NOW THAT RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IS UPON US...

...Canada's Multiculturalism Model is Increasingly Relevant

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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ABSTRACT

The demographic portrait of Canada in the 21st century is increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Over the past 35 years, the percentage of visible minority Canadians have risen from around 1% of the total population to over 13% in 2001 and would account for 20-25% of the population in 2017. Simultaneously, the proportion of adherents of non-Christian religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism) have risen from less than 2% in the same period to over 6% in 2001 and would reach 10-12% in 2017. This article explores some aspects of this religious diversity and the relevance of Canada's multilateralism model.

1. Religious Diversity

Religious diversity is not a recent phenomenon in Canada. This diversity unfolded in layers over the past 400 years, starting with Canada's Aboriginal peoples who have a variety of native customs and spiritual rites, followed by the French settlers in the 16th century who were Roman Catholic Christians.

When the British conquered Quebec in 1759, they were of the Protestant faith but tolerated Catholicism and immediately allowed the French freedom of worship, a freedom that was later reconfirmed in the *Quebec Act (1774)*. Later the *Constitution Act* (1867) provided for denominational school rights.[1]

Since the 18th century, and till the early 1980s, Canadian religious diversity was largely one of a variety of Christian denominations from Orthodox to Protestant, along with a tiny Jewish minority and a variety of Aboriginal customs. The presence of eastern religions in Canada (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism) is a recent phenomenon and has become notable only in the past 10-15 years.[2]

From the vintage point of 2007, religious diversity is becoming a fact of life in Canada, and it is of benefit to social cohesion to understand the dynamic interplay of this fact with the principles of respect and tolerance, and the application of freedom of religion under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

2. Changing Demographics

It follows from the above that Canada has evolved over four centuries, from a country that was essentially white and Christian, to one that is religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse in the current decade (early 21st century). The relevance of, and need for, the supporting statute (the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the *Canada* Labour Code "Labour Standards",[3] etc.) may be greater in an environment of increasing religious diversity.

As the table below shows, adherents of the five minority religions represented 6.3% of the total population of Canada in 2001 (with Islam at 1.9%, Judaism 1.1%, Buddhism 1.0%, Hinduism 1.0%, and Sikh at 0.9%). The question of whether the combined share of the population (6.3%) is significant or not is a complex one, and is also debatable as it goes from one extreme of "one is too many" (Abella and Troper 2002) to the pluralist view that multiculturalism and diversity represent wealth and strength to society.[4]

The table on next page also shows the Statistics Canada projections, which estimate the proportion of adherents of these minority religions at 10%-12% of the total population in 2017 (with Islam at 4.1%, Judaism at 1.1%, Buddhism at 1.2%, Hinduism at 1.7%, and Sikh at 1.4%). Whether these figures are large enough to qualify Canada as *religiously diverse* (i.e., the way India and Russia are), is open to discussion, but two elements are notable in these projections:

Population by religious denomination, Canada (in thousands and per cent). Non-Christian religious denomination.								
	Muslim	Jewish	Buddhist	Hindu	Sihk religions	Other	Total	TOTAL
2001	579.7	340.8	304.2	303.6	289.0	105.0	1,922.3	30,616.5
%	**1.9%**	**1.1%**	**1.0%**	**1.0%**	**0.9%**	**0.3%**	**6.3%**	**100.0%**
2017	1,421.4	375.1	413.9	583.9	495.7	135.2	3,425.3	34,582.2
%	**4.1%**	**1.1%**	**1.2%**	**1.7%**	**1.4%**	**0.4%**	**9.9%**	**100.0%**

Statistics Canada, 2005. Population projections of visible minority groups, Canada, provinces and regions, 2001-2017. Demography Division. Catalogue #91-541-XIE. Percentages: Author's calculations.

> That the levels of religious diversity are more significant in large urban centres, e.g., Toronto and Vancouver (we make the assumption here that a city is religiously diverse if the proportion of religious minorities is at least 10% of the population); and that the Muslim proportion would experience the fastest demographic growth between 2001 and 2017, doubling from 1.9% of the total population of Canada to 4.1%.

Building on these two elements, we establish that, unsurprisingly, religious diversity is more significant in large urban centers[5] (as shown in the table below), particularly in Toronto and Vancouver,[6] thus qualifying these large centers as religiously diverse.

The shaded cells in the table below refer to cities where a single religious minority is at least 2% of the population, and where the total of all religious minorities is at least 10% of the population.

These are some observations on city differences:

1. In 2001, only Toronto and Vancouver had a proportion of adherents of non-Christian religious minorities of at least 10%. However, in 2017, these religious minorities are expected to be at least 10% of the population in all the cities listed in the table below;
2. Adherents of Judaism were at least 2% of the population in 2001 only in two cities: Montreal at 2.7% and Toronto at 3.5%. These ratios are expected to decline in 2017 to 2.0% in Montreal and to 2.4% in Toronto;
3. Adherents of Buddhism represented at least 2% of the population in 2001 only in two cities: Toronto at 2.1% and Vancouver at 3.7%. These ratios are expected to rise in 2017 to 2.2% in Toronto and to 4.4% in Vancouver;
4. Adherents of Hinduism were over 2% of the population in 2001 only in Toronto at 4.1%, a ratio expected to rise to 6.0% in 2017;
5. Adherents of Sikhism were at least 2.0% of the population in 2001 only in two cities: Toronto at 2% and Vancouver at 5.1%. These two ratios are expected to rise to 2.9% and 6.1% respectively;
6. In 2001, Muslims were over 2.0% of the population in all the cities listed in the table: Montreal (2.8%), Toronto (5.4%), Ottawa (4.8%), Calgary (2.7%), Edmonton (2.1%) and Vancouver (2.6%). In 2017, they are projected to account for 5.8% of the population in Montreal, 10.4% in Toronto, 8.5% in Ottawa, 4.4% in Calgary, 3.0% in Edmonton, and 4.5% in Vancouver.

3. Challenges

Multiculturalism policies and practices and human rights and freedoms have helped create an environment of civilized behaviour in which individual Canadians feel comfortable practicing their religious beliefs, and feel secure that they would never be identified by their religious affiliations, nor do they need to fear declaring their religious beliefs openly.

The current domestic and international climate may be feeding negative sentiments, where the media may be a factor, but this climate is one reason why such policies are needed even more. For example, when the 2017 projections were first released in 2005, there was a media focus on Islam, with newspaper headlines declaring "Islam, the fastest growing religion in Canada". This occurred at a time when Islam-phobia (the fear of Islam) is increasing in Europe and North America due to the international events of terrorism and war.

In the absence of multiculturalism and diversity programs, social transformations, especially demographic ones that contain cultural and ethnic dynamics, can pose challenges to hitherto racially and religiously uniform societies.

In Canada, nuanced and covert negative attitudes towards Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities existed for decades. However, Anti-Semitism and Islamphobia and prejudices against other groups have increased, and recently became recurrent themes in news headlines, especially since September 11, 2001. Increasingly, individual stories about the use of turban and kirpan by Sikhs in Canada and of covering women's bodies and heads by Muslims and of accommodating the needs of observing Jews and Muslims in Quebec, were receiving wider publicity (including the story about the arrest of several Muslim Canadians in June 2006 on terrorism-related charges).

Increasingly, many Canadians are feeling the strain of providing national security and public safety in a democratic country in ways that may harm its multicultural principles of respect and inclusion, or may compromise human rights and freedoms. The challenge is that perceptions about the ethnic and religious hue of international terrorism are reflected at the domestic level, which may endanger tolerance and acceptance of those who are non-white or non-Christian, opening the way for calls for assimilation and for a culture of uniformity. The concern is that the balance between civil liberties and human rights on the one hand, and national security imperatives in profiling specific racial, ethnic, and religious groups, on the other, may be tested.

Population by religious denomination, Canada (in thousands and per cent). Non-Christian religious denomination.								
2001	**Muslim**	**Jewish**	**Buddhist**	**Hindu**	**Sihk religions**	**Other**	**Total**	**TOTAL**
Montreal	96.2	92.2	38.4	24.0	7.1	4.6	262.4	3,468.2
%	**2.8%**	**2.7%**	**1.1%**	**0.7%**	**0.2%**	**0.1%**	**7.6%**	**100.0%**
Toronto	258.5	170.0	98.7	196.6	94.2	17.1	835.0	4,797.2
%	**5.4%**	**3.5%**	**2.1%**	**4.1%**	**2.0%**	**0.4%**	**17.4%**	**100.0%**
Ottawa	39.2	11.5	9.3	8.1	2.6	3.1	73.8	822.0
%	**4.8%**	**1.4%**	**1.1%**	**1.0%**	**0.3%**	**0.4%**	**9.0%**	**100.0%**
Calgary	25.9	6.6	16.9	7.2	13.6	3.9	74.0	964.4
%	**2.7%**	**0.7%**	**1.8%**	**0.7%**	**1.4%**	**0.4%**	**7.7%**	**100.0%**
Edmonton	19.8	4.0	14.1	7.8	9.6	4.2	59.6	948.5
%	**2.1%**	**0.4%**	**1.5%**	**0.8%**	**1.0%**	**0.4%**	**6.3%**	**100.0%**
Vancouver	53.6	17.8	75.7	28.2	104.0	12.2	291.4	2,036.9
%	**2.6%**	**0.9%**	**3.7%**	**1.4%**	**5.1%**	**0.6%**	**14.3%**	**100.0%**
2017	**Muslim**	**Jewish**	**Buddhist**	**Hindu**	**Sihk religions**	**Other**	**Total**	**TOTAL**
Montreal	227.4	76.7	42.8	36.6	15.3	5.9	404.8	3,897.7
%	**5.8%**	**2.0%**	**1.1%**	**0.9%**	**0.4%**	**0.2%**	**10.4%**	**100.0%**
Toronto	657.0	151.5	138.3	378.6	180.7	27.5	1,533.6	6,315.7
%	**10.4%**	**2.4%**	**2.2%**	**6.0%**	**2.9%**	**0.4%**	**24.3%**	**100.0%**
Ottawa	96.2	14.2	15.5	20.8	7.9	4.4	159.0	1,130.3
%	**8.5%**	**1.3%**	**1.4%**	**1.8%**	**0.7%**	**0.4%**	**14.1%**	**100.0%**
Calgary	54.7	8.4	20.6	15.7	26.4	6.5	132.4	1,251.4
%	**4.4%**	**0.7%**	**1.6%**	**1.3%**	**2.1%**	**0.5%**	**10.6%**	**100.0%**
Edmonton	35.4	5.6	15.8	12.9	16.5	5.7	92.0	1,182.8
%	**3.0%**	**0.5%**	**1.3%**	**1.1%**	**1.4%**	**0.5%**	**7.8%**	**100.0%**
Vancouver	116.1	18.1	113.1	48.6	156.8	16.1	468.8	2,560.3
%	**4.5%**	**0.7%**	**4.4%**	**1.9%**	**6.1%**	**0.6%**	**18.3%**	**100.0%**

Statistics Canada, 2005. Population projections of visible minority groups, Canada, provinces and regions, 2001-2017. Demography Division. Catalogue #91-541-XIE. Percentages: Author's calculations.

While the current public debate includes genuine concerns about security and social cohesion and questions whether multiculturalism is "a viable concept for integration" (Duncan 2005, p. 12), religious diversity is receiving closer public scrutiny, and some faith-based and visible minority communities and individuals may feel that their religion is coming under greater public focus in a hitherto more open pluralist society.

The second challenge is whether the Canadian public will continue to be highly tolerant of religious diversity as the proportion of religious minorities is rising from a negligible percentage in 1971 to at least 10% in major Canadian cities, along with increased outward and "visible" manifestations of non-Christian religious beliefs, customs, and clothing.

The experience of other countries with increasing religious diversity in the current international political climate may not be encouraging, where racist attitudes and behaviours were lashed out in the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Australia. Unprecedented extreme language was used publicly compared to subdued or polite expressions of opinion, such as an American commentator who wrote about countries with a majority Muslim population: "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity (Coulter, 2001). These attitudes were not dominant in the public debate as enlightened views were also expressed, such as this one: "democracy promotion is better accomplished by attraction than coercion, and it takes time and patience. The U.S. would be wise to encourage the gradual evolution of democracy, but in a manner that accepts cultural diversity" (Nye, 2006).

Canada was not immune to these, now global, passionate public debates on religious diversity, where many social ills are blamed on multiculturalism. While Canadian values are grounded in the principles of democracy and the rule of law, there are some public signs of discomfort with individuals who look different or who have outward manifestations of their non-Christian religions. Some anti-multiculturalism arguments even went to an extreme of calling for ending multiculturalism and diversity policies, and "assimilating" immigrants, who are already here. Such attitudes may contribute to a narrowing of the acceptable boundaries of difference at a time when Canada is becoming more diverse, hence more in need of multiculturalism policy.

4. Canada's Multicultural Approach

Canada's multicultural approach does not endeavour to forcefully assimilate religious and visible minorities, but rather it recognizes the importance of pluralism and diversity in social cohesion by constantly building common spaces and wide avenues of voluntary integration. This approach is not about a multiculturalism of separateness and divisiveness but about respect for difference and inclusion of all Canadians – from colour and dress to customs and religion.

Multiculturalism is working: Public opinion polls, socio-economic studies, and evidence of greater integration demonstrate that Canada is adapting well to rising religious and ethnic diversity. A continued application of responsible policies and programs in Canada, and the spread of public education and greater awareness would help reduce the potential for paranoia and hate over the next ten years when adherents of the five minority religions groups would almost double to 12% of the total population of Canada.

Tagging individual Canadians in one-dimensional terms (such as a 'Jew', a 'Muslim', a 'Sikh') is a form of racist prejudgement and is discouraged, as this tagging ignores the complex attributes of each individual, that this Jew or Muslim or Sikh is also a woman, a professor, speaks flawless English and French, has three children, is an athlete, quite civilized and peaceful, (including of course the possibility that this person is 'not religious') etc.

Dialogue: dialogue is Canada's democratic answer to challenges of social transformations that researchers may consider as potential sources of future tension. The Canadian approach of public dialogue and royal commissions has served the country well over the decades. In this Canadian tradition, many experts call for open debate on issues surrounding multiculturalism and citizenship (e.g., Ostry 2005, Granatstein, 2006). Through peaceful dialogue, Canada has more progressive views on socio-economic issues and immigration and multiculturalism compared to those expressed in Europe and elsewhere. Much progressive thinking since the early 1960s has led to building a unifying vision of the future: an evolutionary peaceful social transformation from the *Quiet Revolution* in Quebec to a series of legislation on social gender and racial equality and multiculturalism.

Conservative Cabinets have introduced some of the most progressive pieces of legislation in Canada (the *Employment Equity Act* 1986, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* 1988).

Legislation: the Preamble of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988)[7] stats that:

> *WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada provides that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and guarantees those rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons;*

Moreover the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1977) guarantees the freedom of religious belief:

> *2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:*
> *(a) Freedom of conscience and religion;*
> *(b) Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;*
> *(c) Freedom of peaceful assembly; and*
> *(d) Freedom of association.*

> *15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.*
>
> *(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.*

Further, in 1955, the Supreme Court ruled that different religions have rights, based upon tradition and the rule of law, and in 1985, the Supreme Court ruled that freedom of religion under the Charter at least includes freedom of religious speech, including "the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest religious belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination".

Not only does Canadian democracy mean that government treat its citizens as individuals first, but that it also designates policies to encourage all Canadians to be proud of their heritage and to share it with other Canadians. Having liberalized its immigration policies in the early 1960s, Canada has moved a long way from the pre-Second World War period negative attitudes of restrictions on the immigration of persons of certain ethnic or religious backgrounds. The current policies of commemoration of cultural heritage are helping voluntary integration.

5. Conclusion

Increasing religious diversity in Canada requires greater attachment to already proven laws and policies in place, principally Multiculturalism. However, more efforts should be devoted to harness religious diversity to be a contributing part of Canada's grand canvas, and this could happen by striking a balance between:

(1) What the public authorities (at all levels) and the mainstream society can do to better accommodate religious minorities; and
(2) What members of religious minority groups can do to fully participate in the social, political and economic life of Canada.

Public education on religious diversity should go both ways:

(1) Educating those who are less tolerant of non-Christian religious minorities, including Canadians who are not immune from inadvertently being intolerant of religious minorities. Even secular individuals may need sensitivity awareness as they may demonstrate a sense of monopoly over goodness and righteousness, a sense that could become unintentionally a total unabashed rejection of a visibly different person who belongs to a religious minority;

(2) Educating adherents of religious minorities on how to integrate in mainstream society without losing self-dignity and self-respect, and without jeopardy to religious freedom. Adherents of religious minorities have to do their share, like all other Canadians, towards social cohesion of Canada. The expression of one's freedom of religion is not a license to create a closed sub-society, away from the mainstream society, where parents or religious leaders or peers could compromise individual freedoms, or where potential radicalizing indoctrination of youth could take place. Such isolationist tendencies are not only divisive to society, but could also lead impressionable individuals to break the law.

Finally, the alternative to people knowing and talking to one another and mixing in common spaces (marriage, workplace, school, community, club, etc.) under circumstances and frameworks that are acceptable to all is isolation and retrenchment in hostile positions that are tantamount to conflict.

A multicultural approach requires nothing short of mutual respect and common embrace of a unifying citizenship. Dialogue as prescribed by multiculturalism is better than coerced integration or forced assimilation that led to the decay of, and even catastrophes in, many countries around the world.

Antipathy towards religious and visible minorities may threaten to roll back hard-fought gains, which over the decades have won a degree of integration of minorities and respect for difference in Canada.

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Notes

[1] Reaffirmed by section 29 of the Charter.

[2] Small numbers of adherents of these minority religions did exist in Canada prior to the 1980s.

[3] For example, Labour Standards under the *Canada Labour Code* would allow religious accommodation in the workplace (religious holidays, reasonable accommodation of certain religious observances at the workplace, etc.).

[4] That eventually, people of different religious backgrounds will find common spaces in schools, mainstream communities, workplaces, civic participation, etc., and that Canada's social integration model has worked, etc.

[5] The rise in the number of adherents of non-Christian religions is directly linked to the rise in the number of newcomers from Africa and Asia, with the vast majority of newcomers settling in the largest urban centers of Canada.

[6] The rise in the number of adherents of non-Christian religions in Canada is largely attributed to source countries of immigration over the past 20 years.

[7] http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/ShowFullDoc/cs/C-18.7///en Accessed February 20, 2007.