

# What does it mean to be a Muslim in Canada today?

A dialogue, discussion and book launch hosted by Simon Fraser University Woodward's on Thursday, March 3 from 7-9 PM.

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Any identity is a complex thing. To be a Muslim in post 9-11 Canada, is particularly complex. In a new collection of essays, [The Relevance of Islamic Identity in Canada](#) (Mawenzi House, Toronto, 2015), a group of Canadian authors grapples with idea of Islamic Identity.

What does it mean to be a Muslim in Canada? Is it a public identity, and as an identity is it compatible with a secular democracy such as Canada?

What relation does it bear to historical, cultural, and ethnic identities? Is a total gnostic or an atheist a Muslim? Is a person who disavows being a Muslim still a Muslim?

How do Muslims cope with anti-Muslim bigotry, especially when it goes "official"? What alterations in society and religious practice and what re-thinking of interpretation can one expect in its evolution? These are some of the questions posed on the book jacket.

At the [dialogue, discussion and book launch](#) being hosted at Simon Fraser University Woodward's on Thursday, March 3 from 7-9 PM; editor Nurjehan Aziz from Toronto and three of the authors, Ameen Merchant from Vancouver, Safia Fazlul from Toronto and Mohamed Abualy Alibhai from Vancouver/ Seattle, will articulate their thoughts about Islamic Identity and engage with the audience in a discussion hosted by Zool Suleman.

The collection of essays fall into three broad categories: identity/memoir journeys; dissections of Islamophobia and state/media power; and identity projects/future trajectories.

Of the three authors the essays by Safia Fazlul "An Incompetent Muslim" and Ameen Merchant "Identity Fragments" fall in to the first group, while Mohamed Abualy Alibhai's essay "The Future of Islam in Canada" clearly tries to chart out a forward looking trajectory for faith in Canada.

Safia Fazlul notes in her opening essay, how she found her identity as a Muslim questioned post 9-11.

She writes: "Ever since 9-11, I find I've been questioned more about being Muslim than ever before. Many of the non-Muslim Canadians who question me seem to feel entitled to my opinion about Islam and terrorism, as though I owe them an explanation for choosing my faith that is inherently "evil", "violent" and "un-Canadian."

"From my own experience and what I hear from other Muslims, I find that this is the subtle but glaring form of discrimination that Muslims face in Canada."

For Ameen Merchant, he is a Muslim and so much more. In his essay, he writes: "Notions of cultural and communal "otherness" are first and always imposed from without. It is a difference articulated for you without consent or explanation, an imposition that both silences and defines the place and space of your being, even if that being is not how one sees oneself."

For both Fazlul and Merchant, Muslim identity is individual and complex. Merchant concludes his essay with the line, "I am a Muslim. But I am also not just a Muslim."

Mohamed Abualy Alibhai's essay is different from the others in the collection in that it is more scholarly in its approach and more risky in its predictions of how the notion of being Muslim in North America will evolve over the next few decades.

This is an understandable approach for someone who has a PhD in Islamic Philosophy from Harvard University and who was a professor at McGill University in the mid 1980's. Alibhai's essay argues that the "American principle of liberty of conscience will inevitably compel conscientious Muslims in Canada and America to question their belief in the verbal revelation of the Quran, and that this questioning will prompt them to conceptualize and build a new denomination drawing inspiration from the hitherto neglected conscience-based enlightenment traditions of Islam."

In a fast-paced journey through the American Bill of Rights, differences in how Europe and North America deal with nationalism/citizenship, and an exploration of how the Quran is reconceptualised, Alibhai weaves together an argument that is rigorous and compelling. It is an essay that he is now turning into a book length project.

This event promises to add more dimensions to discussions about Islamic identity in Canada today. It is being sponsored and hosted by SFU Vancity Office of Community Engagement, SFU Centre for Dialogue, SFU Institute for Humanities, Mawenzi House, MARU, and the Vancouver Observer.