

THE TESSELLATE INSTITUTE



2017 ANNUAL REPORT



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INSTITUTE

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2017 was an extremely productive year for the Tessellate Institute, alhamdulillah.

The highlight of this year was our 10th anniversary event, held in September at the Alliance Francaise in Toronto. Co-founder Irfan Syed helped introduce the crowd with a short talk about what had inspired him to co-found TTI, and I read a congratulatory statement from Dr. Sheema Khan, our 3rd co-founder. There were two panels, each addressing differing aspects of “Muslim Identity in an Age of Right Wing Populism.” Dr. Ingrid Mattson and Dr. Barbara Perry addressed “Muslim identity” and “Right Wing Populism” in Canada, respectively. Fiyyaz Jaat from ISNA Youth talked about Muslim youth identity in the current age of rising anti-Muslim racism. A second panel, moderated by TTI board member Nadiya Ali, featured Samiya Abdi and Gilary Massa discussing the all-too-common exclusion of black Muslim voices from mainstream discourse, even though black Muslims find themselves at the intersection of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia. The panels were interspersed with powerful poetry from teen poets Afrah Ali, Nastaxo Warsame, and Saba Mirabolghasemi, closing with well-known spoken word artist Timaj Garad. After a lively question and answer session with the audience, we headed to a beautiful gallery space for a networking reception with light refreshments.

Who would have thought that we’d see a 10th anniversary for Tessellate Institute? It was with humility and pride that I thanked all the board members, past and present, for their dedicated work over the years, as well as our volunteers. TTI wouldn’t be here today were it not for their tireless efforts. A big thank you to board member Nabeel Ahmed, who managed to pull all the loose threads together into a solid whole, without which the evening would have frayed here and there. Words are not enough to convey proper appreciation and gratitude to you all.

Tea with Tessellate

We marked the year with a number of important achievements. Nadiya Ali revived *Tea with Tessellate*, our café style conversation series, with assistance from Amina Mohamed. The first event in April featured Lucy El-Sherif facilitating a discussion on *Living Muslimhood in an Islamophobic Age*. The second, held in November, was a discussion led by Key Ballah, a Toronto based writer and Hip Hop enthusiast, about the recent book *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States* by Dr. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer.

Picture the Possibilities: Muslimah Photovoice Project

With a grant from the Ministry of Education, we hired Project Manager, Sakinah Hasib, and Abier El-Barbary, a trained psychotherapist and conceiver of the project entitled *Picture the Possibilities: Muslimah Photovoice Project*. Photovoice was an opportunity for young Muslim women in high school to connect, develop self-expression through photography, and exhibit their work in the community. An exhibit of their photographs was held in August at Daniel Spectrum, and a resource kit has been developed for parents and educators of Muslim teens.

Research relevant to Muslims in Canada

Dr. Abdullah Al Shami produced a paper with a grant from the International Institute of Islamic Thought on *Islamic Perspectives on Basic Income*, to present at a multi-faith conference in October. The conference intended to bring faith voices to the fore to inform the Ontario government's basic income pilot project.

Nakita Valerio, who works for the *Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council*, was hired with a grant from the Institute for Religious and Global Studies to produce a research paper on "Jewish Responses to anti-Semitism in Canada: Lessons Regarding Anti-Muslim Racism," due to be published in February 2018.

More new research papers and briefs completed in 2017:

- *The 50 most tweeted words under #M103 tell a story about contemporary Islamophobia in Canada*, a brief note on online discourse by Cory Funk (March)
- *Policy background: Defining Islamophobia for a Canadian context*, a brief note by Dr. Katherine Bullock (March)
- *A Diverse Portrait of Islamic Religious Charities Across Canada: A Profile Analysis of Organizational Dynamics*, a pioneering study of Islamic organizations by Mahdi J. Qasqas and Dr. Tanvir Turin (July)
- *Entertainment or Blackface? Decoding Orientalism in a post-9/11 era: Audience views on Aladdin* by Dr. Katherine Bullock and Steven Zhou, published in *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, Vol 39, No. 5. (July)

Happily, Shazlin Rahman has been able to establish a regular TTI newsletter, another key milestone for us this year. Sign up on our website for our quarterly newsletter, which provides a summary of on-going projects.

Finally, a big thanks to outgoing board members Mohamed Huque and Steven Zhou for their dedication and commitment to TTI over the past few years. We will miss you and wish you well in your endeavours. We welcome back Lina Khatib from her maternity leave.

Katherine Bullock
President, TTI