

Ask Me, Learn about Me, Include Me

As a Muslim, my community and I are placed under a microscope in Western societies like Canada. While my everyday experiences are generally positive, I still occasionally face microaggressions- like being ignored or being stared at. There have been two instances- both of which took place on the Skytrain- where I have fallen victim of racist and Islamophobic tirades, which involves hurtful words like “terrorist”. I also have many friends who have experienced such painful situations, and many members of Muslim communities in Canada and elsewhere. Public rhetoric and media narratives which construct Muslims as “Other” and as enemies, have materialized into these racist realities where Muslims have become alienated, and Islam stigmatized. And they have overridden our own personal narratives, which is the most powerful outcome of racism. Muslims continue to resist through their everyday resilience to ensure that their identities are not erased.

During those times in which I experienced racist incident by being called a terrorist and told that I would go “bomb something”, an immense gesture of support would have been being comforted or defended by onlookers. While I have been able to diffuse and deescalate the situation effectively, once on my own and once with a Muslim friend, many Muslims are more vulnerable and less privileged than myself, and would have been defeated or scared. I encourage others who witness such incidents to not be bystanders, and either comfort the victim or stand up against the perpetrator in a safe way. I had reported the latest incident involving a racist man to the police, and while they were very cooperative during the initial call, they did not follow up with me. Community support from authorities is crucial in combatting hate crime, and more of that needs to happen so that Muslims feel safe.

Through writing & photography, I am able to express myself meaningfully. I have contributed to society through awareness raising about adversities that marginalized communities in Canada and around the world face, through my sociological worldview. As a Youth Worker who serves immigrant high school students in Vancouver, I adopt this lens within my current role.

Learn about others. Know that it’s okay to not have all the answers, and to not be afraid to ask. Activism and social media today have been excellent at amplifying narratives against racism but also are often harsh towards people who aren’t well versed in these conversations. Take time and learn, empathize with communities different to yours, consume media critically, and stop yourself when you feel like you are making assumptions about others. Because ignorant thought can become ignorant speech, and ignorant speech can become ignorant action. It is all of our responsibility to make others feel safe, included and valued.