

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

HAIDEH MOGHISSI, SAEED RAHNEMA, and MARK J. GOODMAN, *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, x + 216 pp., index.

Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond provides a thought-provoking account of the experiences of immigrants from Muslim societies. This commendable text sheds light on the diverse and heterogeneous nature of the Muslim diaspora and the structural barriers this population faces upon arrival in their new host countries. Moghissi, Rahnema, and Goodman specifically examine four communities in Canada – Afghans, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Palestinians. The authors theorize that individuals who originate from Muslim-majority countries appear to be systematically discriminated against, feared, and hated more than other racialized minority groups in the West. While Canada seems to provide the most hospitable environment in comparison to the other regions discussed in the book, Canada continues to be marred by discriminatory attitudes and practices that lead to exclusionary and isolating realities for the newly arrived immigrant.

The authors effectively challenge the mainstream Western notion of a homogeneous “Muslim” by pointing to the diverse nature of these citizens and arguing that it is a mistake to connect their experience entirely to Islam. National origin, political attitude, ethnicity, culture, social class, gender and many other factors divide and separate immigrants from majority-Muslim societies. By one account, highlighted in the text, Muslims in Canada originate from more than eighty-five countries and comprise myriad ethno-racial and linguistic groups. Yet, the authors note that Muslims unlike any other migrant group continue to be defined by religion alone. In an effort to break down stereotypes of the “Other” or “outsider,” the authors maintain that religious attachment or fundamentalism does not unite Muslims into a single, homogeneous group. Since 9/11, sentiments rooted in muslimphobia have increased resulting in the social construction of a prototypical Muslim through a process of racialization. One of the reoccurring themes of this text is that the negative identity markers associated with Western notions of the “Muslim” or the “Islamic” are inappropriate not least of all because of the multifaceted character of this population of people.

Against this backdrop the authors’ fundamental argument is that hostile attitudes in the various countries which Muslim individuals immigrate to result in a failed integration process that inevitably leads to the withdrawal of minorities from mainstream society. The diminished sense of belonging and the absence of larger networks of social support are both central to the creation of new identities which assist individuals in finding their footing in communities linked to their heritage. Moghissi et al. theorize that religious identification may become a new means for

expressing political and cultural solidarity with people in similar circumstances, thus demonstrating resistance to discriminatory and racist practices in the host country. Their research provides evidence for this phenomenon in the many people who declared that they either became increasingly religious upon arrival in their new country or went from non-religious to religious in the face of new challenges and obstacles. Ultimately the authors' findings indicate that social integration in any of the countries studied, including Canada, remains an illusive reality for individuals migrating from Muslim-majority countries.

The reality is that the failure of Canada to integrate Muslim immigrants into the social fabric of Canadian society has a tremendous impact not just on the migrants themselves but on the Canadian population as a whole. The text elucidates that change in policy is required. The authors provide thoughtful and intelligent discussion on what needs to occur. They suggest that policy-makers need to halt the politically driven privileging of the conservative religious Muslim elite who are the minority and stop disregarding the fundamental social, economic, political and cultural needs of the majority. The authors advocate pursuing anti-racist multicultural policies. These policies should work to dismantle colonial mentalities and practices that lead to the exclusion of certain social groups thereby creating diasporas and ethnic enclaves. They contend that in order to achieve the above goals a fundamental shift must take place whereby the homogenization and Othering of the Muslim population ceases to continue. Finally, aspirations for integration in Canada should be targeted at every level, allowing the hope of a decent life to be realized by the many migrants who come here with this dream. The authors conclude that if action is not taken, there is a risk that vulnerable people living on the margins of society will be more susceptible to isolating behaviours and practices and hostile attitudes, which may be characterized as religious fundamentalism.

The strengths in this text are many. With a well-researched foundation, an effective and thoughtful methodological approach and a succinct argument Moghissi et al. expertly and skillfully educate their readership on the fundamental issues facing Muslim migrants and their host countries today. This text offers vital information and important implications for the policy arena. The authors' mixed-method approach which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods was essential in shaping the extensive and high quality of the research. They sought to engage the research participants as partners in research as opposed to objects of research. Through interviews and focus groups the researchers provided an outlet for the voices of the research participants to be heard, many of whom occupy a marginalized status in society. The formal questionnaires allowed for a broader research base to be targeted and included in this study. Because of the structure and content of the comparative analysis and study sample, the text draws on a back and forth momentum that highlights similarities and differences between groups and regions. Furthermore, it draws on detailed statistical figures to demonstrate research results and findings. Perhaps the most prominent critique of this text is that due to the use of so much statistical data, readers must remain actively engaged. The way in which the vast amount of statistical data is presented interrupts the flow of the writing at times. Ultimately, this book is interdisciplinary in that it appeals to scholars whose interests include social inequality, development policies and practices; and the intersections of race, class and gender.

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