

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnama, and Mark J. Goodman, *Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 224 pp. \$24.95 paper (978-0-8020-9543-5), \$60.00 hardcover (978-0-8020-9787-3)

This well-timed book is a badly needed Canadian contribution to the fast-growing literature on the “challenge of diversity,” pointing to a potentially uneasy relationship between the rise of ethnic/cultural diversity and a variety of public goods, such as having a politically secure country, a well-developed welfare state, a common national identity, and a high degree of social cohesion, social capital, and sense of belonging. It also addresses the issue of Muslim minorities in immigrant-receiving countries, a topic of rising importance. The bulk of research in these two areas has been European, with echoes in Australia and the United States. This book adds Canada to the picture, and shows, if not conclusively, a “Canadian exceptionalism” in contrast to the rest of the industrial world. This contrast puts *Diaspora By Design* at the heart of the world-wide debate about diversity.

The book is the product of an ambitious research project studying the experiences in Canada of four Muslim immigrant groups — Afghans, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Palestinians — compared to those of people of similar backgrounds in a few other countries: Iranians and Pakistanis in the UK, Afghans in Iran, and Palestinians in the Palestinian Territories (West Bank). The first 2 chapters provide the background information for the project, as well as sociodemographic information on the groups under study in the 4 countries. Chapters 3–7 tackle some important and interesting aspects of life in the diaspora: family and spousal relations, religious identities and identification, youth, socioeconomic integration and senses of belonging. The authors approach these issues against the background of misperceptions about Muslims in the West, such as that Muslims constitute one homogeneous group and that their attitudes and behaviours are primarily dictated by religious conviction. The book also gives some indications of “Canadian exceptionalism” by pointing to some differences between how things are in this country and in Europe, where Muslim immigrants face a much harsher environment.

Drawing on census information, data from a special survey, and a large number of interviews, the book provides a rich and extensive

amount of evidence. The degree of variation found among the four groups is sometimes astonishing. Iranians, for instance, appear as the group with the highest level of education, most secular views, and least satisfaction in their new homes; Pakistanis, on the other hand, are the most religious and traditionalist, but highly satisfied. Palestinians have the most modest starts, but the greatest accomplishments in Canada.

Some features of the book could have been improved to give a more balanced picture and more effective delivery of the message. First, the authors seem to be more at home with qualitative than with quantitative data. While quotes from the interviews are used extensively (and properly, I should add), the use of quantitative data is limited to some basic cross-tabulations. The richness of the surveys leaves room for more sophisticated multivariate statistical analysis that would refine the picture. Second, comparisons between experiences of the same group in different countries almost disappear in the latter two-thirds of the book (re-appearing briefly in the last chapter). Third, no rationale is provided for why these particular groups were selected for comparison; nor is it clear why these four countries. In the absence of any other information, the reader might be inclined to assume that the choice is made on the basis of convenience rather than for conceptually important reasons. Addressing these issues would add to the robustness of the arguments in the book.

The book would have also greatly benefitted from some small editorial work. Some examples include improper citation, as in the case of Montreal (2003), instead of Eid (2003) (p. 133); the lack of a concluding paragraph at the end of chapter 5 and thus an abrupt termination of that chapter (p. 143); presenting the conclusions of the book at the end of chapter 7 (p. 193) instead of in a separate chapter; and imprecision in reporting corresponding years in different calendars — e.g., the year 1379 in the Iranian calendar is reported as 1999 (p. 170), whereas it should be either 2000 or 2001.

Notwithstanding the above problems, *Diaspora By Design* is an important book that has appeared at exactly the right time. It will be another great Canadian contribution to scholarship and public debates on the issue of diversity, immigration, and Muslim minorities. It has the potential to undo the damaging oversimplifications made by those who have been influenced by an essentialist view of culture and religion. *Diaspora By Design* is a must-read for those with an interest in minority relations, the diversity dilemma, and multiculturalism.

University of Lethbridge

Abdie Kazemipur

Abdie Kazemipur is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. His research revolves around two major themes: the sociocultural

trends in the Middle East, and the socioeconomic performance of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups in Canada. His most recent publications are *Generation X: A Sociological Account of the Iranian Youth* (2008, NashreNay); and *Social Capital and Diversity: Some Lessons from Canada* (2009, Peter Lang AG). He wrote on the themes of this review essay in "A Canadian Exceptionalism: Trust and Diversity in Canadian Cities." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 7 (2006): 219–240, and is currently studying the interaction of Muslim immigrants and the mainstream populations in industrial nations including Canada.

abdie.kazemipur@uleth.ca