



Module 8: Glossary of Terms and Concepts

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century

A

Abaya

A loose-fitting cloak or outer-garment worn from neck to toe by some Muslim women. Traditionally, it is a Middle-Eastern style of veiling, but it is worn by many Muslim women all over the world. Also called a *jilbab*.

Adhan

The Arabic call to prayer. In Muslim countries, it is recited by a *muezzin* (person giving the call) through the minarets of the mosque to let people know it is time to pray. It is recited five times a day for each of the mandatory prayers.

Alim (pl. Ulama)

A religious scholar or an individual who is highly learned in matters of faith, specifically with regard to Muslim laws.

Allah

Arabic for “the one God.” A term used by all Arabic-speaking people, such as Christians, Jews, and Muslims. It is not a “Muslim” God. In Islam there are also 99 names given as attributes of the one God.

B

Burqa

A full head-to-toe outer-garment that covers everything except the eyes. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, where the *burqa* is generally worn, it is part of the local culture and not necessarily a religious requirement. This style of veiling predates Islam and many Muslims believe that the burqa is not mandatory according to the Qur’an. It is one of the many interpretations of the requirements of modest clothing.

While some women wear the *burqa* out of personal choice, many in Afghanistan are forced to wear it based on cultural pressures and are punished for not doing so. Such an act, which takes away the choice from women in deciding to wear the *burqa*, is problematic.

To the dominant Western society, the *burqa* is used to symbolize the ill-treatment of Muslim women by Muslim men and the fear of radical, militant, and extremist views of Islam. This one-sided stereotypical perspective of the *burqa* is also problematic, as it paints *all burqa*-wearing women as powerless victims and Muslim men as violent and barbaric, which is certainly not the case.

C

Chador

A Persian word, usually referring to a large cloak and veil worn mostly in Iran.

D

Dawah

To do *dawah* means to invite other people to Islam. It can also mean outreaching to people of other faiths to create awareness about Islam.

Discrimination

Treating a person or persons unfairly because of a specific characteristic such as race, religion, gender, etc.

E

Eid al-Fitr

A three-day religious holiday celebrated by Muslims at the end of the month of Ramadan.

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha marks the end of *Hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to honour the sacrifice made by Prophet Ibrahim. This festival commemorates his obedience to God when he was asked to kill his son Ishmael as a sign of submission. When Ibrahim was about to kill his son, his son was replaced by a sheep, signifying that Ibrahim's intended "offering" was accepted. That is why on Eid al-Adha, Muslims sacrifice an animal as a form of remembrance of this event and distribute the meat to family, friends, and the poor. Eid al-Adha is followed by Eid al-Fitr.

Essentialism

Theories and assumptions about cultural differences (among human beings in particular) that understand these differences (of race, class, gender, sexuality) as natural, biological givens. For instance, the idea that women are biologically weak, maternal, emotional, etc. is called “essentialist” because it ascribes a psychological and physical essence to the traditional traits assigned to women in male-dominated cultures.

Ethnocentrism

The belief in one’s own ethnicity as superior and its use as the basis to judge all other racial and ethnic groups. Racist ethnocentrism is often referred to as *Eurocentrism*, the placement of the knowledge and experiences of people ancestrally from Europe as the norm from which to view and value all other races and ethnicities.

Equality

The idea that every person enjoys the same status, and thus everyone should be treated the same way, so that all people can realize their full human rights and potential in contributing to social development, and then benefit from the results.

Equity

The process of being fair to everyone. Equity often requires designing particular measures to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that keep different groups at different levels. Equity acknowledges the fact that equal treatment for everyone does not always yield equal results for everyone.

F

Faithism

A form of oppression where people are judged based on their religious affiliation or belief system. In this part of the world, Christianity may be seen as the normal faith group and others may be seen as deviant, wrong or strange.

Five pillars

Five tenets of Islam that are seen as the mandatory responsibilities of every Muslim:

1. *Shahadah*, also known as the declaration of belief that there is one God and that Prophet Mohammed is the last prophet sent by God.
2. *Salah*, the daily prayers Muslims perform five times a day.
3. *Zakat*, donating a set percentage of one's wealth to those in need.
4. Fasting in Ramadan for spiritual revival.
5. *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are physically and financially able to do so.

Fiqh

Islamic jurisprudence. See also *Shariah*.

H

Hadith (pl. ahadith)

The documented sayings and actions of Prophet Mohammed, recorded by his companions. Although not recorded in the Qur'an, *ahadith* are important sources of religious knowledge that complement Quranic teachings and Islamic law. Not all *ahadith* are relied upon equally, as the authenticity of some of the *hadith* traditions is an ongoing debate among religious scholars.

Halal

That which is permissible in Islam according to religious knowledge gathered from the Qur'an, *ahadith*, and other traditions of the Prophet.

Haram

That which is prohibited in Islam based on religious knowledge gathered from the Qur'an, *ahadith*, and other traditions of the Prophet.

Hijab

Curtain (as used in the Qur'an). The word has come to refer to a head covering.

Hajj

Annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. It is a duty for all Muslims who are able-bodied and financially capable of affording this trip.

I

Islam

Submission. Religiously, *Islam* refers to believing in one God, and in Mohammed as the last prophet who came to Muslims with God's message.

Islamophobia

As a system of oppression, *Islamophobia* can be defined as "a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination."

Imam

Religious leader. The term is often used to refer to the person leading *salah* (prayer).

Iman

Faith in God.

J

Jummah

Friday afternoon prayer, usually prayed collectively in a mosque, followed by a sermon by the Imam. The sermon is a crucial component of the *Jummah* prayer.

Jihad

Misunderstood as the violent "holy war" in the media, *Jihad* actually means "struggle" against shortcomings in self and in the community. It means to actively strive to improve one's character and establish justice in society. It can be something as small as organizing against poverty and hunger and as big as armed struggle (only as a form of self-defence with laid-out for rules that prohibit violence against innocents).

K

Kaaba

The holy shrine in Mecca, to which all Muslims direct themselves when performing *salah* (daily prayers).

M

Masjid

A mosque in which Muslims pray. The mosque also serves as a social and cultural hub for the Muslim community to gather and connect with each other.

Minaret

Tower of the mosque from which the *adhan* is called out.

Muslim

A person who believes in one God (Allah) according to Islam.

Muslimah

A Muslim woman.

MSA

Abbreviation for the Muslim Students' Association – an organization with student-run chapters in schools, colleges, and universities across North America.

N

Niqab

A veil that is used to cover the face, in addition to the headscarf. While not necessary to do so, some Muslim women choose to wear the *niqab* because of their understanding of what it means to be modest according to Islam.

O

Orientalism

A term coined by Edward Said to denote the way the Western world negatively views the Middle East and the Muslim world to maintain its own superiority. This means portraying the Eastern world and its people as backward, uncultured, and unchanging.

P

PBUH

Abbreviation for the phrase “peace be upon him” – used to show respect and send blessings. The term is used for all prophets, and more specifically Mohammed.

Power

Power is a relational concept; it functions between individuals and groups and depends on one’s subordination for another’s domination and privilege. This is usually referred to as “power over.” “Power over” is visible in the control of or access to institutions sanctioned by the state; it is visible in the power to define reality and rules, etc. Access to “power over” is complex and partially defined by white privilege. There are also other types of power that are less hierarchical and destructive. Power that works on a horizontal basis of sharing is often found in collective organizing. Power is also evident in an individual’s capacity to act.

Prejudice

A negative opinion or judgment formed about someone/something without any just grounds or sufficient knowledge; a preconceived notion. A negative pre-judgment is often called a *stereotype*; an action based on pre-judgment is discrimination. With reference to racism, prejudice is the unreasonable and inexplicable hostility toward a person, race or ethnic group. A prejudice is an attitude toward a group that may be the result of a stereotype.

Privilege

A special right or unearned advantage that puts one person or a group in a better position than others. It is usually invisible to those who have it because they are taught not to see it. In terms of racism, privilege is the unearned social power given to white people or people of European ancestry. White privilege is mainly historically-based in colonization, and it remains a contemporary system of preferential treatment at the individual and systemic level (i.e., systemic racism).

Q

Qur'an

The holy book of Muslims and the founding basis for all religious knowledge. The Qur'an was revealed orally to Prophet Mohammed through the angel Gabriel and was memorized and passed orally through his companions, who memorized it and later wrote it down. The words in the Qur'an have not changed from the original text; however, its interpretation varies based on how the reader understands it given his or her social, cultural, and historical context.

R

Race

Race is not based on biology; it is a created category with historical roots used to classify groups of people. Race was historically determined by genealogical or class differences. Our modern conception of race based on physical differences is a product of colonialism; it was defined in terms of skin colour, where non-white people were considered lower "races" in order to justify colonial expansion by western European nations. Contemporary relationships between differently raced people are still determined by this colonial moment in history and remain unequal, where based on skin colour white people have the most power and privilege and are considered the norm (i.e., non-raced). It is important to understand that "white" is also a created racial category. Although racial categories were derived from oppressive contexts, they can also be reclaimed and used as forms of resistance by communities of colour.

Racialization

The social process of constructing specific negative and essentialized images and attributing them to particular human groups. Since those images are taken to be the “essence” (fixed, permanent) of the group they are attributed to, they become a way to promote and justify exclusion of members of that particular group. For instance, people belonging to certain human groups can be unfairly assumed to be lazy because the group they belong to is “racialized” as being supposedly lazy. (For example, think of racializing images of Black and Latino groups. These images have a negative impact on the employability of the groups’ members.) On the other hand, certain groups can be racialized as being particularly productive, disciplined and even submissive. (For example, think of certain Asian communities whose members can thus be “commoditized” and exploited as tireless and diligent workers.) Historically, some groups that are categorized as “white” have also been racialized as a means of attaching a negative and debasing reference to their identity. (For example, early Irish immigrants to North America were referred to as the “Black Irish” or “Irish Negroes.”)

Racism

From a socio-psychological standpoint, an attitude that breeds discrimination and hatred of people based on their race or ethnic origin. In Canadian society, being white is viewed as the norm and people of colour are viewed as being outside the mainstream. Racism is a specific type of racial prejudice or discrimination backed up by legitimated institutional power. Although *prejudice* and *discrimination* can be experienced by all people in different contexts, *racism* is specific in its beliefs, assumptions and actions based on an ideology of the inherent superiority of the white race over other racial groups. Racism takes three main forms that operate together to maintain a system of oppression:

- **Individual Racism** – individual acts reflecting racist attitudes/beliefs (racial slurs, jokes, individual acts of violence, etc.)
- **Ideological Racism** – negative ideas and attitudes (for example, Muslims are violent terrorists, Aboriginals are lazy), often circulated through media, texts and informal channels of communication. These ideas and attitudes create stereotypical notions that provide legitimacy and a rationale for the inferiority or superiority of certain groups in society and unequal social relations.
- **Systemic/Institutional Racism** – organizational policies and practices at the institutional levels of society that indirectly target racialized communities and maintain white privilege (for example, racism in the criminal justice system, racial profiling).

Ramadan

The ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar, when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. The main objective behind *Ramadan* is strengthening one's spirituality and community by helping those in need, such as the poor, the elderly, and the oppressed.

S

Salah

The Arabic term for prayers. Many Muslims also refer to it as *Namaz*, which is the Persian word for prayer. *Salah* is performed at five designated times of the day:

1. *Fajr*: prayer in the early morning
2. *Duhr*: prayer around noon time
3. *Asr*: prayer in late afternoon
4. *Maghrib*: prayer just before sunset
5. *Isha*: the last prayer at night

Shariah

A term is more profound than *law*. Metaphorically it means "the way" or the beaten path to the source of water – meaning towards God. *Shariah* is best defined as God's law, and is the foundational source, along with *hadith*, for the development of Muslim law – *fiqh* or jurisprudence – which is the human effort to codify the law.

Confusion is caused by the interchangeable use of the term *shariah*, when what is actually meant is the human development of *fiqh* or jurisprudence.

Muslim majority states have developed their distinctive jurisprudence, based on their understanding of *fiqh*. Some of these laws can be problematic for women.

Stereotype

A fixed general image or set of characteristics that are considered representative of a particular type of person or group. Stereotypes can lead to false conclusions and perceptions. They exaggerate the sameness of a group and the differences between groups. Stereotypes are not just about individual ignorance but are also part of a system that keeps relations of power unequal.

Sufi

Practitioner of the mystical tradition of Islam.

Sunnah

Actions and sayings of the prophet Mohammed that complement the divinely inspired Qur'an. It is another source for laws.

U

Ummah

The global Muslim community.

W

Wudu

A specific form of ritual that involves washing oneself with water to mentally and physically prepare for prayers.