

Book Review

## Muslim Families in North America

*By Earle H. Waugh, Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban, and Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (eds.). Calgary: The University of Alberta Press, 1991, 369 pp.*

The writers contributing their researches to this book deal with an area that has not yet been adequately studied. Most of the literature on Muslims is historically or politically oriented and views immigrant Muslims in North America as extensions of their homelands, in particular the Middle East. This book discusses Muslim families as part of the pluralistic and ever-changing social fabric of the United States and Canada. The families of African-American Muslims and Muslim converts are not studied. We are going to present our critique chapter by chapter.

*Muslim Normative Traditions and the North American Environment (Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban).*

The clear and workable typology of Muslim immigrant families presented here points out major social patterns and links to Islam. They are divided into three cohorts based on "the dynamic interaction between social conditions and group characteristics" (p. 7): pioneer (nineteenth century to WWII); transitional (post-WWII to 1967); and differential (1968 to present). Different generations within each cohort are examined. African-American Muslims are excluded, as their case is unique.

The first cohort lived in an era of total conformity to a sociocultural milieu dominated by the English language and Christianity. This cohort's second generation assumed a more conformist role due to its disadvantaged social status, distance from its original home and culture, and lack of financial resources and ethnic institutions. Inter-marriage with the wider society was high. Ironically, all of this "generated the particular disdain of the newest Muslim immigrants," who arrived after 1976 (p. 18).

The transitional cohort consists mainly of foreign students from well-established indigenous elite families who had been Europeanized before their arrival. As a postcolonial generation, they saw nationalism, not religion, as a valuable means for development and social change. They inter-married with North Americans at a higher rate than their predecessors. The second generation of this cohort, along with the third generation of the pioneers, experienced the most discrimination and media stereotyping.

The differential cohort assumed an anti-assimilationist position, for members came from a very diverse range of Muslim countries and at a time when their homelands were assuming more geopolitical importance. Local development was bringing forth both positive and negative fruits, and, most importantly, the revival of Islamic pride and the conviction that Islam could solve all problems was growing. This group stressed such Islamic norms as *halāl* food and women's dress code, which put them in a less structured normative situation as regards assimilation. Interestingly, this cohort tends to differentiate itself not only from non-Muslims but also from other Muslims based on their practice of Islam. It was the first cohort to enjoy widely available Muslim institutions. With the increasing plurality of North American society, their children "are less likely to find themselves relegated to ethno-religious silence and they are more likely to find others who share similar (minority) world views" (p. 25).

This cohort is the largest and has markedly different aspirations and a distinct worldview. Such an orientation has heightened worries among past cohorts, for it threatens their strategy of survival. In addition, it is believed that this cohort could damage the relations so laboriously built by earlier cohorts with the wider society. Now Muslim families in North America must, for the first time, deal with accommodation and adjustment within the community. If these internal divisions do not become polarized between competitive and confrontational settings, it would make the need to maintain distinctive identities undebatable.

This fascinating chapter is based largely on "extensive contact with this community over almost three decades" (p. 7), in addition to using census data and interviews. The ideas offered are reasonable hypotheses that need more research. As a final note, the introduction explains how Muslims understand Islamic teachings on the family. Although this presentation is very good, the title, "Islamic Teachings on the Family," is inappropriate, for it makes it appear that the current cultural understanding of the teachings is absolute. Also, it mentions that the Islamic family system is "embedded in patriarchy" (p. 8), a controversial statement, and describes *mahr* (bride gift) as "bride price," a very poor translation (p. 9).

#### *The Muslim Family: The Scriptural Framework (Saleem Qureshi).*

This chapter is critical to the book, for it was to offer a framework defining the boundaries within which every aspect of the Muslim family fits. This goal was not realized due to three methodological weaknesses: 1) point-of-time and place references are not clear; 2) confusion over whether the chapter discusses the typology of religion in regard to family (ideological-linguistic) or social reality and how people interact within the textual meanings of scripture; and 3) references are limited and selective.

First, given that the scriptures were revealed in a human language, elements of time and place are of prime importance. Languages develop over time, as does the application of scriptural statements seeking to fulfill the goal of such rulings and teachings in reference to the objective circumstances at the time of revelation. Qureshi ignores these points, for he does not discuss how the scriptures were understood and applied in the past, their relation to contemporary life, or the development of textual understanding over time. He rather mixes eras without distinction and does not explore how different cultures interacted with various meanings.

Second, the chapter does not connect the scriptures' typology with social reality. For example, in "Monogamy Versus Polygamy," Qureshi cites Maxime Rodinson, Ahmed Ali, Muhammad Ali, Marmaduke Pickthall, and Muhammad Husayn Haykal (pp. 43-45). With the exception of Pickthall, the others focus on the textual meaning and make no attempt to reflect social reality. Only Pickthall's interpretation might leave an impact on reality, for English-speaking Muslims have few references on Islam. But Pickthall's connection to social reality is limited to a geographic-linguistic segment of Muslims. Thus the discussion is rather an exploration of the typology of Islam on polygamy as understood by some modern writers.

In "Rights and Duties," we find a history of bedouin attitudes rather than those of Islam and Muslims. Qureshi then proceeds to generalize his findings: "In short, in a Muslim family, the female has a subordinate role, and it remains arguable whether that role is inferior or not" (p. 51). The entire discussion is remote from contemporary Muslim reality, especially in North America. This type of dichotomy is a major feature of the chapter.

Third, the author's use of Islamic resources is problematic, for he cites only a few sources. There is no analysis of a single legal school's views on family matters or a comparative study of what the different schools have to say. Furthermore, the direct scriptural meanings and their English interpretations are mixed with sporadic legal opinions from various legal texts, thereby depriving the scriptural text of all of its possible interpretations. No *fiqhī* typology on the family is drawn, nor is a single issue exhaustively researched and discussed.

Selectivity is another problem. Qureshi uses only the hadith collections of imams Bukhārī and Muslim and al Khaṭīb al Tabrīzī's *Mishkāt al Masābiḥ* (p. 34). Choosing the *Mishkāt* is problematic, for most of its hadiths are not authentic and the book is not "widely accepted" as the author claims. Nor is it accepted as a legitimate source for *fiqhī* rulings, which consider individual hadiths and not the entire book. Thus, "accepted" means prevalent and used by imams and leaders. This choice

could have been justified if the book had been used to discuss the social adaptation of scriptural meanings and not the legal framework.

Qureshi says: "The main explanations for *fikh* are collected in the *fatāwa* of Imam Fakhruddin Hassan Bin Mansur al-Uzjandi al-Farghani, known as Kazee Khan, who was a famous Hanafī mufti and scholar and compiler of juristic works and commentaries of Hanafī *fikh*" (p. 34). But, despite its presumed prominence, is not a "mother" book of Hanafī *fiqh*.

Restricting *fiqhī* opinion to the Hanafī school does not do justice to the proposed framework. As this school was not operative in all Muslim societies, the issues of place and culture are again encountered. Moreover, the Hanafī school was rather large and internally diverse. For example, Muḥammad al Shaybānī and Abū al Hassan al Karkhī often disagreed with Abū Hanīfah (in two-thirds of the latter's *fatāwā*, as some remarked). It is possible that it remained one school only because of its semiadoption by the 'Abbāsīd state. What concerns us here is that there are variations in Hanafī opinion that are dismissed by the author.

Equally important is the fact that the contributions of influential independent or semi-independent scholars who had an impact on the theoretical formation and on the lives of their contemporaries are ignored. Such scholars had a distinctive importance, for they opposed the stagnant status quo and because some succeeded in galvanizing the public. Overlooking such contributions does a disservice to the attempted framework.

The chapter falls short in using original sources. Imām al Bukhārī is cited four times, Imām Muslim eleven times, *Mishkāt* six times, *Fatawa-i-Kazee Khan* six times, and Shukri's *Muhammadan Law of Marriage and Divorce* twenty times. Shukri's work is cited as the final authority and the unequivocal ruling in the case, as if his work stands for a monolithic set of *fatāwā* in Islam! On a related note, there is confusion over references. We read "cited in Shukri" but do not know the original source (pp. 35, 37, and 38). When *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is cited, sometimes there are two numbers for the page and hadith, and at other times there is one. In the latter case, one reads what sounds like a *fiqhī* ruling instead of a hadith (pp. 41, 61, and 63). It is up to the reader to discover that it was the translator's commentary that was cited and not the hadith. This raises the issue of mixing the scripture's textual meaning, its ability to transcend specific circumstances, and an understanding tied to a specific time and place.

The author offers a problematic understanding of the place of hadith in *fiqh* when he claims that Abū Hanīfah "made no use of hadith in the elaboration of his *fikh*" (p. 33). In fact, he did use hadith, but his criteria for reliability did not coincide later with the work of major hadith compilers. What concerned him and other *fuqahā'* was how to integrate the hadith with the Qur'an.

The chapter does not a) provide the promised framework, b) describe the past, c) hold true for the present, or d) lay the foundation for a fresh understanding of the contemporary North American family or its future.

*North America and the Adaptation of the Muslim Tradition: Religion, Ethnicity, and the Family* (Earle H. Waugh).

Waugh states that the focal points for Muslim adaptation in North America are religion and ethnicity. This implies that economic and political factors are subsumed under culture, which is expressed along ethnic lines. According to symbol theory, religion is viewed not along faith lines but is considered "as an underlying system of sacred values and cultural directives that orient the believer in a fundamental way" (p. 70).

What is most interesting is the analysis of three interrelated dimensions of the adaptation process, two of which are contrary to most Islamist arguments and one that is absent from their literature. They are: "First: there are a number of religio-cultural factors in North America that aid Muslims in adapting. Second, there are certain critical differences between Canada and the United States that are relevant to the Muslim process of adaptation. Finally, ethnicity has a considerable impact on the adaptation process" (p. 72).

In elaborating on the first dimension, it is argued that Islam views North American culture with favor because of its positive position regarding the relation between state and religion. Despite the legal separation of church and state, religion plays an important role in shaping the basis of North American culture.

In contrast to Muslim writings emphasizing North America's hedonistic culture, this chapter points to pro-Islamic elements in the culture. If we accept this, then it is up to Muslims to adapt in a positive way. Waugh contends that they are doing this. Citing Ismā'īl al Fārūqī, he says that "Muslims have to develop a personal vision of the meaning of life in America, particularly solutions that do not betray the essence of the faith" (p. 78). I would add that unless Muslims do more than justify their presence in North America on economic and political reasons, and unless they envision the objective possibility of creating their own niche from which they can make a positive contribution to the ummah, they will view North America as a threat rather than an advantage and act accordingly.

While discussing differences between the United States and Canada in relation to the adaptation of Muslims, Waugh notes that Canada's national identity is very much structured around respect for the law and moral responsibility towards the community. These concepts mesh very well with the corporate identity of Muslims and with the sense that truth

is experienced through law and a "system of rights and responsibilities rather than in creeds and statements of faith" (p. 84).

Furthermore, Canada is free of the spiritual patriotism and the fervor of civil religion found in the United States. This allows Muslims who live in Canada to bypass any sense of identity conflict. Ironically, despite Canada's acknowledged multiculturalism, the fact that no indigenous religious groups, other than the old well-established ones, have spread to Canada may mean that the United States is more receptive to Islam.

Ethnicity, internal differential factors within Muslim groups, and differentiation between Muslims and the larger society are also discussed. Islamic literature usually ignores the potent impact of ethnicity on Muslims, for this is seen as "un-ummatic" in pure idealistic terms. Waugh states that "ethnicity is only an imperfect tool in uncovering the meanings of Muslim family life in North America" (p. 91). He mentions that stressing ethnicity represents, at times, a strategy used by families to assert religious convictions.

But it should be noted that this strategy is a double-edged sword, for while it may justify maintaining and reflecting some religious meanings and attitudes, it might impede the development of culturally meaningful Islamic feelings and attitudes and so lead Muslims to an isolated existence in alien enclaves or ghettos without financial power.

*Islamic Identity, Family and Community: The Case of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Muslims (Fariyal Ross-Sheriff and Azim Nanji).*

This qualitative study puts forth a fine methodology for studying ethnic groups with distinct belief systems. It calls for a methodology that examines the dynamic interaction of a group's historical experience with its core religious values, all of which shape their identity in a new cultural context. The study departs from the traditional model, "for it polarizes the incoming and host cultures into an either-or dichotomy" and overlooks how the ethnic group "draws upon their religious tradition as well as modernity to shape new forms of organization and provide an equilibrium upon which to build their lives" (102). It also does not proceed from the Eurocentric view of tradition as an obstacle to progress and individual freedom, but rather asserts that tradition has the "capacity to provide stability while at the same time it is in continuous influx" (p. 105).

With such a sound theoretical framework, the chapter proceeds in examining the Ismā'īlī family as well as its cultural adjustment and institutions that have been built by these immigrants. However the study does not present any supporting data, as it mainly hinges around what the authors themselves say about the group being studied.

*The Muḥarram Majlis: The Role of a Ritual in the Preservation of Shi'a Identity* (Vernon Schubel).

The chapter studies the Shi'a Muḥarram Majlis as practiced at Toronto's Zaynabiyah Hall. It focuses on the ritual's role in preserving Shi'a identity since, as a family activity, it socializes children at an early age. By its powerful symbolism and emotional content, this majlis reaffirms the stated facts of the incident of Karbalā' and allows individual and communal access to the "root paradigms" of Shi'a culture. The chapter draws a clear picture of emotional Twelver Shi'ism in the "personal allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad and his family" (p. 120). The author does not concern himself with how traditional or authentic this ritual is, nor does he discuss to what degree it fits into the American context. Instead, he focuses on how the metaphysical concepts and practices contribute to the stability and growth of Shi'a identity.

*Parents and Youth: Perceiving and Practicing Islam in North America* (Nimat Hafez Barazanji).

This study of first-generation immigrant children and their parents focuses on integration into American society at the conceptual, rather than the social, level. It examines the "effects of preconception of identity on both the adjustment process of immigrant parents and the transmission of identity to his or her children" (p. 133). In regard to the integration process, the study differentiates between social (i.e., behavioral) and conceptual (i.e., worldview) modification. Barazanji argues that conceptual integration is more lasting than social integration (p. 133) and that it is possible to maintain the centrality of *tawḥīd* and its practical implications and "objectify" it in a western secular environment without compartmentalization or withdrawal from society (pp. 143, 145). The analysis uses an Islamic-Arabic integration model, developed by the author, that consists of *tawḥīd*, *'ibādāt*, *mu'āmalāt*, and *a'māl* (pp. 146-47).

The study contends that social assimilation is a function of a more basic dimension: conceptual accommodation. It is suggested that by managing people's conceptual structure, the way they envision reality, and their beliefs concerning the nature of knowledge, a successful integration into American society can be made by the parents and the children.

A questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions and participant observation-investigation was used. The sample is small, which causes the author to state that, at this point, the study "can be only suggestive" (p. 144). The approach is vital and highly promising and has the potential of producing valuable guidelines for Muslim communities on many levels: educational, organizational, sociopolitical, and academic research.

*Marriage and Divorce among Muslims in Canada (W. Murray Hogben).*

This chapter is an extensive record of the attitudes of Muslim leaders on marriage and divorce. Leaders of different viewpoints were interviewed, and statistics were taken from the 1981 Canadian census. The issues investigated were parent participation in children's marriage decisions (arranged marriages); exogamy out of the Muslim community for both men and women and possible conversion before marriage; marriage across Muslim sectarian divisions; and marriages across ethnic lines.

Although the chapter does not contain much sociological analysis, it peeks into the community's concerns and attitudes about marriage and divorce. When citing the Qur'an, he uses inserted square brackets with phrases of his own to put the verse in context. This was quite helpful.

*Marriage Strategies among Muslims from South Asia (Regula Burckhardt Qureshi).*

This study focuses on marriage among Muslim South Asians living in North America. This is not seen as a traditional process, but rather one of conscious "social engineering" in which the community tries to achieve consistency and social continuity within its socioreligious configuration.

The study is an impressive account of traditional marriage, customarily called "arranged marriage." It considers a whole set of factors that are dynamic in this community and demonstrate how they construct a certain way of marriage. The study departs from the standard practice of presenting the individual based-marriage as the ideal and the arranged marriage as an oppressive or irrational practice. It does not, however, overlook the deferential roles, expectations, and socialization of young men and women in this Muslim society. The study shows clearly how marriage is a process of social engineering "designed to reproduce the family and the socio-cultural matrix it requires for survival" (p. 189).

Looking at marriage as a family and a community project, the study delineates parental goals for their children and the ways in which daughters and sons are socialized to insure the successful execution of such a project. The complex criteria for choosing partners, which is mostly endogamous, and options to choose from the home country or the local community are discussed. Finally, the author demonstrates how such a marriage tradition is being adapted and modified within the new American environment.

I hope that this study alerts researchers to the inadequacy of using the term "arranged marriage." As I suggested in my thesis, there are at least three distinctive methods of marriage that are usually described under the term "arranged": "The Joint Venture Type," where both parents and children actively participate in the selection process; "The Delegation

Type," where children (young men) tell their parents what type of wife they want and the parents try to meet these conditions; and "The Planned Type," where parents plan the whole process and consider many family and community variables.

*Family Stability among African-American Muslims (Naim Akbar).*

This chapter begins with promising methodological notes on studying the African-American Muslim family: it suggests that all such studies should take into account the experience and sociohistorical factors of the African-American community. Unfortunately, the main body of the article only illustrates how the African-American Muslim leadership emphasized the importance of the family in an individual's life and how they viewed some family issues. Views of African-American leaders (Elijah Muhammad, W. D. Muhammad, Imam Nuri Muhammad) on family affairs and roles are cited, and an attempt is made to trace the development of those ideas across time.

The analysis is closer to thoughtful reflections than a systematic study. The chapters tells nothing, except by implication, about the "family stability" of African-American Muslims.

*Muslims in North America: Mate Selection as an Indicator of Change (Ilyas Ba-Yunus).*

This study tries to anticipate change in Muslims living in the United States through mate selection preferences among young people. The sample group was drawn from large universities with the help of local Muslim student associations. Three main issues of Islamic marriage were tapped: premarital contact, parental authority and roles in marriage, and *mahr*. Findings indicate that subjects showed strong affiliation with Islamic practices as regards marriage, especially when shifting from the perceived to the ideal roles. This is one of the first empirical studies on Muslim families to use a minimum rigorous or sensitive technique. Thus, as Ba-Yunus states, it is "exploratory in nature" (p. 246).

*Yemeni and Lebanese Muslim Immigrant Women in Michigan (Barbara C. Aswad).*

This article is the result of the author's participant observation study of women's life in an Arab Muslim community in Dearborn, Michigan. She discusses the migration pattern and the evolution of the community for each group, as well as women's role at home and in public, employment outside the home, health, and community support. It is a careful study that shows great sensitivity, insight, and understanding of the dynamics in the Arab Muslim community. Although her analysis adheres to

the feminist line, with its attendant negative attitude towards religion, she does recognize the positive outcomes of some traditional ethnic responses to such social problems as drug use, poverty, and crime.

One of the highlights of this study is its successful integration of the diversity of factors affecting the community, including the conditions in their homeland.

*Palestinian-American Muslim Women: Living on the Margins of Two Worlds (Louise Cainkar).*

This chapter examines the life experiences of Palestinian women born or raised in Chicago, Illinois. It uses the participant observation method to collate group members' recollections. In defending this methodology, Cainkar claims that the "fact that the experiences described by respondents were remarkably similar, despite variations in economic status and the fact that respondents grew up in relative isolation from each other, attest to the validity and significance of these recollections" (p. 282).

Cainkar analyzes the early socialization of Palestinian children, when they gradually discover that they are "different," as mediated through different home language and food. The jokes and remarks of other children intensified group members' desire to show that they were the same, a desire that they acted upon. Also dealt with are early childhood socialization as regards the different patterns for boys and girls.

It is pointed out that during their teenage years, the children's feelings of being different shifted from being based on ethnicity and gender to the "discovery that they were different from everybody" (p. 287). This shocking realization was mediated through carrying the burden of preserving family honor and the markedly different expected patterns of male-female relations, all of which were suddenly imposed upon them after puberty.

The author notes insightfully that it is the stage-related family rules that produce conflict. As children, both sexes were socialized in a way that allowed them to fit easily into the American society and to internalize most of its values. Problems arose when they were required to totally differentiate themselves in conduct, appearance, and relations. This is one reason why they became marginalized, standing on the borders of two cultures without belonging to either one (p. 289). This salient analysis highlights a crucial issue in raising "minority" children: assuring a particular behavior while minimizing conflict with the environment.

Cainkar refuses to consider that mere migration is a liberating force, as some studies suggest. On the contrary, other studies show that "migration from Third World countries may actually result in losses of status and personal freedom for women" (p. 291).

It should be noted that analyses of the situation of Muslim women, even in the traditional and restrictive settings, often fail to see the whole picture. While artificial limitations placed on women in the personal realm are undeniable, one cannot discard the security, life sustenance, and stability that these provide to a woman and her children. This poses epistemological questions, where the emphasis is on "personal" and "choice-multiplicity" freedoms or "holistic" freedom. In that regard, while the chapter accurately describes the process of producing marginality and the dynamics of gender differentiation, it still maintains the western posture of considering any differential treatment, regardless of goal, as a tool of "control" designed to perpetuate the patriarchal system, rather than in the context of division of labor and whether it is fair or not.

Interestingly, girls with a traditional upbringing, confused identity, and quasi-Islamic practices imposed on them who were trained in the American system come to develop an ethnic pride that leads them to re-discover Islam, especially after exposure to the western defamation of Islam and their culture. These girls, unlike those boys who did not suffer as intense an identity conflict, later on become active in community organizations. In the final analysis, marginality paid off.

Finally, it should be noted that the chapter demonstrated that participant observation methodology could explore dimensions that hardly could be tapped by other approaches.

*Reflections on Islamic Tradition, Women, and Family (Marilyn Robinson Waldman).*

This final chapter is well placed, for it describes the diversity of approaches and areas of focus that future research could take. It asks horizon-expansive questions that point to the many dynamic factors in Muslim life and the many operating contexts. Studies could hinge on such different variables as class, education, occupation, ethnicity, and minority status.

Another challenging question concerns the value of the "distinction many Muslims are making between Muslims and Islamic" (p. 310). This is a major area of difference as regards Muslim and western research. Traditional Muslim literature is mostly apologetic and occupied with Islamic ideals, which prevents its authors from analyzing and realizing the reality of the subject matter. While such quasi-scientific approaches impose the ideal on the real, western research almost totally ignores the centrality of Islamic ideals.

Drawing on the experience of the Judeo-Christian tradition, religion is what people think of it and how they act upon its precepts at a certain time in history. To Muslims, religion is the constant corrective source

with which they interact in a duplex mode: people look to their Islamic ideal to inspire vision, guidance, and change while, in the other direction, they allow themselves to update their understanding of Islam and its application in order to make them operative in modern contexts. Thus what Muslim scientific research tries to stress is that considering the ideal is not a way of ignoring the here-and-now, but rather an attempt to discover and unleash Islam's internal power and specific potentials so as to produce solutions that are not detached from the source of the Islamic tradition. This is probably unique to Islam, for in the absence of formal religious authority and institutions, the ultimate emphasis is on the scriptures.

Islamic research, while carefully examining the objective reality at hand, looks to Islam as: 1) the source that sets ultimate ideals and culturally subjective "right" and "wrong" judgments; 2) the proposed solutions coming from the research are to be in line with Islamic regulations, which are the operational manifestation of the ideals of Islam, provided that they are understood in the light of the goals of the Shari'ah; 3) the research cannot focus on one aspect of life and disregard how that component would work within the overall system; and 4) the research would consider the necessary evolutionary phases towards a balanced modern Islamic cultural system, thus departing from the current confused status.

In other words, one approach seeks to redefine religion in order to fit it into what is at hand, while the other is two dimensional: seeking to re-interpret the religious text and to propose reconstructing reality and the situation. As the latter is the serious Islamic research, one can appreciate why reform in Muslim cultures takes time: it seeks comprehensiveness and relatedness to its roots, while western reform is faddish, oscillates between extremes (to use Mona Abul-Fadl's terms), and tends to be more interested in the change itself rather than in its content.

As a final word, the book in general is a departure from the traditional western research approach of asking questions that are unfamiliar and irrelevant to Muslim life. Several articles are superb, while others lack analytical depth and rigorous methodology. The missing link is a credible study of the ecology of Qur'an and hadith on the family.

Mazen Hashem  
Department of Sociology  
University of California, Riverside  
Riverside, California