

Fact Sheet:

Redefining Islam in Canada: An Ismaili Muslim Movement

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Project Description and Goals:

In contemporary society, perceptions about Muslims are often negative, biased, and generalized. These misguided perceptions can have negative consequences for Muslims at home and around the world. Nurturing fear and distrust normalizes hostile anti-Muslim sentiments and fosters an environment of discrimination and exclusion. In Canada, the Shi'a Nizari Ismaili Muslims are one Muslim community who have taken it upon themselves to challenge these harmful discourses both formally and informally.

Cummins' research project investigates the individual, communal, and institutional ways in which the Ismaili Muslim community is actively attempting to challenge the negative monolithic narrative of Islam and Muslims in Canadian society. The research is informed by original online survey data and one-on-one in-depth interviews with members of the Canadian Ismaili community and institutional leadership.

Methodology:

The project aims to identify and understand three components of the movement: (a) Ismaili identity and participation, (b) Resources that drive the movement, and (c) the Crystallization of the movement's efforts in the Canadian public sphere.

In order to understand Canadian Ismaili Identity in Canada and how this identity influences participation in the movement, Cummins launched an online-survey in the autumn of 2015 designed to measure "Ismaili Identity and Participation in Canada." In order to recruit participants, Cummins not only advertised her survey via social media outlets, but also travelled to various metropolises with high concentrations of the Ismaili Muslim community: Edmonton, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. To date, Cummins has received over 200 completed surveys and has completed 30 follow-up interviews with regular Ismaili members and institutional leadership.

These follow-up interviews have enabled her to understand the second and third components; the individual, communal, and institutional efforts of the movement, the resources that mobilize these efforts, and the crystallization of these efforts.

Results:

Cummins is currently in the data analysis stage of her thesis project. Cummins has presented some of her initial findings at Congress at the University of Calgary (2016) and is scheduled to present more of her findings at the Ismaili Studies Conference at Carleton University (2017) and Congress at Ryerson University (2017).