

Muslims in Canada: Acceptance and Belonging

Open February 6 - March 6, 2017

The debate about terrorism and extremism is ultimately only about a tiny number of people. Yet underneath all of these debates are the lives and experiences of many Canadians.

Subject Matter Experts

[Amira Elghawaby](#)

Communications Director

The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

[Momin Rahman](#)

Professor of Sociology

Trent University

Are Muslim Canadians treated differently than other Canadians?

Discussion Overview

Some would argue that several high profile cases (ex. Fahmy, Khadr) show a willingness on the part of the Canadian government to abandon Muslim Canadians to bad treatment abroad. The recent decision to deport Canadian citizens convicted of terrorism charges could be seen to reinforce this image.

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 9, 2017 at 04:33 pm

Hey everyone! Lovely to be back here again - this time discussing ideas under the theme of Acceptance and Belonging. I was quite distressed - but I guess not totally surprised - to read the findings of two recent polls. The first was from Forum Research which found that 4 in 10 Canadians have unfavourable and biased feelings towards racialized groups. Muslims were viewed most unfavourably (28%), followed by First Nations people (16%). South Asians (11%), Asians (10%), Jewish (9%), and Black people (8%) followed. The second poll was from Abacus Data. It shows that a majority of Canadians - 78% - say there is some or a lot of discrimination against Muslims in Canada. Again, First Nations were close behind with 67% of Canadians saying the same about them. While bleak numbers can get in the way of recognizing that many Canadians have favourable views of their Muslim friends, neighbours, colleagues, and fellow community members, we cannot ignore these findings. When significant numbers of Canadians hold biased views, or discriminate against other groups - I believe that we all suffer. Why? Because exclusion can impact our collective well-being and prosperity. I'd love to hear your thoughts. Does this disturb you? Why do you think attitudes are so unfavourable? What, if anything, can we do as individuals, or institutional or public representatives? Does this matter?

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 9, 2017 at 06:37 pm

Just some headlines from the Environics 2016 Survey of Muslims in Canada to get us started. It is generally a positive picture and perhaps speaks to our overall theme of how we attempt reasonable mutual accommodation, but the last point is worrying. The assumption that discrimination will increase and of course, this survey was completed before we had the constant anti-Muslim rhetoric from south of the border and Europe in 2016. I want to agree with Amira that Canada's 'got this' sorted, but I am not sure we can stem the insecurity that Muslims feel, even if it comes from outside our culture.

"Key findings from the new survey include the following: The vast majority (83%) of Muslims feel very proud to be Canadian, and this sentiment has strengthened since 2006 (especially in Quebec). By comparison, 73 percent of non-Muslims feel similarly proud to be Canadian. Most (84%) believe Muslims in Canada are treated better than Muslims are treated in other western countries, and this view has strengthened since 2006 (when it was 77%). An increasing majority also believe that non-Muslim opinions of Islam are generally positive (54%) rather than negative (32%). Non-Muslim opinion is in fact more positive than negative, although no more so than 10 years ago. One-third (35%) of Muslims report having experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly in the past five years, primarily due to their religion or ethnicity, but also because of their language or sex. This incidence is unchanged from 2006, and is approximately 50 percent higher than for the Canadian population-at-large. Nine in ten (90%) Muslims are optimistic the new federal government will lead to improved relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. At the same time, Muslims are more likely to believe the next generation of Muslims will face more, rather than less, discrimination and stereotyping than Muslims do today, and this view is most prevalent among Muslim youth."

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 10, 2017 at 01:54 pm

A story on how Muslims in southern California are feeling in the context of Trump's coming inauguration - how different is Canada in terms of this level of hostility? We have seen similar incidents here and the 'values' debate raised by Kellie Leitch seems aimed squarely at Muslims so can we resist our culture sliding into this normalization of Islamophobia?<http://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/world/as-inauguration-day-looms-muslims-wonder-whether-trumps-tough-talk-will-turn-into-action/ar-BBy5zCC>,

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 13, 2017 at 09:37 am

Thanks Momin for that reflection. I think there's a lot of anxiety South of the border as what a Trump presidency will mean on so many fronts - not least of which, what sort of impact it will have on diverse communities. It was heartening to hear President Barack Obama mention the contributions of American Muslims in his final speech this week, emphasizing the value American Muslims. But my question is: How did we get to a place where we have to insist that a particular group is contributing? What can our communities do to further assure Americans or fellow Canadians that Canadian Muslims are indeed making a positive difference? And why the negative attitudes to Islam? Is it really the media? I was in an 11th grade classroom this week and I was shocked to hear a young Muslim boy say- "The media is the enemy of Islam". As both a trained journalist and someone who works in communications, I was both troubled and disappointed. While much of my work is to challenge bias in the media, it's unfortunate that a young person could view all media this way. What is this young man seeing on his social media feeds? Where is he getting his information? What do his parents say? We have to ensure that positive reflections of our communities are seen in mainstream media, so that we don't alienate anyone. That way, we SHOW, not just TELL people, how we are contributing.

• Post Awarded 5 DR

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 13, 2017 at 11:23 am

Amira Elghawaby wrote on January 13:

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Muslims in his final speech this week, emphasizing the value American Muslims. But my question is: How did we get to a place where we have to insist that a particular group is contributing? What can our communities do to further assure Americans or fellow Canadians that Canadian Muslims are indeed making a positive difference? And why the negative attitudes to Islam? Is it really the media? I was in an 11th grade classroom this week and I was shocked to hear a young Muslim boy say- "The media is the enemy of Islam". As both a trained journalist and someone who works in communications, I was both troubled and disappointed. While much of my work is to challenge bias in the media, it's unfortunate that a young person could view all media this way. What is this young man seeing on his social media feeds? Where is he getting his information? What do his parents say? We have to ensure that positive reflections of our communities are seen in mainstream media, so that we don't alienate anyone. That way, we SHOW, not just TELL people, how we are contributing.

Although I have to say I am not surprised by that kind of comment from a young person since there is lots of evidence that media representations since 9/11 have intensified an Islamophobic version of Muslims and so I really worry that a whole generation has growing up that experiences this as 'normal', bad for both Muslims and non-Muslims in dominant national groups. In Canada, I feel there are more attempts to present balance, like the CBC reports on the Environics survey when it came out last year, but I don't think the sheer number of negative images or stories get displaced by the smaller number of positive stories.

- Post Awarded 10 DR

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 13, 2017 at 01:19 pm

I've written and spoken frequently on the topic of media representation. Here's an article that was published recently that offers some context about why there is a deep sense of concern about how Muslims are portrayed in the mainstream media: <https://this.org/2016/12/13/canadian-media-sucks-at-representing-muslims-in-canada/>

- Post Awarded 25 DR

[Joanne Riley](#) • January 20, 2017 at 04:24 pm

Amira Elghawaby wrote on January 13:

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Thanks for sharing that article, Amira. It's quite a uphill challenge and one that seems, at its core, to require Canadians to face some uncomfortable truths about how quickly we can jump to conclusions about others -especially when a lack of knowledge is at play and we rely just on the media to form opinions. It's not unique to Canadians, of course, but we need to start on home turf.

- Post Awarded 30 DR

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 20, 2017 at 04:30 pm

Joanne Riley wrote on January 20:

Thanks for sharing that article, Amira. It's quite a uphill challenge and one that seems, at its core, to require Canadians to face some uncomfortable truths about how quickly we can jump to conclusions

about others -especially when a lack of knowledge is at play and we rely just on the media to form opinions. It's not unique to Canadians, of course, but we need to start on home turf.

Thanks so much Joanne. Absolutely. It's so important to work together to ensure that Canadians have their facts, and are able to make sound judgments about the kind of country we want to live in. I think those of us who believe in human rights would agree that the basis for any successful democracy is one where all people can live freely and contribute equally to the betterment of society - without fear of discrimination or bias. Sadly, we have much work to reach this goal. But together, we can do it.

[Joanne Riley](#) • January 20, 2017 at 07:44 pm

Amira Elghawaby wrote on January 20:

Thanks so much Joanne. Absolutely. It's so important to work together to ensure that Canadians have their facts, and are able to make sound judgments about the kind of country we want to live in. I think those of us who believe in human rights would agree that the basis for any successful democracy is one where all people can live freely and contribute equally to the betterment of society - without fear of discrimination or bias. Sadly, we have much work to reach this goal. But together, we can do it.

How does social media play into this? A catalyst for unwavering and polarizing opinions? A platform for positive change?

- Post Awarded 5 DR

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • January 23, 2017 at 12:34 pm

Well, I think social media has plenty of benefits, as well as drawbacks. This story from the CBC though was quite shocking, showing online hate has grown by 600 per cent in the past year. "An analysis of Canada's online behaviour commissioned by CBC's Marketplace suggests a 600 per cent jump in the past year in how often Canadians use language online that's racist, Islamophobic, sexist or otherwise intolerant."

The tips in the article for how to respond to hate are quite useful. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/marketplace-racism-online-tips-1.3943351>

What does that mean for all of us? Not sure, because we know that the social media habits of younger generations are different than those of us over 35. So the terrain is ever-shifting.

- Post Awarded 5 DR

[David Courtney](#) • February 12, 2017 at 09:55 am

I always set back when I see racism. Whether it is against others or myself. Working in Northern Canada or the Middle East. I think as a minority in social situations we all have to expect it and learn to see past it. Education is the key to understanding others. The other night we had a gathering at our house for students that will be starting their Doctorates at my partner's lab. Attending was a young Muslim woman. I must say I was caught of guard by the deep sympathy that I had for what she is experiencing. A feeling so deep I believe I only experienced it one other time at a friends funeral. Yet, other than casual conversation I said nothing. I feel helpless to stop the insanity.

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 15, 2017 at 03:23 pm

David Courtney wrote on February 12:

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Hi David, thank you so much for your kind reflections. I think that the way we build compassion and connection is simply to begin by increasing those opportunities to get to know each other. it doesn't take much to let someone know that you respect them, that you see them as a fellow human being. And it's sad, but for many Canadian Muslims, we aren't always treated that way. I appreciate even the smallest smile or friendly response to my attempts at small talk. Sincerity is in the eyes and I'm sure the young woman you sympathized with could feel your empathy. Those small gestures do go a long way.

• Post Awarded 5 DR

[Monica Pease](#) • February 17, 2017 at 10:55 am

Amira Elghawaby wrote on January 23:

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I like the CBC article on responding to hate. Specifically, if we are engaging in discussions online about opinions/beliefs/perspectives, we should ask questions. Quoting the article, "Where does that come from? Why is that your stance of the issue? Why is that how you understand this problem?" she says. "Having a conversation that starts with questions, I think, is really important because then you're not starting with accusations or the presumption that they're being racist."

Meaningful conversation to me is where information/facts are provided and critical thinking is encouraged. However, in the few times I've felt brave enough to push back against hateful messages, the conversation may end abruptly and I feel (I'm projecting) that people are just too afraid to be vulnerable with their lack of knowledge.

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 19, 2017 at 11:29 am

So the protests this past Friday at a mosque in Toronto show us that the issue of acceptance for Muslims is now fully up for debate in Canada, fuelled by both Trump and politicians here in Canada, not least

during the debate in Parliament over the motion to condemn Islamophobia. This is not just racism, but a long drawn out historical understanding of the 'East' as peoples and societies that are 'lesser' than us in the west and, perhaps fundamentally incompatible with what think our 'west' is - peaceful, secular, prosperous. Beyond confronting racism and providing more positive cultural images and stories in the media, I think this also illustrates the need to join in the debates and movements to decolonize educational knowledge. These have arisen from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and we seem ready to embrace (some) of those ideas, but it is also relevant to newer 'others' as well.

[Karen Suykens](#) • February 20, 2017 at 07:56 am

"When significant numbers of Canadians hold biased views, or discriminate against other groups - I believe that we all suffer. Why? Because exclusion can impact our collective well-being and prosperity. I'd love to hear your thoughts. Does this disturb you? Why do you think attitudes are so unfavourable? What, if anything, can we do as individuals, or institutional or public representatives? Does this matter?" Discrimination is always disturbing. People fear what they do not understand and this fear is and has been fueled by political propaganda by Harpers Conservatives during the last federal election and not only Trump in the US but also his predecessors. The "war on terror" has victimized many Muslims, in Syria and numerous other countries. The propaganda being spewed by mainstream media is, in my opinion, the biggest problem. One instance of this is the fabricated necessity to bring down Assad even though the US Peace Council, Tulsi Gabbard and many others have traveled to Syria only to find the people, with little exception, love their leader. He was guiding his people to a democratic society and he was democratically elected. What this war is about is oil. While parts of the east are being demolished a company called Genie Oil, owned by Cheney, Rothschild and Fox News' Murdoch are taking oil illegally. A lot of oil. I believe mainstream media should be held accountable for what they deliver to the public. If they cannot be decisive on what is truth, then they should have to publicize both sides of the story, or all sides as it may be. Does it matter? Of course it does. Division takes away the peoples power.

• Post Awarded 5 DR

[William Innes](#) • February 20, 2017 at 07:58 am

As this conversation has played out , I am reminded of the constructive and peaceful experience I have had directly and indirectly with Canadian Muslims ; and I am struck by the Amira's observation of the power of knowing the stories of each other as people. Only by knowing each other will we understand and respect each other.

I see the protests at the Mosque last Friday as the actions of a fringe who are projecting the hatred, violence and fear we see on our TV screens. I reject the idea that Canada is systematically racist (with the notable exception of our historic relationship with indigenous peoples). The Islamaphobia motion in parliament is just political gaming and the desire for a peaceful, secular, and prosperous society seems very reasonable — recalling the central themes on which our country was founded — peace, orderliness ,and good government.

We need to focus on getting to know the best about each other. Our history is that many waves of refugees/immigrants have been integrated into Canadian society as we have learned how to accommodate to each other. Each has been treated with some suspicion initially, and Muslims are no different. It takes some time and we should strive to do better, but sorry Momin I see no evidence of systematic racism or that the process would be materially advanced by intellectual debate.

[Lynn Lemieux](#) • February 22, 2017 at 12:07 pm

Amira Elghawaby wrote on January 13:

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Thank you, Amira. Recently, I have become horrified and saddened by the way in which articles and other texts such as personal blogs and videos have been used by people on various media platforms to support an anti-Muslim stance. The degree to which many of these media pieces are either fake news, or are highly biased yet presented as genuine facts has astounded and frightened me. I asked myself how the average citizen is supposed to know who or what to believe. Furthermore, it takes considerable time, a certain degree of literary proficiency, and the desire to learn more and get at truth to delve deeper, research and check alternate sources, and ponder the resulting accumulation of ideas, facts, opinions, etc in an effort to come to a defensible opinion or stance of one's own. I strongly agree with you that we need to get to know the best of each other. For me, that has developed through my life experiences working in a highly diverse community. But for many others, although they may live in a multicultural city like Toronto, they have few if any personal experiences with people different from themselves. If all they have to judge others by is what they read/view in various media platforms, given what is happening currently, they are unlikely to develop the kind of understanding and appreciation for others that you speak of. I would like the Muslim community to somehow share stories about their lives that can touch the hearts of non-Muslim Canadians. I believe stories have greater power to change the minds of many people than do factual, and/or academic tracts, although we need those also to refer to.

[Lynn Lemieux](#) • February 22, 2017 at 01:53 pm

Monica Pease wrote on February 17:

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I have had similar experiences as you have, Monica, trying to push back against hateful, ignorant comments in which people have used what I know to be fake news or highly biased reporting to support their claim. Sadly, in most cases, the individuals appear immune to any kind of logical reasoning, and are not interested in considering a different point of view. Often, if I try asking questions about the validity or source of their claims, they simply send links to more highly biased sites. They brand me as a "moronic liberal" if I try to suggest other perspectives, and simply keep repeating the words that they have picked up from the many media sites and personal communications to which they subscribe. Those people do not believe in the notion that there are some non-partisan media sites that can be trusted to

report facts and present different sides of an issue fairly; to them, it is their news sources against the others who are all "fake news" and not to be believed. They don't believe their side is lying and/ or telling partial, twisted truths. I have to end those conversations since it is no sense continuing to try to have a dialogue.

- Post Awarded 5 DR

[Paul Green](#) • February 27, 2017 at 09:21 am

I also see Canada as very accepting of immigrants and I immigrated from the UK myself. However, many things that I have read tell me that at least some muslims believe that they have to carry out jihad against non muslims, including violence. I often hear Imams quoted as saying that Jews and infidels must be killed. In fact the Imam of the mosque that was attacked said such things. Then we witness many attacks made in the name of Allah. Islamic people seem to be very aggressive and they seem not to accept any criticism without claiming prejudice against them. So I have grave doubts about the rationale behind accepting many more muslims into Canada. I have known muslims who were very good people. However, I have a very rational fear of being a victim of someone like the man who drove a truck into a Berlin market. It seems from my side of the table that many muslims actually hate Jews and Christians. Am I mistaken?

- Post Awarded 5 DR

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 27, 2017 at 04:36 pm

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Hi Paul. Thank you for your comments and question. First, I want to be clear - I cannot speak for all Muslims anymore than you can speak for all British people. There are all sorts of people in all cultures, and in all religions/ ways of life. That being said, I want to assure you that the way I understand my faith - and what we hear from scholars - is that we must treat everyone with fairness and with dignity. There are those who will twist our faith teachings to justify hatred, or those who will see political conflict and use religion to justify a position that is antithetical to the core values of the faith. For those people, the vast majority of Canadian Muslims who say they are proud to be Canadian (Environics poll 2016), must continue to stand up for human rights and freedom and challenge those who would try to act in a hateful or violent manner. It should be noted that Muslims themselves have turned in violent extremists - because not only is it a civic duty to do so, but it is a religious duty as well. To save one person, is to save all of humankind - that's what Islam teaches us. It's tragic that far too much violence is done in the name of Islam. But it is questions like yours, and honest dialogue, that will ensure that we confront all forms of hatred - from wherever it occurs. The killings of six worshippers in Quebec City reminds us all that hatred unfettered can lead individuals on a totally destructive path. We all have a role to play in

condemning this, and showing that we have more in common than we have different. At the end of the day, we all want healthy and wholesome communities for our children to grow and thrive in.

[Melissa Fuller](#) • March 1, 2017 at 09:42 pm

I think that many of anti-Muslim sentiments are fueled by social media, although the mainstream media has also failed in several ways. The stories that appear in social media that fan the flames of intolerance are all framed in very visceral, personal terms. I think that this approach could serve the opposite purpose just as well, and encourage people to feel understanding and sympathy for their Muslim neighbours. Lots of people have trouble relating to those they see as "other" and it can really help for them to hear personal stories and see for themselves that we all share ideals and challenges. Canadians in particular have concerns about equal opportunities for women and LGBTQ people, and many view Islam as a threat to the hard-won progress that these groups have made in pursuing equality. Personal stories from members of the Muslim community that demonstrate tolerance and inclusivity in these areas might go a long way toward damping the fires of Islamophobia in Canada.

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • March 6, 2017 at 09:06 am

It is sad that we have witnessed violence and protest during this discussion but it also reminds us that these issues are urgent. I am more hopeful about Canada's culture as a good basis for dealing with difference, both political and social, and in that sense it may seem that there is no structural racism or deep seated attitudes of an ethnic 'norm'. As we have dealt with these issues though, I am reminded that we do have one 'norm', not just in Canada but across the west, that has 'normalized' western societies as somehow not involved in colonialism, and therefore not implicated in the racial hierarchies that suffuse our cultures, both at home and internationally. I do think that 'knowing each other' is important and helps to challenge those divisions in a real way, but part of that knowledge is also about asking the 'norm' to rethink the relationship to historical western colonialism and how it has provided the economic and cultural context for contemporary migration and values. For example, last year I wrote a chapter on Islamophobia for a text book, briefly summarizing established academic analyses but one reviewer (new to this field of study), simply reacted against the implication that the west was at fault, calling the chapter 'too angry'! I think that is an example of the difficulties of 'knowing' each others' stories, because at some point that means acknowledging that accommodation really is mutual, it demands that those in the 'norm' rethink their position in society too. Exploring pathways to dialogue that allow experiences to be shared is really important, but we also need to acknowledge that we will see reactions that illustrate the difficulty of the 'norm' adjusting to a new reality. While the current motion against Islamophobia may just be a political event, the reaction against it reminds me that I am not 'normal', that hate directed at me because of perceived identity is not a deal-breaker for the 'norm' but a reality that society is prepared to accept.

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • March 6, 2017 at 09:18 am

There is clearly so much that we could say on this topic. I am very grateful to Momin Rahman, Canadian Difference, Trent University, and all of you who have read and/or participated our discussions over the past few weeks. The topic couldn't be timelier. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime at aelghawaby@nccm.ca at the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM). Have a lovely spring!

How do Muslim communities deal with Canada's Charter values?

Discussion Overview

The key thing here is to take some of the issues raised by debates about the niqab in the current election (and debates earlier) but to reframe them in a more useful and less polarizing way. The topic is electric and needs to be addressed. Can or should Canadians and Canadian governments accommodate patriarchal cultural practices?

[Momin Rahman](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 6, 2017 at 05:28 pm

The Environics poll of Muslims in Canada last year showed that most Muslims strongly value the rights and culture of Canada. We have been reminded recently of the extreme murderous form that Islamophobia can take, with the Mosque shootings in Quebec City. While this kind of violence is thankfully uncommon, I would argue that the conditions that see Muslims as 'other' to the west are part of what allows an extremist to legitimize their actions. What the rest of us can do is to challenge these constant iterations of Muslim 'otherness', through our work, through the media and through our everyday interactions. Kellie Leitch's 'values' campaign right now is just one example of an action that knowingly draws on Islamophobia to gain success, even though all the evidence points to Muslim Canadians being mostly well-integrated into our democratic and rights based culture. But this success would not be possible unless our culture had built up a systematic and long lasting understanding of Muslims (and many other 'others', like Indigenous peoples) as somehow not belonging to our imagined notion of Canada and the west. We must ask our fellow community members to stop and think about this, to reflect on the fact that the dominant culture is what creates these divisions, not the perceived lack of integration of minorities. Cultures are not static, they always evolve and progress through challenges and interactions with others, and the question here is not really whether Muslims can deal with Charter Values, but how those values are being denied to minorities when an assumed Canadian norm overrides the reality of a diverse Canadian difference.

• Post Awarded 25 DR

[Danielle Harris](#) • February 7, 2017 at 11:10 am

Hi Momin, I see parallels with the Muslim community and the Indigenous peoples, as the "Other" in this country. In my experience with conversations of Indigenous-settler relations, asking settlers (the dominant culture) to reflect on their role in colonization can be very upsetting and can cause so much push back that the conversation ends. There are two approaches to unsettling the settler, one is a direct and intentional affront to the individual's understanding of colonization today, and the role settlers and non-Indigenous peoples play in systemic colonization in Canada. This results in feelings of hurt, anger, confusion, sadness and a resistance to engaging in conversations. The other approach, while less challenging, is simply introducing ideas slowly, over time, in a gradual exposure to the discourse. I have personally experienced the feelings that come with the first approach of "unsettling the settler" and at first was extremely shaken by what I felt and what I had learned. I did not agree with this approach as it caused a shut down, on my part. However, over time, I began to see the ways in which colonization was still very much alive and thriving, and began a personal journey of discovery and understanding. It has taken a year and a half to begin to come to terms with this experience, and now I understand the importance of that experience and am an advocate for the unsettling as a necessary exercise. I share this experience with the discussion board to see if there is a similar approach when engaging in the conversation of Muslim "otherness" in Canada. Is there an approach to awareness of Islam that is similar

to Unsettling the Settler? Can having an "unsettling" experience by the dominant culture with regards to Islam, reframe the conversation away from the Canadian Charter Values?

- Post Awarded 10 DR

[William Innes](#) • February 11, 2017 at 12:00 am

Thank you Momin and Danielle for your insightful remarks. I must admit that I find my self conflicted on this subject. On the one hand I support the idea of diversity in Canada, but on the other as a member of the dominant culture I find it unsettling. Some thoughts which I am grappling with: -- I am proud of the heritage of hard work and sacrifice which has built this nation. With the notable exception of the treatment of our indigenous peoples, the culture of peace, orderliness, and good government is something which I find exceptional in the world, and not something for which I should have to apologize. -- the reality is that the dominant culture is just that. It represents who most Canadians are; and their needs have to be respected. It is not surprising that they may feel threatened by change, and if we wish to evolve it will have to be at a pace which the dominant culture can accept. -- I think Danielle has an excellent point about the pace of change. It will be most constructive if it occurs incrementally. We do need to be thoughtful about the pace of immigration/refugees so that the dominant culture can adjust. Otherwise they will react. I see this issue very differently with respect to indigenous peoples who are part of the original fabric of the country and for whom it is long overdue that we confront the need for aggressive change. -- I often wonder why the reaction to Muslim immigrant/refugees seems so extreme. You don't hear almost any public reaction to the large numbers of Sikhs, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other identifiable groups who are part of the Canadian community. I also don't sense animosity toward individual Muslims, many of whom have stories which are inspirational. However, the reality is that most Canadians see the Muslim world through the brutality, and hatred we see on TV from the conflict between Shia and Sunni's in the middle east. It is not surprising that public consciousness get affected, and concerned that we do not want these conflicts to become part of Canada. It is often pointed out that islam is a peaceful religion, but the reality of the Islamic world is frightening. It seems to me that the only way to overcome this is through the experience of individual Muslims as contributing members of our society.

In reading my thoughts I am struck that we need to deal with both the intellectual and instinctive reactions to this subject. I often find myself disappointed by my instinctive reactions, but as a country we need to deal with the reality that these are real fears and concerns.

[Stephanie Dotto](#) • February 12, 2017 at 07:01 pm

I'm a little uncomfortable with the idea that change has to be made at the pace the dominant society is comfortable with, in part because that is often a cover reactionary forces use to stymy change, though I know that is not your intention here.

More importantly, I think those who are most fearful of Muslims rarely have experienced, or stand to experience, any negative impacts from the presence of Muslims in Canada. Their discomfort is in their head. There haven't been crime waves occasioned by Muslim immigration, and for all the fear about sharia law, to my knowledge there hasn't been a single bill tabled in the HOC suggesting its introduction into Canada. There are no insurgent political parties in Canada advocating for sharia law. I live in a part of Toronto with many Muslim residents, and I haven't noticed any of those fabled no-go zones emerge.

The one area where I did notice some Muslim Canadians bringing religious values into the public sphere was around the protest to Kathleen Wynne's sexual and health education curriculum reforms. However, the Christian right was an equal, if not dominant partner, in those reactionary protests.

I think you're on to something when you talk about the news and the media creating the fear around Muslims. I think the media needs to do a better job historicizing the strife in the Middle East. So much of it can be traced right back to the devastating impact of Western interference and exploitation, whether during colonial conquests of the 19th century, the Cold War proxy wars of the 20th century, or the more recent "War on Terror." Indeed, Trudeau and co just sold Canadian-made armoured cars to a Saudi Arabian regime that is brutally repressing its own citizens and bombing the life out of Yemen. Given this, I think the West, Canada included, may indeed have a responsibility to provide aid to these countries and to bring in refugees and support them to thrive. I know this is a hard sell when the social safety net we have for our current citizens is frayed, but I don't see it as an either/or zero-sum proposition, and ignoring the suffering at our doorstep is neither a moral stance nor one that is wise in the long term.

- Post Awarded 5 DR

[William Innes](#) • February 15, 2017 at 07:53 am

Stephanie you make a good point about the complex history which certainly factors into the conflict in the middle east. However the Sunni/Shia conflict seems to be very much at the heart of what we see on our TV screens. What is so sad is that the violence appears to be so untypical of the Muslim community in Canada; and yet Muslims are tainted by the fear about what is playing out in the middle east. Changing subject — I have been inspired by the stories we are seeing about the efforts being made by Syrian refugees and their sponsors to adapt to Canadian life. The publicity which is being given to this will go a long way to building acceptance. One thing which has surprised me though is that a couple of times I have seen stories of Syrian men who were not willing to take work below their qualification/experience. It makes me wonder what is done in the screening process to educate refugees before they decide to come to Canada about the expectations of all Canadians that they do what they can to support their families. I hope that the examples I have seen are not typical.

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 15, 2017 at 03:25 pm

Hello everyone, such great conversations here so far. William, Stephanie, Momin, and Danielle are raising very critical points. If I may weigh in on a few points. In terms of the Charter itself - it's interesting to understand that it is the presence of minorities, including of Muslims, and the expectations that the Charter applies to them as well, that shows how robust a document it really is. When we look at a famous case called N.S. which involved a woman wanting to wear a face veil in a sexual assault case, the Supreme Court ruling was insightful: religion cannot be checked at the courtroom door - ie. of any institution - religious freedom must be protected. However the ruling also tried to balance the Charter rights of the accused in the rights to a fair trial in which it was argued that seeing the accuser's face can be necessary. Regardless of one's views of the case itself, it is important to see how our Charter is a valuable framework that illustrates how a multi-cultural, diverse society can successfully balance the human rights of all of our community members. When I've presented in Europe on Canada's efforts to balance competing rights, not just at the Supreme Court, but through our human rights tribunals, I've been greeted with much admiration, envy and awe at what Canada has been striving to do.

In terms of having difficult conversations with a dominant culture, I totally understand the tensions in raising the colonial-settler relationship and legacy on our First Nations brothers and sisters. The parallel

is the need for education and contact - as William also raised. As we learned more about the shameful history of residential schools, or listened to Gord Downie's haunting song in memory of Chainie Wenjack called the Secret Path, many more Canadians could empathize and fully understand the painful experiences and therefore commit to supporting change in the relationships with our Indigenous communities. I think the same must occur when it comes to minority communities, including Muslim communities. We must learn the positive stories, as well as understand the real experiences of hatred and discrimination, in order to work proactively to make our country more inclusive.

- Post Awarded 30 DR

[Colleen Dogterom](#) • February 15, 2017 at 03:46 pm

Theodore Roosevelt said this, but it portrays how I feel. "In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes a Canadian and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet a Canadian, and nothing but a Canadian... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is a Canadian, but something else also, isn't a Canadian at all. We have room for but one flag, the Canadian flag... And we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the Canadian people." I understand our ethnicity and our beliefs shape who we are, but when that belief is in conflict with the law, the law supersedes.

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 24, 2017 at 01:19 pm

Colleen Dogterom wrote on February 15:

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I think you raise an interesting point Colleen. The law should indeed supersede. For Canadian Muslims, it is actually not only a civic duty to obey the laws of the land but it is also a religious duty to do so. What I discussed though in the previous thread is that around the issue of competing rights, there will always be tensions and our courts have done much work in this vein. It's rather interesting to see how they have done so in various cases. The Ontario Human Rights Commission defines competing rights here: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-competing-human-rights/4-what-are-competing-rights> In terms of the other point in the quote you reference from Mr. Roosevelt, I think that it is very superficial to assume that people who are loyal to their personal faith background, or ethnic background heritage, would not be fully loyal to Canada. I don't believe it is an either you are Canadian or you are not. On the contrary, unless you are a First Nations person, your heritage is based in another land and there is no reason not to be proud of where our ancestors originated and to celebrate the positive in all of our cultures and beliefs. Of course, those of us who are Canadian celebrate that blessing; but a big part of that blessing is in the freedom to be whoever we want to be, and live our lives glorious and free.

[Alex Cruise](#) • February 27, 2017 at 02:38 pm

Colleen Dogterom wrote on February 15:

Theodore Roosevelt said this, but it portrays how I feel. "In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes a Canadian and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet a Canadian, and nothing but a Canadian... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is a Canadian, but something else also, isn't a Canadian at all. We have room for but one flag, the Canadian flag... And we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the Canadian people." I understand our ethnicity and our beliefs shape who we are, but when that belief is in conflict with the law, the law supersedes.

There's some really problematic stuff in this paraphrase, I personally would not sign this manifesto. The word "assimilate" is not without negative connotations, and "nothing but a Canadian" and "isn't a Canadian at all" are extremely exclusionary language.

Laws are written to regulate behaviour, not touchy-feely concepts like "allegiance" and what people say about their identities. I think this is a Good Thing™.

[William Innes](#) • March 1, 2017 at 08:14 pm

Amira, I so admire the perspective which you have brought to these discussions, but on the Roosevelt quotation I think that we are missing a reality which we need to acknowledge. Most of us as immigrants (including myself) have a cultural heritage which we should and do celebrate, but this different from our commitment to the country of which we have chosen to be citizens. Canada is not just some location of convenience because we have been displaced or are looking for a better job. Canadians have a legitimate right to expect that we will place the interest of Canada first, and that we will make the accommodations necessary to become contributing members of Canadian society — whether it is learning a language, or taking a job which is less than you are used to, or living in a location which may not be ideal. I feel badly in making this point because my own experience is that the vast majority of refugees/immigrants are wonderful committed Canadians, who make tremendous effort to become part of Canada. However, conversations like these seem often to revolve around the rights of refugees or immigrants and not their responsibilities. I think that it would be wrong to assume that Canadians view coming to Canada as a right; rather it is a huge privilege — and it only works if there is accommodation in both directions.

• Post Awarded 5 DR

[William Innes](#) • March 1, 2017 at 08:31 pm

On a different topic, but the title of this segment; Amira/Momin as Muslim Canadians do you find any conflict between your faith and the charter values — particularly with respect to discrimination?. I thought that Amira gave a great example of how the courts have dealt with great consideration with one of these potential conflicts. If there are conflicts, how should Muslim Canadians deal with them?

[Amira Elghawaby](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • March 6, 2017 at 09:30 am

William Innes wrote on March 1:

On a different topic, but the title of this segment; Amira/Momin as Muslim Canadians do you find any conflict between your faith and the charter values — particularly with respect to discrimination?. I thought that Amira gave a great example of how the courts have dealt with great consideration with one of these potential conflicts. If there are conflicts, how should Muslim Canadians deal with them?

Thank you William for your question and earlier comments. As I mentioned earlier - it is both a civic duty and a religious duty for Canadian Muslims to fully respect the laws of the land in which they live. It is also a sacred duty to do good in our communities and general society - not just for one's own immediate community of religious adherents, but for the whole society. That is a huge responsibility that many Canadian Muslims take very seriously - just to give a few examples, our local mosques run regular blood drives with the Canadian Red Cross; the local Islamic schools engage in regular food bank drives; and individuals in their every day experiences are doing what they can to gain skills, contribute time and energy to not only benefit themselves, or their families, but the entire society. There is no conflict in being proud of one's heritage, and also being very proud and honoured to live in Canada and want to do all one can to make it an even better place for everyone. Inclusion is key. In terms of discrimination, there simply should be zero tolerance of any discrimination towards any one, or against any group. This is what's guaranteed by our Charter. Of course, we know human rights violations happen everywhere, in various communities and public settings. It is up to all of us to educate, challenge, and work towards eliminating such barriers. This is a collective task and I believe Canadians are in a wonderful position to illustrate to the world just how to do that. On that hopeful note, please let me thank my fellow discussant Momin Rahman, Canadian Difference, Trent University, and of course, all of you who took the time to read and respond to our discussion. This has been a good opportunity and I very much appreciate the challenging questions that we explored together. I can be reached at [aelghawaby at nccm.ca](mailto:aelghawaby@nccm.ca) for any further follow-up. Kind regards!