994; Paul, 2007), Edmonton (Waugh et al, 2015) and Alberta as a province (Karim-Aly, 2005; Valerio, ECMC 2022).

The issue of the **impact of Islamophobia** on Muslims, in particular and Canada, in general, is quite understudied when compared with global studies; however, it can sometimes be overrepresented in the literature on Muslims in Canada today and especially in actually framing the criteria for determining impact. This is often limited to measurable stressors on individual Muslims, particularly Muslim youth, and their mental health, for example. Put another way, because of this examination of the psycho-social effects of marginalization, the structural impact of Islamophobia tends to be understood in individual, rather than collective terms. There is also little attention paid to how Islamophobia leads to constructions of non-Muslim Canadian

identities which has a snowball effect on legitimating anti-Muslim rhetoric and structural inequity. One point where this becomes truly problematic is how, in studies of Muslims in Canada that claim to be about integration and especially poor economic integration, researchers tend not to point to Islamophobia as a core reason. This is because they tend to view Islamophobia as specifically interpersonal discrimination, rather than a global industry of Muslim disenfranchisement which creates socio-economic instability in whole geopolitical regions and their accompanying refugee crises which precipitate marginalized folks to enter Canada at lower economic brackets and remain there proportionally over time. In so many ways, a wider lens on the impact of Islamophobia is thus needed.

In the section below four sub-themes of the impacts of Islamophobia are explored: psychological distress of Muslims, Muslim experiences of securitization in Canada, Canadian public discourse on Islam and Muslims, and the study of the radicalization of Muslims in Canada.

The work of Marie-Pier and Reitz (2018) was centered on testing the psychological distress of Muslims living as minorities in France and Canada, with findings pointing to similar impacts but not based on religious attachment in hostile environments, but rather structural violence in the form of high unemployment and inactive labour markets. Similarly, Model and Lang (2002) conducted an earlier comparative study of Canada and the UK, looking at the “cost of not being Christian.”

They found that while racist discourse tended to be muted in Canada, non-Christian minorities still faced significantly disproportionate unemployment and were denied equal opportunity for labour force participation.

Elkassen, Mantulak et al (2018) examined the impact of discrimination and microaggressions on the mental health of Muslim school-aged children, concluding that an identity disconnect develops in the children as a result of stereotyping and other stressors. The work of Jisrawi and Arnold (2018) also looked at how the impact of microaggressions and a lack of cultural awareness pose healthcare challenges for Muslim communities in Canada, proposing a cultural competency framework for accommodating Muslims, as well as suggestions for institutional accountability. Similarly, Dilmaghani (2018) conducted a statistical examination for the likelihood of health issues for different religious groups in Canada and their findings offer insights for thinking about how Islamophobia impacts Muslim health equity,

In 2017, the Liberal Government of Canada sought to pass Motion-103 which would officially recognize Islamophobia as a form of discrimination in Canada and would affirm the government's commitment to combating it. Despite prior motions being largely rhetorical and passing with little issue, M-103 garnered disproportionately significant public attention, especially in the wake of the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States, legitimating anti-Muslim rhetoric across North America and emboldening those who opposed M-103 in Canada. In the

wake of the uproar surrounding the motion (which eventually passed), work has been done in examining the Islamophobic nature of Canadian public discourse on Islam and Muslims, ranging from mistrust to open hostility. (Funk, 2017)

Contributions to discourse about the term Islamophobia itself, as well as anti-Muslim racism and bigotry, have also been explored by Canadian researchers and in Canadian contexts. (Bullock, 2017) Work has been done on specifically *anti-Black Islamophobia* (Mugabo, 2016) and the *gendered nature of Islamophobia*, particularly its disproportionate impact on visible Muslim women and girls not only in terms of violence against personhood, but at every other structural intersection. (Ahmad, 2018; Zine, 2006)

The impact of Islamophobia has also been studied in terms of researchers examining Muslim experiences of **securitization in Canada**, particularly in the post-9/11 era. (Jamil, 2014; Nagra, 2017) Securitization is often justified as a natural need for any state to “protect” its citizens from “external” threats. In practice, however, *internal* groups such as Muslims have been rhetorically understood as outsiders and targeted through national security policies which are highly discriminatory. The othering required of Canadian Muslims to justify breaches in privacy and Charter rights follows academic models which place Muslims on a false continuum from secular to extremist, using visible markers of Islamic practices to

ostracize and subsequently racialize them at the highest systemic levels. (Roach, 2009; Slonowsky, 2012) As Fahad Ahmad (2019) puts it,

securitization is a political process that involves a) using political discourse to construct the enemy posing a national security threat; and b) addressing the threat using exceptional institutional measures that require the suspension of democratic processes and public discussion...In particular, the events of 9/11 have been used to cast Muslims as collectively guilty and characterize them as potential threats to national security in Canada and elsewhere.

Even still, this area of impact on Muslim individuals and communities remains understudied.

Comparatively, the study of the **radicalization** of Muslims in Canada has numerous resources behind it. Disturbingly but unsurprisingly given how the specter of Islamophobia haunts academia (like any high-level institution), some of these resources proceed from the confounding assumption that the study of religion and public life is primarily about threats to public safety and political order. (Bramadat, 2014) Even when these authors seem reflexive about how they are “focusing most of our attention on Islam....replicating the narrow and often prejudicial nature of the post-9/11 debate on security and radicalization,” (9) while also admitting to the excessive focus on non-European and non-white ethnic extremist groups (completely sidelining the number one domestic security threat in North America being white nationalist terrorist groups), they proceed with their centering of Muslims in the radicalization debates nonetheless.

Following in this vein, in interviews with Muslims in Toronto, Beyer (2014) seemed surprised that Muslim male respondents would accept religious diversity and be “generally positive about the idea of Canada as a multicultural society,” that they

accepted or had few problems with living in a secular or nominally Christian country; they participated and expected to participate fully; they wanted to be thoroughly woven into the life of that society through their studies, their careers, and their social relations; and they almost uniformly rejected any direct political role for religion and Islam in Canada... (136)

The presumption that such notions would not be expected from Muslim respondents points to deep-rooted biases both in the framing of the study and its execution. In concluding, Beyer argues that despite not finding any evidence of radicalization amongst his respondent groups, that does not mean “that any of *them* could not in the future be subject to it” particularly when coming in contact with what are believed to be “extremist” interpretations. (142, emphasis added) The same claim that “ultra-orthodox” praxis exposure could lead to radicalization and violence is found in the work of Bartlett, Birdwell and King (2010), despite being unfounded in the profiles and interviews used for their research. Such works, especially by non-Muslim researchers, should not only not be taken as part of the overall serious academic work on Muslims in Canada, but can and should be considered racial profiling. This is not even to mention the fact that the actual existential threat of so-called Islamic



extremism or radicalization on Canadian soil is so low as to be statistically insignificant.

Even a 2018 Government of Canada *Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada*, while also putting “Islamic terrorists” at the center of the report, makes note that the threat of Right Wing Extremism (RWE) which is tied to “anti-government and anti-law enforcement sentiment, advocacy of white nationalism and racial separation, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, anti-immigration, male supremacy (misogyny) and homophobia” remains a more significant concern in the domestic sphere comparatively. The report itself was updated on April 29, 2019 as per the Minister of Public Safety’s statement on how the terminology therein maligned specific groups. Regardless of the findings and conclusions reached, it’s clear that in research on Muslims in Canada which studied the impact of Islamophobia, challenges to the production of research on radicalization which demonizes and/or over-represents Muslims in that literature remain deficient.

The impact of Islamophobia is not the only aspect that is studied in the existing literature on Muslims in Canada, but, to a lesser degree, also **how Muslim communities have responded** to the phenomenon in the Canadian context. In *Islamophobia and the Question of Muslim Identity: The Politics of Difference and Solidarity*, Hamdon (2010) examines the work of a Muslim community group in not only developing educational resources for combatting Islamophobia but, in the process of

doing so, demonstrating the plurality of Muslim communities across the country by being forced to deal with and mitigate intra-community conflicts which arise from difference. After 9/11, Zine (2004) interviewed Muslim families in the GTA to learn about their experiences, developing the discursive foundations for an anti-Islamophobia pedagogy. Other work on this issue has focused on Muslim groups examining other religious community responses to discriminations, such as anti-Semitism, in order to derive lessons for Muslim communities responses in future. (Valerio, 2018) More work remains to be done on Islamophobia, and its regional impacts and responses - some of which is forthcoming in publication. (Valerio, EMMC 2, 2022; Al Qazzaz and Valerio, forthcoming, 2023) Notably, Mugabo (2016) has explored the caveats of Black Muslims organizing against Islamophobia while also facing anti-Blackness from intra-community lateral violence.

### *Mental Health, Youth and Family Wellness*

Muslim mental health, youth issues and family wellness are an integral part of the literature on Muslims in Canada, especially when it comes to the fields of social work and psychology.

Most recently, in the past few years, several studies in particular shed light on challenges faced by Muslim youth (Al Qazzaz and Valerio, 2020; Valerio, *I-RSS*, forthcoming) and Muslim youth and family wellness in the Greater Toronto Area (Valerio, MMC, forthcoming). The findings within both of these studies corroborate

existing literature and build upon them to create a more cohesive picture. Of note is the fact that the identity issues mentioned above are a primary finding of the literature on Muslim youth in Canada. Problems related to **conflict or dual identities** abound in the Canadian context which is corroborated in research on Muslim youth in other Western contexts. (Adam and Ward, 2016; Inspirit, 2016; NCCM, 2017; Spiegler, Wolfer and Hewstone, 2019) These issues tend to revolve around being a religious minority (Aziz, 2015; Elkasseem, Mantulak, et al 2018; Marie-Pier, Reitz, 2018; Model and Lang, 2002; Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman, 2009; Nagra, 2017; Moosa-Mitha 2009), and conflicts in parental relationships. (Aroian, Thomas et al. 2011; Aroian, Templin and Hough, 2014, 2016; Chowdhury, Glenwick and Mattson, 2015)

Family conflicts can revolve around issues of **sexuality and marriage** (Ali-Faisal, 2014, 2016, 2018; Hamdan, 2007; Valerio, MMC; Zain Al-Dien, 2010) where Muslim youth either experience distress at being unable to get married due to financial inaccessibility, limited selection of potential spouses, and excessive social, or parental expectations (Nancoo, 1993) or disagreements and abuses that arise when youth act sexually outside of the fold of orthodox Islamic parameters. (Couture-Carron, 2017) Strategies and adaptations around marriage in the Canadian context have been explored amongst South Asian Muslim communities in particular. (Qureshi, 1991; Shuraydi and Zaidi, 2002) Marital sustainability and divorce trends among Muslims

have also been explored, although the literature on this urgent topic is significantly outdated. (Hogben, 1991)

Muslim families also report **gaps in resources**, unaddressed parental and youth mental health, and a lack of non-judgmental and welcoming spaces within Muslim communities to assist with cultivating Muslim family wellness. (Bagheri, 1992; Valerio, MMC) **Barriers to access** include community stigma, a lack of Islamic-centred parenting resources, limited psycho-education for families, and a lack of adequate representation of Muslims or culturally sensitive workers in the mental health and social worker fields to assist with wellness. (Graham, 2009; Valerio, Ibid) The high costs of private therapy combined with long waiting lists for free services mean that many Muslim families are not getting the help they need while community organizations are ill-equipped to help them. Further issues with Islamophobia and the intersections of misogyny and anti-Black racism in experiences with Children's Aid Society and **protective services** have also been reported as affecting Muslim family wellness long term. In the above studies, youth and family issues with family disruption, sexual, mental and physical abuse, substance use, addiction, suicidality and apostasy have been identified.

### *Schooling/Education*

Another key theme that has arisen in the study of Muslims in Canada is issues related to **schooling and education**. Researchers have focused on experiences impacting Muslim youth in public schools, as well as examining Islamic schooling streams, and how Muslim families navigate these systems.

In 2017, the National Council of Canadians Muslims (NCCM) conducted a listening session with 31 Muslim youth in the GTA, examining what kinds of challenges they are facing, not only in their general lives (where they overwhelmingly reported the identity crises mentioned above) but also in their schooling experiences. In addition to experiencing racism, Islamophobia, bullying and a lack of accommodation at schools which did not have the advocacy body of an MSA, Muslim students reported overall alienation in their schools, particularly when hijabi or visibly Muslim, or the population of Muslims at their school was low. Other researchers have looked at the unique and often negative experiences of Black Muslim youth in public and Islamic schooling. (Ayoub and Zhou, 2016; Bigelow, 2008; Collet, 2007; Fellin, 2015; Forman, 2001)

Early history articles trace the development of Islamic schools in Canada, as well as the challenges they have faced. (Adams, 1983; Azmi, 2001; Kelly, 1999) However, more contemporary sources tend to focus on questions about options available for Muslim schools in Canada and how Muslim families navigate decisions about which options to pursue for their children's education (Ahmed, 2008), particularly as it

pertains to whether or not there is adequate religion diversity in non-Islamic schools to accommodate Muslim children. In this vein, Zine (2009) confronts the fallacies Islamic schools “ghettoize” or isolate Muslim children and myths of secular, public school neutrality. In cases of where such diversity is absent, the advocacy efforts of Canadian Muslim parents have also been assessed. (Guo, 2011, 2015; Trichur, 2003)

Recommendations have been put forth based on data acquired in large-scale quantitative work such as the 2016 Environics Study in order to develop a way forward for Muslim students experiencing Islamophobia in their schools. (Hindy, 2016) Some of the work has been quite regionally specific, focusing on public schooling controversies for Muslims in Quebec and Ontario, (Andrew, 2010, Niyozov, 2010) challenges faced by Islamic private schools in the GTA following inflammatory anti-religious schooling rhetoric in the 2007 Ontario election (Memon, 2010), how Islamic schools in Ontario socialize their students and develop their sense of Muslim identity (Zine 2004), and research on gifted Muslimah students in Alberta, looking at the roots of their experiences in schooling to determine their success as well as ascertain any challenges they faced. (Stafiej, 2012) Other examinations of the experiences of Canadian Muslimah students have been contributed by Jasmin Zine. (Zine 2006, 2008)

### *Gender*

There is an entire subset of the literature on Muslims in Canada which has a gendered focus, primarily studying Muslim women and girls from a variety of outlooks and

angles. While some of the themes in this literature have been explored above, it is worth noting what subthemes have been examined when it comes to the study of Muslim women in Canada in particular.

As one would expect, many of the themes already covered in this literature are woven through studies specific to Muslim women and girls in Canada. For example, when Islamophobia is the topic of study, the gendered angle of hyper-visibility of Muslim women (by virtue of their Islamic attire) is often a point of examination. (Ahmad, 2018; Bullock and Haque, 2010; Nagra, 2018; Zine, 2006) Oftentimes, the Islamic attire itself, especially the hijab and/or niqab are the subject of study. (Arat-Koc, 1999; Khan, 1995; Khan, 2001; Khatib, 2012; Shakeri, 2000) Examinations of the interplay between ethnic and religious identities is also often viewed through a gendered lens, (Dossa, 2009; Gibb and Rothenberg, 2000; Hamdan, 2007; Lewis 2008; Mohamed, 2003) as are studies of how Muslim women negotiate religious identities in Canada. (Ramji, 2008) Similarly, explorations of experiences in schooling and education have sometimes taken a gendered approach to shed light on the unique experiences of Muslimahs in Canada. (Hamdan, 2010; Stafiej, 2012; Zine 2006)

One area that appears to be somewhat unique to gendered studies of Muslims in Canada is work which starts from the desire to confront misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslim women, as well as clear up falsehoods about women's rights in Islam, and explore women's empowerment through religion in non-Muslim

contexts and environs. (Anum Syed and Noor, 2015; Hamdani, 2004; Khan, 1993; Khan 2000; Marcotte 2010, Ruby, 2019) The issue with such studies is that coming to the study of the lived realities of Muslimahs in Canada does not make as much room for the complexities and even contradictory existences of such woman. The presence of the non-Muslim audience and its presumed ignorance about Muslim women in Canada affects the research design, the questions asked and how they are permitted to be answered - something which, at first glance, can verge on polemical. That is not, however, the biggest danger in such a defensive approach; rather, not letting the data speak for itself means that the voices and stories of Muslim women that researchers have been entrusted with get lost. As an example, one study, in an attempt to examine the dual liminalities of Muslim women, parsed their struggles as negotiations in a third space (Khan, 1998). The author, using only two case studies of Canadian Muslim women, pitches the struggle for her identity as being between rigid Orientalism and Islamism. Not only is this reductionary and turning a complex situation into a binary issue, it is also assumed that Muslimahs themselves could not also be Islamists but only their 'victims' - a common Orientalist trope in itself. It's clear that more critical awareness is needed about the diversity of Muslimah experiences, contributions and religio-ideological locations for future work of this variety.



## **Final Thoughts and Future Research**

It is clear that a number of themes and trends in the study of Muslims in Canada have emerged in the existing academic discursive environment. While specific centers of gravity have changed over time, study in the areas of identity, integration and Islamophobia persist, as do questions of family wellness, mental health, youth studies, and schooling/education. Within all of these themes, the intersections of ethnicity, race and gender often appear as key foci.

One theme which is not represented in this literature review but has several useful resources dedicated to it is the study of Muslim community building and Islamic organizations - a subject to be covered in-depth in future I-RSS work. Beside this, it is worth noting some of the clear gaps in the existing literature, recognizing that every effort has been made to expand search terms and cross relevant disciplinary lines to examine as much of the existing work as possible.

The literature review reveals that there are significant gaps in research within the aforementioned themes. Firstly, the literature can lack a class-based or economic lens when looking at identity negotiations, barriers to mental health and the challenges that youth and families face. Class was an angle most often taken in integration studies; however, because notions of belonging were not also applied to work where economic participation was significant, it's unclear at this point whether

or not economic growth and integration truly signifies integration for Muslim communities in Canada.

Second, in looking at other intersectional approaches, it is clear that more work remains to be done in the quantitative study of Black Muslims in Canada in general, but especially of non-Somali Black Muslims in particular, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Third and finally, notably muted in this literature review, as well as the cache of resources available in general, is a richly developed historiography as it pertains to Muslim communities' histories regionally across Canada. History and heritage work on Muslims in Canada seems to be another area where future research holds much promise.

In this article, before delving into the overall themes and trends found in the existing literature review, an overview of the types of data on Muslims in Canada was provided. The literature review took a holistic approach in consideration of the work of all types of data in the field of Muslims in Canada. The review, then, concluded with a discussion on the gaps in the research and the underrepresentation of other important themes in the data.

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