

## **“The State of Hate in Canada: Background and Prospects”**

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My talk today reflects the concerns and processes of the Global Consortium on Bigotry and Hate, of which I am a founding member. The consortium consists of scholars and activists from around the world who together meet regularly throughout the year to share information about the rise of right-wing extremism and prejudice, and to discuss ways of addressing the harms associated with this rise, particularly in local contexts. The consortium seeks to understand hate and bigotry in both their local and global aspects. This dual focus is required since new information sharing technologies have encouraged the development of novel ways of spreading prejudice and hatred, yielding potent new forms of global right-wing community, solidarity, and extremity. At the same time, the performance of right-wing hatred occurs locally and is experienced against the backdrop of unique “horizons of significance” that are suffused with the “terroir” of locality. Accounting for an act of hate therefore requires some acknowledgment of the links between local acts and global actors and ideologies at one and the same time as the specific features of each local event are identified, catalogued, interpreted, and assessed.

In order to provide a window on local conditions, members of the Global Consortium standardly each present a “State of Hate” update to their colleagues at the outset of consortium meetings. I’d like to provide a version of this update for you here today. First, however, I need to say something about the challenges inherent in offering a gloss on Canadian prejudice and discrimination – and my assumption is that at least part of what I have to say will resonate with my Russian colleagues, since in several respects (especially scale and complexity) our countries closely resemble one another. To start with, I’d like to stress the extent to which generalizations about a country as vast and diverse as Canada are hugely challenging. Canada is the second largest county on earth, with a territory comprising 9.9 million square kilometers. With a total population of just under 38 million (or roughly half of one percent of the world’s total population), Canada has a population density of only 4 people per square kilometer. The country contains a lot of “empty” space, and things get emptier (and more Indigenous) the further north one travels. 90 percent of all Canadians live no more than 100 kilometers from the US border, and more than 80 percent of the population lives in cities or towns.<sup>1</sup>

What does all of this mean? Minimally, it means that there is considerable pressure on Canadian social life and its related institutions and practices from the giant to our south. When America twitches, we Canadians shake, and the result is a broad anxiety of cultural influence

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<sup>1</sup> Wilcox, M. (2021, February 6). *What are two reasons why 90% of Canadians live within 100 miles of the US border?* <https://Colors-Newyork.Com/>. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://colors-newyork.com/what-are-two-reasons-why-90-of-canadians-live-within-100-miles-of-the-us-border/>

inflecting nearly every part of Canadian life to the extent that it remains a key component of the nation's cultural identity. To understand Canadian culture then (including its cultures of hate and prejudice), one must reckon with it in its uneven and sometimes fraught relation to the USA. Additionally, the sheer size of the country is difficult to contend with in summary fashion since it produces a vast number of regional variations (a function of wildly differing geographies, topographies, climates, available natural and other resources, economies, and patterns of settlement from east to west, as well as from north to south).

We see this variation reflected in the most recent regional statistics on hate and prejudice, covering the period 2016-2019. These statistics testify to the relatively low rates of hate crimes in the Canadian Maritimes region (comprising the Atlantic Provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick); the relatively high hate crime rates in Central Canada (Ontario and Quebec); and increasing rates of hate the further westward one looks, from the Midwest provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan through Alberta and then British Columbia on the Pacific coast.<sup>2</sup> In Canada's northern territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), hate crime also increased between 2016-2019 though in absolute terms these numbers remain very low. Still, the 13 incidents of discrimination and prejudice that were reported in 2019 across northern Canada represent a higher per capita experience of hate than that found in the rest of the country.

Interestingly, statistics show that while hate crime in Canada is still primarily visible in urban centres, the main places where these crimes are reported are not Canada's major cities but rather medium-sized urban centres such as Hamilton, Ottawa, Gatineau, Quebec City, and Peterborough. These five small cities all have populations well-below 1 million, and yet they are all at the top of the list of hate crimes reported to the police. Canada's most hateful big city is Vancouver,<sup>3</sup> which ironically has a national and international reputation as a prized place to live. And yet the most recent statistics show Vancouver has become the epicenter of anti-Asian hate not just in Canada, but in the whole of North America. Reasons for this dubious distinction include, but are not limited to, the continuing influx of East and South Asians (particularly citizens of China and India) into the city where they have been held responsible – not unparadoxically – for increasing crime rates and elevating property prices. As I say, though, we see anti-Asian racism on the rise generally in Canada, and indeed we can say the same for all hate crimes regardless of what motivates them and whom they are targeting.

That said, the highest number of hate crimes reported to police in recent years have been directed towards people of black African descent. Between 2016 and 2019, between 2-3 times as many anti-Black hate crimes were reported as were crimes directed at members of other

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<sup>2</sup> Moreau, G. (2021, March 29). *Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2019*. Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> *Looking at Hate Crime Statistics in Canada*. (2020, August 26). Statistics Canada. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/news-a-events/articles/item/27292-looking-at-hate-crime-statistics-in-canada>

racial or ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> To be clear, most of the figures I am citing are from official sources, and there are several reasons why we should treat them cautiously – not the least of which is the tendency by members of some groups (e.g. Indigenous people) to think of the police not as allies but as perpetrators, and so not people to look to for support in a crisis. It is not unreasonable to expect the apparent statistical gap between, say, Indigenous and Black Canadians' reports of discriminatory treatment to narrow using alternative means of data collection and analysis. In terms of the official statistics, however, the three main bases for hate and prejudice continue to be race, religion, and sexual orientation (in that order), followed by language, disability, sex, and age.<sup>5</sup>

Having now provided a modest sketch of the general background conditions of prejudicial hate in Canada, I'd like briefly to zero-in on three events unfolding over 2021 that have each in its way(s) shifted the national conversation in moral and political responsibility for prejudice, as well as the work of repair. I am referring variously to: (1) antisemitic and Islamophobic hatred and violence on display during demonstrations held across Canada in 2021 over the most recent eruption of large-scale Israeli-Palestinian violence in Gaza and the Occupied Territories; (2) the murder of three generations of a Muslim family out for a walk together in London, Ontario, by twenty-year-old Nathaniel Veltman, who ran them down with his pickup truck on June 6<sup>th</sup>; and (3) the discovery in May, 2021, of the remains of 215 children, some as young as three years old, at an unmarked gravesite at the location of a former Indian Residential School in the province of British Columbia.

Time constraints preclude me from discussing any of these examples at length. For now, what I'd like to do is simply note the ways in which each of these events is in the process of changing that way Canadians understand and respond to hate-based violence, both at the governmental and community levels. To begin with antisemitism and Islamophobia, this past summer the Canadian government organized two national summits to address each of these concerns. The National Summit on Islamophobia took place in Ottawa on July 22, 2021, and included senior government officials as well as representatives from Islamic religious and cultural organizations located across the country. Using the opportunity provided by the summit to air longstanding grievances and demand acknowledgment of the harms done to Canadian Muslims by institutional and popular racism, attendees succeeded in obtaining a number of new commitments from the federal government. These included a commitment to engage with Muslim communities on the government's next Anti-Racism Action Plan, and to seek enhancements to a number of extant government anti-discrimination programs and policies including the Security Infrastructure Program (SIP), Anti-Racism Action Program (ARAP), and Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program (CSMARI). The Trudeau government also undertook to build on lessons learned to improve digital literacy and tackle misinformation, renew its commitment to provide dedicated resources in support of the

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<sup>4</sup> Moreau, G. (2021, March 29). *Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2019*. Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

work done *within* government to combat islamophobia, and to create a Taxpayers' Ombudsperson to conduct a systemic study to address the concerns of Muslim led charitable organizations.<sup>6</sup>

At the National Summit on Antisemitism that took place the previous day, similar assurances were provided to Jewish religious, cultural, and civic leaders, along with confirmation of the government's commitment to provide more than \$6 million for 150 projects intended to support communities at risk of hate-motivated crime through the Communities at Risk: Security Infrastructure Program (SIP). Prime Minister Trudeau has also reaffirmed his government's support for the working definition of antisemitism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and in October, 2021 he spoke virtually at the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism, where he confirmed his support for the development of a national plan to combat antisemitism in partnership with Jewish groups from across the country. The need for such a plan has been advocated for some time owing to an increase in the number of antisemitic incidents being reported, with B'nai Brith documenting 2,610 such last year alone.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the discovery in May of unmarked graves of Indigenous Canadian children at the site of a former Indian Residential School (IRS) in Kamloops, British Columbia sent shock-waves throughout the country. The force of this shock was experienced most acutely by non-Indigenous Canadians still struggling to reconcile themselves to the genocidal history of European settlement notwithstanding the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Indigenous people by and large already had some inkling of this situation because they'd attended more actively to the work of the TRC than non-indigenous Canadians, but also because knowledge of this kind of loss was preserved in many Indigenous communities and passed on from one generation to the next. Subsequent announcements of the discovery of unmarked graves at several other IRS sites – burials numbering in the hundreds in some locations – brought Canadians of all backgrounds together this past Canada Day (July 1) to mourn and vent outrage at the perpetration of IRS atrocities, as well as at the slow pace of national reconciliation and structural reform. Across the country statues representing historical figures linked to colonialism (e.g. Canada's first prime minister John A. MacDonald; Queen Victoria; etc.) were bespattered with red paint and/or toppled. Demonstrators dressed in the protest colours orange and red filled streets and occupied government buildings and other sites. Christian churches were vandalized, and three days later, by July 4, 2021, nearly two dozen had been burned. In response, the nation entered into a prolonged debate over how best to address the past in the present – one mirrored in places like the UK and USA where under the aegis of movements like Black Lives Matter historical memory is being similarly

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<sup>6</sup> Canadian Heritage. (2021, July 22). *The Government of Canada Concludes National Summit on Islamophobia*. Canada.Ca. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2021/07/the-government-of-canada-concludes-national-summit-on-islamophobia.html>

<sup>7</sup> Levy, S. (2021, April 26). *Anti-Semitic acts jump 18.6% in 2020, says B'nai Brith report*. Torontosun. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://torontosun.com/news/national/anti-semitic-acts-jump-18-6-in-2020-says-bnai-brith-report>

contested and reworked, sometimes violently. Importantly, this struggle over the traumatic past is taking place at every level of Canadian society, involving not just Indigenous people and their allies but members of other racial and cultural groups similarly vulnerable to popular and systemic discrimination, neglect, and abuse. In response the Trudeau government has allocated additional ad hoc funding to help identify as-yet undiscovered unmarked IRS graves, and in its 2021 budget a massive \$18 billion was committed “over the next five years to support healthy, safe, and prosperous Indigenous communities, close gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and advance meaningful reconciliation.”<sup>8</sup>

While no doubt significant, those of us studying Indigenous-government relations have good reason to be cautious in our optimism that any such large-scale expenditure will achieve what it is supposed to. As Tunchai Redvers, co-founder of a national support campaign for Indigenous youth entitled *We Matter*, noted in 2018 in response to earlier promises to do more, better, made by Prime Minister Trudeau: “So long as you have a public that doesn’t believe Indigenous issues are a big deal, or doesn’t understand their context, then those issues are going to persist.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Statement by the Prime Minister on National Indigenous History Month*. (2021, June 1). Government of Canada. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/06/01/statement-prime-minister-national-indigenous-history-month>

<sup>9</sup> Hutchins, A. (2018, August 14). *Trudeau’s rhetoric on First Nations not matched by Canadian attitudes: poll*. *Macleans*.Ca. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/on-first-nations-issues-theres-a-giant-gap-between-trudeaus-rhetoric-and-what-canadians-really-think/>