

BOOK REVIEW

AL RASHID MOSQUE: BUILDING CANADIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Waugh, E. H. (2018). *Al Rashid Mosque: Building Canadian Muslim Communities*. Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press. ISBN: 9781772123395.

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Written with a historical perspective, this book is a good addition to the literature on Muslim institutions in North America. Earle H Waugh has offered a close examination of Al Rashid Mosque in Edmonton in Alberta, Canada. The Al Rashid mosque, built by the Lebanese in the 1930s, offers a unique window through which to examine the origins and growth of 20th- and 21st-century Islam in Canada. As Waugh points out, the story of the Al Rashid mosque is one of “highs and lows, of weathering storms, and of becoming a beacon for a religion of great depth and significance” (p. xvii). He points out that the main challenges it has gone through include the accommodation it has had to make, to create a balance between “secularist ideologies and genuine piety, and in contemporary Canada, to accommodate to a new status of a distinctive Canadian voice for Islam” (p. xvii). As scholars such as Kambiz Ghaneabassiri (2010) and Shariq Siddiqui (2014) have pointed out, institution-building has been a key part of creating Muslim American identity.

Written in an easy to read, non-scholarly tone, this book is accessible to a wide audience. The book has five chapters that deal with various aspects of the mosque and community evolution. Chapter 1 discusses the issue of sojourning—a phenomenon well-known to

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scholars of American Islam. This “sojourning” refers to the temporary stay that many from the Levant sought in the US. While many of them actually went back to their countries of origin—Syria and Lebanon, in particular—many others decided to stay back in the US to build their lives here. This created a new challenge for those who stayed back—the need for a Muslim community and spaces to worship, educate their children, among other things. Waugh traces this evolution through four phases, which cross to late 19th and early 21st century. The data for the book comes from various sources: scholarly and popular social science literature about the mosque and Muslims in Canada, interviews with people who are either members or affiliates of the mosque, the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and local newspapers such as *Edmonton Journal*, *Arab News*, and *Aramco Magazine*.

Waugh includes some interesting facts about Canadian Muslims, one of which is that Scottish converts were the first Muslims in Canada. This was in the 1860s, followed by Bosnian Muslims, who arrived later. The subsequent migration from the Arab world came as a result of people from those regions seeking a more peaceful place to live—away from the colonialism in the Arab world and also to seek better economic opportunities. According to the 1931 census, there were 10,700 people of Arab heritage in Canada, 645 of whom were Muslim, Waugh points out. The tumultuous changes in the Arab world, with the establishment of Saudi Arabia, shifting patterns of colonialism in the region, and World War II, created an atmosphere where migrating to the “Americas”—both Canada and the US—was seen as being a “safe” option, Waugh notes. There was also religious upheaval, with the establishment of Salafism in Saudi Arabia, in addition to other reform movements in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, etc. “Those who were restive under these movements must have viewed migration to the West and to America as a shift away from antiquity and towards the modern, in contrast to the influences they saw emanating from the central cities of Mecca and Medina” (p. 7).

In Chapter 2, he builds on the origins of Canadian Muslims and offers insights into how the mosque came into being, as a result of contributions from all people of Edmonton—Muslims, Christians, and Jews (p. 32). Given the respectable credentials of the founding members of the mosque, the mayor and others in the city were welcoming toward the mosque project. Waugh spends considerable time describing the various facets of the mosque, including its structure, change of qibla in the mosque, etc. Chapter 3, titled “The Evolution of the Canadian Mosque Tradition,” and chapter 4, titled “Conserving a Canadian Islamic Community during Adversity,” chart the kinds of strategies that the

mosque community adopted in the post-9/11 world. Being part of a global community, members of Al Rashid had to account for and explain global Islamic movements, Waugh points out. The influence of Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood on perceptions of Islam in Canada were profound, he notes. The subsequent Islamophobia that manifested itself in the US also percolated into Canada, according to Waugh.

Chapter 5 deals with the future of Muslim communities in Canada and is forward looking. Coping with the challenges of Islamophobia, a growing need of the Muslim community, which includes 26 different ethnicities, and planning for the physical expansion of the mosque and other infrastructure are key priorities, Waugh suggests. Based on research carried out for the Embracing 2030 report, Waugh posits that there are likely to be more than a million people in Edmonton. The Muslim population is also likely to grow to over 80,000 if current patterns hold. The author calls for greater planning and coordination, in addition to building greater networks with non-Muslim communities.

Overall, this book is readable and provides accessible and user-friendly insights into an important community in Canada. While it does cover the history of a specific mosque and its surrounding communities, it doesn't delve deeply into the changing nature of Canadian identity in depth. What factors led to the rise of global Islamist movements' influence on Canadian society? Why did the Canadians embrace Islam in the early decades? These questions could have been dealt with in more detail. However, I recommend this book, as it makes a good and honest attempt at offering insight into Canadian Muslim life.

Sabith Khan is an Assistant Professor at California Lutheran University and a scholar-practitioner, with expertise in philanthropy, civil society and communications. Khan is the lead author of the book “Islamic Education in the US and Evolution of Muslim Nonprofit institutions” co-authored with Shariq Siddiqui (Edward Elgar Publishing) and is currently on two research projects involving Nonprofit Leadership and the role of Nonprofits in refugee resettlement. His second book on remittances -with Routledge Press- is due to be released in December 2019 and examines the changing nature of remittances in four countries: India, Mexico, USA and Saudi Arabia. Khan has a PhD in Planning, Governance and Globalization from Virginia Tech and an MPA and MA in International Relations from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

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