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Religion in the News on an Ordinary Day: Diversity and Change in English Canada

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Abstract

Canada has a deeply rooted connection with Christianity in its Protestant and Catholic forms. However, over the latter half of the 20th century there has been a strong shift toward secularization and the promotion of religious diversity. Through our study, we identified 186 news articles that made one or more references to conventional religion, common religion, or secular sacred themes. We then considered news stories with references to religion where religion was the main issue of the story and found that 56 articles with majority of their focus on Islam. In the analysis it became clear there was a conflict in representations of Islam—as a terror threat or as a positive belief system. This study found a greater tolerance for religious diversity than was evident in earlier media studies in Canada, which suggests an overall shift in media representation that may be more representative of Canada's changing religious demographics.

Keywords

Religion, Canada, News, Representation, Diversity

Introduction: English Canada

Canada prides itself on being a multicultural country that is religiously tolerant. In the 1970's when Canada's Prime Minister promoted the concept of the "cultural mosaic," he did so to move the country away from a sense of "biculturalism" (English Protestant/French Catholic) and contrast our cultural environment with that of the United States that promoted the "melting pot" ideology. The "Canadian mosaic" was first conceptualized as a cultural ideal within Canada in the late 1930's by John Murray Gibbon (1938). He believed that Canada could benefit from cultural diversity and that ethnic groups should be supported, and diversity encouraged. Despite this ideal, the reality of Canada's culture is more aptly viewed as a "vertical mosaic." As John Porter

found, certain cultures and religions within the nation dominate the mosaic and tolerance and accommodation are not always the case (Porter, 1965). Porter's research demonstrated that there was in fact a clear hierarchy within Canada, and this was linked with the dominant Christian religious traditions.

As Roger O'Toole argues, "many features of modern Canadian life, including the political party system, the welfare state, foreign policy goals, ... originate, at least in part, in religious ideals, attitudes, and structures" (O'Toole, 2006, 8-9). By the 1960's, cultural shifts began to loosen the grip of institutional religion on the country and by 1971, adopting an official government policy of multiculturalism altered the demography of the country and began to impact the religious diversity of the nation itself. Slowly through immigration, secularization, and changing attitudes about the role of religion, Canada has significantly transformed its religious landscape that was once dominated by Catholicism in Quebec and the "Protestant consensus" in English Canada. Despite these shifts, Canada has a mixed review concerning religion's impact on the nation. The serious repercussions of the residential schooling system and the treatment of the indigenous population, systematic sexual abuse by the clergy within the Catholic and Protestant traditions, and battles for control and power over legal and social issues have left deep religious and cultural scars.

According to the 2011 national census statistics examining religious affiliation in Canada, Catholicism remains the largest religious denomination in the country with 39% representation. Other than Eastern Orthodoxy, all Christian religious organizations in Canada have seen a general decline in overall membership. The largest increases in religious affiliation have been seen within Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh traditions, which had more than tripled. The category of "Other" has also increased from 4.1% in 1991 to 8.1% in 2011. There is also a significant trend in those claiming "no religious affiliation" within Canada—increasing from 12.6% in 1991 to 23.9% in 2011.

Prior Research on Religion and the News in Canada

Framing Religion in the News

Cornies (1988) considered religion stories in three Ontario dailies between 1981-1986. He found that 55% of religion coverage examined Canadian faith issues. He identified discrepancies between population sizes and respective coverage: Catholics who represented 35.6% of Ontario's population represented 38% of news coverage, whereas Protestants at 51.8% of the population received 20% of coverage. Jews represented 1.7%, and Muslims 0.6% of the population, but received 14% and 7% of coverage. Dominant themes were stories of church-state conflict (59%), followed by theology and spirituality (24%). In contrast, Barrier's (1995) work focused on the Canadian Press coverage of court proceedings involving members of the Christian Brothers religious order during the period 1990-1993. Some Brothers were found to have abused boys under their care in the 1970s. Barrier found that reporters avoided the spiritual dimensions of the stories, focusing instead on the crime aspects. Haskell (2009) investigated the perceived negative media treatment of Evangelical Christians in Canada. Beginning with a set of vignettes of media treatment of evangelical politicians within Canada and the United States, Haskell found that "the news media won't say

anything nice about your faith, so when it comes to your faith, don't say anything at all" (p. 30). Another study by Haskell (2011) considered how the same-sex marriage debate was reported by the Canadian media. He analyzed eighty-five news reports from the two leading national newspapers and the television news that featured evangelicals in connection with the marriage issue. He noted that although religious groups intentionally advanced non-religious arguments against same-sex marriage, these reasons were rarely addressed in the news media (p. 322). Haskell studies conclude that media frames religion negatively or in a biased fashion in Canada.

Religious Minorities in the News

In a detailed review of media studies in Canada, Fleras and Kunz (2001), found few studies examined the treatment of religious minorities in the news. An exception was a study by Bullock and Jafri (2000) that examined media stereotyping of Muslim women. Bullock and Jafri reviewed five Canadian dailies between 1993-1997 and identified 96 articles referencing Muslim women. Many of the stories were about wearing the hijab, and often highlighted conflict and a perceived threat to Canadian society. Although the authors did note a few articles that offered different viewpoints, they concluded that Muslim women were "presented to the Canadian public as foreign, 'exotic', oppressed, or threatening 'other' rather than as one's 'unexotic,' unthreatening next-door neighbours" (p. 37). The other study which was reviewed by Fleras and Kunz examined religious minorities in Canadian news media and was a 1999 media watch study by the Canadian Islamic Congress (1999). CIC found that Muslims were frequently typified in the media as "sleazy bullies or tyrannical patriarchs."

Mann (2015) considered Canadian and International newspaper reports of the Ganesha milk drinking miracle that occurred in 1995. News reported that on Thursday September 21, 1995 marble images of the Hindu deity Ganesha began drinking milk offered to them by devotees. Although the first reported miracles occurred in India, similar incidents were later reported around the world. Mann examined how these events were presented in the news media and concluded that the Canadian press, unlike the international media, appeared unable to view a miracle as hard news even when occurrences were reported in Canada. The international press explored questions of secularism, science and rationalism, and the political implications for India.

Bleich et al (2018) explored media coverage of Muslim devotion by analyzing newspaper articles across four countries: UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. They noted that scholars have identified Muslim religious practices as a point of friction in secular liberal democracies. They found that, counter to research that would predict negative portrayal of Muslim practices, the "majority of articles that 'tag' individuals as devout Muslims discuss their faith in a neutral or positive manner" (p. 256). One example from Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper told the story of the tragic death of a father and daughter in a house fire and noted the positive characteristics of the father that included his devout Muslim observance (p. 256). Other stories demonstrated an attempt at understanding and empathize with the struggles of observant Muslims in the west (p. 258).

Summary and Quantitative Analysis of the Newspapers

This Canadian study collected mainstream national, regional, and local papers from all regions of the country in English and, in the case of the province of Quebec, papers in both English and French on September 17 in 2013, 2014, and 2015. For this article, we were required to include only three representative papers in English, while a separate team coded the French-Canadian material. The papers selected were *The Globe and Mail*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, and *The Metro* (Ottawa Edition). *The Globe and Mail* is one of two national papers and is owned by the Woodbridge Company, the controlling shareholder of Thomson Reuters and often takes a centre-right editorial stance. It is a paid daily, published Monday to Saturday with an average weekday print and digital circulation of 336,478 (2015) and a weekly circulation of 2,018,923 (2015). As the most widely circulated paper in Canada, we see it as representative of our national newspaper for the purpose of this study. *The Ottawa Citizen* was selected as our representative regional paper as it is the most widely circulated of fourteen regional and local papers in the Ottawa region with a weekly average circulation of 550,777 (2015). A regional paper from Canada's capital was selected as representative of national media trends within the country. The Post Media Group, a Canadian media company, owns the paper and it supports a conservative position. *The Metro Ottawa* is a free daily tabloid newspaper that was selected from the central Canada region. Torstar Corp. co-owns it with Metro International and maintains a neutral political stance. It is a local paper with an average weekday circulation of 48,319 (2015) and an average weekly print and digital circulation of 241,595 (2015).

186 news articles were identified that include references to conventional religion, common religion, and sacred secular themes from the three papers over the three year period (Table 1). The highest number of references were found in *The Globe & Mail* (n=88, 46%), followed by *The Ottawa Citizen* (n=70, 38%) and then the *Metro Ottawa* (n=28, 15%).

One criterion used in analyzing religious news coverage was “Domestic” versus “International” news (Table 1). These categories were sometimes difficult to separate and an additional category “Mixed” was added. “Mixed” might include stories on the deployment of Canadian troops overseas, or the participation of Canadian athletes in an international competition. Many other context unspecific news items such as horoscopes and TV Guides were placed in the “Domestic” category. Domestic news dominated in all the papers, representing 65% of all stories. The coverage of the domestic and international news varied across the papers, with the largest number in the *Globe*, followed closely by the *Citizen*, and then the *Metro*. The *Globe and Mail*, the national newspaper, had the greatest number of international news stories, followed by the *Citizen*, and then the *Metro*. International news stories themselves are a mix of types including world events such as the refugee crisis and war on terror, sports and celebrities, and international travel. The *Globe and Mail* featured more world events stories, while the *Metro* had more entertainment news.

Table 1: Volume of news: International/Domestic

	<i>Globe & Mail</i>	<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	<i>Metro</i>	Total
Domestic News	55	50	17	122 (65%)
International	27	16	10	53 (29%)
Mixed	6	4	1	11 (6%)

When genre of the news article was considered, the genres of news (n=77, 41%) and features stories (n=31, 17%) represented the majority of the articles collected for the study. This was consistent across all the papers (Table 2). The next most common genres were sports (n=19, 10%), advertisements (n=18, 10%), and opinion pieces (n=12, 6%).

Table 2: Volume of news: Genres

	<i>Globe & Mail</i>	<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	<i>Metro</i>	Total
Advertisement	10	6	2	18
Cartoons	2	0	0	2
Editorial	0	1	0	1
Features	13	11	7	31
Front page	3	4	0	7
Images	1	0	0	1
News	38	28	11	77
News in brief	0	5	2	7
Obituary	7	2	0	9
Opinion	8	4	0	12
Public Reader Responses	2	0	0	2
Reviews	0	0	0	0
Sports	10	5	4	19

News stories were also coded indicating if the reference to religion is a passing reference or the main issue of the story (Table 3). A passing reference might include

religious language in an obituary, a word in a crossword, or the use of terms like “Armageddon” in a movie review. Not surprisingly, most of the references were passing references (n=130, 70%). We then considered news stories with references to religion where a religion issue was the main issue of the story, and these constituted the remaining thirty percent (n=56). When we applied this criterion to the individual papers, we found that the *Citizen* had the largest percentage of “main issue” references (n=23, 32%), followed closely by the *Globe* (n=26, 30%), and the *Metro* (n=7, 25%).

Table 3: News as a main story or passing reference

	<i>Globe & Mail</i>	<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	<i>Metro</i>	Total
Main Issue	26	23	7	56
Passing Reference	61	48	21	130

We then turned to our coding frame for these stories. The coding frame used three broad categories of codes: “Conventional Religion”, “Common Religion”, and “Secular Sacred.” Drawing from Knott et al. (2013), conventional religion is recognized as institutional or official religion within the society. Common religion references supernatural, sacred, and spiritual beliefs and practices that are not anchored within official religions. This includes things like fate, luck, astrology, supernatural beings and magic. Common religion also included a category for folk religion, the general classification used for indigenous beliefs and practices. Secular sacred recognizes non-religious values or beliefs that the society places sacred values upon. For example, heroic figures, sports teams, and celebrities (see Michel and Helland 2021 for the full list of indexing categories). As we worked through the data we found that a story could have more than one code applied to it. For example, a meeting of two religious groups (Roman Catholics and Muslims) would be coded twice with a reference to each group (“Conventional religion – Roman Catholicism”, “Conventional Religion – Islam”). In total, 242 codes were applied to our data (Table 4). When the codes were divided into the three categories, there were 95 (39%) references to “Conventional Religion”, 69 (29%) references to “Common Religion”, and 78 (32%) references to “Secular Sacred”. Nearly half (47%) of the codes for “Conventional Religion” were applied to *Globe* stories, while the largest percentage (42%) of “Secular Sacred” codes were applied to *Citizen* stories. The *Metro* had almost equal application of the three code categories across its stories.

Table 4: Conventional and Common Religion

	<i>Globe & Mail</i>	<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	<i>Metro</i>	Total
Conventional	45	35	15	95
Common	31	25	13	69

Secular Sacred	30	33	15	78
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We next considered the individual codes applied to our data, identifying the codes most frequently used (Table 5). The most frequently used codes were “Conventional Religion – Islam” (n=26, 11%), “Conventional Religion – Religion General” (n=26, 11%), “Secular Sacred – Religion Like” (n=25, 10%), and “Secular Sacred – Mixed” (n=24, 10%). The code “Religion General” includes all generic references to religion such as “God”, “divinity”, or “afterlife” that cannot be attributed to a specific religious tradition. The code “Secular Sacred – Mixed” includes references that would be applicable to more than one code.

Table 5: Significant Topics Overall

	Overall
Conventional Religion - Islam	26
Conventional Religion - Religion General	26
Secular Sacred - Religion-Like	25
Secular sacred - Mixed	24
Common Religion - Other	18

We then applied our earlier filter and considered code frequency only for references where religion was the main issue of the story (Table 6) and noted that there were similarities to the frequent categories identified in Table 5. “Conventional Religion – Islam” and “Conventional Religion – Religion General” were again the most frequent codes. The addition to this list was the code “Common Religion – Fortune Telling Techniques” which included Horoscopes and Psychic columns.

Table 6: Significant Topics where Religion is the main issue.

	Overall
Conventional Religion - Islam	16
Conventional Religion - Religion General	5
Conventional Religion - Other	5
Secular Sacred – Religion-Like	5
Common Religion – Fortune Telling Techniques	5

In the next section of our quantitative analysis we considered the application of codes by individual newspapers.

The Globe & Mail

As noted above (Table 4) there were 106 codes applied to *Globe* stories across all categories. When considering all the codes applied in the *Globe* (Table 7), we identified the most common codes: “Conventional Religion – Islam”, “Conventional Religion – Religion General”, “Common Religion – Other”, and “Secular Sacred – Other”.

In the *Globe* there were 26 references to religion where religion was the main issue (Table 4). Of these references 14 references were to the broad category of “Conventional Religion”, 3 references were to “Common Religion”, and 7 references were to “Secular Sacred” (Table 8). One notable addition is the two code occurrences to “Conventional Religion – Judaism.”

Table 7: *Globe & Mail*: Significant Topics

Conventional Religion - Islam	13
Conventional Religion - Religion General	11
Common Religion - Other	10
Secular sacred - Other	10
Secular Sacred – Religion-like	9
Common Religion – Fate and Destiny	7

Table 8: *Globe & Mail*: Significant Topics (when religion is the main issue)

Conventional Religion - Islam	6
Conventional Religion - Religion General	2
Common Religion – Fate and Destiny	2
Secular Sacred – Religion-like	2
Conventional Religion - Judaism	2
Conventional Religion – Other	2

The Ottawa Citizen

As noted above (Table 4) there were 93 codes applied to *Citizen* stories across all categories. When considering all the codes applied in the *Citizen* (Table 9), we identified the most common codes: “Secular Sacred – Other” (n=13, 14%), “Secular Sacred – Religion Like” (n=12, 13%), “Conventional Religion – Religion General” (n=12, 13%), and “Conventional Religion – Islam” (n=10, 11%). The “other” categories captured all occurrences in a category that did not fit under a specific code. A notable addition is the seven occurrences of the code, “Conventional Religion – Roman Catholicism” (8%).

In the *Citizen* we identified 23 codes applied in stories where religion was the main issue (Table 3). There were 14 references to conventional religion, 7 common religion references, and 2 secular - sacred. The most commonly occurring codes (Table 10) were “Conventional Religion - Islam” (n=8, 35%), “Conventional Religion – Roman Catholicism” (n=3, 13%), “Common Religion – Fortune Telling Techniques” (n=3, 13%), “Common Religion – Gambling” (n=3, 13%).

Table 9: *Ottawa Citizen*: Significant Topics

Secular Sacred - Other	13
Secular Sacred – Religion-like	12
Conventional Religion – Religion General	12
Conventional Religion - Islam	10
Conventional Religion – Roman Catholicism	7
Secular Sacred – Secularism, religion and secular	6
Secular Sacred-Conventional Religion-Folk Religion	1

Table 10: *Ottawa Citizen*: Significant Topics (when religion is the main issue)

Conventional Religion - Islam	8
Conventional Religion – Roman Catholicism	3
Common Religion – Fortune Telling Techniques	3
Common Religion – Gambling	3
Conventional Religion – Religion General	2

Secular Sacred – Religion-like	2
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Metro Ottawa

There were 28 stories in the *Metro*, of which 7 were stories where the main issue was religion (Table 3). There were in total 43 codes applied to stories in the *Metro* in all categories (Table 4). The most frequently applied codes were: “Common Religion – Other” (n=5, 12%), “Sacred Secular – Religion Like” (n=4, 9%), “Conventional Religion – Religion General” (n=3, 7%), and “Conventional Religion – Islam” (n=3, 7%).

There were 11 codes applied in stories where religion was the main issue. When we considered the most frequently applied codes in these stories (Table 12) we found: “Conventional Religion – Other” (n=3, 27%), and “Conventional Religion – Islam” (n=2, 18%).

Table 11: *Metro Ottawa*: Significant Topics

Common Religion - Other	5
Secular sacred – Religion-like	4
Conventional Religion – Religion General	3
Conventional Religion - Islam	3

Table 12: *Metro Ottawa*: Significant Topics (when religion is the main issue)

Conventional Religion - Other	3
Conventional Religion - Islam	2
Conventional Religion – Religion General	1
Secular sacred – Religion-like	1

What are the newspapers saying about religion?

In an attempt to demonstrate how religion is “ordinarily” presented within the media in Canada we have focused our attention on three levels of story and representation. These are global news stories, national news stories and regional news for 2013, 2014, and 2015. We then included a section examining common religion/other supernatural beings and common religion/folk religion to highlight the large “baskets” used in the coding process and the difficulty quantitative indexed data may have on the qualitative evaluation of the material (see Michels and Helland, 2021).

Global News Stories

The majority of international stories that refer to religion in one way or another were found in the *Globe & Mail* newspaper. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East generated news in 2013 and Islam was often implicated, often explicitly but also implicitly. One example was an article about the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian war, "UN on chemical attack this is a war crime" (Associated Press, *Globe & Mail*, 2013, A8). In this article, there is a strong focus on human rights abuses and crimes against humanity regardless of any religious affiliation; we coded this article as "secular-sacred: humanism." Although the article discussed Syria and other Middle Eastern Countries there was no mention of Islam, Muslim or any religion. Instead, the article repeatedly stresses human rights abuses and the need for compassion and international support and calling for the accountability of those responsible, which the article recognized as the Assad regime. To support this position, the article discussed the complexity of the sarin gas attacks used in the Syrian war. They argued for the Assad's regime responsibility through a comparison with the Tokyo subway gas attack from 1995, which they believed would have been more akin to what the rebel forces would be capable of undertaking rather than the sophisticated and deadly attack witnessed in Syria. Although Aum Shin Riko was a religious group responsible for the Tokyo attack, they were not mentioned in the article.

As Islam was the main category coded for international stories, a clear example was a feature article "Female officer dies after attack" (Khan, *Globe & Mail*, 2013, A11), that included a photo with the caption "Afghan policewoman and relatives grieve over the body." Discussing the difficult role of women in Afghanistan and especially those that join the police force, this article highlighted the killing of a top female officer and the pattern of attacks carried out by the Taliban against women working for the government. Recognizing Afghanistan as a "deeply conservative nation," the article quotes other female police officers about being warned by the Taliban that they would be killed one by one on a regular basis. Sub-inspector Negar had been a police officer in Afghanistan before the Taliban took power and forbade women from working. She had gone back to work with the political change in the region but had told friends that even some of her own relatives had threatened her for holding the job. The article also discussed other attacks on women by the Taliban.

As fighting with ISIL continued and even intensified, September 17, 2014 had a more critical tone when discussing Islam. Presenting a unified narrative against Islamist terrorism, The *Globe & Mail* and the *Ottawa Citizen* ran articles that highlight this struggle while also expressing concern for the potential of recruiting Canadians and Europeans to join ISIL. "Recruiting magazine glamorizes apocalypse" (McCoy, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2014, C3) was carried in the *Ottawa Citizen* in Canada's Capital city and home to the Department of National Defense and a number of other agencies that deal with terrorism abroad and within the country. The article begins by quoting an Islamic State magazine (*Dabiq*) story and their view that we are at the culmination of a centuries long cultural struggle for the heart of civilization on this planet and the time is the end of days and the apocalypse. We are informed by the article that *Dabiq* is a news magazine published by the Islamic State in a number of languages in Europe, including English. The article provides examples of the extreme views of this group and their belief that

Allah will support their battles against “the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr [infidels and non-believers] all being led by America and Russia.” The news story makes the case that through this type of propaganda and appeal, thousands of foreign fighters have been recruited from a number of countries. The article recognized that this apocalyptic narrative had never been presented before by ISIL in this way, spanning three issues of *Dabiq* with over 100 pages. The news article also focused upon the brutal violence and tactics used by this group and made an argument that many Muslims in Muslim countries “think Armageddon will occur in their lifetime.”

On September 17, 2014, the *Ottawa Citizen* also ran other articles that examined the ongoing conflict including “Tough talk but little action against Islamic State” (Marsden, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2014, C3). This article emphasized the military role and commitment by the United States in fighting the Islamic State (ISIL or ISIS) and was critical of Middle Eastern countries that are part of a 40-nation coalition yet have failed to offer concrete military support in the battle. The article names Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE as nations that have condemned ISIL but “so far have offered little or no assistance.” The article cites US Lawmakers that are critical of the lack of military support from these nations, showing divisions within US policy and popular opinion concerning how this battle should be fought. The next article on the same page (C3) is titled “Pope Warned of Assassination Threat Ahead of Visit to Albania.” This article not only explains that the Pope is under threat to be assassinated by ISIL for speaking out against the atrocities committed against Christians in Syria and Iraq, it also lists “other key developments Tuesday involving the Islamic State.” These include issues of schooling in Northern Iraq, airstrikes by the US Government, and a critical mention that “at least 53 Turkish families, some with children” had crossed into Syria to join the Islamic State with little attempt by the Turkish Government to “stem the flow.”

On September 17, 2015, there was a shift in international news stories concerning Islam with less focus on terrorism and an increased concern over the refugee crisis unfolding in Europe. An interesting exception occurred due to an incident where a Muslim teen in Texas brought a homemade clock to school as a science project and was arrested, “Texas - Charges are dropped against Muslim teen” (Associated Press, *Metro*, 2015, 14). This story appearing in the *Metro* had a version in the *Ottawa Citizen*, which criticized a North Texas Highschool for calling the police, handcuffing the student and expelling him from school over a homemade clock. The *Globe & Mail* ran a similar story on September 16, 2015. In the article the teacher is explicitly criticized, and the Chief of Police is referenced to show that there was no negative intent from the student and that he in no way was trying to cause alarm or create a hoax bomb. Talking about the boy, Ahmed Mohamed, the article recognized that he repairs electronics, makes his own radios, and made the clock itself from an assortment of parts. The article then goes on to cite the father who “suggested officials reacted as they did because of the boy’s name and faith.” Other articles on this day that explored the event also discussed how President Obama tweeted an invite to Ahmed to bring his clock to the White House and inspire more kids to do science.

Several stories on September 17, 2015 discussed the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. In many of the stories carried within the Canadian media there is little mention of Islam,

rather they appear as humanitarian issues or were classified as “General Religion.” A good example was the front page of the *Globe & Mail* running the story “Chaos erupts as refugees clash with police at Hungarian border” (McKinnon, *Globe & Mail*, 2015, A1). This news story graphically highlighted the struggle that broke out at the Hungarian border and the heavy-handed nature of the Hungarian Government’s response to the asylum-seekers. Citing Amnesty International and discussing the danger the asylum seekers faced, a clear picture was painted of the escalating crisis, arguing that “hundreds of the most vulnerable people are now stuck between razor wire and the abyss of not knowing what comes next.” A number of EU countries and the UN were cited as being critical of the way the border situation was handled, arguing these people are fleeing wars and persecution and must be shown compassion. This view is critiqued in the article by the Hungarian Prime Minister who believed the refugees were in no danger and instead were coming into his country to seek economic opportunity and he was simply protecting his country’s “way of life” against the refugees. The Hungarian Prime Minister was planning on expanding a razor wire border fence along its border with Romania. Romanian and Serbia are both protesting the Hungarian government’s treatment of refugees saying it “contravenes the European spirit” and that members of the EU must behave in-line with “European values.”

National Stories

Within Canada, there were a number of national religious issues that appeared in the news each year. In 2013, there was an ongoing concern in English speaking Canada over a proposed amendment to the Provincial Charter of Quebec to restrict religious symbols worn in public. Most people interpreted this change as xenophobic and focused upon Muslim dress codes. In general, Canada prides itself on religious tolerance and accommodation and many people felt this was an affront to these values. On September 17, 2013, a number of articles noted the Prime Minister of Canada’s position against the proposed Charter changes. “Quebec Charter will be stopped: Harper” (Woods, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2013, A4) highlighted the Canadian Government’s official opposition to Quebec’s proposed “Charter of Values.” The article quotes the Prime Minister as being opposed to the Quebec proposal, stating that if the Quebec legislature adopts a proposal that violates Canadians’ “fundamental constitutional protections from discrimination,” and the government would take any action necessary to stop it. The article reviews the basics of the Quebec proposal which requires any Quebecers giving or receiving public services to keep their faces uncovered and would not allow public servants to wear “ostentatious” religious symbols in the workplace. The article recognizes that polling in Quebec shows a majority of people in the province may support the idea but that this would fundamentally oppose Canadian values that support inclusion and diversity. Although there is no mention of specific religious regalia and which groups are potentially being targeted, the article quotes Jason Kenny, a senior government official, as saying, “elements of the charter, such as regulating the permitted size of certain religious symbols, approach ‘Monty Python-esque absurdity’.”

In 2014, there was a national story criticizing the Conservative Government's position on dealing with issues of recruitment to terrorist organizations. Never explicitly mentioning Islam or Muslims, "Terrorism has causes" (Editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2014, C8) was coded "common religion: other" for its mentioning of evil and "demonic possession." This article examined a formal speech by Canada's Prime Minister, where he stated, "We know (terrorist ideology) is not the result of 'social exclusion' or other so-called 'root causes.' It is evil, vile and must be unambiguously opposed." The article was critical of the way the Conservative Government and conservatives dismiss "root causes" of terrorism, such as poverty and other social ills, as excuses for the behavior rather than any source of its causes. Referencing Aquinas, the author argues that there must be a cause for this activity, rather than the conservative view that terrorism is an expression of pure evil that appears without explanation like some form of "demonic possession." The author argues it is a moral duty of the Canadian Government to oppose terrorism by truly understanding the larger social settings and situations that may foster it.

Although the Government strongly opposed the Charter of Values proposed by Quebec in 2013, they had implemented new rules in 2011 that disallowed any form of face coverings, such as the niqab, during the swearing in ceremony of new Canadian citizens. On September 17, 2015, "Tories to appeal niqab ruling" was covered in the *Globe and Mail* (Levitz, *Globe & Mail*, 2015, A6) and also the *Ottawa Citizen*. Based upon a rule change implemented by the Conservative Government in 2011, people undergoing their citizenship ceremony to become Canadians must have their faces uncovered. Arguing that when people make their public declaration "of one's loyalty to one's fellow citizens and country, one should do so openly, proudly, publicly without one's face hidden." This ruling was challenged by Ms. Zunera Ishaq, a devout Muslim, arguing that the Citizenship Act of Canada allows for "the greatest possible religious freedom when they take their oath." Ishaq had challenged the rule change implemented by Kenney in Federal Court earlier and won her case. The Conservative Government appealed the decision and lost but wished to take their case before the Supreme court of Canada to consider whether face coverings could be banned from citizenship ceremonies. Kenney argued (without evidence) that "the vast majority of Canadians agree with us and that is why we will be appealing this ruling."

Regional Stories

"A world-class showcase for Islamic art" (Adams, *Globe and Mail*, 2013, L2). With the opening of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto in September of 2013, this article examined the cultural significance of the event, arguing that this new museum is a world-class edifice and will become a "cultural destination and player in very short order." Providing some of the background and history of the process of establishing the museum, the article identified the role of His Highness, Prince Shah Karim Al Hussaini Aga Khan IV as the "spiritual head" of 15 million Shia Imami Nizari Ismaili Muslims. The article also explored the splendor of the museum and grounds, being 10,100 square meters, with five reflecting pools, and an Ismaili Community Centre and Jamatkhana. The article noted other galleries and museums in Canada that include Islamic art but recognized the Aga Khan Museum as "the only institution in North America dedicated

solely to the panoply of Islamic art—painted illustrations, ceramics, weavings, calligraphy, scientific instruments, paintings, clothing, myriad editions of the Koran.” The article noted that the permanent collection had been housed in Paris, London, and Geneva with more than 1000 artifacts. Along with describing a number of the beautiful “treasures” of the collection, the article also discusses Islam in relation to multiple dynasties and civilizations encompassing more than one-thousand years of history. The chief curator discussed the religious prohibitions of figurative images in Islamic art and talked of the cultural diversity within Islam and how it has always responded to local traditions. The article also discussed contemporary art, recognizing the continued global development of artistic representation within Islam.

One year later, on September 17, 2014, the *Globe and Mail* ran a follow-up story based upon the speech given by the Aga Khan at the opening of the Aga Khan Museum and community centre discussed previously; “Place of prayer, cradle of friendship” (Khan, *Globe and Mail*, 2014, A13). The article recognized the significance of the opening of the Museum and cultural centre stating that it represents “the inspiring traditions of the past, the stirring challenges of the future and the continuing search for peace through prayer.” The article provided an eloquent summary of the relationship between Canada and the Ismaili community, recognizing that Ismailis from a number of countries are now happy to “develop their destinies under the Canadian flag.” The article then explains the importance of prayer and places of prayer for Ismailis and Muslims in general. A great deal of information is given regarding the central role of the jamatkhana, the place of prayer, but the secular aspects of the new museum and centre were also discussed. Stating that the museum is for Ismailis, non-Ismailis, Muslims, and non-Muslims. It was stressed that the new centre by its design, programs, and activities has a pluralistic spirit that represents deep set Ismaili values, and the “pluralistic commitments that are so deeply embedded in Canadian values.” A number of references were made to the friendships and community spirit that evolved as the center was developed and built, recognizing that the centre now will provide a “beautiful legacy of friendship and enlightenment.”

Perhaps highlighting the controversy over religion and clothing within Canada and the ongoing veil debate, “School dress code on hold after protest draws police.” (Crawford, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2015, A1, A13), examined the issue of Catholic dress codes at private schools and the heavy-handed nature of the schools to control the clothing and attire of their students. In this case, All Saints Catholic High School had implemented a new dress code that disallowed ripped jeans. Several students chose to wear the jeans as a fashion statement and were sent home because of the clothing violation. The students then organized a protest at lunch and the police were called by the principle to deal with the situation. It was reported that four police cruisers and a number of officers escorted protestors off of school property. Parents interviewed by the Ottawa paper argued that the “heavy-handedness of the school is ridiculous.” The school argued that the dress code is used “In order to maintain the Christian atmosphere of the school, short shorts or skirts, low cut tops, pajama bottoms, clothing with vulgar, suggestive, inappropriate language or drug/alcohol messages are not permitted... No midriff revealing, racer back backless tops are not to be worn. Clothing that permits exposure of the naval or undergarments is not acceptable.” In the article, the students that led the protest were

represented as good kids that used their own money to buy the coolest and latest fashion trend.

Common Religion/Other Supernatural Beings

One example of common religion focused on an upcoming art exhibit, described as, “a tantalizing cultural testament to Amanda Knox,” the American student convicted and later acquitted on murdering her roommate. “Amanda Knox and the power of words” (Reguly, *Globe & Mail*, 2013, L5), focused on language used by lawyers and the media to portray Knox during the trial, such as “demon”, “satanical”, “diabolical”, “witch”, and “succubus.” The art, done by Sienna Reid, an American living in Rome, calls attention to how the justice system and media used loaded and religiously shocking symbolic language to stir up public sentiment against Knox. Along with using the words written out on different forms of media for the art exhibit, Reid also created modern “curse tablets” that would have historically been used “by the ancient Greeks and Romans to lobby the gods to cast harm on others.” Recognizing this as a form of “ancient voodoo,” the article talks about how many of the words used to describe Knox were similar to those that would have been on curse tablets in the past, especially the term succubus, “a female demon who was fond of intercourse with sleeping men.” The article reminds readers of the events surrounding the murder of Meredith Kercher who was found dead in the apartment she shared with Knox. The artist was convinced that Knox was innocent and felt that the branding of her as a “she-devil”, “witch” and “succubus” created a media circus and spectacle that could not have happened in other more secular countries.

Common Religion/Folk Religion

Another article coded as common religion shows the difficulty quantified codes may have on the overall interpretation of the data collected (see Michels and Helland 2021). “Alex Janvier’s Morning Star rises again—better than ever” (Simpson, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2014, D1, D2), discusses the significant restoration carried out by the Canadian Museum of History on this iconic work of art. Along with a full restoration of the painting by the artist, the museum installed multi-media, educational material, reclining chairs for viewing, and new background information that unpacks the symbols and colors of the work. The painting was originally completed in 1993 and was not regarded as an expression of indigenous religion, rather it was presented as commentary on the clash of cultures that occurred with colonization. The coding team had considered this article as a possible example of secular sacred, however it also mentioned aboriginal spirituality and had references to non-traditional religious symbols. Janvier is recognized as a “totemic figure in aboriginal art” and the history and significance of the painting is explained in detail, recognizing that “all the colours, shapes, and designs are symbolic of some aspect of aboriginal life and history”, detailing the first European ships arriving, industrialization of fishing for European markets, and a sweat lodge that “represents a contemporary return to traditional spiritual practices by aboriginals across North America.” When the painting was first completed (1993), it was recognized that at that time “Native art wasn’t considered art. It wasn’t even in the National Gallery.” Janvier believes strongly that the painting was and is an important step in helping to enlighten Canada about indigenous cultures.

Conclusion

Our capture of religion on an ordinary day in Canada evidenced a few key issues. First and foremost, within the conventional religion category, Islam was a consistent topic over the three-year period. At the international news level, this was highlighted by the global focus on the war against ISIL and Canada's involvement within it. Stories also focused upon the brutal nature of the Taliban in Afghanistan and highlighted Islamic extremism. At the national level, issues appeared over the Quebec Charter of Values and the implications of banning Muslim women from wearing their religious head coverings. Within Canada, there appeared to be strong national opposition to the proposed changes to the Quebec constitution with the Canadian government strongly rallying against it and promoting religious tolerance and inclusion of the Muslim community. However, at the same time, the news capture also showed that the Federal Government had earlier implemented a ban against face coverings at Citizenship Swearing in Ceremonies, which appears to target Muslim women. Despite the ideals of Canada considering itself a multicultural and religiously tolerant country, this demonstrated the complexity of the religious situation in Canada and role of the Government to promote its ideology, values, and beliefs. We also found that in several articles there was an explicit omission of any reference to Islam or Muslims and instead a focus upon humanitarian issues and human rights. This seemed to represent a secularized version of events for the Canadian public that engaged important issues but not the religious dimensions of the story.

Another interesting finding was based upon the representation of Muslim women within the news capture. As Bullock and Jafri's (2000) earlier research found, there was significant stereotyping of Muslim woman in the Canadian media. In contrast, our news stories represented them as dignified, intelligent, devout, and brave. This positive representation occurred in international stories as well as English national stories that highlighted the struggle of Muslim women in Quebec in relation to the proposed Charter of Values and the wearing of the Hijab. These findings appear more line with Bleich et al (2018) who found in their media study, the "majority of articles that 'tag' individuals as devout Muslims discuss their faith in a neutral or positive manner" (p. 256).

Common religion and secular sacred appeared in numerous places and demonstrated how religious terms and concepts often appear in a non-religious context. For common religion this included sports events, cooking articles, advertisements, and issues of fortunetelling and gambling. Secular sacred often came across as "religion like" and appeared when the news focused upon sports stories and heroic and iconic people. However, these categories were also applied to issues of spirituality and First Nations religious practices and beliefs. Within the coding framework, an Indigenous sweat lodge is not recognized as a form of conventional religion, demonstrating a cultural bias within the coding framework over what constitutes conventional religion. These categories became large catchalls for religion "outside the box" and could conceal rather than reveal the nuances of religion presented in the media (see Michels and Helland, 2021).

Overall, the picture presented of religion in Canada on September 17 represents religious diversity within the country and also demonstrates the role of the Government in power to support what they consider to be the values and beliefs of the nation. It

seems that there is much more tolerance for non-Christian religious beliefs and practices than in earlier media studies examining Canada. This may be identifying an overall shift in Canadian media that is more representative of the changing religious demographics of the nation as immigration continues to increase and the dominant religious traditions of Canada decline in their overall influence.

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