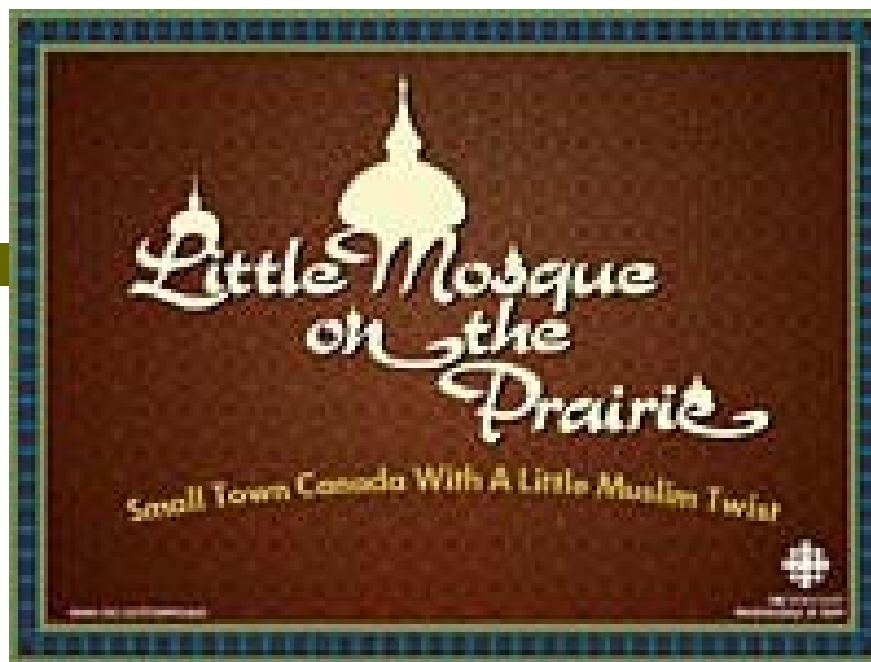


# Acting Out Integration: The Case of “Little Mosque on the Prairie”



Presentation by M. Sharon Jeannotte  
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# “Little Mosque on the Prairie”

## - A quick guide

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- ❑ Canadian sit-com on the interactions between the Muslim and non-Muslim population in the fictional prairie town of Mercy, Saskatchewan
- ❑ Created by Zarqa Nawaz, a 39 year-old mother of four and Canadian Muslim of Pakistani origin
- ❑ Produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)
- ❑ In 2007 attracted an average audience of 1.7 million per episode (exceptionally high for a domestic comedy)
- ❑ CBC has sold the series to TV channels airing in Israel, France, Switzerland, the West Bank, Gaza, Dubai, Finland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and several francophone African countries.

# Canadian context - antecedents

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## □ CBC sitcoms:

- "King of Kensington" – 1975-80

Hero was Larry King, a convenience store owner in Toronto's Kensington Market, known for helping his multicultural group of friends and neighbours to solve their problems.

- "The Beachcombers" – 1972-1990

Hero was Nick Adondidas, a Greek-Canadian log salvager in British Columbia. Many of the plots focused on diversity issues involving his friends, including his native business partner.

# Canadian context - policy

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CBC/Radio Canada guiding principles for public value:

- ❑ Improving the democratic and cultural life of Canadian citizens;
- ❑ Reflecting diversity and fostering cohesion;
- ❑ Delivering on public policy objectives.

(Robert Rabinovitch, President and CEO, CBC/Radio Canada, September 7, 2007)

# Domestic Audience reaction to “Little Mosque”

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- ❑ “It’s so great to see the comments coming in from all corners of the globe. I’m a proud CBC fan and I love Little Mosque – this is the kind of ground-breaking creativity that makes me proud to be a Canadian.” (Riona from Toronto)
- ❑ “Can’t get enough of this show! Ms. Nawaz, I am truly proud of the way you uplift the Muslim image throughout North America and might I add, The World! Hope to see much more seasons of the show (i.e.. a minimum of 10 seasons). This show has become quite addictive 😊.” (Shoaib from Richmond Hill)
- ❑ “It is so risk-averse, so painfully correct, it makes your teeth ache. No sacred cows were gored, or even scratched, in the making of this show.” (Margaret Wente, *Globe and Mail*, January 9, 2007)

# International Audience reaction to “Little Mosque”

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- ` Toutes mes félicitations! Cette serie est formidable, les acteurs sont géniaux, le sujet est traité avec justesse et juste ce qu'il faut d'humour pour passer un message de tolérance. Pour une fois les musulmans ne sont ni terroristes, ni voleurs, ni opresseurs et c'est plaisant à voir, surtout en France où la communauté musulmane connait beaucoup de difficultés. Merci. I love the show!' (Lawen from France)
- “I love this show! I want to see it on tv in the usa sooo bad! I am a muslim revert and think this kind of tv would be totally awesome for my non muslim family to watch!” (Sarah from Chicago)

# Narrative's role in construction and adaptation of social systems

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- Converts individual experience into collective coin of culture (Bruner) by:
  - retaining proven guides to action
  - creating new and untested guides to action
  - transmitting guides to action from one person to another (Wilson)

# Retaining proven guides to action

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- “By looking at the immigrant experience ... Nawaz and her co-producers are banking on an age-old formula that there is humour to be found in the common experiences and often unintended tragic consequences that result from love and life.” (Ihsaan Gardee, *Montreal Gazette*, January 14, 2007)
- “Assalamualaikum. I just discovered your TV Show. It is excellent! Full credit should go to the producers, writers, actors and all the people involved in creating this show! It really shows the true muslim spirit and values to which I adhere to. Jazakallah.” (Khalil from Perth, Australia)

# Creating new and untested guides to action

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- “Hi Little Mosque, Did you see the news item on the National last night (October 23, 2007)?- where Mark Kelly went to a little town in Quebec to interview citizens who are afraid that immigrants, Muslims among them will force them from being true Quebecers? They therefore want to ban immigrants from the town unless they comply to their rules...ever thought of sending this issue to your writers and see how your characters might react in kind?” (Gail from Victoria, B.C.)
- “i came across Little Mosque on the Praire on YouTube...and i have to say, the show is great! i'm addicted to it! i love the character of Rayyan, bit like me..the Muslim woman who knows her rights and wants to feel free to express them! GO THE WHOLE CAST!” (Farah from Scotland)

# Transmitting guides to action

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- “At the end of my World Civ class, I invited students to watch an episode or two with me. They were delighted; we ended up watching four. :-) For them, it was a perfect capstone for the course. What better way to talk about globalization than to see it at work in Mercy, Saskatchewan? Muslims adjusting to the Western world, and vice versa, and showing how very funny and human everyone was, despite outward differences. Bravo to you, CBC. I hope this gets shown everywhere. P.S. Whom do I have to contact to include the show as a part of my course next year?” (Roland from Odessa, Texas)

# Transmitting guides to action

## (Muslim couples kissing in public)

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- ❑ “Although I am really pleased to finally see a Muslim TV Show on air, the only problem I have with your show is that it does not always portrays Muslims accurately or fairly. I do not know if you intended this, but it is sometimes misrepresenting Muslims. For instance, Muslim parents usually don't openly kiss in public (Yasir and Sarah).” (Maha from New York)
- ❑ “My feeling about this is that while it's true that the spectrum of Muslim types is broad and colorful, this particular behavior (kissing in public) is one that conflicts with the rest of the paradigm because it isn't what self-proclaimed masjid-erecting Muslims do. In other words, Yasir and Sarah's public behavior is very different from a more true to life couple would be like (who, as the program portrays them) are totally tied up in masjid culture. It's just not accurate portrayal. Anyone who's that invested in their Muslim community just "knows better". Just my 5 dirhams. :-)” (Hany from Virginia)

# Transmitting guides to action

## (Muslim couples kissing in public -2)

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- "Maha - are you for real? How can you possibly say that "Muslim parents don't openly kiss in public". My husband and I kiss in public. Just because you have some cultural preferences related to public affection doesn't mean you have to wrap it up as religion. I love the show because it shows regular Muslims who live in Canada."  
(Suzanne from Toronto)
- "In response to Maha, I am a Muslim parent and I do kiss my wife in public (at the same time I am sure there are some Muslim parents - like those from other religions - who do NOT kiss in public). Thats exactly the kind of myths that need to be corrected. Thanks CBC for this wonderful show." (Abbas from Windsor)

# Integration and cultural expression

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- Dual domestic role of “Little Mosque on the Prairie”:
  - vehicle for Canadian public policies re: diversity
  - “model” for immigrant integration
- Emerging roles internationally:
  - vehicle for Canadian cultural identity
  - global “guide for action” in diverse societies