

Book Review

Hussain, S. (2016). *The Muslimah who fell to earth: Personal stories by Canadian Muslim women*. Toronto, ON: Mawenzi House Publishers. 192 pages. ISBN: 978-1-927494-97-4

It is quite timely that I find myself writing this review in the days following Navroz (Nowruz), a day of celebration marking the first day of spring, representing renewal and hope for the upcoming year. After reading the thought provoking and emotional personal stories shared in *The Muslimah who Fell to Earth: Personal Stories by Canadian Muslim Women*, edited by Saima Hussain (2016), I feel the sentiment of moving forward into the new year with renewed strength and hope more strongly than ever before. There I was feeling anxious as I entered the mosque on Navroz day, hovering in the mud room and wishing that I thought to wear better socks and something more appropriate for the occasion. As I made my way through the crowd of beautifully dressed and joyful people, exchanging smiles and warm wishes, I found myself lost in thought recalling the stories of these women who brazenly shared their thoughts and experiences as they navigate the complex interactions between identity, faith, and space. Reflecting on the stories of the women in this book, I am feeling slightly envious of Azmina's connection to the community and wishing for an ounce of Maryam's confidence and conviction in her relationship with God, I move through the motions and quickly scurry out to head home. Like Ferrukh, I hold dear my personal connections with faith, and often times fear practicing my faith in communal experiences and spaces. Why? As expressed in many of the stories, constructions and expectations of the ideal Muslim woman, by insiders, outsiders, Muslim and non-Muslims alike, have had more influence and power on my ability to exist as a Muslim woman in Canada than I would care to admit.

Growing up in Canada, the attempt to find balance between the spiritual (din) and material (dunya) realms is an ongoing challenge that others may relate to. Caught in the push and pull between worlds, from the stories of Carmen, Mariam and Tamara, I am reminded that faith is a very personal process of discovery that is to be entered into upon volition on one's own terms to truly discover the value it holds.

Growing up in Canada, I mourn with Lina and Laila, who in their stories express feelings of loss for home countries never known, seen or explored. Perhaps we may never come to know the places that harbour a piece of our identity, at least not in the ways they were known to our parents and grandparents. To lose a part of your identity before you have the opportunity to explore it feels like a cord severed too soon.

Growing up in Canada, I am appreciative of the opportunities being a Canadian has granted me and the relative safety it has offered. Like Sadia, Mona and Jenna, I am grateful but often worry that rising prejudice, discrimination and Islamophobic sentiment might compromise our safety and opportunities to prosper. Though when I find myself too caught up in worry, I think of women like my mother and Ghazia whose strength and perseverance reminds me that I too must be brave and tenacious.

Together the stories in this collection weave together a living quilt of what it means to be a Muslim woman in Canada, stitched together by some shared experiences, though each representing a unique being, who is more than the sum of the pervasive narratives that seek to define her. The result is a beautiful patchwork of the diverse journeys, experiences, thoughts, and hopes of a group of women who seek to elevate a more nuanced narrative that works to counter prevailing stereotypes and static representations of Muslim woman.

In capturing their process to reconcile the expressions of various identities, experiences and faith, Kristen, Maryam, Hanan, Duaa, Munirah, Maria, Ashi, Meharoona, Yasmine and Zunera, explicitly and eloquently defy normative assumptions on a number of dimensions including gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, culture, mental health and spirituality. Contemporary discourse surrounding Muslim women continues to be *about* us as opposed to *from* us. The existence of a book like *The Muslimah who Fell to Earth* challenges the problematic colonial and patriarchal perspectives that tend to diminish our complexity to a singular representation. This work is instrumental in centering the lived experiences and truths of Muslim women living in Canada and rightfully positions the stories and voices of those who know it best. It is our realities that must be represented in the discourse about us. I am filled with hope knowing that progress is well underway to reshape Canadian society's understanding of Muslim women. Finally, it is my hope that this review is accepted as a symbol of reciprocity for the stories, connection and wisdom gifted to me by the all of the women involved in the making of *The Muslimah who Fell to Earth*.

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