

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? No ?epidemic? of Islamaphobia

Here's an exercise: Look around the world and name a single country more open to people from diverse backgrounds than Canada. Not that we're perfect. But it does get tiresome to hear constant carping from close-minded professional victimhood groups about what a horrible, racist society we are. It's not true, plain and simple.

I'm reminded of this tendency to bad-mouth Canada by a recent headline in ? where else? ? the Toronto Star, a Star ?exclusive? no less ? reading, ?Ontario facing ?epidemic of Islamaphobia.'?

Immigration reporter Nicholas Keung writes that ?While Canada rides a wave of global praise for welcoming Syrian refugees, a new poll suggests we're also facing a wave of something sinister ? Islamaphobia.?

In fact, the poll doesn't suggest any such thing. The suggestion ? rather, the direct accusation ? instead comes from officials of the special interest groups who sponsored it.

According to the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and the advocacy group Mass Minority, ?There is an epidemic of Islamaphobia in Ontario. Only a third of Ontarians have a positive impression of the religion and more than half feel its mainstream doctrines promote violence (an anomaly compared to other religions),? according to the 51-page survey.

We are further told that Ontario ?has seen a number of recent incidents targeting Muslims,? and three ? three ? are listed: a woman accosted at a London supermarket in June for wearing a hijab; a Western University student from Iran beaten by two men who taunted him and told him to go back to his country; and an anti-Muslim Toronto protest by a small fringe group rooted in Germany. Not nice, for sure. Certainly not acceptable. But hardly an epidemic. And surely not the kind of behaviour the vast majority of Ontarians applaud.

A sidebar to the main story tells us that police reports of ?hate crimes? against Muslim-Canadians have doubled from 54 incidents in 2012 to 99 in 2014. Two things about that: the definition of a ?hate? crime is pretty broad, and there's a big difference between ?reports? and actual crimes. Even so, there were 99 ?reports? in all of Canada. Troubling, but not an epidemic.

The survey actually found that 72 per cent of the respondents said immigrants play an important part of our cultural identity ? that doesn't sound hateful to me. But ? and here's where the zealots love to twist to their own advantage ? it also found 71 per cent said we should focus on taking care of people ?here? instead of spending resources on refugees.

?Taken together,? we're told, ?this suggests that Ontarians see non-immigrants as more entitled to social care. This entitlement is, in some ways, a contradiction given the inherent value that immigration offers.?

No, it's not. Looking after the home front first is a natural human tendency, no matter where you look in the world. And it is not legitimate to suggest from that finding that respondents are saying we should only take care of non-immigrants. Since the beginning of this country, we've been built on immigration and for most of that time have been at or near the top of the world in accepting newcomers. By saying people ?here? should be taken care of first does suggest that the immigrants who are already ?here? should not be looked after. It's only talking about people who have not come here yet. That's plain for anybody who wants to see, but apparently not so obvious for those who want to see only what they hope to see before the survey was taken.

The real nub of the survey comes in the questions about religions. We're told that of the six major mainstream religions in Canada, ?Islam is the most likely to be viewed by the respondents as a promoter of violence.?

Should we be surprised? When people see almost daily headlines of murderous acts committed by people claiming to be acting in the name of Islam ? including another major suicide bombing the day this story ran ? is it any wonder they're a tad nervous these days? Really?

Granted, terrorist acts by ISIS or other groups ? often against other Muslims ? does not, or should not, define what Islam is, although it would help somewhat if more Islamic leaders spoke out more often and more forcefully against such actions rather than crying ?Islamaphobia? when people express legitimate concerns.

The biggest problem with crying wolf and exaggerating the problem ? while at the same time not facing up to the real issues internally within Islam ? is that if this sort of nonsense is repeated often enough people will come to believe it and we really will have a bigger problem than we have.

As the old saw goes, be careful what you wish for.

