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## A Religion like No Other: Islam and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Canada

Tridafilos Triadafilopoulos & Jameela Rasheed

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Islam and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Canada**

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## **Introduction**

In survey after survey, Canadians express strong support for the maintenance of relatively high levels of immigration and a policy of official multiculturalism. Canadian governments have long pursued aggressive immigration policies and, since 1971, have overseen a policy of official state multiculturalism. Public opinion in other industrialized democracies has been less supportive of immigration and, at least rhetorically, governments have been critical of multiculturalism. In this sense, references to “Canadian exceptionalism” in the sphere of immigration and multiculturalism politics and policy are credible. Canadians’ support for immigration and multiculturalism has not, however, translated into an easy-going acceptance of demands for religious accommodation. This is especially true with respect to Islam. Public opinion toward Muslims is strikingly negative and efforts at meeting requests for accommodation have been resisted, at times strenuously. In this respect, Canada is anything but exceptional; attitudes toward Islam and Muslims are depressingly familiar.

Our paper marks an attempt to make sense of this puzzling contradiction. How are we to understand the popularity of multiculturalism in Canada, on the one hand, and the frequency (and vociferousness) of anti-Muslim sentiment on the other? How can we begin to understand Canadians’ exceptionalism with respect to support for immigration and multiculturalism and more typical antipathy toward Islam and Muslims?

In an effort to address these questions, we advance a two-pronged argument. First, it is important to recognize that Islam is not just another minority religion. The stigma attached to Islam in Canada and other industrialized democracies is unique. Islam is cast by its critics as an existential challenge to liberal democratic states – a remnant of unenlightened, premodern thinking that is out of place in contemporary liberal societies. Second, we maintain that debates over religious accommodation in Canada trigger concern over the maintenance a particular mode of national identity, centered on liberal-democratic values and, ironically, multicultural tolerance. Intolerance of Islam is justified on behalf of protecting a secular, tolerant, liberal-democratic public ethos against a putatively premodern, intolerant and illiberal enemy. In a peculiar way, then, support for multiculturalism may inform opposition to Islam.

After briefly touching on how immigration is changing Canada’s religious landscape, we survey public opinion data on immigration, multiculturalism, and Islam. We then turn to practical manifestations of Islamophobia, including the troubling rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes. We go on to explore how anti-Muslim attitudes and behavior can thrive in a country defined by its commitment to multiculturalism. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s analysis of antisemitism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973), we argue that that fear of Islam is rooted in the history of the recent past, particularly as regards debates over immigrant integration that have been conducted against the backdrop of the so-called “war on terror.” Anti-Muslim activists have exacerbated this fear by framing questions of integration in existential terms, whereby the compromises intrinsic to accommodation represent nothing less than a mortal threat to liberal democracy. We conclude by asking how Canadians’ conflicting views on immigration, multiculturalism and Islam have influenced electoral politics. We note that Canadian parties, particularly those on the Right, face a quandary. On the one hand, institutional dynamics which amplify the weight of new Canadians in electoral politics rule out heavy-handed attacks on multiculturalism; on the other, the deep well of anti-Muslim sentiment in Canada offers a tempting means of securing short term political advantages. We illustrate this dynamic through brief references to the 2015 and 2019 federal elections and the Conservative Party’s 2016-17 leadership campaign.

## **Canada's Changing Religious Landscape**

Canada's religious landscape has been transformed by immigration. While Christianity remains Canada's largest religion, counting 22.1 million adherents, or 67.3 per cent of the total population, "the number of Canadians who belong to other religions – including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity" has increased rapidly (PEW Research Center, 2013). As of 2011, the share of Canadians belonging to an "other" religious group was 11 per cent, up from 4 per cent in 1981. Islam is the fastest growing religion in Canada, with over 1 million adherents, constituting 3.2 of Canada's population. This figure is predicted to double by 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011), in which case "the proportion of Muslims in the total population of Canada at that time will be about four times that of [the United States]. This would be a significant jump in a relatively short period, meaning that Muslims would replace Jews as the largest religious minority in Canada" (Kazemipur, 2014, p. 26).

As Christopher Cochrane (2013) has pointed out, most Canadian Muslims are recent immigrants. As per to the 2011 census, 72 per cent of Muslims in Canada were foreign-born, as compared to 18 per cent of the Canadian population as a whole. Two-thirds of Muslim immigrants arrived in Canada in the decade between 2001 and 2011 and more than 40 per cent arrived between 2006 and 2011. "The comparable figure for immigrants was as a whole were 34 and 18 per cent" (Cochrane, 2013). Most Muslim immigrants hail from countries in the Middle East (35%), South Asia (27%), and Africa (25%). "Muslims ... differ from most other religious groups in that they are overwhelmingly immigrants, and they differ from most other immigrant groups in that they are overwhelmingly recent immigrants from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa" (Cochrane, 2013).

The share of individuals reporting they had no religious affiliation has also increased, reaching 7.8 million, or 23.9 per cent of the population in 2011 (Macdonald, 2013). Canada has developed into one of the most secular countries in the world. Based on recent trends we can expect that the share of Canadians reporting no religious affiliation will also increase sharply over time. This point is worth bearing in mind, as "Muslims are one of the most religiously observant groups in Canada [whose] religious identity and practices appear to be strengthening ... as their lives evolve in Canada" (The Environics Institute, 2016).

Muslim religious observance occurs in a society profoundly shaped by Christianity and increasingly marked by secularism. Religious accommodation will require changes to institutions that were built on a Christian foundation. In addition, like other recent immigrants, Muslim newcomers are settling into a country that for much its history purposefully and self-consciously cast itself as a "white man's country" (Triadafilopoulos, 2004). Hence, religious accommodation occurs against the backdrop of profound demographic change and a legacy of racialized politics and policy. Canada's status as an officially multicultural country would appear to leave it well prepared to make this transition, especially given that Canadians support the maintenance of official multiculturalism. However, as we note below, support for multiculturalism has not translated to a reciprocal enthusiasm for Muslim religious accommodation.

## **Suspicious Multiculturalism: The Odd Contours of Canadian Public Opinion**

Most surveys show that a majority of Canadians support relatively expansive immigration policies. Indeed, in contrast to other industrialized democracies, the Canadian public has become more supportive of mass immigration over time. Whereas 61 per cent of Canadians believed that immigration levels were too high in 1977, only 34 per cent shared this view in October 2019 (The Environics Institute, 2019). Conversely, the share of those

who disagreed with this position was only 35 per cent in 1977; by October 2019, it had increased to 61 per cent (Ibid). A significant majority of Canadians – 80 per cent – believe that the economic impact of immigration is positive (Ibid). Cross-national comparisons of public opinion demonstrate that Canadians' support for immigration is distinctive. The PEW Research Center's 2018 Global Attitudes Survey asked respondents in 18 countries whether immigrants constituted a burden on their country or made it stronger. Canadians expressed the most positive views on this point, with 68 per cent stating that immigrants made Canada stronger and only 27 per cent claiming that immigrants constituted a burden (Gonzalez-Barrera & Connor, 2019, p. 3).

Canadians' views on multiculturalism have been similarly positive. In their analysis of surveys conducted between 2006 and 2009, Stuart Soroka and Sarah Roberton (2010, p. 41) note that "there is broad support for multiculturalism and immigration, and that support has not decreased in recent years; indeed, it may even have increased slightly." Most polls taken since the publication of Soroka and Roberton's report suggest that support for multiculturalism remains steady. For instance, a 2015 survey by the polling firm Environics revealed that the percentage of Canadians who deem multiculturalism to be a very important element of Canadian identity had increased from 37 per cent in 1997 to 54 per cent in 2015. By way of comparison, 39 per cent of those surveyed in 2015 believed that ice hockey was a very important marker of Canadian identity (The Environics Institute, 2015).

The Environics Institute for Survey Research's 2018 Canada's World Survey found that "Multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion are increasingly seen by Canadians as their country's most notable contribution to the world. It is now less about peacekeeping and foreign aid, and more about who we are now becoming as people and how we get along with each other" (Rafter, 2018). The poll also revealed that "Canadians ... feel as though a neighbourly immigration policy is the best way for the country to exert influence internationally" (Rafter, 2018). In an opinion piece published in *The Globe and Mail*, the founder of the Environics Institute, Michael Adams, stated that "Canadians cite our traditions and policies of bilingualism, multiculturalism and mutual accommodation as key achievements. They also note our acceptance of immigrants and refugees from around the planet" (Adams, 2018).

While Canadians' attachment to multiculturalism is evident, their understanding of the policy is complicated. As Soroka and Roberton (2010) point out, Canadians'

broad level of support for immigration and multiculturalism is accompanied by majority support for a certain degree of integration. However, exactly what respondents mean by integration, is difficult to specify given the nature of the questions asked in existing public opinion surveys. Most likely, respondents showing support for integration have quite different views of what that integration entails; the result is that there is a good deal of variance in opinion amongst those within the "integration" category on any one question (p. 41).

Canadians' confusion regarding the parameters of multiculturalism has been evident in recent surveys. The same 2019 Environics poll that showed 54 per cent of Canadians held multiculturalism to be a very important element of Canadian identity also reported that 50 per cent believed too many immigrants were not adopting Canadian values. Another Environics survey conducted in June 2015 showed that 75 per cent of Canadians believed that "ethnic groups should blend into Canadian society", suggesting that a large majority of Canadians were concerned that immigrants were not 'blending in'. A 2016 survey by Forum Research showed that two thirds of Canadians agreed that "prospective immigrants should be screened for "anti-Canadian values."

This concern regarding immigrants' putative reluctance to 'blend in' is amplified significantly when attention turns to Islam and Muslims. An Angus Reid poll released in April 2017 revealed that only 33 per cent of those surveyed stated that they had a "generally favorable opinion" of Islam, as compared to 68 per cent for Christianity. The same poll showed that a majority of Canadians opposed wearing the niqab and burka in public; among respondents 55 and older, 81 per cent opposed wearing the burka in public (Angus Reid, 2017b).

This strong opposition to the burqa and niqab was especially pronounced during the 2015 federal election, when the Conservative Party doubled down on its effort to ban the wearing of full-face veils by Muslim citizenship candidates during naturalization ceremonies (Wherry, 2015). A survey by Forum Research (2015a) revealed that "[f]ully two thirds of Canadian voters disapprove[d] of allowing fully veiled women to the citizenship oath (64%) ... Close to one fifth of Canadians voters also admitted to holding "negative feelings about Muslim people." A follow-up survey showed that "close to two thirds [of Canadians] oppose[d] allowing public servants to wear the niqab to work" (Forum Research, 2015b). The poll found that people who held this view "tend to be older, mid-income, from Quebec (78%) and Alberta (63%) and overwhelmingly Conservative." Another 2015 poll by Abacus Data found that 56 per cent of Canadians would prefer that Muslim women did not wear a niqab in public places. 62 per cent agreed that "the Muslim faith is in some ways 'anti-women'."

This view of Islam as antithetical to Canadian values such as gender equality runs deep and is not limited to residents of Quebec and Alberta. A 2016 survey conducted by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) found that "only a third (32%) of Ontarians have a positive impression of Islam, and more than half (55%) feel that its mainstream doctrines promote violence (an anomaly as compared to other religions) .... Three-quarters of Ontarians feel that Muslim immigrants have fundamentally different values. Only 22% believe that Muslim values are in line with Canadian values of gender equality." It is worth highlighting that Ontario is Canada's most diverse province, in which support for multiculturalism run deep.

In November 2017, Angus Reid released the results of a major survey on "Faith and Religion in Public Life." The poll found that "[t]wice as many Canadians say the presence of Islam in their country's public life is damaging as they say the same about any other religion." The firm's press release went on to note that:

If Islam is involved, a significant segment of Canadians will react negatively.... Collectively [the survey's] findings speak to a widespread unease with Muslims and the Islamic faith in Canada, and this unease is further underscored by the fact that two-thirds (65%) of those asked about Islam in this latest survey say the religion's influence in Canadian public life is growing .... These two findings – that almost half of Canadians view the presence of Islam as a bad thing for their country and that two-thirds see Islam's influence in society as growing – suggest an outsized focus on a group that, while growing rapidly, makes up less than four per cent of Canada's total population (Angus Reid, 2017a).

This distinctive animus toward Islam and Muslims is evident in other studies. In his analysis of data from the World Values Survey, Christopher Cochrane found that while Canadians are comfortable with having immigrants and members of a different race as neighbors, their tolerance breaks down when it comes to living alongside Muslims. Whereas only 4 per cent of Canadians stated they would not want to live beside an immigrant and 3 per cent were wary of having a member of a different race as a neighbor, 12 per cent stated that they would be uncomfortable having a Muslim as a neighbor (among Quebecers, the figure stood

at 23 per cent) (Cochrane, 2015). A 2018 poll conducted by EKOS Research Associates on behalf of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) and the Canadian Muslim Forum, found that “more Canadians consider Muslims markedly less tolerant, less adaptable, less open-minded, more violent, and more oppressive of women than Christians or Jews.” The CJPME’s press release notes that “Canadians believe in the protection of religious rights generally but are less concerned for the religious rights of their Muslim co-citizens” (CJPME, 2018). Similarly, a 2018 poll by the Environics Institute for Survey Research confirmed “earlier findings that a plurality of Canadians believe that Muslims in this country prefer to remain distinct rather than adopt Canadian customs” (The Environics Institute, 2018).

In sum, Canadians’ express positive views on both immigration and multiculturalism. Support for continuing mass immigration has increased over time and support for multiculturalism has also remained steady, despite its falling out of favor in other industrialized democracies. Canadians have come to see multiculturalism as a fundamental element of their national identity. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out, Canadians are deeply suspicious of Islam and Muslims. Strong majorities have consistently expressed skepticism regarding Islam’s compatibility with liberal democracy and have actively opposed religious practices such as veiling.

### **Anti-Muslim Discrimination, Violence and Non-Accommodation**

Anti-Muslim attitudes animate anti-Muslim practices. A 2016 Environics survey found that 35 per cent of Muslims in Canada reported that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment. The figure for non-Muslims was 21 per cent (The Environics Institute, 2016, p. 38). A 2015 analysis by Statistics Canada found that hate crimes targeting “certain religious and ethno-cultural groups, specifically the Muslim population” had increased by 5 per cent over the previous year. “Police reported hate crimes targeting the Muslim population increased from 99 incidents in 2014 to 159 incidents in 2015, an increase of 61%.” A 2017 report by Statistics Canada found this trend had worsened, with “the greatest increase in the overall number of police-reported hate crimes [was] in Ontario ... where incidents rose from 612 in 2016 to 1023 in 2017 (+67%). This increase was largely tied to more hate crimes targeting the Muslim (+207%), black (+84%) and Jewish (+41%) populations.” In Quebec, a 40 per cent increase in hate crimes between 2016 and 2017 was attributed to a sharp increase in “crimes against the Muslim population, which almost tripled from 41 in 2016 to 117 in 2017.”

Quebec was the site of the most violent expression of anti-Muslim animus in Canadian history. During the evening of January 29, 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette murdered six men and critically injured five others attending evening prayers at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City. The police investigation of the crime and subsequent court proceedings revealed that Bissonnette was an “avid follower of radical right-wing figures in the United States, such as David Duke, the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, and Richard Spencer, a prominent white nationalist.... Bissonnette ... told police that he feared his family would be attacked by Islamic terrorists” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2019).

The response to the Quebec City murders was swift and critical, with many Canadians attending candlelight vigils in honor of the victims. Nevertheless, efforts to take a public stand against Islamophobia, through a parliamentary motion (M-103) initially introduced prior to the shootings in December of 2016 and debated a few weeks after, in February 2017, revealed deep divisions among political parties and the public. While the motion condemning “Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination” was passed on March 23rd, 2017 by a vote of 201-91, Members of



Parliament from the Conservative Party of Canada, including two MPs from Ontario, rejected the motion's singling out of Muslims for "special treatment." This despite several previous motions in the House of Commons expressing similar positions on behalf of other religious minorities (for instance, a motion condemning hatred against Jews was passed on February 22, 2016). A survey by Angus Reid revealed that "if Canadians and not their elected representatives were voting, M-103 would [have] fail[ed]." The survey also revealed a split among Canadians, with 45 per cent believing anti-Muslim attitudes were a "serious problem" and 55 per cent believing that they had been "'overblown' by politicians and the media." Opponents of M-103, both in parliament and among the public, also believed the motion stifled freedom of speech through its explicit condemnation of Islamophobia.

The debate over M-103 revealed the degree to which responses to issues regarding Islam and Muslims generate distinctive political reactions. This peculiar sensitivity to demands on the part of Muslim Canadians for recognition and accommodation is longstanding. Two cases from the recent past stand out.

Religiously-based dispute resolution had been a longstanding practice in the province of Ontario. In 2003, the newly established Islamic Institute of Civil Justice (IICJ) "stated that it planned to establish a Darul-Qada – judicial tribunal – to conduct arbitrations in Ontario according to Islamic law" (Farrow, 2006, p. 79). The provincial government appointed former Ontario Attorney-General Marion Boyd to study the issue and prepare a report, which was released in December 2004. Boyd recommended that the existing *Arbitration Act* be extended to include Islamic personal law, subject to conditions, including the registration of arbitrators. The "Boyd Report" generated a sharply critical response (Forbes, 2007; Korteweg, 2008; Young & Triadafilopoulos, 2013). Opponents argued that religiously based arbitration would threaten gender rights and imperil the safety of Muslim women and girls. Some claimed that nothing less than the separation of church and state was at stake. Premier Dalton McGuinty was cast as a cynical political tactician "desperate for votes," by some, and a naïve proponent of multiculturalism, by others (Gillespie, 2005). In a bid to end the controversy, McGuinty hastily announced an outright ban on *all* religious arbitration on September 11, 2005, proclaiming that there would "be no Sharia law in Ontario" (Freeze & Howlett, 2005).

During the 2007 provincial election by the Conservative Party's leader, John Tory, campaigned on a promise to extend public funding for religious education to non-Catholics (who enjoy full public funding for primary and secondary education). Tory's decision elicited an extremely negative response among his political rivals and the general public. In the words of political commentator Robin Sears: "What was...surprising and depressing was how close to the surface lay an easily provoked anti-Muslim itch."

Using code language about race and open threats about the risks to Ontario's security, the highly effective Liberal dirty tricks team got the province enraged. The [Liberal team] conjured the prospect of immigrants with strange religions and foreign tongues 'ripping the heart out' of the public school system, bleeding it of desperately needed funds.... As the damage to Tory began to show up in public polls, they raised the pressure with egregious performances by Dalton McGuinty fretting about creating a 'segregationist' Ontario, and suggesting that Ontario would suffer the same fate as 'London and Paris' if the policy were adopted. In a clear appeal to Islamophobia they successfully ground the Conservative numbers down by nearly ten points in less than three weeks. At Toronto dinner parties one heard 'progressive' downtown Liberals muttering quietly that Tory's policy would fund 'some crazy imam's Mississauga madrassa'.... [I]t was troubling to watch a 'progressive' Canadian politician indulging in ethnic politics rarely seen in Canada (Sears, 2007).

Requests made by or on behalf of Muslims have generated troubling reactions. One would have thought that a symbolic motion to oppose Islamophobia, without the force of law, would have met with unanimous approval after the tragedy in Quebec City. Instead it was contested both inside and outside Canada's parliament, with opponents maintaining that its condemnation of Islamophobia was too generous and threatened their right to freely criticize Islam and Muslims. Similarly, efforts to extend policies benefiting other religious groups to include Muslims met with fierce disapproval in Ontario in 2005 and 2007. It is worth noting that in both cases a centrist Liberal Party premier, and not a populist far-right firebrand, was responsible for rejecting bids to reshape institutions in a way that was more inclusive and equitable. Islam appears to be a religion like no other, generating unusually defensive responses in a country defined by its championing of tolerance and multicultural accommodation.

### **Making Sense of Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Pro-Multicultural Canada**

How might we understand the strange combination of pro-multiculturalism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Canada? To repeat a point made earlier, we believe the first step entails recognizing that Islam is not simply another minority religion. As Tony Evans (2010, p. 1753) has noted, "[t]he assertion that Islam is dedicated to changing Western values has become a common-place theme in European and North American society.... Islam is presented as a monolithic, proselytizing creed dedicated to undermining, overturning, and eventually replacing the values that have sustained capital growth on a global scale." According to Ann Norton (2013, p. 6), "[a]ll the dearest rights – freedom of speech, freedom of the press, equality, even the pursuit of happiness – are said to be endangered by Islam." Jocelyn Cesari notes that "Muslims are often portrayed as a social threat, because Islam is associated with crime, terrorism, honor killings, backwardness, intolerance, and the oppression of women." Islam is simplified and rendered an existential threat to "Western civilization"; "In such a struggle, tolerance and respect for religious differences are considered weaknesses that may be exploited by the enemy" (Cesari, 2013, p. 3).

How did we arrive at this peculiar, reductionist and dangerous view of a complex global religion with several different and competing interpretations and 1.8 billion adherents spread across the world? We cannot provide a convincing answer to this question here – it requires sustained inquiry. We can, however, point to how such an inquiry might be structured. Our model is Hannah Arendt's analysis of the roots of modern anti-Semitism in part one of her seminal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973). Arendt asks why the Jews, a small minority in Germany, became the central preoccupation of the Nazis and the target of such massive violence: "There is hardly an aspect of contemporary history more irritating and mystifying than the fact that of all the great unsolved political questions of our century, it should have been this seemingly small and unimportant Jewish problem that had the dubious honor of setting the whole infernal machine in order" (Arendt, 1973, p. 3).

Arendt considers and rejects two popular arguments: The scapegoat theory, which holds that if it were not for the Jews some other group would have been targeted, and the claim that Nazi anti-Semitism was simply a more recent iteration of an age-old hatred of Jews. In contrast to these positions, Arendt maintains that the anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century was a uniquely modern ideological phenomenon rooted in the relatively recent history of European Jews. In order to make sense of the modern ideology of "antisemitism" one must consider its historical bases – the events and related historical

processes which accompanied and abetted its rise.<sup>1</sup> Arendt argues that this is the only way of understanding how otherwise outlandish opinions of Jews – advanced by “crackpots” on the “lunatic fringe” – could be accepted by so many millions of people.

Drawing on Arendt, we argue that the rise of contemporary Islamophobia is rooted in the history of the recent past, particularly as regards patterns of international migration after the Second World War, related debates over immigrant integration, the events that precipitated to the so-called “war on terror” and the consequent entwinement of security concerns and issues pertaining to migration and membership. In addition, we highlight the role of anti-Muslim activists who have exploited this history to compose a fantastic narrative in which Islam threatens the future of the West. Like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the products of these “crackpots” are both patently ridiculous and extremely dangerous. They are effective because they take advantage of the fear generated by actual events. Fear has also been exploited by hitherto marginal political parties and politicians that have grown in popularity and stature in the wake of the 2008-09 global economic crisis. To sum up, the sources of contemporary Islamophobia are rooted in recent historical events and processes that have been interpreted to cast Muslims as a threat to liberal democracy.

### ***Migration and the Challenge of Integration***

Low skilled foreign workers from Muslim majority countries such as Turkey and Morocco were recruited to work in Western Europe as “guest workers” in the 1950s, 60s and 70s (Chin, 2017; Hansen, 2003). While most returned to their country of origin following the recession of the mid-1970s, improvements in their legal standing, often but not always driven by courts, enabled many to remain and be joined by their spouses and children in the 1980s and 90s (Joppke, 1999; Ingram & Triadafilopoulos, 2010). Immigration was also driven by the collapse of overseas empires, as former colonial subjects were granted – albeit at times conditionally – access to labor markets in European metropolises. ‘Postcolonial labour migration’ was especially relevant for Britain, France and the Netherlands, playing a crucial role in the pluralization of these countries (Buettner, 2016). Traditional settler states, such as Australia, Canada and the United States replaced racialized admissions systems with merit-based alternatives that did not grant preference according to race. In time, these changes would enable shifts in the composition of their respective immigration streams and the admission of new religious minorities including Muslims (Joppke, 2005; Triadafilopoulos, 2013).

Immigration driven by labor market needs, colonial ties and family reunification was augmented by flows of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflicts that emerged in the 1980s and 90s. By the mid-1990s, most advanced industrialized democracies had been transformed by immigration. In many states, concerns arose regarding the difficulties second and third-generation descendants of foreign workers faced in labor markets and with respect to integration more generally. Immigration spurred often intense debates over access to citizenship and the boundaries of national identity.

The discourse around immigrant integration in Europe shifted from the mid-1990s onward. Debates over the integration of former labor migrants and their descendants were increasingly framed in religious terms as yesterday’s guest workers became today’s Muslims (Adamson, 2011). This shift was based, in part, on the social questions raised by family settlement. How would second and third generations be socialized? What role did

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<sup>1</sup> “Modern antisemitism must be seen in the more general framework of the development of the nation-state, and at the same time its source must be found in certain aspects of Jewish history and specifically Jewish functions during the last centuries” (Arendt, 1973, p. 9).

values derived in the country of origin play in the country of settlement, as, for example, regarded family structure and gender relations? How would extant institutions in the country of settlement change to accommodate the needs of religiously distinct newcomers?

### ***Dangers from Abroad and Within: Terrorism***

Questions concerning immigrant integration were to be expected. They took on added weight as a result of events that were unrelated to immigration. Cesari (2013, p. 3) notes that these events conspired to render Islam into an existential threat to Western liberal democracy: “[T]he perception of Islam as the external enemy can be traced back to the Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979-80) and became more acute after the end of the Cold War and 9/11.” The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 were especially important as they were carried out by a small, secretive group whose members identified as Muslim insurgents. The fact that so much damage could be caused by so few individuals, with relatively limited resources, prompted a significant shift in national security planning and foreign policy decision-making on the part of the United States and other industrialized democracies (Faist, 2006; Abu-Laban, 2002). Defense preparation quickly turned to dealing with “asymmetric threats.” Daily life was transformed, as efforts to counteract terrorism led to increased surveillance and nuisances such as expanded security checks at airports. For Muslims and others guilty of “looking Muslim,” changes were much more profound and included seizure without warrant, rendition for questioning outside the purview of the law and torture.

The consequent “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq devastated both countries. The ensuing chaos enabled the growth of radical insurgencies, which (like al Qaeda), had a self-professed Islamic character. The rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) was particularly important, as ISIS employed brutal methods, broadcast globally via the Internet, that were intended to provoke outrage in the Europe and North America (Carr, 2014). ISIS was intent on confirming the worst prejudices of non-Muslims by insisting that it alone represented the Islam’s authentic face. Its strategy was effective. Like the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran, whose 1989 fatwa ordered Muslims to kill the author of the *Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie, ISIS succeeded in uniting groups who otherwise had little in common in political terms; what they shared was a deep aversion to the tactics employed by ISIS and a view that Islam constituted a growing threat.

The bombings in Madrid (2004), London (2007), and Paris (2015) linked external and internal threats through the figure of the “homegrown” terrorist – an otherwise “normal,” and “well adjusted” individual who nevertheless could accept the tenets of radical Islam and willfully murder civilians in suicide attacks (Crone & Harrow, 2011). The fact that al Qaeda and ISIS encouraged and claimed responsibility for the actions of “homegrown” terrorists granted them an influence well beyond their resources. Governments responded by developing and implementing “anti-radicalization strategies,” doubling down on surveillance and linking security to other policy areas such as immigrant integration, which had already been framed in terms of religion.

The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and later Syria generated growing numbers of refugees. Many risked their lives to reach the territory of the European Union. In 2015, over a million asylum seekers sought refuge in Germany, Sweden and other European countries. While responses to the 2015 refugee “crisis” varied across Europe, with a few countries doing much more than most others, the event enhanced the standing of radical right-wing parties that had grown in popularity in the wake of the 2008-09 global economic crisis.<sup>2</sup> While anti-immigration and anti-Muslim tropes had long been favored by extreme right-wing

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<sup>2</sup> This was especially true in Germany. See Geiges (2018).

populists, the 2015 refugee crisis gave them increased salience. Images of thousands of migrants on the move were used to make the case that Europe would be overwhelmed unless drastic action was taken. The fact that many of these migrants came from Muslim majority countries fed into existing fears of terrorism and civilizational threat (Abbas, 2019).

### ***Organized Anti-Muslim Actors***

Debates over the so-called “Muslim question” were not limited to Europe. By the 2010s, the language of civilizational struggle was pervasive, shaping politics in North America, Oceania and beyond. Part of this had to do with incidents of terrorism in individual countries. More important, we believe, were the conscious efforts of a well-financed network of anti-Muslim “moral entrepreneurs” who used events to shape a discourse that the “Western world was ‘under attack’, ‘silently occupied’ by or even at ‘civil war’ with Islam” (Ekman, 2015, p. 1987; Lean, 2017). The members of this “Islamophobia industry (Lean, 2017) include extreme right-wing parties, individual politicians, journalists, academics, members of think tanks, and “internal critics” (Muslims with a critical view of the religion). Their messages are spread through traditional media, but more often via social media and other online formats.

In North America, “counter-jihadi” networks include parts of the religious Right, some Republican politicians, right-wing news outlets, grassroots organizations and “bigoted bloggers” (Ekman, 2015, 1990; Lean, 2017). Members of the United States Congress have referred to Islam as a cancer “and met with Muslim constituents only after they filled out questionnaires asking them questions that included whether they beat their wives” (Uddin, 2019, p. 90). The sitting President of the United States, Donald Trump, has stated publicly that he believes “Islam hates us.” Organizations such as ACT! For America and The Center for Security Policy “receive funds from donors who have a keen understanding of how to influence US politics by promoting a particular narrative about Islam and Muslims” (Uddin, 2019, p. 92). In Europe, organizations such as the International Civil Liberties Alliance, the International Free Press Society and individual scholars, writers, journalists and media figures “produce and distribute ‘knowledge’ about Muslims and Islam” (Ekman, 2015, p. 1990).

Anti-Muslim activists in Europe and North America warn that the West will be “swamped” by Muslims unless immigration from Muslim majority countries is cut back drastically. They also caution that “Muslim organizations and groups are secretly infiltrating and changing mainstream institutions” (Ekman, 2015, p. 1993). This “stealth jihad” is confirmed by “highlighting demands made by Muslim civil rights organizations, or by pointing out Muslims participating in mainstream political life. Ironically, Muslims who integrate into Western society are perceived to be a threat in the same way as those Muslims who do not” (Ekman, 2015, p. 1993). Calls for accommodation are framed as attempts to surreptitiously introduce sharia law. Distinctions among Muslims are ignored and Islam, as a whole, is cast as a totalitarian political ideology rather than a religion characterized by a diversity of views and interpretations. Attempts on the part of non-Muslims to rebut such arguments are reduced to expressions of political correctness, left-wing naiveté and a traitorous multiculturalism that sacrifices Western values in the name of getting along.

These caricatured understandings of Islam are pervasive in Canada. This should not be surprising; Canada does not exist in a bubble. Canadians have access to all manner of information and are voracious consumers of online content (Hermida et al., 2012). Anti-Muslim activism also has its Canadian proponents (Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020). Again, as we have endeavored to point out, the claims advanced by anti-Muslim actors would likely fall on deaf ears in the absence of the events which together constitute the recent history of

our present era. Fear of Islam and Muslims is rooted in world defining processes, such as wars and insurgencies, and the mass displacement of peoples they have provoked. Islamophobic discourse resonates not because of its sophistication but because it taps into fears bred by real events. The fact that mainstream politicians have echoed some of these points, as was the case when former Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared that a decade after 9-11 “Islamicism” still stood as “the major threat” to Canadian security, reinforces these fears and adds a whiff of justification to otherwise preposterous claims (“Harper Says 'Islamicism' Biggest Threat to Canada,” 2011).

Islam has been cast as the antithesis of multiculturalism: pre-modern, illiberal, intolerant, and violent. Rather than being understood as expressions of individual choice, Muslim practices such as veiling are taken as proof of Islam’s inherent patriarchy and incompatibility with Canadian values. Similarly, appeals for religiously based arbitration are not viewed as efforts to adapt existing institutions to a changing society, but rather as evidence of Muslims’ rejection of prevailing legal norms. More generally, requests for recognition and accommodation that should be anticipated and managed are seen as dangerous challenges to the whole structure of liberal multiculturalism. Rather than being the means through which religious accommodation is pursued, multiculturalism has become an institution that needs to be defended.

### **Conclusion: Multiculturalism, Anti-Islam and Unfulfilled Populism**

The fact that antipathy toward Muslims sits alongside support for immigration and multiculturalism in Canada has produced a strange politics. On the one hand, at the federal level, all of Canada’s major political parties support the maintenance of relatively high levels of immigration and a policy of official multiculturalism. On the other hand, as we have seen, governments have at times rejected requests for accommodation and politicians have engaged in anti-Muslim politicking.

This schizophrenia is driven by distinctive incentives. On the one hand, political parties at the federal level cannot take a straightforwardly anti-immigrant, anti-multicultural line if they wish to compete successfully (Triadafilopoulos & Taylor, 2020). Most immigrants live in Canada’s most densely populated regions, which are also home to the greatest concentration of electoral ridings. Immigrants are transformed into citizens at a rapid rate, thanks to Canada’s liberal citizenship regime. Unlike systems based on proportional representation, Canada’s electoral system only rewards winners; ideologically narrow positions are typically punished. To win Canadian elections, political parties must compete for the votes of new Canadians, especially in the province of Ontario and specifically in the seat rich Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. At the same time, as we have demonstrated, many Canadians are concerned about immigrant integration. This worry is especially pronounced when it comes to the accommodation of Muslims. Given that such fears are most pronounced among conservative voters, parties and politicians on the Right have been tempted to tap into anti-Muslim sentiment for political advantage.

Hence, what we have seen and are likely to continue to see is a struggle within parties of the Right, generally, and the Conservative Party of Canada, in particular, regarding how to respond to these conflicting incentives. The 2015 campaign offers a vivid illustration of the Conservative Party’s conundrum. Stephen Harper attempted to split the difference, by politicizing the veil and promising to crack down on “barbaric cultural practices” through a “snitch line” while simultaneously upholding his party’s commitment to mass immigration and official multiculturalism. The end result was a confusing message that enjoyed some success during the campaign but alienated many new Canadian voters and likely played a role in the Conservatives’ loss to Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party (Kymlicka, forthcoming).

Despite this outcome, Conservative leadership candidate Kelli Leitch campaigned on a promise to increase the “screening of immigrants, refugees and even visitors for “anti-Canadian values” (Hepburn, 2016). While her bid to replace Stephen Harper was ultimately unsuccessful, her positions on immigration and multiculturalism helped boost her to frontrunner status for a time. Interestingly, another competitor in that race, Maxime Bernier, ridiculed Leitch for being a “karaoke Donald Trump” (Boutilier, 2018). Yet, Bernier went down the same road after breaking from the Conservatives and forming the Canadian People’s Party. During the 2019 federal campaign, Bernier equated Canada’s immigration program to “a very dangerous type of social engineering” that would “bring increasing cultural balkanization, distrust, social conflict, and potentially violence”. He also drew attention to the threat to “Western culture” posed by “political Islam” and promised that if it formed government, the PPC would repeal the Multiculturalism Act, “eliminate all funding to promote multiculturalism,” reduce the number of refugees and other non-economic immigrants, and only select immigrants that shared “basic Canadian values” through a mandatory in-person interview (Bernier, 2019; Ling, 2019). Bernier’s strategy proved disastrous: The PPC only captured 1.6 per cent of the popular vote and Bernier lost the seat he had held since 2006.

The question moving forward is whether politicians and parties, especially those on the Right of the political spectrum, will be able to resist the temptation to politicize Islamic religious accommodation. We believe that progress on combatting Islamophobia in Canada will depend on all political parties taking a resolute stand against it. While continued dabbling in Islamophobic politics is likely to lead to more electoral dead ends, it will also continue to embolden extremists and imperil the safety of Muslims in Canada. This is an unacceptable outcome in a country committed to upholding human rights in a manner consistent with its multicultural heritage. Nevertheless, it is a reality that needs to be acknowledged and effectively addressed.

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