Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

The Urgency of (Explicitly) Teaching Against Islamophobia

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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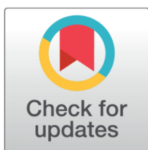
I serve as Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE), former Elementary and Secondary school teacher, and the author of "Stories We Live and Grow By: (Re)Telling Our Experiences as Muslim Mothers and Daughters." I have grown up in Edmonton, also known as Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Cree for Beaver Mountain House), on Treaty Six lands. My ultimate goal is to relationally co-compose more educative ways of teaching, learning, and living, in community. I am interested in multi-perspectival narrative inquiry, (Muslim) mothering and motherhood, curriculum studies, social studies education, and familial curriculum-making. Through my current narrative inquiry research alongside Muslim refugee mothers of children with disabilities, I have been learning more about Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, dis/citizenship, and disability justice. I am blessed to mother three amazing humans who teach me what love looks like in practice every single day.



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FRAMING THE ISSUE

I want to begin my introduction to this issue of ASSERT, "Teaching Against Islamophobia," by situating myself as a Muslim woman in hijab, mother, researcher, scholar, and (grand)daughter of Palestinian refugees living within Treaty 6 lands in Canada.

As I type this, a seventh Muslim woman in hijab has been the target of hate and violence in Alberta. This violence lives at the intersections (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw et al.,

ASSERT
Research for Teachers in a Hurry

2019) of systems of anti-Black racism, misogyny, and Islamophobia (Antoneshyn, 2009; Boothby, 2020; Kanygin & Thomas, 2021; Parsons, 2020). Likewise, Muslim women in hijab (and others who choose to wear "religious symbols") who live in Quebec are being subjected to state-sponsored, racialized exclusion and violence through the enactment of Bill 21 — legislation which makes it illegal for anyone who wears "religious symbols" to teach at public schools (Jahangeer, 2020; Magder, 2020; Vermes, 2020). Although there is currently an ongoing legal challenge brought by Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the National Council of Canadian Muslims against the constitutionality of such a flagrant abuse of human rights (Montpetit & Shingler, 2021), Bill 21 is an example of how 'save the Muslim girl' narratives (Sensoy & Marshall, 2009) that have long positioned Muslim girls and women as oppressed victims in need of rescue, have increasingly become wedded to 'save us from the Muslim girl' narratives whereby Muslim girls and women who choose to veil are simultaneously viewed as suspicious Others.

Over forty years ago, Palestinian Christian scholar Edward Said (1978) wrote about Orientalism and "the exotic Other" in relation to perceptions and portrayals of those from "the East" (including Islam and Muslims) in the West, and is later credited as the first person to use the word "Islamophobia" when he argued that Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have "historically gone hand in hand … [and] nourished at the same stream (Said, 1985 p. 99). The term was then popularized by The Runnymede Trust (1997) report, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All." Islamophobia is so pervasive that, for many of us who experience and/or study it, it seems to have become part of taken-for-granted "common sense" logics that Kevin Kumashiro (2001) warned about. As Özlem Sensoy (2014) asserted, "The 'logic' of colonialism, empire, and a civilized 'us,' the justification for economic and ideological exploitation, and drone attacks killing thousands of unremarkable, interchangeable, and backward 'them' is normalized" (p. 303).

The violence, pain, and trauma of Islamophobia does not envelop the entirety of those who identify as Muslim. Our lives and experiences are also brimming with beauty, love, faith, and community. However, I worry for my children and other children who deserve to be sustained in who they are in their classrooms, schools, and beyond. In this way, Islamophobia is not just an abstract academic "topic" for me and for so many others. It is profoundly lived. So, when Cory asked if anyone would like to be a guest editor for an issue around Islamophobia, I immediately volunteered. Why? Because as tired as I am dealing with Islamophobia, I am also tired of being talked about rather than engaged with. I felt the need to help ensure that this issue would serve to uplift the scholarship of fellow Muslim researchers as much as possible — those who also eschew approaching Islamophobia as a "topic" rather than as an ongoing lived experience with profound reverberations. Because they too have lived it.

WHAT IS ISLAMOPHOBIA?

There is no one agreed-upon definition of Islamophobia (Bangstad, 2016; Bullock, 2017; Massoumi et al., 2017). The most common definitions or conceptualizations associate

ASSERT
Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Islamophobia with fear, dislike, and/or hatred of Muslims and Islam. However, I resonate with Garner and Selod (2015), who conceptualized Islamophobia as "a specific form of racism targeting Muslims, and racialization is a concept that helps capture and understand how this works, in different ways at different times, and in different places" (p. 12). Over the last several decades, Islamophobia scholars have contributed to more expansive conceptualizations. They have asserted, for example, that Islamophobia: is often gendered (Ahmad, 2019; Zine, 2006); intersects with anti-Black racism (Auston, 2015; Best, 2017; Mohamed, 2017; Mugabo, 2016), dis/ability (Munawar, 2019), and homophobia (Safdari, 2019); is a form of racialization (Garner & Selod, 2015; Selod, 2015) , is pervasive at individual and systemic levels (Afshar, 2013; Zine, 2012); is (re)produced by the State (Najib & Hopkins, 2020); and enacts and compounds trauma (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009).

In education research, many have highlighted how schools are not immune to Islamophobia. Following her research alongside Muslim students in Canada, Amjad (2018) asserted that, while there are many teachers who are explicitly teaching against Islamophobia, "some Muslim students perceive most of their teachers not only as ineffective in combating racism, discrimination and Islamophobia, but also as promoting injustice through their teaching methods and curriculum" (p. 327). Several other scholars and researchers have traced Islamophobic violence in relation to schools and schooling (Bakali, 2016; Elkassem et al., 2018; Hindy, 2016; Zine, 2001, 2003, 2012). The authors of this issue contribute additional conceptions, considerations, and dimensions to the important question: How might we teach against Islamophobia in (social studies) classrooms and schools?

CONTRIBUTIONS

The first article of this issue of *ASSERT* is "Interrupting and Disrupting Single Stories: Working with Muslim Youth to Provide (Counter)stories and (Re)shape our World(s)" by Amanah Eljaji. Amanah draws upon her narrative inquiry research alongside a group of Grade Nine Muslim youth in their social studies classroom at the Edmonton Islamic Academy. As their teacher, Amanah was deeply troubled by their collective responses to her question of "What is the single story of Muslims?" after viewing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) TED Talk, The Danger of a Single Story. The article recounts the powerful ways she and the students drew upon their embodied, experiential knowing to provide counterstories to the damaging single stories that they initially provided as they actively challenged (internalized) Islamophobia.

In the next article, Supporting Muslim Students through Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, Nisreen Alameddine traces the potential for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) and collaborative inquiry (CI) to support Muslim students in classrooms and schools. Nisreen asserts that this needs to be done in ways that "address the power dynamics contributing to distorted understandings surrounding Muslims" and provides thoughtful suggestions and considerations towards teaching against Islamophobia.

In the third article, "Muslim Youth Yearning for 'Normal' Lives," Asma Ahmed draws upon her doctoral research alongside Muslim youth, and their teachers and administra-

tors, in an urban public high school in Ontario. Asma found that some of the teachers and administrators held negative biases and perceptions of Muslims and Islam, and that Muslim youth often felt pressure to represent their faith in school places. She concludes her article with several practical suggestions for how to teach against Islamophobia with these findings in mind.

The fourth article, "Teaching about 9/11 and Terrorism and Against Islamophobia" by Jeremy Stoddard involves an exploration of how U.S. curricula and teachers include resources to discuss the events of 9/11. Drawing on research from over a thousand secondary school teachers across the U.S., Jeremy and colleagues "found these materials lacking in their inclusion of specific details, context, and the events leading up to and resulting from the attacks." Jeremy concludes the article with several suggestions for how to teach about 9/11 while simultaneously teaching against Islamophobia.

The fifth article, "Teaching for Change: Listening to Muslim Voices about 9/11" by Randa Elbih draws upon Randa's doctoral research alongside nine Muslim American youth. Throughout her paper, Randa shows "how listening to Muslim students' voices - allowing their reflections of 9/11 in particular to guide the discussion on how teachers can teach for change - can alleviate discrimination against these vulnerable youth." She, too, provides powerful suggestions for teaching against Islamophobia and towards change.

In the sixth and final article, "Encountering Difficult Knowledge through holistic practices: Disrupting 9/11 orthodox accounts in social studies classrooms," Zahra Kasamali highlights how holism could provide powerful insights for teaching against Islamophobia. Drawing upon her doctoral research, Zahra asserts that "holistic insights can help to reposition how young people participate in difficult conversations on difference." Zahra ends the article with examples and practical suggestions for ways this can be achieved in secondary school classrooms.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Clearly, the articles that comprise this issue highlight a diversity of considerations and approaches to teaching against Islamophobia. However, there are many perspectives and voices that have yet to be centred in relation to social studies education and Islamophobia, most notably those located at the intersections of Islamophobia, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, dis/citizenship, poverty, and/or misogyny in social studies education. Further, much of this work tends to focus on secondary social studies classrooms; more research on ways to teach against Islamophobia in elementary social studies classrooms is needed. I eagerly await future scholarship in social studies education that engages with these and other intersectionalities. In the meantime, I invite as many colleagues as possible to join me, the authors of this issue, and many other colleagues in the vital work of teaching against Islamophobia.

On behalf of Cory and the Editorial Board, I thank you for engaging with *ASSERT* and look forward to your responses to this issue.

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April 26, 2021

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