

BOOK REVIEW

Muslims in Canada

Yousif, Ahmad F., *Muslims in Canada: A Question of Identity*, New York: Legas, 1993.

Given the fact that most of the studies dealing with Muslims and Islam are theoretical in nature and do not deal with the problems of today's Muslims, the appearance of Dr. Yousif's book is promising as it can be taken as an indication that at least some Muslim scholars are aware of the need for empirical studies focusing on the problems and experiences of the Muslims. This book examines 'Islamic identity' among the Canadian Muslims. This is a significant issue according to the author, because according to him, "the preservation of religious belief by means of ritual observance and strong religious commitment is central to the maintenance of Islamic identity in a non-Islamic society" (p. 27).

In the Introduction, the author describes the history of Islam, the Muslim community in North America, and in the Canadian National Capital Region (C.N.C.R.), immigration factors, ethnic community relations, Canadian social values; as well as the methodology and techniques of the research. Information provided under these titles is pertinent and quite useful, although some sections have been kept unduly brief.

On the other hand, the author does not provide necessary information on the sampling frame or sampling technique. Sample size was 152, which the author probably considers sufficient to represent a population of fifteen thousand. About sampling method, he mentions that "all subjects were either selected by the researcher or recommended by other members of the community"(p. 27). Although he does not say so, the sample is a non-probability one which can only be used for descriptive analysis and its representativeness is not established. The author could

at least have given a simple table to describe the basic characteristics of the sample, like age, sex, education, occupation, income, length of residence, mother tongue and country of origin. Absence of these data renders any comparison of the sample with the population impossible. His words describing the characteristics of the sample, "all participants were Muslim and eighteen years old or older; their level of Islamic observance was as different as their economic, educational, and linguistic circumstances, the reasons for immigration and their ethnic backgrounds..." (p. 27) is all the information that we have regarding the subjects.

Although Chapter 1 is titled 'The Five Pillars,' the aim of this part is to investigate the degree of commitment of the respondents to Islamic principles. Two different paths are mentioned here; one is to look at the observance of the five pillars (*shaha'dah*, *salat*, *sawm*, *zakat*, and *hajj*) and the other is to look at the importance attributed to twelve issues (praying five times a day, reciting the Qur'ān, paying *zakat*, wearing Islamic dress by females, attending Islamic lectures, performing *Id* prayers, attending the imam's lectures on Sundays, joining community activities, participating in family nights, using Arabic language at home, sending one's children to summer camps for Muslim youth and attitude toward living in a Muslim country). Then he goes on to group the respondents into three groups on the basis of their responses to the twelve issues: 'the most committed,' 'less committed' and 'non-committed.' There are serious methodological flaws here. First, despite the author's emphasis on the observance of the five pillars as the criteria for religious commitment, he tends to lessen their importance by including only two of them (praying five times a day and paying *zakat*) among the twelve issues. Second, no guidelines are provided for separation of the three groups. The reader gets no idea how the respondents are divided into three categories. Third, in some cases responses reflect actual practice (praying five time a day), and in others, importance attributed to an item (paying *zakat*). Fourth, later in the text (for example Chapter 2), the author uses a variable called 'religious observance' with four categories as high, average, fair and poor; sometimes he combines high with average and fair with poor (p. 60). We assume that it is the same variable with religious commitment taping Islamic identity but it has four categories instead of three as described above. Measurement of degree of religious commitment suffers a great deal in this research and its use to tap Islamic identity becomes problematic.

Chapter 2 is devoted to an analysis of 'Psycho-social Problems and Lifestyles of the Muslim community in the C.N.C.R.' Here the author

identifies ten important problems, (drinking alcohol, dietary restrictions, marriage with non-Muslims, bank interest, premarital sex, celebrating Christmas, women working outside the home, loss of identity, media and discrimination and racism) faced by the Muslims in the area and tries to relate them to their Islamic identity. The problem here is the way the results are presented. The author has not include tables in the text. Rather he mentions and interprets some important percentages to make his points. For instance, he mentions a few percentages for a 12-cell table: three percentages for mixed marriages (p. 64), two percentages for Christmas celebrations (p. 68) and four percentages each regarding mass media (p. 73) and eating pork (p. 62). The other problem in this chapter relates to the use of 'correlation.' Even though it is an empirical study and there are options to measure the correlation for variables measured at different levels and through different techniques, the author uses the term without giving any statistics at all (pp.52,54,80,121). The 'model' presented on page 80 cannot be considered a model since it does not indicate the relationship between the factors specified therein.

The next chapter discusses the role of institutions like mosques, schools and associations in keeping the Islamic identity intact. He uses the Breton's concept of 'institutional completeness' which is "the extent to which an ethnic group in a particular locale possesses organizations developed by or for members of that ethnoculture"(p. 84). Inclusion of this chapter is quite appropriate and useful since existence of such institutions is vital for the continuation of religious and ethnic identity. The author skilfully describes each of these institutions pointing out the role they play for the Muslims in C.N.C.R. However, the information furnished here is sometimes contradictory to the information presented in the earlier chapters. Earlier we are given to understand that approximately 50 per cent of the Muslims can be described as 'highly committed.' Now the description is "...for a large proportion of Ottawa Muslims the mosque is not an important part of their lives. *According to the Imam, this is largely due to a lack of Islamic devoutness among these people* [emphasis in italics is mine]. In sum, it appears for almost 85% of sample respondents, there is a declining interest in the religious significance of the mosque" (p. 94). On the basis of the Imam's observation one cannot help but think that the percentage of committed Muslims given earlier, and the author's optimistic picture about strong Islamic identity, were exaggerated (see also p. 54, where the author concludes that, "a noticeable percentage falls short of these obligations") i.e., observing the five pillars of Islam.

Chapter Four discusses the issue that deal with the question of how the Muslims preserve their Islamic identity in the Canadian society. The

author presents the responses given to the question, "if you were not born in Canada, where would you prefer to practice Islam?" Ambiguity of the question is acknowledged by the author in footnote 9 on page 122. But an acknowledgment of the mistake does not prevent respondents to be misled. Further, the question is still hypothetical for the Canadian-borns. This is the type of question usually avoided in survey research. Finally, as it stands, the question invites normative answers rather than the actual ones. In Table 4, a model for formation of Islamic identity is presented. Again, it is difficult to call this a model since it does not delineate the relationship between the factors involved.

The concluding chapter seems rather problematic. On page 127 the author remarks that the "length of residency in the C.N.C.R., undoubtedly affects how these problems are viewed and resolved." Although the the author is emphasizing on the 'length of residency,' he does not use this variable in any of the analysis performed. Contrary to his initial grouping of the respondents on the basis of their religious observance (50 percent was 'the most committed,' 30 percent was 'less committed' and remaining 20 percent was 'non-committed'), he now claims that the most committed segment makes up 20 percent, the less committed 70 percent and the non-committed 5 percent of the sample. Since he did not provide any rationale for the first grouping, this second grouping leaves the reader in a state of total confusion.

In sum, the book addresses a very important subject. The selection of twelve issues to measure religious observance and ten problems that the Canadian Muslims face is appropriate. However, the presentation and interpretation of the results are quite problematic and I think reanalysis of the data will be beneficial in order to remove the logical contradictions.

Yusuf Ziya Ozcan

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, IIUM

Ummah or Nation: A Rejoinder

The academic community's interest and appreciation to my recent publication, *Ummah or Nation? Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society*, is a matter of great pleasure. A number of points raised in the review by Abdul Rashid Moten,¹ however, call for some clarification.