

Innovation Funding Project Report and Student Stipend Report

Peter Beyer

Project Title: *Conceptions of Religious Diversity among Immigrant and 2nd Generation Young Adults in Canada: Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Religious Nones*

1. Project Goals

The research project addressed the question of how people in Canada understand and construct their own religious identities, in part with reference to others, and thus in a context of presumed religious diversity. It did this at the individual rather than at the group or institutional level. The main research question was how individuals in Canada construct their own religious identities and, in so doing, help to constitute Canadian religious diversity in particular ways. The project tackled this question through the analysis of two sets of existing data, gathered by the researchers in the context of two previous research projects.

2. Researchers and Students Involved

The project was carried out primarily by Peter Beyer and Solange Lefebvre, with the collaboration of Patrice Brodeur, Kim Knott, Prema Kurien, Susan Palmer, Sam Reimer, Gary Bouma, Michael Wilkinson, and Caitlin Downie (MA student, Ottawa).

3. Rationale

The Canadian context assumes a society characterized by religious diversity, but this description does not already determine how such diversity is understood and enacted. It does not determine what are the “elements” that “compose” this diversity nor the relations among those elements. The project sought partial answers to this question by looking at interviews from a data set of about 300 young Canadian adults of immigrant families and between the ages of 18 and 30, which takes the form of 300 individual, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews drawn from the “Immigrant Youth” (data gathered 2004-2006), and the “Immigrant Young Adult” (data gathered 2008-2010) projects headed by Beyer and in which the other applicants were co-researchers. The interviewees consist of a mixture of people who clearly identify with a particular religion and those who do not, and therefore the project was able to examine the core question in terms of the fluidity and variability of religious identity constructions in the Canadian context among these subpopulations.

4. Methods

Using an iterative and somewhat intuitive approach and with the assistance of coding using CAQDA software, the project analyzed 80 of the interviews from the more recent project for patterns of religious identity construction: how such identities are constructed, how identities relate to a perceived context of religious diversity, how religious identities are understood to relate to each other in terms of hierarchy/equality, majority/minority, exclusivity/inclusivity, orthodoxy-praxis/auto-determination, insider/outsider, and other important criteria of variation. Since most of interviews from the earlier data set had been analyzed before in the context of the research project for which it was gathered, the analyses of these was supplementary.

5. Ethics, permissions

The data was gathered by the researchers (and others) in two previous projects which had already received multiple ethics certificates from 2004 to 2010. This project constitutes further analysis of that data by the original researchers and therefore required no further clearance.

6. Summary of Activities

The 80 interviews were analyzed and summarized with relation to the core questions; they were then coded on the basis of a common set of coding concepts. Supplementary analysis of the 202 earlier interviews was carried out according to different religious-identity subgroupings, including the different discrete religious identities listed in the title of the project and those judged to fall under the category of “spiritual but not religious”.

7. Provisional Findings

The construction of religious identity and understanding of religious diversity by the samples of interview participants show a range of continuities and also significant differences. Among the continuities: almost all interviewees understood religion as primarily but not exclusively represented by the so-called religion, especially the ‘world religions’ to which the majority of them considered themselves to belong. Most participants also considered all religions to be good (albeit with the proviso that they could be harmful and detrimental if practiced in distorted fashion or through ‘extremism’). Most participants also felt that most if not all

religions shared common orientations, values, and provisions such as giving a moral basis to life, providing meaning and often belonging. In that context, the participants in large majority felt religious diversity was good and should be promoted. They further drew a distinction between religious and cultural diversity as not being constituted by the same categories of diversity, but nevertheless closely related. Cultural diversity was also valued as another societal good. In spite of this seeming clarity, however, many interviews visibly constructed their own religious identities across and even outside the clear categories of diversity that they recognized. Thus, although the majority of participants had single and exclusive religious identities (e.g. Muslim, Christian, Hindu, atheist), many had fluid identities (sometimes one thing, at other times another), carried a single identity but in practice combined beliefs and practices from many sources (the SBNR and the “somewhat religious” ones especially) or eschewed any clear personal religious or spiritual identity that they could or would name. In that context, almost all participants were convinced that religious identity was a personal choice, could and should be allowed to change (at least in principle) over a lifetime, was very important for most (but by not means all), and could only be legitimately determined by individuals. In all these aspects, there were, however, a small minority of exceptions.

8. Outputs

Two conference papers (yet to be delivered) will eventuate in two articles submitted to refereed journals. The conference papers will initially be written by Beyer and delivered at the annual RDP meeting in Cambridge (September 2012) and at the meetings of the SSSR in Phoenix (November 2012). The final articles will be co-authored with one or more members of the research team, preferably from among the student assistants.

9. Finances

Student Information:

Research Assistantships:

The project engaged four student assistants who were primarily responsible for the data analysis (analysis, summary, coding of interviews). Two were financed by the grant received from the RDP (Phonevilay & Hameed), two were financed from Beyer’s other research funds.



Breakdown of Expenses			
Student Funding*			
	Amount	Name	Dates
Student Assistantships	\$4,000	Lamphone Phonevilay	September - March 2011- 2012
	\$4,000	Qamer Hameed	September – March 2011- 2012