



Muslims & Multiculturalism: *Evaluating Common Concerns about Muslims in Canada*

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Notes about this analysis:

- It does not claim to represent the interests and views of all Canadian Muslims.
- It does not intend to minimize any real threats or concerns facing Canadian communities, but rather to put into perspective the ones we face.
- It does not intend to stifle debate on the issues, but rather to present facts supporting an alternative outlook to the ones often presented in mainstream discourse.
- Care was taken to ensure that all information is correct and properly sourced, but if there are any errors, we apologize.

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Introduction

- This analysis is concerned with addressing myths about the Muslim communities in Canada (and North America generally) that fuel pessimism about the viability of multiculturalism.
- These narratives include those related to the incompatibility of “Islam” with “Western values,” Muslims’ propensity for (and agenda of) violence, and Islam’s/Muslims’ oppression of women.
- It is important to note that the types of concerns now salient about Muslims have been raised about new minority groups throughout the histories of Canada and the United States.
- As journalist Haroon Siddiqui reminds us: *“Throughout its history, Canada has been said to be going to the dogs because of bad immigrants. Good immigrants we’ve never had, as per populist parlance. It’s only with the passage of time that the older batches of immigrants are deemed to have done some good for Canada.”* (Haroon Siddiqui, “The new war over multiculturalism” 25 April 2010, *The Toronto Star*, http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2010/04/25/siddiqui_the_new_war_over_multiculturalism.html)
- And in a December 2011 *New York Times* piece debating the question “Is Americans’ religious freedom under threat?”, Harvard law professor Noah Feldman claims that “bigotry” towards Islam is only the latest episode in the long history of religious persecution in America, despite “a principled commitment to toleration.” He cites Baptists, Quakers, Mormons, Catholics, and Jews as having previously faced what the Muslim community now faces: *“Today official hatred of Catholics, Mormons and Jews has faded. Now Islam is subjected to the canard that its values are incompatible with democracy. Proposed legislation in Oklahoma and Tennessee purports to ban Islamic law from the courts — a measure that the American separation of church and state makes completely unnecessary.”* (Noah Feldman, “As American as religious persecution” 22 December 2011, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/12/22/is-americans-religious-freedom-under-threat/as-american-as-religious-persecution>)

Addressing Racism

Concern | Addressing issues of racism is simply a matter of being “politically correct.”

Discussion

- Racism does not just affect the victimized group, but leads to inefficiencies; for instance, racial profiling may lead to misallocation of law enforcement resources
 - Example: A Muslim American from Saudi Arabia was questioned by FBI agents after he was thought to be seen transporting bomb materials – in actuality, he was delivering a traditional Saudi dish in his pressure cooker to a friend’s house. In all likelihood, this incident was not intentionally racist, but was rather the result of assumptions about what those who pose a threat to society look like.
 - These assumptions are largely misleading. The official website for the United States’ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which documents all terrorist attacks on US soil from 1980 to 2005, lists the demographic breakdown of violence committed by various groups during that time period as follows: Latino (42 percent), Christian (24 percent), Other (16 percent), Jewish (7 percent), Muslim (6 percent) and Communist (5 percent). (US Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Terrorism,” http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005/terror02_05#terror_05sum)
 - And in a 2013 study for the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, Professor Charles Kurzman found a broad range of ethnicities amongst the 14 Muslim individuals indicted on terrorism charges in 2012 in the United States: four were Arab-American, two were South Asian, two were white converts to Islam, two were East Asian converts to Islam, and one each were Afghan, Kosovar, Uzbek, and a Latino convert. While no one was killed by Muslim terrorism in 2012, there were 14,000 murders that year – making racial profiling of individuals even less useful. (Charles Kurzman, “Muslim-American Terrorism: Declining Further,” 1 February 2013, http://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Muslim-American_Terrorism_February_1_2013.pdf)
 - Although not all false leads can be prevented, correcting stereotypes should mean that scarce law enforcement resources can better identify real threats.

- Racism can and does result in violence
 - Example: The August 2012 shooting at a Gurdwara (place of Sikh worship) in Wisconsin by a lone gunman. Although lone gunmen may not be representative of society at large (given the questionable status of their mental health) Sikhs have indeed reported increased racism and violence in North America since 9/11. Since this group has been targeted due to the

conflation of 'brown people in turbans' and '9/11 terrorists', this very basic confusion about religious identities is illustrative of the dangers of misinformation, which may normally be manifested more subtly.

Muslims in Canada/North America

Concern | Muslims don't hold Canadian values: why do they come here if they don't like our ways? Incoming Canadians should integrate, not seek to be accommodated.

Discussion

- Studies show that Canadian Muslims are happy and proud to be Canadian, and appreciate the country as it is. The same applies to Muslims in the United States.
 - 94% of Canadian Muslims say they are proud to be Canadian - a figure that roughly mirrors the general population. (Environics Institute, "Focus on Canada – Special Theme: Muslims and Multiculturalism in Canada," 2006, <http://www.environicsinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/focus%20canada%202006-4%20report.pdf>)
 - When asked to name the things that make them proud to be Canadian, the largest numbers of Muslims cite freedom and democracy (33%), Canadian multiculturalism (17%), the fact that Canada is a peaceful country (10%), and the impression that Canada is a humane and caring country (9%). ([Environics 2006](#))
 - Muslims' least favourite feature about Canada is overwhelmingly the weather (24%) – in contrast to Canadians overall, who say it is the government. ([Environics 2006](#))
 - Most Muslims report a strong impression that their co-religionists want to integrate into Canadian society. ([Environics 2006](#))
 - Although members of the Canadian public tend to believe that Canadian Muslims wish to remain apart, these views tend to change for those who have direct contact with Muslims. ([Environics 2006](#))
 - 72% of US Muslims believe that Muslim immigrants to the United States wish to assimilate at least somewhat into larger American society. (Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011, <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/section-3-identity-assimilation-and-community/>)
 - Most US Muslims (63%) say there is no inherent tension between being religiously devout and living in a modern society. A nearly identical proportion of American Christians (64%) agree. ([Pew Research Center 2011](#))
 - American Muslims are more positive about national conditions (56%) than the general public (23%); 79% rate their communities as "excellent" or "good" places to live. ([Pew Research Center 2011](#))

- According to [2006 Environics](#) study, Canadian Muslims are more concerned with achieving success in Canadian society – finding employment and overcoming discrimination – than they are about influences such as popular culture, secularization, and gender equality.
- The reference to ‘Canadian values’ is often implicitly based on the underlying and frequently unexamined idea of who constitutes a “real” Canadian – i.e. a white European, with English or French as a first language.
- As social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad argues in her work on immigration in Norway, being “Norwegian” is conceived as an innate quality, not something to be achieved: the “imagined sameness” of having built the country together positions some citizens as more authentically Norwegian than others. (Marianne Gullestad, “Invisible Fences: Egalitarianism, Nationalism and Racism” (March 2002) 8:1 *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 45)
- Gullestad uses the metaphor of a host-guest relationship: “a host has the right to control the resources of the home, to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to ‘put their foot down’ when the guest does not conform.”
- However, Canadian values are more solidly defined as what we have chosen to constitutionalize (and these values include freedom of religion, equality, and multiculturalism), rather than as being the values inherent to a specific ethnic group (or groups).
- One idea underlying multiculturalism is that respect for minority groups’ traditions and practices benefits not only the minority groups who adhere to them, but also the wider society which learns from them and becomes richer, more flexible and more interesting. Whereas aggressive assimilationism assumes that the host culture is paramount and immigrants must adopt its ways completely, multiculturalism positions the integration of newcomers as, at least ideally, a two-way process in which newcomers both adapt to and shape the mainstream.
- Immigration is not a favour the Canadian state grants to immigrants; immigration to Canada benefits Canada as well as immigrants, and the state only accepts immigrants it think will benefit the country.
- As economist and former Quebec cabinet minister Clément Gignac pointed out recently in the *Globe and Mail*,

“Canada’s strong economic performance since 2008 is explained by many factors, including well-capitalized banks, massive public infrastructure spending – and a strong influx of immigrants. Immigration last year explained two-thirds of Canada’s population growth of 1.2 per cent, well ahead of the 0.7 per cent and 0.3 per cent seen in the United States and the euro zone, respectively.

“Why is this so important? Because without this immigration flow, Canada’s population aged between 20 and 44 years old would be declining. That cohort,

which constitutes most of the labour force, is the one that creates new households, buys new houses, has children and pays the greater part of taxation revenue.

Without immigration, Canada's natural population growth would not be enough to sustain economic growth and welfare. Quebec, given its demographic structure, especially needs immigration to increase its labour force in the short term so as to sustain the costs of its social programs. [. . .]

"As Canadians, we need foreign talent to sustain the country's demographic and economic growth, and we have just the labour market to attract it. Canadians need immigration just as much as immigrants need a destination such as Canada.

Immigration, as it turns out, is most likely the key to Canada's prosperity."

(Clément Gignac, "For Canada, immigration is a key to prosperity" 7 October 2013, *The Globe and Mail*, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/economy-lab/for-canada-immigration-is-a-key-to-prosperity/articleI47II28I/>; emphasis added)

- Journalist Joe Friesen also wrote in the *Globe and Mail* about Canada's need for immigration:

"When immigrants arrive, they not only fill gaps in the work force but pay taxes and spend money on housing, transport and consumer goods. Productive capacity increases and there is a ripple effect across the economy. And studies show that their offspring tend to be among the country's best-educated and initiative-taking young people.

"It's not that the federal government is blind to the issue. Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney is crossing the country to promote his reforms of the system, trying to make it more responsive to the needs of employers and the economy. But he says he has no intention of boosting the actual number of immigrants Canada admits annually, despite demands from nearly every provincial government.

"On that level, the federal plan seems inadequate to the looming challenge. Today, there are 4.2 working-aged Canadians for every senior citizen, making contributions to cover retirees' pensions and health care. By 2031, that ratio will be cut in half. The tax base will shrink, growth will slow and labour shortages will become even more dire. Immigration can't completely cure a problem of that scale, but it can help to alleviate the symptoms.

"Already, in 2012, all the growth in the country's labour force comes from immigration. Within two decades, barring an improbable baby boom, immigration will account for all population growth too."

(Joe Friesen, “Why Canada needs a flood of immigrants” 4 May 2012, *The Globe and Mail*, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/why-canada-needs-a-flood-of-immigrants/article4105032/?page=all>; emphases added)

Concern | Muslims constitute over I billion of the global population, and act as a monolith in opposition to “Western civilization.”

Discussion

- This idea was encapsulated in Bernard Lewis’s and Samuel Huntington’s assertion of a “clash of civilizations” between “Islam” and “the West” – a framework subsequently problematized by multiple scholars (see, for example, Bruce M Russett, John R Oneal, and Michaelene Cox, “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence” (September 2000) 37:5 *Journal of Peace Research* 583 (noting that empirical research provides “little evidence that [civilizations] define the fault lines along which international conflict is apt to occur) and Errol A Henderson, “Not Letting Evidence Get in the Way of Assumptions: Testing the Clash of Civilizations Thesis with More Recent Data” (2005) 42 *International Politics* 458 (observing that “Huntington’s thesis is not substantiated” with data on armed conflict)).
- There is no necessary tension or competition between (religious) identification with Islam and (citizenal or nationalistic) identification with Canada or the United States.
- A majority of Muslim Americans (93%) believe that their American co-religionists are loyal to the United States. Further, in every major religious group surveyed by Gallup, “including Muslim Americans, people who identify strongly with the US are also more likely to identify strongly with their worldwide religious identity.” (Gallup, “Muslim Americans: Faith, Freedom, and the Future,” August 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/153611/REPORT-Muslim-Americans-Faith-Freedom-Future.aspx>)
- Muslims are large in numbers, but are not a monolithic group with a single shared identity, focus, belief or community.
 - o Muslims, like any other religious group, differ even in terms of religious identity – from religious sect, level of religious practice, religious community, religious interpretation, and importance of religion in everyday life. As well, Muslims (like any other people) have various other identities outside of religion that play differing roles in defining them: gender, ethnicity, culture, place of birth and residence, languages spoken, personality, mental and physical health, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, occupation, et cetera.

- Given this diversity, it is not surprising that Canadian Muslims adopt diverse politics – for example, Canadian Muslim Members of Parliament have included Rahim Jaffer for the Conservative Party and Omar Alghabra for the Liberal Party; Ali Naqvi was an advisor to the NDP. Muslim level of support is split between all major parties and Muslims can be seen on all sides of any given social/political debate.
 - Even on the issue of the Middle East – a subject on which Muslims are seen to have a common stance – “there is no consensus among [Canadian] Muslims about the balance of Canada’s policy.” ([Environics 2006](#))
 - Please see [Environics’ 2006](#) report, and the [2007](#) and [2011](#) Pew Research Center reports, for some demographic details and beliefs/opinions of Muslims in Canada and the U.S.
- Moreover, there is no global Muslim community sharing a single set of values in opposition to “Western” ones.
 - The 2013 Pew survey of Muslims around the world (covering more than 38 000 Muslims in 39 countries) found that: most Muslims express support for democracy; most Muslims embrace freedom of religion; the prevailing view in most countries is that there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, or between living in a modern society and being religiously devout; many Muslims enjoy Western popular culture. (Pew Research Center, “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society,” 30 April 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>)
 - A recent Gallup survey in 10 predominantly Muslim countries (representing more than 80% of the global Muslim population) found that Muslims frequently cite political freedom, liberty, fair judicial systems, and freedom of speech as the features of the West they most admire. (John L Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, “Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think,” 8 March 2008, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/press/104209/who-speaks-islam-what-billion-muslims-really-think.aspx>).
 - Despite the obvious truth that Muslims are not a single unit, concern about the global force of Muslims arises out of the assumption that, regardless of other identities, one’s “Muslim-ness” is her/his defining feature. Economist and social theorist Amartya Sen points out the danger of presuming one aspect of identity defines a person more so than any other:

“The same person can, for example, be a British citizen, of Malaysian origin, with Chinese racial characteristics, a stockbroker, a nonvegetarian, an asthmatic, a linguist, a bodybuilder, a poet, an opponent of abortion, a bird-watcher, an astrologer, and one who believes that God created Darwin to test the gullible [. . .] It is when a person only thinks of himself and others in terms of a single attribute that violence erupts [. . .] The illusion of singular identity, which serves the violent purpose of those orchestrating

confrontations, is skillfully cultivated and fomented by the commanders of persecution and carnage [. . .] For example, in India directly after its independence from Britain in 1948, Indians stopped seeing each other as fellow countrymen. Instead, a great many persons' identities as Indians, as subcontinentals, as Asians, or as members of the human race seemed to give way -quite suddenly- to sectarian identification with Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh communities [. . .] Illusion of singular identity leads to violence. No longer did it matter that the enraged, fighting, killing masses were all Indians and humans; many an Indian became a killer in the name of his religion. It is well-known that history often repeats itself."

(from Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2007))

- As Sen explains, the divisions we create between ourselves are often based on somewhat arbitrary distinctions between one another - a single aspect or dimension of our identities that does not constitute the whole, and perhaps does not even represent the most important aspect. Thus, we should view the 1 billion Muslims as *people*, with a multitude of characteristics – including, but not limited to, their faith and religious identity – that contribute to their experience, understanding, and actions in the world.

Concern | Muslim-majority states don't treat their minority populations well, so why should Muslim minorities be treated well here?

Discussion

- Many Muslim-majority States undoubtedly discriminate against their religious minority populations.
- But it is fallacious – although perhaps intuitively appealing – to connect Muslim Canadians to Muslim-majority States, and hold them responsible for their policies.
- This attribution of responsibility is based on the underlying ideas that Muslims are a monolith, and that Muslims belong more to “the Muslim world” than to Canada – even though many Muslims were born in Canada, or have lived the majority of their adult lives here.
- In this line of thinking, Muslim individuals are held responsible for actions of states they may have nothing to do with.
 - Many Muslim Canadians were born in Canada (approximately 10% of all Muslims in Canada) or have spent the majority of their lives here.
 - Those who immigrate to Canada (Muslims and others) mostly do so because they are seeking membership in Canadian society and seek to avail of the rights and fulfill the responsibilities that accompanies this membership (see the [2006 Environics Survey](#) on Muslim perceptions of Canada).
 - Many Muslim Canadians have never been to, lived in, voted in, paid taxes to, or have any ties to any Muslim-majority country.

- The tendency to view Muslim Canadians as being Muslim first and Canadian second, has historical parallels with the treatment of other racialized minority groups. For example, during World War II, the internment of Japanese-Canadians and desire to deport them was based on the assumption that their allegiances were to Japan rather than to Canada, a country that many of those interned were born in and considered home.
- For Muslim immigrants to Canada, their affiliation to Canada is by choice, not birth. In liberal thinking, which emphasizes the importance of the exercise of choice, the choice to immigrate and naturalize should be taken as a stronger connection of allegiance.

Concern | Canadian Muslims seek and require more religious accommodation than other groups.

Discussion

- The Canadian state is, as noted by professor of religious studies [Dr. David Seljak](#), a “*residually Christian*” state: although the state is now officially secular, it continues to privilege the practice of a certain religion, culture and lifestyle. (David Seljak, “Protecting Religious Freedom in a Multicultural Canada,” July 2012, <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/book/export/html/8764>)
- Our 7-day week with Saturday and Sunday off, and national holidays built around mainstream Christian religious celebrations, are vestigial manifestations of the ways in which Canadian society was constructed to accommodate one specific set of needs. Those whose needs fall within those covered, who continue to comprise the majority in this country, do not therefore require additional accommodation for their religious beliefs. Others, including members of marginal Christian groups (like the Mennonites, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hutterites, Eastern Orthodox and conservative evangelicals) as well as non-Christian groups, are more likely to have religious needs that deviate from those already accounted for.
- The movement of Canada to a secular state acknowledges the “*moral equivalence of all citizens*,” and so requires reasonable accommodation of the needs of others in Canada. Our mechanisms for requesting and granting social accommodation are therefore very much based on Canadian values – not only of secularism, but also of multiculturalism (enshrined as a Canadian value in section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms).
- Social accommodation benefits all Canadians: it allows those seeking accommodation to fully participate in Canadian society without compromising their customs and beliefs, while allowing all of Canadian society to benefit from

immigration (which is required for our country's continued prosperity) and enjoy the richness that diversity and multiculturalism bring.

- Muslim citizens are among those who have sought, and will likely continue to seek, accommodation for their practices - but they are certainly not the only ones. In fact, the majority of accommodation requests for religious beliefs or practices have not involved Muslims. Here are some important Supreme Court of Canada cases dealing with accommodation of religious practices:
 - *Moore v British Columbia Ministry of Social Services (1992)*: Moore, a practicing Roman Catholic who objected to abortion on grounds of religion, was fired after she refused to work with a client who sought a state-sponsored abortion.
 - *Syndicat Northcrest v Amselem (2004)*: Amselem, an Orthodox Jew who wanted to erect a sukkah (a small temporary structure built for use during the week-long Jewish holiday of Sukkot) on the balcony of his residential building, was barred from doing so by Syndicat Northcrest, the building operators, who claimed the structures violated city bylaws.
 - *Multani v Commission Scolaire (2006)*: Multani, a Quebec Sikh boy in grade 7, was barred by the school board from wearing a kirpan – a religious ceremonial dagger – at school.
 - *Alberta v Hutterian Brethren of Wilson Colony (2009)*: A religious community of Christian Hutterites living in Alberta – who believe they cannot consent to having their picture taken – lost a previously-held exemption from having identification cards containing their photo.

Concern | Canadian Muslims seek to introduce 'sharia' law as Canadian law.

Discussion

- It is well-established in Islamic law that Muslims are required to adhere to the laws of the jurisdictions in which they live, unless doing so causes one to commit a sin.
- There is some fear, however, that Muslims are attempting (or will attempt) to use Canadian legal structures to introduce and enforce "shariah" law in Canada.
- Ideas propagated by commentators such as Ezra Levant and Barbara Kay of "soft jihad," "lawfare," or "creeping shariah" raise the spectre of the introduction and universal enforcement of shariah through Muslim use of Canadian legal institutions such as human rights commissions.
- Ezra Levant defines "lawfare" as "the hijacking of Western legal processes by Islamic radicals." (Ezra Levant, "Lawfare – a tactic of the 'soft jihad,'" 23 July 2008, <http://ezralevant.com/2008/07/lawfare-a-tactic-of-the-soft-j.html>)
- Barbara Kay argues in an opinion piece in the *National Post* that:

"The soft jihad is gradualistic and law-abiding, but no less desirous of Islamic domination of the West than its violent counterpart. Soft jihad strategy exploits

liberal discourse and weaknesses in our legal system to induce guilt about a largely mythical “Islamophobia” [. . .] One way or another we must stop the fatwa industry in its tracks. Begin with removal of speech-regulation from the HRCs’ [Human Rights Commissions’] legal mandate. Build on that with legislation that imposes costs and damages on litigious third parties who seek to chill journalists.” (Barbara Kay, “Paving the way for ‘soft jihad’” 2 July 2008, *The National Post*, <http://www.barbarakay.ca/articles/view/54>)

- However, when Muslims utilize Canadian legal processes and institutions such as the Human Rights Commissions, their appeal is to Canadian law (such as human rights codes), not “Islamic law.” Arguments must be framed and articulated in the language and logic of Canadian law: for example, complaints before a Human Rights Commission must demonstrate some violation of the applicable human rights code; violations of “Islamic law” are irrelevant. This represents the development of Canadian law, not the entrenchment of foreign legal rules.
- Further, as Law Professor Asifa Quraishi-Landes’ points out in her report “Sharia and Diversity” for the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, most American Muslim do not want state enactment of Islamic law, even when they express a desire to live according to shariah:

“[W]hen American Muslims say that they live according to sharia, this does not mean that they want government enactment of Islamic law. Their request that American law recognize their choice of religious rules in their lives is not a demand that American law legislate Islamic law for everyone. To think so is to fundamentally misunderstand what Islamic law is, the fact that it differentiates between God’s Law and the human interpretations thereof, and how Islamic law operates in practice. Much of the confusion in the United States regarding sharia would be untangled if Americans could appreciate these realities, however unfamiliar.

Sharia is, for Muslims, Divine Law—the Law of God. But it takes human scholarly study of scripture to articulate and elaborate that Divine Law in the form of legal rules. Those legal rules are called “fiqh,” crafted by religious legal scholars with a self-conscious awareness of their own human fallibility. As a result, there are many fiqh schools of law. According to Islamic legal theory, no fiqh rule can demand obedience because every such rule is the product of human (and thus fallible) interpretation. This pluralism allows the divine sharia “recipe” to be tangible enough for everyday Muslim use, yet flexible enough to accommodate personal choice.

Here in the United States, there is no threat to American law presented by American Muslims seeking to live by sharia. There is also nothing particularly novel about some Americans wanting to follow religious laws that differ from the law of the

land. American Muslims are merely the latest of many religious groups in the United States whose religious practices have presented continuing opportunities for American law to define the contours of what religious freedom means in our constitutional system that protects the free exercise of religion. American courts have never automatically dismissed individual requests for legal accommodation of religious law. [. . .] Simply put, the American legal system honors the desire of many American Muslims to organize their legal lives according to their understanding of sharia (Divine Law), within the limits of American public policy. To see this as a threat is to mistake religious freedom for religious invasion.”

(Asifa Quraishi-Landes, “Sharia and Diversity: Why Some American are Missing the Point” 16 January 2013,

<http://www.ispu.org/GetReports/35/2620/Publications.aspx>; emphases added)

- Dr. Quraishi-Landes goes on to explain that:
Muslims in the United States are decidedly uninterested in sharia criminal law. Contrary to insinuations from the anti-sharia campaign, Muslims in the United States show no interest in having American law criminalize actions such as extramarital sex or alcohol consumption, or punishing theft with hand amputation. Although some point to Iran, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan to suggest that Muslims desire state punishment of these crimes, these references are inappropriate for the context of Muslims living under a secular government like the United States. Simply put, the criminal laws of foreign Muslim countries say nothing about what laws American Muslims would like to enact in the United States, any more than the laws of the Jewish state of Israel tell us anything about what laws American Jews want enacted in America.
- The debate about ‘sharia’ family law is one that is also occurring within the Canadian Muslim community. Much of the concern about it has revolved around issues of gender equality. It is noteworthy that Muslim women (55%) are statistically as likely as Muslim men (51%) to believe that ‘sharia’ should be recognized by Canadian governments. ([Environics 2006](#))

Islam, Muslims & Violence

Concern | Islam is an inherently and uniquely violent religion.

Discussion

- Commentators and media coverage have explicitly and implicitly correlated Islamic religiosity with a tendency towards violence.
 - American author Sam Harris: “*The truth that we must finally confront is that Islam contains specific notions of martyrdom and jihad that fully explain the character of Muslim violence [. . .] While the other major world religions have been fertile sources of intolerance, it is clear that the doctrine of Islam poses unique problems for the emergence of a global civilization.*” (Sam Harris, “Bombing our illusions” 10 October 2005, *Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-harris/bombing-our-illusions_b_8615.html)
 - Muslim-American journalist Asra Nomani (writing about the Boston Marathon bombings, and one of the Tsarniev brother’s use of the term ‘Inshallah,’ meaning ‘God willing’ in Arabic): “[*what he is*] admitting is something true but politically incorrect to talk about: the increasing use of these phrases of religiosity are code inside the community for someone who is becoming hardcore. It doesn’t mean that they’re becoming violent or criminal, but it’s a red flag.” (Asra Nomani, “Muslims have a problem. Uncle Ruslan may have the answer” 23 April 2013, *The Washington Post*, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-23/national/38747889_1_radicalization-bombers-islam)
 - In the media coverage of the recent murder of British soldier Lee Rigby, the attackers were described as using “Islamist” slogans such as “*Allahu Akbar.*” (Please visit [Noor’s information page](#) for definitions of commonly-misinterpreted words and phrases used by Muslims, including: ‘jihad’, ‘Allahu Akbar’, ‘sharia’, ‘fatwa’, and ‘madrasah.’)

- With Islam, as with other religions and ideologies, it is important to separate ideals from use (and misuse): “*Some countries bomb other countries in the name of democracy and human rights, while some Muslims commit acts of violence and terror in the name of Islam.*” (author and activist Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, “On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam” (October 2001) *Islam and Modern Age*, <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~rtavakol/engineer/theology.htm>).

- Studies have actually shown that there is either no correlation, or perhaps even a negative correlation, between Islamic religiosity and a tendency towards violence.
 - In his 2012 book ‘*The Myth of the Muslim Tide,*’ *Globe and Mail* journalist Doug Saunders observes that: “*a decade of counterterrorism research, the analysis of volumes of extremist literature and dialogue, and*

*interviews with thousands of current and former jihadists and terror-cell members by large groups of scholars have produced two unambiguous conclusions. First is it **not generally devout or fundamentalist Muslims who become terrorists**. Second, **terrorists are driven by political belief, not by religious faith**. The Muslims who support violence and terrorism are not the Muslims who are the most religious or fundamentalist in their views; in fact, the two rarely have anything to do with one another, and the latter are usually opposed to the former.”*

- A study conducted by Demos (a UK-based cross-political party think tank) found that young Muslim radicals who had greater knowledge of Islamic history and jurisprudence, and read a wide range of Muslim scholars, were more likely to be non-violent. (reported in Jamie Bartlett and Jonathan Birdwell, “The Edge of Violence,” 16 April 2010, <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/theedgeofviolence>)
 - In the United States, the Pew Research Center found that “*Opposition to violence is broadly shared by all segments of the Muslim American population, and there is no correlation between support for suicide bombing and measures of religiosity such as strong religious beliefs or mosque attendance.*” ([Pew Research Center 2011](#))
 - Similarly, Gallup has concluded that “*the frequency with which Muslim Americans – or any other faith group – attend religious services has no effect on whether they justify violence against civilians.*” Further, “*the most frequent mosque-goers also seem to experience less stress and anger [. . .] tak[ing] away from the theory that mosque attendance stokes Muslims’ anger and radicalizes them.*” ([Gallup 2011](#))
 - Jocelyne Cesari (director of the Islam in the West program at Harvard University and a senior research fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University) found in the studies for her book ‘Why the West Fears Islam: Exploration of Islam in Western Liberal Democracies’ that attending mosques promotes social and political integration, instead of fomenting extremism. (Jocelyne Cesari, “Evidence does not support fears of Islam in the West” 21 May 2013, <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=32944&lan=en>)
- Islam, like all religious traditions, has texts or parts of texts which can be used to justify violence, as well as texts which can be used to advocate for non-violence. The use of Islam in garnering support for violent projects is a matter of strategy. “*In the Islamic world, because religion remains a powerful force, its name is still used in support of whatever causes arise that lead to contention and conflict, although the Qur’an emphasizes that war must be only for defense of one’s homeland and religion and not be offensive and aggressive.*” (professor of Islamic Studies Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (2004))

- Islam is not the only religious tradition that has been used to justify violent exercises: Christian rhetoric was used to garner support for European colonialism, and the 2003 invasion in Iraq. Despite the religious rationales given, the motivations for these projects were actually political.
- Similarly, violence committed by Muslims in the name of Islam against Western targets is predominantly politically-, rather than religiously-, motivated.
- A study conducted by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism in the United States – surveying all terrorist attack committed on American soil – concluded that “*Between 1970 and 2011, 32 percent of the perpetrator groups were motivated by ethnonationalist/separatist agendas, 28 percent were motivated by single issues, such as animal rights or opposition to war, and seven percent were motivated by religious beliefs.*” (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, “Database Spotlight: Update on Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the US,” 22 February 2013, <http://www.start.umd.edu/start/announcements/announcement.asp?id=483>)
- As lawyer and journalist Glenn Greenwald argues: “*Religious conviction may make them more willing to fight (as it does for many in the west), but the motive is anger over what is being done by the US and its allies to Muslims. Those who claim otherwise are essentially saying: gosh, these Muslims sure do have this strange, primitive, inscrutable religion whereby they seem to get angry when they're invaded, occupied, bombed, killed, and have dictators externally imposed on them. It's vital to understand this causal relationship simply in order to prevent patent, tribalistic, self-glorifying falsehoods from taking hold.*” (“The same motive for Anti-US ‘terrorism’ is cited over and over” 24 April 2013, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/24/boston-terrorism-motives-us-violence>)
- This is not a justification of such violence, especially when committed against civilians – but accurately understanding the motivations for violence is essential to preventing future occurrences.

Concern | ‘Islamist’ violence poses a great and unique threat to Western societies.

Discussion

- [In 2011, Prime Minister Stephen Harper claimed that ‘Islamicism’ is the biggest threat to Canada.](#)
- While Muslim violent extremism is certainly a problem, it must be analyzed and presented in perspective and context.
- Studies show that Muslims are responsible for a very small proportion of violence in the West, and the threat is often exaggerated by government officials. This is the conclusion reached by Professor Charles Kurzman in his 2013 study for the

Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security in the United States. The study found:

- Number of Muslim-Americans indicted for violent terrorist plots: 14 in 2012; average of less than 20 per year since 9/11
- Number of Muslim-American terrorist plots: 9 in 2012
- Number of fatalities or injuries from Muslim-American terrorism: 0 in 2012 (and 2011); 33 in total since 9/11

As compared to all violence committed in the US:

- Number of fatalities from mass shootings by non-Muslims: 66 in 2012
- Number of total murders in the United States: 14,000 in 2012; 180,000 since 9/11
- Number of fatalities from political violence from White supremacists/other far right groups: 200 since 9/11

(Charles Kurzman, “Muslim-American Terrorism: Declining Further,” 1 February 2013, Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, http://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Muslim-American_Terrorism_February_1_2013.pdf)

- The official website for the United States’ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which [documents all terrorist attacks on US soil from 1980 to 2005](#), lists the demographic breakdown of violence committed by various groups during that time period as follows: Latino (42 percent), Christian (24 percent), Other (16 percent), Jewish (7 percent), Muslim (6 percent) and Communist (5 percent).
- Further, surveys of Western Muslims find the vast majority reject the use of extremist violence and feel it is their responsibility to prevent the use of violence by their community members:
 - Almost nine in ten Muslim Canadians believe that ordinary Muslims have a responsibility to report on potentially violent extremists they may encounter in their communities. ([EnviroNics 2006](#))
 - Muslim Americans are more likely than Americans from other major religious groups to say that [attacks on civilians are “never justified”](#): 89% of Muslims reject attacks on civilians by individuals or small groups, while around 7 in 10 American adults from all major religious groups agree that such attacks are never justified. ([Gallup 2011](#); Nicole Naurath, “Most Muslim Americans see no justification for violence,” 23 November 2013, Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/148763/Muslim-Americans-No-Justification-Violence.aspx>)
 - 92% of Muslim Americans believe that Muslims living in the United States [do not sympathize with al-Qaeda](#). ([Gallup 2011](#))
 - In studies conducted for her book ‘Why the West Fears Islam: Exploration of Islam in Western Liberal Democracies’, Jocelyne Cesari (director of the Islam in the West program at Harvard University and a senior research fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at

Georgetown University) found no evidence that Muslims hate Western civilization or wish to harm the Western countries where they live. (Jocelyne Cesari, “Evidence does not support fears of Islam in the West” 21 May 2013,

<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=32944&lan=en>)

- Kurzman’s studies also show that racial profiling is likely unhelpful in apprehending “Islamist” violence as there is no specific ethnic identity of its perpetrators:
 - o Of the 14 American Muslims indicted for violent terrorist plots in 2012, four were Arab-American, two were South Asian, two were white converts to Islam, two were East Asian converts to Islam, and one each were Afghan, Kosovar, Uzbek, and a Latino convert.

(Charles Kurzman, “Muslim-American Terrorism: Declining Further,” 1 February 2013, Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security,

http://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Muslim-American_Terrorism_February_1_2013.pdf)

- Given these facts, why is ‘Islamist’ violence considered such a threat?
- There is a tendency to view violence committed by Muslims exclusively through the lens of religiously-inspired “terrorism” and to discount personal and political factors. With non-Muslims, however, we are more likely to analyze their actions as being the result of a multitude of factors – including personal ones (such as mental health) and societal ones (such as the desensitization of violence through video games, violence on television). For example: in the case of the young Canadian men involved in the bombing of an Algerian gas plant in early 2013 – little attention was paid to the fact that the two Canadian men involved in the attack might have had mental health issues (Katsiroubas dropped out of high school; they had vandalized an apartment they were sharing). More attention was paid to the fact that one of the other young men implicated had converted to Islam and was becoming increasingly devout.
- Moreover, with non-Muslims, we are more likely to see perpetrators of violence as being the exception, whereas with Muslims, we view those committing violence as acting on behalf of the entire community, and so every act of violence represents the possibility (and probability) of more violence.

Concern | We do not hear Muslim leaders and community members speak out against violence here and abroad – therefore they must support it.

Discussion

- It is not true that Muslim leaders and group do not condemn violence: the [National Council of Canadian Muslims](#) (formerly the Council of American-Islamic Relations - Canada), [Muslims Against Terrorism](#), and the [Canadian Council of Imams](#) are just

- three Canadian groups that have been particularly vocal in disavowing violence and rejecting rationale for it in Islam.
- Following all instances of violence committed against civilians in the name of Islam, religious leaders and members worldwide have spoken out – even if their voices are not always heard within mainstream discourse. See the lists of Muslim organizations condemning violence compiled by Rabbi Arthur Waskow (<https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1466>), Professor Charles Kurzman (<http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/>) and The American Muslim (http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/promoting_islamic_non_violent_solutions/0015593).
 - More importantly, surveys of Western Muslims have shown that the majority reject the use of violence, and feel obligated to report on potential acts of violence.
 - Almost nine in ten Muslim Canadians believe that ordinary Muslims have a responsibility to report on potentially violent extremists they may encounter in their communities. ([Enviroics 2006](#))
 - Only 2% of Muslim Canadians believe that most or many Muslims support extremists like al-Qaeda. ([Enviroics 2006](#))
 - According to Gallup, 89% of Muslim Americans say that attacks on civilians by individuals or small groups are never justified, as compared to just over 70% of Americans from all major religious groups ([Gallup 2011](#)).
 - Indeed, Muslims in the West have been instrumental in helping authorities apprehend alleged attempts of violence by those in their communities.
 - A study conducted by Professor of Sociology Charles Kurzman in 2011 for the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security in the United States found that that out of 120 post-9/11 plots of attempted terrorism by Muslims, the single greatest source of tips (in 48 cases) was from Muslim-American communities. (Charles Kurzman, “Muslim-American Terrorism Since 9/11: An Accounting,” 2 February 2011, Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, http://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Muslim-American_Terrorism_Since_911_An_Accounting_Feb2_2011.pdf)
 - A Canadian example: [Authorities that apprehended a 2013 plot to attack a Via Rail train were tipped off by an Imam \(Muslim religious leader\) in Toronto.](#)
 - However, before asking all Muslims to publicly and visibly denounce violence committed by others in the name of their religion, we should ask ourselves: do we hold all communities accountable for the actions of a few that identify with it? For example, do we expect all Christians (not just Roman Catholics) to be especially vocal against child abuse, given the actions of a few leaders in the Roman Catholic Church? No:

because we understand that most in the Christian community do not know or identify whatsoever with these individuals, are appalled by them, and had as much control over these occurrences as did society at large - their lack of personal involvement acts as sufficient proof of this. To ask communities to constantly apologize for the actions of its members is unfair, unrealistic and overly demanding.

Islam, Muslims & Gender

Concern | Islamic texts and Muslim practices pose a unique threat to women’s equality and dignity.

Discussion

- Concerns about the rights and interests of Muslim women have been prominent in the opposition to accommodation of Muslim practices in public institutions.
- For example, the revelation that Muslim students conducted Friday prayers in the lunchroom of Valley Park Middle School evoked outrage that female participants in the service prayed behind the males, and that menstruating girls were excluded. The perceived tension between gender equality and religious freedom led some to assert that the Muslim students should not be allowed to pray in the school.
- Similarly, the proposal that Muslims should be able to have recourse to “shariah law” in resolving family disputes produced concern that this would severely disadvantage Muslim women.
- University of Toronto law professor Ayelet Shachar dubs this conundrum "the paradox of multicultural vulnerability": the possibility that accommodation of religious practices in the name of multiculturalism may disadvantage (or even imperil) vulnerable members of the religious group, such as women and children. (Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women’s Rights* (2001))
- Unfortunately, productive dialogue on these important issues is often prevented by knee-jerk reactions to Islam, and the portrayal of Islam/Muslims as uniquely and inherently misogynistic and patriarchal.
- All religious communities, and Canadian society in general, grapple with problems of patriarchy. As University of Ottawa law professor Natasha Bakht pointed out – in a piece evaluating the impact introduction of shariah-based family dispute resolution would have on women’s rights and interests – Canadian family law is already often disadvantageous and disempowering for women. (Natasha Bakht, “Family Arbitration Using Sharia Law: Examining Ontario’s Arbitration Act and its Impact on Women” (2004) 1:1 *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*)
- And as former US President Jimmy Carter wrote in column in *The Observer*:

“This view that women are somehow inferior to men is not restricted to one religion or belief. It is widespread. Women are prevented from playing a full and equal role in many faiths. Nor, tragically, does its influence stop at the walls of the church, mosque, synagogue or temple. This discrimination, unjustifiably attributed to a Higher Authority, has provided a reason or excuse for the deprivation of women's equal rights across the world for centuries. The male interpretations of religious texts and the way they interact with, and reinforce, traditional practices justify some of the most pervasive, persistent, flagrant and damaging examples of human rights abuses.” (Jimmy Carter, “Losing my religion for equality” 15 July 2009, *The Observer*, <http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/losing-my-religion-for-equality-20090714-dk0v.html>)

- When talking about women in Islam:
 - 1) We must remember that no religious tradition is monolithic; scholars of Islam hold very divergent views on what Islam’s vision of gender justice entails (see the “Further Reading” section of Noor Cultural Centre’s [resource page on Islam and Muslims](#) for references).
 - 2) We must be careful not to impose our particularistic, contingent vision of "women's empowerment" or "gender equality" on other women; as anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod asks, *“Might other desires be more meaningful for different groups of people? Living in close families? Living in a godly way? Living without war? Why presume that our way, whatever that is, is best? The historical record of the secular humanist West is far from unblemished, with genocides, colonialism, world wars, slavery, and other forms of inequality deep parts of it.”* (Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others” (2002) 104:3 *American Anthropologist* 783, <http://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/OISE/page2/files/abu-lughod.pdf>)
 - 3) As a corollary of the above, we must also resist the temptation to dismiss women’s views on empowerment or equality that differ from our own as “false consciousness,” or internalization of patriarchal norms. As Harvard law professor Martha Minow writes: *“Dueling accusations of false consciousness can escalate with no end. Indeed, here is a risk of infinite regression. You say that women in my culture have false consciousness, but you say this because of your own false consciousness – or I think this because of my own false consciousness, and so forth. These kinds of exchanges essentially are incorrigible. No facts of the matter can prove or disprove false consciousness without a prior agreement about what one ought to want.”* (Martha Minow, “About Women, About Culture: About Them, About Us” in Richard A Shweder, Martha Minow and Hazel Rose Markus, eds. *Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies*)

- We often fail to talk (and listen) to women whose rights we claim to be upholding.

- For instance, the “shariah family law debate” often occluded the interests of women who value both equality and the ability to resolve disputes according to shariah principles.
- Likewise, the voices of Muslim girls was conspicuously missing from Valley Park Middle School prayer debate: did they feel their rights or dignity were violated?

Concern | Violence against women in Muslim homes and communities – or “honour crimes” – is a bigger problem than in non-Muslim ones.

Discussion

- The high public profile of several recent Canadian cases described as “honour killings” – such as the Aqsa Parvez and Shafia murders – has drawn great attention to the problem of gendered violence in Muslim communities.
- Gendered and sexualized violence is undoubtedly a serious problem that deserves more intense and sustained attention than it normally receives.
- However, the disproportionate attention paid to incidences of violence presented as “honour crimes” is problematic.
- The incidence of “honour killings” in Canada is extremely rare: recent figures estimate that there have been 12 or 13 "honour killings" in Canada in the last decade. (Yasmin Jiwani and Homa Hoodfar, “Should we call it ‘honour killing?’” 31 January 2012, *The Montreal Gazette*)
- Statistics Canada numbers indicate that an average of 58 women were killed per year in Canada from 2000 to 2009 as a result of spousal violence. In that same period (2000-2009), a total of 67 children aged 12 to 17 were killed by relatives. (Yasmin Jiwani and Homa Hoodfar, “Should we call it ‘honour killing?’” 31 January 2012 *The Montreal Gazette*; see Statistics Canada, "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile" January 2011: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2010000-eng.pdf>)
- Proponents of distinguishing “honour killings” from other forms of intimate gendered violence argue that crimes of “honour” are uniquely characterized by premeditation, culturally- and religiously-rooted motivation, and broad-based familial and community support. Domestic violence, on the other hand, is depicted as the result of the individual psychology of the perpetrator.
- However, attaching the label “honour killing” to incidents of femicide occurring in particular minority communities fixates on the supposed cultural motivation for the murder, at the expense of analysis of the other individual, family, and societal dynamics also implicated.
- Conversely, as sociologist Anna Korteweg points out, “*negating the pervasiveness of honour in all forms of gender violence impairs ‘our’ conception of ourselves,*

- marginalizing the importance of Western gendered violence and the many common traits it shares with honour crimes.” (Pascale Fournier, “Introduction: Honour Crimes and the Law – Public Policy in an Age of Globalization” (2012) 16 Canadian Criminal Law Review)*
- The provocation defence – a legal claim to a sudden or temporary loss of control as a response to another's provocative conduct sufficient to justify an acquittal, a mitigated sentence or a conviction for a lesser charge – provides just one particularly salient example of how problematic assumptions about gender, masculinity, femininity, relationships, power, emotion, and violence are incorporated into the Canadian legal system, to partially excuse certain incidents of intimate femicide which would otherwise be classified as murder.

Evaluating Claims in the Media

Inaccurate portrayals of Muslims and Islam have been presented in mainstream media (including on CBC, VisionTV, Sun TV) and in privately produced movies created for widespread distribution (including films like *Obsession: Radical Islam's War on the West*, which have been used as informational videos for law enforcement officials; for an analysis of *Obsession* see Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak, Eli Clifton, Jane Hunter, and Robin Podolsky, “Rebutting Obsession” 2 November 2008, http://www.jewsonfirst.org/obsession/main_singlepage.html).

While we depend on outside information to understand the world, what is available to us – whether it is about Islam and Muslims, or other groups with which we are not associated or adequately familiar – does not always provide a complete or accurate picture.

Here are some questions to consider before accepting claims made about any group:

- Who is responsible for producing and distributing this information? Might they have a motivation for presenting information in a specific manner? Have I heard corroborating information from a variety of other unconnected sources?
- Do the arguments presented depend upon personal anecdotes and individual stories or do they use statistics and facts? Do they attempt to appeal to my sense of emotion, or to logic and reason?
- Could information be used (or manipulated) to make similar claims about groups of which I am a member? If so, is my interpretation of my group(s) more nuanced than what is being presented about the group in question? Given the situational factors acting upon this group in question, could I envision myself and mine responding in a similar manner?

- Are there groups representing the community in question that I can contact to seek responses to the claims made? (Please note: there are often multiple groups and individuals representing any given community.)

Sources of Further Information

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