DIVERSITY AND MULTICULTURAL POLICY IN CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

As a country of immigrants, multiculturalism is central to Canada's identity. After centuries of assimilation, the country has now become very diverse in multiple ways. The Policy of multiculturalism, which is a reversal of assimilation, was intended to build a socially cohesive and just society. Announced by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1971, it was entrenched in the Canadian Constitution in 1984 and provided with a legislative framework in 1988, when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney passed the Multiculturalism Act.

Originally inhabited by several First Nations[1] peoples from East to West, and Inuit in the North, colonizers from France and Britain settled in the country from the 17th century. Over the next two centuries, many newcomers arrived from the United States; they largely compromised Loyalists fleeing the American Civil War (1861-65) and African Americans fleeing captivity.

IMMIGRATION

In the 19th century, unrestricted immigration encouraged "white" immigrants to develop the West. However, while the first Immigration Act of 1869 brought large numbers of European immigrants to Canada, there remained preferences even within this group. Southern Europeans, such as Italians and Greeks, and later Eastern Europeans, were not as desirable as Anglo-Saxons. In the early 20th century, after the First World War, a revised Immigration Act in 1919 excluded certain groups from Canada. Discrimination against people based on class and disability, and later on the basis of race, denied entry to Chinese people and South Asians (who, like Canadians, were British subjects at that time) and to Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. Although the ban on Chinese immigration ended in 1947, discriminatory policies against non-white immigrants did not end until 1967. The Indigenous population was subjected to violent assimilation tactics, as once again evidenced by the discovery of the unmarked graves in 2021.

What was the picture of Canada after almost a century of immigration? John Porter described the racial hierarchy at that time in his influential book *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965), wherein he used data to demonstrate the dominance of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP), stark inequalities among ethnic groups, and a "complex reality of Canada as a hierarchical patchwork of classes and ethnic groups" (Helmes-Hayes and Cooper, 2006). Education and class distinction corresponded to a hierarchy based on a classification of race.[2]

1 There are 634 First Nations communities recognized across Canada with over 50 distinct nations and language groups (AFN. n.d.)

2 Scientifically, there are no biological differences among groups of people and "race" has no validity (NIH, 2018). But "race" is very much a social construct and "racism" a social reality.

With a history of racist immigration, how did Canada become so diverse, and ultimately multicultural? The 1967 immigration policy was a watershed in Canadian history because it replaced discrimination by race or nationality with skills. Immigration from countries in Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa increased significantly (Whitaker, 1991) in response to Canada's increasing need for population growth (given its low birth rate), for skilled labour, and for strategic geographical and trade interests. The complexion of Canadian society began to change dramatically. Following his Multicultural Policy of 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau introduced a new Immigration Act in 1976 which established for the first time that Canada was to be a diverse society not only demographically, but also culturally and socially. The Act also defined refugees (mostly non-European) as a distinct group of immigrants for the first time, and by 1980 five classes of immigrants had been established.

MULTICULTURALISM, DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

Clearly, multiple ethnic groups who had come to Canada had all been expected to assimilate into a society based on British culture and values. While I do not discuss the special position of Quebec in this paper, it is worth mentioning that Quebec's assertion of francization is a response to this pressure, although multiculturalism did not satisfy their need to maintain the French language in the province. But Multicultural Policy and the Multiculturalism Act, along with several legal and administrative reforms focused on diversity in the country, recognized the changing racial make-up of immigrants from Asia (particularly China and India) replacing Europeans as the largest source of immigrants to Canada. However, the concept of multiculturalism, which may be seen as building on diversity as an asset (rather than a problem) by attempting to remove barriers to full integration of people seen as "different", remains unclear and controversial, and even contradictory.

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The 9/11 terrorist attack in the USA in 2001 prompted a new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (2001) and religious diversity became an important marker of difference. North America was gripped with Islamophobia – a disproportionate fear or hatred towards Muslims (or persons often mistakenly identified to be Muslims) leading to violence and systemic discrimination (Kanji, 2020). Multicultural Canada which had focused on ethnic diversity is now confronted with religious diversity (Angus Reid, 2017). Religion has become one of the most controversial domains of multiculturalism (Kymlicka (2010).

And herein appears a contradiction: on the one hand in Canada there is broad support both for immigration and multiculturalism, for which support over the years has even increased (Soroka and Robertson, 2010). On the other hand, polls indicate antipathy towards Islam and Muslims (Tradafilopoupos and Rasheed, 2020) , and denial of religious accommodation in Quebec (Bill 21).

So, what does diversity mean in Canada? The concept implies variety, but it means different things to different people, including variability in ideas, characteristics, values, etc. Demographic diversity usually suggests differences in ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, gender, religion, language, sexual identity and preference, and dis/abilities. Vertovec (2007) uses the word "super-diversity" to denote the multidimensional complexity within diversity and its intersections of social class, gender, religion, language, as well as ethnicity and culture – resulting in very different experiences so that no one group can be seen in homogenous terms. Super-diversity poses a considerable challenge to policy-makers and educators alike.

Is cultural diversity the same as cultural difference? Bhabha sees cultural diversity as a static concept, as population segments, while cultural difference is dynamic because cultures are always changing (Bhabha, 2006). So, difference is fluid; it appears "differently in different places" in "innumerable forms" (Pandey, 2010:62).

Diversity implies difference. However, these differences do not mean anything in themselves: the meanings given to differences (in negative or positive terms) are social constructions and change over time and space. The meanings based on constructs such as race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, etc. are influenced by history and structures of power. These markers of difference take on specific meanings and importance at particular times because the target of discrimination may shift with time and space. For example, not all Europeans were considered equally desirable immigrants in Canada at one time, but when people of colour began to come, their status changed.

Differences seen as deficiencies lead to discrimination such as racism or Islamophobia. Racism and discrimination always have a negative social, economic, and psychological impact on the opportunities afforded to people.

Human beings have a range of identities which intersect with each other. Multiculturalism encourages us to retain our differences that have no reflection on our abilities. The preamble to the Multicultural Act (1988) states the "importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (Canada, 1990) to provide Canadians a sense of

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Racial categories are evidently fluid. Interracial relationships are rising, and in the second generations they are as high as 50–75% in Canada (Alba and Reitz, 2021; Todd, 2020). Perhaps because multicultural policy provides a more favourable context for second-generation children (Kymlicka, 1998), interracial children experience less discrimination (Alba and Reitz (2021). In a globalized world,” all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (Rutherford,1991:211). In post-colonial theorizing, the hybrid identity is in a” third space” (Bhabha, 1994), an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation are not fixed.

DIVERSITY, GLOBALIZATION AND COSMOPOLITANISM

The nature of international migration has changed because we not only have immigrants but, increasingly, refugees of various categories and asylum seekers. Furthermore, globalization involves information, capital, technology, etc., all of which create transnational networks of peoples and cultures transcending traditional borders through interconnectivity, so that the entire environment is changing radically and rapidly. In this there is contradiction: the tension between violence and rivalry against each other, but simultaneously interdependence and collaboration between nations, as highlighted during the pandemic. One way to reconcile this conflict is to understand history and the interrelationship of historical events. Most of all we need to understand that we are one world and as Gandhi said: “An eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind”.

Interestingly, multiculturalism has been focused on post-colonial migration and, in Canada, dominant groups have not seen themselves as part of Multicultural Policy. Unsurprisingly, in education, the curriculum remains largely Eurocentric. Growing social inequality within and among countries is viewed without an understanding of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery; although recently, the Black Lives Matter movement has focused our attention on such global events and issues. Several contemporary transnational phenomena that defy national borders such as terrorism, natural disasters, displacement of peoples, rising inequalities and several health pandemics have seen concerted action. The focus of multiculturalism on post-colonial immigrant societies needs to be broadened to include international understanding and global problems that involve humanity and its survival.

In her book *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, one of the world’s most influential contemporary philosophers, Martha Nussbaum (2019) urges us to focus on the humanity we share rather than all that divides us. COVID-19 has shown us that we are one world. We need to fight together and recover together – “The only way that you are going to adequately respond to a global pandemic is by having a global response” (Anthony Fauci).

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The new politics of cultural difference focus on cultural and political identity as central to a changing idea of multiculturalism, transforming it to new forms of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity that provoke new understandings relevant to the global space we share. With cultures blending, people simultaneously have multiple identities and local, national, and global allegiances. Multiculturalism (diversity) does not theoretically prevent the development of a national identity, but it also indicates a movement towards cosmopolitanism (global identity). Cosmopolitanism does not exclude citizenship in one’s country. It simply means we rethink the concept of citizenship through a “cosmopolitan lens” as a global field of negotiated practices (Jahanbegloo, 2007). Simplistic and single-levelled approaches to citizenship are giving way to multidimensional approaches reflecting the complexities involved in activities at the local to global levels.

CONCLUSION

The COVID -19 pandemic is a defining moment globally. As we start on a new era, we have the opportunity to effect change at the level of consciousness of people to envision a kinder, gentler society without hate, discrimination and racism. Globalization has made cosmopolitanism a necessity due to the increased interconnectivity of people from disparate nations. The growth of the non-white population threatens to alter power relations as the historical advantages

of whiteness change. In Canada, the legislative foundations for an inclusive society continue to be built and the concept of multiculturalism is both fluid and broadening to include cosmopolitan perspectives. The blurring of ethnicities through intermarriage will contribute to faster integration and future generations will be increasingly interracial and certainly more open-minded to an interdependent world and the urgency of a sustainable planet.

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