




AFFIRMING
FAITH
 **ISLAM**
WORKBOOK

Egale

 Rainbow Faith
and Freedom

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous Peoples, who have stewarded these lands for millennia. These lands, now known as Canada, are home to a rich tapestry of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

We acknowledge the enduring presence and contributions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to this land, and recognize their deep connection to the territories, waters, and resources.

We acknowledge the painful history of colonization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression that Indigenous Peoples have endured, and the ongoing impacts of these injustices.

We commit to honouring Indigenous rights, supporting reconciliation efforts, and fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities based on mutual respect, understanding, and partnership.

May we all work together towards healing, justice, and a future where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to thrive and flourish across Turtle Island.



ABOUT

Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's national 2SLGBTQI organization working to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and all forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

Rainbow Faith and Freedom

Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) is a global movement to confront religious-based LGBTI Discrimination and improve the human and equality rights of LGBTI people everywhere. Decreasing and lessening the effects of religious-based LGBTI discrimination can, and will, make changing punitive laws easier and improve the lives of LBGTI people so they can be who they are, love who they want, and find safe and accepting places to practice their faith (worship).

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1. ISLAM: OVERVIEW OF THE FAITH

Islam is an Arabic word, often translated as “submission” or “peace”. Dr. Nevin Reda interprets islām as “wholeness making, peacemaking, well-being making, and safety making.” A person who follows the religion of Islam is known as *Muslim* (peace-maker). Islam is considered a universal religion, meaning that it is intended for all peoples and for all times, without distinction based on tribe, skin colour, or other grounds. Muslims are not a monolith. There is great diversity in who identifies as Muslim and how the religion of Islam is practiced across the world today.

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning that it believes in a singular deity, and is the second most widely practiced religion in the world today. The global Muslim population is estimated at over 1.5 billion, of which Arab Muslims make up less than 20%. Muslims live all over the world, with significant populations in Southeast Asia, South Asia, central Africa, and the Southwest Asia and North Africa region.

1.1 Origins

The Islamic religion originated in the Arabian Peninsula in 610 CE in Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia).

It is said the angel Gabriel delivered to Muhammad (p)¹ the command from Allah (God) “IQRA!” (“Read! Recite!” or “Proclaim!”) as he meditated in a cave near his hometown of Mecca. Muhammad (p) wrote down Gabriel’s messages,

¹ In writing, Muslims often follow the name of a prophet with (p) or (pbuh), meaning “peace be upon him”, as a sign of respect. Plural: “peace be upon them” (pbut).



creating what is known today as the Quran. In the region at that time, the concepts of tribe, blood kin, and gender hierarchies were central to social and political society. Islam demanded sweeping changes in these notions, preaching instead the equality and dignity of all peoples, declaring everyone, regardless of their race, gender, tribe, or social status, as siblings. Muhammad's (p) message found early followers among the enslaved, women, and poor. He taught against the idolatry of contemporary society and its fixation with wealth, exploitation and social, tribal, racial, and gender hierarchies. This created great tension with the reigning powers in Mecca, spurring Muhammad (p) and his followers to flee to Medina. Once there, he established the Constitution of Medina, which acted to garner the support of local clans and the establishment of an Islamic state.

Spreading eventually across the entire Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic faith first made its way across North Africa, then across West Asia and South Asia. Today, it is practiced globally.

1.2 Important Texts

The **Quran** (literally 'The Recitation') is the central sacred text in Islam. It comprises the written record of the revelations delivered to Muhammad (p) by the angel Gabriel over the course of 23 years. It is composed of 114 *surahs* (chapters), each of which is divided into *ayats* (signs) and includes over six thousand verses.

The **Hadith** (reported sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and his *Sunnah* (traditions) are important texts for many Muslims to varying degrees depending on sect and interpretive choice.

For **Shia** Muslims, the reported sayings and traditions of the *Imams* (Spiritual successors of the Prophet Muhammad) also form part of the sacred literature and resources.



For **Sufi** Muslims (Muslims who follow or are influenced by the mystical/esoteric teachings of Islam wherein the primary relationship between Creator and Created is that of beloveds), important texts may include The *Mathnawi* of Mevlana Rumi, and the poetry of Hafiz, Rabia of Basri, Bullah Shah, and others.

1.3 Important Concepts

Chronologically, Islam is the most recent of the revealed Abrahamic faiths. However, the Prophet Muhammad did not see his teachings as a new faith, but the same faith revealed to Adam and Eve (*pbut*) and to all the prophets and messengers who came before him.

As such, it shares some concepts and beliefs with Judaism and Christianity, such as belief in Allah (God), the Angels, the Revelations, the Prophets, and the Last Day (also called Judgement Day or Day of Awakening), along with some concepts that are unique to Islam.

★ **Allah** is simply the Arabic word for God. According to the Quran, Allah is “Akbar” (greater and greatest) and “closer to each of us than our own jugular vein” (50:16). Allah has no gender and no partner. In Arabic, Allah is grammatically neither male nor female – a special exception within the Arabic language – though linguistically, it is conjugated with male pronouns because Arabic is a gender-binary language.

Islam strictly forbids the creation of **material representations of the Divine**. Thus, there are no images of the Divine in Islam. Instead, Allah is known through the 99 Most Beautiful Names (*al asma al husna*), attributes that permeate through all of creation.

Muslims believe humans are born pure but forgetful. Thus, over the course of one’s lifetime, a person will accumulate both good deeds and bad actions, the balance of which will determine their fate on Judgement Day.



In Islam, repentance for having sinned is a private matter between the individual and Allah, known as *tawba* (to make whole).

★ **Tawhid** (oneness) refers to the oneness of Allah and of humanity. In Islam, Allah is *Rabb al-Alameen* (Creator and Sustainer of all the Worlds). Everything created is created with the *Ruh* (spirit) of God. Everything in the Universe is from Allah and all things return to Allah. Through the *Ruh*, everything in creation is connected. Islam is the lens that illuminates the connectivity of all things.

The Quran also outlines Islamic dietary law, which categorizes foods as either **halal** (permissible) or **haram** (forbidden). To be considered halal, the food must not contain pork, intoxicants, blood, or other items deemed haram or be processed in a place where contamination by such items could occur. Meat is subject to additional rules relating to how the animal was raised, slaughtered, and processed.

Muhammad and other Prophets

Most Muslims recognize that Allah sent many prophets and messengers to humanity across time, starting with Adam (& Eve) (p). The Quran tells Muslims that they must believe in all of Allah's prophets and messengers. One hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (p) gives the total number of prophets across history as 124,000.

Muhammad (p) is considered the *Rasool* (Messenger) and final *Nabi* (Prophet) of Islam. The Quran represents Muhammad's (p) transcription of the word of Allah as delivered to him by the angel Gabriel.

The Quran names a number of other prophets and messengers, including some from the Torah, and some Arab prophets, as well as John (the Baptist), Mary (mother of Jesus), and Jesus (pbut). The only chapter of the Quran named for a woman is chapter 19, which is named after Mary (p). Jesus and Mary hold high prominence in Islam. Jesus is one of the major Prophets of Islam, and is referred to in the Quran as Jesus, son of Mary, and as *Ruh-Allah* (the breath of God).



The 5 Pillars of Islam

There is some variance across sects regarding the central tenets of Islam and which items comprise the 5 Pillars or Acts of Service. Generally speaking, however, these are *Shahada* (Witnessing), *Salat* (Prayer), *Zakat* (Purifying Giving), *Sawm* (Fasting), and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca).

- 1. Shahada** is the declaration of one's faith. To recite with intention is to testify that there is no god but (one) God, and that Muhammad (p) is the messenger of Allah. Shahada is foundational to all other pillars.
- 2. Salat** is the ritual prayer, which requires preparing one's body for prayer through ritual cleansing, most commonly with water. The majority of Muslim sects prescribe five ritual prayers a day, set at specific times (dawn, after midday, later afternoon, dusk, nighttime).
- 3. The Zakat** is often translated as alms, but it is, in fact, an obligation – part of the social contract to provide for those less fortunate. It is calculated on the financial means of the giver.
- 4. The Quran** enjoins Muslims to sawm (fast) from sunrise to sunset for the Muslim lunar month of Ramadan, wherein the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (p) by the Angel Gabriel.
- 5. Hajj** is the pilgrimage journey to Mecca that all believers who have the means must undertake at least once in their lives. The rituals associated with Hajj are the Sunnah of Hajar, mother of Ismail, and Abraham (pbut). As such, the Quran prescribes it for all believers, not just for Muslims.² Despite that, many Muslim clerics understand the Hajj as a prescribed ritual for Muslims alone. The government of Saudi Arabia restricts visas for the Hajj to Muslims only.

² Various verses of the Quran speak to “all humanity”, and “all believers”, not simply “all Muslims”.



Stance on Gender Equality

Contemporary Islam, like much of society today, has been impacted by patriarchy, European colonialism, American imperialism, post-colonial tyrants, Arab petroleum industry dollars, apartheid capitalism, White supremacy, racism, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia. It is beyond the scope of this document to delve into these various influences in detail. Suffice to say that these do not reflect, and in fact detract from, the very essence of Islam. As the Lady Imam Dr. Amina Wadud³ asserts, patriarchy is a form of *shirk* (the sin of making partners to Allah) since placing men above women contradicts the Quranic vision of equal and reciprocal relationships and violates the assertion that Allah alone is supreme.⁴

1.4 Sects

There are multiple sects or schools of interpretation in Islam. The two major sects are the Shia and the Sunni. The Shia-Sunni split began with the death of the Prophet Muhammad (p) over who would succeed him in leading the community.

★ The **Shia** believe that Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, was the rightful *imam* (spiritual leader) and following him, his lineage through Hazrat Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (p). There are many different groups within the Shia, including the Jafari, Ismaili, Alevi, Alewi, and Bohora, each with their own leadership and authority structures.

3 Dr. Amina Wadud does not capitalize her first or last names.

4 Islam and Feminism <http://www.islamandfeminism.org/amina-wadud.html#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20arguments%20she%20has%20advanced%20is,became%20a%20Muslim%20at%20the%20age%20of%2020>.



- ★ The **Sunni** opted for leadership based on notions of community consensus. As such, there is no singular, central authority or global leader for all Sunni Muslims. The Sunni make up more than 80% of the global population of Muslims today.
- ★ Groups such as the **Nation of Islam** and the **Ahmadiyyah** do not identify as either Shia or Sunni.

It is worth remembering that there has always been and continues to be, great diversity in the ways in which individual Muslims approach or practice their faith. There are Muslims who practice Islam in very literalist or check-list type ways, and Muslims who very much do not. Growing numbers of Muslims do not identify with or adhere to any particular sect.

- ★ **Sufism** is a form of Islamic mysticism that emphasizes spiritual closeness with Allah. It is not a sect, but rather a devotional lens that positions love as the foundation of Creation, and the primary relationship between Allah and Creation. There are both Sunni and Shia Sufi tariqas (paths), and many Muslims are Sufis. There are also some Sufis who do not identify as Muslim.



1.5 Sources and Suggested Resources

Islamic Dietary Law

What is Halal? – A Brief Explanation of the Term Halāl

<https://www.hfsaa.org/what-is-halal/>

Notable Authors and Books

Karen Armstrong

[Muhammad \(p\) – A Prophet for Our Time](#)

Reza Aslan

[No Allah but Allah](#)

Farid Esack

Videos on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=farid+esack

Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Eds)

[Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust](#)

Omid Safi

[Memories of Muhammad. Why the Prophet Matters](#)

[The Times They are A-Changin’ – a Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender, Equality and Pluralism.](#)

[Progressive Muslims on Gender, Justice and Pluralism](#) (Editor)

Videos on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=omid+safi

The Lady Imam Dr. amina wadud

[Qur’an & Woman](#)

[Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam](#)

Personal website: <https://aminawadud.com>

Videos on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=amina+wadud



Quran translations/interpretations

[Islam Awakened](#) (Quran, Transliteration, English Translations)

[Quran – A Reformist’s Translation](#)

Edip Yuksel, Layth Al-Shaiban, Martha Schulte-Nafeh

[The Holy Quran](#)

Translated by Allama Yusuf Ali

[The Message of the Quran](#)

Muhammad Asad

[The Sublime Quran](#)

Laleh Bakhtiar

www.Quran.com

Sufi Orders

The Threshold Society – Mevlevi Order

<https://sufism.org/>

Nurashki Jerrahi Order

<http://nurashkijerrahi.org/>

Inayatiyya Order

<https://inayatiyya.org/>



2. ISLAM: STRUCTURE IN CANADA

According to Statistics Canada, as of 2021, the Muslim population of Canada is just under 1.8 million. Muslims make up a significant proportion of many provincial populations, with the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) having the highest regional concentration (10% of the population).

2.1 Early Presence

While the histories and identities of enslaved Muslim Africans who came to Canada through the Underground Railroad or as United Empire Loyalists have been effectively erased, the government census of 1871 discloses 13 Muslims living in Ontario: an elderly European Muslim couple who came to Canada via the US, and a Scottish convert family named 'Love.' Their first Canadian-born child, James Love is the first recorded Canadian-born Muslim. The first Muslim cemetery in Canada is located in Bible Hill, Nova Scotia.

Canadian Muslims come from all racial, ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian backgrounds. The first mosque in Canada was built in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1938, primarily by Muslims of Lebanese heritage. The first mosques and Muslim centres in Toronto were started by Albanian and Bosnian Muslims, while many South Asian Muslims who came to the West Coast as part of the Gold Rush or after Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee either went south (to California) or returned to their homelands.



2.2 Ethnocultural Diversity

The Muslim community in Canada is incredibly diverse racially, culturally, and in the relationships that people have with Islam.

A large percentage of Canada's Muslim population today has its origins in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora, including South Africa, East Africa, and the Caribbean. In British Columbia, a third of the Muslims are of Iranian heritage, another quarter is Ismaili, and many Sunni Muslims are Fijian of Indian origin. There are large Muslim Somali populations in the Toronto and Ottawa areas and large Arab and African French-speaking populations in Quebec. Due to intermarriages and conversions, there are growing numbers of Muslims with Indigenous ancestry, especially in the Prairie provinces and in BC.

2.3 Sunni Presence

The majority of Canadian Muslims are Sunni, so it should be little surprise that the majority of *masjids* (mosques) and prayer halls/Islamic centres are also Sunni-identified or dominated.

There is no central authority or leadership for Sunni Muslims in Canada. Mosques run largely independently under the guidance of a Board of Trustees or an executive committee, and some may also employ administrative staff. A handful of regions have a local Muslim organization (such as the Ottawa Muslim Association) that may operate or serve to coordinate various community services, such as education, worship spaces, and counselling.

Although many mosques serve a particular ethnic, national, or linguistic group, multiracial mosques also exist. Many multiracial mosques follow a conservative or even fundamentalist interpretation of Islam called Wahhabism or Salafism.



2.4 Shia Presence

There are Shia-specific religious and community institutions throughout Canada, including Shia masjids and support organizations.

While Ismaili Shia Muslims claim a global population of less than 15 million, they number almost 100,000 in Canada, with particular visibility in Vancouver and Toronto. Their international leader is the Aga Khan, and all Ismaili *jamatkhanas* (prayer spaces) and institutions fall under his leadership.

2.5 Sufi Presence

Sufi refers to an esoteric approach to spiritual practice and is not a distinct sect of Islam. As such, Sufi groups and communities may identify as either Sunni or Shia, and some do not identify as Muslim at all.

There are a number of Sufi communities across Canada. Some are connected to international Sufi orders with a *sheikh* (religious scholar) or teacher somewhere outside Canada. A few are organized around a sheikh or teacher within Canada.



2.6 Mixed Sect Spaces

There are few mosques or Islamic centres with mixed Shia-Sunni Congregations. Until recently, the liberal and welcoming Noor Cultural Centre in Scarborough, Ontario, was an exception that welcomed Muslims from all sectarian backgrounds. Regrettably, it closed its physical doors in 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, the only known masjid that integrates Shia and Sunni traditions is the el-Tawhid Juma Circle: The Unity Mosque, started in Toronto in May 2009 by Troy Jackson, Laury Silvers, and El-Farouk Khaki. Gender equal and 2SLGBTQI affirming, congregants participating in the service can choose to lead prayer or give the call to prayer in Shia or Sunni versions. The sermon format incorporates traditional Shia and Sunni elements.



2.7 Other Organizations

The Ahmadiyya, a global community of about 15 million with about 25,000 adherents in Canada, are not recognized by many other Muslims as Muslim. They have a centralized leadership, and masjids and communities under the umbrella of that leadership.

There are a number of social, cultural, charity, and advocacy groups that serve the diverse Muslim populations at local or national levels. Examples of these include:

- ★ **The International Development and Relief Foundation** (IDRF), a national charitable organization focussing on providing humanitarian aid and supporting development locally and globally.
- ★ **The Canadian Council of Muslim Women**, an organization dedicated to the equality, equity, and empowerment of Muslim women in Canada.
- ★ **The Canadian Muslim Lawyers' Association**, a professional group representing Muslim individuals of all backgrounds who are in the legal profession in Canada.



2.8 Sources and Suggested Resources

Religion by Visible Minority and Generational Status: Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations With Parts (Statistics Canada) <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810034201>

Islam in Canada (Wikipedia.org)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Canada

Muslim Association of Canada (MAC)
<https://www.macnet.ca/>

Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada
<https://www.ahmadiyya.ca/>

Aga Khan Foundation Canada
<https://www.akfc.ca/>

International Development and Relief Foundation (IDRF)
<https://idrf.ca/about-us/>



3. ISLAM: HISTORIC AND CURRENT STANCES ON 2SLGBTQI IDENTITIES

While we have evidence of *mukhannat* (effeminate men) in the household of the Prophet, and there is no documented prescription of punishment by the Prophet for homosexual activity, contemporary manifestations of Islam overwhelmingly reject homosexuality, considering it to be sinful, un-Islamic, and punishable.

To support this stance, non-accepting Muslims refer to the Quranic story of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the "people of Lot."⁵ Traditionally in Islam, this story serves as a warning against several transgressions, including homosexuality.

Paradoxically, within many Muslim cultures in history, same-sex relationships were tolerated and homoerotic poetry celebrated. Many Canadian Muslim religious institutions today are socially conservative, especially with respect

5 1 The story, while sharing similarities with the Biblical account, has its own distinct elements and interpretations within Islamic theology. In the Quran, Lot is sent as a prophet to the people of Sodom and the neighboring cities. These communities are described as engaging in sinful behaviors, among which we find the sin of sodomy (that is, any non-procreative sexual activity). Lot advises his people to abandon their indecent behaviors, warning them of God's punishment for their immorality. He strongly condemns their actions, calling them to worship Allah and follow moral conduct. Despite Lot's warnings, the people of Sodom scorn him and threaten him and his followers. Upon Lot's departure, the Quran narrates the divine punishment that befalls Sodom. The city is destroyed by a terrible upheaval that overturns it, and its inhabitants are annihilated by a rain of brimstone. Lot's wife, as foretold, is among those who perish, having looked back at the city in longing or regret.



to 2SLGBTQI inclusion and issues of gender segregation. Globally, no Muslim religious authority or body to date has made a public attempt toward LGBTQI inclusion, including the Shia Seminaries of Qom and the Sunni theological schools at Al-Azhar and Medina. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) does not recognize human rights for LGBTQI people. In fact, it has consistently opposed LGBTQI rights at both the United Nations' General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council.

3.1 Islamophobia and Anti-2SLGBTQI bias

Islamophobia as a form of social oppression interconnects with race, religion, class, and other systems of marginalization. The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) in its submissions and recommendations to the National Summit on Islamophobia (July 21, 2021) states:

Islamophobia is experienced differentially by each person. Structurally, it intersects with other forms of oppression such as anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism. The lived experiences of Muslims with intersectional identities are often removed from conversations surrounding the Muslim experience.⁶

This is especially true for 2SLGBTQI Muslims.

While many Muslims in Canada experience discrimination, harassment, and threats in virtually all aspects of their lives, 2SLGBTQI Muslims (and other "non-conformist" Muslims) are especially vulnerable since they live at the intersection of not only Islamophobia and racism but also homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny. For many 2SLGBTQI Muslims, Islamophobia intersects with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, compounding the

⁶ It is important to note that the CCMW is quite unique as a non-2SLGBTQI specific Muslim organization in its efforts to be inclusive of queer and trans Muslims.



impacts on their spiritual well-being, physical and mental health, and personal safety.

Impossible Identities

Dominant Muslim discourse today seems to be that 2SLGBTQI people cannot be Muslim. So, while many Muslims in Canada profess to be accepting of homosexuality at a societal level, often a line is drawn wherein their acceptance only extends to non-Muslims. "It is okay to be gay, but you can't be Muslim *and* gay."

While a small handful of Muslim organizations have made public overtures of 2SLGBTQI inclusion as a human rights/civil rights issue in more recent years, such as CCMW, there continues to be a dearth of programming or services – in either 2SLGBTQI or Muslim spaces – addressing the needs of 2SLGBTQI Muslims.

Similarly, Muslim organizations continue to be shy to comment on how the human and bodily rights granted by divine authority to all Muslims interact with the 2SLGBTQI identity. This is largely due to sexual and gender diversity being seen as "uncomfortable" or "complicated" topics within the Islamic faith and within their communities broadly.

These dynamics exacerbate the marginalization and injustices experienced by 2SLGBTQI Muslims.

Examples

- ★ A national Muslim organization sought assistance with their response to Islamophobic and homophobic graffiti left on a mosque construction site. However, when the 2SLGBTQI Muslims who provided the requested assistance asked to continue the conversation of making the organization and its advocacy more inclusive of 2SLGBTQI Muslims, the request was ignored.



- ★ In 2015, the same Muslim organization put out a statement against bullying in schools and invited mainstream 2SLGBTQI advocacy groups to a related press conference. It did not invite any 2SLGBTQI Muslim groups, such as the Unity Mosque or Salaam: Queer Muslim Community. During the press conference, the organization refused to engage the issue of 2SLGBTQI Muslim kids and bullying.
- ★ In 2015, 2SLGBTQI Muslims alerted a local Muslim organization of increasing tensions between members of the 2SLGBTQI community in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village community and some homophobic Muslim students from a nearby school.

These examples illustrate just some of the ways in which intersecting systems of discrimination continue to disenfranchise 2SLGBTQI Muslims in Canada.

More recently, the far right, which is vocally and visibly anti-Muslim, has joined forces with conservative Muslim groups in opposing sex education in schools and making schools safe for 2SLGBTQI youth.

3.2 Non-Scriptural Influences

Some contemporary Muslim attitudes toward LGBTQI people have been shaped by Western Euro-Christian colonialism, including the institutionalization of Victorian-era morality and sodomy laws, and more recently by Western forms of imperialism. Many Muslim-majority countries that have been victims of Western colonialism and imperialism continue to criminalize non-heterosexual sexual activity today, especially among people assigned male at birth, and a few even prescribe the death penalty. The marginal spaces in many Muslim cultures that previously accommodated diverse gender identities, such as the *khwaja sira* (South Asia) and *waria* (Indonesia), and *khunthaa* (an Arabic word that refers to intersex people) and others, have been and continue to be eroded.



Today, these individuals continue to be suppressed, dehumanized, and denied access to their Muslim identity.

The discovery of oil in the Arab World in the 1970s and the ensuing wealth have also had a significant influence on religious and societal homophobia and transphobia within Muslim communities globally over the past several decades. Oil was and is used by the governments that control it, as a tool of foreign policy and diplomatic relations, to assert theological global dominance through the funding of *wahabi* oriented mosques, publishing of books, and the training of imams and teachers. This has fuelled a global increase in ultra-conservative views and the recent rise of Islamist movements.

Radicalized and intolerant Muslims are not the only source of safety and security concerns for 2SLGBTQI Muslims, however. Like other Muslims, 2SLGBTQI Muslims increasingly face threats of violence, racism, and homophobia by White supremacists and non-Muslims.⁷

3.3 Advocacy

Nascent progressive or inclusive Muslim organizations in some countries such as South Africa, the UK, Germany, the US, and Canada have made strides in welcoming, if not always affirming, 2SLGBTQI people. The US-based organization Muslims for Progressive Values has a UN presence and is active in Africa and other locations on issues of gender justice. It is inclusive and affirming of 2SLGBTQI Muslims. In Canada, most Muslim groups and organizations are generally silent on 2SLGBTQI rights other than when they oppose them.

⁷ To learn more, see Kaldenhoven, N. J. (2022). *Petroleum Radicalism: How the politics and economics of oil are related to the emergence of radical Islamist ideologies and practices throughout the Middle East and North Africa* [Thesis]. Muhlenberg College.



We must also remember that being inclusive does not necessarily mean being affirming. In some Muslim spaces prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTQ Muslims were welcomed to pray with Muslims of all genders and orientations, but those spaces were not affirming or willing to publicly welcome LGBTQ individuals into their communities.

3.4 2SLGBTQI Muslim Spaces in Canada

While 2SLGBTQI-affirming Muslim spaces remain rare in Canada, some grassroots groups are providing dedicated spaces and networks of support by and for 2SLGBTQI Muslims.

The Unity Mosque

The el-Tawhid Juma Circle, aka "The Unity Mosque," founded in May 2009 in Toronto by queer/human rights activists Troy Jackson and El-Farouk Khaki and ally Dr. Laury Silvers, is the only openly 2SLGBTQI-affirming Muslim/Mosque/religious space in Canada. In March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Unity Mosque moved into being an online-only space. Since then, it has continued online religious, celebratory, educational, and social programming, with some in-person programming resuming more recently.

Affiliate circles currently exist in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal, and Atlanta, Georgia. The Unity Mosque has inspired and even helped seed and/or resource other inclusive mosques around the world, including in the US, UK, South Africa, France, Germany and other places.

The imam of the Unity Mosque, El-Farouk Khaki, is the only out queer imam in Canada and the only marriage officiant known to officiate Muslim marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples.



Salaam Canada

On August 2022, Salaam Canada (formerly, Salaam: Queer Muslim Community (2000), Al-Fatiha Toronto (1999), and Salaam: A social/support group for Lesbian and Gay Muslims (1991-1993)) announced it was shutting down. It was instrumental in creating circles and networks of LGBTQI Muslims across Canada. Its absence will be deeply felt as LGBTQI Muslims no longer have a national, coordinated presence.

Social Media Channels

Salaam Canada's work in creating queer Muslim networks and support systems is continued by groups such as the Toronto-based [Queer Muslim Network](#) on Instagram, which has almost 4000 followers and the [Queer Muslim Project](#), based out of India and has over 40,000 followers on Instagram. Social media platforms enable 2SLGBTQI Muslims to form global networks and communities.

2SLGBTQI Muslim Leaders

Leadership in the Canadian LGBTQI Muslim community is varied, diverse, and changing. Many who were previously active have returned to less active involvement in recent years while new leaders are emerging. Some are at various degrees of being publicly open about their identity. Visible 2SLGBTQI Muslims in Canada, including past and present and future leaders, artists, writers, activists, and change-makers, include (but are not limited to):

Suhail Abualsameed

Remzi Cej

Samra Habib

Hussain Al-Rafi

Farzana Doctor

Nasser Hamadeh

Fatima Amarshi

Rania El-Mugammar

Sabat Ismail

Cara Begg-Reid

Aamer Esmail

Troy Jackson



Fatima Jaffer	Urvah Khan	Asad Rahman
Asif Kamal	Karim Ladak	Momin Rahman
Rozina Kazi	Micky Mackenrodt	Amal Rana
Carl Kern	Marie Manal	Raven Rowanchilde
El-Farouk Khaki	Renee Mercuri	Irfan Salaam
Summeiya Khamissa	Fauz Mirza	Sarah Shah
Arshad Khan	Lali Mohammad	Rahim Thawer
Farrah Khan	Hassan Namir	...and many others.
Mariam Khan	Amber Peters	
Mohamad Khan	Intiaz Popat	

3.5 A Final Note

Despite the current antagonistic stance taken by the Islamic religious community, many 2SLGBTQI Muslims today find comfort and strength in their faith and the tenets of Islam. Many are finding ways to live authentically as both people of faith and as queer and trans people. Some have the support of their families, others do not. As with all other people, a Muslim 2SLGBTQI person's home life, experiences, and beliefs should never be presumed or interrogated.



3.6 Sources and Suggested Resources

2SLGBTQI Muslim Inclusive Spaces

[How to be Culturally Competent When Supporting LGBTQ Muslims](#) (Article)

Rahim Thawer, Medium

[Toronto's queer Muslims are cultivating spaces where their identities can co-exist](#) (Article)

Alex Migdal, Globe and Mail

[What Safer Space Looks Like for a Queer Black Muslim Woman](#) (Webpage)

The Body is Not an Apology

Personal Stories

[Brown, trans, queer, Muslim and proud](#) (Video, 14:47)

Sabah Choudrey

[Queer & Muslim: Nothing to Reconcile](#) (Video, 8:38)

Blair Imani

[Queer and going to the mosque: 'I've never felt more Muslim than I do now'](#) (Article)

Samra Habib, The Guardian

[We Have Always Been Here: A Queer Muslim Memoir](#) (Book)

Samra Habib

[We Resist: A Queer Muslim Perspective](#) (Video, 17:15)

El-Farouk Khaki

[Young, Positive, and Telling You Like It Is: A collection of testimonies by young people living with HIV](#) (PDF, 21pgs)

Naz Project London



Organizations and Networks

[El-Tawhid Juma Circle – The Unity Mosque](#) (Official Website)

[Queer Muslim Network Toronto](#) (Instagram)

[Salaam Canada: Queer Muslim Community](#) (Official Website)

[The Queer Muslim Project](#) (Instagram)

Resources for 2SLGBTQI Muslims and Families

[I'm Muslim and I Might Not Be Straight: A Resource for LGBTQ+ Muslim Youth](#)

(PDF, 14pgs)

Muslim Youth Leadership Council

[I'm Muslim and My Gender Doesn't Fit Me: A Resource for Trans Muslim Youth](#)

(PDF, 20pgs)

Muslim Youth Leadership Council

[Coming Home to Islam and to Self](#) (PDF, 16pgs)

Human Rights Campaign

[Moondragon in the Mosque Garden](#) (Children's Book)

Troy Jackson & El-Farouk Khaki, illustration by Katie Commodore.

Salaam Canada Publications, made possible through funding from the Inspirit Foundation, Community-Based Research Centre, and the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance of Ontario:

★ [Community Discussion Guide: For Support Group Facilitators](#) (PDF, 44pgs)

★ [Do ask, Do Tell? Coming In, Out, & Around as LGBTQ+ Muslims](#) (PDF, 8pgs)



[More Than Just Feeling Alone: Understanding LGBTQ+ Muslim Mental Health](#)
(PDF, 7pgs)

[It's Not a Phase: Support for Family Members of LGBTQ+ Muslims](#) (PDF, 9pgs)

[What is Islamophobia? Safety and Resistance](#) (PDF, 8pgs)

Gender and Sexual Diversity in Islam

[The Accidental Activist: El-Farouk Khaki](#) (Documentary, 22:38)

Canadian Race Relations Foundation

[Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1300-1800](#) (Book)

Khalid El-Rouayher

[Being Gay and Muslim](#) (Webpage)

Daayiee Abdullah

[CCMW's National Action Summit on Islamophobia Recommendations](#)

(Webpage)

Canadian Council of Muslim Women

[Episode 14: Spiritual Inclusion with El-Farouk Khaki](#) (Audio, 59:00)

The Soulspace Podcast

[Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflections on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims](#) (Book)

Dr. Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle

[Inclusive Islam: Is LGBTQI Halal? LGBTQI Lecture Series](#) (Multiple videos)

Imam Daayiee Abdullah

[Is There Room In Islam For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual And Transgender Muslims?](#) (Webpage)

Dr. Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle



[Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions](#) (Book)

Junaid Jahangir and Jussein Addullatif (Foreword by Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle)

[Islamic Texts: A Source for Acceptance of Queer Individuals into Mainstream Muslim Society](#) (PDF, 21pgs)

Muhsin Hendricks

[LGBTQ Muslims in Islam](#) (Video, 14:16)

Junaid Jahangir

[Out of the Koran: A conference for queer Muslims is a step toward liberation](#)
(Article)

Rachael Geise, Xtra* Magazine

[Sexual and Gender Diversity in the Muslim World: History, Law and Vernacular Knowledge](#) (Book)

Vanya Hamzic



4. ISLAM: DO'S AND DON'TS



Do account for Halal dietary restrictions.

If hosting an event or providing catering, make sure there are vegetarian options available to avoid potential risks for Muslim attendees related to non-Halal meat.

Do label food ingredients if providing food or storing it in communal spaces.

This is especially important for foods that contain animal or animal-derived products.

Do think before you speak.

Wanting to get to know your Muslim colleagues better is a good thing. But asking them to quantify their faith with questions such as “How Muslim are you?” or “Do you pray five times a day?” is intrusive and insulting.

Do listen empathically.

Many Muslims experience discrimination and exclusion related to their faith on a daily basis. A smile has the power to break down walls and demonstrate empathy and welcome.

Do be mindful of important Islamic holidays.

Especially during Eid, be sure to wish your Muslim neighbours and colleagues a Happy Eid and Happy Holidays.



Don'ts

Don't make racial assumptions.

Not all Arabs are Muslim, and not all Muslims are Arab.

Don't stereotype about the Islamic faith.

Not all Muslims pray five times a day or fast during Ramadan. How an individual practices their faith is up to them.

Don't book events/meetings/training sessions, etc., on Friday afternoons, when many Muslims gather for congregational worship.

Similarly, avoid scheduling evening events during Ramadan (unless you are going to provide food at sunset, when Muslims break their fast) or on Eid.

Don't engage in anti-hijab rhetoric.

Denounce misogyny. Respect the autonomy of Muslim women who wear the hijab, and those who do not. Don't make assumptions about a woman's devoutness based on whether she wears a hijab.

