CITIZENSHIP: THREE ILLUSTRATIONS OF AN EVOLVING CONCEPT

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The goal of "The Canada We Dream Of"— a two-minute video[1] produced for the Canada 150 celebrations in 2017 – was to convey a feel-good narrative of shared Canadian values of diversity, collaboration, and inclusion. For decades, these have been championed as central to the fabric of Canadian identity. Among the commemorative events listed on the Canada 150 website was Sir John A. Macdonald Day, in honour of Canada's first prime minister, who was responsible for (among other things) the Chinese Head Tax and the establishment of the Residential School system.

The negative backlash that ensued was swift. The irony of the invitation "what you can do to celebrate Sir John and learn more about Canada" was not lost on those familiar with his controversial legacy.

In this paper, I focus on responses to challenges to the stories that we tell ourselves as reflected in citizenship policies, practices and principles. What follows is a brief discussion of three examples that I have investigated over the course of my research career that provide some insight into how Canadian citizenship has manifested historically and the challenges it poses for citizenship discussions and debates. These are, the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program[2] (introduced in 1976), the Canada 150 festivities (2017) and the Tribute to Liberty memorial to "Victims of Communism" (2023), all

1 www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anniversaries-significance/2017/canada-150/video-canadawe-dream-of.html

2 The program allows groups of Canadian citizens to join in sponsoring a refugee to migrate to Canada.

contexts where citizenship values and claims have been prominently displayed and, in some cases, became flashpoints for debate and disagreement about the principles that are foundational to Canadian citizenship.

PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

I begin with the Private Sponsorship Program (PSP) for refugees, as it was one of the most significant tests of citizenship ideals and their reception in the face of shifting geopolitical realities. The history of the PSP can be traced back to Canadian government responses to the post-World War II crisis in large-scale population displacements (Cameron 2020). Decades of advocacy by religious groups and government collaboration with many support groups, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, resulted in changes to refugee support programs, precipitated in large part by the Indochinese "Boat people" refugee crisis in 1979 (Lenard 2020, Hyndman et al. 2021, Winland 1993).

There has been a great deal of scholarship on the PSP, some of it critical and some laudatory. The program has served as a model; "the longest-running and most successful" policy of its kind (Lenard 2020) due to its successful outcomes when compared to those of government-sponsored refugees (Agrawal 2019). Its detractors, though, point to flaws in the refugee determination process, criticism of paternalistic attitudes towards refugees, the "rescue complex" of sponsors (cf. Kyriakides' et. al. 2018 discussion of refugees as agentive, rather than victims) as well as the deleterious consequences of downloading/privatization of refugee support (Ilcan 2009).

What is of particular importance to the discussion of citizenship are the perspectives of sponsors themselves – their motivations and expectations – if and how these cohere with the project of resettling refugees as future citizens.

Macklin and others have argued that citizenship and Canadianness are continually "made" and "remade" through the experience of sponsorship (Macklin et al. 2018, 38).

For example, Mennonite sponsors of Hmong Indochinese frequently reiterated that their own experiences of flight resonated with refugees and how it was their mission to sponsor them but felt more comfortable with sponsoring Hmong, who shared their Christian values, particularly those who converted to Christianity in Thai refugee camps before their arrival to Canada. Hmong refugees often attended Mennonite churches and established their own congregations (Winland 1992).

CANADA 150

The goal of Canada 150 was to celebrate, "what it means to be Canadian" in line with the major contours of Canada's national narrative for both domestic and international consumption (Nijhawan et. al. 2018). Canada 150 in 2017 was an important national event, not only in highlighting historical milestones but in the multiplicity of responses to them.

Even before multiculturalism became official policy in 1971, the Canadian government was in the process of developing a national-identity narrative focused on liberal cosmopolitan values and principles of fairness and equality. Federal government

efforts to forefront and reinforce these principles have been on display at national days of remembrance and commemoration.

The history of the Canadian state features a disturbing record of historical injustice that disrupts these aspirational narratives – systemic racism, the fight for Indigenous sovereignty and self-government, separatist sentiments in Quebec and more. Federal governments of all political stripes have variously endorsed and promoted a 'recognition' framework through inquiries, commissions and apologies for the suffering of Indigenous peoples and the Residential School system, the Chinese Exclusion Act (and the imposition of Head Taxes), Continuous Journey regulations that discriminated against Punjabi-Canadians, Japanese internment camps during World War II, and the refusal to admit Jewish refugees during the Holocaust.

The Canadian government response has been to acknowledge Canada's difficult past, often in the form of apology and redress. This often takes the form of efforts towards reconciliation, which the Indigenous scholar Audra Simpson has referred to as; "performance[s] of empathetic, remorseful, and fleetingly sorrowful states" (2016, 2), which underscores the many challenges to celebratory declarations.

MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM: CANADA A LAND OF REFUGE

The final illustration highlights an important dimension of the changing landscape of citizenship in Canada. Mass migration, global communication and travel, the proliferation of visa designations, permits and passports are expanding at an accelerated rate all over the world, and Canada is not immune. Aside from continual pressures to address the global predicament of refugee and asylum claimants, Canada has numerous, large and some influential diasporas. Diaspora has come to refer less to those who have been banished/exiled from their places or origin to those who maintain connections to their countries of origin (Adamson 2012).

Witness the shift over just a few decades from 'immigrant' to 'diaspora' in the language of government and in daily parlance. Of the many federal, provincial and municipal/community efforts to honour the difficult pasts of diaspora groups, few have been as controversial as the Tribute to Liberty foundation's Victims of Communism: Canada a Land of Refuge memorial in Ottawa.[3]

The influence of diasporas reveals the pressures that can and are brought to bear on governments, which challenges the borders and boundaries of what it means to be a Canadian citizen. The Tribute to Liberty memorial initiative of participating diasporas from post-communist states is an extension of the Black Ribbon Day annual commemoration adopted in a 2009 resolution in the House of Commons, a national day of remembrance for "the victims of Nazism and communism".[4]

The memorial initiative began with the Conserva-

3 The name of the memorial has changed several times over the course of the past 15 years. In 2012, the former Conservative MP, John Baird quietly dropped the word 'Totalitarian'.

4 Among the criticisms of Black Ribbon Day is that it encourages moral equivalency of Nazi and communist crimes.

tive government's response to diaspora entreaties to recognize historical and/or ongoing conflicts, primarily in East European and Southeast Asian countries of origin (Dolgoy and Elżanowski 2018, Winland 2022). The official rationale for this monument – initially scheduled to be unveiled in November 2023, but postponed to 2024 – is to honour those who suffered and died abroad and their descendants who found refuge in Canada. The memorial itself though has been troubled by controversy over its (original) location, cost overruns resulting in the federal government having to underwrite half the costs, as well as over contributions from donors honouring fascists and Nazi collaborators (Noakes 2021).[5]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Together these three examples demonstrate the inevitability of challenges to what it "means to be Canadian." The recent fiasco surrounding Yaroslav Hunka – the Ukrainian "guy in the gallery" – which revealed the complicity of the Canadian government in controversial yet politically expedient decisions during the Cold War (reviewed by the Deschênes Commission of the 1980s), exposed the complex and sometimes flawed process by which citizenship has been and continues to be determined. Efforts to craft a singular and all-encompassing narrative of Canadian identity with citizenship values at its centre falters when it elides the historical and other challenges that are guaranteed to emerge. A reflexive and responsive approach to the inexorable challenges to core citizenship claims and ideals provides an important alternative to global trends towards increasingly exclusionary and, in many cases, nativist renderings of national belonging.

5 Some argue that the efforts of politicians to show favouritism towards some groups at the expense of others, contributes to the development or support of diaspora initiatives with sizeable budgets. The most potent criticism comes from those who claim that these kinds of memorials erode civil society by encouraging Canadians to organize along ethno-national lines.

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