EMERGING TRENDS: MEDIA, MINORITIES AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP

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In this paper, we sketch out two recent policy trends in relation to national identity and citizenship and their impact on and relation to media representations of minorities in the Canadian context. We first argue that the previous trend of a pluralist portrayal of the Canadian national identity has become less inclusive in recent years. We also argue that there has been an increasing securitization of citizenship and immigration issues in Canada in which certain minorities, particularly Arab and Muslim Canadians, are targeted.

The relationship between the media, minorities and public perceptions of majority and minority identities has always been complex, to say the least. Most of the time, it has been strained (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). If we accept Anderson's (1983) definition of nations as "imagined communities" that are constantly constructed and reconstructed through a polyphony of voices, this strained relationship — while not laudable — becomes understandable. Different groups and individuals have different views about who and what constitutes the nation as well as its others.

However, since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a change in the way in which minorities are conceptualized in the construction of a "national identity." Media representations have depicted minorities as potential threats to Canadian liberal-democratic values and to national security. Furthermore, an increasing number of individuals can be considered the victims of globalization and of neoliberal restructuring of the economy and the welfare state. As such, the strained relationship between the "minority" and the "national" is not only exemplified through media representations, but must also be understood through factual changes of

government policies, symbolic politics through government discourse and speeches given by elected officials, as well as the mainstream media.

In this paper, we aim to sketch out two recent policy trends in relation to national identity and citizenship and their impact on and relation to media representations of minorities in the Canadian context. Drawing on recent scholarship and our own studies in this field, we first argue that the previous trend of a pluralist portrayal of the Canadian national identity has become less inclusive in recent years; and this trend is supported by mainstream media representations of minorities. We then argue that there has been an increasing securitization of citizenship and immigration issues in Canada in which certain minorities, particularly Arab and Muslim Canadians, are targeted. Further research will be necessary to verify some preliminary insights that we will describe below.

A "THICKENING" OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: A CONVERGENCE OF MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT DISCOURSES

Mahtani (2001) contends that media are not only producers of discourses, but that they also have a role to play in creating social identities. Media provide information through which citizens gain knowledge about their nation and, as Mahtani (2001) adds: "our attitudes and beliefs are shaped by what the media discerns as public knowledge." The trivialization, culturalization and de-politicalization of minority concerns and contributions to Canadian society influence the attitudes of those who see themselves as a part of "mainstream society," as well as of those who are depicted as "different."

While Canadian researchers find that the amount of blatantly racist material in the Canadian mainstream media has been reduced over time, they conclude that, at the turn of the 21st century, the mainstream media is still incapable or unwilling to fully reflect and accurately depict Canadian society's wide array of ethnic diversity. Frances Henry and Carol Tator (2002) blame the media for taking an active part in the discursive exclusion of ethnic minorities from Canada's imagined community through systematic under- and misrepresentation (Henry and Tator 2002: 39). Four groups seem to be particularly at-risk of being stereotyped in the media: Aboriginal peoples (Grenier, 1992), Chinese and Asian Canadians (Greenberg, 2000), Blacks (Henry and Tator, 2002) and increasingly Muslims (Karim, 1997, 2003).

Despite this, in the 1990s, the Canadian media tended to embrace representations of a pluralist Canadian identity. This trend became particularly popular in the English-speaking parts of the country in the wake of the 1995 Québec referendum on independence. Examining the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* during the 1990s, Winter (2011) argues that there are at least three distinct perspectives of the relationship between Canadian national identity and multiculturalism. In some cases, a common trend in the media was a view that Canada was united by the values and institutions of the British Commonwealth and that these principles constituted the essence of "Canadianness." With this representation, while diversity was tolerated, it was portrayed as a potential danger to the social fragmentation of core Canadian values.

Another way the media represented the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity was to insist upon the country's dualist history: as a nation influenced by its history with the British and the French. Though English-speaking Canadians remained at the core of the idea of the "nation," there is an idea that compromise was a typically "Canadian" virtue. Consequently, compromise played a role in balancing the idea of Canadian nationhood, special status for Québec, self-government rights for First Nations and Canada's policy of multiculturalism. Another mainstream portrayal of Canadian identity identified in the 1990s was a criticism of the status quo. This perspective demanded more rights and recognition for ethnic minorities and immigrants who, by coming to Canada, "trade their talents for membership in a great nation" (Siddiqui, 2000). According to Winter (2011a), by the end of the 1990s, these three core media representations allowed for a multicultural national identity to emerge as the "smallest common denominator" of otherwise conflicting views of what it means to be Canadian.

In recent history, however, this representation of Canada as a pluralist nation has changed. Studies have illustrated that the trend of understanding Canadian values as inherently British has become more common than other aforementioned media representations. There seems to be a newfound consent among politicians and media representatives in favour of a "thick" republican notion of citizenship, which goes hand in hand with a move away from multiculturalism as an essential marker of Canadian national identity.

The new trend is best described as a language of Community that no longer refers to minority groups but circumscribes the pan-Canadian nation (Winter 2011b). This language can clearly be observed in government discourse. With the introduction of the *Citizenship Action Plan* in 2009, this representation was extended into governmental policy and programming. The question to be asked here is whether this shift in ideology at the political level is reflected (and reproduced) in media representations.

In a recent article, Winter and Sauvageau (2012) examine media representations of the new citizenship study guide introduced by the Conservative government in 2009. This study guide is distributed to all immigrants who wish to apply for Canadian

citizenship in order to pass the citizenship test. Although the authors identify a number of themes that are dealt with differently in French —and English— speaking media outlets, they also observe an astonishing amount of convergence.

Both the French — and the English — language media demonstrate that they are aware of the guide's rebranding of Canada into a conservative country, however they do not take issue with the guide's emphasis on British values and institutions. On the contrary, commentators on both sides of the linguistic divide identify internal and external enemies of "Canadian values". Some of these commentators express satisfaction over the fact that newcomers are "warned" that Canadian multiculturalism does not justify "barbaric acts" such as honour killings or forced marriages (Carlson, 2009), while others stress that "citizens of convenience" are not welcome here (Kennedy, 2009). Increasingly, this new emphasis on national identity seems to go hand in hand with the securitization of immigration and citizenship.

THE SECURITIZATION OF IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

Based on the observations mentioned above, scholars (e.g. Kowalski, 2013; Steuter and Wills, 2009) have come to argue that we have entered into a period of general media scepticism or even xenophobia towards Muslim and Arab populations. This attitude is said to be related to a general preoccupation with security and terrorism, both at the international and the national level.

In fact, in the new century, an increasing number of scholars observe that false and misleading information concerning Arabs and Muslims is massively shared in mainstream media. According to Antonius (2013), this misrepresentation concerns the misunderstanding of Muslims' and Arabs' culture, the ignorance of major facts of their history and the misrepresentation of some crucial aspects of their political struggles. Kowalski (2013) argues that this general misrepresentation can be associated with an orientalist perspective, since Muslim Canadians are increasingly referenced in relation to an increasing rise of Islamic and Muslim fundamentalism and "barbaric" practices.

One of the most dramatic consequences of the misrepresentation of Muslim Canadians is the framing of these citizens as a threat to the core values and livelihood of Canadian citizens. Many commentators argue that one of the explanations behind what has been called the "Reasonable Accommodation Crisis" in Québec is the intense and unjustified coverage of banal stories of religious and cultural agreements, giving the impression that reasonable accommodation of some requests may serve to threaten the core values of Québec society, such as equality between women and men (Antonius, 2013; Giasson, Brin and Sauvageau, 2010; Potvin, 2008).

Despite this view, however, there is some evidence that mainstream media representations of minority Canadian citizens is not always negative. In a recent exploratory study, Asthana (2014) found some careful balanced positions by media on representations of minority citizens, as well as criticisms of certain governmental policies that have contributed to the insecurity of these Canadians. The study employs a thematic content analysis of editorials in three English-language Canadian newspapers (*Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail* and the *Ottawa Citizen*) and one French-language Canadian newspaper *(Le Devoir*) to analyze media representations of two Canadian citizens that were "stranded" abroad for different reasons: Abousfian Abdelrazik and Suaad Hagi Mohamud. On the one hand, in both cases, these Canadian citizens were falsely accused of posing a security threat to Canada and were thereby arrested in the African countries that they were visiting. These citizens were also minority citizens (Abdelrazik is a Muslim Canadian of Sudanese origin and Mohamud is a Canadian of Somali origin). On the other hand, these two citizens belong to two different categories, as only one of them, Abdelrazik, is a Canadian citizen who was detained or forcefully "stranded" on the basis of a perceived terrorist threat.

To get a preliminary understanding of media representations of these citizens, forty-two editorial articles were examined using content analysis on the basis of seven inductive themes: a reference to

- a security "threat;"
- a counter-terrorism policy or practice;
- "extraordinary" practices in the treatment of the citizens;
- representation of the individual as a Canadian citizen;
- religio-racial discrimination;
- mention of another case or terrorist incident;
- empathetic language in representing the citizen.

Across newspapers, Abdelrazik's situation was represented in three primary ways: as an exceptional and extraordinary set of circumstances (coupled with a criticism of the practices of the Government of Canada that caused this situation); as a violation of inherent citizenship rights; and in some circumstances, as an unclear comment on Abdelrazik's identity as a "suspected terrorist." Articles tended to focus on the disturbing nature of exceptional national security and

counter-terrorism policies and have thereby ignored suggestions that Abdelrazik's plight may have been caused by some degree of religious or racial discrimination. Comparatively, in Mohamud's case, editorial articles tended to emphasize her identity as a Canadian citizen, occasionally making light of the security accusations made against her. The editorial articles analyzed also tended to focus on the bureaucratic deficiencies that led to her imprisonment, rather than on the potential racial aspects of the situation that may have contributed to her imprisonment. Hence, while the media was sympathetic to Mohamud's plight, it tended to downplay the possibility of racial or religious discrimination.

In both cases, the newspapers criticized the government for their reluctance to aid a citizen in need. However, questions of security and terrorism arose more frequently in the discourse surrounding the Abdelrazik odyssey than for Mohamud's experiences. This can be attributed to the fact that Abdelrazik was suspected of crimes of terrorism and admitted that he was an acquaintance of the convicted "Millenium Bomber" Ahmed Ressam. Furthermore, Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police allegedly played some role in requesting his detainment in Sudan. In that sense, Abdelrazik's case is similar to the plights of Maher Arar and Omar Khadr. In comparison, Mohamud was "merely" accused of identity fraud and "lower-level" authorities (consular officials) were responsible for her prosecution by Kenyan authorities and, ultimately her imprisonment.

Although preliminary, these findings suggest that even in the aftermath of 9/11, media representations of racialized and religious minorities are not always one-dimensional. Rather, the media tends to distinguish between cases and major Canadian English-language and French-language newspapers may even empathize with the situation of members of minority groups who appear to have been "abandoned" by their government.

CONCLUSION

If during the 1990s, the representation of the "national we" and its (internal and external) outsiders were discussed in the media in a somewhat controversial and fluid way, several years into the century the boundaries between those who are said to belong and those who are rejected seem to have become even less porous than before.

In this paper, we have identified two recent trends of media representations of minorities and perceptions of national identity and citizenship. On the one hand, we argue that in the first decade of the new century, there is a "thickening" of national identity and citizenship taking place in governmental discourse. Drawing upon the example of the new citizenship study guide, we argue that with respect to this trend, a convergence between media and government discourse can be observed. The mainstream media has tended to represent the ideals of Canadian citizenship and national identity as being in need of protection and reinvigoration. Rather than developing an analytical, critical discourse about the recasting of national citizenship in government discourses, the media has tended to embrace and amplify them (Winter and Sauvageau, 2012). Within this process, some minority groups tend to be more targeted than others. According to Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes (2013), representations of immigration and national identity are dialectically related. They write:

> *"Representations of the "Other" have no meaning without some definition of nation and who belongs within it. In Canada, representations of immigrants as threatening, criminal, or disease-carrying are juxtaposed against discourses of the nation's humanitarian generosity and multiculturalism" (Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2013: 2). Specifically Muslims and those living "transnational lives" are sometimes represented as posing a danger to or deflating the value of the Canadian nation (Hennebry and Momani, 2013).*

On the other hand, we observe another trend in media minority representations, namely one related to the securitization of immigration and citizenship. Here, our research is not yet conclusive and more studies are necessary to examine the complex relationship between media representations and government policy. As argued above, Canadian scholarship overwhelmingly notes that the media contributes to producing public perceptions that stigmatize specific cultural or religious groups. Groups that seem to be particularly at-risk of being targeted by the media are Arab and Muslim Canadians. In fact, media is often found to be propagating misrepresentations of Islam and presenting Muslim culture as barbaric and threatening for the Canadian society.

Despite this, we have noted that in a small exploratory study, there may be some exceptions to this rule, particularly in instances in which the media reports on the plight of individuals who are members of racialized or religious minorities and who seem to have been unjustly targeted and/or abandoned by the Canadian state. In these instances, we have found that the mainstream media tend to present a much more balanced coverage of the events, often empathizing with the minority citizen and criticizing the government for not defending this individual's citizenship rights. Admittedly, we are in the early stages of our research, but we hope that this paper will illustrate that the relationship between media representations and government policy is complex and that any analysis must allow for contextual variation and differences in editorial stances.

Furthermore, it may well be that media representations tend to be more balanced when reporting on policies and processes affecting "real" people— individual Canadians, whether mem-

bers of minority groups or not, who are identified by their names and not an abstract notion of an "Other"— than when suggesting that Canadian citizenship and Canadian values are "under threat" through portrayals of diverse racial and religious groups as an undifferentiated mass of potentially intolerant and dangerous perpetrators.

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