ETHNOGENSIS

Immigrants to Ethnics and the Development of a Rainbow Class Structure

ABSTRACT

Today's immigrants and their children are being asked to transform into "Canadians." And, over time, they may integrate into Canadian society, although they also will produce new hybrid ethnic groups and identities. Simultaneously, today's policy makers have developed policies and programs based upon models of acculturation and ethnic identification largely from the historical experiences of earlier European immigrants However, recent data suggests that these models are perhaps not the most appropriate for identifying the processes of ethnic integration. Current information suggests that a process of "segmented assimilation" is occurring in Canadian society, in which some immigrant groups are rapidly integrating while other groups are not. The focus of this brief essay is to point out that neither of the two fragile majority communities have taken substantive, decisive action to facilitate/integrate immigrants into Canadian society.

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Before addressing the issue of immigration and ethnicity, we need to clarify the social organization of Canadian society. First of all, Canada is a country with a "split-ethnic majority," an issue that has held the attention of Canadians for the past three decades. The unique social organization of Canada finds two "majorities" in the same country and this has resulted in a social fragility as the divisive domestic struggle continues on. Second, the existence of two "majorities" within the geographical space of Canada has meant that each of the two majorities have taken different steps to deal with ethnicity. Overall, in English-speaking Canada and in Québec, little social policy has been developed to deal with the ethnic dimension of immigrants entering Canada. However, in Québec, most of the effort has focused on language while in the remainder of Canada, emphasis has been on immigrant settlement. At the same time governments have spent countless hours refining the criteria for allowing immigrants to enter Canada. Unfortunately once they arrive, both fragile governments have only the general multicultural/interculturalism social policy to guide them in dealing with the ethnic dimension of immigrants.

The focus of this brief essay is to point out that neither of the two fragile majorities have taken substantive, decisive action to facilitate/integrate immigrants into Canadian society. Today's focus on integrating immigrants has centred on the human capital and language abilities immigrants bring in. Little attention is given to enhancing or facilitating the spouses' or children's (the next generation) ability to integrate other than to make available public service organization facilities which are inappropriate for immigrants and their children. (See for example Reeves and Frideres, 1981, on the role of various types of service organizations). Specifically, the lack of policy and programs related to ethnic communities has resulted in the ever-increasing gap between immigrants and the larger society with regard to social and economic indicators of quality of life.

The context

Canadian society has been transformed in terms of its ethnic makeup over the past three decades due to its immigration policy and role in facilitating immigration, including refugees. Jedwab (2001) notes that today the majority of immigrants to Canada now come from Asia and the Middle East. Some three-quarters of our most recent immigrants come from Asia, Africa, the Middle-East and Central and South America and fall largely within the category of visible minorities. Today while immigrants make up nearly 20% of the total Canadian population, visible minorities also have shown an increase with nearly 14% of the population now classified as visible minority. Thus not only has the ethnicity of immigrants revealed a major difference from historical patterns, it has introduced the issue of visible minority into ethnic relations. It is estimated that while "whites" remain the largest group, they are a declining proportion and by mid-century, will not be the majority, if current trends continue (Tiryakian, 2003). As these new immigrant groups form in Canadian society, the process of *ethnogensis* occurs and the children of immigrants become ethnics in tomorrow's society.

Today's immigrants are heavily concentrated in larger urban centres across the country. For example, in Toronto, over half the population are immigrants. In other major metropolitan areas

across the country, the percentage is not as high but they make up a sizeable proportion of the urban population. This increasing size and concentration of the immigrant population, along with its diversity in culture and social class, makes it an issue policy makers need to attend to immediately. Policy-makers must make a decision as to whether or not these new ethnics will revitalize the nation or create major social problems. Policies today suggest they seem paralyzed with inaction.

Today's immigrants and their children are being asked to transform into "Canadians." And, over time, they may integrate into Canadian society, although they also will produce new hybrid ethnic groups and identities. Today's policy-makers have developed policies and programs based upon models of acculturation and ethnic identification largely from the historical experiences of earlier European immigrants (Rex and Singh, 2003). However, recent data suggests that these models are perhaps not the most appropriate for identifying the processes of ethnic integration. Current information suggests that a process of "segmented assimilation" is occurring in Canadian society, in which some immigrant groups are rapidly integrating while other groups are not. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have noted that this segmented process is a result of several factors:

> • the human capital brought by immigrant parents and the context of reception;
> • the differential pace of acculturation among parents and children, including the development of language gaps between them and its bearing on normative integration and family cohesiveness;
> • the cultural and economic barriers confronted by second-generation youth in their quest for successful adaptation; and
> • the family and community resources (social capital) for confronting these barriers (p. 8).

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All of these structural conditions intersect in such a manner that give impetus to the social and economic trajectory of children of immigrants. Some of the ethnic groups created by recent immigration are clearly in an upward mobility path. They are integrating into mainstream society and enriching it with their culture and energies. However others are blocked in their aspirations and are headed in a downward spiral, making up a greater proportion of the poverty population. This differential trajectory of immigrant/ethnics reflects the notion of "segmented assimilation" that has been identified by Portes and Rumbaut and has been ignored by our policy-makers. Already a "rainbow underclass" seems to be emerging as immigrants are occupying the lower rungs of both occupational status as well as income. This new phenomenon suggests that a "colour line" has been established, albeit informally, but nevertheless as potent as one that is public. Moreover, once this gap has been created, upward mobility of children of immigrants becomes increasingly difficult.

As I have noted above, there is no single path that immigrants (or their children) take when trying to integrate into Canadian society. However, we do know that the different outcomes of the second generation (children of immigrants) are determined by the experiences and achievements of their parents. Immigrant resettlement is influenced by what they bring with them in terms of skills, experiences and resources as well as the environment of the host society. The mode of incorporation of immigrants and their children reflect a number of social forces such as the official policy toward immigrants, public receptivity of immigrants and the character and resources of preexisting co-ethnic or related ethnic communities. While these factors focus on the attributes of the immigrant-ethnic, there are other issues that impact on an immigrants' ability to integrate.

Barriers to integration

Of all the barriers, none is more important than discrimination. Previous research on youth experiencing discrimination shows that they tend to shift their identity to ethnic or racial from "Canadian." A second barrier to successful integration is the tension between educational achievement and alternative life choices. As I have noted earlier, most immigrants settle in large metropolitan areas and within them, in central cities. This residential concentration puts immigrant children in close contact with the cultural models of the inner city that are not supportive of formal educational achievement within public service organizations. Only those children ensconced in well-structured communities tend to be unaffected by the "oppositional" role models they come into contact with. Moreover, the influence of these external role models is not contingent upon the parents' socio-economic status but rather on the character of the family and the density of networks within the ethnocultural community. In short, ethnic communities that are able to maintain high levels of institutional integration and solidarity are relatively immune to these external influences and can shape the positive contribution of their children and create integrative forces. As such, their children are able to integrate and become "Canadians."

This discussion highlights the importance of ethnocultural communities in both the lives of immigrants and for Native-born Canadians across the country. If an ethnic community is able to operate as a source of social capital by reinforcing parental authority and expectations for the future, external forces that are inimical to the expectations of parents, will be neutralized. As Rambaut and Portes (2001) point out, this resource cannot be purchased in the market but rather depends instead on the density and strength of networks grounded on a common heritage. This means that the more successfully integrated immigrants do not depend on complete acculturation but rather on selective preservation of immigrants parents' culture and the collective ties that go with it.

I argue that the current government policies and programs, the host society's receptivity and the preexisting ethnic community function to place individuals in different positions at the entry of the funnel of integration. Unfortunately, politicians and policy makers have not identified these factors as important to the social integration of immigrants and their children. Moreover, such a position is directly opposed to theories of immigrant assimilation that focus exclusively on individual human capital (Borjas, 1999). Research emanating from the Metropolis Project shows that constraints and opportunities created by social structures have much more impact on immigrant integration than the immigrants' ambition or level of skill. At the same time, government policies and programs impact local social structures, including the structure and shape of ethnic communities which in turn, affect individuals, determining the extent to which human capital can be put into play and social capital accessed for normative regulation of the second generation can take place (Rambaut and Portes, 2001).

Conclusion

The question thus remains, why has government not taken action to deal with these issues? First of all, past experience has clearly demonstrated that government is not prepared to be "proactive" on social issues and thus does not address them until they have matured into full-blown pathologies. Instead, focus is on concentrated poverty of immigrants, violence (family and other), gangs, drugs and other "high profile" social pathologies that capture the interest of the media and politicians. A second reason for not addressing the above issue is the resurgence of "Nativism." These proponents have argued against immigration and would prefer to keep immigrants out or isolate them until they magically become integrated into Canadian culture.

Finally, existing policies dealing with immigrants such as English/French immersion (which does not allow them to become functional in one of the official languages) and the subsequent loss of heritage language and culture, weaken immigrant parents' authority and help drive a wedge between generations. This in turn lessens the social capital inherent in their families and co-ethnic communities. Despite the presence of large numbers of professionals and entrepreneurs in today's pool of immigrants, the majority are poor. The data suggest that the best change for educational achievement and economic mobility among the children of immigrants lies in "selective acculturation." However, this position has no political constituency to support it or provide a basis by which new social policy is developed. What is needed then, is to help the children of immigrants preserve a clear sense of their roots, the value of fluency in a second language and the self-esteem grounded on strong family and community bonds. Unfortunately, when structural changes in the institutional arrangements of the public sphere and the relation of the public sphere to the private/communal sphere are called for, public policy seems resistant to change.

The lack of understanding of the role of ethnic communities in the integration process has been an impediment for the integration of immigrants and their children. A singular focus on developing policies and programs utilizing public service organizations and not ethnic (member) service organizations has begun to accelerate the process by which some immigrant/ethnic communities are unable to develop sufficient social capital to support the goals and dreams they had when coming to Canada.

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