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## DEEP EQUALITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO ACCOMMODATION AND TOLERANCE

### *Abstract*

The call to manage religious diversity from various sectors has produced a response that has largely been framed in terms of tolerance and accommodation. It has also produced an over-reliance on law and legal solutions and a tendency to look to top-down, or vertical, solutions rather than the ways in which difference and diversity are negotiated in everyday life. Based on a wide range of data that highlights the themes of respect and similarity, this article proposes the concept of deep equality as an alternative to accommodation and tolerance. The article concludes by reflecting on the objections to and limitations of such an approach, including the objection that focusing on positive narratives is naïve and a possible evolutionary human pre-disposition toward negativity.

Keywords: diversity, equality, accommodation, tolerance, lived religion

Public space is riddled with negative stories about religion and difference that play on themes of conflict, diversity, demands for accommodation, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Such stories represent the multiple layers of strain placed on societies by religious diversity, at the interpersonal, group and institutional levels. A core project of late modern societies has become to manage and respond to this ‘troublesome’ diversity. During the past decade religious diversity has come to occupy centre stage in academic and policy discussions that focus, broadly speaking, on the functioning of religiously diverse societies. This preoccupation has been brought about by a number of convergences that need not be thoroughly rehearsed here as there is a broad academic literature on them (see Calhoun et al. 2011; Dessing et al. 2013; Modood 2013; Berman et al. 2013; Bader 2007, 2013). However, the vectors include: increased demographic diversity with enhanced populations of non-Christian immigrants in majoritarian Christian countries; the decline of institutional Christianity coupled with an increase of religious ‘nones’; a concomitant disjuncture between a residually Christian society (Seljak 2012; see also Martin 2000 for the notion of ‘shadow establishment’) and the lived experiences of nones, non-institutional Christians and religious ‘others’; and entry into what Beyer (2013) calls

the post-Westphalian phase which sees the traditional arrangements regarding religion falling apart in the face of, amongst other things, globalization and specifically the global flow of religion. All of these have produced the call to 'deal with' religious diversity.

Emerging from this call are questions about the management of religious diversity, the negotiation of religious diversity, the challenges of religious diversity, and so on. In almost every case, religious diversity is imagined as something that is a relatively recent development, and as something requiring scholarly and policy attention as a problem to be solved. One of the results of this 'crisis of diversity' has been a springing up of numerous research initiatives aimed at studying and resolving this 'problem' of religious diversity.<sup>2</sup> These include a number of programmes of research, including IMPACT, NOREL, Religion and Society and RELIGARE, to name only a few.<sup>3</sup>

During the past four years I have been the director of one such large research initiative entitled the Religion and Diversity Project. It is based in Canada but is comparative in nature and involves 37 researchers in five countries. The project objectives and goals are described as follows:

What are the contours of religious diversity in Canada and how can we best respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by religious diversity in ways that promote a just and peaceful society? Specifically, the project investigates the following questions: 1. How are religious identities socially constructed? 2. How is religious expression defined and delimited in law and public policy? 3. How and why do gender and sexuality act as flashpoints in debates on religious freedom? 4. What are alternative strategies for managing religious diversity? (Religion and Diversity Project 2014b).

The project positions itself in the midst of the 'problem' of diversity, and discusses the 'management of diversity' as one of its areas of focus. While critical in its intellectual intention and motivation, the project also contributes to the perpetuation of the notion of diversity as a problem to be dealt with or responded to. The Religion and Diversity Project is merely one addition to an intellectual flurry of activity involving constellations of academics, policy makers, and anxious governments who have created an industry around identifying problems and solutions related to, especially, religious diversity.

This article is a call to reformulate the focus from the problem of diversity to an exploration of the ways in which people work out difference in day-to-day life. In this sense it is methodological in its focus. In addition, the article proposes a broad normative framework that is a necessary accompaniment to the methodological strategy. This may rankle those who deny sociology's normative tendencies (for a discussion, see Sayer 2000, 2011), but, true to the sociological imagination, this framework, which I call 'deep equality', is based in empirical evidence, broadly defined, and draws on a realm of social life that is currently under-studied in relation to diversity and its so-called management. Boldly stated, sociologists concerned about religious diversity need to devote at least equal attention to the ways in which people negotiate difference in everyday life or risk simply perpetuating the 'problem' of the problem of diversity.

There were four primary motivators for the research in which I am engaged: a concern with the rigid conceptualization of religion in thinking about diversity; a frustration with the armchair ‘solutions’ to diversity emanating from political theory and those who had little or no familiarity with empirical data about religion; an unease with the over-attention to negative narratives about diversity; an observation that tolerance and accommodation have become the primary framework within which ‘diversity management’ is discussed; and a worry that law has gained prominence as the mechanism for ensuring social justice and fair treatment of religious minorities.

## The Consequences of the Problem of Diversity

The fetishization of religious diversity has created a particular framework within which religion, its expression, its lack of expression, and religious difference must be framed. Religious diversity has been demarcated as a problem, which in turn has produced a cadre of experts, a discursive framework, and a constant monitoring, regulation of and emphasis on difference at multiple levels of society. These are not merely matters of semantics. The underlying premises and conceptual frameworks attached to them shape the production of knowledge in fundamental ways, and, specifically, the focus of these large intellectual enterprises in which we are engaged.

At the conclusion of their Danish Pluralism Project, which began in 2002, Ahlin et al. (2012) engaged in similar reflections about the work that the concept of diversity was doing in their examination of religion in Denmark. They noted in particular that the concepts of religious pluralism and religious diversity may be based on unsustainable assumptions about the stability of the relationship between «religion and religious adherents and clear-cut boundaries between religious groups» (2012: 403). Ahlin et al. rely on Ulrich Beck’s (2002) concept of the ‘zombie category’ to bring some interesting imagery to their argument. Certainly religion as it is often used by social scientists, humanities scholars, policy makers and those who work in law has taken on this air, floating disconnectedly from the practices of day-to-day life that are so difficult to describe given our current conceptual repertoire. Given the fluidity with which religious identities manifest in social life, as well as the growing number of people who describe themselves as religious nones, the observations of Ahlin et al. must be taken as a serious call to reconfigure the ways that religion is studied (see Woodhead 2011). There exists a profound disconnect between current legal, philosophical and social science discourse and the way that religion works on the ground, as evidenced by the Danish project, and others. For example, Woodhead (2014: 3) notes:

...the idea of ‘religious traditions’ or ‘world religions’ as highly differentiated from one another, separated by clear boundaries, teachings and practices—and therefore prone to problems of encounter—is one which is most often defended by religious and political elites who have interests in preserving religio-political differences. By contrast, the everyday realities of religion lived by ordinary people are often much more diverse, mixed, and ‘confused’—and hence less subject to ‘problems’ of encounter.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of religious diversity as it currently circulates depends on and invokes difference or a rigid conceptualization of religious identity as though it exists in pure form.<sup>5</sup> In this imaginary, difference is ‘pure’ and exists in discrete identity packages that serve to separate and to create potentially conflicting social actors through an adherence to religious identity rigidity. Yet, this is not how people live their lives, or, it is not the *only* way people live their lives. Flexibility, fuzzy boundaries, ‘confusion’ and shifting contexts shape the negotiation process, which is often so unremarkable in content that it can be understood as a ‘non-event’.

Failure to account for stories of positive resolution or interaction in everyday life and a primary focus on negative incidents facilitates law’s dominance in the definition and resolution of the challenges of diversity (Amiriaux 2014a, 2014b). Since law is designed to deal with the worst and most contentious cases—those cases in which difference has been escalated into an unresolvable problem—this has the unfortunate effect of producing a distorted image of issues around religious diversity that highlights negative narratives and dramatic encounters. To be sure, law has a role to play, but the tendency to give priority to legal solutions creates an impression that conflict rather than resolution is the norm (see Beaman 2012). Law does not cope well with flexible and fuzzy identities, which reifies the tendency toward identity rigidity already pervasive in relation to understanding religion. Finally, law has colonized the meaning of equality, watering it down and displacing it with concepts like ‘reasonable accommodation’ and tolerance.

Law is not the only institutional game in town: the media plays an important role in brokering and constructing narratives about religion and diversity (see especially Knott et al. 2013 and Lövheim 2013). One of the key contributions of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission (a public commission in Quebec, Canada, which examined ‘accommodation practices related to cultural differences’ in 2007) is one of the least remarked upon: the Commission took upon itself to investigate 21 media stories about religion and the ‘accommodation’ of religious minorities in Quebec. Of those stories, the Committee found that the media accounts of the facts were astonishingly inaccurate in 15 of them (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 69). One of the most famous stories involved an alleged Muslim takeover of space and food offerings at a maple sugar cabin. It is difficult to explain in this short space the cultural significance of the ‘cabane à sucre’ to the Quebec imaginary, suffice to say it is a cultural hotspot. The Commission found that the facts of the media story were completely distorted, and that the owners of the cabin had carefully negotiated the Muslim visit to provide prayer space and a modified dish of beans without pork. The furore in Quebec over ‘too much accommodation’ of religious minorities (and which prompted the creation of the Commission) was produced by a matrix of legal and media frameworks for understanding religious diversity, which ignored the predominance of everyday success stories and positive narratives.

## Moving Beyond Tolerance and Accommodation

There is a strong presence, then, in public discourse and law of the idea that tolerance and accommodation is the framework within which religious diversity should be understood and ‘resolved’.<sup>6</sup> This discourse frames the beginning place for discussions about religious difference and diversity, including public conversation and debate, policy discussions and legal frameworks and interpretations of religious freedom protections. Veit Bader (2007, 2013) defends the use of tolerance as a standard or framework, arguing that tolerance is a bare minimum standard to which we should adhere in religiously diverse societies. To be sure, the notion of tolerance has produced restraint, grudging sharing of resources, and a sense that there are moral ‘shoulds’ underlying the negotiation of difference. Similarly, the operationalization of tolerance through accommodation relies on these notions to achieve a certain balance between majorities and minorities. But the balance of power, or more specifically the veto power, lies predominantly in religious and cultural majorities (see Brown 2008; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004).

The origins of the discourse of tolerance and accommodation are complex, but include Locke’s (1689) famous letter on tolerance in which he advocates tolerance except for Catholics and atheists. Interfaith projects rely on ‘tolerance’, legal frameworks that address diversity incorporate the notion of tolerance (legal decisions often refer to social or national values, including ‘tolerance’),<sup>7</sup> and certainly the idea of reasonable accommodation has developed in law as a mechanism first for responding to the needs of disabled persons in employment and public sector settings, and then in relation to religious needs and employer duties to accommodate. Reasonable accommodation has circulated in public discourse in public reports, such as the Bouchard-Taylor report in Canada (Bouchard and Taylor 2008) and The Round Tables on Interculturalism report in Belgium (Foblets and Schreiber 2013).

The work done by the concepts of tolerance and accommodation as they circulate in various realms is to effectively maintain the status quo, preserving the hegemony of religious majorities and indeed of cultural majorities. I argue for shifting the focus of discussion from tolerance and accommodation to equality, and, more specifically, to deep equality. The rush to ‘solve’ the problem of diversity has produced a blindness to both the ways in which people resolve or work with difference as well as the needs of diverse groups themselves. Initially, I turned to the idea of equality to think about a viable framework for understanding diversity. I realized, though, perhaps because of my sociological training, that thinking about this was not possible in isolation from what was happening in everyday life, between people who navigate difference and bring a variety of religious/non-religious identities to their day-to-day interactions in the workplace, with their children, in business transactions, and so on. Thus I turned to a variety of data sources to explore the ways that people simply get along.

In his book *The Art of Listening* (2007), Les Back criticizes the failure of sociology to engage with stories and voices in a meaningful way. He argues that sociology has lost the art of listening, of carefully attending to the detail of what people do and say in their day-to-day lives, and instead has «been diverted by an enchanted obsession

with the spectacular, namely, the loudest voices, the biggest controversy and the most acute social concern» (2007: 8). Following a long sociological tradition found in the work of people like C. Wright Mills (1959) (whom Back mentions) and Dorothy E. Smith (1987), Back calls for «more considered ways to engage with the ordinary yet remarkable things found in everyday life» (2007: 7). As with Mills and Smith, Back sees the everyday as an important entry point into understanding broader social patterns, with a view especially to challenging conventional interpretations of events, history and predictions for the future. In listening and paying «imaginative» attention to seemingly ordinary stories, it is possible to decipher what is at stake in the stories themselves (in this case, the successful negotiation of diversity) and link such stories to larger sets of public issues (the construction of diversity itself and to subvert broader, dominant, negative discourses that underlie the notion of diversity as problematic).<sup>8</sup>

Worrying that through reality television, media sound bites, and a sort of moral cannibalism, public life has degenerated into a «contemporary equivalent of the Victorian freak show» (2007: 14), Back points to the tendency to expect the worst. He argues, though, that the «solution to these troubles is not in the quality of the individual self, but rather in the realm of vital shared life» (2007: 15). Drawing on Hannah Arendt's essay on Walter Benjamin (1992), who she described as a pearl diver, Back suggests that sociologists need to sort through the «profusion of informational debris» to recover the pearls of social life that will «not illuminate the ocean floor, but rather [...] shine with histories and memories that have been transformed by the sociologist's craft» (2007: 21).

Back's comments resonated for me as I sought to put into words what it was I was trying to say about deep equality. My anxiety about the partial fragments of what are portions of broader life narratives, my methodological insecurity resulting from my sociological training which, while predominantly qualitative in nature is influenced by the model of positivistic science that seems to produce a more authentic 'truth'; and the knowledge that, by focusing on positive narratives that present themselves in fragments, I was simultaneously opening myself to accusations of naïveté, irrelevance and bad method, all worked to delay the project on more than one occasion. Yet, the focus on traces of practices that map and create deep equality found validation in Back's words, which reminded me that one of the locations of this project, despite my commitment to interdisciplinarity, is precisely in the sociological imagination named by Mills and so skilfully deployed by Smith and others. These multi-located stories are rich sources of information about the day-to-day negotiation of difference in ways that are often too ordinary to notice. These stories were pearls that not only deserved a closer examination, but which contained markers toward a different imaginary of social life—one that focuses on the navigation of difference rather than conflict and the negative impact of diversity.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than residing in law, grand pronouncements about political systems, formalized mediation, 'interfaith' awareness or elaborate conceptual frameworks, deep equality exists in the everyday world on a persistent and consistent basis. This everyday world has been theorized by a plethora of scholars, especially phenomenologists like Alfred Schutz (1967, 1971), and social theorists and philosophers such as Pierre

Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1993), Michel de Certeau (2011) and to some extent Jürgen Habermas (1985, 1987). Few of these scholars, however, actually take us to the everyday world to consider commonplace interactions in detail. At best, stories are distilled such that they are often unrecognizable to those whose lives they purport to represent. In some ways the project of considering deep equality is a project of exploring the taken for granted ways in which social life works. Rather than focusing on stories of conflict, it is in the stories of resolution, navigation and negotiation of difference that I locate the idea of deep equality. What might we see if we turned our attention to the positive narratives and success stories of the everyday working out of religious difference? How might a shift open space for those voices that have been muted?<sup>10</sup>

So, from where do these stories come? One of the challenges of researching what I above called ‘non-events’ is that very often these moments occur as matter of fact interactions in everyday life. Researching the ‘non-event’ can prove to be especially challenging. In addition to drawing from the 900 submissions to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission<sup>11</sup>; 500 interviews with young immigrant adults across Canada<sup>12</sup>; 55 interviews with Muslims in St. John’s Newfoundland and 35 in Montreal<sup>13</sup>; and thousands of legal cases<sup>14</sup>, I have also analyzed novels and films<sup>15</sup> for insight into how deep equality is exhibited in everyday life and what values people bring to its achievement. Further, I have collected stories from people who have heard me talk about deep equality or who are simply interested in religion, non-religion and diversity.

What shape do the stories take? Sometimes they are brief vignettes describing interactions between people who do not know each other; sometimes they emerge from ongoing relationships. They may take place between neighbours, in the context of a commercial transaction, between co-workers or between service providers and their clients. They reflect a constellation of values and pre-conditions, the most important of which are respect and the willingness to emphasize similarity rather than difference. As suggested by Back, the ‘pearls’ to be gathered from these stories are the traces of values, blurred and multiple identities, and a consistent recognition of similarity amongst those whose stories I have analyzed.

## Detailing Deep Equality

Globally, people confront, ignore, live with and negotiate difference every day. How? What are the frameworks they use to successfully move through day-to-day life? And what insights can they offer to ground our understanding of difference and its resolution in a way that shifts the language of diversity management to something new? The core assumption of this research is that the current overemphasis on problems has resulted in a corresponding under-emphasis on resolution, understanding, and success in negotiating difference. How can scholarship contribute to building positive models of social life if only failures are documented and studied? What if social scientists were to examine stories of negotiation—or the working out of difference—that emerge from a range of domains? What if the focus shifted to what works, rather than on what does not work?

Deep equality is not a legal, policy or social prescription, nor is it achievable by a magic formula that can be enshrined in human rights codes. It is, rather, a process, enacted and owned by so-called ordinary people in everyday life. Deep equality is a vision of equality that transcends law, politics and social policy, and that relocates equality as a process rather than a definition, and as lived rather than prescribed. It recognizes equality as an achievement of day-to-day interaction, and is traceable through agonistic respect, recognition of similarity and a simultaneous acceptance of difference, creation of community, and neighbourliness. It circulates through micro-processes of individual action and inaction and through group demonstrations of caring. It is not the language or process of tolerance or accommodation. Paradoxically, deep equality is fragile. We might, therefore be tempted to say that it is not 'deep' at all, but shallow. However, it recurs, circulates, reshapes and reframes and thus forms part of the bedrock of social life. By retelling and exploring stories of negotiation it is possible to shift our social imaginary to better facilitate what works. And, what works varies from place to place and time to time.

How do people with different religions or non-religion get along? What strategies do they employ to navigate difference? Many of the stories from everyday life suggest that shared values and practices are key to the production of deep equality.<sup>16</sup> The idea of shared values is frequently deployed by governments and courts in Western democracies to demarcate 'us' from 'them', often, of late, in relation to Muslims (if not overtly, then by implication). So, for example, in its citizenship guide for new immigrants entitled «Welcome to Canada: What you should know» the Canadian government notes Canadian values of human dignity and gender equality and positions these in relation to «barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, honour killings, female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence» (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2013: 36). In *S.A.S. v. France* (2014), recently decided by the European Court of Human Rights, a range of national values is deployed to justify dismissing the applicant's challenge to the French criminal law banning the wearing of facial coverings. The punishment for violating the facial covering ban is to take a citizenship course. The Court states that «the purpose of the course is to remind the convicted persons of the Republican values of tolerance and respect for the dignity of the human being and to make them aware of their criminal and civil liability, together with the duties that stem from life in society» (at para. 28). The niqab-wearing woman is imagined to be in need of reminding about the 'values' of tolerance and respect. Despite the prevalence of violence against women in Canada, and the questionable achievement of gender equality (both in Canada and in other Western democracies), gender equality is cited as a value that is positioned in opposition to the Other who is by implication Muslim and who is imagined to not share these values.<sup>17</sup>

Governments have the potential to both create a climate in which difference is highlighted or in which difference is minimized. This vertical action often attempts to shift horizontal or populist understandings of Us, or it may attempt to strengthen a weak horizontal conceptualization of Our Values or to weaken a strong conceptualization that runs in opposition to state goals or interests.<sup>18</sup> The following excerpt is taken from *Birds Without Wings*, a novel by Louis de Bernières (2005). Set in a small Ottoman



town in what is now Turkey's south-west coast at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the novel traces the lives of the townspeople during a politically tumultuous period. Although 'Muslim' and 'Christian' are discernable identity categories, the novel dissects these easy labels through its exploration of everyday life, and the intersection of political power struggles, including the imposition of identity categories, with the lives of its characters. One of the main characters, Drosoula, is eventually 'repatriated' to Greece, as were all Christians in the village:

And why are you screwing up your face like that, and spitting? Because I mentioned the imam? Because I mentioned a Turk? Well, you should think before you spit, because I may be Greek now, but I was practically a Turk then, and I'm not ashamed of it either, and I'm not the only one, and this country's full of people like me who came from Anatolia because we didn't have any choice in the matter. When I came here I didn't even speak Greek, did you know that? I still dream in Turkish sometimes. I came here because the Christians had to leave, and they thought all of the Christians like me were Greek, because the people who run the world never did and never will have any idea how complicated it really is, so if you call me a Turk you might think you're insulting me, but it's half true, and I am not ashamed...so I'll have no more spitting when I mention the imam (De Bernières 2005: 20).

Drosoula's observation about the 'people who run the world' is a cautionary tale for governments and courts that use values to create social categories of belonging and distinction which can effectively destroy communities in which people co-exist successfully.<sup>19</sup> An example of state policy having the opposite effect is elaborated by Bo Lidegaard in his book *Countrymen* (2014), in which he explores the state policies that he argues worked to protect Denmark's Jewish population during the Second World War. Simply put, the position of the government and the king at the time was that there was no Jewish 'problem' in Denmark. Jews were, argued both, well integrated and part of 'Us'. By refusing to differentiate, Denmark was able to protect its Jewish citizens more fully than many European countries. Moreover, argues Lidegaard, this position accounts for the strong commitment by ordinary Danes to take extraordinary measures to keep Danish Jews safe. Danes themselves did not see these measures as extraordinary or heroic.

There is also an alternative, non-oppositional, mode of understanding values that emerges from research on values and attitudes amongst religious groups. As Riis notes, for example, in Denmark «Muslim and non-Muslim residents generally share the same values, but Muslims more often stress respect for all religions» (Ministeret for Flygtninge 2007, quoted by Riis 2011: 26). A survey commissioned by the Religion and Society Programme in England, entitled *Religion in Personal Life* and conducted by YouGov, offered some rather startling insights (Woodhead 2013a). The survey explored attitudes amongst religious and non-religious people related to three contentious issues: abortion, euthanasia and same sex marriage. In other words, the study explored values and their similarity or difference across religious groups. Rather than finding significant disparities between religious groups, the study found that the vast majority of people, whether religious or not, held similar beliefs about all of these issues. There was, the survey found, a relatively small group (about 9 % of the popu-

lation), spread across religious traditions but with a greater concentration of Baptists and Muslims, who shared a position in opposition to the vast majority of the population. Woodhead, the director of the Religion and Society Programme, names this the «moral minority» (Woodhead 2013b). Even then, for example, on the issue of family, being male and voting Conservative were bigger predictors of a narrow view of the family than belonging to that moral minority.

Values are deployed in a slightly different way, although also to support a broader narrative of similarity, in the stories I have analyzed: sometimes they are articulated explicitly, and sometimes they are implied. Frequently mentioned is the notion of ‘respect’, and often implied (though sometimes explicitly mentioned) are the values of caring, neighbourliness and shared humanity.<sup>20</sup> Drosoula’s protectiveness of and caring for the imam, in the excerpt above, is reflected again in the story of Marie-Claude<sup>21</sup>:

The other day my son and his friends were playing at home, and when mealtime was close, my son and one of his friends asked us if there was pork in the dinner, because the third friend could not eat pork. I found it very generous from 15 year old boys to take care of the dietary considerations of their friend, not leaving him with the embarrassment of asking if there was pork in the food, but taking it on themselves to secure the appropriate menu for him. They behaved not as if it was the kid’s own issue, but as if his well being was something they were all concerned about (Personal communication with Marie-Claude).

Diet and food are frequent themes in the data and rather than representing the much-maligned «saris, samosas, and steel drums» (see Alibhai-Brown 2000) model of multiculturalism, the navigation of dietary restrictions is fertile ground for understanding how people negotiate difference. This statement from a Newfoundland interviewee is typical as she reflects on how she navigates her dietary practices when she is dining with non-Muslims: «Like a certain kindness that we can exchange between ourselves and sitting, to me sitting around this table as long as they don’t impose on me their eating practices. It’s not offensive. It is acceptable. So it was a certain mutual respect.»

American political theorist William Connolly (2005) develops the notion of ‘agonistic respect’ in his thinking about what he calls ‘deep pluralism’. Woven through many of the stories I have analyzed is the practice of agonistic respect. Respect is ‘agonistic’ because it requires an abandonment of ‘rightness’ and the conviction that one is imbued with the truth through some sort of transcendent authority. Rooted in imminence, agonistic respect maps on to the experiences described in the stories of deep equality presented here. In these often brief moments of exchange ‘rightness’ and ‘truth’ lose ground to similarity. Throughout the Newfoundland, Montreal and Immigrant Youth interviews as well as the submissions to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, ‘respect’ is a word that recurs over and over. Part of the data upon which I draw comes from an analysis of human rights decisions in the Canadian province of Ontario. We coded for a variety of terms, but the goal in the project was to attempt to sort out those moments of deep equality even when the matter ended in contention. In her concluding report, our assistant, Stephanie Voudouris (2013) observed a theme that emerged from the cases: «When the dispute in question involves individuals holding a

perspective that their religious beliefs are the ‘truth’ concerning the proper normative ordering of the world, including the proper ways to lead a ‘good’ lifestyle, it is very difficult for another party to suggest that a different normative ordering might be possible; and, might also still be consistent with the core principles of the particular religion.» Voudouris’ observation reflects that of Connolly in relation to his theorizing of respect.

Another story from the Newfoundland interviews, told by Faiza<sup>22</sup>, illustrates agnostic respect:

I even remember the incident of my neighbour, who happened to be a retired man in his maybe close to 70 years old. Very well educated man. And he was not...he did not believe in any religion...he was not atheist, but he did not even accept the question of whether God exists or not...but anyways, he was so kind to me. One day he asked me ‘do you know the direction of the qibla? I know you are performing daily prayers, but I am just curious as to, you know, whether you are praying in the right direction’. And then, believe it or not, he spends a few hours on the computer to calculate scientifically where the qibla exactly is. So the next morning when I woke up there was a picnic table right next to, in our common front yard (she laughed). I saw an arrow on that picnic table showing me the direction of the qibla. I found it so sweet, so nice. And he came to my door and he said ‘you know if one day, you know (she laughed again) we are questioned about what we did in this life you can at least refer to me’, you know, showing me the right direction. ‘I’m saving you from praying in the wrong direction’. So it was friendly, full of humour, and you know, it was beautiful.

Faiza’s neighbour allows himself to suspend his own ‘rightness’ to support her in her commitment. And Faiza opens herself to the beauty of the gift of her neighbour’s caring. She could have taken offense to a non-Muslim, agnostic man interfering in her spiritual life. But she allows him to enter her sacred world.<sup>23</sup>

Respect as a value is not without its own challenges: as Brian Leiter (2012) argues, in order to be meaningful and produce more than mere tolerance (what he describes as ‘minimal respect’), it must be affirmative. Minimal respect looks like «You should show some respect for his feelings» and affirmative respect «I really respect her intellect» (Leiter 2012: 69). Without exception, the use of respect in the stories I have examined move beyond ‘mere respect’ or minimal respect to a more fulsome, affirmative notion of respect. Rather than an empty moral ‘should’, the stories illustrate a commitment to and experience of the sort of respect articulated by Connolly (2005).

In addition to the values of respect, caring and neighbourliness (among others) that can be traced through the stories of negotiation, the ability and willingness to identify similarity between oneself and others is also a consistent theme in the stories. In some cases people use similarity to make sense of events in everyday life that underscore difference between themselves and someone else, and in others they use similarity to attempt to shift the situation around them by calling it to the attention of others. Religion is merely one variable in all of this, and similarity is not religious similarity (although, in Bernières’ novel the priest and the imam end their frequent arguments with ‘oh well, we are both people of the book’), but references a wide range of identi-

ties that can be drawn upon to establish common ground. In her individual submission to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, Arlene describes this incident:

«It is a sin for us to drink wine», she said in a neutral voice. Fatima is my neighbour. We're having a friendly chat each from our balconies in the same building, like neighbours in urban centres all over the planet. I am enjoying salad with cold cuts and dried fruit, accompanied by a glass of wine, during a magnificent summer evening. I am also enjoying her company and that of her 5 year old son who has just innocently asked me: «Are you drinking apple juice?». Should I lie? Not in a million years, but I also don't think it is necessary to tell him that I am eating cold pork roast. Even if Fatima's comment is not accusatory, at first I find it strange that she would make it. Knowing me, she must know that I know drinking alcohol is forbidden in her religion. But after thinking about it, I realize that the comment was directed to her son as a teaching moment. For the next few days I pay attention to her behaviour and that of her kids in order to see if I can detect a bit of estrangement. There is none. There are differences between us that are not relevant to our relationship, and thus it is not worth talking about them. What we have in common weighs far more than those points and we don't want to throw the baby and the bathwater over the balcony (Van Leewen 2007).

Arlene's story illustrates a number of values and practices that can be traced across the data I have examined: she uses humour, respect for Fatima and her son, neighbourliness, and possibly engages in forgiveness. Her end comment, though, in which she highlights similarity, or 'what we have in common', flags the role of similarity in achieving deep equality. The ability to 'get along' is named by Arlene as one of the main attractions of living in Montreal. In a political climate in which the vertical deployment of difference and values occurs frequently, this ability is something that distinguishes Montreal as a place to live. The horizontal or popular navigation of difference in such a context is remarkable. Shifting attention to cooperation, rather than conflict or competition, intersects with a mapping of deep equality as it is evidenced by everyday narratives which reveal, as Andrew Sayer describes it, «lay normativity» (2011: 2).

The notion of similarity is important in thinking about how, when and why deep equality is enacted. The ability to imagine oneself in relation to others and what one has in common with others is key to navigating difference. Similarity is positioned on a continuum between difference and sameness, and I have been made keenly aware of the minefield at either end of this continuum by the work of Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (1993), who criticize the tendency of Christianity toward universalism (they are equally critical of what they call Jewish particularism). «Christian universalism, even at its most liberal and benevolent, has been a powerful force for coercive discourses of sameness, denying, as we have seen, the rights of Jews, women, and others to retain their difference» (1993: 707). The path to similarity and the identification of commonalities includes an exploration of difference and then an identification of similarity without a view to universalizing. This is not an easy balance to strike, and requires constant vigilance and awareness about the perils of either end of the spectrum. Yet, at the same time, in stories from the everyday, it is precisely this balance that is struck.

Focusing on similarity may help us to push past the legitimate challenge raised by the Boyarins to both the universal (sameness) and the particular (difference). Similarity manifests in multiple ways: it may be located in common humanity (as one of the submissions to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission stated, «we are all in the same boat»<sup>24</sup>), common experiences (a shared evening on a balcony, or, more dramatically, a shared experience of trauma or disaster), common values (we are both people of the book), shared identities (parent, daughter, son), a common cause, and so on. Similarity may be extremely tenuous or thin, or it may be robust. It can be invoked to prompt the enactment of deep equality and it is a condition of it. It is sometimes explicitly articulated, as was the case in the following event in Montreal.

At the height of the debates over the Charter of Values in Quebec, which, if made into law, would have banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public sector workers (teachers, doctors, police officers), photographs of two niqab-wearing daycare workers began to circulate on social media (the parents of the children reported that there were 9000 Facebook shares in 48 hours). Comments posted were vitriolic and negative about the daycare workers and included: «2 bullets; it's hunting season, let's go!», «Let's burn these women and rape them like pigs!», «These children must have nightmares at night after seeing ghosts all day» (CTV News 2013).

A group of 13 parents of the children crafted a letter which they sent to various media, explaining their relationship to the daycare workers.<sup>25</sup> In the letter they emphasized the love and exceptional care their children received. They also admitted that they had initial reservations about the veils, but the excellent care their children received and the smiles on their children's faces when they talk about the workers caused their doubts to 'quietly fade away'. The parents pleaded for the community to respect their choice (and to respect the daycare workers), even if they did not agree with it. In the letter they attempted to establish common ground: «We just want to talk, as parents: maybe we have something in common, being a mother or a father...Is being parents something we have in common? How would that make you feel, seeing your child in a photo generating so many hateful comments?» They described the painstaking and sometimes frustrating process they had gone through to find a daycare, something which many parents in Quebec, and worldwide for that matter, could identify with.

Similarity or commonality was invoked or identified on three fronts by the parents—first, that the reader might share the experience of being a parent; second, that the daycare workers took care of their children as though they were their own; and third, the parents intervened to establish commonalities between themselves, the daycare workers and the readers: «they are university educated and they speak English and French. They are loving.» The letter displaced religion as the focus of the discussion and reframed the issue as one of finding a good daycare. It also turned the values discussion on its head by emphasizing the shared values of the daycare workers and themselves, noting the honesty of the owner (who told them before they came to inspect the daycare that she wears a niqab), the openness of both the women and their husbands, a shared commitment to the best interests of the children, their philosophy, their gentleness, kindness and their vision on educating the children. Again, turning the prevalent 'fear of the Muslim other' discourse on its head, the parents emphasized the

fear they felt for their children, not because of the daycare workers, but because of the actions and comments of people who saw the photographs or saw the children and the workers in public.

The parents were honest about their own reservations about the daycare workers, and admitted that «upon visiting the daycare, we were introduced to the whole family. We were able to ask all our questions, including some of the more embarrassing ones.» They note, though, that «the trust came. And with that, our apprehensions, our fears, our doubts all quietly faded away.» The parents' admission is important: deep equality is not always easy and they are honest about their struggle. We might argue that there should not be a struggle or reservations in the first place. This would, however, ignore the very real fears and hesitations that difference can evoke. One of the keys to displacing those fears is the finding of common ground, which in the data I have examined is located in the recognition of similarity between people. Sometimes this occurs as a matter of course, and sometimes people must work to find it.

How do we understand these observations in relation to group or institutional dynamics to go beyond what some might consider 'merely' the interpersonal level? One vertical dimension, as mentioned above, is state policies that can highlight or diminish religion as a marker of difference. An in-between site of interaction is the group. These intermediary spaces are as under-studied as interpersonal interactions, and warrant particular attention because they may offer important clues as to how to mobilize an alternative to 'tolerance and accommodation' more fully.<sup>26</sup> The systematic recovery of non-events discussed above as well as an examination of middle-level initiatives can create a valuable alternate narrative to the 'problem' of diversity narrative. The excavation and exploration of these small stories offer pearls, to paraphrase Les Back (2007), that, when strung together begin to create an alternative imaginary that has the potential to foster fairness and justice.

## Conclusions

In addition to the methodological challenges of studying 'non-events' discussed above, and the pervasiveness of law in the conceptualization of equality and the perpetuation of accommodation and tolerance, there are two additional obstacles to locating deep equality outside of law and in the streets and to insisting that positive narratives warrant more serious research attention: defensive skepticism and evolutionary/biological factors.

### *a. Defensive Skepticism*

In a recent public lecture, Canadian legal scholar John Borrows talks about the theme of love and law in relation to First Nations peoples and the legal interpretation of aboriginal rights (CBC Ideas 2014). As he says, love might seem to be an odd pairing with law, and as a lawyer and someone who has spent a fair amount of time thinking about how law works, I would have to agree. Borrows' journey through the historical appearance of love in treaty negotiation is fascinating, but one of his observations in

particular resonates with my observations about positive narratives: that such narratives are often minimized through an accusation of naïveté. Borrows says: «For most people, it would be the height of folly to view love as a realistic benchmark for law and political agreement. It would be seen in many circles as chillingly and childishly naïve.» Comments focusing on the ‘naïve’ form an important component of the reviews of some of the films and books I use in this project. Yet, the accusation of naïveté, which allows for an abrupt dismissal of the possibility of the positive, is a power play that allows the issuer to avoid contending with his or her own discomfort or disbelief in the story being told. It creates a hierarchy of the ‘knower’ of the truth and an ‘other’ who may be well intentioned, but clearly not apprised of ‘reality’. It is, then, important to push back against this accusation, insisting that positive narratives *should* take greater space in the public imaginary. Focusing on narratives in which difference is uneventfully resolved does not mean a denial of real and pervasive incidents of negative events and experiences. But, my argument is that the balance is tilted too far on the side of the negative when it comes to thinking about the ‘management’ of religious diversity.

*b. Evolution and Human Nature*

From his study of neurological evidence, ‘happiness’ researcher Rick Hanson (2013) has concluded that there are evolutionary reasons for why human beings focus on negativity. Using neurological and biological research, Hanson argues that we are hard-wired to emphasize negative narratives and danger. As sociologists we often resist any inclusion of research that might suggest biological determinism. However, Hanson’s research is a sensible blending of biology and sociology: he points out that we can retrain our brains (he talks about neuroplasticity) to see the positive first—and in part this is achieved through the emphasis or focus on positive narratives. Such a retraining is both individual and collective, and it has the potential to foster agonistic respect, the recognition of similarity and the state or process of deep equality. It may also foster an enhanced willingness to respond to injustice more fully.

A second and complementary body of research is located in evolutionary biology and game theory. Competition is one of the master narratives of our time, moving far beyond biology to economic theory and public discourse about how the world works. However, during the past 40 years or so a number of researchers in a range of fields, including game theory, biology, and mathematics have developed an alternative conceptualization that may help in the reorientation toward positive rather than negative narratives. In their experiments Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield (2011) have observed that it is cooperation and not competition that underpins innovation. As they (and others) argue, there is ample evidence to suggest that cooperation is a dominant force in nature. Cooperation, they argue, is «the architect of living complexity» (2011: 15).<sup>27</sup> A similar emphasis on cooperation in economies is developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006) in their examination of what they call ‘postcapitalism’ and in management by Frances Westley et al. (2007).

One of the reasons that narratives of deep equality, of navigation and working things out remain occluded is their failure to fit into the story of competition, which has been a powerful framework within which to understand the 'natural' and social worlds. This, combined with a biologically conditioned tendency to focus on the negative results in a challenge to focusing on positive stories.

### *c. Shifting the Focus*

A systematic search for and examination of narratives of resolution and navigation of difference offer the possibility of uncovering, revealing and recovering equality. This recovery of a notion of deep equality is vital to living in an increasingly diverse society. Three ideas underlie the main argument I make: 1. That tolerance and accommodation are inappropriate frameworks to facilitate human thriving in a diverse context; 2. That a reconstituted notion of equality can subvert the binaries that are kept alive by tolerance and accommodation; 3. That positive narratives offer a map toward a renewed conceptualization of equality, and a recognition of day-to-day human activity in its constitution. An analysis of the elements of deep equality can help us to better understand and to foster resilience among individuals, communities and societies.

What does deep equality look like? It lies in the agonistic respect demonstrated by Faiza's neighbour when he suspends his own disbelief to engage in her world of belief and practice; it is situated in humour and generosity that prompts her to laugh with delight that he has taken the time to contemplate the proper direction for her prayers. It resides in that space of that neighbourliness between Fatima and Arlene, and Marie-Claude and her son in their creation of a space of inclusion as matter of fact. It lies in the forgiveness and suspension of misunderstanding, in the assumption of good intentions on the part of others as they sometimes make mistakes or stumble. It is found in the everyday actions and relationships between people. Sometimes those are located in neighbourhoods, sometimes in passing encounters, economic transactions, on the bus, when we do not speak the same language, and in friendship.

Under what sorts of conditions do we find deep equality? Where similarity rather than difference or sameness forms the basis for encounters. Where there is an agonistic respect that opens space for missteps, mistakes, forgiveness and flexibility. There are many stories of this space. My argument is that it is time to consider these stories more carefully to create alternative narratives of deep equality, recognizing their fragility and cultivating a commitment to their stability.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Public space is admittedly a contested concept. Habermas (2006), whose discovery of the importance of religion has prompted him to comment on religion in the public sphere, refers to this largely in relation to formal mechanisms such as legislative bodies and courts of law. However, the media, internet, editorial spaces and other places for public debate remain under-theorized. See also Casanova (1994).
- <sup>2</sup> Grace Davie (2013: ix–xx) has asked important questions about these research projects – why now, to what ends, and what are the implications of producing results for the resolution of the problem of diversity?
- <sup>3</sup> Several major research projects that deal with religious diversity include: IMPACT: The Impact of Religion – Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy (2008–2018). IMPACT is based at Uppsala University, Sweden, and looks at religious diversity in the Nordic countries through six thematic lenses: (1) religious and social change; (2) integration, democracy and political culture; (3) families, law and society; (4) well-being and health; (5) welfare models – organisation and values; and (6) science and religion. NOREL, The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere, is a comparative study of the five Nordic countries (2009–2013), based at KIFO (Centre for Church Research), Oslo, Norway. NOREL focused on (1) state and religion; (2) religion and politics; (3) religion and the media; and (4) religion and civil society. The Religion and Society Research Programme (2007–2013), based at Lancaster University, United Kingdom. The programme funded 75 original research projects across the arts, humanities and social sciences. RELIGARE, Religious Diversity and Secular Models in Europe: Innovative Approaches to Law and Policy (2010–2013), based at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. RELIGARE spanned thirteen research centres across the European Union and Turkey. Themes included the family; the workplace; the public space; and state support, all in relation to religious topics. Other projects include The Pluralism Project, based at Harvard University (1991–); and Religions, the State and Society: National Research Programme, NRP 58 (2007–), based in Switzerland.
- <sup>4</sup> See also, for example, Gottschalk's *Beyond Hindu and Muslim* (2005) in which he challenges the too easy assessment of Indian politics that relies on communalism and broad sweeping categories like 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. His careful research traces multiple identities, historical location, versions of narrative and local events that shape the ways that people interact and share common interests and difference. He rejects what he describes as the 'singular identity approach', instead describing: the ways that group memory, depending on context, both includes and excludes religious identity; the ongoing interactions and interrelations between Muslims and Hindus in private and in public, «even those identified as 'religious' by participants—sharing identities beyond the religious ones» (2005: 34); and the historical and ongoing possibility of «shared religious identities, such as those that result from the melange of devotional traditions, including Sufism and bhakti, that have influenced one another in north India at various times» (2005: 37).
- <sup>5</sup> For two very different perspectives on the situated nature of religious identity, see Reeh (2012) and Badone (2013). As Sikka (forthcoming) notes, there are a number of consequences for groups when they are pressed into such identity corners: «the fact remains, as Anthony Appiah remarks, that sometimes acts of recognition are like the gaze of the Medusa, turning

to stone the identities that are their objects (Appiah 2005, 110).»

- 6 In Canada, the public commission led by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor (2008) and the landmark case of *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* (2006) both rely extensively on ‘accommodation’.
- 7 In *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* (2006), the Supreme Court of Canada stated: «Religious tolerance is a very important value of Canadian society. If some students consider it unfair that Gurbaj Singh may wear his kirpan to school while they are not allowed to have knives in their possession, it is incumbent on the schools to discharge their obligation to instil in their students this value that is, as I will explain in the next section, at the very foundation of our democracy» (at para 76). The European Court of Human Rights in *Eweida and Others v. The United Kingdom* (2013) was of the opinion that «a healthy democratic society needs to tolerate and sustain pluralism and diversity» (at para. 94). The ECHR echoed this sentiment in *S.A.S. v. France* (2014), noting that «Pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness are hallmarks of a ‘democratic society’» (at para. 128).
- 8 I paraphrase some of Back’s words here, found in the introduction to his book on page 7.
- 9 I also drew inspiration from other scholars who have insisted that the everyday ‘lived’ religion is an important site of investigation: Meredith McGuire (2008), Robert Orsi (2005), Linda Woodhead (2014) and Inger Furseth (2005).
- 10 As Ole Riis noted in his 2010 keynote address at the Nordic Conference for the Sociology of Religion, «the voice of the majority, modern moderate Muslims is muted in the polarizing debates» (2011: 26).
- 11 This project entitled ‘La sécularisation, la laïcité et les identités religieuses dans le contexte québécois’, led by Principal Investigator Solange Lefebvre, discovered stories of deep equality within the Bouchard-Taylor submissions.
- 12 The projects entitled ‘Religion Among Immigrant Youth in Canada’ and ‘Religion Among Immigrant Young Adults in Canada’, led by Principal Investigator Peter Beyer, included interviews with Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist youth and revealed non-events that overshadowed isolated incidents of discrimination.
- 13 The project entitled ‘Religion in the Everyday: Negotiating Islam in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador’, with Principal Investigator Jennifer Selby, showed how Muslims negotiate their religious identities through stories which illustrated kindness, respect, and attention to similarity. Amélie Barras, a postdoctoral fellow with the Religion and Diversity Project, conducted parallel interviews in Montreal amongst Muslims and also heard stories of people working out difference in daily life.
- 14 In analyzing Ontario Human Rights Commission decisions, Stephanie Voudouris (2013), alongside Benjamin Berger, unearthed narratives of negotiation. For a collection of case law databases, access the Religion and Diversity Project website (2014a).
- 15 The complexity of day-to-day life and living with diversity are illuminated in novels like Louis de Bernière’s *Birds without Wings* (2005), Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), and in films like *Where Do We Go Now?* (2012) and *Bottle in the Gaza Sea* (2011).
- 16 There is useful literature from psychology that demonstrates that shared values and similarity are important indicators of relationship success. See Hill et al. (1976); Byrne and Nelson (1965); Murstein (1970); Montoya and Horton (2012); and Morry et al. (2011).
- 17 See McRobbie (2009) for a discussion of the pervasiveness of the myth of equality and the work that it does to displace critical gender analysis.
- 18 See Riis (2011) for a discussion of horizontal and vertical culture and religion, upon which my argument here draws.

- <sup>19</sup> Drosoula captures the complexities of identities in ways that seem to elude social theory, social science and law, observing that ‘the people who run the world’ will never ‘have any idea of how complicated it really is’. For Drosoula, the hardened lines of ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ are blurred in a complex identity that finds her chastising her listener for ‘screwing up his face and spitting’ at the mention of an imam. She also recognizes that it is the ineptness of the ‘people who run the world’ that creates the identity boundaries that do not match the lived reality of people on the ground. Drosoula focuses on her similarities with her neighbours, observing ‘I was practically a Turk then’.
- <sup>20</sup> Shared humanity is of course not without its own challenges and objections as a basis for navigating diversity. I think here especially of Rosi Braidotti’s argument for a posthuman subjectivity that is «materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere» (2013: 51).
- <sup>21</sup> Marie-Claude L’Archer has been a research assistant on the project «La sécularisation, la laïcité et les identités religieuses dans le contexte québécois» (Principal Investigator Solange Lefebvre) and this story is used with her permission.
- <sup>22</sup> Pseudonym.
- <sup>23</sup> One suggestion during the presentation of this talk was that Martin Buber’s (1971) work might be of help in understanding the stories I have analyzed. Buber’s philosophical work is helpful in that he emphasized the «Ich-Du» relationship which he saw as an authentic, unstructured, encounter between two beings. Buber’s notion applies to a wide range of encounters and for this reason alone it is applicable. The ‘rawness’ and authenticity of the encounter, which seems to be Buber’s focus, is also mine. Importantly Buber also saw such events as largely unmeasurable, and thus the notion of the non-event follows on (though was not inspired by) Buber’s reflections. I am though, further interested in the effect of these encounters in creating an alternative narrative to the predominant story of difference and challenge that circles around religious diversity at present. Thank you to the unidentified audience member for reminding me of Buber’s work.
- <sup>24</sup> «Nous sommes tous liés et dans le même bateau» (Greffard 2007).
- <sup>25</sup> The letter entitled «We are the parents of the children in the photo» is featured in CTV News (2013).
- <sup>26</sup> In my talk I gave three examples of group initiated action that exemplifies deep equality, some of the values I have identified as recurring values in narrative, and that drew on the notion of similarity to achieve justice in the non-legal sense. They were the Human Library Project, originating in Denmark and in particular as it was offered at the Surrey Public Library in British Columbia in 2014 (Surrey Libraries 2014); ‘Cook and Share a Pot of Curry Day’, which is a grassroots led initiative in Singapore (Adam 2011) and the protest actions of the Blossard boys soccer team in reaction to an attempt to ban turban wearing Sikhs from the soccer field in Quebec in 2013 (Off and Douglas 2013).
- <sup>27</sup> Nicholas Wade (2010) takes evolutionary theory in a slightly different direction, arguing that humans have a religious disposition or gene that facilitates or even produces social solidarity.

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