CHALLENGES TO DIVERSITY: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE*

ABSTRACT

In response to terrorist attacks and related incidents of global violence, multiculturalism – variously defined – is being questioned internationally. Although Canada is often held up as a model of multicultural integration both domestically and abroad, such world events, whether in Britain, France, the Netherlands, or Australia, ought to remind us that Canada has its own legacy of less publicized "flashpoints" which point to the serious political, cultural and economic concerns of groups such as Aboriginal people, official language minorities, and visible minorities. This article suggests that what may be required in Canada is more comparative analysis to determine which socio-economic, religious, cultural, and politico-legal factors need to be addressed to ensure that the country is able to engage all citizens in finding common ground, and extending a collective sense of belonging.

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In the wake of a series of terrorist attacks worldwide (e.g. New York, Madrid, Bali, London), rioting in "immigrant" suburbs of Paris, Birmingham and Sydney, political shifts and reactions surrounding the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands, and violent incidents occurring in the aftermath of the controversial *Jyllands-Posten* cartoon depictions of the prophet Mohammed (the so-called "Danish cartoons"), multiculturalism – variously defined – is being questioned internationally. Canada's approach is often profiled as one that has been more successful than other liberal democracies in accommodating diversity. The Canadian approach to diversity, therefore, draws considerable international attention as a model that may be uniquely suited to meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

Given recent international events, or "flashpoints," it is important to explore the degree to which Canada shares with these other countries what has been characterized as the multicultural challenge to social cohesion. The meaning of multiculturalism, for instance, is highly contested even within a given national context. Multiculturalism is a social construct; it can mean significantly different things to different people – and to different nations. Canada is often held up as a model of multicultural integration both domestically and abroad. While this country may not have experienced the kinds of high profile flashpoints that have characterized other countries, Canada has its own continuing legacy of less publicized flashpoints which point to serious, political, cultural and economic concerns of groups such as Aboriginal peoples, official language minorities, and visible minorities which too often remain ignored.[1] This article suggests that what may be required in Canada is more comparative analysis to determine which socio-economic, religious, cultural, and politico-legal factors need to be addressed, with particular emphasis on identity and belonging.

The Canadian experience

While it is well known that Canada is a country built on immigration, it is important to understand the country's diversity in terms of a specific set of historical forces. The first is the past and present role of Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit). This role and the attendant rights that have evolved as a result of it are explicitly recognized in the *Constitution Act* of 1982 (s. 35). The second force consists of the two colonizing groups who eventually defined themselves as the two founding peoples of Canada, namely, the French- and English-speaking communities. The third force comprises those racial and ethnic minorities who fall outside these first two categories, that is, native and foreign-born Canadians with non-Aboriginal, non-French and non-British ancestry. Based on this kind of history and sociology, Canada has been described as a multinational and poly-ethnic society.

Although immigrants to Canada during the early and mid-20th century were overwhelmingly European in origin,[2] shifting patterns of world migration and changing immigration policies have meant that Canada now increasingly accepts immigrants from source countries such as Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central America. What this means, in turn, is that approximately 13% of the population, or 4 million people, are visible minorities. The number of visible minority

Canadians is projected to grow as high as 20% of the population by 2017. In view of declining fertility rates in Canada and an ageing population (with the exception of the Aboriginal population), immigration increasingly provides Canada with its most reliable source of population growth.

Before the adoption of multiculturalism as a policy in 1971, nation building, in the symbolic and cultural sense, was oriented toward a British type of society in Canada. In fact, Canadians were defined as British subjects until the passage of the *Canadian Citizenship Act* in 1946. Events during the 1960s paved the way for the eventual demise of assimilation as government policy and the subsequent appearance of multiculturalism. The pressures for change at this time stemmed from the mounting assertiveness of Aboriginal peoples, the growing wave of Québécois nationalism, and the increased resentment by ethnic minorities about their place in society. Thus, with the adoption of official policies of bilingualism in 1969 and multiculturalism in 1971, Canada's major forces of diversity were given institutional expression for the first time. Bringing these forces into the mainstream of government and society has undoubtedly helped to ensure greater stability for Canada with respect to its diversity challenges.

Despite Canada's international reputation and self-image as the world's most peaceable multicultural liberal democracy – a national myth that arguably began to take root in the public imagination after the 1969 official languages policy and the 1971 multiculturalism policy – history tells a more complex and often painful story.[3] Interestingly, Canadians tend to suffer from a kind of collective amnesia with respect to such history. Since the 1967 Centennial, for instance, there have been some significant incidents of violence, discrimination, and social upheaval in Canada, emerging from contending diversities and national visions.[4]

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Such events do not easily square with the Canadian collective myth. However abhorrent, these and other incidents like them have remained *potential* flashpoints; they have not yet led to an erosion in international opinions, nor in Canadians' idea of themselves, as citizens of a peaceable, multicultural society nor their support for multicultural diversity – either from the point of view of public opinion or government policy. This stands out most clearly in international comparisons.

What is the source of Canada's optimism? Is it the very specificity of Canada's flashpoints – and the fact that few of the threats to social cohesion have been directly associated with immigration?

Is Canada fundamentally different, or merely 20 years behind Europe in terms of the challenges of diversity? What do past potential flashpoints, and the widespread "amnesia" about them, mean for Canada's future? How – and how well – will Canada accommodate the increasing diversity of the future?

The near future: Canada 2017

Canada's prosperity, security, unity, and social cohesion in 2017 will depend, at least in part, on revitalizing the concept of Canadian citizenship for the 21st century. Two major challenges to such an accomplishment are: integrating unprecedented numbers of new immigrants of non-European background and Canada's Aboriginal people into an already diverse social fabric, such that no one is left behind; and, responding to profound alterations in the traditional relationships and cultural connections between Canadians being brought about by globalization, urbanization, and proliferating information and communications technologies. This implies a level of public education and dialogue which has not yet occurred, and for which the policy development has barely begun.

In respect to revitalizing Canadian citizenship, there are intersecting challenges that have only begun to be understood in their complexity and are in need of further research: these include the meaning of Aboriginal citizenship in Canada, the meaning of religious pluralism in the Canadian context of secular liberalism, the future of official language minority communities, Canadian youth and their more open definitions of diversity that are not confined to ethnic difference.

Exploring dimensions of diversity

In a recent article, Canadian political theorist Will Kymlicka questions his own "triumphalism regarding liberal multiculturalism" (Kymlicka 2005, 82). International events have led governments to reconsider their approaches to multiculturalism and this, in turn, leads Kymlicka to acknowledge that liberal democracies are not necessarily on the same progressive continuum with respect to diversity and integration. Having reached this important conclusion, Kymlicka offers the following set of four indicators comparing international contexts of, and responses to, diversity:

Migration status (legal vs. illegal)

Large numbers of illegal entrants generate fears of being swamped and may cause the general population to believe that multicultural policies encourage illegal immigrants to enter the country. Significantly, Canada probably has the lowest level of illegal immigration among the Western democracies and the highest level of public support for multiculturalism.

Cultural practices (liberal vs. illiberal)

It is difficult to gain public support for multiculturalism if those who are perceived as its beneficiaries are also thought to exemplify "illiberal" cultural practices that violate widely accepted Western norms of human rights – especially if multiculturalism is invoked to maintain such practices. In the West, cultures that are not perceived as sharing Judeo-Christian values are viewed as having the most religious or cultural commitment to "offensive" practices. For example, Muslims have been portrayed in the West, especially since 9/11, as the classic "other."

Economic impact (contributors vs. burden)

It is difficult to sustain public support for multiculturalism where immigrants who would benefit from multicultural policies are seen as a burden on the welfare state. In Canada, immigrants have generally been perceived as net contributors to the welfare state. Historically this has been the case, this is strengthened today by the perception that immigrants are needed to offset the ageing population structure.

In accordance with Canada's well-known points system, immigrants are recruited for employability, and tend to have *relatively* high rates of employment. In Europe, this is not usually the case and post-colonial populations with the right to enter, plus refugees, and especially illegal entrants, are viewed as an unsustainable burden.

Security risk (low vs. high)

Fears about security and border control can be viewed as attempts to rationalize the dislike of diversity. Even in Canada, where multiculturalism can be viewed in relatively positive terms by the public, concerns are regularly expressed in political and media discourse that the institutional recognition of ethnic identities erodes Canadian national solidarity.

Kymlicka's four dimensions focus primarily on the dominant society's *perceptions* about newcomers, based on a mixture of empirical "facts" about the immigration system and judgements about them. It should be noted that there is also a complex intersection of dynamics *between* these dimensions that may come into play. Other factors include religious diversity, citizenship access and uptake, diversity of diversities, and socio-economic outcomes.

Religious diversity

As we have seen in the dimensions listed, Kymlicka identifies the allegation of "illiberal" cultural practices as a predictor of public opposition to diversity. In recent times, in Canada and elsewhere, this has largely been a question of minority religious beliefs and the practices attributed by the wider society to those holding those beliefs. At times, illiberal cultural practices "stand for" a whole religion, which is then set against the whole of Western "civilization." Once accomplished, this kind of sleight of hand can result in the kind of "clash of civilization" rhetoric that has appeared in Europe, the United States and Australia in the context of the war in Iraq, and that has occurred most recently in the "Cartoon Crisis" in Denmark (2006), although in a somewhat different form.

Citizenship access and uptake

In approaches to immigration and integration, there are important differences between liberal democracies of the "Old world" (Europe) and the "New World" (North America and Australasia). In "New World" settler societies like Canada, national myths about origins and development revolve primarily around immigration. Access is comparatively open: newcomers are eligible to obtain citizenship within a relatively short period (2 to 5 years), and citizenship acquisition is celebrated and mythologized (Tran et al. 2005, Wills 2005). Many continental European nations only reluctantly grant access to citizenship for immigrants and their descendants and require residency ranging from five to twelve years.

> Since the 1967 Centennial, for instance, there have been some significant incidents in Canada of violence, discrimination, and social upheaval, emerging from contending diversities and national visions. Such events do not easily square with the Canadian collective myth.

Diversity of diversities

Low population densities, wealth of resources, and economic opportunities have allowed the classical immigration countries to absorb larger numbers of newcomers than the countries of Western Europe, who have sometimes reacted strongly against *any* further immigration at all.[6] Unlike Europe, Canada has maintained comparatively high levels of immigration, while selecting migrants considered to be "desirable" – in recent years, economic migrants. These levels and selection processes, combined with the comparative geographic isolation of Canada, ensured that the source countries were more diverse, preventing the development of dominant immigrant groups and helping to create the "diversity of diversities" that characterizes Canada today.

Socio-economic outcomes

In Canada and abroad, one of the main contributors to social conflict is the socio-economic exclusion of immigrants and minority group members. Recently, a number of fault lines have begun to develop in Canada, related to increasing socio-economic exclusion: Jeffrey Reitz's recent work, for instance, suggests that immigrant outcomes in Canada are in decline, that recent immigrants are not doing as well as their predecessors, in spite of better education, and that durable concentrations of ethnic groups are occurring at a much higher rate than in the past.

While most new immigrants to Canada settle in Toronto, Vancouver or Montréal,[6] not all immigrant

communities are poor. However, if poor socio-economic outcomes do become associated with particular ethno-cultural groups that are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, there is a danger of the wider public forming an association between those groups, marginalization, and poverty. Once such an association is formed – as has occurred widely in Europe – it may lead to the perception that immigrants put extra strain on social programs, resulting in anti-immigrant backlash (Reitz 2005, Wills 2005).

In spite of higher levels of education, economic outcomes for immigrants to Canada are worsening. Denise Helly recalls that in 2001 "immigrant men earned 63.1 cents for every dollar a native-born Canadian with the same education earned" whereas 20 years earlier the ratio was equal, namely $1 for everyone in 1980 (Helly 2004, 6).

This discrepancy will increase the number of immigrants who live in poverty, make residential concentrations of poverty more likely and heighten the dependence of immigrants on the close social bonds of their own community. At the same time opportunities decrease for developing the bridging and linking social capital that is so crucial to integrating into the wider society, as well as creating a wider public perception that immigrants are not contributing their share to the economy and society.

Citizenship for the 21st century

In an international context where social order based upon diversity is showing signs of strain – or threatening to break down completely – it is critical to find the balance between smug romanticism and hand wringing fatalism about the Canadian multicultural model of citizenship (i.e. "It could never happen here; we've got it right in Canada" vs. "It is only a matter of time; the centre cannot hold"). While there is a kernel of truth in each response, both misrepresent the complexity of the challenge in open societies committed to both diversity and shared core values – and neither is constructive in itself. All such societies are vulnerable (including Canada) and all have much to lose if socio-political commitments to diversity falter.

Although, in comparison to other liberal democracies, Canada's national identity has evolved through a process which has arguably left more "space" for the negotiation of difference, the pace of demographic change in the coming years is expected to weigh most heavily where the model may be most fragile, i.e. mutual respect, shared values and common understanding between citizens (new immigrants and visible minority Canadians, people of different – or no – religious faiths, Aboriginal Canadians, official language minority Canadians, etc.)

In this environment, re-imagining and revitalizing the concept of Canadian citizenship looms as one of the country's greatest challenges. The process will require putting an essentially political frame around the human task of welcoming newcomers, finding a way to continue the historical conversation between English and French-speaking Canadians including Quebec's role in the federation, and in achieving reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. Such a process could be definitively Canadian if it manages to engage all Canadians in finding common ground and extending a collective sense of belonging.

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Notes

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1 The arrests of terrorist suspects in Toronto in June 2006 caused a minor media storm but nothing comparable to the European contexts referred to above as "flashpoints."

2 This is not to say that there were not already significant Black and Asian communities, for example, in parts of Canada but rather that immigration patterns or waves during this period flowed predominantly from Europe.

3 See *Official Languages Act* 1988; *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* 1988.

4 Some of the better known examples that have occurred since 1967 include: the forced removal of the historic Afro-Canadian community of Africville, by the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1967; FLQ terrorist incidents in Montréal, Québec (the "October Crisis") in 1970; the Air India Flight 182 Bombing in 1985, a flight which originated in Vancouver, BC; the Concordia University protest and cancellation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech in 2002 (Québec); the fire bombing of Montréal's Jewish United Talmud Torah school library (2005); and, a lengthy series of Aboriginal blockades, protests, occupations and crises across the country; such as the Oka Crisis, 1990 in Kanesetake First Nation (Québec); the Ipperwash Crisis, 1995 in Kettle & Stony Point First Nation (Ontario); and the recent Six Nations occupation of Caledonia, Ontario in 2006.

5 See Van Selm 2005.

6 According to the 2001 Census, 43% of immigrants during the 1990s settled in Toronto, 18% in Vancouver, and 12% in Montréal.

Attachment

	Canada	Australia	United Kingdom	Netherlands	France
Population July 2005, estimate[a]	32.8 million	20.9 million	60.4 million	16.4 million	60.7 million
Net migration 2005, estimate[b]	+5.9 migrants /000	+3.91 migrants / 000	+2.18 migrants / 000	+2.3 migrants / 000	+0.66 migrants / 000
Top 5 source countries of immigrants in 2002 (thousands)[c] Percentages[d]	33.2 China 14.5% 28.8 India 12.6% 14.2 Pakistan 6.2% 11.0 Philippines 4.8% 7.0 Iran 3.1%	12.5 U.K. 13.4% 12.4 New Zealand 13.3% 6.7 China 7.2% 5.8 India 6.2% 4.6 South Africa 4.9%	34 Australia 12.8% 18 China 6.8% 16 France 6.0% 16 Germany 6.0% 16 India 6.0% (2001 data)	5.4 Turkey 6.2% 5.1 Germany 5.9% 4.9 Morocco 5.7% 4.8 U.K. 5.5% 3.4 China 3.9%	23.3 Algeria 16.1% 21.4 Morocco 14.8% 8.5 Turkey 5.9% 7.6 Tunisia 5.3% 3.4 USA 2.4%
Visible minority population[e]	13.4% visible minority (2001) but projections for 2017 are 19-23%	N/A	7.9% non-White (2001)	6% (estimated)	8% (estimated) Mostly North African
Foreign-born - % of total population in 2002[f]	18.2% (2001)	23.2%	N/A	10.6%	10% (1999)
Foreign population - % of total population in 2002[g]	N/A	N/A	4.5%	4.3%	5.6% (1999)

[a] *World Fact Book*, 2005 estimate, www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos.

[b] *World Fact Book*, 2005 estimate, www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos.

[c] *Trends in International Migration*. SOPEMI 2004 Edition. OECD 2005.

[d] Calculated from data in *Trends in International Migration*. SOPEMI 2004 Edition. OECD 2005.

[e] Information available on the Government of Canada and the United Kingdom's Government Websites.

[f] *Trends in International Migration*. SOPEMI 2004 Edition. OECD 2005. Foreign Born defined as first-generation migrants, and may consist of both foreign and national citizens.

[g] Trends in International Migration. SOPEMI 2004 Edition. OECD 2005. Foreign Population includes immigrants having retained the nationality of their country of origin as of the second or third generations born in the host country.