

## Workshop Report

### Norms of Religious Minority Participation: Fields of Practice

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An international conference on ‘Norms of Religious Minority Participation: Fields of Practice’ was held at the University of Victoria on November 27-29, 2014 and was co-organized by 3 members of the *Religion and Diversity Project* (Avigail Eisenberg, Paul Bramadat and Pamela Klassen) and Patti Lenard (University of Ottawa). The conference considered some of the successes, failures, benefits and challenges of the participation of religious minorities in decision making in different contexts or what we call ‘fields of practice’. The conference was funded by the *Religion and Diversity Project* (\$15,000); SSHRC Connections (\$12,000) and various sources at University of Victoria, University of Toronto and University of Ottawa.

In the first part of the conference, held on Friday, February 28, six graduate students presented their research. The students came from UVIC (2); University of Toronto (2) and l’Université de Montréal (2) and from Religious Studies, Sociology, History and Political Science. The research topics ranged from how shamanism was portrayed in Soviet and Russian museums, to how public health nurses convey information to new mothers from minority cultures. The students were at different stages in their programs and each received thorough critical feedback from the scholars and practitioners present. All participants concurred that the graduate students delivered excellent presentations and their topics fit the overall conference theme well. For many of us, the conference would have been worth it just to hear about these interesting research projects.

In the second part of the conference, held on Saturday November 29, senior scholars (and one post-doctoral fellow) and practitioners explored four fields of practice in four separate panels:

- 1) environmental assessment processes;
- 2) hospitals and healthcare;
- 3) security and policing;
- 4) education.

Each panel featured three presenters and a respondent. At least one presenter ‘practitioner’ actively working in the field, and all participants discussed experiences or case studies regarding minority participation in a field of practice. Panel 1 included Troy Sebastian, a community activist from Ktunaxa First Nation, who led his community’s against the planned Jumbo Ski Resort. The case study was discussed alongside two other scholarly presentations, one by Cameron Owens about using spiritual or ‘affective’ reasons in the context of environmental assessment processes and one by John Borrows, about the nature of the reasons given by First Nations people and the Canadian State to justify jurisdictional authority over land.

Panel 2, focused on minority participation in healthcare, featured Dr. Monika Naus, Medical Director, Immunization Programs & Vaccine Preventable Diseases, British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, and Associate Professor, School of Population & Public Health, UBC, explained some of the challenges of soliciting support and participation for immunizing children from the Dutch Reform community outside Vancouver. Dr. Sheryl Reimer Kirkham also explored pluralism in healthcare ‘best practices’ in home care in the BC lower mainland, and Dr. Arlene Macdonald, presented on the benefits and challenges of having hospitals funded by private donors whose donations target the needs of specific ethnic communities (i.e. the Brampton Civic Hospital and the Sikh community in Brampton).

Panel 3 brought together international perspectives on minority participation in relation to practices of “securitization.” Sergeant Steve Corcoran of the RCMP E Division Integrated National Security Enforcement Team in British Columbia explained how the unit works and how community participation is generally incorporated into their work. The panel also heard from Baljit Nagra, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Ottawa, about the impact on religious minorities from changes in Canadian immigration policy spurred by the rise of securitization. Finally, Dr. Tufyal Choudhury of the University of Sussex discussed the levels of belonging amongst British Muslim youth and how Britain’s securitization policies have dramatically affected this community.

On Panel 4, speakers examined tensions in incorporating religious voices in public education settings. The practitioner role was taken on by Jeremy Webber, who reported on his experience presenting a brief to the British Columbia Law Society about whether the Society should recognize the law degrees awarded to Trinity Western University students. This discussion was set in a context of a presentation by Ben Berger about recent trends in the law and legal cases in Quebec about religious instruction in public schools and a third presentation by Monique Scheer which discussed the successes and challenges experienced in Germany incorporating Islamic Schools of Theology into public university settings

Our aim was to reach four main audiences: faculty; students; policy practitioners and the public. To meet this aim and to have an impact on the community by stimulating a more sustained intellectual conversation about religious minority participation, the conference was organized and timed to include four additional university- and community-wide lectures delivered by three of the conference participants. These events included:

- 1) The CSRS/European Union Centre for Excellence lecture delivered by Monique Scheer. Professor at the University of Tübingen, on ‘The Emergence of Centres of Islamic Theology in Germany’ (Thurs Nov 26)
- 2) The Bishop’s Distinguished Lecture delivered by Charles Taylor on ‘Secular Futures’ (Thurs Nov 27 evening)
- 3) The Victoria Colloquium delivered by Charles Taylor on ‘Some Crises of Democracy’ (Fri Nov 28)

- 4) The Lansdowne lecture, delivered by Ben Berger on 'Belonging to Law: Religious Difference, Secularism and Civic Inclusion' (Mon Dec 1)

These events each attracted different audiences (some of which overlap) and numbers, ranging from 120 at the Victoria Colloquium, to 50 at the other lectures, to 35-40 at the main conference and 15-20 at the graduate student conference.

On Friday, a reception for the University community followed the Victoria Colloquium presentation by Charles Taylor. A conference dinner at a local restaurant followed the conclusion of the main conference on Saturday.