

Exactly 14 years ago today, the National Post published an op-ed by Neil Seeman, “Are we all Islamophobes? Not really.” In it Seeman debunked the idea, promoted by Riad Saloojee, then executive director of CAIR.CAN (the Canadian chapter of the Council for American-Islamic Relations, now known as the National Council of Canadian Muslims, or NCCM, without apparent change of mission or affiliations), that “a very well-documented, anti-Muslim hate wave” had swept through Canada.

As Seeman noted, Saloojee’s accusation was based on a small polling of 296 Muslims (questions sent to an in-house listserve rather than a random community sample, no margin of error reported). Of them 117 people said 9/11 changed their lives for the worse. Ninety eight said their lives had improved in terms of building bridges with non-Muslims and remedying stereotypes. Clearly, Seeman observed, not a hate wave.

But CAIR.CAN would not let it rest. In 2005 it published results of another survey on Islamophobia, “Presumption of Guilt,” which came into question when a representative from CAIR.CAN testified before the Maher Arar commission of inquiry. In probing by Simon Fothergill, counsel for the attorney general of Canada, it turned out the anonymous, questionnaire-based study’s methodology was to make its questionnaire available on the Internet, effectively allowing people who’d never set foot here to complain. More than this: more than half the respondents were connected to CAIR.CAN and a “good proportion” engaged in Islamic advocacy, Fothergill discovered.

Sheema Khan, then CAIR.CAN’s chair as well as a Globe and Mail columnist, musing in print on a putative jihadist strike on Canada, asked, “Is internment in the works? Mass deportation of non-citizens?” Since then we’ve seen our allies struck repeatedly by Islamist terror and at home have had small strikes and prevented major ones. Yet no internment, no deportations. Khan’s fear-mongering was in vain.

In fact, after a minor two-month post-9/11 spike in anti-Muslim incidents, even these sharply diminished. Out of 1,000 hate crimes in 2002, according to police reports from 12 populous Canadian cities, 25 per cent targeted Jews, 17 per cent blacks, 11 per cent Muslims, 10 per cent South Asians and nine per cent LGBT. In 2006, the year following “Presumption of Guilt,” of religiously motivated attacks, a stunning 66 per cent targeted Jews, while just 11 per cent targeted Muslims. Anti-Semitism still maintains a dramatic lead over Islamophobia in hate crimes.

Their entwined history makes it fair to say that both Saudi-funded CAIR (designated as an unindicted co-conspirator in the successful U.S. Holy Land Foundation terror-funding prosecution) and its NCCM/CAIR.CAN colleagues are fixated on proving that Muslims are singled out for hatred in North America, when there is no objective evidence to make such a case.

All the more puzzling, then, that the controversial Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA) and NCCM/CAIR.CAN managed to strike up a collaboration with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and attract funding from the Red Cross to produce a guide for Canadian teachers — Helping Students Deal with Trauma Related to Geopolitical Violence and Islamophobia.

This guide is troubling in many ways.

First, obviously, there’s the collaboration itself, which lends credibility and respectability to NCCM/CAIR.CAN and ISSA from two prestigious but allegedly neutral bodies, the CHRC and the Red Cross. The CHRC’s involvement is especially awkward as a federal government organ closely linked to a quasi-judicial tribunal (the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal).

For the CHRC has now endorsed a document that declares, “The core values and central tenants (sic) of Islam are immutable and the best counter-narrative to the terrorist ideology of hate.” Many Canadians might argue that the best

“counter-narrative” to terrorism is the Sermon on the Mount, rational atheism or any number of other things; the point is, CHRC should not be advocating for any particular belief system.

Then there is the apparent CHRC and Red Cross failure of due diligence. Two years ago, NCCM/CAIR.CAN and ISSA collaborated with the RCMP in the creation of the counter-radicalization handbook, *United Against Terrorism*. Likely embarrassed by the controversy over the handbook’s recommending of hardline clerics for consultation (and its curious emphasis on Muslims’ right not to co-operate with law enforcement), the RCMP withdrew its support (although the RCMP name and logo continues to appear on the handbook).

Furthermore, some specialists say NCCM/CAIR.CAN strategically aims to silence its critics through “libel lawfare” — a pattern of lawsuits intended to chill free speech against the group and its brand of Islam.

For example, the organization — which denies wrongdoing — is suing former prime minister Stephen Harper’s communications director, Jason MacDonald, for libel for publicly implying NCCM/CAIR.CAN has ties to Hamas. In a defeat for NCCM/CAIR.CAN, a Superior Court judge agreed to MacDonald’s demand for more documentation about NCCM/CAIR.CAN’s background and connections. If produced, the documentation could well prove damning, so NCCM/CAIR.CAN may decide to drop the suit (as it abruptly did in a previous libel case).

So even apart from the impropriety of collaborating with any religious advocacy group on a devotional teaching guide, was it not particularly ill-advised, indeed reckless, for the CHRC and Canadian Red Cross executives to plunge in here without waiting for public news of the MacDonald case outcome?

Then there are flag-raising statements in the guide itself.

The guide states “it is apparent” that Muslim children are suffering high levels of stress and alienation, but provides no objective evidence other than vague allusions to community feedback. Are mental health professionals reporting elevated levels of Muslim-specific anxiety? It doesn’t say (raising the question: in future CHRC proceedings, could assertions from this CHRC-approved guide be relied upon by parties to a CHRC process without independent proof of their veracity?)

The guide (divisively) states that “racial and religious profiling” has become “acceptable” when directed toward Muslim youth, but provides no examples, or comparisons with, say, black profiling.

The guide suggests Israeli children’s suffering receives more media sympathy than Palestinian children’s suffering. That is demonstrably false. But is this now a CHRC-Red Cross position?

The guide says special support is needed for arriving Syrian Muslim children traumatized by their war experiences, without mentioning the war-related trauma of (the shamefully few) Syrian Christian or Yazidi children allowed into Canada. What message does this send the latter groups?

Most ominously, in its “Final tips” to teachers, the guide states: “Generally, some care should be taken by teachers on the language and tone they take when discussing world events and the Islamic faith.” As opposed, say, to the tone teachers may feel free to take when discussing other religious faiths? One sees here the heavy hand of the Cairo Declaration and its intention to see criticism of Islam criminalized, or at least censored, on a global basis.

If a teaching guide on tolerance is necessary, let it be about tolerance for all minority groups. Let it be evidence-based and a collaboration of racial, religious and other groups. And instead of NCCM/CAIR.CAN, let Muslim input come from the democratic, pluralistic and reform-minded Council for Muslims facing Tomorrow (MFT), one of whose founders, Sohail Raza, responded to my media query on this subject:

“The CHRC and the Red Cross should be more concerned about human rights abuse and actual racial discrimination than

pandering to a victim ideology and a contrived phrase like 'Islamophobia' created to stifle conversation. MFT is distressed by the activities of certain organizations claiming to represent Muslims while closely linked to the supremacist Muslim Brotherhood. These organizations are part of the problem and not the solution."

Well said. This ill-conceived, "some are more equal than others" initiative, designed to encourage grievance-collecting in Muslim children and baseless guilt in other Canadian children, should be terminated at once.

National Post

kaybarb@gmail.com

Twitter.com/BarbaraRKay