

Book Review: Producing Islam(s) in Canada: On Knowledge, Positionality and Politics, Amélie Barras, Jennifer A. Selby, and Melanie Adrian, eds. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2022.

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In the edited volume, *Producing Islam(s) in Canada: On Knowledge, Positionality and Politics*, Amélie Barras, Jennifer A. Selby and Melanie Adrian offer a useful and timely compendium of academic research related to Islam and Muslims in the Canadian context. The editors engage scholars and scholarship from various disciplines to chart recent trends and key issues in knowledge production as it pertains to Islam(s) and Muslims, with a specific focus on how this has taken shape in Canada. These three editors approach the subject as scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds; Barras is currently in a law and society program while Selby and Adrian are both trained in anthropology. All three editors research and write at various intersections of law, lived religiosity and politics as influenced by the state. The editors identify themselves as ‘white, perceived-Christian, cisgender, settler, tenured women’ (p. 10). While it is curious that none of the editors corrected the notion of ‘perceived-Christian’ by identifying their religious affiliation, as Muslim or otherwise, this decision becomes clearer through the content of the text itself where the examination of the ‘insider-outsider’ debate on positionality and its connection to researching marginalized communities surfaces.

In the introductory chapter, Barras, Selby, and Adrian outline the specific questions this volume seeks to address. They dissect the process of knowledge through questions such as: “How is knowledge produced? Which methods are most commonly used? Which funding sources enable this production? When has knowledge about Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada been produced most prolifically? How do political contexts influence the directions of research? Who produces different kinds of research or is seen as authorized to do so? And how do these scholars shape the directions knowledge takes and the questions that are posed?” (p.6). This line of inquiry highlights details that surface in the text through the dialogue between and within the chapters. One further question that surfaces for us is, what is the intention of such research? How does it benefit or harm Muslims?

The editors offer a further goal for the text: to reflect on the past while exploring new directions for the study of Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada. They begin with the assumption that Muslims are not only ‘increasingly surveilled by the state’, but so too by academic research. The editors make their theoretical orientations clear by situating this text in the Orientalist and post-modernist

traditions, which seek to complicate notions of academic research as objective and make plain the ways in which geopolitical ends may be served by academic means. “Knowledge production is central to what we do in the academy. It is political, it is positioned, and it requires examination” (p. 3). The very first lines of this volume make a clear statement about the necessity of this text. The use of the ‘postmodern punctuation’ (s) indicates their approach to considering ‘the breadth and multiplicity of Islam’. Indeed, through the chapters and conversations presented in this book, the editors successfully capture the broad landscape of literature in the study of Canadian Muslims and Islam, while engaging the reader in deeper questions related to how Islam(s) and Muslims are constructed, produced and wielded in the scholarship.

The text is organized into four thematic sections, 1: Examining Knowledge Production on Islam, 2: Charting the Study of Islam(s) and Muslims in Canada, 3: Positioning Selves and 4: Future Trends. Each section offers multiple chapters which approach the central theme from different directions, and with differing conclusions. The underlying approach of the editors uncovers the complex interplay between research, the researcher and those researched.

Section one presents four pieces that examine knowledge production of Islam and Muslims. Amir-Moazami’s exploration of the ‘Muslim Question’ in Europe is a curious choice to begin a volume dedicated to the study of Muslim and Islam(s) in Canada. However, Amir-Moazami deftly sets the stage for comparison across European and Canadian contexts, highlighting the geopolitical realities related to securitization and integration of Muslims and the so-called ‘Muslim Question’. By examining the epistemic frameworks that allow researchers to categorize Muslims onto a spectrum of normality-deviance, where normality becomes assimilation, Amir-Moazami identifies academics as often complicit in the construction of the Muslim as the essentialized Other. Hughes’ piece expands this complicity to include funding bodies who determine which research projects will receive financial support. While Hughes stops short of suggesting an explicit ‘agenda’ per se, he clearly demonstrates that knowledge production about Islam in Canada is neither a neutral nor unobstructed academic endeavour.

The second section presents six discussions beginning with a retrospective on qualitative literature from 1997 to 2017 – providing a historical and social context for the research that has been conducted on Islam and Muslims in Canada. The third section on “Positioning selves” highlights the works of Muslim academics and the role of one’s own identity as an insider or outsider. With the focus on future trends, the final section delves into approaches to studying Muslims, and possible directions for future study.

One gripping component of the volume is the absorbing conclusions of each section. In interviews with leading scholars such as Lara Deeb, Anver Emon, Karim H. Karim, Abdie Kazemipur, Jasmin Zine and Katherine Bullock, many larger questions are raised about who is engaging with the scholarship on Muslims and Islam(s) in Canada, how scholars must be cognizant of the politics of representation (i.e. the near-obligatory requirement that certain stereotypes be dispelled in order to address Islamophobia) and the ‘flattening’ of the experiences of Islam and Muslims into bite-sized pieces for digestible consumption by mainstream (read: white, Christian) Canada. These chapters demonstrate how scholarship can contribute to public discourse and opinion on the presence of Muslims in Canada.

The volume offers a scan of key themes and issues present in the research, while examining from a ‘meta’ lens how research about Muslims has evolved. As mentioned in the text ‘the treatment of Canada is marginal and overshadowed by the American experience of being Muslim’; the Canadian context and realities of settler colonialism rooted in Christianity, the presence of violent and mundane Islamophobia and securitization of Muslims, as well as diversity within the Canadian Muslim population are effectively explored with depth and nuance. For example, Sharify-Funk and Sparke’s chapter on Sufism and the interview with Karim H. Karim discussing Ismaili Muslims, present narratives of Muslims and Islam(s) that are often left out of mainstream dialogues and the academic study of Islam in Canada. The surprising mixture of authors/perspectives and approaches make what might otherwise be a heavy lift, an engaging and thought-provoking read.

Within these conversations they highlight the diversity of thought and dispel (both in content and in presence of diversity of authorship) the notion of a monolithic Islam and quintessential Muslim figure (or in this case, research subject). With this bird's eye view of the current scholarly landscape, this volume is a necessary read for anyone interested in conducting research with or about Muslims in Canada. As Muslim women engaged in in the academy and researching the experiences of Muslims, we find this a necessary volume which serves as a concise yet thorough introduction to the landscape of academic literature regarding Muslims in Canada.

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