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The Muslim Question

UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE
SOCIOLOGIST, IN HIS NEW BOOK,
UNCOVERS SOME TROUBLING
SIGNS WITH MUSLIM
INTEGRATION IN CANADA

LETHBRIDGE HERALD

Canada has managed to avoid the level of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims that has occurred in other countries, but a University of Lethbridge sociologist has uncovered some worrisome signs.

In his new book, "The Muslim Question in Canada" (published by UBC Press), Dr. Abdolmohammed (Abdie) Kazemipur shows Muslims in Canada seem to have less difficulty with Canadian public institutions and media than in other countries, but face major difficulties integrating into the Canadian economy and entering the social mix.

Using data from nationwide surveys and interviews with Muslims of different ages and ethnic backgrounds living in different Canadian cities, Kazemipur found Muslims in Canada worry most about their economic and social well-being.

They are also concerned about the occurrence of racism and discrimination against Muslims, and Kazemipur added that could be a reason why they aren't fully integrated into the economy. His research found this is something a large number of non-Muslim Canadians agree with, too. Among all the immigrant groups in Canada, the level of interaction between native-born Canadians and Muslims is the lowest. He advocates for programs to increase the level of co-operation and interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, and for the

removal of any hidden biases in the job market.

"Both groups have to work hard and take initiatives to change this situation," said Kazemipur.

The problems, if left untreated, could grow and create a bigger divide marked by tension on both sides.

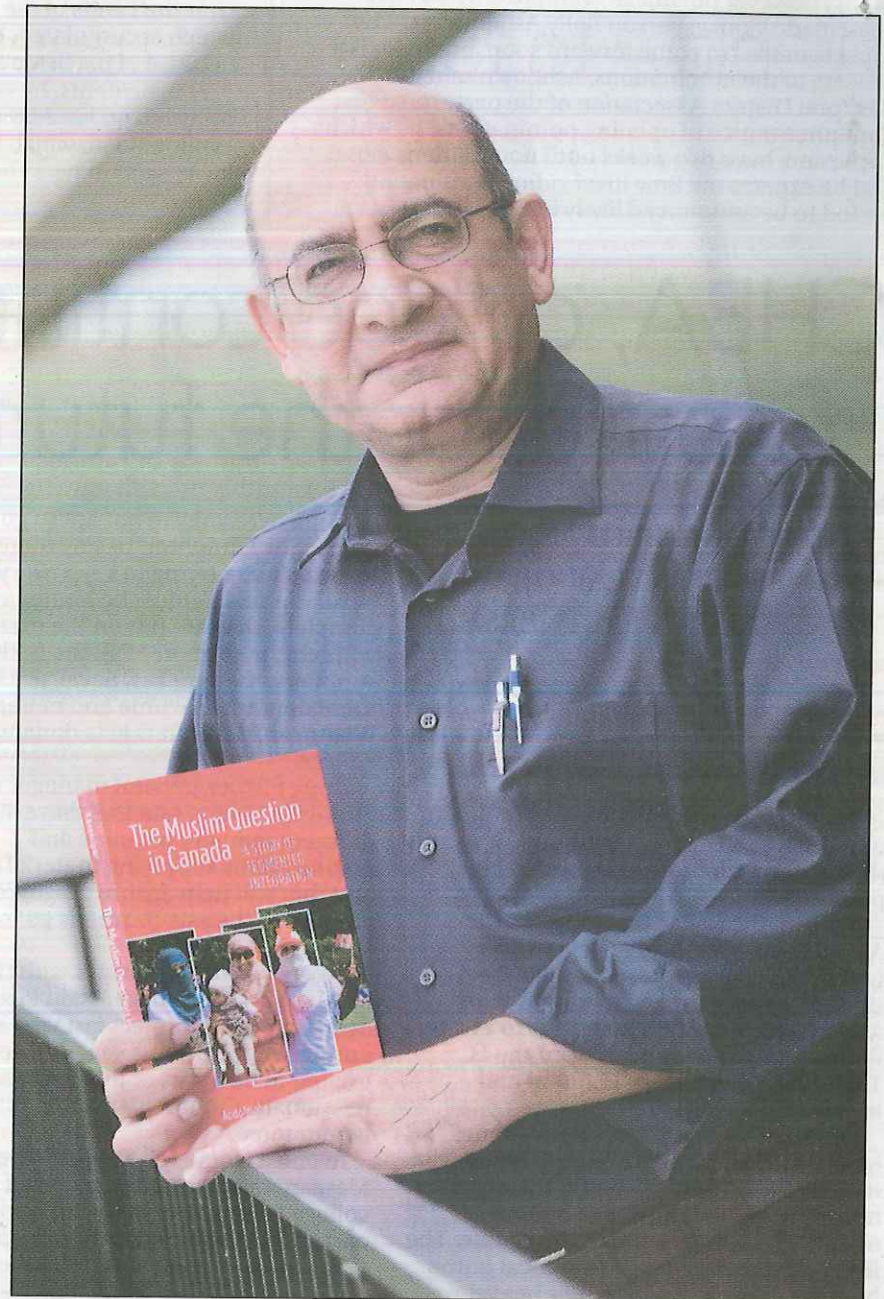
"In the extreme, it can lead to extremism and violence that have happened elsewhere in the world," he said. "If part of the population feels like they don't belong, then they won't care much about what is happening in the country. That's not something that is a Muslim issue — that's a human issue."

Kazemipur added people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, immigrate to Canada in search of a better life and, in any population, a small number of people could be found who deviate from this goal and develop a tendency toward violence. Danger arises when the behaviour of a few is generalized to the whole population. Also, having large segments of a population feeling unattached and alienated creates a favourable ground for the growth of extremism.

"In the absence of social connectedness, extremist elements can draw on a population for recruitment and can find supporters much more easily," he said. "But when people feel like they are part of a bigger population then they never think of themselves as a minority or majority. They think they are all part of one thing, part of a big 'us,' and they are much less likely to support an activity against themselves."

The data also put to rest any notion forbidding Muslims to practise their faith will hasten their integration into Canadian society.

"To the extent that they can practise their faith freely and without any limitation or pressures, they become more integrated and they develop a much more positive view towards Canadian society," said Kazemipur.



Herald photo by Ian Martens

Abdie Kazemipur, a professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge, explores issues facing Muslims integrating into the Canadian economy and society in his book, "The Muslim Question."